

SIN & SUPERSTITION

For at least six months, maybe longer, someone has been promoting what can only be called religious superstition with little slips of paper tucked into our hymnals. I noticed them one Saturday as I was heading to the Reconciliation room. Now, most Saturdays, I spend ten or fifteen minutes going up and down the aisles and removing them, but I'm sure that I miss some of them. And each week I pray that it's not one of our own parishioners who is responsible for this.

The "prayer" seems innocuous at first glance, a "Prayer to Virgin Mary"; what could possibly be wrong with that? But the first sentence gives you the first clue: "Never know(n) to fail." Then when your eye gets to the end, you see the instruction: "Say this prayer for 3 consecutive days and publicize." That is nothing less than superstition, which happens to be a sin, and a fairly serious one since the promotion of superstition involves leading others to sin. Remember Jesus' Gospel admonition that involves a millstone around the neck and a dunking in the sea for those who lead others to sin?

This type of "chain prayer" has been around for a long time but I've never understood how a faithful Catholic could fall into this kind of trap. A "never fail" prayer that requires repetition for a particular length of time along with "publication" for others implies that God—or in this case, Mary—can be bought or manipulated. What a horrible thought! To be sure, praying to the saints for their "intercession" is a venerable practice in the Church. It's our way of asking them to be with us in our need and to join us in prayer to God—since we are all part of the *Communion of Saints*. But it is NOT about asking Mary or any of the other saints to, in effect, twist God's arm to help get us what we need or want, much less to expect that they will respond to what amounts to a bribe paid out in the form of a prayer repeated in a certain way. "You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours." Is that really how anyone could see their relationship to God, Jesus or the saints?

So if the person responsible for these "prayers" is reading this, please cease and desist—and go to confession one of these days! But if I miss the retrieval of any of these little slips of paper when I make my rounds each week and you find one, please dispose of it to help nip this particular virus in the bud and to keep others from falling into the same sin.

Fr. Bob