Introduction: A Word That Unsettles… and Saves

In a world that flees from pain, renunciation, and sacrifice, speaking of “mortification” sounds strange, outdated, or even suspicious. And yet, this millennia-old practice, deeply rooted in Christian spirituality, holds a forgotten secret: true life is only attained when we learn to die… to ourselves.

Mortification, far from being a masochistic or backward practice, is a path to freedom, a medicine for the soul, an act of love that unites us more intimately to the crucified Christ. In this article, we will rediscover its meaning, its biblical and theological foundation, its historical development, and above all, how to live it today, in a world that wants everything, now, and effortlessly.

What Is Mortification? Definition and Christian Meaning

The word “mortification” comes from the Latin *mortificatio*, which means “to put to death.” In the Christian context, it refers to a spiritual practice that seeks to subdue disordered passions, purify the soul, and conform the believer to the crucified Christ.

It is not about hating the body or repressing healthy emotions, but about ordering desires so that the love of God may fully reign within us. As St. Paul says:

> *“If you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” (Romans 8:13)*

This verse summarizes the entire logic of mortification: it is the Spirit who guides this process, and its fruit is true life.

Biblical Foundation: Dying to Rise Again

Christ himself gave us the most perfect example of mortification: His Passion and death on

the Cross. He, who had no sin, voluntarily accepted suffering out of love for the Father and for the salvation of all.

Sacred Scripture is full of exhortations to mortification:

- **“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”** (Luke 9:23)
- **“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”** (Galatians 2:20)
- **“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”** (Galatians 5:24)

These words are not poetic metaphors. They are concrete calls to a life of conversion, interior discipline, and radical love.

Mortification Throughout the History of the Church

From the earliest centuries of Christianity, mortification was understood as a spiritual necessity. The martyrs offered their lives as the supreme testimony. The desert monks, like St. Anthony the Great, lived in austerity to seek God in solitude and silence.

In the Middle Ages, saints such as St. Francis of Assisi or St. Catherine of Siena led lives of deep penance, not out of hatred for the body, but out of burning love for the crucified Christ.

The Council of Trent reaffirmed the value of mortification as an indispensable aid in the struggle against sin, and great mystics like St. John of the Cross insisted on it as a path of purification toward union with God.

The Theology of Mortification: A Pedagogy of Love

Why is mortification necessary?

1. **Because sin has disordered our desires.**
   Not everything we desire is good for us. Mortification helps us regain control of our will and place it at the service of goodness and of God.

2. **Because it unites us to the Cross of Christ.**
   St. Paul speaks of “filling up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ” (Colossians 1:24). In mortification, we participate in His redemptive work.
3. **Because it strengthens the virtues.**
   Patience, temperance, humility… do not grow without effort. Mortification is a spiritual gymnasium where saints are forged.
4. **Because it purifies the soul.**
   Suffering accepted out of love erases temporal punishments, frees the heart from attachments, and increases grace.

Mortification Today: Is It Possible in the 21st Century?

The answer is yes—and more necessary than ever. We live in a culture of immediacy, limitless pleasure, and “me first.” Mortification, on the other hand, teaches us to wait, to renounce, to love without asking anything in return.

It is not about seeking pain for its own sake, but about **training the soul to truly love**. It is a way of telling God: “I love You more than I love myself.”

Practical Guide to Christian Mortification

1. **Interior Mortification: The Most Important**

- **Renounce interior judgment:** do not mentally criticize or judge others.
- **Overcome impatience:** accept setbacks without complaints.
- **Mortify the ego:** yield in a discussion, avoid seeking attention.
- **Master useless or negative thoughts.**

> *Pastoral tip: practice a “fast of negative thoughts” for one hour a day. Offer that hour to Christ.*

2. **Mortification of the Senses**

- **Sight:** avoid images that distract or distance you from God.
- **Hearing:** do not take part in empty or malicious conversations.
- **Speech:** keep silent when you would rather speak.
- **Taste:** do not snack between meals, choose simpler foods.
- **Touch:** avoid excessive comforts.

> *Example: give up sweetened coffee once a week as an offering. Do it with love, not guilt.*

3. **Bodily Mortification**

- **Fasting:** endorsed by the Church as a great spiritual weapon. Not just for Lent.
- **Voluntary deprivation:** sleep without a pillow one night, use cold water, avoid luxuries.
- **Demanding prayer postures:** pray on your knees, bow reverently.

> *Caution: always with balance. Never to the detriment of health. Consult a confessor or spiritual director.*

4. **Social Mortification**

- **Remain silent when you want to justify yourself.**
- **Accept correction with humility.**
- **Do not always seek the last word.**

> *Pastoral tip: practice the art of "losing with love," and you will see inner peace grow.*

Mortification as an Expression of Charity

We must not forget that every Christian mortification is at the service of love: love of God and love of neighbor. Mortify yourself to become less impatient, more helpful, more generous, more free. The true test of a good mortification is that it makes us more charitable.

> *"If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing." (1 Corinthians 13:3)*

Conclusion: The Joy of Dying a Little Each Day

Mortification is not a bitter penance, but a divine medicine. It is not oppression, but liberation. Not death, but life. It is the hidden path of the saints, the school of authentic love, the Christian art of dying to live.

Are you ready to begin? You can take the first step today. Don't wait for an extraordinary sign. Start with the small, the hidden, the everyday. Where no one sees, God awaits you. And in every little death, He will grant you a little more of His Life.

Would you like to receive more articles like this one, practical guides, or personalized spiritual support? Write to me or visit my website. Let's walk together toward holiness.

"For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His." (Romans 6:5)