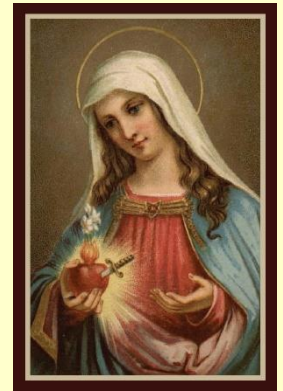




CONSECRATION
TO THE
Sacred Heart of Jesus
AND THE
Immaculate Heart of Mary



June 4, 2018

Immaculate Heart of Mary, Perfect Model of Sanctity: The Prayer for Holiness

Many people wonder what the Sisters do all day. Our students, not to get out of classwork, of course, will ask us to explain the life of a Sister. It is always a little daunting to tell them that during the school year we rise at 4:30 a.m. The students and many others cannot imagine getting up even before the roosters. Many people will keep early hours for employment, for the quiet, or for other reasons. Our primary purpose is for prayer. When I entered the convent at the age of twenty, this was not the best time for me to pray; I was too busy trying to remember who I was and what I was doing here. The amazing thing is that I persevered and now I find myself looking forward to the quiet time the morning affords. It is not always easy to wake up so early; I learned quickly to like coffee, and that has helped...immensely.

The first thing that we do each morning after we get ready is spent thirty minutes in mental prayer. Reflecting on the readings each morning connects us to Sacred Scripture and the Mass in a compelling way. We then meet for Morning Prayer and our communal Mass. Following our thanksgiving after Mass and Holy Communion, we say our communal prayers; these are the first non-liturgical communal vocal prayers that we say during the day.

We do not have too many rote prayers that we say in common. Our Directory reads, "Daily the Sisters recite communally the following prayers: of Reparation, for Holiness, to St. Michael, to the Guardian Angels"

(19). Also, we pray the Angelus three times a day together, grace before and after meals, and an Act of Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary in the evening. A Sister can say her own desired prayers, and we have a prayer book with many good prayers contained in it. It is always something to ponder, "Why do we say these prayers and not others when there are some pretty good prayers out there?" Our formation teaches us that the prayers we say, each act of devotion we perform, expresses a particular aspect of our community, of our charism.

So this evening I would like to take you through a reflection on the "Prayer for Holiness". It does not sound like a prayer to Our Lady but it contains many beautiful aspects of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, ones that should be reflected upon each day. Since it is named the "Prayer for Holiness", it makes an essential point about how one's growth in holiness is connected to Our Blessed Mother.

In renewing our community, Mother Joanne made this prayer one of the prayers that the Sisters would say each day. When I read it in just a moment, you will see how beautifully it expresses what it means to be devoted to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. It goes:

Immaculate Heart of Mary, perfect model of sanctity, take my soul and mold it according to your sublime perfections. Purify my heart and set it free from every obstacle to holiness, so that detached from self and the pleasures of sense, it may be adorned by you with the virtues and perfections of your own Immaculate Heart.

Then lead my soul to that divine intimacy which alone can satisfy the immense capacity for love and union with which God has created the human heart. From you I confidently hope for this grace of holiness, and I entrust to your Immaculate Heart my eternal destiny and the sanctification of priests. Amen.

This prayer is attributed to an American mystic, Marie-Rose Ferron who lived in the early part of the twentieth century; she bore the wounds of Christ and had many other personal sufferings. Confined to her

bed for most of her life, she slept tied to a board as it was the only way her limbs could be controlled. She had a great devotion to Jesus, especially in His Passion (<http://marieroseferron.com/>). What is also very clear is that she had a deep devotion to Mary's Immaculate Heart and understood what this devotion meant.

Immaculate Heart of Mary

We have spoken of this amazing devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, a devotion for our times. Her heart represents her, in all her beauty and integrity. Other talks have elucidated particular features of devotion to Mary's Immaculate Heart; I want to focus on the word "immaculate". It means "without sin, without stain". Sin distorts our vision; it keeps us from seeing things as they are. In the medieval times, they understood sin as "missing the mark". Mary teaches us through her Immaculate Heart the right direction to go. She guides us to her son; she helps us to turn to what is good, rejecting what is bad.

Perfect model of sanctity

The IHM Constitutions direct the Sisters with the following words: "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" (4). Again, the Sisters are reminded: "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" (6).

Mary was the perfect disciple. This is an important distinction. We often use the words "disciple" and "apostle" interchangeably, but they have two different meanings. All of the apostles were disciples, but not all of the disciples were apostles. I'll explain: before being sent out, our Lord trained his apostles (this means "sent out"). A disciple is a student. Mary of Bethany sat at the feet of our Lord, much to the chagrin of her sister, Martha. She had chosen the better part, learning from the Master. We are all called to be disciples, to

learn from our Lord. Even before the Annunciation, our Blessed Mother was the first and greatest disciple.

We each are given different missions as disciples; our Lord has a plan for each of us.

Take my soul and mold it according to your sublime perfections

Sacred Scripture contains many images. One that comes to mind with this section is the image of the potter and clay. Working clay is a difficult job for the potter but think of what the clay has to experience. Our Lord has allowed Mary to work in our lives as well. As the Mediatrix of graces, she works to get what we most need. This is not always painless; mothers many times have to do things that they do not like to do: watch a child get stitches, give bitter medicine. The mother's first choice would be to take the place of the child, to receive the treatment for him or her.

Purify my heart and set it free from every obstacle to holiness

Our hearts are cluttered with many things. Mary will help us in the purification of our hearts, but more importantly, Mary helps us understand that we do not need to be perfect before going to Our Lord. She can help us work on our faults and vices, but she teaches us that we need to come to Jesus as we are. He loves us in the midst of our sins and failings.

One of the roles of Mary is to help us see the tender and deep love God has for us; it is like her work at the Wedding Feast of Cana, bringing to our Lord the concerns of the newly married couple and then stepping back to let Him work. She did not have to take notice of this need, but she did. She cares for us and does not want us to be discouraged, especially in the spiritual life. For those who are striving for holiness, many times we become discouraged by our lack of progress. We want to do so much better and find ourselves lacking day in and day out; will we ever improve?

Recently, I had a reminder from our Lady of God's love for me. It was on the feast of the Visitation (a sign of our Lady's work); I had begun my meditation on the Gospel account found in Luke, as I usually choose the Gospel for my time of prayer. As I opened my Bible something led me to the first reading from the Old Testament. Many people don't realize how precious and beautiful the Old Testament is. Throughout God

speaks of His great love for His people in such tender ways. I would like to share with you the passage from Zephaniah 3:15-18

“The LORD has removed the judgment against you, he has turned away your enemies; The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst, you have no further misfortune to fear. On that day, it shall be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear, Zion, do not be discouraged! The LORD, your God, is in your midst, a mighty savior, Who will rejoice over you with gladness, and renew you in his love, Who will sing joyfully because of you, as on festival days. I will remove disaster from among you, so that no one may recount your disgrace.”

After reading this passage, I was reminded of how much God loves me for who I am; He is present, and His love will purify me.

So that detached from self and the pleasures of sense, it may be adorned by you with the virtues and perfections of your own Immaculate Heart

A critical element of the spiritual life is detachment. These lessons tend to be painful, like removing a bandage from a wound. We have different responses to these experiences. Detachment is essential because it empties us from sin and ourselves, things that keep us from the path of holiness. Mary wants to help us with this. First, she assists in the purification. We have had for our reflections for Advent the image of Mary preparing the stable for the birth of her son. She is very good at getting everything ready for his coming.

In our IHM Constitutions we are reminded of this detachment through our vow of poverty which is in imitation of Mary and Jesus: “Imitating the Mother of the Lord who witnessed the poverty of Jesus and lived it with Him, the Sisters seek to detach their hearts from material things to possess the riches of virtue” (19). It is important to be detached from material possessions; how easily they can get taken from us. In addition to goods, one needs to practice detachment of the will. Everyone is called to obey; we can do this cheerfully or begrudgingly. Mary gives us her example of how to be docile to the Father’s will: “To seek only God’s will – “I

take what is set before me” – to accept humbly and gratefully whatever God sends or permits, is to do always the things that please the Father, who holds each one in his hand and shapes her in the likeness of Christ” (IHM Constitutions, 32).

Once we are detached of self, Mary will clothe us with her virtues. She wants to see her children well-dressed; this is true for every mother. A good reminder of being clothed with her virtues is through the wearing of the Brown Scapular; this is a sign of our consecration and consecration shows itself in a life lived in imitation of Mary.

With what virtues will Mary clothe us? She will help us with what we most need; we only need to ask. For the Sisters, we see in the image of Mary’s heart several virtues. There are many images of the Immaculate Heart of Mary; the one we wear, the one designed by our Father Founder, Fr. Masmitja, is specific. While Mary lived out all of the virtues, only four are represented in this image. The three roses represent the virtues of humility, purity, and obedience; charity is represented by the flame. These are important in the spiritual life and helps to draw closer to our Lord. Father Masmitjá stressed to the Sisters the importance of our fraternal charity; it is the way we are united in the heart of our Mother who will lead us to Jesus (IHM Constitution, 54).

In striving to live out the virtues, many times we keenly feel our lack. We want to be much better than we are and this leads to discouragement. One of the aspects of our Lady’s virtues that I think is critical for us as we are striving for perfection is gentleness: gentleness with ourselves and gentleness with others. We can make more advances in the spiritual life by being patient with ourselves; we can bring more people into the faith by our mildness. St. Peter writes in his first letter, “Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence” (15-16).

We have been talking about the lessons that mothers teach us; this reminds me of a story from graduate school. We were getting ready to take our final for Ecclesiology class; students who had had this professor gave us advice for preparing for his tests, namely, study everything. I had crammed my brain full of facts about the Church, and I wanted to get through the exam. Before the professor distributed the booklets,

he said that he had decided to shorten the test, thanks to his mother. His mother had passed away a few years previously and, as he was putting together our test, he was reminded of a story about her. During the school year, he teaches seminarians; his mother called him to talk.

Her conversation began with "What are you doing?"

He responded, "I am writing a test for the seminarians."

She replied, "I hope you are nice to those boys."

He was a little irritated, "First mom, they are not boys and second, I am nice."

Silence from his mother. He soon got the point that only a mother could express; here he was dealing with young men who needed support and encouragement, even when he did not think so. So our Lady is with us; she encourages us and helps us to assist other people.

Then lead my soul to that divine intimacy which alone can satisfy the immense capacity for love and union with which God has created the human heart

St. Augustine said, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee." We were made by God and can only find meaning in God. He has put into our hearts a yearning for greatness, for His presence. One of my favorite quotes from the Bible is from the book of Ecclesiastes 3:11 "He has made everything appropriate to its time, and has put the timeless into their hearts, without men's ever discovering from beginning to end, the work which God has done." We gain so much by looking at what God has done for us in our lives. Having a spirit of gratitude is essential to finding God in our midst.

Our Constitutions again mention how a Sister is to imitate Mary in her prayer and pondering, "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 the imitation of his life advanced in her pilgrimage of faith. With her a Sister seeks to persevere in openness to the Holy Spirit" (41). Mary teaches us how to be grateful to God for all his gifts. Her Magnificat is a beautiful expression of one who knows God's role in her life and is always seeking to praise him for his benefits.

From you I confidently hope for this grace of holiness,

Hope is the theological virtue that points us to Heaven. We could not dare to imagine that we could go to Heaven, to spend eternity in the presence of the Blessed Trinity. The holiness that Mary is going to help us with is what fits us for Heaven. We realize that we cannot do it on our own. We have a mother who will help us. One of the titles she has is Eschatological Icon of the Church; this means that since she is in Heaven body and soul, the Church can aspire to be there one day. It is in the Dogma of the Assumption of Mary that we know she has made it to Heaven.

And I entrust to your Immaculate Heart my eternal destiny

This is echoed in the concluding portion of our vow formula: I implore through her Immaculate Heart the grace of perseverance in this way of perfection. Mary will help lead us to Heaven. St. John Vianney states it in this way, "Mary will not rest until all her children are in Heaven." Mary has a mother's heart, and she longs for us to be in Heaven, even more than we desire it.

Sometimes we are concerned for others and their salvation. Mary wants us to entrust them to her as well, whether they are on the path or not. I recently experienced this. A dear woman from Hutchinson with whom we work had been suffering several months in the hospital, a hospital in another state. Her family was not able to be with her due to the distance and, for some reason, the cards we sent to her were getting sent back. Also, she was unable to speak and unable to take phone calls. Her health, the separation from her family and friends, had caused me some distress; would she be able to keep up hope in these circumstances? Many times I had to entrust her to Our Lord and Our Lady. Finally, she returned to Kansas, only to die a short time later. Upon reflection of her situation, I was reminded of her great devotion to our Lady; she had made for her wedding bouquet a Rosary from flowers. She would repeat to me that her name "Marlene" was a derivative of the name "Mary". She had been unable to communicate with me during her final days; I had to trust even more in our Lady to give her comfort. I visited her three times before her death each time reciting the Rosary for her, and I was inspired by her devotion. Even more, reassurance came for me when she passed

away after receiving Anointing of the Sick on the last day of May, Mary's month, which also happens to be the feast of the Visitation. Our Lady gives us signs of her presence with the dying; this reminds us that she will be present with us as well.

Now we come to the last part of the prayer; this is not from the original prayer, but it does fit the desires of the Immaculate Heart of Mary: **and the sanctification of priests. Amen.**

When Mother Joanne began the renewal for our community, she wanted to include an emphasis on praying for the sanctification of priests. Our Constitutions read, "In union with Mary the Sisters pray for the Church, especially for the conversion of sinners and the sanctification of priests" (7)

This mother's heart extends to her sons, priests. As Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, we know how important it is to support priests by our prayers; it is something dear to Our Lady. As our Constitutions state, it is one of our prayer apostolates. Each Thursday, Mass is offered for priests and each day Sisters pray for a particular group of priests. Priests do so much for us and the Church. Without Priests we would not have the Eucharist, Jesus' presence with us.

While this prayer is one among many prayers that one can say, I would encourage you to recite it on occasion, to join in spirit with the Sisters who say it each day and strive to imitate the message contained in this prayer. We have provided you with bookmarks to take with you so that you can say this prayer as well.

I leave you with one story about the prayer. A priest friend of ours had come to say Mass for us; during the homily, we learned that he also prayed this same prayer, one he had come across on his own. It had become a very important prayer to him as a result of a particular incident. One day while he was getting into his car, he had set his breviary on top of the vehicle while managing his keys and other items; forgetting that he had placed his book on the top of the car, he drove away. Once he realized what he had done, he returned to the site only to find that his office book was gone. The one thing that remained was the holy card containing the "Prayer for Holiness". While he did not take this as a sign to stop saying his office, he did take this as a sign that he should continue this devotion.

Our Lady wants us to entrust ourselves to her Immaculate Heart, through the Morning Offering, the wearing of the brown scapular, total consecration but most importantly by striving to imitate her in her life. She is our Mother who cares for us, who wants to see us happy; she wants us to be in Heaven with her and her Son.

Let us conclude our time here by saying the prayer together:

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Then lead my soul to that divine intimacy which alone can satisfy the immense capacity for love and union with which God has created the human heart. From you I confidently hope for this grace of holiness, and I entrust to your Immaculate Heart my eternal destiny and the sanctification of priests. Amen.