

THE PLAN THAT NEVER DISAPPOINTS

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The life testimony of Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, the Archbishop of Chicago, as one of proceeding ahead with his unflinching faith in the Divine Providence in times of troubles, torments, trials and tribulations. He was much loved and admired by the society, but an evil-minded person came forward with a serious allegation against the archbishop. That crooked man told the people that the archbishop had misused him in his youth. The archbishop then passed through some Gethsemane days of suffering and excruciating pain. His good name was stained and smeared. At least some people looked at him with suspicious eyes. People close to him began to stay away from him. The world was eager to pelt stones at the stained Archbishop. News embellished with all kinds of metaphors and hyperbole filled the print and electronic media. It was a time and test which could pulverise even the strongest mind.

Despite all the deafening din and accusing fingers, Joseph Cardinal Bernardin appeared calm and composed. He faced all the false allegations with fortitude and courage. In the days of his dire tests, what gave him fortitude was a resolution he had made at the start of his priestly life. He had pledged a word to Jesus: "I would spend the finest hour of each day before the Eucharistic Lord." Every day he spent the first hour of his service in front of the Eucharistic Lord. During the crisis, when he went to pray to the Holy Eucharist, he was comforted and solaced by Jesus. Jesus asked him to meditate upon his Passion to give him strength. Jesus was unjustly judged. All his adversaries wanted Jesus to be crucified. The Scribes and Pharisees insulted and ridiculed Jesus in the house of Caiaphas, the High Priest of Israel, and in the palace of Pontius Pilate. Jesus was sentenced to death on the cross, the punishment given to the grossest criminals. Jesus was ridiculed and mocked at even when he was

hanging on the cross, convulsing with excruciating pain. That Jesus emboldened and strengthened Cardinal Bernardin. Beyond the cross, there is resurrection. Beyond suffering there is glory. Beyond death, there is a new life. Jesus told Cardinal Bernardin: “Now you become a partaker in my suffering, not murmuring and complaining but smiling; not with intolerance but patience and forgiveness; not with desperation and pessimism, but with ebullient hope and buoyant optimism.

The day of Resurrection promised by the Lord has arrived. The sepulchre built with the stones of falsehood was broken and pulverised by the power of Truth. The crook named Stephen Cook who cooked up a false accusation implicating the saintly Cardinal Bernardin finally confessed to the world that the accusation he made was false and groundless. He openly admitted that he had fabricated a titillating story from his fertile imagination and Cardinal Bernardin was utterly blameless. A shepherd had a hundred sheep. One of them was missing. What did the shepherd do? Jesus said: Leaving the ninety-nine sheep in the open country, the shepherd went in search of the lost sheep. When he found the lost sheep, with joy and jubilation he carried it on his shoulders. He will be happier about the one lost and found sheep than the ninety-nine that had never strayed away. In the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent (Lk 15).

Cardinal Bernardin went out seeking the lost sheep. He finally found the missing sheep that was wandering helter-skelter with deep desperation and disappointment. He consoled the repentant sinner who was standing with his head bent low with remorse and regret. He graciously forgave the sinner and was reconciled with him. In jubilation Cardinal Bernardin offered a Holy Mass celebrating forgiveness. The participants in the Holy Mass could not check their tears of joy at the reconciliation and they glorified God. Triumphantly

overcoming all the false accusations levelled against him, Cardinal Bernardin continued with his sacerdotal duty of looking after his flock. Like gold purified in the cauldron of flaming fire, he came out as pure gold without even the slightest stain of sin and was able to shine in different fields of activity.

But unfortunately, his joy did not last long. He was afflicted with pancreatic cancer and the doctors told him that his life would hardly last one more year. But even this information did not terrify Cardin Bernardin. He faced his affliction with stoicism, courage and hope. He openly told the world about his plight. This is what he said, “I know this affliction will end only in my death. I know I am close to death. But I am happy that the Lord, who was wounded for our sins, has chosen me to partake in his suffering.” After this frank announcement, Cardin Bernardin entered a fortress of safety made of three things - unflinching faith in Jesus, deep prayer life, and the love and affection of an infinite number of friends and admirers.

Meditating about life, Cardinal Bernardin etched this in his final days, “My life has taught me that the pains and sufferings without thoughts about God are futile.” As a corollary it means pains and suffering with God, as per His will, are fruitful in His presence. By relying on the scheme of God, when we place our life in His hands it will lead to healings and blessings. The Word assures us that those who seek God will never have to be disappointed.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher” (Is 55:8).