



CHURCH OF SAINT MARY

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Dear Parish Family,

May 1, 2011

Today is Divine Mercy Sunday. You may gain a plenary indulgence for yourself or for the deceased by praying the Creed, an Our Father, and the short prayer "Merciful Jesus, I trust in You!" before the Blessed Sacrament. The usual conditions for a plenary indulgence apply (sacramental confession, Eucharistic communion, prayers for the Holy Father, and a spirit of detachment from all sin.)

Please join me in congratulating the seven First Communicants who received our Eucharistic Lord for the first time at the 11:00 am Mass at St. Mary.

The month of May is dedicated to Our Lady. This month, we will begin devotions to Mary under the title of Mother of Perpetual Help after the Tuesday evening 8:00 pm Mass at St. Mary. In an effort to foster your own devotion to the Mother of God, you could consider attending these devotions; join the Rosary prayers before any daily or Sunday Mass; join the Rosary group at 11:00 am on Wednesdays at Mt. St. Joseph; or begin praying a family Rosary in the evening in your home. Rosaries are available on the tables near the entrances of both churches and are free to a good home (although donations are always gladly accepted.)

Also, in the office are several copies of St. Louis de Montfort's Consecration to Jesus through Mary. This month-long prayer is a wonderful way to deepen your relationship with Our Lord and His Blessed Mother.

Please continue to keep our communities and parishes in prayer. Your intercession is important to our spiritual health. God bless you!

Fr. David

Blessed Pope John Paul II: On his vocation

This weekend in Rome, the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, declared his predecessor, Pope John Paul II, to be Blessed. In September of 1987 while in Los Angeles, Pope John Paul spoke on his own vocation to Holy Orders, saying:

"I am often asked, especially by young people, why I became a priest. Maybe some of you would like to ask the same question. Let me try briefly to reply. I must begin by saying that it is impossible to explain entirely. For it remains a mystery, even to myself. How does one explain the ways of God? Yet, I know that, at a certain point in my life, I became convinced that Christ was saying to me what he had said to thousands before me: 'Come, follow me!' There was a clear sense that what I heard in my heart was no human voice, nor was it just an idea of my own. Christ was calling me to serve him as a priest."

"And you can probably tell that I am deeply grateful to God for my vocation to the priesthood. Nothing means more to me or gives me greater joy than to celebrate Mass each day and to serve God's people in the Church. That has been true ever since the day of my ordination as a priest. Nothing has ever changed this, not even becoming Pope."



MOTHER OF PERPETUAL HELP

The documented history of this icon begins in the year 1495, when the image was venerated in a church on the island of Crete. At that time it was already considered to be very old.

Most writers agree that the painting came into the possession of a wealthy merchant in the late fifteenth century. He carried the painting from Crete to Rome, where he became seriously ill. Before he died he requested that the painting be placed in a church as soon as possible. Contrary to his request, the painting remained in private hands until 1499, when it was escorted in a solemn procession to the Church of St. Matthew on the Esquiline Hill. During the procession, a man who had been paralyzed for some time was immediately cured when the image passed by.

For the next 300 years the image hung in St. Matthew's church, where innumerable favors were granted to the people who prayed in its chapel.

In 1798 Napoleon's army invaded Rome and forced Pope Pius VI into exile in France. Nearly 30 churches were destroyed, including the Church of St. Matthew. Thankfully the image of Our Lady was saved. For several years it found refuge in the Church of St. Eusebius. It was then placed in the Church of St. Mary of Posterula, where it was hung in a side chapel and was all but forgotten for almost 40 years.

When Pope Pius IX in 1853 requested that the Redemptorists establish a house in Rome, they chose a property on the Via Merula. While the church was being built, one of the priests mentioned that he had found a reference which revealed that their new church was being erected adjacent to the site where once had stood a church which enshrined a miraculous image of the Blessed Mother. One of the priests replied that he knew the history of the image and the exact location where it could be found. On learning of the portrait's whereabouts, the Redemptorist Superior General gained a private audience with the Pope. The Holy Father listened to his plan to have the portrait returned to the site where it had been enthroned for almost three centuries. Pope Pius IX then recalled that as a small boy he had once prayed before the miraculous image while it was in the Church of St. Matthew.

In compliance with the wishes of the Pope, the image was given by the Augustinians to the Redemptorists and placed in the Church of St. Alphonsus. During this translation two noteworthy cures took place: one was the healing of a boy who was seriously ill with meningitis; the other miracle involved a young girl who received the use of her paralyzed leg.

Pope Pius IX also assigned the feast of the image for the Sunday before the feast of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist, and by a decree dated May, 1876, and he was among the first to visit the portrait in its new home.

Devotion to the icon spread rapidly to the United States. In 1870, when the Redemptorists were asked to

establish a mission church in Roxbury, not far from Boston, they dedicated their small church to the Mother of Perpetual Help. They received from Rome the first copy of the portrait, which had been touched to the original. Since then more than 2,300 copies that had been similarly touched to the original have been sent to other houses of the Order.

The United States also takes credit for inaugurating the Tuesday night devotions to the Mother of Perpetual Help. Devotions that first took place at St. Alphonsus (Rock) Church in St. Louis, Missouri, on Tuesday nights, were quickly adopted by other churches, and took the form of a perpetual novena, a practice that is now observed worldwide.

A study of the portrait is necessary to understand its historical and artistic qualities. Although its origin is uncertain, it is estimated that the portrait was painted sometime during the thirteenth or fourteenth century. It is painted in a flat style characteristic of icons and has a primitive quality. All the letters are Greek. The initials beside the Mother's crown identify her as "Mother of God." Those beside the child, "ICXC," are abbreviations meaning "Jesus Christ." The smaller letters identify the angel on the left as "St. Michael the Archangel." He is depicted holding the lance and spear with the vessel of vinegar and gall of Christ's Passion. The Angel on the right is identified as "St. Gabriel the Archangel." He holds the cross and the nails.

When this portrait was painted, halos were not commonly depicted. For this reason the artist rounded the head and veil of the Mother to indicate her holiness. The golden halos and crowns were added much later. The Madonna in this portrait is out of proportion to the size of her Son since it was Mary whom the artist wished to emphasize.

The charms of the portrait are many, from the naivete of the artist, who wished to make certain the identity of each subject was known, to the sandal that dangles from the foot of the Child. The expression of the Child Jesus is haunting as He grips the hand of His Mother while gazing sideward at the instruments of torture held by the Angels. Above all, the expression of the Madonna evokes a sadness on the part of the viewer. With her head gently touching that of her Son, and while surrounded with the instruments of her Son's sufferings, she seems to gaze plaintively—as though seeking compassion from those who look upon her.

Countless miracles attributed to the image extend from the time of its documented history in 1495 through the years until the present day. These seem to give ample testimony and proof of the portrait's favor with the Mother of God.

The miraculous portrait is still enthroned on an altar in the Church of St. Alphonsus in Rome. The ruins of the Church of St. Matthew, where the image was revered for almost 300 years, are found on the grounds of the Redemptorist monastery.