

BARBARA PFISTER, A GERMAN MYSTIC AND STIGMATIST

Barbara Pfister was born on September 1, 1867, in Wattenheim, a village in the Pfalz region of Germany. (Wattenheim had, in 1867, a population of 816 Catholics and 473 Protestants. For many years the Catholics and Protestants had to share a church, which resulted in much animosity and strife. In 1892 this situation was resolved at last; the Protestants kept the old church and the Catholics built a new one.)

Barbara's father was a master carpenter, member of the community council and of church administration. Both of her parents were practicing Catholics who made sure their children went to daily Mass. They had five children - three sons and two daughters, the youngest of whom became a nun and died in 1939. The parents were strict when it came to raising their offspring. The father, while strict, was very loving; he was fond of playing with his children. The mother was always earnest.

Barbara, her father's darling, was pious and obedient since her earliest childhood. Her mystical experiences started when she was barely three years old. At the time she used to go to the nearby meadow, accompanied by the family's dog. There she spent a long time sitting under the trees, listening to the birds, and admiring the beautiful wild flowers.

She was often joined by the Child Jesus and Anne Catherine Emmerich, whom she called Annkathrinchen and who was at the time appearing to her as a child as well. On one of these occasions, 3 or 4 year old Barbara and Annkathrinchen visited, in vision, Bethlehem where they saw the Holy Family just before they had to flee to Egypt.

(Note: There are great similarities between Barbara Pfister and Anne Catherine Emmerich, who died in 1824. They had similar youths, both suffered greatly for the Church and for sinners, both received similar extraordinary graces - the stigmata, visions from the life and Passion of Jesus, knowledge of sacred history, recognition of consecrated and blessed things, etc. Both had a forked cross, or Y shaped cross, imprinted on their chest.)

After some time the neighbors alerted her parents that Barbara was spending much time in the meadow, and her parents forbade her to go. From then on she started spending long hours in the parish church. Since her earliest years Barbara truly saw Jesus in His "little house" - that is, in the tabernacle. If allowed, she would never have left the church, where she was with her beloved Child Jesus much like before in the meadow. Yet her parents were once again alerted to their daughter's unusual habit of

spending much of the day in the parish church, and they told her to be at home by the time of the Angelus.

Barbara - also called Babette - never spoke to anyone about her seeing Jesus. Until, that is, she suddenly stopped seeing Him in 1883. The 16 year old Barbara then spoke to her parish priest about her spiritual anxiety - she was convinced she must have committed some terrible sin since Jesus was no longer visible to her. The astonished priest asked her, "but, have you seen the Savior before?" Barbara, surprised at such a question, replied by asking whether other people don't see Him. It was only then that she realized that seeing Jesus with bodily eyes is an exceptional grace not granted to the vast majority of the faithful.

Barbara had quite a fiery temperament but she strove to control it since early age, so that she was always obedient, humble and loving towards all. Only on rare occasions has her natural temperament showed itself; it was almost exclusively when she felt that God's majesty had been insulted, or when someone failed in respect to priests or the Church. Once, while still a child, when her sister spoke some harsh words about a priest, little Barbara instantly gave her a slap on the mouth. Her sister stood there in silent astonishment; no one ever saw such a reaction from Babette before.

Barbara also had a very close and familiar relationship with her guardian angel since earliest childhood. He has protected her on the many occasions when the devil tried to do her harm. Even as little child she was attacked by the evil one; he threw her down the stairs, lifted her to a tall ladder only to throw her down with force, etc - yet to the astonishment of all she was never harmed in the slightest.

When Barbara was 16 she entered as a postulant in the cloister of the Dominican sisters in Speyer. Her father, who had by then been ill for almost two years, could hardly bear to see his Babette leave home to enter the convent. But God had other plans for her. On two occasions, while she was praying in the cloister's oratory, she lost consciousness. The nuns thought she was ill. The doctor who attended the cloister could not determine what was wrong, but he marveled at the radiant face of the unconscious girl who seemed like an angel. What had actually happened was that Barbara, while praying, saw Jesus carrying His cross. He looked at her, and she seemingly fainted - in reality went into ecstasy. This state lasted for many hours. When it happened again, the mother prioress decided to dismiss Barbara, thinking she was ill. Barbara never told the nuns what she saw. Years later the prioress deeply regretted having sent Barbara away.

Barbara thus returned to her parents by Christmas of 1883. By then her father was ill and the family's economic situation became quite dire. Barbara took care of her father and helped him to have a good death. She took on various service jobs after her father's death. While working for a family in Speyer, she again fell into ecstasy while seeing Jesus in His Passion, and was thus deemed ill yet again. Finally her mother brought her back home, where she helped in the school and later worked with the knitting machine.

Barbara had, since early childhood, a great love for the Most Holy Sacrament. As mentioned earlier, she actually saw Jesus, with her bodily eyes, in his "little house". At 11 she was allowed to receive her First Communion, although the customary age then was 13. After some time she was able to receive Jesus in the Communion every two weeks, and later almost every day. (At this time lay people almost never received daily Communion, and even many religious only did so once a week or even less frequently.)

The days when her parish priest was away she would walk great distances to other villages to humbly beg the local priest to give her the Eucharistic Lord. At times she had to wait several days; on these occasions her health deteriorated so rapidly that she seemed to be on her deathbed. When the priest then brought her Holy Communion, her aspect changed immediately - life came back into her, the paleness of death was replaced by a healthy color and, after an ecstasy which lasted several hours, Barbara recovered completely and was back to full health. Jesus in the Eucharist was truly her "bread of life". He gave her not only the spiritual but also the physical strength necessary.

Archpriest and Prelate Martin Hemmer (years later) related how, during a visit to Wattenheim, he celebrated a private Mass very early in the morning, in which he gave Holy Communion to Barbara. As he turned to Barbara, raising the Host from the ciborium, he was astonished to see her face enveloped in a bright light which seemed to shine from her to the point where her face almost disappeared in it. He was convinced that she actually saw Jesus in the Host.

On another occasion when Barbara and some other girls were decorating, with flowers, the pillars near the high altar of the parish church, to the astonishment of the people who were present, Barbara "shot up like an arrow towards the tabernacle" and became as if glued there, held by some inexplicable power. The people called the priest and he commanded her back from her ecstasy, after which they helped her come down to the ground.

When the Most Holy Sacrament was exposed for adoration, Barbara would spend all the time she could in the church. On some occasions she would be there the entire night, on her knees, immovable and in ecstasy, until the church was about to close or until a priest called her (back from ecstasy) in obedience.

The Holy Mass and the Eucharist were the center of Barbara's life. She didn't pray the Mass, she truly lived it, being present and participating in Jesus's Passion and Death not only in the Sacrifice of the Mass but in her own life as a victim of expiation for the Church and for sinners.

She spent large parts of the Mass in ecstasy. When a priest didn't say Mass with the due dignity and piety, she suffered terribly and expiated. She often saw the Blessed Mother at the altar, as if guiding the priest.

Barbara had tremendous respect for priests. She was able to always recognize priests (even if dressed in lay clothes) by the power of their consecrated hands. She also had the gift of recognizing consecrated and blessed objects. This has been tested and proven on numerous occasions, by many priests. When in ecstasy, her confessor or spiritual father could always and instantly call her back - even when he gave the order only mentally. He could also give the authorization to another person, in which case Barbara, without knowing anything about the delegation, came back from ecstasy upon the order from said person.

One of the fruits of Barbara's deep love and connection to Jesus in the Most Holy Sacrament was her love for her neighbor. Her charity was consistent and offered to all. Not that she was not hurt when certain people insulted her or spoke ill of her, but she was able to forgive, forget and love. The lack of charity, even among religious, saddened her deeply. She also had great compassion for the misfortune and suffering of others, even as a child, and did everything she could to help and alleviate them. She would often take the suffering and ills of others upon herself.

Barbara's life as a victim soul and a crucified bride of Christ began on November 26, 1884, when she was praying for her just deceased father. (However, she began having visions of the Passion in the fall of 1883 while being a postulant of the Dominican nuns.) On the 26th, during the Mass for the repose of her father's soul, she had a vision of him in the fires of Purgatory. She fainted and was brought to the nearby house of a kind family where she would later often find refuge during her participation in the Passion.

(Thanks to Barbara's prayers and sacrifices four of the sons of this family became exemplary priests and two of their daughters became nuns.)

On top of her expiatory suffering Barbara also often suffered all sorts of physical illnesses that she took on for others (thus the sick person became well and Barbara was struck by their illness instead). It was truly a miracle that she not only didn't die of these often mortal illnesses but became instantly healed once the time of her vicarious suffering for the other person was completed. Many times she knew for which particular person she was suffering; on other occasion God did not reveal this to her.

She often suffered and expiated for the Church and also for particular parishes, cloisters or dioceses. As Anne Catherine Emmerich, Barbara was able to see the spiritual state of individuals as well as that of entire parishes and dioceses. She never disclosed the names of people for whom she was expiating their sins and transgressions; to do so, even to her spiritual director, would for her be the sin of detraction.

Barbara suffered and expiated both for the living and for the dead. She often had souls in the Purgatory appear to her and beg her for prayers and sacrifices. Some of these were Protestants, such as a man who in life was a factory owner in Speyer. His generous almsgiving was rewarded with the grace of perfect contrition; when he lay dying a religious sister handed him her crucifix which he kissed with great love for God while making an act of perfect contrition for all his sins. This soul appeared to Barbara, telling her he was in the part of Purgatory where there is only pain but no alleviation from prayers of the living. Barbara suffered for him, and also alerted his former housekeeper who offered Masses for his soul. (Barbara's spiritual director and biographer, Fr. Molz, knew all the involved people personally.)

Barbara also helped many hardened sinners, obtaining for them, by her prayers and great sufferings, the grace of conversion and a good death. Such was the case of an old woman who not only stopped practicing her Catholic faith but joined a Masonic sect and had a great hatred for all things Catholic. Barbara was shown her entire life and her sins, in all their grotesque ugliness. She also saw how Satan had this woman in his grip because she had given him so much power over her. Barbara prayed and suffered so much for this soul - who was then in her final illness - that her clothes as well as bed linens became stamped with bloody cross marks (the wounds, in the shape of crosses, that appeared on Barbara's body during many of her expiatory sufferings, left marks on the linen). At last the old woman had a remarkable change of heart. She, who before cursed all things Catholic, suddenly asked for a priest. She made her confession and died after receiving the last rites. Barbara was still to suffer much for this soul who was now in Purgatory.

Barbara often saw sins in the form of frightening animals and other grotesque figures that were rotting and emitted terrible odor. Each sin had its own corresponding image. So also had she suffered a particular pain when she expiated for a particular sin of others. Sins against the love of God (which all sins are) are attacks against the Heart of Jesus from which the sinner is, so to speak, ripping off pieces. Thus Barbara was feeling this kind of pain in her heart when she was expiating for sinners. Sins of the tongue she expiated through pain as if her tongue was on fire; often her tongue also became dried up, shriveled and torn. Sins of theft she suffered with fire in her hands and a pain as if her limbs were being torn out. Sins against fasting and abstinence had to be expiated with torturing thirst and hunger as well as horrific nausea and sense of disgust. When expiating sins against faith, hope and love, and sacrileges, every nerve in her body was on fire, and her heart was being ripped apart.

Barbara was a victim soul - she willingly offered herself to satisfy Divine Justice and bear on her body the punishment for the sins of others, both the living and those in Purgatory. Jesus chose her to participate in His Passion and to also bear His Wounds in her body.

Barbara first received the side wound, on the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, 1890. On that day she was brought, after Mass, to the house of Oswald Schaefer, near the church. The Schaefer family witnessed her in ecstasy, on her knees and barely touching the floor. She remained in this state for a long time and no one could bring her back until the parish priest was called and, by his order, Barbara came back from ecstasy.

Some days later, on the feast of St. Peter and Paul, she received the stigmata of the hands and feet and the crown of thorns, while praying in front of the high altar in the church. She was again brought to the Schaefer house where her painful Passion ecstasies began. Barbara had to stay in bed for several days, ravaged by terrible pain. Then the painful ecstasies were followed by a joyous vision, during which Barbara spoke with Jesus - as witnessed by members of the Schaefer family. Thereafter she recovered and regained her health.

Barbara's parish priest, Fr. Weber, wrote a letter to the bishop on September 13, 1890, to inform him of the events. The letter mentions Barbara's exemplary piety and virtue, and describes the appearance of her five wounds as well as the marks of the crown of thorns, the shoulder wound (the wound Jesus had from the carrying of the cross) and the wounds caused by flagellation. It also mentions that already some time before - on the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus - Barbara received the wound in the side.

Fr. Weber further described how the stigmata appear every week (initially on Sundays but soon every Friday, after she received Holy Communion in the morning), and that Barbara would for the next day or two suffer from extreme bodily pains. These would disappear after a joyful vision which would bring her back to health. During the appearance of the wounds she would be insensitive to external stimuli, her body being in a cramp-like state and often trembling. Her face would betray the pain she was in.

The parish priest told the Pfister family to keep silence about the events, and for almost three months no one else became aware of Barbara's stigmata. However, it was inevitable that sooner or later someone would notice the bleeding wounds, as indeed happened in church on one Friday. The wider public learned of it from the local Protestant pastor who mentioned it (mockingly) in his sermons.

The German press - both the Protestant papers and some freethinking Catholic ones - published various articles mocking not only Barbara but the idea of miracles and of stigmata overall. (This was a time when liberalism was in full swing, and even Catholics - especially those educated and in higher social standing - adopted the new ways of thinking in order to be well regarded by society.)

Someone denounced Barbara to the local authorities, accusing her of fraud, which the police then began investigating. The secular authorities sent several doctors to examine her. They were antagonistic and hoping to uncover a fraud. These examinations confirmed the presence of bleeding wounds as well as marks of bloody crucifixes on Barbara's clothes and linen. No fraud could be detected, and the investigation was ended.

Unlike some stigmatists who have deep flesh wounds at all time, which then bleed on Fridays and other days of penitence, Barbara's stigmata were bleeding but when the blood was wiped off no flesh wound was present; the blood then immediately started coming out again from the seemingly intact skin. She also had, very frequently, bleeding crosses and other signs of the Passion, as well as (sometimes) the Heart of Jesus pierced and crowned with thorns, appear on her body. These were not permanent but would appear and disappear at times. Many pieces of cloth and linen have been preserved that show clear marks of all these figures.

The scientifically educated and highly regarded Fr. Josef Kapper from Karlsberg near Wattenheim wrote several reports on Barbara Pfister. He was initially very skeptical when he heard of the stigmatized girl but, after his observations of Barbara, became

convinced of the authenticity of her stigmata. He also had the blood from her wounds tested, proving it was real human blood and not paint, as some critics had claimed.

He described her stigmata in detail: how blood from the crown of thorns covers her forehead and often streams down to her eyes, nose and cheeks, and runs all around her head under the hair; how the blood from her hand wounds runs upwards onto her arms and the blood from her feet wounds runs upwards - when she is laying in bed - towards her toes. This was always the case with Barbara's bleeding - similarly to all other stigmatists - the blood was running upwards - against all laws of nature, as if she was hanging on the cross and not laying in bed. Her clothes, over her chest, were stained by the blood from her side wound.

Several priests who came to see Barbara and the stigmata, reported how she obeyed their orders expressed in Latin and even just mentally, to lift her head, open and close her hands, etc. On other occasions priests asked her a question in languages unknown to her, and she would reply (in German). When Babette was participating in the Passion of Christ she was totally insensitive to anyone around her; she would, however, always respond to the orders and questions of her parish priest or spiritual father, who was also able to recall her from ecstasy.

Barbara's bleeding would start unexpectedly and instantly, sometimes right after she had received Holy Communion and sometimes several hours later. A number of people witnessed how the blood suddenly appeared on her hands, feet and forehead. Once, when Barbara and two other women who were accompanying her, knelt down in church, the two women heard a painful moan coming from Barbara; as they looked at her, blood was streaming down her face, covering much of her skin.

Often Barbara would lose consciousness after Holy Communion, and enter in ecstasy. She would then be carried to the nearby house of the Schaefer family. Thus the Schaefers very often witnessed Barbara's stigmatization and her participation in the Lord's Passion. During such times they let Barbara stay in a room on the second floor of their house, with a view onto the church. (The Schaefers kept several bed linens on which were impressed bloody crosses as well as images of the Heart of Jesus, and a pillow with the bloody impression of the crown of thorns.)

Babette's mother never spoke of her daughter's stigmata, ecstasies and other supernatural gifts. Barbara's younger sister Ida also stayed silent until 1938, when - long after her sister's death - she first described her experiences with the extraordinary states Babette was in every Friday and throughout Lent.

Barbara's biographers, Mons. Nikolaus Lauer and Mons. Molz, collected testimonies of eye witnesses who saw her on the days when her stigmata were bleeding. Not only Catholics but also many Protestants were deeply moved by her stigmata and her tremendous suffering. (Fr. Molz, Babette's spiritual father, was himself a frequent witness of her stigmatization. He could repeatedly observe how the blood starting springing from her skin, and thus knew that no fraud was possible.)

Barbara herself never spoke of her stigmata to any outsiders, and very rarely to those closest to her; she would only do so in obedience to priests. She didn't write down anything about her extraordinary mystical experiences and gifts. There have, however, been two visions where Jesus explained to her her participation in His suffering, which she did write down on some loose sheets of paper.

On the feast of the Immaculate Conception of 1890, in a vision, Jesus told her He would grant her what she had long had begged for - the disappearance of the external stigmata. However, he told her that instead she would receive even more suffering, as well as persecution and detraction of all kinds. He told her the press would write about her and people would doubt her and accuse her of fraud. Jesus also said that after some time when she will be in perfect health (with no external signs of any kind), she will again have to suffer much physically, including all sorts of illnesses, for many years.

Barbara was extremely grateful that the visible stigmata would be taken away, as they indeed were, after Easter of 1891, albeit only temporarily. The pain of the stigmata, however, always remained. The visible bleeding wounds would come back every year during Lent. The side wound would remain for the rest of her life.

Not only was Barbara and her family molested by scores of curious people (not all of them coming to see her with good intentions) but she soon had to suffer terrible defamation. Certain people denounced her to the bishop, accusing her of all sorts of shameful things. Her parish priest even made her swear that she never committed any of the things she was being accused of. Finally God intervened. Six months later the chief culprit behind the false accusations came clear and begged the bishop to forgive him his lies and defamation of Barbara.

Barbara - who had been told by Jesus that the signs of His Passion would bring her much suffering and insults - never once complained nor criticized the actions of her enemies. She prayed for them, and stayed silent through the entire ordeal. The bishop

never intervened in the matter of her stigmatization but he did publicly state, on various occasions, that she was a virtuous and honorable virgin.

While she suffered terribly, throughout the year, for the conversion of sinners or liberation of the poor souls, Babette's sufferings were always the strongest in the penitential times of the Church year. Especially from Septuagesima through to Easter she was tortured by such pain that she could just barely drag herself to daily Mass, but had to lay in bed the rest of the time. During Holy Week, she didn't just participate in the suffering and the Passion of the Savior but also felt the indescribable pain of His Holy Mother. Barbara often stated she would have died of heartbreak at experiencing some of the suffering the Virgin Mary had to suffer, if God had not sustained her. On Easter Sunday she saw the resurrected Jesus in all His glory, and her pain was changed into happiness and longing for Heaven.

Barbara was a member of the Third Order of St. Francis. She shared his great love of poverty, of nature (especially flowers) and of people - in particular the sick and the poor, the sinners and the poor souls in Purgatory. She was a living model of the rule of the Third Order - living a life of extreme austerity and abnegation, living in the world but detached from it both materially and in spirit.

As she was sacrificing herself and praying for the release of the poor souls, so they were often helping her. In the morning, especially after she had spent an entire night suffering terribly, it was often the poor souls who woke her up (often from her ecstatic state, as she spent many nights and even entire weeks and months without any sleep) and helped her get up so that she was always ready to start her day of work, prayer and suffering, at the earliest hour of the morning.

Her confessor once ordered her, under obedience, to ask the poor soul who was most helping her in the morning (or at night to get to the chapel to pray) who she was. Barbara did so and then told the priest the answer. It was the soul of Sister Lucia who used to be the mother superior in the Merciful Sisters house. She had to spend nearly 12 years in Purgatory due to her sometimes too harsh and strict treatment, but would soon be released thanks to Barbara's help.

The priest, who knew Sr. Lucia in life, was astonished to hear that the virtuous and saintly nun was still in Purgatory. Barbara replied that 12 years in Purgatory was not a long time, since time as we know it doesn't exist in eternity. Shortly before Christmas, on the feast of St. Thomas the Apostle, Barbara could witness how the soul of Sr. Lucia was taken to Heaven. This happened at the end of a Holy Mass celebrated for her

release; Barbara, the current mother superior of the Sisters, and the soul of Sr. Lucia were present at the Mass. During the Mass Sr. Lucia (whom Barbara saw the entire time) became more and more beautiful and resplendent, until, after the 'Ite Missa Est', Heaven opened and Jesus, with His Holy Wounds shining, came to take Sr. Lucia with Him.

(Barbara saw that Sr. Lucia also had the stigmata - the wound in her heart and the wounds of the crown of thorns. They seemed to have been invisible or kept hidden from others, during her life. As Sr. Lucia was taken to Heaven, Barbara saw that there were quite a number of souls who had born the wounds of Christ. These, in Heaven, had a special place near Jesus, similarly to the martyrs.)

She was often taken to the Purgatory in her visions and ecstasies. She contemplated not only the great suffering of the poor souls but also their peace and resignation as they were completely united with the Holy Will of God. She saw that the most joyous times for the poor souls were the visits of the Virgin Mary when she came to the Purgatory to take a soul or a number of souls to Heaven. All the poor souls rejoiced at seeing another soul go to Heaven as if it was themselves who had been released. Barbara was also told by Jesus that a large number of souls are released on Christmas Day.

The month of November, when she suffered especially greatly for the poor souls, was a hard time for Barbara. Advent, a penitential season for the Church, was also a time of extreme suffering for the saintly victim soul; her pains became almost insupportable, similarly to the time of Lent. The great feast days of the Church were a time when she experienced great relief from suffering. She was usually immersed in hours-long ecstasies and visions, such as those during Christmas when she was present (in vision) at the crib of the newborn Savior and was given to hold Baby Jesus in her arms, by the Mother of God, while the angels sang 'Gloria in excelsis' and adored the Child. However, the vigils of the great feasts were very hard times when her pains were multiplied.

At the beginning of Advent and Lent she was usually shown a vision of her upcoming suffering, either by a vision of flowers, or an overgrown field full of thorns which she had to clean with her bare hands. This knowledge of imminent suffering frequently caused her a great natural fear, which sometimes manifested by profuse sweating - at times sweating of blood (much like that of Our Lord in the garden of Olives, as he was contemplating His upcoming Passion). Yet, far from asking God to take it away from her, or wanting to flee from pain, she accepted whatever God wanted to send her, and only begged for the grace to carry her crosses according to His Will.

When Barbara was in ecstasy, she could only be recalled from it by an order of her confessor or other religious authority. She also instantly came back from an ecstasy when it was time to do some work she has been asked to do as part of her duties. She would then come back from her ecstatic state exactly on time (to perform her duties), despite not having a watch and not being able to know what time it was.

On May 5, 1896, Barbara moved to Speyer where she was received by the Sisters of Mercy. Living in their house she was thus able to live under one roof with Jesus in the Most Holy Sacrament, and receive Him almost daily in the Communion, which was a foretaste of Heaven for her. Her aged and ill mother soon moved to Speyer as well, to be close to Barbara.

Barbara's life now consisted of suffering, crosses and work. She had to work to support herself and her mother. She did household work for the Sisters and also knitting. Yet her knitting didn't bring in enough money, so that she barely had the minimum necessary for daily survival. She also had to take care of her suffering mother which took much time and strength. It was only by God's help that Barbara, weakened by her daily sufferings and pains (and the copious blood loss), was able to do this.

Barbara tried hard to keep her stigmata and other sufferings hidden from the Sisters. However, it wasn't long before they noticed what was going on. The bleeding and blood-soaked linen was impossible to keep hidden for a long time. She also had to spend a considerable time in bed, especially during the penitential periods when her sufferings were even greater than usual.

Despite the atrocious pains Barbara was suffering most of the time, she was always kind, patient and even cheerful. At times people insisted in talking to her for extended amount of time, even on her bedside when she was in incredible pain and agony. Yet she never treated them harshly or with any hint of impatience, and excused their impertinence by saying they didn't realize what she was going through.

On top of the pain caused by the bleeding wounds and other vicarious suffering, the agony caused by the crown of thorns was unimaginable. It was as if long, sharp thorns had pierced her every nerve, and penetrated deep into the eye sockets. The pain took over her entire body, and not a single nerve or muscle was left unaffected. Her heart seemed to be the center to which all the pain gathered, so that she was able to stay alive only by a miracle of God.

In times of extra hard suffering Barbara often received a cross imprinted on her chest (sometimes along with other crosses and instruments of the Passion) which was bleeding and caused her particularly atrocious pains. This was often the case in Advent, Lent, the ember days, and also when she was tasked with reparation for the conversion and salvation of some hardened sinner.

At times she had to expiate, for a period of time, a particular sin frequently committed by people - pride, blasphemy, sins against the Most Holy Sacrament, etc.

Barbara's heart was also enlarged and several of her ribs were out of place as a result, which caused yet more suffering. This supernatural enlargement of the heart was also present in a number of saints (incl. St. Philip Neri, St. Paul of the Cross, St. Teresa of Avila and several others).

Sister Lucia, the poor soul Barbara helped to release from Purgatory, foretold her she would soon enter the second part of her suffering. So it was to be...Barbara would, from 1897, enter what the mystic theology calls the dark night of the soul.

Around Christmas of 1896 she also received the admonition to prepare herself to be ready by Easter for the mystical nuptials with Jesus. This was worrying her greatly as she considered herself to be completely undeserving of such a great grace.

From Septuagesima of 1897 Barbara lived and suffered the Passion of Christ in accordance with the liturgical texts of each day. This is an entirely unique case not seen in any of the other mystics, saints and stigmatists. Barbara didn't have a Missal and, prior to the Septuagesima of 1897, she didn't know the Mass texts (beyond those parts read aloud in church).

Her director, Fr. Molz, tested her on this on many occasions. There was no natural way Barbara could have known all these liturgical texts, of every single day, in their entirety. Not even a priest with decades of experience would know, from memory, the entire text of each day's Mass, with all its variable parts.

So how could Barbara know them? As she explained it to Fr. Molz, she was present - with Jesus and Mary - at the Mass the night before the actual Mass was celebrated in the church. So she participated in each day's Mass the preceding night (and then again in the morning in the church), suffering along with Jesus and the sorrowful Mother.

Fr. Molz dedicated nearly two thirds of his biography of Barbara to the description of her visions and suffering connected to the daily Mass from Septuagesima to Easter.

As he wrote, they are not as detailed as they would have been had he not wanted to spare the stigmatized and deeply suffering Barbara - who spent each night of the penitential season on her knees and in unspeakable pain, and then had to work during the day to make ends meet - of having to give him minute explanation of each day's participation in the liturgy and the Passion of Jesus.

The Sisters of Mercy in whose house Barbara lived since 1896 gave their testimony to Fr. Molz, of her great suffering, the blood she shed from her wounds, and the wonderful results of her intercession for so many sinners. Fr. Molz relates a number of these stories, of hardened sinners who, after being away from the Sacraments for many years and even decades, had a sudden conversion in the last days before their death, after Barbara had spent days and weeks suffering terribly for their salvation.

Babette also often knew about things and events she could not have known by natural means. On occasion she was able to tell people about their relatives whom they had lost contact with or about events that would happen - all this would turn out as predicted. Many times she saw the sins of certain people she had to expiate for; this (seeing the sins) caused her terror and dread.

The Sisters also related how certain people in a time of great danger mentally asked Barbara, whom they knew, for help, and in fact obtained it. Another case witnessed by the Sisters was how Barbara, who was present (in vision) on the feast of the Assumption, at the Mother of God's descent to the Purgatory, accompanied by many holy virgins, from where she took a large number of souls to Heaven. There was one soul, deep in Purgatory, who begged the Mother of God to also take her. The Virgin replied that God's Justice requires more expiation. Barbara, who was present, then offered herself to expiate for the soul, and the soul was allowed to join the other souls going to Heaven. Barbara then spent four days and four nights laying lifeless in bed. When she came back (to life) she was surprised to still see all the Sisters around, for she believed she had been expiating, in Purgatory, for 40 years, for that soul.

By the end of 1897 started the third and last part of Barbara's life. She was plunged into the dark night of the soul which was to last for almost 12 years, until her death in 1909. Thus to her continued bodily suffering and expiatory suffering was added an even worse torture of spiritual pain and desolation.

During much of this time she felt abandoned by God, her soul deep in a terrible darkness, the previous graces (visions, mystical contemplation, etc) taken away. She no longer found any joy or peace in prayer, in the Mass, in the reception of the Holy

Communion. She continued to receive Communion in obedience to her spiritual director, but felt unworthy to do so, and unable to make a good preparation and thanksgiving. On top of all this she was tempted by the devil, who wanted her to believe that everything she had previously experienced and done was a delusion, an error, and that her soul was dead and not pleasing to God.

As her body was torn by the pains she took on in expiation for the sins and salvation of souls, and by her ongoing participation in the Passion of Christ, her soul was tortured by a sense of abandonment, dryness, sadness, doubts and scruples. There were some rare moments of rest, glimpses of the supernatural, such as when she saw (in a vision) the foundation of the Church and its hierarchy, or brief moments of contemplation of the nativity of Jesus, etc. But these were rare and only a shadow compared to the supernatural light she had been receiving earlier, during much of her life.

It is important to note that even in these long years of spiritual darkness and desolation, Barbara never ceased to offer herself in expiation for sinners and for the poor souls, or for the good of the Church. She continued to participate in Jesus' Passion, especially in the penitential season, when she would spend entire nights on her knees, her body, heart and every nerve torn by unspeakable pain, blood flowing from her wounds. She continued to do what God wanted her to do, even though He took away all the light and consolation.

(Note: By the dark night of the soul God wants to prove his chosen souls to see if they will love Him equally even after He takes away all consolation and sweetness of His love and presence and plunges them into darkness and abandon. In this process the soul is purified from even the smallest imperfection and completely detached from all earthly things and attachments.)

At last on Easter Sunday of 1908 the "dark night" was gone; a great inner peace came back to her soul.

In January 1909 Barbara became very ill with dropsy. Her legs became so swollen and painful she was no longer able to lay in bed nor have anything touch her legs.

Her sister, who was a nun, got permission from her superiors to come to see her. When she complained at finding her so ill and in pain, Barbara replied joyfully that she was at peace and free from all the earlier desolation and temptation, and the bodily suffering was the least she could still offer to Jesus. She also told her sister to let her go (to Heaven) - after all, she had longed for Heaven her entire life.

Barbara was deeply united to Jesus since earliest childhood. She saw Him, spoke to Him, suffered with Him and for Him. After such a life, it is not surprising that she now joyfully waited for Jesus to come and get her and take her to Heaven.

The evening before she died she told her crying sister: I'm going to Heaven, to Heaven, to Heaven. One of the Sisters of Mercy asked her to remember her in Heaven, to which Babette replied that she would come and get every one of them once their time of death comes.

In the evening of March 8, Fr. Molz brought her Holy Communion for the last time. She received her Jesus with much love and gratitude. Moments later her agony began. Barbara died after midnight, on March 9, 1909, surrounded by her spiritual director, the religious Sisters, her old mother and her sister. Her last word was: "Jesus!"

The Sisters dressed her body in the habit of the Third Order of St. Francis of which she was a member. She was buried on March 11, 1909, in the new cemetery in Speyer. Several priests, including her spiritual father Fr. Molz, 14 nuns, and many lay people were present. The grave has been visited, ever since, by many pious souls who come to ask Barbara's help. There are numerous votive tables at her grave testifying to the power of her intercession.

Barbara Pfister, despite of all the extraordinary graces God bestowed on her, always remained a simple, friendly, modest and humble village girl. As close as her union with Jesus was, she never considered herself worthy of anything but the last place in the service of God - not a spouse of Christ but only the least of His servants.

Only God knows the full extent of what Barbara suffered, from age 17 to 42 - for the Church, for priests, for individual dioceses and parishes, for the poor souls in Purgatory, and for the conversion and salvation of so many sinners. Because of her great love and willingness to suffer and expiate the sins of others, Jesus chose her as a victim and gave her the great grace of participating in His Passion and bearing of His Wounds.

Barbara said: "Carried with patience, every cross contains in it a particle of the Cross of Jesus, which makes it possible for us to carry it."

Barbara, as most people, had to live in the world. She had to sanctify herself in the daily life, by carrying her cross. It was in and through suffering that she was able to grow in virtue, abnegation and selflessness, and perfect her love of God and of neighbor.

Per crucem ad lucem.

We may not be called to be a victim soul, nor to receive extraordinary graces (stigmata, visions, ecstasies, etc), but this basic principle of Christian life is just as valid for all of us as it was for Barbara Pfister. May we imitate her in her willingness to do the Will of God at all time and to carry all our crosses with patience and love, for the love of God and for the expiation of sins and salvation of immortal souls. That is what all of us are called to do.

Final notes:

Barbara's long term confessor and spiritual director, the cathedral vicar (later vicar general) Friedrich Molz, wrote down, over many years, his observations as well as details of Barbara's visions. In 1928, 19 years after Babette's death, when he was 80 years old and four years before his own death, Fr. Molz decided to publish his writings in a book, to leave a testimony about the saintly victim soul.

The numbers of those visiting Barbara's grave and asking her intercession didn't diminish over the years. Quite the contrary. This prompted the Bishop of Speyer to form a commission in May of 1938, to gather all existing written records of Barbara Pfister and interview all still living witnesses who knew her. The commission was to study all the testimonies and materials gathered, which would be the first step necessary for a beatification process.

However, not long after WWII broke out, which made the endeavor impossible . Years later, when conditions would allow the proceedings to resume, the 20 or so people who had personally known Barbara and who were still alive in 1938, had already died. We are therefore left with the writings of prelate Molz, and with the confidence pious souls in the Pfalz still have, to this day, in Babette's sanctity and intercessory power.

Sources:

“Barbara Pfister, Eine Pfälzische Stigmatisierte” by Mons. Friedrich Molz

“Barbara Pfister” by Mons. Nikolaus Lauer

