

## IN TIME OF SUFFERING

Our Father, Who willed us into being, knows our needs, our wants and our dreams. His only wish for us is to give us gifts and blessings beyond our understanding.

Jesus promised this, on His life, "for every one who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. What father among you would hand his son a snake when he asked for a fish? Or a scorpion when he asks for an egg? If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him." Luke: Chapter 11; 9-13

So, when you are suffering, you can be assured that the Father will be working on the problem with you. It is a done deed. You can safely say, "I give you thanks and praise for the work You are doing this very moment to help me in my need." The gifts you receive may be far different from those asked; almost always we ask too little. They may be gifts of the Holy Spirit such as patience, compassion for others, courage under fire and humility. I always prayed for the "flashy" gifts of knowledge, wisdom and healing—but when my greatest time of suffering came, at the death of my husband, and the mess that he left behind, it wasn't the great gifts but the humble ones of patience, courage, fortitude and self-denial that put starch in my spine and carried me through. We must trust these are to our good. While we are in the midst of trials we don't have the wisdom to see, but looking back, don't we see that God worked it out far better than we could have dreamed? Go for broke, give thanks and praise for those things for which you suffer and long, even if it should require a miracle.

St. Paul wrote to the Philippians, "The Lord is near. Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, in prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in the Lord Jesus." (Chapter 4:67) "In all circumstances give thanks," he wrote to the Thessalonians. (Chapter 5:18)

We do not give thanks for the evil visited upon us but for the good that will come to us if we are open to receive it.

## STOP ASKING WHY?

To get to the point of thanks and praise for our crosses we first have to disavow ourselves of the idea that God wills, sends, or tests us with anything against our good. Does He know what will befall us—Yes. Does He allow it—Yes. Why? Why?—we ask. Why would a good God allow children to be abused and deserted? Why are innocent people maimed and killed? Why do so many of our brothers and sisters around the world kill each other with seeming abandon?

From time immemorial theologians and philosophers have tried to answer that question. Why? Though we hear "original sin," "free will," "lesser nature," none of these satisfy. Our limited minds cannot comprehend "why?" It is a mystery.

In the youth of my spiritual journey this was disturbing to me. Even as a child, I wanted to know the 'how' and 'why' of everything and everyone. Reason and logic were big with me. I am still uneasy with things that make no sense. But as I become more spiritually mature, I see something better than reason, something higher than sense and that it is 'divine mystery.' St. Francis said it well, "the light is too much for my blind eye." Somewhere along the way we have to decide between trusting in those things which

can be understood and allowing ourselves to enter into the mystery of things for which we hope. Just because our finite mind can't discover answers, it doesn't mean that there are none. In fact, one of the greatest gifts of the cross is that the deeper we allow ourselves to go into the mystery of Christ, the more sense everything makes.

#### TRUST IN GOD'S PERFECT PLAN

From St. Francis, "At the center of our lives and the lives of all men stands the fact that God has a plan for us—a very simple plan." Our job is to discern it.

For our purposes today we will think on two parts of the 'perfect plan.' One is prayer and the other is trust in God's will.

Cardinal Hume wrote, "Friendships need space to develop and grow strong. Friends must waste time together. It is also thus with prayer. Prayer is making friends with God and He with us. Prayer is trying to focus the mind on God and to admit Him into our hearts. Prayer is wasting time with God. Prayer needs space to develop and grow strong."

If you get nothing else from my words about suffering, please remember prayer. Make time for daily silence. Without fail, plan time with Him. "When you can do nothing else during your time of prayer but to gently take your heart and place it on our Lord's---your time of prayer will have been well spent indeed," said St. Francis DeSales.

God's grace in time of prayer is not just a pretty concept—it is real. In this time you will find all that you need to live this life.

In time of sorrow and suffering when you can't pray, ask others to pray for you. Ask your priest to bless you. Ask family and friends to hold you in silent prayer, call the prayer chain to pray for you.

From Bishop Edmond Browning in his book, A Year of Days, "in the life of prayer, this sense of inter relatedness is expressed in what traditionally has been called 'intercession.' 'I'll pray for you,' one person says to another as they part. I will join myself to you when I sit in the presence of God. I will intend your good in the stillness of my soul. I will long for your joy as I long for my own." That is prayer.

The second part is to ask to be shown God's perfect will for your life and the lives for whom you pray, and turn all over to Him.

"Many people tell the Lord; I surrender everything to you without reservation; but few in fact practice this surrender. This surrender is nothing else but a state of mind whereby we are perfectly open to receive all the events of life in total faith in God's providence." (St. Francis DeSales)

So in your sorrows—fear nothing, give it to Him and rest assured that He will show you what you are to do.

Remember, out of our deepest fears can come our most profound hope.

Remember too, that of all symbols the firemen and rescue workers could have made out of the Trade Center rubble of 9/11, the one they chose to erect was a cross of bent steel, a sign of hope.

## USE YOUR IMAGINATION

It's too bad that most of us lose our imagination as we lose our childhood. Remember when we found all sorts of things in clouds as they rolled by on a summer day? St. Francis never lost his flair for imagery. His books and letters are filled with it. I recently read that he had penitents look at the crucifix for three minutes after confession. He also advised this in time of trouble. Nothing fancy; no words; just gaze at the crucifix.

I have been doing this in recent months and I have to tell you I am beginning to know those who stood at the foot of the cross. I stand next to the Blessed Mother as she looks with unspeakable agony upon her Son. She is so strong, she never sags, she doesn't falter, she stands sentinel with her child. She is calm and forgiving though I know she must cringe with the injustice of it all. He was perfect, He did nothing, while I, for whom He hangs there, stumble and fall into her supporting arms when I suffer. Mary Magdalene is there. She prays for me and mine though her heart is breaking. His aunt, Mary the wife of Clopas, who doesn't understand any of it, holds my hand. The beloved disciple receives me as a sister. As a drop of Jesus' sacred blood falls on me, I feel strength to return refreshed to the life in which I have been placed. That which we imagine can become real.

## LIVE JESUS

Through the cross, I know what Francis meant when he said LIVE JESUS. Jesus first lived me. He lived each of you. There on that wretched, glorious day on Calvary, we were actually there. We were loved by name because He carried my sins and your sins and He had, in His distress, to know each of us because of these sins. He knew what we would choose and what we would pass by. He included us when he said "Father forgive them, they know not what they do." He meant us when He said, "You will be with me in paradise." Our names were engraved on the nails. Our hopes, dreams, and fears flowed with His blood. The crown of thorns was made up of our failings. Our burdens were chiseled in the wood. He carried us all.

Now it is our turn, to live Jesus. To live Him in His unfinished work here and now. Therein lies some of the secret of the Mystery. We have the noble honor to join with Him in the redemptive work of the salvation of souls and not just any souls but those He has entrusted to our care.

The prayer of St. Francis was "Lord, give me the grace to help those who have come close to me, draw close to You."

So our call to holiness is not to waste our sufferings but to use them for the intentions of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. How does this transfer to help people we may never meet as well as our loved ones. In this life we will never know—it is a Mystery.