

A Pilgrimage to the Virgin Mary

I had the opportunity this August to go on a short pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Good Help in New Franklin, Wisconsin—just outside of Green Bay. Never heard of this shrine? If not, then you may be surprised to learn that the apparitions that happened at this site back in 1859 are the first (and currently only) approved Marian apparitions in the United States. I think that all of us should be aware of Mary’s message to us right here in our own country, and especially we who are under the special protection of her Immaculate Heart here at IHM. So, let me share with you the story of how God’s Mother changed the life of a 28 year old Belgian immigrant named Adele Brise.

Adele was a regular, hardworking farm girl. She was on her way to the local mill “with a stack of wheat on her head.”¹ As Adele traveled through the woods:

...she saw a lady all in white standing between two trees, one a maple, the other a hemlock. Adele was frightened and stood still. [...] [She] could see the beautiful lady, clothed in dazzling white, with a yellow sash around her waist. Her dress fell to her feet in graceful folds. She had a crown of stars around her head, and her long, golden, wavy hair fell loosely around her shoulders. Such a heavenly light shone around her that Adele could hardly look back at her sweet face.

The vision faded, but the following Sunday same thing happened again while Adele, her sister, and a neighbor woman were on their way to church. After Mass, Adele told her confessor about the events. He assured her that if the vision was from God, then she had nothing to fear, but that she should “ask in God’s name who it was and what it desired of her.” On her journey home, as Adele approached the spot for the third time, the vision appeared once again. Overcome, Adele fell to her knees; when she asked the lady who she was and what she wanted, the following dialogue ensued:



The official statue of Our Lady of Good Help

Mary: “I am the Queen of Heaven, who prays for the conversion of sinners, and I wish you to do the same. You received Holy Communion this morning, and that is well. But you must do more. Make a general confession, and offer Communion for the conversion of sinners. If they do not convert and do penance, my Son will be obliged to punish

1 The Shrine of Our Lady of Good Help, *The Shrine of Our Lady of Good Help*, “Apparitions,” copyrighted 2011, accessed 14 April 2011 <<http://www.shrineofourladyofgoodhelp.com/>>. All the quotations in this article are from this website. Please note, however, that this website has undergone extensive revisions since I collected this information. Most of it is no longer available on the website, although it can now be found on numerous other websites on the internet.

them. [...] What are you doing here in idleness...while your companions are working in the vineyard of my Son?"

Adele (weeping): "What more can I do, dear Lady?"

Mary: "Gather the children in this wild country and teach them what they should know for salvation."

Adele: "But how shall I teach them who know so little myself?"

Mary: "Teach them their catechism, how to sign themselves with the sign of the Cross, and how to approach the sacraments; that is what I wish you to do. Go and fear nothing. I will help you."

"To honor the alleged apparition, Adele's father erected a makeshift chapel near the spot of Adele's vision," which came to be known as the Shrine of Our Lady of Good Help. The current shrine, which is the fourth structure built on the site, continues to sit directly atop the ground on which the Blessed Virgin appeared between that maple and hemlock tree. On December 8, 2010, the Most Rev. David Ricken, bishop of the Diocese of Green Bay, officially approved the apparition of Our Lady of Good Help.

Now, this Marian apparition was not so different than many, many others throughout the world and throughout history, including in the United States. We might ask, then, what was it that prompted Bishop Ricken to give it official Church approval? The answer is that it was nothing other than effect that this apparition had on the local church, on Adele herself, and also



Sr. Adele (far right) and 2 of her companions.

the effect its legacy continues to have even today. Adele herself immediately began a ministry of catechizing and evangelizing the morals of her neighbors. She gathered several other women around her to aid in teaching the children of the area, and to this end they opened a completely free school. The new sisters lived a life of simple humility and great faith, often begging for their daily food. Another, and perhaps the most important sign of the apparition's authenticity, was Adele's obedience to her bishop and respectfulness to the clergy, even when, because of

misinformation from some of the priests, the bishop placed the chapel under interdict, demanded the closing of the school, and threatened her with excommunication. She was, of course, vindicated in the end.

Another sign of God's favor was that, throughout its history, the shrine and institutions connected with it have always been able to raise funds for all of their needs, including the funds to rebuild the chapel three times to accommodate growth. Further, the shrine quickly became a part of the devotional life of the local people. Finally, and not the least significantly, many claims of miracles, especially miraculous healings, have been made over the years at the shrine, although no miracles have as yet been officially verified. However, the most significant miraculous event was the preservation of the shrine during the Great Peshtigo Fire of 1871, which seems indisputably miraculous. "The Robinsonville area was destroyed and desolate...except for the convent, the school, the Chapel, and the five acres of land consecrated to the Virgin Mary. Though the fire singed the Chapel fence, it had not entered the Chapel grounds." For all of these reasons, and for all of these benefits to the local church, this

apparition was considered worthy of examination and, ultimately, of official approval by Bishop Ricken.

A final point that I would like to make about the apparition of Our Lady of Good Help is that it did contain the somewhat unique call for teaching our young people their faith. Our Lady's call is a timely and important message for Catholics in the United States of America. In the 1800s and especially in rural areas, religious education of youth was a major concern. There were few priests, and most Catholics were immigrant families who had left their native land and, often, a great deal of their culture and traditions behind them to come to the New World. All too often, this included losing their Catholic faith, or at least ceasing to practice their religion. But Our Lady knew that her words were not just for the 1800s; they were for us today as well. In this country, ruled as it is by a republican government, education has always been a key factor in fulfilling the dream of having a country of the people, by the people, and for the people. If we American Catholics are to bring our religious and moral principles to bear on social and political decisions, as indeed we must, then we must educate ourselves in the faith, and especially educate our young people. Thus, Our Lady clearly spoke in a way relevant to the people and nation to which she came, not only in the 1800s, but also for us today.

So, that is the story of Sr. Adele Brise and Our Lady of Good Help. While we might be tempted sometimes to say, "Just one more Marian apparition to add to the thousands we have already," the importance of each apparition is that the Virgin Mary is calling her children in a particular time and place closer to herself. In Wisconsin, she is clearly calling you and me to take a trip, a pilgrimage—not necessarily literally, but a pilgrimage to draw closer to her. Why does she call us to herself so insistently? As always, she has but one goal: to bring us closer to Our Savior Jesus Christ and help us (after all, she's Our Lady of Good Help) to live in imitation of Him. Our Lady of Good Help, pray for us!



Sr. Adele Brise

“Let the children come to Me”

Jesus loves the little children—all the little children of the world! so the old song goes. And indeed, Jesus loves us all as His children and tells us that “unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:3). For those who literally are still children and youth, who are still more pure and innocent than the majority of us, Jesus expresses a special love, as when He tells His disciples, “Let the children come to me” (Matt. 19:14). Jesus loves the children. But do the children love Jesus? More precisely, do our children love Jesus?



Here at Immaculate Heart of Mary, it’s pretty clear that our children are a big focus. We have a great grade school, a thriving Parish Religious Education Program, an active Youth Ministry, and a number of groups like KofC Squires, American Heritage Girls, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and Cub Scouts that bring faith into their other activities. There’s Sunday School, Children’s Liturgy of the Word; I could go on. There are tons of opportunities for our parish youth to learn to love Jesus. But again, I have to ask the question: do they? That is to say, do we as adults make use of the opportunities available to really give our children the chance to fall in love with Jesus Christ?

It’s very tempting to say “yes” to that question simply because our children talk about Jesus and can answer a lot of the basic questions about Jesus. But that really can be different than falling in love with Jesus. We have noticed a continuing trend of lower attendance at Sunday Mass, at Youth Group, even in our school and PREP classes that does not bode well for our future. Admittedly, most children don’t get very excited about all of the rules and regulations of our religion (just, I might add, as they don’t get very excited about the rules and regulations of family life). But if they are brought into continual contact with faithful adults and peers who have really fallen in love with the Person Jesus Christ and live a life in the Holy Spirit, then they have a real chance of feeling the love of Christ expressed in other people and entering into that love themselves. Because basically, if they don’t find a stable, consistent, and loving culture in their parish family, then they will begin to be drawn into the secular culture.

I’ll give you an example. The other day one little first-grader here at school, whose company I regularly enjoy, drew and cut out for me a picture of a big ship. He said to me, “This is the Titanic,” and then proceeded to tell me the story about how it sunk (so precious). Then he points out little people (marks, really) on the edge of the ship and tells me—“and that’s Jack and Rose.” First Grade. Now, I have never watched *Titanic*, but it’s famous enough that I knew who he was talking about. I also know that *Titanic* is rated PG-13, and for good reason. It is this sort of thing that makes me worry that we are failing our children: we don’t protect them from the bad influences and backwards priorities of secular society.

You may have heard about the Christmas campaign put on by the group called American Atheists, which they’ve been doing for several years now. This year they are putting billboards up along highways with a picture of a little girl writing to Santa Clause: “Dear Santa, all I want for Christmas is to skip church! I’m too old for fairy tales.” This is the sort of society we live in



nowadays. If we are going to keep what I can only describe as the poison of secularism from getting into the lives of our children, then you must take seriously your job as parents to teach your children the faith. I say “your” job intentionally because it is really my job, and the job of our various educational programs, only in a secondary sense. You, the parent, are the primary teacher of your child, as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches. “Through the grace of the sacrament of marriage, parents receive the responsibility and privilege of evangelizing their children. Parents should initiate their children at an early age into the mysteries of the faith of which they are the ‘first heralds’ for their children. They should associate them from their tenderest years with the life of the Church” (*Catechism*, par. 2225).

Your role in your child’s life is indispensable, and nowhere is this more true than in the transmission of faith, hope, and love in Jesus Christ. If your children see that you really believe—that your actions are based on what the Church and the Bible teaches and not necessarily what the world teaches—then they will believe. If they see that your hopes and dreams are ultimately not about this life but the next, then they will have hope. Most especially, if they see that your love is Christian love: conformed to the Truth of Christ, able to sacrifice, loving our neighbor as ourself, loving even our enemies, and particularly the way that you love each other as husband and wife—then they will know that the love of Christ for them is true and they will be able to love in return. Obviously, that’s kind of a terrifying responsibility. And how do you find the time to do it, with all the other responsibilities of life getting in the way? Well, I can’t take that responsibility away from you as a parent, but I am here to tell you that you don’t have to do it on your own. In fact, you can’t do it on your own—that’s why Jesus left us the Church as His Body and the community of His love. Let the parish help you raise your children to know, love, and serve Jesus in this life so that they may be happy with Him forever in the next (did you get the *Baltimore Catechism* reference there?).

Practically, what does all of this mean? There is not, of course, a magic answer that fits every family, but as you prayerfully discern how you are bringing your children to the Lord Jesus, allow me to offer a few time-tested ideas:

- Pray together as a family every day.
- Read the Bible together as a family.
- Take the time to ask your children questions about their faith or how positive or negative situations in life affect their faith.
- When it comes to a choice between starting your child’s second sports commitment and Youth Group, make up your mind now that Youth Group wins. Or when the choice is between dance and PREP, PREP wins.

I know it is very counter-cultural these days, but putting your foot down and making the right choice for your child is often the best way of bringing them to Jesus. Even if they don’t like it now, they will thank you in the future because you will be teaching them what is truly important in life.

To conclude, then, I ask all of our parish parents to take some time at the beginning of



this new year to reevaluate the amount of time and attention you are giving to bringing Jesus into the lives of your children. To ask whether your actions as a family really reflect your faith, since as St. James says, "Faith without works is dead" (Jas. 2:26). You may remember from our last newsletter the story of Our Lady of Good Help and the mission that she entrusted to Sr. Adele. She told Adele, "Gather the children in this wild country and teach them what they should know for salvation." While our country is not wild in the same way that it was back in the 1800s, modern America has its own wildness, and it isn't a good sort. Let us all work together to gather our children and teach them what they should know for salvation: teach them to know and love Jesus Christ and His Church. I pray each and every day that you and I will not fall short in our responsibilities.

2015 Spring Issue

Preparing for Death – Preparing for Resurrection

As we continue to celebrate the Easter Season, it is perhaps a good time to reflect on the connection between death and resurrection. As we profess each Sunday in the Creed, we believe in the resurrection of the dead. All of the dead. Even those condemned to Hell by their sinful choices will have body and soul reunited and transformed into something immortal. As the Prophet Daniel says, “Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; some to everlasting life, others to reproach and everlasting disgrace” (Dan. 12:2). We shall all rise, but we shall not all rise in Christ. How, then, can we rise in Christ? Only by dying in Christ.

Our faith teaches us that “dying in Christ” has many levels. Of course, it starts with Baptism and the gift of faith. It continues with living a life of sacrifice: dying to ourselves so that Christ may live in us. But what I really want to bring out in this article is how it ends. Dying in Christ becomes more than a motivation, even more than a Sacrament, at exactly that moment when it becomes literal—that is, when we die. The moment of death is the final moment of this life of testing. It is the moment when the moral character that we have been forming throughout life is put to the final test, like clay in the oven. Will we withstand the final ordeal, or will we crack? Only God knows the answer, of course, but again our faith teaches us that a great battle rages around us at that moment—Satan and his demons tempting us with all their might, while Christ and His Angels and Saints defend us and encourage us to make our own, free choice of total submission to God. As any who have cared for the dying know, added to this spiritual warfare are the normal circumstances of human death, which often include severe pain, weakness, and terrific fear of the unknown.

I don’t know about you, but thinking about the moment of death always makes me tremble a bit. Not because I doubt Christ as my Savior, of course, but because I doubt myself. If only there were some way to fill these last days and moments of life with the presence of Jesus Christ and His abiding peace. Oh wait, there is! The Last Rites of the Church. As the name implies, the Last Rites involve several different Sacraments and sacramentals. Ideally, the dying person is able to make his final Confession, easing his soul of any sins and the guilt that accompany them. Then, the priest grants the person a special plenary indulgence known as the Apostolic Pardon which, if received devoutly, can eliminate or greatly reduce the need for time in Purgatory. The dying person then renews his vows of Baptism and is sprinkled with holy water. Next comes the Anointing of the Sick—at this moment properly called by its other name, Extreme Unction—which is the Sacrament that helps us unite our suffering with the suffering Christ. Finally, and most tenderly of all, the dying person receives the Eucharist for the last time as Viaticum, which literally translates to “food for the journey”: the final journey. How truly significant it is that, as someone prepares for death and the final test, the last Sacrament he should receive is Jesus Himself, substantially present in the Holy Eucharist. What attacks of the Devil could stand before this mighty barrage of grace? None, I believe.

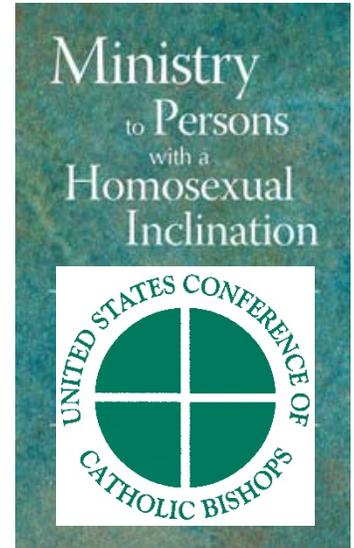
As a priest, I have seen firsthand the strength and peace that the Last Rites bring to the dying. But, as you may have noticed, most of these rites need some level of participation from the recipient. Confession of sins, renewal of baptismal promises, even reception of Holy Communion demand that the person is conscious, able to speak, and able to take at least a little food. Unfortunately, many Catholics who are seriously ill wait too long to request these Sacraments. By the time the family gets around to calling a priest, the best we priests are able to do is give the Sacrament of Extreme Unction and impart the Apostolic Pardon. Again, from experience I know that people delay in asking for a priest because they see us and the Last Rites

as the harbingers of death. But that is simply not true. All of these Last Rites can and should be repeated numerous times if the circumstances require it. It is far better for the dying person to receive the Last Rites when he can still be aware, participate, and receive the psychological and emotional comfort that they bring, than to wait until he is unconscious and oblivious. And so, as your shepherd in Christ, I urge all of you to take seriously the great grace Jesus wishes to give us through those Last Rites that He left us in His Church. In this way, we can have the certainty of faith that, having died in Christ, we will also rise in Him on the Last Day.

What Does the Supreme Court Decision on Same-Sex ‘Marriage’ Mean for the Church?

As you are probably aware, on June 26th in the decision *Obergefell vs. Hodges*, the Supreme Court of the United States of America ruled that same-sex ‘marriage’ is now legal in our country. This is a very confusing time for our country and a confusing time for us as Catholics. And yet, nothing has really changed from the Church’s perspective. I wish to take a few moments to express my support for all faithful Catholics who deal with homosexuality, both here at IHM and at large. I also wish to tell you—as best as I am able—what you can and cannot expect from the Catholic Church as the American bishops and priests try to react appropriately to this decision and lead the People of God in our common response. Here is what I feel that I, as a priest, can promise you:

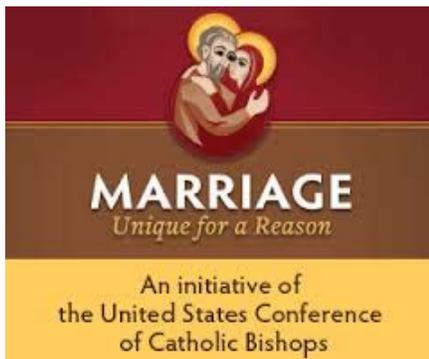
1. The Church **does not** hate anyone. Nor does she unjustly discriminate against anyone. St. John writes in his first epistle, “Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life remaining in him” (3:15). The Lord Jesus Himself says, “Love your enemies” (Matt. 5:44) and “Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matt. 25:40). We must always work to purify ourselves and our Church of any hatred or unjust discrimination. We must work to show love, respect, and support to our brothers and sisters who struggle with homosexuality.
2. The Church **does not** consider people with homosexual tendencies (in politically correct language, people who are gay or lesbian) to be sinful. We cannot always control our feelings and passions, although we can always control what we do with them. Same-sex attraction is not a sin. Catholics with homosexual tendencies who are living according to the teachings of Jesus Christ and His Church are welcome among us as first-class citizens (as they say) and can receive the Sacraments like anyone else.
 - At the same time, it is important to say that—unlike popular culture today—the Church **does** consider same-sex attraction to be disordered. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says, “The number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. This inclination, *which is objectively disordered*, constitutes for most of them a trial. They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. These persons are called to fulfill God’s will in their lives and, if they are Christians, to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord’s Cross the difficulties they may encounter from their condition” (par. 2358, my emphasis). That whole quotation from the *Catechism* is important, but the point I wanted to make is about the sexual inclination being disordered. Again, this doesn’t mean sinful—a person must choose to act on the inclination for it to become sinful. But just as it is a bodily disorder that some of us are nearsighted or farsighted, or that some of us are born with a cleft palate or Down syndrome, it is a disorder to be sexually attracted to someone of the same sex.



3. The Church **does** consider sexual relations between same-sex couples to be a serious sin. This should not be surprising. When heterosexual couples have relations before marriage (what we call “fornication”), it is a serious sin. When two people commit adultery because one or both of them are married, it is a serious sin. Every use of our sacred sexuality outside of the context of a man and woman who are married (see Matt. 19:3-9) is, as the Church teaches, a serious sin. Even within marriage, things such as spousal rape or viewing your spouse as an object of lust are serious sins. It is no different with homosexual relations. As with each of these examples, Catholics with homosexual tendencies who commit the sin of homosexual relations must repent, go to Confession, and resolve to sin no more before they can receive Holy Communion. And by the way, even if people choose to remain in sin, we don’t hate them because they’re sinners. Love the sinner; hate the sin—difficult, but that’s what Jesus teaches.

4. Catholic churches **will not** be celebrating weddings for same-sex couples. A ‘marriage’ between a same-sex couple may be recognized now by civil government, but it is not and will never be recognized by the Catholic Church. Using both faith and reason, we understand the act of sexual intercourse to be sacred and a reflection of God’s love, even between two non-Christians. Of course, for Christians, marriage is something even deeper: a Sacrament that makes present the love between Jesus Christ and His Church (see Eph. 5). This expression of love cannot be reproduced between two people of the same sex, as even the physical structures of our bodies make clear. We are grateful that, at this point, the Supreme Court still recognizes that the religious liberty we have in our country allows the Church exemption from these new laws. The Church cannot be legally compelled to witness same-sex weddings.

5. The Church **will** continue to oppose and peacefully agitate against laws or court decisions that incorporate the idea of same-sex ‘marriage’ into the U.S. legal code. The Catholic Church has nothing against the love, friendship, and affection that may exist between two people of the same sex. (As mention above, however, she does condemn actual sexual relations between them.) Nor is the Church particularly concerned with whether two people



can attain the same legal benefits that have traditionally been given to married couples (tax breaks, inheritance, power to make medical decisions for the other, etc.). That’s a decision for civil government to make. Nevertheless, we cannot agree with a law or court decision that gives legitimacy to an immoral union between a same-sex couple and tries to call it “marriage.” These laws are unjust laws, which means that they are not really laws at all. As Catholics, we will not obey them when they infringe on our God-given, civilly-recognized religious liberty, and we will continue to fight until they are repealed.

I pray that this simple review of what Catholics believe and why will be helpful in this confusing and challenging time. As pastor of IHM, allow me to extend a personal and communal welcome to anyone struggling with homosexuality. We want to make a place for you here in our parish. We are not perfect, and we have a long way to go in learning how to minister to our brothers and

sister who deal with homosexuality. I hope that you can give us that chance. I am sure that we have much that we can teach each other and learn from each other. I pray that all IHM parishioners can strive to embody the teachings of Jesus Christ and His Church when it comes to this timely and delicate issue. Immaculate Heart of Mary, pray for us!