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FROM LOURDES

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THE DIRECTOR'S LETTER

FR. GEORGE SZAL, S.M.

An Extraordinarily Ordinary, Orderly Marian Life

Browsing the books on the shelf in my office I found an amazing little one about St. Bernadette Soubirous that helped me understand my vocation as a Marist and a practical way to holiness available to everyone. Founded in 1836, the Constitutions of the Society of Mary describe Marian spirituality in this way:

“The Society, like the Church, finds its model in Mary the woman of faith. Its spirituality is simple and modest in its expression, close to the lives of ordinary people, apostolic in character, and marked by spontaneity and joy. It tries to make its own the Christian experience lived by Mary.” – (#117)

I have been a Marist for over 50 years. I have read and studied and been to dozens of workshops and retreats about Marian spirituality, and have never really been satisfied that I finally “got it”. However, reading “Bernadette and Her Rosary: A Study of Marian Spirituality” by Fr. Andre Rivier SJ, has brought me a lot closer to understanding the gift of Mary in our lives as Catholics, her concern for souls and the way she



St. Bernadette Soubirous

shows us to salvation in Christ.

Certainly I have learned a lot about living the spirit of Mary from Marist saints, both those who have been canonized and those not officially recognized by

the Church – the religious men and women with whom I have lived and worked. However, seeing their lives again through the life of St. Bernadette has made me see Mary and Marian lives as if for the first time.

Bernadette Soubirous was a poor, sick, uneducated peasant girl, the eldest of nine children, living in with her family in an old jail cell next to a dung heap. She did not receive her First Holy Communion until after her visions had ceased because she couldn't remember any of her catechism except the answers to the questions, “Who is God?” and “Why did God make you?” Up until the time she entered the convent of St. Gildard the only prayers she knew were the Sign of the Cross and the Rosary (Creed, Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be) which she prayed fervently and constantly. Yet, an atheist, seeing St. Bernadette make the Cross devoutly remarked, “If the Sign of the Cross is made in heaven, that's how it is done.”

She was convinced that God chose her to be His missionary just

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An Orderly Marian life

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because of her poverty and ignorance and she often showed her humble self-knowledge with wit and simplicity. “Do you think I don’t know,” she would often say, “that if Our Lady couldn’t have found anyone more stupid than me she wouldn’t have chosen her instead?” At another time, to Sister Philippe Molinery she asked, “What do you use a broom for?”, “Sweeping.”, “Exactly! And that is just my story. Our Lady has used me and now I’m back in my right place and I am happy to be there.”

What was Mary’s mission? What was Bernadette’s? From the age of 14 until she died at 35 Bernadette was hidden from public view, at first in a convent boarding school and then as a Sr. of Charity at Nevers. After taking first vows, all of the nuns in her class received assignments in schools or hospitals except her. When the Bishop asked what Bernadette could do, the Mother Superior said, “That child can do nothing, she will be a burden on any convent we send her to.” So the bishop said to 22 year old Sr. Marie Bernard, “I give you prayer as your future work.” This was actually her second vocation. Her first was “being an invalid”, since almost half of her life was spent in the convent sick and



suffering. Then the bishop asked, “Are you really no use at anything?” “Our Mother General is quite right,” she answered, “that is really true.” He became flustered and asked, “Then what is the use of your entering the Congregation?” To which Bernadette replied, “That is exactly what I said to you at Lourdes, and you said it didn’t matter.” “Well then,” he said, “Would you be able to carry a hot drink to an invalid and to peel vegetables?” Humble and simply Sr. Marie Bernard answered, “I’ll try.”

In these brief glimpses of St. Bernadette’s life we can see the simplicity and humility of Mary’s spirit, the spirit of Jesus Christ Crucified. “I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me

according to your word.” Bernadette herself said, “My Divine Spouse has drawn me to a humble and hidden life, and has often told me that my heart will only cease to beat when it has sacrificed all. And to strengthen my purpose, He often brings to my mind that at the end of all, when I am dying, I shall have no other comforter than Jesus – and Him crucified! He and He alone is my only faithful friend and all that I shall carry with me to the grave. What folly of follies to love anything but Him.” (Ravier, p. 42).

So, how live a Marian spirituality? To pray (especially to meditate on the life of Christ in the Gospels and Mysteries of the Holy Rosary). Also, by the power and grace of the Holy Spirit not to grumble or complain about my history or my lot in life; to accept the will of God for my life, and humiliation and suffering as a means of my conversion from pride, greed and the need for the affection of others; to pray and do penance for sinners (myself foremost among them); to receive the sacraments devoutly, especially the Eucharist; to prefer to be hidden and unknown in this life, doing the good that I can do and leaving the rest to God and others.

Have a blessed Lent and Easter!

Peace,

Fr. George Szal, SM



Contemplative Prayer

BY FR. FRANCIS A. GRISPINO, S.M.

I came across a parish bulletin in which a book on contemplative prayer was recommended. I am convinced that more and more will be written on this form of prayer directed to the ordinary Catholic. This must be so if the following statement rings true: We must become contemplatives or we will cease being Christian. The following narrative will highlight a few of the basics underlying the core of contemplative prayer.

Contemplation Maximizes Love **1 Cor 14,13**

The dynamics between two lovers are much the same as our relationship with Jesus. During the time of dating a couple begin to see the attractions and virtues in one another. They express such by way of complements and praise. Eventually there comes the moment when all is expressed in the words

“I love you.” This is true in our relationship with the Lord. Hearing and reflecting on the Scriptures Sunday after Sunday and spending some time in personal prayer, on the healing and miracles stories, his compassion and love for the people, but especially appreciating the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross for us and our salvation. All can be summed up in the heartfelt words: I love you.

But even these three words can recede and surface in a whole different way. The following story explains.

Contemplation: No Words, No Thoughts

This story is about unspoken communion going on between two persons in love.

A member of the family relates the incident. Both parents are seated. One is reading the newspaper, the other is knitting. Folding the newspaper, the

father gets up off the chair. The wife responds, “Where are you going?” The relator of this incident remarked, “My father interrupted some sort of communion taking place from my mother’s side.” The point of the story is that while no overtly expressed communication passed between them, the wife was alert and absorbed by the presence of the husband until the interruption. This, I believe, helps us to understand what takes place in contemplation. There is that loving attention in the presence of the Other – no thoughts, no words, just spending time being aware, in faith, of the Divine Presence.

Contemplation: Knowledge and Love Deepens

John 15,15

God communicates with us through knowledge and love. It comes packaged.

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Contemplative Prayer

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Now there is a kind of knowledge that God wishes to communicate. It cannot come to us in the ordinary way, by way of the five senses. That is why consolation or feeling fervent in prayer must cease. It too has its origins in the senses.

Reflection, memory, and use of the imagination must be bypassed for the same reason: Nothing comes to the intellect unless first through the senses. It is no wonder we find ourselves in uncharted water. The tendency is to head back to the warm, comfortable shallows. This is a mistake. Courage is needed to meet the challenge to persevere in contemplation and settle for rendering the loving attention to God without consolation in prayer. Why? The short answer is: to prove the authenticity of your love. To be without consolation is to discover that one is empty of self. This is the proof that we are praying out of love for God and not for some personal gratification. In short, we are giving and not getting. That is love. In marriage the expression used is, "The honeymoon is over."

And love deepens as the challenges of community life are met.

Contemplation is: Waiting in the Dark

This waiting in the dark is not without some glimmerings. In subtle ways God is communicating knowledge and love. It is done secretly, barely discernible-if at all. The reason is that the quality of this knowledge and love is not imparted

in the ordinary way, that is, through the senses. The following may serve as examples:

—> Jesus says, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you, not as the world gives do I give you" (John 14, 27). St. Paul states, "...the peace of God surpasses understanding" (Philippians 4,7).

—> What of an inspiration that comes to you out of the blue? Whence its origin? It was not reasoned out. It is the Holy Spirit at work in the believer as stated in Thessalonians 2,13, "...the word of God now at work in you who believe."

—> What about your part in the celebration of the Mass? How often do you realize you fall short, way short, to meet the

proper response to God's love shown in the Sacrifice of the Mass? Now listen to St. Paul. "The Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes with inexpressible groanings" (Romans 8, 26). Our yen to respond to the love shown in the mystery of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is enhanced, secretly, in the mystery of the Indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Seeking to return to the former method of praying using the faculties of understanding, memory, imagination, and will, won't do. It is now time for God to be working in you. Do not impede the working of the Holy Spirit. This working is called: infused contemplation.

Summary

Find time in your life to: Be still; with no thoughts, no words; simply "be" in loving openness to the Divine Presence. "For 'In him we live and move and have our being'"(Acts 17,28). And in time note the change in your life.

Readers Write

Dear Fr. George,

The beautifully written card I received from you today touched my hear and prompted me to help Basil have his wish come true and go on pilgrimage to Lourdes this June. I trust Our Lady of Lourdes will grant Basil all he needs in order to resume supporting his family now relocated in MA. Please let me know the dollar amount that has to be funded to allow for Basil's pilgrimage. Thank you, and best regards. YA

(I had written several thank you's to various donors and told them about Basil who was smashed in the skull during an anti-Christian riot in his country. Basil almost died, but fled with his family to the US

and is hoping to get well enough to support his wife and twin 6 year old sons. Recently YA sent us a check to cover the entire cost of Basil's pilgrimage. Thank you YA and all of you who support our mission to the sick and suffering. Fr. George)

Dear Fr. George,

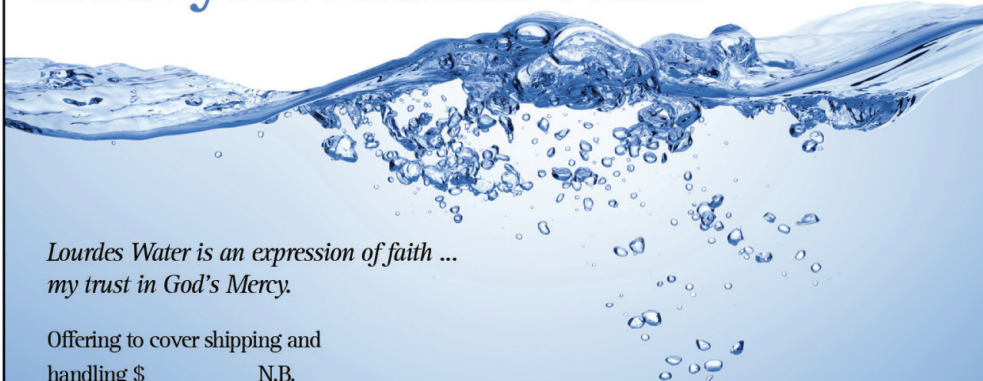
No television, no computer, no cell phone. Need prayers! KH

Dear Fr. Szal,

We received a Christmas gift from God. On Christmas Eve my mother's bedsore was healed! I have been anointing my Mother with Lourdes Water for the pst

year, and slowly the bedsore improved and finally closed up on Christmas Eve! Glory to God in the highest! And thank you, Gracious and Loving Mother, for asking Jesus to heal my Mother, because He did! NJF

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P.O. Box 15575

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Boston, MA 02215-2594

Our Deceased

We have been notified that the following friends of the Lourdes Center have passed away. Please join us in remembering them in your prayers.

GRACE VON KOSS, MI
ROSELINE FREDRICKSON, NE
F.J. & M.K. SITZMAN, MN
NABAR A. ALVIDREZ, AZ
BENJAMIN VELASCO, CA
MARY WINTHROP, CO
BOB MURDOCK, OH
JOSEPH STRNAD, NY
LOU BABST, WA
ELLEN PALMER, FL
JOSEPHINE ANDREUCCI, WI
HELEN DUHART, FL
BARBARA KRUPP, LA
JOHN NALEVANCO, MN
FREDERICO HIFREERA, IL
CELESTIA STEIMIE, MO
BEVERLY TUCKER, CA
PILAR GOIEOECHIEA, GA
JULIA M. KASTRUP, NE
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MONIQUE R. JEZISKI, MD
EILEEN & HAROLD HUPFER, IN
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ALDA DANIEL, TN
FRANCIS CADY, MA
RICHARD PACUCH, PA
ROBERT C. HINES, MA
PAULINE SAMMONS, FL
ROBERTA PECK, LA
SHIRLEY WILSON, NY
MARTY CARR, WI
WILLIAM BREDECK, MN
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and Friday, April 12 and Friday, April 26,
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will be praying for you.

*You can count on it, on the second and the fourth Friday of every month, we hold a special prayer day
when we say special prayers and offer Mass at our chapel for our extended Lourdes family
... including you.*

Please send us your intentions: _____

Please direct your intentions, and any offering you'd like to send, to: Marist Fathers,
698 Beacon Street, P.O. Box 15575, Boston, MA 02215-0010

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