



During the apparitions at Paray-Le-Monial (1673-1689), Jesus came to ask us, among other things, to unite ourselves regularly with his agony in the Garden of Olives through the Holy Hour. He knows that in order to know his loving Heart, we must indeed join him in this terrible agony. But what is agony? It is the torment that precedes death. Jesus' body will agonize on the cross, but his Heart will agonize in the Garden of Olives. *"The agony of Gethsemane is that of the heart; the blood that flows in the Garden is the blood that flows from the heart,"* said St. Alphonsus Liguori. Jesus will experience this trial in his humanity. It is his human Heart, so good, so pure, so gentle, that will struggle and be crushed, motivated solely by his boundless love for us. Therein lies the glory of the "Sacred Heart," and that is why Jesus wants to be honored **with his human Heart visible** on statues and paintings. Let us now contemplate the sufferings of Jesus. Among other things, they will take three particular forms.

***Agony of horror at the sins of the world that he bears.***

At this hour, Christ takes upon himself the ignominy of all the sins of the world, as if he himself were responsible for them. He, the most pious being, finds himself burdened with the most atrocious blasphemies. He, the most charitable being, finds himself bearing the most cruel massacres. He, the purest being, finds himself burdened with the most despicable sins of the flesh. This gulf between His holiness, the infinite delicacy of His sensitivity, and the ugliness of the sins of men rushing upon Him creates unspeakable suffering. As St. Thomas Aquinas teaches, such pain would have been enough to kill Him; but Christ freely retained His life in order to go through with the sacrifice of the cross.

St. Alphonsus Liguori describes this terrible hour of Jesus' life as follows: *"He must atone for our sins in our place; He must therefore take them upon Himself like a filthy garment dragged through the mud; He must take them upon Himself and, before His Father, bear full responsibility for them, as if He had committed them Himself. This is the hour of the powers of darkness. Jesus is kneeling on the stony ground of the garden of agony; suddenly, from the distant past and future, like the horizon suddenly darkening when a storm breaks, he sees all past and future sins rushing towards him: they embrace him, they splash him, they overwhelm him, hideous, muddy waves against which he does not even try to struggle; he merely bows his head and blushes; he is the sinner, he is sin."*

Not that He becomes a sinner—for He remains the Innocent One—but He accepts to bear the full weight of it. Oh my sweet Jesus, in the midst of this assault of evil, you took on **my own sins**. Yes, at that moment, you saw me defiling you, crushing you. May this terrible vision of what I have done to you personally inspire in me immense humility and gratitude toward you, so that I may throw myself at your feet with sincere contrition, begging your forgiveness.

Agony of fear in the face of suffering and death. Jesus sees clearly the torment that awaits him. He sees the flagellation, more than a thousand blows that will lacerate his body and drain him of his blood; he sees the crown of thorns digging into his head and disfiguring him; he sees the humiliation of nakedness; he sees the hatred of the crowd; he sees the nails piercing his nerves; he sees the abandonment of his apostles. All this fills him with real human fear in the face of the imminent torment. This is not weakness: it is the truth of the mystery of the Incarnation: Jesus, true God, **but also true man**. Finally, he sees his Mother at the foot of the Cross, her Immaculate Heart pierced with sorrow. This vision overwhelms him. He knows that by accepting his redemptive mission, his Mother will be drawn with him into the Passion. And since his filial love is perfect, this pain strikes him to the depths of his Heart. However, in the midst of these torments, his love for us remains stronger. He accepts the cup, if such is the will of his Father.

Agony of the soul, in temptation and darkness. Another inner pain is added. For while the apostles sleep, Satan watches. And he tempts Our Lord, seeking to make Him give up: why suffer so much, since so many souls will reject His Love and be lost? In his agony, Christ sees the souls who will go to hell for eternity, not because the offering of the Lamb is insufficient, but because it can be freely rejected by

some. The pain of seeing a multitude of souls rushing into hell plunges him into a terrible night. This vision crushes his h d Heart, for he loves all men without exception. So what is the point of continuing your mission, Satan whispers to him. But, as in the desert, he does not give in to temptation. He does not give in to despair. St. Alphonsus describes this suffering of Jesus' soul: *"Then, from the depths of his bruised and weary body, from the depths of his soul drenched in shame, the cowardly counsels of temptation rise up. Why suffer to erase sins you did not commit? Why try to heal the human soul, so vicious that it will return to evil despite all the pains of Calvary? And Christ sees very clearly the perfect sterility of his sufferings for countless beings! Why love so madly men who ignore and blaspheme him? Why? Why? (...) The hardest part of his agony in the Garden is the certainty that his suffering will be lost on the damned and that his blood will fall upon them: to give his blood to save and, through his blood, to lose those he loves, this is the height of torment for the Heart of Jesus, this is, at the bottom of the chalice, more bitter than the crucifixion itself, the dregs that the Savior must drink."*

Faced with this agony of the Heart of Jesus, we might be tempted to reassure ourselves by considering it a moment in the past, now far away. However, on a mystical level, **this agony remains present**. Just as, in the Holy Eucharist, Jesus renews in a bloodless manner the unique sacrifice of the Cross, so too the new sins of mankind, which He already bore in His agony, manifest its permanent relevance. A holy priest, Father Charles Parra, wrote: *"He is agonizing today for me because of my sins today, which he knew, in their every detail, with their number and their gravity, in the Garden of Gethsemane."* The Sacred Heart appeared at Paray-Le-Monial to **ask us to participate in the sufferings of his agony**. There are two reasons for this: on the one hand, Gethsemane was the most painful moment of his entire Passion and the highest expression of his love; on the other hand, he wants us, considering our own sins borne by him, to have our hearts broken with regret in communion with his, and to remain at his side to make reparation. This is why He asks us to join Him in His agony by keeping vigil with Him during a "Holy Hour" on the eve of the first Friday of each month.

This contrition for our sins is the fruit of this mystery. Let us beware of the absence of contrition, telling ourselves that it is not so serious after all and that we still love Jesus. This attitude is a "sin against the Holy Spirit," which is unforgivable because we do not ask for forgiveness and God cannot force our freedom. We find this in the recent notion of "automatic mercy," which consists in believing that God's forgiveness is guaranteed no matter what we do. It is a terrible trap that gradually weakens our will. Why bother making an effort since we are all going to heaven anyway? This allows us to sink into sin with a clear conscience, and our soul gradually heads towards hell without us realizing it, which is Satan's supreme trick. Of course, God wants to give His mercy to all men without exception. But not everyone obtains it because this mercy depends precisely on our sincere contrition. Contrition and mercy are inseparable. We can only understand the splendor of God's mercy in light of what it cost Him: the terrible agony of Jesus' Heart and His sacrifice on the Cross. St. Francis de Sales explains that *"any love that does not originate in the passion of the Savior is frivolous."*

The second outcome of this meditation must be the contemplation of the Love of Jesus who offers Himself for us in the agony of His Heart. All the greatness of Redemption is expressed here. In His terrible torments in the Garden of Olives, as on the Cross, Jesus' indomitable Love for us is omnipresent and at the root of everything. *"In the Redemption through the Cross, it is love that commands everything: infinitely more than the satisfaction of divine justice, which demands that sin be punished, there is the Love of God, who wants all men to be saved. All this Love of God vibrates and pulsates in the Heart of Our Lord,"* says St. Alphonsus Liguori. Yes, sincere and profound regret for our sins must be accomplished in an act of trust in the Love and infinite Mercy of Jesus. Let us throw ourselves weeping like a little child into His arms and entrust ourselves to His Heart. Then He will burn away all the evil we have done to Him and raise us up to His Father.

To conclude, let us repeat this prayer with St. Alphonsus Liguori: *"My Jesus! When I consider my sins, I am ashamed to ask you for Heaven [to ask for your mercy, editor's note], after having renounced it so many times in your presence for unworthy and fleeting pleasures. But when I see you attached to this cross, I cannot help but hope for paradise, knowing that you wanted to die on this painful gallows to atone for my sins and obtain for me the heavenly happiness that I have despised."*