

The Miraculous Medal (Explained)

Front of the Medal

Mary standing on the globe. Our Lady stands upon a globe representing the world, and as she told Catherine, "each person in particular." She is Queen of heaven and earth, and Mother of each soul individually. Beneath her feet on the medal's design, the globe also recalls the golden globe Catherine saw her holding, which Mary offered to God as the whole world entrusted to her prayer.

The serpent crushed beneath her feet. Mary's foot rests on a serpent, the ancient enemy of Genesis: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head" (Genesis 3:15, Douay-Rheims). The medal proclaims that the battle foretold at Eden's gate is real, and that it is already lost by the serpent.

The rays streaming from her hands. In the vision, rings on Mary's fingers flashed with light streaming down upon the globe. "These rays," she told Catherine, "are the symbols of the graces I shed upon those who ask for them." Some gems, though, gave no light at all. These, Mary said, are the graces for which souls forget to ask. The rays on the medal are a standing invitation: *ask*.

The inscription. Framing the image are the words Our Lady herself composed:

> *O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee.*

This Miraculous Medal prayer professes the Immaculate Conception a full generation before the Church solemnly defined it in 1854 — and it names the medal's one condition: recourse, made with confidence.

The year 1830. The date of the apparitions, stamped into the design at Our Lady's request — the medal carries its own birth certificate.

The Back of the Medal

Notice first what the back does *not* have: an inscription. The devotional tradition holds that when the question of wording for the reverse was raised, the answer given was that no words were needed — the Cross, the M, and the two hearts say enough. The back of the medal is written entirely in symbols.

The M surmounted by the Cross. A large M — Mary's initial — interwoven with a bar bearing the Cross. Mary stands inseparably beneath the Cross of her Son, as she stood on Calvary:

"There stood by the cross of Jesus, Mary His Mother" (John 19:25).

The classic commentaries on the medal love to point out *how* the two are joined: the monogram of Mary forms, as it were, a support and pedestal for the Cross — she does not stand beside her Son's sacrifice but beneath it, upholding it, her whole role bound to it and never apart from it. The old writers summed her up in three words the M can carry at once: Mary, Mother, Mediatrix — the one through whose hands, as the front of the medal shows in rays of light, the graces of the Cross reach us.

The two hearts. Beneath the M are two hearts side by side: the Sacred Heart of Jesus, crowned with thorns, and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, pierced by a sword — the sword Simeon foretold: "thy own soul a sword shall pierce" (Luke 2:35).

The medal places the two hearts together because that is how they beat: *in love and in suffering, the tradition says, these two hearts are inseparable.* As the Sacred Heart is the model and source of all holiness, the Immaculate Heart is its most faithful mirror — and the pair together preach a whole spirituality in miniature: His Passion was also hers, and ours, united to theirs, becomes redemptive too.

The twelve stars. Ringing the design are twelve stars — the apostles, and through them the whole Church gathered around Mary, the "Queen of Apostles"; and the crown of the woman of Revelation: "a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars" (Revelation 12:1). The old commentaries add a bracing point: the stars are not only a picture but a summons. To wear the medal is to be reminded of one of our chief obligations as Christians — to be apostles ourselves, by the example of our lives, our words, and our zeal — for "they that instruct many unto justice shall shine as stars for all eternity" (Daniel 12:3). The back of the medal is, in miniature, the Church's whole picture of Mary: under the Cross, beside the Heart of her Son, crowned amid the apostles — and it asks the wearer to take a place in that crown.