



80129

REV. JOHN J. VAUGHN, C.S.S.R.
VICE-POSTULATOR

JOSIE BECKER
EDITOR

SECOND CLASS POSTAGE
PAID AT NEW ORLEANS, LA.

VOL. VII NO. 6 JUNE, 1968 - SUBSCRIPTION \$1.00

I PRAY TO DIE OF CANCER

by John J. Vaughn, C.S.S.R.

I have been planning on writing this article for over ten years. Somehow I never got around to it. The ideas expressed here are ideas that have been in my mind for many, many years.

I have often told people "I actually pray that I will die from cancer". Invariably they look at me with a rather puzzled expression. Interiorly they are saying to themselves, "This guy must be nuts or something. Can it be that he does not know how much suffering cancer causes? Why would any man want a long and lingering suffering? Wouldn't it be better to have a heart attack and get it over with fast?"

Quite often at a funeral I hear someone say: "Well, at least Mother went fast. She had no suffering".

To my mind this indicates a lack of understanding of the purpose and meaning of suffering in human life. Unfortunately, so many people start with the idea that suffering is something bad and must be avoided at all costs. Is it any wonder then that life seems to have so little meaning for them? They are confused because they find so much suffering and they find no way to avoid it.

They do not understand the place that suffering had in the life of Christ. Nor do they understand the opportunity of rendering Christian witness that suffering brings. Nor do they know the peace of heart that can be and is the result of suffering in life.

If you will but pause and think for a moment you will readily understand the truth of this statement: People who do not suffer never grow up. It is only through suffering that we become full, complete and fulfilled human beings.

But lets get back to what I said in the beginning: I pray to die from cancer. I guess the biggest reason why I pray for a cancer death is because the most beautiful deaths I have ever seen in my life are deaths from cancer. Maybe you do not think that death can be beautiful. Having attended the deathbeds of hundreds of people, I can truthfully say that death can be the most beautiful thing in the world. What could be more beautiful than to see a soul, so calm and courageous, peacefully accepting the fact that soon he will die. There is a beauty in this calm courage that no artist can paint.

What can be more beautiful than to behold a person whom you know has gone on for days, weeks,

months and sometimes years in continual and excruciating pain yet he remains calm and uncomplaining in the face of such agonizing tortures. I guess some people feel sad and depressed when they see such things. To me, however, the experience is something beautiful and inspiring. When I see such a calm, courageous soul I cannot help feel that somehow I have touched God. In some mysterious way the power of the Lord is working in their souls. Man by himself cannot achieve such heights of peaceful resignation. Only through God's help can man peacefully accept suffering and death.

I recall how shocked I was to read an article in the March, 1957 issue of Look magazine, concerning a 53 year old atheist who was dying of cancer. The article was written by his wife and was entitled "The Death of a Man". He had cancer. He and his wife had agreed that once he ceased to function as a man, once the pain and weakness became so great that he could no longer be considered a man in the fullest sense of the term, he would either commit suicide or if he was unable to perform self-destruction she would end his life for him. In the end he sliced his own wrists as she held bowls underneath them to catch the blood.

When all is said and done their action was perfectly logical — if you leave God and His graces out of the picture!

Only with a special help from God can man calmly accept suffering and death.

I pray for death from cancer because in my heart I feel that somehow through a long and painful death God will enable me to do some of the things with myself that I have failed to do while healthy. Somehow I feel that through a long and painful suffering, ending in an agonizing death, the Lord will bring about a certain closeness between me and Him. I guess I really can't find words to express it. It's just that I feel that through this suffering I will somehow get to be close to the Lord. I can't give you reasons or put it into words. All I can say is this: I have seen so many people rise to the heights of heroic sanctity when dying of cancer, that I want the same experience.

Nobody will ever write the story of these heroes in any book. No one will put statues of these people on our altars. But there are thousands, hundreds of thousands, of real saints who became so in the last days of their life. When suffering and death stared them in the face they calmly and courageously met it through the grace of God.

It is indeed quite possible that your mother, father, wife, husband, child is just such a person. Many can recall truly saintly deaths of loved ones.

Perhaps we should be praying to these people as well as to Father Seelos and the canonized saints.

And so I shall continue to pray that when my time comes to die, I will die of cancer. Of course, I hope he lets me keep my health for a long time yet. I still have lots to do. Maybe when the time does come I will have second thoughts and wish that I hadn't prayed for this. But right now I feel that a death from cancer is a privilege, not a curse.

These words are written in the hope that they may be read by someone who is now dying of cancer, and that somehow he or she may find strength through these words to face suffering and death with calm courage.

PATHWAY TO SAINTHOOD

by Luana Thiel Jambois

Francis Xavier Seelos was familiar with "sanctified suffering" — suffering sanctified by having been accepted patiently as a sign of love for God.

Francesca Seelos, his mother, was the first to teach him the valuable lesson of "sanctified suffering." When she cut her finger one day as she sliced bread for supper, instead of crying out with pain she bowed her head. "Thank you, God, for the pain," she said, "with it I find my way to you." Her son never forgot the lesson.

His father, Mang, was quick to seize every occasion to teach his children this valuable lesson. When his sister, Kunnegunde, fell downstairs to her death from the upstairs attic room where the hay was stored, Mang Seelos commanded his family to kneel around her. Instead of cries against the horrible fate that had befallen their sister the children joined their father in prayers to God for His Mercy. "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away," said Mang Seelos.

In his beloved poor, in the sick he met wherever he went, Francis Seelos saw happiness beneath the suffering. "Sickness sanctifies us. Pain burns the flesh to reveal the soul."

When young Frater Seelos came to America, he lived beneath the tutelage of the Blessed Bishop Neumann who too had learned "sanctified suffering." The religious vied with each other to offer up their "blessed poverty." Crusts of bread were the food for their often-empty bellies; and cold became their companion when they shivered in the great unheated house. But there was great happiness in the monastery as they busied themselves, tending to their people who were often worse

off than they; as they fought to instill the faith they shared into the hearts of the immigrant people of their parish.

Wherever Father Seelos went, the source of his root-strength, the consolation he offered his people was the "sanctified suffering" he had learned so early. The pathway to salvation, he believed, was through carrying whatever Cross God sent him with patience and resignation and offering it up joyously as a sacrifice to His Beloved Master.

NOTICE

For many years I have wanted to return to school in order to study the many things I feel that I lack in my present knowledge. It has long been my desire to learn more about people and about how to help them solve their problems. Since I am 42 years old and am not getting any younger I decided that now was the time to return to school to study further why people do the things they do; and how I can help them solve the problems that face them. I approached my superiors with my plans and they approved. Therefore, with regret, I must announce that I shall no longer be Vice-Postulator.

I wish I could have personally said "goodbye" to all those who have been so devoted to Father Seelos over the years and who have been such a help to me. This, of course, is impossible. I do thank one and all. In the next issue of this newsletter it will be announced who will succeed me in this task.

Father Vaughn

"ORDER FOR SUBSCRIPTION"

Some are confused by the phrase "order for subscription" found on the return envelope. Also, they note that a subscription price is found on the face of the newsletter. This was done in order to comply with postal regulations. We continue to be supported by the voluntary contributions of our subscribers. All will continue to receive information regarding Father Seelos whether they contribute anything or not.

A PRAYER TO FATHER SEELOS

For your own intentions, and all the petitions placed before the tomb of Father Seelos, let us pause and say -

O, MY GOD, I TRULY BELIEVE YOU ARE PRESENT WITH ME, I ADORE YOUR LIMITLESS PERFECTIONS. I THANK YOU FOR THE GRACES AND GIFTS YOU GAVE TO FATHER SEELOS, IF IT IS YOUR HOLY WILL, PLEASE LET HIM BE DECLARED A SAINT OF THE CHURCH SO THAT OTHERS MAY KNOW AND IMITATE HIS HOLY LIFE. THROUGH HIS PRAYERS PLEASE GIVE ME THIS FAVOR . .

Published monthly at the Seelos Center, 2030 Constance Street, New Orleans, Louisiana, 70130.

In conformity with the decree of Pope Urban VIII all statements contained herein are unreservedly submitted to the judgement of the Holy See and the decision of the Sacred Congregation of Rites.

Published with Ecclesiastical Approbation.
