

My Love is Crucified

There are very few people alive who could grasp the deep things of what our title is saying: *My Love is Crucified*. Nor shall this newsletter attempt to unfold them. There is only one “newsletter” where its depths can be unfolded, and that is the “newsletter” of the human soul in love with Jesus Christ, the one God and Savior of all the world. We could also venture to say that, for the saint who originally expressed this beautiful thought, communicating to others the depths of its meaning was also impossible. But we might scratch the surface a bit with a brief consideration.

“My Love has been Crucified”: Christ Himself, the Jealous Spouse and God of the human heart, is the “Love” who is “Crucified.” Let us recall, too, how often the Lord in dealing with Israel referred to Himself as “a Jealous God”; “jealous” of His People as “a People”, because “jealous” for the exclusive love of each individual person. The Lord God who was “in the beginning”, has created all things and all men—out of Love. He called Abraham the Chaldean—out of Love; and from him he created that people who would be called Israel, His People—out of Love. This very God who created all things through His Word—a Word who breathes forth Love—has truly Loved me into being. Christ Jesus is this God of Love who has come into the world as a thirsty Traveler, thirsting and dying for my poor creaturely love.

“My Love is Crucified”: Another scratch at the surface of this thought tells us that my love has been purified. These are the words of a seasoned veteran in God’s service—a saint. Recall that a



“seasoned veteran” in the Lord’s service can be quite young. Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity, the Carmelite nun who died in 1906 at 26 years of age, was one such “veteran.” The soul can say, “My creaturely love for Christ is no longer disordered; I no longer try to love things together with Him, besides Him, apart from

Him. Whatever I love outside of Him, it is for Him and in Him that I love it. I am truly the Master or Mistress of all things around me. I use all things—even misfortune—for God’s service. I am not possessed by them, I am no longer their subject. I remember the stirring words of St. Augustine, the Prince of Mystics (John Paul II), who said in his *Confessions*, ‘He loves Thee not who loves anything together with Thee.’ I live now the words of St. Paul, *‘I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who Loved me and gave Himself for me.’ (Galatians 2.20)* True, even the newly—baptized can say this and say it truly. But

the soul is supposed to grow in the Lord, and these words find their deepest — unutterable—truth in the saints. *‘For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in Him.’ (Philippians 3.8)* These explosive statements of the Mystic Saint Paul are great fonts of the Christian spiritual life.

“My Love is Crucified” is a statement that is meant to be authentically lived by each of the faithful. Note this clearly, it is not just for monks and nuns. So powerful is the Love of Christ that it can be lived to the fullest in every state of life and in every varying circumstance—if the

soul is willing. Divine Love...so Creative!

“Alleluia! Pleasing in the Lord’s eyes are fasting and prayer. And yet more pleasing in the eyes of God is pure love. The one who accomplishes these three attains the crown of glory and receives the inheritance.” (Maronite Liturgy)

This poetic verse from our Liturgy is obviously not stated with the precision of scientific theology or dogma, but we can say: “There is fasting, there is prayer and there is Supernatural Christian Love (Charity).” In the ordinary scheme of salvation, only the soul in the state of grace ‘possesses’ Supernatural Charity-Divine Love. No one else does. The state of grace alone renders the acts of the soul meritorious in the sight of God. I may fast much, I may pray much, but if I do not ‘possess’ Supernatural Charity, they avail me nothing in the sight of God. In our hymn’s order, fasting and prayer come before charity, but in fact Charity-Love comes before fasting and prayer: because without Supernatural Love, fasting and prayer are lifeless husks. Supernatural Love makes them meritorious toward “attaining the crown of glory and receiving the inheritance.” “The greatest of these is Charity”, sings St. Paul the Mystic in his hymn to Charity. (I Cor. 13.13)

We commemorate two women of the fifth century, Saints Marana and Koura, on February 28 each year. How Divine Love drove them on! Again, the words of St. Paul come so powerfully to mind: “The Love of Christ urges us on”, even controls us. (2 Cor. 5.14) The Love which controlled these two women so powerfully “controlled” them, “urged” them on to fast and pray and afflict themselves in striking fashion! These were two souls so intent on “attaining the crown of glory and receiving the inheritance.” “My Love is Crucified”, they could rightly proclaim from the depths of their pure souls.

We learn about Saints Marana and Koura from Theodoret of Cyr (393-466), the famous monk-bishop of northern Syria, who wrote a history of the fourth- and fifth-century ascetics in his region. On the outskirts of their hometown of Berea, Marana and Koura obtained a small structure for themselves, entered it, and walled themselves in. There was no roof over them, just four walls and a couple small windows, for necessary communication and for receiving food. They were, therefore, covered in snow and ice in the winter, and exposed to burning sun

and rains in the warmer seasons. Marana alone spoke to visitors; Koura was never heard to speak. We can listen to a direct quote from Theodoret: “They wear iron, and carry such a weight that Koura, with her weaker body, is bent down to the ground and is quite unable to straighten her body. They wear mantles so big as to trail along behind and literally cover their feet and in front to fall down right to the belt literally hiding at the same time face, neck, chest, and hands. I have often been inside the door in order to see them; for out of respect for the episcopal office they have bidden me dig through the door. And so I have seen that weight of iron which even a well-built man could not carry. ... round the neck the collar, round the waist the belt, and on hands and feet the chains assigned to them.” If that weren’t daunting enough, these two human mounds of cloth and iron were devoted to regular fasting, having gone as much as 40 days without any food on three different occasions, and 21 days without food the same number of times. Theodoret tells us, “In this mode of life they have completed not merely five or ten or fifteen years, but forty-two; and despite having contended for so long a time, they love their exertion as if they had only just entered on the contests.” So they were by this time in their 50’s-60’s, let us say. This is the eye-witness testimony of their local bishop.

But now, lest we be deceived by our pleasure-loving modern mentality into condemning them as crazy, Theodoret explains to us what was the motive for their austere lives. It is Love: Crucified, Pure Love. “For contemplating the beauty of the Bridegroom, they bear the labor of the course with ease and facility, and press on to reach the goal of the contests, where they see the Beloved standing and pointing to the crown of victory.” How true it is that they could sing, “My Love is Crucified” in both senses we’ve spoken about.

In the *“Epilogue on Divine Love”*, which concludes his historical work, he explains further what moved the saints he wrote about to such penitential lives: “Being taught, therefore, by divine Scripture that He is beautiful, has indescribable wealth, is the fount of wisdom, is able to do whatever he wishes, possesses immeasurable love for men, pours forth rivers of kindness, and in everything wishes solely to benefit men—and being taught by the God-bearing men about the myriad and uncountable varieties of his beneficence—they have been wounded by the sweet darts of Love, and, as limbs of the Bride, exclaim

with her, ‘We are wounded with Love.’”(Canticle 5:8) There it is.

When I think about this gigantic love of just these two saints—leaving aside so many others—which moved them to such a “crucified life” in response to the Love of Jesus the Bridegroom.....and when I consider myself: that I complain (at least to myself) if the weather is too gray, too rainy, too hot, too cold; this person doesn’t act the way I would like him to; My neck hurts, etc. I can only conclude from this unwillingness to sacrifice myself in comparatively little things, that I must have little true love for Jesus my Lord. What a drag. But let us not pout, let’s move on and hear from St. Bonaventure.

Theodoret described Saints Marana and Koura as seized by Divine Love for Christ, “We are wounded with Love” (Canticle 5.8), and thus blossomed their austerity of life. St. Bonaventure, in a related fashion, comments upon Canticle 4.9: “You have wounded my heart, my sister, my bride; you have wounded my heart.” These words are spoken by the Bridegroom. St. Bonaventure wonders at the repetition of the words “You have wounded my heart.” Why this repetition? “Your Bride, Your Sister, Your Friend, has already wounded Your Heart, O most loving Jesus! Why did it have to be wounded again by Your enemies?” The Saint explains: “Your Heart was also wounded in order that, through the visible wound, we might see the invisible wound of Love. For one who ardently loves is wounded by love. How could Christ better show us this ardor than by permitting not only His Body but His very Heart to be pierced with a lance? The wound of the Flesh reveals the wound of the Spirit... The sister

and bride is the cause of both these wounds, as if the Bridegroom were clearly saying: ‘Because you have wounded me with the zeal of your love, I have also been wounded with the soldier’s spear.’ That is why the Bridegroom says: ‘You have wounded by heart, my sister, my bride: you have wounded my heart.’ ...So the Heart of Jesus had been wounded to death for a long time. Then physical death was added—victorious for a time, only to be vanquished for eternity.”

The love of Saints Marana and Koura was ignited by their consideration of the living Love of Jesus Christ, who suffered so greatly, died and rose for love of their souls. *My Love is Crucified!* We need to reflect a whole lot more on the spiritual, invisible wound of Love which the Heart of Jesus bore from the instant of His Virginal Conception—a Love blazing for us. This more than anything might move us to love Him more, in the real day-to-day order, not just in theory. The wound of Loving Desire for us, which the Lord Jesus bore in His Heart all during His life on earth drove Him to, made Him anguish for, the Consummation and Revelation of this Love on the Cross.

St. Bonaventure concludes, “How strong must that love be that...kills by the very wound of desire; which is the case not only of the Lord Jesus but also of His followers.” In a court of law, would we be found guilty if accused of being “followers” of Christ? ...Catholics? May the Lord give us, His “followers”, the generosity and courage to open our poor hearts to receive His wound of Love; and may Saints Marana and Koura help us by their prayers, Amen. ✠