

## First Saturday Devotion and Sins against the Immaculate Heart of Mary

This evening's topic is the First Saturday Devotion and Sins against the Immaculate Heart of Mary. This evening's talk will summarize the aspects of the first Saturday devotion, name and explain the sins against the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and suggest some ways of making reparation to Mary out of love for Our Lord, Our Lady, and our fellow men. The primary resources used for this talk were articles by Fr. Andrew Apostoli, CFR, in Soul magazine (2002-2003), and Lucia's Memoirs (Fatima in Lucia's Own Words, 10<sup>th</sup> Ed., 1998).

To understand better the reason for the first Saturday devotion, let us draw upon something we already know: the love we have for our mothers. Imagine your own mother, and what you love most about her. What if someone insulted her by false or malicious speech, or defaced her picture, or tried to make others ignore or despise her? How would you feel? Wouldn't you want her offender to retract what he or she said or did? To what lengths would you go to show that you love her, and try to make up for her pain? How much more reason does our Lord Jesus have to consider such things? After all, many people have offended his Mother, Mary, who is perfect and deserves no insult. Mary is our Mother, too; therefore, Jesus has asked that we make reparation to her through the first Saturday devotion.

At Fatima in 1917, Our Lady appeared six times to three children named Lucia, Francisco, and Jacinta. In her third apparition, on July 13, Mary told them, "I will come (again) to ask for...the Communion of Reparation on the First Saturdays..." After Francisco and Jacinta had been taken to heaven, Mary fulfilled her promise to return. She visited Lucia on December 10, 1925, while Lucia was a postulant for the Dorthean Sisters at a convent in Pontevedra, Spain. Our Lady and the Child Jesus appeared together to Lucia. Jesus spoke first, saying: "Have compassion on the Heart of your Most Holy Mother, which is covered with thorns that ungrateful

men drive into it every instant, while there is no one who does an act of reparation to withdraw them for her.” Notice that Jesus was offended because ungrateful men were offending Mary, his Immaculate Mother. Meanwhile, Mary’s Heart hurt because ungrateful men were offending Jesus, her Divine Son, by their sins. Each of them always thinks of the other—and of all of us—instead of self.

Going back to the apparition: after Jesus spoke, then Mary spoke to Lucia, showing her Heart and making a request: “Look, my daughter, at my Heart encircled with thorns, with which ungrateful men wound it at every moment by their blasphemies and ingratitude. Give me consolation, you, at least; and announce for me that I promise to assist at the hour of death, with the graces necessary for salvation, all who on the first Saturday of five consecutive months confess, receive Holy Communion, recite five decades of the Rosary, and keep me company [for a quarter of an hour] with the purpose of making reparation to me.” The first Saturday devotion basically helps us grow into more faithful disciples of Christ. Let us now consider the aspects of the devotion.

The first aspect of the first Saturday devotion is to go to Confession, preferably within one week before or after the first Saturday of the month. At Fatima Mary asked us to help bring sinners back to God, and we start by bringing ourselves. This sacrament of healing is called the “Sacrament of Confession” because in it we confess our sins to Jesus the Lord, who is present in his priest. It is also called the “Sacrament of Reconciliation” because in it we are reconciled with God, whom we have offended by our sins. It is also called the “Sacrament of Penance” because in it we receive and carry out a penance to make up for our sins and to help amend our lives. By asking us to go to Confession, Mary leads us to Jesus; it rejoices her Immaculate Heart to see us reconciled to God. She knows the peace and joy of freedom from sin, and she wants us, too, to be free from sin.

The second aspect of the first Saturday devotion is to receive Holy Communion, on the first Saturday itself of each month. After being freed from sin through the Sacrament of Confession, we are better prepared for the Sacrament of Holy Communion, wherein we are united to the all-holy God. In grateful and loving attentiveness to our Divine Guest, we adore our Eucharistic Lord and make “reparation for the outrages, sacrileges, and indifferences by which He is offended” (Prayer of Reparation, given by the Angel at Fatima). By asking us to receive Holy Communion, Mary leads us to Jesus; it rejoices her Immaculate Heart to see us united with God. She knows the peace and joy of union with God, and she wants us, too, to be united with Him.

The third aspect of the first Saturday devotion is to recite five decades of the Rosary. In his document on the Rosary, Pope John Paul II describes praying the Rosary as “contemplating the face of Christ at the school of Mary” (*Rosarium Virginis Mariae*). The verbal prayers of the Rosary, which come from Scripture and Tradition, express veneration and supplication. Meanwhile, the Rosary properly prayed involves much more. The accompanying meditative prayer consists of pondering the mysteries of our Savior’s life, death, and victory over death. Who knows more about the earthly life of Jesus than Mary, who lived devotedly at his side? Mary is the only human creature to be our Incarnate Lord’s companion throughout his entire earthly life, beginning with his Incarnation, and she remained with his disciples after his ascension. By asking us to pray the Rosary, Mary leads us to Jesus; it rejoices her Immaculate Heart to bring us to prayer. She knows the love and strength derived from pondering her Son’s life in her Heart, and she wants us, too, to grow in love and strength by pondering his life in our hearts.

The fourth aspect of the first Saturday devotion is to “keep [Mary] company” while meditating on the mysteries of the Rosary for 15 additional minutes. What better companion

could we have than the one God chose for Himself? Jesus kept Mary company as a little boy, learning from her; He prayed with her and Saint Joseph; he must have kept her company and consoled her when Saint Joseph died; and now He wants us to keep Mary company and console her in her sorrow over the spiritual sickness of her children, including ourselves. This is quiet time set aside to seek Christ at Mary's side.

The fifth aspect of the first Saturday devotion is to form a specific intention: to fulfill the devotion with the intention of making reparation to Mary's Immaculate Heart. Hand in hand with this intention, the final aspect of the devotion is to continue it for five consecutive months; Jesus appeared to Lucia to reveal why. On the night of May 29-30, 1930, Our Lord told Lucia: "My daughter, the motive is simple: there are five ways in which people offend and blaspheme against the Immaculate Heart of Mary. There are blasphemies: (1) Against her Immaculate Conception, (2) Against her Virginity, (3) Against her Divine Maternity, refusing at the same time to accept her as the Mother of all mankind, (4) By those who try publicly to implant in the hearts of children indifference, contempt and even hate against this Immaculate Mother, and (5) By those who insult her directly in her sacred images."

Actually, the offenses against the Immaculate Heart of Mary also insult God. All of Mary's privileges were given in view of her Divine Maternity; God gave Mary the vocation to be his own Mother so that He could be born into our world, save us from sin, and bring us to eternal happiness. To downplay or deny Mary's Immaculate Conception, Perpetual Virginity, or Divine Maternity ultimately insults God, who invented and conferred these great and mysterious gifts for the sake of man's salvation. A detailed explanation of Our Lady's privileges and graces would provide wonderful food for meditation. However, such detail could also provide enough for a whole novena's worth of presentations! Therefore, this evening's talk will touch on only

the highlights, as well as give examples of sins against Mary's Immaculate Heart and suggest ways we can make reparation for those sins.

The first sin against the Immaculate Heart of Mary is blasphemy against her Immaculate Conception. The dogma of the Immaculate Conception states that Our Lady, through a special grace and privilege of Almighty God, in view of her becoming the Mother of God, was preserved free from Original Sin and given a fullness of grace from the first moment of her conception. Mary's complete and total freedom from sin shows God's absolute victory over sin in a human creature. God is outside of time and applied the merits of redemption to Mary before Jesus was born and won our salvation.

Blasphemies against Mary's Immaculate Conception offend God by dishonoring the extraordinary grace He gave her in her Immaculate Conception. The devil hates God and tries to discredit God's marvelous works; the devil sows seeds of disbelief in man's mind about things that are beyond human capacity to understand fully. The devil also hates Mary because she has always been completely free from sin; not for a single instant has she been subject to the devil's influence, and he greatly resents this.

We can atone for ridicule of and disbelief in the Immaculate Conception of Mary by renewing our faith in God's wondrous works, even those we do not understand. We may make a simple act of faith, or use universal prayers of the Church, such as the Creed or the Divine Praises. In fact, the Divine Praises were introduced specifically to make reparation for blasphemies. Another means of reparation is to call trustingly on Our Lady for help in times of temptation; the devil has no power over her, and she is the Woman who crushes the serpent's head, as foretold in Genesis (cf. Gen 3:15). We can wear the Miraculous Medal given by Our Lady to Saint Catherine Labouré, and pray the inscription on it: "O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you." We can take her as our personal patroness, since she

is already the patroness of our diocese and the cathedral in Wichita. We can also make the five first Saturday devotion, and encourage others to do so.

The second sin against the Immaculate Heart of Mary is blasphemy against her Perpetual Virginity. The dogma of Mary's Perpetual Virginity states that Mary was a virgin before, during, and after the birth of Jesus; the Gospels and writings of the Fathers of the Church attest to and explain this belief. Two thousand years after the birth of Jesus, one of Our Lady's most popular titles is still "Virgin Mary". We address her as such in hymns and prayers, such as in the Memorare: "Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary...."

Blasphemies against Mary's perpetual virginity frequently stem from lack of thorough catechesis, such as in misunderstanding the term "Jesus' brethren" in the Gospels. In the social sphere, ridicule and contempt of Mary's perpetual virginity also arise from a general disregard in modern culture for the virtue and beauty of chastity. Our Lady's perpetual virginity is a moral rebuke to the promiscuity that many people accept and promote in today's world. If we are not vigilant, we can become desensitized to recognizing these sins against purity. For example, glorified in modern media and entertainment there are fashions offensive to the Lord, as Our Lady of Fatima foretold; many of these create occasions of temptation for others. A lot of television shows and movies present compromising relationships, such as cohabitation or adultery, as normal or even desirable; people may watch these without realizing how their thoughts and values are affected. Our Lady of Fatima told Jacinta that more people go to hell for sins of the flesh than for any other sin; hence, there is great need to be pure ourselves and to offer continuous prayers and sacrifices for the conversion of sinners who sin against purity.

We can make reparation for these offenses and for blasphemies against Mary's Perpetual Virginity first of all by living chastity according to our state in life. We can dress modestly, as temples of the Holy Spirit; we can regard sexuality as a gift reserved for marriage and the

creation of new human life; we can be discerning in our choice of entertainment and practice custody of the eyes; we can practice bodily mortification, like the three children of Fatima did, to atone for so much sinful indulgence of the flesh; and we can beg Mary's help for ourselves and others when we or they are tempted against the virtue of purity. We can also make the five first Saturday devotion, and encourage others to do so.

The third sin against the Immaculate Heart of Mary is blasphemy against her Divine Maternity, as well as refusing to accept Mary as Mother of all mankind. To help us understand Mary's divine maternity, the Catholic Church explains in her dogma what the Incarnation means: in Jesus there is only one Person—the Second Divine Person of the Blessed Trinity—but there are two natures—one divine and one human. We acknowledge Mary's divine maternity, or motherhood of God, when we address her in prayer, such as in the Hail, Holy Queen: "Pray for us, O holy mother of God...."

Blasphemies against Mary's Divine Maternity usually come from misunderstanding or deliberate disbelief about Mary as the Mother of God. When people deny or ridicule the teaching that Mary is the Mother of God, they deny that Jesus is God, that He is a Divine Person; such a denial necessarily rejects the infinite value of the Jesus' death on the cross and therefore declares our salvation nullified. The dogma of Mary's Divine Maternity shows the great dignity of Mary, but above all it keeps us faithful to the truth that Jesus is truly God.

We can make reparation for these blasphemies against Mary's Divine Maternity by honoring her as God's mother and continually renewing our belief in Jesus' divinity. For example, we can pray the Angelus three times a day, as Christians have for centuries, and really call to mind the sublime mystery of God's Incarnation. On the cross, Jesus made Mary the spiritual mother of us all. To atone for offenses against Mary's universal motherhood, "let us [imitate] our Savior, who chose the Virgin Mary for his mother" (Liturgy of the Hours, Common

of the Blessed Virgin Mary). As good children of Mary, we can strive to pay attention when we pray to our Immaculate Mother, approaching her as a living person who listens to us. To console the Heart of our Sorrowful Mother, we can pray and sacrifice for the conversion of her children, for whom Jesus died to save them from their sins. We can also make the five first Saturday devotion, and encourage others to do so.

The fourth sin against the Immaculate Heart of Mary is alienating children from devotion to Our Lady. During Jesus' public ministry, some mothers brought their children to Jesus so He could bless them. When Jesus' disciples started turning them away, He responded, "Let the children come to Me, and do not hinder them. The kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (cf. Mt 19:14-15). The Lord loves children, and He was once a child Himself. As a child He learned, prayed, worked, and played at the side of Mary; as a man, while dying on the cross, He bequeathed Mary to his young beloved disciple, saying, "Behold your Mother" (cf. Jn 19:27). Centuries later, Jesus sent his own mother to three children in Fatima (namely, Lucia, Francisco, and Jacinta). At the loving invitation and encouragement of Mary, these children embraced prayer and sacrifice to a heroic degree, and thereby became helpers in Jesus' own mission of saving souls.

Keeping children away from Mary can occur like any other sin—by actively committing an offense, or by neglecting to do something one ought to do. Some people have terrible contempt for Mary and teach children to avoid her or even to hate her. Others fear that she will get in the way of love for Jesus and deter children from cultivating any devotion to her. Still others keep silent about her, perhaps unaware of the benefits obtained by her intercession, and neglect to introduce children to her; hence, many are deprived of her motherly companionship.

In reparation, let us imitate God the Father who, in his infinite wisdom, entrusted to Mary the human formation of his Son, Jesus. We can spread devotion to Mary among those we know,

especially children, starting in our own hearts and homes. We can pray the daily rosary with our families; we can promote Marian devotion in our Catholic schools and participate in Marian events in our parishes. We can teach children (and ourselves) to imitate Mary's virtues, and teach them to develop the habit of turning to Our Lady for help throughout the day. We can also make the five first Saturday devotion and encourage others to do so, especially families with children.

The fifth sin against the Immaculate Heart of Mary is insulting Our Lady directly in her sacred images. Throughout human history, art has expressed the values, aspirations, and historical happenings of various cultures. For example, America uses monuments to honor national heroes. The Catholic Church has always used art, such as stained glass windows, as an aid to evangelization and prayer. Images of Mary in particular remind the faithful of Our Lady's motherly protection and intercession.

Blasphemies against Our Lady in her sacred images can take several forms. One is destroying or in any way disfiguring statues or pictures of her. Another grave insult is to make distorted images of her or to make them out of offensive materials. One other dishonor to Mary is to forbid the display of her image for prayer and veneration. Often, these offenses are done deliberately, for example, out of anger at God or contempt for Our Lord or Our Lady. Whether motivated by malice or misunderstanding, these blasphemies require reparation.

To atone for offenses against Mary in her sacred images, we can show attentive veneration whenever we encounter an image of our Blessed Mother. We can keep images of Our Lady in our homes, cars, wallets, and workplaces; we can wear devotional objects with images of Mary, such as the Miraculous Medal or the Brown Scapular, to remember the Mother whom we love, and to remember to act as her child. And, of course, we can also make the five first Saturday devotion, and encourage others to do so.

The Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary are happy to invite you to the first Saturday devotion here at Saint Joseph Parish. Every first Saturday of the month in the Church, we start at 7:50 a.m. with the 15 minute meditation and a reminder of the intention, which is to make reparation to the Immaculate Heart of Mary; there is usually an opportunity for Confession before Mass, and Mass begins at 8:15; after Mass there is exposition of the Blessed Sacrament with recitation of the rosary and Benediction.

To conclude, the first Saturday devotion illustrates the love of Jesus and Mary for each other and for us, sinners though we are. Our Lady of Fatima's message focuses on the salvation of souls, and specifically on Mary's Immaculate Heart as God's chosen instrument to bring all sinners back to God. If we heed this message well, we will draw closer to Jesus and Mary, and even aid them in the work of salvation. For love of Our Lord, Our Lady, and those in danger of perdition, let us do all that Jesus and Mary ask of us. Immaculate Heart of Mary, pray for us.