



Dolorosa

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THE PERFECT EFFORT

A Message of Warning, Love, and Hope

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The year 1789 was one that was destined to change the course of history for the worse. In that year the anti-Catholic spirit of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation gave way to the anti-God French Revolution.

During the French Revolution, especially during the Reign of Terror, countless atrocities were perpetrated against Almighty God, the Catholic Church, and the faithful as a whole. In the name of liberty, equality, and fraternity, thousands upon thousands of people were savagely murdered by the revolutionaries. Churches were plundered and sacred vessels were stolen. Statues were desecrated and smashed to pieces. Altars, sacred books, relics of the saints, crucifixes, and holy pictures were publicly burned in the streets while the mobs danced around them, blaspheming Almighty God. Numerous Catholic priests and religious died martyrs; many others were exiled from the country. The worship of God was forbidden. Instead, the revolutionaries enthroned the goddess of reason on the high altar of the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris for the mobs to worship.

By 1799 the revolution as a political force came to an end, but its anti-religious spirit lived on. The so-called intellectuals of France repeated the same message in the classroom and in the books, newspapers, and magazines of the day: "Look at the progress man has made in science and in other studies. We are so close

to solving all the problems of our day. A new day is dawning for man. We no longer need a God."

In *The Woman Shall Conquer*, Don Sharkey writes:

From France, the revolt against God spread throughout the world, like a great insidious cancer. Catholic and Protestant countries alike were affected by it and are still suffering from its effects. It became unfashionable to talk about God. The only things that mattered were the things of this world. The nineteenth century was the century of materialism. (9)

Such was the state of the world in the wake of the French Revolution.

When the Blessed Virgin Mary looked down at the world of 1830, she saw, as Don Sharkey says, "a world that had revolted against her, against the Church, against God Himself" (9). As a loving Mother, Our Lady knew that she must do something to help her children. So, in 1830 she went on the offensive against the powers of hell. In that year she made the first of a series of apparitions designed to win the modern world back to her divine Son. Interestingly, as Don Sharkey points out, "[Our Lady] began [her] campaign in the heart of the enemy's territory—in Paris" (11).

As a loving Mother, Our Lady knew that she must do something to help her children. So, in 1830 she went on the offensive against the powers of hell. In that year she made the first of a series of apparitions designed to win the modern world back to her divine Son.

On the night of July 18, 1830, Zoé Catherine Labouré, a postulant of the Daughters of Charity at the convent in Paris, awoke to find a child standing at her bedside. He was clothed in white with a golden light surrounding him. He appeared to be about four or five years old. “At eleven-thirty,” Saint Catherine later recounted, “I heard someone calling my name: Sister, Sister, Sister!” Catherine sat up, surprised and slightly troubled.

“Come to the chapel,” the child said. “Get up quickly and come to the chapel: the Blessed Virgin is waiting for you there.”



“How can I [do that] . . . without waking [the other Sisters]?” Catherine asked. “Someone will hear me.”

“Be at ease,” the child replied, “it is eleven-thirty; everyone is asleep. I will come with you” (Sharkey 15; Dirvin 69).

Without a moment’s hesitation, Catherine rose from her bed and began following the mysterious child. What happened next is best described in Catherine’s own words, which are related by Father Joseph I. Dirvin, C.M., in *A Woman Clothed With The Sun*:

He followed me, or rather I followed him; he kept to my left, and was surrounded with rays of light. Wherever we went, the lights were lit, a fact which astonished me very much. But my surprise was greatest at the threshold of the chapel: the door opened of itself, the child scarcely having touched it with the tip of his finger. It was the height of everything, to see that all the torches and tapers were burning—it reminded me of midnight Mass. (70)

The child led Catherine to the altar rail where she knelt down. She had been kneeling there for some time when the child broke the silence and announced, “Here is the Blessed Virgin; here she is.” A sound like the rustling of silk filled the chapel. Catherine looked up and saw before her eyes a Lady of incomparable beauty standing at the foot of the altar. She was dressed in an ivory robe and wearing a blue mantle. The Lady stepped forward and sat in the chair which was usually reserved for the spiritual director of the convent.

“It would be impossible for me to describe what I felt at that moment, or what passed within me,” Saint Catherine later wrote. “Looking upon the Blessed Virgin, I flung myself toward her, and falling upon my knees on the altar steps, I rested my hands in her lap. There a moment passed, the sweetest of my life” (71).

“My child,” the Blessed Virgin said, “God wishes you to undertake a mission. You will have much to suffer, but you will rise above these sufferings by reflecting that what you do is for the glory of God” (72).

Our Lady then told Catherine many things. Much of her message was for Catherine alone and has not been made known to us. “The words which we do know,” says Don Sharkey, “began Mary’s message to the modern world, a message which [culminated] at Fatima and which has not yet been concluded” (16).

“The times are very evil,” Our Lady said. “Sorrows will befall France; the throne will be

overturned. The whole world will be plunged into every kind of misery” (Dirvin 72). As she said, this Saint Catherine notes that Our Lady’s countenance was one of distress.

“But come to the foot of the altar,” the Blessed Virgin continued. “Here great graces will be poured out upon all who ask them with confidence and fervor. They will be bestowed upon the great and upon the small” (Sharkey 16).

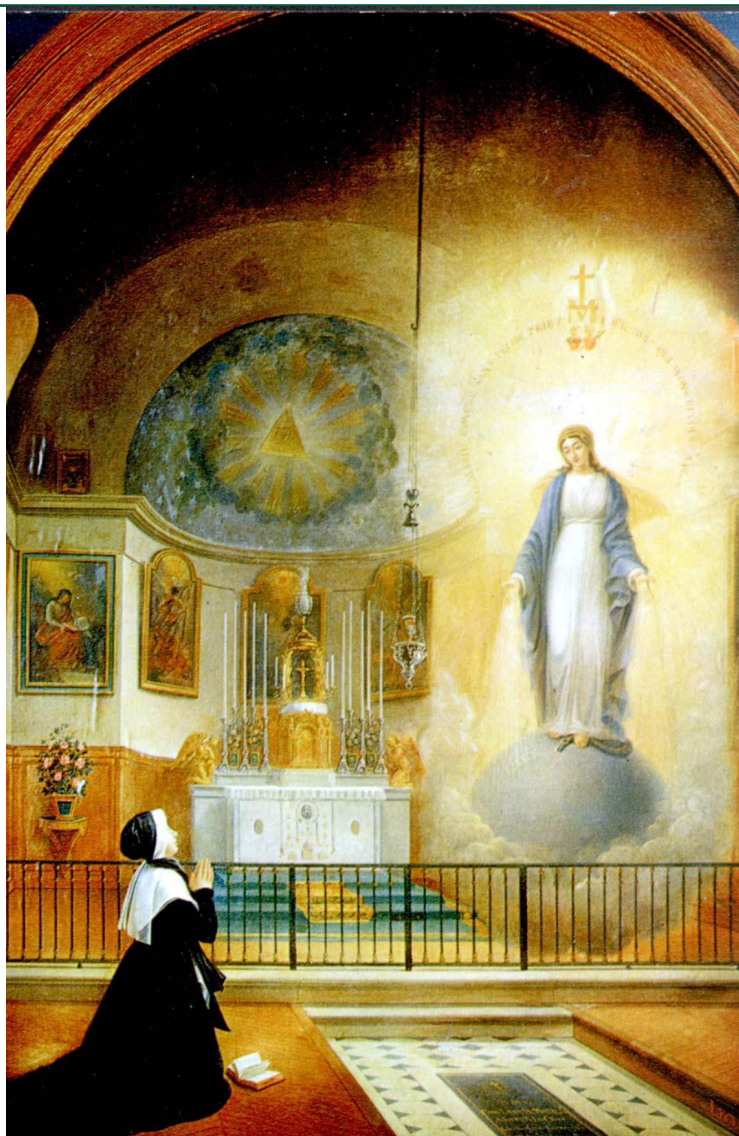
At this point, Saint Catherine tells us that Our Lady had tears in her eyes and that her anguish was depicted on her face.

“There will be an abundance of sorrows, and the danger will be great,” the Blessed Virgin said. “The moment will come when the danger will be extreme. It will seem that all is lost. At that time, I will be with you. Have confidence” (Dirvin 73).

After telling Saint Catherine some things about the Daughters of Charity in general, she proceeded to foretell some rather alarming events which were to befall France, as Catherine understood it, by 1870. “My child,” Our Lady said, “the cross will be treated with contempt; they will hurl it to the ground. Blood will flow; they will open up again the side of Our Lord. The streets will run with blood. . . . the whole world will be in sadness” (74).

As it neared 1:30 a.m., Our Lady prepared to leave Catherine. Before departing, the Blessed Virgin left her with a few encouraging words. “My eyes are ever upon you,” Our Lady said. “I shall grant you many graces. Special graces will be given to all who ask them, but people must pray” (Sharkey 16-17).

Four months later on November 27th, Our Lady again appeared to Saint Catherine Labouré. During this apparition she revealed to Saint Catherine her mission. Our Lady asked her to have a medal struck according to the vision she saw over the high altar of the chapel. We know this medal as the Medal of the Immaculate Conception or, more commonly, as the Miraculous Medal. “All those who wear it with confidence,” Our Lady promised, “will receive great graces.”



The Mother of God appeared to Saint Catherine once more in December 1830 to repeat her request that a medal be made. After that, Catherine saw Our Lady no more. Saint Catherine lived her life in the silence of the cloister for the next forty-six years. Having made Our Lady’s request known, she died peacefully on December 31, 1876.

“My eyes are ever upon you. I shall grant you many graces. Special graces will be given to all who ask them, but people must pray.”

When people hear the name of Saint Catherine Labouré, they often think immediately of the Miraculous Medal. Her name is perpetually linked to Our Lady’s powerful sacramental. What many people do not realize, however, is that Our Lady revealed more to Saint Catherine than just the design for the Miraculous Medal and the commission to have



—Our Lady of Grace. Charles Bosseron Chambers.

it made. Our Lady foretold events that would befall France and the world. She even alluded to World War I as a time when “the whole world [would] be plunged into every kind of misery” (Dirvin 74). Furthermore, our heavenly Mother promised all her children grace and protection during the dark times that were to come. “But,” she said, “people must pray.” Our Lady thus revealed to Saint Catherine one of the great solutions to the problems of modern times and one of the powerful weapons in the spiritual combat—prayer.

We live at a time that is not so different from that in which Saint Catherine Labouré lived. If anything, these days are worse. The effects of the French Revolution are still felt today but to an even greater degree. In classrooms and lecture halls, in books and magazines, on television and on the Internet, we hear the same message that was broadcast during the French Revolution: “Look at the progress man has made in science, in technology, and in other fields. A new day is dawning for man. We no longer need a God.” As a result, we have the steady rise of atheism and anti-religion in our world.

Then, there is the spirit of worldliness or materialism. If, as Don Sharkey said, the nineteenth century was the century of materialism, how much more so is this true of the twenty-first century? If, as he wrote, it was unfashionable to talk about God then, how much more so is that the case today? The only things

that seem to matter to many people are material goods. People have become so preoccupied with the gadgets, the news, the entertainment of today, that they leave little—if any—time for God. So much time is given to the material, that the spiritual is neglected. Sadly, this is true some Catholics, as much as of non-Catholics.

Is it any wonder, then, that the world is in so sorry and sinful a state? Regarding the widespread perversion and vice in our country alone, I have been asked on numerous occasions, “Father, how has it come to this?” “How can people behave this way?” The answer is quite simple: it is because mankind has turned from his Creator and Redeemer. When one removes God from society, the morals are not far behind. This did not happen overnight. Little by little, the devil sewed seeds of revolt in the minds of men. These seeds sprouted into outright revolution, first on the anti-Catholic level in the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century and then on the anti-God level in the French Revolution of the 18th century.

“The times,” the Blessed Virgin said, “are very evil. . . . There will be an abundance of sorrows, and the danger will be great. The moment will come when the danger will be extreme. It will seem that all is lost. At that time, I will be with you. Have confidence.” When we look at the state of the world, it does indeed seem, at times, like all is lost. But, we must never lose confidence. We must trust that God knows what He is doing and that Our Lady’s eyes are ever upon us. We must also strive to give a perfect effort in carrying out Our Lady’s request at Paris in 1830. “People must pray,” she said. If prayer was essential when Our Lady appeared 188 years ago, how much more is it needed today?

“The times,” the Blessed Virgin said, “are very evil. . . . the danger will be great. The moment will come when the danger will be extreme. It will seem that all is lost. At that time, I will be with you.”

Very simply, prayer is the lifting of our minds and hearts to God. “Many pray,” says Saint Alphonsus, “but they pray negligently, and thus they do not obtain what they desire.” In other words, they lack one or more of the qualities that make prayer efficacious. Saints and theologians enumerate five qualities that make our prayer more favorably heard by Almighty God: (1) intention, (2) humility, (3) confidence, (4) perseverance, and (5) attention.

Intention

When we begin our prayer, it is helpful to form an

intention—someone or something for which we pray. Saint Augustine tells us that we are permitted to pray for anything that is lawful to desire. In other words, we can pray for good in general and in particular, spiritual blessings, and even material goods provided they are not the final end.

Humility

Our prayer must be humble. In other words, we must pray with the understanding that we are utterly dependent upon Almighty God and that without Him, we are utterly powerless to do any good. To cultivate this quality, it is helpful to formulate this mindset when beginning our prayer: “My Lord, I know that without Thee I am nothing. I cannot obtain what I ask on my own. If it is Thy will, please grant my request.”

Confidence

“He who prays with confidence,” says Saint Alphonsus, obtains what he asks.” Our Lady herself pointed this out to Saint Catherine. “Great graces,” she said, “will be poured out upon all who ask them with confidence.” When we pray, then, we must not pray with the attitude: “maybe God will answer my prayer.” Rather, we must pray with the attitude: “God will answer my prayer, and He will answer it in the way that is best for me.” In one of his sermons, Saint Alphonsus tells us that God grants our petitions only when they are conducive to our spiritual welfare, that is, only when they will help us save our souls. Otherwise, He refuses them because He loves us and because He knows that they would be harmful to our souls.

Perseverance

We must continue in our prayer in spite of the obstacles or the feelings of discouragement that may beset us. We cannot put a time limit on God. Sometimes He wants us to keep asking Him as a child is wont to ask his father for

something over and over again. Look at Saint Monica. She prayed for years for the conversion of her husband and for the conversion of her son Augustine. She is an admirable example of perseverance in prayer. Let us strive to imitate her.

Attention

Attention is perhaps the quality that is most lacking in prayer. Willful distraction is the destruction of prayer. We must therefore be ever on guard against allowing ourselves to be willfully distracted while praying. Distractions, however, will come of their own. We are only human. When they do, we should calmly turn our mind from them and back to our prayer. They may return over and over again, but as long as they are not willful, they do not harm our prayer. In fact, they do just the opposite. Seeing us resolutely turn from distraction is very pleasing to Our Divine Savior and thus makes our prayer more pleasing to Him. For this reason Saint Francis de Sales wrote, “If the heart wanders or is distracted, bring it back to the point [of prayer] quite gently and replace it in its Master’s presence. Even if you did nothing during that [time of prayer] but bring your heart back and place it again in Our Lord’s presence, though it went away every time you brought it back, your [time] would be very well employed.”

“Many pray,” says Saint Alphonsus, “but they pray negligently, and thus they do not obtain what they desire.”

When the world was in the midst of a revolt against God, His Mother appeared to a young French Sister to deliver the first of many messages to the modern world. It was, as all her messages have been, a message of warning, of love, of hope. While so many have failed to listen to her admonitions down through the years, let us at least take them to heart. “People must pray,” Our Lady said. We must pray for ourselves, for our family and friends, for the Church, and for our country.

May we ever bear in mind that prayer, not politics or diplomacy, not science or technology, is the solution to the problems of today. If we therefore strive to pray well, we will make a difference in this world and many special graces will be given to us. For Our Divine Savior has promised: “Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and you shall find: knock, and it shall be opened to you” (Matt. 7:7-8).

Chapel of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal. Paris, France.

