

Protected

BY THE HEARTS OF JESUS & MARY

Dear Friends of the Heart of Christ,

One of the things that always amazes me when I have to leave the monastery for a medical appointment or for an errand (which is not too frequently) is to see our monastery sitting on the top of the Berkshire Hills. Although in the summertime our building is barely visible through the trees, in cooler weather I can see it more clearly. And I am in wonderment that we are here in the Berkshires and that where at one time there was only woods, now there is a monastery dedicated to the Two Hearts of Jesus and Mary. That's what we decided to name our monastery, calling it *Mont Deux Coeurs*—translated from the French, it means Mount of the Two Hearts. Anyone walking into our chapel, can't miss the stained glass window high up over our sanctuary proclaiming that theme in its symbols of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary. We wanted everyone to know that being in this building, they are under the auspices of these two holy Hearts.

Another symbol of these two Hearts in our chapel that cannot so easily be seen by outside people is the large plaque of the escutcheon of the Visitation Order. It's very visible from inside the sanctuary and from the Sisters' side. It's placed on the wall right outside the entrance to the priests' sacristy. Its design is a heart pierced by two arrows surrounded by a crown of thorns. This pattern was actually given to our founder St. Francis de Sales. We know this because one day he sent a note to St. Jane de Chantal telling her that God had inspired him the previous night with this thought: "Our house of the Visitation has now, by His grace, attained sufficient nobility to have its own arms, crest and device. I have thought, then, my dear Mother, if you agree with me, that we should take for our armorial bearings a heart pierced by two arrows and encircled by a crown of thorns; this heart serving as a base for a cross surmounting it, and bearing engraved upon it the holy names of Jesus and Mary... for indeed, our little congregation is the work of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary."

When we recall that St. Francis de Sales died in 1622 and that the great apostle of the Sacred Heart St. Margaret Mary was born in 1647, we can begin to see how providential these words of St. Francis de Sales were. His inspiration to found the Visitation of Holy Mary—the official name of our Order—with its particular charism of gentleness and humility, made it the ideal cradle for devotion to the Two Hearts of Jesus and Mary. In the wisdom of God, the Lord called St. Margaret Mary to the Visitation Order where she could be immersed in the love of these two holy hearts. As Fr. George Tickell, SJ writes in his seminal work on the *Life of St. Margaret Mary*: "The Order of the Visitation, to which Margaret Mary was so mysteriously called... was prepared from its first institution for receiving the devotion which she was chosen by our Lord to introduce."

Saint Margaret Mary had from her childhood a great love of the Blessed Virgin Mary. One of her first experiences of Mary's motherly care was our saint's healing from an unknown illness that confined her to bed for four years. We are told that her bones pierced her skin and that she nearly lost the use of her limbs. After physicians had failed to help Margaret, she was vowed to the Blessed Virgin. In her own words she tells us, "A promise was made that if Mary cured me I should be one day one of her Daughters. I had no sooner made this vow than I was cured, and I experienced quite a fresh protection on the part of the Blessed Virgin, as if I belonged wholly to her." Margaret goes on to inform us that the Blessed Virgin made herself so entirely directress of her heart that she took upon herself the absolute government of the young girl and even reprov'd her of her faults and taught her to do the will of God.

Now all of us, can if we so desire, have access to the protection and guidance of our heavenly Mother. She is our Mother in the spiritual realm, be you sinner, saint, regular Joe, Protestant, Catholic, Jew, Muslim, Buddhist, pagan, or whatever. Whoever you are, whatever you are, the Blessed Virgin Mary is waiting to help you, intercede for you, lead you to Jesus and to your eternal happiness. Her Immaculate Heart is, as the Litany of Loretto invokes her, the Refuge of Sinners. Is there anyone out there who does not need a heavenly advocate to soothe over some pain or some unfortunate mistake of your past life? Mary is our supreme intercessor with the Sacred Heart of Jesus who always, always listens to her prayers.

There is a photo in my breviary that was given to me several years ago of a statue of Our Lady in the garden of our Georgetown Visitation Monastery. She is depicted as decisively stepping on the head of a serpent that represents Satan. In today's world, we can read about and can experience for ourselves, the phenomenon of the growing influence of the prince of darkness. Young minds, curiosity seekers, those looking for alternative sources of empowerment and self-affirmation are attracted by New Age thinking and techniques that leave them vulnerable to Satanic persuasion and control. To offset this, we have only to turn to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Satan hates the Blessed Virgin Mary. Remember the prophetic words in the Book of Genesis after the fall of Adam and Eve. God addresses Satan in serpent form predicting his ultimate doom. "And I will establish a feud between you and the woman, between your offspring and hers; she is to crush your head, while you lie in ambush at her heels" (Gen.3:15; Knox translation). Although some translations provide the masculine pronoun making the sentence "he will crush your head," we see that the real meaning is that Jesus is going to crush Satan *through* Mary. She is the instrument Jesus has chosen to use to destroy his ancient enemy. Just imagine the absolute loathing Satan must have for this lowly servant of the Lord who will defeat him! Satan and Mary are polar opposites and every ounce of Satan's hatred and bitter envy will be pulverized by the deep humility and gentle power of the Blessed Virgin Mary. No wonder Satan is on a rampage, wreaking as much havoc as he can, wherever he can—in families, in religious communities, inside the Church, in society, and in individual hearts. His time is running out and he is pulling out all stops to get his way.

So my fellow strugglers, we must be on the alert! Where can we turn? To the Immaculate Heart of Mary—she does only what the Sacred Heart of Jesus wishes. We need not be embarrassed by our past failings to approach her, for she is a creature just like us. St. John Damascene says that Mary is not only the refuge of the innocent, but also of the wicked who implore her protection. Her heart is so gentle, so compassionate, even toward the most despicable of us humans. And her intercessory prayers are incomparably effective before the throne of God.

One of the most heart-rending stories of conversion and Mary's powerful intercession that I have recently read about involves a young woman by the name of Christine Watkins. She tells her dramatic story (along with other remarkable conversion stories) in her book entitled *Full of Grace*. Christine avers that growing up she did not even know there was a God. A gifted ballet dancer, she made her talent "her god" and eventually landed a professional position with the San Francisco Ballet Company. But a foot injury and three subsequent operations ended her career. Depression set in. To seek some comfort in her sadness, she latched onto unwise relationships which only sank her deeper and deeper into sin. As each relationship ended, she experienced a dark hollowness, never thinking to change her pattern of living. One summer she got very sick and was diagnosed with cervical cancer. Her prognosis was poor. But she says she was even sicker inside her soul. Crying out in guttural despair, she sought relief in the New Age movement. "I wanted nothing to do with Jesus and Mary," Christine confides. "I once saw an image of them and wanted it taken down, the darkness inside of me was so disturbed by just their images. I hated the names and images of our Lord and his Mother." Yet, the tender Hearts of Jesus and Mary were very much aware of Christine's plight. She declares, "Jesus decided to save me, a sinner. I shouldn't even be alive." One day, Christine perceived a "beautiful presence" around her and within her and heard a loud pop. A friend of hers who was praying for her at that moment said that he sensed Mother Mary had taken pity on her and had asked her Son to save her. "I knew after that the cancer was gone," reveals Christine, "and that I should sin no more." Shortly afterward she joined the Catholic Church. "I had hated them," she admits, "but they had always loved me." It was then she had a most remarkable experience. She heard what she describes as the most beautiful symphony: "I couldn't figure out where it was coming from. Then I realized the music was coming from inside me. Heaven was rejoicing because just one sinner was saved." Amazed at God's incredible mercy, Christine is living a new life in Christ. "God can be hated," she explains, "but he doesn't know how to do anything but love us right back. My life isn't mine anymore. It's God's."

All of us who sincerely want to follow the Lord need protection from the onslaught of worldly values and from enticements that constantly allure us to wayward reasoning and behaviors. In the Letter to the Ephesians (6:10) we are exhorted to "put on the armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes." For our struggle, we read from this scripture passage, is not against flesh and blood but against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil. Therefore, our confident recourse to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, so close to the Sacred Heart of her Son, can help us overcome the obstacles of life that threaten us at every turn.

Thinking about this, today I would like to suggest the use of a very powerful sacramental that can act as a spiritual armor for us. It's called the "Badge of the Immaculate Heart of Mary" or the Green Scapular. It was given to the world by the Mother of God in a series of apparitions to Sister Justine Bisqueburu, a Daughter of Charity, in the early 1840's in Paris, France. Mary appeared to the young nun while holding in her right hand an image of her Immaculate Heart, and holding in her other hand a scapular. On one side of the scapular was an image of Our Lady; on the other side was an image of her Heart with the inscription: "*Immaculate Heart of Mary, pray for us, now and at the hour of our death.*" Mary promised that when she was invoked under this title and through this holy image, she would obtain great favors from the Divine Heart of Jesus, especially in the areas of physical health, peace of mind and spiritual conversion. Our Lady explained that the scapular was not like others, but only needed to be blessed by a priest and worn or carried by the one who wished to benefit from her intercession, with a daily recital of the short prayer on the scapular. This prayer could even be said for another, if the intended beneficiary of the scapular's use would not say it. It is the confidence we place in Our Lady and her Divine Son that makes this sacramental so effective in releasing grace.

Personally, I have witnessed the efficacy of Our Lady's intercession through the use of this "badge." One of my favorite reminiscences in relation to the Green Scapular happened a few years ago. I was planning on mentioning it in a former talk and had prepared a basket of Green Scapulars to be blessed by a Marian priest who was saying our Sunday Mass. But I had forgotten to put the basket out, and before the Mass concluded, I went to an adjacent room to get it. I was standing in the sacristy with the basket in my hand waiting for the priest—Fr. Anthony Norkunas, MIC—to give the final blessing. Before he did so, he unexpectedly said a few words. I couldn't believe my ears as he started to exhort the people to make use of the Green Scapular. Never had he mentioned it before in our chapel or even given an announcement at that place in the Liturgy. It could only have been God's perfect timing, confirming His power through the Immaculate Heart of Mary and the use of her special "badge" when we put our confidence in the assistance of Jesus and Mary. Whatever situations we find ourselves in today, may the protection of these Two Holy Hearts be with us and guide all our decisions and actions. +

This talk on sacred Heart spirituality was given in our Gathering Room on May 1st, 2016. If you would like to attend similar presentations by the sisters, our next talk will be held on Sunday, June 5th at 4:00 p.m.