

Bernadette Soubirous and Sister Mildred Mary Neuzil Take Mary and Joseph As Their Own

Indeed, the first striking aspect in the life of Bernadette [Soubirous] and in the facts of Lourdes is the extreme poverty into which the unfortunate family gradually sank. A poverty of the destitute which recalls that of Bethlehem. A poverty we find painful to observe so horrible does it appear to us: Bernadette seemed to breathe the Gospel in this poverty. Money was what horrified her, the touch of it burned her like a red hot iron! Everything was poor in and around her: her family, her health, her knowledge, her means...everything was transparent, everything was inhabited by the Spirit of God. (Andrew Doze, SAINT JOSEPH--SHADOW OF THE FATHER, Alba House, New York, pg. 61.)

In the Diary of messages of “Our Lady of America©” to Sister Mildred Mary Ephrem Neuzil, Our Lady expressed in different words this same idea of transparency, poverty of spirit and being inhabited by the Spirit of God, which means being inhabited by all three persons of the Blessed Trinity, for where one Person is, all three Persons are. This is the Divine Indwelling.

I will work my miracles of grace only in those who ask for them and empty their souls of the love and attachments to sin and all that is displeasing to my Son. Souls who cling to sin cannot have their hands free to receive the treasures of grace that I hold out to them.

...Our Lady spoke to me about the Divine Indwelling. It was her life and she lived it perfectly, always conscious of His presence, never forgetting that all her greatness came from within, from Him Who dwelt there, working, loving, and doing good through her. This is what Our Lady means when she speaks of reformation, renewal. It is this about which she is so concerned, namely, sanctification from within.

As Our Lady spoke this, she seemed at the time to be deeply occupied. Though the serenity of her countenance never left her, she spoke with a gravity that made her words all the more solemn. She seemed anxious to impress me with some idea of the greatness of this gift of God to us, namely, His Divine Presence within our souls through sanctifying grace.

(Sister Mildred Mary Ephrem Neuzil, Diary, “Our Lady of America©,” Fostoria, Ohio, pgs. 18-19.)

Andrew Doze in **SAINT JOSEPH – SHADOW OF THE FATHER** goes on to say:

In Lourdes, Mary makes Bernadette enter into the particularly special atmosphere of the Holy Family which is one of poverty, silence, humble labor; but, at the same time, it is one of peace, of joy, of an astonishing fecundity, the atmosphere in which Jesus was guided and educated for a long time in Mary's company. Everything happened as if Joseph were revealing himself in this mysterious silence which accompanied most of the apparitions. Mary's words were brief and few: Bernadette perceived them not through her ears but in her heart. (Doze, pg. 63.)

In the messages of "Our Lady of America©" Our Lady gives us the same bidding—that we must enter the Heavenly Family by way of the Holy Family, that most perfect model of the kingdom of heaven on earth. Our Lady tells us we must imitate those simple virtues of a modest family life and poverty of spirit, humility and obedience to the will of God expressed in the humble labor of the duties of our lives. Like Mary's and Joseph's lives, ours must be centered on Jesus and on a life of prayer that requires a certain amount of silence if we are to hear the Word of the Lord and live in His peace and joy and in the charity that inevitably flows from the Presence of God within us.

Bernadette herself lived during the reign of Pope Pius IX which was a time of revolutions in Italy, France and all of Europe, a time of conflict between secular power and that of the Church. On December 8, 1854 he defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, confirmed less than four years later by Our Lady herself in the apparition to Bernadette at Lourdes, March 25, 1858 when she identified herself as "I am the Immaculate Conception." In 1869 he convened the first Vatican Council and defined Papal Infallibility which brought adverse reaction, especially from secular powers. In 1870 revolutionaries seeking a unified Italy with Rome as its capital and a king for its head, dissolved the Papal States when the Austrian army withdrew its protection for the Pope. These had been given to the Vatican by Charlemagne. During the occupation of Rome Pope Pius IX was considered a prisoner in the Vatican. The greater the turmoil around him the more the Pope turned to St. Joseph, Protector of the Holy Family, and thus deepened the Church's understanding of the role of St. Joseph in its life. The same year as the Pope lost the papal states, he declared St. Joseph "Patron of the Universal Church." Having abandoned some of his liberal views, he became outspoken against the heresies of his day and wrote the encyclical "Quanta Cura" and the "Syllabus of Errors" in defending the Church's teachings against these errors. He was the first great Pope of modern times and the longest reigning in the history of the papacy, 31 years. (Doze, pgs. 18-25.) These same revolutions reached Bernadette's convent at Nevers, France but Bernadette refused to flee with the other sisters. She did not fear the soldiers but chose to remain and minister to countrymen and enemy alike.

We know there are no accidents with God and are, therefore, not surprised that **Bernadette's mother, Louise Soubirous, died on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, December 8, 1866**, nor are we surprised that with that death Bernadette declared **"the Lady" her dearest Mother**. Nor are we surprised that only three months after Pope Pius IX declared St. Joseph the "Patron of the Universal Church," that **Bernadette's beloved father, Francois Soubirous, died on March 4, 1871, the first Saturday of the month**, Mary's day and St. Joseph's month. Thereupon Bernadette declared, **"St. Joseph is my father now."**

We see this same testimony in the Diary and letters of Sister Mildred. She, too, had taken Mary for her mother and St. Joseph for her father. Mary and Joseph, in return, expressed their maternal and paternal love for her in such endearing terms: "sweet child," "poor child," "small one," "child of my heart," "my daughter," "my humble one," "my small flower," "my beloved daughter," "my dear daughter." Jesus, on the other hand, wanted to call Sr. Mildred "my little white dove," "little secretary of My Heart," "my faithful spouse."

In a previous article, we recounted the bi-location of Sister Mildred to Lourdes, France, and her encounter with Bernadette, not as a sister but as the poor peasant girl. Sister Mildred was given a vision of a stairway to heaven and she was eager to climb it and go there, but Bernadette told her it was not yet her time; she had work yet to do. Here we see two lowly souls, sisters hidden away in their convents, identified so deeply with the obscurity of the Holy Family, accepting Mary and Joseph as their spiritual Mother and Father. Both were so poor in spirit and so pure of heart and so filled with grace because of their humility and obedience to God's Will that mirrored those virtues lived out in the Holy Family to whom they both gave their hearts and their lives.

It is no wonder then that Our Lady, who confirmed the role of her Immaculate Conception in the salvation of mankind with her apparitions at Lourdes, should again confirm the importance of that doctrine in her first appearance to Sister Mildred, visionary of the apparition of "Our Lady of America®," by presenting herself as Our Lady of Lourdes. Surely Our Lady wished to acknowledge the honor we give her here in America under the title of her Immaculate Conception as our Patroness, and to acknowledge the honor we have given her by building the most magnificent Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C., center of American government and the American church. Unlike other apparitions, Our Lady does NOT ask for a shrine in the location of her first appearance nor in any of the multiple places where Our Lady appeared during the course of these messages. Why did she not ask for a shrine on the location of the first appearance as "Our Lady of America®?" Precisely because we were already building the shrine she wanted as the center of this devotion, because it and it alone is the church of ALL the American people. Any other shrine would contradict her mandate to hurry and finish **this** shrine

so she could make **it** a place of special pilgrimage, a place of wonders, especially for, but not only for, her children in America. Any other shrine would contradict Our Lady's wishes and would divide the devotion and its national and universal character, for the National Shrine embodies not only the devotion of the American people but the shrines and devotions of Our Lady's children from around the world, who are also the focus of the universal message of this devotion, a spiritual renewal and return to Faith and Purity in every aspect of our lives.

We know that for years before Our Lady's first appearance at Rome City, IN, Sister Mildred had locutions with both Jesus and Mary and visions of St. Michael and St. Gabriel, the guardian angels of God's people. We also know that, unlike other sisters, Sister Mildred had been moved from place to place with unusual frequency. Why so many places? Again, there are no accidents with God. Could it be to show the national character of this message that Our Lady wanted centered in our Nation's capital and our Nation's church that is THE church of ALL the American people, not of one exclusive city or state. Sister Mildred insisted nothing should take precedence over the National Shrine. Archbishop Paul Leibold, her spiritual director, deliberately removed all mention of any place other than the Shrine in Washington, D.C. Why did he do so? Was that the guidance of the Spirit to prevent any confusion about where Our Lady wanted to be honored, or to prevent any small interest group from trying to center the devotion where Our Lady did not ask for it? When we seek the Will of God, we must do what He says, through those whom He chooses, not what we wish He had said or what we decide. Our Lady has never asked for a shrine to honor her under the title she asks for as "Our Lady of America, the Immaculate Virgin®" anywhere but at the National Shrine and that wish must be obeyed and honored, absolutely! Our Lady can never divide herself nor her devotion; she will never confuse people nor deceive them. She says exactly what she means and that is why we must follow her words exactly as stated in Sister Mildred's Diary. Nothing else. Of course there can be churches named after this title or chapels dedicated to this title without changing Our Lady's emphasis, but there can be no other shrine without distorting Our Lady's message and its unity and universality. The kind of childlike obedience that Our Lady desires is that of the Holy Family to the Will of God, seen so clearly in the lives of St. Bernadette and Sister Mildred.

On October 13, 1956, Sister Mildred describes this special visit of Our Lady that states her desire and this central focus on the National Shrine so clearly.

Today the Holy Virgin appeared to me as I was working in my room. Our Lady was very beautiful, and she was again smiling in her heavenly way. She was dressed in the same manner as when I first saw her, except that her Immaculate Heart did not appear. Instead of the lily, she held with both hands a small replica of the finished Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. She then began to speak. Her presence

overwhelmed me with its holiness. I was compelled to stop my work for it was impossible to go on. I then knelt down and wrote Our Lady's words as she desired: "This is my shrine, my daughter. I am very pleased with it. Tell my children I thank them. Let them finish it quickly and make it a place of pilgrimage. It will be a place of wonders. I promise this. I will bless all those who, either by prayers, labor, or material aid, help to erect this shrine."

Our Lady then asked me to draw a picture of her first appearance. She also requested a statue made according to this likeness and placed, after being solemnly carried in procession, in the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C. She wishes to be honored there in a special way as "Our Lady of America, the Immaculate Virgin.®"

Our Lady, moreover, often emphasized her desire that the Shrine in Washington, D.C., be made a place of special pilgrimage.

Our Blessed Mother called herself "Our Lady of America®" in response to the love and desire that reached out for this special title in the hearts of her children in America. This title was the sign of her pleasure at the confidence our land places in her and as a reward for its staunch and childlike devotion to her. Her children longed for this personal visit of Our Lady, whether consciously or otherwise, and in her kindness and mercy she responded far beyond all expectation.

I am pleased, my child, with the love and honor my children in America give to me, especially through my glorious and unique privilege of the Immaculate Conception. I promise to reward their love by working through the power of my Son's Heart and my Immaculate Heart miracles of grace among them. I do not promise miracles of the body, but of the soul. ... For it is mainly through these miracles of grace that the Holy Trinity is glorified among men and nations. Let America continue and grow in its love for me, and I in return, in union with the Heart of my Son, promise to work wonders in her.

My child, I entrust you with the message that you must make known to my children in America. I wish it to be the country dedicated to my purity. The wonders I will work will be the wonders of the soul. They must have faith and believe firmly in my love for them. I desire that they be the children of my Pure Heart. I desire, through my children in America, to further the cause of faith and purity among peoples and nations. Let them come to me with confidence and simplicity, and I, their Mother, will teach them to become pure like to my Heart that their own hearts may be more pleasing to the Heart of my Son. (Sr. Mildred Neuzil, Diary, pgs. 10-14.)

Our Lady's words are simple and clear. They speak for themselves and it is up to us to honor them. Our Lady makes "reform of life" a necessary prerequisite before the enthronement can be a sign of true devotion to her. She warns:

They think they have done enough in consecrating themselves to my Immaculate Heart. It is not enough. That which I ask for and is most important many have not given me. What I ask for, have asked, and will continue to ask is reformation of life. There must be sanctification from within. (Sister Mildred Neuzil, Diary, pg. 18.)

When Our Lady tells Sister Mildred to tell the Bishops of the United States, her loyal sons, of her desires and how to carry them out, surely she is not just talking about the enthronement but about the whole message and its call for a reform of life and sanctification from within, the teaching of the awesome doctrine of the Divine Indwelling Presence of the Blessed Trinity, especially to our Youth, and working toward a correction of the errors in the Church today and the disobedience within it, working toward the renewal of the family in imitation of the simple virtues of the Holy Family, giving fathers their rightful place in the family in imitation of St. Joseph's fatherhood over Jesus, and upholding the splendor of the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist, and promoting a deeper understanding of the spiritual life, the interior life of the soul. It is this that will bring us the peace of Christ and a more just society. Like Bernadette who had to face all kinds of disbelief and questioning throughout her life, Our Lady tells Sister Mildred:

...you are not being accepted because you are a small one, but in the end all will come as I desire. Those who oppose you will receive light to understand. These good people mean well and if they are in authority it is for you to listen respectfully and obey. I will speak to them in their hearts and the Divine Spirit who makes all things clear will give them wisdom and understanding. In the end they will do as I wish. So, have patience, dear one, it will happen as I have said and those who have opposed me will become my most ardent and courageous supporters. Until this comes to pass, wait in trust, knowing that I never fail those who place their confidence in me. (Sister Mildred Neuzil, Diary, pg. 37.)

May the Holy Spirit, Mary's divine Spouse, and St. Joseph, her human spouse, hasten the day when Our Lady's wishes are fulfilled! All of them! And to hasten that day, let us pray with Sister Mildred that beautiful prayer she composed to Our Immaculate Queen and the Indwelling Trinity to open our hearts to God's awesome grace and His passionate desire to be united with us.

“Cloister Echoes”
On the Divine Indwelling
by Sister Mildred Mary Ephrem Neuzil

O Mary, Immaculate Queen,
You who were always conscious
Of the Presence of God within you,
Obtain for me the grace
Of an ever-increasing awareness
Of the Indwelling Trinity
Abiding in my soul.
May this Divine Doctrine
So penetrate my heart
That I may realize, in truth,
I am the veritable house of God
Sheltering within myself
The Divine Being
Who is the Source of all sanctity
And holy living.
May I never forget that I
Am the living temple of God.

Help me, then, O peerless Virgin,
To be ever mindful of my dignity.
Let me remember also that all,
Even the most derelict of men,
Were redeemed by the same God,
And are, therefore, worthy
Of my respect and honor.
Obtain for me also
That the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass,
The Fountain Head of grace,
May exercise so great an influence
Upon my life,

That I may become, as it were,
Another Savior,
Going about, doing good.
May I too, carry Christ,
As you carried Him, O faithful Virgin,
And thus become a means
Of repentance and greater holiness to
others.

May I be a channel of grace
To those to whom grace, perhaps,
Would never be able to penetrate.

May the Hand of the Father,
Who created me,
Work through me.

And may the voice of the Word,
Become Man, Who redeemed me,
Speak through me.

May the Love of the Holy Spirit,
Who is my continuous sanctification,
Bring holiness to others through me.

Amen.

See also 2009 newsletter...

http://www.ourladyofamerica.com/the_message/BernadetteSoubirousandSisterMildredMaryNeuzil.pdf

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