



SHARING IN THE CHARISM OF THE

Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary
of Wichita

May 30, 2016

Primacy of Prayer in the Life of a Sister of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

“Look to God that you may be radiant with joy.”

Psalm 34:6

- ~ a morning offering and other personal prayers
- ~ one half-hour of mental prayer meditating on the readings for daily Mass
- ~ communally praying Morning Prayer, Midday Prayer (in the novitiate), Evening Prayer and Night Prayer, and privately praying the Office of Readings
- ~ communally praying the prayer of Reparation, prayer for Holiness, prayers to St. Michael and to the Guardian Angels
- ~ at morning, noon and evening, reciting the Angelus outside of Easter and Regina Coeli during Easter
- ~ daily praying the Rosary and the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary or the Servite Rosary and/or another Marian litany
- ~ daily making an examination of conscience, both general and particular
- ~ individually making a daily Holy Hour, and on special communal feasts and solemnities, a Community holy hour with Exposition, Eucharistic Adoration, and Benediction

~ 3 hours of prayerfully reflecting on spiritual reading each week, using Sacred Scripture, the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, the mystics and magisterial statements

~ nocturnal adoration on Fridays

~ first Saturday communal Act of Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary

~ Annually making a silent retreat for at least five days, and monthly a day of recollection

~ communal novena in preparation for the feasts of Christmas, Pentecost, and the Immaculate Heart of Mary (IHM Directory 14-29)

Why? And how can someone praying that much be truly joyful? More specifically, why have Immaculate Heart of Mary Sisters in the Spain, California and Wichita joyfully volunteered to live a life that holds prayer in such a preferred place in their lives? To understand the reason why love leads us to such a life, as well as, its place in our charism it is helpful to place our prayer in the lives of our founder and foundress, and the world into which they and we were born.

Nineteenth century Spain, in which Fr. Joaquin Masmitja de Puig founded the Daughters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, was a time filled with much turmoil, attacks on the family and the Church, and the promotion of secularism, indifferentism, rationalism, anti-clericalism and industrialism. Many men left their families alone, causing destitute women to sell themselves to support their children, the government closed churches, government officials sought to drive parish priests out of their communities and in the land of St. Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross attacks were made on the Carmelites in an attempt to stop the good works of Religious Communities. (Does some of this sound familiar to present day life?) The joy that should have been central in every Christian's life was lacking and it was in the midst of these great trials that

Father Masmitja began his priestly mission to convert all nations. A humble man, filled with the joy of a personal relationship with our Triune God and His Blessed Mother, Fr. Juaquin realized that the healing of society will only come through helping people develop a life where prayer is central. Beginning with his spiritual directees and then reaching out to the parish by way of mission, Fr. Juaquin began promoting Forty Hour Devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, and devotion to Mary, the Beloved Mother of God. His spirituality can be summed up as "...directed toward praising the Glory of God...an uninterrupted contemplation of the Three Divine Persons which manifests itself in service to others; in a desire to lead all persons to God; and in seeing Mary's heart as a temple where the Trinity could be glorified." (p. 39, *Masmitja: The Life of Joaquin Masmitaj De Puig Founder of Daughters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary*). Father understood that all things are possible with God. He began to help the laity, and members of his new foundation of Sisters develop a prayer life that included at least some of the following: holy hours or the Forty Hour Devotion with Exposition, Adoration and Benediction (think of how easy it is for us to have access to Adoration in Wichita Diocese.); novenas to the Holy Spirit, Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Our Lady of Sorrows, the Immaculate Conception and of course the Immaculate Heart of Mary; praying a daily Rosary or at least a decade of it and/or what he called the Crowning of our Lady of Sorrows, which is another name for the rosary of the Seven Dolor Rosary worn and prayed by each of the Sisters; listening to holy sermons; attending Spiritual Exercises (which we find in most parishes throughout the year and of course at the Spiritual Life Center); meditation and contemplation of the Sacred Scriptures; with everything leading to participation in the greatest prayer – the Liturgy of the Mass and prayerful reception of the

Sacraments. If you think about this, we are blessed, throughout our diocese, with opportunities to participate in all of these. Fr. Masmitja's charism has something for everyone on this list of ways to develop a life of prayer.

Fr. Masmitja's spirituality spread to the United States when in 1871, when he sent 10 Spiritual Daughters to California. Not only the Sisters, but men and women of the laity, students and coworkers, and members of the IHM Auxiliary received instructions on how, in imitation of our Blessed Mother Mary, to develop a life of prayerfully listening to God. Many of them began to discover that they too can, "Look to God that you may be radiant with joy." (Psalm 34:6) Then, when all chaos broke out in the 1960's and 70's, the spiritual life of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Sisters came to Kansas under the guidance of Mother M. Joanne, IHM and her co-founding Sisters. From the beginning, Mother made it clear that before we give, we must first receive. Our Constitutions states:

It is God who places in each person the desire to seek Him in the intimacy of prayer so that He may grant her knowledge of Himself and a hunger for holiness. Fidelity to His call obtains His blessings of joy, faithfulness to her mission, and strength for perseverance. (Hos. 2:14)

Const. 40

God is calling all of us to a more intimate relationship with Him and Mary our Mother. By prayer, Mother Joanne, IHM was not just talking about memorizing a lot of words (though memorization is important). She wanted her daughters and those with whom we share our spirituality, to recognize that prayer is always God calling and our listening, and then our answer

to God's call. For us to listen, we must begin and end with a time of silence. She taught when praying, we should not rush about from one activity to another (devotions, readings, etc.) instead, choose one or two and be at peace. People in love wait for the other, sit silently enjoying each other's presence and are not in a hurry to separate from the beloved. We are in love with the Triune God. Doesn't He deserve at least that much from us in our prayers?

Mother showed us that as physical and spiritual beings, we need to have both the physical and spiritual component to our prayer life, though the spiritual is always the most important. We see this reflected in many ways through the daily lives of the Sisters which imitable by everyone. These include such prayer in action as 1) When praying the Stations of the Cross, walking, genuflecting, bowing, carrying and kissing a crucifix; 2) Using a rosary when praying the Divine Mercy Chaplet, the Seven Dolors, Rosaries, and other prayers; 3) Kneeling, standing, sitting, laying prostrate with arms spread in a cross ; 3) Going for rosary walks, 4) Folding hands in prayer, 5) Participating in as many postures of prayer used in the Liturgy as one is capable of doing; and the many ways we physically and spiritually participate in the reception of the Sacraments.

Early in each Sisters formation, she begins to look at Mary as the model of her life. Mother Joanne taught us that, Mary's specialty is listening, it is there she hears God's message.

(Notes from Mother Joanne's teachings) In our Constitution, Mother Joanne worded it:

By frequent prayer, by listening to the Word of God, by studying the life of Jesus Christ, a Sister follows the Blessed Virgin Mary who pondered His words and His works, and by imitation of His life advanced in her pilgrimage

of faith. With her a Sister seeks to persevere in openness to the Holy Spirit.

(Lk. 2:19, 51; 11:27; c663:4) Const. 41

Listening, pondering in our hearts it is in this that our daily prayer grows ever deeper.

Servant of God, Fr. Masmítja recognized a call to something more, a call to meditate when St. Augustine wrote, “When you pray to God with psalms and hymns, meditate in your heart upon that which you utter with your lips.” (Ch. 111, *Rule of St. Augustine*) Meditation consists in our use of the senses to better understand God’s message and opens us to a greater understanding of His Scriptures. Each day, the Sisters spend at least 30 minutes meditating on the readings for daily Mass. Sometimes we read a Gospel story and, in our mind, picture the event; what is Jesus teaching? How are the people responding? Why did He teach this here and not at another time? What happened before? How do I respond to this message? The Gospels are not just a rereading of a historical event. God is calling us to meditate on them and go deeper. In a letter to the Sisters, placed before the original Constitutions, Fr. Masmítja explained:

The Servants of Mary have for their pious end to honor the Mother of God by contemplating the dolours she suffered during the life, Passion, and death of her divine Son. This institute of her Immaculate Heart meditates on the cruel sword of sorrow that pierces this heart when it sees 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 to obtain from the divine Mercy with prayers and other pious practices an interior grace for sinners so that abandoning

the state of sin, they will turn to God, the center of all happiness.

(Joaquin Masmitja, Priest to His Spiritual Daughters The Religious of the Most Holy Heart of Mary)

Other times, God calls us to go out into the deep. Contemplation is a resting in Christ, an expression of God's love for us. God unites us to Himself, transforming us into greater union with Him. We marvel at the wonder of God, and the beauty of His universe. Hebrews 3:7 teaches us, "If today you hear His voice harden not your hearts..." In contemplation, the only thing we should become hardened toward is sin. Any of our daily prayers, especially our rosary can and should be some form of meditation or contemplation. This is what we want to take to our Holy Hour. There is a time to read Catholic periodicals and news, but in the chapel, they can get in the way of our listening, pondering, hearing the Word of God. The world we live in today, sounds a lot like 19th century Spain and with attacks on the Catholic Church, the family, the sanctity of each individual, in truth, we are much worse with governmental promotion of abortion, euthanasia, alternative sexuality and what is referred to as "marriage." Do we not have a much greater need to go before our Lord in prayer and like Mary ponder in our hearts?

For Father Founder, an Archconfraternity was the means of including the laity in the charism of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Sisters. Today, we have other ways to spread our charism of prayer, such as; responding to the call of Mary at Fatima we open our home for first Saturday devotions, including Mass, a 15 minute meditation, fellowship with coffee and rolls, and the praying of the rosary; every year we have a novena to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, where for 9 days we give spiritual talks, share fellowship and refreshments, followed by Exposition, Adoration and Benediction, and during the holy hours a priest (when possible) to

hear confession, thereby sharing the mercy of God with everyone; as well as, leading days of recollection, retreats, presenting talks and being open to whatever other means God sends us to help people develop in their life of prayer. We want to make it possible for everyone to grow in contemplation of the Trinity, participation in the Liturgy and adoration of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament; and also, in developing a relationship with Mary through processions on May and October 13th, rosary processions and the spread of the Memorare novena. At the end of his life it was said the Father

Joaquin's spiritual life was in essence an uninterrupted contemplation of the Trinity which manifested itself in service of others; in a desire to lead all persons to God; and in seeing Mary's Heart as a temple where the Trinity could be glorified.

(Joaquin Masmitja de Puig: Priest, Confessor, Founder brochure)

How wonderful Heaven will be if the same can be said of each of us at the end of our lives!

As Sisters we are not just learning, experiencing, living daily meditation and contemplation, we are reaching out to others to share our charism of prayer. By its very nature this requires us to prayerfully help all to see that meditation on the Sacred Scriptures is easily possible for everyone, even busy moms and dads; contemplation is not just for the "saints"; showing an Ignatian examination of conscience that is of benefit to everyone; and encouraging people to see Mary is the model for us all. Mother Joanne firmly believed, "Mary, creature that she is, manifests the love of the Trinity." (*Notes from Mother Joanne's teachings*) We all want to become a manifestation of love of the Trinity.

Many people remark about the joy they see reflected in the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and wonder at its source. Some are even suspicious as to whether it is real or are we simply putting on an act. Why do we have it and not someone else? Yet, it is something that everyone can have, for its basis is a deep abiding prayer life. Before the many works of our Community, and in fact the source of our ability to carry out our apostolic duties, is the love with which each Sister celebrates her prayerful participation in the Mass, Liturgy and Sacramental life, and is the fruit of her prayer life, daily meditation on Sacred Scripture, and a life of contemplation of our Triune God. Without a life of prayer and contemplation we cannot serve God and as many have seen to their sorrow, would soon find ourselves abandoning our vows. This joy is waiting for all of us, priest and religious, married and single, men and women, adult and child. The success of each and every life depends upon the relationship we have with our Lord and our Lady and is discovered through the power of a joy-filled prayer life. Let us seek God's will and in seeking God's will we will become like Mary. Let us place our lives under her protection, listening and obeying, and in that way, may our life of prayer grow and transform our lives! Together, let us all become saints.