

**Pastoral Letter of the Servant of God**  
**Metropolitan Andrej Sheptycky**  
*To The Sick*

I am obliged to send you this Pastoral Letter of encouragement with my greetings and blessings, since I am confined to a wheel-chair and unable to stand up.

The teaching of the Holy Gospel that holds God's true revelation is the source of real joy for those who follow it, especially for those who suffer, however great their suffering because it gives them the understanding that their illness is instigated by our merciful yet just God for their own good. Our Lord allows these sufferings, sicknesses, frailties, great pain, and surgical intrusions through His love for us and for the greater Good. We experience suffering & sickness not because we want it, but because it's always necessary. Without it our lives could become distanced from God's commandments and we could be condemned into eternity. In order to save us from this peril and lead us onto the right path of salvation that our Lord allows our physical and spiritual sufferings.

Dear Beloved, through our nature we are sinners and since our corrupt nature rebels against God's will, it leads us down the wrong path. Blessed is he who suffers since in this state one atones for his sins and to gain forgiveness of God Our Father from time to time — these sicknesses become necessary.

Through suffering, our soul is guided through God's Grace and goes down the road of the prodigal son returning to his father's house. If one was healthy, rich, famous and fortunate, in other words if things in life went well, they would be left far away from their father's house. It's not good to live a life distanced from Our Lord and His Commandments. To lose God's graces is the greatest of all misfortunes yet worse still is the loss of our Faith in Him. When sickness and all the tribulation that come with it are accepted, they become that small price we pay for the return to Our Father's House and they are accepted by God as an atonement for our sins.

In this period of Lent and with the oncoming of the Feast of the Resurrection of Our Lord, I invite all of you who are burdened with sickness to repent and go to Confession and receive Holy Communion. The Body and Blood of Jesus Christ will bring you true happiness and privileges. When the Lord has entered your hearts speak to Him and say: *"Lord my Saviour; You suffered pain for me because of my sins. Because I love You, as an act of contrition, I accept my present illness and everything that comes with it including all the discomforts in my past life just give me strength of a true Christian to cope without complaint and to accept Your will."*

Soon it will be Passion Week when we meditate on Christ's sufferings and I hope some of you will read parts of the Gospel that describe them. By doing this our own suffering will be lightened and even in severest pain we will experience true joy. If you have a copy of the New Testament, then read it, at least the passages describing our Lord's passions, because the Book of Gospels is filled with the great and holy teachings that raise our souls to heaven and teaches them to suffer with Christ in the hope of Eternal Salvation and glorious Resurrection.

The infirm body is confined to a sick-bed, yet when the Grace of the Holy Spirit touches its soul it enlightens the mind and enables it to see and taste the Goodness of God the Father; we experience how good it is to be with Jesus and to suffer with Him and one day be born again.

This enlightenment of mind, this seeking of God in our heart touched by the Holy Spirit, we call the Resurrection with Christ's hope and grace.

Now is not the time for real Resurrection but a time for suffering and sickness. Today we have to patiently await the Resurrection of the dead. However, there is hope that through God's Grace, we will receive something out of Christ's Resurrection in the midst of our sickness, which raises, blesses, cleanses and enlightens our soul. True joy will flow into our souls and we will experience real happiness and even forget our own suffering.

Some of you may find that you cannot lift up your hearts to God and Jesus, but with God's Grace your soul within your infirm bodies confined to the sick-bed will be led onto the path leading to heaven. We cannot only be happy in the midst of our suffering, but we can be happy with the hope of attaining salvation through God's Grace, which cleanses the soul forgives our sins and allows us to return to the Fathers House.

All these are great riches and true treasures for our soul. They are the *"protected treasure,"* which more than one of you may have just found in your present illness, which God sent you. Only those, who understand what kind of treasure this is, will rejoice and at the time of their greatest suffering will find moments of happiness.

There is a story about an avaricious rich man, who when dying asked that he be brought his treasure-chest. Once it was brought he scattered its contents of gold coins, necklaces, precious stones, and diamonds set in gold; he ran them through his fingers as if he was parting from them. *"Unwise and ill-fated, this day your soul will be taken from you, and what you have collected whose then will it be?"*

Likewise, but with a different intent, open your own treasure-chest and look inside. See, what beautiful gold coins are there! Every good deed of a Christian deserves a reward. Look how much God has given you. A glass of water given to a pauper will command a reward. See how much God has given you.

Look — the precious stone is the Holy Catholic Faith; how beautiful, rich and great it is. The emerald represents hope of attaining heaven and the diamond, which would have adorned the kings crown is God's love, that sanctifies the soul making it a child of God. Isn't being Gods child a greater treasure than life itself? Surely it's greater because it gives eternal life and bliss. Look further: Isn't a good Confession a channel for forgiveness of all our sins!

Isn't the Holy Eucharist a means by which Christ Himself enters our soul? By drinking His Precious Blood from the Chalice we obtain medicine for death itself and payment for eternal resurrection and union with God forever! Are not the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation this beautiful jewel? What a shame that such a treasure was hidden from our eyes, yet what a blessing it is to find and rejoice in it. And when we go through God's treasure held there in the hands of Our Lord in our thoughts, let us not forget the present gifts from heaven. Remember your dear father and mother, who may have died a long time ago, remember your youth, the innocent games you used to play, the sincere prayers led by your mother and don't forget your friends, who may have died a long time ago; remember the good times and times of past sufferings and sacrifices made for the family and Country.

The miserly rich man's treasure couldn't bring him happiness because the thought of parting from it was poisoning the last hours of his life. Your treasure though, can bring you joy and happiness because no one can take it away from you. The Lord says to you: "Gather your treasure in heaven where it will not be eaten by rust or moths, nor be stolen by a thief. It is as if the Lord said: *"Trust me with your treasure, let me hold it; I will keep it for*

*safekeeping till times are better*". Believe in the Gospel that even in one's the greatest suffering you will find comfort in this treasure deposited into the hands of Jesus and stored in heaven. The fact that one can rejoice is also proclaimed through God's teaching, this is the experience of all the Saints, of every Christian, who wants to contemplate on these truths and wants to better himself. St. James clearly teaches: "*My brothers, with the fullness of joy, accept suffering, when you fall into various temptations*" (James 1, 2).

Search well, apply yourself, pray and you will find, that you can't only be joyful in suffering; you have to experience real joy through suffering itself. In such a state, it would be unpleasant for the soul if the suffering was final, since it rejoices in suffering and considers this state, as a good one. Think, is this disposition of one's soul — false? Not only is it not false or self-deceiving, it is based on real truths. Naturally one has to be disposed to God's Grace, have strong Faith and be open to God's Love. These are the gifts of God to us. Every one of you can have strong faith, the gift of grace and love in abundance. When we look and reflect upon suffering through eyes of Faith and Love, we will find that our entire suffering, with all the medications, pain, operations and sleepless nights are those jewels deposited in our treasure-chest which is worthy to be placed in the hands of our Lord at the appropriate time. My brothers and sisters, in order to clearly handle this burden it should be placed under the symbol of a wooden cross. You could reject, but wait, look at it more closely and then: — why not embrace and kiss it. Doesn't this symbol have any real value for you! Who knows? Maybe it has restored your health. Remember that bodily illness restores health to our souls.

Look into your soul. Hasn't this cross restored some health to the soul? If it has then it isn't a worthless medicine; surely a healthy soul is more important than a healthy body! Think about it and come to a decision! Is it worthier or not? Be what may — a healthy soul will have meaning after death. Even if you were not a believing Christian but thought that on death the soul didn't perish as do the Jews, Mohammedans, Hindus, Brahmins, Buddhists, Theists and even all Spiritualists — remember that they considered a healthy soul as something of value into eternity. We Christians maintain that our eternity, joyful or condemned, depends on a healthy soul. Isn't your small cross a very important and valuable lesson in life? Was it not the key to your hidden treasure-chest? Wasn't it the channel that led you to a good Confession, to the Eucharist, to a change in your life style to an act of contrition for your sins? Take those tears you shed when remembering your deceased parents, were they not a gift of this wooden cross? If you could grasp the value that this cross is given to you, you would cherish it as the most valuable treasure you possess. This treasure is protected. Look my dear brothers and sisters, all our Christian treasures are protected; from the outside they appear insignificant and small, but when you look on the inside you begin to discover the real substance and once you look for the protected treasure — you will find that even the most straightforward issues in the Gospel are treasures of eternal value. That is why you should look at the cross more closely. Look, have you noticed red stains on it? These are the drops of Christ's blood shed for us on the Cross because of His love for us. That's why the symbol of your illness is the Cross and that's why we call sufferings — our crosses.

What do we mean by this? We mean that suffering comes from God through Jesus Christ and that it unites us with Him and that if we carry our cross with patience, it will draw us closer to Him. When we carry our cross with humility we become like Simon of Cyrene — we help Jesus to carry the heavy Cross to Golgotha, and then the rays of sun from Jesus Cross are reflected onto our own little cross. In other words, by calling our illness the little cross,

we reaffirm that it is adorned by the Blood of Christ. This trail of Christ's blood makes our own suffering precious and dear. Looking at our own little cross even closer, we will discover more than one precious sign; we will find traces of the blood of our Martyrs, those untold good and holy men, who gave their lives as witness to Faith. By spilling their blood they glorified God and became our guardians in heaven. Upon their relics, so highly valued by Christ's Church, the Liturgy of Christ's sacrifice is celebrated.

How can we say that our cross is beautified by the blood of Martyrs? We believe this since all Christians form one family and are one body. This holy family, this body is known in the Holy Book as the Mystical Body of Christ, meaning, that we are all united into one family of Jesus Christ within both faith and grace. We are all redeemed and cleansed by his blood; we all belong to Him and form part of his mystical body. We belong to this brotherhood, where the head is Jesus and where life is Christ's life. As members of Christ's body we are all united — good or bad.

A sinful Christian causes harm not only to himself but to all Christians: before God he wastes and loses something of the common good of God's Grace. But when a Christian goes forth with God's blessing, his merits become common to all the family. That is why your sicknesses and sufferings, your sleepless nights, if carried with Christian dignity, can with the Grace of God bestow mercies on other members of our brethren. In this way, the suffering of our Holy Martyrs; are entwined before God with our own sufferings; when suffering, let us suffer with the Holy Martyrs, with our sufferings we proclaim God as they did with their martyrdom.

Our cross is only a small part of the big cross that carries mankind cleansed and redeemed by His Blood.

Our cross is a small part of the great cross that first was carried by the Blessed Virgin. She, in a saintly state, suffered and bore so much pain in her heart that it equaled or maybe even surpassed the sufferings of all the Martyrs put together. To this great cross, a small part of which is our own, belong pain and suffering of all the saints: our martyrs, who gave their lives for their faith, the slaying of the Hermits, the suffering of the holy Confessors and the struggles and deeds of the Religious. With the great cross is the suffering of the whole of mankind, which is saved by Jesus, He embraces it in His infinite love to His own cross. The value of all the sufferings of the Martyrs and Saints with our own suffering, is only when it is in union with Christ. If we are then all interrelated with Christ, we can surely say that our own little cross is splattered with the blood of the Martyrs and enlightened by the merits of all the Saints. Furthermore, we can say that it has been marked by the sufferings of all our brothers: those who fell fighting for their Homeland, those who are far away and are dying through horrific starvation, and those whose misfortune scattered them around the world. They are our dear Brothers and their blood, suffering, tears, battles and pain are marked on our cross. The cross of our sickness unites us with them, and they are recognizable in it. Don't take suffering lightly since it was given to you by God's providence. Look at it through eyes of faith, seek out the hidden treasure and explore in it with faith the unbounded love of God. That's the whole teaching of the Gospel; that's Christian living, however weak, it still reflects the Lord's Gospel. The New Testament is full of mystery and so is our life, the more we explore through the Grace of God our own cross and what it says to us the more we will understand Jesus' cross.

My dearest, if you think that I am speaking to you in terms which you consider to be unclear, let me say that I do this because I want you to be introduced to these deep mysteries. How clearly can I speak about them? How can one express these infinite mysteries in human

terms, one would need an angelic language to show and explain what is deposited in this treasure-chest, which people take so lightly and are happy to cast away.

Let me try and take a further step. Although this discourse could be unclear to you I will endeavour to explain the hidden mystery of your small cross.

You are God's children bought by Christ's Blood and the Holy Spirit has touched your minds and hearts and your soul blessed by his graces. Therefore, the eternal mysteries of God's teachings can and should be understood by you. You are children of the Saints; you belong to the holy family of Christ's Body.

Concentrate your attention on this little cross that has become a symbol and sign of all the suffering in our life. On it you will notice, they way I would describe it as — a trail of Christ's blood warm and flowing from it. What does this mean? The cross is the instrument of Salvation. With His death on the cross, Jesus gained our salvation, since He gave everything of Himself — His mission, His suffering, and before His crucifixion He gave us the Holy Eucharist, this Sacrifice which is repeated daily. From the cross He gave us His Mother and after His death he allowed His heart to be pierced shedding the last drop of his precious blood.

Christ gained our salvation but He did it in such a way that it requires us to give something of ourselves. Only then, will the salvation of mankind be complete. St. Paul speaks of this: *"Now I rejoice in suffering for you and I add to my body that, which is missing in Christ's suffering for His body"* (Col. 1. 24). What an unusual saying! What does Christ's suffering lack? What can one add to it? It is an odd mystery, because with God's will and the will of Christ's people, we are called to this so that our suffering becomes an addition to that of Christ's. It's as if the chalice filled with the Blood of Christ is not full and so He allows a few drops of our human blood to be added to it. It's obviously not through their merits that their blood can have such value, since without God's Graces oceans of blood spilt by mankind would not be able to save it. So when people shed blood through their suffering and sickness to attain graces then it becomes Christ's blood. Through this extraordinary grace we are allowed to pour into Christ's chalice our blood, and by doing so we add that, which is missing in Christ's passion. We are allowed to complete Christ's act with our suffering. Can our mind grasp this? You my poor child suffering pain and confined to your sick-bed and abandoned by all, you are the one allowed to accept this suffering and make your sick-bed Christ's cross on which your crucified body will shed blood together with Christ for the salvation of the world.

When St. Paul spoke of himself saying that Christ's suffering increases in us (2 Cor. 1,5), when he said: *"I am crucified with Christ to the cross"* and *"the Lord lives in me"* (Gal. 2, 20), when he wrote *"I am carrying the scars of Jesus on my body"* (Gal. 6, 17) he spoke not only for himself. He spoke in the name of humanity. This was not some unusual privilege of his apostolate but a gift accessible to every Christian. It could be said that the sanctified grace allows the Christian to repeat after St. Paul, *"Christ lives in me"*. All these quotations of St Paul describe not only the sanctifying grace in its lowest form but they also speak about a higher form accessible to all those where Christ lives in their soul and the person carries the wounds of Christ on their body where they are multiplied. When we ask why these privileges are accessible to grace and why they add to Christ's suffering it's nothing other but though suffering itself. In other words, one can preach this Gospel Truth to those who are suffering and sick. You who accept your sufferings and carry them stoically enable the sinful people to receive God's grace. Together with Christ crucified, you are called to this mission by the Gospel, and your state gives salvation to mankind.

St. Peter wrote to his persecuted disciples: *"When you are doing well and when you patiently bear annoyances this becomes a gift from God. You are called to this, Christ suffered for us leaving an example so that you can follow in his footsteps... who carried our sins on the cross"* (1Petr: 2, 21). We can apply these words to the sufferers although they are not persecuted for their faith. To the sufferer, who accepts this state and wishes to join in Christ's suffering as a means of salvation and conversion of mankind, we can say that he suffers for justice. To suffer for God through our love to Him and to suffer for justice, these are very close to each other and so, you who are full of suffering can say about yourselves: *"When I suffer for justice I am fortunate "* (1Petr: 3.14) It seems that St. Peter not only referred to those persecuted for their faith — the Martyrs, but to ever one who suffers when he says: *"Be joyful in participating in Christ's suffering, so that in the revelation of his glory you rejoiced"* (1Petr: 4,13). Therefore, by suffering you show God your greatest love, and when at the time of suffering you think of your neighbours and those worse off than yourself and offer this suffering for them, you are showing immense love for your neighbour and love covers a multitude of sins.

To rejoice in suffering could be a difficult virtue to possess, but to understand that the cross is a gift from God and that he allows them because of his love for us and because they can bring us and our neighbour an abundance of good things it already means a lot. So if you understand and think about this it will become easier to avoid complaints and blasphemies, you will avoid temptations and you will be able to at least glorify God through Jesus Christ, for whom the power and glory are forever and ever. AMEN.

March 1st 1934 Lviv

+ Andrej Metropolitan