

Immaculate Heart of Mary

Being a convert it was challenging for me to begin to pray to Mary or any saints. Growing up, we were told you ONLY pray to God, have a relationship with Him and only Him. And yet, in the years of reading spiritual books, listening to homilies and speakers, I am aware that prayer to Mary (and other saints) is important in our salvation too.

It became much clearer to me when I recently heard a priest speak about the Immaculate Heart of Mary. He used the following quote from Saint John Paul II: “The work of our redemption began at the moment when the Word descended from Heaven in order to assume a human body in the womb of Mary. **From that moment, and for the next nine months, the Blood of Christ was the Blood of Mary, taken from Her Immaculate Heart; the Heart of Christ was beating in unison with the Heart of Mary.**”

This makes perfect sense why Christ wants the Immaculate Heart of Mary unified with His Sacred Heart. They shared the same blood for nine months. The blood from her Immaculate Heart is in the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Hers is the heart that gave Jesus His blood and still dwells with His human heart.

The talk went on to say that in the Garden of Eden was the Tree of Life. Unlike Eve who partook of the Tree of Good and Evil causing the downfall of humankind, Mary’s life counteracted that evil. She is like the Tree of Life, so that her children can partake of its fruit, even to this day. What is the fruit of Mary? It is the fruit of her womb—JESUS. Jesus received His humanity through the heart of Mary. Mary, in turn, shared the fruit of her womb with the world.

The priest went on to mention that Mary’s womb was the first tabernacle for Jesus. So in honoring Jesus in the tabernacles of the world today, we should be mindful that if Mary had not accepted Jesus in the tabernacle of her womb, there would be no tabernacles for us today.

So, I hope that sharing this bit of information which opened my mind to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, may do the same for you. Immaculate Heart of Mary, pray for us.

Allergy Season

This has been an exceptionally bad year for allergies. Between the pollens, grass, trees, pet dander, and dust I have been going through the boxes of Kleenex, bottles of eye drops and over-the-counter pills to remedy the problem.

Having allergies sometimes limits what one can do. I wouldn’t think about walking by a field of goldenrod, or doing a lot of outdoor chores on the days the smoke rolls down from Canada.

Allergies occur when the body’s immune system overreacts to a substance, treating it as a threat. These substances, called allergens, can trigger a range of reactions, from stuffy to runny nose, itchy eyes, sneezing and coughing. It can cause breathing problems, such as wheezing and asthma.

We can have allergic reactions to sin too. Sin attaches to our soul first. If left untreated it can affect our sleep and relationships (including our relationship with God); it can cause depression, anger, shame, overeating and a number of physical ailments. Like allergies, however, there is relief made available. This spiritual relief is Reconciliation.

So any time sin triggers reactions in our lives, let’s seek a remedy immediately. Confession will nip it in the bud. We will find ourselves smiling more and sleeping better. Then we follow

up with Mass, prayer and daily devotions to avoid future flare ups. We should also be attentive to those things that can trigger sin in our lives. What a blessing that we can have instant relief from sin with just a short walk into the Reconciliation room for a dose of God’s mercy.

Sneaky Snake

I am guessing a number of us have seen more snakes around this summer. Was it due to the wet season? I don’t know. But my husband has gotten some with the lawn mower, and I’ve listened to our granddaughter scream when she saw snakes slithering near our garage and under the deck. Anyway, snakes like dark and damp places and there are plenty of those around. Perhaps some of you remember the old song, Sneaky Snake by Tom T. Hall. One has to wonder if he had some underlying message for us through some of the words in the song, such as—

“Boys and girls, take warning.” “Keep your eyes wide open and look for sneaky snake.” “Maybe you won’t see him, and maybe you won’t hear, but he’ll sneak up behind you.” “I don’t like old sneaky snake. He laughs too much you see.”

We all know the greatest sneaky snake is satan himself. Let some of these lyrics, be a reminder to us that he always likes to slither around. So beware of that sneaky snake always!

Beam vs. Splinter

Remember the Scripture about the beam and the splinter? If not, check it out at Matthew 7:3-5. Jesus speaks about judging others. I think we have all been guilty of this at one time or another. I heard the following homily regarding this Scripture that is good for us all who are striving toward holiness:

We humans tend to focus on the sins of others and neglect our own sinfulness. What happens is that we tend to say, “I’m not as bad as George over there who cheats on his income taxes.” We tend to compare ourselves to these people—trying to make ourselves look like angels. Jesus calls us to work on the beam in OUR eye first.

So we need to spend our time and effort prayerfully asking God, “How can I change the things in MY life that are sinful? How can I grow in holiness?”

We are called to hate the sin, but love the sinner. Think about someone who has a physical illness—say cancer. We separate the disease from the person. We hate the disease, but it doesn’t change the love we have for the person. If anything, I think it increases our love for them. Sin should do the same. Sin is a spiritual form of cancer. When someone sins, we should view this the same way: separate this cancer from the person who has it. Hate the sin but continue to love the sinner. But our tendency is to say, “That person is stubborn. I hate stubborn. And because I hate stubborn, I hate that person.” Whoa, wait a minute. Instead we should think, “That person has a tendency to be stubborn. I don’t like stubborn, but I still love the person.” Separate the sin out, but continue to love.

And, sometimes the things we don’t like about a person are the same tendencies we have in ourselves. It might be a reflection of ourselves and where I/we need to change.

So Jesus tells us to look at ourselves first and ask, “How can I be more compassionate toward others who have a splinter that is similar to the beam I have?” IF I CAN SEE MY OWN BEAM IN MY EYE, THAT I AM BROKEN AND SINFUL, AND IN NEED OF GOD’S MERCY, I can learn to be more understanding toward the one with a smaller splinter in their eye.

Scaring the Demons Away

I recently listened to a talk by an exorcist in the U.S. We read in the Bible about people being possessed and how Jesus was needed to drive demons out from a body. For some reason many don't seem to have the fear of demons today, but perhaps we all should. The exorcist mentioned that demons work on our weakest link. In other words, if being impatient is a downfall for us, things will be put in our path by demons to make you more impatient. If you have a tendency to steal or lust, be jealous or self-centered, demons will be right there, hard at work in those areas.

The exorcist priest went on to say that if we cling to God, attend Mass, go to confession regularly as soon as there is mortal sin on our soul, and use sacramentals (holy water, crucifixes, Bibles, holy medals, etc.) in our homes, and pray regularly, we have nothing to fear.

He said that if each person in the world would only sin one time a day, the world would still offend God over 8 billion times each day. And, we know that most of us sin in thought, word or deed more than once a day! We all know how important it is to remain close to God and to strive for heaven as our spiritual goal. But above our desire to reach heaven (and avoid hell), should be a desire to please God, if we love him above all else.

This priest also mentioned that God allows some temptations in our lives to challenge us to grow in faith. He gives us every opportunity for growth. We just need to be attentive to these situations: recognize the times of temptation, prayerfully discern how to react, and ask God for strength and wisdom in those moments.

This priest also said that the best way to begin to improve our spiritual life is through **discipline**. We shouldn't say, "I will say my prayers, or I will read Scripture sometime each day." Rather, say, "I will get up at 6:00 am every morning and pray for one-half hour every day," or "I will set my alarm for 3:00 pm to pray the Divine Mercy Chaplet each day." Internal discipline means you don't get lax in your God-time. It also means we need to strive to improve in small ways each day. For example, resist that second helping of food at meal time, or close our lips when we feel the urge to use harsh words. He said demons want a soft target, and if we don't stick with structure and discipline that they won't miss an opportunity to succeed.

In the end, however, demons know that God always wins. God has authority over them. When we use the weapons that God gives us to ward them off, God stands with us.

Thomas Merton said, "Power is made perfect in infirmity, and our very helplessness is all the more potent claim on that Divine Mercy Who calls to Himself the poor, the little ones and the heavily burdened." His reaction to a sermon on hell was that "the magnitude of the punishment gave me a special and particular understanding of the greatness of the evil of sin. But the final result was a great deepening and awakening of my soul, a real increase in spiritual profundity and an advance in faith and love and confidence in God, to Whom alone I could look for salvation from these things." May it do the same for each of us.

Goodness Gracious, Great Balls of Yarn

I got halfway through knitting a sock, when lo and behold, the yarn quit coming smoothly from the skein. When I would tug on the yarn, it just knotted up that much more in the center of the skein. I knew the yarn was tangled and that I'd have to find the other end of the yarn and begin to roll it into a ball before any more knitting could take place. I couldn't believe the mess I had! Tangled yarn everywhere. All I could think was, "OK, Aunt Aggie, you are probably laughing at me from heaven, or even shaking your head about this mess." (I could give Aunt Aggie a mess of yarn and she would have it rolled up so nicely for me in no time.)

Sometimes life becomes a tangled mess too. No matter what we do, it doesn't seem to change; it may even bring the threads of our lives to the breaking point. That's when we need to surrender that messiness over to God. And sometimes God will put people (like Aunt Aggie) into our lives to help us through those messes.

I recently attended a seminar on suicide prevention. It is important to watch for signs that others may be struggling and nearing a breaking point. Even though there are no clear-cut signs, there are some that do stand out—becoming withdrawn, signs of hopelessness, and the choice of words used. As fellow Christians, we need to take the time to speak with these friends. The psychologist giving the talk said, we must never fear asking them, "Have you ever considered suicide?" If we let them know we are asking because we care about them, they will be understanding.

We're on this earth to help one another grow closer to the kingdom of God. So may we always be mindful of the tangled messes our lives can get into, and be watchful of others who find it difficult to cope with the stresses in their lives. Likewise, if we find ourselves in a tangled mess and don't know where to turn, ask for help. There are many Aunt Aggies in the world willing to come to our aid.

I Am With You

When Moses encountered God at the burning bush, he asked, "Who do I tell people that you are?" God said to tell the Israelites, "**I AM** sent me to you." Note that **I Am** is the present tense. God doesn't say, "I was" or "I will be," but rather **I AM**. So always remember that God is present with us right now, always.

Jesus speaks the same in the New Testament when he says **I AM** the Bread of Life. **I AM** the light of the world. **I AM** the sheepgate. **I AM** the Good Shepherd. **I AM** the resurrection and the life. **I AM** the true vine.

God never changes. He is the constant in our lives. He told Moses this in the book of Exodus, that **HE IS** "the Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob." Then continued by saying, "This is my name forever; this is my title for all generations."

So always remember that God never leaves us. From the beginning of creation until today, He abides with us and forever loves us.

One of the most powerful concepts, one which is a sure cure for lack of confidence, is the thought that God is with you and helping you. This is one of the simplest teachings in religion, namely, that Almighty God will be your companion, will stand by you, help you, and see you through. No other idea is so powerful in developing self-confidence as this simple belief when practiced. To practice it simply affirm, 'God is with me; God is helping me; God is guiding me.' Spend several minutes each day visualizing his presence. Then practice believing that affirmation. —Norman Vincent Peale