

Prayer

June 3, 2024



The year is 2012. The Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary of Wichita have been praying to find land, looking at a variety of possibilities and then news comes: the Simon farm is going on the auction block. That is until the Sisters express the desire to put in a bid. As if ordained by Providence, the farm is taken off the market and with the help of Mary Immaculate, becomes the property on which now stands the house built by Millions of Memorares for Mary.

Why the Memorare? What is it about this particular prayer that appeals to so many?

This evening I hope to share with you some insights into this prayer that will send you forth on your journey to Heaven with a new or renewed confidence in the love and care that Almighty God provides for us through His saints, especially the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and our mother too.

I invite you to think of your own mothers or a mother figure in your life. Think of a time that you were hurt. Maybe you fell off the bicycle as you were learning to ride on a gravel road. You skinned your knee and your mother had to clean up the wound requiring her to take out the little rocks and remove the dirt. Once she had accomplished this task through all your crying and wailing, she put on first aid cream and covered it with a bandage. Then she kissed you and assured you it would get better. Your mother took care of your wounds.

When I was in high school my siblings and I had to ride the school bus. Our driveway was roughly a quarter mile long. Sometimes between getting off the bus after school and walking to the house we had to watch for moose. It was particularly important as the daylight faded and darkness fell. Red alert! My mom would be at the end of the driveway with a flashlight, the red light blinking to warn us to take caution. (Just a note. Typically, moose do not bother people as long as you do not get too close or they do not have a little one with them). So, we would walk fast in order to get to the house without incident. Our mother was there to make sure we got home safely.

Are not these homey examples a picture of what Mary does for us? In some way, do not our own mothers reflect Our Blessed Mother?

The Memorare prayer is an expression of a child going to its mother seeking help. Although popularly attributed to St. Bernard of Clairvaux in the 12th century this prayer actually has a somewhat later history. It appeared in the 1400s in the early 15th century written within a longer prayer entitled in Latin *Ad Sanctitas Tuae Pedes*. The words beginning the prayer ring true of what is found in the late Middle Ages, “*Ad sanctitatis tuae pedes, dulcissima Virgo Maria*” – “To the feet of your holiness, O sweetest Virgin Mary”, yet the devotion and doctrine can be found in the early Church.

At some unknown time in the 15th or 16th century an anonymous person took this long prayer of several hundred words and reduced it into the fifty-three words of the Memorare, making the prayer a simple cry of the heart of a child to its Mother.

At the Wedding Feast of Cana when Mary told the servants to do whatever He tells you, to the foot of the Cross when Jesus gave His own Mother to each one of us, to the time of Pentecost and beyond, Our Lady has been interceding for her children. She will not stop until all her children are safely in Heaven. Quoting Charles Peguy: “In the plan of salvation, prayer to Mary is the ultimate recourse: with it we can never be lost”(Glavich, *The Catholic Companion to Mary*, 166).

The Memorare prayer affords us endless recourse to her. How? we might ask. Through the carefully selected words we utter in our prayer. Each word, each phrase expresses the confidence a child has when he or she goes to Mother for help. We begin with “Remember”.

Remember means so much more than nostalgic reminiscing, thinking back on some significant event in our lives. “Oh, remember when...” (You fill in the blank). What then is this to remember, this remembrance? Remembrance plays an intrinsic part in our makeup. Our memory is vital in our lives. To remember is a calling to mind, a recollecting, a collecting the pieces together that have been scattered. The power of memory brings these pieces together into the present. Much of how we act is conditioned by memory. It is also that which binds people together. Families, nations, churches share a common identity through memory. Memory in the biblical sense is taking an event from the past and bringing it into the present so that those not present at the original event can still participate and receive the merits and fruits as from the original event. Of course, the best example for this is the liturgy of the Mass with its ritual celebration. But liturgy is not the only place that the memory plays a role. We remember other scriptural accounts such as events in the life of Our Lady- the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Birth of Our Lord, the Loss of the Child Jesus, the Finding in the Temple, the Standing at the Foot of the Cross, the Crucifixion, the Receiving of Jesus’ Dead Body, just to name some. In calling these to mind, we are asking God to call them to mind, to bring them forward into our present situations and needs.

We can initiate our prayer to Our Mother with “Remember” because she is one of us, sharing with us a common family bond. This remembrance evokes within us and within her the mercies that God has shown to His people for generations. From start to finish, the bible is replete with God pouring out His mercy which we must constantly call to mind, to “remember”, so that by repenting of our sins, we may create a reservoir to receive and be changed by His mercy and love. “Remember ...”

“O Most Gracious Virgin Mary”

The manner in which we greet people reveals much of what we wish to receive from another. Who does not remember coming home from school and proclaiming: “Mom, you are the best!” Then almost in the same breath requesting a sweet treat? Certainly, mothers know that such a compliment is fueled by a desire for receiving something. The child knows that mom knows and mom knows that the child knows that she knows. Nonetheless, mothers also know that their children really do think that mom is the best and undoubtedly this brings them sheer delight. When we address our Mother as “O Most Gracious Virgin Mary” we are telling her that she is the greatest of mothers and we bring this reality to our minds and hers. There is both a formal and intimate tone in this address. We are her children rushing home to Our Heavenly Mother who is the best of all mothers.

When we use the word “gracious” we hear the word grace. This is not accidental. The English word “grace” is “gratia” in Latin. We need just think of (remember) the Latin phrase “gratia plena” and we are brought to the scene of the Annunciation in Luke chapter one. There the Archangel Gabriel appears to Mary with the words: “Hail, full of grace.” These words remind us of the Church’s teaching on Mary conceived without original sin making her the All-Holy and All-Pure one (after Jesus, of course). God’s Grace is brimming over in her; nothing in her impedes His Grace. Because of this, she is the perfect person to call on in our needs.

As the word “gracious” describes Our Lady, the word “Virgin” is used as her title. This title of Our Lady denotes the fact that Mary gave up something naturally very beautiful in marriage by giving herself totally spirit, soul, and body to God. By this means, she made herself available to God to become the Mother of His Son. The Church teaches that she remains forever a virgin, before, during, and after the birth of God the Son. We call this the Perpetual Virginity of Mary.

Like the sacred chalice that holds the Precious Blood and thus is not to be used for any other purpose as this will desecrate the chalice, Mary, having conceived and carried God Himself in her womb, is forever consecrated. She becomes the Virgin of virgins.

The prayer continues with an almost outrageous claim: “...never was it known...was left unaided.” Never? Really, never? Yes, never. With this claim, the author of this

prayer shows his confidence in what Our Lady can and will do for us. “Never” is an absolute. What this means is that when you and I pray, we will receive that which we need. We have a guarantee that she will come through for us. Numerous examples from the lives of the saints attest to this.

One such example comes from the life of St. Teresa of Calcutta who had frequent recourse to Our Lady. Here is her story. “When the Congregation of the Missionaries of Charity had just been established, we urgently needed a building for the Congregation’s motherhouse. To get it, I promised the Virgin to pray 85,000 Memorares...There were not too many of us yet. I came up with the solution: to bring all the children and the sick we were taking care of...I taught them the prayer and we all promised to pray it. The building did not take long to become ours”(Hoffman, *The Memorare Moment*, 83) . Had only one person been praying, it would have taken years to accomplish, but Mother Teresa knew that by enlisting an army of prayer warriors, the graces would readily come. Closer to home, the IHM Sisters continue with our campaign of Millions of Memorares for Mary and we invite all of you to join us, as we continue to look ahead for our future needs.

I would also like to insert a personal story which happened several years ago while I was teaching in Hutchinson at Trinity Catholic High School. You may remember the time (I do not remember the year) when all across the country there was a threat of very severe storms. We were informed that it was to strike Hutchinson hard. For some reason I was inspired to get people to pray Memorares. I sent out emails to people in the school as well as to my Community. I got the children to pray in school. Leading up to the day, people were praying and the day it was to hit, we prayed even more. I remember listening to the rain and praying almost non-stop. My confidence was high that Mary would come through. And...she did! The following day, one of the teachers showed us the radar. On the radar, the storm had formed an oval around the city of Hutchinson as if someone were preventing it to enter! Who was that someone but Our Lady! Not only that, the national news reported that the severity predicted was greatly reduced!

If we were to ask individuals who have participated in the praying of the Memorares, they would have their own stories to tell. Our Blessed Mother wants to help her children in any way they need it. This means that although we may not always get exactly what we ask for, - a job, health of a relative, a new house, financial security, you name it, everyone who asks receives what he or she needs. We do not pray to change God; we pray so that we are more changed into Him, our minds and wills conformed more perfectly to His. When we pray to God, when we pray the Memorare, we have to remember that He and Our Lady see the greater picture. The Memorare delivers what is promised, namely, what we need.

Everyone who prays this prayer pleads: “anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help or sought thy intercession...” These phrases come from persons

who care deeply about their concerns, who yearn to be heard, who lean into their request. They simply pray and ask her for aid, “inspired by this confidence” that she is listening.

“I fly unto thee, O Virgin of virgins my Mother; to thee do I come, before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in thy mercy, hear and answer me”.

Because she is listening and bends her ear to our cry, you and I should run swiftly to her without fear of being rejected in spite of our unworthiness to be near her who is filled with God’s Presence. She is the Mother of mercy and like every good mother, she delights in being merciful towards her children. The word mercy comes from a Latin word *miser cordia*. It is made up of two words: *miseriae*, in English, misery or miserable and *cor*, meaning heart. Thus, *miser cordia* or mercy, means having a heart for others by taking another’s misery as one’s own. The person gives, extends his or her heart to the misery of others. Is this not what we see throughout all of Scripture, beginning with God Himself? God is constantly meeting our misery with His mercy. In fact, the greatest quality of God is His Mercy which he lavishly pours on us through the hands and heart of His Virgin Mother.

The last part of the prayer “hear and answer me” before the “Amen” is our final plea to Our Blessed Mother. We ask her to hear, pay attention, to our petition and then return with a favorable response. This requires something from Our Lady and from us as well. We live in a society of distraction. Parents check their emails while trying to help their children with homework. Teenagers are talking with (or at) each other and at the same time are texting messages to one another. Others are scrolling endlessly on their phones, looking for who knows what. Drivers are brushing their teeth, combing their hair, and putting on make up all as they engage in multiple electronic communications. When we are distracted, we are not being attentive and we certainly are not listening. In order for us to listen, we must be silent. Here is a fun fact. Did you know that the English words listen and silent contain the very same letters: l-i-s (listen) and s-i-l (silent), ending with t-e-n for listen and e-n-t for silent? You and I cannot hear if we do not listen. We cannot listen if we are not silent. Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta reminds us that God speaks to us in the silence of our hearts. Living in the midst of endless stimulation and noise makes it difficult if not close to impossible to really listen with our interior ears. If we want Our Lady to hear us and to answer our prayers, then we must set aside silent time each day just to be, just to pray. This means turning off all the electronic gadgets, finding a quiet place, creating a silent space within, calling to mind God’s Presence, talking to God and Our Lady and ... listening.

We should pray every day preferably in the same place for a sustained period of time, time specifically given to prayer and nothing else. Location and duration will

vary for different people. What is important is being consistent. I offer this suggestion as an example of how you can do this. Make a daily date with God, Our Lady, St. Joseph, the angels and all the saints. Each day tell yourself I will pray for twenty minutes from (let's say) 6:00 to 6:20 in the morning in my prayer corner in my room. The more faithful you are to this practice, the more you will discover that God, Our Mother, and all of heaven are waiting to fulfill your every need.

I invite you all now to pray the Memorare with me. "Remember, O Most Gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known..."

Thank you. May the Lord shine His Face upon you and grant you, His Peace.

Works Consulted

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