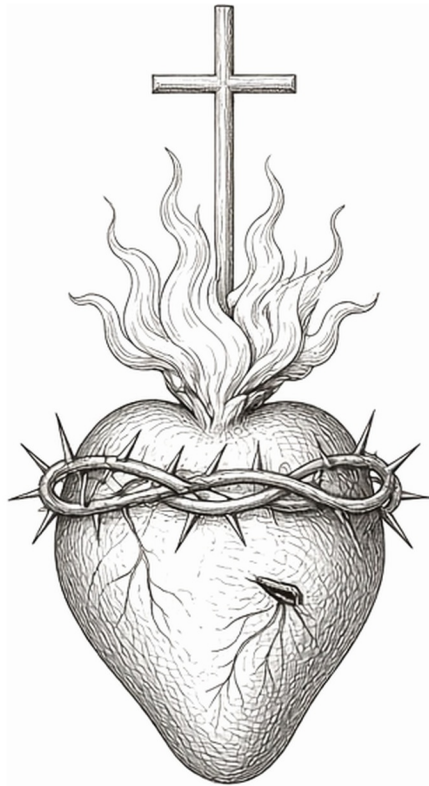




SILENT HOMILIES

The Nun Who Lived with the Sacred Heart

St Margaret Mary Alacoque



Silent Homilies

Little Treasures



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Before You Begin



You have probably seen the picture. A heart, a flame, a cross, thorns and a wound. It may have been hanging in a church for so long that nobody looks at it anymore.

This booklet is about the nun who taught millions of Catholics to look again.

St Margaret Mary Alacoque lived in seventeenth-century France. She was often ill, misunderstood and hidden inside a small Visitation convent. Between 1673 and 1675 she reported a series of encounters with Christ centred on His Sacred Heart.

The Church later received this devotion, but private revelation never adds a missing page to the Gospel. If it is genuine, it points us back to Christ already given to us in Scripture, the sacraments and the faith of the Church.

So this is not mainly a book about visions. It is about what the visions point to: the Incarnation, the Eucharist, Gethsemane, Calvary, reparation, discernment, and the astonishing Catholic claim that divine love came close enough to have a human Heart.

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Chapter 1

The Girl Who Could Not Get to the Door



Margaret Alacoque was born in 1647 in a small part of Burgundy. Her father died when she was still young. For a while she was educated by Poor Clare nuns, and there she made her First Communion.

Then her body failed her. For about four years she was so ill that walking became impossible. Later she remembered making a promise to Our Lady: if she recovered, she would belong to religious life.

She did recover. But notice the order. The future messenger of the Sacred Heart first spent years unable to go anywhere. Before journeys, visions, convent walls and pilgrims, there was a sick girl who could not get to the door.

We often imagine a vocation begins when somebody becomes useful. Scripture is less tidy. Moses stammers. Jeremiah says he is too young. Paul discovers that grace can work precisely where strength runs out.

Margaret's illness did not prove that God wanted her to suffer. It proved something simpler: sickness did not prevent Him from beginning.

Reflection

There is a sentence in St Paul that can sound almost too familiar: My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness. It does not mean weakness is pleasant. It does not mean illness should be romanticised.

It means God is not forced to wait outside the room until we become impressive again. That matters when somebody is housebound. It matters in hospital. It matters when age removes abilities one by one. We can start thinking that our useful years were the years when we could drive, work, cook, organise, travel or help everybody else.

Margaret's story quietly disagrees. For four years she could hardly move, and yet something was already being formed: dependence, prayer, desire, and a strange future she could not yet see. The Christian question is not always, "What can I still do?" Sometimes it is, "Can I let God meet me here?" A sickroom can feel like the edge of life. The Gospel says God knows how to enter rooms with closed doors.

A Short Prayer

Lord, when our strength becomes small, do not let our hope become small with it. Amen.

Chapter 2

The Wound in Her Mother's Face



After her father's death, Margaret's home became difficult. Relatives controlled the household and she later described a life with little freedom and much humiliation.

Her mother also became seriously ill. A painful wound developed on her face. Margaret dressed it. It is an uncomfortable detail, which is probably why it matters.

Years later people would know Margaret because she spoke about another wound: the opened side of Christ and the Heart shown with a wound in it. Long before that, she had learned what love looks like when a wound smells, hurts, needs cleaning and cannot be turned into a pretty religious picture.

The Gospel is full of this kind of nearness. The Good Samaritan pours oil and wine onto wounds. Jesus touches people others avoid. At the Last Supper He gets down to the level of dirty feet.

Catholic devotion becomes false when it makes us admire wounds from a safe distance. Margaret's first lesson was much nearer to the basin.

Reflection

Some acts of love are beautiful only after somebody tells the story later. While they are happening, they are mostly tiring. Changing a dressing. Washing a body. Cleaning a floor after somebody has been sick. Sitting beside a person who asks the same question again.

None of this looks like the Sacred Heart image. And yet perhaps it explains the image better than we think. The Heart of Jesus is not a decorative way of saying that God is nice. It is love that has entered flesh. Flesh can be touched.

It can become tired. It can be wounded. That is why Christianity cannot remain an idea. Margaret cared for her mother's face before she became known for speaking about Christ's Heart. I would not turn that into a neat prophecy.

Life is rarely that neat. But it is a striking preparation. Sometimes the person teaching us how to approach Christ's wounds is the person whose wound we would rather not see.

A Short Prayer

Jesus, wounded for us, make our devotion practical enough to touch the wounds near us. Amen.

Chapter 3

The Evening She Came Home Different



Margaret recovered and, for a time, enjoyed ordinary social life. She dressed well. She went out. There was a ball. Later, in her own account, she connected that period with an experience of Christ as the Scourged One.

It is important not to make the story say what Catholic faith does not say. Dancing is not a sin. A beautiful dress is not a sin. Cana was a wedding feast, and Christ supplied the wine.

The question is not whether something is pleasant. The question is whether we are still free.

St Ignatius of Loyola gave Christians a useful word for this: indifference. He did not mean not caring. He meant being free enough to receive a created thing from God and free enough to put it down when it begins to stand between us and Him.

Margaret did not need to become suspicious of joy. She needed to discover which joy could carry the weight of her life.

Reflection

Try a very ordinary test. Think of something you enjoy: a phone, a drink, shopping, praise, sport, television, being noticed, even being needed. Now imagine being without it for a week. The discomfort can tell us something.

Catholic freedom is not the freedom to have everything. It is the freedom not to be owned by what we have. This is why fasting belongs to Christianity. We occasionally put down something good so that we can discover whether it has quietly become necessary in the wrong way.

Margaret's experience after the ball belongs to private revelation; Catholics are not required to reproduce her experience. But the question underneath it belongs to every Christian. Can I enjoy God's gifts without asking them to be God?

Christ does not make life smaller when He asks for first place. He puts everything else back into its proper size.

A Short Prayer

*Lord Jesus, teach us to enjoy Your gifts without asking them to do what only
You can do. Amen.*

Chapter 4

Why Paray-le-Monial?



On 25 May 1671 Margaret entered the Visitation monastery at Paray-le-Monial. The Order had been founded by St Francis de Sales and St Jane Frances de Chantal.

There is an interesting detail about the Visitation. Francis de Sales originally wanted a form of religious life that could welcome women who did not have the physical strength for the severe austerities expected in some communities. The Order's spirituality was gentle without being soft: humility, charity and the quiet transformation of ordinary life.

That makes Margaret's home there especially fitting. The woman who had spent years physically weak entered a community born partly from the conviction that weakness need not exclude holiness.

Paray itself was not a great European capital. It was a small town. God had no difficulty with that.

Nazareth should have prepared us. Christianity began with a habit of important things happening in places the world would not have chosen.

Reflection

We sometimes postpone holiness until the scenery improves. When I have more time. When the parish is easier. When the family problem is solved. When I move. When somebody finally understands me. Then God points to the place where we are standing.

Nazareth was not Rome. Paray was not Paris. A tabernacle in a small church is not less inhabited by Christ because tourists never arrive. The Visitation itself carries a lovely lesson. St Francis de Sales did not believe holiness belonged only to the physically strong.

The Gospel has room for different bodies, temperaments and limits. That does not mean every place is permanent or every difficult situation must be endured. Sometimes God calls us to leave. But we should at least ask the uncomfortable question before we run: what if the place I keep calling “too small” is the place where God is already waiting for me?

A Short Prayer

*Lord of Nazareth, save us from missing You because we were waiting for
somewhere more important. Amen.*

Chapter 5

St John Was There First



On 27 December 1673, the feast of St John the Evangelist, Margaret reported an experience in which Christ allowed her to rest close to His Heart and made known to her the love represented by that Heart.

The date gives the scene a biblical depth. In St John's Gospel, the beloved disciple reclines close to Jesus at the Last Supper. Margaret's devotion does not begin a new Christianity. It sends us back into that room.

This matters because the Sacred Heart can become sentimental if we forget the Incarnation. Jesus did not merely appear human. The eternal Son truly took flesh. He had a human body, human affections and a human heart.

After the Resurrection He did not throw His humanity away. Thomas is invited to the wounds. The risen Lord eats with His disciples. Christianity does not end by escaping the body.

So when Catholics honour the Heart of Jesus, they are not worshipping an organ separately from Christ. They honour Christ Himself, with His human and divine love, through the biblical language of the heart.

Reflection

Why a heart? Why not simply say, “God loves you,” and stop there? Because Christianity keeps bringing us back to flesh. A baby in Bethlehem. Hands touching lepers. Feet washed at supper. A side opened by a spear. Bread placed into human hands.

The Word became flesh. That one sentence explains a great deal of Catholicism: relics, images, sacraments, kneeling, anointing, water, oil, bread and wine. God chose not to save us by sending an idea. Margaret Mary's experience belongs to private revelation.

But the truth underneath it does not. St John had already written that the side of Christ was pierced. He had already leaned close to Jesus. The Sacred Heart is therefore not an escape from the Gospel into later devotion.

At its best, it takes us back to the Gospel and says: come closer. You may have read the words. Now notice the Heart of the One who speaks them.

A Short Prayer

Word made flesh, bring us close enough to Your Gospel to hear Your Heart in it. Amen.

Chapter 6

How to Read the Picture



A Sacred Heart image can become so familiar that we stop seeing it. There is the Heart itself, the flame, the cross, the crown of thorns and the wound.

The symbols are not random. The flame speaks of love that is alive. The cross tells us what that love accepted. The thorns recall mockery and suffering. The wound takes us to Calvary and to the opened side in St John's Gospel.

The Church does not worship the picture. The image points beyond itself to Christ. The old Christian defence of sacred images rests on a surprisingly simple fact: the invisible God became visible in Jesus.

That is why the Second Council of Nicaea in 787 could defend the proper veneration of sacred images while rejecting idolatry. Christians are not pretending wood, paint or paper is God. Honour passes to the person represented.

The Sacred Heart image is therefore a small catechism hanging on a wall. It is theology you can see before you have found the words for it.

Reflection

Next time you see the image, read it slowly. Start with the fire. Love is not cold. Then the thorns. Love was refused. Then the cross. Love did not turn back. Then the wound. Love allowed itself to be opened. And finally the Heart.

The picture is not trying to frighten you. It is asking whether you have noticed what Christian love costs. Catholic churches are full of things that teach before anybody speaks: stained glass, statues, candles, Stations of the Cross, the crucifix, the sanctuary lamp.

None of them replaces Christ. Good sacred art does the opposite. It gets out of the way and points. That is why an old Sacred Heart print in a grandmother's hallway may contain more theology than its owner could ever have explained. She may simply have known where to look.

A Short Prayer

*Heart of Jesus, teach our eyes to see what familiar things have stopped
telling us. Amen.*

Chapter 7

Thursday, Eleven O'Clock



Margaret reported that Christ asked her to keep an hour of prayer on Thursday night, from eleven until midnight, in memory of Gethsemane.

That detail is easy to lose once “Holy Hour” becomes the name of a parish event. Its original shape in this devotion was not simply an hour of peaceful religious atmosphere. It was staying with Christ in the garden.

The biblical question is painfully simple: Could you not watch one hour with me? The disciples slept.

Margaret's Holy Hour became one source of the later Catholic practice of spending an hour in Eucharistic adoration. The Eucharistic setting matters. Catholics believe the One remembered in Gethsemane is not absent from the tabernacle.

Prayer, then, is not always about producing thoughts. Sometimes it is the decision not to leave.

Reflection

There are evenings when an hour feels impossible. The mind wanders. The body is tired. Nothing dramatic happens. That can make us think the prayer has failed. But Gethsemane changes the question. Jesus did not ask Peter, James and John for an hour of brilliant meditation.

He asked them to remain. There is something very human about that. When a person is suffering, we often cannot solve the suffering. We sit beside the bed because leaving would say the wrong thing. Eucharistic adoration has that same simple grammar: I am here because You are here.

St Claude de la Colombiere would later help the devotion spread, but the Holy Hour itself remains wonderfully uncomplicated. Stay. Not because Christ would cease to be God without you. Not because you must manufacture a feeling. Stay because love sometimes measures itself in minutes willingly given.

A Short Prayer

Jesus in Gethsemane, when we have no great words, teach us simply to remain. Amen.

Chapter 8

What Reparation Really Means



In June 1675 Margaret reported the words associated with the great revelation of the Sacred Heart: Christ showed His Heart and spoke of His love for humanity and of the coldness with which that love was often received.

This is where the word reparation enters the devotion, and it is easily misunderstood.

We do not repair God as though something in the Trinity were damaged. We do not complete the sacrifice of Christ as though Calvary were insufficient. His self-offering is perfect.

Reparation means something more human and more demanding. Sin rejects love. The Christian answers rejected love with love, joining that response to Christ's own offering.

Think of Peter after the Resurrection. Three denials are met by three questions: Do you love me? Jesus does not ask Peter to rewrite Good Friday. He asks for love now.

Reflection

Peter may be one of the best people to teach us reparation. He had promised loyalty and then denied even knowing Jesus. After the Resurrection, Christ does not give him a speech about repairing divine feelings. He asks a question three times: “Do you love me?” That is very close to the heart of reparation.

The past cannot be made not to have happened. But love can answer now. A First Friday, an act of reparation, Confession, a Holy Hour - none of these adds power to the Cross. They place us inside Christ's already perfect offering and let our own small yes become real.

This also protects the devotion from emotional exaggeration. We are not rescuing an insecure Jesus. We are allowing His love to expose the places where our own love has become cold, distracted or selfish - and then answering Him.

A Short Prayer

Heart of Jesus, where we have answered love badly, teach us to answer again. Amen.

Chapter 9

The Priest Who Did Not Believe Too Quickly



Margaret's community did not immediately accept everything she reported. That is not an embarrassment in the story. It is one of the most Catholic parts of it.

In 1675 the Jesuit Claude de la Colombiere came to Paray. He listened, tested what Margaret told him, and became convinced of the authenticity of her experiences. He encouraged her to write and supported the devotion.

Here is a less familiar part of his story. In 1676 Claude was sent to London as preacher to the Duchess of York and lived at St James's Palace. During the anti-Catholic panic surrounding the false "Popish Plot", he was arrested in 1678, held for about three weeks in King's Bench Prison, and expelled from England. His health never fully recovered. He died at Paray in 1682.

The priest who helped discern the Sacred Heart devotion therefore knew what it meant to remain Catholic when Catholicism carried a cost.

The Church's caution with private revelation is not lack of faith. St Paul gives the rule: test everything; hold fast what is good.

Reflection

We sometimes want the Church to decide immediately. A reported vision appears. A message spreads online. Somebody says a statue moved, a warning was given, or a saint spoke. Then people divide into believers and sceptics before anyone has had time to ask good questions.

Catholic discernment is slower. That slowness can be a gift. St Claude did not help Margaret by becoming excited. He helped her by listening carefully, testing what she reported, and placing it inside the faith the Church already possessed.

Private revelation is never a second Bible. It cannot improve the Gospel. At most, it can point to something in the Gospel that Christians have neglected. Claude's later suffering in England adds another dimension. The man who tested Margaret's words eventually had to test his own fidelity under pressure.

Discernment is not only deciding whether somebody else's experience is true. It is learning whether we ourselves will remain true when truth becomes expensive.

A Short Prayer

*Lord, give Your Church patient discernment, brave priests, and hearts
that prefer truth to excitement. Amen.*

Chapter 10

Nine Fridays — and the Other Twenty-One Days



Margaret also reported the promise later associated with receiving Holy Communion on the first Friday of nine consecutive months. It became one of the best-known practices of Sacred Heart devotion.

It can also be misunderstood. A devotion is not a machine. Nine Fridays are not nine stamps on a card that force heaven to open.

The Church's sacramental life does not work by superstition. Grace is gift, but grace calls for a response. Confession is not permission to plan the next sin. Communion is not a charm. Devotion should lead a person deeper into faith, hope and charity.

The nine Fridays are powerful precisely because they teach return. Month after month: come back to Christ, receive Him, begin again.

Margaret died on 17 October 1690. She was canonised in 1920. The devotion travelled far beyond the convent where she lived. But its real success is not measured by how many Sacred Heart pictures were printed. It is measured by whether the Heart in the picture changes the life in front of it.

Reflection

There are roughly thirty days in a month. First Friday is one of them. The interesting question is what happens to the others. If I receive Christ on Friday and spend Saturday refusing forgiveness, something has gone wrong.

If I honour His Heart in church and speak cruelly at home, the picture has not yet reached the room where it is needed. Devotions are meant to train the Christian life, not replace it. The Rosary should lead us into the mysteries of Christ.

A novena should teach perseverance. Eucharistic adoration should deepen love for the Eucharist. First Fridays should make the Heart of Christ less foreign to our own heart. That is why repetition matters. We return because we forget.

We return because love needs habits. And perhaps that is the quiet wisdom of nine months: enough time for a practice to stop being an event and begin becoming part of a life.

A Short Prayer

Heart of Jesus, keep us faithful not only on First Friday, but on the ordinary days that follow. Amen.

A Last Word



The next time you see the Sacred Heart, give it ten seconds before you walk on.

Look at the fire. The thorns. The cross. The wound.

Then remember that the devotion is not asking you to become interested in a picture. It is asking you to become interested again in Christ.

Margaret Mary did not give the Church a new Gospel. She pointed to the old one with unusual insistence: the Word became flesh; the side of Christ was opened; the Eucharist is not an idea; love can be refused; love can also be answered.

Perhaps that is why the image survived. It keeps asking a very simple question in a complicated world:

What will you do with a God who has loved you like this?

Sacred Heart of Jesus, I place my trust in You. Amen.

Sources and Further Reading



Sacred Scripture. 2 Corinthians 12:9; John 1:14; John 13:23-25; John 19:33-37; John 20:24-29; John 21:15-19; Matthew 26:36-46; Luke 10:29-37. Catechism of the Catholic Church. 66-67 on private revelation; 476-478 on Christ's true humanity and the Sacred Heart; 1159-1162 on sacred images; 1322-1419 on the Eucharist. St Margaret Mary Alacoque. Autobiographical writings and letters transmitted through the Visitation tradition at Paray-le-Monial.

St Claude de la Colombiere. Spiritual writings and official Vatican biographical material. He served as preacher to the Duchess of York in London, was imprisoned during the anti-Catholic panic of 1678, expelled from England, and died at Paray in 1682. Church teaching and tradition. Second Council of Nicaea (787) on sacred images; Pius XII, *Haurietis Aquas* (1956), on devotion to the Sacred Heart.

Historical details have been kept deliberately brief. Private revelations are presented as St Margaret Mary's reported experiences, not as additions to the deposit of faith.

Keeping a Light Beside the Heart



Margaret Mary was asked to stay awake for an hour. Most of the work behind a Little Treasure is also hidden: reading, checking dates, comparing sources, returning to Scripture, checking Catholic teaching, writing a paragraph, cutting half of it, and starting again because the simple sentence has still not appeared.

These booklets remain free to read. I want them to stay that way. But free to the reader does not mean they take no time or resources to make.

If this Little Treasure has helped you see the Sacred Heart differently, and if you are able to support my work, I would be very grateful. A gift through the Silent Homilies website is not payment for these pages. They are already yours. It simply gives me more time and resources to research, write and prepare the next one.

And if you cannot give financially, nothing is owed. Read it. Share it. Give it to somebody who has passed the Sacred Heart for years without really looking.

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