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10. Faith-filled words for a dying person

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Faith-filled words for a dying person

To Brother Auguste Pagnier¹

Brother Auguste² was scarcely out of the novitiate, when he was diagnosed as suffering from advanced tuberculosis, which at that time was incurable. Father Libermann had great affection for the Brothers and in this letter he is preparing him for death. By this time, Libermann could feel his own strength fading fast. His letter is full of kindness, the spirit of the Gospel and simplicity of heart when faced with death.

Paris, 26th July 1851

My very dear Brother,

I have heard that it would ease your mind to receive a letter from me and I now hasten to satisfy your wishes.

You have to be patient, for the moment of glory is getting nearer. The wedding feast of the spotless Lamb is about to take place, but the preparations for it involve a lot of work and pain. The closer you get to that great day, the more you can expect to suffer. Prepare your soul for that by humility, recollection, the love of God, gentleness and mortification in your suffering.

Let me explain these things to you:

1) Humility. Consider your soul its smallness before God, who is completely good and merciful. Think about your sins, your weakness and your faults and so keep yourself small

¹ N. D. XIII, pp. 243-245

² See Index of Names

before him. You must feel very tiny and full of gratitude for his infinite goodness towards you. Be full of confidence, for he loves you and wants to take you to himself. His plan is to place you in the assembly of his angels and saints, to let you sing, praise, bless and adore for ever the infinite mercies he has shown you.

2) Recollection. I think, my very dear Brother, that there is no need for you to try to spend all day in prayer. You must not make great efforts to do that, but turn your mind to Jesus whenever you can. Repeat again and again simple little prayers. If you don't have enough strength for that, just make them in your mind. Concentrate on sacrificing your whole being, heart and soul, to Our Lord.

3) The love of God. You are probably not able to have feelings of love for Jesus at the moment. They are not at all necessary: love consists in being perfectly submissive to his holy will, accepting not only your pain and sickness, but also the mistakes, forgetfulness, and negligence of those who are looking after you. Bear with all of that for the love of God and with the desire of pleasing him. That is to be your way of loving.

4) Gentleness. Imitate Jesus with whom you are going to be united for all eternity. He was as gentle as a lamb towards the people who tormented him so horribly and maliciously. You are his beloved child, and must resemble him by the loving gentleness and patience you show towards your dear brothers in religion. You have this advantage, which Jesus did not have: He was tortured by people who hated him, whilst you have only small things to put up with from those who love you tenderly and wish to make you happy. I underline that point, because I have learned from experience that sick people, once they are weakened, are liable to become impatient. Be

Careful about that, my dear Brother, so that you remain close to Jesus and Mary. When you are annoyed, look at your beloved Saviour and glance at your gentle and loving Mother. Look into her eyes, for she will encourage you and strengthen you.

5) Mortification. My poor child, you will probably be astonished that I am speaking to you about mortification. But I am not going to tell you to impose penance on yourself in addition to what the good Lord is giving you already. Although your pains are not fierce, it takes a great deal of courage to bear them when they are so continuous. Lift your mind and heart to Calvary and God will give you the strength you need. When you are tired of being in bed, consider Jesus with his torn body, covered in blood, hanging on the wood of the cross, attached to it by nails. When you feel thirsty, think of Jesus who felt the same! When you find it hard to breathe and experience heart palpitations, look at Jesus hanging there, with his swollen chest and his weakness of heart and remember that all of that was undergone for love for you. Finally, my dear Brother, don't be preoccupied about the food you are getting or other pleasures of this world. You no longer belong to this earth, but to Jesus. You are his child, one of his angels, and you are destined to follow the Lamb wherever he goes.

Farewell, my dear child. I shall come on the 9th or 10th of August. You can surely wait until then! However, it may be asking too much; if you want to depart sooner, ask your good Master to take you. I will not forget you before God.

Yours in Jesus and Mary,

F. Libermann, Superior