



Benedictine Daughters of Divine Will



✦ O Star of Wonder ✦

When praying recently about the theme of this newsletter and for all those who would read it, we gazed at Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and asked: *What do **You** want to communicate to them?* The answer was clear and immediate, as we felt the Lord saying: *"Tell them that I love them."* That was it. And yet, that is everything. What more would we need or want to hear? *You* – the indispensable, irreplaceable, unrepeatable gift reading these words right now – are deeply and uniquely loved by God. But do you believe that?



At an early point in her diary, Luisa, feeling quite desolate after having suffered the privation of Jesus' tangible presence, asked Him if He loved her. Jesus simply answered, "Yes." The sassy southern Italian mystic, with childlike confidence, then insisted that He be more specific. She wanted to know exactly *how* Jesus loved her. Taking courage from Luisa's example, we were also honest with our Spouse and followed-up with the question that was really on our heart: "Could You expand on that a bit?" The Holy Spirit, always rewarding sincerity, immediately brought this passage mind. It's from a meditation on the Epiphany that our Blessed Mother recounted to Luisa, where She describes how the star of Bethlehem guided the Magi's journey to Jesus:



"My blessed child, the Divinity...makes a new star, so beautiful and luminous, arise under the azure heavens; and with its light, it goes in search of adorers, to say to the whole world with its mute twinkling: 'The One who has come to save you is born. Come to adore Him and to **know Him as your Savior.**' ...Among many, only three individuals paid attention and, **heedless of the sacrifices, put themselves on the way to follow the star.** And just as a star guided their persons along

the journey, so did My prayers, My love, My yearnings, My graces descend into their hearts like many stars **to illumine their minds and guide their interiors** - in such a way that, without yet knowing Him, they felt that they loved the One for whom they were looking, and **they hastened their step in order to reach and see the One whom they so much loved...**

My Son and I do nothing but make stars arise, one more beautiful than the other, to call some to know their Creator, some to sanctity, some to rise again from sin, some to the heroism of a sacrifice. ***But do you want to know what these stars are? A sorrowful encounter is a star;*** a truth that one comes to know is a star; a love unrequited by other creatures is a star; a setback, a pain, a disillusion, an unexpected fortune, are as many stars that shed light in the minds of creatures. And caressing them, they want to make them ***find the Celestial Infant, who is fidgeting with love,*** shivering with cold, and seeking a refuge in their hearts to be known and loved...

Now, My child, as the holy Magi Kings entered Jerusalem, ***they lost the star, but in spite of this they did not stop looking for Jesus.*** However, as they went outside the city, the star reappeared and led them, festive, into the grotto of Bethlehem. ***I received them with love of Mother,*** and the dear Baby looked at them with great love and majesty, ***letting His Divinity shine forth from His little Humanity.*** And so, bowing down, they knelt at His feet, ***adoring and contemplating that celestial beauty.*** They recognized Him as true God, remaining ***enraptured and ecstatic, while enjoying Him...***



Then, as they came round from their rapture, they offered the gold of their souls, the incense of their faith and adoration, and ***the myrrh of their whole beings and of any sacrifice He might want.*** To these they added the offering of the external gifts, symbol of their interior acts: gold, incense and myrrh. But my love of Mother was not yet content. I wanted to place the sweet Baby in their arms, and – oh! with how much love they kissed Him and pressed Him to their breasts. ***They felt paradise in advance within them...*** Now a little word to you, My child: if you want Me to act as your true Mother, ***let Me place Jesus in your heart.*** You will make Him happy with your love.”¹

What just stirred your heart as you read Our Lady's words? Be as honest and uncensored with the Lord as possible. Perhaps you might be thinking: *How difficult it is to see the sorrows in our lives as beautiful stars!* Don't be afraid to express it. The Holy Spirit wants to speak so tenderly to that area of vulnerability. Read the passage again and see what jumps out to you. We've highlighted a few things that particularly touched us, especially with regards to the mystery of suffering. It truly is a mystery that cannot always be understood, explained or reasoned with. Suffering is part of living in a fallen world, but *it doesn't have the last word.* Christ does. And whenever we set out on a journey of faith to follow these stars in our lives, we will *always* find Him.

Sometimes it may seem like we've lost the star and are being plunged into darkness. In those moments, we must keep going and keep looking for Jesus. We must persevere, knowing that our

¹ Servant of God, Luisa Piccarreta, *The Virgin Mary in the Kingdom of the Divine Will*, Appendix, Meditation 4

Blessed Mother is accompanying us with Her prayers, graces, and love. She is both Our Lady of Sorrows and Our Lady of Victory. And what a victory it will be when we arrive at Bethlehem! We will find that we've been there with Jesus the whole time and He's been here with us all along the journey. He never leaves us to suffer alone.

In fact, we were conceived with Jesus in Mary's womb, born with Him in that little grotto, and we can find every moment of our lives in Him. That's what Christmas should remind us of. Christ took on our flesh to reunite our humanity with His Divinity, to *wed* us to Himself, to dwell both among us *and within us*. Remaining in His presence, we find true joy and the beauty we've always longed for. Abiding in Jesus, we find comfort in our sorrow and the strength to endure all of the sacrifices, struggles, and trials that arise in our lives. In the faithful company of our Bridegroom, we find the infinite love that heals, consoles, and allows us to experience paradise here on earth.



Every star we encounter can lead us to Bethlehem, but the brightest ones and those that place us on the quickest route come in the shape of a cross. Suffering has the powerful capacity to lead us into intimacy with Jesus more than anything else. That's why when the Church begins the process of canonization for a saint, they first look to see whether the person's life was marked by suffering. Christ consummated His marriage with the Church on the wedding bed of the Cross. And we, as Bride, have the opportunity to open up to receive the gift of our Bridegroom – *the total gift of Himself* – and return the gift of ourselves to Him on our own bed of sufferings. This is where we are most deeply united with Jesus. This is where the agony and the ecstasy come together. This is where our pain is given meaning and endowed with the power to pour grace upon the whole world...including those dearest to us and for whom we pray the most. And this is where our lives become abundantly fruitful, making everything worth it.



But we don't have to wait until Good Friday. From the first moment of His Incarnation, Jesus was conceived together with all of the pains of His Passion – which include every one of our pains. So come to Him now. Come this Christmas to find your Savior in the manger who profoundly knows you, understands you, and suffers everything with you. Come unite with your Bridegroom who awaits you in prayer and in the Eucharist. Come bask in the presence of that adorable Baby and let Him love you, in whatever season of life you may be passing through. Come hold Him, adore Him, dwell in Him, and let Him dwell in you. More than milk from His Mother's breast, that is what He is thirsting for. Jesus thirsts for you! Whenever we allow the stars in our lives to lead us to Him, we can quench

that thirst. And we'll also discover that our burning thirst for love, for communion, for God Himself is being quenched as well...beginning now on earth and continuing in *super abundance* for all eternity.

*"Christ enables us to live in Him all that He Himself lived, and He lives it in us. By His Incarnation, the Son of God has, in a certain way, united Himself with each man. **We are called only to become one with Him.**"* (CCC 521)

"The truth is that only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light...Christ, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear...Born of the Virgin Mary, He has truly been made one of us, like us in all things except sin...By suffering for us He not only provided us with an example for our imitation, He blazed a trail, and if we follow it, life and death are made holy and take on a new meaning...Such is the mystery of man, and it is a great one...Through Christ and in Christ, the riddles of sorrow and death grow meaningful. Apart from His Gospel, they overwhelm us. Christ has risen, destroying death by His death; He has lavished life upon us so that, as sons in the Son, we can cry out in the Spirit: Abba, Father." (Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 22)



★ The Stars over Talamello and San Marino

Up here on the hill of Talamello, almost 1,300 ft. above sea level, we have a great view of the surrounding mountains, neighboring farmlands, and stony river that runs through our Italian province. On a clear day, our sisters in San Marino can gaze upon the Adriatic Sea from their terrace at a 2,500 ft. height. In addition to the beautiful stars we both enjoy every evening from our convent windows, quite a few new ones have arisen for our two communities these past few months...of all shapes and sizes.

Sr. Teresa's mother passed away in late August at 91 years old. Sister was not only able to assist her mom during the last two months of her life, but Our Lord and Our Lady miraculously enabled her to be at Carmella's side, praying and holding her hand, as she took her last breath. The summer also brought us lots of visitors in Talamello – friends, Oblates, and a few vocation guests at various stages of their discernment. One young woman from the UK plans to enter the community this coming February.

San Marino has been given a new Apostolic Nuncio. Canadian-born and of Croatian descent, His Excellency Archbishop Petar Antun Rajič visited the independent republic in September for his official introduction to the government. Our sisters there very much enjoyed their first meeting with Msgr. Rajič and look forward to working with him in the coming years. At the same time, we say farewell with much gratitude to our previous Nuncio and current member of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints, His Eminence Cardinal Emil Paul Tscherig. He was



The sisters visit Cardinal Emil in Rome

responsible for our convent in San Marino, having requested from our bishop the presence of sisters in the country's historical center to revive its spiritual roots.

The fall was also studded with many stars that lead us to lands near and far. In September, we met up with Christopher West in Rome who took the time during his busy pilgrimage to give us an amazing four-hour private course on the Theology of the Body and Celibacy for the Kingdom. Later that month, Sr. Francesca, Sr. Gemma, and Sr. Teresa were invited to participate in a Divine Will retreat in Garabandal, Spain, led by Guy Murphy (Totally Yours Pilgrimages) and with Derek Williams as the main speaker. It truly was a time of grace! Just a couple of weeks later, both the Talamello and San Marino sisters were



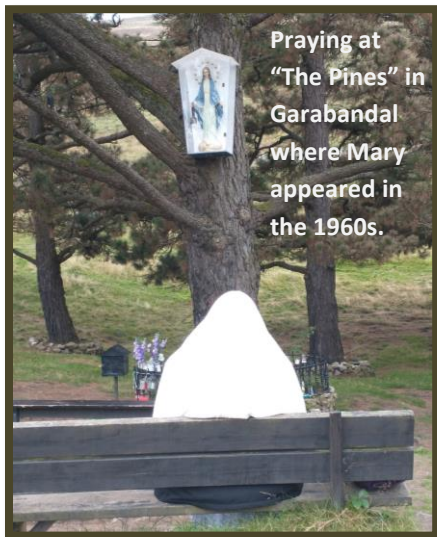
Christopher West and the sisters at the Angelicum in Rome, in the very classroom where the future Pope John Paul II defended his doctoral thesis.

on the road again to Corato – Luisa Piccarreta's hometown and burial site - to take part in a Divine Will unity conference with pilgrims from the U.S., Canada, South America, and Europe. What a blessing to hear talks from Fr. Bernardo and Alejandra Acuña (children of José Luis Acuña), Fr. Sergio Pellegrini (Vicar General of Luisa's southern Italian diocese), and Fr. Dave Leon of San Diego, CA.

Finally in November, Sr. Francesca and Sr. Elizabeth joined Mother Gabrielle Marie and Sr. Jacinta in Australia where the four were asked to speak at various retreats and meet with so many wonderful people who are also on the journey of living in the Divine Will. We were all in awe of God's incredible creation in the "land down under" and how much Luisa's writings are very much

loved and spread there. In each of our travels, thank you so much to all those who invited us, hosted us, financed our trips, dedicated their time, and made us feel so very welcome. We felt at home everywhere we went, getting a big taste of the communion of saints here on earth!

This Advent, we've entered more deeply into our contemplative life, seeking to belong more and more to our Bridegroom. Without our times of prayer and adoration, without our union with Jesus, we would have nothing to give to others. Be assured of our daily prayers for all of you, your families, and your needs and intentions. Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year with much love from all the sisters here in Talamello, Italy, and San Marino!



Praying at "The Pines" in Garabandal where Mary appeared in the 1960s.



Divine Will Unity Conference in Corato

Australia Memories



Australian beaches exceed every expectation



Meeting with our first Divine Will group on the Gold Coast

Cutting the FIAT cake during a tea break at the Gold Coast Divine Will conference



Oblate ceremony after the Divine Will retreat at the Divine Mercy Shrine in Lower Chittering, WA



Hanging out with the Hempels, the awesome family of one of our aspirants



Talking with the kids about our vocations and the Divine Will



Spending time at the New Norcia Benedictine monastery in Western Australia with the beautiful Fr. Anscar



A Message from Mother and the Maryville Sisters

Christmas has crept up on us so suddenly, but as we strive to live more and more in God's Divine Will, it seems that every day of the year is like Christmas. What a joyful time of the year! As our love for one another grows, our joy grows because God is all Love and Joy.

Our community here in Maryville, TN has had a quiet year of prayer as we continue to live the monastic life in the forest at the foot of the Great Smoky Mountains. After Mother Gabrielle Marie's busy year of travelling and giving retreats in different



parts of the US and in other countries, she's content to be celebrating the quiet life in our little house in TN.

In July some of our sisters were privileged to attend the Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis. What a grace it was to see so many people so in love with our Eucharistic Jesus. We thank our sponsors who purchased our tickets and opened their homes to us.

We want to wish all of you a very special and grace-filled time during this Holy Christmas Season. Be assured that you all remain in our prayers.



Merry Christmas to all of you from Mother Gabrielle Marie and the Sisters in Tennessee.

Progress and Plans for the Little Mountain Monasteries

Work continues on Little Mountain in Maryville, TN. Architectural drawings were completed and submitted to the county for review. Construction permits have been approved and we have broken ground for the underground plumbing. Concrete foundations are not far behind. As you may recall, there will be two monasteries, one for the Benedictine Daughters of Divine Will and one for the Benedictine Monks of Divine Will. Each monastery will have room for 17 to 20 nuns or monks. Below is a rendering of the design.

The completion of the 7,500 square foot facility will cost about \$3 million each, so fundraising efforts are underway. If you would like to contribute to the building of our new monastery of sisters, information on how to donate can be found on the last





page of the newsletter. Just make sure to write "For the purposes of constructing the new monastery" on your check or in the note section if donating online by credit card. We hold all of our benefactors in our hearts, as does Our Lady, and we pray for your intentions several times a day.

Thank you all!

Supporting the Sisters

If you feel called to financially support the Benedictine Daughters of Divine Will this Christmas 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 following address:
(All donations are tax-deductible)

Benedictine Daughters of Divine Will
2425 Tipton Loop Rd.
Maryville, TN 37803



In gratitude for your goodness to us, three Holy Masses will be celebrated for all of our benefactors, family members and friends this beautiful season.



Merry Christmas & Happy New Year!