

VENERABLE ANTONIO MARGIL DE JESUS: “LA MISMA NADA”

Image courtesy Margil House of Studies Houston.



With the grace of God, I had the privilege of running a men’s support group for a period of 7 months to combat pornography and other sexual sins. It had only a few men who attended but in that time I was able to really get to know them as very dear friends. We prayed together, discussed our situations, and I believe that it was a very effective vehicle for God’s grace for every one of us. In addition I was able to fine tune and expand much of the material that I had written and placed on the Blessed Margaret website, both to present it to them in a meaningful way each week but also in preparation for writing this book.

For quite a while I had planned to begin a support group for the Blessed Margaret Family Help Center, Inc. As I stated earlier, I had intended to start with an alcoholics support group, kind of a Catholic AA, principally for a friend of mine who was an alcoholic who had not been successful in controlling his alcoholism even though he had been to more AA meetings than you could shake a stick at, so to speak.

As God permitted me to understand more about what the Catholic 12-Steps should be over the years since I first wrote the website material, it became obvious to me that what I was really called to do was to work with pornography addicts and that I was to use the Catholic 12-Steps, not for my alcoholic friend but really for men who were like me – addicted to pornography. I included all sins against the sixth and ninth commandments in my recruiting flyers for the group so when I talk about “pornography addictions” it’s really shorthand for all sexual hooks, and not just pornography. The last nail in the “helping-the-alcoholics” coffin, so to speak, was when my friend moved out of town. Gee, it was pretty obvious that he wasn’t going to be involved in any alcoholics support group run in Cincinnati if he lived hundreds of miles away! It was finally clear to me that my hook was what I was supposed to focus on and not someone else’s.

Now, one of the original goals that we had put into the tax-exempt application with the IRS was to run addict support groups as one of our apostolates so it was logical to simply make the switch from alcoholism to pornography. The question was how to do it. I had the website material but literally nothing else, no computer, no projector, no program, no name, nothing – just a plan. I’ve always marveled at how the Good God erases the slate that He wants to write on and He did just that. Several months after planning on starting the group, I received an email from, I presume, a man; he left no email address and no name. He simply touted the wonderful works of a saint I had never heard of. His name was Venerable Antonio Margil de Jesús (Mar HEEL, I think, since I don’t speak Spanish. At least that’s how I hear the priests at the Margil House pronounce it). He was a Spanish missionary in Central America, Mexico, and

southwestern USA. Here is the entire text of this eye-opening email from someone whom I don't even know but to whom I owe the deepest thanks.

Subject: sexual addiction

Username:

UserEmail:

UserTel:

UserFAX:

ContactRequested:

Date: 02 Jul 2005

Time: 14:11:50

Comments:

I was addicted to sexual compulsion for about 24 years. This involved videos, pictures, and self-abuse. This was entirely by myself. I even browsed web pages at this very library for hours on straight. I usually went to confession about 2 or 3 times a month (usually to some priest with a cast-iron stomach). I am not making any jokes about it. I am admitting the depth of my sin.

I've been straight for 14 months. The reason for this, in my opinion, involves devotion to Venerable Antonio Margil of Jesus. He was a Franciscan missionary who lived from 1657 to 1722 and preached throughout Central America and the American Southwest. He spent long hours preaching and hearing confessions. He also seemed to have powers similar to Padre Pio (i.e., bilocation, performing miracles, and reading penitent's sins without their telling them). He also was said to have the rare ability to cure penitents of sexual addiction. I prayed to him in May of last year and broke my dirty habit. I still get tempted, but now I resist and keep busy with other things.

Information about "antonio margil" can be found with a web search. I hope that somewhere down the road he can get his two miracles and get canonized. I don't know if my situation involves a proven miracle, because I think this involves hard evidence. Then again, maybe he will get his two miracles. I pray to him daily (check out the "Alabado" on the web). I also pray for his cause and donate money from time to time to the Margil House of Studies in Houston, Texas. Please pray for me so I don't relapse.

I was mesmerized when I received it. Here was the perfect patron saint for a men's support group to fight pornography addictions. I HAD to find out more about him. Certainly obscure in the United States, he was so humble that he signed his letters; "La Misma Nada" which I am told translates to "Nothingness Itself". La Misma Nada typified the sense of humility and of one's own impotence that is necessary for Steps 1 and 2 so I took Venerable Antonio's moniker and made it the name of the support group. I also wrote an Act of Humility for those steps that I thought would mimic his humility and I hope it meets with this wonderful saint's approval.

There is a Franciscan House in Houston, Texas called the Margil House of Studies. In making the holy card for the Nothingness Itself prayer I had the joy of speaking to Fr. Lambert there about my plans and he graciously gave his permission for me to use their image of Venerable Antonio on my holy card.

Now for those who are interested in what our meetings were like, the following is a brief run-down on the order of the meetings.

Meetings were held once a week on Wednesday nights at 7 or 7:30 pm. I ran the meetings primarily through a PowerPoint presentation using my work laptop and an old projector that I borrowed every week from work. We started each meeting with the Prayer to the Holy Ghost, the Rosary, and invoking what I called “the Litany” or list of La Misma Nada’s patron saints. The bold texts are the parts that the entire group said together.

Come, O Holy Ghost, fill the hearts of Thy faithful and enkindle in them the fire of Thy love.

V. Send forth Thy Spirit, and they shall be created.

R. And Thou shalt renew the face of the earth.

Let us pray.

O God, Who by the light of the Holy Ghost, didst instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that in the same Spirit we may be truly wise, and ever rejoice in His consolation. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Rosary

Our Lady, Refuge of sinners, Pray for us

St. Joseph, Pray for us

St. Augustine, Pray for us

St. Ignatius (of Loyola), Pray for us

Blessed Margaret (of Castello), Pray for us

Venerable Antonio (Margil), Pray for us

Holy Family, Help us

Next, I would present the night’s agenda and read the ground rules. As this was about using the Catholic 12-Steps, the purpose of course was personal sanctity; we used only first names but we already knew one another so that really wasn’t an issue; use of any and all natural non-anti-Catholic means were encouraged since you never knew what “trick” would be personally most effective; everything said in the group had to stay in the group because lack of confidentiality could be the quickest means to bring the whole program crashing down; and lastly, it was critical that we keep our discussions and descriptions from becoming near occasions of sin for us. Since we were talking about things sexual it could have been extremely easy for Satan to use what we were trying to do to cut the line to the hook as the very means of pulling us into sin.

Tonight’s Agenda

7:00 Opening Prayer and Introduction

7:10 Rosary
7:30 Ground Rules & Who is Antonio Margil?
7:40 Addictions – The Hook and St. Augustine
8:00 Break
8:10 Open Discussion
9:00 Closing Prayer

La Misma Nada Ground Rules

- Purpose is to grow in sanctity through combat against one's addiction – using our addiction as leverage to gain holiness and heaven.
- Grace builds on nature – use all natural non-anti-Catholic means necessary to obtain needed grace.
- Complete confidentiality outside of the group – what's said in here stays in here!
- Keep support group from becoming “near occasion of sin” – no unnecessary details that may cause “reaction” in self or others.

Next came a review of last week's material that was supposed to last ten minutes (fat chance of that when I started to speak) and then a twenty-minute discussion of a new topic. I will say that I tried very hard to keep to the topic and stay on schedule – you'd have to ask the group members how often I might have droned on too long. Sometimes there were questions but I think that I talked them into wanting to get right to break, so there usually weren't too many of them.

When the talks were finished, we closed the first half of the meeting with the “Nothingness Itself” Prayer and had a five-minute break.

The second half was an open forum of discussing one's progress and how things were going or not going. I included how things were with me as well. Sometimes other problems emerged that gave me some insight as to what other factors were relevant in the different cases. That's how the idea for The Counterattack chapter was born. This was open-ended so we didn't worry much about the time limit. After the discussion ran out of momentum, we then closed the meeting with a Hail Mary, a Glory Be, and we repeated the “Litany” of the group's patron saints. After shaking hands, saying, “God bless and persevere” the group breaks up and everyone goes home – usually after about 10-15 minutes of outside socializing.

Venerable Antonio, pray for us!