

Words of Lenten Wisdom to Sister Mildred Mary Neuzil from Father Paul Leibold, Her Spiritual Director

In a letter to Sister Mildred Neuzil, date unknown but before he was a bishop, Father Leibold offered her what he called his poor thoughts on the use of Lent. He referenced St. Paul's call to run the race for the crown, which demands training for the race. He called voluntary penance our training period, but our penance must be done in imitation of Christ, our model in all things, for Christ's life was a sacrifice, a penance, especially the hard penance of being misunderstood and rejected by those He came to help, whom He loved from the moment of his birth until the last drop of His Precious Blood oozed from His torn body. His motive was love of God and of us. Our motive must be love of God and imitation of Christ. **How shall we do this?**

First and foremost, accept God's will in our lives; His providential plan in every detail of our day and life with perfect confidence in His loving handling of our affairs; secondly, try to be as faithful as we can to our state of life; we well know all that implies as an individual, as a member of a community, as a religious dedicated to His service; finally, as the specific penances suggested to us: prayer, penance and alms giving.

Regarding prayer, Father said not to pile more upon more exercises until they become a burden weighing us down to earth instead of lifting us up to heaven; rather, give *greater devotion* to our regular prayers and seek to *pray always*, seeing in every detail of our daily activity a prayer to God, living always with and in Him. **As for penance and fasting**, he counseled Sister that the physical types are not important to one trained in convent life with its mild austerities, but she should rather think of fasting of the senses, e.g., the eyes--how many things do we curiously look at in the day which are not necessary or wholesome for our lives; our ears—are they open to gossip and rumors and focused on the failures of others? our nose--not so much in smell but in its figurative use, are we putting it into other peoples' business and things that do not concern us. We can exercise real penance with "sense fasting." **Almsgiving?** Even if we have little materially, we have all the faculties and powers God has given us and we should use them in the exercise of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, especially in patience, gentleness, kindness, generosity of spirit in all things, helpfulness and all the other beautiful expressions of giving what we have to others.

Father called Jesus' Agony in the Garden the most terrible part of His Passion.

There we have his prayer for deliverance; to evoke such a prayer from such a man as Christ there must have been a terrible picture before Him—and what was this picture? We find three periods of prayer in the garden, where He suffered so much He fell flat on the ground in His anguish. What was in the first of the three chalices that were offered to Him? This chalice carried all the physical pain He was about to undergo—the details of that are bad enough for us thinking of them from afar; how much more for Him whose nature was the most delicate possible, we can never fully know. The second chalice was more terrible than the first; it contained all the sins of man from beginning to end which He had to bear so that St. Paul said of Him, He became

sin. Here too, we can never fully appreciate what an awful thing sin is for we can't fully know the infinite love of God rejected by sin; Christ did know that, and so this second chalice was more overpowering than anything we can conceive. But the third and final chalice was the worst of all—this chalice contained the bitter poison of unrequited love;



here was Christ giving His all for love of us and we, either rejecting it, hating Him or at least being rather indifferent to it. This most terrible gall, again, we can never know for we do not appreciate God's love for us; but we see how in the presence of this awful chalice His sweat became as blood; that heart which ever beat for love of us seemed to pump its very contents out of His veins in its frantic attempt to show us how it was beating for love of us. With all Christ prayed—"Father, if it be possible...but not my will." His is the perfect prayer and his prayers MUST be answered—was this prayer answered? Yes, in God's Yes, in God's way—in answer the chalice was not removed; He had to drink it to the last dregs, but God gave Him the strength to drink and the light to see in the drinking the accomplishment of His Father's will, that reassurance that He was acting for His Father —that answer changed Christ. He rose from the ground of the Garden, no

longer a broken man whose soul was sorrowful unto death, but as a conquering hero, confident that though the battle would be terrible, victory would certainly be His. The apostles could sleep now, He did not need their human consolation. Judas could come with his clubs and swords—it was a King exercising His royal prerogatives from this moment until the end—even His "My God, My God" on Calvary was but a recitation of the 21st Psalm claiming that He was the fulfillment of this promised Savior. [underlining our emphasis]

Venerable Fulton J. Sheen in his book LIFE OF CHRIST, in the chapter on The Agony in the Garden, states that for Jesus to be a Savior He must be a sacrifice! It was this that would scandalize His apostles and they would abandon Him. Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich speaks thus of this holy sacrifice:

...the debt of the whole human race had to be paid by that humanity which alone was sinless—the humanity of the Son of God. ... No tongue can describe what anguish and what horror overwhelmed the soul of Jesus at the sight of so terrible an expiation—his sufferings were so great, indeed, that a bloody sweat issued forth from all the pores of his sacred body. ... [The angels tried to console him.] For one instant there appeared to be, as it were, a struggle between the mercy and justice of God and that love which was sacrificing itself. Several times I heard him exclaim: "O my Father, can I possibly suffer for so ungrateful a race? O my Father, if this chalice may not pass from me, but I must drink it, thy will be done." [Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich sees the Adorable Sacrament profaned, churches deserted, and priests despised.] ... I saw the Church as the body of Christ, as all these bands of men who were separating themselves from the Church mangled and tore off whole pieces of his living flesh. ... I beheld whole nations thus snatched out of his bosom and deprived of any participation in the treasure of graces left to the Church. ... Alas, it was as though Jesus himself had been torn into a thousand pieces.

(Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich, THE DOLOROUS PASSION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, Dover Publications, Pgs. 103-115.)

In the message of Our Lady of America, Our Lady tells Sister Mildred that nothing is accomplished without pain, and she should prepare to suffer much. **“You see the sword in the Heart of your Mother. Suffering completed the work of divine grace in my soul. He who refuses to suffer will never abide in the Spirit of Christ, will never be formed into His image.”** (Sister Mildred Mary Neuzil, *The Diary, OUR LADY OF AMERICA*, Tiffin, Ohio, Pg. 23.)

Sister Mildred was asked by her beloved Spouse, Jesus, to suffer many things, especially in expiation for sins against the chaste virtue, and she never refused Him. Accordingly, Father Leibold would urge us to kneel down beside Christ in the Garden during Lent and try to sweeten that third chalice of Jesus by consoling Him in His sufferings and showing Him our appreciation and love by embracing a life of “cross-bearing” with Him, seeking the same strength in our sufferings that He sought in His by embracing His Father’s holy Will.

In her August 6, 1956 letter to Father Leibold, Sister tells of her efforts to sweeten that third chalice of Jesus with her life of love and “cross-bearing.”

Jesus came to me holding a large cross and a crown of thorns. He said to me smiling, as though He knew what the answer would be (He did of course.) “I come with My cross and My crown of thorns, will you accept Me My spouse?” You know the only answer I could give, Father. Who could refuse Jesus anything? During the night I awoke and Jesus said to me, and He said it with a profound emphasis: “I have placed you upon the Altar of Sacrifice.”

On June 14th, anniversary of my perpetual union with Jesus, He asked me again: “Bride of My Heart, do you still wish to suffer all things to give Me to souls?” I answered: “Yes, yes dear Lord, I am poor and wretched, and unworthy, but you know what is in my heart.” He said, “My little white dove, will you then continue to wear the Crown of Thorns, and permit yourself to be nailed to the Cross?” I told him in the best way I could, how much I desired Him to do with me just as He desired. So, in this way my desires are wholly united to His.

Sister’s life was deeply configured to the agony and passion of Jesus, but each of us is called likewise to share and identify with the Suffering Christ, our Redeemer. Venerable Fulton J. Sheen emphatically says that we, too, must be nailed to the cross!

What He [Jesus] has done with His human nature, we must do with ours—plant it in the soil of the cross and await the Resurrection of the Eternal Easter.... The cross is the condition; we must be nailed to it. Our Lord loved His Cross so much that He keeps its scars even in His glory. He who had won victory over death, kept the record of its wounds. If so precious to Him, they cannot be meaningless for us. In their preservation is the reminder that we too must be signed with those signs and sealed with those seals. On Judgment Day He will say to each of us: “Show Me your hands and feet. Where are your scars of victory?” ... But woe to us who come down from the Calvary of this earthly pilgrimage with hands unscarred and white! (Fulton J. Sheen, *THE SEVEN CAPITAL SINS*, Alba House/St. Paul’s, Pgs. 69-70.)

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