



# Spiritual Letter Box



## THE NIGHTS OF THE SOUL

*Marie-Paule having expressed the desire, a few years ago, that a spiritual letter box column appear regularly in the paper "Le Royaume", we thought we could draw from the invaluable treasury of letters to which she herself replied, letters that were published over the years. Those writings, still very topical, have lost nothing of their pertinence and continue to be an important spiritual correspondence which ought to be exploited for the good of all.*

### LETTER TO MARIE-PAULE

*I have sometimes heard it said by retreat masters that "every soul God calls to a perfect union must pass through deep purifications". Furthermore, that is the teaching of the great mystical Doctors of the Church and I sincerely believe this.*

*For forty years, I have never stopped seeking God; I have always tried to please Him and thus hasten the perfect union with Him on earth. During all those years, many spiritual and material trials have been strewn along my path without their having been able to pull me away from my only Love and my ideal.*

*After having experienced a calmer period, my soul has been plunged, for some time now, in a strange darkness. My good will is no longer victorious over difficulties in spite of my real efforts; my faults and my imperfections stand out before me in all their ugliness. I feel as though I am hateful and contemptible; my sensitivity is very strongly shaken. I feel as though I am alone on an island without any support. Besides that, my soul is gripped with terrible struggles: suspiciousness, mistrust, the fear of displeasing God and neighbor, loss of confidence in myself, etc.*

*During those storms, God hides; my friends seem to have abandoned me and people no longer seem to trust me. No matter where I look for comfort, I find only disappointment. I am sensitive to such an extent that everything hurts me; my soul is like a raw wound. What would previously have made me smile now makes me start and react awkwardly or tactlessly, and this hurts me even more. My inability to overcome the thousand and one forms of vexation also causes me great suffering, for, in this darkness, I am always afraid of displeasing God, even if I apply the maximum good will in order to accept with love those different situations. If I seek some comfort or some light from a spiritual director, I have the impression that he is unable to understand me and touch the depths of my soul in order to discover therein the inner drama. So, his exhortations often increase my anguish. Thus, it seems to me that so many years of sustained effort in a persevering love are a "real failure" because, instead of progressing along the path of perfection, it is as though I have regressed, and this deeply afflicts me but does not discourage me.*

*Tell me, is this scrupulousness, a sensitivity of conscience, wounded pride, or all of this at the same time?*

*Whatever its cause, in this state of suffering, I cling always*

*more to God and Mary despite their apparent estrangement; I am progressively detaching myself from self and creatures; my prayer is more entreating and I accept to live such anguishing situations as long as God desires. I love Him and for love of Him, I am giving myself over entirely to His designs of mercy for my soul, regardless of its cost to me.*

**Jeannine**

### MARIE-PAULE'S REPLY

In spite of the dark "night" falling over your soul, you are nevertheless lucid enough to perceive the divine action in what is happening to you and courageously get through this difficult phase which will inevitably lead you to the light, to the joy and sweetness of living closer to God in a love that is increasingly purer.

Obviously, you are not a beginner in the ascetic life, in your march towards perfection and this is easily perceived in your letter. However, it is necessary that you seek the light in order to be reassured. To do so is quite logical when the soul is going through a tunnel of darkness in which it does not see any light filtering through to show it the way.

In order to clearly situate your case, based on the presentation you have made of it, let us start by saying that you have experienced what is called the "nights of the soul". They are called "nights" because the soul is journeying as though during the night and in darkness. These "nights" are periods of hardships and purification which lead the soul to the transforming union. As you put it so well, those nights have detached you from others and from yourself, that is to say, you are living by loving God and the others in God. The soul, having been purified of what is human, uplifts itself more easily to Him who fulfills it, even if God lets the cross weigh more heavily on it or seems to be drawing away from it. However, when the soul is plunged in darkness or is going through a "night", that is precisely the moment when God is closest to it. His light bedazzles the soul and blinds it, so that it no longer feels the beloved Presence and feels alone, deprived of all consolations, even human ones.

### The Night of the Senses: Active and Passive Night

You know this because you have experienced it, the **active** night of the senses is the mortification of the appetites which

the soul imposes upon itself based on its good will.

The **passive** night of the senses is God's work in a soul. He alone is directing the operations and this forces the soul to let itself be purified in accordance with divine desires, so as to be more pleasing to God. So, you have gone through those long phases which alternate with less arid periods brightened by a few rays of light.

Up until this point, your intellect and your will were acting according to the laws of a human equilibrium. But now, your soul, being subjected to God's purifying action, is going through another phase, placing you at a higher level because this time the divine invasion of your soul is bringing about the deep "night of the spirit", thus purifying your faculties, that is, the intellect, the will and the memory. The result is a certain confusion and even a painful disturbance. Rarely do souls accept this purification and for good reason...

### The Night of the Spirit

The first night (that of the senses) is bitter, terrible for the senses. The second is incomparably more dreadful for the spirit. If the soul had not been prepared for this by the first "night", it would not be willing to undergo the second.

God, being love and purity, then undertakes the task of purifying the faculties in order to destroy in them the consequences of original sin: the tendencies, the attachments, imperfect habits which remained in the spirit after the purification of the senses. This latter cut the branches, that is to say, stopped the external manifestations, but it left the trunk and the roots found in the spirit, at the very root of the faculties.

That is why the soul is subjected to the darkness of the intellect, the anguish of the will and the afflictions of the memory. This divine action in the soul digs into its very depths and painfully creates a sense of emptiness in it. The divine transforms the spiritual substance by absorbing it to such an extent that the soul feels annihilated.

Now, I do not have to describe in detail the drama the soul must bear during that time, which is both so long and so painful. You have done so in the paragraph of the "storms".

That is how God creates a void in a soul. This purification is so painful, this torment so strange that the person has the impression that his bones are broken, and his "soul is a raw wound". Quite often, an overwhelming flood of temptations submerges it. Moreover, the soul is penetrated by, imbued with the sense of its wretchedness, its imperfections, its mistakes and this becomes unbearable. Then, it is impossible to find consolation. The spiritual director himself is unable to restore its confidence. The soul thinks he does not understand it and cannot see what it is experiencing. In short, this is a torture of

which no one can have any inkling. The night of the spirit is a real drama.

### The Light

But after the night there comes the light of dawn and this is followed by the light of day. The night of the spirit, a drama of the depths, leads to union with God. When light springs forth, the soul then realizes that its senses have been purified, its intellect refined, its will strengthened, and a human equilibrium is established. Its human personality is enhanced by the presence and influence of the Spirit. It no longer has a will of its own, except that of doing God's will.

### Humility

During those difficult phases, one must not try to reason. Patience, prompted by a supernatural hope, will be the best, the most effective remedy. You are already practising this patience and you have that hope. They are intense purifications which cause the soul to become more aware of its wretchedness, of its lowliness which it was unaware of before, that it to say, it no longer has any self-esteem or self-satisfaction. Now, God esteems much more the little satisfaction it has of itself, this deep humility, than all the works it previously accomplished.

It was through her humility that Mary of Nazareth was pleasing to the Most High. "My soul magnifies the Lord..., for he has looked upon the lowliness of His handmaid." Mary, vested with the Spirit of God because "empty" of herself,

attracted the divine gaze with a view to the Work of the Redemption.

Thus, every soul wanting to collaborate effectively in the work of the Co-Redemption must first accept to die to itself in order then to be vested with the Spirit of God. Through the light of the wisdom of love in suffering, God enlightens the soul on itself and fills it with graces. Then, its faculties and its works are more divine than human.

Continue along your way in submission and abandonment to God's will. Abandonment is a trust that creates an attitude of soul which attracts Him who is Love in the overflowing powerfulness of His outpourings. The soul is immersed in God like a sponge in the ocean, and it stays in the transforming love that has grasped it and continues its work.

We were made for God who is our end. Blest is the soul that consents to the Master's purifying action and finally experiences peace and joy because it now only lives for Him, and love is its lot.

**Marie-Paule**

(*Le Royaume*, no. 1, May 1982, p. 11)

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*The more a soul abandons itself  
to God's will  
who holds out the cross – crosses – to it,  
the more it surpasses itself  
and frees itself from constraints;  
it passes from the weightiness of matter  
to freedom through grace,  
going from one world to another  
so much more consoling  
and more fulfilling.”*  
(Marie-Paule, *Amour!*, p. 11)

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