

Arthritis Novena to St. Alphonsus Liguori

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Liguori

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INTRODUCTION

When asked, “What is love?” a six-year-old girl replied: “When my grandma got arthritis, she couldn’t bend over to paint her toenails anymore. So my grandpa does it for her all the time, even though he has arthritis, too! That’s love.”

Jesus’ compassion for the sick and suffering shows us that people with illness have a special place in God’s heart. As part of the healing process, the Divine Physician offered the afflicted the surety that they are worthy of God’s love. And to feel profoundly loved by God is to love him in return, according to the patron for arthritics, St. Alphonsus Liguori.

Moreover, because Christ endured so much pain on the cross for love of us, Alphonsus willingly turned his pain and sufferings into a love offering for Christ. He wrote that “it is not so much the sufferings of Jesus Christ as the love he showed us in enduring them that obliges and all but constrains us to love him,” adding, “Lord, everything that I see on the cross invites me to love: the wood, the form, the wounds in your body; and above all, your love invites me to love you and never forget you.”

For the last forty years of Alphonsus’ life, a disease affected his spine that made the vertebrae of his neck curve, bending it until his chin was buried permanently on his chest. This produced a deep wound that could easily become infected. Also, Alphonsus suffered from chronic respiratory ailments: sciatica, poor vision, partial deafness, scruples, and depression.

He was completely crippled for the last twelve years of life.

Even his doctor was astounded by his ability to handle pain. “Witnessing his peace, we felt pain had no power over him,” the doctor said. “Even if his only pain were the wound in his chest that was infected to the bone, it would have been enough to drive another person mad. Never once did I hear him complain.”

Why didn’t Alphonsus complain when the pain was nearly intolerable? “After many treatments, I remain in about the same condition except, perhaps, that I am in greater pain than ever,” he wrote to another priest. “The doctors do not seem to know what to do next, and so I have decided to leave things to God and to embrace as much pain as God wishes me to endure.”

That is love!



HOW TO PRAY THIS NOVENA

Saint Alphonsus was keenly aware that the Holy Spirit is the love between Father and Son. For him, “the gift of love, which the Lord infuses into our souls and which is the greatest of all gifts, is particularly attributed to the Holy Spirit.”

He said a novena of the Holy Spirit is supreme to all novenas “because it was the first that was ever celebrated, and that by the apostles and Mary in the upper room.” Their fervent prayers for nine days—from the evening on the day of Jesus’ ascension until the first Pentecost Sunday—were distinguished by many wonders and gifts, principally by the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The meditations on the following pages were inspired by St. Alphonsus' own novena of the Holy Spirit. To begin, desire divine love foremost so that through our devout actions, especially prayer, we can partake in that love. Recall that God promised this gift to all those who ask for it with humility: "the Father in heaven [will] give the holy Spirit to those who ask him" (Luke 11:13). Then invoke the Holy Spirit as an expression of love:

Spirit of God, rest upon me.

Spirit of God, consecrate me.

Spirit of God, bid me go forth
to proclaim your peace and joy.



PRAYER TO BEGIN

Offer this on each day of the novena:

SAINT ALPHONSUS,

you are the special patron
of all who suffer from arthritis
and the pains of many years.

When our fingers twist with pain,
keep us focused on the hands
of Christ pierced with nails.

When our knees throb with endless
aches, allow us to see the knees
of Jesus smashing to the street under the
heavy cross.

When our backs stiffen with soreness,
let us remember the back of Christ
thrown across the rough wood
of the cross.

When our hips, elbows, knuckles, and
other joints hurt us so much that tears
well up in our eyes,
help us to recall the tears, the sweat, and
the blood that flowed from our crucified
Jesus,
who suffered so much more
for each of us.

SAINT ALPHONSUS,
you were afflicted with curvature
of the spine
and confined to a wheelchair
in your final years.

Teach us to unite all our pains
with the sufferings of Jesus.

By your intercession,
may our pain be eased—
but even more, may we be one
with Jesus in his death and resurrection
for the redemption
of the world.

Amen.