



SHARING IN THE CHARISM OF THE

Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary
of Wichita

May 26, 2016

Fr. Masmitjá and Our Lady of Sorrows

A few weeks ago, I was invited by another teacher to talk about my community's charism and habit in his class. I was surprised by the reaction I received from another teacher who heard about my talk. Someone with whom I have taught for years did not know about certain aspects of our community that I had taken for granted was well known. So I decided to share our community story with all my classes. In giving it, I was renewed in my own commitment to pray for the conversion of sinners. In God's providence, Mother asked me to give a talk on this very topic to you this evening.

Fr. Joaquin Masmitjá y de Puig

First, who is Fr. Masmitjá? He was born in 1808, in Olot, near Barcelona in northern Spain. He was ordained a priest in 1834, completing a doctorate in Canon Law the same year. Because of the political situation of the time, even though he was a young priest, he became the acting pastor at San Esteban, his home parish in Olot. In those five months as interim pastor, he became known for his zeal for souls and his prudence in navigating the rough waters of the political state of affairs.

When he returned as pastor of San Esteban in 1844, one of the first things he did was to arrange for St. Anthony Claret to preach a mission to his parish and establish the Forty Hours devotion to preserve the spiritual fruits of the mission. The two clerics became friends because of this event. Later St. Anthony would introduce Fr. Masmitjá to the devotion of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and encourage him to go

forward with his inspiration to found our community, when Father consulted the Saint about the matter.

Inspiration before the pieta for a religious community: shield against the eighth sword

Before an image of the Sorrowful Mother, still venerated at San Esteban, Fr.

Masmitjá was meditating on the seven sorrows of Mary, he realized that there was an eighth sword that pierced Mary's heart: the loss of souls even though Her Son had suffered so much for their salvation. He conceived of a congregation of women religious that would shield the heart of Mary from this eighth sword. The Sisters' mission would be to attack the roots of the



evil by praying for the conversion of sinners and by working for the evangelization of society, especially through works of Catholic education.

In the Forward of the 1852 Constitutions Father writes:

“This Institute of the Immaculate Heart meditates on the cruel sword of sorrow that pierces this Heart at the sight of sinners renewing the passion and death of her Son and despising the merits of the blood shed for them with so much love. It seeks especially, through prayer and other pious practices, to obtain from the Divine Mercy an interior grace for sinners, so that, abandoning the state of sin, they will turn to God, the center of all happiness. Likewise, it sees in giving a solid education to girls an apt means of introducing and spreading, in all classes of society, true devotion to God and a holy fear of Him, so that others may not fall into sin.”

By prayer and penance for sinners

The primary apostolate of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary is prayer for the conversion of sinners, with Mother Joanne's addition of praying for the sanctification of priests (that will be a later talk). As the above quote says, seeking the grace of conversion of sinners through prayer and other pious practices. Some of these pious practices included the devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Refuge of sinners, as revealed at Our Lady of Victories in Paris and the Miraculous Medal. Both of these

devotions had only recently been introduced in the early 1830s. Fr. Masmitjá encouraged the Sisters to hand out Miraculous Medals and promote devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary as one of the most efficacious means of converting sinners.

But the key devotion that Father Masmitjá gave the Sisters was that of the Servite Dolours. This came naturally to him, because his father had been a tertiary member of the Servites. The Servites are a mendicant order founded at Florence in the Middle Ages. Seven members of a guild of merchants had heard the call to console the Mother of Sorrows by meditating on her Son's suffering and death. But this contemplation of the mysteries of Redemption is a cause for joy. Why, because God has revealed his amazing love for us by becoming man and suffering even unto death to save us from our sins. The first seven young women Father Masmitjá asked to start this new community were known for their joy.

He also recommended penance, but recognized that the arduous nature of teaching precluded the strict fasting of the cloistered orders.

“It is well known that in order to mortify our will, and to punish and control our body which is our enemy, there is no better remedy than fasting. However, since this order is required to live such an active life by reason of their teaching which is very strenuous, it is advisable to relax in this matter the observances of contemplative religious.” (1852 Constitutions, XXII)

He did not absolve them from what the Church would require from all the faithful. However, the emphasis is on the mortification of their daily duty, an abnegation of will rather than physical penance (although he did not exclude physical mortifications). In this he prefigured the later message of Fatima, offering the sacrifice of daily duty and the small irritations of living and working with others for the conversion of sinners.