



Homily Notes/Meditation to observe 2010 *Pro Orantibus* Day

“A Matter of Abandonment to Divine Providence” By Rev. Brian Mullady, O.P.

Reading: Lk 8:16-21

[Jesus said,] “No one who lights a lamp conceals it with a vessel or sets it under a bed; rather, he places it on a lampstand so that those who enter may see the light. For there is nothing hidden that will not become visible, and nothing secret that will not be known and come to light. Take care, then, how you hear. To anyone who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he seems to have will be taken away.”

Then His mother and His brothers came to Him but were unable to join Him because of the crowd.

He was told, “Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside and they wish to see you.”

He said to them in reply, “My mother and My brothers are those who hear the Word of God and act on it.”

Purpose and Outline:

(a) The cloistered life serves as a reminder of the presence of God in our midst and that our true destiny is to be with Him forever in Heaven; (b) Our Lady and cloistered religious impress upon us the vital importance of silent and contemplative reflection within our daily life; (c) Each of us must develop an “abandonment to Divine Providence” which goes with the movements of one’s life charted by God as He sees them; (d) The contemplative life is a powerful sign and support to the rest of the Church of the embracing of the “sacrament of the present moment.”

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In a reflection on the contemplative life, Fr. Gabriel O’Donnell, O.P., has beautifully written: “A monastery of cloistered nuns is like a lighthouse set on a hill. It reminds the whole diocese of the presence of God in its midst and reminds us that our true destiny is to be with Him forever in Heaven. What the tabernacle is to the parish church, the monastery is to the diocese. Christ is there: waiting, calling, helping, healing and forgiving.”¹ Today many people would like to have a fast-food spirituality in which they find some method or technique so that they can exercise a certain control over God. This is perhaps the result of our noisy, overactive, materialistic culture. The silence needed to treasure all things in our hearts about Christ as the Blessed Virgin Mary did is certainly not a much sought after value.

The cloistered life and the life of Mary stand in direct opposition to this. Instead of the closed fist of *carpe diem* (seize the day), Our Lady and cloistered religious say: “Let it be done to me according to Your word” with hands open to receiving all from God. This attitude of going with the movements of our life charted by God as He sees them has traditionally been called “abandonment to Divine Providence.” The

Jesuit Fr. Jean-Pierre de Caussade (1675-1751) is the master at explaining what this means. He explained to the people of his time that the secret to developing a life of the spirit was what he called embracing the “sacrament of the present moment.” “God still speaks as He spoke to our Fathers, when there were neither spiritual directors nor set methods. Then they saw that each moment brings with it a duty to be faithfully fulfilled. That was enough for spiritual perfection. On that duty their whole attention was fixed at each successive moment like the hand of a clock that marks the hours.”² The cloistered life is the perfect fulfillment of this practice.

Some people have read these words of Father de Caussade and taken them in an almost quietistic sense that no action on their part is needed, that they are merely putty in the hands of God and they contribute nothing. This is contrary to the Catholic doctrine of cooperating grace. Any true spirituality is based on the fact that our faithfulness to God’s plan is both active and passive. Active fidelity requires carrying out the duties of our state to the best of our ability and is the metal from which virtue is forged. When Mary conceived Christ, her first act was one of practical charity, visiting her cousin who was elderly and with child and perhaps even acting as midwife to John the Baptist. At the wedding feast of Cana, she is actively involved in saving a young married couple from embarrassment.

The pressure cooker of daily cloistered life, lived in such close quarters, demanding work, recreation and just normal household tasks is where the active virtues are put to the test. The cloistered religious who is faithful to these simple expressions of generosity with others fulfills both the words of Christ and goes with the flow of Divine Providence.

Passive fidelity to Divine Providence also entails accepting God’s will, especially when we suffer things God sends us from a grace-filled and loving generosity. Though the enclosure or monastic grounds is certainly meant to keep out distractions and not to keep those embracing it within, the very humdrum nature of the almost invariable schedule and the lack of outside influence can be a great cross. But if one remains focused on Christ, even standing at the foot of the Cross like Mary, one can discover the plan of God.

There are times in every life when one cannot quite make sense of what the plan of God might be. Suffering, either physical or mental, may be very acute. There may be people in the enclosed community who have very special temperaments and cause no end of difficulties for one or another member of the community. These are the times when all the love of active fidelity in the present moment is realized also in passive fidelity. Then one must truly allow God to work in the soul. This is an expression of the traditional Catholic theology of operating grace, a result of grace where God alone moves the person. The person merely allows God to move him. For such a person, “Everything is equally useful and useless.”³

The cloistered, contemplative life is a powerful sign and support to the rest of the Church of the embracing of the “sacrament of the present moment.” On *Pro Orantibus* Day, the Church encourages all the faithful to show both spiritual and financial support for this life. It is the life of Mary; it is the life of obedient love to which we are all called according to the duty of our state in life.

Notes: ¹ “A Day to Support the Cloistered Life,” *The Compass* (Diocese of Green Bay), November 11, 2009; ² Jean-Pierre de Caussade, *Abandonment to Divine Providence*, I, I, 1; ³ *Abandonment*, I, 1, 6.



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