

The Astonishing Power of One Hail Mary

A prayerful petition in Pittsburgh changed lives.



‘Hail Mary, Full of Grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now, and at the hour of our death. Amen.’ (photo: Unsplash)

Did you ever think about or realize what the power of one Hail Mary can do?

John Petrovich and Father Joe Freedy have, after a recent, convincing incident.

“When I heard it, I was struck — how incredible that story is,” Father Freedy senior parochial vicar at Divine Mercy parish in Pittsburgh and president of Dry Bones Ministries, said after he listened to Petrovich recounting the details to him at the end of a retreat.

Shortly before, on a Saturday morning, Petrovich was running, as usual, in a Pittsburgh neighborhood. On his route, he passed a house where there was an ambulance in the driveway. The house's front door and garage doors were open.

“Growing up, every time you heard any type of siren — ambulance or police car — you made the Sign of the Cross and said a prayer for those in need and protection for those involved. That was second nature to me,” Petrovich told the Register.

“One thing different on that occasion was I always said that prayer but never felt compelled to say a [particular] prayer. That was the one thing that was different than anything else. And the first prayer that came to mind [that day] was the Hail Mary.”

Petrovich thought of stopping and helping, but since he has no first-aid training, he decided to keep running, although he wondered if he was wrong not to stop. Yet he prayed: “God, if that ambulance is still parked in that driveway, I will stop and see if I can give assistance.” On his run back, he reported, “The ambulance was not there, there were no lights in house, the garage door was shut, and the front door was shut.”

The following Thursday, after work, Petrovich was running in the same neighborhood.

Approaching the house where he had seen the ambulance, he saw a lady “at the edge of the driveway of that house, and she started waving her hand, and she said, ‘Stop. Please stop,’” Petrovich recalled.

“So I came to the edge of the driveway, and she said, ‘Thank you for stopping, sir. I need to talk to you. I have to thank you because you saved my life.’”

Puzzled, Petrovich asked, “How did I save your life?”

“Then,” he related, “she tells me, ‘Let me tell you what happened to me last week.’” Alone at home, she suddenly started feeling strange and blacked out. She knew she was dying.

She told Petrovich how, before finding herself in a hospital bed and about to regain consciousness, “she got a vision of Jesus who came to her, and said, ‘It’s okay. Everything is going to be fine. You’re going to be fine because this person prayed for you.’”

“On the palm of his hand was your face — on Jesus’ hand,” she told him, recounting what went through her mind. “And I thought, ‘I have to thank you for saving my life.’”

“And how do you react to something like that?” Petrovich told the Register. “I was speechless. I didn’t know what to say, except, ‘Thank you.’”

Saints Praise the Power of the Hail Mary

In *The Secret of the Rosary*, St. Louis de Montfort highlights several holy men and women who learned of the power of the Hail Mary. Among the examples:

St. Thomas Aquinas, who once preached for 40 days just on the Hail Mary, taught, “In any peril you can obtain salvation from this glorious Virgin. Hence the Cantic of Canticles 4:4: ‘a thousand bucklers’ (that is, protection against dangers) ‘hang upon it.’ Again, in every work of virtue you will find her ready to help. Therefore, she herself says in Ecclesiasticus 24:25: ‘In me is all the grace of the way; in me is all hope of life, and of virtue.’”

Father Francisco Suárez, a pious 16th- to 17th-century Jesuit theologian and author of several major books, “was so deeply aware of the value of the Angelic Salutation that he said he would gladly give all his learning for the price of one Hail Mary well said.”

In the 13th century, St. Mechtilde learned, as de Montfort recounts, that “it is the highest praise that we can give to Mary,” after Our Lady appeared to her “with the Angelic Salutation written in letters of gold upon her breast and said to her, ‘My daughter, I want you to know that no one can please me more than by saying the greeting which the most adorable Trinity presented to me and by which I was raised to the dignity of the Mother of God.’”

Both de Montfort and St. Alphonsus Liguori tell the story of St. Dominic preaching to a large number of people who brought him an Albigensian heretic who spoke publicly against the Rosary. Dominic had everyone say the Rosary very slowly and with great devotion. “[A]t each Hail Mary that he and the people said, a large number of devils issued forth from the wretched man's body under the guise of red-hot coals. When the devils had all been expelled and the heretic completely delivered from them, Our Lady, although invisible, gave her blessing to the assembled company, and they were filled with joy. A large number of heretics were converted because of this miracle and joined the Confraternity of the Holy Rosary.”

As de Montfort himself counseled, “A single Hail Mary said properly is worth more than 150 said badly.”

Power That Strengthens Faith

The results of that one Hail Mary in Pittsburgh affected others, as well. Father Freedy shared how it touched him.

“That story has struck me and others so much and really moved John,” he told the Register. “The Blessed Mother is actually listening, and God is answering our prayer. One of the things I love about the story is that John told me, as he was jogging, he didn’t fold his hands, didn’t kneel down, and that’s how attentive our Blessed Mother is and Our Lord is to us. St. Thérèse talked about prayer as turning one’s heart to God. Prayer with full intention and with the heart is the way God wants us to pray.”

Father Freedy said such answers to prayer help “increase the supernatural virtue of faith. ... Our gift of faith increases, our conviction increases, we really pray from the heart, and our prayers become even more efficacious. It’s a really hopeful story.”

He reminds the faithful that although we know God doesn’t always answer a prayer when we want and how we want, “No prayer, no sigh of the heart isn’t heard and acted upon by God.”

After learning what his one Hail Mary did, Petrovich saw what he calls a “major change for me for all my prayers,” putting “more emphasis on why we should be praying for one another and not just for our wants and needs, but for other people and their needs and wants before ours.”

Now, he always carries a rosary with him everywhere he goes — and he prays it. He said that he and his wife, Bethann, “do our best to always pray the Rosary on a nightly basis.”

Petrovich also realized the power of intercessory prayer.

“Many times, we have truly prayed for somebody yet never hear and never know how it gets answered. We’re always looking for a great outcome and prayer answered in our time,” he said. “This taught me, too, that not all prayers are answered quickly and in the way we want them. But God hears them and answers them. This case was answered in such a profound, dramatic way. It takes you back and gives you a ‘jolt’ — and you think about praying and truly making it a heartfelt prayer. We may never know the outcome, but we trust in God.”

“The other lesson to learn,” he added, “is the quickest and shortest way to Jesus is through the Blessed Mother.”

Father Freedy also accentuates that lesson found at the heart of this prayerful story — the power and the intercession of Mary: “This story is a gift to strengthen our faith and the power of Our Lady’s intercession.”

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