

Now I Know What It's Like to

## ASK THE PASTOR

by J. M. Haffert



Two years ago our family moved into St. Coleman's Parish in Pompano Beach, Florida. Several parishes in the area had Blue Army cells, especially in nearby Fort Lauderdale (see SOUL, Sept.-Oct. 1972). A few parishioners were staying after the eight o'clock Mass each morning to say the Rosary and my wife soon inaugurated a cell in our own apartment building.

But the word "Fatima" was never heard from our pulpit. The little Rosary group, although praying with permission, seemed barely tolerated. On feasts of the Blessed Virgin (even the Immaculate Conception) the subject of devotion to Our Lady was usually ignored in the pulpit. The Bishop's Pastoral Letter (1) late last year followed this year by Pope Paul's *Motu Proprio* (2) on the need of devotion to Mary seemed to make little difference. And some parishioners were concerned that one or two of the younger priests seemed to question not only devotion to Mary but even some basic Christian beliefs.

Meanwhile the cells of "holiness", based on the message of Fatima, were working. Little groups were meeting once a week to say the Rosary with some special prayers for the parish.

And then something happened.

One trembling day in June of 1974 an appointment was made with a new pastor who had come to the parish just six weeks before. Mrs. Cecilia Clermont, Florida State Regent of the

Catholic Daughters of America, had become a member of the cell in our building and my wife had asked her to speak with the pastor...

I happened to be home the day of the appointment and for the first time in my quarter of a century in this apostolate I discovered what it was like to knock on a pastor's door to ask: "Can we have the Fatima Apostolate in our parish?"

Did nervousness touch Cecilia Clermont, who is a registered nurse in addition to having long experience as a leader in the Catholic Daughters of America? If so, it did not hinder her forthright approach. The pastor's housekeeper (an important door opener!) greeted her with respect.

"We have Blue Army cells in this parish," Cecilia said, placing before the pastor the program of the cell's HOUR OF HOLINESS. "There are also cells in other parishes." She flicked through some impressive newspaper clippings and the pastor glanced at headlines of Blue Army and Fatima Apostolate activities in other parishes. (3)

"Well, what do you want?" the pastor asked.

"That's it," Cecilia said. "We want to have this Apostolate in this parish."

"But what EXACTLY do you want?" the pastor asked again.

While Cecilia was answering, the pastor took four telephone calls, gave instructions to one of some twenty persons on the

parish payroll (about a truck), and left to greet someone at the door and tell them to wait. And meanwhile Cecilia explained:

"We would like to have a Mass on the first Saturday of every month with a special fifteen minute sermon on the mysteries of the Rosary...and with Rosary before Mass and opportunity for Confession."

"In other words," the pastor said, "You want the First Saturday Mass with all the trimmings."

"That's it," Cecilia said... "and an opportunity after Mass for those who are interested in promoting this to meet together."

"All right," the pastor said, "We'll schedule it for every First Saturday at eleven A.M. and you send me the details for the program and the publicity."

"Can there be a place for the promoters to meet after the Mass?" one of us asked.

The pastor, who had made this decision in the midst of so many interruptions, looked at us kindly. "Yes," he said, adding: "I used to promote the Block Rosary. Thank you for coming."

### WHY DID IT WORK?

We were a relieved and happy trio! And we had the impression that although the pastor (Monsignor Dominic Barry) had been businesslike, he was gratified to find a group in his parish interested in prayer and in cooperating in the fulfill-

ment of the requests of Our Lady of Fatima.

Some readers may think this "worked" because I was there. But Msgr. Barry did not know me at all.

The first key to success was Cecilia Clermont...a person well known in the parish. The other keys were: 1) a SPECIFIC request; 2) Documentation (SOUL, the Cell program and a few press clippings), backed by 3) PERSONAL HOLINESS of a persevering little Rosary group and a few Blue Army cells.

### BLESSING TO PARISH

Little by little this First Saturday program can bring a wave of transforming holiness to an entire parish.(4) The Church had established this devotion, with a plenary indulgence, even BEFORE Our Lady appeared at Fatima and announced that by this devotion (which "GOD wishes to establish in the world") the tide of atheistic communism would be turned back. Our Lady returned (as She had promised at Fatima on July 13, 1917) with the specific details of the devotion:

- 1) On Five Consecutive First Saturdays;
- 2) Confession;
- 3) Mass and
- 4) Holy Communion;
- 5) Recitation of the Rosary;
- 6) Fifteen minutes of meditation on the mysteries;
- 7) All of the above in reparation for offenses committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

In reply to questions put to Sr. Lucia, who was told by Our Lady at Fatima that God willed that she remain in the world for the establishment of this devotion, Our Lord and Our Lady

specified that if it is *impossible* to go to Confession on the first Saturday one can do so within the week. But almost as though anticipating a decline in the reception of the Sacrament of Penance, Confession was made an essential and central condition. And Sr. Lucia has explained why:

### PURPOSE OF THE DEVOTION

The primary purpose of the Five First Saturday devotion is RENEWAL AND RECONCILIATION. It is as though Our Heavenly Mother wished by this means to take Her children by the hand, once a month, TO RENEW THEIR COMMITMENT to fulfill the three essential conditions which She set down at Fatima to save the world. The most important of these is the sanctification of our daily duty.

"Everything depends on this," Sr. Lucia explained. By the Rosary, and by practicing consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary through the Scapular, we are assisted in the offering up of the sacrifices of our daily duty. Lucia explained. And by the First Saturday, WE ARE REMINDED ONCE A MONTH as we purge ourselves of the sins and failures of the previous month; we "practice" the application of the mysteries of the Rosary to the essential condition of the sanctification of our daily duty as we plunge ourselves in a special and intense manner into the Eucharistic Mystery.

### IDEAL PROGRAM

Following is the First Saturday Program (centered of course around the Mass) which we suggested to our pastor:

11:00 A.M.: Confessions and "ROSARY BEFORE MASS"

with special meditations totaling about five minutes.

11:15 A.M.: Holy Mass, with ten minute meditation on a mystery of the Rosary...usually connected with the Feast or Liturgical season.

After the Mass: Renewal of consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary (with act of reparation) through group enrollment in the Scapular and presentation of pledges of those who on this particular First Saturday, are just beginning.

12:00 P.M.: Meeting of Promoters. (coffee could be served) (Confessions could be continued after Mass if necessary.)

The promoters could prepare and give the meditations. Meditations in preparation for Mass are already available (5), and a different set of mysteries may be used each First Saturday. It is very interesting (and usually very inspiring) if five promoters each give a two minute meditation (in place of one ten minute homily given by the priest) followed by a brief coordinating summary or commentary by the pastor or celebrant.

Of course, printed copies are available of the brief Scapular enrollment and renewal of the "pledge", which contains the essential conditions of devotion to Our Lady's Immaculate Heart, as requested by God at Fatima.

If Our Lady could promise to save the world when enough persons are doing these things, can we imagine what saving graces and special blessings are to be expected in the individual parish where this devotion...so urgently requested in our day at Fatima (6), ratified by the Council (7), and sanctioned by the Holy Father (8)...is carried out?

Why not ask YOUR pastor?

### REFERENCES:

- 1) BEHOLD YOUR MOTHER, Pastoral of the U.S. Bishops, November 21, 1973.
- 2) MARIALIS CULTUS, Motu Proprio of Pope Paul VI published by L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO, April 4, 1974.
- 3) Blue Army CELL MANUAL. See also SOUL, Jan.-Feb. and May-June, 1974.
- 4) FIVE FIRST SATURDAYS, 12 page pamphlet, AMI Press (L-48)
- 5) THE ROSARY BEFORE MASS, 4 page pamphlet, AMI Press (Also available on cards which can be left in pews) (L-73)
- 6) LUCIA SPEAKS (Abbreviated translation of Memoirs): Apparition of June and July, 1917, and apparitions of Our Lord and Our Lady in Pontevedra: December 10, 1925, December 15, 1926, and June 29, 1929.
- 7) Paragraph 67 of LUMEN GENTIUM, explained by Pope Paul in message to International Marian Congress published in L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO, April 2, 1965.
- 8) SIGNUM MAGNUM, Encyclical of Pope Paul VI, May 13, 1967.