

THE MIRACULOUS MEDAL AND ITS MEANING

The medal of the Immaculate Conception popularly known as the Miraculous Medal was designed by the Blessed Virgin herself. No wonder, then, that it wins such extraordinary graces for those who wear it and pray for Mary's intercession and help.

Mary, the Mother of God, gave the pattern for the medal to Sister (now Saint) Catherine Laboure on November 27, 1830. The visions occurred in the motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul in Paris. Catherine saw Our Lady standing on a globe with dazzling rays of light streaming from her outstretched hands. Framing the picture were the words, "O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you." Have a medal struck upon this model, Mary instructed Catherine. Those who wear it will receive great graces, especially if they wear it around the neck.

With the approval of the archbishop, the first medals were struck 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, followed in its wake. Before long, people were calling it the Miraculous Medal. And in 1836, a canonical inquiry undertaken in Paris declared that Catherine's apparitions were genuine.

There is no superstition, nothing of magic, connected with the Miraculous Medal. No one should consider it strange that God works wonders through the faith and trust symbolized by sincerely wearing a medal. God loves us and works through his Church to bring about salvation. The medal is simply an instrument bringing a person's prayers into focus and submission to God's plan.

The two sides of the medal convey two different messages. The front presents the person of Mary. It shows Mary in the glory of her Immaculate Conception. She stands upon the globe, as the Queen of Heaven and Earth. Her feet crush the serpent, to proclaim that Satan and all his followers are helpless before her. It shows her as intercessor, the rays of light from her hands symbolizing the gifts coming through her intercession to all who ask for them. Etched above the rim is the invocation composed by Mary herself, "O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you."

The reverse side shows Mary in relationship to us, the Church. There are no words there because, as Mary said to Sister Catherine, "The M and two the hearts express enough." For they tell us that Mary is not only Queen and intercessor, but also our mother who knows our sorrows and mother of our redeemer. For the love of God's children his heart wears a crown of thorns and hers is pierced with a sword. We find her with Jesus her Son at the foot of the cross, as shown in the cross intertwined with the letter M.

The twelve stars are a double reminder. They can refer to the apostles, who represent the entire Church as it surrounds Mary. They may also be reminders of the stars in the vision of Saint John, in which "a great sign appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars." In this we can see Mary's part in our salvation. She brings her children through the sorrows of earth to the bliss of heaven, where in the crown of the Queen they will shine like stars for all eternity.