

## Sr. Paula of Jesus + Concord Carmel



Homily for Sr. Paula of Jesus  
18 January, 2006

One of our deceased Carmelite friars used to tell us that his grandmother would complain to Jesus that he only suffered three hours of agony on the cross while she, and many others, suffered much longer. While we are not here to question the intensity of the sufferings of Jesus, this thought occurred to me as I reflected about the life and death of our dear Sister Paula of Jesus. I'm sure no such idea ever crossed her mind yet you could say that she had every right to complain to Jesus. After all she carried his cross in the form of a debilitating illness for almost thirty years.

How can we make sense out of such suffering? St Teresa of Jesus Our Holy Mother tells us that God "gives us according to the love he bears us, to those he loves more, he gives more of these gifts ..." (by gifts she meant a sharing in the sufferings of the beloved Son), "and he gives according to the courage and the love each has for his majesty. He will see that whoever loves him much will be able to suffer much for him ... I myself hold," she said, "that the measure of being able to bear a large or small cross is love." It is clear then that Sr Paula was a woman of great faith and courage; her love for Jesus knew no limits. She lovingly accepted a heavy cross, and for a long time. Surely this cross too was a sign of the Lord's great love for her.

Paula of Jesus has been described to me as a woman of great beauty. She enjoyed a social life and dated a great deal before entering Carmel at the age of 28. She was always looking for something more. Even as a young woman she would spend long periods of time on her knees in prayer. She was a talented singer, baker and calligrapher. She was an intelligent woman who loved to study and discuss the Fathers of the Church. She worked at the turn where she had contact with those who came to the monastery and she did this well. She was a joy to be with.

When in her late fifties, Paula was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. She remained in the monastery another 20 years before transferring to the nearby nursing home where she patiently spent the last years of her life. She died on Friday at the age of 87; she had been in Carmel 59 years. Sr Paula struggled to accept her illness. It was not easy for her and it took time. But she learned to surrender to the Lord and give him all he was asking of her.

She truly came to understand and to live out St Paul's words to the Philippians: "I have come to consider all these advantages that I had as disadvantages. Not only that, but I believe nothing can happen that will outweigh the supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. For him I have accepted the loss of

everything, and I look on everything as worthless if only I can have Christ and be given a place in him. I no longer try for perfection on my own efforts,... I want only the perfection that comes from faith in Christ ... All I want is to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and to share his suffering by reproducing the pattern of his death." God gave Sr Paula many gifts and then he asked her for them back. Over the passage of time she surrendered everything to his will.

The gospel chosen for this liturgy is that of the Transfiguration. It was a special moment of prayer for Jesus and his closest friends. Moses, the Lawgiver, and Elijah, the prophet, were present. At that moment Jesus realized that he would be both the glorious Son of Man and the Suffering Servant who would heal God's people by his wounds. For a moment his glory broke through his frail humanity and the apostles, caught up in the experience, were overwhelmed. Jesus was talking, however, about his passage to Jerusalem, his passion and death. The apostles wanted to erect tents to memorialize the moment. Jesus, however, led them down the mountain and they continued the day-by-day journey of faith.

St. Paul tells us that the Spirit of God, a spirit of confidence and adoption. Is at work in us transforming us into the image of the Beloved Son. We have our own moments of transfiguration. Sr Paula shared intimately in the sufferings of Christ. Now she shares in his glory. Her transfiguration is completed. Now she rejoices with him forever.

When Lazarus, Jesus' dear friend died, he went to Bethany. Martha met Jesus on the way and said: "If you had been here my brother would not have died." Jesus replied: "Your brother will rise again." Martha said: "I know he will rise again, at the resurrection on the last day." Jesus then said: "I am the Resurrection and the Life, If anyone believes in me, even though he dies, he will live and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."

Jesus came that we might have life, life and joy to the fullest. What I think he is telling Martha here is that those who die in him have the fullness of life in him - not later, not on the last day, not when he comes as judge of the living and the dead - but even now. With confidence then we celebrate this liturgy for our beloved Sr Paula, believing fully that she is with Jesus whom she loved her whole life.

The motto Paula chose to have engraved on her profession crucifix was: "O truth, My God, make me one with you in everlasting love." God has now done that for her in Christ. Now she can truly say: "My beloved is mine and I am his."



( *Following of Christ*, Bk. 1, Ch. 3, vs. 8)