

THE END DAYS

Sister Josefa Menendez sees Hell

Sr Josefa Menendez was a Spanish Nun of the Society of the Sacred at the convent of Les Feuillants in Poitiers, France where she died at the age of 33. Her book, The Way of Divine Love, consists largely of her notebooks, in which she wrote down under obedience from Our Lord the revelations of His Sacred Heart, plus portions of her biography. The following material is quoted verbatim from the Appendix to The Way of Divine Love.

SISTER Josefa wrote with great reticence on this subject. She did it only to conform to Our Blessed Lord's wishes, Our Lady having told her on the October 25th, 1922: "Everything that Jesus allows you to see and to suffer of the torments of Hell, is . . . that you may make it known to your Mothers. So forget yourself entirely, and think only of the glory of the Heart of Jesus and the salvation of souls."

Some extracts of her notes have been quoted in a former Chapter (V) and a few more are added here:

She repeatedly dwelt on the greatest torment of Hell, namely, the soul's inability to love.

One of these damned souls cried out: "This is my torture . . . that I want to love and cannot; there is nothing left me but hatred and despair. If one of us could so much as make a single act of love . . . this would no longer be Hell . . . But we cannot, we live on hatred and malevolence . . ." (March 23rd, 1922).

Another of these unfortunates said: "The greatest of our torments here is that we are not able to love Him whom we are bound to hate. Oh! How we hunger for love, we are consumed with desire of it, but it is too late. . . . You too will feel this same devouring hunger, but you will only be able to hate, to abhor, and to long for the loss of souls . . . nothing else do we care for now!" (March 26th, 1922).

The following passage was written by obedience, though it was extremely repugnant to Josefa's humility:

"Every day now, when I am dragged down to Hell and the devil orders them to torture me, they answer: 'We cannot, for her members have undergone torture for *Him* . . .' (then they blasphemously name Our Blessed Lord) . . . then he orders them to give me a draught of sulfur . . . and again the reply is: 'She has voluntarily deprived herself of drink. . . .' 'Try to find some part of her body to which she has given satisfaction and pleasure.'

"I have also noted that when they shackle me to take me down to Hell, they never can bind me where I have worn instruments of penance. I write all this simply out of obedience." (April 1st, 1922).

She records, too, the accusations made against themselves by these unhappy souls: "Some yell because of the martyrdom of their hands. Perhaps they were thieves, for they say: 'Where is our loot now? . .

. Cursed hands. . . Why did I want to possess what did not belong to me . . . and what in any case I could keep only for a few days . . . ?’

“Others curse their tongues, their eyes . . . whatever was the occasion of their sin ‘Now, O body, you are paying the price of the delights you granted yourself! . . . and you did it of your own free will’” (April 2nd, 1922).

“It seemed to me that the majority accused themselves of sins of impurity, of stealing, of unjust trading; and that most of the damned are in Hell for these sins.” (April 6th, 1922).

“I saw many worldly people fall into Hell, and no words can render their horrible and terrifying cries: ‘Damned forever. . . . I deceived myself; I am lost. . . . I am here forever. . . . There is no remedy possible . . . a curse on me. . . .’

“Some accused people, others circumstances, and all execrated the occasions of their damnation.” (September 1922).

“Today, I saw a vast number of people fall into the fiery pit . . . they seemed to be worldlings and a demon cried vociferously: ‘The world is ripe for me. . . . I know that the best way to get hold of souls is to rouse their desire for enjoyment. . . . Put *me* first . . . *me* before the rest . . . no humility for *me*! But let me enjoy myself. . . . This sort of thing assures victory to me . . . and they tumble headlong into Hell.’” (October 4th, 1922).

“I heard a demon, from whom a soul had escaped, forced to confess his powerlessness. ‘Confound it all . . . how do so many manage to escape me? They were mine’ (and he rattled off their sins) . . . ‘I work hard enough, yet they slip through my fingers . . . Someone must be suffering and repairing for them.’” (January 15th, 1923).

“Tonight,” wrote Josefa, “I did not go down into Hell, but was transported to a place where all was obscure, but in the center was a red smoldering fire. They had laid me flat and so bound me that I could not make the slightest movement. Around me were seven or eight people; their black bodies were unclothed, and I could see them only by the reflections of the fire. They were seated and were talking together.

“One said: ‘We’ll have to be very careful not to be found out, for we might easily be discovered.’

“The devil answered: ‘Insinuate yourselves by inducing carelessness in them . . . but keep in the background, so that you are not found out . . . by degrees they will become callous, and you will be able to incline them to evil. Tempt these others to ambition, to self-interest, to acquiring wealth without working, whether it be lawful or not. Excite some to sensuality and love of pleasure. Let vice blind them . . .’ (Here they used obscene words.)

“ ‘As to the remainder . . . get in through the heart . . . you know the inclinations of their hearts . . . make them love . . . love passionately . . . work thoroughly . . . take no rest . . . have no pity; the world must go to damnation . . . and these souls must not be allowed to escape me.’

“From time to time Satan’s satellites answered: ‘We are your slaves . . . we shall labor unceasingly, and in spite of the many who war against us, we shall work night and day. We know your power!’

“They all spoke together and he whom I took to be Satan used words full of horror. In the distance I could hear a clamor as of feasting, the clinking of glasses . . . and he cried: ‘Let them cram themselves with food!

It will make it all the easier for us. . . . Let them get on with their banqueting. Love of pleasure is the door through which you will reach them. . . .’

“He added such horrible things that they can neither be written nor said. Then, as if engulfed in a whirl of smoke, they vanished.” (February 3rd, 1923).

“The evil one was bewailing the escape of a soul: ‘Fill her soul with fear, drive her to despair. All will be lost if she puts her trust in the mercy of that . . .’ (here they used blasphemous words of Our Lord). ‘I am lost; but no, drive her to despair; do not leave her for an instant; above all, make her despair.’

“Then Hell re-echoed with frenzied cries, and when finally the devil cast me out of the abyss he went on threatening me. Among other things he said: ‘Is it possible that such weaklings have more power than I, who am mighty. . . . I must conceal my presence, work in the dark; any corner will do from which to tempt them . . . close to an ear . . . in the leaves of a book . . . under a bed . . . some pay no attention to me, but I shall talk and talk . . . and by dint of suggestion, something will remain. . . . Yes, I must hide in unsuspected places’” (February 7th–8th, 1923).

Josefa, on her return from Hell, noted the following: “I saw several souls fall into Hell, and among them was a child of fifteen, cursing her parents for not having taught her to fear God nor that there was a Hell. Her life had been a short one, she said, but full of sin, for she had given in to all that her body and passions demanded in the way of satisfaction. Especially she had read bad books.” (March 22nd, 1923).

Again, she wrote:” . . . Souls were cursing the vocation they had received, but not followed . . . the vocation they had lost, because they were unwilling to live a hidden and mortified life . . .” (March 18th, 1922).

“On one occasion when I was in Hell I saw a great many priests, religious and nuns, cursing their vows, their Order, their Superiors and everything that could have given them the light and the grace they had lost. . . .

“I saw, too, some prelates. One accused himself of having used the goods belonging to the Church illicitly . . .” (September 28th, 1922).

“Priests were calling down maledictions on their tongues which had consecrated, on their fingers that had held Our Lord’s sacred Body, on the absolutions they had given while they were losing their own souls and on the occasion through which they had fallen into Hell.” (April 6th, 1922).

“One priest said: ‘I ate poison, for I used money that was not my own . . . the money given me for Masses which I did not offer.’

“Another said he belonged to a secret society which had betrayed the Church and religion, and he had been bribed to connive at terrible profanations and sacrileges.

“Yet another said that he was damned for assisting at profane plays, after which he ought not to have said Mass . . . and that he had spent about seven years thus.”

Josefa noted that the greater number of religious plunged into hell-fire were there for abominable sins against Chastity . . . and for sins against the vow of Poverty . . . for the unauthorized use of the goods of the Community . . . for passions against charity (jealousy, antipathies, hatred, etc.), for tepidity and relaxation; also for comforts they had allowed themselves and which had led to graver sins . . . for bad Confessions through human respect and want of sincerity and courage, etc.

Here, finally, is the full text of Josefa's notes on "the Hell of consecrated souls" (Biography: Ch. VII–September 4th, 1922).

"The meditation of the day was on the particular judgment of religious souls. I could not free my mind of the thought of it, in spite of the oppression which I felt. Suddenly, I felt myself bound and overwhelmed by a crushing weight, so that in an instant I saw more clearly than ever before how stupendous is the sanctity of God and His detestation of sin.

"I saw in a flash my whole life since my first Confession to this day. All was vividly present to me: my sins, the graces I had received, the day I entered religion, my clothing as a novice, my first vows, my spiritual readings, and times of prayer, the advice given me, and all the helps of religious life. Impossible to describe the confusion and shame a soul feels at that moment, when it realizes: 'All is lost, and I am damned forever.'"

As in her former descents into Hell, Josefa never accused herself of any specific sin that might have led to such a calamity. Our Lord meant her only to feel what the consequences would have been, if she had merited such a punishment. She wrote:

"Instantly I found myself in Hell, but not dragged there as before. The soul precipitates itself there, as if to hide from God in order to be free to hate and curse Him.

"My soul fell into abysmal depths, the bottom of which cannot be seen, for it is immense. . . . At once, I heard other souls jeering and rejoicing at seeing me share their torments. It was martyrdom enough to hear the terrible imprecations on all sides, but what can be compared to the thirst to curse that seizes on a soul, and the more one curses, the more one wants to. Never had I felt the like before. Formerly my soul had been oppressed with grief at hearing these horrible blasphemies, though unable to produce even one act of love. But today it was otherwise.

"I saw Hell as always before, the long dark corridors, the cavities, the flames. . . . I heard the same execrations and imprecations, for—and of this I have already written before—although no corporeal forms are visible, the torments are felt as if they were present, and souls recognize each other. Some called out, 'Hullo! *You* here? And are you like us? We were free to take those vows or not . . . but now! . . .' and they cursed their vows.

"Then I was pushed into one of those fiery cavities and pressed, as it were, between burning planks, and sharp nails and red-hot irons seemed to be piercing my flesh."

Here Josefa repeated the multiple tortures from which no single member of the body is excluded:

"I felt as if they were endeavoring to pull out my tongue, but could not. This torture reduced me to such agony that my very eyes seemed to be starting out of their sockets. I think this was because of the fire which burns, burns . . . not a fingernail escapes the terrifying torments, and all the time one cannot move even a finger to gain some relief, nor change posture, for the body seems flattened out and doubled in two.

"Sounds of confusion and blasphemy cease not for an instant. A sickening stench asphyxiates and corrupts everything, it is like the burning of putrefied flesh, mingled with tar and sulfur . . . a mixture to which nothing on earth can be compared.

"All this I felt as before, and although those tortures were terrific, they would be bearable if the soul were at peace. But it suffers indescribably. Until now, when I went down into Hell, I thought that I had been

damned for abandoning religious life. But this time it was different. I bore a special mark, a sign that I was a religious, a soul who had known and loved God, and there were others who bore the same sign. I cannot say how I recognized it, perhaps because of the specially insulting manner in which the evil spirits and other damned souls treated them. There were many priests there, too. This particular suffering I am unable to explain. It was quite different from what I had experienced at other times, for if the souls of those who lived in the world suffer terribly, infinitely worse are the torments of religious. Unceasingly the three words Poverty, Chastity and Obedience are imprinted on the soul with poignant remorse.

“Poverty: You were free and you promised! Why, then, did you seek that comfort? Why hold on to that object which did not belong to you? Why did you give that pleasure to your body? Why allow yourself to dispose of the property of the Community? Did you not know that you no longer had the right to possess anything whatsoever? That you had freely renounced the use of those things. . . . Why did you murmur when anything was wanting to you or when you fancied yourself less well treated than others? Why?

“Chastity: You yourself vowed it freely and with full knowledge of its implications . . . you bound yourself . . . you willed it . . . and how have you observed it? That being so, why did you not remain where it would have been lawful for you to grant yourself pleasures and enjoyment?

“And the tortured soul responds: ‘Yes, I vowed it, I was free. . . . I could have not taken the vow, but I took it and I was free. . . .’ What words can express the martyrdom of such remorse?” wrote Josefa, “and all the time the jibes and insults of other damned souls continue.

“Obedience: Did you not fully engage yourself to obey your Rule and your Superiors? Why, then, did you pass judgment on the orders that were given you? Why did you disobey the Rule? Why did you dispense yourself from common life? Remember how sweet was the Rule . . . and you would not keep it . . . and now,” vociferate satanic voices, “you will have to obey us not for a day, or a year, or a century, but forever and ever, for all eternity. . . . It is your own doing . . . you were free.

“The soul constantly recalls how she had chosen her God for her Spouse, and that once she loved Him above all things . . . that for Him she had renounced the most legitimate pleasures and all she held dearest on earth, that in the beginning of her religious life she had felt all the purity, sweetness and strength of this divine love, and that for an inordinate passion . . . now she must eternally hate the God who had chosen her to love Him.

“This forced hatred is a thirst that consumes her . . . no past joys can afford her the slightest relief.

“One of her greatest torments is shame,” added Josefa. “It seems to her that all the damned surrounding her continually taunt her by saying: ‘That we should be lost who never had the helps that you enjoyed is not surprising . . . but you . . . what did you lack? You who lived in the palace of the King . . . who feasted at the board of the elect.’

“All I have written,” she concluded, “is but a shadow of what the soul suffers, for no words can express such dire torments.” (September 4th, 1922).