



Sister-Servants of the Holy Spirit of Perpetual Adoration

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Remembering Mother Mary Michael

Gifts of the Season

Before the year 2016 draws to a close, the Church's liturgical calendar would have already set its beginning for a New Year to commence. That's when we celebrate Advent. It is evidently a special time of prayerful longing and silent waiting for the great and radiant feast of the birth of Jesus, our divine Savior. The joyful season of Christmas comes soon after, with its festive character of family gatherings, gift-giving, heart-warming carols and all that makes it a real feast of the heart. One cannot help but just be bathed in its spirit of joy, peace, love and generosity. Hidden, however, in our celebrations are God's other precious gifts of the season. Often we take them for granted, for they are but ordinary, unperceivable realities. Gazing at them long and hard though, we slowly discover in them a certain uniqueness so that they begin to be stripped of their triviality.

Time's timeless treasure

There is something quite unique about time. It is as imperceptible to the human eye as the air we breathe, yet we are certain that it is there. Undoubtedly, it is present, yet it passes by too quickly, so that we could rightly sense time more like an elusive wind that comes and goes, and when gone, it is for forever, with no promise of return. Time therefore moves on steadily, and irrefutably we must admit: with what finality! What is, therefore, left at our disposal with time is just the NOW! Yesterday is over and gone, tomorrow is yet to come. The *now* is all that we have, for in reality, it is the only time we have, and soon it will also move away. God's gift of time is hidden in every *now* of our life. What makes this gift even more precious is that our *now* is directly joined to eternity. Every single *now* bears an infinite value and carries with it the merits of eternal life. Living our every *now* to the best of our intention of pleasing God gives us a hundredfold assurance of a blissful eternity with him.

One of the finest compliments that the Sisters have for Mother Mary Michael was that she was calmness personified. Nothing could ever disturb her composure. Her glance always aimed directly at God, in every situation she stood with constant, unchanging readiness at the disposal of the divine will.¹ How was it possible with her? She lived moment by moment in the firm conviction that “What God does is well done.”² Her capacity to live the *now* of her life was so intense that she once wrote to the Sisters, “We must live by faith and look upon **everything** that happens to us and around us with the eye of faith; for **everything** comes from God, either directly or indirectly.”³ “To a Sister, who sympathized with her on account of her many cares and labors, she replied smilingly, ‘Sister, don’t let that trouble you. Whenever I enter the chapel, I leave all my cares outside; then they can’t disturb my prayer. Neither do I lose a minute’s sleep on account of them. All things come from God; he guides and directs everything. We should never foolishly think that he makes a mistake in his plans.’”⁴

As in prayer so also in her daily duties, M. M. Michael regarded in faith the graces at work always and everywhere in the *now* of daily life. She therefore encouraged the Sisters to work diligently and not squander a morsel of the precious gift of time.⁵ But although they should work diligently, they nevertheless should avoid haste and inquietude. At all times a holy calm should reign. “There have always been those,” she once said, “who would like to have everything done in one day, but so far no one could accomplish it. Even the good God, who is almighty, took six days to complete the work of creation. He certainly could have done it in one day; but in order to teach us a lesson, he did one thing at a time and rejoiced at each, for it was very good. Then he proceeded to the next task. Diligence with calmness and calmness with diligence is the correct way. This keeps us healthy and happy.”⁶ With work, one can truly experience the richness of grace promised in the *now*, and when it is done with supernatural motives it can be a fruitful means of salvation for others and for oneself, the reward of which is nothing less than eternity ... time without end.

¹ cf. A-thought-a-day Guide in striving for religious perfection, February 23

² cf. Burning Lamps, p. 119

³ cf. *ibid*, p. 117

⁴ cf. *ibid*, p. 126

⁵ cf. *ibid*, p. 100

⁶ cf. A-thought-a-day Guide in striving for religious perfection, October 26

Presence, precious and personal

Presence is one of those words which has evolved drastically in our digital age. What used to be a simple fact about *presence - being there* - is now multiplied into as many impressions and meanings (e.g. virtual presence, etc.) as there are now many different media of communication available.

There is however a *presence* that has kept its pristine essence to this day. It is just as it is but no less precious for the reason of its ordinariness. “This presence is called ‘real,’ and what is referred to here is the mode of Christ’s *presence* under the Eucharistic species. In the most Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist, the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, the whole of Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained. This is not intended to exclude the other types of *presence* as if they could not be ‘real’ too, but because it is *presence* in the fullest sense: that is to say, it is a substantial *presence* by which Christ, God and man, makes himself wholly and entirely present.”⁷ He is really there!

“Our heaven on earth!” This expression was employed by M. M. Michael whenever she spoke about the Holy Eucharist. She would then add, “The Blessed Sacrament is indeed the most beautiful and most sublime gift that our small earth and the whole world calls its own.”⁸ After her death, a Sister wrote beautifully: “M. M. Michael’s bearing during adoration was for us the most effective sermon on the Blessed Sacrament. She knelt there like a devout child; her hands rested folded on the prie-dieu, her eyes were fixed upon the sacred Host, her entire being breathed recollection and absorption in God. The impression it made on us was unforgettable. Only a holy soul could pray thus.”⁹

Presence is also the true essence of prayer. According to Scripture it is the heart that prays. If our heart is far from God the words of prayer are in vain. The heart is the dwelling-place where I am, where I live, the place to which I withdraw. It is the place of encounter. Thus, the life of prayer is the habit of being in the presence of the holy triune God and in communion with him.¹⁰ Time is in the Father’s hand; it is his special gift to us. Time is also our gift to him; our being there for him and with him in prayer. It is our being present

⁷ Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 1374

⁸ cf. A-thought-a-day Guide in striving for religious perfection, July 19

⁹ cf. Letter of Rev. Mother M. Ignatia on the Occasion of the 100th Birthday of Mother Mary Michael, December 1961

¹⁰ cf. CCC, n. 2562, 63,65

to his great Presence that we encounter him, neither yesterday nor tomorrow, but today.¹

An exchange of gifts

“O marvelous exchange! Man’s Creator has become man, born of the Virgin. We have been made sharers in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share our humanity.”² God did not only give us the gift of time but he himself came to be present in our world of time. When his earthly life ended, he gifted us with his presence, the Holy Eucharist, no less real than his human presence in time. What more could God do for us, what more could he give us?

Mother M. Michael, who was uniquely gifted with practical wisdom, has much to teach us so that we can grow in appreciation of God’s workings in our lives, in joys and blessings but most especially in the unpleasant and sometimes unavoidable pains of our *now*. “In daily life,” she once said, “we can benefit by the smallest trifles from morning till night to give pleasure to God, if only we are attentive enough. One must make a habit of not allowing any opportunity to pass by.”³ Everything that happens to us and around us must be regarded with supernatural eyes, with eyes of faith. Mother M. Michael’s life was stamped with serenity and gratitude because she saw everything as coming in one way or another from God and as part of his service. It is of no little wonder why the hallmark of her life was joy.⁴

Mother M. Michael invites us to walk with her along the path of faith, and live the seasons and the days to come with fresh vigor and new ideals. Our precious time amidst our busy schedule can be our loving gift to God, as we set aside moments of quiet with him. Our loved ones also need our valuable presence and precious time. Spending quality moments with them, even “wasting time” with them and being truly there for them is worth more than the expensive gifts we purchase for them this Christmas. How much difference it will make to us and to those around us this Christmas and in the coming New Year, when we become both a loving presence and a present of love to everyone who comes our way!

¹ cf. CCC, n. 2659

² cf. Liturgy of the Hours, Epiphany, Evening Prayer II, Antiphon at the *Canticle of Mary*

³ cf. A-thought-a-day Guide in striving for religious perfection, January 12

⁴ cf. *ibid*, February 5