



### **TAKE UP YOUR CROSS AND FOLLOW ME**

In September 1962 a woman died in a village in Bavaria

She was born in the same village 64 years before, and she lived there all her life. 10,000 people attended her funeral and accompanied her coffin to the local cemetery. They came from all over Germany and from Belgium, Holland, Austria and Switzerland, the woman's name was Therese Neuman

As a young girl she worked on the farm, but at the age of 28 she received first in her side, then in a hands and feet, the wounds of the crucified Christ, the stigmata. For the sake of the salvation of many thousands, even millions of souls, Therese, was being invited to share in Christ's redeeming work by making present in her body, in her generation, the Paschal mystery of Jesus.

She lived through the first and second world wars; her calling came at one of the most brutal moments in human history.

"The marks on my body at those of Jesus" said St. Paul to the Galatians. Did he bear the stigmata perhaps? St. Francis of Assisi certainly did. And other saints. In our own day the stigmata appeared in the flesh of Padre Pio, the Italian Capucin.

Each Friday Therese re-lived the Passion of Christ with deep spiritual and physical sufferings. The stigmata would open, and the wounds bled copiously as Theresa entered the drama of Golgotha.

In time her agony would cease. and she would pass to the joys of Easter morning and experience the peace of the risen Lord.

From 1926, when the stigmata first appeared, until her death 36 years later, Theresa no longer needed to eat or drink. Her only food was the host received each day in communion.

Strict investigations ordered by the Catholic bishops of Germany, and confirmed by independent doctors, attested this fact. During the war the Nazis confiscated Theresa's ration card on the pretext that she had no need of food!

The stigmata is a rare and extraordinary phenomenon. The ability to live without food and drink even more so. But these extraordinary signs only express with great intensity the very truths that all Christians are called to live and experience. That Christ the bread of life is our real food.

Therese needed the Eucharist, not just to feed her body, but more importantly in order to sustain the crushing weight of the sufferings that she experienced, far beyond any human strength, or human endurance and to live this experience joyfully and serenely, offering it for the salvation of souls.

In the 60's and 70's, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council, the church re-discovered the essential link between the Hebrew Passover and the Christian eucharist.

The Passover is a true memorial of the Exodus from Egypt in which God makes himself totally present in all his power, mercy and love, to those celebrating it; enabling them to relive this event of freedom even though in human time it has long gone. (Memorial=making totally present and event).

The Christian Eucharist, likewise is a memorial of Christ's, Passion, Death and Resurrection; in other words when we celebrate the Eucharist, the whole experience of Golgotha, is made present for us, including the victory of the risen Christ. St Paul "it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20).

Therese could do without bodily food for 36 years, but not without this memorial of Christ, which is the Eucharist; she could not sustain this vocation to be 'another Christ' without the grace that flowed from the celebration of the mass. We cannot do without it either!

Therese experienced Easter morning after Good Friday, joy followed sorrow, peace followed conflict and anguish. If we too are prepared to live this mystery of love, by taking up our own cross and following after Christ, giving ourselves over for the good of our brothers and sisters, we too will experience the same pattern of undulation in life with the guarantee that whatever lonely place we have to go to find Christ and serve him, we will in that place experience the victory of the Risen Lord. That we will be filled, and the bread multiplied.

Therese Neuman, pray for us! Our lady of sorrows Pray for us!



