

From St. Gaspar

*"A Book to be read. It is the Crucifix."*¹

*"Enter on this holy retreat, therefore, holding in your hands the book of the crucifix."*²

*"I send a reply to your very esteemed letter on this third of May, the feast of the Holy Cross, the mystical ladder to heaven, the cathedra of truth, the tree of life, under whose shadow we are to find rest in the peacefulness of the just. Oh what a great book for us is the Cross! It is a summarization of the apologetics of our faith, a practical knowledge for our moral life, and the most tender lessons of love that the Lord has shown. From this book, every soul is encouraged to promote evermore the most important devotion to the Divine Blood, which I highly recommend to your zeal and charity, so that it will become known wherever possible."*³

Homily Notes, Good Friday, April 10, 2004

1. Q. What did you think of the movie? A. The book was better.

On seeing the movie several have mentioned feelings of sorrow and sadness and even feelings of guilt.

Do we strive for sadness? Do we gather for sorrow?

When we look at the cross, there are two things we are to hope for:

- a. That it might comfort and strengthen us, maybe even embolden us. This is the Holy of Holies for us; our God has visited us in the most unlikely and opposite places. There is no sorrow of ours, no sadness, pain or defeat that he has not also experienced. Our God has not abandoned us in our struggles, but has entered them, and led us through them.
- b. We look at the cross to challenge us. If in our life our principle goals are consolation, blessing, success, prestige, honor, possession, rest, relaxation, and our own sense of right and justice, then the cross must challenge us to new goals, to a life whose principle goal is to be given.

2. Why the Book was better

All our other books are but dust and ashes. St. Gaspar would remind us many times that the cross is the only book we need to read. This is not formulas and ideas. This is the only book that will give us the truth.

¹ Letter to Fr. Antonio Pascucci, January 1827, Letter 1555

² from the Second Circular Letter, 1827

³ to Mrs. Eleonora Rozzi, 3 May 1828, Letter 1929, Strokes of the Pen IV, Resources 23, pg 54

3. The Chair of Truth

- a. The experience of the cross is where we experience humanity at its absolute worst: deception, denial, betrayal, preservation of status, violence, hatred, abuse, annihilation.
- b. The experience of the cross is where we experience humanity at its absolute best. The innocent, the just one suffers in silence. He remains as he is: no anger, fear, or bitterness. If life is forever, death cannot diminish us.

4. It is the Power of Evil that wants us to think God has abandoned us.

He wants us to think that God asked for this, that God demanded this, that our God is a bloodthirsty God just waiting for us to suffer agony and pain.

It is the devil that wants us to be afraid, or work, of struggle, of difficulty, of defeat, of death. It is the devil that wants us to be afraid of God.

5. The example of St. Gaspar

Napoleon imprisoned those priests who would not profess allegiance to him. Gaspar refused. The prisons of the early 19th century were not pleasant places, they were designed to defeat and discourage. They were places of hunger, filth, and darkness.

So here, St. Gaspar and a few other priests imprisoned with him were known as the *gaudentes*, the joyful ones. They turned the prison into a place of prayer, of study, and of preparation for ministry. They turned it into a place of song.

He would often repeat a saying from 2 Cor 7:14, *superabundo gaudio in omni tribulatione*, we overflow with joy in all our troubles.

Are we supposed to know joy in our troubles?

yes!

a. Comfort and Strength

We look at the cross and know that we are not alone, that one no less than the creator of the universe is with us in our darkness, that absolute darkness can now be a place of light. We can never think again that our God does not understand, but that indeed he will go before us, and even suffer with us.

b. Challenge

Who will cry when the poor suffer? Who will die to save another? Who will honor the other and lift them up. In taking up the challenge in his cross, we, in him, become the book our society can now read, the only book of truth.

6. We gather not in mourning, in observance, in remembrance, or to be defeated by his shame.

We gather to fall in love with the cross. And this love will be a decision to step forward with him, to accept the strength and the challenge, and to carry the cross today, in our families, in our school and in our work.

We read this book, not for ideas, formulas or theories, but for the truth that will help us lift our feet, so that we might follow him.