

They can still be brought back even at the last moment, as the thief, or as Arthur Rimbaud. Here was a man who blasphemed Christ intensely in this life by his writings; a man whose greatest thrill was to intoxicate anyone who spoke to him of God and Our Lady in order to berate and even physically abuse him.

He even delighted in breaking his mother's heart to whom he wrote: "Happily this life is the only one; which is obvious, because one cannot imagine another life with more boredom in it than this one."

Then came his end, which is described for us in the language of François Mauriac: "Now imagine a human being who has great powers of resistance, who is much more masterful than I am, and who hates this servitude.

"Imagine a nature irritated and exasperated to distraction by this mysterious servitude and finally delivered over to an abandoned hatred of the cross.

"He spits on this sign which he drags after him and assures himself that the bonds which attach him to it could never stand out against a methodical and planned degradation of his soul and spirit.

"Thus he cultivates blasphemy and perfects it as an art and fortifies his hatred of sacred things with an armor of scornful contempt.

"Then suddenly, above this stupendous defilement, a voice rises, complainingly, appealingly; it is hardly so much as a cry, and no sooner has the sky received it than the echo is smothered by frightful jeers and by the laugh of the devil.

"As long as this man is strong enough, he will drag this cross as a prisoner with his ball-chain, never accepting it. He will obstinately insist on wearing this wood along all the paths of the world. He will choose the lands of fire and ashes most suited to consume it.

"However heavy the cross becomes, it will not exhaust his hatred until the fateful day, the turning-point in his destiny, when he sinks down at last under the weight of the tree and under its agonizing embrace.

"He still writhes, pulls himself together and then sinks down again, hurling out a last blasphemy. From his hospital bed he brings abominable accusations against the nuns who are tending him; he treats the angelic sister as a fool and an idiot and then, at last, he breaks off. This is the moment marked from all eternity.

"The cross which has dragged him for thirty-seven years and which he has denied and covered with spittle, offers its arms to him: the dying man throws himself upon it, presses it to, him, clings to it,

embraces; he is serenely sad and heaven is in his eyes. His voice is heard: 'Everything must be prepared in my room, everything must be arranged. The chaplain will come back with the Sacraments. You will see. They're going to bring the candles and the lace. There must be white linen everywhere...'"

No! Religion is not the opium of the people.

Opium is the drug of deserters who are afraid to face the Cross - the opiate that gives momentary escape from the Hound of Heaven in pursuit of the human soul.

Religion, on the contrary, is the elixir which spurs a soul on to the infinite goal for which it was made. Religion supplies the profoundest desires.

The greatest thirst of all is the thirst of unrequited love—the hand reached out which never grasps; the arms outstretched which never embrace; the hand knocking on a door which is never opened. It is these things religion satisfies by making man think less about his passing desires and more about his ultimate desire.

His passing desires are multiple and fleeting—gold one minute, food another, pleasure another. But his ultimate desire is unique and abiding—the perfect happiness of everlasting joy and peace. It is our duty to lead men to the realization of this desire.

Those who hate religion are seeking religion; those who wrongly condemn are still seeking justice; those who overthrow order are seeking a new order; even those who blaspheme are adoring their own gods - but still adoring.

From certain points of view they are all prisoners of Divine Love; they are confusing desires with the desire, passions with love.

They are all living in the shadow of the Cross, they are all thirsting for the Fountain of Divine Life. Their lips were made to drink - and we must not refuse to reach them the cup.

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The Need of Zeal

Most Rev. Fulton J. Sheen

"I Thirst."

The Fifth Word from the Cross

The cry, "I thirst," refers not to physical thirst.

It was His soul that was burning and His Heart that was on fire. He was thirsting for the souls of men. The Shepherd was lonely without His sheep; the Creator was yearning for His creatures; the First-born was looking for His brethren.

All during His life He had been searching for souls. He left heaven to find them among the thorns; it mattered little if they made a crown of them for Him, so long as He could find the one that was lost. He said He came "not to call the just, but sinners," and His Heart thirsted for them now more than ever. He could not be happy until every sheep and every lamb was in His sheep-fold. "Other sheep I have, that are not of this fold: them also I must bring ... and there shall be one fold and one shepherd."

There was sorrow in His sad complaint during life; "You will not come to Me"; but there is tragedy in the last cry: "I thirst."

There was probably no moment during the three hours of redemption in which Our Lord suffered more than in this. Pains of the body are nothing compared to the agonies of the soul.

Taking His life did not mean so much to Him, for He was really laying it down of Himself. But for man to spurn His Love—that was enough to break His Heart.

It is difficult for us to grasp the intensity of this suffering, simply because none of us ever loves enough. We have not the capacity for love that He has, therefore we can never miss so much when it is denied.

But when our tiny little hearts are sometimes denied the love they crave, we do get some faint inkling of what must have gone on in His Own Great Heart.

The faithful loyal wife whose husband is snatched from her by death, the mother whose son refuses to visit her and bless her declining days with filial affection, the friend who has sacrificed all only to be betrayed by one for whom he gave all—all these experience the keenest and bitterest of all human sufferings: the pangs of unrequited love. Such victims can and really do die of a broken heart.

But what is this love for another human being, compared to the love of God for man? The affection a human heart bears for another lessens as it multiplies the objects of its love, just as a river loses its fullness the more it divides itself into little streams.

But with God there is no decrease of love with the increase of objects loved, any more than a voice loses its strength because a thousand ears hear it.

Each human heart can break His Sacred Heart all over again; each soul has within itself the potentiality of another crucifixion. No one can love as much as Our Lord; no one therefore can suffer as much.

Added to this was the fact that His infinite mind saw within that second all the unfaithful hearts that would ever live until the end of time; all who would follow like Judas, and then betray; all who would fall and refuse His helping Hand; in a word, all who would pass by His Cross and only stop with the executioners to shake dice for His garments, while within a stone's throw of them would be the Prize so precious it was worth gambling their very lives away.

It was this picture of ungrateful men which renewed the Agony of the Garden and caused His Death. He died of thirst in the desert of human hearts!

From this Word we discover this great lesson: the necessity of our loving our fellow men as Our Lord loves us.

If Jesus Christ thirsted for souls, must not a Christian also thirst? If He came to cast fire upon the earth, must not a Christian be enkindled? If He came to bring us the seed of Life, must not that seed fructify and bear fruit? If He lit a Light in our minds, must we not be illumined? Has He not called us to be His Apostles and His Ambassadors, in order

that His Incarnation might be prolonged through the continued dispensation of the divine through the human?

A Christian then is a man to whom Our Lord has given other men. He breaks bread to the poor through our hands, He consoles the sick through our lips, He visits the sorrowful upon our feet, He sees the fields of harvest through our eyes, and He gathers the bundles into His everlasting barns through our toil.

To be worthy of the name Christian, then, means that we, too, must thirst for the spread of the Divine Love; and if we do not thirst, then we shall never be invited to sit down at the banquet of Life.

Crowns shall be given only to the victors, and the chalice of everlasting wine only to those who thirst.

A Catholic who does not strive to spread his Faith is a parasite on the Life of the Church; he who is not girding his loins for apostolate is abdicating his seat on the dais of Christianity; he who is not bearing fruit is like a tree cut down on the road impeding the march of the army of God. He who is not a conquering spirit is a renegade.

The torch of Faith has been given to us not to delight our eyes but to enkindle the torches of our fellow men. Unless we burn and are on fire for the Divine Cause a glacial invasion will sweep the earth which will be the end, for "The Son of man, when he cometh, shall He find, think you, faith on earth?"

The measure of our apostolate is the intensity of our love. A human heart loves to talk about the object of his love, and loves to hear that object praised.

If we love Our Lord, then we will love to talk about His Holy Cause for "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." To those who have such love, there is never the excuse of a want of opportunity.

Our Lord has told us "the harvest indeed is great, but the laborers are few."

To the zealous Christian every country is a mission country; every banquet room a Simon's house where another Magdalen can be found; every ship another bark of Peter from which nets of salvation can be let down; every crowded city street another Tyre and Sidon where the whelps that eat the crumbs from the master's table can be rewarded for their faith; arid every cross is a throne where thieves become courtiers.

There are those that would destroy every mark of the Savior's feet from the face of the earth. There are those who would renew the Crucifixion by hating those who preach His love; the wicked today hide not the

shame of their sins, but seek to find others and make others like unto themselves, in order to find consolation in their corporate decadence.

But these are not the reasons why Christians should go into the catacombs and leave the earth to the race of Cain. While these enemies of Divine Love live, they are still purchasable by Divine Grace and are potential children of the Kingdom of God. They are our opportunities.

Our Lord thirsted for them on the Cross, and we must thirst for them too, and love them enough to try to save them.

One thing is certain, we are not called to be Christians to damn them, but to save them, in order that all men may be one great redeemed humanity and Christ its Sacred Heart.

Some will always resist, but there are no hopeless cases. Sometime ago in Spain, two hundred men were ordered shot when the Spanish people won over a city from the forces of anarchy.

These two hundred men had burned churches, murdered priests and nuns, ravaged virgins, and were now to expiate their crimes. The Carmelites who had suffered from their hands began a novena of prayer and fasting, that they might be converted to God before their death. Out of the two hundred, one hundred and ninety-eight at the end of the novena received the Sacraments and died in peace with their Savior.

Something we must never forget is that every man wants to be happy, but he cannot be happy without God. Below the surface of every heart, down deep in its secret gardens, is a craving for that for which it was made, as even the caged bird still retains its love of flying.

As the Holy Father put it: "Beneath the ashes of these perverted lives there are to be found sparks which can be fanned into a flame." Even those who hate religion have never really lost it; if they had, they would not hate it so much.

The intensity of their hate is the proof of the reality of that which they hate. If they really lost religion, they would not spend all their energy attempting to make everyone else lose theirs; a man who has lost a watch does not go about persuading others to lose their watches.

Thus hate is but their vain attempt to despise.

That is why we are not to consider them beyond evangelization.