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THE LIVES OF THE SAINTS

Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque and the Heart of the Redeemer

Those who receive a special commission from the Lord do not always have an easy time of it. They encounter resistance of all kinds, often from the people closest to them. However, it is precisely in such circumstances, when the chosen ones cling to their mission despite all the difficulties, that God's work bears fruit, revealing its divine origin.

This was the case with Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque, whose feast day we celebrate today according to the traditional calendar.

She was born on July 22, 1647, in Burgundy, France. She was the fifth of seven children of Claude Alacoque, a wealthy notary, and his wife, Filiberta Lamyn. Orphaned by her father at the age of eight, she was sent to a boarding school run by Poor Clares. At the age of ten, she contracted polio and was bedridden for four years. After making a vow to enter a religious order, she was suddenly and miraculously cured.

From childhood, she loved prayer, silence, and solitude. She did penance and disciplined herself. Mystical traits began to manifest in her life: She started hearing voices and having visions. In fact, it was during one of these private revelations that she received her vocation to religious life. Despite her family's opposition, she entered the convent of the Order of the Visitation, founded by Saint Jeanne Françoise de Chantal, in Paray-le-Monial in 1671.

However, even in the convent, Margaret Mary encountered resistance from some of the sisters, and the superiors did not protect her. Her mystical experiences were viewed with suspicion, and the tests she was subjected to yielded a negative verdict. The sisters were particularly indignant when Jesus instructed St. Margaret to denounce the faults committed within the convent and to let them know that God had chosen her as a “sacrificial victim” for the sins of the nuns, as they were unwilling to change.

Margaret's situation improved when she was assigned Saint Claude La Colombière, a Jesuit priest who had been appointed rector of his order's college in Paray-le-Monial, as her confessor. He also took on the role of confessor to the Visitation nuns. From their

first spiritual encounter, Saint Claude believed in Margaret's visions, which caught his attention. She, for her part, heard the voice of God telling her that this was the priest who would support her in her mission to promote devotion to the Sacred Heart. They had several conversations in which Margaret felt understood for the first time. Claude, for his part, pledged to do everything possible to promote devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

On December 27, 1673, Margaret Mary had her first vision in which Jesus Christ entrusted her with the propagation of this devotion. Over the next year and a half, she had three more visions in which the Lord asked her to ensure that the first Friday of each month and the second Friday after the Feast of Corpus Christi would be dedicated to his Sacred Heart. In one of her visions, she saw the Sacred Heart burning with love. Jesus said to her, *“Behold the heart that has loved humanity so much and, in return, receives ingratitude and forgetfulness. You must seek to make amends to Me.”*

From then on, Margaret devoted her life to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and spreading this devotion. The center of this devotion is God's love for humanity, which was manifested in a special way through His Son, Jesus Christ. Clearly, the Lord wants us to understand that love motivates all of His actions. It is precisely this love that we reject when we do not observe His commandments, when we follow our own wrong paths, when we do not accept the Lord's sacrifice, etc. Therefore, it is understandable that atonement is closely linked to devotion to the Sacred Heart. The idea of vicarious atonement is profound: Just as Jesus took upon Himself the sins of the world despite being innocent, Christians are called to unite with his sacrifice on the cross and to ask forgiveness for all rejections of God's love committed by men, in order to prevent the consequences of their transgressions from falling upon them.

Despite all the difficulties, devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus has made its way into the life of the Church. Finally, in 1856, Pope Pius IX established the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart throughout the Catholic Church.

Let us conclude this meditation with three pieces of advice from the saint that demonstrate how devotion to the Sacred Heart can concretely help us on our journey with the Lord:

“If you find yourselves in an abyss of weakness into which you fall at every moment, go and immerse yourselves in the strength of the Sacred Heart, which will strengthen and lift you up with equal frequency.”

“If you find yourself in an abyss of infidelity and inconstancy, go and immerse yourself in the firmness and stability of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, our true and faithful friend, who will teach you to be faithful and constant to Him, as He has always been in loving us.”

“If you find yourself in an abyss of distractions, go and lose them in the abyss of tranquility of the Sacred Heart, which will unfailingly bring you victory if you fight them with generosity.”

Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque, pray for us!

Meditation on the Gospel of the day: <https://en.elijamission.net/no-hypocrisy/>