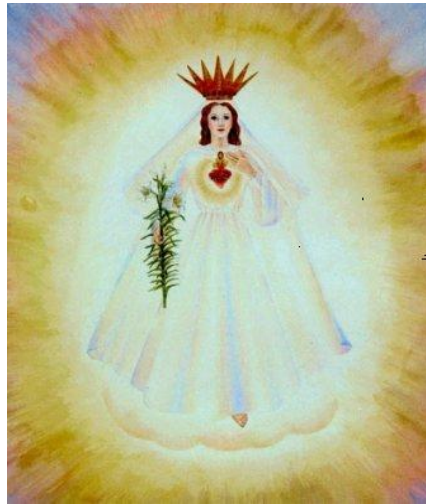


The Pure White Lily

A Symbol That Points to Jesus, Mary and Joseph



The next morning, the feast of the North American Martyrs, Mass had just been concluded and the Community thanksgiving was almost over. There were a few minutes left when suddenly Our Lady appeared before me, enveloped in a soft glow of light. I knew with unmistakable certainty that it was she, though she did not speak immediately. What I noticed was the smile on Our Lady's beautiful countenance and the lily she held in her right hand. She wore a white veil reaching almost to the waist and a mantle and robe of pure white with not a single decoration of any kind. An oblong-shaped clasp or brooch held the ends of the mantle together at the top. It was all gold, as was the high and brilliant crown which she wore. Her hair and her eyes seemed of medium brown. Her feet were bare, but these I did not always see, as they were sometimes covered by the moving clouds on which Our Lady stood. She continued to smile. Then I saw her heart appear, encircled with red roses, the symbol of suffering as it was revealed to me, and sending forth flames of fire. With her left hand Our Lady seemed to be holding up slightly the upper part of her mantle, so that her Immaculate Heart could be seen.

Then solemnly and distinctly, in calm yet majestic tones, I heard these words: "I am Our Lady of America. I desire that my children honor me, especially by the purity of their lives."

(Sister Mildred Mary Ephrem Neuzil, Diary, "Our Lady of America©,"
Fostoria, Ohio, pg. 10.)

Our dear Lady has come to us here in America through Sister Mildred Mary Ephrem Neuzil under the title of our country, “Our Lady of America®,” bearing a lily in her right hand, that symbol of her great purity, her Immaculate Conception by which this Nation honors her in our patronal church of all the American people, the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D. C. It is for honoring her under this great privilege of her Immaculate Conception, along with her Perpetual Virginity, privileges that flow from that first great privilege of her Divine Maternity, that Our Lady favors us with her gracious visit to satisfy the longing in our hearts for a sign of her motherly love for us. In showing us her gratitude, she likewise lays upon our hearts the mandate from heaven to help her, St. Joseph and all the angels and saints to bring the world back to Faith and Purity, to bring peace among men and nations. **She especially mandates America, the United States of America, to be the Nation dedicated to her Purity!**

Since the Middle Ages the white lily has become the most prominent religious symbol for Our Lady because its whiteness symbolizes the utter purity that was bestowed on Mary with her preservation from original and personal sin with her Immaculate Conception. White is the color in which all color is contained, a symbol for the infinite fullness of God whom she bore within her womb as the Word made flesh, thus becoming “Our Lady of the Divine Indwelling©,” translucent and resplendent with the glory of God within her. The lily is tall and stately, symbolizing strength, endurance, royalty! Because of its height, it often bends downward, becoming a symbol of both greatness and humility all in one. It is a fitting symbol for Mary’s greatness, for there is no created person greater than she, and for her humility, for she surrendered her will so completely to the Divine Will with her humble “fiat,” without which the plan of salvation could not have occurred. “Behold the handmaid of the Lord.” The lily is also a religious symbol for the Archangel Gabriel, the Angel of Purity as Sister Mildred notes in her Diary. It is he who addresses Our Lady as “full of grace” and announces her vocation to be the Mother of the God-Man, a call that implies the Immaculate Conception.

The lily has been used in heraldry by royalty throughout the ages, especially by the Kings of France. It is said that an angel presented the French King, Clovis, a lily from heaven on the day of his baptism to signify the great purification of the sacrament and its invitation to share in the pure life and light of God that is our perfection. Others say Clovis saw a lily in a vision of Mary. The French royalty often signed their documents with the word “Lis” which means “lily.” When Clovis’ father gave him the surname “Florus” which means “flower,” the terms were combined as “fleur-de-lis,” then popularized and used widely on emblems. The one dimensional “fleur-de-lis” has only three petals and was used to symbolize the most Holy Trinity. Joan of Arc is said to have carried a banner showing God blessing the “fleur-de-lis” as she led France into battle against England. The center of the lily flower has seven seeds. Seven is the biblical number for fullness, completeness, wholeness. We see that significance so readily in the works of the Holy Trinity: in the seven days of creation by the Father that

are completed with the great day of the Sabbath, the Lord's day; in the seven Sacraments that pour out the grace of Redemption won by the Son; and in the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit Who constantly increases our sanctification, from glory to glory. Thus is the Trinity honored in this one small flower.

Reference: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fleur-de-lis>

Although the lily is immediately associated with Mary, we often see St. Joseph pictured with a lily in his right hand as well, symbolizing his purity and humility, his endurance and greatness, as well as his royalty, for he, like Mary, descends from the house of King David in the line of the Promise for the birth of the Savior. He was given a singular privilege similar to Mary's Divine Motherhood, that of Virgin-Fatherhood over Jesus, legal paternity according to Jewish law which established Jesus scripturally and historically in the House of David as prophesied. "But a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom." (Is 11:1) This is, of course, a reference to the Messiah coming from the family of Jesse, the father of King David, and includes both Mary and Joseph, mother (by flesh) and father (by law) to Jesus Who is that bud blossoming on the stump of Jesse just as they had budded on it before Him in the ancestral line of the Promise. The blooming rod or lily is a most appropriate symbol for all three of these pure and holy persons who make up the Hypostatic Order of Grace and Redemption.

The lily is not only a sign of Jesus' royal birth and Messianic mission, but as the Easter lily, it is a sign of Christ's Resurrection and Ascension into heaven, that Holy of Holies that is eternal glory in the presence of the All Holy and Infinitely Pure God. Sacred Scripture speaks of God raising up Israel like the lilies in the field that spring up everywhere with beauty and grace. So will God multiply us and shape us with His grace, the sunshine of His love, into the new Israel, His Body, the Church. Jesus would use the lilies of the field to teach us some vitally important lessons. First, we exist to give glory to God by our very existence, like the lilies that neither toil nor labor but give glory to Him. Second, our self worth and our dignity as persons comes from God by the sheer fact that He created us, and created us in His own image, and we are His, precious in His sight. Our worth does not depend on what *we do* but on what *He does* for us and through us, if we allow Him to. And third, God is simple and demands that we have the simplicity of a child if we are to enter the kingdom of heaven; God delights in the little ones. The simplest life and simplest deeds, done with great love, can give Him more glory than the proud and illustrious deeds of those who exalt themselves. While self esteem comes from what others do or don't do toward us or what we believe about ourselves, self worth comes from God and no one can take it from us. We are of the utmost value because we are God's; we are made in His image and mirror His infinite goodness and beauty. Life is sacred because each person is called in grace to be a living tabernacle for the Indwelling God, each one just as Mary was.

There is a legend that God gave Adam a rod, the symbol of His authority and His power, when he banished him from Eden. Supposedly this rod was passed on through the generations of the Patriarchs in the line of the Promise. Since many of these chosen men were from families of shepherds, it would not be hard to imagine such a rod being passed on as a shepherd's staff and to be recognized in the rod of Moses who was tending his sheep when he was called by God in the burning bush, the rod that worked so many miracles for God's people in the desert of their exile. Surely we can picture David, the shepherd boy, with his rod, his staff, tending the sheep when he was called to do battle with Goliath with naught but a small sling shot. Perhaps it was Joseph's walking stick as he traversed through the land of Egypt from which God had led his people from slavery as it led him in escape from the tyranny of Herod. Indeed, its symbolism is truly fulfilled in Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who with His rod and His staff gives us courage and leads us into green pastures and beside restful waters.

Scripture does, however, speak quite clearly of the blooming rod of Aaron. When the twelve tribes of Israel were quibbling over God's favor and their power, God ordered each tribe to present a rod over which the priests would pray. The rod that bloomed would be God's choice of the tribe that would carry on the priesthood for His people. The rod of Aaron, Moses' brother from the tribe of Levi, bloomed and thus the priesthood was established with the House of Levi.

We know the story of Mary's birth to Anna after years of barrenness and Anna's gift of her back to God by taking Mary to the temple at age three. Marriage was the exalted state in the Hebrew covenant, for the blessings of God were seen in the number of children and the size of the flock. No wonder then, that barren women like Anna and Elizabeth were looked upon as cursed by God, though we know God only wished to delay His blessing on them for His greater work! Marriage was especially exalted in the line of the Promise, for every woman hoped to be the mother of the long awaited Messiah. Mary, however, had never considered herself worthy of such honor and was content to give herself completely to God in a vow of virginity. It was the custom to return the temple virgins back to their families for marriage at around age 14. Tradition tells us that Mary wished to stay in the temple, but being of the line of the Promise and with Joachim deceased, the temple priests insisted she marry and they arranged the marriage, for marriages were generally arranged in those days and religious minded people always sought the direction of God and prayer of the priests regarding whom they should marry. Under God's direction the priests gathered the unmarried men of the area and asked each to bring a rod to the temple; again, as in the days of Aaron when God revealed his choice through the blooming rod, the priests prayed for God to show whom He wished to be Mary's husband. Joseph's rod bloomed; God's choice was made manifest and confirmed. Hence Joseph is pictured so often with the blooming lily rod.

The priest is seen as the one who offers sacrifice for the people, who intercedes for them with God. In other words, he is a bridge, an intercessor. The word “sacrifice” means “to make holy.” We offer sacrifice to God to acknowledge our total dependence on the Creator as His creatures in an act of worship, humbly admitting that without God we are nothing and can do nothing. We offer sacrifice to atone for our sins. It is His power and love that has created us, sustains us, redeems us and sanctifies us and welcomes us home into the bosom of His Infinite Love from which we were conceived in the Eternal Mind of our God. Joseph, like Aaron of old, has a priestly role to play in the work of Redemption in offering Jesus to the Father on our behalf and in interceding for us. Is he not the bridge between Jesus and the Father, between us, his spiritual children and our heavenly Father? Was he not first to offer that most Perfect Sacrifice to the Father on our behalf when he took Jesus to the temple at the Presentation and made the offering for the first born son, Jesus, whose name means Savior, knowing well that it was the Promised Messiah he held in his arms and offered to God for all of us? Jesus is the Eternal High Priest, the Holy Prophet of God, for He is The Word, the Logos of God. He is not only born of a royal family, He is the King of kings. If our baptism gives us a share in the priesthood of Jesus, his kingly and prophetic roles, how much more did Joseph share in those awesome attributes of his Son?

We have seen Joseph’s appearance to Sister Mildred with his heart upon the cross of Jesus’ passion on the eve before his feast day, March 18, 1958. On the evening of the feast day itself, he again appeared to Sister and spoke of being king in their little home in Nazareth where he sheltered the Prince of Peace and the Queen of Heaven. He went on to speak of the love and obedience and respect that should reign in the home and that when we honor his fatherhood we also honor Jesus and Mary. He called on us to imitate the virtues of the Holy Family if we wish to know the peace which comes from God alone. Then Sister Mildred describes a new vision of him.

Then suddenly, as he ceased speaking, I was favored with a unique and marvelous vision of the glorious St. Joseph. He seemed suspended, as it were, a short distance above what had the appearance of a large globe with clouds moving about it. His head was slightly raised, the eyes gazing upward as if in ecstasy. The hands were in a position similar to that of the priest during the celebration of Holy Mass, only they extended upward somewhat more.

The color of his hair as also of his rather small and slightly forked beard seemed a very dark brown. His eyes resembled in color the hair and beard. He was clothed in a white robe that reached to his ankles. Over this he wore a sort of cloak which did not come together at the throat, but covering the shoulders and draped gracefully over each arm, reached to the hem of the robe. The cloak at times had, or seemed to have, the appearance of a brown, sometimes a purple, hue, or perhaps a

slight blending of the two. The belt about his waist was of a gold color, as were his sandals.

His appearance, though quite youthful, gave at the same time the impression of rare maturity combined with great strength. He seemed a bit taller than medium height. The lines of his face appeared strong and purposeful, softened somewhat by a gentle serenity. I also saw his most pure heart at this time. Moreover, I saw the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove hovering above his head.

Standing sideways, facing each other, were two angels, one on the right, the other on the left. Each carried what appeared to be a small pillow in a satin covering, the pillow on the right bearing a gold crown, the one on the left, a gold scepter. The angels were all white, even their faces and hair. It was a beautiful whiteness that reminded me of the stainlessness of heaven.

Then I heard these words: “Thus should he be honored whom the King desires to honor.” (Diary, pgs. 29-30.)

What better example could we have of Joseph’s share in the work of Jesus as Priest, Prophet and King, the priesthood of the laity, as it were? He is a bridge for us with Mary and her Divine Spouse, a bridge for us with Jesus, and a bridge to our heavenly Father. He is a father to us, too, and like the heavenly Father, seeks to give us good things, to provide and care for us, to guide and lead us. Let us turn to him for his intercession with Jesus and Mary, for neither of them can refuse him. And neither can the Father refuse Jesus on our behalf. Like Joseph, let us offer to the father for the salvation of the entire world that One, Holy, and Perfect Sacrifice that is so pleasing to the Father, His own Son. Nothing could please Him more.

Saint Therese, that Little Flower of beauty and grace not associated with lilies but with roses, the flower Our Lady revealed is the symbol of suffering, of the Passion, took Joseph for her father when she suffered the loss of her dear earthly father. She enjoyed St. Joseph’s great favor by being a little one like he was, hidden away in the Nazareth of her cloister. She has her own words to say about being little and simple, like the wild flowers, like the lilies in the fields.

Our Lord’s love is revealed as perfectly in the most simple soul, who resists His grace in nothing, as in the most excellent soul! ...He created the child who knows only how to make his feeble cries heard... It is to their hearts that God deigns to lower Himself. These are the wild flowers whose simplicity attracts Him. When coming down in this way, God manifests His infinite grandeur. Just as the sun shines simultaneously on the tall cedars and on each little flower as though it were alone on the earth, so Our Lord is occupied particularly with each soul as though there were no others like it. And just as in nature all the

seasons are arranged in such a way as to make the humblest daisy bloom on a set day, in the same way, everything works out for the good of each soul. (St. Therese of Lisieux)

**Oh that we might be such simple souls, for God loves them so!
God is simple, too!**

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