

## The Miraculous Medal

It was in November of 1830. It was a period when God and His Church were being attacked by His enemies, and ignored by the faithful. Our Lady told Sister Catherine Laboure about the evils of the world, which were to become more intense in the years that lay ahead. She then portrayed an image signifying her Immaculate Conception. She instructed Sister Catherine to have a medal made to that likeness, which should be worn by all as a safeguard against the snares of the devil. As Sister Catherine tells it:

“The Blessed Virgin was standing on a globe, and her face was beautiful beyond words. Her fingers were covered with precious jewels whose light dazzled me. And I heard: ‘Behold the symbol of the graces I shed upon those who ask for them!’ Then an oval frame formed around the Blessed Virgin and I read in letters of gold: ‘O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee.’ The vision reversed and I beheld the letter ‘M’ surmounted by a cross, at the foot of the cross, a bar, and below all, the Heart of Jesus crowned with thorns, and the Heart of Mary pierced with a sword. A voice said to me, ‘Have a medal struck after this model. Persons who wear it will receive great graces, especially if they wear it around the neck.’”

After two years of deliberation by Church authorities, the medal was finally struck according to Our Lady’s prescription, and in a short time it was being worn by millions. Countless wonders came to those who wore it: health was restored; bad habits were overcome; dangers were averted; men survived war and pestilence; and thousands were converted to the True Faith. People began to call it the “Miraculous Medal” — the official title it now bears in the liturgical feast that was established to honor the Queen Mother who gave it to us.

The little French nun whom the Blessed Virgin used as an agent remained unknown to the world during her lifetime. Not even her colleagues in her Order were aware of her role of intermediary in God’s work until after her death in 1876. She was canonized Saint Catherine Labouré in 1947, and today her mortal remains lie, still incorrupt for all to see, in the chapel where the Blessed Virgin first appeared to her.

## A Remarkable Conversion

Of all the countless conversions effected by the wearing of the Miraculous Medal, perhaps the most famous, because it was the object of an official canonical investigation, was that of Alphonse Ratisbonne in 1842. The heir of a wealthy Jewish banking family, Alphonse was a cynic with no faith whatsoever, and an abiding hatred for the Catholic Religion. Due to a unique circumstance, Alphonse found himself wearing around his neck one of the medals and reciting daily the *Memorare* of Saint Bernard — for the explicit purpose of proving to a Catholic acquaintance that it would *not* bring about his conversion.

The event of Ratisbonne’s conversion, nearly as sudden and dramatic as that of Saint Paul, is worth retelling here. We shall quote from the account of Baron de Bussieres, the acquaintance who induced Alphonse to wear the medal. De Bussieres, having business with some monks, had left a disdainful Alphonse in the chapel of a church in Rome. After about ten minutes’ absence, the baron returned to the chapel:

“When I came back into the church I saw nothing of Ratisbonne for a moment; then I caught sight of him on his knees, in front of the chapel of S. Michel. I went up to him, and touched him three or four times before he became aware of my presence. At length he turned towards me, his face bathed in tears; joined his hands, and said, with an expression no words will render: ‘Oh, how this gentleman has prayed for me!’

“I was quite petrified with astonishment; I felt what people feel in the presence of a miracle. I raised Ratisbonne, I led him, or rather almost carried him, out of the church; I asked him what was the matter, and where he wished to go. ‘Lead me where you please,’ cried he; ‘after what I have seen, I obey.’ I urged him to explain his meaning, but he could not; his emotion was too mighty and profound. He drew forth from his bosom the miraculous medal, and covered it with kisses and tears. I could get from him nothing but exclamations, broken by deep sobs: ‘Oh, what bliss is mine! how good is the Lord! what a grace of fulness and happiness! how pitiable the lot of those who know not!’ Then he burst into tears at the thought of heretics and misbelievers. . . .

“This wild emotion became gradually more calm. He begged me to take him to a confessor; wanted to know when he might receive holy baptism, for now he could not live without it; yearned for the blessedness of the martyrs.... He told me that he could give me no explanation of his state until he had received permission from a priest to do so; ‘For what I have to say,’ he added, ‘is something I can say only on my knees.’

“I took him immediately to the Gesu to see Father de Villefort, who begged him to explain himself. Then Ratisbonne drew forth his medal, kissed it, showed it to us, and exclaimed: ‘*I have seen her! I have seen her!*’ and his emotion again choked his utterance. But soon he regained his calmness, and made his statement.

“I had been but a few moments in the church when I was suddenly seized with an unutterable agitation of mind. I raised my eyes; the building had disappeared from before me; one single chapel had, so to speak, gathered and concentrated all the light; and in the midst of this radiance I saw standing on the altar, lofty, clothed with splendour, full of majesty and sweetness, the Virgin Mary, just as she is represented on my medal. An irresistible force drew me towards her; the Virgin made a sign with her hand that I should kneel down; and then she seemed to say, *That will do!* She spoke not a word, but I understood all!”

She had spoken not a word, yet this hardened unbeliever of just moments before now understood all! He understood far more than those who take the faith for granted — even to a “profound understanding of the mystery of the Crucifixion.” De Bussieres wrote:

“The Catholic Faith exhaled from his heart like a precious perfume from a casket, which contains it indeed, but cannot confine it. He spoke of the Real Presence like a man who believed it with all the energy of his whole being; but the expression is far too weak, he spoke like one to whom it was the object of *direct perception*.”

Alphonse continued to grow in sanctity and zeal. He was ordained a priest in 1847, and devoted the rest of his life to converting others of his race to the Catholic Faith. His conversion, although a spectacular and widely publicized event, was but a sample of the many thousands of lesser known wonders wrought by the wearing of Our Lady’s great sacramental.

From: <http://catholicism.org/miraculous-medal.html>