

3. February 2024

Devotions for the first five Saturdays

According to the traditional calendar, today, 3 February, we can choose to celebrate the memorial of Saint Blaise or the first Saturday of the month to make reparation for sins against the Immaculate Heart of Mary. On this occasion, I would like to focus on the so-called "Five First Saturdays Devotion". Let us therefore listen to the Gospel for this devotion:

Jn 19:25-27

Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Mag'dalene. When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

The veneration of the Blessed Virgin is very important for the faithful. In her apparitions, she herself constantly reminds us of the essentials of the faith and offers us help to counteract what threatens it.

After the Second World War, on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, Pope Pius XII consecrated all humanity to the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Under the symbol of the Heart of Mary, the Church venerates the unique holiness of her soul and, above all, her ardent love for God.

Through various devotions we are invited to take refuge in the heart of the Mother of God and to consecrate ourselves to her. This is most meaningful when we remember that the heart is the "seat of love". When we say to someone: "My heart is yours", we are letting that person know that we love him/her. If we can tell God that He is the owner of our heart, then we are loving Him as He wishes and as He has already laid down in the first commandment. If all people fulfilled this requirement of love and righteousness towards God, there would be true peace on earth and evil could not exist.

But in the Old Testament our Father often laments that the hearts of His people have turned away from Him (cf. e.g. Isa 29:13). When this happens, it also results in everything that separates us from our neighbour, everything that plunges us deeper and deeper into misery.

Our Heavenly Father preserved the Virgin Mary from original sin. He did so in view of the incarnation of His Son in her womb and for the salvation of mankind. She was to be the "new Eve" who would not succumb to the temptation of the devil, but who would fully accomplish God's will and be included in His plan of salvation. Mary responded to God's call with total self-giving and gave birth to the Saviour of humanity, Our Lord Jesus Christ: true God and true man.

The Mother of Jesus, who was also His disciple, followed her Son to the foot of the Cross. Her love never wavered, and even in those difficult hours when her Son was giving His life for humanity, she said "yes" to God's will. As we hear in today's Gospel, the Lord made her the Mother of the faithful.

Thanks to her significant apparitions throughout history, we know that the Virgin Mary continues to be preoccupied with the concerns of humanity. One such apparition, which has left its mark on the life of the Church, took place in Fatima in 1917. The events are well documented. I will therefore only highlight a few points.

Sister Lucia, one of the three visionaries, recalls that in the sixth apparition Our Lady said to them: *"Let them offend Our Lord God no more, for He is already much offended"*.

In the fourth apparition, on 19 August 1917, she said: *"Pray much and make sacrifices for sinners, for many souls go to hell because there is no one to make sacrifices for them"*.

In the third apparition, on the 13th of July 1917, Our Lady asked the little shepherds: *"Do you wish to offer yourselves to God to endure all the sufferings that He may be pleased to send you, as both an act of reparation for the sins with which He is offended and an act of supplication for the conversion of sinners?"*

During this apparition, Our Lady gave the children a glimpse of hell, which prompted them to pray even more that souls might not be damned.

Catholic piety suggests concrete actions to respond to Our Lady's call to pray and sacrifice for those who offend God with their sins. The Holy Rosary is part of this. Here the concept of "atonement" must be kept in mind. Every sin is an offence against God's love, and the faithful, aware of this and concerned for the eternal salvation of sinners, offer their love to the Lord in reparation for those who do not love Him. They unite their sacrifices and labours to the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross to atone for the sins of mankind. It is in this spirit that the "devotion of the five first Saturdays", requested by Our Lady herself, should be understood.

This devotion consists of performing various acts of piety every first Saturday of the month, for five consecutive months, with the intention of making reparation for sins against the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The acts of devotion on the first Saturday of each month are: going to confession, receiving Holy Communion, praying the entire Rosary and keeping Mary company for at least fifteen minutes, meditating on the fifteen mysteries of the Rosary.

The Lord explained to one of the visionaries that the number of five Saturdays is due to the fact that "there are five types of offences and blasphemies against the Immaculate Heart of Mary":

1. Blasphemies against the Immaculate Conception;
2. against her Perpetual Virginity;
3. against her Divine Maternity and at the same time the refusal to recognize her as the Mother of all mankind.
4. Blasphemies of those who seek openly to foster in the hearts of children indifference or contempt and even hatred for this Immaculate Mother.
5. The offenses of those who directly outrage Her in her holy images.

We can conclude that any offence against the Virgin Mary is also an offence against God. By making reparation to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, we also make reparation to Our Lord. I can only advise all those who listen to me to study the Message of Fatima and to include in their piety the concept of reparation (atonement). It would be a great work of love for God and neighbour, and countless souls could be saved.