

## (2.11) So Few Lovers of the Cross

Jesus has many lovers of his heavenly kingdom but few bearers of his cross; many are wanting of comfort, but few of hardship and sacrifice. *Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.*<sup>1</sup> He finds many willing to join Him at His table, but few of His abstinence and fasting. All desire to rejoice with Him, but few are willing to endure suffering for His sake. Many follow Jesus to the breaking of the bread, but few to drinking the chalice of His passion. Many are in awe of his miracles, but few follow the hardships of his way of the cross that enable them to be accomplished.



Many love Jesus as long as they meet with no adversity, many praise and bless Him as long as they receive consolation from Him. But if Jesus hides himself and leave them for a while, they either murmur or fall into excessive dejection. The danger that can ensue with this attitude is exemplified by *the Israelites in the desert who grumbled against God, felt dejected, and lost their way, suddenly finding themselves among a nest of seraph serpents.*<sup>2</sup>

But, if a man love Jesus for Jesus' sake, and not for the sake of some comfort of his own, he will bless Him no less in distress and agony of heart than in time of greatest solace. And though Jesus should seldom give him consolation, yet would he always praise Him, and always give Him thanks. *Afterwards the God of all grace who called him to his eternal glory through Christ [Jesus] will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish him after he has suffered a little.*<sup>3</sup>

O how powerful is the pure love of Jesus, when mixed with no self-interest of self-love! He who is ever seeking consolations is like a *hired man, who is not a shepherd and whose sheep are not his own, sees a wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf catches and scatters them.*<sup>4</sup> Do they not prove themselves to be rather lovers of themselves and the world than of Christ, who are always seeking their own advantage and gain? Where shall we find a man that is willing to serve God without seeking a reward?

Seldom do we find anyone so spiritual as to be willingly stripped of all comfort. For who shall find a man that is truly poor in spirit and detached from all created things. And if a

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 14:27

<sup>2</sup> Numbers 21:4-7

<sup>3</sup> 1Peter5:10

<sup>4</sup> John 10:12

man give his whole substance still it is nothing. And if he do great penance, it is but little. And if attain to all knowledge, he is far off still. And if he have great virtue and very fervent devotion, there is still much wanting in him, namely, the one thing which is supremely necessary for him. What is that? That having left all things else, he leave also himself, and retain nothing of self-love. And when he shall have done all things which he knows he ought to do, let him think he has done nothing but his duty. Then he can call upon God in prayer as did the Psalmist, saying, "Look upon me, have pity on me, for I am alone and afflicted."<sup>5</sup>

Let him not credit himself of that which might be much esteemed by others, but let him in truth acknowledge himself to be an unprofitable servant. *When you have done all you have been commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants; we have done what we were obliged to do.'*<sup>6</sup>

Yet no man is richer, no man more powerful, no man more free than he who knows how to humble himself and let go of all worldly things, and to be content even in the very lowest place. *God opposes the proud but bestows favor on the humble. So humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.*<sup>7</sup>

This article is based on Book 2, Chapter 11 of Thomas of Kempis' writing, "Imitation of Christ." It is not necessarily a translation, and there are many of those, but a personal reflection on his writing: if any of it helps give credit to Thomas of Kempis; if any of it fails the responsibility is mine. ( rfm)

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<sup>5</sup> Psalm 25:16

<sup>6</sup> Luke 17:10

<sup>7</sup> 1Peter 5:5b-6