

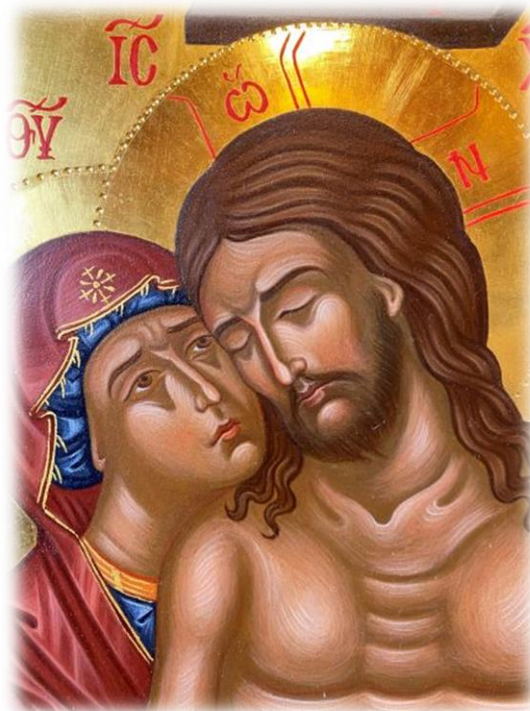


Benedictine Daughters of Divine Will



The Bridegroom and the Bride

"Mamma Mary, teach me how to receive." This has been the prayer of one sister since discovering Pope St. John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*. For the past couple of months, the Holy Spirit has been immersing us in this treasure of a catechesis, particularly through the inspired teachings of Dr. Christopher West – the internationally well-known theologian affectionately referred to as "the Theology of the Body guy." We've not only discovered a remarkable connection with the Divine Will writings, but TOB has also helped us to penetrate their depths in a new and exciting way. To put it briefly, the late and great Pope takes a deep biblical dive into the meaning of life - into what it means to be human, male and female made in the image and likeness of God – through the lens of spousal love/union that permeates all of Scripture. It is a theology of the Incarnation, for as the Catechism of the Catholic Church states, *"The entire Christian life bears the mark of the spousal love of Christ and the Church"* (CCC, 1617). And who lived this great mystery with Christ more perfectly than Mary? In fact, She lived it perfectly for us all.

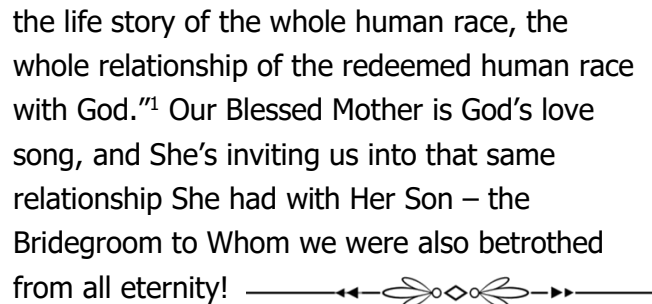


Mary is the quintessential Bride, a mystical vocation we're all called to as members of the Church. Therefore, Marian receptivity – remaining in a posture of total surrender to God and His Will – must be our continuous goal. Sister's prayer above was not only a fruit of this burning desire to be like her heavenly Mother, but it also came from an acute awareness of her own weakness: her impatient tendency to grasp rather than wait and receive, an all too familiar inclination to accept only what feels good, and the instinctive reaction at times to close herself off in fear of God's Will. Before you judge Sister too harshly, this is what lies in all of our hearts if we're really honest with ourselves. We all want the ecstasy without the agony. But this was not Mary's way of receiving.

She received with faith, with sacrificial love, and with reciprocity. From the moment of Her Immaculate Conception, Mary opened Herself completely to the gift of the Divine Will, responding with nothing less than the total gift of Her human will in return. When that union took on flesh at the Incarnation – when Jesus' divinity was wed to our humanity in Her virginal womb – Mary's response didn't change. It deepened all the more. Her "I do" to the Divine proposal meant Life for Life, Hers for His...for better or for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, and in all of the agonies and ecstasies prepared for Her Son. As the



But what does this mean for us poor, weak banished children of Eve living in this valley of tears? It means that Mary is, indeed, our life, our sweetness, *and our hope*. “To Jesus through Mary” – the famous motto of Marian consecration – is more than just a pious saying. It is a reality. *In* Mary, in Her womb, we were reborn in Christ at Baptism. She is truly Our Mother! Living *with* Mary, we find in Her our model, the most perfect and poetic example of what it means to be Bride. And incapable of reaching Her heights of holiness, we journey *through* Mary...Who, as Caryll Houselander states in her spiritual classic The Reed of God, “lived the life of all humanity. Concentrated into Her tiny history is



From Saint Anne's womb, Mary enjoyed the full fruits of Redemption through the foreseen merits of Christ's life, death, and

Could we not follow Our Lady's example and do the same? In all of the innocent pleasures we experience with our senses – the brilliant colors of a fall sunrise, the creamy sweetness of an Italian gelato, or the affectionate kisses of our faithful pet – we can say, "Jesus, this is my body which I give to You. Come, enjoy this delight in me and let us glorify Our Father for His goodness together." In this way, the goods of creation find their fulfillment – pointing us toward the



www.benedictinesofdivinewill.org

divine and not to themselves. When experiencing physical pains or discomforts, we can repeat with Mary, "Behold your handmaid, behold my body ready to share this and any suffering with You." In any of the acts we do throughout our day – whether big or small, easy or difficult – we can repeat the same refrain, allowing Jesus to live in our humanity.

At our invitation, the Eternal Word truly does come to dwell in our humanity in a very *real* way, a type of mystical Incarnation! Though the literal Incarnation is Our Lady's privilege alone, let us never, ever take for granted the tremendous grace we are offered at every Holy Mass when our mystical union with God is consummated in the flesh! So at Holy Communion, when the priest holds Our Lord's Eucharistic Presence before you and says "The Body of Christ," open wide your mouth with deep longing like Mary. Open up to receive Jesus' Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity and respond in the only way that your Bridegroom desires – with the total gift of yourself, body and soul, in return.

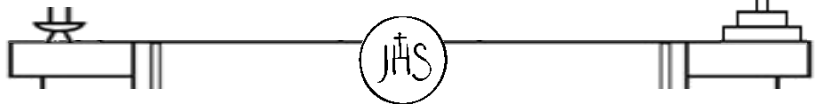
Be it done unto Me according to Thy word

As beautiful as the above reflection may seem, it's not complete without the second half of Mary's fiat: "*Be it done unto Me according to Thy Word.*" The total submission of our human will to the Divine Will is what really transforms our self-offering into true gift. Once again, Our Lady sets the standard. Once again, She echoes Her Son. She draws grace from the words He prayed shortly after offering His own Body in the Eucharist:

"*Father...not My will, but Yours be done.*" Jesus' full and free obedience to His Father's Will made Redemption possible and it made what He did in the Upper Room real. And Mary's full and free obedience to that same Holy Will made the Incarnation possible; it made it real.

Even the words of consecration spoken at Holy Mass are only rendered effective with the priest's *intention* to consecrate the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus. The Divine Will requires the will of the priest. The same goes for each of us, called to the common or *royal* priesthood through our Baptism. If we truly want Christ to live in us - allowing His Will to animate our whole being like living hosts - then we must do as St. Paul says and offer ourselves "as a *living sacrifice*, holy and acceptable to God, which is [our] spiritual worship" (Rom 12:1). And we must do this together with Mary, surrendering *continuously* to our Bridegroom with love and trust. For without our own "yes" to His proposal, without the full and free consent of the bride, a real marriage cannot take place.

Son, why have You treated us so?



The loss of Jesus at twelve years old in the Temple is definitely the most puzzling of Our Lady's Sorrows, something that could have easily been avoided. It was as if Jesus purposely inflicted that suffering on His Mother *by not letting Her know His plans*. And in a way, that's true. He allowed Her to experience that pain, that loss, that confusion because Mary Herself wanted it. She wanted to suffer everything that Jesus would have to suffer, including the sense of divine abandonment. When Our





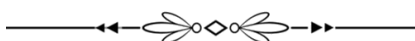
Lady asked – “*Why have You treated us so?*” - after three harrowing days of searching for Him in utter desolation, She was uniting with Her Son on the Cross...who after three agonizing hours cried out, “*My God, My God, why have You abandoned Me?*”

How difficult it is for us to receive the gift of suffering, especially when that suffering doesn't seem to make sense. Especially when it feels like we've been left alone in our pain, without

God's comfort or help. But spiritual darkness, divine privations, and every other means the Lord uses to purify us are the greatest graces - for they prepare our hearts to be penetrated more deeply by divine love. We need them to grow! And though Mary didn't need to be purified, She faithfully accepted even this sword of sorrow for us...loving us always with Christ's love.

So how should we respond to this kiss of love from our Bridegroom? In the same way Mary did, in the same way Jesus gave us that kiss. In the most bitter moments of our lives, They've given us permission to cry out in our confusion and pain. Far from teaching us resentment or rebellion, this mystery invites us to profound sincerity and vulnerability before God. *Naked with the naked Christ*, as St. Francis described it. Christ was, indeed, naked on the Cross...on the wedding bed of the Cross, where all was consummated. And as Hosea 2 foreshadowed, the nuptials take place in the desert. God comes to marry us when we feel the most desolate, when He can finally be alone with us: “*Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her...I will make you lie down in safety. And I will espouse you forever...in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will espouse you in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord*”(v. 14, 18-20). Both at twelve and thirty-three, Jesus was about His Father's business – wedding all of humanity to Himself!

It is finished



“It is finished” was first uttered by Our Lady, in Cana at a wedding. The wine was finished and She pointed it out to Her Son. Though His response, “O woman, what have you to do with Me? My hour has not yet come,” seems almost dismissive, in Hebrew this would have been understood as Jesus' desire to fulfill His Mother's request. He wanted to know what She wanted, if She was ready for Jesus to begin His mission of salvation. He wanted Her “yes.” And Mary gave it with confidence: “*Do whatever He tells you.*” Our Lady was even ready to *anticipate* Her Son's hour because this miracle wasn't just for that married couple or their guests. *All* of Her children needed the new wine lost at the Fall. This is Our Blessed Mother's love for us! For She knew that this sign not only pointed to the Eucharist and to the wedding feast of the Lamb, but also to the moment when Her little Lamb, for the





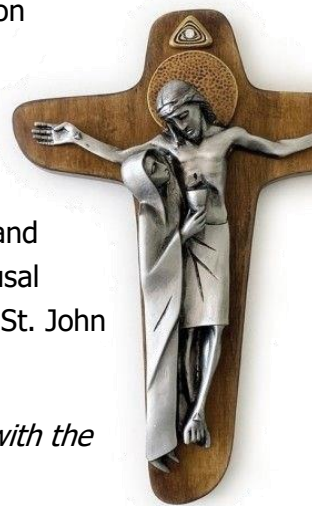
sake of all humanity, would have to be slain. Yet Mary was ready anyway because Her Son would not be alone. As Houselander, again, so aptly describes: "[*This*] is the secret of Her heroism; of Her strength in being able to see Him suffer. It was because His suffering was Hers...She lived in Him; Her life was in His; Her flesh and blood was in His; Her will was in His" (p. 97). The New Adam and the New Eve would drink from that bitter chalice together.

By opening Herself up to the fullness of Her Son's gift at the foot of the Cross, by perfectly receiving every last drop that flowed out from His pierced Heart, Mary was already in the act of giving. She gave Jesus an outlet for His love and pain, responding (as always) in kind: with Her love, Her pain, and the very gift of Herself. Mary most willingly allowed Him to suffer in Her and She suffered in Him. All was finished - all was consummated – between the Bridegroom and Bride. Using the words of St. Augustine: "*The heavenly Bridegroom*

left the heavenly chambers, with...nuptials before Him. He came to the marriage bed of the cross, a bed not of pleasure, but of pain, united Himself with the Woman, and consummated the union forever." How fertile was that union! From it, the Church was born. From it, the new wine of divine life and love was generated in superabundance for all. And from that union, our own nuptial union with God became possible.

As little brides, we must behold Our Mother. We must cling to Christ on the Cross, ready to drink the portion of His chalice He prepared for us with love from all eternity. Yes, that chalice is filled with agony, but that agony also promises a far greater ecstasy – the ecstasy of sharing a mutual gift of self with one's Beloved and generating always new life with Him. This is redemptive suffering. This is true spousal love. This is Trinitarian love! And this is the heart of living in the Divine Will. Pope St. John Paul II summarized it perfectly in one simple sentence:

"Holiness is measured according to the great mystery in which the Bride responds with the gift of love to the gift of the Bridegroom." (from *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 27)



Little Mountain
Maryville, TN



The Big Move



Speaking of agony and ecstasy, the moment has finally arrived. At the end of this month, Mother Gabrielle Marie and four sisters – Sr. Maddalena, Sr. Gloria, Sr. Jacinta, and Sr. Pamela – will be permanently moving to Maryville, TN. They'll be staying in temporary housing while our new monastery on Little Mountain continues to be built. Though preparing for the move has been difficult and the separation will be painful, we also feel a real peace, joy, and excitement

for what lies ahead. When God wants something, He always provides us with the grace and means to

accomplish His Will...even if there are trials along the way. The Lord has proven that to us over and over again - in miraculous ways! - these past twelve years of our community's existence. Why should He stop now?! So during this time of transition, please pray for us all - those of us staying behind in Italy and those of us going. May both our U.S. Motherhouse and Italian foundation flourish with new vocations and may we each grow to live more and more in God's Most Holy and Divine Will. For then, sharing one mind and heart, there can be no real separation.



It's hard to believe that Mother Gabrielle Marie and Peter DePalma only met in person for the first time this past July at the Divine Will retreat in Malvern, PA. We've been recording DW programs with him for so many years on Mary's Hill and Radio Maria. If you'd like to check out some of our past shows or watch/listen live, just visit the "Family Tree" page of our website and scroll down to the Servant of God, Luisa Piccarreta for more info. You can also drop Peter a message at maryshill@queenofthedivinewill.org to receive regular emails on upcoming Divine Will cenacles and programs. Mother loved the retreat and enjoyed meeting so many of you there this summer. What a gift it was!



If you feel called to financially support the Benedictine Daughters of Divine Will during our big move 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**



Thank you for your goodness to us and be assured of our continuous prayers!