



HEAVENLY HELPERS OF THE HEART OF JESUS

St. Margaret Mary and St. Padre Pio

by Sr. Judith Clare

October 2009

Dear Friends of the Heart of Christ,

This is my favorite time of year. Not only do I love the change in seasons—the crisper and cooler air, the new colors that delight the eye, the shifts in lighting and the quieter, darker mornings here in Tyringham—I also am so grateful that the Church has given us so many wonderful examples in the lives of the saints to inspire us and help us along our daily path. This is the time of year when we celebrate the lives of Padre Pio, St. Therese, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Faustina, St. Teresa of Avila, St. Margaret Mary, the archangels and guardian angels, Our Lady of the Rosary and so many other “big names” in the heavenly realms. They are given to us as models, guides, teachers and intercessors for all our needs.

Thinking about this October talk, I wanted to share with you some good thoughts from the life of St. Margaret Mary whose feast we celebrate on the 16th. Yet, I’ve been distracted somewhat in that... It started on the feast of Saint Padre Pio which happened to fall on a Wednesday this year. Wednesdays are special days here in our Tyringham Monastery when we have what we call “Early Night.” That means that we don’t have evening recreation and Night Prayer is said privately. In other words we are free and can, if we wish, go to bed early. For those who constantly live by a schedule and a bell, this is a much appreciated bit of freedom in our typically full days. That night of Padre Pio’s feast I went to the library to find something good to read and I came out with a little book called *Stories of Padre Pio*. What an insightful and spiritually enlightening read I found this to be. Could Padre Pio, I wondered, have had a special devotion to the Sacred Heart? The answer to that is a resounding yes! So today, we are going to spend some time with two great lovers of the Sacred Heart and see how they can help us in our spiritual lives and in our everyday routine existence as well.

Although St. Margaret Mary may be well-known for her great revelations from the Sacred Heart, many readers probably are not so familiar with her family background. Her early years, before she entered the Visitation Monastery at Paray-le-Monial (France) in 1671 at nearly 24 years of age, were quite rocky and filled with stress. One of five surviving children, she was born into a fairly well-off family in east central France. Her father was a royal notary and then a magistrate of several towns. However, when Margaret was only eight, he died, leaving Margaret and her mother subjected to domestic persecution and captivity in their own home by some of their relatives. Reading her *Autobiography* gives one a good idea of the constraining and suffocating atmosphere of her family life. This situation drew her more and more to mental prayer and propelled her closer to Christ in His

God be Praised!



suffering. Already the Lord was preparing her for her great mission—to revive, exalt and consecrate anew in the Church the devotion to Christ’s love. She would be the chosen instrument to present to the world the devotion to the Sacred Heart in its modern form. She would be the main conduit by which the treasures of that Divine Heart would be revealed to human hearts. Numerous revelations were made to Margaret Mary by the Sacred Heart, perhaps as many as forty. The most significant of these began on December 27, 1673 and culminated with the greatest of them all in June of 1675. Showing Margaret Mary His Heart, Jesus declared: “Behold this Heart which has so loved men...” The Lord goes on to lament the ingratitude He receives from the greater part of humanity, even from those consecrated to Him.

It is interesting to note that four centuries before the first great revelation on December 27, 1673 but also on the Feast of Saint John the Evangelist, this beloved disciple appeared to the Benedictine mystic St. Gertrude. She asked him why he, who had rested his head on Jesus’ chest, had not written anything regarding his Divine Master’s heart. John replied, “To speak of the sweetness of His Heart’s pulsations has been reserved for later times, that hearing of such things, the world, when growing old and losing its love of God, may regain its fervor.” Could this be applied to Margaret Mary’s times? Yes, indeed.

Delving into the 17th century when St. Margaret Mary received the messages of the Sacred Heart, one finds a period of marked spiritual indifference and a significant decline and distortion of the love of God. Margaret Mary lived her entire life under the reign of Louis XIV—the renowned Sun King, builder of the super opulent Versailles palace and France’s longest reigning monarch (1643-1715). The greatest King of France’s grand siècle, the country exercised pre-eminent power on the European continent during Louis’ time. It was also a period of tremendous ostentation and luxury at court and notably one of scandalous immorality and the heresy of Jansenism as well. Great corruption existed in the highest circles, where the example set by the royal family and its courtiers found many followers. One historian puts it this way, “Most shameful disorders were hidden beneath the brilliant surface of a society that appeared noble and stately when viewed superficially. Immorality was, as it were, a mark of good style and fine education and men boasted of things for which they should have blushed.”

Such was the era in which Margaret Mary lived. To counter this spiritual decadence, the Lord spilled the treasures of his Sacred Heart upon the world. How did Saint Margaret Mary react to such knowledge of man’s sad condition? She responded by willingly embracing Christ’s cross and pouring every drop of herself into her prayers and sacrificial offerings. “We must try,” she tells us, “to make ourselves living replicas of our crucified spouse by portraying Him in ourselves in all our actions; nothing so unites us to the Sacred Heart as the cross.” The sins of a whole age, all that was wanting in weak humanity’s love for God was to be expiated by Margaret Mary’s wholehearted acceptance of the cross in whatever form the Lord sent it. No wonder she was given as her special patron St. Francis of Assisi, the first recorded saint to have the stigmata. [This apparition took place on October



4, 1673.] We may wonder why St. Margaret Mary was so filled with the love of the cross. Couldn't she be more normal? Couldn't she be more like us and enjoy life a little? To understand our saint's constant insistence on suffering, humiliation, being buried in an eternal oblivion and despised by all, we need to realize that there was a burning desire within her heart for pure love, an incessant ardor to love as the Sacred Heart loves. This blazing flame of pure love was implanted into Margaret Mary's heart by the Lord himself. Pure love had to be completely devoid of self-love. It had to persist in the midst of aridity, personal discomfort, repudiation and even desolation. There were no half-measures with Margaret Mary. Her heart was undividedly centered on the Sacred Heart.

That is a lot for us weak earthlings, so distracted and preoccupied with self-concerns, to handle. Even though we may not measure up to such an exalted standard, we can give what we can, and we can gain immense spiritual and temporal graces by asking our holy sister for her help and heavenly intercession. Truly, the treasures of Christ's Heart are waiting to be poured out upon us. In our own era we are so badly in need of them.

A wonderful example of a lover of the Sacred Heart closer to our own time is the well-known Saint Padre Pio. Padre Pio, that great Capuchin priest and son of St. Francis of Assisi who also bore the stigmata of Christ, had a deep devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. One day as he was praying after mass on April 12, 1912, he had an extraordinary experience. He tells about it this way:

"When Mass was over I remained with Jesus in thanksgiving. Oh, how sweet was the colloquy with paradise that morning! It was such that although I want to tell you all about it, I cannot. There were things which cannot be translated into human language without losing their deep and heavenly meaning. The Heart of Jesus and my own—allow me to use the expression—were fused. No longer were two hearts beating but only one. My own heart had disappeared as a drop of water is lost in the ocean. Jesus was its paradise, its king. My joy was so intense and deep that I could bear no more and tears of happiness poured down my cheeks. When paradise is poured into a heart, this afflicted, exiled, weak and mortal heart cannot bear it without weeping."

Like St. Margaret Mary, Padre Pio's union with the Heart of Christ was focused on the Passion of the Lord and his sacrificial offering. Such an intimate union with the Sacred Heart made his prayer very powerful before the throne of God. In a letter to one of his spiritual daughters, the holy priest gives this piece of choice advice that we can all benefit from: "Do not ever lose heart when the tempest rages; place all your trust in the Heart of the most gentle Jesus and I might add, devoutly pester the Divine Heart." Devoutly pester the Divine Heart... What a marvelous recommendation from one who knew how to get his prayers answered! Earlier, I mentioned a fascinating little book on Padre Pio. The author Madame Katharina Tangari was a lay woman who personally knew Padre Pio and left some valuable first hand reminiscences of him. Her stories manifest how seemingly impossible situations can be totally reversed by the power of prayer and the intercession of God's



holy ones. I'd like to leave you with one of these stories that illustrates how we can touch the Heart of God by our sincere prayers and concrete sacrifices.

The author of the book *Stories of Padre Pio* relates what happened to her on her fourth visit to Padre Pio's friary in San Giovanni Rotondo, Italy in January of 1952. During her confession to Padre Pio, Tangari hoped to receive advice concerning a worrisome business contract. This contract was drawn up for 25 years and bound the woman and her family to some dishonest people.

Tangari says that as she was leaving Pio's confessional he asked her,

"Do you want anything?"

"That contract," she replied.

Padre Pio responded with silence.

After a moment he asked again, "You don't want anything else?"

"Padre Pio, that contract..."

Again no answer came from the saintly priest. It seemed Pio had become deaf and dumb. He repeated for the third time his question. Finally, Tangari left the confessional without receiving her desired advice. She was highly disappointed. Here she had come to resolve the difficult question of the harmful contract and had received no answer from Padre Pio. As she was saying her penance, a great ray of sunshine illuminated for a few seconds a painting that had been obscured in the darkness. It was of the Capuchin brother Saint Conrad of Parzham. Twice more the beam returned to light up the painting. But seeing no significance in the three rays of sunlight, Tangari left.

About a month later, she was talking to a Franciscan priest and requested a certain book from him. Not finding the book that was asked for, the priest substituted another one. By chance it was the life of St. Conrad of Parzham! Reading with great interest about the saint, Tangari found out that Conrad had spent most of his life at the great Marian shrine of Altotting in southern Germany. Taking this to be an invitation to visit there, she planned to stop at the shrine on an upcoming trip. There she prayed before the relics of St. Conrad and entrusted to him all the matters weighing on her heart. While there she learned of a pious custom performed by the faithful who had no earthly solutions to desperate problems. They would promise to carry a cross around the chapel while imploring heaven's assistance. After Mass, Tangari solemnly made her promise that if she were delivered from the irksome contract, she too would perform the penance of carrying the cross. In less than two months, the contract that was to last 25 years was cancelled. So let us take heart and not lose hope. We too can entrust our difficulties to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, asking Him through the intercession of his holy ones to come to our aid and to guide us on our earthly journey. He desires to hear and heed our prayers.