Clelia Speaks

Settling for Less

It would have been easy for Clelia Merloni to think that she had done enough for God, or that she had prayed and suffered enough to be “holy enough” for one person. After all, she had gone to great lengths to respond to her vocation, and had founded an entire Congregation to serve God and the Church. Instead of settling into her situation however, Clelia realized that we are not made to reach some external marker of sanctity. She knew that each of us has been created with a beautiful identity and an eternal soul that God longs to bring closer and closer to Himself. Clelia was determined to continue each day her resolution to love and serve “God Alone”, always opening her heart to His presence. This attitude carried her into a deep relationship with the Lord that overflowed graces into the world 100 years ago, and continues to send us blessings today.

Highly esteem your own soul, since the Father of fathers and the Lord of lords created it for His own dwelling and temple. –Mp p. 21 (Spiritual Anthology p. 6)

Forget the good you could have done and through yourself generously into the holiness you have yet to acquire. –Mg. I p. 4 (Spiritual Anthology p. 10)

Where do you feel that you have done “enough” for God?

How has God surprised you in the past by going beyond your expectations – in an answer to prayer, in a relationship, in providing strength in a difficult time?

God Speaks: Matthew 5:46-48, 1 Kings 19, 2 Cor 4: 16-18, Jas 1:5

Trouble

God reveals His will in strange ways: You may fall flat on your face, kissing the concrete or the boss stops in to say that as of December 31, he can no longer afford your salary. In the blink of an eye our world is turned upside down. God, our loving Father, does not cause these events to occur. Others who have free will—just as we do—make choices which at time have dire consequences. Our faith tells us that our life is not about us. God has a plan for our good. In the middle of our trouble we may wonder: What do I do know? It’s times like these that we are challenged to discover more deeply who it is God calls us to be. God is at work in us.

These sudden reversals are precisely what Clelia experienced numerous times. What she has to say reveals the depths of her faith: I assure you that if you take all the events, great and small, distasteful and less so, as coming from the hand of God, without becoming disturbed, without nurturing an inner sense of bitterness or disgust toward someone, who is simply an instrument of God’s plan for you, you will attain, in a short time, a spiritual fruit that so many other souls could not attain in the course of a long life full of sacrifices and good works. Book 8

When have you struggled to discover God’s will for you?

How can you support another who is in the middle of “troubles?”

Discouragement

Humanly speaking, if anyone had a right to feel discouraged, it was Clelia Merloni. Those whom she loved in childhood were taken from her...her desire to enter religious life was repeatedly thwarted...her father gave up the practice of his Faith...the congregation she eventually founded was beset by financial disaster and she herself was maligned and calumniated...she suffered exile from the very daughters she so loved...even in death she remained unknown or misunderstood for many years. However, having lived her entire life for “God Alone,” Clelia saw her setbacks and sufferings as nothing when compared to the suffering Jesus bore in love for each of us.

“Why do you let yourselves get so discouraged? What’s missing? Jesus, maybe? ... Don’t you see that He’s close by but is hiding so that you can’t see him?” Venerable Mother Clelia Merloni Ms. II, p. 141 (Spiritual Anthology p. 229)

When have you felt discouraged?
In what little ways can you encourage those who feel overwhelmed?


Loneliness

“Every day...I recollected myself in solitude, cut off from every distraction, and concentrating only on God, to learn from Him how to love Him even more.” (Diary 163-164)

Venerable Mother Clelia Merloni was certainly no stranger to loneliness. From losing her mother at the tender age of three to being exiled within the confines of the Congregation she founded, Clelia experienced loss, misunderstanding, and rejection throughout her entire life. The behaviors of family members, friends, strangers and even her own sisters could have led Clelia to a road of utter despair. But they didn’t! So what was Clelia’s secret? Clelia knew that, though good in themselves, true fulfillment was not found in human relationships. Rather than focusing on her own unhappiness, Clelia focused on the Lord, saying, “I find my delight in speaking with God, in remaining in His divine presence.” Clelia embraced moments of loneliness as a gift and she turned to the divine Giver, allowing Him to transform her loneliness into a holy longing for Him and for the salvation of souls. She knew that, despite feelings of londiness, she never walked alone.

Do I experience loneliness as a burden or as a gift?

How do I choose to respond?

God speaks: Matthew 26:36-46, John 4:4-26, Psalms 56, 88, 121, and 146
Humility

“...with generous humility and sincerity bare you souls before the divine Model and see if you can recognize in them a true copy of the Divine Redeemer, if you can say that you are other Christs.” Mtg. 1, 157, Mother and Teacher p. 172.

Clelia’s gaze was on the beauty of Jesus. He attracted her. So she is able to attract us to him. Giving, understanding, and healing attract as does harmony. All are found in Jesus and Jesus finds himself taken up in the mutual love of the Father and the Holy Spirit. He receives strength when he gives himself to the Father. “Into your hands Lord, I commend my Spirit.” These are the same hands into whom Clelia humbly commended her spirit and thus by her example exhorts us to turn our spirit over too. In turning herself over to God during her confinement to a single room because her leadership was suspect she hears God within. He said, “I will not leave you.” The harmony of her abandonment with Christ’s gains our attention. Her act of humility is united to Christ’s humility when he was abandoned. She passes on this model to us. So we see as she humbly bore her cross we too can bear our cross. We thank God for her example of humility and her example of abandonment.

How have you abandoned yourself to God’s Will in your life?

Does Christ and Clelia abandoned help you humbly accept your suffering?

God Speaks: Ps. 25:9, Mt. 11:29, Mt. 18:20, Col. 3:12

Consolation

Clelia Merloni suffered many deprivations and hardships in her life. Her mother died when Clelia was a child. There was discord between her father and stepmother. Clelia’s father did not share her spiritual fervor and values and, at first, sought to block her aspirations to become a religious sister. In her adult life, Clelia’s inheritance, which was being used to support the good works of her fledgling congregation, was lost by a trusted confidante handling her finances. Clelia’s ability to lead was questioned and she left the congregation for a time. Through all her troubles, Clelia found consolation in the love Jesus had for her. His love and mercy was the constant in her life. She felt Christ’s suffering and death gave meaning to her tribulations and those of all humanity. Her letters are filled with exhortations to her sisters in community to find comfort in Christ’s saving love. She asked that the sisters console the Lord and others, especially the poor, by living lives of service. Undaunted by trials in life, Clelia promoted joy as the characteristic of a true Apostle of His Heart, secure in His love.

“When you feel so afflicted and abandoned, don’t become discouraged but remember that the God of consolations is near you, as is Jesus who has loved you so much as to die for your love, and who is watching you with a gentle and fatherly look of love; the Holy Spirit, the true consoler of souls, is near you; that there is a more than motherly Providence who cares for you, who loves you so very much. I ardently desire that your heart will be consoled by these thoughts.” Venerable Mother Clelia Merloni Mg., I, p.2 (Spiritual Anthology p.45)

How has Jesus’ consoling love been evident in your life?

In what circumstances do you comfort others?
God Speaks: Psalm 23, Romans 5:1-5, 2 Corinthians 1:3-7, 1 Thessalonians 5:14, 2 Thessalonians 3:3-5, Revelation 7:14-17

**Compassion**

“Just as in the body, when one member suffers all the others suffer with it . . . ; in the same way true Christian charity gives us a tender and compassionate heart for all those who suffer.” (Mg., II, p. 112)

Compassion means “to suffer with.” Venerable Mother Clelia understood that if we want to be truly compassionate people—to love others tenderly so as to ease their suffering—then we ourselves must accept painful and difficult experiences in a way that leads us to greater kindness and charity.

When Venerable Mother Clelia speaks of suffering, she is not speaking as a teacher or giving advice to her sister Apostles. She is speaking from her own experience. Her suffering was, in some respects physical during parts of her life, but her greater suffering was what she experienced in the treatment she received from those she loved most—from her father who resisted her religious vocation for so long, from those she served who questioned her integrity, and even from her sister Apostles who rejected her leadership.

Mother Clelia’s experiences of suffering did not make her angry or bitter. Rather, it allowed her to write with warmth and tenderness even toward those who were the source of her suffering: “I bless you with all the effusion of which my heart is capable, remaining your most affectionate Mother in Jesus Christ.”

How can my own struggles and pain make me more compassionate?

Who in my life has shown me the greatest compassion?


**Betrayal**

“Whatever tribulation, whether caused by nature or people, whether physical or moral, is always from and serves and His divine will." (Venerable Mother Clelia, Mg. 1, pg. 150)

The boss tells you that you are up for a promotion. When you get to the meeting, you get fired instead, by the very people who helped you to believe otherwise. How foolish you feel, how taken for granted. How angry. You feel slapped in the face for all your hard work; work which really did make a difference for the better. You feel betrayed. You are left with mountains of hurt to get over and to forgive. How will you ever do it?

Venerable Mother Clelia can help you; she has been through it all and understands your feelings. She chose to suffer as Jesus did in His Passion, silently, in the midst of rejection and deceit. How did she manage THAT? She found identification with Christ and sought her consolation from Him. She trusted that God was working out His plan for her through her suffering, no matter how terrible they seemed. She believed that all her hurtful experiences and feelings of betrayal were going to bring blessings in the end. Thus, she was able to generously forgive her enemies. Christ did it. Clelia did it, so…

Do I thank God for my difficulties and try to see God’s hand bringing blessings through them?

God speaks: Philippians 4:4-7, John 14:6, Sirach 2:1-11