

“Pray for Sinners”

Tenth Annual Novena to the Immaculate Heart of Mary

*The Fruit of Her Pondering: the Words of Our Lady*

Sr. Mary Catherine, IHM

Thursday, June 18, 2009

Introduction

The beautiful melody of the “Ave Maria” haunts us and may give us a slight awareness of the supernatural beauty of Our Lady, as she appeared to various seers. This talk, entitled “Pray for Sinners” will center upon Our Lady of Fatima, with some description of Our Lady of Lourdes as well; the same message has occurred in these and all the many church-approved apparitions: “pray for sinners”. What do the words *ora pro nobis peccatoribus* mean? As many of you probably know, it means “pray for us sinners”. We are all sinners. However, some, as we sadly hear from Our Lady, “go to hell because there is no one to pray for them”. (Fatima message)

Scripture tells us, through the words of St. James, to pray for sinners.

“My brothers, if anyone among you should stray from the truth and someone bring him back, he should know that that whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.” (James 5: 19-20)

A little joke illustrates the power of Catholic prayer for converts. One day, a Catholic missionary, hearing that other non-Catholic evangelists had not made it through a deep jungle in Africa, bravely ventured the risk, assured of the power of Catholic prayer. He then met what his other comrades met: a hungry lion. “Lord”, he prayed, “please convert this lion!” And indeed, the lion looked at him and began to speak: “Bless us, O Lord and these thy gifts...” (For the children among you, this really did not happen-it is a joke!)

However, seriously speaking, the Lord has placed in my life people who have indulged in the occult, including ex-Satanists. When I asked one ex-Satanist turned

Catholic why she became Catholic, she simply replied, “The Catholic prayers work!” Having been on the complete opposite side, she should know.

Our Faith tells us to pray constantly, to adore, praise, express sorrow for our sins and intercede for others. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* has an entire section devoted to prayer. So, it is a duty we have, but a joyful one.

In this talk of 25-30 minutes, I will briefly cover the following:

What is prayer?

Why pray for sinners

Our Lady of Lourdes

Our Lady of Fatima, the more focal point of the talk

What is Prayer?

Prayer is simply “speaking to God, the One who you know loves you”, says St. Teresa of Avila.<sup>1</sup> Vocal prayers without mental prayer become mere garble. Peter Kreeft, a philosophy professor at Boston College and prolific writer, says our religious practices--be it knowing our Faith, going to Mass without really praying---is like a skeleton without flesh.<sup>2</sup> Vocal prayer demands mental prayer, knowing to whom we pray, what we pray, etc., or else it is mere routine. Prayer is really experiencing God, the most exciting thing in the world, though in a deep and peaceful way.<sup>3</sup> It is the unfolding of the most loving relationship in the world.<sup>3</sup>

Jesus Himself told Mary of Bethany she had chosen the better part, not that He negated what Martha was doing,(Lk 10:38-42) but that prayer comes first and will inspire us to fulfill our duties with more fervor.

Conversion of Sinners

According to St. Catherine of Siena, the first sinner to convert is our self<sup>4</sup> and this means an ongoing conversion. Is it not selfish to allow Our Lord, with the help of prayer and the sacraments, to convert ourselves first? No. It is true self love which enables us to help others. I will give you an example.

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<sup>1</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, *Way of Perfection*,

<sup>2</sup> Peter Kreeft, *Prayer, the Great Conversation*, (Ignatius Press: San Francisco, 1991), p. 12

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 13

<sup>4</sup> St. Catherine of Siena, “Prologue” in *The Dialogue*, ((Paulist Press: New York, 1980) note one, p. 26

Let us pretend that Hannah Belton, whose father won the Immaculate Heart of Mary prize and wants to give it to her, ran outside to get it from the car to show her friends. A car was zooming at 100 miles per hour. The car ran over Hannah. We all would run to see if she was alive. She is breathing. We call 911, but we implore the help of any RN's, and we know that our novice Sr. Mary Guadalupe is a superb nurse. If Sr. Mary Guadalupe is herself---healthy and alert---she will help Hannah until the paramedics come. However, what if Sr. Mary Guadalupe herself went with Hannah and got run over? She could not help. That is why it is essential that we take care of ourselves spiritually. We cannot give what we do not receive, says St. Thomas Aquinas, applying it to the life of prayer.

So then, How about praying for sinners?

Let us go back to Hannah lying in pain, with the competent Sr. Mary Guadalupe helping her. How grateful are Hannah's parents and all of us to Sr. Mary Guadalupe, when a doctor tells us that Sister saved her life. A life!

The conversion of sinners can be compared to this. We have many people in mortal sin. "Mortal" comes from the Latin *mors*, which refers to death. For example, we talk about a "mortal" wound. People with mortal sin are walking around with deadly spiritual wounds; they are disordered, ugly, like the orks on "Lord of the Rings". People in mortal sin are destined for hell, and the picture of hell, for me, is "Mordor". (For those of you who have seen "Lord of the Rings".)

Peter Kreeft, in his book, *Prayer: The Great Conversation*, tells us that intercessory prayer for others is both practical and powerful. He quotes the famous saying "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams." Someone in a hospital bed or in a wheelchair can be saving the world without even knowing it, simply by uniting his or her sufferings with prayers for the conversion of sinners.<sup>5</sup>

We can think of our lives as concentric circles. The people with whom we live, work and meet every day are in the first tiny circle. Good actions and words can help these people who are most likely our family, friends and co-workers. Then there is an outer circle: people we never meet, but are indirectly helped by our friends to whom we showed love. Or the services we do or letters we write or things we build that affect

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<sup>5</sup> Kreeft, *Prayer, the Great Conversation*, pp. 81-82

people you don't know. Then, as we all know, one vote can make a difference and that is why it is vitally important to vote. Finally, your prayer "vote" reverberates across the universe because it bounces off of God. Prayer is the widest influence we can have.<sup>6</sup>

Dr. Kreeft suggests keeping a list of people for whom you want to pray. What we do as IHMs is entrust people's intentions to Our Lady. Venerable John Paul II would have long lists of people and events for which to pray, and he would kneel going over each one. By the way, God may refuse us material things, but He will never refuse us the gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as conversions of sinners and our own conversion!

Dr. Kreeft asserts that there's so much evil in the world partly because so few people pray. One man's prayer---Abraham's---almost saved two cities, Sodom and Gomorrah. In Exodus, Moses' prayer saved all the Jews from destruction. The devil is have been heard to say, through the body of a possessed person, that if there were ten priests like St. John Vianney the world would totally belong to God.

Some paralytic in a hospital bed may be saving the world from nuclear war, and this person may be the most important person in the world, because of her/his sanctity. (Bishop Sheen says in heaven we will have many surprises of who is important in God's Kingdom.) Just like every vote counts, every prayer counts. In war, every weapon counts, and in spiritual warfare, every prayer counts.<sup>7</sup>

What does Our Lady have to do with all of this, since she spoke so rarely?

Now Mother Marie Bernadette very well established that Mary is our Mother. Very briefly, I will go over what Our Lady does to teach us now. At Fatima, she has sadly proclaimed that "Unless you pray the Rosary, many will go to hell."

Mary appeared in Lourdes, France and in Fatima, Portugal. (There have been many more, but we do have a time limit!!) These apparitions fall under the category "private revelation". What is "private revelation"? Private revelation is an apparition, locution or other supernatural phenomena that God permits to teach what Our Lord had already taught in public revelation and the Church, with its authority, has developed. The Church goes through extensive questioning with many theologians, philosophers,

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<sup>6</sup> Peter Kreeft, *Prayer: The Great Conversation*, (Ignatius Press: San Francisco, 1991) pp.81-82

<sup>7</sup> Kreeft, *Ibid.*, pp. 86-87

scientists, psychologists, and medical doctors to ensure the seers or receivers of the locutions are mentally balanced and the supernatural event is real. Usually miracles verify the authenticity of the apparitions. At most places you see wheelchairs and crutches left as reminders of these physical miracles, but much more importantly are the spiritual ones. A Catholic is not obliged to believe private revelation, but must believe that God can do miracles.

(St. Thomas Aquinas tells the conversion of a sinner is a much greater miracle than that of "a person rising from the dead.)<sup>8</sup>

What is common in all private revelation of our Mother Mary are:<sup>9</sup>

1. She admonishes, cajoles and entreats us to listen to Her, just like any good mother
2. She repeatedly asks for prayer and penance for our sins and those of others.
3. Since our emphasis is prayer, she often asks
  - a. for Eucharistic worship (Guadalupe, Lourdes, Fatima) and Eucharistic Processions: Adoration of Her Son exudes an unceasing stream of grace and favors.
  - b. She proves by physical cures her authenticity and often predicts prophecies that come true. (She prophesied at Rue du Bac, La Sallette and Fatima)
  - c. She, therefore, demonstrates her main point: "I have come to save sinners. Pray for poor sinners. Intercede through me to Jesus."

A possible objection someone may have: Too bad for sinners, anyway; they made their bed, let them live with their consequences.

Reply: This statement totally goes against Christian teaching. Our Lord has repeatedly preached, "I have come to save sinners" and "Love your enemies". The most basic Christian concept He gave us: "Love one another as I have loved you." We are all sinners, anyway, and if it were not for God's grace, who knows what we would be like? Again, if you saw a young girl's

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<sup>8</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica, Ia-IIae*, Q. 8, A. 9, "I Answer That" in "Of the Will, in Regards to what Moves it" (Christian Classics: Maryland, 1948)

<sup>9</sup> John J. Delaney, *A Woman Clothed With the Sun*, "Our Lady's Apparitions" (Doubleday and Co.: New York, 1960) pp, 27-29

leg get broken, who of us would not immediately go to her aid? The spiritual consequences of sin are infinitely worse. St. Teresa of Avila tells her Sisters to pray, if necessary, for temporal needs that people ask, but the most supremely important mission is that of praying for sinners.<sup>10</sup>

If we are in the state of grace, and sincerely trying to love God, it is almost natural to want to pray for sinners. Jesus described this state to St. Catherine of Siena:

When love grows, so does sorrow.

....It is a general sort of cruelty when you see yourselves and others damned and in danger of death for having lost grace....The service you cannot render Me you must do for your neighbors...when with loving desire you are looking out for my honor and the salvation of your neighbors by bearing fruit for them in many holy prayers.<sup>11</sup>

### Marian Apparitions

#### Our Lady of Lourdes

Lourdes, often connected with healing of the sick, contains also references to spiritual healing. In 1858, Our Lady appeared in a remote grotto in the foothills of the Pyrenees to a young fourteen year old girl of a poverty-stricken family. Although suffering from asthma, she offered to pick up firewood for her family, along with her younger sister and a friend. When they got to the river Gave, the two other girls shouted how cold it was and Bernadette deliberated if she should go. She decided she should risk it and began taking off her shoes when she beheld a beautiful and young lady, who beckoned her to advance to the grotto. The Lady smiled at Bernadette and the girl immediately took out her Rosary, as did the Lady. However, the Lady did not pray the Our Father or Hail Mary, but only the Glory Be. An intangible magnetic attraction overcame Bernadette for the next few days and she went back. The Lady asked her to “do the favor of please coming to the grotto for 15 days.”

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<sup>10</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, *Way of Perfection*,

<sup>11</sup> St. Catherine of Siena, *Dialogues*, “The Way of Perfection”, (Paulist Press: New York, 1980) trans. Suzanne Noffke, O.P., pp. 37-38

In the sixth apparition, the Lady, as Bernadette referred to her, asked her to “pray for sinners”. Bernadette did this for the rest of her life. Our Lady caused a miraculous spring to appear, because Bernadette obeyed her requests to dig at the ground for a supposed spring and drink from it. It looked as if the girl had become mad, with mud all over her face. Nonetheless, springs of water gurgled and the next day she beheld a pool. The Lady asked her on this tenth apparition to “kiss the ground”, a form of penitential prayer, “for sinners”.

The next apparition, number eleven, came a difficult request, “ask the clergy to build a chapel on the site of the apparition and in the fourteenth, “to come to this chapel in processional form.” In other words, Our Lady was asking for Eucharistic worship and adoration. As we all know, endless streams of grace flow from Our Lord’s real presence in the Eucharist.

A good bishop told us an interesting story about Lourdes. He was on a bus, filled with sick people of all kinds of illnesses. Unfortunately, on the way to Lourdes the people quarreled. Reaching Lourdes, they all reached the miraculous waters and, with a spirit of Faith, bathed in it. No physical cures occurred, but on the way back, the people were of one mind and heart, filled with kindness for each other. The Bishop said this was the cure Our Lady gave: charity.

#### Our Lady of Fatima

Our Lady appeared in 1917, as many of you know, to three children: Lucia, Francisco and Jacinta, ages 10, 9 and 7. In visiting Lucia later, a priest who lived in Fatima for purposes of research said, “She is as normal as a plate of cookies.”<sup>12</sup> He also adds that there is evidence in her younger days that she acted with a supercharged energy and jabbered talking. Jacinta, Lucia’s first cousin, Jacinta, on the other hand, was pretty, with fine features, but was very shy. Francisco, a very handsome young boy, brother to Jacinta, was very quiet, compassionate to all who suffered, liked to be alone and not play with other people except Lucia and Jacinta. The children were all mentally balanced and normal.

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<sup>12</sup> John de Marchi, IMC, *The Immaculate Heart*, (Farrar, Straus and Young: New York, 1952) p. 14

Our Lady came to Fatima as a catechist par excellence, and though beautiful and sweet, making the children feel comfortable, taught some hard lessons. Amazingly, just before she came, Pope Benedict XV implored prayers for peace: “To Mary, the Mother of Mercy, let loving and devout appeal go up from every corner of the world.”<sup>13</sup> The Pope made this appeal on May 5, 1917, and Our Lady came on May 13, 1917. She told the children that “I come from heaven” with a smile that ravished their hearts. She asked that they come the 13<sup>th</sup> of each month and “My children, continue to say the rosary as you have done.” (By the way, unlike at Lourdes, Our Lady at Fatima usually did not smile.)

On June 13, when they arrived at the Cova de Iria, the place where Mary appeared, she said, “Now, when you say the Rosary, add the prayer, “O, my Jesus, forgive us our sins. Save us from the fires of hell and lead all souls to heaven, especially those who have most need of Your mercy.”

July 13 perhaps brought a dramatic scene. Our Lady implored the children to “continue to say the Rosary in order to obtain peace for the world and the end of the war, for she alone will be able to help.”

Then the Lady opened the earth and, the children gazed upon a great sea of fire of fire which seemed to be under the earth. Lucia writes, “Plunged in this fire were demons and souls in human form, like transparent burning embers, all blackened or burnished bronze, floating about in the conflagration, now raised into the air by the flames that issued from within themselves together with great clouds of smoke, now falling back on every side like sparks in a huge fire, without weight or equilibrium, and amid shrieks and groans of pain and despair, which horrified us and made us tremble with fear. The demons could be distinguished by their terrifying and repellent likeness to frightful and unknown animals. The lost souls were in their human bodies and seemed brown in color, tumbling about constantly in the flames and screaming with terror. All were on fire, within and without their bodies, and neither devils nor damned souls seemed able to control their movements. They were tossing about like coals in a fiery furnace, with never an instant’s peace or freedom from flames.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Pope Benedict XV as cited by Msgr. William C. McGrath, “The Lady of the Rosary” in *A Woman Clothed with the Sun*, *ibid*, p. 156

<sup>14</sup> Sister Lucia de los Santos, *Fatima, In Lucia’s Own Words*, (Postulation Center: Fatima, Portugal, May 13, 1976) p. 169

Lucia continues, “So terrible was this vision, that we would have all died had not Our Lady was standing right beside them and had assured us that we would go to heaven.”

Our Lady responded to the little children: “You have seen hell, where the souls of poor sinners go. To save them, God wishes to establish devotion to My Immaculate Heart.”

By the way, Hell could be described in the following way: undisguised self love consuming itself as a flame within. The children heard unrestrained envy, jealousy, pride, greed, lust, and the assorted choir of vices shrieking in the disharmony and cacophony of their own intimate natures. Those little children saw the final state of those who chose not to love and the disorder of sin, unclothed in its ugliness. It, unfortunately, is disguised as something attractive in the secular propaganda that we often see and hear; the children saw it, as we can and should, for what it is: sheer selfishness and pride, as opposed to true self-love. Our Lord said, “If you love Me, keep my commandments.” At Fatima He said, “If you love, keep your love like the Heart of Mary.”

We do not have to accept the vision exactly like it was pictured. What we do have to accept is that hell exists and is a state of total misery.

Our Lady had more to say in this July 13<sup>th</sup> vision.

1. “If people do as I shall ask, many will be converted and there will be peace. If people do not stop offending God...the world will be chastised through wars, famines, persecutions of the Church and of the Holy Father.”

“To prevent this, I come to ask for the consecration of Russia (which would be in the future the center of atheistic Communism) to My Immaculate Heart, and the Communions of Reparations on the First Saturdays of the month.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Our Lady of Fatima, as cited by Sister Lucia of the Immaculate Heart in *Fatima in Lucia's Own Words*, *ibid.*, p. 169 (Apparition of July 13, 1917)

Here we see Our Lady explicitly asking for devotion to the Immaculate Heart and stating that the supernatural cause of war is sin. She yearns for peace, but sin causes war. Thus, to prevent war, we need to pray for sinners and amend our own lives!

Once more, Our Lady appeared on August 19<sup>th</sup>, since the children were locked up on August 13 in prison. Our Lady told them again that “Many souls are lost because there is no one to do penance and pray for them.” She also asked to “continue to pray the rosary daily.”<sup>16</sup>

The principle message of Fatima: Pray the rosary for sinners.

### Application

We can easily apply this message to our own lives, whatever our state or age. practice more recollection during the day and more silence, we can

1. Say aspirations such as:

O my Jesus, save souls

I offer this sacrifice for You through Mary to save souls

O my Jesus, save us from the fires of hell, ...

Sweet Heart of Mary, be my salvation

O Most Holy Trinity, I believe, I adore, I hope and I love you; I ask forgiveness for those who do not believe, nor adore, nor hope nor love you (prayer taught to the children in 1916 by the Guardian Angel of Portugal)

O my Jesus, I make the sacrifice of listening to Sr. Mary Catherine speak tonight!

2. Make the Communion of Reparation on the First Saturdays.

\*An advertisement: As Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, we promote the first Saturday of Reparation at St. Joseph’s every month. We even offer coffee and rolls afterwards!

3. We can say the rosary daily.

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<sup>16</sup> Our Lady of Fatima, *ibid.* apparition of August 19, 1917

When I was a teenager, my mother especially accepted and lived the Fatima message. So, each evening we would say a family rosary. If we were in a tiff over some little thing as siblings, after saying the Rosary whatever we were arguing about was forgotten. Saying the family rosary brought an indescribable peace and joy to us.

Father Patrick Peyton, known as the “Rosary priest” who is up for canonization, used to say, “The family that prays together, stays together.” Father Peyton guaranteed family unity and peace to those who sincerely said the rosary as a family.

If we want peace, we should live the Fatima message. Portugal was saved from World War I and at that time almost everyone had devotion to Our Lady of the Rosary.<sup>17</sup>

#### Conclusion

To conclude, Dr. Kreeft suggests that we make, as stated before, a list of persons for whom to pray and treat it like a spy’s assignment each day, a map of enemy-infiltrated territory for Jesus and Mary to conquer through us. And a map is not just to read, it is to follow. So Sr. Mary Catherine will stop talking and let you start praying!

Thank you and God bless you.

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<sup>17</sup> Rev. John De Marchi, *The Immaculate Heart*, *ibid.*, p. 261