

Walking with Mary on the Path to Holiness

Sunday, June 14, 2020

Mary and Trust in God's Providence



Have you ever wondered why bad things happen to good people? Please read on and find God's answer!

In this "written" talk we will explore the meaning of Divine Providence, look at Mary's trust in God's plan, and conclude with practical tips on how to develop our own trust in God's Will.

Divine Providence is a great mystery with which at times we all probably struggle. Mysteries of the Faith remind me of a little joke –

A man was taking it easy, lying on the grass and looking up at the clouds.

He was identifying shapes when he decided to talk to God. "God," he said, "how long is a million years?" God answered, "In my frame of reference, it's about a minute." The man thought for a moment and then asked, "God, how much is a million dollars?" God answered, "Well to ME, it's just a penny." With this, the man thought a moment longer. Finally, he asked, "God, can I have a penny?" God answered, "In a minute."

<https://alphausa.org/alpha-jokes>

Hopefully, this joke brought you a smile, but even if it did not, it shows us something. Faith Mysteries lie beyond our limited minds and we often don't "get it." It's impossible for us humans with finite minds to comprehend God's infinite mind. Even our Blessed Mother did not

totally understand God's mysteries. How much more we who were conceived with sin and even after baptism bear sin's effect, one of which is a darkened intellect ... how much more are these mysteries dim to us, who have peanut minds next to God's!

The philosopher Kierkegaard puts it this way: "... going forward where all the warning signs say 'Go Back!'; finding oneself in the open sea 210 miles deep below you; ...being thrown completely in the arms of the Absolute." (Kierkegaard, 66f)

Divine Providence, unlike other Christian teachings, also evoke angry responses due to our not understanding why good people suffer. We probably have all at times not understood why God permits our loved ones, ourselves, or others in our country and world to anguish. At times my own heart aches at the pain others endure & I too ask "Why?" Our Lord answers, "Trust in My Divine Providence."

I'm sure you have been plagued with questions now and in the past ... Why did God let my loved one die at time and in that way? Why did He permit a parent to leave me as a child? We each can think of countless other questions. Mary can teach us how to answer these questions of the heart, giving us peace.

Explanation

Servant of God, Fr. John A. Hardon, SJ, defines Divine Providence as "God's all wise plan for the universe, including the most personal decisions of human beings." (Hardon, "Providence") Fr. Hardon adds that Vatican Council I defined this teaching for us, so it is something we as Catholics must believe.

What Does This Mean?

God's desire to bring us to heaven trumps everything else in our lives. He's thinking of our eternal joy, and if it means you and I have to bear some earthly trials, we are so precious to Him that He will let us, for the sake of living in unending love.

Many people see God's Providence, though, only in terms of the good that He causes, not the evil He permits.

Fr. Wilfred Stinissen, co-founder of a contemplative community and author of many books, wrote the inspiring work, *Into Your Hands, Father*, and phrased this objection: "... people today ... say all too easily 'But it's not God's Will that there are wars, or people starve or are persecuted....' No, he did not will the sinful act but from all eternity He has taken into account the consequences of it in our lives." Why, one may ask? "He wills that we grow through those very things that others do to us that are difficult and painful. (Stinisson, 13)

Stinisson adds that we tend to have a fixation on the faults or sins of others who hurt us. Is not this true?!

We will unpack Father's thoughts; much of the following explanation will be taken from Stinissen's work.

The Bible has much on trusting in God: St. Paul writes in his letter to the Ephesians, that he rejoices at the "mystery of God's Will." (Eph 3:9) God's Will or God's plan are other names for Divine Providence. God's Will is a magnificent design, "hidden for ages in God," that is, from all eternity, where even sin and evil have their place. Paul assures us that even the greatest catastrophe contributes to His message of love for you and me. Nothing falls outside of God's plan.

Nothing? Yes ... God's loving Omnipotence catches all the absurdity resulting from human foolishness. Everything that happens has a purpose in God's plan.

How can this be, we may ask? Is this a form of predestination? Does not this lead, then, to indifference or apathy? No, it does not deny free will. No, this teaching does not mean indifference or apathy to evil. Can you imagine anyone calling Mother Teresa of Calcutta indifferent or apathetic? Yet, as a saint, Mother Teresa trusted, like Mary, entirely in Divine Providence

An "If/Then" Argument

A short "If/Then" argument will show the reasonableness in trusting in Divine Providence.

If, God is the great Director guiding the world and humanity, then we can encounter Him everywhere ... in our parents, children, spouse; our body – its health or sickness; ourselves --- our gifts and limitations, and all that the past entails - those unhealed wounds and emotional traumas.

As soon as you and I stop fighting God’s plan and accept His reality, we begin to live in His kingdom. Again, this does not mean we do not fight evil; our Catholic tradition commands us to war against our own sin and society’s evils.

“Aha Moments” Will Come with Trust in Divine Providence

Trust in God’s plan, while not implying apathy, will point to “AHA” moments. What are “Aha” moments? According to Merriam -Webster, an aha moment is one of sudden inspiration or insight. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/aha%20moment>

The Patriarch Jacob experienced such a moment. As you know, Jacob dreamt of a ladder rising from earth to heaven with angels walking up and down. Jacob realized the contact between heaven and earth showed a reality ... the reality of divine messengers coming constantly to him even when he did not see them.

Like Jacob, wherever we go, we encounter God. We can, with Marylike faith, meet the divine in the prosaic. We can face the painful past with a new memory, the uncertain future with hope, and we can declare, “I believe God is in charge, no matter how bleak the skies.”

Do I Really Surrender to God’s Plan ...? A Short Test

How do I know if I wholeheartedly trust in divine providence & not just intellectually? There’s a sure-fire test. Think of something really sad that happened to you.

Are you troubled about the situation or anything that has occurred to you or your loved ones? If you and I are distressed, we may not totally accept divine providence. If we truly believe, then we will be at complete peace. By the way, we can have a deep peace while feeling emotions of grief, anger, sadness.

The Objection: God Does Not Really Know My Pain

Another objection: Can we say to God, “You don’t know ... You’ve never experienced my suffering?” We can never express this, for He does know. He has experienced the indifference, hardness and cruelty of people. Everything that wounds us, first wounds Him. He says to us, as He said to Mary, “You aren’t alone. I am with you.”

St. John Henry Newman reminds us of this in a sermon, “The Mental Sufferings of Christ.” Newman tells us that, like a sinner, He experienced guilt and hatefulness; revolting images He did not want filled His memory. Jesus took on every mental and emotional suffering we can think, to an infinite degree.

(<http://www.newmanreader.org/works/discourses/discourse16.html>)

He felt forsaken as He cried out on the cross, “My God, My God, why have you abandoned me.” Why?

As we know, He suffered, OUT OF LOVE, FOR US.

Comparison of God to a Magnificent Chef

God is like and unlike a magnificent chef. A superb cook can create an elegant meal from leftovers, but a beginning cook can make a bad dinner from the best ingredients. However, even our outstanding chef cannot cook a good meal out of bad food, right?

Unlike our good cook, God can make a succulent feast out of the bad food of evil and sin. God communicates to us minute by minute everywhere in everything. At times you and I can glimpse the thread of His tapestry, but this thread is always there, whether we see it or not.

More Objections: It is Unfair That the Innocent or Those Who Do Not Know Christ Suffer

An objection: I can’t accept the suffering of innocent children, or the starving in the third world, or the recent events of our own country.

Two undeniable facts make for a sound response:

1. The Heavenly Father did not prevent His Only Son's painful death, suffering and seeming failure. However, we all know the Father loves His Son.

2. Christ's suffering was not in vain, but bore redemptive power. Likewise, the adversities of innocent people can bear redemptive power.

Another question you may raise - What about people who suffer who do not know about Christ? Is that fair?

To answer, look at the Holy Innocents, the babies who King Herod's soldiers murdered because Herod was jealous of the new baby King. Was that fair?

Yet the Church teaches that these babies are now enjoying heaven; we annually celebrate their feast day. They did not know Christ. Often humans suffer without knowing Christ. Venerable Fulton Sheen preached that people in the west know Christ without the Cross, but people in the east know the Cross without Christ. I believe Sheen implied that the suffering people in the east were saved by their participation in Christ's Passion.

Faith leads us to accept both the light and dark in our lives Darkness and light yield their beauty only by being seen together. Think of some beautiful painting or natural scene, such as the sky as the sun rises or sets God permits in our life, as in these beautiful sights darkness and light, pain and love, riches and poverty, even the trappings of heaven and hell, so that we can become the human person God created us to be.

Mary and Divine Providence

Our Lady's Trust While in Complete Solitude

Mary wholeheartedly accepted God's plan for Her life. With her yes, her "fiat," she trusted in God's Will; she teaches us the importance of faith, and letting God be our pilot.

Let us see how far Mary trusted. After she gave God her consent to bear the Messiah she found herself in complete solitude, explains Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, papal preacher and author, in his book, *Mary Mirror of the Church*. To whom could she explain what had taken

place in her body? Who could understand that the babe in her womb was conceived by the Holy Spirit?

Cantalamessa refers to another writer, mystic and author Carlo Carretto, who in his own book on Our Lady shares how he understood Mary's trust. Carretto lived in a desert and heard from his Afro-Asiatic friends that a young girl had been betrothed but had not gone to live with the man since she was too young. Carretto associated this with Luke's account of Mary: she was betrothed to a man named Joseph.

Two years later Carretto once again came to the desert encampment and did not see the young woman. He asked where she was? He noticed embarrassment; one of his friends secretly approached him, made a sign - he held a hand to his throat in the gesture of Arabs when they want to say, "Her throat had been slit." The young girl, pregnant before her marriage, had been put to death, for her family's honor.

Carretto thought of Mary again, of people's callous glances, knowing winks, and then he understood Mary's solitude.

No woman had been a virgin-mother and no woman would ever again become one. Mary walked in complete aloneness. She, unlike the Apostle Thomas, believed without seeing. In short, Mary trusted in God's plan for her life.

Do we? What are our risks in believing? Most likely, with us fallen sinners ---- we fear suffering.

As we look at Mary's solitude, we see trust. Mary too grew in faith the Second Vatican Council teaches us. (Cantalamessa, 46)

Our Foundress, Mother Joanne Brummel, IHM, once told us "Don't deny merit to Mary." She did not see everything clearly, as we may imagine.

Mary and Joseph with Baby Jesus Flee Murderous Men

Let us go back to Mary and see her and Joseph respond to the angel in Joseph's dream: "Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him." (<http://www.usccb.org/bible/matthew/2>)

Did Joseph say, "Can we have some time ... I have a business to operate ... or in Mary's case, "I need time to pack for the three of us ... I cannot just get up and leave. Be reasonable, husband."

No, both Joseph and Mary immediately leave with Jesus, knowing His safety is more important than their comfort. They obey God, and sadly flee from their homeland, knowing that their baby son was in deathly danger.

How did Mary and Joseph feel when they heard behind them the shrieks of the mothers, the screams of the baby boys who had been murdered? Can you imagine what went on in Joseph's manly heart? He could only save Jesus and not save the others. What about Mary's motherly heart? Mary knew what was happening to these poor babies and how their mothers felt ...she could only pray for them.

Yet, both Mary and Joseph escaped to Egypt, a strange pagan land with different customs, languages, let alone morality. Immigrants, they had to begin again. It was only their total Faith in Divine Providence that kept them strong.

Practical Application

"All right, what am I to do?" "How can I live with Jesus, Mary and Joseph and imitate their faith?" We now come to the practical application.

First, give everything to Mary, placing our worries, weaknesses, sinfulness, past traumas, & future fears in Our Lady's Heart. Do we do this? If not, why not? When our loving Mother Mary carried our woes in her heart, we have peace; she will work out everything for us.

Second, be a thankful man or woman.

I suggest making a daily Examen as taught by St. Ignatius of Loyola. Follow St. Ignatius and daily reflect what God has been doing and giving you this day. We go back to recall gifts and graces in the day's events. Like pieces in a puzzle, all God's graces are important. St. Teresa of Calcutta and many saints used the Examen. St. Ignatius taught it can infallibly make you a saint, if we make it daily and sincerely.

One practical way to do this is to consider, before retiring, five blessings we have received during the specific day. Doing this daily, we slowly begin to see God as the Giver of blessings, instead of only a judge.

If we make the Examen with Mary, she will help us see God's plan, His presence all around us. We begin experiencing God's constant love.

Gratitude causes joy, for we know we are loved. This awareness of being loved by God inevitably begets more trust in His Divine Providence. Each of us can truly say with Mary, "My Soul Proclaims the Greatness of the Lord."

May each of you find answers to any unresolved difficulties in your life by heartfelt trust with Mary in Divine Providence. With Our Lady, may we truly pray, I BELIEVE IN LOVE! THANK YOU, JESUS, FOR EVERYTHING! (D'Albee, 66)

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