

Thoughts On The Passion

“Jesus is Struck by the High Priest’s Servant”.

Translation of a Sermon by Rev Father Louis Bourdaloue, S.J.
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BOURDALOUE.

“And when He had said these things, one of the servants standing by gave Jesus a blow, saying: ‘Answer You the High Priest so?’ (John 18:22).”

WHAT, pray, had Our Saviour answered when questioned by the High Priest? What did He do to deserve such prompt chastisement? What was there in His reply to call for such an outrage?

Annas had asked Him for an account of His teaching, and in reply, Jesus had referred him to His disciples whose testimony should be sought on this point. Does this constitute an offence? Is this sufficient cause for insulting Him, for striking Him on the face? But we cannot argue here according to the laws of equity, they are all transgressed; we cannot expect justice in a trial where passion dominates, and that one of the most violent of passions — envy. The only object of our consideration, of our admiration, of our imitation, must be the imperturbable calm of the Son of God under circumstances, which would upset any man no matter how strong, no matter how much master of himself. Long ago had the Lord said by the mouth of His Prophet: “I have not turned away my face from them that rebuked Me, and spit upon Me.” (Isaiah 50:6). It is in this way that He would teach us to receive injuries, a lesson which is of practical importance in daily life — to receive injuries as Jesus did, that is, to bear and even to welcome them: to bear them by accepting them patiently, and even to welcome them by accepting them with joy: far from breaking forth into anger or seeking revenge, to go so far as to expose ourselves to them and even to love them.

PART 1.

FORGIVENESS OF INJURIES.

What a test it must have been for Our Lord’s patience to receive a blow in the presence of a large assembly; to receive a blow as a punishment, as a correction; to receive a blow from a common servant. This is an unpardonable insult if offered to an ordinary man, but what an enormous crime it must be when we consider that it is offered, not to an ordinary man, but to the Son of God, to God-made-Man? Our Saviour could have exacted terrible vengeance for this insult: He had only to say the word and fire would have come down from heaven to destroy the insolent aggressor: He had only to ask His Father for legions of angels to assist Him: He had but to make use of His own miraculous power in His defence. Not only had He the power to avenge Himself for the insult, but it would even seem to have been incumbent on Him to do so. For there is here a question of scandal. He is struck on the ground that he had shown disrespect to the High Priest. If He accepts it, He would seem to admit the charge of disrespect of authority; it would leave a stain on His character whose purity they had sought in vain to tarnish. Nevertheless, He would not exact the justice,

because His action would be capable of being interpreted as springing from a spirit of resentment or a desire for revenge, and this is just what He desires to banish from men's hearts, namely, all trace of that spirit of resentment and that desire for revenge.

It is not as if vengeance does not belong to Him since He is God: "Revenge is Mine" (Romans 12:19). But if it belongs to Him as God, it does not belong to Him as man; and since He is man as well as God, and what He did as God might be attributed to Him as man, He would not avenge Himself, in order to teach men not to seek revenge, and in order not to provide them with even an apparent precedent to which to appeal.

He had indeed worked a miracle in the garden, when, at His single word, the soldiers, sent to seize Him, had fallen backwards on the ground. But that was before they had attacked and laid hands on Him, when such a miracle could not be regarded as an act of revenge. But now that He has been outraged, He does nothing. If He worked a new miracle, His enemies would fear Him; but He prefers to appear helpless, rather than appear to act under the influence of passion. Therefore, He answers, not haughtily, not insisting on His rights, but with unutterable gentleness: "If I have spoken evil, give testimony of the evil; but if well, why strike you Me?" (John 18:23).

This is His only answer. He does not vindicate His rights: He does not punish the evil-doer with a punishment that would be an example for all time. For no matter how well-merited this chastisement might be, it could not but be taken for an act of revenge springing from natural resentment.

Our divine Lord avoids even appearing to take vengeance, for He has come to destroy among men the spirit of revenge. And since in this matter the appearance and the reality are hardly distinguishable, in order to destroy the reality, which is sinful, the slightest appearance must be avoided. As the giver of the New Law, He had already given His commandment, and had taught forgiveness of injuries to His disciples; but, Saint John Chrysostom says, that was not enough. He must safeguard this precept and put it outside the reach of all the stratagems and subtleties to which men descend, when under the influence of passion, in order to avoid its obligation and practice.

For, the holy Doctor adds, how inventive we become when our self-love is aroused: we persuade ourselves that we are insulted when the injury is only imaginary; or if we have indeed received some slight injury, we magnify it out of all proportion. In order to justify ourselves, we put on a mask of righteousness, of zeal for the laws of equity: we draw up arguments and call in authorities to prove that we are doing only what is reasonable, what is expected of us, and seek a thousand and one reasons for justifying our action. It was necessary to put an end to all this; and in order to achieve this purpose, man could be left no room for argument; because there is nothing so subtle and so full of guile as the reasoning of a mind under the influence of passion, for then it is really the heart that reasons. So our Divine Saviour had to strengthen this precept by putting it outside reason; and this He did by His example — by example in allowing this outrage to go unpunished, with even demanding reparation. For even if He did not wish to punish this insult offered so publicly, even if He did not wish to make use of His divine power by which He could overwhelm evil-doers and make them feel the severity of His chastisements, could He not appeal to the judge, could He not appeal to His own outraged innocence and to the High Priest's dignity which was injured by this act of violence committed before his tribunal, before his very eyes? Instead, He renounces all His rights, He forgets all His interests, He sacrifices all His glory, and is concerned only in giving us an example of the most heroic patience.

This is an example so striking that it leaves us no room for hedging. Now you will have difficulty in arguing, in justifying your action. After this example of our divine Saviour, you can only remain silent and give in. There is now no other rule to be followed, no other principle on which to act. It is a principle that is clear-cut and non-compromising; we cannot escape from it, inasmuch as it is so well within our powers of grasping. It is according to this principle that we must judge all others. It is the only principle that can repress the outbursts of a heart carried away by passion, be it ever so little Christian in outlook. In a word, from this principle there follows this great counsel put by our Divine Saviour among the most important articles of that heavenly doctrine He came to teach us: "But I say to you not to resist evil, but if one strike you on thy right cheek, turn to him also the other." (Matthew 5:39).

If our divine Lord had merely spoken as Master and Teacher, we should always have received His word with reverence as coming from the source of all holiness and wisdom, but we could still say that it was too severe, that its practice was too difficult: "This word is hard," using the words spoken by the people of Capharnaum in another context. The Son of God foresaw this possibility, and see the measures He took to prevent it.

"Well," He says to us, "if I must temper the apparent rigour of My teaching, I shall do so, I shall make it easy, and how shall I do so? By My example, for I do not want it to become a stumbling-block for you; I do not want My word, which is the word of life, to be the occasion of your leaving Me, to be the occasion of your loss by estranging you from Me. Is there anything more insulting than a blow on the face?

"Well, I shall expose Myself to this outrage, and My patience will temper the harshness of My precept which you find so difficult, and so impracticable."

Indeed, it is impossible not to relish this teaching of our divine Saviour, bitter though it may seem, when we see Him putting it into practice Himself. We cannot say that He demands too much of us in wishing us to follow His example. Should we not regulate our lives according to His? Does He not wish to reform the world as much by His example as by His preaching? It was for this very reason that He became like unto us, that He assumed our human nature, that we might become like unto Him, that we might follow His example. It is just this example of God bearing patiently a most grievous insult that is the greatest condemnation of our countless susceptibilities and extreme sensitiveness in all that concerns the false honour of the world, of our impatience and irritation so difficult to moderate or satisfy.

This is a vice that is very prevalent in our time, and is always on the increase. This is a vice which preachers of the Gospel with all their zeal and eloquence have not been able to correct. This is the last of all the vices of which we strive to rid ourselves, of which we believe we ought to rid ourselves. There are good people in the world who lead a fairly orderly life: their lives are characterised by nothing underhand, by no vicious habits or scandalous excesses; they are rather the soul of uprightness and honour in all things. There are pious and devout souls who give themselves to pious practices, who visit churches, listen to the word of God, practise mental prayer, frequent the sacraments, exercise charity towards the poor. There are religious souls who go yet further: with a view to arriving at the most sublime perfection, they give up all this world's goods, renounce pleasures of sense, shut themselves up in a cloister, and there pass their days in poverty and obscurity, in a state of subjection and dependence, in works of penance and mortification. All these things are due to the Grace of God, and for them we cannot thank Him too much. But, — can I

venture to say it? Among all these good Christians, among all those souls who are virtuous, or who at least strive after virtue, among all these souls who are perfect, or who at least wish to be perfect, and for that reason have retired from the world, among all these there is perhaps hardly a single one who can overlook an insult, who can forgive and forget.

We learn all other things, we train ourselves in all other accomplishments, we practice all other virtues: we discipline ourselves to fasting, to watching, to prayer; we learn to chastise the flesh and to mortify it. But silence, patience, charity, moderation, self-control, especially when we believe ourselves to be offended, this is what we hardly ever leant; this is what we do not even want to learn. We make a point not to be so good, not to be so forbearing; we do not want to pass for a person who can be attacked with impunity, who cannot defend himself: we rather pride ourselves on the fact that we have rendered ourselves invulnerable, that we have taught others to respect us, not to take liberties with us. And for all this, we have a thousand and one reasons of prudence, of dignity, of justice: but reasons which, when examined and sifted, reduce to this sole reason, that we do not want to suffer.

Nevertheless, we claim to live in accordance with the highest standards of morality, we spend long hours before the Tabernacle; we belong to a circle that sets itself up as a model of virtue; we experience raptures and ecstasies: of a truth, we are like those mountains mentioned in Scripture, which a single touch causes to emit thick clouds of smoke and blazing flames: "Touch the mountains, and they shall smoke" (Psalm 144:5 or Psalm 143:5 in the Vulgate). Such mountains are those souls so pure and holy, or at least that pass for such. They are high mountains, mountains that reach almost to the third heaven by the sublimity of their views and aspirations. But just cross them even in the slightest way; just let slip one word, one gesture of disparagement; just contradict them in any way, ah! then, they become volcanoes in eruption, belching forth smoke and fiery lava: or if, perchance, they restrain themselves and show no signs of annoyance, it is only to nourish a secret grudge, which, like a hidden poison, acts slowly indeed, but only to produce its effects the more surely and the more malignantly at the opportune moment.

This is a fatal obstacle to the virtue of so many souls that are otherwise irreproachable. It is an obstacle that can cause their ruin, from which they can never escape because it follows them everywhere; and besides, it is often in the most regular communities that it is most to be feared.

Whatever be your position in life, the example of Jesus Christ is meant for you. For the words of the Prophet addressed to Almighty God can easily be applied to you, you can say to yourself: "Look on the face of Your Christ" (Psalm 84:9 or Psalm 83:10 in the Vulgate). Have you been offended by word or deed? Have you difficulty in holding yourself in check and putting up with the offence? There are many considerations, which would help to control your anger and to sweeten the bitterness of your heart, but the most potent of all is to look upon the face of your Christ. See this face before which the angels prostrate themselves in adoration, this adorable face struck by a servant: "Look on the face of Your Christ." Your Christ, because for you He has been annointed: your Christ, because for you He has delivered Himself into the hands of His enemies, for you He has immolated Himself on Calvary: your Christ, He is more than that; He is your God. Now compare person with person, insult with insult; the sacred person of the God-Man, and your miserable little self; a blow on the face, and an offence, perhaps in itself altogether insignificant, about which you nevertheless make such a fuss. It is a stain on your honour, do you say? Is your honour more precious than that of the Son of God? It is against your interests? Is your interest more important than that of our holy religion, which is attacked in the person of its head and author? You

have been insulted, your person, your name, your rank, your birth, have all been disregarded? Is the insult offered to you greater than the insult offered to the sovereign majesty of God? No matter what you say, the answer is always the same: 'Look on the face of Your Christ'. Look on your Christ and learn of Him, not only to accept injuries patiently, but even joyfully, and, if needs be, to expose yourself to them, to love them.

This is the point to be treated next.

PART 2. BEARING INJURIES JOYFULLY.

It is not enough for the example of the Son of God to extinguish in our hearts all desire for revenge. It should effect something more. It should make us ready to receive insult and contempt, and any attack on our honour, about which we are so very sensitive. What does this mean? Does it mean that we must be ready to accept generously any aspersions on our honour? No, that is too little to expect. Does it mean accepting it all willingly as coming from the hand of God? Even this is not enough. Does it mean that we must welcome it, love it, glory in it and seek after it? Yes, that is what we must strive after, and this, I venture to say, is something essential and often indispensable.

Perfection, it would seem, cannot be raised to a higher degree; and yet this perfection, which appears to be so elevated, becomes, on many occasions in our daily lives, a precept, which obliges us strictly in conscience. Let us develop this important point and make it as clear as possible.

For instance, what means must I take if I am to forgive injuries generously, as I ought, and not to desire revenge? What must I do if I am to be prepared on every occasion to uphold the cause of God, and to defend it; to oppose scandals which I see arising at every instant in the world about me, scandals which, in virtue of my office, it is my duty to suppress as far as I can; to disregard all those considerations which might deter me when the honour of religion and its interests are at stake? In a word, what must I do if I am to have an unshakeable resolution to behave as a Christian, and not bring dishonour on this glorious name, regardless of the cost, regardless of what may be said about me? In all these cases, and in countless others, what contradiction, what false judgments, what sharp words, reproaches, and calumnious talk, and even insults must be faced? How can we undergo all these evils with resolute firmness unless we are ready to love them for God's sake, to welcome them for God's sake, to honour them and even to glory in them for God's sake?

The faith, which we profess, demands of us the same sentiments, which the Apostles expressed when they were calumniated and ill-treated by the Sanhedrin. They considered themselves happy to suffer all kinds of opprobrium for the name of Jesus Christ. "They were rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus." (Acts 5:41).

It is quite true, and beyond any possible doubt, that this requires great purity and generosity of heart; but it is a necessary virtue. And if our holy religion imposes on us a law that is so difficult and contrary to the tendencies of our nature, it also gives us the aids we need to practise it, and of these, is there any more potent and more capable of consoling and strengthening us in the humiliations of this life than the contemplation of Our Divine Saviour, God-made-Man receiving a blow on the face, and not merely receiving it, but even desiring and seeking it? Be quite sure of this, He received it only because He willed to receive it, for He could have prevented it. But not only did He not wish to prevent it, He desired it, He exposed Himself to it: He made it the object of His most ardent desires and, as it were, the object of His delight. The Prophet Jeremiah, when speaking of the sufferings of Our Divine Saviour, used an expression, which is very apt and very forceful, namely, that He would be sated with opprobrium: "Saturabitur opprobriis." (See Lamentations 3:10) We do

not partake of a dish which is distasteful to us; or if we must, only the bare minimum. But if it is a dish we like, we eat of it with relish, even with avidity; we eat our fill of it, even to satiety. Our divine Master made humiliation His food.

He took His fill of it. If the Son of God made humiliation His food and the object of His desires, in order to procure the Glory of His Father and the salvation of men, should it not become for us an object of respect, of veneration, even of love, especially since by it, the same Glory of God and the salvation of men are obtained?

This explains why the saints have rejoiced at being the objects of persecution and the contempt of the world. It is for this reason that Saint Paul, who was as proud as any man and knew what real honour was, since he was of noble blood and enjoyed the privileges of Roman citizenship, nevertheless found pleasure in even the most humiliating outrages, as he so emphatically declared on several occasions: "I place myself in my infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ." (2 Corinth 12:10). He did not say merely: "I console myself", "I am resigned", "I strengthen myself to face these outrages," but, "I take pleasure in them". And why does he say this? "Because my Saviour has made them holy, and they have become precious in my estimation." It is for this reason that David, though he was King, seeing this mystery of God being violently outraged, instead of fleeing from insults, awaited them, asked for them, received them with thanks as if he received favours. "My heart has expected reproach." (Psalm 69:20 or Psalm 68:21 in the Vulgate). Semei, (sometimes called Shimei) one of his subjects, poured out maledictions and reproaches upon him, but the King blessed God for them. His whole court, righteously indignant, wished to punish the audacity and presumption of the insolent fellow, but the King forbade them. "Let him be," he said, "God has sent me this humiliation: it is a gift from God. Do not take it away from me."

Who could have inspired David with a sentiment so unusual in a King, and even so much opposed to all principles of policy? It could be nothing else than the consideration of His God and Saviour, undergoing the ignominious sufferings of His Passion, revealed to him in vision. He saw the God of all glory, the sovereign majesty, insulted by a blow on the face, and filled with a holy indignation at this spectacle, he cried out: "Ah, Lord, who would fear after this all the outrages in the world; who would not long for them, since You take them for yourself and make them ornaments of Your Sacred Humanity? Therefore, My Lord, I accept them, no longer simply as a proof of my patience, for I have no longer any need of this virtue, but as the fulfilment of the desires of my soul, which waits for them and longs for them. My heart has expected reproaches."

Note well the reason he gives, for it contains a short formula for the whole of the gospel teaching: "For the reproaches of them that reproached You, are fallen upon me." (Psalm 69:9 or Psalm 68:10 in the Vulgate). Because, My God, all the outrages heaped upon You in Your dolorous Passion, have fallen in anticipation on me: because, having considered them carefully and in thinking upon them, I have had most lively experience of them myself: because they have filled my heart with a supernatural desire, with a supernatural love of them, with a love of them not in You, Lord, but in myself. For even though I am attacked personally and these outrages are offered to me, I regard them as Yours, and considering them in that light, how can I not love them? Yes, Lord, they are Yours, since You have made them pass from Yourself to me, and after first experiencing them, You have made them fall back on me. 'Because the reproaches of them that attacked You, have fallen upon me'."

(See: Saint Augustine: Commentary on Psalm 60 and 68).

Only the Grace of God can establish a soul in this disposition and this is not surprising, for only by the Grace of God can we do homage to the humiliations of the God-Man. Flesh and blood cannot teach us these grand maxims or those exalted moral principles; only the Father Who is in heaven can reveal them to us, only the Son Who came down an earth, only the Holy Ghost Who abides in our soul. And this work is, as it were, the masterpiece of God's all-powerful Grace. But let us be fully convinced of this fundamental truth, that without it we cannot be Christian at all. This is what Scripture teaches, and this is what we must take to heart.

For this is a point that must be insisted on, a point that we cannot meditate on too much: that it is impossible to be a Christian, even a simple Christian, if we are not prepared for insults of all kinds; for there are countless occasions in our lives on which we are bound, under pain of damnation, to expose ourselves to humiliations in order to satisfy our conscience and for the salvation of our soul. Furthermore, it is impossible to be really prepared for humiliations as long as we retain a voluntary aversion for them; and finally, we must inevitably have the same horror of them, unless we have a just estimation for them and love them for God's sake. These propositions follow necessarily one from the other, because we cannot love what we do not value, and we must value what we consider wretched and contemptible. We must therefore begin with the intellect in order to form in our hearts those real tendencies, which God requires of us. In proportion as we learn to value insults and outrages, as the world calls them, we shall reverence and welcome them.

But how can we value and love what lowers us in the eyes of men, what humiliates us and takes away from us our honour? As long as we regard them in themselves, and do not look beyond them, we cannot value them; but we must not consider them in themselves, we must view them in Jesus Christ, in relation to Jesus Christ. That is, we must look upon them as a portion of the reproaches offered to Our Lord, as making us like Our Lord; as something to offer to Our Lord, as an opportunity of showing our love for Him. When viewed in this light, there is nothing so humiliating, nothing so degrading in the eyes of the world, which does not become glorious to the eye of Faith, which we do not embrace as a benefit, as a favour.

This lesson is so much beyond ordinary human views, that it is impossible to make it too clear, and to point out exactly what is expected of us in practice. Such expressions as to esteem insults, to love insults and rejoice in them, to receive insults willingly and even with pleasure, are so strange and so much above our feeble nature, that we wonder what it all means. It does not mean that we must stifle all feelings of repugnance. It does not mean that we must become so entirely callous that we do not experience those movements of self-love or displeasure, which are really inseparable from our human nature. It does not mean that we must feel pleasure in them or that they should appeal to our sensitive nature. It is true that some saints have reached the stage where they had so far repressed their lower nature that no insult or outrage could disturb in any way their peace of soul; they sought them as eagerly as ambitious men seek vain distinctions and worldly honours.

Numerous examples can be given, but they are all extraordinary graces, miracles of Christian humility, which are in no way indispensable to the practice of this virtue. It means that in spite of what worldly prudence tells us, in spite of even the most violent revolt of our sensitive nature, we consider ourselves happy to share the ignominy of the Son of God, especially when it is for the Glory of God or in defence of the Faith. It means that we must prefer to be despised, to be ridiculed, to be condemned and even persecuted for justice' sake, rather than by compromising, to be

applauded and praised and honoured. It means that we must have an inviolable resolution never to deviate from the path of virtue, whether in the hope of worldly distinction or through disgust for a hidden and a lowly condition.

Sometimes we may be greatly agitated, we may be moved to the very depths of our being, we may be tempted to burst out in reproaches and angry recriminations. At critical moments, we may feel helpless, unable to bear any more. But amid this storm of our senses from which our reason and our will stand aloof, we remain immovably fixed in our adherence to the same principles, which are the principles of the Gospel. We hold firmly that it is a good, the greatest good in this life, to be able to prove our fidelity to God when we feel most desperate. We find strength in Our Lord's words to the Apostles: "They will accuse you, they will calumniate you; they will speak all kind of evil against you. But do not you relax in the exercise of your ministry, do not worry. On the contrary, you ought to glorify it, and rejoice. Be glad and rejoice." (See Matthew 5:12).

We are sustained by these consoling thoughts: that the greatest glory of a Christian is to make to God the sacrifice of his own glory; that if it is the most difficult sacrifice, it is also the most meritorious of eternal life; that a humiliation received in such a good cause is a deposit which receives hundredfold profit; that there is no better way of showing Him our inviolable devotedness; that, if at first it is bitter to the taste, this bitterness soon changes into a sweetness that is real and sometimes even overflows into the senses, if we use the eye of Faith in judging an insult which is offered to us.

All such considerations give the soul, not the blind prudence of this world, but a truly divine wisdom; they strengthen it; they restore its calm, and give it peace in the midst of circumstances, which give rise to so many disturbances and wars among men.

Almighty God, on His part, is never outdone in generosity; He never abandons a faithful soul; but pours out His Grace in abundance, so that there is nothing, no matter how distasteful, no matter how repellent, which His Grace cannot make sweet. With the help of His Grace, we are in a position, if I may so speak, to face, for the honour of God, for the defence of Holy Church, for the good of religion, for the fulfilment of our duty, any insult and outrage.

In fact, the more we are loaded with insult, the more do we cry out with the Royal Prophet: "It is good for me that Thou hast humiliated me. (Psalm 119:71 or Psalm 118:71 in the Vulgate). Blessed are You, O Lord, for allowing me to be thus humiliated, since it is all for You." We repeat the words of the Apostle: "Maledictions are heaped upon us, but we cannot answer but in benediction and thanksgiving. Blasphemies are hurled against us, but we reply by praying for those who speak evil of us. We are regarded as the least among men, – and far from being grieved, we rejoice in it" (1 Corinth 4:12). For we know why we are treated in this manner. It is because we belong to God and wish to belong to Him always; it is because we never wish to depart from the obedience due to the commandments of God nor to turn away from His Law; it is because we use the authority which we have received from God to maintain order, to uphold the law of equity, and know no compromise in these matters; it is because we use the gifts God has given us and the zeal with which His Grace has inspired us to attack vice, to combat error, to unmask falsehood. If for these reasons we are decried, if our characters are painted in the blackest colours, if we are the object of hatred and spite, it ought to be a source of consolation for us, it is a sign of our triumph, it is something for which we cannot sufficiently thank the Lord, Who is testing us, and we cannot repeat often enough the words of the

Psalmist: “We have rejoiced for the days in which You have humbled us, for the years in which we have seen evils.” (Psalm 90:15 or Psalm 89:15 in the Vulgate.)

PART 3.

May it please God to animate you with this spirit. If He does not raise you to the point of rejoicing in insult, He will at least strengthen you against one failing which is very common among Christians — namely, human respect, which is an obstacle to so many good works, and is the cause of many disorders and evils.

Because we are afraid of ridicule or mockery we often neglect most important obligations and even allow ourselves to be led on to excesses and crimes which are abhorrent to us; because we have not the strength to overcome a false sense of shame; how often do we experience its disastrous results. If we wish to free ourselves from this slavery, let us follow the advice of the Apostle, and keep before our minds the example of Our Blessed Lord: “Looking on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of Faith.” (Hebrews 12:2). He is its Author by His wisdom, and its Finisher by His love: He is its Author by His all-holy doctrine, and its Finisher by His divine example. He did not wish to be the Author of our Faith without also perfecting it; not only lest we should think that it was quite easy for Him to order things thus without having to observe them Himself, but above all because its perfection seemed to Him as glorious and as worthy of Him as its authorship. While wishing us to be faithful observers of His Law, He reserved to Himself the glory of being the perfect model of its observance, the Finisher of our Faith. Saint Paul tells in very explicit terms how He did this: “Who having joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame.” (Hebrews 12:2). It was by despising the shame, by rising above it and bearing it with courage and constancy. But I venture to add something to these words of the great Apostle without altering their meaning; it was not only by despising the shame but by loving it.

Hence, I can never hope to have a really strong faith nor a truly solid piety, as long as I am dominated by human respect, by the fear of not being the subject of conversation, by the fear that man will turn against me, that they will attack me. But as soon as I am freed from this slavery, as soon as I am no longer ashamed of my God and of my duty, then I begin to be a Christian. Going, if necessary along the way of humiliation, which is so contrary to the false ideas of this world, I shall arrive at that true glory, which is the eternal glory.
