

# NEVER

## Underestimate the Caring Heart of Mary

Dear Friends of the Heart of Christ,

It's May and I would venture to say that most of us are very glad this winter is finally past and we can at last see the signs of spring in our back yards and in the beautiful Berkshire hills that surround us. For most of us the topic of ice and snow was forever on our lips over these winter months as we anticipated another "imminent" snow storm and the freezing cold temperatures that never seemed to give us a break from their arctic-like grip. Memories of this winter may stay with us for years to come... I know these are the sentiments that I will carry away after slipping on a patch of black ice in early March and fracturing my upper arm in several places. I was not looking forward to the doctor's verdict that it would be best to let an orthopedic surgeon put the pieces in my arm back together in the usual way of "internal fixation," that is using a plate and screws. So even though I consented to this procedure, every ounce of me wanted out.

Perhaps it was the merciful providence of the Lord that the night before I was to be operated on I happened to watch a fascinating video on our Lady of Guadalupe. The video's presentation was so well done that I couldn't help but come away from it with the consciousness that Mary, our heavenly mother, was saying to me what she had spoken to Juan Diego, the humble visionary who received her apparitions: "Do not be troubled or weighed down with grief. Do not fear any illness or vexation, anxiety or pain. Am I not here who am your Mother? Are you not under my shadow and protection? Am I not the fountain of life? Are you not in the folds of my mantle? In the crossing of my arms? Is there anything else you need?" [words spoken by Our Lady to Juan Diego on December 12, 1531] So with these great comforting words I surrendered myself to the ministrations of all kinds of medical personnel who prepared me for surgery and must admit that I did experience an aura of caring presence and peace that came from both within and without. Was it our Lady of Guadalupe's intercession that helped me pass peacefully through this ordeal? I believe so. Looking at the face of her whose image is now imprinted on Juan Diego's tilma, a fragile piece of material that has not deteriorated in the least in almost 500 years, it is easy to understand why there is a power that moves the human heart and soul to turn to Mary and confide in her care.

Jesus' own final gesture to the apostle John, standing beneath his cross, was to entrust this beloved disciple into his mother's care, making it obvious that all of us who profess to follow our Savior, do the same. We are irrevocably given to Mary, whether we know it or not, as the someone who will lead us more intimately to Jesus. She is the one who "was there" at the final hour of her son's death, and she will be there for us, too, in the dilemmas and difficulties of this life.

In her compelling article entitled, "Our Lady as Healer," the journalist Patricia Treece testifies to the immediacy of Mary's help in her own dire health dilemma. She writes: "I was twenty-seven years old, pregnant, and my body was being overwhelmed by a massive kidney infection that had me vomiting constantly and in severe pain. Blood transfusions were necessary because my hemoglobin was so low. But where lay the root of all this? Was it TB in the kidney, was it... urologists, gynecologists, internists huddled together in the hall, murmuring names of strange diseases. I was so petrified because my mother had died at age twenty-seven and pregnant." She continues, "A Catholic convert of several years

standing, I made a novena to Our Lady of Guadalupe, attracted by her promise to Juan Diego, and her assurance that his uncle was cured. I asked for life for myself and for my baby and that my child would not be damaged by all the medications, tests and x-rays. The ninth day of my novena came. And with it a knock on my door. I opened to a stranger who introduced herself as a practical nurse living just two doors away. She had heard about me from my landlady and wanted to loan me a book." The book was by a nutritionist and focused on dietary ways to ensure health for both mother and child. "Because it (the book) came on the final day of the novena and from the hand of a total stranger, I felt this had to be God's answer to my prayers. I devoured the book that day... I began to eat the (recommended) foods, some of which I would have never touched at one time. I also took the vitamins, and in two weeks, surprised doctors found I did not need my next blood transfusion... After six months, I had an uneventful labor and a healthy son" {quoted from the book *A handbook on Guadalupe*, 2001, compiled by Franciscan Friars of the Immaculate, New Bedford, Ma, pp. 106 - 07}.

Mary's protective care has been recognized in an abundance of human dilemmas. Perhaps one of the most dramatic figured in the decisive naval battle of Lepanto on October 7, 1571. Alert to the Ottoman invasions into Europe, the bishop of Mexico sent an image of our Lady of Guadalupe, painted in the original likeness and touched to the original tilma of Juan Diego, to the king of Spain in 1570, asking that it be placed in a suitable location in the Christian navy when battle seemed imminent. The king complied with this request and the image was mounted in the admiral's own cabin. When the great naval battle actually ensured and it looked as if the Christian armada was facing destruction, the admiral rushed to his cabin and prostrated himself before Our Lady of Guadalupe's image, begging for her assistance. At that critical moment, it is recorded, a tremendous wind came up which contributed to a favorable advantage for the Christian forces leading to their ultimate victory.

Despite this well-known intervention of the Blessed Mother (which came to be associated more with our Lady of the Rosary), there are innumerable examples of Mary's presence in the daily lives of ordinary people. She is there for us when we require a helping hand and a loving heart, in times of great necessity or in moments of small befuddlement. We should not hesitate to call out to her as need arises and remember her frequently as our spiritual intercessor with the Heart of her divine Son. Just as at the wedding feast of Cana, she will take our urgent requests directly to Jesus so that the unresolved problems of our lives will be placed into his merciful heart. Mary can do this because she too was immersed in the great mysteries of our redemption which lead her to the foot of the cross. As the eminent theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar notes, "Mary is continually involved in mysteries, the sense and meaning of which tower over her, but instead of resigning herself to bafflement she gives them space in her heart in order to continually mull over them there." Mary is always pondering within herself the "mysteries of salvation" that have gripped her whole life's existence. She comes into our lives to do the same, inviting us to ponder what comes to us each day with the faith that animated hers. For although she wishes to aid us in our toils in this life, she comes primarily to enlighten us and sustain us in our faith in her Son whose main concern is the sanctification and redemption of our souls. We have only to recall her words to the Lourdes visionary St. Bernadette, when she told her at her third apparition: "I do not promise to make you happy in this world, but in the other."

However, it is this supreme interest in our souls that gives our heavenly mother the grace to aid us with the consolation of one who has suffered with others. Mary's understanding heart looks upon us with the eyes of concern and delicacy, for she wishes to turn our hearts to her Son's, not by compulsion and constraint, but with wisdom, gentleness, peace, and spiritual strength. It is not by the methods of this world that she works, but by the standards of heaven, leaving aside all the force and trickery that emanate from self interest, and coming instead with a heartfelt care that stems from genuine love. So it is that our loving mother Mary could assure Juan Diego and countless others who have encountered her that there will never be a moment when she is not available for us, as well. Call upon her and you will see. Invite her into your consciousness by praying her rosary. It is not only to Catholics that she responds, but to all people, making it clear that her mission is for everyone who is seeking a deeper relationship with God. Mary's touch has something life-transforming to it, reaching into the deepest levels of our psyche, turning our turbulent agitations into sweet composure, our gnawing doubts into lively faith, our afflicted spirits into wholesome humanity.

Even, when at times sorrowing over the waywardness of our world, Mary does not lose hope, for she knows that in the end her immaculate heart will triumph and that her intercession with us on behalf of her Son will bear abundant fruit, drawing many souls into the very Heart of Love itself. +

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*This talk on Sacred Heart spirituality was given in our Gathering Room on May 3rd, 2015. If you would like to attend similar presentations by the Sisters, our next talk will be held on Sunday, June 7th, 2015 at 4:00 p.m.*