

HER REWARD by J.M.Haffert

My wife had been in the hospital two days for observation when suddenly, in the early morning of March 6th, her heart began to fail. And at 7:15 p.m. we saw a glorious fulfillment of the promise Our Lady had made to all those who complete the devotion of the Five First Saturdays: the promise of Her actual presence at the hour of death "with all the graces needed".

Anne (my wife) had begun the devotion of the Five First Saturdays in St. Coleman's parish, in Pompano Beach, Florida, the previous September. She had privately made the First Saturday devotion before. But realizing the tremendous importance of this devotion she wanted to see it established in her own parish.

IT STARTED WELL

So she had persuaded others to join her in going to the pastor. She was afraid the pastor would not receive them well but he was gracious and said quite simply:

"So you want the First Saturday devotion with all the trimmings?"

Anne broke into a great smile and said: "Yes, Father, that is what we want" (because of course she wanted not only the Mass at a special hour, but priests to hear confessions and help with the fifteen minutes of meditation on one or more mysteries of the Rosary).

The pastor set the First Saturday of September, and gave the hour of 11 o'clock for a special Mass for this devotion. Anne made daily calls throughout the whole area to interest people and I was so touched by this apostolic endeavor that I wrote to the Bishop of Fatima (who had intended to come to America just a few weeks later in September) asking if His Excellency might not come to Florida to be personally present at the inauguration of this First Saturday devotion.

The Bishop accepted.

Several hundred people were present for the opening of that devotion which Anne and her circle of friends continued to promote in the months that followed.

However, she suffered a great disappointment.

After the very first devotion, the pastor decided not to have a "special" hour for the Mass, but merely permitted that the Rosary be said before or after the last regularly scheduled Mass on Saturday morning. Priests were not available for hearing confessions even though it was only once a month. And after a while there even seemed to be a resentment on the part of the parish if more than fifteen minutes were taken for the Rosary and meditation altogether.

I had invited my wife and daughter to Rome for the opening of the Holy Year. Anne was already sick at that time, but she was present on Christmas day in St. Peter's square for the Holy Father's Christmas message and blessing. I wanted her to remain in Rome for the opening of the New Year but she said she "*had to get back to help with the First Saturday devotion*" so that she could make some telephone calls in advance and make sure that all was ready.

The last Mass she attended in this life was on the First Saturday. It took her almost an hour to get dressed and to get to Church that morning. Even so we did not know how ill she really was. She did not complain of pain, but she had an inward pain perhaps as great as her physical pain: To her great disappointment, now there had not even been a parish announcement (not even a mention in the parish bulletin) about the First Saturday. This was the source of her greatest grief at the end of her life.

But her grief was turned to joy on March 6th.

Our Lady promised that those who make the Five First Saturdays will not only die in the state of grace, but that Our Lady Herself "*will be present at the hour of their death with all the graces needed*".

How many persons die after hours, days, even weeks of agony? How many go through long hours of heavy breathing and suffering? And how many, in addition to the physical suffering, endure terrible moral suffering of doubts and fear?

But the first certain sign that Anne was dying was evident only on the very day she died, and although she breathed heavily during the morning, she was suffering but little. Her eyes were bright. She received the Viaticum three times within 24 hours. And she had been receiving Communion daily.

GLORIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES

At the very moment of her death word spread by telephone not only throughout the area in which she lived, but throughout the country. Hundreds offered plenary indulgences for her. Several churches in the area announced at the First Friday Masses the next morning that she had died, and dozens upon dozens of people remained after Mass to say the Rosary for her.

That same night vigils were being held throughout the country, and in many of these vigils she was remembered during the entire night before the Blessed Sacrament.

How many persons could ever hope to die under such wonderful, such glorious circumstances?

Truly in her we saw fulfilled that great promise of Our Lady for those who make the Five First Saturdays. But even more we saw in her the glorious reward in store for those who not only make the First Saturdays, but who go out of their way to see that this great devotion so desired by God at the present hour is established in our local parishes, and in the world.