

A Brief History of the Miraculous Medal Its Promise, and Its Meaning

The Promise of the Miraculous Medal

The Medal of the Immaculate Conception - popularly known as the Miraculous Medal - was designed by the Blessed Virgin Herself! The Blessed Virgin said to St. Catherine Laboure, Apparition of 27 November 1830: ***“All who wear it will receive great graces. They should wear it around the neck. Graces will abound for persons who wear it with confidence.”***

The First Apparition

On the night of July 18, 1830, Sister (now Saint) Catherine Labouré, a novice in the community of the Daughters of Charity in Paris, was awakened by her guardian angel who called her softly several times. She awoke to her guardian angel whose appearance was that of an extremely beautiful child about five years old with dazzling clothes. The angel said, “Come to the chapel; the Blessed Virgin is awaiting you.” In the chapel, St. Catherine was surprised to see all the lights lit as if for Midnight Mass on Christmas. She was led to the sanctuary and knelt by the chair that the Director used when giving conferences to the Sisters.

Suddenly she heard the rustle of silk and saw a most beautiful Lady walking towards her. The Lady was dressed in an ivory-coloured dress with a blue mantle and white veil covering Her head.



She sat down on the Director’s chair next to St. Catherine. The angel told Catherine, “This is the Blessed Virgin.” Catherine leaned her hands on the Lady’s lap and looked into Her eyes. The Lady spoke, “My child, the good God wishes to entrust to you a mission.”

Mary also predicted sorrows and tribulation for France and the Catholic Church in France which were fulfilled in that year and after. In speaking about the tribulations of the world, Mary, as if giving a remedy, pointed toward the foot of the altar and said, “Come to the foot of the altar (i.e. Mass). Here graces will be shed on all who ask for them. Graces will be shed especially on those who ask for them.”

The Second Apparition



The mission that God wanted to entrust to Catherine was revealed to her on November 27, 1830. It was the mission of making and distributing the Medal of the Immaculate Conception, now known as the Miraculous Medal. The Sisters were gathered in the chapel as usual for prayers at five-thirty in the afternoon. Suddenly, our Lady appeared to Catherine.

At first Mary appeared standing on a globe and dressed in white, with a long white veil falling to Her feet. The Virgin held in Her hands, at shoulder level, a golden ball which She seemed to be offering to God as She raised Her eyes to heaven. Her fingers were covered with rings whose precious jewels sparkled brilliantly and showered down innumerable, dazzling rays of light on the globe under Her feet. Mary looked at Catherine and said nothing but Catherine heard this message: “The ball which you see represents the world, especially France (France was experiencing difficulties at that time), and each person in particular. These rays symbolize the graces I shed upon those who ask for them. The jewels which give no rays symbolize the graces that are not given because they are not asked for.” Then the apparition changed.

The Third Apparition and the Miraculous Medal

Front Side and its Meaning

Our Lady appeared with a white dress, a blue mantle and a white veil. She was still standing on the globe, and had one foot on the head of a serpent which lay at Her feet. "1830" was inscribed on the globe. The Virgin had Her arms and hands pointed downwards, with innumerable rays falling down from both hands onto the globe. Around the Blessed Virgin was an oval frame within which was written in gold the beautiful prayer: **O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to You.** This was the front side of the medal to be made.

Mary is standing upon a globe, crushing the head of a serpent beneath Her foot. She stands upon the globe, as the Queen of Heaven and Earth. Her feet crush the serpent to proclaim Satan and all his followers are helpless before Her, the Victorious Woman of Genesis (Cf. Genesis 3:15).

The innumerable rays indicate the effect of Mary's role as Mediatrix of all Graces. *...all of grace, all of salvation, all – I say and let us doubt it not – flows to us from Her (St. Bernard: Sermo de Aqueductu).*



Would God the Father who has given us Jesus through Mary not also give us all the graces Jesus won for us through the very same channel i.e. Mary?

In the beautiful prayer given we find the truth of (i) the Immaculate Conception of Mary – Mary is the only creature of God who was conceived without sin (ii) Mary's intercessory power with God for us who ask for Her aid. Mary's power of intercession for us with God is greater than that of the whole heavenly court of saints and angels put together! (St. Louis de Monfort – True Devotion to Mary).

The year "1830" inscribed on the globe may indicate the year which begin the final stages of the battle between the Woman and the serpent, between good and evil, - the start of the modern Marian era. Pope Paul VI declared, "Our era may well be called the Marian Era." (The Great Sign, #6, p.11, May 13, 1967).

The Back Side and its Meaning

Then the vision revolved to show the reverse side of the medal. On the reverse side was a Cross with a bar at its feet with which was intertwined an "M." Beneath the "M" were the Hearts of Jesus and Mary, both surmounted by flames of love, one having a crown of thorns, and other pierced with a sword (A sword shall pierce your soul – cf. Luke 2:35). Encircling all of this were twelve stars around the oval frame.

The twelve stars refer to the Apostles, who represent the entire Church as it surrounds Mary. They also recall the vision of Saint John, writer of the Book of Revelation (12:1), in which "a great sign appeared in heaven, a Woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under Her feet, and on Her head a crown of 12 stars." The Cross symbolizes Christ and our Redemption, with the bar under the Cross a sign of the earth. The "M" stands for Mary, and the interweaving of Her initial and the Cross shows Mary's close involvement with Jesus and our world. In this we see Mary's vital part in our salvation and Her role as mother of the Church. Thus, "M" also stands for Mother. It was at the foot of the Cross Jesus gave us through St John, Mary to be our own Mother (Cf. John 19, 25-27).

The two hearts surmounted by flames symbolize the burning love with which Jesus and Mary accomplish the work of Redemption, each in their proper way. No greater love does one have than to lay down one's life for one's friend (Cf. John 15:13). "Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her..." (Ephesians 5:25-27).

The union of the two Hearts side by side foreshadows the message of Fatima: *“The Sacred Heart of Jesus wants the Immaculate Heart of Mary to be venerated at His side.”* (Lucia Speaks, III Memoir, World Apostolate of Fatima, Washington, NJ: 1976; p.137). *“God wishes to establish in the world devotion to my Immaculate Heart.”* (ib. p. 126).

We can see then in the Miraculous Medal a symbol of the whole history of salvation from Genesis to Apocalypse, and we can see the vital role that the Victorious Woman is destined to play in the final defeat of the devil. It is amazing how in such a small medal God can give us so many profound lessons. As is the case with all of God’s graces, it is up to us to humbly accept what He offers, as Mary did (Cf. Luke 1:38), and to cherish and ponder it in our hearts, as Mary did (Cf. Luke 2:19 & 51).

Mary’s Promise

Then Mary spoke to Catherine: **“Have a medal struck after this model. All who wear it will receive great graces. They should wear it around the neck. Graces will abound for persons who wear it with confidence.”**

Catherine explained the entire series of apparitions to her confessor, and she worked through him to carry out Mary’s instructions. In humility, she did not reveal that she received the Medal until just before her death 47 years later.

With approval of the Church, the first Medals were made in 1832 and were distributed in Paris. Almost immediately the blessings that Mary had promised began to shower down on those who wore Her Medal. The devotion spread like wildfire. Marvels of grace and health, peace and prosperity, following in its wake. Before long, people were calling it the “Miraculous” Medal. In 1836, a Canonical inquiry undertaken at Paris declared the apparitions to be genuine.

There is no superstition, nothing of magic, connected with the Miraculous Medal. The Miraculous Medal is not a “good-luck charm”. Rather, it is a great testimony to faith and the power of trusting prayer and Mary, the Virgin Mother of God. Its greatest miracles are those of patience, forgiveness, repentance, and faith. God uses a medal, not as a sacrament, but as an agent, an instrument, in bringing forth certain marvelous results. *“The weak things of this earth hath God chosen to confound the strong.”* (1 Corinthians 1:27).

When our Blessed Mother gave the design of the medal to Saint Catherine Labouré, She said, **“Now it must be given to the whole world and to every person.”**

Glory and Sainthood

Sister Catherine died on 31 December 1876. She was proclaimed a saint on 27 July 1947. When her body was exhumed after fifty-seven years of burial, it was found to be completely incorrupt and supple.

References

St. Catherine Laboure and the Miraculous Medal by Rev. Robert J. Billett, C.M.F.