



PESTERING THE HEART OF JESUS IN PRAYER

by Sister Judith Clare

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Dear Friends of the Heart of Christ

When I was a little girl I often looked at the picture in my missal of St. Margaret Mary. To a child's mind, she appeared as a very special holy person, wearing the long habit of a dedicated nun and being very close to the Sacred Heart. In my mind's eye I can still see that picture, never dreaming at that time that I would someday be wearing that same kind of habit and giving talks on the Sacred Heart of Jesus. When I entered the Visitation Monastery in Wilmington, Delaware over 30 years ago, I had originally planned to enter on October 7th, a significant day for my family since it was my parents' wedding anniversary. The superior asked me to come earlier because she wanted me to accompany the community to the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, DC for their historic visit with other religious to see Pope John Paul II. So I chose instead to enter on October 4th, the feast of the great Saint Francis of Assisi.

As I was nervously getting ready to leave that morning, I received a phone call from my very good friend who was to drive me to Wilmington-about 3 hours away from where I lived in Pennsylvania. She told me that she was calling from the hospital where she had taken her mother that morning and that her mom had suffered a slight heart attack. Then she gently told me that she would not be able to drive me that day. I was stunned. Now what! When I called the monastery to explain that I would not be coming that day, a lay helper answered the phone telling me that the Sisters were all in Philadelphia seeing the Pope and that they would be home at 3:00 to receive their new postulant who was expected. I told her that I was that new postulant and I would not be there! Well, subsequently, I entered the next day-somewhat disappointed because it was only October 5th and nobody's special feast day. Yet, God's plans are always bigger than ours. October 5th happened to be a First Friday and a very special day in the Visitation. Years later, it became the feast day of a new saint-Faustina Kowalska. Needless to say, I never imagined that someday we would move to the Berkshires and have the Marianas as our chaplains who spread the devotion to the Divine Mercy.

I share these thoughts with you because God's vision and plans for us are so much larger than our limited horizons.

So often in the course of my 30 years of religious life people have asked us about our prayer life. And as contemplatives in the church, we are supposed to be professional prayers. Everything we do, whether in church or out of church is supposed to lead us into prayer and a prayerful disposition. As Visitation Nuns we have one of the greatest models of prayer that the Church gives us-Saint

God be Praised!



Margaret Mary. Even though she lived from 1647-1690, her message and her example are still relevant today. But before I talk about her. I'd like to consider some preliminaries about prayer.

Prayer is so powerful that for some people it's scary. I think it is scary for some secular-minded people because prayer can change things. For example, recently I read an article about the 40 Days of Life campaign. This is a group of pro-life citizens who prays for 40 days non-stop outside of abortion facilities. Imagine 40 days of continuous prayer storming heaven for a cherished cause. The article went on to tell of the self-announced termination of a large abortion center in Florida that was unexpectedly closed after 40 days of the peaceful, prayerful presence of faithful Christians who prayed that the abortions would cease. Could this just be a coincidence? I don't think so. It's God working in mysterious ways, answering our fervent prayers. Prayer can and does solve problems and dilemmas that seem out of the power of human resources to resolve.

Prayer is our life-line to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. What is prayer? Very simply, I would say that prayer is remembering God's presence. God/the Sacred Heart is always with us. Yes. ALWAYS. All we need to do is remind ourselves of this fact to be in contact with the greatest source of help, comfort, healing and power there is. The gospel's admonition "to pray always" means to be aware of God's presence and to invite that Divine Presence into our lives and into everything we do. St. Francis de Sales used to say that he never went longer than 15 minutes without thinking about God's presence. Getting in the habit of doing this means that we are constantly praying.

Over the past 30 years that I have been a contemplative nun, I have witnessed the power of prayer to change people and circumstances. Situations that were literally impossible, or very complicated, or exceedingly delicate or black as black could be, I have seen reverse because of prayer. I am not talking about chance or fate. Personally, I do not believe that there are such things in the spiritual life but that the hand and heart of God are always at work directing all that befalls us. Alfred Lord Tennyson wrote that "more things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of." I can attest to this beyond a doubt because of my own personal experiences. The Sacred Heart of Jesus has assured us through St. Margaret Mary: "If you believe you will see the power of my Heart." If we put forth a sincere effort to pray and to entrust all the problem areas of our life to the Heart of Jesus, we can be absolutely sure our prayer will be heard. Things may not turn out exactly as we expected, but we can be sure that they will turn out in a way that will lead to even greater good in the end.

May I share two stories with you. Several months ago, a Sister in our community received an urgent prayer request from a member of her family. It involved a young mother in her 30's with two small children. The mother, whose name is Marion, was stricken with a severe aneurysm that was extremely life-threatening. The only way to save her was a very risky operation which could result in her death or in a vegetable-like state. The relatives of our Sister who are friends of Marion called



begging for our prayers. They related how one of Marion's co-workers, an atheist, even vowed to become a believer if she pulled out of this. Much was at stake. We were all anxious to get the news of how Marion's operation went. I know for myself that when it was announced that Marion had survived the surgery, I breathed a sigh of relief. However, the next day, we heard that Marion was comatose and then had died. My heart sunk. I could only think that God knew what he was doing. The thought of an atheist now firmly entrenched in his conviction that God did not care and does not exist anyway was a bitter pill to swallow. However, the story was not ended. Several days later we were presented with the unbelievable news that Marion was still living and doing a little better. Apparently, everyone was sure from her vital signs that she was brain dead and not going to make it so that it was announced her death was imminent. But then for some inexplicable reason she started to get better. Very tiny improvements shifted her back into the living stage and slowly, very slowly she is improving.

Here is another story that happened several years ago but I will never forget it. It involved a woman we know from Wilmington who has a great love of the Sacred Heart and was recently here on retreat. She wrote us a letter that went like this:

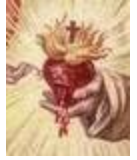
I think I told you about my brother Joey's drinking problem. Well, things continued to worsen-I was so worried about him. Really terrified. His marriage was falling apart, his life was falling apart. I really feared he would commit suicide. That's how bad it was. My sister-in-law was calling me and crying. She'd go from wanting to throw him out to wanting to help him. I was praying and praying-and asking everyone else to pray. Finally, a good friend of mine told me that I may have to change my prayer. She said that she had gone through the same situation with her son. She finally had to say to the Lord, "Help, him, Lord, whatever it takes." She told me that she thought I had to say this same prayer. Believe me when I tell you that this was the hardest prayer I've ever prayed in my life. Because I didn't know what "whatever it takes" would be. And sure enough, things went from very bad to worse! He was drinking everyday and having black-outs-something that never happened to him before. But I kept taking a deep breath and praying that prayer. Then, the miracle happened. The Saturday before Christmas we received a phone call from Joey asking us to pray for him, that he was going for a rehab program for two weeks... Well, the Lord answered our prayers wonderfully well. Beyond our expectations!

When Joey called us two weeks later upon his return home, the first thing he said was how different this rehab center was than the other one he was in. I told him, of course, that's because Jesus was right in the midst of this one. He then told me that he attended Mass every day while he was there and went to confession for the first time in 30 years. Praise God! So the miracle continues...

These are clear cut evidence for me that the Lord hears our heartfelt prayers because he is all love and mercy.

God be Praised!

Live+ Jesus



It was to a very hidden soul that a reminder of Christ's burning love was revealed to humanity and that soul was, of course, Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque. Even though she lived so long ago, St. Margaret Mary's revelations from the Sacred Heart of Jesus are still very powerful and very meaningful in today's world. Love never grows old when it is sincere and sacrificial. The Lord carefully prepared His servant for her great mission through suffering, prayer and special guidance. In this way she was able to present to the world the devotion to the Sacred Heart in its modern form.

God be Praised!