

## **Feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (10<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time)**

Upon finding her beloved Son lost in the Temple, Mary says to Jesus in today's Gospel: "Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety." Well, it turns out that the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph weren't the only ones who struggled with anxiety! I have been too. Just to give you a little update, several weeks back I got hit with the bronchitis bug that several of you suffered from as well. And although I did take a few days back then to recover, I picked right back up with my work here shortly thereafter. But as time went on, and I never fully recovered from the bronchitis, anxiety began to set in. This was something that really affected me, and something that I have not had to deal with before. Therefore, as you may know, I decided to take a few weeks away at St. Vincent Seminary for a time of retreat, rest, and healing. It was a very helpful time, and all I can say is that God is so good. The graces and blessings that He bestowed upon me during this time were incredible. At the same time, I would not be truthful with you if I said everything was all better. I am continuing to work through my anxiety issues in a number of helpful ways. As my healing continues, I would just ask for your patience, support, and prayers. I am very happy to be back here at IHM, especially as we celebrate our parish celebration of 40 Hours Eucharistic Devotions this Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday. I'm sure many of you are also happy to have me back too. But, I would just ask you to not overwhelm me too much – I still need to take it easy.

You know, today's second reading from Romans – one of my favorite Scripture passages in the whole Bible – reminds us that “all things work for good for those who love God.” All things. I can honestly say that this whole experience has, on the whole, not been a very joyful one for me. But these words of St. Paul's explain a truth that truly sets me free. You see, everything we go through, when we approach it with faith and hope, is ultimately aimed at our good – here and in eternity – everything. It's part of God's loving plan for us. For example, through all this, the Lord has taught me the power of trusting in Jesus – of surrendering to God's will – of believing that He will provide for all of my needs. He has brought me closer to my family through the love and support they have offered. He has taught me great humility in accepting the help and care of others. But in the end, these are lessons in life that we each have to learn. And the Lord, who truly wants to give us what is great and best in life, does not want us to settle merely for what's “good enough”. And so He uses illness and trials and difficulties to prepare us now for that great day when we shall see Him face to face.

The Blessed Virgin Mary, our Mother, was herself no stranger to the hardships of life. Yes, today we celebrate her under the title of her Immaculate Heart. But, we also honor her under the title of her Sorrowful Heart. Today's Gospel gives us just one little glimpse of the sorrows she bore. But think of those other situations, like when she was at the foot of the cross watching her Son die a painful death. At the same time, we, like Mary, must ask ourselves: "But, what did His death and Resurrection bring us?" Salvation. See, all things do work for the good of those who love God!

My friends, we need to constantly ask the Lord for the gift of faith and hope to help us through the difficulties and storms of life. Trying to just get through and doing it on our own is not enough – trust me. Perhaps you also are struggling with anxiety, or depression, or some type of loss, or some hurt or wounding. Whatever it is, these are truly opportunities that God wants to use to bring good – to you and to others through you. Believing that might sound like a stretch – and it is – but that's what faith and hope are for. Put your trust in Jesus, believe in His love and care for you, and He will never disappoint you. God bless you.