

When God Says No

Our Lady of Sorrows

by Susan Handle Terbay

Ask and you will receive. Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be opened to you. For the one who asks, receives. The one who seeks, finds. The one who knocks, enters. (Mt 7:7)

Whenever I pray I want to believe that I will be heard and God most certainly will answer my prayer(s), especially if my prayers are for the good of those I love; but then what if God says “No.”

My prayers of late have been for some of my children who are struggling and for the grace to help them find answers and bring about an inner peace because life right now seems to be attacking them. There are times in my life when I wonder if God even hears my prayers or has he put me ‘on hold’ for an indefinite period of time. *“Can’t we just sit down and talk about this, God? I’m a mother, I understand limitations, I understand restrictions, and I understand the word ‘no’ to a child. Right now I just don’t understand your ‘no’ to this particular child.”*

As I watch my children struggle, my heart aches because I cannot help them. My heart aches, but it does not bleed. It bleeds when I watch one of my children, even a grandchild, weep in pain, cry in despair because of situations they cannot control. My prayers have been intense and raw; perhaps even desperate. Am I asking God for the moon? If I pray with depth of faith, will I be just as deep in that faith when the realization is that the reply is no or there is no reply at all? If God deems that I am asking for the moon and it cannot be so, then my prayer is: *“Can I at least have the light from this unattainable moon to help me understand why?”*

Am I the only mother who questions God’s response or a feeling of lack of response to prayers? I doubt it. While moms’ prayers vary from simple to desperate, many mothers around our world I believe often find themselves wondering if God is listening to their pleas of: why my child has to suffer; why my family has no home; why my children are hated for their color, creed, or sexual preference? During such horrors as the Holocaust, the genocides in Africa, the death of our young men and women in wars, and the starvation in third world countries, I’m sure mothers wonder if God still exists and find themselves asking God why.

This morning once again I’m asking God why because nothing seems to be changing. In my prayer I spoke out saying: *“Hello, it’s me, Susan, I’m seeking, I’m asking, and I’m knocking!”* Then I open my meditation book and lo and behold staring me from the pages is the prayer focus of the day—for it is the day of Our Lady of Sorrows. Talk about getting an immediate response to that prayer! Mary had her heart pierced with great sorrows, and I’m sure she had lots of questions and prayers seeking answers to why her son had to



be violated, why her son—God’s son—had to weep in pain and cry in despair. Even Jesus himself felt abandoned at the time of his death.

Yet despite all of this, Mary’s faith never wavered, and Jesus when he breathed his last, released His spirit to his Father knowing His Father awaited him.

Such a realization helped me to refocus back to my faith; back to the time when my grandchildren were lost and the only prayer I could whisper was ‘*please*’; back to other moments of great anxiety and uncertainty; back to the pit of despair I had found myself in years ago—when while I was ‘giving up’ during such moments—God was just getting started.

I began this column asking God why, and I’m ending it asking God why, because I still want answers. Someday I believe I will know the answers; until then, well, my faith tells me God is listening, and I should not give up on God so quickly. I’m also not alone with my whys and my frustrations waiting for a response—for Mary understands and so do lots of other moms.

If you, with all your sins, know how to give your children what is good, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to anyone who asks him! (Mt 7:11)

The following is a poem I wrote at a retreat many years ago during one of my darkest moments:

DESPAIR

As I descended down into the pit
I watched the light slowly fade away.
The opening became the size of a pin hole
there was no longer day.

Frightened, alone and cold
I screamed and no one came.
Desperate, pleading and naked
I listened, but no one called my name.

Sitting in that dampened well
I gave in to my greatest fear
For I was totally alone
And felt even God was nowhere near.

While the walls were closing in around me
As I sat in that darkened pit
I imagined this world without me
Tired and exhausted, I just wanted to quit.

But the God that created my being
The spirit within my soul
Softly whispered to me

In that blackened forsaken hole.

"Foolish child" I heard the voice within me say
"The light you seek, the love you want,
Does not come from without but within.
You are never alone
For all the love and light you need
has from within you grown."

Then a light began to glow within
as I drifted toward the top.
At that very moment God bent down
And gently scooped me up.

As I looked around me
The light began to glow
For God and love had not forsaken me,
It was I who had let them go.