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University of Notre Dame
Religious Bulletin
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. . the fund for Boys Town.
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Mary, The Grotto, Penance And Purgatory.

Many an evening in May students have stopped the priest after hymns at the Grotto and asked what words he sang at the end. They are "Cor Mariae Immaculatum-- Immaculate Heart of Mary." And they mean:

"Mary, in thee there is not a stain. That is why you are called Immaculate. That is why God loved you so. That is why, on the day you died, you were ushered at once by angels into the presence of God.

"You were conceived Immaculate. We are conceived in original sin. You needed no Baptism. We were washed by water and the Holy Ghost and our souls became white as snow. You never committed the slightest fault. We have all sinned, some lightly, some gravely. By our first sin, we smooched the white of our soul, turned it to dirty gray-- if the sin were grievous, to black.

"Mother of God, your prayers can help whiten our souls again. That is why, when the priest sings 'Cor Mariae,' we respond, 'Ora pro nobis-- pray for us, Heart of Mary.'

"When you appeared at the Grotto of Lourdes, you uttered one word three times to impress Bernadette. That word was 'Penance.' 'Do penance,' your Son once said, 'Or you shall all likewise perish.' That is, 'Do penance and you shall be saved, your sins of scarlet shall become white as snow.'

"Teach us, Mary, the meaning of penance. Is it not changing our minds about sin, being sorry, promising never to do it again, keeping free of occasions?

"Mary replies: 'It is meaning your Act of Contrition. Penance means also humble confession, following closely the priest's advice, seeking counsel outside of confession when this is needed. It is doing hard things to make up for sin: rising promptly at the very first stroke of the bell, cutting down on the smokes, saying "Wait-- five minutes." It is pushing aside your dessert now and then, postponing a show, being kind when you feel like "mad."'

"If we would only do penance enough, good Mother, and balance the penalty our guilt has incurred, then our days would be happy. We should never be worried. God could come for us, as He came for you, crown us with glory as once He crowned you.

"But you know us well, better far than we know ourselves. Foolhardy children, we despise your counsel, we rarely do penance, certainly never enough. And if we should die tonight, it might be without guilt, but who of us has caught up with saying his penance? That is the meaning of Purgatory, God's spiritual laundry after death where the 'washing' of penance continues. 'Nothing defiled,' He has written, 'shall enter heaven.' Penance there is much harder than here. It burns our souls of their least impurities, makes them white hot with love of God.

"Mary, you know the suffering of the Souls in Purgatory. We understand the pains are as grievous as hell but that they shall come to an end. Only, however, when the very last farthing shall have been paid. From this there is no escape. Here or there.

"In this 'Year For Others' more than ever before we shall make November the Month for Poor Souls. As we kneel at your Grotto we pray the last spots may be melted away from their souls. We pray for all who have gone before us, parents, relatives, strangers, friends. Their names we have placed on an altar where one of the priests is saying a Novena of Masses for them. At five o'clock, those nine days, you shall find us in Sacred Heart Church at the public prayers.

"Immaculate Heart of Mary, pray for us and please give us sense. Make us tough with ourselves here below. Help us do our penance now."