



# SHARING IN THE CHARISM OF THE

## *Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary*

### *of Wichita*

**June 3, 2016**

#### **Devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary**

The more I read and the study the apparition of our Lady of Guadalupe to St. Juan Diego in Mexico the more I am struck by the love our Lady has for us. I would like to highlight one part of this story that I think is most beautiful and a cause for reflection this evening. Mary had already appeared to Juan Diego and they were set to meet again. Unfortunately, Juan Diego's uncle, Juan Bernardino, was sick and in need of a priest. The dutiful nephew was torn; he did not want to miss his meeting with the beautiful lady but knew how much his uncle desperately needed a priest for the sacraments. Juan Diego decided to go for the priest and bypass the location in which he was to meet Our Lady.

However, Our Lady was not to be deterred. She went out to meet Juan Diego along his alternate route; his mission of mercy was her mission of mercy. She had come to visit his people and their concerns were her concerns; she had cured his uncle and would go on to draw the peoples of the New World under her mantle. But first, she assured Juan Diego of her particular concern for him (which also shows her particular concern for each person):

Listen, put it into your heart, my youngest and dearest son, that the thing that disturbs you, the thing that afflicts you, is nothing. Do not let your countenance, your heart be disturbed....Am I not here, I, who am your Mother? Are you not under my shadow and protection? Am I not the source of your joy? Are you not in the hollow of my mantle, In the crossing of my arms? Do you need anything more? ([A Handbook on Guadalupe](#), 200).

Mary is speaking to each one of us. How often we are caught up in the cares and concerns of our lives that we fail to recall her loving concern for each of us? We are worried, we are anxious but Mary is always there to tell us, “Do not let your countenance, your heart be disturbed....Am I not here, I, who am your Mother?”

No matter how old we are, we still need a mother. And Mary wishes to be our Mother. She was given this responsibility at the foot of the Cross and she takes it very seriously. One of my favorite quotes on this is from St. John Vianney, “Mary will not rest until all her children are in Heaven.” She is in Heaven working to make sure that we will be with her in Heaven, praising God for all eternity.

But like a good mother, she does not want to be a “smother” ([The Second Greatest Story Ever Told](#), 162). The mothers in this room know the best way to get to their son or daughter to do something is to get them to think that they originated the idea. Many maternal suggestions go unheeded (not because it is not a good idea) but because it wasn't original. Mary does not want to be pushy; she has plans for us but she is patient and will wait until we are ready to hear them.

This is how she has been throughout the centuries. The early Church had her beautiful example of love; this was picked up by the Apostolic Fathers, like St. Irenaeus and St. Justin Martyr. The Fathers of the Church like St. Augustine and St. Jerome continued writing and preaching about Mary's care and concern for us. St. Bernard, through his poetic words on our Lady, drew the faithful to a deep love of our Lady. Saint after saint promoted devotion to her; the faithful said the Rosary, went on pilgrimage to her shrines, turned to her in all simplicity.

But then came the upheaval; I believe we can compare it to adolescence. Europe had come of age and was wanting to throw off the yoke of authority, even the authority of a loving Mother. The Protestant leaders did not begin disregarding the role of Mary but soon their followers did not see the value of devotion to Our Lady. This was followed by the Enlightenment and more of a distancing from God and

His plan for our happiness. One could almost conceive an image of our Lady, with a heart so full of rejected love, asking her Son, “Is it time yet to show my love to the world?”

So in the 16<sup>th</sup> century she had her chance to make known her Mother’s love to the New World. Mary’s appearance at Guadalupe in Mexico is considered the beginning of the Marian Age, an age where Our Lady again and again revealed a heart so full of love for mankind. From this point on, Mary unrelentingly showed her attentiveness to her children on earth. The children of the Americas were brought under her protection; her next step was to show her loving heart to a world gone cold. Europe had attempted to overthrow the control of God but Mary would not have it so. After the revelations of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to St. Margaret Mary, the Blessed Virgin revealed her loving heart as well. The Sacred Heart, which is the adorable Heart of the Son of God, reveals His love to mankind. Yet the Immaculate Heart is the heart of a creature. While we admire the Heart of Jesus and strive to imitate his love in the way we can, Mary’s heart offers us a creaturely example of the divine Heart of Jesus. This heart so full of virtue - charity, humility, purity and obedience – pierced with a sword of sorrow is one that we can turn to in our time of need, a heart where we can seek refuge. Did not Mary say at Fatima, “My Immaculate Heart will be your refuge and the way that will lead you to God” ([Fatima](#), 177)?

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Our Lady appeared to people like St. Catherine Laboure, giving her the Miraculous Medal, a source of much blessing for a people under the influence of Rationalism. She next appeared to Sr. Justine, another Daughter of Charity, giving her the Badge of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, also known as the Green Scapular, popular for conversions. I could continue on; I haven’t even mentioned Lourdes or LaSallatte. Many founders were inspired to begin religious communities under her patronage. As you have heard already in our talks, Fr. Joaquin Masmitjá founded our community in 1848; he knew the love of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, refuge of sinners, and desired to form a community dedicated to spreading the merciful love of God through the Immaculate Heart of Mary. He

instructed the Sisters, “We should all work for the glory of God and the honor of His Most Holy Mother in every respect.”

All of the turmoil of the 19<sup>th</sup> century certainly spilled into the 20<sup>th</sup> century; I don’t need to paint you the bleak picture of the wars and revolutions that greeted the turn of the century. Mary was undaunted in her efforts. She found three shepherd children in which to convey her love to a world that was turning more to hatred than to charity. She knew where this would lead society. In the three “secrets” as they are known as, she showed the children hell, where poor sinners go; then, immediately, she showed them her Immaculate Heart which is the means by which poor sinners would be drawn back to God. She said, “You have seen hell where the souls of poor sinners go. To save them, God wishes to establish in the world devotion to my Immaculate Heart” (Fatima, 178). Later on, the third “secret” was revealed but it is on the first two secrets that I would like to focus. Mary wishes to show the mercy of God to the world but the world has to first face the consequences of sin. It is only in recognizing our sinfulness that we can receive God’s mercy – hence, we have the loving heart of a mother in which to turn. The children immediately got to work making sacrifices. Jacinta and Francisco would have a short life but one filled with love for Our Lady and for sinners. Lucia was to continue on this earth for some time in order to spread devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Mary told her, “Jesus wishes to make use of you to make me known and loved. He wants to establish in the world devotion to my Immaculate Heart” (177). Mary also related the reason for devotion to her Immaculate Heart, “In the end, my Immaculate Heart will triumph” (179).

It is no wonder that when Mother Joanne was guiding our newly formed community she would give specific mention to the message of Fatima. We are dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and our concern is to draw sinners back to God. How do we do this?

Mother Joanne gave the Sisters a clear guideline, “We are here first of all to become saints, not teachers.” While teaching is an important part of our lives, it is not the only part of our lives; we cannot give what we do not have. We are first called to become holy. In 1 Peter 1:15, he writes “Be holy in every aspect of your life.” In living out devotion to our Lady, our own sanctification is important:

When all is said and done, our primary responsibility is not the conversion of Russia or the prevention of world wars, but the salvation of that little world within ourselves over which, with God’s help, we must exercise control, and for which we shall one day have to render an account to God in judgment. What will it profit us, even if Russia is converted and an era of peace be granted to humanity, if we have failed in the great task for which we were created, the salvation of our own immortal souls (McGrath).

How do we become holy? We look to the Saints before us and what is characteristic of every Saint is a devotion to our Lady. It is part of our very IHM Constitutions, “Following the inspiration of the founder, Father Joaquin Masmitjá, the Sisters take as their model and protectress the Blessed Virgin Mary, turning to her in all things to beg her maternal protection and guidance as they seek to imitate the life of her Son” (n. 4). And in article number 6, “The spirit of the Institute springs from the Church’s doctrine concerning the place of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the economy of redemption. In Mary the Sisters find the pre-eminent model of holiness and the type of the Church in the order of faith, charity and perfect union with Christ”.

Even our vow formula highlights the role of Mary in the life of each Sister, “In seeking perfect charity in the service of God and of the Church, I give myself unreservedly to my Religious Institute which invokes the protection of the Sorrowful Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Refuge of Sinners. I implore through her Immaculate Heart the grace of perseverance in this way of perfection” (n. 106).

We, as Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, have an important connection to Our Lady; we are constantly reminded of her special protection and guidance. We continually turn to her in all our needs.

But all Christians are called to a special devotion to Our Lady. This is how we will become Saints. St. Louis Marie de Montfort noted that it is specifically in consecrating ourselves to Jesus through Mary that we will become saints. He called it the surest, easiest, shortest and the most perfect means to reach sanctity.

What does it mean to be consecrated to Jesus through Mary? Fr. Gaitley in his work, 33 Days to Morning Glory writes, “Marian consecration (or consecrating oneself to Jesus through Mary) basically means giving Mary our full permission (or as much permission as we can) to complete her motherly task in us, which is to form us into other Christs” (26). St. Louis de Montfort says, “God the Son wishes to form himself, and, in a manner of speaking, become incarnate every day in his members through his dear Mother” (n. 31). It is all about making Christ more present on this earth.

When we are faced with the huge task of sanctification, we realize that we cannot do it on our own. We need the help of our Mother, Mary. In striving for holiness, we are drawn out of ourselves and our holiness affects others. It also contributes to the holiness of the world. For as St. Maximilian Kolbe, another great Marian Saint, understood, consecration to Mary is the way to give glory to God. “Kolbe’s method of outreach was to encourage each and every individual to make a total consecration of themselves to the Immaculate Virgin Mary. This act of abandonment would result in personal sanctification, the conversion of Church opponents and ultimately the establishment of the universal reign of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ” (Aim Higher, ix-x). It is not Mary’s idea; it is Jesus’ idea.

Remember what Our Lady said at Fatima!

How do we go about consecrating ourselves to Mary? One very helpful way is through this book, 33 Days to Morning Glory. It is modeled off of St. Louis de Montfort’s Preparation for Total Consecration. Fr. Gaitley has helped us busy, modern people see the need for placing our lives in the hands of our Lady. He has gone on to show the importance of this consecration in another book, The Second

Greatest Story Ever Told. Once you have made the consecration, it would be helpful and encouraging to read this second book to see all of the good total consecration to Jesus through Mary has done.

But why is this consecration to Jesus through Mary so important? She knows that humanity is fallen and tends to avoid seeking out the Heavenly Father's mercy. We would rather wallow in our sins. I remember a homily where the Priest spoke of the mother in the parable of the prodigal son; he imagined what this mother would say in a letter to her son. She would probably mention how his father sits on the porch every day waiting for his son to return. The mother would convey to the Son that it doesn't matter what you have done, your Father still loves you and misses you. This is our Mother, Mary, for Mary reminds us of how much the Father loves us and waits for us.

Also, because of original sin, we do not always know what is good for us. We think that we can do it on our own. Sometimes like Juan Diego – he thought that he had to take care of his uncle and didn't seek out Mary's help. Sometimes like the prodigal son – he thought that he could find happiness away from the Father's house. Mary wants to be part of all of our endeavors and plans.

Also, she did the will of God perfectly. She said "yes" when asked to be the Mother of God and was attuned to all that was required of her throughout her life: from going to the Temple, to the Flight into Egypt, to living a humble life in Nazareth, to Jesus' Public Ministry (begun by her at the Wedding Feast of Cana) and finally to the Cross. Yet it did not end there. She helped the early Church and helps us from her place in Heaven.

Mary has done so much for us by her love and by her example. What are we called to do for her? Consecrate ourselves to her! She desires that we trust her for she wishes to take us to Jesus. Again we are foolish children who eat too much candy or stay up too late watching TV. We do not always do what is the wisest. Here is our mother who gives us her example; she gives us her heart in which to seek our refuge.

Once we have made this consecration, how do we live it out? There are so many expressions that one can practice. For all of us, we should wear the Brown Scapular which is a sign of our consecration, making a Morning Offering and saying a daily Rosary. At particular times of the year, one can renew this consecration through First Saturday Devotions and the annual IHM Novena (offered here at our Novitiate House). Yet, we can do more. I believe that if you ask Mary how she wants you to live out your consecration, she will let you know.

I recently started teaching “Prayer and Liturgy” at the high school level. This was a new experience for me; I felt such a responsibility for helping young people grow in their spiritual life. How was I going to teach them to pray and continue practices that would follow them after high school? The thought came to me of having some type of project for the student to grow in their devotion to Mary. Brainstorming with the Sisters, I developed a list of different activities, all with the expressed objective of growing in love for the Blessed Virgin. Students could learn about the Brown Scapular, the Miraculous Medal, make a cord Rosary, attend one of our Marian events, and so on. A short time later I was at the First Holy Communion of my niece. There were several family members that were there but I went up to my cousin, Katy. Why? Honestly, it was because she was holding my six month old nephew and I, like a possessive aunt, wanted to hold him. But I didn’t steal him right away; instead we began talking. Interestingly, our conversation began on the topic of the Blessed Virgin Mary. She had been in her parish’s adoration chapel and had come across a pamphlet on the Green Scapular; she read about our Lady’s appearance to Sr. Justine and the many conversions that had come as a result. Immediately, she went out and purchased some for herself, her husband and her two daughters. However, she found others who needed them more. Thus began her apostolate of the Green Scapular. Any time she hears of someone in need, an accident, cancer diagnosis, she takes the person a Green Scapular; she explains it and encourages them to pray the prayer or offers to pray the prayer for them. As I was listening to



her, I saw in action the assignment I wanted my students to complete; it gave me great assurance of the power of Mary to reveal to her children her love and protection of them. That was over a year ago. My cousin has given away 51 green scapulars and has spoken to 300 young people about her experience; the encouragement my students have received from this sacramental has been amazing.

Mother Teresa had a great devotion to the Miraculous Medal. She gave out thousands and thousands of this powerful medal. Whether it was the pilot who flew her to one of her many locations or Daniel Ortega, the dictator in Nicaragua, she was not so shy that she could not spread devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. These two recipients of the Miraculous Medal teach us something. First, the pilot was moved to tears by Mother Teresa's gift; he had flown many famous people in his plane and no one had even thanked him, let alone gave him a gift. Mother Teresa's great kindness struck his heart. As far as Ortega, it might seem that he would be the last person that one would attempt to give a Miraculous Medal and, yet, after receiving the medal, he allowed the Missionaries of Charity to set up a hospital in his country. Our Father Founder encouraged the Sisters to give out the medals and we ourselves carry some to give to people we meet.

The Memorare is a powerful prayer; we have asked everyone to join us in saying the Memorare for the building of our Novitiate House. A priest, the first time he saw our building, was delighted to be in "The house Memorares built." This has encouraged the saying the Memorare Novena for additional intentions: the conversion of sinners, the healing of families, and so much more. We could write a book of all the prayers that have been answered.

Ultimately, Mary wants us to turn to her in everything, great or small. I want to conclude with a story to illustrate this point. There was a mother who had given birth to her 8<sup>th</sup> child; this was the 1950's when medicine was not as advanced as it is today. The woman began hemorrhaging and the doctors were at a loss as to what to do. They informed the husband of the situation; he bleakly faced the prospect of

being a widower with eight children. The mother, while not being told of the severity of her situation, knew that something was wrong. She did the only thing that she thought would be of effect; she turned to the Mother of God. She prayed to our Lady not to allow her to be taken so soon after the birth of her child and she promised to say a Rosary every day in thanksgiving for this gift. It was not long after this that the woman received a visitor; she presumed that someone from the staff had been sent to her. She spoke to this woman, relating her condition and fears; this visitor prayed with the mother, calming her concerns. The visitor left and the mother felt a new peace. As the days progressed, her health improved; soon she was out of danger and was sent home – much to everyone’s astonishment and delight. As she was being wheeled out of the hospital, she asked the staff if she could speak to the employee that had visited her at that pivotal time. She described what she was wearing and what she looked like but none of the employees could identify this woman. While the staff pondered whom this woman might be, this miraculously recovered patient did not have to think too much on whom her visitor was; she knew that it was our Lady who had visited her, calmed her fears and preserved her life. And she did fulfill her promise: in thanksgiving, she prayed her Rosary each day, living to her nineties. Whether we know of Mary’s presence or not, she is there guiding us and our families. She will be with us through our joys and sorrows always leading us to her Son. Place your life in her hands and she will reveal God’s plan for you:

Listen, put it into your heart, my youngest and dearest son, that the thing that disturbs you, the thing that afflicts you, is nothing. Do not let your countenance, your heart be disturbed....Am I not here, I, who am your Mother? Are you not under my shadow and protection? Am I not the source of your joy? Are you not in the hollow of my mantle, In the crossing of my arms? Do you need anything more? ([A Handbook on Guadalupe](#), 200).

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