

“Justice For Laura” Novena - 9 Days of Prayer

Day One



Scripture Passage: “The Proclamation of the Kingdom of God”

He said, “The time has come; the kingdom of God is at hand. Change your ways and believe the Good News.” As Jesus was walking along the shore of Lake Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net in the lake, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” At once, they left their nets and followed him. -MARK 1:15-18

Meditation:

No matter who we are, no matter where we have been, no matter what we have done, Jesus is speaking directly to us in this narrative. We have all sinned, yet Christ proclaims the kingdom of God and calls us to believe in the Gospel. God's kingdom is never one of tyranny, but one of Love, and the Good News is precisely that “God IS Love,” and He holds out the gift of Love to each and every one of us. All that He asks is that we would repent of our sins and turn back to Him, and He will fill our hearts with

that fire of Love which descended upon the Apostles at Pentecost, leaving them all in a state of holy inebriation on the “wine” of God's Love.

It is important for us to remember just what exactly “sin” is. The word itself originates from ancient Greek archery; the archers “sinned” whenever they missed their target. Christians adopted this term because they realized that behind every single sin is a genuine human desire, which is good in and of itself because God put it there, that has simply become twisted and distorted. Whenever we sin, we are actually seeking something good, yet we seek in the wrong places. This may be hard for us to accept at times, but even the most horrific crimes are borne out a good desire of the heart – the sinner simply missed the mark.

Laura's murderer simply missed the mark. Yes, he missed it very badly, but we must recognize that he is NOT, in and of himself, an evil man. God does not create evil men; men do evil things when they “miss the mark.” Laura's murderer may be horribly twisted but he is not evil. His heart, at the very deepest level, is still made in the image and likeness of the God who loves him unconditionally. Let us pray that the Holy Spirit may guide him to recognize this, repent, and believe in the Good News of the Gospel. Repentant sinners, we must never forget, usually make the best “fishers of men.”

And we pray for Justice For Laura.

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Abba, Father,

You have revealed Yourself as the God of Love Who desires all Your children to be saved, and Who will run to embrace any soul who sincerely turns back to You.

We lift up the soul of Laura's killer, Your beloved child who has wandered in a far away land squandering the inheritance which You, his most Loving Father, have bestowed upon him. We beg the Holy Spirit to sing Your song of Love into his heart. Speak to his soul of his dignity and beauty as Your child, and give him the confidence to turn back to You in trust and repentance.

We ask this through the infinite merits of Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Divine Mercy Whose compassion knows no bounds.

Amen.

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Day Two



Scripture Passage: “The Resurrection of Our Lord”

The Angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he is risen as he said. Come, see the place where they laid him.” -MATTHEW 28:5-6

Meditation:

This is the rock of our faith - the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If Jesus had remained in the tomb, his entire life's work, his agonizing passion and gruesome death would mean nothing to us, it would just be another sad fact of human history. **BUT HE ROSE.**

And in rising, he offers us something so utterly astounding that no human being can ever fully fathom it. In the midst of our sin, the Lord **OFFERS US A NEW LIFE.** If we are willing to carry our cross and follow Jesus to calvary, to die with him, then he will raise

us up to new glorious life with him as well. Good Friday always comes before Easter, and the cross is heavy, the thorns are sharp and the nails are excruciating, but if we suffer what we must suffer to follow the Lord in Spirit and in Truth, we will also be raised in the resurrection with him in glory. And this is not just about our ultimate destiny, this is right now – Jesus came into the world to give us the power to live a new life! The law came through Moses, but Christ comes with grace! Grace to be raised to new life, to reclaim the original glorious plan of God for our lives and live from the depths of our hearts in the fullness of love which is God! We are talking about our redemption, and this is not just some abstract theological concept, but this is meant to be lived and experienced by each one of us, and through the transformation of our hearts we are called to gradually come to live and love in the image and likeness of God, as we were made to, and are called to. Jesus is the antidote for our sin, and there is real power in Christ - in His cross - to redeem our hearts that we may live free from sin. IF we die with Him, we WILL rise with Him.

Let us pray then, that Laura's murderer may discover the power of Jesus to raise him to new life. Let us pray that he would find refuge in the Cross and hope in the Resurrection of our Lord. Our faith is grounded in and founded upon the resurrection of Jesus, let us pray that the Holy Spirit may kindle the first flames of faith in this poor man's heart, and that fanned by the love of Christ, those flames may grow into a raging fire that will consume and transform him into the fullness of who God made him to be.

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Day Three



Scripture Passage: “The Presentation of our Lord in the Temple”

“And when the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every male that opens the womb shall be consecrated to the Lord”) and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.” Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And inspired by the Spirit he came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, “Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepare in the sight of all the peoples, a light of revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel.” And his father and mother marveled at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother,

“Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that will be contradicted (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed.” -LUKE 2:22-35

Meditation:

This prophecy of Simeon is addressed in some way to all of us. The fathers of the Church and Biblical scholars for two thousand years have recognized that Mary is a sort of icon of the Church and in some way of all the human race (although at the same time this does not in any way detract from the historical person of Mary and her utter uniqueness which is due to the fact she gave birth to the Redeemer of the world), and so when Simeon speaks to her in this passage, when God speaks to her through Simeon in this passage, God is also speaking to us in a certain sense in this passage. “A sword will pierce your own soul also.” If we follow Christ, we must inevitably follow Him, as Mary did, to the foot of the Cross. What suffering must have afflicted her soul!

Imagine, a mother who like any mother loved her son in a million human ways, but also loved God in her son because God is her son! And to be there, at the foot of the Cross, seeing Him - hanging in agony, abandoned by practically all of his followers, even by most of his closest friends, the twelve. A sword indeed pierced the heart of Mary. And we must go through the same thing if we are to be authentically converted, shall we say “to the heart.”

Suffering – the Cross – is part of the Christian vocation. Period. But for us suffering takes on new meaning precisely because of who Jesus is – He is the Redeemer! And in his redemptive work of salvation, which he accomplished in and through his own suffering, he has also in some sense redeemed the very nature of suffering, giving it a sort of “salvific” meaning. Christ's body hung on the cross for the salvation of the world. We call the Church “the mystical body of Christ,” and this is not just a metaphor, this is reality! And this reality, the Church as the body of Christ, must also, at least in a sort of mystical manner, hang on the Cross for the salvation of the world. This does NOT mean that the one sacrifice of the Cross on Calvary was insufficient; far from it!

But because Christ is an eternal person, outside of time, all that he did inside of time on this earth takes on an eternal dimension, and in some sense is continually and for all time carried out by His mystical body, the Church, even today. Every Christian who truly seeks to follow the Lord has experienced this truth – for the world at large rejects the demands of the Gospel, so for us to live “Gospel lives” we too, in a certain sense, must become “a sign to be contradicted,” and how often are we contradicted in this world... But this is part and parcel of the Christian life, and it is indeed for the salvation of the world, for when we boldly take a stand for the Gospel and the values and truth it contains, even in the face of contradiction and suffering, we affirm the truth of Christ in the world, and if we are truly living in communion with Christ this becomes an occasion for great joy. We remember all the martyrs throughout the ages who have literally gone

to their deaths smiling with the knowledge that their joyful martyrdom is a witness to the truth of Jesus Christ and the salvation he freely offers to all the world. “Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the sake of the Gospel will save it.”

The Cross is a part of our lives, and above all it is a part of our conversion, which we all know is a continuous and lifelong process. But we have no need to fear the Cross! For we know and believe that after the Cross comes the Resurrection. After we “die” with Christ, we WILL be raised with him in glory, and we CAN and DO even begin to experience this in our lives here and now. But we must go to the Cross. And in doing so, we must accept and even embrace the “sword” that will pierce our hearts.

Conversion is no easy task, especially for those of us who have led terribly sinful lives before meeting Christ, for we are forced to admit and confess our sinfulness to the Lord and this recognition of our own failure to live as we ought is always painful – the admitting of our guilt implies and requires the crucifixion of our pride. Laura's murderer is no exception to this rule. He has sinned in a most grave and grievous manner, and he is called to account for that, but before he can confess it to the Lord he must confess it to himself. He must come to terms with his own failure to live as he ought, at least in the past (for we have no sure knowledge of his life since then, and no grounds for judging him, but only his past actions.) Nevertheless, he must face the truth if he is to be converted, and this facing up to the facts will not be easy - it will be a “sword” through his heart. Let us then pray for him, that he will be bold and courageous in facing the truth of his sin, but also in facing the truth of Christ who sets us free from our sins and empowers us to live a new life by grace. Let us pray for this man that he, hearing Christ proclaim the kingdom and call him to conversion, that he may also go to the Cross and “die” with Christ precisely so that he may also rise with him in the glory of the resurrection, both at the end of time and also here and now in this life. Just think of the sanctification that this man could offer to so many souls through this process of his own redemption! The example he could set by suffering what he must to be converted... many, many souls would be saved!

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beg the Holy Spirit to sing Your song of Love into his heart. Speak to his soul of his dignity and beauty as Your child, and give him the confidence to turn back to You in trust and repentance.

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Amen.

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Day Four



Scripture Passage: “The Agony in the Garden”

“Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, “Sit here, while I go yonder and pray.” And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me.” And going a little farther, he fell on his face and prayed, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.” And he came to his disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, “So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” -MATTHEW 26: 36-41

Meditation:

Jesus told us very plainly that He is “the WAY, the TRUTH, and the LIFE,” and we know and believe that we are called to take up our crosses daily, and follow Him; and

following Him means going to Calvary, going to our death... But this does not mean that the Good Lord wishes for us to be literally crucified, but we do know that we MUST “die” in a spiritual sense, if we are to rise with Christ in glory. We must die to sin, we must die to our selves, we must “put off the old man” and “put on the new man” as the apostle Paul exhorts us. The new man is Christ. “You who have been baptized have put on Christ.” (Galatians 3:27).

We are all called to this, and along the road to Calvary we also must pass through the garden, Gethsemane. And we too, following and imitating Christ, will very likely be tempted to reject our Father's plan for our “death,” and thus will pray “if it be possible, let this cup pass from me,” but we MUST finish that prayer in communion with Christ - “nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will,” with the certainty of our faith that the Father's will is only and ever for our good and eternal welfare, for God is Love. But we can still say with a great deal of certainty, that our souls, too, will be “sorrowful and troubled,” “very sorrowful,” in fact, “even to death.” Until the exact moment that we are fully and totally “crucified,” and “die” with Christ, our souls will be “very sorrowful,” for we are being called to “lay down our lives” and this is never an easy task, and always an unpleasant one. But it is necessary.

It is necessary for the man for whom we pray, Laura's murderer, for he too is called to rise with Christ in glory, and along the way to that destiny he must pass through the garden of suffering, carry his cross, and die with Christ. And we, as Christ's disciples, MUST NOT “fall asleep” in our prayerful support for this man. We absolutely must remain vigilant and devoted to prayer, for we are not only praying for this man, but we are truly praying for Christ. Jesus Christ is an eternal person, and therefore every action which he did in his earthly sojourn is an eternal action, and thus we cannot leave anything in the pages of history, but continually draw near to these eternal moments of the Gospel. Christ, in some mystical sense, is still suffering in the garden – the mystical body of Christ, the Church, is suffering in the garden, even today, and we, as members of that body but also disciples of that body, must NOT “fall asleep,” but remain devoted to that body and support it through our prayers. Christ is hurting in the garden precisely because he is taking the sins of the world upon himself, and Laura's murderer will, in his conversion, have to take his own sins upon himself and in a deep examination of his conscience and heart he will be called to account for all he has done, and he will suffer in that garden. Christ suffers with him and for him, and we, as members of Christ and also disciples of Christ, must stay faithful to our Lord by supporting this man in prayer, so that he may pass through the garden, go all the way to Calvary, “die” with Christ, and reap his eternal destiny which is nothing short of the resurrection and glory of Christ for eternity.

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Day Five



Scripture Passage: “The Crowning with Thorns”

“Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the praetorium, and they gathered the whole battalion before him. And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe upon him, and making a crown of thorns they placed it on his head, and put a reed in his right hand.

And kneeling before him they mocked him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” And they spat upon him, and took the reed and struck him on the head.” - MATTHEW 27: 27-30

Meditation:

They have turned our Lord into the butt of a joke. They have regarded the True King of Kings, The Lord of Lords, the Most High God as nothing more than a means to their own petty and sadistic satisfaction. Even if Jesus were merely a man - a mortal human being - and not a veritable God, then this situation should cause the hair on the back of our necks to stand up and our stomach should be turning in revolutionary disgust. Man – mortal human beings, both male and female – is possessed of a dignity which is far

greater than we can ever comprehend. We are made in the image and likeness of God! How often do we disregard this Truth and treat people as though they were made in the image and likeness of a glorified ape... Even apes do not merit the treatment that Jesus received in this scenario.

How often have we treated Christ exactly the same way?... They made him a mock king. They said with their lips, "Hail, King of the Jews," yet with their actions they said something very different. How many times have we gone to Church on Sunday and praised the Lord with our lips, and then turned right back around and done something very different with our actions...

Christ, in teaching his disciples about the judgment at the end of time, spoke about our actions in direct reference to Him (see Matt. 25:31-46). "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Matt 25:40). In other words, the way we treat our human brothers and sisters IS the way we treat our Lord. He makes no distinction. If we are kind and gratuitous to others, then we are kind and gratuitous to Christ, and we fulfill what He Himself commanded: "Love one another, even as I have loved you" (John 15:12).

He said, "I was hungry and you fed me... I was in prison and you came to visit me..." (see Matt 25:31-46). Laura's murderer is hungry. He is starving, in fact, for love. And we all are – for love is the deepest and most fundamental truth and meaning of human life. Without love, we cannot even begin to make sense out of life, and our own humanity remains an enigma as it were, unless we experience and participate in love. This man for whom we pray was utterly deprived of and starving for love when he murdered Laura. No other reason can explain the actions of this man. To do those things to an innocent little girl... he was desperate. This is no excuse! But if we can unravel the deeper motivations for what he did, we can begin to feel authentic compassion for this man, even to the point that we would want to actively embrace and love him if we had the chance to. In fact, every Christian on the face of the planet is called to such a high degree of love, and in a certain sense we are not truly Christian unless we are actively striving to attain this kind of love. Jesus said to love others as he has loved us, and unless we are truly and actively seeking that love in our lives then we are hypocrites to claim the name of Christian. Prejudice has no place in Christianity. We cannot condemn this man, or any person, for any thing which they have done. The things which they have done might be utterly depraved and evil, but the person who did those things is still, at the deepest and most fundamental level of who they are, utterly beautiful and good – made in the image and likeness of God, who IS Love.

Laura's murderer is made in the image and likeness of God – Trinitarian Love: life giving, self-sacrificing, gift-of-self, LOVE. That is the image he is made in, even if he failed to act like it. He failed to act like it, most probably anyways, because he was

deprived of love himself; nobody ever showed him true love, and the result was a starvation for love which manifested itself in a horrible way. He is hungry for love, and he must be fed. He is also in prison, so to speak – a prison of isolation from the love that he is hungry for. Cut off from love, a man can not ever hope to find himself or any real meaning in life, and in these circumstances we can begin to understand the roots of certain evil actions on the part of men. “I was hungry and you fed me... I was in prison and you came to visit me... Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me!” In other words, “If your hearts are so hard that you cannot have compassion on any person in the world who is in need, you are failing to have compassion on me in my great passion which has paid the price for your soul.”

And to top it off, if we fail to love as Christ loves, or at the bare minimum seek with all our hearts to do so, we are, in our actions, crowning him anew with thorns, even as we proclaim with our lips, “Hail, King!”

The glorious good news about all of this – that would be the Gospel – is that we have a merciful and loving God who we can ALWAYS turn to in trust. That God wishes to fill our hearts with His own life-giving Love, and His Love is THE Love that truly satisfies the aching human heart. Let us pray for Laura's murderer that he will discover this utterly awesome truth, that GOD IS LOVE, and He, God, is the love for which he, Laura's murderer, has been looking for this whole time.

And we pray for Justice For Laura.

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Day Six



Scripture Passage: “The Annunciation”

“In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!” But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father, David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end.” And Mary said to the angel, “How shall this be, since I have no husband?” And the angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For with God nothing

will be impossible.” And Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.” -LUKE 1:26-38

Meditation:

Biblical scholars for two thousand years have recognized that Mary is a sort of archetype for the Church and also for the whole human race. She was and is, of course, an utterly unique human person in salvation history precisely due to the fact that she gave birth to the Son of God, but nevertheless the early fathers of the Church insisted that we have much to learn about ourselves and about humanity from the Virgin Mary in the Gospel narratives.

The Paschal Mystery – the passion, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ – is the price for our salvation and redemption. But in some way the whole thing started right here, at the Annunciation. Mary gave her consent to God's proposal BEFORE “the Word was made flesh,” and so in some sense we owe a debt of gratitude to that little Jewish virgin who had so much faith in and love for God that she boldly proclaimed herself to be the handmaid of the Lord. Of course, in the natural order of things all humans are the handmaids of the Lord simply because of the hierarchy of existence: God is infinitely higher than we are, and therefore we are, by our very nature and being, subject to Him. But God is also a gentleman – He never forces our hand at anything, but simply offers his gift of love freely and awaits our acceptance and return of love. Mary, acting in the name of all humanity, accepted the gift of love that God proposed to her; she opened herself so profoundly to God's gift that the same love was made flesh in her womb. She conceived the love of God within her precisely because she had received that love, and she was only able to receive that free gift of love because she believed in the gift!

God wants to give His gift of love to all of us, but we cannot receive it unless we truly believe that He is offering. The gift of love that He offers is Himself! Jesus Christ! GOD IS LOVE, and He gives himself to us in a free and total self-donation of love which is beyond our scope of understanding but believed in by our faith. And in this free gift of love, the Incarnation is repeated in each and every Christian in and through their conversion to Christ – and this is how Mary teaches us, in some way, what it means to be human! To be a fully alive human being is to be open and receptive to God's gift of love, to receive that gift of love, and then receiving, to conceive the gift of God's love within us and bear it forth to the world! Of course, this is more poetic language for us, as we will not literally conceive Christ as Mary did, but we ARE meant to conceive His Love within us so that we may “incarnate” that love in our own lives and bear that love forth to all the world. But we must first receive! Christ told us to love as he loves, but before he said that he also told us to first abide in his love. Abiding in His love requires a total surrender of ourselves to God, it requires us to proclaim in unison with Mary,

“Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to your word.” This takes a tremendous amount of trust on our part, but if we are submissive to God He will gratuitously pour out His love upon us and we will conceive divine life and love within, and become empowered through that gift of God's love to share it with others. We will be empowered to love rightly and truly, in total self-donation and self-giving. And we will be utterly filled with the fullness of God's love which is nothing short of a blissful ecstasy - an explosion of Trinitarian love beyond the power of words to describe. God is yearning for us to say “yes” to His love!! If we say yes, we conceive the love of Christ within our own hearts and we are brought into the transforming union of love between God and our own soul, and in turn we become shining beacons of hope and love in the world which reveals the love of Christ – we are made able to fulfill Christ's command to love as He loves, and to become perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect. We become, ever so gradually but nonetheless truly, perfect in love.

The opposite of love is NOT hatred. Love is essentially the free, total, faithful, fruitful gift of self; the opposite of that would not be hatred, but it would be using another person for our own selfish end. USE, not hatred, is the diametrical opposite of love. Laura's murderer is well acquainted with this too, for he used Laura for his own selfish end – treated her as a thing, as a means to his end, and an expendable one at that; and going even beyond the horrific act of discarding the used expendable thing, he actually destroyed it. He destroyed her. He murdered her... This entire series of events constitutes the most severe and tragic degradation of a person – Laura was not a thing to be used, but a person, made in the image and likeness of God, to be loved. But her murderer is also a person made in the image and likeness of God, yet he acted horribly out of character. However, we can also say with the certainty of faith, that he would never have acted that way if he had received and conceived the Love of God. It was precisely the lack of God's love in his heart that permitted him to behave so incongruently with his own nature – as a man who is naturally made in the image of God, who is infinite love. We must pray fervently that this man would open himself to the Love of God, for we know that God never forces Himself upon anybody, but He can certainly “nudge” a person in the right direction with a flash of divine light which illumines the person's mind to the true nature of God as One who is holding out a free gift of infinite love. May the Holy Spirit send such a flash of divine light to this man, so starved for love, and may he, perceiving the gift, open himself to God's gift of love, which will be the necessary measure for his conversion.

And we pray for Justice For Laura.

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Day Seven



Scripture Passage: “The Last Supper”

“And taking bread, he gave thanks and brake and gave to them, saying: This is my body, which is given for you. Do this for a commemoration of me. In like manner, the chalice also, after he had supped, saying: This is the chalice, the new testament in my blood, which shall be shed for you.” -LUKE 22:19-20

Prayer Before Meditation:

“O Lord Jesus Christ, Immaculate Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, draw us close to Your Sacred Heart and fill us with that divine fire of love which so utterly consumed Your heart in the upper room that night as You left Your disciples with an eternal pledge and promise and proof of Your Love. Teach us, O Lord, to make a sincere gift of ourselves in imitation of You.

Come, Holy Spirit. Fill the hearts of Thy faithful and kindle in them the fire of Thy

Love. Send forth Thy Spirit and they shall be created, and Thou shalt renew the face of the earth. O God, who did instruct the hearts of Thy faithful people by the light of the Holy Spirit, grant us that by the same Spirit we may be always truly wise, and ever rejoice in His holy comfort. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.”

Meditation:

Mother Teresa, when speaking of the Eucharist, called the sacrament “a mystery of love,” one which can never be fully understood by our mortal minds, but nevertheless must be appreciated as much as possible.

What is Jesus doing in the upper room? And why?

We cannot see our souls. We cannot see the souls of anyone else, at least not physically with our eyes. We see the inner mystery of each person revealed in and through their physical bodies, which make that which is invisible visible to the world; it is the same with our Blessed Lord. His disciples could not see the inner mystery of Christ's sacred soul, but they could see His body right before their eyes. It is through Christ's body that His very person, His soul, His self, His Being, is manifested to the world, and it is only through His body that we can see and perceive what that soul is doing. “This is my body,” can thus be understood as “this is the very essence of who I am. This is my person, this is my self, this is my heart and my soul, the core of who and what I am.” And this is, “given up for you.” Christ, the Eternal High Priest, GIVES HIMSELF up for us, for the remission of our sins.

Recall what sin is – the word originating from ancient Greek archery which was used when the archers missed their target. They were aiming for something good, yet they “missed the mark.” Christian theologians meant the word “sin” in this same way, and to affirm that the desires of the human heart are in fact very good – it is only when those desires become twisted and distorted, and especially whenever we go to the wrong place to fulfill those desires, that we “miss the mark” and therefore sin. Christ gives himself up for the remission of our sins. But how do we understand that? What does that even mean? Christ said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” He said, “No man comes to the Father but by me.” He said, “FOLLOW ME.” Follow me and you will find everything which your heart has ever yearned for and desired. Every hunger of your soul, for love, for intimacy, for touch, for communion, for union... all of these things will be utterly and fully satisfied if you would just believe in me enough to follow and imitate my example. I am going that way, to the cross, to GIVE my body, my self, my soul, my person – FOR YOU. I will SACRIFICE myself for LOVE of YOU, and this I do for your own redemption and the remission of all of your sins. Follow Me!... Our sins are all the ways that we have “missed the mark” in our search for the satisfaction of our hungry hearts. We are all looking for something in this life, and God Himself has

revealed to us that HE is the satisfaction for which we crave. Every other desire is merely a reflection of the deepest hunger of our hearts – which is for God alone. And God, revealed definitively in the person of Jesus Christ, GIVES Himself up for us for the remission of our sins. In other words, He gives Himself up for us to SHOW US THE WAY, to show us “the mark” which we have “missed” so terribly. He shows us that “man cannot fully find himself, except through the sincere gift of self.” THIS is exactly what Christ is doing in the upper room at The Last Supper.

The Eucharist, instituted by Jesus Christ in The Last Supper, is the gift of himself – His person, His being, His body and blood, His soul and divinity, which He GIVES to us. “Take this, all of you, and eat it.” HE HIMSELF nourishes our souls through His GIFT OF SELF. And in doing so, He shows us essentially what it means to be human, to give OURSELVES away in love, and in that self-sacrifice, that “gift of self,” we are in some mystical sense participating in the very same sacrifice of Christ, for the salvation of the world. For we are the mystical body of Christ, and if we join our gift of self to Christ's gift of self in and through his mystical body, the Church, then it becomes Him who gives Himself in and through us, and we participate in that glorious work of salvation for the entire world. Christ showed us how to live, and he said to “do this, for a commemoration of me.” In other words, he is continuing to save the world in and through us, if we are willing to join our sacrifice to His. God allows us to participate intimately in His saving action... AMAZING... This is not really so abstract either. As we give ourselves away in love, we are sowing seeds of love throughout the world, and love begets love, and eventually the world WILL be taken over with this Love - which IS Jesus Christ, and HE is slowly but surely spreading the perfume of His Love throughout the world, and He lets us take part in it! (If we join Him in the freedom of love.)

This is the basic desire of the human heart: love. And love - authentic and true love anyways - always seeks to give itself away in love; it overflows and seeks to expand its own communion. Love cannot be bottled up inside, or it is not really love; love must be shared. And the deepest yearning of every person on this planet, whether they realize it or not, is for love! And again, this love for which we crave must give itself away, it must sacrifice itself for the good of another or many others. And somewhere, deep in our hearts, we all know this, but in this noise-polluted world we so rarely take the time to actually listen to what our hearts are saying to us that we do not even realize what it is that we truly desire in this life. What do we truly desire? One word, really: Love. “GOD IS LOVE.” We discover God in and through love, and in and through self-giving. And it is because of this, that Christ “fully reveals man to himself, and makes his supreme calling clear.” “FOLLOW ME!!!”

Laura's murderer is not unlike any other human being. He desires love more than anything else in this life. He desires to be loved. He yearns for love, longs for it, craves

unceasingly for intimacy, for touch, for union, for... Holy Communion. He desires union with God, just like we all do. Somehow, in some twisted and perverted and horribly distorted way, when that man abducted and murdered Laura years ago, and did God only knows what to her in the process, He was actually seeking God. He was trying to satisfy the ache in his heart for God – the hunger, the longing, the yearning which we all have within us, but so often repress... He did not repress it, but he also did not redeem it with the Blood of Christ, and because of this tragic mistake his desires took on an utterly evil perversion and he sought satisfaction in horrific, evil ways. He “missed the mark” very, very, very badly... The “mark” is Jesus. The mark is love: self-giving, self-sacrificing Trinitarian love. And that is what he was looking for, in some way, in some sense, but he missed terribly. Let us pray for this man, that he may recover proper aim.

“Jesus... You, Lord, are the Love that truly satisfies. You are the “bread come down from heaven” that will satisfy the deepest hunger of our hearts. Have mercy on your child, Laura's murderer, who longs so desperately for your love, perhaps without even realizing it. He was looking for You all along, he was looking for Holy Communion with You, and he just didn't know where to look, so he looked in all the wrong places. Have mercy on him, O Merciful Savior, and reveal to him that love which he has been looking for.”

And we pray for Justice For Laura.

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Abba, Father,

You have revealed Yourself as the God of Love Who desires all Your children to be saved, and Who will run to embrace any soul who sincerely turns back to You.

We lift up the soul of Laura's killer, Your beloved child who has wandered in a far away land squandering the inheritance which You, his most Loving Father, have bestowed upon him. We beg the Holy Spirit to sing Your song of Love into his heart. Speak to his soul of his dignity and beauty as Your child, and give him the confidence to turn back to You in trust and repentance.

We ask this through the infinite merits of Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Divine Mercy Whose compassion knows no bounds.

Amen.

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“Justice For Laura” Novena - 9 Days of Prayer

Day Eight



Scripture Reading: “The Crucifixion of our Lord”

“And when they came to the place which is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on the right and one on the left. And Jesus said, “Father forgive them; for they know not what they do.”..... One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done no wrong.” And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” And he said to him, “Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.” -LUKE 23:33-43

Meditation:

Our Lord has ascended the Cross as a sort of pulpit from which He will deliver His last sermon. Beaten, bruised, bloodied, scourged, crowned with thorns, abandoned by all but

his most devout followers, and exhausted from carrying His own Cross all the way to the place of His death, our Lord speaks to us. His words are few, spoken through the asphyxiation of being crucified, yet His sayings are among the most important words we sinners can ever hear in our lives. Let us beg God for “ears to hear.”

“Father forgive them; for they know not what they do.”

If we did know what we were doing when we crucified the Son of God then we probably would not have very much hope of salvation. Indeed, if we were aware of the malice of even one seemingly small sin, we would break down and weep... The magnitude of an offense is in direct proportion to the dignity of the one offended; in the case of sin, God is the One offended, and, as His is an infinite dignity, even a “small” sin constitutes an infinite offense against the Most High God. We cannot fathom the great majesty of the Holy Trinity Whom we so often offend, but we can and do catch a glimpse of the immensity of His mercy when He Himself takes our place on the cross, and cries out in anguish from that most exalted place, “Forgive them!” The boundless mercy of God exceeds the boundaries of our hearts and minds, so darkened by sin... Our Lord appeals to His Father (we can call Him “Our Father” only by the magnanimous gift of incomprehensible grace) on behalf of all those individuals who are actively crucifying Him: the ones who drove in the nails and crowned Him with thorns and mocked him; those who cast lots for His garments and scoffed at Him, saying, “If you are the Christ, come down off that cross!” Our Lord forgives them all and prays for them, knowing that they are ignorant... Didn't WE drive nails into His feet, fastening Him to the cross every time we strayed from “the way”? Didn't WE crown Him with thorns and make Him a mock king and ridicule Him every time we praised His Name with our lips but then in our actions railed against Him and His Church, even consciously justifying our sins because they were so “small” and “insignificant”? Didn't WE drive the spear into His side – into His Sacred Heart – with all of our idolatrous false loves, seeking God's uncreated Love and satisfaction in the created things of this world?

Amen, Amen, if we only knew the scorching furnace of Love that we were offending every time we sinned then we would agonize and weep to have hurled such blasphemous insults at the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We would feel such a compassion for so great a God that we would yearn to be crucified with Him for our sins – recognizing that for us crucifixion would not be even a small sacrifice, but only justice for the venom which we have so often offered Him, even under the mask of praise. We feel as though we ought to be the thief being crucified at His side, in atonement for our many sins, and we proclaim with that thief that our crucifixion is “the due reward of our deeds.” We look upon the God whom we ourselves have nailed to a tree and we cry out for forgiveness, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom!” We own and acknowledge our sin, and our just punishment, and all we can do is turn to God and beg Him for mercy, knowing full well that we do not deserve nor could we ever merit the

pardon which we seek... We surrender everything knowing that we are entitled to nothing....

And it is RIGHT HERE, prostrate before our crucified God - Whom WE crucified!! - that we discover the unfathomable depths of mercy and the inexhaustible treasures of Love contained in the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

“Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

He died FOR us. WE should have died. WE should have been nailed to that tree and beaten and scourged and spat upon and mocked. HE took OUR place. WHY?!?! After we had offended Him so many COUNTLESS times why in heaven or on earth would God die for us? So that we could have the chance to be with Him in paradise!! That's the whole reason He made us in the first place!! The only reason why we are even breathing at this moment is because God loves us so much and desires for us to spend eternity with Him – absorbed into and participating intimately in the eternal exchange of love between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: that EXPLOSION of Trinitarian, life-giving, perfect and utter “gift-of-self” love-bomb that is God! GOD IS LOVE!!!

“Jesus, remember me when you enter into your kingdom!” Such a simple and humble prayer. A recognition of guilt and a plea for mercy.... and paradise opens.

Laura's murderer is the thief on the cross. He very may well be living a sort of crucifixion even now, so cut off from and starved for love... And all he needs to do is recognize his guilt, confess it to the Lord and cry out for mercy, and the ocean of Love that overflows from the Heart of Christ will engulf even him, and the gates of paradise will open to him.

“Lord, give him eyes to see.”

And we pray for Justice For Laura.

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Abba, Father,

You have revealed Yourself as the God of Love Who desires all Your children to be saved, and Who will run to embrace any soul who sincerely turns back to You.

We lift up the soul of Laura's killer, Your beloved child who has wandered in a far away land squandering the inheritance which You, his most Loving Father, have bestowed upon him. We beg the Holy Spirit to sing Your song of Love into his heart. Speak to his soul of his dignity and beauty as Your child, and give him the confidence to turn back to You in trust and repentance.

We ask this through the infinite merits of Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Divine Mercy

Whose compassion knows no bounds.

Amen.

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“Justice For Laura” Novena - 9 Days of Prayer

Day Nine



Scripture Passage: “The Resurrection of our Lord”

“But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices which they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel; and as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and on the third day rise.” And they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told this to the apostles; but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home wondering at what had happened.” -LUKE 24:1-12

Meditation:

After three years spent in the intimate company of our Lord during His public ministry, after seeing countless miracles and witnessing so many prophecies fulfilled right before them, the apostles do not believe that the Lord has risen. They did not believe! They who were so close to Him and left all they possessed to follow Him did not believe that He had risen from the dead. The women too - they had no faith in the resurrection until the angel declared it to them, for they had gone to the tomb with spices to anoint the body. The apostles were afraid of being persecuted for their affiliation with Jesus, so they HID themselves away in the upper room! Peter and his brothers went back to fishing.... Incredible....

God asks so little of us in comparison with what He Himself gives. He lavishes graces and blessings upon us and we hardly even stop to notice. The ONE thing which God has asked for from the very beginning is our faith; that is all! And everything else will fall in place. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever would BELIEVE IN HIM would not perish, but have eternal life.” Eternal LIFE!! Do we really believe in EVERYTHING that Jesus taught us? By His words? Deeds? Through His own apostles Whom He commissioned to teach all nations? Or do we pick and choose which doctrines and dogmas are “true for us” (as if objective truth can be subjectively interpreted) and leave the rest?

The Lord has risen! He is alive! And if there is one thing which the resurrection tells us it is that Jesus Christ truly is the Son of God! He IS the One Whom He Himself said: “I AM.” And if He IS, then WE ought to follow EVERYTHING which He has taught and commanded – and more than anything else we MUST heed His commandment of love: “Love one another, as I have loved you.” How did Christ love us? He laid down His life for us! He suffered and died for us! He fed and feeds us with His own body and blood nourishing us in the life of grace and empowering us to fulfill that command!

The Passion of Christ was in vain unless we live a new life, and unless we are striving to live that new life in Christ, even daily seeking improvement and sanctification, then we offer a grave insult to our Lord in return for His loving sacrifice for us. He died to pay the infinite price for our sins, thereby opening up the possibility of heaven for us, but He did SO MUCH MORE: He has EMPOWERED US to live a new, redeemed, TRANSFORMED life through grace, and He holds that grace out to us in a totally free and gratuitous gift. But we cannot receive that gift unless we first believe in it. The gift is HIS LOVE.

GOD IS LOVE.

The Love which He offers us is capable of producing a radical transformation of our hearts, but He will never force it upon us. All of the old testament prophets speak of God's love for His people as the love of a husband for his bride, but the bridegroom cannot force his love upon his bride – that would not be love, that would be rape. It is the same with God, and God will NEVER “rape” us with His Love. He holds it out as a free gift and awaits our reply. If we BELIEVE in His gift, then we have nothing to fear, and we should OPEN ourselves FULLY and totally to Him, and allow that Love to permeate and penetrate us, and it WILL transform us into “a new creation.” Conversion is not simply saying a little prayer telling Jesus that we believe in Him and accept Him as our Lord and Saviour, it is ALLOWING Him to ENTER our hearts in a POWERFUL way to RESTORE us to the life of grace. And in allowing Him in, we must surrender everything to Him, and let Him CRUCIFY every evil and disordered passion in our hearts - “take up your cross daily and follow me” is not only a matter of bearing patiently with the sufferings of this life, although that is part of it also, it is a matter of bearing the spiritual crucifixion which is necessary for us to be transformed in Christ and redeemed. And it hurts. It is gut-wrenching, in fact. But if we allow the Lord to crucify all of our sinful ways then He will resurrect every pure and good desire of our hearts, and the fullness of Love which He Himself will pour into our hearts will be our qualification to Love as Christ loves. This love will not only give the strength, but even the holy desire to lay down our lives for the good of others - the actual yearning to sacrifice all that we must to bring others to the Love of God, because once we have tasted this “extravagant love” we will not want to rest until the whole world knows about and is immersed in it.

God longs to pour out this love on all of us, and to fill us with the ecstasy of blissful Trinitarian Love, but He will not force our hand. We must receive it as a GIFT. And to receive, we must BELIEVE.

Before Christ told us to love as He loves, He told us to ABIDE in His love, and that abiding can only happen in and through a deep and contemplative prayer life. We are not all called to be hermits or live in cloistered monasteries, but there IS a sort of everyday mysticism which we ARE all called to, and it is through that every day living of a deep prayer life that we truly discover and encounter the God Who is Love – and we “abide” in that love. And in that abiding we allow God into the deepest, darkest, most secret places of our hearts and He floods light upon those caverns of sin and transforms them into luminaries of divine love, thereby empowering us to share His Love with others.

In 1965 Jackie DeShannon sang: “What the world needs now, is love, sweet love. It's the only thing, that there's just to little of.” Amen to that. Let us abide in Christ's love through prayer. Prayer - it's actually the ONLY thing which our Lord specifically asks of us in the whole of the four Gospels - “Watch and pray that you do not enter into

temptation.” “Could you not watch with me one hour?”

Keep watch. Know and abide in the Love that truly satisfies, and abiding in His love, pray that everyone in the world, and especially Laura's murderer, will come to know and abide in that Love. Amen.

And we pray for Justice For Laura.

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Abba, Father,

You have revealed Yourself as the God of Love Who desires all Your children to be saved, and Who will run to embrace any soul who sincerely turns back to You.

We lift up the soul of Laura's killer, Your beloved child who has wandered in a far away land squandering the inheritance which You, his most Loving Father, have bestowed upon him. We beg the Holy Spirit to sing Your song of Love into his heart. Speak to his soul of his dignity and beauty as Your child, and give him the confidence to turn back to You in trust and repentance.

We ask this through the infinite merits of Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Divine Mercy Whose compassion knows no bounds.

Amen.

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