

If It Is Your Will Lord

(What's Up With Paul Darrow)

When I was being filmed for an EWTN episode of Living Divine Mercy last spring, my voice became increasingly hoarse. I apologized to Michael, the cinematographer, and told him this was not my normal voice. Then a little later, I said something that surprised us both. I told Michael I believed this would be the last interview I would ever give and that I would no longer be a Catholic speaker. When he asked me why I believed this, I sheepishly replied, "I don't know why, I just do."

One afternoon several days later, I felt moved to pray in front of the Divine Mercy painting I had recently purchased for my bedroom wall. But as my eyes were fixed on the image of Jesus and I was about to pray, I was filled with a childlike amazement by the thoughts and visuals that flashed through my mind. I thought about how this image with the words Jesus I Trust in You on a holy card had given me the courage to share my testimony publicly for the first time twelve years earlier. And I reflected on the seemingly supernatural ways I had been saved from injury and death going all the way back to when my mother was planning to end my life in her womb.

I also visualized the faces of a few people who not only had greatly impacted my life but also had exemplified what it means to suffer gracefully. One of them was dear Mother Angelica, who often struggled with long periods of extreme pain. Another was my good friend Joanne, who spent decades dealing with the life-altering, painful effects of lupus. But despite their suffering, they each had an unmistakable joy in their heart and a twinkle in their eye as they continued to smile, laugh, care about the souls of others and give glory to God.

Then turning my head, I gazed at the crucifix on the same wall. Although I could not fully imagine the magnitude of what Jesus had endured as a consequence of His sacrificial love, I had clear mental images of our Lord suffering, and dying, on the cross. These images brought tears to my eyes and got me thinking about how little I have suffered physically, apart from the brutal beatings I received as a child. With these thoughts and images still in the forefront of my mind, I began to pray. And what a prayer it was.

My intention was to express gratitude to God. However, after starting to pray I was interrupted by a euphoric feeling of pure love that seemed to flow throughout my body. Wanting to actively participate in this gift of love, I decided in that moment to surrender my heart and entire body to Jesus. So I prayed, "Jesus, I have rarely known real physical suffering. But if it is your will, I am ready to accept suffering to honor your suffering on the cross. And if it is your will, may my suffering be offered for the sake of others and of souls in purgatory. And dear Lord, if I am to suffer, please help me to suffer gracefully and joyfully like Mother Angelica did."

The indescribable love I felt that afternoon has never left me—nor has the suffering that appeared shortly afterward. Just weeks later, I tested positive for lupus. Then a biopsy confirmed I had leukocytoclastic vasculitis as well. Over the following weeks, scans showed scarring in my lungs and an off the chart cardiac calcification score. By autumn it was confirmed I have syringomyelia, Raynaud's syndrome and a few other health challenges. And although I am currently being treated for myasthenia gravis by one neurologist, my other neurologist has me scheduled for another painful test because she is not ready to rule out ALS.

But wait, there's more! Due to my ever-weakening throat muscles, I am no longer able to swallow anything other than thin liquids. And my most challenging issue is that my epiglottis no longer flips to block whatever I swallow, including saliva, from entering my trachea (windpipe). This means the possibility of aspiration or choking could be just one swallow away. Plus, I am supposed to avoid talking as much as possible in order to save my weakened voice. You can imagine how well I am not doing with this one.

However, here's the really good news: God graciously hears us; I am able to offer up real suffering; I have never felt such consistent joy and love in my heart; and I have never felt this close to God since I spent the entire Hour of Mercy on my knees at Mother Angelica's bedside.

"I set the Lord always in my sight: for he is at my right hand, that I be not moved."

-Psalm 16:8