

## **Christians are to be faithful to God in good times and in bad times**

Reflection on the Lives of Saint Lidwina and Father Nikephoros

A few weeks ago, while preparing materials for Sunday school, I searched for ways to explain leprosy to the children. In that process, I discovered the inspiring stories of two Catholic saints: Saint Lidwina and Father Nikephoros. Their extraordinary faith in the midst of suffering deeply moved me.

Saint Lidwina (1380–1433)

Born in Schiedam, Holland, Lidwina was the daughter of a humble laborer. From a young age, she displayed a deep devotion to God—praying fervently, fasting, and sacrificing sleep to express her love for Christ. Though admired for her beauty, she valued virtue above appearance, saying, “It is virtue that adorns the soul before God, not beauty that fades with time.” Her desire was to live a life of virginity, consecrated to Christ.

At age 15, a skating accident left her paralyzed. What followed was 34 years of intense suffering—bedridden, blind, and in constant pain. Her condition worsened over time, and even the slightest breeze felt like fire on her skin. Despite this, Lidwina never gave up. She found strength in prayer and the Holy Communion, which became her spiritual and physical sustenance.

Her suffering became a ministry. She offered her pain to God, never bitter or questioning His will. Through her deep intimacy with God, she became a spiritual counsellor and intercessor. Miracles occurred at her bedside, and many sought her wisdom and healing. Even when blinded in her final years, she continued to pray and serve others, relying on her inner spiritual sight and the comforting presence of Christ.

Father Nikephoros (1890–1964)

Born in a mountainous village in Khania, Greece, Father Nikephoros (Nicholas Tzanakakis) became an orphan at a young age and was raised by his grandfather. At 13, he showed signs of Hansen’s disease (leprosy), and by 24, he entered a leper colony in Chios, where he became a monk.

Despite his illness, he was known for his joyful spirit, constant prayer, and sweet demeanour. He never quarrelled or hurt anyone. As the disease progressed, he lost his sight and mobility, yet he continued to chant prayers from memory and radiated peace and joy. His face, though disfigured, shone with divine light. A fellow monk once witnessed him levitating in prayer—a miraculous testament to his spiritual depth.

Lessons from Their Lives

What sustained these saints through decades of suffering? Two things:

## 1. Unceasing Prayer

Both Lidwina and Father Nikephoros turned to prayer as their lifeline. Prayer drew them into God's presence, gave them strength, and allowed them to bless others despite their limitations.

## 2. Yielding to God's Will

They never questioned or resisted God's plan. Like Christ, they embraced suffering as a path to spiritual fruitfulness. John 12:24 reminds us:

\_"Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."\_

Their lives challenge us to reflect:

- Are we willing to yield to God's will, even in suffering?
- Do we remain faithful in both good times and bad?
- Are we committed to God beyond convenience?

## A Call to Faithfulness

Today, many Christians turn away from God when faced with trials. Some leave the church over misunderstandings or hardships. But what does it mean to be truly committed to God?

The church is the bride of Christ—not a building, but a community of believers who pledge loyalty through baptism. Like marriage, our commitment to God should endure through joy and adversity.

Saint Lidwina and Father Nikephoros could have withdrawn in despair, but they chose to serve, comfort, and bless others. Their lives were not defined by suffering but by their unwavering devotion.

## Final Reflection

May the lives of these saints inspire us to deepen our faith, embrace suffering as a path to spiritual growth, and serve others regardless of our limitations. Let us not be lukewarm in our love for God, but faithful in all seasons.

Like Job, who said, \_"Shall we accept good from God and not adversity?" (Job 2:10), may we remain steadfast, trusting that in our yielding, God brings forth blessings beyond measure.

