

## Father Leibold Reflects on the Agony of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane



Already in the 1940's Sister Mildred (Mary Ephrem) Neuzil was directed by Jesus to go to Father Paul F. Leibold for help with this mission Our Lady had given her for America and the world for the salvation of souls. Father was such a humble priest and yet so wise in his direction of her from 1940 to his sudden death in 1972. We present his letter of Lenten wisdom to Sister with his special reflection on Christ's Agony in the Garden for your inspiration and prayer. We corrected some typing and grammar errors to make it more readable than his hand written copy.

**March 9, 1955**

**Dear Sister Ephrem:**

How time flies -- it seemed only yesterday that I heard from you and when I look at the date, it was Feb. 22 and here we are already at the Feast of St. Frances of Rome and well into Lent. I always kind of envied St. Frances for the privilege she had of seeing her Guardian Angel with her always; such would surely help to remind us of the presence of God within us to have His special guardian next to us.

It occurred to me that the talent to be able to paint a picture of the Sacred Heart must be wonderful to possess—yet I am sure for one who loves the Sacred Heart it leaves a kind of feeling of frustration as one realizes that they cannot express in the paint what they would like to, and this instrument is so inadequate to put on the canvas even a little hint of the love that should be expressed there.

As for the mouse, well I guess Christ is not especially pleased with having mice around any more than He is by having lions roaring about. Anger is a strange emotion; good in itself otherwise God would not have placed it within us; yet it must be controlled, and in controlling it we can fail in either direction, either by not using it when we should and by letting it get out of hand when we should not – Christ our model of course had that delicate touch that knew how to use this emotion perfectly; before the Pharisees He could roar out you whitened sepulchers, hypocrites; before the money changers He could form whips of ropes and scourge them out of the temple—this was the same Christ who wept over the Jerusalem that rejected Him, kept silence in the presence of his false accusers and tormentors and begging His Father for their forgiveness, only pleaded with his friends to pray with Him. Sometimes we find it difficult to apply this perfect balance in our lives as to when righteous anger is to be expressed and when we should hold our peace –surely this much we can know, when the occasion grows out of ignorance or weakness on the part of our brother, or when its effect is only to make us less personally in the sight of men; hence it takes nothing

away from the glory of God, then we suffer the hurt in peace – but in the face of malice that hurts Christ, we have reason to express our determined opposition.

As for our confidences, I know of no rule nor even spiritual advice that directs us to necessarily place our confidences in those who are our legitimate superiors. We owe them obedience, sincerity and submission as to the will of God expressed through them as far as what might be called the order of our day; but the expression of our heart and our conversations with God in our heart are quite another matter quite outside the orbit of their direction. The Church recognizes this so very well and so has, for example, two distinct offices in her Seminaries – the Rector, the superior who must be obeyed and rules the house; the spiritual director who guides the inner man and is not even permitted to enter in any way into the routine of the house or sit in judgment on the candidates. So, our feeling in this direction should not be looked on as an evil, but rather well within God's plan.

We recognize Lent as a period of required penance. Christ ordered us to do penance, unless you do penance you shall all likewise perish – so we try to exercise ourselves in this regard in obedience to God – then in reparation for our sins, every sin is an injustice to God, taking from Him something that is His due; we try to make repayment by voluntarily submitting our will more fully in penance – then we do it as a period of spiritual training, like the athletes that St. Paul calls us –running in the race for the crown, we need to be trained for the race; voluntary penance is our training period – then most of all we do it in imitation of Christ, after all He is our model in all things, His life was a sacrifice, a penance (especially the hard penance of being misunderstood and rejected by those He came to help and whom He loved from the moment of his birth until the last drop of His Precious Blood oozed from His torn body; so we do penance in imitation of Christ that we might become more and more like the Christ dwelling in us. These are our motives: what shall we do: 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, we try to be as faithful as we can to our state of life, we well know all that implies on an individual, as a member of a community, as a religious dedicated to His [soul]; finally, as the specific penances suggested to us: prayer, penance and almsgiving; how do we do those things? Prayer, not piling more upon more exercise until they become a great daily burden weighing us down to earth rather than lifting us up to heaven, but by greater devotion to our regular prayers and more perfect praying always and seeing in every detail of our daily activity a prayer to God, actually living always with and in Him. Penance or Fasting: the physical types are not important to one trained in the convent life and its mild austerities, but we rather think of fasting of our senses, e.g., the eyes, how many things do we curiously look at in the day that are not necessary objects of this faculty; our ears, always open for the unnecessary, even the word of gossip or failure of our brothers; our nose, not so much in smell but its figurative use, putting it into other peoples business and things that concern us not and so on,-- here is where we can exercise real penance and “sense fasting.” Almsgiving – we have nothing materially but we have all our faculties and powers given to us by God and we can give them so much in the exercise of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy; we especially think of patience, gentleness, kindness, generosity of spirit in all things, helpfulness and all the other beautiful expressions of giving what we have to give. These are my poor thoughts of the use of Lent.

The more one thinks of it the more it seems that the most terrible part of Christ's passion (which we meditate on more during this season) was the Agony in the Garden. 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 or 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 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 21<sup>st</sup> Psalm claiming that He was the fulfillment of this promised Savior.

Let us kneel down beside Christ in the Garden during Lent especially -- to try to sweeten especially that third chalice a bit with our expression of love to console Him in His suffering that not all is lost –and to try to see that often God answers our prayers in the same way, the suffering is not removed; we are given the strength to bear it and the light to see it as acting with the God in us.

But here I am rambling on as though I were able to tell you something about Him that you do not already know so much more clearly than my human writings can express it – anyhow, if God wills, He can use even such a poor seed as my words to plant a flower in your heart for Him; may it be thus.

Finally, permit me to assure you that I am willing to try in any way my poor efforts are able to promote an appreciation of and return of the love of Christ, but I know too that for real success one must not only be willing to give what he has but also express that love more perfectly himself to Christ by a real life of “cross-bearing” with Him; that frankly scares a fearful heart like mine and so I need very much the participation in the strength that Christ received in the Garden.

God bless you and keep you and fill you with Himself to overflowing – spend a tiny bit of the overflow on this poor servant.

Paul F. Leibold

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