

Dec. 27th, 2023 lecture about the 1st apparition: Sacred Heart of Jesus

INTRODUCTION

As mentioned, numerous times before – this year or better yet this year and a half (18 months) we are in the 350th Anniversary of Sacred Heart of Jesus. One thing to keep in mind is that the revelations are never necessarily meant to be private, nor were they meant to be exclusive to a particular time frame or a particular country. They may be more beneficial to a particular group of people or a particular time. A revelation is something in accordance with God – and God’s truth is eternal, thus revelations are generally of a universal value to people of all places and all times, exposed to us at a providential time. This is the reason why we wish to do what we will call “The Reliving the Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus According to Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque.” So that the benefits that Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque received may also bear fruit in our own lives.

NARRATION OF THE APPARITION

First and foremost, we can note there were a total of four apparitions of the Sacred Heart of Jesus made to Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque. The first three are considered in union which have led to the fourth apparition, the fullness and completion of the revelation. This last revelation is also referred to as ‘the Grand Apparition’; granted to Saint Margaret Mary on what was *to be* the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the year 1675.

It is strongly believed that these apparitions all occurred in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. Saint Margaret Mary was so often caught up in ecstasy that some mentioned she appeared as a “marble statue.” She would remain motionless, kneeling for hours absorbed in prayer. She also had a very special devotion to the Holy Triduum (particularly Holy Thursday and Good Friday) – on one Holy Thursday she remained in prayer for 12 consecutive hours.

WRITINGS

There are very few personal writings coming directly from Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque about the Devotion. Most of what we know about these apparitions of the Sacred Heart come from the saint’s letters directed to either her superior or her spiritual advisor. What she had written was all done under the vow of obedience. Her superior asked her to write in order that these

apparitions could later be examined and approved. The saint reluctantly accepted; as she did not want to fall into pride nor did she want to cling herself to these visions, thus losing the grace of Heaven or the graces she had received from them.

Humility persuaded her to lay down the pen, while obedience would convince her take it up again. In the beginning of her narrations she writes, "It is for thy love alone, O my God that I submit to write this in obedience, and I ask thy pardon for the resistance I have made...let it never be seen by anyone except by him whom thou wishes to examine it."¹ And in another she writes, "I proceed through obedience, O my God, without any other design than that of satisfying thee by the martyrdom which I suffer in penning these lines, every word of which seems to me a sacrifice."²

APPARITION 1 - Dec. 27th 1673

Saint Margaret Mary was only 26 years old when she received this first apparition and had been under religious vows (evangelical counsels) for just over a year.

Although the exact date of the first apparition in some way remains unknown – it is highly plausible - as restated by numerous commentaries - that it would have been on December 27th of 1673 - the Feast of Saint John the Apostle. Many commentaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in fact insist 'without a doubt' December 27th would have been the date of the first apparition, the same day Saint Gertrude also received her spiritual experience of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Like Saint Gertrude, Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque was granted the grace to rest upon the bosom of the Lord, experiencing the love, affection and warmth of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. In some way, Jesus had made know to Saint Gertrude the pre-revelation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, but by Divine Providence He requested that she should not promote this devotion insisting it would later be promoted at a designated time, that being through Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque in 1673-75.

¹ REV. EMILE BOUGAUD. *The Life of Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque*, p. 162. [Memoire, p. 289.]

² REV. EMILE BOUGAUD. *The Life of Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque*, p. 163. [Memoire.]

Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque's experience: "This Divine Spouse...granted me the incomprehensible favour of which I was so unworthy, of allowing me to rest on His Heart with His beloved disciple, and of giving me His Heart, His cross, and His love."³

In another letter it indicates that she was before the Blessed Sacrament resting for an extended period of time on the most Sacred Heart of Jesus. She writes, "Once being before the Blessed Sacrament and having a little more leisure than usual, I felt wholly filled with this Divine Presence, and so powerfully moved by it that I forgot myself and the place in which I was."⁴ Then Jesus revealed to her His profound love as the Narration continues, "the marvels of His love and the inexplicable secrets of His Sacred Heart which he had...[which] were hidden from me until then. He opened it to me for the first time, but in a way so real, so sensible that it left me no room to doubt, though I am always in dread of deceiving myself."⁵

Saint Margret Mary was a very doubtful person – *not doubtful about the existence of God nor about His Divine mercy and love*. But she was very doubtful about herself; she did not trust her own experiences or the conclusion she had about the faith. In some way, she always wanted to run it by someone else to make sure her experiences were not against any fundamentals of the faith. She was humble enough to ask about the faith.

Our Lord then responded to her saying, "My Divine Heart is so inflamed with love for men, and for you in particular, that not being able any longer to restrain within itself the flames of its ardent charity, it must pour them out by your means and manifest itself to them to enrich them with its precious treasures, which contain all the graces of which they have need to be saved from perdition."⁶

Our Lord continues, "I have chosen youas an abyss of unworthiness and of ignorance for the accomplishment of this great design, that thus all may

³ JEAN BAINWEL, *Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus*, p. 12. [Letter XCIII, Vol. ii, p. 187 (222); G., XXIX, 281.]

⁴ REV. EMILE BOUGAUD. *The Life of Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque*, p. 163. [Memoire.]

⁵ REV. EMILE BOUGAUD. *The Life of Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque*, p. 164. [Memoire.]

⁶ REV. EMILE BOUGAUD. *The Life of Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque*, p. 164. [Memoire.] & JEAN BAINWEL, *Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus*, p. 18.

be done by Me.”⁷ Until then the Sacred Heart had only been revealed to a few, but here our Lord expresses that this devotion, that he is now revealing to Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque, is not exclusive to her, nor only a few, but is to be universal – it is to be made known to everyone.

In the wonder of the miracle she was experiencing, she did not question the method Jesus was going to use her to expose this devotion. Nor when or how she was to promote the devotion. All of these questions were instantly answered in the love and trust she was experiencing.

Before disappearing, Jesus asked her one question – in some way her own ‘fiat,’ to see if she was willing to give Him her own heart. She narrates, “He [then] demanded my heart, and I supplicated Him to take it. He did so, and put it into His own Adorable Heart, in which He allowed me to see it as a little atom being consumed in that fiery furnace. Then drawing it out like a burning flame in the form of a heart, He put it into the place whence He had taken it, saying, ‘Behold my beloved, a precious proof of my love. I enclose in thy heart a little spark of the most ardent flame of My love, to serve thee as a heart and to consume thee till thy last moment.”⁸ This moment of the apparition may remind us of the scripture verse from the Book of Ezekiel which says, “I give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will remove your hearts of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”⁹ We can say this verse foreshadowed the devotion of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

At the conclusion of the apparition Jesus Christ says to Saint Margaret Mary, “Until now thou hast taken only the name of my slave; henceforth thou shalt be called the well-beloved disciple of my Sacred Heart.”¹⁰ As we said, this was revealed to Saint Margaret Mary so that all of us may participate in the benefits of this devotion. Thus, each person who practices this devotion faithfully is called ‘well-beloved disciple of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.’

AFTER THE VISION

⁷ JEAN BAINWEL, *Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus*, p. 18.

⁸ REV. EMILE BOUGAUD. *The Life of Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque*, p. 165. [Memoire, p. 326.]

⁹ Ezekiel 36:26

¹⁰ REV. EMILE BOUGAUD. *The Life of Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque*, p. 165. [Memoire, p. 326.]

After the apparition, the Saint writes of the blessed confusion she experienced, suggesting she struggled to understand whether she was in Heaven or still on earth. She also experienced much exhaustion, indicating she struggled very much to do common daily tasks because of the excessive spiritual and physical fatigue. She experienced in a marvelous way the fullness of God that she could no longer express herself to her superiors.

She was filled with excessive guilt for her sins that she wanted to distance herself so much from sin and make perfect amends. So arduous was her desire to make amends she writes she would have loved to make a general confession in the refectory with all the sisters present, “so that they may see the depth of my corruption; so that they would attribute to me none of the graces I received.”¹¹

She also understood the Catholic paradox between the cross and grace, as she would call it ‘the pains of love.’ She wrote at one moment, “the pain of this wound is so precious to me, causes me transports so lively, that it burns me alive, it consumes me.”¹²

CONCLUSION

Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque learned a few things on this day – things that we should also be aware of for ourselves:

1. God himself could not contain in His Heart the secret love He has for Humanity; it is up to us to contemplate and penetrate that love.
2. Faith and Trust – He would make use of her in order to reveal the Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. We too do not know what the plan nor path God has laid out for us, but all our questions are answered through faith, love and trust.
3. The devotions she practiced and the humility she expressed - the love she had for (1) Jesus present in the Blessed Sacrament [Holy Adoration], (2) her humility in that she never trusted in herself and her own opinion but rather always sought approval, (3) the Obedience she expressed in being faithful to write down the apparition as requested by her legitimate superior (our humble obedience to our priest and bishops although we may not totally

¹¹ REV. EMILE BOUGAUD. *The Life of Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque*, p. 166. [Memoire, p. 326.]

¹² REV. EMILE BOUGAUD. *The Life of Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque*, p. 166. [Memoire, p. 327.]

agree) and (4) the love she had for confession, because although she did not make the public confession with the sisters in the refractory, she did recourse to the Sacrament of Confession often. In order to better understand God's Mercy and the Sacred Heart of Jesus we too should have frequent recourse to the Sacrament of Confession.

The saint was then given 6 months to recover, to ponder and to grow in the virtues necessary to make her a fellow disciple of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. As given to us, we are given 6 months to ponder, to practice the devotion she had, and to make ourselves worthy too to be faithful disciples of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Lecture given at Sacred Heart Church, Peterborough