



The Joy of the Cross in the life and teachings of St. Julie Billiart
FOUNDER OF THE SISTERS OF NOTRE DAME DE NAMUR AND SAINT FOR OUR TIMES

The Joy of the Cross

by Camilla Burns, SNDdeN

Joy and the cross seem to be incompatible words. We often think of suffering as something to “grin and bear” and hardly a source of joy. St. Julie did see a connection and I would like to explore that aspect of her spirituality.

Mère St. Joseph gives an account of Julie’s physical as well as spiritual suffering in *THE MEMOIRS*. “I learned—partly from her own lips—that during her long illness, twenty-two years of difficult crises and setbacks, there were periods that ran into months, during the revolution, when she was deprived of all spiritual help, for besides her physical suffering she was prey to the dark night of the soul that God sometimes requires of his chosen ones” (p.201). We also know that after the founding of the Congregation she knew calumny, misunderstanding and difficult relationships with the very persons who should have helped her.

Julie gave profound meaning to all of her problems, frustrations, disappointments, injustices or failures by naming them the cross. It gave her an immediate purpose to every situation and expressed her deep union with God. “Let us look at our daily trials with the eyes of faith. The cross is the most precious gift that God can give to his children.” Nothing was too trivial or too burdensome because she saw everything in the large context of faith. Her “eyes of faith” lifted her

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above the event and she saw herself actively participating in the cross of Christ.

In this union and acceptance of the cross, she found deep joy. It is a joy that does not remove suffering but transforms it. It does not put an end to difficulties but gives them meaning. It does not banish the darkness but comes from the dark light of union with God. Julie’s smile, warmth and enthusiasm came from her deep faith which transformed all of her difficulties by rooting them in the cross. The smallness and meanness of her painful experiences were large with meaning. Crosses were a means of staying united with the good God that was a source of profound joy for Julie. It can be the same for us.

