

Schoenstatt Updates

Meeting people where they are... leading them to where *God calls them to be!*

Lenten Retreat with Father Kentenich “The Sign of the Cross” - Part 1

You are invited this Lent to a personal Retreat with Father Kentenich called “The Sign of the Cross”. For every Sunday in Lent, we will receive a short meditation from him on the meaning and symbolism of the cross for our spiritual lives. This First Sunday of Lent, we begin with the foundation of the cross in our lives - to transform our love. When Father Kentenich describes the Cross, he uses different symbols to highlight different perspectives or different aspects of the Cross in our lives. For example, he uses the symbol of an altar, a mirror, a banner, and a book. We will take these symbols one at a time, one for each of the five Sundays of Lent. The following article is based on a Talk by Father Kentenich in Milwaukee from 24th February 1958.

One of the things that we hope for and expect in our Covenant of Love with our Blessed Lady is that **she transforms our ability to love**. What does that mean? It means that our love grows and becomes what the Lord designed it to be. We can speak about two types of love: the first type is a selfish love, a primitive love that is centred upon ourselves all the time. This immature love puts us always at the centre of everything. Even if we should love someone else, we only love them because it gives us something, i.e. our needs are being met. The second type of love is a more mature love, where the people we love are first and foremost. They stand at the centre. Mature love is selfless and self-donating. It doesn't matter what kind of love we are talking about, you will always find these two types - selfish love or mature love. When we love someone, then we always do the best for them and we always try to find God present in our love. It isn't easy to always love like this. For this reason, we need to ask for a miracle of transformation.

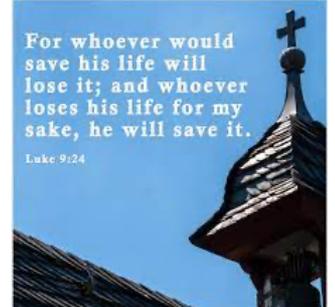
Our Blessed Lady revealed how mature and self-giving her love was when she surrendered her heart to God at the Annunciation and said: “I am the handmaid of the Lord”. She noticed the embarrassment of the couple getting married in Cana when the wine had run out and she said to the servants: “Do whatever he tells you”. In other words, my Son will put this right, just do as he asks. She revealed the extent of her love when she went “in haste to her cousin Elizabeth”, to support her in her pregnancy by simply being there and helping as much as she could. The heart of our Blessed Lady is a home and refuge for everyone. She shows us what mature love looks like: everyone has a right to find shelter in her heart. This is a monumental challenge in a world where so many people are used to putting themselves first.

Mature love will always include some form of suffering and sacrifice. In fact, we can understand suffering and crosses in our own lives as an opportunity to grow in love. Mary and Joseph also didn't understand why Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem when he was twelve years old and didn't let anyone know. True love will always include disappointments, or misunderstandings, or even challenging experiences that take us to the limit. The story of our love is always, at the same time, the story of our disappointments. The essence of love continuously draws us to the infinite, but often we experience our own limitations. We want to love more, but we often feel that we can't love anymore than we are already doing.

Matthew Kelly wrote about the recoiling from sacrifice when he used the example of people always seeking the most comfortable way: “Our modern times seem addicted to comfort and allergic to sacrifice. Both postures make the Christian life at least difficult and at most impossible. In order to love, and love deeply, we have to be willing to give up some comfort and take on some sacrifice. Love of comfort is a form of self-worship. Let us set aside our fixation with comfort and worship the one true God by adopting the spirit of sacrifice that Jesus embraced on the Cross. Our willingness to make sacrifices for those we love is one of the ways we give weight to the words, “I love you.”... Willing

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For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake, he will save it.
Luke 9:24



sacrifice out of love is a path most people have never tried. It is a path most married couples have never been taught. And it is a path that is essential if we are going to find our way back to thriving in this world. Sacrificial love brings meaning to our lives in a culture of meaninglessness. It binds us together in a world intent on tearing everyone apart. It provides healing in a culture overwhelmed with wounds."

So what then is the purpose of suffering when we love? Through experiences of difficulties and challenges, God wants to transform our love and set it aright. He wants to bring about in us a true love that doesn't put ourselves at the centre and reaches out to find its ultimate fulfilment in the heart of God. Sometimes we are blind to the value and transformative power of sacrifice and suffering. We often easily see worldly values around us, but remain blind to God's values breaking through into our lives. Our love grows and matures when we see the challenges and sacrifices that face us as God's gift of transformation. Through our personal crosses we can atone for the times we have put ourselves and our own pleasure first; we can allow our love to be set free from self-absorption, so that we can love faithfully. Our personal crosses also help us to persevere and bring to bear the necessary patience and goodwill.

Father Kentenich often spoke about three different ways that we can react to sacrifice and suffering in our own lives. He tended to use three Latin words to express them: "**Fiat**" - this means "Yes". This is when we are able to say a heartfelt "yes" to the crosses that God sends us and we accept them from our hearts. A second and deeper way he called "**Deo Gratias**" - which means "Thanks be to God". This is when we not only accept the cross God gives to us, but we thank the Lord for it. Through our worry and our tears, we can still turn to the Lord in gratitude. And then he defines the third way as "**Sitio**" - which means "I am thirsty" taken from the words of Jesus on the cross in John's Gospel [John 19:28]. This reaction to suffering means that our prayer to God is: "Father, if you desire to let this happen to me, then may your will be done in me. I only want what you want. I thirst to do your will in my life". Our prayers and desires should always be united to God's will and to his boundless love.

Matthew Kelly offers us a powerful story. Siroki-Brijeg is a city with no divorce. Located in Bosnia-Herzegovina, there are 30,000 inhabitants and not a single recorded case of divorce in living memory. For centuries these people were persecuted for their Catholic faith. They suffered the invasions of Muslim Turks, they suffered Nazi occupation and genocide, and more recently they have suffered at the hands of Communist atheists. Famine, war, cultural strife, and unending political upheaval stain almost every page of their history books. They have suffered. And through that suffering they have learned an epic lesson: sacrifice and salvation are inseparably connected. What does all this have to do with marriage and divorce? Out of these intense and prolonged experiences of suffering, they developed a unique wedding ritual. On the day of their wedding, the bride and groom bring a crucifix to the church. The priest blesses it and tells the couple: "You have found your cross. And it is a cross to be loved, to be carried, a cross not to be thrown away, but to be cherished." When it comes time for the exchange of vows, the bride places her right hand on the crucifix and the groom places his hand over hers. The priest wraps his stole around their hands and around the cross. After pledging their vows, the bride and groom do not kiss one another. They both kiss Jesus on the Cross - only then do they kiss each other. When the ceremony is over, the now-married couple takes the crucifix to their home and displays it prominently. From that day on, they bring their hopes, dreams, struggles, worries, gratitude, and sorrows and lay them at the foot of the Cross. When they have children, they present their children to Jesus on the Cross. It becomes the centrepiece of their spiritual life as a couple, and as a family. Every night before going to bed, the children kiss Jesus goodnight, just as their parents kissed Him on the day they united their souls as one in marriage. Love and sacrifice are inseparable. Suffering and salvation are inseparable. In a fallen world, broken by selfishness and bent out of shape by pride, greed, wrath, envy, lust, sloth and gluttony, love requires sacrifice. In relationships which have failed, people are constantly tempted by selfishness and pride - love and sacrifice go hand in hand. Married couples need to know this better than most, but every truly loving relationship in our lives is stitched together by an endless stream of sacrifices. The moment you stop sacrificing for the other person in a relationship is the moment that relationship begins to die.



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CONTACT AND INFORMATION DETAILS

If you know of anyone who would like to receive these Schoenstatt Updates or the monthly Schoenstatt Newsletter from Scotland, then please send their email address to John and Agnes Burns - john.burns111@gmail.com - Thank you!