



*Mary, Mother of Mercy*

O Mary, Mother of Mercy, Watch over all people,  
that the Cross of Christ may not be emptied of its power,  
that man may not stray from the path of the good  
or become blind to sin,

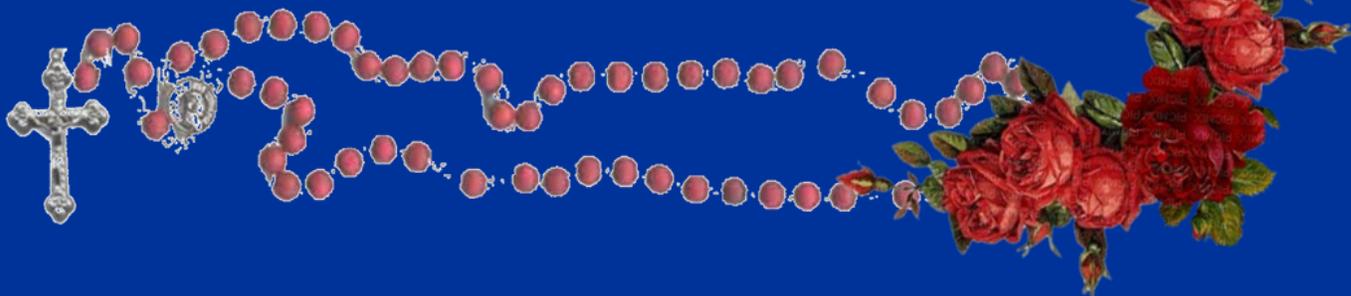
but may put his hope ever more fully in God

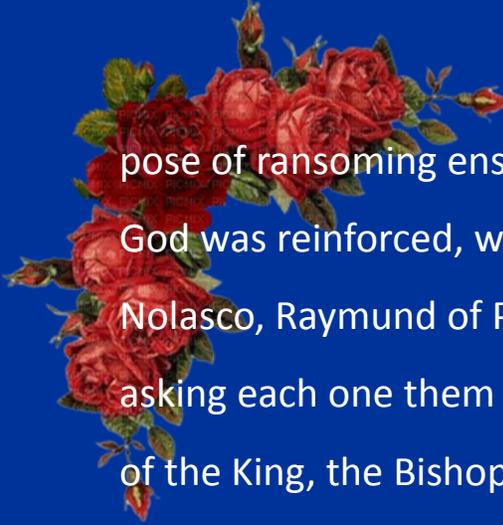
Who is rich in mercy (Eph. 2:4).

may He carry out the good works prepared  
by God beforehand (Eph. 2:10) and so live completely  
for the praise of His glory (Ep. 1:12). Amen.

(Veritatis Splendor 120)

One of the events that led to devotion to Our Lady Mother of Mercy, will sound very familiar to those who spend any time watching the news. In the 1100's Christians were being captured at sea and in Spain, imprisoned and tortured into denying the Catholic faith. Those men, who withstood these attacks, were sold into slavery and frequently martyred, while women were given over to the Moors as concubines or forced into marriage with their captors. Many Catholics were worried, and their rulers were trying to discern how to free all of the Christians held in captivity by the Moslems. Saint Peter Nolasco began to ponder the possibility of founding a religious order for the pur-

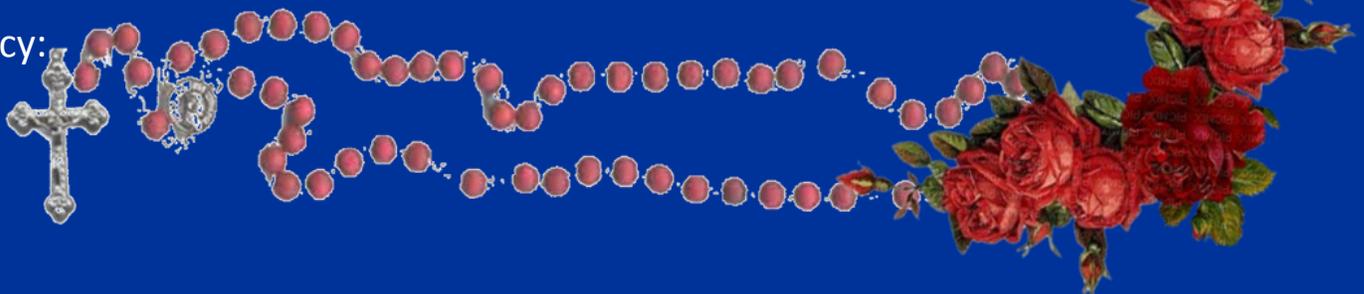




pose of ransoming enslaved Catholics. His conviction that this was the will of God was reinforced, when on August 1, 1218; Mary appeared to Saint Peter Nolasco, Raymund of Penafort (Peter's confessor) and King James I of Spain, asking each one them to undertake this great work of charity. On the request of the King, the Bishop of Barcelona celebrated Mass and gave his blessing for the founding of the Order of Our Lady of Mercy August 10, 1218. The members of this order vowed to work for the redemption of captives, even to the point of offering themselves as payment to free the Christians. Pope Gregory IX approved this and Our Lady of Ransom, aka. Mary, Mother of Mercy, became the principal patroness of Barcelona.

During the Protestant takeover of England, devotion to Our Lady of Ransom was revived and prayers were offered for the return of England to the Catholic faith, as well as, prayers for the persecuted Catholics and the freedom of those imprisoned for their faith.

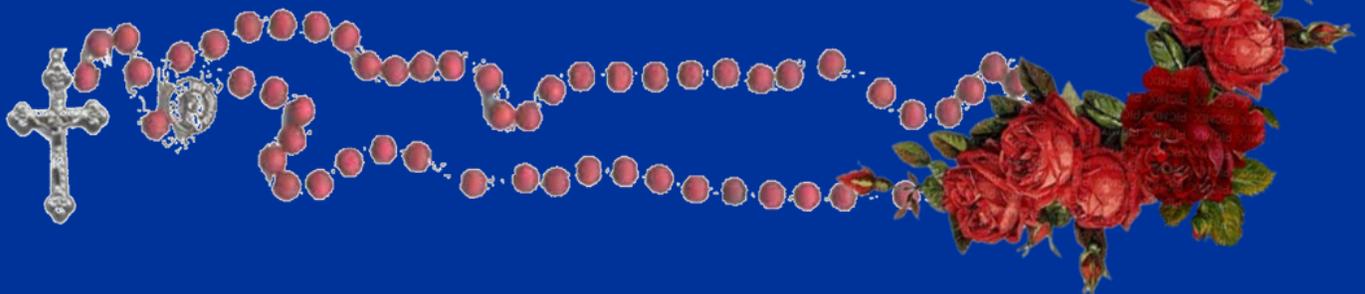
In the 1800's Pope Pius VII, after being kidnapped by Napoleon, vowed to crown Our Lady of Mercy, at the Shrine of Our Lady of Mercy, as soon as he was freed. This was fulfilled when he gave her a golden crown, and on May 24, 1815, he instituted the Feast for Our Lady Help of Christians, thereby spreading the devotion to Our Mother of Mercy. But devotion to Mother of Mercy goes back even further than these events. St. Augustine of Hippo in the late 300's wrote a prayer which gives us an understanding of the role of Our Mother of Mercy:

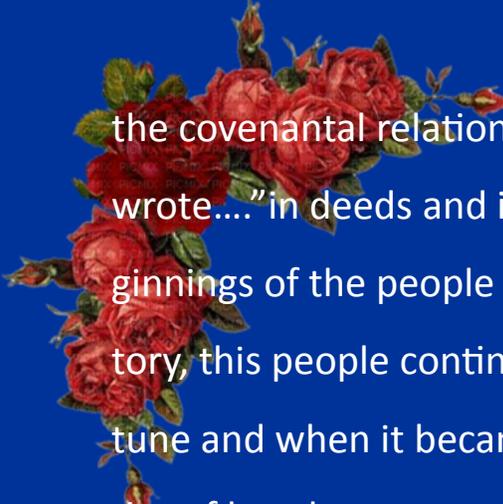




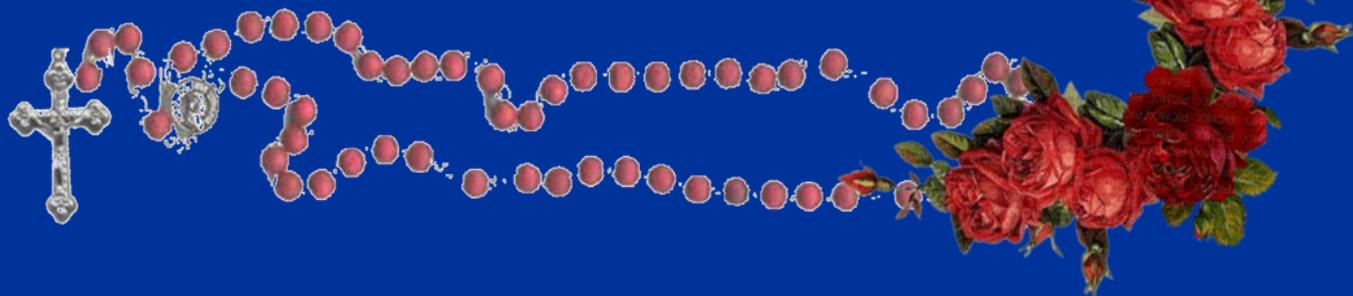
Blessed Virgin Mary, who can worthily repay you with praise and thanks for having rescued a fallen world by your generous consent! Receive our gratitude, and by your prayers obtain the pardon of our sins. Take our prayers into the sanctuary of Heaven and enable them to make our peace with God. Holy Mary, help the miserable, strengthen the discouraged, comfort the sorrowful, pray for your people, plead for the clergy, intercede for all women consecrated to God. May all who venerate you feel now your help and protection. Be ready to help us when we pray, and bring back to us the answers to our prayers. Make it your continual concern to pray for the people of God, for you were blessed by God and were made worthy to bear the Redeemer of the world, who lives and reigns forever. Amen. (catholic.org)

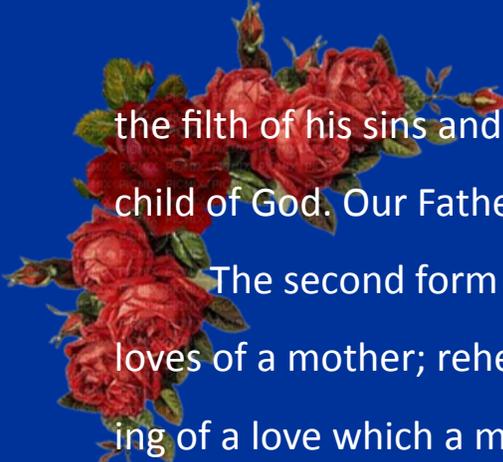
To truly understand this devotion, one must begin with Sacred Scripture, the concept of mercy and the union of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary in fulfilling the will of God, our Merciful Father. Saint John Paul II in his encyclical *Rich in Mercy (Dives in Misericordia)* explains how in the Old Testament, mercy is generally referred to in two different terms and that we must reflect on both of them to understand the mercy of God and how Mary is the Mother of Mercy. The first term is “Hesed” which represents a more of a masculine form, the justice of a father, faithfulness, an interior commitment, and is usually used in the context of





the covenantal relationship between God and man. Pope John Paul II wrote...." in deeds and in words, the Lord revealed His mercy from the very beginnings of the people which He chose for Himself; and, in the course of its, history, this people continually entrusted itself, both when stricken with misfortune and when it became aware of its sin, to the God of mercies. All the subtleties of love become manifest in the Lord's mercy towards those who are His own: He is their Father...Even when the Lord is exasperated by the infidelity of His people and thinks of finishing with it, it is still His tenderness and generous love for those who are His own that overcomes His anger. Thus...when they desire to sing the highest praises of the Lord, break forth into hymns to the God of love, tenderness, mercy and fidelity." (*Dives in Misericordia* 4) The story of the prodigal son is a perfect example of this. The Father, God, knows that His son has not only sinned and thrown away all of his worldly wealth, but more important has lost his human dignity. Justice no longer requires God to fulfill the covenant with His children, and it is at this point that the true depth of His love is seen, with God, in His mercy, giving a love that is "more powerful than betrayal, grace stronger than sin...the fruit of this love are forgiveness and restoration to grace." (D.M. 4) Our Father God is not satisfied to wait for us to come and beg His forgiveness. He goes out to wait outside the gate and as soon as He sees the repentant child, God the Father runs to gather him in His arms, wash away

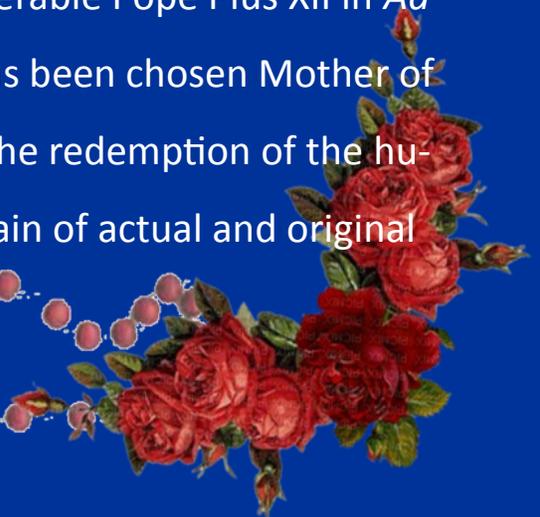


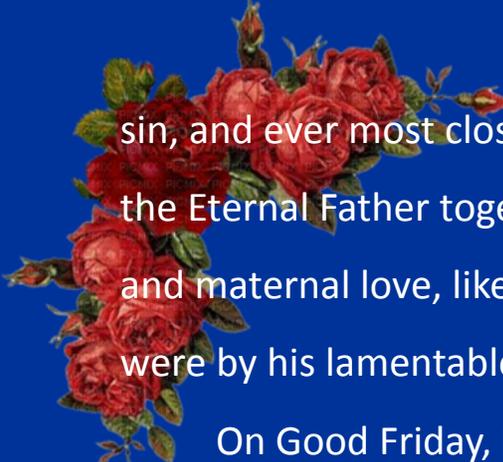


the filth of his sins and elevate the child once again to the dignity of being a child of God. Our Father God is faithful when we are not.

The second form of mercy, “Rahamin” refers to the humble mercy and loves of a mother; rehem meaning from mother’s womb. In this we are speaking of a love which a mother has for her child, and brings the hope and a promise of new birth. “I will heal their defection, I will love them freely.” (Hosea 14:5) While this is the feminine expression of mercy, it is not a denial of justice, but a reflection of God’s love that tempers justice with mercy as seen from the Cross.

St. John Eudes, develops our understanding of the these two forms of mercy when he explained that there are three elements necessary for mercy “... the first is that it takes pity on the miseries of others, for he is merciful who bears in his heart, through compassion, the miseries of the wretched; the second, that it possess the greatest will to help the outcast in their miseries; the third, that it pass from thought and will into effect.” (*The Admirable Heart of Mary*, St. John Eudes, p. 302) God in His mercy saw that mankind was falling further and further into sin, knowing that we can never make a just restitution for our sins; He became man and took upon Himself the weight of justice. Jesus became the new Adam and Mary the new Eve. Venerable Pope Pius XII in *Ad Caeli Reginam* explained that our “...glorious Lady has been chosen Mother of Christ ‘in order that she might become a partner in the redemption of the human race’; and if, in truth, ‘it was she who, free of stain of actual and original

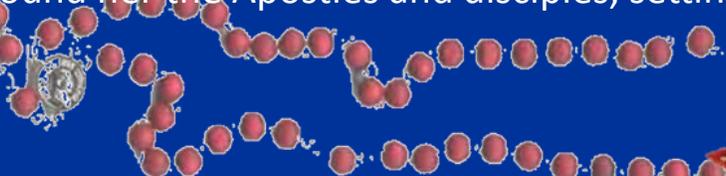


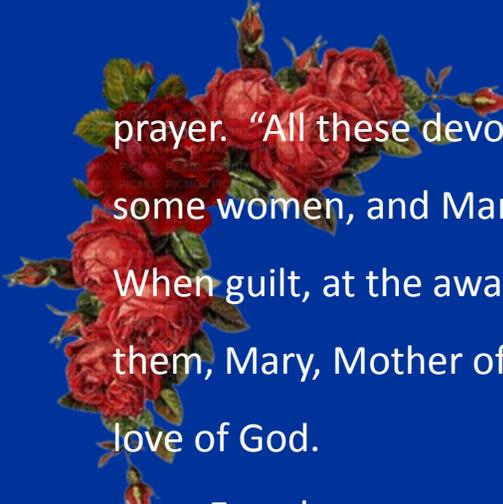


sin, and ever most closely bond to her Son, on Golgotha offered that Son to the Eternal Father together with the complete sacrifice of her maternal rights and maternal love, like a new Eve, for all the sons of Adam, stained as they were by his lamentable fall..." (ACR 38)

On Good Friday, Mary stood at the foot of the Cross, making her offering of Jesus to the Father and Jesus responded by making His own offering. Not only did He say, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." (Luke 23: 34), but He gave us to Mary and Mary to us when He said "Woman, behold, you son," and then "Behold, your mother." In that instant, Mary took us as her own. As our Mother, the Mother of the Church, she reflects the mercy of God. Pope St. Leo XIII in *Magnae Dei Matris* stated, "When we have recourse to Mary in prayer, we are having recourse to the Mother of mercy, who is so well disposed toward us that, whatever the necessity that presses upon us especially in attaining eternal life, she is instantly at our side of her own accord, even though she has not been invoked. She dispenses grace with a generous hand from the treasure with which from the beginning she was divinely endowed in fullest abundance that she might be worthy to be the Mother of God. By the fullness of grace which confers on her the most illustrious of her many titles, the Blessed Virgin is infinitely superior to all the hierarchies of men and angels, the one creature who is closest of all to Christ." (MDM 9)

After Christ's passion, death, resurrection and ascension, Mary continued to gather around her the Apostles and disciples, setting the example of a life of

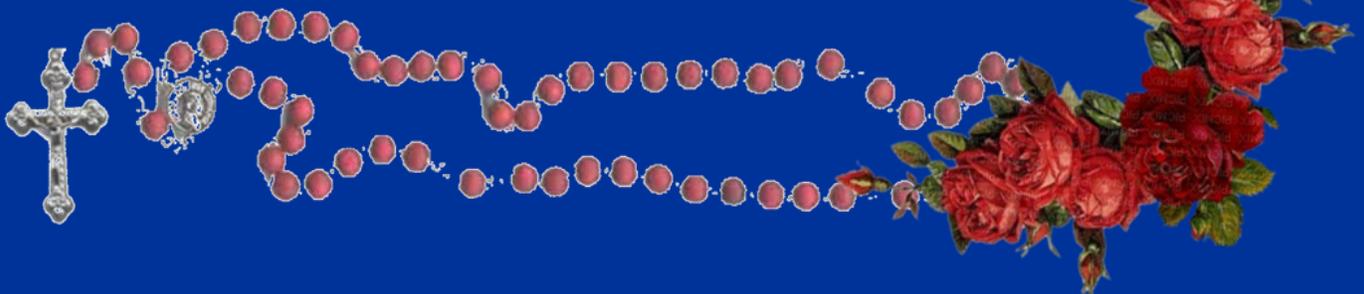


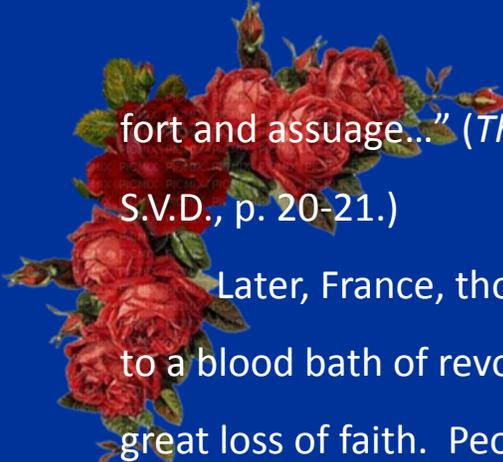


prayer. "All these devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary the Mother of Jesus and His brothers." (Acts. 1:14)

When guilt, at the awareness of the cost of their sins might have overwhelmed them, Mary, Mother of Mercy, was present to show the disciples the mercy and love of God.

Even her assumption into Heaven could not separate her from her children. Like the prodigal father, Mary is ever watching, waiting for the opportunity to run outside the gates and bring her children home. Throughout the past 2000 plus years Mary has made her role as Mother of Mercy known by her repeated apparitions and growth in devotions to her. Many of these have been mentioned throughout this novena, but I would like to quickly tie some of these into Mary, Mother of Mercy. During the early foundation of Christianity in America, Mary appeared to Juan Diego on December 9-12 in 1531. This was a world where human sacrifice to demonic gods was rampant. Conversion was slow and a great miracle was needed. During her first apparition Mary spoke of her mercy and love. "Know my well-beloved son, that I am the Ever-Virgin Mary, Mother of the true God Who is the Author of Life, the Creator of all things and the Lord of Heaven and Earth...Here, as the loving Mother of you and your fellow men, I will show forth my loving kindness and compassion for your people and for those who love me and seek me, and call upon me in their labors and afflictions. Here I will hear their cries and their petitions; I will com-

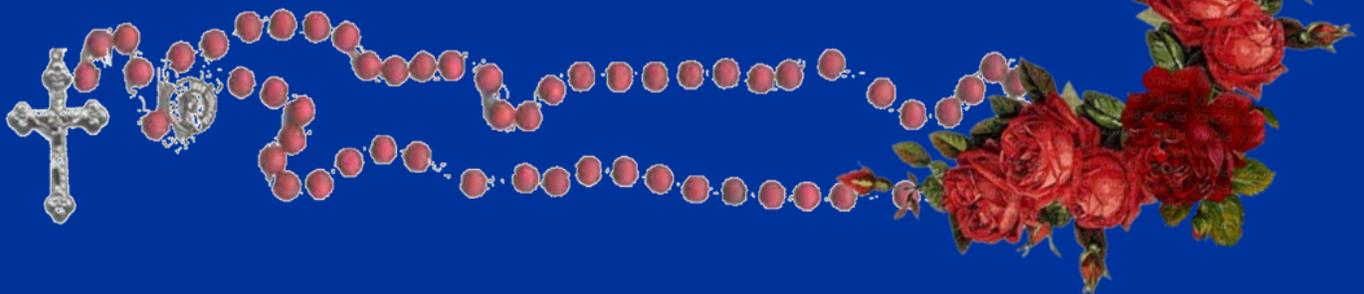


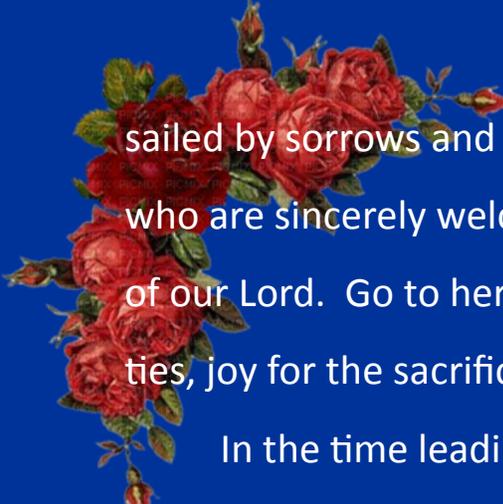


fort and assuage..." (*That Motherly Mother of Guadalupe*, Rev. L.M. Dooley, S.V.D., p. 20-21.)

Later, France, though called the eldest daughter of the Church, turned into a blood bath of revolution. Many Catholics were martyred and there was a great loss of faith. People were dying in mortal sin, and there was a great need of reconversion of France. Mary could not ignore what was happening to her children. In 1830, Mary appeared to St. Catherine of Laboure, in Rue du Bac, Paris. She asked Catherine to have a medal made containing the images of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, a large M surmounted by a Cross and all of this surrounded by 12 stars. On the other side is the image of Mary, Mediatrix of All Graces, surrounded by the words "Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee." This medal has been used to show God's mercy to those who are in great need of conversion, of repentance, of mercy so as not to be damned to hell.

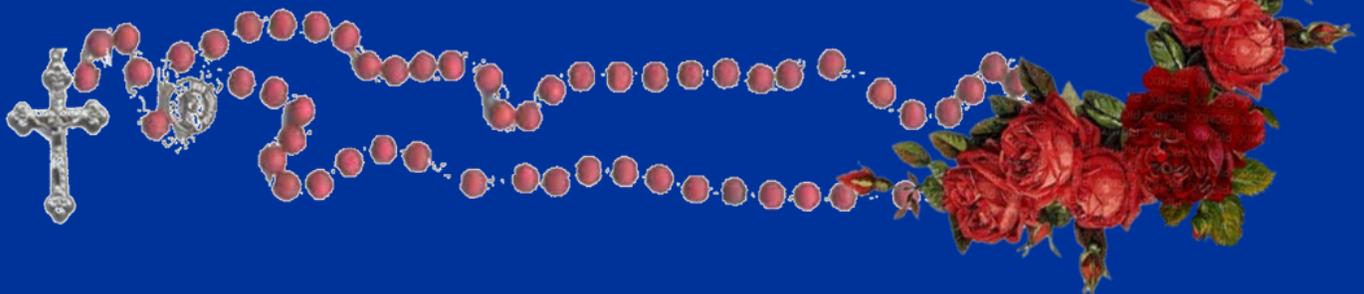
Venerable Pope Pius XII, in his encyclical *Warning Against the Materialism on the Centenary of the Apparitions at Lourdes* explained that we see a reflection of the mercy of God in the apparition at Lourdes. Here the Mother of Mercy draws those who are sick and suffering, those who are dying, those who are spiritually dying or spiritually dead and brings about the healing necessary. He wrote; "Go to her, you who are crushed by material misery, defenseless against the hardships of life and the indifference of men. Go to her, you who are as-

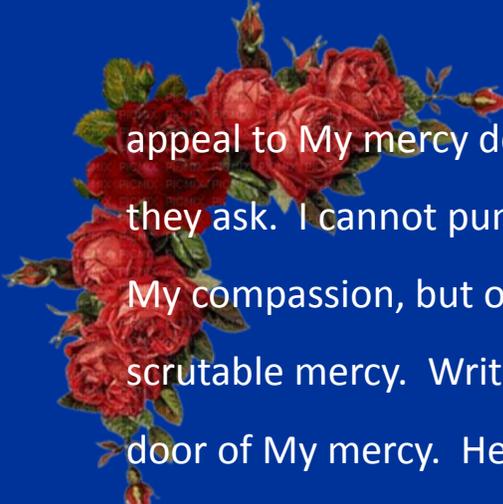




sailed by sorrows and moral trials. Go to her, beloved invalids and infirm, you who are sincerely welcomed and honored at Lourdes as the suffering members of our Lord. Go to her and receive peace of heart, strength for your daily duties, joy for the sacrifices you offer. (Le Pelerinage De Lourdes 57)

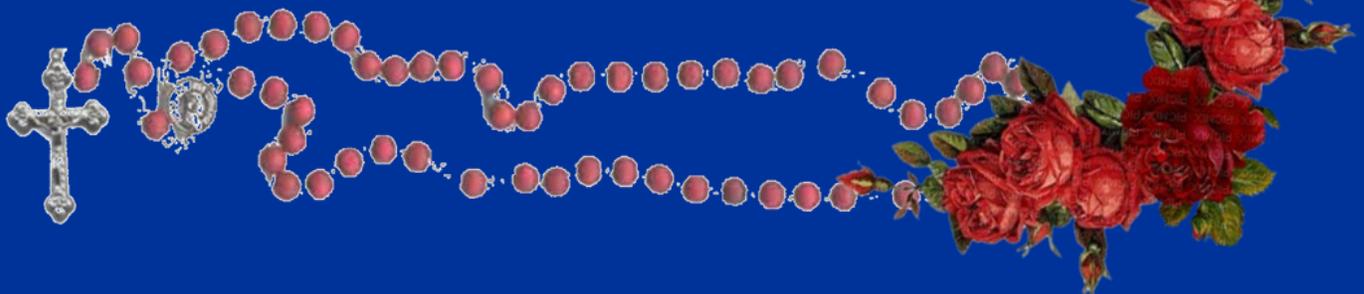
In the time leading up to World War II Jesus spoke to St. Faustina about His divine mercy and called upon her to become the Apostle of Mercy. In her Diary Sister makes it clear just how important Mary, our Mother Mercy's role is in our salvation when she wrote, "...In the evening, I saw the Mother of God with Her breast bared and pierced with a sword. She was shedding bitter tears and shielding us against God's terrible punishment. God wants to inflict terrible punishment on us, but He cannot because the Mother of God is shielding us. Horrible fear seized my soul. I kept praying incessantly for Poland, for my dear Poland, which is so lacking in gratitude for the Mother of God. If it were not for the Mother of God, all our efforts would be of little use..." (Notebook II, #686) While God could override His mother, He has put such importance on her place as the Mother of Mercy that He honors her sacrifices and accepts her prayers for her sinful children. The time will come when she will no longer be able to intercede for us and we will have to face our final judgment. Of this judgment Jesus said; "[Let] the greatest sinners place their trust in my mercy. They have the right before others to trust in the abyss of My mercy. My daughter, write about My mercy towards tormented souls. Souls that make an

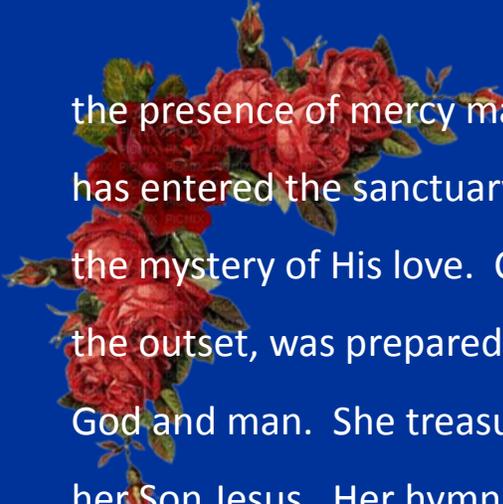




appeal to My mercy delight Me. To such souls I grant even more graces than they ask. I cannot punish even the greatest sinner if he makes an appeal to My compassion, but on the contrary, I justify him in My unfathomable and inscrutable mercy. Write: before I come as a just Judge, I first open wide the door of My mercy. He who refuses to pass through the door of My mercy must pass through the door of my justice..." (Notebook II, #1146) Our Mother Mary, Mother of Mercies is striving to draw us ever closer to the door of God's mercy. In her great love, she speaks to us and for us. She appears to her most humble children and begs them to spread the message of her great love and mercy which is a reflection of the mercy and love of God.

Let us conclude with a statement from the *Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy* decreed by Pope Francis "We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace. Our salvation depends on it. Mercy: the word reveals the very mystery of the Most Holy Trinity. Mercy; the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us. Mercy; the fundamental law that dwells in the hearts of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life. Mercy the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness." (*Bull of Indiction of Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy* 2)..."No one has penetrated the profound mystery of the incarnation like Mary. Her entire life was patterned after





the presence of mercy made flesh. The Mother of the Crucified and Risen One has entered the sanctuary of divine mercy because she participated intimately in the mystery of His love. Chosen to be the Mother of the Son of God, Mary, from the outset, was prepared by love of God to be the Ark of the Covenant between God and man. She treasured divine mercy in her heart in perfect harmony with her Son Jesus. Her hymn of praise, sung at the threshold of the home of Elizabeth, was dedicated to the mercy of God which extends from 'generation to generation' (Luke 1:50). We too were included in those prophetic words of the Virgin Mary. This will be a source of comfort and strength to us as we cross the threshold of the Holy Year to experience the fruits of divine mercy." (Ibid. 24)

Mary, Mother of Mercy, pray for us.

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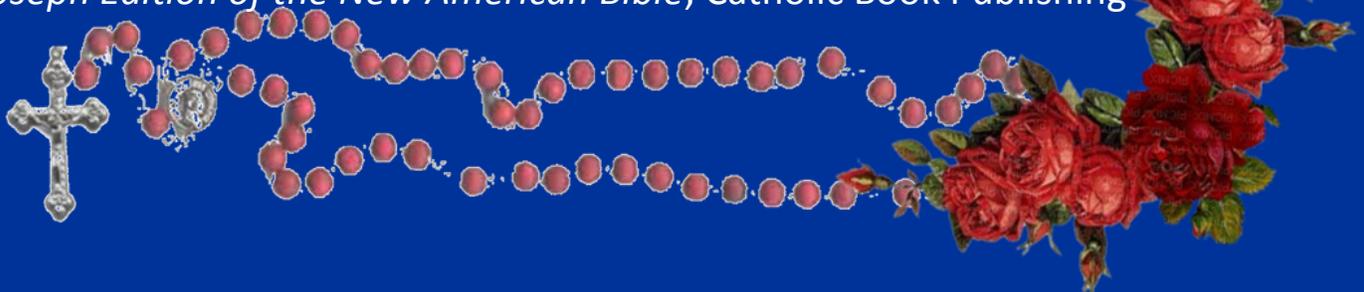
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