

Memo

Date: July 31, 2023 *Feast of St. Ignatius of Loyola*

Re: Indulgences and Advantages to Joining the Confraternity of Christian Mothers

I.

The Confraternity of Christian Mothers is a rich source of grace and blessings to Members and their children. Since a Member may be any Catholic woman in good standing, whether or not she is married or has children, some have questioned (1) whether all the benefits of the Confraternity extend to Members who are not married or who have no children, and (2) whether including all women in Membership somehow reduces the privileges or special nature of the Confraternity in assisting women who are mothers.

First, it is clear that all Members share in the benefits of the Confraternity, including the rich indulgences offered to Christian Mothers, whether or not they are married or have children. However, it must be noted that Membership is not offered to all women equally, but only to those who are Catholics in good standing who *sincerely intend to cooperate with the Confraternity's mission of promoting Christian marriage and the Christian and Catholic education of children*. Insofar as they do promote this mission, they are entitled to the benefits of the Confraternity, whether or not they are married or have children. Married women with children receive the greatest benefits from the Confraternity because of the nature of their vocation and because their husbands and children also receive benefits.

Second, the nature of the spiritual advantages offered to Members only increases the more other Members add their prayers and good works to the Confraternity's spiritual treasury. Thus, mothers and their children will benefit all the more from having holy women become Members, even if they have no children or are not married. This should be clear to anyone who considers the manner in which the prayers and good works of each Member are shared with all the others. Christian Mothers should also covet the rich indulgences offered to them as Members of the Confraternity. While it is true that Holy Mother Church is very generous in offering other indulgences to the faithful who are not members of confraternities, the fact that She offers particular indulgences to women who are Members of the Confraternity reveals Her special intention that mothers should become Members. To quote St. Francis de Sales:

“Be ready to take part in any confraternities and associations you may find in the place where you are called to dwell, especially such as are most fruitful and edifying. This will be pleasing to God; for although confraternities are not ordained, they are recommended by the Church, which grants various privileges to those who are united thereby. And it is always a work of love to join with others and take part in their good works. And although it may be possible that you can use equally profitable devotions by yourself as in common with others, – perhaps even you may like doing so best, – nevertheless God is more glorified when we unite with our brethren and neighbors and join our offerings to theirs.”

– (St. Francis de Sales, Introduction to the Devout Life Part II, Chapter 15)

Including women who are not married or who have no children as Members should present no risk that the Confraternity will devolve into some sort of women's social club. As we have already pointed out, since women may only join and participate if they intend to cooperate with the aims of the Confraternity to promote marriage and the education of children, they will not distract from that mission. The Directors and Officers of each Confraternity chapter must be firm in ensuring that all women – married or unmarried, mothers or childless – understand and promote the Confraternity's special mission.

II.

The following enumeration of the advantages of joining the Confraternity and its associated indulgences is given here in order to remind everyone of the great spiritual benefits they can receive as Members, and

to show that including more faithful women as Members will add greater wealth to the Confraternity's spiritual treasury.

Advantages of Joining the Confraternity

One of the special advantages in membership is the actual presence of our Divine Lord with His graces. For this we have His own sacred promise: "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them."

Hence flow innumerable graces to the members; for where Jesus tarries, there does He dispense His favors, and wherever He is present by special invitation His graces are more profusely lavished.

These many and powerful graces will descend chiefly upon the prayers and good works performed by the Members in obedience to the rules of the Confraternity and the guidance of its Director. For this, too, we have our Savior's own words. He says: "If two of you shall agree upon earth concerning anything, whatsoever they shall ask, it shall be done for them by My Father Who is in heaven."

To the preceding advantages must be added:

1. The special protection of the heavenly patrons of the Confraternity. Our Blessed Mother cannot be far distant from her Divine Son. The confidence of the mothers in choosing Mary, Most Sorrowful, as their chief Patroness, and the blessed parents and children of heaven as their special helpers, will obtain, as it deserves, their very particular protection and powerful intercession.

2. Membership in a Confraternity, one of the most useful in existence.

3. The particular favor, approbation, and hearty blessing of the Holy Father and the Bishops.

4. The instructions, prayers, and care of the spiritual director and the prefects or officers.

5. *Participation* in all the holy Masses which are offered for the Members of the Confraternity.

6. *Participation* in the daily prayers and the good example of the other Members of the Confraternity.

7. *The special communion of prayers and merits of the whole Confraternity.* Wherever a Member of the Confraternity prays for herself and for her children, *she includes also*, in a particular manner, all the other Confraternities of Christian mothers and their children, *all the other Members and their children partake of the fruit of her petition.* The same holds true with regard to the good works. Every Member has as much share in the merit of the good performed by others *as if it were, to a certain extent, her own individual work;* and this union of love, prayer, and merit follows the departed Christian Mothers beyond the grave.

8. Special plenary and partial indulgences offered only to members of the Confraternity (*see below*).

So many and so great are the spiritual benefits which a woman may obtain upon joining a Confraternity of Christian Mothers! As a zealous Member, she will lead a life full of merits; and, consoled and encouraged by the thought of having so many prayers offered up for her, and by the merits of the other Members of the Confraternity, she will at last leave this world having obtained the plenary indulgences granted to the Members of the Confraternity. In heaven she will find the Members of the Confraternity, who preceded her, who, with the love of sisters, will welcome her; she will there find also her children, for whom she has secured eternal happiness by her common sacrifices, sufferings, and prayers, and all, united intimately in love and friendship, will enjoy together for eternity the exceeding great reward of so many good actions.

Special Indulgences for Members of the Confraternity of Christian Mothers

All the Confraternities of Christian Mothers that have been canonically erected and affiliated with Archconfraternity have been granted various Plenary and numerous Partial Indulgences.

Plenary Indulgences

A Christian Mother duly admitted into the Confraternity of Christian Mothers may obtain a plenary indulgence provided she fulfills the usual conditions and makes or renews (at least privately) her promises to observe faithfully the rules of the Confraternity:

1. On the day of her reception,
2. On the feasts of the Holy Family, the Annunciation, the Queenship of Mary, Our Lady of Sorrows, St. Gerard Majella, St. Elizabeth and Christ the King.

Partial Indulgences

Christian Mothers duly admitted into the Confraternity of Christian Mothers may obtain a partial indulgence:

1. Four times a year, on days established by her local Confraternity, or on the next Sunday, after having visited the church of the Confraternity and there prayed for the intention of the Pope.
2. As often as she attends a Confraternity conference or lecture.
3. Each time she recites, with a contrite heart, the Christian Mother's Daily Prayer for the Children.
4. For every good work performed according to the intention and rules of the Confraternity or on its behalf.

This last indulgence is, on account of its greatness, worthy of special attention. Every good work performed by a Member of the Confraternity, for the Confraternity in general, or for its Members, for the education and the benefit of her own children, or for the children of one of the Members, obtains for herself, if she performs it in the state of grace and with a pious intention, a remission of part of the temporal punishment due to sin. While the former custom of assigning a time value to partial indulgences is no longer in effect, it may be helpful to Christian Mothers to know that in ages past, the Church assigned these good works the equivalence of sixty days of severe penance!

III.

The question of associate membership

Finally, with the authority granted to me by the Holy See, I have decided to abolish the status of "associate member" in the Archconfraternity of Christian Mothers, for the following reasons:

- 1) This status, over time, came to be a provision for non-married Catholic women to be admitted into the Confraternity, with or without children. My predecessor has already eliminated the requirement of the Sacrament of Marriage or children to be a solemnly received Member of the Confraternity, therefore, this status is no longer necessary.

Women joining the Confraternity today are living in a culture that, if it once supported the Sacrament of Marriage and the Christian education of children, no longer does. This cultural situation is ironically similar to the period in France when the Confraternity began in 1850: In the wake of the revolution, the French government had turned hostile toward the Church, women were looking for concrete support, encouragement and inspiration for living the Sacrament of Marriage in a time when the government and culture had turned against those very sacred aspirations. We can then understand the wisdom of my predecessor, given the current cultural situation.

The revision of this status is drawn from the various reasons why today, practicing Catholic women might find themselves in these situations. These women need more not less of the concrete support, love and encouragement that the Confraternity can offer them:

- a) Widows (We would never dismiss them or refuse them entrance, particularly as they are entitled to our special care)
 - b) Grandmothers (once a mother, always a mother)
 - c) Practicing Catholic women with or without children who, through no fault of their own, have been abandoned by their spouse.
 - d) Married or unmarried women, with or without children, who have had a sincere conversion to the Faith and want to support the truth of Christian Marriage and family life.
 - e) Practicing Catholic women who are for whatever reason unable to have children but desire to support the special mission of the Confraternity and desire the fellowship with like minded women seeking holiness.
- 2) The current associate member status also came to allow for non-Catholics to be admitted to the Confraternity, this is no longer an option for two reasons:
- a) There is a clear contradiction in the fact that the Confraternity is a parish based organization and a non-Catholic, by definition, is not a registered Catholic parishioner. If the non-Catholic woman is preparing to enter the Church she would be admitted as a Member after her reception into full communion in the Church, regardless of her marital status or whether she has children or not.
 - b) Canon law does not provide for the granting of indulgences to non-Catholics. *(It is important to note that eliminating the possibility of a non-Catholic becoming an associate Member in no way forbids non-Catholic women from participating in the activities of a Confraternity, if she sincerely intends to promote the aims of the Confraternity. In fact, such kind hospitality and participation would certainly be a source of grace for such women and an effective way for them to consider entrance into full communion with the Church.)*