

THE SWEETEST AFFLICTION

THERE ONCE was a young man who, like many before or since, was a “prodigal son.” One day he found himself in the uncomfortable position of staring at a carved wooden statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary miraculously shedding tears. What’s more, this took place only minutes after he had taunted God to make this statue weep, if He could. That his family, who had hoped for this very thing, had cajoled him into being at this rectory and before this statue, was standing by waiting (no doubt) to hurry back news of his reaction to relatives who had long since labeled him a “black sheep atheist,” only aggravated the situation.

So he gives the statue careful scrutiny, hoping to find some natural explanation for the tears. He searches for water portals, mechanical parts, *anything* that could expose this as a hoax and return him to his comfortable, godless life. He finds none. The situation rapidly turns into a major crisis and just when his life seemed so nicely in place otherwise; suddenly, this freak occurrence threatens to turn it upside down and dump it at *her* feet!

A few minutes later, he asks the stout pastor, the keeper of the statue, to hear his confession.

“Now *she’s* got you!” His girlfriend later screams at him. Poor fellow. It’s one version of an experience, not all that uncommon; one which we all may have heard witnessed – maybe more than once, but which relatively few have personally experienced. Yet for him and all the other “select,” eventually it must sink in that they were lovingly conquered by Our Lady with a sort of unshakable “bug.”



G.K. Chesterton, drawing from his own experience, wryly referred to such an affliction in responding to a critique speculating that Chaucer must have “passed through a period of intense devotion, more especially towards the Virgin Mary.” “It does occur from time to time,” he said, “I do not quite understand why Chaucer must have *‘passed through’* this fit of devotion; as if he had Mariolatry like the measles. Even an amateur who has encountered this malady may be allowed to testify that it does not usually visit its victim for a brief *‘period’*; it is generally chronic and (in some sad cases I have known) quite incurable.”

A profound reality is thinly veiled here. St. Bernardine of Siena explains that Mary was “preordained in God’s mind before all creation,” in order that she “might beget God as man.” Thus, the world was made for the Immaculate Queen in God’s Mind; and she, in the fullness of time, was created for God. It is the greatest irony that this august Queen of all creation, Mother of all mothers, should often have to tearfully (La Salette is only one example) “afflict” her recalcitrant children with signs of her broken Immaculate Heart. Is it not a terrible risk that she takes? What further measures may she resort to if her children go unmoved by this extreme, or aren’t “infected” at the sight? Ah, but this is the affliction, as it were, at the other end, which is the pearl of great price: the love *of* the Immaculate Heart of Mary. That is, her love for *us!*

Indeed, this Immaculate Heart is as immanent, accessible, and necessary to our souls as the air we are so

wont to take for granted. Borrowing the powerful analogy of Gerard Manley Hopkins in his famous poem, *The Blessed Virgin Mary Compared to the Air We Breathe*, she abides where the Trinity abides; where Jesus is conceived again, but in *us*, through the Immaculate One. In the words of St. Maximilian Maria Kolbe, whose heart was wonderfully afflicted by love of Our Lady:

“Mary is the one closest to God, while we are closest to her, and consequently, through her to God Himself... In the womb of the Immaculate, the soul is reborn in the form of Jesus Christ. She must nourish the soul with the milk of her grace, lovingly care for it, and educate it, just as she nourished, cared for, and educated Jesus. On her lap the soul must learn how to know and love Jesus. It must draw love for Him from her heart, or even love Him with her heart, and become like unto Him by means of love. She alone must instruct each one of us in every moment; She must lead us, transform us into herself, in such wise that it is no longer we who live, but she in us, just as Jesus lives in her and the Father in the Son. Let us allow her to do with us and by means of us whatever she desires and surely she will accomplish miracles of grace: we will become saints and great saints.”

Bl. Edward Poppe (d.1924), a “priest on fire,” according to Pope St. John Paul II, and a zealous promoter – even then – of the Eucharistic Crusade for young people said:

“Mary will cover you with her shadow, and you will remain calm and confident. She will start the journey with you and lead you by secret shortcuts. You will not be spared suffering, but she will make you hungry for it, as if for an essential food. Ah, Mary! Mary! Her name will be like honey and balm on your lips. Mary! Mary! Ave Maria! Who can resist? Tell me, who will be lost with the Ave Maria?”

“Sick” with love for Our Lady, Fr. Frederick Faber wrote these lyrics to “*Mother of Mercy, Day by Day*”:

*“Mother of Mercy, day by day
My love of thee grows more and more.
Thy gifts are strewn upon my way,
Like sands upon the great sea shore.
Though poverty and work and woe
The masters of my life may be,
When times are worst who does not know
Darkness is light with love of thee?
Give me the grace to love thee more,
Jesus will give if thou wilt plead;
And Mother, when life’s cares are o’er
Oh, I shall love thee then indeed.”*

And St. Bonaventure said, “To say that you are my Mother is next to nothing; O Mary, you are my absolute love!” And, again, St. Maximilian: “We should never fear loving Our Lady too much; we will never come to love her as Jesus loved her.”

Would you consider it excessive to call your mother on the phone every day if you could? Many people adopt this habit. The point is not so much what they converse

about, for love is exchanged just in the act of calling. Your daily Rosary is the “telephone” call to Our Blessed Mother, and from heart to heart she says far more to us than we ever realize. Remember her words at Guadalupe: “Am I not here who am your Mother? Are you not under my shadow and protection? Am I not the source of your joy? Are you not in the hollow of my mantle, in the crossing of my arms? Do you have need of anything else? Let nothing afflict you, disturb you.”

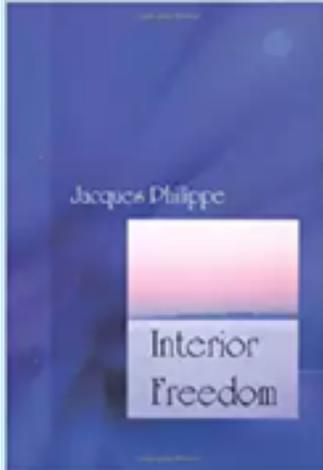
So, why stop at a daily Rosary? Why not consecrate yourself totally to her? Really get the “bug!” Really let her conquer you! Christ came to us through Mary. He desires we come to Him through her. Consecrating ourselves to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, we consecrate ourselves to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. In a word, to know and find Mary is to know and find Jesus ... and eternal happiness.



“We should never fear loving Our Lady too much; we will never come to love her as Jesus loved her.”

- St. Maximilian Kolbe

BOOK RECOMMENDATION



“Every Christian needs to discover that even in the most unfavorable outward circumstances we possess within ourselves a space of freedom that nobody can take away, because God is its source and guarantee.”

With these words author Jacques Philippe begins his small spiritual treatise on *Interior Freedom*. We live in an age where the notion of freedom is often confused with that of license. Ironically, this skewed notion of freedom leads people

into the worst forms of slavery. Jacques Philippe manifests in this spiritual classic that true freedom is only possible with an ever-deepening exercise of the theological virtues of faith, hope and love – those virtues that unite us to God directly. True human freedom is rooted in our communion with God. Fr. Philippe brings these virtues alive in a new way by applying their exercise to ourselves and to the particular, concrete circumstances of life. This work is anything but a dry and abstract treatment of the subject. Every page breathes the comfort and light of the Holy Spirit. It challenges us to look on the various aspects of our lives with new eyes, from the perspective of God Himself and invites us into a deeper union of trust in Him, very much in harmony with the Little Way of St. Therese. Highly recommended.