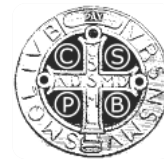




Benedictine Daughters of Divine Will



The Road to Easter



Our first stab at Irish Soda Bread on St. Patrick's Day



We've heard it said that the forty days of fasting during Lent are meant to prepare us for the fifty days of feasting during the Easter season. At the surface, this seems to simply imply that we deprive ourselves so that we can eventually indulge. But the exact opposite is actually true. We deprive ourselves, we enter into a greater acknowledgement of our littleness, and we open ourselves to a deeper conversion of heart not to fall back into our old ways, but to enjoy the *glorious* freedom of the children of God. We are called to live the redemption Christ won for us to the fullest! As St. Paul says, it is "for freedom that Christ has set us free" (Gal 5:1). This is not a freedom to indulge ourselves, but a freedom to choose the good and to love. It is a freedom to become a gift to God and our neighbor. It is the freedom we need to give the Divine Will free reign in our lives. This is man fully alive and fully himself!

Now that we're at the homestretch of the Lenten season, what have you learned about yourself these past six weeks? In what way has the Church prepared you to celebrate Christ's Resurrection? When praying with these very questions, one sister felt inspired to look at the liturgy, the Gospel readings that kicked off Lent for us and the ones that end it. We started with Jesus' temptation in the desert and we end with His Passion. What could the Spirit be telling us through this?

Hunger and Thirst

*And Jesus fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward **He was hungry**. And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But He answered, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"* (Mt 4:2-4)

After only one day of fasting on bread and water in the convent, we're all very ready for our breakfast the next morning. It's usually a good and hardy one too! Could you imagine what Jesus must have felt after forty days with no food at all? His Humanity was probably very ready to eat – and rightly so! - but He chose to wait. Jesus chose not to seek immediate satisfaction of His legitimate hunger by feeding Himself, as the devil tempted Him to do. And thus He teaches us: *It's ok to be hungry*.

God created everything good for love of us, to nourish and delight His children, but we misuse His gifts and turn them into idols. The mortification of these legitimate goods during Lent earns for us the freedom to enjoy them more after Lent is over, because we learn to appreciate them rightly – as signs, or

icons, of our Father's love for us. But if we're unable to fast or abstain from certain things, our enjoyment of them is no longer a doorway to union with God. It becomes merely a way to indulge the passions of our self-will. As Christopher West puts it, "If we can't say no, our yes means nothing."

This is the work Jesus is doing in the Servant of God, Luisa Piccarreta's soul in the early volumes of her mystical diary, particularly in Volume One. He's teaching and preparing her, in a radical way, to be nourished by the Divine Will alone (eventually granting her the grace of living solely on the Eucharist). Though most of us are not extraordinary mystics called to such extraordinary manifestations of holiness, Jesus invites us all to mystical union with Him and to be nourished only by His Will...according to our particular vocation or state in life and in the very gifts that surround us. This is at the heart of what Luisa calls the Rounds of Creation. We were made not just to take pleasure in the things and people God places in our lives, but to receive His love in them and to return to Him that very love with a heart full of gratitude. These are the little "holy communions" that the Lord wants to feed us with every moment of every day.

But living in this way requires custom-made purifications for each of us. It requires that we remain in our hunger and thirst for a time, whether it be for food, comfort, beauty, affection, intimacy, or any other human delight. If we're constantly grasping at immediate satisfaction, we not only prevent the Lord from quenching our thirst, but we also end up numbing our hunger for *Him* altogether. *"Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life"*(John 4:13-14).



The aches of both our bodies and souls are gifts. They have the capacity to draw us into ever-deepening union with the Lord if we open them all up to Him in prayer – which Pope Benedict XVI describes as *"nothing other than becoming a longing for God."* This is why both prayer and fasting are such a powerful one-two punch during Lent. As the late Holy Father also taught, if we really want to offer ourselves as a gift to both God and our fellow man, we must pass through **"the purification and healing of [our]**

will, required in loving the other...*This is not, then, about suffocating the longing that dwells in the heart of man, but about freeing it, so that it can reach its true height"*(General Audience, 11/7/2012).

Did Jesus not model this perfectly for us with His thirst on the Cross? Though He needed no purification, Jesus' *"I thirst"* was a thirst for souls – a longing to give Himself up completely in love to redeem and restore each one of His children to their original glory. He was willing to surrender even divine consolations, as He thirsted for the tangible affection of His Heavenly Father as well, crying out, *"My God, My God, why have You abandoned Me?"* The Church rightly calls Jesus' suffering and death His *Passion* – for it was nothing other than the visible manifestation of His burning passion for both His Father and for man. The more we live in Christ and allow Him to live in us, the more He will transform our hunger and thirst into *longing* for the Father's Will and the salvation of every soul. So when Easter finally arrives, we will have both the freedom to enjoy and celebrate as well as the freedom to once again abstain when

necessary, because all that we do will be motivated by the same purpose: Love. *"Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but **anyone who loses his life for My sake will find it.**"* (Mt 16:25)

*"Freedom, especially as self-mastery (self-dominion) ...is indispensable in order for man to be able to give himself...in order for him to be able **to find himself fully** through a sincere gift of self."* (St. John Paul II, TOB 15:1-2)

The Mystery of Suffering

Then the devil took Him to the holy city, and set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will give his angels charge over you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'" (Mt 4:5-7)

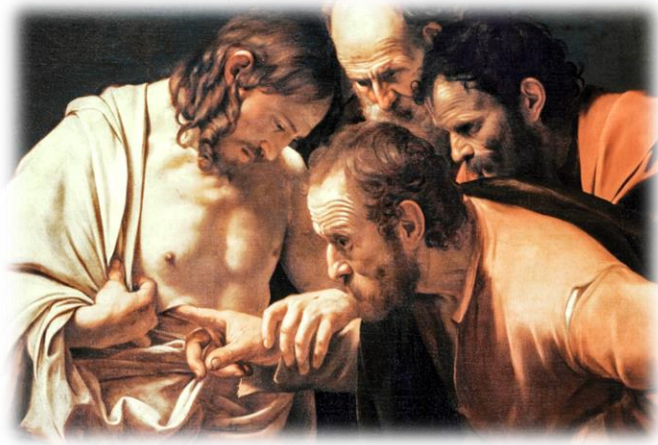
The Lord never promised that His children wouldn't have to suffer. But He did promise never to leave us alone in our pain. Jesus had the power to save Himself from the Cross – *"If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross"* (Mt 27:40) – but He chose to endure every possible suffering for us, so that we would have a God who understands all that we go through and who wants nothing more than to carry every cross together with us.



Quite often, we have a hard time accepting suffering because we don't understand how it could possibly be part of God's plan. We see it as a deviation from His Will that must be fixed, remedied, or fought against immediately. Though sometimes God does indeed call us to action, we often stray in *how* we act. Are we motivated by love like Christ, who patiently offers His pain to the Will of the Father for the sake of those inflicting it? Or are we more like Peter, *reacting* with excessive zeal and ready to fight our "enemies" with the sword? Though the Lord also invites us to seek healing and reconciliation, the Calvary we usually have to pass through first can throw us for a loop. But tremendous grace is hidden in these moments. God works *in and through* our sufferings, for He never allows any evil without bringing a greater good out of it. Throughout all of Luisa's thirty-six volume diary, Jesus continuously sings the praises of the Cross – providing much consolation for those of us who suffer.¹

Look back on some of the darkest and most painful moments of your life, no matter what their cause. How have you grown because of them? Would you be the person you are today without those crosses? What other graces have come from them? When we say, *"Not mine but Thy Will be done,"* and surrender to the great mystery of God's Will, we allow the Cross to work miracles in our lives. It shows us the truth of who we are and who God is. It purifies us, grants us wisdom, and grounds us in virtue. The Cross espouses us more deeply to our Bridegroom and provides us with the means to comfort Him. It transforms us into the image of Christ and allows us to participate in His work of redemption. And when we invite Jesus to suffer in our suffering, when we unite our crosses to His – *no matter how big or small*

¹ A PDF of all Jesus told Luisa about the gift of suffering can be found on the "Family Tree" page of our site.



– Our Lord so generously grants us the merits of His own Passion and death to share with every soul past, present, and future. That includes us, our family members, our friends and enemies, those we so ardently pray for (and maybe worry about) along with an infinite number of others who we will hopefully meet one day in Heaven! In other words, the Cross teaches us how to love with God’s own divine and sacrificial love...and that always bears abundant fruit.

After Jesus had risen, when the sufferings of His Humanity came to an end, the trials and tribulations of the Apostles were about to begin. He never told them things would be easy. He invited them to *follow Him*, with the promise that He would remain with them always - to the end of time. And by revealing His glorified wounds to the Twelve, Jesus showed them (and us) what He can and will do with our all of sufferings: *bring them to glory*. The Resurrection always follows the Cross. This is the hope of Easter!

*"The notion that the human will, when united with the Divine Will, can play a part in redeeming all mankind is overpowering...The wonder of God's grace transforming worthless human actions into efficient means for spreading the kingdom of God here on earth astounds the mind and humbles it to the utmost, yet brings peace and joy unknown to those who have never experienced it...As long as the soul does not lose sight of this great truth, the inner joy and peace that follow upon it persist through **even the saddest and gravest moments of human trial and suffering.**"* (Fr. Walter J. Ciszek, S.J., from his book He Leadeth Me: An Extraordinary Testimony of Faith, describing what he learned after 23 years in Soviet prisons and labor camps, p.123-124)

The Glory to be Revealed

Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and he said to Him, "All these I will give You, if You will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Begone, Satan! for it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve'." (Mt 4:8-10)

How much courage it takes to be little! Though we may not be striving after kingdoms, we all crave some kind of earthly glory – whether it be esteem, honor, praise, control, positions of importance, being preferred to others or simply seeking human approval. How often do we not just want to be wise but *appear* wise? Or how often do we settle for *appearing* holy rather than actually *being* holy? We’ve all got subtle layers of pride in our hearts that the Lord, most likely, began to purify during our Lenten journeys.

Praying with the *Litany of Humility* can be a powerful way to unmask some of those hidden layers and open them up to God’s love and mercy. That’s the cure for our pride and the secret to true humility: grounding ourselves in the Heavenly Father’s paternal love and in our deepest identity as His beloved children. For pride is really just a defense mechanism for our insecurity, a way to protect ourselves from our greatest fear - that we are unwanted and unlovable as we are. But



when we allow God to satisfy our hunger for love and belonging, to tell us that we are each a "single, unique, and unrepeatable **someone**, thought of and chosen from eternity, called and identified by name" (St. John Paul II), then we no longer need to seek our value in worldly glory. We no longer need to compete or compare ourselves with others. We are happy and secure in who we are and in *Whose* we are. This is how, in our nothingness, we come to discover our true and glorious dignity.

At Our Lord's baptism – right in the beginning of His public ministry and right before the Spirit led Him into the desert – the Father claims Jesus as His beloved Son, the One in whom He delights. And on the Cross, while suffering the most humiliating of deaths and appearing to all as a complete and utter failure, Jesus speaks these last words: *Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit*. He's showing us that the Father's Will must be our foundation. His love must be our strength. If we surrender to the humiliations that are so necessary for our soul, if we die to ourselves and drop the masks of our ego, if we seek the things that are above and remain hidden in Christ, then we *will* know freedom in this life and rise again with Him in glory. That is the promise of Easter.

"For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is the Spirit Himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him in order that we may be glorified with Him." (Rm 8:15-18)



The Current Status of Luisa's Cause and Her Writings

Many rumors have been going around about the Servant of God, Luisa Piccarreta's Cause for Beatification and the legitimacy of her Divine Will writings. However, despite what "news" may be circulating the internet or what controversies may be brewing in certain countries, *nothing has changed* on either front since the last communication issued in 2020 by the current Archbishop of Trani-Barletta-Bisceglie, Msgr. Leonardo D'Ascenzo. A very close priest friend of our community and member of the official Luisa Piccarreta Association in Corato also confirmed the same, explaining that the Church, in Her wisdom and prudence, does not want to beatify Luisa until the ambiguities in her 36-volume diary (*Book of Heaven*) have been clarified. Once declared a Blessed, Luisa Piccarreta's fame will spread even more rapidly and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith wants to be prepared with a proper theological and contextual interpretation of her writings for the faithful.

Archbishop D'Ascenzo reaffirms in his 2020 letter that these "ambiguities and equivocal elements" are "**not to be considered doctrinal errors in themselves**," but they do require great attention "due to the magnitude of the themes touched upon." Though this process of *clarification* may take time, the Archbishop still encourages "*everyone to continue along this rich and fruitful path toward holiness*." He further states that, "given this new situation, *as we read [Luisa's] writings*, we should all feel encouraged to pay more attention to the author's intention, in greater faithfulness to the teaching of the Church and above all in the awareness that the Divine Will is the Heavenly Father's merciful appeal addressed to the

free will of the men and women of our times.” Finally, Archbishop D’Ascenzo - recognizing that “many groups of the Divine Will have long travelled a path under the guidance of the Church [and] have striven to anchor the reading of these writings in the doctrine of the Church and in a dignified conduct of life” - urges “everyone *to continue with renewed commitment...a balanced and respectful missionary proclamation*” springing from the doctrine of the Divine Will.

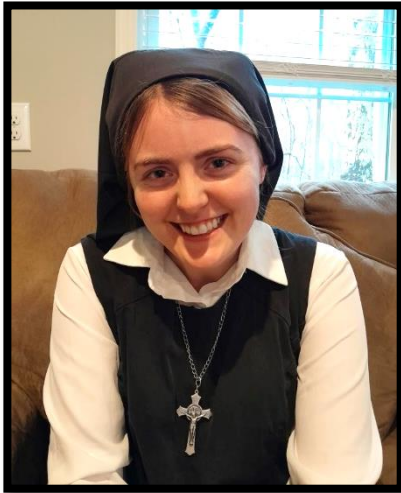
So there you have it. We are encouraged to read and pray with Luisa’s Divine Will writings as an effective path toward holiness, *always* through the lens of Sacred Scripture and Church teaching. We are also invited to share the gift of these knowledges with prudence and balance, with love and respect for the free will of others, in union with Holy Mother Church, and guided by Holy Spirit. For a deeper dive into the status of Luisa’s Cause and her writings, we’ve posted a document to our website entitled, “Is the Divine Will approved by the Church?” You can find it on our “Newsletters” page, next to the file for this March 2024 newsletter, or by going to our “Family Tree” page and scrolling down to Luisa. In it, we’ve compiled a list of facts and helpful information from various credible sources for those who may still have some questions and doubts. The topics covered include:

- A brief timeline of Luisa’s Cause and the examination of her writings, including: (1) the unanimous determination by the tribunal responsible for Luisa’s Cause that she lived a life of heroic virtue and that her mystical experiences were authentic; (2) the positive judgment of two highly qualified theologians appointed by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.
- St. Annibale Maria di Francia’s relationship to Luisa as her extraordinary confessor and the ecclesiastical censor of her writings along with his role in the examination, approval and printing of the Divine Will writings. St. Annibale’s credibility cannot be questioned, for “the solemn canonization of a saint is an *infallible and irrevocable* decision of the Supreme Pontiff” (1967 Catholic Encyclopedia).
- The significance of the Nihil Obstat and Imprimatur.
- The Church’s current stance on the *Servant of God*, Luisa Piccarreta, and her writings.
- Excerpts from the final 2012 communication of the late Archbishop of Trani-Barletta-Bisceglie, Msgr. Giovanni Battista Pichierri, where he clearly expresses his positive opinion of Luisa, encourages the reading of her writings, and affirms that there are NO doctrinal errors.

However, one of the most compelling pieces of evidence can be found in The Sun of My Will: Luisa Piccarreta by Maria Rosaria Del Genio, the official biography of Luisa issued by the Libreria Editrice Vaticana (the Vatican Publishing Company). In her timeline of Luisa’s life on pg. 238, Del Genio lists the following – “1995: November 13, Archbishop Carmelo Cassati asks *the prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith*, then-**Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger**, if copies could be made of the 34 manuscript notebooks of the *Diary* kept in the dicastery’s archive. *The aforementioned copies are approved and made from January 29 to February 2, 1996.*” The current postulator for Luisa’s Cause, Msgr. Paolo Rizzi, also confirmed Cardinal Ratzinger’s approval of Luisa’s writings in a 2017 conversation with Mother Gabrielle Marie and Fr. Elijah Joseph. In addition to serving as the Vicar of Christ, Pope Benedict XVI was also one of the Church’s most brilliant theological minds. Could anyone call into question his orthodoxy?

“I allow these oppositions, even from religious people, so that the truth may shine more in its own time...All I want from you is an upright and simple operating. Do not bother about the pros and the cons of creatures. Let them think what they want, without being the least troubled, since wanting that all be favorable is wanting to deviate from the imitation of My own Life.” (Jesus to Luisa, Vol. 2, 5/31/1899)

Vocation News...on both sides of the ocean



Sr. Christine entered the religious life on her birthday, March 2nd, which was also the first Saturday of the month. She's also the first sister to join the community at our Motherhouse in Maryville, TN! Please keep Sr. Christine in your prayers, as she continues on the journey of discerning her vocation as a postulant.



↑ During Christine's vocation visit at Talamello in 2022

Maryville, TN



Investment of Sr. Maria Faustina of the Merciful Heart of Jesus

January 6, 2024
(Epiphany of the Lord)

"The moment when Mother Gabrielle Marie clothed me and announced my new name, my heart wanted to explode. Tears came out and I felt so loved by God. All I can say is that I am so grateful for saying 'Fiat' when the Lord called me to religious life."

– Sr. Faustina



With her parents, Francisco and Maria



"Delight thyself in the Lord, and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart." (Psalm 37:4)



Talamello, Italy



Our last ceremony before the big move



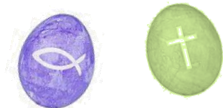
First Vows of Sr. Marija Elizabeta of the Eternal Fiat and the Holy Innocents - October 13, 2023
(Anniversary of the miracle of the sun at Fatima)

“Just the mere sound of it – ‘marriage with Jesus’ – takes my breath away.” – Sr. Elizabeth

If you feel called to financially support the Benedictine Daughters of Divine Will this Easter season or throughout the year, visit the “Donations” page of our website to make a one-time donation by credit/debit card or to sign up for automatic monthly contributions...



www.benedictinesofdivinewill.org



You can also simply send a check or money order to the address of our U.S. non-profit organization below:
(All donations are tax-deductible)



Benedictine Daughters of Divine Will
P.O. Box 1002
Hanceville, AL 35077

Your generosity not only helps support our sisters in the U.S., Italy and San Marino, but it will also contribute to the building of our new Motherhouse in the diocese of Knoxville, TN. Thank you for your goodness to us and be assured you and your intentions never leave our daily prayers.

Happy Easter!