

Trusting in the Lord During Difficult Times **Kitty Cleveland**

Hi friends, I'm Kitty Cleveland and welcome to our first day of the Advent Retreat together. I'm so glad to be here with you and to have been invited by Pray More Novenas to offer you these next few weeks of reflections during this Advent. And with the themes of Trust During Trials, Finding the Peace that Only Christ Can Give, Living with Mary in the Heart of the Trinity, and then Taking Mary as your Own Mother. So, I'm really looking forward to sharing some of my own stories with you and what the Lord has, and His goodness revealed to me over the years. So let's begin with a prayer.

Opening Prayer

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. Lord Jesus, we love you, we thank you, we adore you. Lord, thank you for giving everything for us that we might know you and then we might one day live with you forever in heaven. We entrust these next few weeks to the intercession of our mother who brings us all the graces every day that we need and together, let us pray. Hail Mary full of grace the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus. Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death, Amen.

Trust During Trials

So, my friends today, our first theme is trust during trials and who of us is not going through a trial right now? Can I get an amen? I don't know where you are in the world, but you're going through a trial right now. And so, we have been these last couple of years and so as much as each one of us would like life to be easy and a bowl of cherries, it just isn't and why is that? Because in the cross, we find intimacy with Jesus and it is through the cross, through the trials and the temptations that come to each one of us that the Lord's forms in us the graces that we need to become saints.

And so, my spiritual director said to me, whenever I find myself losing my peace and something difficult comes along, he said Kitty, say "Fiat, Fiat." He tells a story one time of being in the Amazon Jungle. And he said, the insects in the Amazon Jungle are unlike anything you've ever seen. And he said I forget the name of it, but it's a giant fire ant, Amazon-sized fire ant that bit him on the arm. And he said the pain was so intense, all he could think about was having somebody cut off his arm. And so, he was yelling in pain and then he heard this voice swell up inside of his spirit "say Fiat, say Fiat." And so, he just kept saying Fiat over and over again, and

offering up that suffering for the salvation of souls for all that the Lord needed to accomplish that day through that sacrifice.

So that's one of the ways that we can trust in the Lord during our trials is simply by saying Fiat, what a beautiful act of faith imitating our mother. I mean, when Jesus came to her in the flesh through the power of the Holy Spirit, that upended her plans, certainly it was nothing she could have anticipated, but she said Fiat, let it be done. And we can trust the Lord.

Romans 8:28

Romans 8:28, that is a scripture verse. I want everyone to memorize before we're done, Romans 8:28. I know some of you can already repeat it with me and we know, we know that ***God makes all things work for the good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.*** How many things? All things, all things. Disasters, natural disasters, illness, temptations, all of it. He can make work for the good even our own sin. When we repent, the Lord can work for the good. So what can the enemy do to us? If our good God can make everything work for the good, even our death, what have we to fear?

A Hurricane Story

I'm sitting here looking out at my front yard and there are mountains of trees and limbs and debris from our latest hurricane here in south Louisiana. And there will be more hurricanes. I'll tell you a quick little story just by way of background. I'm from New Orleans, Louisiana. I'm the oldest of six girls and was a lawyer, I call myself a lawyer in recovery. I left my dad's law practice to get a master's in counseling and then left that after teaching for a few years at the college level, then started doing music ministry and speaking full-time. And that was over 20 years ago. Started with life on the rock with Jeff Cavin's on EWTN and that was in the year 2000. We have a little miracle that year too, which I'm going to tell you about.

But anyway, just looking out at the debris here, we were planning to ride out this hurricane, and then, this is Hurricane Ida. And just a few minutes before I was... I pray a live morning rosary every weekday morning at 6:00 AM Central time with my teenage daughter. And I'll send the links to that as well if you'd like to join us, it's such a beautiful time together. It's different every day, spontaneous meditations.

But right before the morning rosary, I was doing a special rosary on a Sunday. Usually, we have guests who lead it on the weekends, but we had a hurricane coming and we were planning to stay for this hurricane. And right before I started the rosary, someone texted me that the hurricane was now a category five and that it was 30 miles closer to our home, which was not very far away. And that could be potentially life-threatening. And so, I was a little undone, but during the

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rosary, I had this beautiful image of Our Lady Star of the Sea with a single star over her head gesturing towards Florida. And so as soon as the rosary was done, I called my friend Jan in Florida and I said, can you take us in? And she said, come on. So, in 30 minutes we were on the interstate, and we got right behind a big truck with a single star on the back and it said “Land star.” Now the hurricane had already started coming through. The first bands were already through.

There was no wind, just a light rain. I didn't even have to put my windshield wipers on all the way, no traffic, where it took people 12 hours a day before, it took us three. So, God just made a way. He led the way through the storm. When we arrived at her place, there was a tray with a big star in the middle of it. And she texted me during the time “may Our Lady Star of the Sea guide you to safety.” She had no idea.

So why do I share all this? Not because God loves me more than the people who stay behind for the hurricane, but I think Our Lady just needed me to keep this rosary going, we've been doing it for over a year. We have this wonderful community, and I wouldn't be able to do that if I had stayed at home. So, God knows you, He's interested in you, He loves you. He has plans for your welfare and not for woe. Jeremiah 29:11, that's another one to memorize. ***For I know well the plans I have in mind for you says the Lord. Plans for your welfare, not for woe. Plans to give you a future full of hope.***

A Profound Trial

So why do we fear? Why do we have such a hard time trusting? Because none of us likes to suffer. Jesus didn't like it, but life is difficult. There will be suffering. And so, our challenge is to repeat the mantra that Saint Faustina taught us. Jesus, say it with me. I trust in you. Jesus, I trust in you.

When my dad went through a profound trial, this was in 1995. The FBI showed up at our law firm and long story short, my dad was sent to prison for 10 years for white collar crimes he did not commit. And so, learning to trust God in the midst of a devastating verdict diagnosis, terrible news, it's something that we just have to go through, and we make an act of faith when we say Jesus, I trust in you. When they were reading the guilty verdicts against my dad, I was sobbing in the courtroom. We were completely blindsided by it. We all thought he was coming home, and I had my face buried in my hands. But rather than seeing darkness, I saw the Divine Mercy image of Jesus. I just kept repeating over and over again.

Jesus, I trust in you. I couldn't see, I didn't know how we were going to make it, but I just felt like a little girl, and I was just reaching up and grabbing a hold of His hand. And I was like ‘Lord, I can't see, but I know you can see. And so, I'm going to trust you.’ And He saw us

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through it. He saw my dad through it and the violence, the profanity, the filth, the noise, it was a nightmare for him. And after a year and a half of being in prison, we were just waiting for the appeal. We knew once they looked at the appeal, he was coming home. And then we got the phone call, all verdicts affirmed, rubber stamp. Then another seven years in prison.

My baby sister was only I think seven when all this started, she would grow up without her daddy. And so, for me, that's when I got angry. You go through these stages of grief because this was like a death without the death. And so, I started going to the adoration chapel every day for an hour. And I worked it out with the Lord and my dad for his part found his greatest peace when we lost the appeal surprisingly because he stopped begging God to let him go home. And instead, he said 'I surrender, please just give me peace.' And he said he made that act of surrender, that act of trust in God, and just asked for peace, that peace that surpasses all human understanding. He said it was like a grace bubble descended from heaven and enveloped him in this warm embrace. And he lived alone with Jesus in the midst of hell, and I would say even had joy, moments and glimpses of joy in the middle of hell in prison.

Surrender

So that's another key to trusting in the Lord, that surrender to release our death grip because really control is an illusion. I wrote a song for my dad in the adoration chapel at this point called Surrender. I'll share a link to it on YouTube at the end of this video and maybe in the notes on the website. But the refrain is "then came the peace touched so deeply by your mercy. I lost my pride and found you're all I need. You rescued me, felt your love and my surrender. I reached my greatest height down on my knees."

Yeah, that's our call. We walk it out. So, some takeaways for you today, memorize Romans 8:28. We know that ***God makes all things, all things work for the good, for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.*** Jeremiah 29:11, ***I know well the plans I have in mind for you says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for woe, plans to give you a future full of hope,*** and the Divine Mercy devotion. I want to encourage you to pray the Chaplet to read Saint Faustina's diary. It's so inspiring. It really is the message for now. And this is the time of mercy. So, let's avail ourselves of that, avail ourselves of the sacrament of mercy, which is reconciliation.

During this advent, I want to encourage you to start getting in the habit of going to confession at least once a month. I know it's hard, but you can do it. And it is so liberating, and virtue just flourishes when we make that offering of ourselves to God in humility and in trust. And then Jesus comes in the confessional with His sacred heart and just His blood washes you clean. We can't do that for ourselves. Only He can do that, and it requires our humility, and our trust has to be tasted to be understood.

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So, I want to leave you with those things. I'm going to close us in a prayer. And I want to encourage you to check out the links to the song Surrender that I wrote for my dad. I think I also can share a link to the Divine Mercy Chaplet. I recorded a CD with a children's choir where I sing the Chaplet, I think available for free on YouTube. I think there's another link. Oh, there's a song called I Place my Trust in You that's on my Divine Mercy CD. I'll share a link with that as well written by my precious friend, Kara Klein. And I think all of those will be a bomb to your soul. God is with you, He loves you, He knows you. He has good plans for you ultimately to have you with Him forever in heaven and that is good news.

Closing Prayer

So, let's close in a prayer. In the name of the father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. Jesus, I trust in you. Lord, we believe we make an act of faith and hope and love that you do make all things, all things work for the good for those who love you and Lord, we do love you, and we want to love you more. Give us more love to love with which to love you. Lord, I ask you especially for your blessing on each person listening right now, I ask that you share that peace that can only come from you, not from our circumstances until we are together again in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Kitty Cleveland signing off until next week, bye friends.