



The Christian Martyrs' Last Prayer by Jean-Léon Gérôme. 1863.

*“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you.
Not as the world gives do I give to you” (John 14:27) ESV-CE*

A FAMOUS PAINTING SHOWS A group of Christians in a Roman amphitheater about to be put to death for the entertainment of a large audience. Gathered in a circle and kneeling, an elderly man (probably their bishop) with outstretched arms leads them in prayer as the lions and tigers emerge to devour them. Despite the circumstances, they appear at peace even though the beasts are about to devour them. How can one be at peace under those circumstances? Only Jesus Christ can give that peace.

While not threatened by literal wild beasts today, nevertheless, we face a similar challenge. How do we

keep interior peace with all that is happening today? The Russian invasion of Ukraine, violence in Gaza, Islamic persecution of Christians around the world,

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the culture of death, the war against the family, and apostasy within the Church. It all appears very depressing. But, nevertheless, we are called to be at peace like our forebearers mentioned above, and by the same means—Jesus Christ. Here are some fundamental principles:

According to Fr. Jacques Philippe, *“To strive to acquire and maintain peace of heart, the first thing of which we must be convinced is that all the good that we can do comes from God and from Him alone: ‘Apart from Me,*

you can do nothing,' Jesus said (John 15:5). He did not say, 'you can't do much,' but, 'you can do nothing.' It is essential that we be persuaded of this truth." Only with this conviction can we then be open to receive that peace of Christ, since He alone can save us. Do we have this faith and confidence in Him or have we placed it in ourselves?

Our contemporary culture mitigates against this and attempts to "reset" everything without any reference to God. Rather than having absolute dependence on Him, we have acquired an exaggerated self-confidence turned into hubris. We see ourselves as "wills" inserted into a body (much like ancient Gnosticism). Instead of being an integral part of our God-given identity, we see our bodies as appendices to be used or changes according to our "will." We don't need God in this scenario because we believe that we can create (from our "will"—the *real* us) our own existence and thus save ourselves. We might use God selectively to spice up our existence as one adds spice to food, but the "without Me you can do nothing" notion is absent. When our "wills" don't get what they want, we become angry. This anger makes having the peace of Christ impossible.

As Fr. Morrow points out in *Overcoming Sinful Anger*, *"we can't control when we will feel angry, since that depends on events that occur outside of us. But we can control what we do about the feeling."* We can suppress an angry feeling, but it will sooner or later come to the surface. If anger reaches the point of a deliberate desire to kill or seriously wound someone, it is gravely against charity; it is a mortal sin. So when anger comes—and it will come—what should we do?

First, take the time to calm down and figure out why you are angry. The Roman Stoic philosopher, Seneca, offers some sage advice: *"The greatest remedy for anger is delay."* Say a short prayer before acting. We must give this anger to the Lord. Offer this

feeling as a sacrifice for sins, and every time this feeling comes back, give it to the Lord again. Remember, in Christianity all suffering—and that includes what causes anger—is redemptive. Our culture of death fears suffering and sees death as the remedy for it: hence the growing popularity of assisted suicide. The

saints urge us to get rid of our anger before we go to sleep at night. Every time you feel the anger, just accept it as part of your cross and move on. Fr. Philippe explains why:

"It is of the greatest importance that we strive to acquire and maintain an interior peace, the peace of our hearts...The more our soul is peaceful and tranquil, the more God is reflected in it, the more His grace acts through us. On the other hand, if our soul is agitated and troubled, the grace of God is able to act only with much greater difficulty."

So, what do we do in practice? Self Abandonment. We make a total surrender of ourselves to God and place all our trust in him. As Fr. Philippe states:

"We must put everything, without exception into the hands of God, not seeking any longer to manage or 'to save' ourselves by our own means: not in the material domain, nor the emotional, nor the spiritual. We cannot divide human existence into various sectors: certain sectors where it would be legitimate to surrender ourselves to God with confidence and others where, on the contrary, we feel we must manage exclusively on our own. And one thing we know well: all reality that we have not surrendered to God, that we choose to manage by ourselves without giving carte blanche to God, will continue to make us uneasy. The measure of our interior peace will be that of our abandonment, consequently of our detachment."

That is why so many martyrs during the Church's entire existence went to their deaths with a sense of peace. They knew that they were in the hands of a loving Savior and that this earth was not their



true home.

An excellent devotional practice to acquire this self-abandonment and peace is that of the “The Surrender Novena.” This novena originates with Fr. Dolindo Ruotolo (1882–1970) who was a stigmatized priest known as “the mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit.” Saint Padre Pio, a contemporary of his, called him “a saint.” His whole spirituality was that of total self-offering to God. He said, *“I am totally poor, a poor nothing. My strength is my prayer, my leader is the will of God which I let take me by the hand. My security over the uneven path is the heavenly mother Mary.”* He experienced tremendous sufferings: paralysis and other ailments. He surrendered all this to God’s Providence. He believed greatly in the redemptive value of suffering.

The Surrender Novena is quite simple. You repeat, “O Jesus, I surrender myself to You, take care of everything.” You can easily find this novena online. It

also makes an excellent short ejaculatory prayer that can be prayed whenever we experience the Cross. It is also ideal to pray when anger rears its head. Fr. Dolindo often remarked that when we pray we often know just how we want the prayer answered. He likened this to a person going to a doctor for a cure for some condition and then telling the doctor exactly how he wants to be cured. That can’t be our attitude with our prayer. God wants our absolute trust, no matter what. It is in this total surrender that we acquire that peace of heart without which we cannot grow spiritually. It is the stuff that martyrs are made of. May it be ours!

Editor’s note: the writer acknowledges the inspiration coming from the books Searching for and Maintaining Peace by Fr. Jacques Philippe and Overcoming Sinful Anger by Fr. T.G. Morrow.

