



Benedictine Daughters of Divine Will

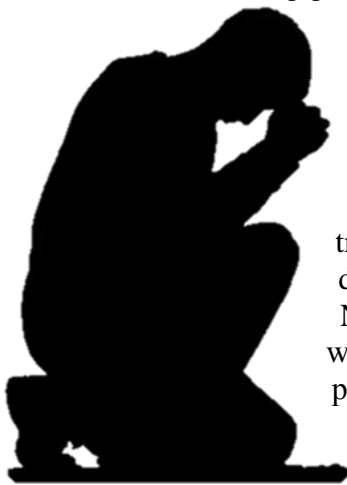


“Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the Kingdom of Heaven belongs.” *Luke 18:16-17*

**“Although my memory’s fading, I remember two things very clearly:
I am great sinner and Christ is a great Savior.”**

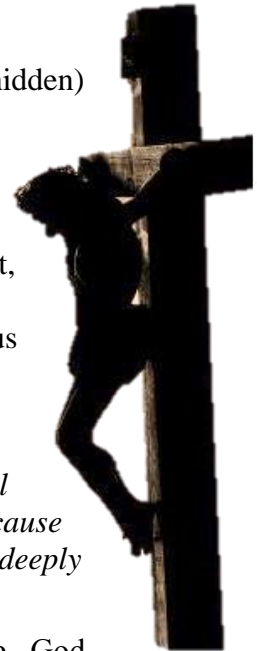
We recently heard this awesome line in a movie depicting John Newton, a former slave-ship captain and Christian convert who wrote the lyrics to the epic hymn “Amazing Grace”. As a million and one possible themes for our Lenten newsletter were scribbled in journals or written on the backs of receipts, none of them seemed quite right...with the exception of these few simple words. A truly inspired thought spoken by someone who knew the abyss of his misery as well as the depths of God’s mercy.

Though much can be (and has already been) written about this rich and beautiful liturgical season, wouldn’t it all find its crux in Newton’s candid statement anyway? We are all great sinners, no matter what shape, form, degree, or category our sins may fall under. We are all misery and weakness itself, capable of nothing good without divine



grace. Though most of us know this intellectually and may even affirm it in our speech, can we truly say these truths have entered the depths of our soul? No. We still remain with our “incurable pride” as St. Francis so perfectly put it, manifested in a

variety of hidden (and not so hidden) ways...our criticisms and judgements, our difficulty forgiving, our anger and resentments, our complaints etc., etc., etc. So we need Lent, with all of its sacrifices and penitential psalms, to remind us of the painful truth about ourselves that we so easily forget and to teach us the humble prayer of David: *“Foul and festering are my soars because of my folly. I am stooped and deeply bowed down”* (Psalm 38:5-6).



But it doesn’t end there. God does not expect, nor does He want us to lie in the mud for forty days either. Though the extent of our miseries may often surprise us, it’s nothing new to Him. Not one failure, not one weakness, not one small speck of our sinfulness escaped Jesus while He agonized in the garden. Yet He chose to suffer and die for us anyway. So courage... onward Christian soldiers! No matter what we may be suffering this Lent, no matter what we discover in that painful mirror of self-knowledge, there is still much reason for rejoicing. The Lord empties so that He may fill. He humbles only to exalt us. We do indeed have a great Savior and everything always works together for the good of those who love Him in return.

And the greatest of these is LOVE

As Sister Maria Benedicta prepared to vow herself to the Lord in poverty, chastity and obedience for the first time on December 8th, 2015, the question arose in our community as to whether this would be consistent with the Benedictine tradition. Though most religious orders profess these three customary vows, Benedictines throughout their history have chosen to keep more in line with the language of their Holy Patron's famous Rule. They, instead, take vows of obedience, stability (the promise to remain in the community where he or she entered), and *conversatio morum* ("conversion of morals" - the promise to faithfully persevere in the daily conversion of oneself within the context of the monastic life, which includes the evangelical counsels of poverty and chastity).



Sr. Maria Benedicta of Our Little Mother of the Divine Will and Her Most Chaste Spouse signs her vow formula after making her first profession, 12/8/15.

Being a young and growing religious community with the hopes of opening up new foundations in different locations, we felt the vow of stability would stifle our missionary spirit and desire to achieve true detachment from all things, people and places... "for our citizenship is in heaven" (Phil 3:20). As for *conversatio morum*, we loved the concept but missed the specific mention of poverty and

chastity in our profession formula – two key elements that so fittingly personify our principal calling to be brides of Christ. Then after a few meal time discussions, the Holy Spirit stepped in, prompting a suggestion that the whole community immediately embraced, "What if we just add a vow of charity?" And so it came to be. For there can be no real conversion without love.



St. Benedict with his young disciples, Sts. Maurus and Placid

From 12-1pm on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, the Benedictine Daughters prayed the "Hour of Grace" together according to the request made by Our Lady *Rosa Mystica* in the 1940s. Those of us who had already professed vows in the past silently renewed them before our Spouse in the Blessed Sacrament, adding the new promise to live in charity "according to our way of life based on that of the Holy Family of Nazareth and the Rule of Saint Benedict" (excerpt from our vow formula). Later on that afternoon during a solemn mass celebrating our Immaculate Queen, Sister Maria Benedicta professed the very same vows for one year in the presence of her religious sisters and brothers, our bishop, and lots of friends in the small country church of Carpegna where our monks reside.

Benedict, we hope to be honoring him and the very first message he wished to communicate in his "little Rule" for beginners: "*Listen carefully, my son, to the master's instructions, and attend to them with the ear of your heart.*"

Specific words don't animate a law, but rather the spirit and purpose behind them. Instead of straying from our Holy Father St.



For better or for worse...



On Saturday, February 13th, 2016, Sister Gemma Marie of the Sacred Heart of Jesus became the next bride to consecrate herself to God and His Kingdom as a Benedictine Daughter of Divine Will. Making her simple vows like Sister Benedicta, she promised “to live in chastity as a sign of the Kingdom of Heaven, to embrace voluntary poverty, to offer the sacrifice of obedience, and to practice holy charity in all circumstances” for an initial period of one year. Though weddings and religious professions are not very common during Lent,



Sister Gemma Marie of the Sacred Heart of Jesus receiving the Benedictine crucifix after her first profession, 2/13/16

the Lord used our mistaken calculations and a series of other circumstances to reveal His Will, leading us directly to the eve of both St. Valentine’s Day and the first Sunday of Lent. What a gentle reminder our beloved Bridegroom gave

both His new and not-so-new spouses by choosing that very day. How many insufficient words did we type and delete, attempting to express this beautiful paradox of love and suffering. So we’ll leave the last word to Sister Gemma’s patroness who said it best:

“When I shrink from suffering, Jesus reproves me and tells me that He did not refuse to suffer. Then I say ‘Jesus, Your will and not mine’. At last I am convinced that only God can make me happy, and in Him I have placed all my hope.” ~ St. Gemma Galgani (1878-1903)

Top Reasons why it’s so important to read the Passion book *... not just during Lent, but all year long:

* *The 24 Hours of the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ* by the Servant of God, Luisa Piccarreta

- 1) “I believe that if one who meditates them is a sinner, he will convert; if he is imperfect, he will become perfect; if he is holy, he will become more holy; if he is tempted, he will find victory; if he is suffering, in these Hours he will find the strength, the medicine, the comfort. And if his soul is weak and poor, he will find spiritual food and the mirror in which he will reflect himself continuously to be embellished and to become similar to Jesus, our model.” (from a letter of Luisa to Saint Annibale M. di Francia)
- 2) “If Jesus heard His own voice and His prayers being reproduced in those reparations, just as the ones He raised to His Father during the 24 hours of His sorrowful Passion...if this were done in each town or city at least, by as many souls, Jesus seems to make me understand that Divine Justice would be placated in part, and in these sad times of torments and bloodshed, Its scourges would be stopped, in part, and as though dampened.” (from the same letter to Saint Annibale Marie di Francia)
- 3) “The purpose of these Hours of the Passion is not so much that of narrating the story of the Passion...But rather, the purpose is the reparation, uniting the different points of the Passion of Our Lord with the diversity of the many offenses, and making worthy reparation for them together with Jesus, almost making up for all that the other creatures owe Him.” (see above source)
- 4) Jesus to Luisa: "If they do them together with Me and with My own Will, I will also give them a soul for each word they will recite, because the greater or lesser effectiveness of these Hours of my Passion is in the greater or lesser union that they have with Me.” (October 1914, Volume 11 of Luisa’s diary, *The Book of Heaven*)

Ready to start reading Luisa’s Passion book? Click on the “Family Tree” page of our website and scroll down to the Servant of God, Luisa Piccarreta to download the PDF version.

”Truly I say to you, unless you change and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 18:3)

We’re sure we have used this quote a hundred times before, but nothing else seemed more fitting in the case of Sister Pajie who lost her very noticeable front tooth just days before her investment. God certainly does have a sense of humor, too, because in those couple of days when anyone in a similar situation would have wanted to remain hidden, quite a few guests were scheduled to visit...one of whom was our bishop. Though slightly embarrassed over her appearance – especially after a friend of ours openly laughed and said she could play the clown of the community – Sister Pajie handled it all with a joyful, light-hearted spirit. “Well, I’m like a little girl getting ready for her First Holy Communion,” she would say giggling, or, “I did feel like a toddler in the Divine Will, but now I guess I graduated to about second grade.”



But the Lord does heal after He wounds...or better yet, after He teases as it seemed to be the case with His good-natured postulant. And always at the last minute, too, in heroic God-like fashion, sending a dentist and his family to our home the Sunday before the ceremony for a dinner planned over a week prior to the mishap. By 10am the following morning, Sister Pajie was able to smile again without covering her mouth. And on Tuesday, February 2nd, after an 11am mass offered for the Feast of the Presentation, she got engaged. In our intimate convent chapel, amidst many tears of joy, the new novice received the white, Benedictine Daughter habit along with a new name – Sister Maria Maddalena of the Divine Will. May we all learn to giggle when humiliations come our way, seeing everything as a playful game of love between our Father in Heaven and His little children...remembering, also, that Daddy will always be there to help clean up the pieces.

As a community totally reliant upon Divine Providence, we are always in need of financial assistance. Would you prayerfully consider supporting the Benedictine Daughters of Divine Will? You can make a one-time donation by credit/debit card or sign up for automatic monthly contributions on the “Donations” page of our website (www.benedictinesofdivinewill.org). Or simply send a check or money order to the address of our non-profit organization below:

**Benedictine Daughters of
Divine Will
P.O. Box 1002
Hanceville, AL 35077**

Though we pray for our benefactors daily, all of our prayers throughout Holy Week and the Octave of Easter will be offered specifically for each and every one of you who have so generously supported us in any way, shape, or form. Thank you for your love and know that you are all very much loved right back!



*With many blessings for a happy and holy Lenten and Easter Season from all of
the Benedictine Daughters of Divine Will*