



## Will You Allow Me to Nail You to My Cross?

***“Will you allow Me to nail you to My Cross?” Jesus asked Sister Mildred (Mary Ephrem) Neuzil. Then He laid her upon the altar of sacrifice.***

The Passion is described as the mystery of Christ’s suffering. It was a mystery at the time because people could not reconcile it with what they had expected. In the sense that we can never fully understand the idea of God suffering, the Passion is still a mystery. Now if our sufferings are somehow or other to fit into the Passion of Christ—and this is no fiction because this is where they belong—there will surely be an element of mystery about them. They will make demands on our faith. —Fr. Hubert van Zeller, OSB

In February of 1958, Our Lady spoke to Sister Mildred (Mary Ephrem) Neuzil:

**“My child, nothing is accomplished without pain. 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 Ephrem) Neuzil, *The Diary, OUR LADY OF AMERICA*, Tiffin, Ohio, Pg. 23.)

And suffer she did! Our Lady’s words were like the sword that had pierced her own Heart now piercing Sister’s as well. **“Help me save those who will not save themselves. Help me bring once again the sunshine of God’s peace upon the world.”** (Diary, Pg. 15.) **“Weep, then, dear child, weep with your Mother over the sins of men. Intercede with me before the throne of mercy, for sin is overwhelming the world and punishment is not far away.”** (Diary, Pg. 34.)

One of the most painful of sufferings, according to Father Paul F. Leibold, Sister’s first spiritual director, is the persecution meted out by otherwise good Religious. Sister would encounter much of that from members of the active order.

**One very good Sister told me last year that she was going to pray that I would remain in the teaching profession. She thought it a shame that I should be thinking about entering the Cloister. And she has not been the only one who thought and expressed herself this way. I know there are many who turn up their noses at the very thought of a cloister of this kind in the Community. That there will be much suffering awaiting me in the cloister, I have no doubt. I expect a much harder life than I am living now.**

Sister’s experiences were not always sweetness and light. She dreaded her obedience to return to Rome City, Indiana in 1956 for the second time, but she trusted God works all things for one’s good and His glory. She wrote about what happened there.

**I do not know how long this trial lasted—weeks, months. Then suddenly it stopped. But the devil was furious. Through the help of our Lord and His Holy Mother, he had lost his hold over me and had himself been defeated. He would give me a frightening remembrance of his hatred. One evening, I believe it was the same day the “ordeal” ended, as I made preparations for the night, I felt his presence in my cell. I got into bed and just as I closed my eyes the “attack” began, just that suddenly. It was no dream as I was not yet asleep. It was as though two huge, horrible arms encircled themselves around me and like a monstrous vise kept tightening and tightening. I could help myself**

in no way except for prayer. So I cried out “Jesus!” The vise became tighter. I cried out in terror, “Jesus, Mary!” But this time the pressure, the pain became so unbearable, I was gasping for breath, but I managed to cry out one last prayer—“Jesus, Mary, Joseph!” Then just as suddenly as it started it stopped. I opened my eyes and my soul was filled with that deep sense of peace that has since never left me. I opened my eyes to darkness but it held no terror for me as the Phantom of Evil had fled. *Our Lord has since told me that one special part of my “mission” was to make reparation for sins against the chaste virtue. He said that to do this I would have to suffer these “attacks” off and on, all through my life. He asked if I were willing. I shuddered, Father, but how could I refuse Him?* He is so good, besides His grace would always be there to help me. But it is a cause of much suffering to me and mental distress. I never know when these “attacks” will come, so can do nothing but pray. These latter attacks usually last only a few moments or minutes, sometimes longer, but they always seem to last such a long time and I am always in dread of them. (Sister’s Letter, date unknown.)

As for the senses, consolations are withdrawn, discursive meditation is impossible and yet the light of contemplation is so dim that one feels lost in darkness. There is total aridity, yet right along with this, there is still an intense longing for more intimate union with God. This condition is often accompanied by great temptations... [against] faith, hope, and love, also of the moral virtues, *one is permitted to suffer misunderstanding from others, superiors and equals, often there are great exterior crosses* - - all this so that the soul might better see what an evil and useless thing it is in itself, and how dependent on God; thus, it is purified more and more. This darkness all enters in the spiritual powers for a more radical purification of our soul, to strip out every vestige of pride, even in our goodness, and any over boldness with God; in this spiritual darkness one suffers spiritual trials, the mind seems to be darkened so we do not seem to know or see, the will is arid and leaves us with a feeling that we are lost forever, our memory of blessings seems to dim and our affections for God are painful - - in the midst of this trial God often gives one a passing interval of peace and joy lest they find the burden too great. But of course, God intends all this for our good; for a purification of intention, to encourage us to follow Him more completely with a holy abandonment. Oh for a determined faith in this trial is the fact that God loves us as much when the sun is shining as He does in the midst of the darkest night, and that we, on our part, do love the sun while it is shining brightly, but we desire and long for it more intensely when it shines not at all, we love it then more purely, for we love it for its own goodness and not for the pleasure it is giving us -- that is what God wants thru the darkness He permits to us.

How sweet are sufferings for they identify us with Christ and His Mother, and how much more Christlike are those which permit of no human consolations -- indeed we are unworthy to be called by Christ so to suffer with Him; yet our sense of unworthiness should never make us fear them, nor fear that we will fail Him, nor that sense growing from humility should only make us cling more closely, like Magdalen in the Garden, to Him Who alone is our strength.

If God permits spiritual experiences to any soul -- and He breathes when and where he wills - St. John of the Cross reminds us in prudence never to desire nor ask for these extraordinary favors, for they are not necessary means for divine union, in fact if one desired them for themselves they could weaken one’s childlike faith -- yet when and if they come, we accept them as a kind of Divine touch; an approving pat as it were.

(Father Paul Leibold, Correspondence, October 20, 1954.)

Sister wrote: There are times when pain blurs my vision a bit, but it is not long before His enlightening grace makes me see again with that clear light God reserves for the lowly and pure of heart. At this time, Father, Our Lord assured me of His continued help. He said to me that very evening after I had received the Obedience, I will be with you

wherever you are, spouse of My Heart. You have nothing to fear.” This was after I had said to Him, “Dear Lord, what are You doing to me?”

You know, Father, what a longing there is in me to draw souls to God. It is a consuming fire that incessantly burns within me. So it seems that Our Lord in this way is giving me a certain outlet for this fire. (Sister Mary Ephrem, Correspondence, December 6, 1955.)

In spite of her many trials, Sister Mildred never lost her sense of humor. She tells how someone asked her in what capacity she was going to “**the old peoples’ home,**” meaning Rome City, Indiana, and she responded, “**most probably as an inmate.**” She smiled and said she intended to try out all the easy chairs they have there, but said she was glad she would not be staying too long, for it had too many places of rest-- back rests, head rests, feet rests. She intended to put on the armor of God, according to St Paul’s advice. Then, one morning, as she was shivering from the cold, Our Lord came and said:

“Remember My Wounds, My daughter, and nothing will seem hard to thee.” (Sept. 13<sup>th</sup> 1958) This struck me very forcibly, Bishop, and is a great help to me.... We are so inclined to magnify our own pains and grievances. When we contemplate the sufferings of Our Lord, however, how small and insignificant ours appear.

Sister’s August 6, 1956 letter tells us that Jesus placed her on the altar of sacrifice with Himself. This must be our Good Friday experience, too.

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 14<sup>th</sup>, 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.

May Sister Mildred arouse in us such a deep desire for prayer and penance in expiation for sin, especially sins against the chaste virtue, and with such a longing to save souls! Are we nailed to the cross with Jesus? Has He laid us on the altar of sacrifice with Himself? Oh, yes, we are co-redeemers with Him when we unite our cross with His!

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