

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

The Devotion

The writer Anne Lamott once said the two most popular prayers are: “Help! Help! Help!” and “Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!”

I thought about that the other morning, as we began a Monday tradition at Our Lady Queen of Martyrs: the Novena to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal. (*) As devotions go, it is modest, only a few minutes long. But if anything embodies Anne Lamott’s thoughts about prayer, it is this humble novena. We beseech and we thank, out loud and in our hearts. Then we get up, head out the door and hope for the best.

I first became acquainted with this devotion before I was even born. My mother had suffered a series of miscarriages, and her doctor was doubtful she’d be able to carry another child. So, off she went to St. Catherine Labouré Church in Wheaton, Maryland, with her husband and daughter in tow, to pray for divine intervention.

And here I am.

The Miraculous Medal Novena is most often prayed at churches on Mondays. It seems a fitting way to start the workweek. Who better to ask for help in the everyday trials of life than the woman who declared herself, happily, God’s handmaid?

Over the years, I’ve encountered this novena in other churches, other cities. Last time I visited St. Catherine’s, some years back, it was a big Monday night event, complete with music, Benediction and a brief sermon.

Here in Forest Hills, it is a simpler affair—a collective recitation of love and faith. We place our needs before God, pray the familiar words of the Memorare and entrust ourselves to Mary’s care: “Pray for us who have recourse to thee...”

There are some modern Catholics, I suspect, who dismiss this sort of devotion as a kind of antiquated piety—unenlightened and superstitious, almost medieval. But those of us who pray it regularly and wear the medal around our necks know better. We know that the miracles that matter are those we cannot see or touch. They unfold in places hidden from view, quietly. A heart may be healed, a spirit resurrected. Belief, and a belief in possibility, are miraculous enough.

In this month of Mary, the month when even nature seems to raise every petal in prayer to her, we are reminded of a mother’s tenderness and love. We turn to her in times of trial, knowing she can intercede. We turn to her in thanksgiving, for prayers that have been answered and causes that have been heard. We know that the woman who gave birth to the greatest miracle of all can sometimes make the impossible possible.

“Pray for us who have recourse to thee...”

We know she will hear us. Even if all we have to say is this: “Help, help, help. Thank you, thank you, thank you...”



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