

The Interior Life

Winning Wars With Prayer, Not Weapons

“I am the resurrection and the life, and unless souls seek their life in Me, they will find only death and destruction. They fear man-made destroyers of life, yet destruction is in themselves. Man destroys himself through the evil that is in himself. Implements of war kill only that which is without. Man kills that within himself which none but he can kill.”

Sister Mildred (Mary Ephrem) Neuzil, Diary, OUR LADY OF AMERICA®, Fostoria, OH, Pg. 4, Words of Our Lord in locution with Sister, May 22, 1954.

At Our Lady's first appearance to Sister Mildred (Mary Ephrem) Neuzil she promised miracles of grace, miracles of the soul, especially to her children in America if we would do as she asks. And the most important thing she asks for is **“reform of life, sanctification from within.”** (Diary, Pg. 18.) Sister wrote that Our Lady is **“anxiously concerned about our inner life.”** (Diary, Pg. 10.) It is the same concern Jesus has for us when he said **“Man kills that within himself which none but he can kill.”** Man kills the life of God within his soul through sin.

So what is the interior life? And can we understand the focal point of the message of Our Lady of America®, the Divine Indwelling Presence of the Most Holy Trinity in each soul, both as the source of holiness from within and as the spiritual weapon that will crush the head of Satan, if we have not cultivated an interior life? And how does our interior life relate to our exterior life, our apostolate?

Theologically speaking, the interior life is a share in the very life of the Most Holy Trinity through union with the Sacred Humanity of Jesus in the mysteries of His Incarnation and Redemption that are the source of **sanctifying grace** meted out to us through the sacramental life of His Mystical Body, the Church. It flows from the Eucharist, the source and summit of every Christian life, where we encounter the Real Presence of Jesus and receive Him, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity within our own flesh in a holy communion that transcends human explanation. All real living is within and springs forth from that deepest place within ourselves that belongs to God alone and from which He acts in us and through us as the life principle of all our actions. The interior life is our challenge to live within ourselves, always in that sacred place within where we meet God in a most intimate way and come to know how much He loves us, each one as though we were the only person on earth. In that sacred place we are espoused to Him in grace and become the beloved of God in imitation of the First Beloved Son, Jesus. It is where we discover our total dependence on God for life and sustenance and where we learn that He is the one true God and the only One who can satisfy our deepest longings for peace and happiness, for

He created us precisely for Himself. We are His children and we belong to Him, our ultimate and only Good.

This supernatural life and relationship with the Most Holy Trinity begins in Baptism when the Trinity comes to dwell within us in a unique way with the gift of sanctifying grace, making us tabernacles in our own flesh for the living God. This Presence within us is perfected in Confirmation with a more intense outpouring of God's Holy Spirit. Reconciliation restores our relationship with God when we break it with sin. This supernatural interior life is continually nourished with the very Bread that has come down from Heaven to be our spiritual food, Jesus in the Most Holy Eucharist. It grows in the measure in which we cooperate with its grace and place no barriers in its way. It is our union with God in Jesus so real and so pervasive and so unifying that it permeates everything we say and do. With St. Paul we, too, can say, **"I live, now not I, but Christ lives within me."** And, **"In Him I live and move and have my being."**

Saints have given testimony to this supernatural interior life and how it bore fruit in the particular mission the Will of God had ordained for them. No mission on earth, after Christ's, was as great as that of Mary and Joseph in the Holy House of Nazareth. Theirs was a life of solitude and contemplation of the Face of God in Jesus. It was a humble life, performing the ordinary duties of caring for and protecting Jesus as they centered their whole life on Him. There was no fanfare, no extraordinary exterior deeds or public recognition, yet Mary and Joseph are the two greatest human persons who ever lived—she the Mediatrix of Christ's grace and he the Patron of the Universal Church. Nazareth was surely heaven on earth!

Other saints have likewise given testimony to the transforming power of the interior life and its fruitfulness in their apostolates. They teach us we must literally fall in love with God, with Jesus, to come to any real understanding of the spiritual life. When Moses descended the fiery peak of Mount Sinai after conversing with God, his face was so brilliant with a hint of God's glory from the back side--for no one can see God in this life and live--that no one could look upon Moses unless he veiled his face. The encounter with God will always transfigure us in some way. Jacob wrestled with God all through the night to confront the lie he was living and arose in the morning wounded by the encounter with Truth but so free. Peter answered Jesus' question, **"Who do you say that I am?"** with **"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."** Jesus told Peter only the Spirit could have revealed that to him. When Jesus presented his teaching on the Eucharist many walked away saying it was too hard; Jesus asked his apostles, **"Will you, too, walk away?"** It was Peter again who said, **"Lord, to whom shall we go; You have the words of eternal life!"** When asked what he did sitting before the Blessed Sacrament so long, St. John Vianney replied: **"I look at Him and He looks at me."** The interior life is truly a love affair with Jesus, with God, wherein we learn God's love is Agape love, eternal, self-emptying and unconditional and that He alone has complete authority over us. He alone has the words of eternal life which afford us lasting peace and everlasting and complete happiness.

Jesus says, **“Unless you become as little children you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.”** The Little Flower got it so right. She described her prayer, her contemplation, as climbing into the lap of God, her Father--as she had so often done with her earthly father--and falling asleep there, pressed close to His Heart. The Holy Spirit transforms us into the image of God’s Son so each time the Father looks at us, He sees Jesus, His dearly Beloved and loves Jesus in us. This love and identification with Jesus will necessarily thrust us into the mystery of Christ’s Passion and Death and nail us to His cross so we, too, might conquer sin and death and rise to eternal glory with Jesus. The saints teach us the most fruitful of all contemplation is that on the Passion of Jesus and that sometimes we learn the interior life best through persecution and suffering. After Mary and Joseph, St. Francis is often considered the saint who most imitated Christ by his renunciation of the wealth of this world that was his inheritance in order to espouse himself to Lady Poverty in imitation of Jesus Who had nowhere to lay His head. So great was Francis’ contemplation on the wounds of Christ that Christ literally embedded them in Francis’ own flesh to seal the covenant of love between them.

What gifts has God given particularly to me and what mission has He ordained for my life? Jeremiah 29:11-14 addresses this question.

“I alone know the plans I have for you, plans to bring you prosperity and not disaster, plans to bring about the future you hope for. Then you will call to me. You will come and pray to me, and I will answer you. You will seek me, and you will find me because you will seek me with all your heart.”

The interior life, this living within ourselves in union with God, demands silence, recollection and freedom from the distractions of the world and creatures so we can hear the Lord speaking to us in the depths of our being. It demands contemplation of the Word of God in order to know the Person of the Word as Redeemer and Sanctifier, source of all life and holiness. His Word is Truth, our weapon against the lies of Satan. It demands custody of the heart to subdue concupiscence and to free us to fix our gaze upon Jesus as our First Love and the Bridegroom of our souls, our one true God and highest Good without Whom nothing else has meaning. Because Jesus has identified with every human person in His Sacred Humanity, we must see Him and love Him and serve Him in each person as though he or she were Jesus Himself. **God sent His only begotten Son into the world that we may live by Him. The end of human creatures is union with God; and in this their happiness consists.**

In his book, **THE SOUL OF THE APOSTOLATE**, Jean-Baptiste Chautard speaks of two heresies regarding the interior life: **Quietism and the Heresy of Good Works.**

[Briefly] Quietism (Latin *quies, quietus*, passivity) in the broadest sense is the doctrine which declares that man's highest perfection consists in a sort of psychical self-annihilation and a consequent absorption of the *soul* into the Divine Essence even during the present life. In the state of "quietude" the mind is wholly inactive; it no longer thinks or wills on its own account, but remains passive while God acts within it. Quietism is thus generally speaking a sort of false or exaggerated mysticism, which under the guise of the loftiest spirituality contains

erroneous notions which, if consistently followed, would prove fatal to morality. It is fostered by Pantheism and similar theories, and it involves peculiar notions concerning the Divine cooperation in human acts. In a narrower sense Quietism designates the mystical element in the teaching of various sects which have sprung up within the Church, only to be cast out as heretical. ... All these varieties of Quietism insist with more or less emphasis on interior passivity as the essential condition of perfection; and all have been proscribed in very explicit terms by the Church. Reference: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12608c.htm>

Quietism is evident in those religions that seek union with God through **self-annihilation or indifference**, the complete removal of all desire and expectation. They are akin to Greek Stoicism and tend to ignore the reality of evil, concupiscence and sin in the human condition, as well as the use of intelligence and free will, the defining features of human nature that give testimony to our creation in the image of God. **In Quietism one is utterly passive; God does it all.** It is highly individualistic and isolating in its stance. It sees no need for a Church or sacraments or moral law or identification with a body of believers bound together in a common faith and love that serves Jesus in one another. It has affinity to Pantheism and the idea of a world soul or even to false notions in New Age thinking that suggests man comes of age and achieves a maturity of being that ends in some form of godhood. It is reflected in Protestantism's doctrine of salvation by faith alone, without good works.

Since the interior life is directly concerned with God and the union of the soul with God, it is superior in itself to the exterior life which is directed more towards the service of God in His creatures. The Angelic Doctor, Thomas Aquinas, said, "**The contemplative life is by its very nature better and more effective than the active life.**" But the interior life of contemplation and the exterior life of the apostolate cannot be separated, for God chooses to mediate His grace through men and in the Sacred Humanity has identified Himself with all humanity. Christ established His Church for this mediation through men. The apostolic life, however, will never achieve God's purpose unless it is rooted in the interior life to ensure that it begins and ends in the Will of God and not our own. Jesus was first to proclaim the superiority of contemplation to the active life in His words to Martha, so frenzied about external things, when He praised Mary for sitting at His feet in awe of Him: "**Mary has chosen the better part.**" Who can give Jesus to others if he does not first possess Him?

The opposite of Quietism, which says God does it all, is the **Heresy of Good Works** which credits us with doing it all. Dom Chautard describes it thus:

Feverish activity taking the place of God; grace ignored; human pride trying to thrust Jesus from His throne; supernatural life, the power of prayer, the economy of our redemption relegated, at least in practice, to the realm of pure theory: all this portrays no merely imaginary situation, but one which the diagnosis of souls shows to be very common though in various degrees, in this age of naturalism, when men judge, above all, by appearances, and act as though success were primarily a matter of skilled organization.

(Jean-Baptiste Chautard, THE SOUL OF THE APOSTOLATE, TAN Books, Charlotte, NC, 1946/reprint 2010, Pgs. 10-11.)

Those of exaggerated exteriority and works fail to live within themselves and fail to recognize Christ as their life principle. They attribute their success to themselves instead of to God's grace. They look with disdain on the contemplative as lazy, selfish and unproductive since the fruits of contemplative prayer are not readily seen. They demean contemplation as a selfish "God and me" spirituality, but such a spirituality can only exist in the mind; in reality, any union with God results in taking on the attributes of God's nature which is Otherness and self-giving and impels one outward toward the service of others by necessity! We cannot love God without loving all who are His. In truth, contemplation and prayer are activities of the highest kind and bear more fruit than any activity we do in our exterior lives. Could we imagine the hidden, interior life of Mary and Joseph as being selfish and sterile? Was the life of the Cure of Ars who spent endless hours in the confessional or before the Blessed Sacrament selfish and sterile? Imagine what regeneration would take place in this country in a short period of time if there were one John Vianney in every diocese! And Jesus! Did he not spend 30 years in solitude and 40 days in the desert before embarking on his 3 year mission? And how many times did He leave His work to go off and pray?

What do we Catholics believe as regards these heresies? Our belief is neither extreme. We recognize that we have come from God, were created for His glory and that our happiness is union with Him. **Like the Trinity, where there are three distinct persons in the unity of one God, we do not annihilate ourselves or lose ourselves in our union with God.** We retain our distinctness and actually achieve our greatest individuality and uniqueness in the measure in which we are united to God. And, as St. Augustine has said, **"God created us without our consent but He cannot save us without our consent."** While we are passive in contemplation, resting in the Spirit in allowing grace to work its wonders within us, we are at the same time actively participating in the removal of barriers to grace and in stirring up a passionate yearning for God, using our intelligence to ponder His Word and our free will to choose Him above all other things. We believe in the necessity of our cooperation with grace in achieving our salvation and sanctification, and we believe we achieve our salvation in communion with our brethren in the Mystical Body of Christ. The interior life flows from a Eucharistic life that leads naturally into the apostolate where we serve our Lord in one another. **Our Faith and the interior life are both active and passive.** We must sit in awe of God to learn how to live in awe of Him in order to imitate His works of Creation, Redemption and the ascent to glory.

In the interior life we are given the spiritual weapons that overcome the Powers and the Principalities behind every spiritual and physical battle that plays itself out in the depths of our souls or on the bloodied soil of our Nations.

With Jesus, the interior soul hears the voice of the world's crime rising up to heaven and calling down chastisement upon the guilty; and this soul delays the sentence by the omnipotence of suppliant prayer which is able to stay the hand of God, just when He is about to let loose His thunderbolt. "Those who pray," [Chautard quotes the eminent statesman Donoso Cortes, after his conversion] "do more for the world than those who fight, and if the world is going from bad to worse, it is because there are more battles than prayers." ...

[Dom Chautard goes on:] A single burning prayer of the seraphic St. Theresa (as was learned through a highly creditable revelation) converted ten thousand heretics. And her soul, all on fire for Christ, could not conceive of a contemplative life, an

interior life, which would take no interest in the Savior's intense anxiety for the redemption of souls. "I would accept Purgatory until the Last Judgment," she said, "to deliver but one of them. And what do I care how long I suffer, if I can thus set free a single soul, let alone many souls, for the greater glory of God?" (Chautard, Pgs. 36-37.)

No one in this world knows the reason for the conversion of pagans at the very ends of the earth, for the heroic endurance of Christians under persecution, for the heavenly joy of martyred missionaries. All this is invisibly bound up with the prayer of some humble, cloistered nun. Her fingers play upon the keyboard of divine forgiveness and of the eternal lights; her silent and lonely soul presides over the salvation of souls and the conquests of the Church. ... [Chautard quotes the Bishop of Cochin-China] "Ten Carmelite nuns praying will be of greater help to me than twenty missionaries preaching." (Chautard, Pgs. 37-38.)

We see this enormous truth of the **primacy and importance of prayer and the contemplative life** throughout the message of Our Lady of America®. We see it in Our Lady's exhortations to Sister Mildred to pray and sacrifice herself for souls. Let us tuck these passages into our hearts and, like Mary, ponder deeply on them.

"Peace is from within, not from without. If mankind were at peace with itself, there would be peace in the world. Man will only have peace if he has in his heart that true love of neighbor that springs from a whole-hearted love for my Son. My sweet child, if love does not have its roots implanted deeply within the soul, it will die out or be rooted up by the first storm that besets it. ... If men truly loved my Son, they would not quarrel with each other and they would have peace in their own hearts." (Diary, Pg. 16.)

"...He who refuses to suffer will never abide in the Spirit of Christ, will never be formed in His image. My sweet child, the Father will never recognize a soul as His own unless He sees in it the likeness of His beloved Son. Souls must attain to the perfection of the Father through the Spirit of the Son." (Diary, Pg. 23.)

"The Presence of the trinity within every human being is the focal point, the basis of interior holiness. From this will spring a deep life of prayer and a love for penance as the discipline needed to convert all peoples to a serious preparation for the coming of my Son and His Kingdom....You must try to make my people understand that the Life of God within them is the source of their peace and happiness. There is no other way. This is what my Son came to teach and bring and it was for this He lived and died. Unless this mystery of God's Presence within is accepted and lived, peace will not come. It is the only way, believe me, my daughter." (Diary, Pg. 37.)

"Beloved daughter, there is no true love unless there is sacrifice. A selfish heart cannot love because it is filled with self and so has no room for love. My precious one, if self-love be true, it contains within itself the love of all and ignores no one. Your love then becomes God-Love because it embraces and contains the love of everyone. Heed this, sweet child, then you will despise no one, no matter what their conduct might be. The Heart of my Son is open to anyone who wishes to enter and is closed to no one." (Diary, Pg. 43.)

To all outward appearances, Sister Mildred Neuzil was like any other nun, but who could have known of the divine intercourse and sweet intimacy that must have transpired

between her and **her divine Spouse!** What love between them must have prompted Jesus to come to her, **offering her His cross and crown of thorns as He asked her if she was still willing to suffer to give Him to souls!** Of course she said, “Yes!” We see the trust Our Lady had in Sister’s love for Jesus and herself when she bid Sister, **“Help me save those who will not save themselves.”** (Diary, Pg. 15.) That same trust is seen in Our Lady’s other invitations to Sister calling for prayer, contemplation and sacrifice, activities so essential to the fruitfulness of the interior life.

“...O my little one, daughter of my Pure Heart, you must pray with greater fervor and offer yourself with greater love to the Heart of my Son.” ...O my sweet child, time passes and with it wasted graces and constant refusals on the part of man to co-operate with me in the accomplishment of the Divine Will for his own sanctification and salvation.” (Diary, Pgs. 17-18.)

“My poor child, you have suffered much, but do not fear. Take courage, for soon a haven of rest will be given you—not a refuge from suffering and pain, but a nest of solitude for the little white dove, so dear to me and the Heart of my Son.
(Diary, Pg. 19.)

Do we have a nest of solitude wherein to meet and fall in love with our God?

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