

Homily: May 12, 2024: 6th Sunday of Easter

“The Background and Meaning of Our Lady’s Miraculous Medal Apparition in 1830”

Adapted from the EWTN online library re: St. Catherine Laboure (see www.ewtn.com).

In the darkness of **the night of July 18-19, 1830**, just before the hour of midnight, God, through the person of Mary, visited Sr. Catherine. It was almost midnight; Sr. Catherine was asleep. She awoke, startled at a voice. She was sure she had heard someone call her, but not quite sure.

"Sister Catherine!" This voice in the darkness was without reason, without explanation, but a shining angel, who looked like a 4- or 5-year-old child who stood beside her bed! *"Come to the chapel, the Blessed Virgin is waiting for you." "I might awaken the other sisters if I get up." "Do not fear, everyone is sound asleep. It is half past eleven. Come! Mary is waiting for you!"*

Sister Catherine dressed quickly. It was risky business. She was only a novice with the Sisters of Charity for a few months. Prowling around the convent by night would bring quick expulsion if detected. But when her guardian angel commanded, hers was not to reason why, hers only to obey in blind faith, leaving the rest to God and His Providence. Out through the corridors and down the halls they went, the convent lamps lighted miraculously all the way, an occurrence not to be explained naturally. The Chapel door was locked as usual, but at the touch of the angel it swung open. The Chapel, normally dark by night, was lighted brightly as if for Midnight Mass! Up the aisle they walked, the angel leading Sr. Catherine. He stopped before the director's chair in the sanctuary. Instinctively, Sr. Catherine knelt. Nothing happened. In the strange silence of such an uncanny experience, Sr. Catherine grew uneasy. The clock struck twelve. *"Here is the Blessed Virgin,"* said the angel.

Sr. Catherine saw no one. Then there was the sound of rustling silk, and a very beautiful and majestic Lady walked down the altar steps and seated herself in the director's chair. Sr. Catherine knelt at the foot of the chair and put her hands in Mary’s hands and together she talked with the Queen of Heaven for a long time, some two hours – by the way, the only approved apparition of the Church where the visionary actually touched Mary. At first the conversation was personal; then there were messages from Our Lady herself to Father Aladel, Sister Catherine's confessor and spiritual director. And then there was the message for the world *"My child, the whole world will be filled with trouble and sorrow."*

"My child, the good God wishes to give you a mission. Later I shall let you know what it is. You will have much to suffer. But do not be afraid. Come to the foot of this Altar often. **Here many graces will be given to everyone who asks for them.** They will be given to the rich and to the poor, the great and the lowly." Then the Blessed Virgin arose and left. "She has gone," said Sr. Catherine's guardian angel. And he led Sr. Catherine back to her bed where she lay awake for the rest of the night. The angel disappeared as quickly as he had come. The clock struck two; she had been away from her room about two hours. **An imp note:** Even before Our Lady appeared to Sr. Catherine in July of 1830, she was given the special grace a few months earlier, in that, almost every day of her novitiate (training period as a religious to see if you fit in the Community), Sr. Laboure had seen visibly Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, an amazing singular grace.

A few months after her first visit to Sr. Catherine at the Convent in Paris, Our Lady was to pay her second visit on **November 27, 1830 at 5:30 in the evening.** "My child, I have a mission to entrust to you. You will have to suffer much in the performance of it, but the thought that it will be for the glory of God will enable you to overcome all your trials. You will be opposed but do not be afraid. Grace will be given you. Tell your Director all that takes place within you with simplicity and confidence. You will see certain things; you will receive inspirations in prayer. Give an account of everything to him who has charge of your soul. **Remember** "My eyes are always watching you; I shall grant you many graces. **Special graces will be given to all who ask for them, but people must pray.**" Sr. Catherine was praying hard to know her mission, of which Our Lady had spoken on the first visit in July. During Sr. Catherine's prayer on November 27th, she heard the same rustle of silk over St. Joseph's altar in the Chapel, and **there stood the Blessed Virgin clothed in white!** She was standing on a globe, one foot crushing the head of a serpent on the top of the globe. In her hands she held a smaller ball, a golden one surmounted by a Cross, which represented the world. Our Lady was offering this to God, looking toward Heaven and praying for its acceptance by the Almighty. On her fingers were many rings, filled with jewels and precious stones, from which shining rays of light descended. Our Lady said to Sister Laboure: "This ball which you see is the world, France in particular, and each person individually. I am praying for it and for everyone in the world. **The rays which fall on this ball are the graces which I give to those who ask for them.** **But there are no rays from some of the stones. For many people fail to receive graces because they neglect to ask for them.**"

After a time, the small ball representing the world in Our Lady's hands vanished and she lowered her arms outstretched, and the rays glittered and glistened more brilliantly than before. Around her Queenly head appeared the luminous letters of the words: "***O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to Thee.***" A frame of gold appeared around the entire vision as Our Lady said, "*Have a medal struck after this model. All who wear it will receive great graces; it should be worn around the neck. Great graces will be given to those who wear it with confidence.*"

Our Lady showed Sr. Catherine the model for the metal. This was a large "M," surmounted by a Cross on a bar. Below the "M" were two hearts, one encompassed with thorns, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and the other pierced with a sword, the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Encircling the whole were twelve stars bordering the golden elliptical frame. The vision disappeared.

It was repeated several times. The last time Our Lady said, "*You will see me no more, but you will hear my voice in your meditations.*" Sr. Catherine's confessor, Father Aladel, placed very little credence in her visions at first. Our Lady's voice in Sr. Catherine's meditations over time complained that the medal had not been made. "*But my dear Mother,*" Sister Catherine said, "*I have told Father Aladel and he hasn't done anything about it.*" "*A Day will come,*" replied our Lady's voice, "*when Father Aladel will do what I wish. He is my servant and would fear to displease me.*" This new message jolted Father Aladel, and he laid the matter before the Archbishop of Paris, who ordered the medal struck immediately and ordered the first quantity for himself.

Our Lady had opened the great drama of the Final age of mankind and the battle between good and evil. This was her first official herald, the Heaven-sent insignia of the modern Age of Mary. It was to be called the "Medal of the Immaculate Conception," the prayer inscribed on it honored Our Lady's unique privilege: "*O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to Thee.*" It would prepare the world for the great declaration of a quarter of a century later when Bl. Pius IX would declare the great dogma of the Immaculate Conception as an article of faith, an essential element of Catholic belief. The medals of the Immaculate Conception streamed from the presses by the millions. They overflowed France into the world beyond. So many favors, cures and conversions were effected through its instrumentality that its name and doctrinal significance were lost in the clamor; it became known simply as 'The Miraculous Medal.' †