

Conquest of Paradise

by Bl. Louis Guanella, S.C.

Translated by Fr. Peter Di Tullio, S.C.

1. Rejoice, my brothers and sisters, because paradise is ours now. Jesus Christ has conquered death, has won over hell. Jesus Christ is risen immortal from the tomb. He is pointing out to all that paradise is open. Come now, let us enter.



Yet the path to reach it is the same as the one the divine Savior traveled. One must ascend by thorny paths, must shed blood along the way, must sweat. It is written in St. Matthew: "The kingdom of God has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force." This saying of the Lord is very true. Nevertheless paradise is so great an enjoyment that to secure it is worthy of the sacrifice, or of any effort on our part.

2. To achieve paradise calls for strength of spirit. The divine Savior came to point this out especially to his chosen people, the people of Israel. Then, seeing the stubbornness of that nation, he pointed it out to all the nations, though pagan, as if to say: "I offer it for anyone to steal, man or woman, Hebrew or gentile, rich or poor, learned or ignorant: everyone can achieve the kingdom of heaven. To this end nothing is required but that people strive with force to merit" What did we do so far? How much did Jesus Christ suffer to enter gloriously into his kingdom!

3. We, too, to rise up high, have to use violence to God and effort against our own selves. One employs violence to God by praying insistently so that at the end he is forced to surrender in granting what we ask for. Then, we show violence to ourselves by denying whatever human senses ask for themselves. If the eyes want to look at that neatly dressed woman, you immediately restrain them. If your ears want to listen to seductive discourses, if your tongue wants to exert itself by urges of anger, you immediately guard yourselves as to reprimand those sinful urges. This calls for effort, that's true. Yet the kingdom of heaven demands violence. How much of violence had Jesus done to his most holy humanity! From the time he was in the cave in Bethlehem to the sepulcher at the foot of Mt. Calvary it was a continuous suffering.

4. To steal the kingdom of heaven means that one must earn it quickly by the merit of generous deeds. The divine Saviour walked like a giant. At the time of his greatest sufferings, Jesus displayed such an unusual joy as to exclaim: "*I have greatly desired to eat this Passover with you.*" (Luke 22: 15). Hanging in agony from the cross, he spoke most lovingly, "*Sitio! I am thirsty!*" (Jn 19:28) (*I would ...endure even greater sufferings!*)

5. To steal the kingdom of heaven means to strive openly to get it. It means to challenge human respect and trample upon human expectations, laughing at the mockery of people. Likewise the divine Savior regarded with indulgence the iniquitous efforts made by the scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees to disparage his reputation, interpreting with malign intentions his works of salvation. Paradise is too precious a possession. He who wants it must attain it even at the cost of trampling upon his own human considerations.

6. Lastly, those who enter paradise include those who, through suffering, are almost thrown into it by force. When a crowd of people enter a church, you can see that some of those who enter do so because they press on, but many others are almost carried into it by the people pressing behind. My brothers and sisters, let us at least allow ourselves to be carried into paradise by the throng of daily sufferings which purposely God sends to us out of his great mercy so that we may be saved.

We certainly do not ask for those sufferings, do we? We don't have the strength to ask the Lord to make us suffer more. Yet let us bear with patience the daily sufferings, for this is a pledge for that fortunate gain. Would you like to receive the heavenly kingdom as a gift? This is not possible. The kingdom of heaven calls for force. Jesus Christ gave us the example by attaining it at the cost of so many sufferings, as you well know.

Reflections

1. Acquisition of paradise.
2. It is obtained by force as if it were to be stolen.
3. We have to exert force on God and on ourselves.
4. We need to hurry about it.
5. And do it openly.
6. At least, then, we need to be carried into it by the throng of sufferings falling upon us daily.

(Credit: Guanella, Louis. "Easter of Resurrection." Trans. Peter Di Tullio. *Oh Father! Oh Mother!* Rpt. in *Now and at the Hour* April-May 2002: 13.)