The Love of Christ Crucified

(Intention of the Archconfraternity of the Passion for March, 1924.)

IT is not difficult for a Christian to get that understanding of the Cross of Christ which reveals it as the unerring way to true and lasting happiness. A little thought must impress upon us the conviction that if the Son of God, Who came to show us the way to heaven, has left us His Cross as our standard, that Cross, however it may appear to the weakness of flesh and blood, must be the only means to eternal joy.

This understanding of the Cross, however, is not sufficient; for, although we may understand a truth perfectly, it does not necessarily follow that we are going to realize that truth and act upon it.

There is, as we all know, much disagreement in our lives between theory and practice, between what we know and what we do. And the cause of this disagreement lies undoubtedly within ourselves. It is the old "law of our members fighting against the law of our minds." (Rom. 7.) We may, for example, be absolutely convinced that virtue is lovely and desirable in every way and able to make us happy here and hereafter. Yet, when we attempt to practice virtue, this "something" within us fights against us bitterly. We may realize perfectly that vice is detestable in itself and in its effects. Yet this "something" is always striving to allure us, to coax us, to force us on to sin.

Now, this "something within ourselves," this disorder which is the source of all the disorders of our passions, is nothing else than inordinate self-love, that puts our own likes and dislikes, our own selves in the place which belongs to God alone. This was the cause of every sin that ever has been or ever will be committed.

Are we to be surprised, then, that this proud self-love is going to fight most bitterly against our practicing the lessons of the Cross of Christ, which contains in itself all virtue, condemns all vice, and spells the very crucifixion of self-love? No! Let us remember always that in beginning to practice the lessons of Christ's Passion, and at every new practice lesson, we must be prepared to feel the opposition of this false god within us.

And yet it is precisely this fact which proves to be one of the richest blessings that flow from devotion to the Passion. Sometimes we are surprised to find that people who have long been regarded as pious persons, prove under adversity that they are far from being resigned to the will of God. So long as they had been blessed in every way, they thought that they loved their Maker; but now, when those blessings are taken away from them, and the cross of sorrow and suffering is laid upon them, they discover that they love themselves more than their God. For years, perhaps, their self-love has been lurking unsuspected in the darkest depths of their souls, twining itself more and more firmly about the fibres of their hearts, and slowly hardening them against the bright warmth of God's love. But now, when a cross touches them, that proud rebel is stung into mutiny, and they and all who know them are amazed at the revelation of what had so long been hidden even to themselves.

INDEED, it is the Cross that opens our eyes to the greatest danger to the human soul. It is the trying to practice the lessons of our Lord's Sacred Passion which proves to us whether or not we really love God more than self.

Let us enter, however, with confidence upon this supreme struggle against the "source of all evil," bearing in mind that if the Cross is the surest detector of this disordered self-love, it is at the same time its most effective destroyer.

Love is the strongest of all passions, and can be conquered only by love,—a love that is stronger than itself. But here the struggle is between the love of self and the love of Christ Crucified; and there can be no question which is the stronger by nature. It remains for us only to cultivate this stronger love of our Crucified Lover, to stay close to Him, to think about Him, to study Him, to speak to Him, and above all to try to follow Him.

The members of the Archconfraternity of the Passion are asked to pray during the month of March that we may all grow in the love of Christ Crucified.

The Archconfraternity of the Sacred Passion, originated by St. Paul of the Cross, is a canonically established society. It has been generously enriched with indulgences for the living and the dead. The only essential condition for membership in it is to have one's name registered. Its main purpose is to cultivate a personal devotion to Jesus Christ Crucified. For its more efficient operation, three degrees of membership have been instituted. **First Degree** Members say daily Five Our Fathers and Five Hail Marys in honor of the Five Wounds of Christ, and also make, morning and evening, an Offering of the Precious Blood. **Second Degree** Members make the Stations of the Cross once a week, besides saying the prayers of the First Degree. **Third Degree** Members make fifteen Minutes Meditation daily on the Sacred Passion, besides performing the works of the First and Second Degrees. The **Spiritual Activity** of the Archconfraternity consists in a **Crusade of Prayers** and **Good Works** for the conversion of sinners, especially for the conversion of China, and for the welfare of the Passionist Missionaries in China. Please send your name for enrollment to THE SIGN, West Hoboken, N. J.