

April 17, 2020

Today is a beautiful April day.

It is 6:39 in the morning as I return to this letter I left off on Wednesday. When I looked out the kitchen window just now there was frost on the rooftops, new leaves on the trees, and brown leaves of fall tucked away here and there and in the wooded areas behind the rectory. Only the heat of summer was missing.

Building upon my letter of April 15, as we continue to make our way through life with Covid-19, we know now that we can only do it with hope if we walk hand in hand with Our Lord and look with Him beyond the human side of things.

When it comes to preaching and writing on the topic of the Divine Providence, one of the masters is Father J. P. de Caussade. He is often quoted by others who tackle the subject, including Dom Lehodey, whom we heard from in my last letter. In his one great work, Self Abandonment to Divine Providence, de Caussade had this to say in a letter he wrote to a religious sister about events in her life that were troubling her:

*I think that you look too much on the creaturely side of events; as for me... I wish to see nothing but Him in all that happens.... God brings circumstances and necessities into being as He pleases. May He be blessed for all, in all and forever (Father J. P. de Caussade, Self Abandonment to Divine Providence, p. 124).*

Of course, the great takeaway here is de Caussade's confident and altogether supernatural declaration: *I wish to see nothing but Him in all that happens* (Ibid).

Some letters back, I introduced you to Carmelite Father Gabriel of Mary Magdalene, another great help to us now. In his own retreat conferences, collected and published after his death under the title, Divine Intimacy, Father Gabriel certainly echoes Father de Caussade:

*We must understand that all such things are positively permitted by God precisely to purify us even to the very inmost fibers of our being. In the face of these trials, we must ... see only the hand of God who offers us these bitter remedies to bring perfect health to our soul (Fr. Gabriel of Mary Magdalene, Divine Intimacy (1059-1061).*

My friends, can it be that our good Father in Heaven wants to bring perfect health to our souls through our patient endurance of the Coronavirus pandemic? The answer, the only answer must be *yes, of course*. It will be helpful here to recall the words from Dom Lehodey that I quoted in my last letter:

*Providence has views very different from ours regarding both the end to be pursued and the means of attaining it (Dom Lehodey, Holy Abandonment, p. 92).*

And let us not for a moment forget the very enlightening words of the Lord's Prophet, Isaiah:

*For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways, says the LORD.  
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

My life was changed for good once I discovered Isaiah 55:8-9 and let its wisdom sink in.

Father Gabriel goes on to say:

*Whatever suffering comes to us... has only one true explanation: Our Lord wishes to purify us, and is beginning to do it precisely through these exterior tribulations. Let us be persuaded that these... serve greatly for our spiritual progress, because before attaining to union with God, it is necessary to be reduced to nothingness, that is, to be established in the profoundest humility. (Father Gabriel of Mary Magdalene, Divine Intimacy, (1059-1061).*

*To be reduced to nothingness, that is, to be established in the profoundest humility.* What our Lenten resolutions could not give us God is willing to supply.

If we were to ask St. John of the Cross for advice today he might reference the following lines from his work, The Living Flame of Love:

*It greatly behooves the soul, then, to have patience and constancy in all the trials which God sends it, whether they come from without or from within, and are spiritual or corporal, great or small. It must take them all as from His hand for its healing and its good, and not flee from them, since they are health to it (LF, 2, 30).*

My dear friends, God *does* want to bring perfect health to our souls and as hard as it is to grasp, He wills to use the Coronavirus to do it, for our healing and for our good. Saint John of the Cross and Father Gabriel have both told us so:

*... See only the hand of God who offers us these bitter remedies to bring perfect health to our soul (Fr. Gabriel of Mary Magdalene, Divine Intimacy (1059-1061).*

*It greatly behooves the soul, then, to have patience and constancy in all the trials which God sends it.... It must take them all as from His hand for its healing and its good, and not flee from them, since they are health to it (LF, 2, 30).*

What I am teaching you now you must remember and hold on to; it is essential teaching for all of us if we are to live through this unprecedented crisis with faith. From now may we live within the safe haven of the Divine Providence, respecting the grandeur of God's Hidden Counsels and learning to see beyond the human side of things. These truths are not the stuff of Sunday

homilies. If not for the Coronavirus I might never have had the opportunity to teach you of them so plainly and straightforwardly.

As you can see, I've been studying the Hidden Counsels of God for a long time. Before I close, let me introduce you to yet another of my mentors, one I came upon 20 years ago, 14 months before the September 11 attacks on our country. His name is Father Jeremias Drexel.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Father Jeremias Drexel, a German Jesuit, was a contemporary of John of the Cross and well-known for his teaching on the conformity of the human will to the divine. Taken from his great work, The Heliotropium, some of what he wrote can help us to understand God at this time in our lives:

*Since whatever is done in the world happens through the Permission or Command of God, it is our duty to receive everything as from the Hand of God, and to conform our will to His Holy Will, through all things and in all things...ascribing nothing to accident, chance, or fortune (J. Drexel, The Heliotropium, 9-10).*

*Not only to fortune or chance must nothing be ascribed, but neither to the negligence or persevering care of man as first causes. Vain and idle are such complaints as, 'This or that happened to me because this or that man hated me, or managed my affairs badly, or did my business carelessly. Things would certainly have turned out differently if he had only been well disposed towards me, and had entered into the business with all his heart, and had not spared his pains (Ibid, 10).*

*This kind of philosophy is vain and foolish. But true, wise and holy is this, 'The Lord has done it all.' For, as I have already said, good and evil things are from God (Ibid).*

*The Lord has done it all (Ibid).*

Remember the saying *Life is a bowl of cherries*? I haven't heard it in a long time, but in 1970 Beatle Paul McCartney said it photographically on the front cover of his first post-Beatles solo album *McCartney*.

Far closer to heart and home for me and you, is the description of life on earth as we hear it described in the prayer, *Hail Holy Queen* as living in *this valley of tears*.

We do not choose when we enter this world, nor are we authorized to choose when we shall leave it; the Lord alone is the ruler of life and death. Knowing all things to the finest detail, He willed that we should live at just this time. He has done us the honor, one might say, of summoning us into His service at a critical moment in the life of His Kingdom on Earth, and He will equip us with every grace we need to serve Him faithfully in our station, however humble and insignificant that station may seem right now. *He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble (Luke 1:52)*. Do not lose heart; Christ has overcome the world (John 16:33).

May our Risen Lord of History encourage your hearts, enlighten your minds, and strengthen your will this weekend, especially on this most blessed Divine Mercy Sunday.

Now I send you my blessing, through the air, with kindest regards and remaining always,

Your grateful pastor,

Father DeMartino