



Benedictine Daughters of Divine Will



The Friends of God



There was a holy priest assigned to a nearby parish who died a couple of years ago. Fr. Giorgio was simple, humble, and childlike, and you couldn't help but love him. One Sunday when we decided to attend mass at his church in San Leo, the Gospel was taken from Matthew 21:28-32 with the following verse at the heart of Our Lord's parable: *"In truth I tell you, tax collectors and prostitutes are making their way into the kingdom of God before you."* And in the typical, unpretentious Fr. Giorgio-like fashion, he begins his homily pointing out what probably most people were thinking. *Jesus says some strange things. It almost seems as if we have to become swindlers and streetwalkers to get into Heaven.*

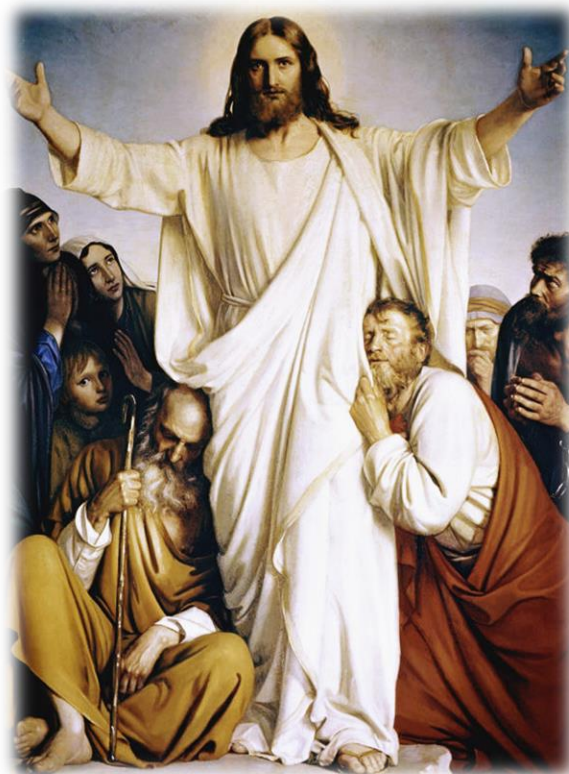
Of course the saintly priest expounded on the true meaning of the gospel passage, but it does make one think of Jesus' unusual taste in friends – those He blessed with special favors, exalted, chose to be closest to Him, or set apart for special missions. But what attracted Him so much to these unusual characters with shady pasts or obvious defects? *Their misery.* And through the great wonders of love and mercy that Christ worked through their miseries, He wanted to give us courage and hope in our own. He wanted to reveal not so much who they were but who He is, not what they were capable of but what He can do. The saints didn't become saints because they were good, but because God is good...infinitely good and all-powerful.

How often do we fall into that self-pitying, self-defeating attitude that we don't have the same "stuff" that saints were made of, that we are somehow unjustly deprived of the lion's share of grace that they enjoyed. But if we look closely at the real lives of these holy ones, and not just at the external glory we sometimes focus too heavily on and secretly desire more than holiness itself, we'll find that we're all very much equipped with the same raw material that the Lord used to make them great saints – total and utter nothingness. This bizarre, yet only apparent, paradox is the joy of the Gospel, the good news we must live and radiate, and the gateway for true life in the Divine Will.

You may be thinking, "So if we're all nothing, why doesn't everyone become a saint then?" Well, there's a two-fold aspect to God's mercy. As some of our favorite brothers and sisters in the struggle are about to show us, the Lord stoops down to us all by Himself, but raising us up to new life in Him requires our response...particularly one of humble acceptance and repentance, trust, courage and, of course, love.

"My daughter, one who believes himself to be something before Me and before men, is worth nothing. One who believes himself to be nothing is worth everything...because if he does something, he does not think he does it because he can do it, having the strength and the capacity, but rather because he receives from God the grace, the helps and the lights. Therefore, it can be said that he does it by virtue of divine power, and one who has divine power with him is already worth everything."

(Jesus to the Servant of God, Luisa Piccarreta, Book of Heaven, Vol. 4, 12/24/1902)





King David

David was the man after God's own heart, the apple of His eye. He was the anointed king with whom God chose to establish His royal covenant, promising David an everlasting throne with the Messiah coming from his own family line. David was also an adulterer and a murderer, taking the wife of one of his loyal soldiers and then having him killed in battle. It's sometimes hard for us to look past this ugly stain in David's life, unable to comprehend what made him so special to the Lord and why He still continued to trust David to guide and rule over His people Israel. But we have to, in order to understand how the heart of God works and how our own sinful, broken hearts must react to such unfathomable goodness.

God did not define David by his sin, but rather looked at him always as son. And as both Proverbs and St. Paul remind us, *"The Lord disciplines him whom He loves, and chastises every son whom He receives"* (Heb 12:6). So through the prophet Nathan, God reprimanded David severely, pointing out both his grave offense as well as the punishment that awaited him. But how did David react? With immediate, sincere, and profound repentance, accepting even the painful consequences of his sin. Though for six days David fasted, did penance, and pleaded with the Lord for the life of the child borne to Bathsheba, upon hearing the news of his son's death on the seventh day, *"David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he went into the house of the Lord, and worshipped"* (2 Sam 12:20).

From the darkness of tragedy and shame comes the light of Psalm 51 – the fruit of David's remorse and model for all of us who, in one way or another, suffer from the weight of our own guilt. In it we find deep sorrow and humility mingled with great trust in a God he clearly views as a tender father. And from this, both hope and even joy flow. All of David's psalms are nothing more than the outpouring of the intimate friendship shared between him and his Lord, a relationship strengthened through trial and difficulty. He teaches us that he not only understands every facet of the human experience, but also how to – in all situations – pour our hearts out to God with great affection in praise, thanksgiving, joy, and anguish. If David had never tasted for himself the loving mercy of God even in his most miserable of moments, we wouldn't have his beautiful songs of love to turn to in Sacred Scripture either.

Finally, David's understanding of God's goodness and humble gratitude for His forgiveness remained embedded in his soul for the rest of his life and was evident in his actions. When two of his own sons committed horrendous acts against him and his family, David – the son of a merciful Father – wanted them treated with mercy. When forced to flee Jerusalem and the priests and Levites wanted to take the ark of God with them, King David meekly replied: *"Take the ark of God back into the city. Should I win Yahweh's favor, He will bring me back and allow me to see it and its tent once more. But should He say, 'You displease Me,' here I am – let Him treat me as He sees fit"* (2 Sam 15:25-26). A little later on when Israel's exiled king encountered a man who cursed, insulted, and threw stones at him, David admonished those wanting to defend his honor, saying, *"Let him curse! If he is cursing because the Lord has said to him, 'Curse David,' who then shall say, 'Why have you done so?' ...It may be that the Lord will look upon my affliction, and that the Lord will repay me with good for this cursing of me today"* (2 Sam 16:10,12).

David saw everything as the Will of God, humbly submitting himself and trusting with full confidence that the Lord was working for his good. And the Lord always was, for He deeply loved the ruddy shepherd boy whose life's passion was God's honor and glory. Through the humiliation of a sin of the flesh, that boy's Heavenly Father did indeed create a clean heart and humble, contrite spirit in him...so much so, that God did not disdain to associate him with His only begotten Son: *"Roll of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham"* (Mt 1:1, the first sentence of the New Testament).

St. Matthew

We don't know much about St. Matthew. He was a tax-collector that became one of the twelve Apostles and eventually the author of the first gospel. The story of his conversion is extremely brief and pretty much

identical in the three synoptic gospel accounts. However, the few details we are given say a great deal. Jesus called Matthew *while* he was sitting at the tax office, at the very job which branded him a sinner. All Jesus says to him is *“Follow Me,”* and Matthew got up, left everything, and followed Him – no questions asked, no words protesting his unworthiness, just simple trust and obedience. He was obviously touched by a special grace. Perhaps he witnessed Jesus healing the body and forgiving the sins of the paralytic not long before, a story found immediately before Matthew’s call in all three gospels. Maybe Matthew felt the disease that lay inside of him and longed also to be made whole.

And what attracted Our Lord to this one of many tax collectors? It’s beautiful to meditate on Matthew possibly being the inspiration for the parable of the tax collector and the Pharisee who go to pray at the Temple. The publican bows his head low, admitting his sinfulness and begging God for mercy, while the Pharisee lists off all of his righteous deeds, thanking God for making him so wonderful and not a miserable wretch like that guy sitting all the way in the back. You probably remember which one left justified that day. Could it be that Jesus witnessed the seed of repentance and conversion being planted in Matthew’s soul before the two ever met? Man sees the outward appearance but God looks deep into the heart. Finally, who does the new follower invite to the great reception he holds for Jesus at his house? *“A number of tax collectors and sinners came to sit at the table with Jesus and his disciples”* (Mt 9:10). Matthew was already evangelizing, carrying the proverbial stretcher of his own sick friends to receive the same healing love of Christ that he did. And Our Lord affirms his silent preaching to the complaining Pharisees with a response that we must always keep before our own minds: *“It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick...Mercy is what pleases Me, not sacrifice”* (Mt 9:13).



The Good Thief (Lk 23:39-43)

Jesus’ forgiveness of “the good thief” at the crucifixion is a story we could probably all recount by memory, but there may be a couple of significant details that most may miss. For example, Matthew and Mark both describe the two bandits who were crucified with Jesus as taunting Him in the same way as the soldiers, chief priests, scribes, and elders. So not long before he received the grace of conversion, the good thief was reviling Jesus with all the rest. No hint of remorse yet. So what changed his heart? Well, Luke is the only writer who mentions this moment of divine mercy and he places Jesus’ first word on the cross right before it: *“Father forgive them, for they know not what they are doing.”* Our Lord’s forgiveness of the most horrible of offenders in the most painful of circumstances is what transforms the poor criminal. And this perfect example of loving forgiveness not only brought the good thief to true repentance, but he also received the grace to accept his sufferings as a just consequence for his sins with confidence in Jesus’ great love and mercy: *“Remember me when You come into Your kingdom.”*

But this is the kicker. Why is Luke the only evangelist to record this episode of salvation history? We like to speculate that it had something to do with the very strong influence behind his gospel account – the Blessed Mother. Due to the great detail with which Luke describes the events before and surrounding the birth of Jesus, many scholars and saints believed that he spoke in length to Our Lady as one of his main sources. Can you just picture Mary pierced with sorrow at the foot of the cross, praying and interceding for the two reprobates crucified on either side of Her sinless Son? They were Her children, too. And how often She must have pondered that moment of victory - the humble, trusting response to grace of the good thief - in Her sweet and loving Heart. That one soul was infinitely important to Our Blessed Mother, yet Luke fails to give us his name. Perhaps Our Lady wants us to fill in the blank with the names of those souls who seem beyond hope in our eyes and to follow Her example of merciful love. Or maybe She wants us all to place ourselves in his position. Though we may be in the midst of suffering, though we may feel the weight of our own misery, Mary is always there praying for us as Mother. Her Son is suffering right there next to us, ready to offer us immediate and boundless mercy if we just ask with a meek, childlike heart. *“Today you will be with Me in paradise.”*



St. Mary Magdalene



Mary Magdalene is probably everyone's favorite sinner-turned-saint. She's most famous for being the former prostitute, but we often forget that she also had seven demons inside of her – which many scholars have equated with the seven deadly sins. So one could say that Mary was also possessed by pride, lust, anger, envy, etc., etc. Probably not such a pleasant person to be around...until Jesus freed her, that is. Our Lord couldn't have found a lower individual to raise up to the title of *Apostle to the Apostles*. As first witness of the Risen Christ, she announced to the Eleven what they were to announce to the world. What gave Mary of Magdala this great honor? Well for one, she was there...even when all

seemed lost. She was there at the empty tomb early in the morning, as soon as it was possible to go out after the Sabbath, to anoint the body of her Lord. Mary seemed to always be there, close to Jesus, and she could care less what anyone had to say about it.

Mary fearlessly entered the Pharisee's home, knowing full well how she would be treated, in order to fall at the feet of Jesus in deep sorrow, love, and gratitude. In fact, Mary loved her Master's feet. She bathed them with her tears, sat by them at Lazarus' house, anointed them with oil at Bethany, and threw herself at them after the Resurrection. Jesus' head, hands, and heart were too lofty for her, so in humility, she remained at the lowest part of His Humanity...where she would always have to bend down in order to kiss. Though Martha complained, Mary knelt by and listened to her Lord. That's where she learned to love much and where she needed to be. Mary remembered well the abyss she had been in and knew how easy it would be to fall right back if she didn't remain attached to the One who saved her. And that total reliance on Jesus, along with a profound awareness of how much He loved her, also gave Mary the fortitude and compassion to remain faithful at the foot of the cross when ten other men ran scared. Mary never ran away nor ever turned back. She just followed and loved, always moving forward.

St. Peter



You can't help but relate to Peter. His three years following Our Lord seemed to be marked by a series of ups and downs, exaltations and humiliations. He was the only disciple with the tenacity to get out of the boat and walk on the water towards Jesus, yet seconds later he shifted his gaze, got scared, and began to sink, receiving the embarrassing reproach: *"Oh man of little faith, why did you doubt?"* (Mt 14:31). Peter was the first to reveal what was burning in his heart when Jesus asked the disciples who they thought He was: *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God"* (Mt 16:16). Then, just moments after blessing Peter for having received this word from the Heavenly Father and declaring him the Rock on which He will build His Church, Our Lord already has to rebuke his dear friend: *"Get behind Me, Satan! You are an obstacle in My path, because you are thinking not as God thinks but as human beings do"* (Mt 16:23). Peter, of course, thought it was his duty to correct Jesus for having prophesied His impending Passion and death. And that really is the principle problem for those of us, like Peter, who sincerely try to serve Christ whole-heartedly – we rely too much on our own strength and reason and not enough on the wisdom and power of God.

So the Lord allowed Peter to taste his own weakness firsthand. After having protested at the Last Supper, *"Even if all fall away from you, I will never fall away,"* and slept in the Garden of Gethsemane when he should have been praying, Peter not only ran away like the rest but sank so low as to deny



Jesus three times. And while most of us would have taken that as a cue to go find a sturdier rock, God used the opportunity to prepare this poor fisherman for his very mission. Matthew tells us that Peter wept bitterly, maybe for the first time experiencing true sorrow and profound repentance. The one who wanted to know just how many times he would *have to* forgive his brother was about to receive one of the greatest acts of forgiveness from the Master whom he abandoned and denied. The sometimes prideful man who was called to lead the Twelve, now profoundly felt that he was the least of them all. The Apostle chosen to be Christ's vicar was - in this darkest of moments - learning what it means to be sick and, consequently, receiving the seed of compassion that he would need to truly understand and shepherd a weak and wounded flock.

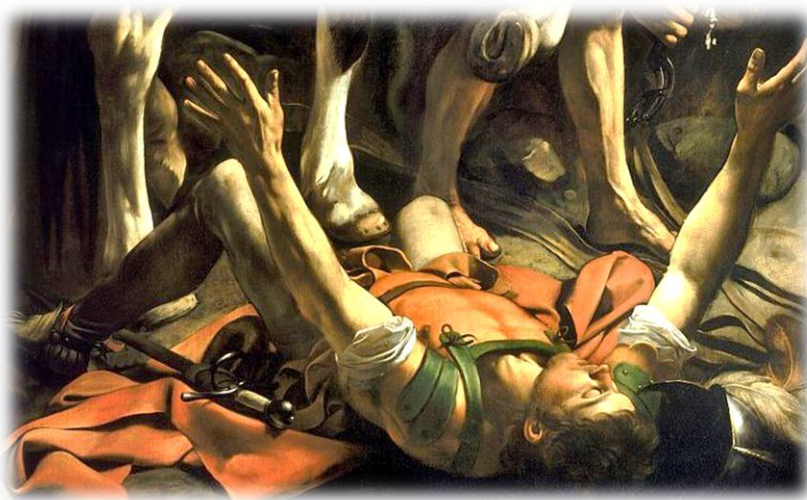
What else do we find in this very faulty, very real man? Peter was also full of fervor, enthusiasm, initiative, and truly did love Our Lord, wanting to do all that he could to please Him. He was honest and without airs about him. After the Eucharistic discourse in John 6, Peter didn't pretend to understand what in the world it meant to eat Jesus' flesh and drink His blood, but rather he leaned on faith instead: "*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we believe, we have come to know that you are the Holy One of God*" (John 6:68). Finally, Peter always bounced back...after every correction, every humiliation, and even after his worst fall. He accepted Jesus' mercy, jumped out of the boat and waded through the water to meet his beloved Master on the beach, and professed his love three times. And Peter, though mortified and beaten down by his own weakness, got up with Christ's strength and faithfully carried out the task assigned to him. God did not destroy the natural talents that He had given to Peter, but He purified them. He emptied Peter of self so that the Holy Spirit could fill him to the brim, the same Spirit that later gave him wisdom in leadership, power in preaching, joy in persecution, and courage in martyrdom.

St. Paul

"To keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from getting above myself. About this, I have three times pleaded with the Lord that it might leave me; but He has answered me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.' I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Cor 12:7-9). Let these words comfort you as you continue your journey on the road to sanctity. Paul didn't convert when he fell off that horse, but rather began his conversion. Granted it was a pretty incredible start and he received extraordinary graces, but even Paul had to continue to struggle and fight the good fight...particularly because he was entrusted with so much and for his own good.

Just because we've given our fiat to the Divine Will, doesn't mean that we're magically going to become perfect overnight. The Lord will keep testing us and disposing the situations He knows we need to grow in holiness. But if we persevere in asking Jesus to take on the lead role in all that we do, relying totally on His strength and not ours, He'll get us to the finish line. And together with Paul, we'll be able to say: "*I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God*" (Gal 2:20-21).

So rejoice in your miseries and weaknesses, as long as your will is not in them, for they make us cling



more firmly to God and, as Luisa tells one of her spiritual sons: "*They can serve as footstool on which the Divine Will forms Its throne in order to dominate us and reign...or as soil in the hands of our Celestial Farmer who makes of our miseries, without our will, the most beautiful flowerings to extend His Kingdom...Therefore, courage and trust...If we don't take the first steps, we cannot take the second, the third, and so forth. If we do not enter the sea, we cannot get wet or swim in it. Therefore, the essential thing is really to begin; the rest will come by itself.*"

(Letter #47 to Federico Abresh)



Bridegroom and Bride

On February 2nd, Feast of the Presentation, Sister Gloria Marie of the Holy Family made her first vows in our parish church of Talamello before all of her brothers and sisters, many friends of the community, and our bishop, Msgr. Andrea Turazzi. The bishop gave a beautiful homily that day, comparing Jesus' presentation to the Father in the Temple to Sister Gloria's offering of herself in marriage to Christ. The first came through the hands of the holy priest, Simeon, and the second through one of the Apostles' successors – both passing through the authority established by God. And we believe that Our Lady and St. Joseph are present for all of our wedding feasts, as well - playing key roles in preparing each sister for her consecration to their Son.



Other than a few new songs added to our repertoire, nothing else really distinguished this ceremony from any other we've had over the years. The profession formula was the same. The vows of poverty, chastity, obedience, and charity were the same. Even the ceremony booklets were the same, reused from sister to sister. But in the midst of all this sameness, there was something different about Sister Gloria's profession – a unique grace that couldn't be seen, but was very much felt. In fact, each sister's wedding day is marked by that "something special" that we can never quite put our finger on, but we always know is there. As one sister was reflecting the other day, this feeling is nothing more than an awareness of the singular relationship that God desires to have with each soul.

Being religious, we sometimes get asked if we ever get jealous that Jesus has so many wives. We really should be, right? Our Spouse seems to be the only one dispensed from monogamy. And why are we not entitled to be *the one* - the one woman alone longed for by her husband? Well, the answer can be found in the mystery of the Eucharist. Though there may be many consecrated hosts, we don't share parts of Jesus or have to take turns with Him. With every Holy Communion, we all receive the fullness of Christ's Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. The two become one. The covenant between God and each of our unique souls is renewed, with Jesus whispering "*You are Mine and I am yours.*" In our religious consecration, we feel the same way – that we each have our own, personal Jesus to ourselves, though He remains always One. And this type of intimacy is not reserved only for priests and religious, but for everyone.

At the wedding feast of the Lamb, Christ is Bridegroom and you all are bride too (not just us). From all of eternity, He willed you into existence, placing an exclusive and irreplaceable love into your heart. Our Heavenly Father loves you individually, in a way that He loves no one else in Heaven or on earth. What's more, you possess a special love with which to love both God and your neighbor, one that no other creature can substitute for (no matter how beautiful, talented, or holy they may be). That's how precious we all are! And just as an earthly marriage involves both an exchange of persons and possessions, the no less real and far greater supernatural marital covenant that binds us to God requires the same...but in HD (high-definition). Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are ever-ready to give us all that They are and all that They possess...in other words, the Divine Will. This is what we were created for and what Jesus won back for each of us. But in order to make His Holy Will flow in all that we are and do, God wants the dowry of our own human will – the little material needed to make us living hosts. Just think, by living each moment in this beautiful exchange, we have the opportunity to renew our covenant bond with the Lord even in the simplest, most menial tasks of our everyday life!

Imagine how quickly your relationship with Christ would deepen if you looked at everything as a personal invite to greater intimacy with Him. St. Faustina spoke of the benefits of meditating on the Lord's Passion with the awareness that Jesus would have suffered every pain even if you were the only soul that existed. Try approaching the Hours of the Passion with this lens, and like Luisa, place yourself there with Jesus at each moment, truly believing that He desires your company. We don't suggest that you pray in this way, but *live* in this manner. Though the cross may come our way or our days be monotonous, a life lived in continual union with God brings constant fulfillment. Take it from us. We go through the same motions, following the same schedule every day, yet there is never a dull moment. The outside may always appear the same, but the fount of

new graces never dries up on the inside. However, like we said earlier, it's not something one can quite put their finger on. You just have to experience it for yourself.

Do you desire to live in the Divine Will? To participate in the Sacraments on a whole new level, extending that grace – that divine life – to every aspect of your life? To requite your God and Bridegroom in the way He created you for? The teachings Our Lord gave to the Servant of God, Luisa Piccarreta will show you how. Just drop us an email and we'll get you everything you need.

What's on your mind?

“Always be joyful, then, in the Lord. I repeat, be joyful. Let your good sense be obvious to everybody. The Lord is near. Never worry about anything; but tell God all your desires of every kind in prayer and petition shot through with gratitude, and the peace of God which is beyond understanding will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, let your minds be filled with everything that is true, everything that is honorable, everything that is upright and pure, everything that we love and admire – with whatever is good and praiseworthy...Then the God of peace will be with you.” (Phil 4:4-9)



As Paul sits in prison, writing at the time of Nero's persecution, he provides both early Christians as well as modern-day Catholics with a recipe for protecting, strengthening, and sharing our faith in the Good News of Jesus Christ in a world gone mad: joy, good sense, prayer, gratitude, peace, and **filling our minds with all that is good and pure and true**. This last element is key, for it'll dispose us to live more fully the other virtues on the list as well. Feeling discouraged and depressed, anxious and fearful, angry and frustrated with the current state of affairs? Well, what's filling your mind and consuming your time? Replace it with something that will make you happy, holy, and a source of evangelizing hope and love for others.

We've fallen in love with two fantastic websites with tons of resources for Catholics to deepen their understanding of the Bible and the Church's teachings. The more we understand our faith and what God has done for man, the deeper we will be able to live in the Divine Will. *“When We [the Most Holy Trinity] find one who recognizes Our works, We feel as though repaid for what We have done, because We gave love and love We receive.” (Vol. 24, 9/10/1928)*

- **The St. Paul Center** – stpaulcenter.com – founded by Dr. Scott Hahn offers a wide variety of online studies, videos, audio courses, podcasts, and books from some of the most well-respected scripture scholars and theologians today (including Dr. Hahn himself, Dr. Brant Pitre, Dr. John Bergsma...just to name a few). They make studying the Bible and our Catholic faith not just really interesting, but spiritually fulfilling as well!
- **Ascension: The Faith Formation Leader** – ascensionpress.com – is another website we've recently fallen in love with, featuring widely renowned Catholic speakers and scholars such as Fr. Mike Schmitz, Jeff Cavins, Dr. Edward Sri, and many more. You'll not only find tons of resources in order to evangelize your own mind and heart, but also helpful tools on how you can form your own study groups and evangelize to others.

Just a reminder of the two Divine Will Cenacles we're regular guests on if you're interested in tuning-in:

- *The School of Mary: A Kindergarten in the Divine Will*, hosted by Peter DePalma on Radio Maria every Thursday at 11am (EST). Go to radiomaria.us to listen live or radiomaria.us/divinewill for all of our past episodes along with other Divine Will programming on Radio Maria.
- *Mary's Hill Online Contemplative Divine Will Cenacle* – To receive regular invites, drop an email to Peter DePalma at maryshill@queenofthedinewill.org. The Mary's Hill website, queenofthedinewill.org, is also chock full of text and audio resources for learning about the gift of living in the Divine Will.



Praying at the tomb of Blessed Carlo Acutis: "To always be close to Jesus. That is my life plan."



Learning how to make corporals as a Holy Thursday gift for the priests of our diocese. We don't know what we're doing, but God is getting pretty good at it.



Supporting the Sisters



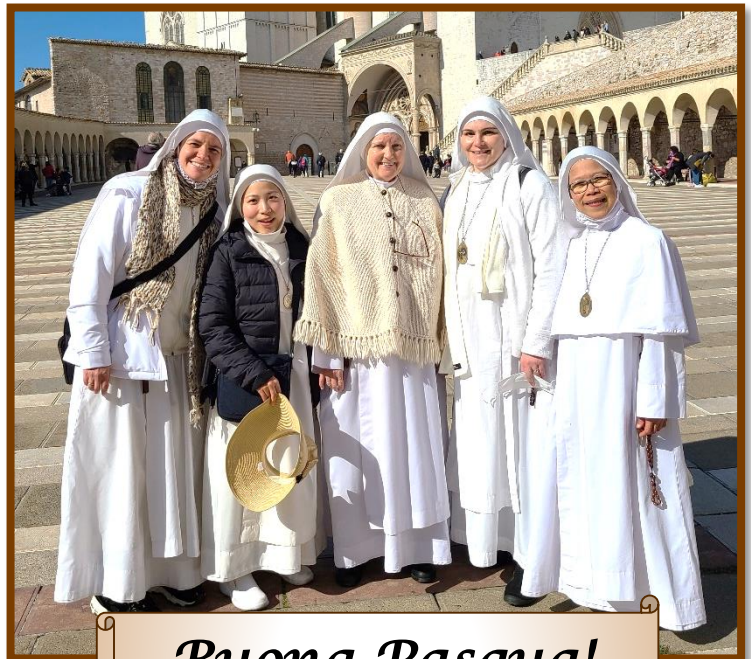
If you feel called to help support the Benedictine Daughters of Divine Will this Lenten and Easter season or on a regular basis, visit the "Donations" page of our website to make a one-time donation by credit/debit card or to sign up for automatic monthly contributions:

www.benedictinesofdivinewill.org

You can also simply send a check or money order to the address of our U.S. non-profit organization below: *(All donations are tax-deductible)*

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In gratitude to God for each and every one of our benefactors, Holy Mass will be celebrated this Easter Season for all those who have supported us in any way, shape, or form. Know that you never leave our prayers and we count on your continued prayers for us, as well. God bless you and...



Buona Pasqua!