

Miracles

OF THE HOLY HOUR

Dear Friends of the Heart of Christ,

As some of you may recall, our last talks scheduled for December were snowed out as an ominous weather report materialized into reality with the white stuff furiously falling by our 4:00 pm meeting time. One brave soul showed up. So if you like, copies of our December talks are available besides these talks today. Back at the beginning of December, if you remember, we were anticipating the beatification of Archbishop Fulton Sheen. As you know, this has been postponed and we await the official date still to be announced. To prepare for this important event, our community decided to read in the refectory Bishop Sheen's autobiography entitled *Treasure in Clay*. If you have never read this book and appreciate Bishop Sheen's thoughts and spirituality, I highly recommend this gem. Its cogent explanations of the Gospels and spiritual realities as well as its true life stories and little and not-so-little miracles will stimulate your spiritual appetite. God certainly was at work in his life and priestly ministry. And it's no wonder why. This is how he explains it: "On the day of my Ordination, I made two resolutions—1) I would offer the Holy Eucharist every Saturday in honor of the Blessed Mother to solicit her protection on my priesthood. 2) I resolved also to spend a continuous Holy Hour every day in the presence of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament." He affirms that in the course of his priesthood he was able to keep both of these resolutions. His experiences of leading souls to Christ were truly amazing. Before I begin sharing some of these with you, I'd like to remind you of the origin of the Holy Hour and its association with Saint Margaret Mary.

Of course, we remember from the Gospels, the Lord's injunction to Peter, James and John in the Garden of Gethsemane to stay awake and watch with him one hour (Mt. 26:37). With a heavy heart as He looked at his sleeping apostles, Jesus sighs, "Could you not watch one hour with Me?" That same request was made to St. Margaret Mary during one of her great apparitions from the Sacred Heart of Jesus, most likely around the year 1674. As she was praying before the Blessed Sacrament, she fell into a state of complete recollection in which she describes as having her "senses and faculties utterly withdrawn from their surroundings." Then she beheld the Lord Jesus as a blaze of glory. His five wounds shone like five suns while flames issued from all parts of his body. His Heart was like a burning furnace of love in which he revealed to our saint the "indescribable wonders of his pure love for us." Margaret Mary then tells us that as the Lord spoke to her, he opened his Divine Heart and such a scorching flame shot forth from it, she thought it would devour her.

The Lord had come for a reason. One of His requests to our saint was that she make a Holy Hour. These are the Lord's words as recorded in her *Autobiography*: "Every Thursday night I shall give you a share in that fatal sadness which I allowed myself to feel in the Garden of Olives. Death could not be so hard as the agonized state to which this sadness will reduce you. You are to get up between eleven o'clock and midnight, to keep me company in humble prayer to my Father, exactly as I spent that night in my agony. Lie face downwards with me for an hour—not only to allay God's anger by asking mercy for sinners, but also to soothe in some way the heartache I felt when my apostles deserted me, when I had to reproach them for being unable to watch with me even for an hour."

May I make a few reflections on this from the context of Visitandine life. One thing to keep in mind is that most conscientious Visitation nuns are probably fast asleep at 11-12 at night. So this was a special request that was not a regular part of our horarium. St. Francis de Sales did not want his daughters to get up in the middle of the night and go down to the church for the Divine Office or prayer. He founded our Order to admit women of more delicate health and his thrust was toward mortification of the will and not corporal austerities. It was the usual practice in the Order for the choir to be closed or locked after Compline to deter any fervent Sisters from walking around the monastery at night and sneaking into the church to pray. The rule called for the nuns to be in their cells, with lights out typically around 10:30 pm. It was time for sleep and if one could not sleep, then she could pray quietly in her cell. Therefore, we can picture our saintly sister as making a Holy Hour in her monastic cell, most likely lying on the floor—face down. Even this unusual practice would require explicit permission from the superior. So these initial Holy Hours were most likely made in complete privacy apart from the church.

Getting back to Bishop Sheen we know that his clerical state enabled him to have easy access to the Blessed Sacrament and he readily took advantage of this great privilege. He attests to the fact that he always tried to be faithful to his resolution to make a daily Holy Hour. He knew the spiritual significance of this practice, writing: "The purpose of the Holy Hour is to encourage deep personal encounter with Christ." And he summed up its effect on his life by saying: "The Holy Hour became like an oxygen tank to revive the breath of the Holy Spirit in the midst of the foul and fetid atmosphere of the world." It has been said that we can never outdo the Lord in generosity. Sheen's many years of faithful practice of the Holy Hour yielded abundant graces on his ministerial priesthood and his service toward souls. Reading his *Autobiography* we encounter numerous examples of this. Here is just one of them.

Throughout the years, Sheen was God's instrument to bring many souls to the Catholic faith and to a deeper relationship with Christ. His first convert as a young priest was made in Washington, D.C. While a graduate student at Catholic University, an aunt of his asked him to visit a young woman who was ill. She was married with two children. Warned that she was not well disposed to Catholics, Sheen introduced himself at the front door, only to be promptly spit in the face and told to leave. Every single day he prayed for her and begged God to give her the grace of conversion. He relates what happened: "In February I received a telephone call from her. I asked, 'Why did you send for me?' She said, 'I do not know. I went to the doctor yesterday and he told me that I would be dead in two weeks.' She drew her two young children to herself and wondered who would care for them. I assured her that she was not going to die in two weeks and told her of the prayers I offered for her conversion. 'The Lord, I believe, is frightening you into the Church.' The next day I began explaining the teachings of the Church, baptized her in May and continued to keep in touch with her for many years."

Many, many stories are told like the one above in the *Autobiography* of Bishop Sheen. He wants his readers to grasp the fact that his daily Holy Hours yielded a rich harvest of souls who changed their lives and turned to the Lord. He asks, "The Holy Hour. Is it difficult?" He writes this response: "Sometimes it seemed to be hard; it might mean having to forgo a social engagement, or rise an hour earlier, but on the whole it has never been a burden, only a joy. I do not mean to say that all the Holy Hours have been edifying, as for example, the one in the Church of St. Roch in Paris. I entered the church about three o'clock in the afternoon, knowing that I had to catch a train for Lourdes two hours later. I knelt down and said a prayer of adoration, and then sat down to meditate and immediately went to sleep. I woke up exactly at the end of one hour. I said to the Good Lord: 'Have I made a Holy Hour?' I thought His angel said, 'Well, that's the way the Apostles made their first Holy Hour in the Garden, but don't do it again.'"

At the beginning of his priesthood, Bishop Sheen tells us, he would make a Holy Hour during the day or the evening. As the years went by and he became busier, he made the Hour early in the morning, generally before he said Holy Mass. This way he would ensure that the Hour would be a part of his day, giving those first moments of the morning to the Lord and asking Him to bless and guide all his endeavors. He points out, "So the Holy Hour, quite apart from all its positive spiritual benefits, kept my feet from wandering too far." How much good came out of his Holy Hour is shown by this illustration. Sheen writes, "As an indication of the very wide effect of the Holy Hour, I once received a letter from a priest in England who told me in his own language, 'I left the priesthood and fell into a state of degradation.' A priest friend invited him to hear a tape on the Holy Hour from a retreat I had given. Responsive to grace, he was restored again to the priesthood and entrusted with the care of a parish. Divine Mercy wrought a change in him..." As a result, his entire parish was completely renewed too.

The laity also started to make the Holy Hour as they read Sheen's books and listened to his tapes on the subject. And it was not only Catholics who responded. The bishop explains that the most remarkable effects of the preaching of the Holy Hour were on non-Catholics. Having preached several retreats to Protestant ministers, he received one day a call from a Christian gentleman who was engaged in a work of world evangelization. He asked Sheen to recommend a practice that would help his work for the Lord prosper. Sheen recounted how much he depended on his daily Holy Hour before the Blessed Sacrament and suggested that since Protestants did not have the Eucharist reserved in their churches, he could ask people to spend one continuous hour with the Scriptures, in prayer and reparation for the sins of the world. Within a short time, 100,000 One-Hour Watchers had committed themselves to dedicate time in prayer to help solve problems related to World Evangelism.

As Catholics, many of us have the opportunity to take part in Eucharistic Adoration in our parishes. Our busy lives may make this seem impossible, yet the one hour we devote to the Lord each week can reap a rich harvest of graces. One busy sceptic wrote this about his own experience:

I have for many years resisted the call or invitation to be involved in Eucharistic Adoration. I didn't see any great advantage in it and anyway I felt I was too busy. Adoration has been going on in this Parish for 10 years or more. My life was taken up with work, sporting activities and holidays. I never had a spare moment. Suddenly I faced a crisis in my life and when all else failed I dropped into our church to ask for help. Adoration was in progress with a few people present. On the way out I was approached by this man who asked me if I would commit to an hour a week for about a month and fill in for him while he was on holidays. After some persuasion on his part I agreed. This was the best decision I ever made. It was the first time in years that I experienced peace in my life and I wanted more of this. When the month passed, he came to thank me and suggested I commit for an hour of my own. I agreed to give it a try. Seven years later I am still doing an hour a week. It has made such a difference in my life. I now go to Mass regularly and have a much greater love of the Mass and am much more interested in it. The crisis, bit by bit disappeared. I am still very busy at various things but the hour in Adoration seems to help me to have a clearer head and do things more effectively and efficiently. I now realize after all these years that the busier you are the more you need the Lord and one of the places to find Him is in the Adoration Chapel.

In this confusing time in our world and Church, the Lord Jesus is beckoning us to console Him and make reparation for all those who spurn His love, for those who mock His sacrifice, His blood, His Eucharistic presence. He wants us to spend time close to His Heart and invites us to come to Him, promising us that He will do more for us than we ask or imagine. Even if we are unable to visit the Blessed Sacrament in our churches, we can unite ourselves in spirit to His sacramental presence. The Lord's words found in the book *In Sinu Jesu* speak volumes to us all: "It is enough for you to be with Me. This is all I ask of you. I do not ask for elevated thoughts, or for emotional outpourings, or for nicely constructed phrases. I ask only that you stay with Me. I need your company even now, just as I needed the company of Peter, James, and John in Gethsemane. They slept on, it is true, but I knew they were there, and their mere presence was a consolation to My agonizing Heart." (p. 247) +

This talk on sacred Heart spirituality was given in our Gathering Room on February 2, 2020. If you would like to attend similar presentations by the sisters, our next talks will be held on Sunday, March 1, 2020 at 4:00 pm.