

Would I Live Differently If I Knew This Was My Final Earthtime Moment ...

ON THE WAY TO PERSONAL RESURRECTION ...

ONE LIFETIME TO LIVE,

DAY BY DAY,

HOUR BY HOUR,

MOMENT BY MOMENT

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Would I Live Differently If I Knew This Was My Final Earthtime Moment ...

*Dedicated to Missionaries: Here, There, Worldwide,
Who Are Privileged To Tell the Resurrection Story*

To those who have never heard it told before

Trusting in the Mercy & Goodness of God, we pray:

“May First Evangelizers be forever blessed!”

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Would I Live Differently If I Knew This Was My Final Earthtime Moment ...

PREFACE

A friend of mine, a pastor and priest from the Pittsburgh Diocese, recently went to Nigeria, East Africa, hoping to experience “first evangelizing”. He found himself one sunny African day, standing under a tree, before a group of teens, members of the Maassai Tribe. (The Maassai are herders, a wandering tribe, genetically unusually tall, and they always seem to be chewing on the gummy bark of the beetle juice tree, that dominates the countryside.) There are no tv’s, no classrooms, no shopping Malls in the area, and so, when the youth learned that a white-faced, holy man from America wanted to talk with them, they gathered under the tree, and sat on the ground in front of him. They did so mostly out of curiosity; it had little to do with any eagerness on their part to hear about God. Their elders had told them about the one god in the spirit world, and about the respect they ought to have for god who manifested in the forces of nature, sometimes gentle and generous; sometimes bold and destructive. Whatever the reason, the youth were sitting there, ready and waiting to hear what this white man from America wanted to say to them.

Fr. Donald smiled. ...

This was what he had come thousands of miles to do. He began to tell the story of Christ, Who lived and walked and talked and did good things for all whom He met on His lifetime journey. But as Word of Christ’s message and His actions of unconditional love and mercy spread, and the crowds that followed Him grew larger, those who held power in that part of the world began to fear Him. Who is this man, Who calls Himself the Son of God? Is this man, not the son of a simple carpenter?

Those who held power in that part of the world decided that this Man must die. He needed to be stopped, and soon. So they held a mock trial, and condemned Him to die on the Cross. To be nailed to a Cross was the worst way to die at that time, in that part of the world.

Christ read the hearts of those in power. He let them put Him to death. He did so because He wanted to show them, once and for all, that He was God, and that neither the forces of nature, nor the trickery and cunning of those who ruled had power over Him. He embraced the death He was born to die, in order - that the message of mercy and love would be told - the message that personal resurrection, as promised, would be the gift He has prepared for each of us.

So the soldiers whipped Him, and they made Him walk a long way, to the highest hill in the area, carrying a heavy wooden cross, - the cross to which they would nail Him.

He bled. He fell. He met His pained and grieving mother along the way. He saw His friends, those Whom he had taught and helped and healed, - hiding midst the crowd along the way, too afraid in this moment to step forward to defend Him.

On a hilltop, the soldiers nailed Him to the cross; to the cross that He had carried through the streets of the town. After three hours of unspeakable pain and suffering, He died.

Shortly thereafter, several friends came and hurriedly took His lifeless body down from the cross, and they placed Him in a grave, - a grave in a hollowed-out rock, that one of them had earlier prepared for himself. Quickly, they rolled a large stone in front of the opening to the grave ... probably to prevent the animals from finding His body, or to prevent some of His enemies from coming to steal His body. They intended to ask the women to return to His grave at sunrise, to oil and perfume the body, - which, in the Jewish faith, is a

ritual service for the dead. (By way of His human birth to His Jewish mother, Mary, - Christ was born, a Jew.)

So when the women returned to the grave site in the morning with the oils and the perfumes, they were startled. They were frightened. The huge stone at the door of the grave was rolled aside. The body of Christ was not there.

They quickly ran to tell His friends that His body was not there. But one of the women, named Mary, remained; she was wandering through the garden, looking for some sign of His body. And lo and behold, she saw Him. Standing before her, radiant and beautiful and very much alive, was the Christ. "I am risen as I said ... "

At that point in the story, a six-foot, very tall young Maassai jumped up from the ground, and said, He what? He rose from the dead! He is alive!

Needless to say, the lesson ended in that moment, even as the youth present became excited; animated. Their voices rose – first in disbelief; then quieted into a subdued moment of joy & belief.

Yes, repeated the young, white man priest above the noise of their excitement, - He rose from the dead. He is alive, and He has made the promise, many times over, that you and I, once we die, will die no more. We, too, will resurrect. We will live forever.

Would that we all could experience such a "first evangelizing" moment. The priest evangelizer from America did. A few weeks later, he returned to his Parish in Pittsburgh. But now, with new eyes, with new understanding, he began to appreciate what a lifetime journey is all about; he began to live differently ... knowing that each day, each hour, each moment, he - and you and I - are on the way to our own personal Resurrection.

CHAPTER ONE: LIVING A LIFE OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

It is my thesis in this writing that you and I, that the whole of humanity, would live differently if we really understood the promise made to us by the Risen Christ. His resurrection gave credibility to His Promise of our own personal resurrection; it gave indisputable evidence that, with God, the impossible is possible. Many times in His ministry, He spoke of the Promise, to each and all, of life after death; of life forever. ... In His own Resurrection moment, He showed forth, for all to see, that His Word is true; that His Word is living; that His Promise to each of us will come to pass. For, of each of us, "it will, one day, be said: he/she is Risen!"

But first, there is a lifetime to live: my lifetime, and your lifetime. Would I live differently if I was conscious, every step of the way, that any day, any moment, any hour could be the moment of my personal death; my personal Resurrection?

We need only look to the gospel to see what such a lifetime would look like. In the all-knowing mind of Christ-God, He knew that over thirty-three years of life, He was on the way to His Resurrection. How did He live each day, each moment, each hour? The gospel texts tell us. Read there the biography of His earthtime journey.

If you will, you can focus on one or other of the healing or miracle stories. Underlying each and all of these accounts, what stands out is His unconditional love.

He did not hesitate to stand tall beside the woman who committed adultery. Nor did He hesitate to eat a meal at

the home of the taxpayer, despised by many for his crafty ways of extorting money from the poorest of poor.

Whether meeting with sinners or saints; with the sincere or the hypercritical, Christ's unconditional love for one and all prevailed.

What might such an unconditional love – try if we would to emulate it – look like in our twenty-first century world?

Our thinking and our way of acting every day, every moment, every hour is divisive at best. Even as we oppose abortion and adamantly claim to be pro life, we pass by the woman on the corner, begging for food for her children.

Even as we celebrate Black History and its heroes, we vehemently oppose the black family, that would come to live in our neighborhood. And the Vietnamese or Latinos also know that they are not unconditionally welcomed. We stereotype, and sometimes even shun, folks who come from different countries or cultures, other than our own.

How would Christ act in our twentieth century world? Ever and always, He loves each and every person. He knows each of us by name. Personal Resurrection is a promise made to each and all.

Would that His example of Unconditional Love would prevail among us. It can and it will, given that we live each day, knowing that even as we are loved unconditionally by Christ, so is the neighbor so loved. Though the neighbor's skin be white, yellow, black or red, we are one human family. And, each and all, (yes, even the neighbors from the different cultures and countries whom we shunned in our human lifetime; yes, even the neighbor, - the poor whom we all too often pass on the street corner, as we march by in protest of a cause we support), - all of us, we are on the way to personal Resurrection; on the way to a life together as one family, - with God forever!

CHAPTER TWO: LIVING A LIFE OF FORGIVING, EVEN AS WE ARE FORGIVEN

Do you remember His last words, just before His last moment of human, earthtime life?

With parched lips, out of the depths of the strength of His enduring spirit of unconditional love and absolute forgiveness, He whispered, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” Though they didn’t know, He knew. He knew that the executioners were doing the will of those in power. He also knew that they were but instruments unknowingly doing His Will, bringing Him moments closer to His Resurrection, and to the fulfillment of His Promise of personal resurrection for one and all; personal resurrection for the whole of humanity.

This quality and depth of forgiveness, this inner courage to risk all and to forgive, doesn’t just happen. Again, read the gospel texts; especially read and re-read the parables.

The Good Shepherd goes looking for the one who doesn’t even yet know that he needs forgiveness.

The Prodigal Son is welcomed by his father, who for many years, has stood on the hilltop, hoping and waiting to see his son, who knows he has sinned, return home.

Read the story of the adulterous woman, who felt and knew she should be condemned. She waited to be stoned; she waited to be publicly condemned. But to her, after her accusers were dismissed, He says, “Go and sin no more.”

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Then there is the story of Mary Magdalen, the publicly denounced, - the abused and used, prostitute. Weeping and kneeling before Him, she oiled and perfumed His feet.

He loved her so very much ... probably because, though she had sinned the most, He knew her heart; He knew her repentance was truly genuine and profound.

Then there is the gospel story of the thief, tied to a wooden cross, that stood on the hillside beside the cross to which Christ was nailed. Christ's response of forgiveness of the thief, - His response to the faith and repentance of the thief, - is absolute. "This day you will be with Me in Paradise."

Always, Christ lived and acted from out of a pure and forgiving heart. And it is that Sacred Heart, that is there for us when we would be forgiven for our trespasses (our flaws, our sins, our imperfections). And it is there, leaning on that Sacred Heart, that we too can learn to forgive.

Why so? Because loving neighbor with an unconditional love, and forgiving neighbor even as we are forgiven by Christ – that's what it takes - to be consciously and with intent, ever on the way to our own personal resurrection.

It was always so in the human lifetime of Christ, on the way to His own Resurrection moment in human history. May it be so for you and for me; for us all.

CHAPTER THREE: LIVING A LIFE, EVER AWARE OF HIS ANIMATING PRESENCE WITHIN SELF

Yes, that's what it takes. To live a resurrection-focused lifetime, it takes a living, personal relationship with Christ's animating presence within self.

We teach, and we know, that from the moment of Baptism, the presence of Christ is with us. Our natural, human life is graced with the divine life of Christ. He becomes present within self, and remains with self, - from that first baptismal moment till our personal resurrection moment.

But, do we know it? Do we live like we know it? Do we care? Do we hear Him speaking with us through the happy and sad moments we experience in our lifetime? Do we speak with Him about our worries, our problems, our hopes, our dreams? Do we try to discern what it is that He wants from us; that He wants for us?

Do we really believe that in all the sacramental moments, that we celebrate over our lifetime, that His presence within self increases and intensifies; do we give praise and thanks for each such gifted experience. Where and when does this giftedness happen, you ask? At every Mass attended, with every Communion received, with every Confession made, He is ever more present within.

Do we talk with Him as a friend? I often tell the story about a lady I met in the ICU department in the local Arlington, VA hospital. As I was walking through the department, stopping to visit here and there, a lady waved me into her room. Her weakened voice said, "I'm a Methodist, and I am

dying.” (It was clear that she knew I was a Catholic Sister, and the expression on her face seemed to wonder why I would even stop and visit with her.) I smiled and said something like, “I’m ecumenical. God is God for all humanity.” She went on. “I know I’m dying, and it’s ok. I lived as a good Methodist. But when I cross over, God won’t know me. He’s so busy taking care of the rest of the world.”

“Mildred,” I said, “put your hand on your heart. Can you feel your heartbeat? If you can, know that God is present with us in this moment. He has walked with you every moment of your lifetime. He knows you by name. And when you cross over today, He will be waiting with a word of welcome.” “Welcome, Mildred, you will hear Him say.”

Mildred smiled. So glad to hear this. Together, we then prayed. We asked pardon for anything in the past that may have offended Him. We asked for peace and joy in these final lifetime moments, - confident that the fullness of mercy and forgiveness would be expressed soon – in Mildred’s personal resurrection. (A few hours later, I checked back to see how Mildred was doing. She had crossed over into eternal life, - with a most beautiful smile on her face.)

Is God for you just a duty to do – A God Who asks you to attend Mass on Sunday, with maybe a prayer once in a while on the weekdays? Or is God for you a 24/7 God? Is remembering Him something that is always with you - just like your heartbeat is always with you?

Is God your best friend? He’s given you a whole lifetime to get ready to be with Him forever. What are you doing to deepen your friendship with Him?

**Do you see Him in your neighbor?
Do you see Him in the poor?**

**Do you see Him in each and all, no matter
the color of their skin?
Do you talk with Him, always and everywhere?**

**He is a patient friend ...
He's always there for you.
Are you there for Him? Always? Sometimes? Never?**

**Does He talk with you? Perhaps not in words, but He does
talk with you in the inspirations and movements within self
that you, and all of us, experience.**

**Recently, I was in the cashier's line in a local grocery store.
I was there to check out and pay for a few cans of soup, a
quart of milk and a loaf of bread that I wished to purchase.
It was a long line, and as usually happens, the lady behind
me smiled and said, "Hello, Sister. I see you are shopping
early this morning." "Oh," I said, these aren't for me. They
are some groceries for an elderly friend, who is
homebound." We continued to chat.**

**When it was my turn to check out the groceries, the lady
behind me laid a "rose" alongside my purchases, and said to
the cashier, "I'll pay for all of this." She did, and as I
thanked her, she said, "I receive more than I give in
moments like this." Her response was from her heart; it
was her response to God's presence within herself. (I don't
even know her name, but I know that God does. He knows
each of us, by name.)**

**Another true story I love to tell, is the story of a young man,
now an ordained priest. As he told it, the young man left his
office one evening and was on the way home. He kept
hearing within himself something like, "Stop and buy a
gallon of milk." Nonsense, he thought. I live alone and I
never would need or buy a gallon of milk. But the thought
persisted. He couldn't shake it away.**

So as he passed a grocery store, he stopped and bought a gallon of milk. Then, as he continued to drive home, he felt moved to turn left, when he knew his home was on the right. By this time, he was beginning to respond, not knowing why. He felt moved to stop at a house at the end of the block; a house that was all dark; no lights. Why not, he thought. This whole evening has been somewhat weird. So he took the gallon of milk, and walked up to the door of the house with no lights on. A man opened the door, and both men could hear a baby crying in the background. The man then explained, "We have no milk for the baby, and I lost my job. So our heat and lights have been turned off."

The young man left the gallon of milk, and he emptied his pockets of any money he had with him. ... For several days and weeks after, he went back to that home and tried to do what he could for his new friends.

But in so doing, he received much more than he gave. Today he is an ordained priest. The animating presence of God within brought him to the priesthood : God did so with an inner urge to purchase a gallon of milk.

CHAPTER FOUR: LIVING A LIFE OF TRUST IN HIM

When everything is going well, it is easy to trust. It is equally easy to tell a friend, who is troubled, to trust.

But trust, at its deepest level, asks that we, when trouble comes our way, and it will, that we embrace the problem, the difficulty, the crisis that would seem to overwhelm us. We read in the lives of saints that they actually rejoiced when confronted with misunderstandings, with poor health, with suffering in its many forms.

To trust is way beyond words. Trust comes from an abiding conviction that God's will is being done; that He never asks us to bear more than we can sustain; that the suffering He sends is His way of leading us on to that final earthtime moment of our personal resurrection.

On the way to His death on the Cross, Christ met His mother Mary. No words were spoken. But Heart to Heart, volumes were said. Mary's trust in Him was way beyond words.

Mary knew her Son well. She had experienced the visit of the Angel at the Annunciation. She heard the words of Elizabeth when she visited her. Both women pregnant with children to be born, who were chosen from the beginning of time, to bring the world closer to the global transforming moment of His Resurrection in human history. Elizabeth said, "How is it that the mother of my Lord would come to visit me?"

Two very ordinary women chosen from all eternity to be extraordinary in their pregnancy; in their motherhood; in their trust. “Be it done to me according to Your Word.”

At this point in this writing, I’d like to talk about my cousin, Saint Faustina Kowalska (1905-1938). She was a farmer’s daughter, one of ten children, very poor, and only third grade educated.

Yet, she was chosen to be the Risen Christ’s secretary; to be His messenger of Mercy; she was asked to remind humanity of His unconditional love and mercy. She was asked to TRUST in fullest measure.

In 1931, Sr. Faustina, a young woman in the Convent of the Sisters of Divine Mercy in Krakow, Poland, twenty-six years old, was in her room, kneeling by her bedside, saying her evening prayers. In that moment, the Risen Christ came and stood before her. For the next seven years, He often would come and always, His message was simple: “TRUST. I AM WITH YOU, EVERY STEP OF THE WAY.”

“Have the Image of Me, as the Risen Christ, have this Image painted and let it be displayed in every home and in every place of worship,” He said.

“I don’t even know how to draw. I only went to third grade,” she replied. Trust, His smile said. She did.

Very early on, she had learned to TRUST. And even in Heaven today, she TRUSTS that His Word will come to pass. It will. And one day, every home and every place of worship will display the Image of the Risen Christ. No matter how long it takes in earthtime, His Will will be done! For God, it’s eternally NOW. No past, no present, no future, - just an eternal NOW.

“Have the Sunday after Easter restored to the Liturgical Church Calendar as the Feast of Divine Mercy,” He said.

“How can I ask the Pope in Rome to restore this Feast to the Liturgical Calendar? I am here in the convent in Krakow, Poland. I have no way and no money to go to Rome,” she said. Trust, His eyes said. She did.

In 1978, forty years after her death in 1938, a young man, who grew up in a farming village not far from where she was born, heard the story of her life and the message from Christ that she received — the message of Divine Mercy and His promise of personal resurrection for one and all. The young man believed. He, too, “Trusted”. So it was that in the year, 2000, sixty-two years after St. Faustina’s death, that Pope John Paul II canonized St. Faustina, and declared that the Sunday after Easter, would henceforth be celebrated in the universal Church as Divine Mercy Sunday. Trust. She did, and she continues to do.

“Write in your notebook (in one of six notebooks found in her room when Sr. Faustina died in 1938) the intentions for the Novena of Prayer to be said nine days before Divine Mercy Sunday, from Good Friday to the Saturday after Easter.” He said.

He spoke the words. And with His hand guiding hers, she wrote.: (In the original notebooks, found after her death, she wrote phonetically and in the dialect of her Polish village; she really couldn’t spell well.)

First Day:

“Today, bring to Me all mankind, especially all sinners, and immerse them in the ocean of My mercy.”

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Second Day:

“Today, bring to Me the souls of priests and religious, and immerse them in My unfathomable mercy.”

Third Day:

“Today, bring to Me all devout and faithful souls, and immerse them in the ocean of My mercy.”

Fourth Day:

“Today, bring to me those who do not believe in God and those who do not yet know Me.”

Fifth Day:

“Today, bring to Me the souls of those who have separated themselves from the Church.”

Sixth Day:

“Today, bring to Me the meek and humble souls and the souls of little children, and immerse them in My mercy.”

Seventh Day:

“Today, bring to Me the souls who especially venerate and glorify My Mercy and immerse them in My mercy.”

Eighth Day:

“Today, bring to me the souls who are detained in purgatory and immerse them in the abyss of My mercy.”

Ninth Day:

“Today, bring to Me souls who have become lukewarm, and immerse them in the abyss of My mercy.”

So it was that Faustina wrote these intentions in her notebook; intentions given to her by Christ on one of His visits to her (1931-1938); intentions for the nine days of prayer; intentions for humanity to read, to reflect upon, and to pray about during the Novena of Prayer, the nine days that precede Divine Mercy Sunday.

These intentions tell us something of what is on the Mind of God, as He continues to guide humanity, on the way to humanity's Resurrection.

Trust. She did. And in Heaven today, very near to the Heart of the Risen Christ, her friend, St. Faustina continues to pray for us all. (St. Faustina was the first to say the Novena of Prayer in the Chapel of the convent in Krakow, Poland. In that Chapel, where she spent many hours in prayer, her body, transferred from the convent cemetery in the valley, is now laid to rest under the side altar.)

**CHAPTER FIVE:
LIVING A LIFE:
RECEIVING HIS
GRACES, BLESSINGS,
HEALING MIRACLES,
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PERSONAL RESURRECTION,**

There is little doubt that the Risen Christ chose St. Faustina to be His messenger of mercy. When I read her Notebooks, now published as the *Diary of St. Faustina*, I was awed by the theological and philosophical truths of the Faith, that are found in her writing. Most of what I know about God, and the things of God, come from years of formal study at several universities. I learned from Franciscan, Jesuit, Dominican, and the Spiritan Holy Ghost Fathers, professors, excellent teachers all, and I also learned from the self-study of the writings of the Theologians and Sainted Doctors of the Church. So to learn yet more, from this third grade educated farmer's daughter, my cousin, comes as a bit of a surprise. Yet, admittedly, it is so.

And equally surprising is that there have been and are many accounts of graces, blessings and healing miracles, attributed to prayers said in her name, and requesting her intercession with the Risen Christ, she knew so well.

We all know the story of Father Ron Pytel, Pastor of Holy Rosary Church in Baltimore, Maryland. In 1995, Father was given less than a month to live by the renowned cardiologist who was his physician. His heart was weakened and damaged beyond surgical repair.

When they heard this news, his Parish Community prayed. They prayed the Mercy Chaplet. They asked, in Faustina's name and through her intercession, that he be granted a miracle of healing. ... The rest is history. Father Ron Pytel, a personal friend of mine, lived well into the twenty-first century. At the altar in Rome, in April, 2000, as Pope John Paul II pronounced the words of the canonization of St. Faustina, Father Ron Pytel was there at the Pope's side, healthy and well, ready and eager to give praise and thanks for the miracle of healing he experienced.

The other major miracle, well documented, that led to the canonization of St. Faustina, is that of Maureen Dignan. Her condition, of hemolytic anemia and the edema that resulted, had already led to the amputation of one of her legs. If the condition remained unhealed, her death was certain; imminent. So, in 1981, with a great deal of trust on her part, she was taken by plane from Massachusetts, where she lives, - to Krakow, Poland. That was no small feat on the part of her husband and her confessor. It was winter, and winters in Poland can be long and tough. But somehow, her companions maneuvered her wheelchair from the top of the hill in Krakow, Poland, where the convent is located, to the valley below where at that time, Sister Faustina had been buried. (Faustina's body has since been transferred and placed under the side altar in the main Chapel of the Convent.) ... Again, the rest is history. Maureen's health was instantaneously restored when her wheelchair was rolled onto the grave of St. Faustina. Even as I write this today, 2010, she is alive and well, and continues giving praise as she tells the story of her miracle of healing.

These and many more miracles stories can be told. But that's not what the Risen Christ, St. Faustina and her friend, Pope John Paul II, are all about. That isn't the essence of the Divine Mercy message.

Then, what is, you ask? It's a reminder, asking each of us to develop a personal relationship with and awareness of Christ's presence within self. God knows your need long before you pray and ask for His graces, blessings and miracles of healing. His intervention in your life will happen in accord with His will.

So much rests on the extent to which you believe and trust. There's no doubt in my own mind that Father Ron Pytel had an ongoing, personal relationship with Christ, - both before, during and after his miracle healing.

And the same can be said of Maureen Dignan. She was praying for a miracle at a time when Sr. Faustina was not yet canonized; when the canonization of Sr. Faustina was not yet on the human horizon. It took a great deal of faith to make that leap of faith : to go on a wheelchair, to go from her home in Massachusetts, to pray at the grave site of this uneducated, farmer's daughter in a distant convent cemetery, somewhere in Krakow, Poland.

One miracle that comes to mind that, I think, further demonstrates the depth of faith and trust that the one who prays for graces, blessings and miracles of healing needs: a woman whose life depended on going bi-weekly for dialysis decided to give up. It wasn't worth all that bother. She was tired. She sensed her caretakers were tired. Having made this decision, she phoned and asked for prayer.

We talked, but her attitude was without faith. Try as I might, I knew my words were futile. I couldn't reach her; I couldn't change that basic attitude, "I give up. I'm tired," she repeatedly said.

So I prayed and asked a few friends to pray for her, and then it came to me to phone Fr. Ron Pytel, who had just recently experienced a miracle healing. Having described the situation, I asked him to phone her and to pray with her.

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... Several hours later, the lady phoned. Her attitude was transformed. She said that, after talking with Fr. Ron Pytel, she had turned her life over to God and to St. Faustina. ... The rest is history. The lady went for dialysis.

Exactly two weeks later, the National Organ Transplant Center phoned and informed her that she was a match to receive a new kidney. She was. She did. And she lived for seven years after, giving praise and thanks to God and to St. Faustina.

So it is, that whether we are praying for another, or praying for oneself, both the one praying and the one being prayed for need to live, - knowing that each and all are on the way to personal resurrection. Both need to pray, "Thy will be done." Graces, blessings, miracles of healing or no : His will is being done.

CHAPTER SIX: LIVING A LIFE OF: PRAISE, THANKS AND JOY!

As I write this, we are being beset with a snowstorm, that is predicted to leave us with more than twenty-four inches of snow. How can you speak of joy, you might be asking? All that snow is creating a whole lot of problems, - the least of which is cleaning the car and the driveway.

It all depends on one's attitude. We either see the Earthsleep we are experiencing (as distinct from an Earthquake) as either an obstacle or a blessing. Our attitude, toward the snow piling up before our eyes, hurts or helps us. It doesn't change the nature of the twenty-four plus inches of snow out there, waiting to be moved aside, as we prepare to drive to work or school in the days to come.

So it is, with each and every life situation. Complex or simple, no situation changes because we growl and groan. It's there. It's the challenge we face, on the way to personal resurrection, this day, this hour, this moment. It will be there for us to resolve whether we growl and groan, or whether we embrace it with peace, equanimity and joy, as today's challenge. We forget that "this too shall pass."

In the Apostolic texts, we read of situations where, the saints embraced martyrdom and death, with exceeding joy.

We read:

**: of the Apostle Matthew:
He suffered martyrdom in Ethiopia, killed by a sword wound.**

: of the Apostle Mark:

He died in Alexandria, Egypt, after being dragged by horses through the streets until he was dead.

: of the Apostle Luke

He was hanged in Greece as a result of his tremendous preaching.

: of the Apostle John

He faced martyrdom when he was boiled in a huge basin of oil during a wave of persecution in Rome. However, he was miraculously delivered from death. John was then sentenced to the mines on the prison island of Patmos, where he wrote his prophetic Book of Revelation. The apostle John was later freed and returned to serve as Bishop of Edessa in modern Turkey. He died as an old man, the only apostle to die, without wearing a martyr's crown.

: of the Apostle Peter

He was crucified upside down on an x-shaped cross. According to church tradition it was because he told his tormentors that he felt unworthy to die in the same way that Jesus Christ had died.

: of the Apostle James

The leader of the church in Jerusalem, was thrown over a hundred feet down from the southeast pinnacle of the Temple when he refused to deny his faith in Christ. When they discovered that he survived the fall, his enemies beat James to death with clubs.

: of the Apostle James the Great

Son of Zebedee, James was a fisherman by trade when Jesus called him to a lifetime of ministry. As a strong leader

of the church, James was ultimately beheaded at Jerusalem. The Roman officer who guarded James watched, amazed, as James defended his faith at his trial. Later, the officer walked beside James to the place of execution. Overcome by conviction, he declared his new faith to the judge and knelt beside James to accept beheading as a Christian.

: of the Apostle Bartholomew

Also known as Nathaniel, he was a missionary to Asia. He witnessed for our Lord in present day Turkey. Bartholomew was martyred for his preaching in Armenia, where he was flayed to death by a whip.

: of the Apostle Andrew

He was crucified on an x-shaped cross in Patras, Greece .. After being whipped severely by seven soldiers, they tied his body to the cross with cords, to prolong his agony. His followers reported that, when he was led toward the cross, Andrew saluted it in these words: 'I have long desired and expected this happy hour. The cross has been consecrated by the body of Christ hanging on it.' He continued to preach to his tormentors for two days until he expired.

: of the Apostle Thomas

He was stabbed with a spear in India during one of his missionary trips to establish the church in the sub-continent.

: of the Apostle Jude

He was killed with arrows when he refused to deny his faith in Christ.

: of the Apostle Matthias

The apostle, chosen to replace the traitor Judas Iscariot, was stoned and then beheaded.

These are the Apostles, the saints of early Church History. Each embraced death; of each, it is written, that they did so with exceeding joy.

But contemporary saints are not less capable of joy in suffering moments. (St. Faustina, suffering many years with asthma, pneumonia, then tuberculosis, prophetically announced, with exceeding joy, - on the morning of her death in 1938 – “that this is the day I will die”. In the evening of that day, October 5, 1938, she crossed over into the arms of her Friend and Life Companion, the Risen Christ.)

An attitude of joy transforms the most difficult challenge into an experience, that, if we allow it to do so, can remind us that God is very near. He is nearer, - the tougher the challenge.

**CHAPTER SEVEN:
LIVING A LIFE,
EACH DAY, EACH HOUR,
EACH MOMENT -
ANTICIPATING HIS PROMISE
OF THE FULLNESS OF MERCY,
EXPRESSED IN THE GIFT OF
PERSONAL RESURRECTION
FOR EACH AND FOR ALL.**

It would make a difference, it would make for a far better and happier world, if each of us, you and I, lived a personal resurrection-focussed life.

If we awakened each morning and reminded self that this day will bring us one day closer to our personal resurrection, to our being with God forever – what joy! What a joyful thought with which to begin the day.

Our moments and our hours of each day would then cry out to us to fill them with good things; with God-remembering things.

It doesn't mean that we would do extraordinary things that day, but it does mean that we would do ordinary things, extra-ordinarily well.

Our parents lived this way. They had no fear of death. In life, they lived with God. In death, they would just continue to do so.

At the time, as a child growing up, I didn't understand this very well. But now, looking back, I remember. I remember how my mother would bake bread every day. (We were

seven children; always hungry.) She would knead that dough, let it rise, and then knead it again. When the texture was just right, she would pat the dough into the baking pans.

Then, as we watched, she would make the Sign of the Cross over each pan of bread, and then she would place the pans into the oven. When the bread was baked and golden brown, she would open the oven and we would hear her say, “*Chvala Bohu!*” “*Praise God.*”

To this day I hear her words echoing deep within me, and I find myself echoing them in remembrance, 24/7.

Maybe that’s what life is all about. It’s not about asking and receiving; nor is it about doing. It’s about giving praise and thanks for all the giftedness, - the graces, blessings, healing miracles, - that each day brings. It’s about knowing that the Risen Christ has made a promise to each and all. He has assured that we will never die; that the joy we give and receive in our earthtime life will never end.

There is more. Our earthlife joy will only intensify in our life beyond time, even as our Praise and Thanks will also continue to intensify and to sound forth – eternally.

It was that way for my cousin, St. Faustina. She didn’t have much. She didn’t do much.

But she believed. She trusted. And, as she washed the dishes and baked the bread, her heart was singing her Praise & Thanks to the Risen Christ, in anticipation of the Personal Resurrection, the forever life with Him, that He promised would come to pass for her; for all humanity.

The Risen Christ’s Promise of the fullness of His Mercy, expressed in His gift and promise to each of us, - the promise of our personal resurrection, - is the animating Good News of the gospel. It is why, if we understood and

Would I Live Differently If I Knew This Was My Final Earthtime Moment ...

really hear His message and promise in the gospel text, and in His message to St. Faustina in 1931, we would live differently.

We would go about doing good; His Kingdom would, sooner, rather than later, be incarnated on earth, even as it is in Heaven.

And like the Maasai youth, we would jump with joy and want to tell everyone we met, “He is Risen.

He is alive, and He has made the promise, many times over, that you and I, once we die, will die no more. We, too, will resurrect. We will live forever.

EPILOGUE: READERS RESPOND ...

Perhaps, just to test the waters and to discern whether readers understand the Divine Mercy message given to my cousin St. Faustina, - a message that I would promote, - I sent a rough copy of this writing to a few friends. Their responses are given below.

“Dear Sister Paulette,

I am touched and honored that you would share this with me. Thank you! Just a couple of impressions. Ref. p. 17 "Do we speak with Him about our worries, our problems, our hopes, our dreams?" - somewhere in Orthodox literature, I read that a saint said, you should never pray for anything earthly. Earthly matters are "dross". Instead, pray for spiritual things like, salvation of your soul; pray for an increase in your ability to love, etc. - but in Catholic circles I frequently hear petitions for earthly things. So, I am confused and unsettled on this point.

The story of the Methodist Mildred on her deathbed was particularly touching. So was the "Gallon of Milk" priest.

The Novena of Divine Mercy is a powerful concept. It has personal significance to me.

- 4th day for atheists. (In my own family, I have atheists.) - I pray and pray for them but they won't budge.

So, your book touched me in those aspects particularly, and surely it will touch other readers as well. It sounds like it is a book you HAD to write; you were moved to write; you were given a mission to write, - so -carry on! In Christ, Your friend.”

* * * * *

“Dear Sister Paulette,

When I read your Chap. 2 about Forgiveness, I thought of this email below, which coincidentally (?), I read on the same day as I read your emailed draft of your book. It seems the saint commemorated this day on the Orthodox calendar is about Forgiveness. And the story shows the great importance of Forgiveness – that it was more of value in the sight of God to be able to forgive than it was to die for one’s faith. (i.e. Sapricius was ready to die for Christ, but was not willing to forgive. Therefore he lost the grace of martyrdom, and chose apostasy instead. You can't be for Christ, and be against Forgiveness.)

The Holy Martyr Nicephorus lived in the city of Syrian Antioch. In this city lived also the presbyter Sapricius, with whom Nicephorus was very friendly, - so friendly that they were considered as brothers. They quarreled because of some disagreement, and their former love changed into enmity and hate.

After a certain time Nicephorus came to his senses, repented of his sin and more than once asked Sapricius, through mutual friends, to forgive him. Sapricius, however, did not wish to forgive him. Nicephorus then went to his former friend and fervently asked forgiveness, but Sapricius was adamant.

At this time the emperors Valerian (253-259) and Gallius (260-268) began to persecute Christians, and one of the first brought before the court was the priest Sapricius. He firmly confessed himself a Christian, underwent tortures for his faith. and was condemned to death by beheading with a sword. As they led Sapricius to execution, Nicephorus tearfully implored his forgiveness saying, "O martyr of Christ, forgive me if I have sinned against you in any way." The priest Sapricius remained stubborn, and

even as he approached death he refused to forgive his fellow Christian. Seeing the hardness of his heart, the Lord withdrew His blessing from Sapricius, and would not let him receive the crown of martyrdom. At the last moment, he suddenly became afraid of death and agreed to offer sacrifice to idols.

In vain did St. Nicephorus urge Sapricius not to lose his reward through apostasy, since he already stood on the threshold of the heavenly Kingdom. St Nicephorus then said to the executioner, "I am a Christian, and I believe in our Lord Jesus Christ. Execute me in place of Sapricius." The executioners reported this to the governor. He decided to free Sapricius, and to behead Nicephorus in his place. Thus did St Nicephorus inherit the Kingdom and receive a martyr's crown.

I think this story shows the great importance of Forgiveness - that the lack of it was of greater value in the sight of God, than dying for the faith (i.e. Sapricius was ready to die for Christ, but was not willing to forgive. Rather than forgive, he chose apostasy. The grace to be a martyr was not given to him. You can't be for Christ and be against Forgiveness.)"

* * * * *

"Sister, I am on chapter 7 and am mesmerized by this new book I will finish it later . I love it. ps: Josh continues to do incredibly well. Praise God!"

* * * * *

"Dear Sr. Paulette, What a generous gift you've given us, by sending us a draft of your book! Just what I need to read, because I've had to turn off the TV. All the warnings about how to tell if your roof is going to collapse have me worried! Thank you so much for sharing this!"

* * * * *

Dear Sr. Paulette, Thank you for sending along the book draft. I enjoyed reading it very much. I am especially appreciative whenever I read books, booklets, pamphlets and the like, reminding me that we are all members of one family - that when I look at you, you're my sister, and when I look at anyone, male or female - they are truly my brother and sister in this marvelous family of mankind. It's all too much to comprehend, but not too much to accept and believe that Our Father is Our Father, and Mary is Our Blessed Mother, and we are mere children, sometimes behaving well and sometimes badly. Best wishes with your latest writing endeavors. Most sincerely."

* * * * *

"HELLO SISTER, THANKS VERY MUCH FOR THIS BOOK DRAFT. I WILL KEEP IN TOUCH, AND PASS THIS MESSAGE UNTO OTHER BRETHREN. PEACE AND LOVE OF CHRIST BE WITH YOU."

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