

20A SML 2020
MT 15:21-28

I am sure there are more than a few at Mass this evening/morning who have been praying for your “this,” your special intention for a long time. As children, my Mother was forever asking us to pray for a special intention. I only know of one that was answered, and that was my father converting to the Catholic faith. And as we pray, I am sure more than a few are disappointed in Our Blessed Lord, in His timing, in His taking His time. It seems there is a delay in God’s love.

I’d like to relate a story about the Little Flower, St. Therese of Lisieux, also known as St. Therese of the Child Jesus. It is a story in relationship to the delay in God’s love. As scripture says in the Psalms, Proverbs, Lamentations, Isaiah, Micah, Romans, the list goes on, “Wait on the Lord.”ⁱ I’ll quote Isaiah:

The Lord is waiting to show you His favor. He yearns to have pity on you, and happy are all who wait for Him.
(30:18)

The Little Flower at one time did not want to wait on Him. When she was fourteen-and-a-half years old, she wanted to enter the monastery at Carmel when she turned 15.

- ✓ She went to her father who said yes.

- ✓ Since her uncle was her legal guardian, she needed his permission, and he said no.
- ✓ She went to her pastor who said no.
- ✓ She went to the Superior of the monastery who said no.
- ✓ She went to the vicar general of the diocese who said no.
- ✓ She went to the bishop who said no.

She then asked if there was any recourse. The bishop said, “Well, you can ask the Holy Father.”

So she went with her father to Rome to ask the Pope, who was Pope Leo the Great, a very formal and learned man.

When she asked the Holy Father, he said, “If it is the will of God, you will enter Carmel.” That was the saddest day of her life. Therese had to learn a lesson in a delay of God’s love.

How did she take it? I’ll share a paragraph from her own autobiography, where she wrote:

For some time I had indulged the fancy of offering myself up to the Child Jesus as a plaything for Him to do with what He liked with me. I don’t mean an expensive plaything. Give a child an expensive toy, and he will sit looking at it, afraid to touch it. But a toy of no value, a ball, . . . at His disposal. He can throw it on the ground, kick it about, make a hole in it, leave it in a corner or press it to his heart, however he feels about it.

In the same way, I wanted our Lord to do exactly what He liked with me, and here in Rome, He has taken me at my word. In Rome, the Child Jesus made a hole in the ball to see what was on the inside of it. Then satisfied with that, He threw the ball away and went to sleep. Who is to tell us what the Child was dreaming about while the ball lay there neglected? Perhaps He dreamed that He was still playing with it, first dropping it and then picking it up. Letting it roll a long way and then pressing it to His Heart to make sure that it never slipped from His Hand. Yes, He can do with it what He likes. But you see, Reverend Mother, it's a depressing sensation to feel that you are like that ball that has been thrown aside.

So the Little Flower had what she said was the greatest disappointment of her life, not to enter Carmel at 15. But actually she did. But first, she had to learn the lesson of delay as she did in Rome.

Granted greatest disappointments are relative at best. A "this" for a 15 year old girl is different than your "this" and my "this," but it is a "this" nonetheless, a "this" we take to Our Blessed Lord.

As an aside, I read a book on communism during the pandemic. When General Sikorski, the prime minister of Poland, intervened for the 1.5 million Poles exiled to Siberia, Stalin's cold, immoral answer was, "Why do you protest that there are 1.5 million Poles in Siberia? I have 12 million

Russians there.” There is delay, and then there is DELAY. There is “this” and then there is “THIS!”

There are two philosophies of life. One is the pagan philosophy: First the feast, then the headache. The other is the Christian philosophy: First the fast, then the feast, first Good Friday, then Easter Sunday. First the cross, then the empty tomb.

Let’s delve a bit deeper into this delay of God’s love, particularly from Scripture.

Noah: Think of how God tested Noah, for example. Noah lived in the desert, and He told Noah to build an ark. Imagine the sarcasm, the sneers poor Noah must have had simply because he obeyed God? Building an ark in the desert. Nothing to float in because there is nothing to float on, while he was building . . . This was a delay in God’s love.

Abraham: “You will have children as numerous as the sands of the sea and as the stars of the heavens.” (GEN 22:26) When Abraham was 98 and Sarah was 80, they had no children but God told them they would have progeny as numerous as the stars. A delay in God’s love, but then they had Isaac.

Lazarus: News reached Our Blessed Lord. Lazarus is sick. Jesus delays two days. Lazarus is dead. No faith on Martha's part. Lord, if you had been here, my brother would never have died." Have you ever noticed in Scripture that no dead person ever remained dead in the presence of Our Lord? The daughter of Jairus, the son of the widow of Naim and Lazarus. Even in the presence of death there is Life in Christ. Here again is the delay in God's love.

And today's gospel of the Canaanite woman. She was not a Jewish woman. She lived in the pagan part of the land in which Our Blessed Lord lived, and had a daughter troubled by a demon. And in the delay of God's love, Jesus gave her no word of response, in front of the Apostles who were ready to chase her away because she was a pagan. Yet she persists.

Fulton Sheen says he thinks Our Blessed Lord winked at the woman in order to draw her out. He wasn't talking to her as much as He was talking to the Apostles to remind them that all are loved by God, even this pagan, even in delay.

Coming back to the Little Flower, this is one of the darkest moments of her life. She was asked by the vicar general, "How long have you wanted to be a nun?" She said, "All my life."

Fourteen and a half years for a child is a long time. What does she do? She said, “Well, I’m delighting the Lord anyway. I’m just the ball and He doesn’t want to play with it. He’s not amused with it. He just wants to put a hole in it, that’s all. Leave it in the corner.” So she was content to be in the corner.

In praying for a special intention, be prepared for the delay in God’s love, but keep on praying. Prayer is distinct from petition. All prayer is dependence. Prayer is love. And you will find that as you love more, you will seek less.

For all we know, when Pope Leo said, “If it is the will of God, you will enter Carmel,” God had already decided she was going to enter Carmel. And when Pope Leo went to heaven, one thing that he was sorry for was telling a young girl to keep still. What a lesson that is. To think that he controlled the life of the Little Flower. No. Everything changes in the mind of God.

St. Therese of the Little Flower, St. Leo the Great, pray for us, in our time of delay.

ⁱ PS 27:14; 37:7,34; PVB 20:22; IS 40:31; LAM 3:26; MICAH 7:7; ROM 8:24-25 etc.