

Prayer

June 1, 2024



First Saturday
Devotions

In his book called, *The Memorare Moment*, a priest named Francis Joseph Hoffman tells about his tender devotion to Mary which started in childhood. He recounts how he and his brothers used to put on socks and slip around their hardwood floors, made extra slick by a generous use of Pledge dusting spray. One day, little Francis took an especially daring run across the lubricated floor but couldn't bring himself to stop before he crashed into the wall. His collision caused the "ceramic image of the Blessed Virgin Mary" to fall down and break "into three pieces." Fr. Francis writes, "I figured I was going to be in big trouble. So I put on my most contrite face and went to find Mom to tell her what I had done. I prepared to take my punishment like a man. 'I broke the Blessed Mother,' I confessed. 'No, you didn't,' Mom replied. 'You can't break the Blessed Mother. You can only break her Heart.'" (Hoffman, 42).

This was a touching response, but the truth behind this simple statement is why I will speak about making reparation to Mary's Heart, specifically by practicing the First Saturday devotions and by allowing these devotions to permeate our daily walk with the Blessed Mother.

In Fatima, Portugal in the year 1917, the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to three shepherd children—Lucia and her cousins Jacinta and Francisco—on the 13th day of six consecutive months. Our Lady's loving and yet urgent message involved praying the rosary every day to obtain peace in the world and praying and making sacrifices for the conversion of sinners, particularly by spreading devotion to her Immaculate Heart. When Our Lady appeared to the children in June, she revealed to them her Immaculate Heart which was encircled by thorns. Lucia said that through an interior revelation, the 3 children "understood that this was the Immaculate Heart of Mary, outraged by the sins of humanity, and seeking reparation" (Dos Santos, 177). Then, in the July apparition, Our Lady showed the children a terrifying vision of hell and warned that if people did not convert, a war more devastating than World War I would break out. "To prevent this," Our Lady said, "I shall come to ask for the consecration of Russia to my Immaculate Heart and the Communion of Reparation on the First Saturdays" (Carmel, 68). Here, Our Lady explicitly mentioned the First Saturday devotion, but she did not reveal the details of its practice for another 8 years. By that time, Jacinta and Francisco had received the fulfillment of Our Lady's promise to take them to heaven, and Lucia, who was

left on earth to help spread devotion to Mary's Heart, had joined a convent of Dorothean Sisters. The following is Lucia's direct account of how the First Saturday devotion was made known to her:

It was December 10, 1925. I was in my room, when suddenly the room lit up and it was the light of my dear Mother in Heaven who came with the Child Jesus on a luminous cloud. Our Lady, as if wanting to instill courage, rested her hand on my shoulder, and as she did so, showed me her Immaculate Heart encircled by thorns, which she was holding in her hand. The Child Jesus said:

-Have compassion on the Heart of your most holy Mother, covered with thorns, with which ungrateful men pierce it at every moment, and there is no one to make an act of reparation to remove them.

Then, Our Lady said:

-Look, my daughter, at my Heart surrounded with thorns with which ungrateful men pierce me at every moment by their blasphemies and ingratitude. You at least try to console me and say that I promise to assist at the hour of death, with all the graces necessary for salvation, all those who on the first Saturday of five consecutive months, shall confess, receive Holy Communion, recite five decades of the Rosary, and keep me company for fifteen minutes while meditating on the mysteries of the Rosary, [all] with the intention of making reparation to me." (Carmel, 158).

You can almost hear the love and the sorrow in Mary's voice as she holds out her Heart to Lucia. Even during the 1917 apparitions, the 3 children were so deeply affected by the sadness they saw in Jesus and Mary that they would remind each other of this sorrow whenever they struggled to persevere in prayer or sacrifice. Why are Jesus and Mary sad? It's because sinners, all of whom they love, ignore, reject, and sometimes even attempt to discredit the infinite Love of Jesus, their *only* remedy, and they act similarly toward the gift of His Mother, our Mother...But there's hope! They come to you and ask, "Will you at least console me?"

In a later vision, Jesus revealed to Lucia the 5 specific blasphemies with which our Lady is afflicted. They are:

1. Blasphemies against Mary's Immaculate Conception
2. Blasphemies against her Perpetual Virginity
3. Blasphemies against her Divine Maternity, refusing at the same time to accept her as the Mother of all mankind.
4. Those who try publicly to implant in [the] hearts [of children] indifference, contempt, and even hate against this Immaculate Mother.
5. Those who insult her directly in her sacred images.

These blasphemies are directed toward Mary's special privileges as the one who was chosen, from all eternity, to be the Mother of God. For the sake of time, I will only highlight the importance of one of these privileges. I will then repeat some of the specific details in regards to practicing the First Saturday devotions and give some practical applications as to how we can make the "spirit of First Saturday" permeate our lives.

The first three offenses Jesus lists—blasphemies against Mary's Immaculate Conception, her Perpetual Virginity, and her Divine Maternity—are directed toward 3 of the Marian dogmas of our Catholic faith. The word "dogma" refers to "formally revealed truths...promulgated as such by the Church. They are revealed either in Scripture or tradition, either explicitly (as the Incarnation) or implicitly (as the Assumption [of Mary into Heaven]). Moreover, their acceptance by the faithful must be proposed as necessary for salvation" (Hardon, 169). This means that these three Marian dogmas, for example, are not optional beliefs for some individuals to uphold and others to reject; they are revealed truths to which we must all reverently assent.

Anyone who draws close to Mary knows that she always points to Jesus. So while these blasphemies certainly offend our Mother, her greatest sorrow is not that people reject her, but that in rejecting her and her privileges, they misunderstand, in a contingent manner, the full identity of her Son. For instance, those who do not believe that Mary was Immaculately Conceived misunderstand the central aspect of the mystery of the Incarnation. When the Second Person of the Trinity became incarnate in Mary's womb, He was fully man and fully divine. This means that Mary had to be sinless.

But why and how was Mary sinless from her very conception? It is because Jesus' redemptive Passion which atones for the sins of every person of all time was applied to Mary in an anticipated way. All other people are saved *after* being stained by original sin; Mary was saved *before* being stained. Besides Mary needing to be a pure temple to receive the Lord in her womb, she also shows, "Jesus' complete power and victory over sin" (Apostoli, 8). After Adam and Eve committed the first sin, God tells the serpent, "I will put enmity between you and the Woman, and between your offspring and hers; she will crush your head, while you strike at her heel" (Apostoli, 10). This "Woman" is Mary—untouched by Satan from her very conception. Scripture again verifies the Immaculate Conception when the angel Gabriel comes to Mary and greets her by saying, "Hail, full of grace!" There is no room for sin in her; she is full of grace, full of God.

The Immaculate Conception, a privilege reserved for Mary alone, inspires us to be faithful to every grace God wishes to send. None of us will receive the same graces as Mary, but by drawing close to her and imitating her docility, we can

become saints who glorify God to our fullest capacity; this is one of the many reasons why our Lady urges us to practice the First Saturday devotions—by forming our hearts to be more like hers, she forms them to be one with the Heart of Jesus.

To see how the Blessed Mother helps us to grow in holiness through the practice of the First Saturday devotions, let's review the requirements: receiving Holy Communion, going to Confession (Lucia clarified that this could be 8 days before or 8 days after First Saturday), reciting the rosary, spending 15 minutes keeping Mary company while meditating upon the mysteries of the rosary, and completing each of these prayers with the intention of making reparation to her Heart. If a person completes these requirements for five months in a row, he or she will have begun forming the habit of going to confession once a month (a practice encouraged by many saints), of going to Mass in addition to one's weekly obligation, of praying the rosary (which, as Sr. Mary Ann explained on Thursday, is an indispensable form of prayer), and of spending a few extra minutes in Mary's company, as is common for close companions.

The 15-minute meditation, is, in my opinion, the sweetest requirement of the First Saturday devotions. This meditation is distinct from the time one takes to pray the rosary itself, so why would Mary make this additional request? Though she is exalted far above the saints and even the angels in grace, she cherishes quality time with each of her children. It reminds me of when she appeared to Bernadette in France, 1858 and asked, "Would you do me the honor of returning here for a fortnight?" or when she appeared to Juan Diego in Mexico 1531 and first addressed him as "Juanito" which, in the original Aztec language, would have conveyed an exquisite, almost reverent courtesy" (Johnston, 49). This is the same Mother who appeared to Lucia with the request that we keep her company.

Our Lady's promise to assist us at the hour of our death is granted to those who complete First Saturday devotions for five consecutive months, each month making reparation for one of the 5 blasphemies that afflicts Mary's Heart, but the ultimate goal is to repeat these devotions every First Saturday and to invite more and more individuals to answer Mary's request to console her Heart. By practicing First Saturday devotions regularly, "... one's focus on the benefit of the Promise [Mary assisting us at our death] changes to an inward focus on living life as an act of reparation to the Heart of the Mother [for love of her and] because it pleases God" (Carmel, 159). One can then share the same sentiments as Lucia when she expressed, "I wanted...to suffer all the torments to repair the Immaculate Heart of Mary, my dear Mother, and one by one take from her all the thorns which lacerate it. I understood that these thorns are the symbol of numerous sins that go against the Son, crossing the heart to His Mother. Yes, because of them, many children are lost forever" (Carmel, 159). If we imitate Lucia, making reparation will not be limited to one day a month; we will seek to offer Mary our love and reparation every day as

we carry out our daily duties. Reparation is defined as “...making up with greater love for the failure in love through sin; it means restoring what was unjustly taken and compensating with generosity for the selfishness that caused the injury” (Hardon, 463). Let us offer our love to Mary, on our own behalf and on behalf of all those who do not love her. Our trials and sufferings, even the smallest, are also excellent opportunities to make reparation. Our Lady of Fatima showed her approval of this practice when she taught the children that any time a sacrifice is made, we should pray, “O my Jesus, it is for love of you, for the conversion of sinners, and in reparation for the offenses committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary.” By living in this way, the spirit of First Saturday will permeate our lives.

To provide a few practical applications of how to live the spirit of First Saturday, I'd like to return to the blasphemies against Mary's Heart to suggest ways you can continue to “keep Mary company.” Last night, Sr. Cora Marie talked about how living in God's presence in imitation of the Holy Family in Nazareth is something we can all practice, regardless of our age or state in life. Similarly, “keeping Mary company” is part of the First Saturday devotions, but it is something we can do always.

The first 3 blasphemies, as I mentioned, are directed toward 3 Marian dogmas: The Immaculate Conception, the Perpetual Virginity of Mary, and her Divine Maternity.

To keep Mary company, I suggest learning more about these dogmas and taking what you learn to prayer. Ponder with Mary the mysteries of God's favor toward her, and, through her, to all mankind. Allow what you learn to foster deeper love for Mary and gratitude for God's abundant goodness. This time in prayer will also bring consolation to Mary, as you cherish the very mysteries that are under attack by anti-Mary enthusiasts.

As you learn about these dogmas, it will be important to use sources that align with Church teaching. Remember that some people are actively trying to discredit Mary's privileges by spreading heresy. You may consider returning to the Church Councils and decrees which promulgated these dogmas to read the explanation that springs from the voice of the Church, the Holy Spirit. Provided that foundation, you can then seek other authors who articulate the Church's teaching in broader terms to deepen your understanding.

This prayer and study will prepare you for encounters with people who are indifferent or even hostile to Mary because of one of her privileges. In a true Marian way, you will be able to explain the truth calmly and with charity and hopefully, help bring these individuals to a conversion of heart.

For the next example, I'm going to skip ahead to the fifth blasphemy which involves people who disrespect Mary in her sacred images.

To keep Mary company, I suggest that you fill your homes and workplaces—any place you frequent—with her statues and images. These will remind you that Mary is always present, desiring you to converse with her or to quietly walk by her side. Consider searching for devotional images at a second-hand store before looking to buy new ones. Sometimes the statues and images you find in these stores are chipped or in need of new paint, but the added sacrifice of refurbishing them after purchase—and in the meantime, loving Mary through a less-than-brand-new image—could be offered in reparation. However, if an image or statue you find wasn't made well in the first place and therefore does not give fitting honor to Our Lady, you could consider buying and then burying the piece, in case it was blessed by a priest before it was passed on to the thrift store.

As a final suggestion, encourage devotion among children. Recall that the fourth blasphemy against Mary's Heart mentions those who seek to instill in the hearts of children indifference, contempt, and even hatred toward the Blessed Mother; to counter-act this movement share with children the example of a life lived in Mary's company by praying to her as a family, honoring her feast days, speaking of and imitating her virtues; you can even introduce children to making small acts of reparation to remove the thorns from Mary's Heart.

All of these suggestions are oriented toward gaining an increased awareness of Mary's loving presence. As one C.K. Sister beautifully explained, "Do you have a devotion to the Blessed Mother? Because she has a devotion to you." Our good, devoted Mother has shown us her Heart, surrounded by thorns and yet full of Love, and begs us, at her Son's request, to make reparation.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention that every First Saturday, we offer First Saturday devotions in our chapel starting with Mass at 8 a.m., followed by a 15-minute led-meditation, a light breakfast in the dining room, and then we return to the chapel to pray the rosary. We are blessed in Wichita to have a variety of Saturday morning Mass times available, but if you or someone you know is from an area that only offers a Saturday Vigil Mass, Fr. Robert J. Fox, a prolific writer about the events of Fatima, suggests that you attend the Saturday Vigil Mass (for your First Saturday Mass) and then attend Mass again Sunday morning for your weekly obligation. As he reminds us, this is not too big of a sacrifice to make for Our Lady (Fox, 19-20). Just outside the chapel, there is a table with a plethora of Fatima devotional items, but you may be especially interested in taking a "First Saturday" card to help you keep track of the First Saturday devotions you complete each month. However, I encourage you to continue the practice every First Saturday and even to grow to live in the "spirit of First Saturday" by making reparation, keeping

Mary company, and inviting others to join the privileged mission of being consolers of Mary's Immaculate Heart.

Works Cited

Apostoli, Andrew. *Treasures of First Saturday Devotion*. World Apostolate of Fatima, 2006.

Carmel of Saint Teresa-Coimbra, Portugal. *A Pathway under the Gaze of Mary*. Translated by James A. Colson, World Apostolate of Fatima, 2015.

Fox, Robert J. *First Saturdays: The Triumph of the Immaculate Heart*. Park Press Quality Printing, 2000.

Hardon, John A. *Modern Catholic Dictionary*. Doubleday & Company, 1966.

Hoffman, Francis Joseph. *The Memorare Moment*. Relevant Radio, 2022.

Johnston, Francis. *The Wonder of Guadalupe*. Tan Books and Publishers, 1981.