



Benedictine Daughters of Divine Will



Abide in Me

In talking with people who sincerely seek to grow in their love and service of the Lord, we've noticed a common thread that – if we're totally honest – resonates with an ache of our own hearts. Most of us never feel like we're doing enough. We want to do more. We want the Lord to use us more. We want to bear more fruit. And that's not a bad thing. In fact, it's a very beautiful and holy desire. However, when a worldly mentality or our own insecurities twist that desire, we often seek to fulfill it ourselves...with our human will. We endlessly chase after some elusive good while neglecting or failing to recognize the Will of God – *the greatest good* - right before us.



One sister experienced this firsthand while home helping her only sibling through some serious health issues. She and her sister attended a Holy Hour and Eucharistic procession at the local parish one evening. It was part of a Eucharistic Revival, where priests, religious sisters and laity walked from parish to parish, from one end of the diocese to the other, with Our Lord exposed in the Blessed Sacrament over the course of several days. It was a grace-filled evening and Sister was touched deeply. However, there was also something else tugging at her heart – a sense of guilt that she wasn't doing enough, that she should have found the time to participate more in this beautiful pilgrimage.

That guilt came with disturbance, shame and the urgency to figure out how she could fit more good and holy things into her already busy schedule. Those seemingly pious thoughts told her she needed to do more... more for her sister, more for her community, more for Christ, more for His Church! They harassed her all night until a Holy Spirit moment spoke truth into her soul the next day. While taking her sister's dog on his routine morning walk, with a poop bag in hand and in the very act of cleaning up after him, Sister sensed these words in her heart: *Don't you see? It's all the same in My Will?* She immediately understood, more deeply and concretely, what she had read so many times in Luisa's writings¹.



God does not look so much at the multiplicity, difficulty or greatness of our works, but rather at their connection to His Will. He delights in and can do much with acts both big and small, humble and illustrious, *as long as* they are done: (1) *in* the Divine Will (with Christ at the steering wheel); (2) *because* they are His Will; and (3) *for* love of God and our neighbor. Any act that

¹ The Divine Will writings of the Servant of God, Luisa Piccarreta.

Jesus does within us has an infinite and divine value, capable of moving mountains and touching all souls with immeasurable grace...even if we don't necessarily see it or feel it. That's where faith comes in!

Our Blessed Mother taught Luisa, "To sacrifice oneself for one day – now yes, now no – is easy. But to sacrifice oneself in each instant, in each act, *in the very good that one wants to do*, for one's entire life, without ever giving life to one's own will, is the sacrifice of sacrifices. ***It is the greatest proof and the purest love***, filtered through the Divine Will Itself, that can be offered to our Creator. This sacrifice is so great, that God cannot ask anything more of the creature, nor can she find how to sacrifice more for her Creator."²

Our Lady also recounted Her early life in the house of Nazareth, after Her betrothal to St. Joseph but before the Annunciation. Her days were filled with the ordinary acts of a young wife along with mystical trips to Heaven, where She incessantly prayed for the descent of the Eternal Word upon earth. The Eternal Father answered those prayers with the following: "Daughter, who can resist You? You have won; the divine hour is near. Return to the earth and *continue Your acts in the power of My Will, and by these, all will be shaken, and Heaven and earth will exchange the kiss of peace*" (Day 18). Prayer,



simple acts done in the Divine Will, and the fiat (or "yes") of a humble Virgin were all the Father asked for in order to accomplish the greatest event in salvation history: *the Incarnation*. Ponder this the next time you take out the trash or wash the dishes!

Mary's life was one of prayer, work, and total surrender. Before St. Benedict wrote about these principles in his little Rule and made "Ora et Labora" his motto, this was framework of the Holy Family – the context of their sanctity and the expression of the love. They lived their simple lives in complete openness to the Will of God, allowing it to both guide and animate their activity and contemplation.

Jesus lived the vast majority of His life, thirty of His thirty-three years on earth, in the house of Nazareth – faithfully loving and obeying His parents, humbly working as a carpenter, and spending much time in prayer. His life was hidden and seemingly ordinary, yet, in everything, He was loving and glorifying the Father on behalf of all. He was purifying, sanctifying and divinizing every one of our own acts while also providing for us a model of holiness.

Even in His public ministry, Jesus only did what the Father told Him – nothing more and nothing less. Despite being both God and man, He knew He needed time in intimate solitude with His Father, to receive His love and His Will. Despite the number of sinners in need of saving, the number of people in need of healing and deliverance, the number of sermons yet to be preached, Jesus always made time to go off alone and pray. In His Humanity, He was making visible the innermost secret of God, that one, eternal Act from which all other acts flow: the ever-deepening exchange of love between the Father and the Son from which the Holy Spirit flows. This was the foundation of Jesus' life on earth, the power behind His ministry, the strength in His Passion, and the heart of His total self-gift on the Cross. The Catechism tells us we are *destined* to share in that exchange, yet do we make the time to pray? We

² *The Queen of Heaven in the Kingdom of the Divine Will*, Servant of God Luisa Piccarreta, Day 5



certainly can't be busier than Jesus or be less in need of consistent prayer than Him. Christ also found the time to leave the ninety-nine and go after the one sheep...seeking not just all souls but each, individual one. If we want our hearts to be truly conformed to His, we must be willing to do the same.

We invite you to spend some time in prayerful meditation of Jesus' parting words to His Apostles in John 15:1-17. They are a beautiful summary of life in the Divine Will. The main theme: *abiding*. Abide means to remain, to dwell, or to continue in a state or relationship. Jesus tells us to abide in Him, in His Word and in His love. "*Abide in Me and I in you*" (15:5). And it is from this intimacy with Him, this mutual abiding in one another, that we will bear much fruit... "for apart from Me you can do *nothing*" (15:5). Yes, there will be pruning and, yes, there will be death...for "greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his sheep" (15:13). But this will all serve so that we may enter into deeper union with Christ, learning to live as He lived and love as He loves, thus bearing *more* fruit for His Kingdom. By all this, the Father is glorified. "*These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete*" (15:11).

"My daughter, the closer the soul comes to her goal, and draws near to the source of every good thing – which is the true and perfect love of God in which everything will be drowned (while only love will rise to become the engine of all things) – the more she will give up all the virtues she has practiced along the way, so as to enclose everything in love – to love alone – and to rest from everything else...So, take courage along the way, because the more you move forward in love, the sooner you will enjoy a foretaste, here on earth, of the eternal beatitude of true and undivided love." (Book of Heaven, Luisa Piccarreta, Vol. 6, 10/16/1905)

The Wind Blows Where It Wills...

"...and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit" (Jn 3:8). The Spirit has been active in our community the past few months...and so has Mother Gabrielle Marie! She's been busy traveling in Europe, as well as from north to south of the U.S., giving talks on the Divine Will wherever invited. Mother was the main speaker on an eight-day retreat in Garabandal, Spain, which united the writings of the Servant of God, Luisa Piccarreta with Ignatian spirituality. During an extension of that same pilgrimage, she also had the opportunity to share these beautiful teachings at the healing waters of Lourdes, France, one of the most famous and visited Marian apparition sites in the world. Various groups in Louisiana and Alabama asked Mother Gabrielle Marie to give talks while home visiting family this spring, and in the weeks to follow, she was boarding planes to Minnesota and Ohio to speak at Divine Will weekend retreats. Did we mention she also turned 80 on May 2nd?!



Mother is unstoppable, as the Holy Spirit continues to call her all over to spread the Divine Will. She would often tell us that her experience at Mother Angelica's monastery, serving as novice mistress and vicar for many busy years, taught her that God is the One doing everything. That's the only way it's possible. And she recently told one sister, "I just try to focus on the one thing that's in front of me at the moment and not think about everything else I still have to do." Over the next few months, that "everything else" includes more speaking engagements in Pennsylvania, Orlando, Scotland and Belgium.

Mother loves the monastic life - spending her days in quiet contemplation before the Blessed Sacrament, forming the young sisters in Tennessee, and taking care of whatever community needs present themselves each day. However, she has said from the beginning that we are also called to share the graces we receive in prayer and the great gift of the Divine Will with others. Union with our Bridegroom must bear fruit and bring forth life, whether in hidden ways that we'll only recognize in Heaven or those incarnate, tangible ways that the Lord wills for us as well.

Though traveling and being away from the community can be difficult at times, Mother Gabrielle Marie has enjoyed every one of her mission trips. She's edified by how much the Divine Will is growing and touched by the loving, family spirit that she encounters with every group. "Divine Will retreats are different from other retreats I've been on. The people are so happy, free and beautiful. Everyone was so generous and united. They couldn't do enough for each other," Mother recounted after one such retreat. That's Nazareth. That's life in the Divine Will. *"And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, 'Here are My mother and brethren! For whoever does the Will of My Father in heaven is My brother, and sister, and mother'"* (Mt 12:49-50).

Happenings Across the Pond...

In Italy and San Marino

An unexpected pilgrimage

In celebration of Luisa Piccarreta's 160th birthday, Sr. Scholastica, Sr. Benedicta, and Sr. Teresa were invited to attend and help translate a Divine Will conference in Corato this past April. Within the first two hours of their road trip to southern Italy, the three sisters received news of Pope Francis' passing that Easter Monday morning. As Providence would have it, the Holy Father probably took his last breath around the time the sisters were praying the *Gloria* at 7:30am Mass. When the date of the Pope's funeral was announced during the conference, the sisters knew the Holy Spirit was at work and decided to make a detour to Rome on the way back from their pilgrimage.



A dear friend of the community, who lives in Rome yet spends her summers right next door to us in Talamello, arranged everything. She hosted the sisters in her own home while her son – a "Papal Gentleman," or lay attendant of the Pope – provided the Vatican tickets. The sisters described how much grace flowed that sunny, Saturday morning when they and thousands of other members of the faithful bid their last goodbye to Pope Francis. "You felt as if the whole world was present and united in prayer in St. Peter's Square, whether physically or spiritually."

The impromptu excursion culminated the following morning – Divine Mercy Sunday – when their hostess took them to morning Mass at her local parish. It was dedicated to St. Anthony of Padua and St. Annibale di Francia, Luisa's extraordinary confessor, and housed a first class relic of the latter saint's heart. The sisters prayed a novena they had begun earlier in the week for the election of a new pope before the relic, a novena written by St. Annibale himself. Only the Lord can plan these things! Though they didn't remain in Rome for the election of the new Pontiff, the sisters headed home with the sure hope in Christ's promise to always provide His Church with a successor to St. Peter so that *the gates of hell would never prevail against It* (Mt 16:16).

Less than two weeks later, we were thrilled to watch the announcement of Pope Leo XIV as our new Holy Father – the first American pope! And so we leave you with a beautiful snippet of his homily on the occasion of his Installation Mass: *"Communion is built primarily 'on our knees,' through prayer and constant commitment to conversion. For only in this way can each of us hear within the voice of the Spirit crying out: 'Abba! Father!' and then, as a result, listen to and understand others as our brothers and sisters."*

Let the little children come to me



We recently heard a priest say the following to a group of young children: "Don't let anyone tell you that you are the future of the Church. You're not the future of the Church. You are the PRESENT!" The sisters in Talamello have been experiencing that truth with their students all throughout the catechetical year, which concluded with a trip to Assisi and the First Holy Communion of Sr. Gemma's and Sr. Elizabeth's fourth-grade class.

A pilgrimage to the land of St. Francis and St. Clare was a long-time desire of parents, children and catechists alike. When the day finally arrived this past May, the kids were full of joy and very excited to see Bl. Carlo Acutis. Sr. Gemma remembers the love and interest on their faces as they finally prayed before the tomb of the soon-to-be saint. The group made their rounds through the many iconic spots in Assisi, but a little girl's candid comment stuck out as one of the most precious moments of the day. Standing inside a centuries-old church, the young catechism student looks up at her parents and asks, "So when are the two of you going to get married?" How easily the Holy Spirit can work through little ones!

If we pay more attention to the marvels the Holy Spirit is working in our children today, we'll find a little Robert Francis Prevost in every parish, celebrating pretend Mass on an ironing board and using potato chips as hosts. One parent in our catechetical program tells stories of how her son dresses up in a white robe, pretending to bless houses in the neighborhood like our pastor, Don Jean-Florent. When playing inside the house, he and his twin sister have also been known to place white tablecloths over their heads and imitate Sr. Gemma and Sr. Elizabeth. Another little boy, before his first confession, said he wants to be pope when he grows up. How important it is to nurture these adorable seeds in our youth!

On the Solemnity of Corpus Christi, sixteen children from Talamello received Jesus in the Eucharist for the first time. Dressed in white robes, they filled the front pews like pure, fragrant lilies. As consecrated religious, we were deeply moved to see them so joyful and devout. Sure, we have come to know their mischievous sides over the years. But that day, all we could see were little angels. Isn't that how the Sacred Heart burns with love for each one of us? Despite our flaws and shortcomings, He never stops loving us and looking at each one of us as His precious son or daughter. We thank you, Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, for revealing these things to us through the little ones!



A time to mourn, and a time to dance

Please pray for the soul of Sr. Teresa's father, Antonio Valentino, who passed away at 92 years old on the morning of June 28th – right in-between the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the

Memorial of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Sister was incredibly grateful that her tender and loving dad died on a Marian feast day, armed with the sacraments and wearing the brown scapular of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel. Our Lady promised St. Simon Stock that anyone who dies wearing Her scapular will not suffer eternal fire and, if they're devoted to Her, She will bring them out of purgatory the first Saturday after their death. What a comfort!

Despite the profound sorrow that comes with losing a parent, Sr. Teresa felt sustained by everyone's prayers and filled with many beautiful and strong emotions. "I will always remember his last gazes and his last breaths," she confided to one sister. As many of you may remember, Sister also lost her mother less than a year ago, so please keep her and her siblings in your prayers, as well.



Kissing the Two Hearts on his daughter's medal



Supporting the Sisters

If you feel the Holy Spirit calling you to financially support the Benedictine Daughters of Divine Will this summer 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...

Your generosity will provide for the basic needs and expenses of our sisters in the U.S., Italy and San Marino as well as help us to carry out God's Most Holy and Divine Will in any capacity He asks of us. If you would like your donation to be allocated to the building of our Motherhouse in Tennessee, just make sure to write "*Monastery donation*" on your check or in the note section if donating online by credit card. See attached flyer for more information. Thank you for your goodness to us! Be assured our benefactors never leave our daily prayers. God bless you!



www.benedictinesofdivinewill.org

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