

St. Margaret Mary Alacoque and Sr. Mildred Mary Neuzil

Apostles for the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary

See this Heart which has loved men so much that it has spared nothing, even to exhausting and consuming itself, in order to testify to them its love. In return I receive from the greater part only ingratitude, by reason of the contempt, irreverence, sacrilege, and coldness that they show Me in this sacrament of love. But what I feel yet more is that there are some hearts consecrated to Me that treat Me thus. It is for this reason that I ask thee that the first Friday after the octave of Corpus Christi be set apart as a special feast to honor My Heart, by making an act of reparation, and by communicating on that day to repair the indignities it sustained during the time of exposition on the altars. I promise thee that My Heart will expand to pour out abundantly the influence of its divine love upon all that will render it this honor.

(Rt. Rev. Emile Bougaud, *The Life of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque*, Tan Books, Rockford, IL, 1990, Pgs. 236-237)

Margaret Mary was born the fifth of seven children, on July 22, 1647 in Verosvres near Paray, France, to Claude and Philiberte (Lamyn) Alacoque. Her father was a notary of noble standing. When only 4 ½, she was sent to live with her childless godmother. At a tender age Margaret developed a great love for Our Lady and for prayer and solitude. One day at Mass she was compelled to pray: *“My God, I consecrate to Thee my purity. My God, I make to Thee a vow of perpetual chastity.”* All she understood by these words at that age was that she belonged completely to God. When she was 8, her godmother died and Margaret returned home. That same year her father died, leaving her mother with many debts and five children to care for. Two sons were sent to Cluny monastery, two to an uncle, and Margaret was sent to the Poor Clares. Here she made her First Communion and grew in her desire for prayer and solitude until an illness sent her back home to her mother’s care. No cure could be found for her ailment, but as soon as she was offered to Our Blessed Lady, she returned to good health. Her mother was unable to reclaim the family fortune and they became servants in their own household, ill treated and without freedom. Margaret hid away in the garden to pray and weep at the foot of the crucifix, sometimes not eating or drinking for days, unable to alleviate her or her mother’s sorrow. Some time after, her mother became quite ill and was told nothing short of a miracle would

heal her. Margaret poured out her heart to Jesus and, remarkably, her mother got well. By the time Margaret was 15 she had already undertaken many austerities to comfort her crucified Lord who had begun to appear to her as the Crucified, or the Ecce Homo, or carrying His cross. This made her own crosses seem small in comparison. Margaret always sought refuge before the Blessed Sacrament and would become totally absorbed in Jesus, lost in contemplation for hours.

When Margaret turned 17, her older brother reached manhood, married and restored the family's position and influence, bringing gaiety and social life back into the home. Margaret began to enjoy these new pleasures and her family sought to find her a suitor, but Divine Love pursued her and pierced her soul with flaming darts that tore at her heart. She begged the Lord's forgiveness for turning away from Him. After attending Carnival one night, she returned home to be confronted by Jesus, disfigured with His flagellation, whereupon in remorse she inflicted upon her own body the injury she felt she had inflicted on His. The more she turned from the world's seductions, the more ole Satan played on her emotions, insisting her mother could not live without her and her leaving to enter the cloister would cause her mother's death. She feared to violate that childhood vow to Jesus, but she struggled three more years in contest between these two strong loves, the love for Jesus and the love for her mother. To alleviate and to distract herself from this pain, she began to work with the poor, bringing them into her home, then going out to visit the sick, often bringing healing to them.

Soon after, more sorrow came as her two older brothers died within a short time of each other. One younger brother was preparing for Holy Orders and the other for marriage. Her mother did not wish to be subject to a daughter-in-law's authority and again begged Margaret to marry and take her in. After these years of doubt, hesitancy and confusion, Jesus again appeared, like love despised, and asked Margaret, after being promised to Him, from whence did she desire to break with Him? He told her if she contemned (despised) Him, He would abandon her, but if she remained faithful, He would never leave her. Margaret then resolved to fulfill her childhood vow to Jesus, but it took another three years until her family would provide the necessary dowry and permission. Finally, in 1671, at age 23, she entered the Visitation Convent in Paray, an order founded by St. Jane de Chantal and St. Francis de Sales, which, according to God's designs, would become the sanctuary of the Sacred Heart, wherein the wounds inflicted upon that Sacred Flesh from so many outside would be soothed by those within.

Margaret had developed such an ardent love of suffering that our dear Lord had to reprimand her for going beyond the limits of obedience. On the feast of St. Louis, August 25, 1671, she received the habit. Then Our Lord began to appear to her in a constant and ever-present manner, leading her into a deep annihilation of

self and into ever greater awe of His wondrous majesty. The Lord became Master of her soul and the object of her total affection. She was given the saintly Claude de la Colombiere as her spiritual director to guide her through those precious Tabor experiences and those that would become the martyrdom of her soul, born of a folly and passion of love the world would never understand. Some of her sisters spoke of her spending 12 hours at a time on her knees before the Blessed Sacrament, totally motionless and rapt in ecstasy of the Adorable Heart of her Divine Spouse. Only obedience could call her out of such rapture.

At that time, France, an elder son of the Catholic Faith throughout 15 centuries, had been wounded by the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century which saw the rise of such heresiarchs as Martin Luther, John Calvin and Cornelius Jansen, with their attacks upon the authority of the Pope and the Church's teaching magisterium. Their errors would deny the role of Tradition in Divine Revelation alongside Scripture, papal infallibility and authority, the divinity of Jesus and transubstantiation and the Real Presence in the Eucharist, and denial of the forgiveness of sin in confession. These men would preach the erroneous doctrines of predestination and justification by faith alone, without good works. The doctrine of indulgences was misinterpreted and the unity of the Church was broken when these Protestants reformers were unable to "reform" the Church and separated instead.

France, a nation of passion, more of the heart than of the head, fell out of love with the Lord of its life and its history and lost its soul. The reigning Louis XIV, the Sun King, brought France to a new height of human glory but sought to control the Church with his belief in the divine right of the king. The number of those entering the priesthood and religious life decreased; monasteries and convents were torn down. Heroism and sanctity diminished; mediocrity, false teaching and the vanities of the world reigned, paving the way for the Age of Reason and Enlightenment in the next century. France rejected its Catholic heritage and its moral fiber decayed, but behind cloistered walls the Heart of Jesus still held its flaming torch to the souls of its inhabitants. Such was the Visitation convent where Margaret Mary hid herself away in the bosom of Her Master who would entrust to her the *three revelations of His Sacred Heart*, His flaming furnace of Divine Love, that sought to rekindle its fire upon the earth and to offer France its restoration in grace. The first revelation was revealed on December 27, 1673 presenting this new devotion to the Sacred Heart that so loved all mankind and sought to enflame every heart; the second in 1674 called for the First Friday devotion and reparation; and the third on June 16, 1675, called for the special feast day to make this devotion a public devotion within the whole Church. (http://www.ourladyofamerica.com/whatsnew/The_Sacred_Heart_of_Jesus.pdf)

Each year the sisters renewed their vows on the feast of the Presentation of Mary in the temple. In 1677 Margaret entered the refectory after the day of fast for the feast and fell to the floor unable to speak until ordered in obedience, at which time she announced to the community that God was displeased with it for

not being sufficiently holy and was about to punish it unless Margaret herself consented to be a victim in its stead, willing to endure the chastisements God had prepared for it. In fear she had hesitated to tell her superiors, and hence, the Lord laid upon her this public humiliation. The Mother Superior understood that the Lord needed to purify this convent so it might deserve to be the first sanctuary of that Adorable Heart. All the sisters were ordered to their cells to take a discipline in expiation for the sins of the community. The next day after Communion, Margaret heard Our Lord say, **“My daughter, the peace is concluded, and the sanctity of My justice is satisfied.”** The temple had been purified.

As Margaret’s extraordinary experiences manifested themselves more and more, her new superior, seeming to doubt her revelations, felt obliged to test her virtue with rigor and humiliation, forbidding her time before the Blessed Sacrament and refusing her the First Friday vigil. Margaret accepted these trials quietly but the Lord expressed His irritation over them. Her superiors relented when a young sister suddenly died and they feared it a sign of the Lord’s displeasure. When Margaret fell very ill, she was ordered by her superior to ask Jesus for a cure until the feast of the Presentation and renewal of vows that year (noted by the superior as a test of the divine origin of her revelations). Margaret was immediately cured, only to relapse into the same illness when the feast day arrived five months later. Margaret endured and eventually became mistress of novices and was able to share with these young sisters her love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, though superiors asked her to refrain from spreading the devotion in any public way. Margaret shunned letters and the parlor and hid in her humility. An image was created, however, to Margaret’s great pleasure, and with it would spread the public aspect of devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus throughout the world, the mission she had lived and suffered for so much.

As Margaret sensed her mission drawing to a close, she desired to write her Last Will and Testament, offering again all her prayers and sufferings, her merits, even the prayers that would be said for her after her death, to her Divine Lord so her whole life would be utterly at His disposal. She begged the Mother Superior to be allowed to sign this Testament with her own blood. She then retreated to her cell to carve the name of Jesus above her heart. Drawing blood from the wound, she signed the document, **“Sister Margaret Mary, Disciple of the Divine Heart of the Adorable Jesus,”** an act that would seem to the world one of foolishness and excess, but oh so pleasing to her Lord who so hated mediocrity and understood so well the language of love and excess. Such is the private side of this devotion for the sanctification and salvation of souls, a revelation of Divine Love that Satan will never be able to quench.

But the devotion also had a social and national side to it. Jesus wished to enter with pomp and magnificence into the palaces of princes and kings who would humble themselves before Him as He had been so humbled before the mighty of this world in His bitter Passion. The Lord wished that Louis XIV should consecrate France to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, erect a national monument to His Sacred Heart and place an inscription to His Heart on the national standard. In return He would protect France from her enemies and give her a lasting reign of glory. This “Grand Request” made in a 1689 letter seems never to have been fulfilled; it is not sure if it was presented to the King or ignored by him. Thus we see in less than a century France passed into the hands of Louis XV and Louis XVI and more decay. An accumulation of refusals to recognize the authority of God over the land in the 16th and 17th centuries following the Protestant Reformation would lead to the rise of the Age of Enlightenment, the Age of Reason, Rationalism, and Secularism in the 18th century, and eventually paved the way for Atheism, Fascism, Nazism and Communism to come to power in the 20th century. Each new “ism” devised its own attacks upon the Church of Christ. France slipped from pride to corruption to impiety and to hatred of God. The glorification of man and human wisdom replaced the glory of God and divine wisdom. It is no surprise then, that 1789 would see the demise of the monarchy with the French Revolution as the king and queen, and so many others, were sent to the guillotine. The years after that saw further alienation from the Faith that had cradled France in the arms of a loving Father for so many centuries.

Margaret Mary, that apostle of the Sacred Heart in that cold 17th century world, had done what God wished of her. Now it was time for her to die so the public aspect of her mission could be completed. Only a few knew of this devotion before her death, but it was destined to spread like fire across the earth to rekindle the fire of God’s love in every human heart. Thus it was, that on October 17, 1690, at age 43, Margaret expired in the arms of her sisters, whispering that Holy Name -- “Jesus!”

In our own time, that same Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary have made another plea to a dying world, cold and indifferent, blasphemous and sacrilegious, militant and impure, violent and divisive, through another contemplative sister, Sister Mildred Mary Ephrem Neuzil, begging us to come back to *His Heart* with *all our hearts*, to return to Faith and Purity, to obedience and humility, to prayer and sacrifice, for the sanctification and salvation of souls, and to the praise of that Most Holy Trinity Who seeks only to pitch His tent in our midst and to dwell in the “holy of holies” in our inmost souls. Jesus and Mary make **a special plea to consecrated souls** to resist the “tawdry trinkets” of the world that turn their gaze away from the Lover of all lovers, the

only One Who can truly satisfy the hungers of the human heart, for He made us for Himself from the profundity of His Eternal Love, creating, redeeming and sanctifying us, reducing Himself to a “Beggar” to woo our love in return.

I am a Beggar for love, but how few give to Me the means by which to satisfy My divine hunger. I hunger for the love of My own, and I receive only the crumbs no other would accept. (Sister Mildred Neuzil, Diary, “Our Lady of America®”, Fostoria, OH, pg.6)

O my sweet child,...My Immaculate Heart desires with great desire to see the kingdom of Jesus my Son established in all hearts. How I have pleaded with my children to open their hearts to Him, but most are cold and indifferent. Has ever a mother shown more love and interest in her children’s welfare than I have done? O my little one, daughter of my Pure Heart, you must pray with greater fervor and offer yourself with greater love to the Heart of my Son. (Diary, pg. 17)

My humble one, my small flower, we must have more souls who love, love unselfishly and without reserve. Who does anything who does not love? I wish to gather about me, my tender child, soldier and valiant bearer of the torch, an army of brave lovers, who as my torchbearers will enkindle the fire of Divine Love in the souls of men. Only those who are strong in love can become my soldiers to bear aloft, not the sword of destruction, but the sword of fire, the flaming torch of Divine Charity. (Diary, pg. 19)

How like Jesus’ words to St. Margaret Mary on the indifference of those souls especially consecrated to Him are His words to Sister Mildred on July 18, 1959. How like Jesus’ gift of his “flaming furnace of Divine Love” in His Sacred Heart is this new gift of “Our Lady of America, the Immaculate Virgin®” who gives us the “flaming Torch” of that Divine Love again, in order that we might help her set the world ablaze with the fire of God’s Love, passionate and pure with the simplicity and humility of a child. O hear the anguish in Jesus’ cry!

Oh, the pride of souls! How they resist My grace! O My priests, My religious, what would I not do for you if you would only let me! I come daily laden with graces, which you daily refuse. What am I to say of you, my best beloved? How long will you resist My love? It is from you I expect everything, and you give Me but the husks of your affections.

How long will I bear with you, O My chosen ones? How long will you spurn My approaches? My little white dove, it was this ingratitude on the part of My priests and My religious that caused Me so much sorrow in My passion. Oh how they resist My grace! How they fight against My love! So fearful are they that I will deprive them of their tawdry trinkets that they turn their backs lest they see the reproach in My eyes. (Diary, pg.33)

On July 18, 1980, Our dear Lady herself thanked those faithful priests and religious and other faithful souls who have remained true to her Son and His ways. She begs for more of such self-sacrificing souls.

Dear child, there are those of my children who are faithful, among these are my priests and religious who live a life of prayer and dedication to the work of my Son. What a consolation they are to me, with what joy I watch them furthering the Kingdom. But there must be more of such self-sacrificing souls, many, many more. Until this comes to pass, peace will not come, rather much more of suffering will encompass the world. I wish to spare my children from this, but I cannot do it without their help. (Diary, pg. 37)

We see so many similarities between the lives and private and public missions of St. Margaret Mary and Sister Mildred. Both had early mystical experiences and deemed them nothing extraordinary, for they lived lives of great intimacy with Jesus and Mary. While St. Margaret committed herself as a child to the Lord, she struggled with pressure from both the world and family while she awaited permission to enter the convent at age 23. Sister Mildred already entered the convent at age 14 and later entered the cloister in order to give herself totally to her Divine Spouse even as St. Margaret had. Each was called to “victimhood,” to suffer a great deal for the salvation of souls and for their own communities. Just as Margaret so often suffered at the hands of her superiors and was then asked to be a victim soul for the failures of her community so that it might be purified sufficiently to become that chosen sanctuary of the Sacred Heart devotion, so Sr. Mildred suffered rejection, persecution, betrayal from her own and was asked by Jesus, too, to be a victim soul for the salvation of many, and likely as well, for the purification of the same community that had caused her so much sorrow.

While St. Margaret engaged in many austerities of the flesh along with the sufferings of body and soul that were visited upon her, Sr. Mildred’s penances were simple, ordinary and tied to the duties of her life as a religious and the sacrifice of her will in obedience, which brought her the greatest pain of all—being ordered by a superior to sign final exclaustation papers without knowing full well what she was signing until her ring was forcefully taken off her finger and she was told she could no longer wear the habit. Just as God used superiors to confirm the divine origin of Margaret’s revelations through the sufferings those superiors imposed on Margaret to test the spirits, so were superiors used to try the heart and soul of Sr. Mildred in confirming the divine origin of her visions, testing her total abandonment to the will of God, trusting He would rectify the wrongs done her in His due time. Just as Margaret was moved to great love for Jesus when confronted with His Passion and suffering, so was Sr. Mildred, who wrote that when Jesus appeared offering her the crown of thorns and the cross, she could refuse Him nothing.

Just as the devotion to the Sacred Heart had a public and national side, as well as the private, so, too, “Our Lady of America®” has a public and national

side, as well as the private. France was offered the promise of unending protection if it would consecrate its king and its land to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, place that inscription on its standards and build a monument to honor the Heart of Jesus. So, too, America is being offered the protection of the Immaculate Heart of Mary if it will place “Our Lady of America, the Immaculate Virgin’s®” image in our National Shrine and in our homes as a sign of our commitment to the reform of life she asks of us. France failed to respond to the longing of the Sacred Heart of Jesus for honor from the kings of this world and the country fell into the ruin of its own choices. Will America fail to honor its Patroness with a return to Faith and Purity and fall likewise into ruin? As Our Lady said, she has done all she can do; now it is up to us! **Dare we presume the benediction of God upon our land when we refuse to genuflect to His Holy Will?**

What better way to reflect on these saintly examples of passionate love that so mirrored the excess of God’s love made manifest in the hearts of Jesus and Mary, than to read again the account of Sr. Mildred’s call to victimhood for souls. May we find in her words the grace to draw our cold hearts out of mediocrity and hardness and into that purifying and flaming furnace of Divine Love.

June 8th, Feast of the Sacred Heart, we were allowed to make a night hour, those who wished to. During this time Jesus made known to me the sorrow of His Heart over the ingratitude and indifference shown to Him in the Sacrament of His Love. When I went back to bed, Jesus came to me holding a large cross and a crown of thorns. He said to me smiling, as though He knew what the answer would be (He did of course). “I come with My cross and My crown of thorns, will you accept Me My spouse?” You know the only answer I could give Father. Who could refuse Jesus anything? During the night I awoke and Jesus said to me, and He said it with a profound emphasis: “I have placed you upon the Altar of Sacrifice.”

On June 14th, anniversary of my perpetual union with Jesus, He asked me again: “Bride of My Heart, do you still wish to suffer all things to give Me to souls?” I answered: “Yes, yes dear Lord, I am poor and wretched, and unworthy, but you know what is in my heart.” He said, “My little white dove, will you then continue to wear the Crown of Thorns, and permit yourself to be nailed to the Cross?” I told him in the best way I could, how much I desired Him to do with me just as He desired. So in this way my desires are wholly united to His. (August 15, 1956 letter from Sister Mildred to Bishop Leibold.)

(NB: All biographical material on St. Margaret Mary is gleaned from Rt. Rev. Emile Bougaud’s biography of her life.)