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DAY 25

The Daily Darkness

Yesterday, we looked at our “daily bread” of the Mass, our way of entering heaven while still on earth, though in a veiled way.

We saw how the Mass is our way of anticipating and participating in the perfect love of God for Himself, and thereby, a way to become “perfect” ourselves. But there’s another daily bread, a daily bread we also must share in if we are to live the Little Way: the bread of daily darkness.

Most of us are among the vast majority of humanity who are not famous, not well known, and not held up high on the pedestal of public opinion. In other words, we’re probably numbered among “the ordinary people.” If that describes you, then thank the Lord. It will be much easier for you to live the Little Way, become one of the greatest saints of all time, and help save the world. (More on that tomorrow.) But we have to be willing to accept the cross of an ordinary life and eat the bread of daily darkness.

Let me explain.

Of course, most of us, especially in this social media age, long to be known, well liked, and praised for being important or attractive. But then, when we have to endure the torture of being quiet and alone in our own rooms, we realize that in the eyes of the world, we’re not so important or attractive. I mean, even if we have plenty of accomplishments and beautiful selfies, there will still be that self-accusing ache that creeps in and says, “You’ve not attained a destiny of greatness. You’re not important. You’re not attractive. You’re nothing.” To combat this, we may take even more selfies or rush off to accomplish even greater things to make a name for ourselves, to be “somebody.” But the ache comes back because we can never do enough to satisfy our craving for greatness and love, and our precious “accomplishments” and digital images fade away like so much dust and vanity (Eccl 1:2).

Now, make no mistake: We are called to be great, very great — beyond-our-wildest-imaginings great. But this greatness is not what’s usually thought of as greatness. True greatness isn’t based on the judgment and assessment of mortals. Rather, it’s based on the judgment of Almighty God, who alone is truly great. And His greatness is revealed in the fact that what most attracts Him are the little souls: the humble, the weak, and the broken. His greatness is shown in

how He has “scattered the proud in their conceit and has lifted up the lowly” (Lk 1:51), in how He “resists the proud but gives grace to the humble” (Jas 4:6). And to little souls like us, if we accept it, His greatness is shown in the way that He will give us a share in His own greatness and glory.

But remember, the Little Way is a Little Way of darkness. So, we won't always feel the greatness of God filling our hearts. (If we did, we might get puffed up with pride and no longer be little.) In fact, most of the time, we probably won't feel it at all, and we'll have to fight to believe that God still loves us. In fact, we may have to fight depression, discouragement, and even despair. We may have to “hope against hope” in God's promise of mercy. And that's really the fine point of living the Little Way.

Little souls often live ordinary lives, but they're called to do so with extraordinary faith, hope, and love. Their extraordinary faith and hope is to believe in God's promise of mercy and to hope that He will bring them to the heights of holiness, even if neither they nor anyone else sees it in this life. Their extraordinary love consists in their efforts to keep trying, to keep striving to love God and neighbor in the little things. In fact, their aim is to do little things with great love.

Now, in their efforts to live all this hidden and extraordinary faith, hope, and love, little souls are in good company. For instance, back on Day 4, we saw that Mary, the Mother of God, had to eat the daily bread of darkness. Think of that. This most blessed among women lived a hidden life in an unknown little town while bearing the same burdens of countless ordinary people. For instance, She cooked meals, changed diapers, and washed laundry. But in the midst of Her hidden and ordinary life, she had an extraordinary faith, hope, and love.

Faith, hope, and love in the midst of the daily darkness: That was Mary's greatness, and that can be our greatness, too.

So, don't believe the voices of the world that say, “You're not important! You're not attractive! You're not successful! You're not anything!” With the Little Way, the Lord will make us immensely important, incredibly attractive, and wildly successful in His eyes — but we'll have to accept that we probably won't see it. We'll have to accept to be in the dark, to live an ordinary life, and to walk by faith. Yes, we'll simply need to embrace the promise that God will clothe us with His own Divine Love in His own time and in His own manner, even if we have to wait until the very end.

To close today's reflection, let's ponder Therese's description of the Little Way as a

way of darkness: “Jesus took me by the hand, and He made me enter a subterranean passage where it is neither cold nor hot, where the sun does not shine, and which the rain or the wind does not visit, a subterranean passage where I see nothing but a half-veiled light, the light which was diffused by the lowered eyes of my Fiancé’s Face! My Fiancé says nothing to me ... I don’t see that we are advancing toward the summit of the mountain since our journey is being made underground, but it seems to me that we are approaching it without knowing how.”

Today’s Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, fire of mercy.

Help me to live my ordinary life with an extraordinary faith, hope, and love.

Volume 10

December 22, 1910

To be able to do great things for God, it is necessary to destroy self-esteem, human respect and one’s own nature

.As I continued in my usual state, various priests appeared before my mind; and blessed Jesus said: “To be able to do great things for God, one must destroy self-esteem, human respect and one’s own nature, so as to live again by Divine Life, and to take into consideration only the esteem of Our Lord and those things that concern His honor and glory. It is necessary to crush—to pulverize—what is human to be able to live in and by God. And this is how, not you, but God Himself will speak and work in you, and the souls and the works entrusted to you will produce splendid effects, so that you will obtain the fruits which you and I longed for — like the work of the reunions of priests of which I spoke to you before. One of a number of souls might be able to promote and also carry out this work, but a little bit of self-esteem, of useless fear, of human respect makes him incapable; and when grace finds the soul immersed in these weaknesses, it flies from him, and the priest remains but a man who operates as a man, and his works have only the effects which those of a man can have — not the effects which a priest animated by the spirit of Jesus Christ can have.

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The Difference Between the Virtues and the Divine Will.

I was thinking to myself that my sweet Jesus says so many grand, amazing, sublime, and wonderful things about the Will of God—yet it seems to me that souls have no idea worthy of His Will nor of the great impressions formed by the wonders that It contains. Rather, they seem to place It on the same level as the virtues, and perhaps they pay more attention to them than to the Most Holy Will of God. And my ever-beloved Jesus stirred within me, and said to me: “My daughter, do you want to know why? It is because they have not purified their palates and they are addicted to the ordinary goods of this base world—which are the virtues—and not to the celestial and divine food, which is My Will. Only the soul who counts the earth, material things, and even people as nothing—unless ordered in God—can taste this heavenly food. The virtues that they can practice on earth seldom exclude human intentions—from self-esteem to self-glory, from a love of showing off to human respect. All these intentions are like so many flavors to the ordinary palate of the soul; and many times the soul practices virtues more to taste these flavors than to produce the good that the virtue contains. This is why the virtues make more of an impression on the soul; because the human will always gains something. On the other hand, the first thing that My Will destroys is the human will; and It will not tolerate any human intention. My Will is Heavenly and It wants to infuse a heavenly, divine element in the soul. In this way, her own ego starves and begins to die, and as she feels herself dying and losing hope that any other food will be left for her to eat, she decides to take the food of My Will; and, as she takes It, since her palate is purified, she experiences the flavor of the food of My Will; and it is so good that she would not give up that taste, even at the cost of her own life.

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Then, He added: “My daughter, all human actions, such as working, eating, sleeping, suffering, experiences of joy or sorrow, are nothing but straw. Now, it is true that wheat cannot grow without straw. The straw protects the wheat from frost, from the burning rays of the sun, from water, and from all of the extremes of weather. It covers the wheat like a garment, and grows with it, and eventually separates itself when the wheat has matured, and has given life to the grain. And the straw achieves this separation and receives it by being beaten, after it has served to give life to the grain. The same thing happens with human acts. From

the smallest to the greatest they are all straw, and what flows from within them is the grain of My Will. And they serve in a wonderful way to hide and protect the grain of My Divine Will. And the less straw, the less grain one can hope to possess. It is a magical thing, My daughter, to see a human act that encloses within itself the purest grain and refulgent gold of My Divine Will. Like straw, they seem to take precedence over the grain, and they can boast, saying: 'It is true that we are straw, but we hide a Divine Will within ourselves, one that is greater than any grain. We remain at Its service, and we give It room to inform our actions.' On the other hand, if My Will does not flow within them, human acts remain nothing but straw—worthy to be burned, because they did not form within them the pure wheat that is worthy of the Heavenly Homeland.

"Now, in the same way that threshing separates the wheat from the straw, death separates human actions from the pure wheat of My Divine Will. Death breaks down what is human and shreds the garment that clothed the golden wheat of My Will. And, as it brings it out into the open, it makes known how much of what the soul possessed was wheat and how much was gold. Indeed, **it is not the actions that add value to one's being, but the will with which they are done.** How many actions seem to be beautiful and holy—but are found to be full of the filth of self-interest, the wind of pride and self-esteem; the rot of human respect; or the smoke of attachment to human things. How many things the straw of human acts conceals! But in the last day of life, when the threshing takes place and crushes the straw, death will make known all that men concealed within themselves.