

Letter 098  
Amsterdam, May 30 1877

Dear Theo,

Thanks for your letter that arrived today, I am very busy and write in a hurry. I gave your letter to Uncle Jan, he sends you his greetings and thanks for it.

There was a sentence in your letter that struck me, "I wish I were far away from everything, I am the cause of all, and bring only sorrow to everybody, I alone have brought all this misery on myself and others."

These words struck me because that same feeling, just the same, not more nor less, is also on my conscience.

When I think of the past, – when I think of the future of almost invincible difficulties, of much and difficult work, which I do not like, which I, or rather my evil self, would like to shirk; when I think the eyes of so many are fixed on me, – who will know where the fault is, if I do not succeed, who will not make me trivial reproaches, but as they are well tried and trained in everything that is right and virtuous and fine gold, they will say, as it were by the expression of their faces: we have helped you and have been a light unto you, – we have done for you what we could, have you tried honestly? what is now our reward and the fruit of our labour? See! when I think of all this, and of so many other things like it, too numerous to name them all, of all the difficulties and cares that do not grow less when we advance in life, of sorrow, of disappointment, of the fear of failure, of disgrace, – then I also have the longing – I wish I were far away from everything!

And yet I go on, but prudently and hoping to have strength to resist those things, so that I shall know what to answer to those reproaches that threaten me, and believing that notwithstanding everything that seems against me, I yet shall reach the aim I am striving for, and if God wills it, shall find favour in the eyes of some I love and in the eyes of those that will come after me.

There is written: "Lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees," and when the disciples had worked all night and had not caught any fish, they were told "go out into the deep and cast your nets again into the sea."

My head is sometimes heavy and often it burns and my thoughts are confused – I don't see how I shall ever get that difficult and extensive study into it – to get used to and persevere in simple regular study after all those emotional years is not always easy. And yet I go on; if we are tired isn't it then because we have already walked a long way, and if it is true that man has his battle to fight on earth, is not then the feeling of weariness and the burning of the head a sign that we have been struggling? When we are working at a difficult task and strive after a good thing we fight a righteous battle, the direct reward of which is that we are kept from much evil.

And God sees the trouble and the sorrow and He can help in spite of all. The faith in God is firm in me – it is no imagination, no idle faith – but it is so, it is true, there is a God Who is alive and He is with our parents and His eye is also upon us, and I am sure He plans our life and we do not quite belong to ourselves as it were – and this God is no other than Christ of Whom we read in our Bible and Whose word and history is also deep in our heart. If I had only given all my strength to it before, yes, I should have been further now, – but even now He will be a strong support, and it is in His power to make our lives bearable, to keep us from evil, to let all things contribute towards a good end, to make our end peaceful.

There is much evil in the world and in ourselves, terrible things, and one does not need to be far advanced in life, to be in fear of much and to feel the need of a firm faith in life hereafter, and to know that without faith in God one cannot live, one cannot bear it. But with that faith one can go on for a long time.

When I found myself in front of the corpse of Aerssen the calmness and dignity and solemn silence of death contrasted with us, who still live, to such an extent, that we all felt the truth Of what his daughter said with such simplicity: "he is freed from the burden of life, which we have to go on bearing." And yet we are so much attached to the old life, because next to our despondent moods we have our happy moments when heart and soul rejoice, like the lark that cannot keep from singing in the morning, even though the soul sometimes sinks within us and is fearful. And the memories of all we have loved stay and come back to us in the evening of our life. They are not dead but sleep, and it is well to gather a treasure of them.

A handshake and write soon to

Your loving brother, Vincent