



The Immaculate Heart of Mary and the Conversion of Sinners

It used to be that one could ask any Catholic, second grader or older, why they were created; the response was immediate: “To know, love and serve God in this life and to be happy with Him in the next.” Though the understanding of that statement sometimes stayed at a second grade level, the clarity of the statement is somewhat astonishing.

I was created to know, love and serve God in this life and to be happy with Him in the next. You were created to know, love and serve God in this life and to be happy with Him in the next. Each member of your family was created to know, love and serve God in this life and to be happy with Him in the next. Those you work with, those you encounter in the stores, those you pass on the streets, the repairman who comes to your house, the homeless man asking for a handout, the single mom, the victim of crime, the perpetrator of the crime, those involved in human trafficking and drug trafficking, the victims of human trafficking and drug trafficking ... every single person who has ever come into existence and will ever come into existence: the seemingly good person, the seemingly evil person, and everyone in between, was created to know, love and serve God in this life and to be happy with Him in the next. We were made for God! We were made to spend eternity with Him in heaven **because He loves us**. We were **created** because He loves us and we were created to share in that love.

It is that simple; but life isn't that simple. With the fallen human nature we all have, knowing, loving and serving God sometimes doesn't seem so attractive and when we call that into question, we also question the attractiveness of being happy with God for all eternity. The luring power of sin enters the picture and everything, all of a sudden, gets very complicated.

When one decides to pursue, or slides into the default of seeking, the passing pleasure of sin instead of the goodness, the truth, and the beauty of God, one would rather forget the reality of hell and the existence of the devil – that is what the devil would prefer as well. However, just ignoring it or wishing it away or even claiming that God's mercy will not allow eternal punishment, does not make hell non-existent, it does not just go away. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is clear: “The teaching of the Church affirms the existence of hell and its eternity. Immediately after death the souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin descend into hell, where they suffer the punishments of hell, ‘eternal fire.’ The chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God, in whom alone man can possess the life and happiness for which he was created and for which he longs” (CCC 1035). Why is eternal separation from God the chief punishment of hell? Because we were



created to be happy **with** Him for all eternity ... to be possessed by Him and to possess Him ... to be united to Him ... to see Him face to face ... to enjoy His presence ... Hell is the frustration of all of this.

Now we encounter a question. Do we just let people wander away from the Lord and endanger their eternal salvation, frustrate their purpose of existence and thus be unhappy? How do we express concern for those who do not seem to be knowing, loving and serving the Lord and thus fulfilling their purpose for being? As Christians we can't just ignore them. We cannot be satisfied with minding only to our own salvation. The answer to the famous question first posed by Cain in the Book of Genesis, "Am I my brother's keeper?" is "Yes!" Yes, you are, I am, we all are! We have a moral obligation to assist others in their salvation; we cannot write anyone off or be content with the mess they may have made of their lives and their loves. Nor can we assume, or worse yet, hope that someone has gone to hell. The Catholic Church teaches the eternal existence of hell, but does not dare to list the inhabitants. As Catholics we have to want, to hope that everyone goes to heaven! Hoping, however, is not enough.

St. John in his first letter says, "If anyone sees his brother sinning, if the sin is not deadly, he should pray to God and He will give him life" (1 Jn 5:16). Some are called to evangelize and preach on street corners or in foreign lands – or teach in classrooms – working for the conversion of sinners. But **all** are obliged to

assist others in doing or returning to what is right and just, to knowing, loving and serving God so that they can be happy with Him now and for all eternity in heaven. We cannot idly let sinners go on their way, sadly seeking happiness and fulfillment apart from God, for we are only really happy when we are fulfilling God's will, not when we are working against it or ignoring it. We are our brothers' keepers. **So we must pray for the salvation of souls, for the conversion of sinners.**

With all of that said, let me approach the real topic of this evening's talk: the Immaculate Heart of Mary and the conversion of sinners. You may have been politely wondering what all of this had to do with Our Lady. Well, a lot!

From the cross, Jesus gave us to Mary as her children and her to us as our mother. Who is most concerned for us? Our mothers; and mothers, who are you most concerned about? Your children, and maybe, by extension, your grandchildren. It serves to reason that Mary, as St. John Vianney says, "will never rest until all of her children are in heaven."

Especially under the title of the Immaculate Heart, Mary's concern for her children has been repeatedly expressed throughout history. Though devotion to Our Lady explicitly under this title was first introduced by St. John Eudes in France during the 1600's and by Fr.



John Peter Pinamonti in Italy in the 1700's, the devotion was overshadowed by the tumultuous times and the on-going turmoil in the aftermath of the Protestant Revolt.

Mary seemed to take matters into her own hands in the early 1800's. In 1836 in Paris – less than a generation after the French Revolution, when Catholics were guillotined, the Blessed Sacrament openly desecrated, and Catholic Churches used for obscene purposes – a simple priest was inspired during Mass to consecrate His parish to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

The story goes as such: St. Catherine Labore's confessor, Fr. Des Gennettes, to whom she confided her apparitions of the Miraculous Medal (on the back of which is a simple image of the Immaculate Heart of Mary) and to whom its promulgation was entrusted, was transferred to the parish of Our Lady of Victories two years after St. Catherine's visions. Our Lady of Victories Parish had an illustrious history, 150 years previous to the French Revolution, of strong Marian devotion, conversions, and cures. However, during the French Revolution the Church was confiscated, desecrated, made into a pagan temple for Diana, and then, finally, used as the Paris stock exchange, real stock, that is, livestock: cows, pigs, chickens, goats, sheep, and whatever else. When it reopened only a few parishioners returned.

For four years Father tried to revive the parish. On Sunday, December 3, 1836, during Mass he heard a voice say, "Consecrate your

parish to the Most Holy and Immaculate Heart of Mary." He doubted hearing these words, but after Mass the message was unmistakably repeated and he was inspired to found a confraternity in her honor. His stated purpose in starting this confraternity was to bring men under Immaculate Mary's protection and through her, to draw them to her divine Son and the adorable Trinity **in order to obtain from the Divine Mercy the conversion of sinners.** After the confraternity was speedily approved, he announced at Mass the next Sunday – to the ten or so people in attendance – that he would have Vespers in the evening and explain the confraternity. That evening 400 people attended! They were praying the Litany after the Rosary and the crowd spontaneously repeated three times in unison the invocation, "Mary, Refuge of Sinners, pray for us." "Mary, Refuge of Sinners, pray for us." "Mary, Refuge of Sinners, pray for us." The Confraternity became so popular it spread through Paris, throughout all of France and beyond.

During this same time period Sister Justine, a member of the same Congregation as St. Catherine Labore, was receiving visions of Mary's Immaculate Heart.

"On the Feast of the Nativity of Mary, Sept. 8th, 1840, the Mother of God appeared holding in her right hand her Immaculate Heart, mounted by flames and



holding in her other hand [the badge of the Immaculate Heart].

At the same time an interior voice revealed to Sister Justine that God desired to establish among mankind a more tender and confident appreciation and love of His Most Beloved Mother by means of devotion to her through the title of her Immaculate Heart. When invoked under this title and through this holy image, Our Lady would obtain great favors from her Divine Son, especially in the area of ... spiritual conversion. She who is the Refuge of Sinners would particularly obtain the conversion of those who had fallen away from the True Faith, and those poor sinners who had no faith” (From the web site of the Society of the Green Scapular).

We have come to call this badge the green scapular. This scapular often works in a hidden way. Since it is particularly effective for the conversion of sinners, often the one for whom it is intended is unwilling to wear or carry it. The one praying for the sinner’s conversion should try to keep one of these scapulars in close proximity to the one for whom he is praying and simply pray, ‘Immaculate Heart of Mary, pray for us now and at the hour of our death.’”

I would like to give just one example of a green scapular miracle that has been published. A Father Leo Steinbach gives this

account of his experience from his early hospital chaplain days:

“... I discovered a non-Christian woman patient who had been unconscious for 10 days previously. The doctor explained to me that she would very probably die within three days without regaining consciousness. He and a nurse escorted me to the room. I addressed the sick woman but she gave no indication whatsoever that she understood a word I was saying. Thereupon I took a green scapular from my pocket, applied it to her forehead and repeated the invocation, "Immaculate Heart of Mary, pray for us now and at the hour of our death."

And what happened? The woman immediately regained consciousness, joined her hands and very devoutly asked God to forgive her sins. I was amazed. The doctor and the nurse both non-Christians were also flabbergasted. I immediately instructed and baptized the dying patient that same day much to her joy. She remained perfectly conscious for three days more during which time she very devoutly received [the Last Rites of the Church]. She breathed her last while praying to the Immaculate Heart of Mary” (From Our Lady of Rosary



Library web site).

Our own beloved Sister M. Giovanni would love to repeat her own green scapular miracle story. Her uncle had left the Church years earlier and now he was in the hospital dying. As a young Sister, she went into his hospital room to visit him. He was happy to see his niece; he was not happy to have a Sister in his room. She stayed only a short time, but she hung a green scapular from his bed. She visited him often and each time she would ask if he would see a priest. His answer was always the same: an emphatic "NO!" Sister Giovanni, however, did not give up. Continuing to visit him she continued asking him. One day to her surprise, he met her with a weak but huge smile and asked her to get him a priest! He died in the embrace of the Church.

Now, back to my historical time line ...

A short eight years later after Our Lady appeared to Sister Justine, revealing her Immaculate Heart and giving her request for the Green Scapular, on the other side of the Pyrenees Mountains in Olot, Spain, the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary were founded by Fr. Joaquin Masmitja. He wrote: "The aim of our Congregation is the conversion of sinners ... The purpose of the foundation ... consists of praising God and His Blessed Mother, praying for the conversion of sinners and teaching Christian doctrine." And later he wrote: "[The Institute] 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."

All of this is happening within twelve years! What I am trying to demonstrate through history is that devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and praying for the conversion of sinners has from the very beginning and ever since, gone hand in hand. The sinless virgin, Immaculate Mary, can see more clearly than any other human being, the effects of sin and what is lost by living and dying in sin. Our Mother wants desperately to have all her children in heaven, being happy with God forever.

There is yet one more major chapter in this history: the apparitions of the angel of peace and of Our Lady of the Rosary in Fatima, Portugal, in 1916-1917. Even in the angel's apparitions which prepared the three shepherds for Mary's coming, the message is clear. In late summer of 1916 the angel taught Lucia, Francisco and Jacinta the following prayer:

"Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, I adore You profoundly and I offer You the Most Precious Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, present in all the tabernacles of the world, in reparation for the outrages, sacrileges, and indifferences by which He is offended. And by the infinite merits of



His Most Sacred Heart and **through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I beg the conversion of poor sinners.**"

The next spring, that of 1917, when Mary appeared **revealing her Immaculate Heart to the children**, she made this the topic of three of her six apparitions:

- During her first visit, on May 13, Mary asked the children: "Are you willing to offer yourselves to God, to endure all the sufferings He may be pleased to send you as an act of reparation for the sins by which He is offended and **to ask for the conversion of sinners?**"
- In July, before showing the three children a vision of hell, she encouraged the children to "**Sacrifice yourselves for sinners** and say many times, especially when you make some sacrifice, 'O Jesus, it for love of You, for **the conversion of sinners** and in reparation for the sins committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary.' " After she showed them hell, she taught them the prayer, now very familiar to us: "O my Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of hell; and **lead all souls to heaven, especially those in most need of Your mercy.**" And she told them, "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.**"
- In August she reiterated, clearly, her request: "**Pray much and make sacrifices on behalf of sinners, for many souls go to hell because there is**

no one to make sacrifices and to pray for them."

Yes, you heard me correctly; Mary said there are many souls going to hell because there is no one sacrificing and praying for them.

These words of Mary are crystal clear: we can make a difference! The eternal destiny of some souls is dependent upon our sacrifices and prayers. May those words of Our Lady never be true again.

Praying for the conversion of sinners is central to the Fatima Message. Just think, to repeat, in July she said, "To save them [that is, poor sinners], God wishes to establish in the world devotion to my Immaculate Heart." Devotion to Mary is primarily imitation of her; devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary is imitating her active concern for hardened sinners. So we can say that devotion to the Immaculate Heart consists in a large part, of praying for the conversion of sinners. It is no wonder that Mary revealed her Immaculate Heart to the three shepherds **and** instructed them to pray for the conversion of sinners. How good God is to provide us with such an efficacious means to accomplish that which He directs us to do. He tells us from the beginning, from the book of Genesis, that we are to assist one another, that we are our brothers' keeper; He tells us through St. John that we are to pray for those we see sinning – and implied, even those we do not see, but are sinning. There is no shortage of sinners!

We must often call to mind the purpose of



our life, and thus the purpose of all human life: to know, love and serve God in this life and be happy with Him in the next. By praying for the conversion of hardened sinners we beg for them an extra share in the merits of salvation; it gives them a boost, so to speak, in turning from their sinful ways so that they can strive to know, love and serve God in this life and then be happy with Him in the next. We must never become complacent and simply resign the hardened sinners to their fate, uncontended. Hell is eternal separation from God and we were made, ultimately, to be happy with Him forever in heaven. We have an obligation, as members of the Mystical Body of Christ, to assist our brothers and sisters in their Christian life.

Our Community, founded under the patronage and protection of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, was founded for the purpose of praying for the conversion of sinners and teaching the faith... in other words, to implore Our Lady assistance in saving souls from hell. You can help us do that!

Some of you have already heard of our prayer pledge; we have promised Mary millions of Memorares for the conversion of sinners. In return, we are asking her to obtain for us the means we need to build the first phase of our Motherhouse, the Novitiate, on our property between St. Mark and Colwich. Each May 13 and October 13 we will be presenting them to Our Lady at her shrine on that same property. You are invited to join us in both endeavors! Please help us fulfill our pledge of 5,000,000

Memorares and join us in presenting them to her. We have postcards to help you keep track and you can mail them to us when you finish – and we will send you another one!

Mother Teresa, in her speech upon receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979, said, “We have been created for [] love. We have been created in [God’s] image. We have been created to love and be loved...” (December 11, 1979). In the homily during her beatification, Blessed Pope John Paul II quoted this well-known statement.

What better expression of love is there than to pray for someone? Actually, St. Thomas Aquinas said that praying for another is the greatest act of charity.

Praying for the conversion of sinners, through devotion to and the intercession of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, is a very real means to fulfilling our purpose in life and, at the same time, to help others fulfill theirs. Mary wants to help us help others. No one knows, loves or served God more wholeheartedly, more deeply, more perfectly than Our Lady. And no one, more than Our Lady, wants everyone to know, love and serve God so that we all can be happy with Him and with all the saints for all eternity. Only then, when all her children are in heaven, will Mary be able to rest in Heaven.

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