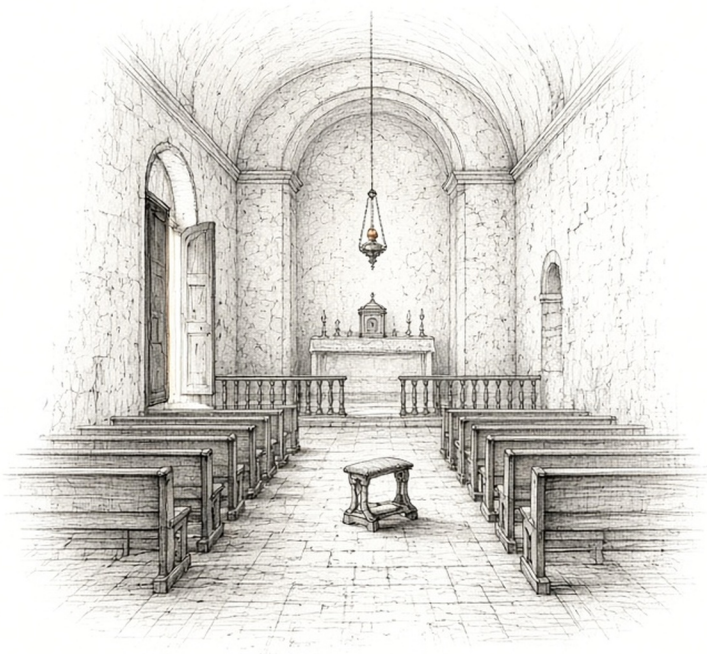




SILENT HOMILIES

The Friday He Asked For

What Jesus actually requested of St Margaret Mary



Silent Homilies

Little Treasures



The Friday He Asked For

What Jesus actually requested of St Margaret Mary

Before You Begin



Someone asks, after Mass: “Father, what are the First Fridays actually about?” That is a fair question. Most Catholics have heard the phrase. Fewer could say what was asked, by whom, and why it was a Friday.

The devotion comes from a Visitation convent in Paray-le-Monial, in Burgundy, in the 1670s. It comes from St Margaret Mary Alacoque, a nun some of her sisters found difficult, and from a handful of requests that were more concrete than a feeling about love.

This little book is not a life of St Margaret Mary. Those pages stay close to one question: what did the Lord ask her to do, and what did the Church later make of that asking?

You will meet a town, a Jesuit who discerned her experience, a feast that took a long time to reach the whole Church, and a warning the devotion itself requires. Nine First Fridays are not a ticket. They are a way of returning to Christ.

The revelations to St Margaret Mary are private revelation. They do not add a new Gospel. Catholics are not required to treat every approved private revelation as an article of the faith. At the same time, the Church has examined this devotion, approved it, and strongly encouraged love of the Sacred Heart. That balance is part of the story.

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Chapter 1

A Friday in Burgundy



Margaret Mary Alacoque was born on 22 July 1647 at Lauthecourt, near Verosvres in Burgundy. She knew illness as a child. She entered the Visitation monastery at Paray-le-Monial in 1671. The sisters there lived a hidden life of prayer. She was prayerful. Not everyone in the community understood her. That matters, because God does not only work through people whom everyone finds easy to understand.

Between 1673 and 1675 she reported a series of revelations of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The most important for this book belong to those years at Paray. She died on 17 October 1690. She was beatified in 1864 and canonised in 1920.

The Heart she was shown is not a separate religion inside the Church. Catholics honour the Heart of Jesus because it belongs to His real human body and because it is a sign of His love. We are not worshipping an anatomical drawing. We are honouring the love of the Word made flesh.

Friday was already the Christian day of the Passion long before anyone spoke of First Friday. The Church had kept Friday as a day of penance and memory of the Cross. First Friday did not invent the holiness of Friday. It took a day already joined to the death of Christ and asked that the first Friday of the month be given to Communion and reparation.

A Small Reflection

Why does it matter that Margaret Mary was not immediately easy to live with? Holiness is not the same as being agreeable. Communities can be holy and still find a particular sister difficult. That cuts both ways. It is a reason for caution when someone claims visions. It is also a reason not to assume that God only speaks through the people we already like. The Church has to do two things at once: test the claim, and not dismiss the person.

A Short Prayer

St Margaret Mary, pray for us. Amen.

Chapter 2

What He showed her first



Before the lists and the promises, she was shown a Heart. The devotion begins there. Love that has been refused asks to be recognised. The image of the Sacred Heart, with the wound and the flame and the cross, became a way of looking at that love. Jesus asked that the Heart be honoured, that an image be set up, and that people make reparation for coldness and neglect.

Reparation is a word many Catholics hear without being able to explain. It does not mean paying God back. It does not mean buying forgiveness. It does not mean that the Cross was incomplete and we must finish it. Reparation means responding with love where love has been refused. Sin wounds our relationship with God. Prayer, sacrifice and love offered in return are a way of saying: we will not leave that wound unanswered.

The Heart and the Eucharist belong together in this devotion. The First Friday request is a request for Holy Communion. The feast of the Sacred Heart was later placed in the week after Corpus Christi. That is not an accident. Devotion to the Heart of Jesus is meant to lead a person to the altar, not away from it.

A Small Reflection

We can treat the Sacred Heart as a picture on a wall and forget that the picture points to a Person. In the Eucharist, Christ truly gives Himself to us. If the devotion ever becomes a separate piety that does not need Communion, something has gone wrong. Margaret Mary's chapel was a Visitation chapel. The requests she reported keep sending people back to the altar.

A Short Prayer

Heart of Jesus, burning with love for us, make our hearts like Yours. Amen.

Chapter 3

The requests, said plainly



So what was she actually asked to do?

Honour the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Make known His love. Have an image of the Heart honoured. Keep a feast of the Sacred Heart. Receive Holy Communion in reparation, especially on the first Friday of the month. Keep a Holy Hour in memory of Gethsemane. Offer the first Fridays in a series of nine. Live in a way that answers neglect with love.

These requests were very practical. A feast had to be kept on a day. Communion meant going to Mass. A Holy Hour meant actually giving time to prayer. Reparation meant a life willing to answer neglect with love.

Catholics are not bound to every detail of a private revelation as if it were the Creed. We are bound to the Gospel. The Church later judged that this particular asking was in harmony with the Gospel, and she gave the devotion room to grow. That is why First Friday still appears on parish notices.

A Small Reflection

The requests are practical. Honour the Heart. Keep a feast. Go to Communion. Stay for an hour. Remember Friday. Catholic devotion often asks us to give time to something in concrete, repeatable ways. In this story the Lord does not begin with a theory about love. He asks for acts a person can put in a diary.

A Short Prayer

Lord Jesus, teach us to do the simple things You ask. Amen.

Chapter 4

Nine First Fridays



The Great Promise is reported in a letter St Margaret Mary wrote in May 1688 to Mother de Saumaise. She said that one Friday, during Holy Communion, the Lord promised that all who received Holy Communion on nine first Fridays of consecutive months would be granted the grace of final repentance. They would not die in His displeasure, or without the sacraments. His Heart would be their refuge at the last moment.

That is a serious promise. It is also easy to misuse. Nine Communion do not work like a machine. They do not make later mortal sin irrelevant. They do not replace Confession, conversion or the rest of a Christian life. Holy Communion is to be received in a state of grace. If someone is conscious of unconfessed mortal sin, they must go to Confession first. That belongs to ordinary Catholic teaching, not to a special rule invented for First Friday.

The nine months matter because they ask for perseverance. A person has to keep coming back. Novenas work the same way. So does Sunday Mass, week after week. Repetition is not there because God forgets. We forget. A habit of returning is already part of the gift.

If a month is missed, the series of nine is broken. The honest response is to begin again, not to pretend the gap did not happen, and not to despair as if God were counting like a clerk. The devotion is meant to form trust, not anxiety.

A Small Reflection

Why does the Church so often use repetition? Nine months. A novena. The Rosary. Advent and Lent, year after year. Sunday after Sunday. It can look like a lack of imagination. It may be something kinder. We are creatures of habit, for good and for ill. Repeated prayer forms habits. It reminds us to return even when the feeling is not there. Treating the nine Fridays as a bargain misses the point. Letting them become a way of learning to come back does not.

A Short Prayer

Lord, give us the grace to return, and to begin again when we have missed a Friday. Amen.

Chapter 5

Thursday night as well



First Friday is only half of the asking. There was also a Holy Hour. It is joined to Gethsemane and to the words, “Could you not watch one hour with me?” The traditional time associated with St Margaret Mary was Thursday night, from eleven until midnight, the hour before Friday begins.

That particular hour is a beautiful form of the devotion. It is not the only way the Holy Hour can be kept. A person who works nights, cares for children, or is ill is not failing the Sacred Heart because they cannot sit in church at eleven o’clock. An hour of prayer on Thursday evening, or another hour offered in union with Gethsemane, still belongs to the same asking. The essence is to stay with Christ. The clock-time is a traditional shape, not a lock on the door.

In Gethsemane the apostles were not asked to solve anything. They were asked to remain. That is a hard kind of love. It has a place in hospital rooms, in bereavement, and beside someone who is dying. There are hours when the only thing love can do is stay.

A Small Reflection

Why did Christ ask the apostles to stay rather than to fix the night? Some suffering cannot be managed. It can only be accompanied. The Holy Hour trains that kind of love. We are not always able to be useful. We can still remain. Families already know this, even if they have never used the word Gethsemane. The devotion gives that ordinary fidelity a name and a time.

A Short Prayer

Lord Jesus, who asked for one hour, teach us to stay when we cannot solve.

Amen.

Chapter 6

The Jesuit who believed her



St Claude de la Colombière was born in 1641. He was a Jesuit priest. In 1675 he was sent to Paray-le-Monial as superior of the small Jesuit house there, and as confessor to the Visitation. Margaret Mary needed someone who could discern what was happening, not someone who would either laugh or believe everything at once.

He did not simply accept her word because it was unusual. He examined it. He became convinced that the devotion was from God. He supported her when the community was unsure. He later spent time in England, suffered imprisonment, and died in 1682 at Paray. The Jesuits helped carry the devotion far beyond one convent. They preached it, printed it, and took it with them.

Good discernment is neither gullible nor cynical. A spiritual director who believes every vision does the Church no service. A director who dismisses every unusual spiritual experience without listening carefully can also fail the person. Claude's importance is not only that he believed her. It is that he knew how to test, and then how to stand with her.

A Small Reflection

What is the difference between believing someone and discerning what they say? Believing someone can be a kindness. Discernment is a responsibility. The Church asks both. Families know a smaller version of the same task. Not every intense experience is from God. Not every unusual person is confused. Claude's work at Paray is a picture of the Church at her best: slow enough to test, brave enough to recognise a gift.

A Short Prayer

St Claude de la Colombière, pray for us. Amen.

Chapter 7

How the Church received it



The Church did not turn one nun's reported revelations into a universal feast the following year. That slowness is easy to resent. It is also a form of wisdom. Private revelation should be tested. A feast for the whole Church is not a small thing.

In 1765 Pope Clement XIII permitted a feast of the Sacred Heart for Poland and for the Roman Archconfraternity. In 1856 Blessed Pius IX extended the feast to the universal Church. In 1899 Leo XIII published *Annum Sacrum* and consecrated the human race to the Sacred Heart. Pius XI wrote *Miserentissimus Redemptor* in 1928 on reparation. Pius XII wrote *Haurietis Aquas* in 1956, a full teaching on the theology of the Heart of Jesus.

Those names are not a parade. They are a story of reception. What began in a convent chapel was examined, encouraged, given a place in the calendar, and explained to the whole Church. The popes did not invent the devotion. They recognised that it belonged with the faith already held: Christ loves, Christ has a human Heart, that love asks for an answer.

A Small Reflection

The Church sometimes moves slowly. That can frustrate people who already love a devotion. Delay is not always fear. Some things need time because they matter. Time alone does not guarantee wisdom. There is a difference between caution that tests a gift and caution that can no longer recognise one. Paray waited. The feast came. Both parts of that history belong to the story.

A Short Prayer

Lord, give Your Church patience to test, and courage to receive what is truly from You. Amen.

Chapter 8

What the promise is not



Holy cards often print Twelve Promises of the Sacred Heart. That numbered list was compiled later from passages in St Margaret Mary's writings. It was not dictated as twelve numbered sentences on a single occasion. The cards have done good. Many people learned to trust the Heart of Jesus through them. The history simply means we should not treat the list as if it were a separate Gospel.

The twelfth promise on those cards is the Great Promise of the nine First Fridays. It should be received with confidence and without superstition. It is not a guarantee that nine Communions will save a person whatever they do afterwards. It is a promise of mercy and of help at the end, given to those who approach the Heart of Jesus in this way. The Church has encouraged the devotion. She has not turned it into magic.

The same warning applies to any sacred practice. A scapular, a novena, a First Friday: all of them can be used as if God were a machine. They can also be used as they were meant to be used: as ways of staying near Christ. The difference is in the heart that comes, and in the life that follows.

A Small Reflection

Catholic devotions can sometimes be used superstitiously, but that is not the same thing as saying the devotion itself is superstition. The Great Promise asks for trust in Christ's mercy, not for a contract written against the rest of the Gospel. A person who makes the nine Fridays and then lives as if sin no longer matters has not understood the Heart they came to honour. A person who comes, confesses when they must, receives Communion, and keeps returning has understood more than they may realise.

A Short Prayer

Jesus, meek and humble of Heart, make our hearts like Yours. Amen.

Chapter 9

A parish that still keeps Friday



A parish can keep First Friday without inventing a programme. Confession before Mass helps those who need it. Mass and Holy Communion are the centre. A Holy Hour, or a time of silent adoration, belongs naturally beside them. Prayers to the Sacred Heart can be said. So can silence. A parish does not need a complicated programme. The centre is still Christ in the Eucharist.

Not everyone can come. Shift work, small children, illness and distance are real. A housebound person can still unite themselves with the parish Mass and make a spiritual communion. A parent who cannot stay for an hour can still receive Communion that morning. The devotion has an essence: love, reparation, the Eucharist, returning. It also has traditional forms that not every life can copy exactly.

If a parish has forgotten Friday, the remedy is not guilt. It is to put Mass on the first Friday again, if that is possible, and to say why. People come more readily when they know they have been asked.

A Small Reflection

Parish life is full of good ideas that last three weeks. First Friday has lasted because it is simple and because it is joined to something the Church already does: Mass on a weekday, Confession, an hour of prayer. First Friday does not need a complicated programme. If the Eucharist, Confession and prayer are there, the devotion already has its centre.

A Short Prayer

*Lord, bless our parishes with priests and people who still keep Friday.
Amen.*

Chapter 10

Living with a Heart that asked



What remains for an ordinary Catholic is fairly simple. It helps to know what was asked. Communion on the first Friday, when we can get there and when we are in a state of grace, is at the centre. Confession belongs there when it is needed. If a month is missed, the honest thing is to begin again. A Holy Hour is part of the older form of the devotion, and a shorter time of prayer is still prayer if that is what the day allows. An image of the Sacred Heart can help, provided it is not treated as a charm. The devotion is meant to take a person to Mass.

The Sacred Heart is not a separate Catholicism. It is a way of looking at the same Christ. Friday already belonged to Him. The Host already is He. Reparation is only love answering love that has been refused. The rest is the calendar, and the decision to come back next month.

A Small Reflection

A devotion survives when it can be lived by people who are tired. The requests reported to Margaret Mary can be lived after a night shift, with a child on the pew, or when kneeling is no longer possible. They can also be ignored by people who own every holy card in the shop. Owning Sacred Heart pictures is not the same thing as living the devotion. The important thing is whether we actually return to Christ.

A Short Prayer

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

A Last Word



So what was asked? To receive Christ, to remember His love, to make reparation, to spend time with Him, and to return.

That is enough to take into the next first Friday. The rest is in the Mass, and in the Heart that still asks.

St Margaret Mary, pray for us.

St Claude de la Colombière, pray for us.

Sacred Heart of Jesus, have mercy on us.

Sources and Further Reading



The Autobiography and letters of St Margaret Mary Alacoque, especially the letter of May 1688 to Mother de Saumaise on the Great Promise.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 66–67, on private revelation; 1324–1327 and 1385 on the Eucharist and the need to be in a state of grace.

Leo XIII, *Annum Sacrum* (1899).

Pius XI, *Miserentissimus Redemptor* (1928).

Pius XII, *Haurietis Aquas* (1956).

On the feast: Clement XIII, 1765; Pius IX, extension of the feast to the universal Church, 1856.

On St Claude de la Colombière: his life and letters, and the records of his time as superior at Paray-le-Monial.

On the later compilation of the Twelve Promises: the published writings and letters of St Margaret Mary, from which the familiar numbered list was later arranged.

A word of thanks



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