

VALUE AND USE OF CROSSES

François Fénelon

We have much trouble convincing ourselves of the kindness with which God crushes those he loves with crosses. Why take pleasure, we say, in making us suffer? Would he not know how to make us good without making us miserable? Yes, doubtless, God could do so, because nothing is impossible for him.... But God, who could have saved us without crosses, has not wished to do so.... In this he is the master. We have only to be silent, and to adore his profound wisdom without understanding it. What we see clearly is that we cannot become entirely good except as we become humble, disinterested, detached from ourselves, in order to relate everything to God without any turning back upon ourselves. The operation of grace, which detaches us from ourselves and which uproots our self-love cannot, without a miracle of grace, avoid being painful.

God prepares a series of happenings which detaches us little by little from creatures, and which at last tears us away from ourselves. This operation is painful, but it is our corruption which makes it necessary, and that is the cause of the pain we bear. If this flesh were healthy, the surgeon would not make any incision. He only cuts in proportion to the depth of the wound, and the area of the infection. If the operation causes us so much pain, it is because the infection is bad. Is it cruelty in the surgeon to cut to the quick? No, on the contrary, it is affection. It is skill. He would thus treat his only son.... He cuts to the quick to cure the ulcer of our heart. He has to take from us what we love too dearly, what we love in the wrong way and without discretion, what we love to the prejudice of his love.

What does he do about it? He makes us weep like children from whom we take the knife with which they are playing, and with which they could kill themselves. We weep, we are discouraged, we cry out loud. We are ready to murmur against God, as children are vexed with their mothers. But God lets us cry, and saves us. He afflicts us only to correct us. Even then when he seems to overwhelm us, it is for our good, it is to spare us from the harm which we would do to ourselves. What we weep for would have made us weep eternally. What we believe to have lost was lost when we thought we had it. God has taken it into safe-keeping to give it back to us soon in the eternity which draws near. He takes from us the things which we love, only to make us an eternal joy in his bosom, and to do a hundred times more good to us, than we would know how to desire for ourselves. Nothing happens on earth which God has not willed.....

François Fénelon (1651-1715), a French Catholic bishop, theologian and writer, was often in trouble with the leaders of church and state for his passionate promotion of the spiritual life and his association with the "quietism" of Madame Guyon, which many of his contemporaries viewed as fanaticism. The excerpt printed here is taken from the book *Christian Perfection* (Harper & Row Publishers. 1947. pp. 82-87).