

CATECHISM OF THE MIRACULOUS VIRGIN

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(Catechism of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal)

1. Who is Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal?

The Blessed Virgin Mary of the Miraculous Medal is Mary of Nazareth, herself, Mother of Jesus Christ.

2. Is the Virgin of the Miraculous Medal known by any other name?

The Virgin Mary is also known as the "Virgin of the Miraculous Medal" or "The Immaculate of the Miraculous Medal".

3. How did this new name and devotion of the Virgin Mary develop?

This new name and devotion of the Miraculous Medal developed from an apparition of the Virgin Mary to St. Catherine Labouré.

4. Who was St. Catherine Labouré?

St. Catherine Labouré was a novice in the Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul in Paris, France.

5. In what year did these apparitions take place?

These apparitions took place in 1830

6. How many times did the Virgin appear to Sister Catherine Labouré?

The Virgin Mary appeared to St. Catherine Labouré twice. The first apparition took place on the night of July 18, 1830. The second apparition took place on November 27th of that same year. This last apparition is the most widely known. It is this apparition that gave rise to the Miraculous Medal devotion given to us by the Blessed Virgin Mary to St. Catherine Labouré.

7. Why do we know of these private apparitions?

We know of these private apparitions because Sister Catherine herself communicated them to her Spiritual Director, Fr. Jean Marie Aladel, C.M., a priest of the Congregation of the Mission of St. Vincent de Paul. He ordered her to put what the Blessed Virgin Mary revealed to her in writing.

8. What happened during the first apparition of July 18, 1830

On the occasion of the first apparition, the day before the Feast of St. Vincent de Paul(at that time), Sister Catherine, was awakened from a sound sleep by an angel who told her; "the Blessed Mother is waiting". The angel led St. Catherine to the chapel. There the angel declared; "This is the Blessed Virgin Mary!" Sister Catherine then watched as the Blessed Virgin Mary sat down in the chair of the Spiritual Director. Sister Catherine knelt next to our Lady and with confidence rested her hands in her lap to receive the words of the Virgin Mary.

9. What did the Virgin say on that occasion?

During this first apparition, which lasted two hours, the Virgin Mary told Sister Catherine what was to happen in France. She spoke of the revolution that was to come upon the country and about the sufferings the Church and Religious Communities would endure. Mary's most important message during this apparition was: "My child, the good God wishes to charge you with a mission." (The making of the Miraculous Medal was the mission later entrusted to St. Catherine Laboure)

10. Did Our Lady make any recommendations to St. Catherine Laboure?

Yes: Our Lady made three recommendations to St. Catherine Laboure. 1. She recommended special devotion to her during the month of May. 2. Our Lady asked for devotion to St. Joseph. 3. Our Mother Mary asked that above all we approach Jesus in His Most Blessed Sacrament in all our needs.

11. When did the Virgin appear for the second time?

The Virgin appeared for the second time on the evening of November 27, 1830 when Sister Catherine was in prayer in the Chapel. That day was the eve of the First Sunday of Advent.

12. How did the Virgin appear to St. Catherine Laboure during this second apparition on November 27, 1830?

On this occasion the Virgin appeared to St. Catherine Laboure in two different forms. We count them as if they were two different apparitions, the Second and the Third.

13. Which was the first form Our Lady appeared during this second apparition?

In this first form that the Virgin appeared to Sister Catherine, Our Lady was standing on a white sphere, her eyes were raised to the sky and she was holding in her hands a gold ball topped by a little cross. We know this "image" as "The Virgin of the Globe" and we count it as the Second Apparition.

14. What does the sphere that the Virgin holds in her hands symbolize?

The sphere that the Virgin holds in her hands symbolizes the world that the Virgin offers to God the Father.

15. Which was the second form in which Our Lady appeared to St. Catherine Laboure during the apparition of November 27, 1830?

The second form in which the Virgin Mary appeared to Sister Catherine as the apparition continued was with her hands outstretched downwards. Rays of light came out of them. This is the most well know image. It is what we call the Virgin of the Rays or more popularly, "Miraculous Virgin". This moment is what we count as the Third Apparition.

16. What did Sister Catherine see in the Third Apparition?

During the Third Apparition, Sister Catherine saw the Virgin Mary standing on the middle of a sphere. Her arms were outstretched towards the ground and her hands were covered with rings full of jewels. From some rings there came many rays of light that illuminated the sphere under her feet. Some rays were brighter than others. Others did not shine. Letters of gold formed around the Virgin which read:

"O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee"

All this formed like an oval-shaped painting. This scene would later become the "front of the medal of the Virgin".

17. What does the sphere under the feet of the Virgin signify?

It signifies the world and each person in it.

18. What symbolism do the rays of light have?

The rays of light symbolize the graces of God that Mary pours out on the world and on each of her children who asks for them.

19. Why didn't some stones in the rings show rays of light?

As the Virgin explained to Sister Catherine; some stones do not show rays of light because, though I wish to give them, these are the graces that no one asks for in prayer.

20. What do the words: "O Mary, conceived without sin..." refer to?

These words refer to the privilege that God has granted to His Blessed Mother to be conceived without original sin. This singular privilege is what we call; The Immaculate Conception. This favor from God to Mary was declared "dogma of faith" years later, in 1854, by Pope Pius IX.

21. And the words: "... pray for us who have recourse to thee"?

These words express the firm conviction of believers that the Virgin Mary wishes to intercede for us before God when we invoke her as a mediator.

22. What else did St. Catherine see?

It seemed to St. Catherine as if the image before her eyes turned around.

23. What was on the back of this image?

In the center of the image was the letter "M" with a cross on top; and below the "M" were two hearts.

24. What is the meaning of the letter "M"?

The letter "M" represents the name of Mary, "true Mother of God the Redeemer."

25. What is the meaning of the cross on top of the letter "M"?

The meaning of the cross on the top of the letter "M" represents Christ the Redeemer who, by his life, passion, and death on the cross, gained for us all the graces needed for our salvation.

26. Does it have any special meaning that the cross is above the letter "M"?

Yes. The position of the cross above the letter "M" symbolizes Mary's intimate union with Christ the Redeemer. She stood at the foot of her Son's cross on Calvary. Mary's closeness to her Son continues in the glory of the Risen One.

27. What do the two hearts represent?

The two hearts symbolize the hearts of Jesus and Mary.

28. How does one, as inscribed on the Miraculous Medal, distinguish the heart of Jesus from the heart of his mother Mary?

Jesus' heart, crowned with thorns, expresses the unmeasured love of Christ who gave himself to us by his suffering and death. Mary's heart is recognized by the sword that pierces it.

29. What does the sword in Mary's heart mean?

The sword in Mary's heart refers to the words of the elderly prophet Simeon to Mary: "you yourself a sword will pierce." (Luke 2:35) This sword speaks to us of Mary's pain which is so intimately associated with Christ's redemptive task.

30. Who gave these explanations about the cross and hearts inscribed on the Miraculous Medal to St. Catherine?

No explanation was necessary. When the Saint asked the Virgin, she replied that they were symbols sufficiently intelligible by themselves.

31. In addition to what St. Catherine saw; Is there a message that the Virgin communicated?

Yes, there are several messages of importance to us that the Virgin communicated to St. Catherine Laboure. These messages are about: Jesus, an Association, a Medal and our relationship with Mary.

32. What did the Virgin tell St. Catherine about Jesus?

The Virgin's message to St. Catherine about Jesus was the same as her message to the servants at the Wedding Feast of Cana; "Do whatever he tells you." (John 2:5).

Our Lady also told St. Catherine that, in her sorrows, she should go to Jesus, prostrate herself before him in his Most Blessed Sacrament, give him her heart so to receive many graces and consolations.

33. What did Mary tell St. Catherine about the Medal?

The Virgin told St. Catherine that she wished to have a medal struck after the model she was shown during the apparition.

34. What does the Medal contain?

The front of the medal contains the image of Mary with her arms extended downwards along with beams of light that stream out of each of her hands. The Virgin is standing on a half sphere. Around the image of Our Lady a prayer is written:

"O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee".

35. What is inscribed on the back of the Medal?

Inscribed on the back of the medal is the letter "M" with a small cross above it and below it are the two hearts of Jesus and Mary.

36. Is there anything else in the Medal?

A serpent is placed under Mary's feet, as a reference to God's words to the serpent (the devil) in Genesis 3:15: "I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers. They will strike at your head, while you strike at their heel".

37. What does this scene mean?

This scene means that the Virgin Mary was not prey to the devil at any time in her life. From her conception she was free from original sin.

38. What else appears on the back of the medal?

On the back of the medal are twelve stars that form an oval. It is an image that comes from the vision of St. John in the Apocalypse: "A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars." (Revelation 12:1)

39. Did the Virgin make any promises regarding the Medal?

Yes: The Virgin promised that all who wear this medal will receive great and abundant graces.

40. Is all we need to do to receive these graces is to wear the medal?

No. The Medal is not a talisman, nor a magical object. It is a medal that evokes the memory of Mary and the graces she has promised to all that wear the medal with faith and trust in her intercession. We, who wear the medal, must live a life of fidelity to Christ and to his word in imitation of Mary.

41. When were the first Miraculous Medals struck?

The first 2,000 medals were struck on June 30, 1832.

42. How is this Medal known?

This medal is known as the Miraculous Medal. As from the beginning, the Virgin fulfilled her promise about the medal and many miracles were attributed to it. The people, who were so grateful for the graces received, had already given it the nickname "Miraculous".

43. Why is it said that this Medal was given to us by the Virgin?

We must not take this expression verbatim as if the Virgin herself had brought this Medal from heaven. It means that the Virgin offered the model or design of the Medal to us when she asked Saint Catherine Laboure to have a medal struck as it had been shown to her in the apparitions.

Listening to the story that Saint Catherine left us, it can be said that the Virgin "posed" for this Medal. Certainly, the idea and the design were both the initiative of the Blessed Virgin.

44. What has been said about this Medal?

1. That it is the graphic representation of the entire Marian mystery.
2. That it condenses the biblical foundations of Mariology and the Gospel passages referring to Mary.
3. That it is the Medal of: the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Magnificat of the Virginal Motherhood of Mary, the prophecy of the elder Simeon, the "hour of Cana", Calvary, the intercession of Mary and the Assumption of Mary.
4. That it is like a miniature, because with a minimum of symbols, it presents Mariology in its fullness.
5. That the medal is a Marian catechism.

45. What did Mary say about an Association?

The Association was the Virgin's idea. Saint Catherine only expressed Mary's wish that an Association of "Marian Youth" be founded to which the Virgin would grant many graces.

46. Was the Virgin's wish fulfilled?

Yes. The Association of Sons and Daughters of Mary was founded in Paris in 1835. In 1862 the first group of Daughters of Mary was formed in Mexico City.

47. Does this Association still exist?

Yes: but at present it is called "Marian Youth" and is widespread in Mexico and around the world.

48. What is the purpose of this Association of Marian Youth?

Its purpose is to imitate the Virgin by listening and fulfilling the Word of God, and in her most characteristic virtues: purity, humility, obedience, and charity. This association also exists to carry out the apostolate according to the needs of the Church. This is an apostolate characterized by charity and catechesis in order to evangelize the poor.

49. Who forms this Association of Marian Youth?

Young lay people who "live the purpose of the Association in the fullness of their human and Christian lives with a clear and responsible conscience of their mission in the People of God, in imitation of Mary".

50. What is the emblem of the Association?

The Miraculous Medal.

51. What other consequences have been derived from the apparitions of the Virgin of the Miraculous Medal?

The Association of the Miraculous Medal and the practice of the Home Visit of the Miraculous Virgin.

52. What is the Association of the Miraculous Medal?

Its full name is: Association of the Immaculate Conception of the Sacred Medal. It is a group of devotees of the Miraculous Virgin whose purpose is to venerate the Immaculate Virgin thus seeking their own sanctification and dedicating themselves to the Apostolate.

53. What is the characteristic of this Association?

The Miraculous Medal.

54. What is the Home Visit?

The Home Visit is the specific means of the apostolate of the Association of the Miraculous Medal whereby the image of the Miraculous Virgin is taken to homes of the faithful for a time of prayer.

55. What is intended by this Home Visit of the image of the Miraculous Virgin?

The intention of the home visit of the image of the Miraculous Virgin is that true devotion to the Virgin Mary be spread far and wide. It is also intended that families be strengthened in their faith and union with one another.

56. What are the foundations of this practice?

The foundations of this practice of the Home Visit of the image of the Miraculous Virgin is inspired by the Virgin Mary's visit to her relative St. Elizabeth. This visit was a source of joy and sanctification for the family of Zechariah, Elizabeth, and their son John.

57. How is the Home Visit organized?

The Home Visit is established by forming groups of 30 families. These families receive the image of the Virgin for one day each month under the attention of a caregiver called "warden".

58. What are the functions of the warden?

The functions of the warden are to:

1. Visit the families that make up each group;
2. Take care of the good functioning of the "little chapel".
3. Encourage zeal in prayer and in the Apostolate.

59. What does the Virgin want to tell us through her Miraculous Medal?

The Virgin wants to tell us that the apparitions of the Miraculous Medal are pure prayer. Similar to Jesus before his disciples; Mary prays with Saint Catherine and recommends that we also pray. Our Lady, through the Miraculous Medal, teaches us to pray with words and symbols.

60. Why did the Virgin Mary choose Saint Catherine Labouré?

Our Lady chose St. Catherine Labouré because she was a humble peasant woman like Mary herself. According to biblical history, God's choice usually falls on these types of people: the small and humble.

61. Why did the Virgin leave us such a small sign?

Certainly, the Medal is a poor sign, tailored to a poor Church. But it is a sign rich in meaning adapted to the simple faith of the Christian people.

62. How does the Miraculous Medal help promote devotion to Mary?

Devotion to Mary is legitimate and necessary. The Medal helps us to know the excellence of the Mother of God, to love her with filial love and to imitate her in her virtues, which are all elements of true devotion.

63. Finally, what are the most important facts about Catherine Labouré?

The most important facts about Catherine Labouré are:

- She was born in Paris, France in 1806. Her name was Catherine but in her house she was called Zoe.
- In 1830 she entered as a postulant in the Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul.
- In that same year she began her novitiate.
- On July 18, 1830, she has her first vision of the Blessed Virgin Mary.
- On November 27th of the same year the Virgin Mary appeared to Sister Catherine Labouré for the second time.
- From 1831 to 1876 Sister Catherine lived and worked in the service of the poor without anyone knowing, apart from her confessor priest, Fr. Aladel, that she was the visionary of the Virgin, even though the devotion to the Miraculous Medal was already widespread.
- She was beatified by Pope Pius XI in 1933 and declared a Saint in 1947 by Pope Pius XII.