



Benedictine Daughters of Divine Will



Vulnerability

Sister Grace Thomas is no more. Well, she's no longer known by that name anyway. On Friday, May 13th she entered the novitiate, receiving both a new habit and a new name – Sister Maria Jacinta of Our Lady, Queen and Mother of the Divine Will. As with all of our investment ceremonies, Mother Gabrielle Marie cut off Sister Jacinta's long, thick, curly locks. And, as usual, that touching moment brought many to tears. Together with Sister Maddalena, our community seamstress, Mother then began to cloth her nineteen-year-old spiritual daughter with the white tunic, scapular, and cape that she helped to sew...one of Sister Jacinta's many "firsts" since entering the convent. Once the cap and veil were properly adjusted, the new novice was then armed with her shield and weapon – a Benedictine medal around her neck and a rosary hanging on her left side. All the while, the rest of us sang the Magnificat in Italian as we watched our very childlike younger sister with great affection. Even Sister Jacinta's father was able to fly in from Georgia for the big day! Though a couple of mistakes were

made here and there, lightening the emotional ceremony with a bit of laughter, it all couldn't have gone better. But the most precious scene actually came after everything was all over and it was noticed by only a few.

We decided to hold the investment ceremony at the monastery of our brothers in Carpegna. In addition to one monk also entering the novitiate, two made their first vows and another his final vows on the same day. For that reason, our beloved bishop – Msgr. Andrea Turazzi – was there celebrating the mass. Afterwards, there was a great hustle and bustle of people outside the church in the monastery courtyard...lots of hugs and congratulating, conversations with family and friends, preparations for the meal afterwards and, of course, pictures. At one point, all of the monks who celebrated something that day gathered around the bishop



Sister Maria
Jacinta of
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along with Sister Jacinta for a photo. After it was done, a few of us sisters decided that we wanted a picture of just Bishop Andrea and Sister Jacinta. So our brothers quickly scattered while our naturally shy little sister stood there with a noticeable awkwardness, just her and one of the successors of the Apostles (probably another first for Jacinta). You could tell she didn't know what to do or how to pose or even how close she should get to the bishop. Sensing the young sister's discomfort, Bishop Andrea tenderly grabbed her hand in pulled it close to himself, leaving us with one of the sweetest pictures we've ever taken. A good shepherd sure does know his sheep!

Gosh, why was that moment so special? We all felt it and one sister has been pondering it very much ever since, until one day the answer came to her in prayer.

Vulnerability. The catalyst was vulnerability. Sister Jacinta could have faked confidence and poise or even used a little humor to mask her uneasiness (as most of us probably would have), but she didn't. And it was exactly her willingness to be awkward, feel uncomfortable, and appear weak in front of everyone that incited the bishop to rescue her with a noticeable affection. That's exactly what moved those of us blessed to witness it as well.

This simple and brief scene reaches into the deepest desires of our hearts. Who doesn't want to be loved for who they are, without the need to perform or strive? Who doesn't want to be nurtured and protected with paternal affection? Who doesn't want to be seen, understood, and delighted in? The funny thing is, these very things that we yearn for and spend our entire lives trying to grasp in disordered ways have already been given to us by our Father in Heaven. We were created for this kind of love, intimacy and security with God – the fulfillment of all our desires! Through the gift of the Divine Will, Jesus is calling us back to really *live* this purpose for which we were created, to redirect our hearts back to the Eternal Love from which we were formed, and to rediscover our identity as beloved children. Does this not sound like Heaven on earth?! What holds us back, then? Quite often, it's our fear and avoidance of vulnerability. If we're not ready to be vulnerable, we're not ready to let God be God in our lives and restore us to His true image and likeness. It's that simple.



So what does it mean to be vulnerable?



Exposure

If you right-click on the word vulnerability in a Word document, you can find a variety of synonyms. The second to last one on the list is "exposure." It reminded us of something we heard Christopher West say in an interview. He's pretty much the gold standard in explaining St. John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*. When discussing his own personal struggles in the spiritual life and battles with perfectionism, especially as a public figure whose flaws are on display for everyone to see, West shared a pearl of

wisdom from his own spiritual director: *"Holiness is not about having it all together. It's about having all of your miseries and weaknesses exposed to the mercy of God."*

That is very scary for most of us. Without even realizing it, we spend a great deal of time and energy hiding from ourselves, from others, and especially from God. Paralyzed by the fear of rejection and abandonment, we just can't handle looking at that dark and embarrassing stuff inside that causes us so much pain and shame. But being vulnerable means praying in those very places that make us cringe, opening up *everything* to Jesus for Him to enter. Though it's extremely difficult, something remarkable happens! Jesus swoops down and loves us right there, with a merciful, tender and fatherly love. What we find repulsive, He uses as a means to draw us closer to Himself and lead us into deeper conversion. And all this simply because we've given Christ access to the deepest recesses of our hearts, allowing Him to see us, forgive us, and transform us through the healing power of His love.



*"I am Mercy itself; therefore, I ask you to offer Me your misery and this very helplessness of yours and, in this way, you will **delight My Heart.**"* (Dairy of St. Maria Faustina Kowalska, #1775)

"Fix your gaze on the Lord and your face will grow bright, you will never hang your head in shame. A pauper calls out and the Lord hears, saves him from all his troubles...O taste and see that the Lord is good! How blessed are those who take refuge in Him!" (Psalm 34:5-6,8)



Nakedness

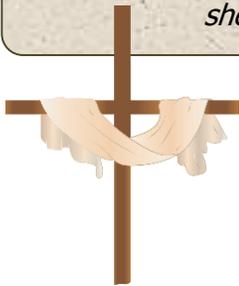


There is nothing more vulnerable for the human body than to be naked. Though it seems hard to imagine, it's even more difficult, more vulnerable for the soul to be naked. Since the Fall of Adam and Eve, man has done nothing but try to cover himself up. It started with fig leaves, but in our massive insecurity, we're now decked out in entire hazmat suits. Original sin, along with all of our subsequent sins, has given us an acute awareness that we fall far short of who God intended us to be. That painful reality of "I am not enough" festers deep within our hearts until pride steps in to save the day...or so we think. We cover our nakedness with all sorts of things to make us feel safe and secure, to make us feel more beautiful, and ultimately to convince ourselves, others and God that we are loveable:

Perfectionism, workaholic behaviors, the seeking of authority or control. Comparing ourselves with others, criticizing, competing. Vanity and people-pleasing. Asserting our strength and abilities. Scrupulosity, justifications, unhealthy self-reflections. Maybe we've used our talents or even holy practices in order to prove our worthiness rather than glorify the Lord.

The irony of it is, the more we self-protect in this way, the more we actually feed our insecurities and pride, rendering ourselves slaves to the human will. And slaves always live in fear and anxiety, poorly dressed and thirsting for love and freedom. The only solution is getting naked, allowing God to strip us little by little of that false self we have clothed ourselves with. Yes, it can be painful and humiliating, but if we're willing to be just that vulnerable, our good and faithful Father will neither abandon nor forsake us. He will instead clothe us with His own Son, revealing the true beauty and dignity we possess when our lives are lived in Christ. And after unraveling everything that this broken world and our fallen human nature has taught us over the years, we finally come to realize one important thing: We don't have to be enough because Jesus already is!

"My daughter, the more the soul strips herself of herself, the more I clothe her with Myself. The more she believes she can do nothing, the more I act in her and do everything."¹



"If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?" (Mark 8:34-36)

Littleness

There are a few ways we can equate littleness with vulnerability. Weakness, for example. Little people are ok with being weak because they know, like St. Paul, that the power of Christ is made perfect in their weakness (2 Cor 12:9). Little ones are also poor...and happy in their poverty.

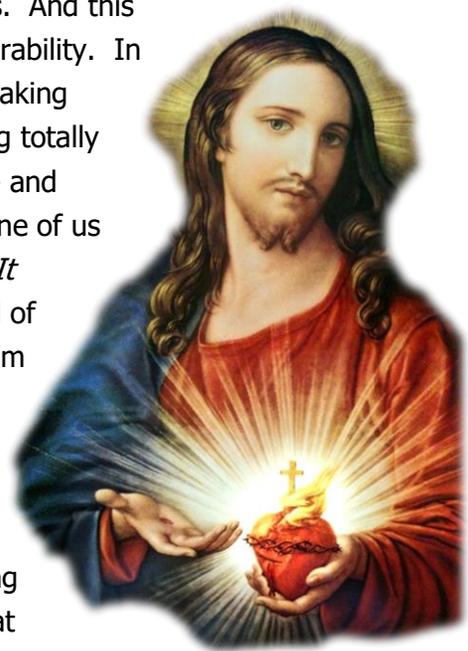


Continuous surrender and recognition of our nothingness does make us completely vulnerable and needy, but it also teaches us total reliance on God...who can never be outdone in generosity. Look at what Jesus tells Luisa: *"Life and holiness consist of two acts: God giving His Will and man receiving it. And after he has formed in himself the life of that act of Divine Will which he has received, he must give it back as an act of his will, so as to receive it again – to give and receive, receive and give. Everything depends on this. God could give nothing more to man than the continuous act of His Will. Man could give nothing more to God – inasmuch as it is possible for a creature – than His Divine Will received within himself for the formation of divine life in him."* (Vol. 29, 10/26/1931)

Little children are also entirely, one-hundred percent themselves. One of the sisters' spiritual directors before entering the convent once told her that the best way we can fulfill God's Will is by being who we

¹ From the diary of the Servant of God, Luisa Piccarreta, *Book of Heaven*, Vol. 12, 6/14/1917. See also Vol. 16, 1/14/1924, for further meditation on this topic.

are...in other words, being real and sincere, without wearing any masks. And this starts by speaking heart to heart with the Lord in all sincerity and vulnerability. In fact, this is one of the purposes of the Sacred Heart devotion - Jesus making Himself totally vulnerable with us so that we may feel comfortable being totally vulnerable with Him. Holding out the tender place where all of His love and sorrows and yearnings are concentrated, it's as if He's saying to each one of us personally: *"Don't be afraid. This Heart of mine is human and divine. It understands you completely and will never reject you."* This is the kind of relationship God wants to have with you, one in which you belong to Him and He belongs to you in perfect trust – with nothing hidden or held back.



So in prayer, hold out your heart before Jesus. Show him the love and also the wounds that may dwell there. Tell Him everything – your doubts, fears, hurts, worries, joys, pains, or whatever may be filling it in that moment. He cares about it all so much! But don't do it so that Jesus will solve your problems (though He may) or to receive some great insight in prayer (though you may get one) or even to be relieved of some suffering (though it may happen). Do it simply for the sake of intimacy. And as with Sister Jacinta and Bishop Andrea, sweet Jesus will be enamored by our vulnerability and draw us ever closer to His Heart.

One of the most edifying things about reading Luisa's diary is witnessing how vulnerable, intimate, and *real*/she was with the Lord. Oh boy, was she real! If you'd like to start reading her Divine Will writings, drop us an email and we'll get you everything you need: daughtersofdivinewill@gmail.com.



A snapshot of our last few months



Sister Monica Frank, our newest postulant from San Diego, with Sister Maria Jacinta.

← (left to right) Sr. Monica, soon-to-be Sr. Jacinta, and Sr. Dora on their first Holy Thursday as Benedictine Daughters.





We found this little guy hanging out in the flowers outside our front door. Now Sister Scholastica can add *hedgehog* to her résumé of rescued animals.



Visiting the tomb of our patroness – Servant of God, Luisa Piccarreta



Talamello



More pics from the big day



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**Benedictine Daughters of Divine Will
P.O. Box 1002
Hanceville, AL 35077**

Thank you for your goodness to us! May God reward you a hundred-fold in His Most Holy Will. Have a great summer and keep praying for us. We never stop praying for you!