



LIGHT & LIFE

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Fr. Joseph Sergott, OP, Director Nov-Dec 2018, Vol 71, No 6 Western Dominican Province

PERSEVERANCE

By Fr. Joseph Sergott, OP

The perseverance of Fr. Paul Duffner, OP astounds me. Fr. Duffner contributed to the very beginnings of the Rosary Center decades ago and has been a fixture there ever since. His untiring devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and her Rosary is something which began as a young boy and has continued to this very day. Fr. Duffner is now 103 years old. As one who has lived a full life completely dedicated to God, Fr. Duffner still has a spirit that wants to press onward in his preaching of the Gospel. These last years have taken their toll upon him; however, his faith in God and perseverance in life remain. There is a running joke in the Western Dominican Province that the former novices of Fr. Duffner keep dying of old age as he continues to live on at 103!

This past year I became his superior (in our Dominican Community of Holy Rosary); consequently, I have had the opportunity to get to know him better. The one thing that stands out when I visit him is his perseverance. I asked him recently how he does it every day, having such a good attitude, remaining faithful no matter the trial, even when physically he has been failing for many years. He told me simply, "I take each day as it comes." Now, he has good days and then bad days; but, we both know that eventually the Lord will take him home.

I notice though that his demeanor is even-keel. He really does live each day one day at a time. He is a reminder to me that even though the body fails, one can still keep their faith in God with their feet firmly planted on the ground.

"Taking each day as it comes" is wisdom for everyday living, and good for us all to practice—but what's behind that? If you look deeper into the man who has given his life to God for eight decades, you'll find that perseverance is a part of the very fabric of his being. It speaks of his faith and his love for God.

The other day he said to me, "None of us has perfect love for God. We recognize though that we are on the way." This may be the key behind his perseverance in the Lord. He does not rely upon himself, but upon God's grace, given to him at every moment of his life. Further, it implies that the journey of faith is beset with trials, pitfalls, doubts and wrong turns; but, if one keeps their eyes set on their final goal, perseverance to the very end is possible if we lean on the grace provided for us by the Lord.



Perseverance is defined as a "moral virtue that perfects the irascible appetite so that a person is reasonably inclined to continue in the practice of virtuous action in spite of difficulties arising from the protracted period during which the effort must continue. It is one thing to be called upon to perform a single virtuous act; it is quite another thing to be expected to continue to act in a virtuous manner for a long time." (*New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 11, pg. 153)

One of the greatest stumbling blocks in life is worry or anxiety. This can actually bring us to ruin. This can cause us to fail in perseverance. Our Lord reminds us not to have so much anxiety. He tells us not to worry needlessly, "Can any of you by worrying add a moment to your life-span? If even the smallest things are beyond your control, why are you anxious about the rest? Notice how the flowers grow. They do not toil or spin. But I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of them. If God so clothes the grass in the field that grows today and is thrown into the oven tomorrow, will he not much more provide for you, O you of little faith?" (Luke 12:25-28)

Sometimes when we are weighed down by burdens, for example, our own infirmity, anxiety about finances, worries about relationships, our own sinfulness, or the lack of direction in our lives, we can lose focus. But there's something about the virtue of perseverance that causes

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THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

Thorny Ground: On the Lookout for God's Will

By Fr. Christopher Eggleton, O.P.

[Dominican Friar Chris Eggleton, O.P. was born in Louisville, Kentucky, and was influenced greatly by the Dominican priests and brothers at St. Louis Bertrand Parish. Growing up with the prayer of the Holy Rosary, Fr. Chris professed his vows in 1983 and was ordained in 1988 on the Feast of Dominican St. Juan Macias, of Peru. Fr. Chris has enjoyed parish and spiritual direction ministries as well as community and apostolic leadership ministries. He presently works in Rome as an assistant to the Master of the Order of Preachers for the Provinces of the United States and the Vicariate of Vietnam in Canada. Fr. Chris is also Promoter General of the Rosary for the Order. Preaching the Rosary and its Mysteries of the Incarnation fills him with fire and joy.]

"I rejoice in my weaknesses, because the strength of the Lord abides in me." (I Cor. 12, 9b). Saint Paul wrote the community of Corinth freely sharing with the faithful his own particular struggle, which he names "a thorn." This was certainly a holy preaching for, in so doing, he exhorts the people to rely on the presence of God abiding inside their being, including in the deep fog and torment of temptation and struggles. What "thorn" it was which caused torment and confusion for Paul, we don't know. What Paul did was to appeal "to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, but He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.'" (II Cor. 12, 8-9a).

How honest and open Paul was in revealing himself so deeply in his writings so to reach others with the truth of our God Who chooses to rest in us, to console us, and to animate us. It is Paul's being in possession of truth in transparency that he enjoys the depth of relationship with Christ, Who sends him out over and over again on mission where Paul meets with all manner of successes and calamities. Paul's martyrdom occurred while accomplishing God's Will.

God's holy will for us seems so very elusive, and we can spend an excessive amount of energy in nurturing a debilitating angst while fretting about knowing God's will immediately in the here and now. Mostly, God does not offer "next day delivery" in communicating His will. God's will for us is encountered in the hearing of the Word of God in prayer and then preaching that Word with our lives on mission. One of the key prayers we have been given is the prayer of the Rosary, which is filled with the mysteries of the Incarnation. It is here that our stories get mixed in with Jesus' story, His life, His temptations, His own coming to discover God the Father's Holy Will for Him and the accomplishment of that Will and mission. In this we become conformed to Christ.

While praying and preaching the rosary in Portland, Oregon, alongside my Dominican brothers this past June, I could not help but learn something of the people, events, and realities of the downtown area and some of the neighborhoods of Portland. From the beginning of

my several days there, it was clear to me that there are a substantial number of people on the streets, homeless. Many were youth, most were young adults and medium-aged persons, and some quite elderly. Some of the poor homeless were quite up-front about begging something to eat, begging cash or coins, while others said nothing, awaiting in silence for a material blessing from passers-by. It was also notable that a good portion of the people of the streets were suffering from disease, including mental illnesses. Moreover, most of the homeless hungry were not together in two's or three's, but isolated and alone.

This image of the people remained with me. Two weeks later, along with other members of my Dominican community, I was praying the sorrowful mysteries of the rosary late one Tuesday afternoon. We were praying the third mystery, Jesus being crowned with thorns, when I was given, in heart and mind, an image of Jesus' head with the crown of thorns being driven, in rough manner, into His head. Rivulets of blood were streaming in crooked paths down his forehead and all around the rest of his head. It was a few moments later that the faces of the two homeless men who had crossed my path in Rome that very day came into view, replacing the face and head of Jesus and each one with the same crown of thorns causing bleeding and obvious intense pain. Following these pained faces, the images of several of the homeless persons from Portland, each wearing a crown of thorns, were there in this contemplation.

Praying this sorrowful mystery was painful to me; however, these images came from Jesus' suffering and the suffering of my sisters and brothers living a homeless life. This experience pulled forth from me a notable and visceral compassion, and subsequent action.

Immersion into the mysteries of the Holy Rosary has provided an ever-deepening conviction in me to act on behalf of those who suffer the humiliation of having thorns, of whatever form or source, driven into their heads. To alleviate suffering by assisting in the removal of the thorns digging into another's body, mind, and spirit from violence, injustice, or disease, personal or societal, is to do the Will of God. It is in the acts of prayer and alleviation of suffering that we discover ourselves already practicing what God desires. The delight of knowing God's holy will which comes forth from immersion into the mysteries of Jesus' life is a blessing. Along with the loving discipleship of Mary, Mother of God, Mother of Sorrows, Mother of Prompt Succor, the Holy Spirit instills in us the mission we will be capable of bringing to completion.

It is in this way that, being led to the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, we are becoming the body of Christ in our

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What would the Blessed Virgin say about doing God's will?

by Fr. Reginald Martin, OP

At Cana, Mary tells the servants to “do whatever he tells you,” and they fill the water jars to the brim. The gospel is a story told about us, so Mary is not merely speaking to the hired hands at a wedding reception; she is speaking to us. When our Holy Father visited Ireland in 1979, he prayed to Mary, “We wish to do what your Son tells us... to carry out and fulfil all that comes from him...as our forefathers did for many centuries....” Thus, what Mary might tell us first about following God’s will is to embrace it, without considering the cost – or the consequences.

And if embracing God’s will leads to suffering? Our faith tells us Jesus took on our flesh and went through every moment of our life. Not so we would not have to, but to show us how, and how “to get it right.” In the Incarnation, God’s Word came to look like us, which means we look like Him. All our images of Mary present us a beautiful portrait, but she would be the first to remind us, “Beauty isn’t simply as Beauty does; Beauty is only as Beauty does.” If we look like Jesus, we must act like Him, even if – perhaps especially if – this means following His example of suffering. In His moments of greatest suffering, in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross, Our Savior has bound Himself most intimately to us. Mary’s words to “Do whatever he tells you” are more than an instruction that will save a host from the embarrassment of failing to provide adequately for his guests’ refreshment. These words are a command to imitate Our Savior by embracing the suffering He endured for our salvation.

Our Blessed Mother was no stranger to this suffering. When she said, “I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word,” (Lk. 1:38) Mary acknowledged her willingness to surrender – to give up – to God’s will. When we consider Mary’s response to the angel, we probably most often think of the joy she experienced when she visited her kinswoman, Elizabeth, and then gave birth to Our Savior. However, the additional consequences of her surrender have led to our naming her “Our Lady of Sorrows.” These painful events include the flight into Egypt, encountering Jesus on the way to Calvary, and witnessing His death and burial. We may, occasionally at least, consider suffering a punishment for sin. But if Mary suffered, she who was sinless from the first moment of her existence, we must adopt a different view of suffering.

Mary’s words at the Annunciation show that nothing in our spiritual life is done automatically or mechanically, without personal participation. We are not mere tools in

God’s hands, and grace never deprives us of our freedom. However, God, too, is free, and He can withdraw from us – if only momentarily – and allow us to suffer, that we may realize just how infinitely deep is the abyss of our human infirmity. The value of this abandonment is unquestionably hard to acknowledge at the time, but it is a sign of God’s regard and trust, and evidence that He intends to bring something from the experience, something far greater than the pain we undergo.

Were we to ask, what might Mary say about the moments of suffering that occasionally befall each of us? She would undoubtedly begin her reflection by reminding us that suffering invites us to throw ourselves on God’s mercy, even if we can discern little or no evidence of that mercy. She would remind us that our moments of suffering should not be moments of despair, but rather of revelation, for when we come face to face with our weakness we learn to embrace the true Humility that is the remedy for Pride and Self-conceit. Mary will assure us that wherever we find Gethsemane or the Cross we will find ourselves. God already knows our inner dispositions, so suffering teaches God nothing, but it teaches us a great deal about ourselves.

If we asked Our Blessed Mother to continue, she might tell us that God allows us to suffer to remind us of our weakness. St. Thomas Aquinas teaches that if we did not have bodies we would be faced with the same choice as the angels at the moment of creation – aware of how magnificent our minds are, and just how wonderful our existence would be if we were subject to no one but ourselves. Suffering is a reminder how very much we need God’s mercy and love. Mary might also suggest that God allows us to suffer to strengthen us. Experience teaches we are apt to extend ourselves physically only so far as we must. In the last century two Dominican theologians observed, “The same...is likely to happen in the soul when no demands are made of it....”

Mary tells us, “Do whatever he tells you”; if we take her words seriously, we will find ourselves at the Cross. With her, who was the first to take these words to heart. ■

He has raised up for us a mighty savior, born of the house of his servant David. Luke 1:69

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neighborhood, in the world, in Mother Church. Always with love. We do well to remember that praying one decade of the Rosary with love in our hearts for God and neighbor is far greater than praying twenty decades of the Rosary without love.

We need not fret about how God chooses to reveal His will or in pride fool ourselves by attempting to impose our will on God. Let us delight in listening, praying, and putting into practice the compassion that emerges as we immerse ourselves in the mysteries of the Holy Rosary. ■

us to move forward one day at a time, one step at a time. Sometimes perseverance means just enduring through whatever we're going through knowing that eventually we will see the break of day. Keeping hope is a critical part of perseverance.

The one thing that we don't often look for in the saints is the virtue of perseverance. In their lives on earth, perhaps we take their perseverance for granted. But they too had to battle infirmity, their own sinfulness, a lack of clarity of what God wanted for them, the challenges and roadblocks that came from others, and their own doubts . . . but somehow, they took it a day at a time and persevered until they reached God's kingdom.

When I look at the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph, if you view it from their perspective, many doors seemed to be closed to them as they took it one step at a time. Mary wondered how she could have a child without having relations with a man. Then it came to pass. Mary and Joseph had no place for Mary to even give birth. Then the Lord provided. Mary and Joseph, and Jesus were in danger for their lives; but the Lord revealed a way out in the dead of night as they made their flight into Egypt. Mary and Joseph lost Jesus for three days and were flummoxed by his disappearance, wondering what the will of God was for them and their child. It took time for them to understand what God had planned for their son. And through all their struggles, they saw that God always had a plan—even though sometimes it was revealed to them only in the last minute!

Finally, the Blessed Virgin had to walk the road of the cross with her son, once again wondering what the will of God was. She stayed with Jesus to the very end at the foot of the cross.

If we want to learn how to persevere, we can take the lead from Mary and Joseph; and even though they both had extraordinary grace in their lives, we see how they persevered by taking each day, sometimes each hour, one step at a time. We can do the same. We also can take the lead from many other ordinary people, like Fr. Paul Duffner, OP who follow the example of Mary and Joseph and show us that to persevere is to take one step at a time, going forward in faith, following the Lord and letting him lead the way, while leaving our anxieties and worries behind us on the side of the road. ■

**From his fullness we have all received,
grace upon grace, because while the law
was given through Moses, grace and
truth came through Jesus Christ.
(John 1:16-17)**

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

The United States Bishops chose the Blessed Virgin Mary under her title of the Immaculate Conception as the patroness of the United States of America. Here are the words of the bishops' decree on May 13, 1846.

With enthusiastic acclaim and with unanimous approval and consent, the Fathers [of the Baltimore Council] have chosen the Blessed Virgin Mary, conceived without sin, as the Patroness of the United States of America.

From *Ineffabilis Deus* (Dec. 8, 1854) by Pope Bl. Pius IX which defines Mary's Immaculate Conception as dogma for the Universal Church:



From the very beginning, and before time began, the eternal Father chose and prepared for his only-begotten Son a Mother in whom the Son of God would become incarnate and from whom, in the blessed fullness of time, he would be born into this world. Above all creatures did God so love her that truly in her was the Father well pleased with singular delight. Therefore, far above all the angels and all the saints so wondrously did God endow her with the abundance of all heavenly gifts poured from the treasury of his divinity that this mother, ever absolutely free of all stain of sin, all fair and perfect, would possess that fullness of holy innocence and sanctity than which, under God, one cannot even imagine anything greater, and which, outside of God, no mind can succeed in comprehending fully. (par. 1)

We declare, pronounce, and define that the doctrine which holds that the most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instance of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin, is a doctrine revealed by God and therefore to be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful. (par. 34)

We are firm in our confidence that she will obtain pardon for the sinner, health for the sick, strength of heart for the weak, consolation for the afflicted, help for those in danger; that she will remove spiritual blindness from all who are in error, so that they may return to the path of truth and justice, and that here may be one flock and one shepherd. (par. 36)

And since she has been appointed by God to be the Queen of heaven and earth, and is exalted above all the choirs of angels and saints, and even stands at the right hand of her only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, she presents our petitions in a most efficacious manner. What she asks, she obtains. Her pleas can never be unheard. (par. 37)

*Oh Mary, conceived without sin,
pray for us who have recourse to thee!*