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33 Days
to
Morning
Glory

A Do-It-Yourself Retreat
In Preparation for Marian Consecration

INTRODUCTION

Who are the contemporary Marian experts? There are plenty of them, but I've chosen for our reflection "the big three." Specifically, I've picked the top three Marian saints who have most dramatically added to the beauty and richness of consecration spirituality. They are Sts. Maximilian Kolbe, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, and John Paul II. When we add St. Louis de Montfort to this mix, we've got a grand total of four Marian giants who will help lead us through a power-packed and updated form of Marian consecration.

Moreover, because this retreat is so structured, it may be helpful at the outset to briefly consider a breakdown of the four full weeks of the retreat, keeping in mind that the last five days are reserved for review:

Week 1 – St. Louis de Monfort

Weeks 2- St. Maximilian Kolbe

Week 3 – St. Mother Teresa

Week 4 – St. John Paul II

Here's a chart that breaks down of the starting dates and feasts:

START OF THE 33 DAYS	MARIAN FEAST	CONSECRATION/ FEAST DAY
January 9	Our Lady of Lourdes	February 11
February 20*	The Annunciation	March 25
April 10	Our Lady of Fatima	May 13
April 28	The Visitation	May 31
Varies	Immaculate Heart	Saturday after Corpus Christi
June 13	Our Lady of Mt. Carmel	July 16
July 13	The Assumption	August 15
July 20	Queenship of Mary	August 22
August 6	Nativity of Mary	September 8
August 10	Holy Name of Mary	September 12
August 13	Our Lady of Sorrows	September 15
September 4	Our Lady of the Rosary	October 7
October 19	Presentation of Mary	November 21
November 5	Immaculate Conception	December 8
November 9	Our Lady of Guadalupe	December 12
November 29	Mother of God	January 1
December 31	Presentation of the Lord	February 2

* During a leap year, when February has 29 days, the starting date is February 21.

WHAT IS MARIAN CONSECRATION?

To properly understand the essence of total consecration to Jesus through Mary, we'll first need to reflect on an important point: Jesus wants to include all of us in his work of salvation. In other words, he doesn't just redeem us and then expect us to kick back and relax. On the contrary, he puts us to work. He wants all of us to labor in his Father's vineyard in one way or another. Why he didn't just snap his fingers and so order things that everyone in the world would individually hear and understand the Gospel by some private, mystical revelation, we don't know. What we do know is that Jesus relies on others to spread his Gospel and that he commissions his disciples to preach it to all (see Mt 28:19-20). He basically says to them and to us, "Let's get to work!" Of course, that God wants to include us in his work of salvation is a great gift and glorious privilege. Truly, there's no more important work to be done.

While everyone is called to lend a hand in the great work of salvation, not everyone has the same role. For example, St. Paul says, "There are varieties of service and ... there are varieties of working" (1 Cor 12:5-6). He goes on to say that God has appointed to the work of salvation "first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators" (v. 28). Whoever we are, God has appointed us to a special task in his great work.

Among the various roles God has given to his children, there's one that's radically more important than all the others: the task he gave to Mary. We all know that God uniquely blessed Mary by choosing her to conceive, bear, and nurture Jesus Christ, our Savior. But do we also realize that her blessed work didn't end once Jesus left home and began his public ministry? After the three years of Mary's hidden life during Jesus' public ministry, Jesus brought her back into the picture of his work of salvation at its most crucial time, the "hour" of his Passion. At that hour, we might say he fully revealed Mary's special task — the same task she had begun some 33 years before and that she still continues.

Jesus fully revealed Mary's special task shortly before his death. It happened when he looked down from the Cross and said to Mary as she stood with the Apostle John, "Woman, behold, your son" and to John, "Behold, your mother" (Jn 19:26-27). At that moment, Jesus gave us one of his greatest gifts: his mother as our mother. Of course, Mary isn't our natural mother. She's our spiritual mother. In other words, just as it was once her task some 2,000 years ago to give birth to Christ, to feed and nurture him, and to help him grow and develop into a man, so also, from the time she first said yes to being the mother of Jesus until the end of time, Mary's task is to give spiritual birth to Christians, to feed and nurture them with grace, and to help them grow to full stature in Christ. In short, Mary's job is to help us grow in holiness. It's her mission to form us into saints.

"Now, wait just a minute," someone might say, "isn't it the job of the Holy Spirit to make us holy?" Indeed, it is. The Holy Spirit is the Sanctifier. It is he who transforms us at our Baptism from being mere creatures into members of the Body of Christ, and it is he who helps us in our ongoing transformation into Christ through continued conversion. Great. So how does Mary come into all of this?

Mary is the spouse of the Holy Spirit. At the Annunciation, the angel Gabriel declared to Mary that she would conceive and bear a son and that the Holy Spirit would overshadow her (see Lk 1:31-35). When Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38), we can see most clearly that she's the spouse of the Holy Spirit, for at that moment, she gave the Holy Spirit permission to conceive Christ in her womb. Thus, at that moment, the already unfathomably deep bond between Mary and the Holy Spirit that had begun (in time) at the first moment of her Immaculate Conception was revealed as nothing less than a two-become-one marital union (see Gen 2:24). As a result of that union, the Holy Spirit is pleased to work and act through his spouse, Mary, for the sanctification of the human race. Of course, he didn't have to be so united to Mary. It was his free choice (and that of the Father and the Son), and in that choice he takes delight.

So, it's Mary's great God-given task, in union with and by the power of the Holy Spirit, to form every human being into "another Christ," that is, to unite everyone to the Body of Christ and form each person into a fully mature member of this Body.⁹ Therefore, every human being is invited to rest in the womb of Mary and be

transformed there, by the power of the Holy Spirit, more perfectly into Christ's own image. Yes, if we want to become more fully Christ, then we need to belong more fully to Mary. By going to her and remaining with her, we allow her to accomplish her mission in us. We allow her to form us into other Christs, into great saints. But how do we do this? How do we belong more fully to Mary and allow her to fulfill her mission in us? Simple. We say yes, just like she did.

Mary has a deep respect for human freedom. She knows from her own experience in Nazareth what a free yes to God can do (see Lk 1:38), and so she doesn't pressure us into giving her our yes. Of course, she always cares for her children, but she won't force us to enter into a deeper relationship with her. She surely invites us to such a relationship and patiently waits for us to accept her invitation, but she remains respectful. Still, if we could see how much longing hides behind her silence, we'd say yes to her if only to give her relief. In fact, saying yes to her gives her more than relief. It gives her joy. Great joy. And the more fully we say yes to Mary, the more joyful she becomes. For our yes gives her the freedom to complete her work in us, the freedom to form us into great saints. This brings us to the essence of what Marian consecration is all about.

Marian consecration basically means giving Mary our full permission (or as much permission as we can) to complete her motherly task in us, which is to form us into other Christs. Thus, by consecrating ourselves to Mary, each of us is saying to her:

Mary, I want to be a saint. I know that you also want me to be a saint and that it's your God-given mission to form me into one. So, Mary, at this moment, on this day, I freely choose to give you my full permission to do your work in me, with your Spouse, the Holy Spirit.

As soon as Mary hears us make such a decision, she flies to us and begins working a masterpiece of grace within our souls. She continues this work for as long as we don't deliberately choose to change our choice from a yes to a no, as long as we don't take back our permission and leave her. That being said, it's always a good idea for us to strive to deepen our "yes" to Mary. For the deeper our "yes" becomes, the more marvelously she can perform her works of grace in our souls.

One of the greatest aspects of being consecrated to Mary is that she's such a gentle mother. She makes the lessons of the Cross into something sweet, and she pours her motherly love and solace into our every wound. Going to her and giving her permission to do her job truly is the "surest, easiest, shortest and the most perfect means" to becoming a saint. What joy it is to be consecrated to Jesus through Mary!

Note:

After each daily reading there is a short prayer. You are always welcome to pray additional Marian prayers such as the Litany or Loretto, the Rosary etc.



WEEK ONE
St. Louis de Montfort

DAY 1

The Passionate Saint of Brittany

Take a look at a map of France. Now notice something about its shape. See how one part sticks way out almost as if it were running away from the rest of the landmass, ready to dive off into the Celtic Sea? That jutting arm in the northwest of the country is called “Brittany,” and that’s where St. Louis de Montfort grew up.

There’s something special about Brittany that seems to have had an influence on St. Louis: its Celtic roots. Brittany is considered one of the six Celtic nations, meaning that the Celtic language and culture still survive. (So, scratch that part about Brittany being ready to dive into the Celtic Sea. It’s already in and swimming.) And one part of Celtic culture seems to have seeped deeply into the heart of St. Louis: the high-spiritedness of its warriors.

From ancient times, Celtic warriors have struck terror in the hearts of their enemies. If you’ve ever seen the movie *Braveheart*, you know what I mean. Think of the fearless figure of Sir William Wallace (played by Mel Gibson) and his crazy crew of Scottish Highlanders who take on an English enemy many times their size. This shows something of the Celtic fighting spirit, but the real life version is even more intense.

Often wearing nothing but blue battle paint, real Celtic warriors would work themselves into a blood-thirsty frenzy, rush into combat screaming their heads off, and wildly slash, bash, and slice away at their enemies with huge, two-handed swords. These fierce fighting men, despite their lack of discipline, armor, and order, were extremely effective in battle because of their unmatched passion and ferocity. Throughout history, nobody has wanted to mess with the crazy Celtic warriors.

St. Louis’s dad, Jean Grignon, must have been descended from these wild- men warriors, for nobody wanted to mess with him either. In fact, he was known for having the most fiery temper in all of Brittany. As one author puts it, “He was a volcano frequently erupting.”¹⁰ St. Louis, on the other hand, was as gentle as a lamb, right? Wrong. He confessed that his temper was just as bad as his father’s. But Louis channeled his fiery passion not to threats and violence but to laboring for the greater Glory of God — well, except for the time he knocked out a couple of drunks who wouldn’t stop heckling him while he preached. We can get a better sense of Louis’s remarkable zeal if we reflect on his short but incredibly productive priestly life.

When he died in 1716, St. Louis was just 43 years old, having been a priest for only 16 years. Tireless labors to bring souls to Jesus through Mary, especially by his preaching an endless succession of parish missions, brought about his early death. As if these life-sapping labors weren’t suffering enough, Louis had to bear vicious persecution from the clergy and Jansenist heretics,¹¹ even to the point of being physically attacked and poisoned by them. Despite all this, our indomitable warrior kept advancing on the battlefield, continuously preaching his trademark path to Jesus through Mary. In fact, when leaders in the Church in France thought they had put an end to his work, Louis walked the thousand-mile journey to Rome and asked the Pope for his wisdom and counsel. The Pope not only told him to go back to France and continue preaching but awarded him the title “Apostolic Missionary.” Obediently and joyfully, our saint returned to France where he continued to preach, write, and patiently bear his many sufferings out of love for Jesus, Mary, and souls.

St. Louis’s passion and zeal lit a fire in a young Karol Wojtyła, the future Pope John Paul II. A few years before his death, the Pope was able to realize a lifelong dream and visit de Montfort’s tomb. He said on that occasion, “I am happy to begin my pilgrimage in France under the sign of this great figure. You know that I owe much to this saint, and to his *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*.”

Now what about us? Do we have a fire in our hearts as we begin this retreat? We should. Or at least we should strive for it. Desire and generosity are key ingredients to making a successful retreat. May Mary intercede for us, and may the Holy Spirit fill us with a passion to conscientiously make these days of retreat, despite any fatigue, distractions, or obstacles. And let’s remember that what we may have to endure in terms of the discipline of prayer is nothing compared to what St. Louis went through, and he’ll be interceding for us. Relying on his intercession and that of the Mother of God, let’s resolve right now to dedicate ourselves to this

retreat with the intensity and zeal of a Celtic warrior — though without all the face-paint and screaming.

Today's Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, living in Mary.

Help me to make this retreat with generosity and zeal.

DAY 2

St. Louis's Influence on the Church

There's a story from St. Louis de Montfort's life that particularly expresses his passion, which we pondered just yesterday. In the town of Pontchâteau, St. Louis inspired the peasants to build a huge monument to the Passion of Christ on a neighboring hill. For 15 months, hundreds of peasants volunteered their skills and labor to build it. When completed, it stood as a massive structure, a real labor of love, and on the day before it was supposed to be dedicated by the bishop, word got back to Louis that his enemies had convinced the government to destroy it. (They had lied to the authorities, saying that the structure was actually meant to be a fortress against the government.) When Louis received this disappointing news, he told the thousands of people who had gathered for the blessing ceremony, "We had hoped to build a Calvary here. Let us build it in our hearts. Blessed be God."

One thing about doing the Lord's work: It doesn't always turn out according to our plans. For example, St. Louis surely had planned that his monument to Christ would last more than a day. Yet the saint obediently accepted the destruction of his plans and blessed God. Because of this kind of detachment from his own will and attachment to God's, Louis became an instrument used by God to accomplish even mightier works. So, although his physical monument was destroyed, Louis's teaching eventually became a huge edifice in the Church that exercised great influence on many Popes and on Catholic spirituality. Indeed, de Montfort's passionate labors paid off in the end, even if he didn't see the fruit himself.

As we are just beginning our preparation for consecration to Jesus through Mary, let's ponder some of the support various Popes have given to St. Louis's teaching. May the testimony of their support strengthen our resolve to journey on to Consecration Day, and may it help us to trust that our consecration truly will bear great fruit in our lives, even if we don't yet fully understand how.

- **Blessed Pope Pius IX** (1846-1878) stated that St. Louis's devotion to Mary is the best and most acceptable form.
- **Pope Leo XIII** (1878-1903) not only beatified de Montfort in 1888 but granted a Church indulgence to Catholics who consecrate themselves to Mary using de Montfort's formula. Moreover, this Pope was reportedly so influenced by St. Louis's efforts to spread the Rosary that he wrote 11 encyclicals on this preeminent Marian devotion.
- **Saint Pope Pius X** (1903-1914), like Leo XIII, also recommended de Montfort's teaching on Mary to the faithful. In fact, he granted a plenary indulgence *in perpetuum* (in perpetuity) to anyone who would pray de Montfort's formula for Marian consecration, and he offered his own apostolic blessing to anyone who would simply read *True Devotion*. This Pope so strongly encouraged the faithful to follow de Montfort's path of Marian devotion because he himself had experienced its power. In fact, in his Marian encyclical *Ad Diem Illum*, the saintly Pope expressed his own dependence on de Montfort in writing it, which becomes obvious when one compares it with *True Devotion*. The Pope's encyclical continually reflects the tone and spirit of de Montfort's classic work as evidenced by sentences like this: "There is no surer or easier way than Mary in uniting all men with Christ."
- **Pope Pius XI** (1922-1939) simply stated, "I have practiced this devotion ever since my youth."
- **Venerable Pope Pius XII** (1939-1958) canonized St. Louis in 1947 and, in his homily for the Mass of canonization, referred to de Montfort's Marian teaching as "solid and right." Then, when the Pope addressed the pilgrims who had come for the canonization, he said that de Montfort leads us to Mary and

from Mary, to Jesus, thus summarizing the meaning of Marian consecration.

- **Saint Pope John Paul II** (1978-2005) promoted de Montfort's teaching more than any other Pope. We'll learn more about this during the fourth week of the retreat. It's enough here to recall two amazing facts: First, that John Paul's papal motto was *Totus Tuus* ("totally yours"), which he took directly from de Montfort's shorter prayer of consecration; second, that John Paul described his reading of *True Devotion to Mary* as a "decisive turning point" in his life.

Today's Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, living in Mary.

Prepare me to give myself fully to living out this true and solid devotion.

DAY 3

De Montfort's Consecration (Part One)

Okay, so on the first day of this week, we asked for a greater passion and zeal in making our preparation for consecration. Then, yesterday, we pondered the incredible influence that de Montfort's brief life has had on the Church. The powerful testimony of authorities no less than Popes should have further fired our zeal and gotten us reflecting, "What is this amazingly influential teaching of a priest who only lived to be 43?" Of course, it's his teaching on Marian consecration, but what exactly does this mean?

Recall the summary of Marian consecration in the introduction to this retreat. There I presented consecration as our giving a "yes" to Mary, allowing her to fulfill in us her God-given task of forming us into other Christs. And that's all true. But there's more. Saint Louis gives two key emphases in his teaching on Marian consecration that expand what we've already read about it. These two emphases are (1) a renewal of our baptismal vows and (2) a particularly intimate gift of ourselves to Mary. Let's look at each of these in turn (one today and one tomorrow).

The day of our Baptism is the most significant in each of our lives. It's when we poor, sinful creatures are not only cleansed of sin but also given the amazing dignity and honor of being transformed into sons and daughters of the almighty God. On that joyous occasion, before we received this amazing grace, we solemnly promised (or if we were infants, others promised in our name) to reject Satan, and then we (or others in our name) professed our faith and commitment to Jesus Christ. Then, every Easter, we solemnly renew this promise and commitment. But do we keep it? Are we true to our word? No. We all sin. Sadly, we all give in to Satan's "poms and works" and reject Christ, at least in little ways.

Why does this happen? The simple answer is original sin: We have a fallen nature and we're prone to sin. That's true, but St. Louis invites us to go deeper and examine our consciences. If we do, we'll discover that a principal reason why we fall into sin is because of forgetfulness, forgetfulness of our promise and commitment to Christ at Baptism. De Montfort suggests that if we were to personally and sincerely renew our baptismal vows and place them in the hands of Mary, then this act alone would go a long way in helping us overcome sin in our lives. Therefore, he makes such a renewal of vows an essential element of his prayer of consecration. In fact, in the very first paragraph of this prayer, he has us address Mary and pray to her as follows:

I, (name), a faithless sinner, renew and ratify today in thy hands the vows of my Baptism; I renounce forever Satan, his poms and works; and I give myself entirely to Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Wisdom, to carry my cross after Him all the days of my life, and to be more faithful to Him than I have ever been before.¹³

So, St. Louis has us attack sin right at its root — Satan and his poms and works — has us recommit our lives to Christ, and has us do all of this with and through Mary. Why through Mary? Because God has put enmity between her and Satan (see Gen 3:15), and Satan can't stand her. In fact, according to St. Louis, Satan fears her not only more than the angels and saints but, in a sense, even more than God himself! Why? Because, as he puts it, "Satan, being proud, suffers infinitely more from being beaten and punished by a little and humble handmaid of God, and her humility humbles him more than the divine power."¹⁴ So, de Montfort gives us a practical and effective way to overcome sin in our lives: formally renounce Satan and recommit ourselves to Christ, through Mary.

We'll hear more about Mary's power over evil on the last day of this week. Tomorrow, we'll reflect on the second element of St. Louis's consecration, the particularly intimate gift of ourselves to Mary. Today, let's reflect on the promise we made at our Baptism to reject Satan and to love and follow Christ.

Today's Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, living in Mary.

Give me the grace to reject Satan and follow Christ more closely.

DAY 4

De Montfort's Consecration (Part Two)

Yesterday, I said that St. Louis gives two special emphases in his teaching on Marian consecration: (1) a renewal of our baptismal vows and (2) a particularly intimate gift of ourselves to Mary. We covered the first emphasis yesterday. Now let's look at the second, beginning by asking the question, "Why should we give ourselves to Mary?"

We should give ourselves to Mary in imitation of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. After all, didn't Jesus give himself to Mary from the moment of the Incarnation? Yes, he did. And aren't we called to imitate Christ? Yes, we are. But isn't Mary a creature? Yes she is, but she's unique. Not only is Mary free from sin and totally conformed to God's will, but by God's will and good pleasure — as we learned from the introduction — Mary has a special role in our sanctification. Therefore, we should give ourselves to the Mother of God, so she can help form us into saints, into other Christs. We should give her our yes. But St. Louis takes all of this a step further. His yes to Mary is particularly deep, a profoundly intimate gift of himself to Mary:

This devotion consists, then, in giving ourselves entirely to Our Lady, in order to belong entirely to Jesus through her. We must give her (1) our body, with all its senses and its members; (2) our soul, with all its powers; (3) our exterior goods of fortune, whether present or to come; (4) our interior and spiritual goods, which are our merits and our virtues, and our good works, past, present, and future.¹⁵

This fourth point is most interesting. By this aspect of our consecration to Mary — according to St. Louis — our gift of self to her goes even beyond what is required when people offer themselves to God through religious vows. For instance, by virtue of the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, a religious sister does not give God the right to dispose of the grace of all her good works nor does she give up her merits. Allow me to bring into better focus just how radical a gift of oneself this Marian consecration really is.

First, in regard to others, if we give Mary the right to dispose of the graces of our good works, then this means we cannot unconditionally apply such graces to whomever we choose. So, for instance, if I make such an offering to Mary, I cannot insist that the graces from a sickness I am offering up go to the person I want them applied to. Second, in regard to ourselves, if we consecrate ourselves to Mary, then when we die, we won't get to appear before God clothed with the merits of our prayers and good works. In fact, we'll have to appear before God with empty hands, because we will have given all our merits to Mary.

If the radical nature of this offering has got you worried, don't be worried. Tomorrow, we'll see why this offering is not to be feared, and in fact, why it's incredibly beautiful and completely worth it. Until then, we can reflect on the second part of de Montfort's formula for Marian consecration, which speaks of this intimate gift of ourselves to Mary:

In the presence of all the heavenly court, I choose you this day for my Mother and Queen. I deliver and consecrate to you, as your slave, my body and soul, my goods, both interior and exterior, and even the value of all my good actions, past, present, and future; leaving to you the entire and full right of disposing of me, and all that belongs to me, without exception, according to your good pleasure, for the greater glory of God, in time and eternity.¹⁶

Today's Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, living in Mary.

Help me to give myself entirely to Jesus through Mary.

DAY 5

Should We Really Give Mary *Everything*? (Part One)

The second part of de Montfort's formula of consecration says that we should give Mary *everything*, including "our interior and spiritual goods, which are our merits and our virtues, and our good works, past, present, and future." Isn't this a bit too much? No. It's perfect. It's beautiful. Let's see why by learning how the offering affects others and ourselves.

In regard to others, when we fully consecrate ourselves to Mary, we lose the unconditional right to distribute the value of our prayers and good actions to others. In other words, we give the rights to the grace (merit) of our prayers to Mary. We're telling her, "Mary, I give you the right to distribute the grace of my prayers as you see fit."

Making such a gift to Mary has a big benefit. It ensures that the grace of our prayers will be used in the best way possible. It works like this: Because of her unique vantage point from heaven, and on account of her most intimate communion with her Divine Son, Mary can best determine which people are most in need of our prayers. For instance, seeing some forgotten person in China about to die in despair, Mary can take the grace of our prayers (and "offered up" sufferings) and use it to help that dying person to trust in God and accept his mercy.

Now, perhaps this idea has got some of us thinking: Well, that's great. I'm happy to help the dying person in China, whom I don't know, but I'd be disappointed if I therefore couldn't use the grace of my prayers and good works to help the people I do know, like my family and friends. I'm worried that if I give Mary the right to distribute the grace of my prayers and good works, then I thereby lose the right to pray for those whom I especially love, even if they're less in need than other people in the world.

This is a legitimate concern, but there's no need to worry. Why? For two reasons: First, Mary makes the good things we give her more perfect. In other words, she augments, increases, and purifies the spiritual gifts and merits we give her. When we give them to her, because she makes them more perfect, there's more grace and merit to go around. St. Louis uses an unforgettable analogy to explain this:

It is as if a peasant, wishing to gain the friendship and benevolence of the king, went to the queen and presented her with a fruit which was his whole revenue, in order that she might present it to the king. The queen, having accepted the poor little offering from the peasant, would place the fruit on a large and beautiful dish of gold, and so, on the peasant's behalf, would present it to the king. Then the fruit, however unworthy in itself to be a king's present, would become worthy of his majesty because of the dish of gold on which it rested and the person who presented it.¹⁷

Here's the second reason we shouldn't worry: Mary is never outdone in generosity. So, if we're so generous as to give her the right to distribute the grace of our prayers and good works, she'll surely be especially generous to our loved ones. In fact, she'll take even better care of our loved ones than we ourselves can. For instance, let's say one of our family members or friends is in need of prayer, and we don't know it. Well, Mary knows it, and she'll make sure that that person doesn't go without. Giving Mary the right to distribute the grace of our prayers and good works doesn't mean we can't still pray for our loved ones. We can and should pray for them. It's just that we give Mary the final say in deciding to whom and for what purpose the grace of our prayers and good works should be applied.

Remember, Mary is not outdone in generosity. She especially hears the prayers of those of us who have given her everything — including the value of all our good works — and she wants us to tell her of the people and intentions we hold in our hearts. If we've given her everything, is there any doubt that she'll be generous in giving whatever good we ask for to those who are dear to us?¹⁸

Today's Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, living in Mary.

Help me be generous in giving all I am and have to Mary.

DAY 6

Should We Really Give Mary *Everything*? (Part Two)

Okay, so yesterday we looked at how, when we fully consecrate ourselves to Mary, we give up the right to distribute the grace of our prayers and merits to others. But we saw that it all works out even better in the end. Now, today, we turn to ourselves. Isn't it crazy to give to Mary all the value of our good actions and prayers and so appear before God with empty hands? No, it's not crazy. Remember, Mary is not outdone in generosity. If we give her all our merits, she'll give us all of hers. And that's a big deal.

I once read a story about a saint on earth who had a vision of heaven. In her vision, she saw the saints in heaven and their different degrees of glory. With some saints, she was astonished because they had risen so high in glory as to be worshiping God with the Seraphim, the highest choir of angels. Another time, I read a passage in the *Diary of St. Faustina* in which Faustina had a similar vision of heaven. She related that if we were to see the differences among the degrees of glory in heaven, we would willingly suffer anything on earth just to move one degree higher.¹⁹ After reading these testimonies, I say to myself, "I not only want to go to heaven, but I want to reach the highest degree of glory in heaven that I possibly can." There's an easy way for us to do this: We give Mary everything. We rely not on our own merits but on hers. Saint Louis explains:

The most holy Virgin ... who never lets herself be outdone in love and liberality, seeing that we give ourselves entirely to her ... meets us in the same spirit. She also gives her whole self, and gives it in an unspeakable manner, to him who gives all to her. She causes him to be engulfed in the abyss of her graces. She adorns him with her merits; she supports him with her power; she illuminates him with her light; she inflames him with her love; she communicates to him her virtues: her humility, her faith, her purity, and the rest. ... In a word, as that consecrated person is all Mary's, so Mary is all his.²⁰

Now, despite these consoling words, one might still be troubled and say, "That's great! I'm all for having a high degree of glory in heaven. But what I'm worried about is purgatory. I'm afraid that if I give away all my merits, even to Mary, then I'll have to suffer in purgatory for a very long time." Saint Louis responds:

This objection, which comes from self-love and ignorance of the generosity of God and His holy Mother, refutes itself. A fervent and generous soul who gives God all he has, without reserve, so that he can do nothing more; who lives only for the glory and reign of Jesus Christ, through His holy Mother, and who makes an entire sacrifice of himself to bring it about — will this generous and liberal soul, I say, be more punished in the other world because it has been more liberal and more disinterested than others? Far, indeed, will that be from the truth! Rather, it is toward that soul ... that Our Lord and His holy Mother are the most liberal in this world and in the other, in the orders of nature, grace, and glory.²¹

Okay, this settles it — and we get a gentle rebuke on top of it all. Saint Louis repeats the important point: Mary is not outdone in generosity! If we are especially generous with her, then she'll be especially generous with us. And he makes another good point: the gentle rebuke. He says that these kinds of concerns come from self-love. So, yes, we should aim high. Yes, we should have holy ambition and want to reach the highest heights of holiness. But our motive should not be self-love; rather, it should be that we want to please God and give great glory to him. We should keep this important point in mind when, tomorrow, we read about some of the awesome benefits of being consecrated to Mary.

Today's Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, living in Mary.

Help me to give great glory to God by giving all I am and have to Mary.

DAY 7

A Quick, Easy, and Secure Way to Holiness

For the last two days, we've learned about some beautiful benefits of being consecrated to Jesus through Mary, benefits both to ourselves and to those who are closest to us. Today, on this final day of meditation on the teaching of St. Louis, we're going to focus on other benefits of Marian consecration. Specifically, we're going to learn about how Marian consecration is a quick, easy, and secure way to holiness. As we read about this, we should keep in mind that the gift of these benefits doesn't entitle us to just kick back and take it easy. (This would be the self-love that St. Louis rebuked during yesterday's reading.) Rather, when we see God's generosity in giving us such a great gift as Marian consecration, we should strive all the more ardently to live it out and grow in holiness.

Let's start with the quick and easy part: The way of consecration to Jesus through Mary is a quick and easy way to holiness. And what is holiness? Dying to self. And this definitely is not easy. Still, Marian consecration is a relatively quick and easy way along a path that by its very nature isn't easy and often takes a long time. Saint Louis introduces this way as follows:

As there are secrets of nature by which natural operations are performed more easily, in a short time and at little cost, so also are there secrets in the order of grace by which supernatural operations, such as ridding ourselves of self, filling ourselves with God, and becoming perfect, are performed more easily.²²

So how do we follow this quick and easy way? By giving ourselves to Jesus through Mary. Mary leads us to Jesus and makes the road to holiness quick and easy, even though she doesn't take away our crosses. In fact, those who are particularly beloved by Mary often have more crosses than others, but Mary makes the crosses sweet and light:

[I]t is quite true that the most faithful servants of the Blessed Virgin, being also her greatest favorites, receive from her the greatest graces and favors of Heaven, which are crosses. But I maintain that it is also the servants of Mary who carry these crosses with more ease, more merit, and more glory. That which would stay the progress of another a thousand times over, or perhaps would make him fall, does not once stop their steps, but rather enables them to advance; because that good Mother, all full of grace and of the unction of the Holy Spirit, prepares her servants' crosses with so much maternal sweetness and pure love as to make them gladly acceptable, no matter how bitter they may be in themselves; ... [it's] just as a person would not be able to eat unripe fruits without a great effort which he could hardly keep up, unless they had been preserved in sugar.²³

We make more progress in a brief period of submission to and dependence on Mary than in whole years of following our own will and relying upon ourselves.

By this practice, faithfully observed, you will give Jesus more glory in a month than by any other practice, however difficult, in many years.²⁵

[True devotees of Mary] have such facility in carrying the yoke of Jesus Christ that they feel almost nothing of its weight.²⁶

So, the way of Marian consecration truly is quick and easy, relatively speaking. As St. Louis says elsewhere, it's like the difference between a sculptor who makes a statue through long weeks of hard labor, hammering away with a chisel and another artist who makes the same statue quickly and easily by using a mold. Mary is the mold that forms us most perfectly, quickly, and easily into other images of Christ.

We'll now close these reflections on the wonderful benefits of Marian consecration by letting St. Louis describe how this way is also a *secure* path, meaning that, as we walk it, we're particularly protected from and defended against evil:

[Mary] puts herself around [her true children], and accompanies them "like an army in battle array" (Cant 6:3). Shall a man who has an army of a hundred thousand soldiers around him fear his enemies? A faithful servant of Mary, surrounded by her protection ... has still less to fear. This good Mother ... would rather dispatch battalions of millions of angels to assist one of her servants than that it should ever be said that a faithful servant of Mary, who trusted in her, had had to succumb to the malice, the number, and the vehemence of his enemies.²⁸

Today's Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, living in Mary.

Help me to praise you for such a quick, easy, and secure path to holiness!



WEEK TWO
St. Maximilian Kolbe

This week, we'll focus on the example and words of the 20th century apostle of Marian consecration, St. Maximilian Kolbe. Kolbe knew well de Montfort's Marian teaching and spoke enthusiastically about it. In formulating his own expression of true devotion to Mary, he not only deepened several of de Montfort's insights but added many new ideas from his own contemplation of the mystery of Mary. Before we turn to his Marian teaching, let's first get to know the man.

DAY 8

Who are you, St. Maximilian Kolbe?

“Who are you, St. Maximilian Kolbe?”

If we were to ask the saint this question in an interview, we might be disappointed, at least initially. With gentleness and humility, he would probably reply: “Now that question is not so important. What’s really important is this one: ‘Who are you, *O Immaculate Conception*?’” This answer shouldn’t disappoint us if our goal in the interview were to get to know St. Maximilian, for his answer actually tells us a lot about him. In fact, one great passion of his life was to come to know the mystery of Mary, particularly as she revealed herself to St. Bernadette of Lourdes, “I am the Immaculate Conception.” Why did she call herself “The Immaculate Conception?” Isn’t her name Mary? Tomorrow, we’ll begin to reflect on this intriguing mystery. Today, let’s see what, in our hypothetical interview, Kolbe wouldn’t have answered.

Who is St. Maximilian Kolbe? He’s known by many titles: Martyr of Charity, The Saint of Auschwitz, Founder of the Militia Immaculata, Apostle of Mary, and Patron Saint of the 20th Century. But before all this, he was just Raymond, Raymond Kolbe, who in 1894 was born into a poor, Polish family. And from the beginning, one wouldn’t have guessed he’d eventually be a great saint. In fact, one day, his mother was so frustrated with his behavior that she yelled at him in exasperation: “Raymond, what will become of you?!” This shook the boy to the core. Filled with grief, he immediately turned to the Mother of God, asking her, “What *will* become of me?” Then he went to a church and repeated his question. The future saint recounted what happened next:

Then the Virgin Mother appeared to me holding in her hands two crowns, one white and one red. She looked at me with love and she asked me if I would like to have them. The white meant that I would remain pure and red that I would be a martyr. I answered yes, I wanted them. Then the Virgin looked at me tenderly and disappeared.²⁹

The white crown of purity came first. Raymond confirmed himself in it when, as Brother Maximilian, he professed religious vows, one of which was chastity.

But his purity was not just of the body. For there’s another kind of purity: purity of intention. A person practices purity of intention when he directs his thoughts, words, and actions not to himself or another creature but to a divine purpose or mission, and ultimately to God.

Perhaps because of his natural intensity and passion, Kolbe felt a particularly strong desire to give himself to a specific mission or goal. One of his classmates in the minor seminary relates, “He often said that he desired to consecrate his entire life to a great idea.”³⁰ Kolbe’s “great idea” eventually crystallized into what he called the “Militia Immaculata,” which he started in 1917 with six of his fellow seminarians. The “M.I.,” as they called it, truly was a “great idea,” at least in the sense of its ambition. Its goal was nothing less than to bring the whole world to God through Christ under the generalship of Mary Immaculate, and to do so as quickly as possible. Fulfilling this mission through obedience to God’s will, in union with Mary Immaculate, was Kolbe’s entire concern — his pure intention — and he sacrificed everything for its accomplishment, which brings us to the red crown.

In 1941, after decades of incredibly fruitful apostolic labors in Poland and Japan, Kolbe was arrested by the Gestapo and sent to the Auschwitz concentration camp. Before his arrest, his brother Franciscans had pleaded with him to go into hiding. He said he was grateful for their loving hearts but couldn’t follow their advice. Later, he explained why, “I have a mission — the Immaculata has a mission to fulfill.”³¹ That mission was accomplished on the eve of the feast of Mary’s Assumption into heaven, when, after having volunteered to take the place of a prisoner condemned to starvation, the impatient Nazis finished Kolbe off with a lethal injection. Thus, St. Maximilian died a martyr of charity and received his second crown from his Immaculata.

Today's Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, living in Mary.

Make me pure in body and spirit and help me to die to myself.

DAY 9

Who are you, O Immaculate Conception? (Part One)

Yesterday, when I mentioned St. Maximilian's arrest by the Gestapo, I left out a remarkable detail that will be important for today's reflection: Two hours before his arrest, the future saint penned the single most important theological reflection of his life. It was nothing less than *the answer* that had eluded him for so many years, the answer to the question he had pondered over and over from the earliest days of his religious life: "*Who are you, O Immaculate Conception?*" In today's reflection, we'll begin to unpack this remarkable document, but before we do, let's pause and say a silent prayer to the Immaculata, asking for the grace to receive Kolbe's wisdom.

The document begins as follows:

IMMACULATE CONCEPTION. These words fell from the lips of the Immaculata herself. Hence, they must tell us in the most precise and essential manner who she really is... Who then are you, O Immaculate Conception?³²

Good question, but still no answer. Later in the document, Kolbe points out a simple but key point: At the apparitions in Lourdes, Mary didn't say to St. Bernadette "I was immaculately conceived" but rather "*I am the Immaculate Conception.*" This seems to be a problem. After all, Mary *was* immaculately conceived. In other words, through a special grace from God, she was conceived in the womb of her mother, St. Anne, without any stain of original sin by the foreseen merits of her Son.³³ So why does she speak so strangely? Why does she make the grace she received at her conception *her very name*? Doesn't this almost seem as if she were making herself divine? Clearly, Mary is not God. Kolbe wrestled with this apparent "divinity problem" for decades, and it led to the following solution.

The Immaculate Conception is divine. But the one I'm talking about isn't Mary. It's the Holy Spirit. In other words, Kolbe believed there are two "Immaculate Conceptions": Mary and the Holy Spirit. Mary is the *created* Immaculate Conception and the Holy Spirit is the *uncreated* Immaculate Conception. In other words, before there was the *created* Immaculate Conception (Mary), for all eternity there is the *uncreated* Immaculate Conception, the One who for all eternity "springs" from God the Father and God the Son as an uncreated conception of Love and who is the "prototype of all the conceptions that multiply life throughout the whole universe."³⁴ So, "the Father begets; the Son is begotten; the Spirit is the 'conception' that springs from their love."³⁵

Now, the Holy Spirit is a "conception" in the sense of being the Life and Love that springs from the love of the Father and the Son — in some analogous way, there's the conception of children who "spring" from the love of husband and wife. The Holy Spirit is an "immaculate" conception because, being God, he is obviously without sin. And finally, the Holy Spirit is an "eternal, uncreated" conception because, again, he is God. Okay, so this covers Kolbe's teaching that the Holy Spirit is the Immaculate Conception, but why does Mary call herself by the same name? We'll leave this question for tomorrow.

Today's Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, living in Mary.

Unveil for me the meaning of the Immaculate Conception.

DAY 10

Who are you, O Immaculate Conception? (Part Two)

So the Holy Spirit is the *uncreated* Immaculate Conception and Mary is the *created* Immaculate Conception. Why not make it easier and just say that the Holy Spirit is the Immaculate Conception and Mary was immaculately conceived? Again, it's all because of Lourdes. Blame St. Bernadette!

In all seriousness, we should thank both St. Bernadette and St. Kolbe profusely, because their fidelity to grace is now opening up for us a glorious truth that undergirds the whole theology of Marian consecration. This truth has to do with *the union between the Holy Spirit and Mary*. Kolbe explains this in a passage that is long and difficult but incredibly rich and deserving of deep reflection:

What type of union is this [between the Holy Spirit and Mary]? It is above all an interior union, a union of her essence with the “essence” of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit dwells in her, lives in her. This was true from the first instant of her existence. It was always true; it will always be true.

In what does this life of the Spirit in Mary consist? He himself is uncreated Love in her; the Love of the Father and of the Son, the Love by which God loves himself, the very love of the Most Holy Trinity. He is a fruitful Love, a “Conception.” Among creatures made in God’s image the union brought about by married love is the most intimate of all (see Mt 19:6). In a much more precise, more interior, more essential manner, the Holy Spirit lives in the soul of the Immaculata, in the depths of her very being. He makes her fruitful, from the very first instant of her existence, all during her life, and for all eternity.

This eternal “Immaculate Conception” (which is the Holy Spirit) produces in an immaculate manner divine life itself in the womb (or depths) of Mary’s soul, making her the Immaculate Conception, the human Immaculate Conception. And the virginal womb of Mary’s body is kept sacred for him; there he conceives in time — because everything that is material occurs in time — the human life of the Man-God.

... If among human beings the wife takes the name of her husband because she belongs to him, is one with him, becomes equal to him and is, with him, the source of new life, with how much greater reason should the name of the Holy Spirit, who is the divine Immaculate Conception, be used as the name of her in whom he lives as uncreated Love, the principle of life in the whole supernatural order of grace?³⁶

In light of this remarkable passage, I’d like to make three points. First, ponder it again, deeply and prayerfully. As you do, keep in mind that these are the parting words of one of the greatest Marian saints of all time, answering the very question to which he dedicated his life and energies. Second, if it seems that Kolbe has gone a bit overboard with this talk of Mary and her union with the Holy Spirit, don’t worry. Pope Paul VI went out of his way to reassure the faithful that Kolbe’s teaching is sound.³⁷ Third, if you only get one point from this challenging passage, may it be this: Mary is the Spouse of the Holy Spirit. In fact, her union with the Holy Spirit is even deeper than what we understand by a spousal relationship. We’ll pick up this thread tomorrow.

Today’s Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, living in Mary.

Unveil for me the meaning of the Immaculate Conception.

DAY 11

The Immaculata Always Does God’s Will, Perfectly

Yesterday, we learned about the intimate union between the Holy Spirit and Mary, the uncreated and created Immaculate Conceptions. Now we may be thinking, “That’s nice, but what follows from it?” Here’s what follows: Mary does the will of God perfectly — and this is a big deal. Let’s take a step back and put this into context by looking at the *big* picture of reality.

According to St. Thomas Aquinas, all of creation makes one big, circular movement from God and back to God, referred to by theologians as “The Great Circle of Being.” Aquinas writes:

Issuing from the Primary Principle, creatures accomplish a sort of circuit, a gyratory movement, such that all things when they tend to their proper end are returning to the Principle whence they came forth. ... We

were created by the Son and by the Holy Spirit; and hence it is by them that we are brought back to our end.³⁸

Now, St. Maximilian Kolbe, being the good theologian that he was, describes this big picture structure of reality in a similar way. He begins by pointing to our own experience of the world:

Everywhere in this world we notice action ... departure and return; going away and coming back; separation and reunion. The separation always looks forward to union, which is creative. All this is simply an image of the Blessed Trinity in the activity of creatures.³⁹

What Kolbe describes here really is true. It's the structure of the cosmos. Everything has come forth from God and is going back to God, more or less perfectly. This movement is sometimes called the great "Exit and Return." Although Kolbe uses the term "separation" instead of "exit," he's got the same idea:

First, God creates the universe; that is something like a separation. Creatures, by following the natural law implanted in them by God, reach their perfection, become like him, and go back to him. Intelligent creatures [human beings] love him in a conscious manner; through this love they unite themselves more and more closely with him, and so find their way back to him.⁴⁰

Among all creatures in the universe, Kolbe believes that the Immaculata deserves special mention:

The creature most completely filled with this love, filled with God himself, was the Immaculata, who never contracted the slightest stain of sin, who never departed in the least from God's will. United to the Holy Spirit as his spouse, she is one with God in an incomparably more perfect way than can be predicated of any other creature.⁴¹

Let's reflect for a moment on this vision of reality: First, everything going forth from God. Think of all creation. God speaks, and it goes forth from him. Then, plants and animals return to God by fulfilling their natures, by being what they were created to be. They do this without thinking or deliberating and with a sort of ease. It happens by a kind of instinctual autopilot. Human beings, on the other hand, are different. While there are times when we act by instinct, we also act in a way different from the animals. We act by reason and will, and we're conscious as we do so, present to ourselves as we act. This is what it means to be made in the image of God: We can know God and love him. And whereas the animals do God's will by instinct, we can do his will freely and consciously.

The problem is, we abuse the freedom God gave us. We don't always choose his will, and so we don't return to him as we should. We sin. And if we sin gravely and don't fully repent, then we don't make it back to God. This is a great tragedy of human life. But thanks be to God! For he sent his only Son and the power of his Spirit to save us, to bring us back home to our Father in heaven. And thank God that after the fall of the human race, he made a creature who was conceived without sin and who is freely and perfectly conformed to his will, for she is perfectly united with the Holy Spirit. She helps us poor sinners along the way. She helps us to overcome the tragedy of sin. She leads us to do God's will, return to God, and become saints. We'll hear more about this tomorrow.

Today's Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, living in Mary.

Renew the face of the earth, so that all creation may return to God.

DAY 12

Who Are You, O Holy Saints of God?

Saint Maximilian used to give spiritual conferences to the new men in his religious community, the novices. One day, he taught them a lesson they would never forget: "How to become a Saint." The future saint began by telling his listeners that sanctity isn't so hard. It's the result of a simple equation, which he wrote on the blackboard: "**W + w = S.**" The capital W stands for God's Will. The small w stands for our wills. When the two wills are united, they equal Sanctity.

This lesson wasn't just for the novices. Kolbe repeated it over and over, in different ways, to his whole community. In Poland, Kolbe had founded the world's largest Franciscan monastery, which he named *Niepokolanow* ("City of the Immaculate"), and he continually urged the more than 600 friars there to become soldier saints for God under the generalship of Mary Immaculate. Why under Mary Immaculate? Because, among creatures, she alone does the will of God perfectly. Therefore, when our wills are united with hers, they're necessarily united to God's will. Here are just two of the countless examples of how Kolbe would make this most important point:

Let us pray much that we would understand more and more what the Immaculata said at the Annunciation: "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done unto me [*fiat mihi*] according to your word." As God wills, so be it. In this thought, all happiness is contained, already here on earth, all destiny fulfilled. ... Let us beg our Blessed Mother that she might teach us how our soul might be a "handservant" of the Lord, as was her own. God did not reveal Himself directly to the Mother of God, but rather through a messenger. We too have divine messengers. ... Let us pray that we would know how to say to every one of these messengers: God's will be done. And in this is everything that we are placed upon this earth to learn.

To be one in will with Mary of the great fiat, the only human being whose will has never deviated by her choice from God's, is to be perfectly united to the will of God. And it is this alignment of your will with his that is the pressing business of your life.

Doing God's will is not easy — unless we have the Immaculata's help, "Through the Immaculata we can become great saints, and what is more, in an easy way."⁴⁴ Becoming a saint was Kolbe's number one goal. Literally. In his retreat notes before his ordination to the priesthood, he made a list of his spiritual goals. The first goal reads, "I wish to be a saint and a great saint."⁴⁵ He knew the Immaculata would help him and even make the path to great sanctity an easy one. How does Mary make sanctity easy? We read many reasons for this last week, during our closing reflection on St. Louis de Montfort's teaching. But Kolbe emphasized another reason why Mary makes sanctity easy. It has to do with her being the Mediatrix of all grace, an idea he expresses in his formula for Marian consecration, "God has willed to entrust the entire order of mercy to [Mary]."⁴⁶ It's God's will that she distribute his graces. Why? Because it's God's will to unite himself to Mary by his Holy Spirit, "The Holy Spirit does not act except through the Immaculata, his spouse. Hence, she is the Mediatrix of all the graces of the Holy Spirit."⁴⁷ And hence, it's "easy" to become holy when we stay close to and ask for graces from the one whose very job it is to distribute them for God.

We can get a better idea of Mary as Mediatrix of grace if we look at her image on the miraculous medal, which comes to us through her apparitions to St. Catherine Labouré. Kolbe was deeply moved by this image, because it depicts Mary standing on a globe with rays of light (graces) streaming from the rings on her fingers. In one of the apparitions, Catherine noticed that rays did not stream from all of Mary's rings. Mary explained that the rays and graces were available but did not come because nobody asked for them. Kolbe's way is not just to ask for these graces but to allow Mary to take us completely into her hands, so as to make us channels of these very graces for the whole world. We'll learn more about this way tomorrow.

Today's prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, living in Mary.

Unite my will to the will of the Immaculata, which is one with your will.

DAY 13

To Be an Instrument — Rather, to be Instruments

Again, St. Maximilian didn't just want to ask for graces from the Immaculata. He wanted to *be* the graces of the Immaculata. He didn't just want to do the will of the Immaculata. He wanted to *be* the will of the Immaculata. Wait, *be* the graces and the will of the Immaculata? Isn't this a bit too much? Not according to Kolbe's reasoning. He figured, "Well, if people can give themselves over to Satan to be possessed by him and be his instruments of evil, why can't people give themselves over to God to be possessed by him and be his instruments of love?" He further reasoned that, more than anyone, the Immaculata is "possessed" by the Holy Spirit,⁴⁸ so why not ask to be "possessed" by her so as to be perfectly united to God's will? In other words, it

wasn't enough for him just to be Mary's "slave," as St. Louis de Montfort often put it. He wanted something deeper. He wanted to be an *instrument* in the hands of the Immaculata.

To be an instrument in the hands of the Immaculata. This is the central idea to Kolbe's whole vision of Marian consecration. Thus, he writes it directly into his prayer of consecration, "Let me be a fit instrument in your immaculate and merciful hands." To what purpose? The conversion of *the entire world*.

Come on. Kolbe is getting a little carried away, right? I mean, what can one man do? But this gets to his main point, his master strategy. His own piece wasn't the only part of his master plan. In fact, he wanted to raise up *a whole army* of fighting knights and soldiers who give themselves to be instruments in the grace-filled hands of the Immaculata. He wanted to build a "Militia Immaculata," which he describes as follows:

The Knights of the Immaculata seek to become ever more truly the property of the Immaculata; to belong to her in an ever more perfect way and under every aspect without any exception. They wish to develop their understanding of what it means to belong to her so that they may enlighten, reinvigorate, and set on fire the souls living in their own environment, and make them similar to themselves. They desire to conquer these souls for the Immaculata, so that in their turn they may belong to her without reserve and may in this manner win an ever greater number of souls to her — may win the entire world, in fact, and do so in the shortest possible time.⁴⁹

What genius! Notice the brilliant logic that undergirds Kolbe's whole strategy: If we really love God, if we truly long to work for his kingdom, then we should find the quickest and easiest way to become saints, and thereby return to him. Now, the quickest and easiest way to do this — as we learned from de Montfort — is through Marian consecration.

Yet Kolbe takes it further: He didn't just stop with himself. He didn't keep the great saint-making secret to himself. Look at it this way: What's better, one saint or two? A thousand saints or a million? Think of what a million saints fully consecrated to Mary could do. Imagine if Mary had a million instruments through whom she could fulfill the perfect will of God. It's an amazing thought. So, Kolbe exclaims, "Teach others this way! Conquer more souls for the Immaculata!" If this is the quickest, easiest way to become a saint, then it's also the quickest, easiest way to conquer the whole world for Christ, if only we teach others about it. So, Kolbe says, "Let's get to work!" Yes, let's begin by learning to live this consecration ourselves, and then bring others into it.

Okay, so first things first. We need to learn to live this consecration to the Immaculata. We need to "belong to her in an ever more perfect way." How do we do this? Simple. We learn to love the Immaculata. How? *By relying on her powerful intercession, experiencing her tender care, speaking to her from our hearts, letting ourselves be led by her, having recourse to her in all things, and trusting her completely.* Yes, we should especially trust in the Immaculata and be happy in her. We should follow the example of Kolbe, related to us by one of his religious brothers:

When things ... were going well, he rejoiced with all his heart with everyone and fervently thanked the Immaculata for the graces received through her intercession. When things went badly he was still happy and used to say, "Why should we be sad? Doesn't the Immaculata, our little mother, know everything that's going on?"⁵⁰

Tomorrow, we'll learn more about Kolbe's form of consecration to "our little mother." Today, let's end by reflecting on his words: "My dear, dear brothers, our dear little, little mother, the Immaculate Mary, can do anything for us. We are her children. Turn to her. She will overcome everything."⁵¹

Today's Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, living in Mary.

Prepare me to be a fit instrument in the hands of the Immaculata.

DAY 14

Kolbe's Prayer of Consecration

To conclude this week's reflections on St. Maximilian's teaching on Marian consecration, it will be good for us to get to know his actual prayer of consecration. We'll now look at it in its three parts: (1) an invocation, (2) a plea to Mary, that she will receive us as her property, (3) a plea to Mary, that she will use us to gain other souls for her. The prayer begins with an invocation:

O Immaculata, Queen of heaven and earth, refuge of sinners and our most loving Mother, God has willed to entrust the entire order of mercy to you.⁵²

Here we have Kolbe's favorite title for Mary, the "Immaculata." As we learn from her apparition at Lourdes, this is her identity. For Kolbe, this is her most important identity, because it highlights her intimate union with the Holy Spirit. This invocation also brings in another part of Mary's identity: Mother. Mary is the most humble, gentle, tender, and loving mother. Finally, another of Kolbe's favorite titles is alluded to here, namely, Mediatrix of All Grace. For to Mary, "God has willed to entrust the entire order of mercy."

The second part of the consecration prayer expresses a plea that Mary will receive us as her property:

I, (Name), a repentant sinner, cast myself at your feet humbly imploring you to take me with all that I am and have, wholly to yourself as your possession and property. Please make of me, of all my powers of soul and body, of my whole life, death and eternity, whatever most pleases you.⁵³

Recall that de Montfort, in his formula of consecration, expanded and elaborated on *what he was giving to Mary*: body, soul, goods, merits, etc. Kolbe means the same thing as de Montfort, but he simplifies it by expressing his gift of himself to Mary with a concise statement: "[T]ake me with all that I am and have." On the flip side, where de Montfort describes the *purpose* of his consecration with the simple, summary statement, "for the greater glory of God," it's Kolbe who expands and elaborates. Thus, in the third part of his consecration prayer, Kolbe describes the purpose of his offering not simply as "the greater glory of God" but as the following:

If it pleases you, use all that I am and have without reserve, wholly to accomplish what was said of you: "She will crush your head," and, "You alone have destroyed all heresies in the whole world." Let me be a fit instrument in your immaculate and merciful hands for introducing and increasing your glory to the maximum in all the many strayed and indifferent souls, and thus help extend as far as possible the blessed kingdom of the most Sacred Heart of Jesus. For wherever you enter you obtain the grace of conversion and growth in holiness, since it is through your hands that all graces come to us from the most Sacred Heart of Jesus.⁵⁴

The boldness of the first sentence may easily be overlooked, but when we fully take it in, its boldness can be startling. Kolbe is asking Mary to use him to completely crush the reign of Satan! Perhaps he pulls back this incredible ambition (a little) when he says that he wants her to use him to help extend "*as far as possible* the blessed kingdom of the most Sacred Heart of Jesus." Still, his boldness is incredible. He wants Mary to use him as her instrument — as much as possible — to crush Satan and extend the kingdom of God, the kingdom of the love of the Heart of Jesus.

It's interesting that Kolbe homes in on the Heart of Jesus, mentioning it two times. This isn't a passing fancy. For instance, it appears again when he gives the motto of his army of Knights of the Immaculate, the Militia Immaculata: "To lead all men and every individual through Mary to the most Sacred Heart of Jesus."⁵⁵ We'll learn more about the Heart of Jesus as a most perfect goal for our spiritual lives when we reflect on St. Mother Teresa and her teachings next week.

Today's Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, living in Mary.

Prepare me to give all to the Immaculata for the sake of the kingdom.



WEEK THREE
St. Mother Teresa

This week, we'll focus on the example and words of a third great teacher of Marian consecration: St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta. She's notable for the way she puts Marian consecration into context. In other words, while de Montfort and Kolbe give us the main details of Marian consecration, Mother Teresa helps us to see it more fully within the big picture of a most intimate relationship with Christ. Although we won't immediately begin reflections on her devotion to Mary, we'll get to them soon enough.

DAY 15

Lover of the Heart of Jesus

Who is St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta? She's easy to understand. All we really need to know are two words: "*I thirst.*" These words of the Heart of Jesus, spoken from his agony on the Cross, were Mother's whole concern, her everything — and the same could be said of Our Lady. The deepest desire of the hearts of both Mother Teresa and the Mother of God is to satiate the thirst of the Heart of Jesus for love and for souls. In this sense, Mother Teresa's life is a revelation of the Heart of Mary and presents one of the richest expressions of Marian consecration. We'll reflect on the details of this revelation and example during many of the days that follow, but first let's ponder an overview of her life as a whole.

Mother Teresa's home parish in her native Macedonia was fittingly called "Sacred Heart." Fittingly, because as she herself said, "From childhood, the Heart of Jesus has been my first love."⁵⁶ This love may have begun when, at the age of five, she received the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus for the first time. On that occasion, she experienced the Lord's own burning thirst for souls. Over the years, this thirst grew and blossomed into a conviction at the age of 12 that God was calling her to be a missionary. When she was 18, she joined the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (The Loreto Sisters) and applied to go to their missions in Bengal, India, where she was sent the next year. After a year of novitiate, Teresa was assigned to the Loreto community in Calcutta and appointed to teach at St. Mary's Bengali Medium School for girls. The new sister would serve there for more than a decade and a half.

Mother Teresa's years at St. Mary's were happy ones. She was a joyful, generous, hardworking sister. In fact, she was so generous with the Lord that, with the permission of her spiritual director, she made an extraordinary vow: to refuse Jesus nothing. Five years later, Jesus tested this vow in a big way. On September 10, 1946, while on a train to her yearly retreat, the 36-year-old sister experienced what she described as "a call within a call." The details of this call became clearer in the subsequent weeks and months through a flood of mystical experiences that included visions. At the heart of this call was *the burning thirst of Jesus for love and for souls* and a plea to Teresa to found the Missionaries of Charity religious congregation. Regarding the latter, as if to remind her of the vow she had made, Jesus kept repeating to her, "Wilt thou refuse?"⁵⁷

Mother Teresa did not refuse the Lord. After her retreat, she spoke with her spiritual director and, with his permission, contacted the bishop. When the bishop hesitated to approve her plans, she wrote to him: "Don't delay, Your Grace, don't put it off. ... [L]et us take away from the Heart of Jesus His continual suffering."⁵⁸ In the same letter, she repeated this idea, "Let us bring joy to the Heart of Jesus, and remove from His Heart those terrible sufferings."⁵⁹ Eventually, the bishop gave his approval, and Mother founded the Missionaries of Charity, whose general purpose she described as follows: "To satiate the thirst of Jesus Christ on the Cross for Love and Souls."⁶⁰

From the beginning of the new congregation, Mother Teresa began to experience "such terrible darkness" in her soul "as if everything was dead."⁶¹ At times, it seemed unbearable, and she frequently found herself on the brink of despair. In 1961, she received a light in this darkness. After a conversation with a holy priest, she realized that her painful longing was actually a share in the thirst of Jesus: "For the first time in this 11 years I have come to love the darkness. For I believe now that it is a part, a very, very small part of Jesus' darkness and pain on earth."⁶² Teresa's experience of darkness and painful longing continued to the end of her life. She found the strength to persevere because, as her spiritual director put it, she realized that the darkness was actually a "mysterious link" that united her to the Heart of Jesus.⁶³

What about us? Do we yet realize the mysterious link between the darkness we sometimes experience in our

own lives and that of the Lord's suffering? Let us ponder Mother Teresa's words on suffering that come from her own experience and so, like her, become better lovers of the Heart of Jesus:

Suffering has to come because if you look at the cross, he has got his head bending down — he wants to kiss you — and he has both hands open wide— he wants to embrace you. He has his heart opened wide to receive you. Then when you feel miserable inside, look at the cross and you will know what is happening. Suffering, pain, sorrow, humiliation, feelings of loneliness, are nothing but the kiss of Jesus, a sign that you have come so close that he can kiss you. Do you understand, brothers, sisters, or whoever you may be? Suffering, pain, humiliation — this is the kiss of Jesus. At times you come so close to Jesus on the cross that he can kiss you. I once told this to a lady who was suffering very much. She answered, “Tell Jesus not to kiss me — to stop kissing me.” That suffering has to come that came in the life of Our Lady, that came in the life of Jesus — it has to come in our life also. Only never put on a long face. Suffering is a gift from God. It is between you and Jesus alone inside.⁶⁴

Today's Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, living in Mary.

Help me to find the love of the Heart of Jesus hidden in the darkness.

DAY 16

'The Gift God Gave September 10th'

In the overview of Mother Teresa's life that we reflected on yesterday, recall that one crucial event changed everything: the September 10th “call within a call,” the experience of Jesus' thirst for love and for souls. For many years, Mother Teresa did not speak about this experience to anyone except her spiritual director. Then, four years before her death, on March 25, 1993, after reading a Lenten message of Pope John Paul II on “I Thirst,”⁶⁵ she felt moved to reveal her secret in a letter to her Missionaries of Charity. Because this letter seems to reveal the heart of Mother Teresa better than anything else, I'll now cite it at length, and it will constitute our entire reflection for today:

After reading Holy Father's letter on “I Thirst,” I was struck so much — I cannot tell you what I felt. His letter made me realize more than ever how beautiful is our vocation. ... [W]e are reminding [the] world of His thirst, something that was being forgotten. ... Holy Father's letter is a sign ... to go more into what is this great thirst of Jesus for each one. It is also a sign for Mother, that the time has come for me to speak openly of [the] gift God gave Sept. 10th — to explain [as] fully as I can what means for me the thirst of Jesus. ...

Jesus wants me to tell you again ... how much love He has for each one of you — beyond all you can imagine. I worry some of you still have not really met Jesus — one to one — you and Jesus alone. We may spend time in chapel — but have you seen with the eyes of your soul how He looks at you with love? Do you really know the living Jesus — not from books but from being with Him in your heart? Have you heard the loving words He speaks to you? Ask for the grace, He is longing to give it. Until you can hear Jesus in the silence of your own heart, you will not be able to hear Him saying “I thirst” in the hearts of the poor. Never give up this daily intimate contact with Jesus as the real living person — not just the idea. How can we last even one day without hearing Jesus say “I love you” — impossible. Our soul needs that as much as the body needs to breathe the air. If not, prayer is dead — meditation only thinking. Jesus wants you each to hear Him — speaking in the silence of your heart.

Be careful of all that can block that personal contact with the living Jesus. The Devil may try to use the hurts of life, and sometimes our own mistakes — to make you feel it is impossible that Jesus really loves you, is really cleaving to you. This is a danger for all of us. And so sad, because it is completely opposite of what Jesus is really wanting, waiting to tell you. Not only that He loves you, but even more — He longs for you. He misses you when you don't come close. He thirsts for you. He loves you always, even when you don't feel worthy. When not accepted by others, even by yourself sometimes — He is the one who always accepts you. My children, you don't have to be different for Jesus to love you. Only believe — you are precious to Him. Bring all you are suffering to His feet — only open your heart to be loved by Him as

you are. He will do the rest.

You all know in your mind that Jesus loves you — but in this letter Mother wants to touch your heart instead. ... That is why I ask you to read this letter before the Blessed Sacrament, the same place it was written, so Jesus Himself can speak to you each one.

... His words on the wall of every MC chapel [“I Thirst”], they are not from the past only, but alive here and now, spoken to you. Do you believe it? If so, you will hear, you will feel His presence. Let it become as intimate for each of you, just as for Mother — this is the greatest joy you could give me. Mother will try to help you understand — but Jesus Himself must be the one to say to you “I Thirst.” Hear your own name. Not just once. Every day. If you listen with your heart, you will hear, you will understand.

Why does Jesus say “I Thirst”? What does it mean? Something so hard to explain in words — if you remember anything from Mother’s letter, remember this — “I thirst” is something much deeper than Jesus just saying “I love you.” Until you know deep inside that Jesus thirsts for you — you can’t begin to know who He wants to be for you. Or who He wants you to be for Him.

... [Our Lady] was the first person to hear Jesus’ cry “I Thirst” with St. John, and I am sure Mary Magdalen. Because Our Lady was there on Calvary, she knows how real, how deep is His longing for you and for the poor. Do we know? Do we feel as she? Ask her to teach Her role is to bring you face to face, as John and Magdalen, with the love in the Heart of Jesus crucified. Before it was Our Lady pleading with Mother, now it is Mother in her name pleading with you — “listen to Jesus’ thirst.” Let it be for each ... a Word of Life.

How do you approach the thirst of Jesus? Only one secret — the closer you come to Jesus, the better you will know His thirst. “Repent and believe,” Jesus tells us. What are we to repent? Our indifference, our hardness of heart. What are we to believe? Jesus thirsts even now, in your heart and in the poor — He knows your weakness, He wants only your love, wants only the chance to love you. He is not bound by time. Whenever we come close to Him — we become partners of Our Lady, St. John, Magdalen. Hear Him. Hear your own name. Make my joy and yours

complete.⁶⁶

Today’s Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, living in Mary. Help me listen to Jesus’ thirst.

DAY 17

The Visions of 1947

Several months after Mother Teresa first felt her “call within a call,” she experienced three visions that further expressed her calling. In the first vision, she saw a huge crowd of all kinds of people that included the very poor and children. The people in the crowd had their hands raised toward her and were calling out, “Come, come, save us — bring us to Jesus.”⁶⁷

In the second vision, the same great crowd was there, and this time Mother Teresa could see the immense sorrow and suffering in their faces. She was kneeling near Our Lady, who was facing the crowd. Although she couldn’t see Mary’s face, she could hear what she said: “*Take care of them — they are mine. — Bring them to Jesus — carry Jesus to them. — Fear not.*”⁶⁸

In the third vision, the same great crowd was there again, but they were covered in darkness. Despite this, Teresa could see them. Within this scene, Jesus hung on the Cross, and Our Lady was a little distance away. Teresa, as a little child, was just in front of Mary. Mary’s left hand rested on Teresa’s left shoulder and her right hand held Teresa’s right arm. Both of them were facing the Cross, and Jesus spoke to Teresa:

I have asked you. They have asked you, and she, My Mother, has asked you. Will you refuse to do this for Me — to take care of them, to bring them to Me? ⁶⁹

Notice the role of Our Lady in these visions. She is there, helping Teresa to hear the desire of the Lord's Heart and to see the suffering of the crowd. She is there as a Mother with her "little child," facing Jesus and the crowd together. She gives comfort and support to Teresa, just as she did to St. John at the foot of the Cross. Father Joseph Langford, MC, co-founder of the Missionaries of Charity Fathers, reflects on the meaning of these visions:

Without Our Lady, we would be ... alone before the crosses of life, oblivious to Jesus in our midst. In times of trial, we are often like the poor in Mother Teresa's vision, covered in darkness, unaware that Jesus is there in the midst of us. [W]ithout the fidelity [Our Lady] gave to Mother Teresa, the world would not have heard those words [I thirst], or seen them lived out, today.⁷⁰

It turns out that Our Lady was specially present to Mother Teresa not only in these visions but also during the original, September 10th grace. On the 50th anniversary of that blessed day, Mother shared something new: "If Our Lady had not been with me that day, I never would have known what Jesus meant when he said, 'I thirst.'"⁷¹ What was Teresa getting at? What she meant comes to light when we reflect again on the Marian dimension of the March 25th letter on "I Thirst":

... [Our Lady] was the first person to hear Jesus' cry "I Thirst" with St. John, and I am sure Mary Magdalen. Because Our Lady was there on Calvary, she knows how real, how deep is His longing for you and for the poor. Do we know? Do we feel as she? Ask her to teach Her role is to bring you face to face, as John and Magdalen, with the love in the Heart of Jesus crucified. Before it was Our Lady pleading with Mother, now it is Mother in her name pleading with you —"listen to Jesus' thirst."

This passage gets to the heart of Mother Teresa's relationship with Mary, and nothing summarizes it better than this golden line: *[Our Lady's] role is to bring you face to face ... with the love in the Heart of Jesus crucified.*

Today's Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, living in Mary.

Bring me face to face with the love in the Heart of Jesus crucified.

DAY 18

The Immaculate Heart of Mary

Mary's role is to bring us face to face with the love in the Heart of Jesus crucified. But what if when we're there with him, "face to face," we don't feel moved? What if we stand before a crucifix, ponder the Lord's Passion, and feel little or nothing? What if our hearts are hard and insensitive because of our sins? This happens. We all sin, and sin hardens hearts. Aridity and desolation also happen, regardless of our sins. Whatever the reason, our hearts can be cold and unfeeling, and this can be a problem. Thankfully, the one who has a sinless, perfect, immaculate heart will help us. She'll give us her compassionate heart. She'll even let us live in her heart! If only we'll give her ours.

During our week with St. Louis de Montfort, we learned that when we consecrate ourselves to Mary, we give our whole selves to her, and Mary then gives her whole self to us. The emphasis that week was on merits: If we give our merits to Mary, she gives her merits to us. This is a marvelous thing. Yet Mother Teresa gives a bit of a different emphasis to all this. Her concern is with the heart. In other words, her version of a total consecration to Mary focuses on a kind of exchange of hearts: We give Mary our hearts, and she gives us her Immaculate Heart. For Mother Teresa, this gift of Mary's heart through consecration essentially means two things that are expressed by two simple prayers: "Lend me your heart" and "Keep me in your most pure heart." First, "*Lend me your heart.*" By this prayer, Mother Teresa asked Our Lady to give her the love of her heart. In other words, she says, "Mary, help me to love with the perfect love of your Immaculate Heart." Remember, Mother Teresa's passionate desire was to satiate the thirst of Jesus for love, and she wanted to do this in the best way possible. What better way to love Jesus than with the perfect, humble, immaculate Heart of his mother? Here, Mother Teresa found the secret to living out her vocation to the full: "Mary, lend me your Immaculate Heart."

But can Mary really give us her heart? Of course, there's something piously poetic in this idea. Yet there's truth in it. When Mother Teresa often said to Mary, "Lend me your heart," she meant it. Did she suppose that the physical organ of her heart would be removed from her body and that Mary would come down from heaven and give her hers? Of course not. The physical organ of the heart is itself but a symbol of a deeper, spiritual reality. "The heart" refers to one's inner life and the seat of the indwelling Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit. Now we come to the heart of the heart of the matter.

Recall our week with St. Maximilian Kolbe and how he emphasized the bond between the Holy Spirit and Mary. He said that Mary is the spouse of the Holy Spirit and that their union goes even deeper than a spousal union. He went on to say things like this: "The Holy Spirit does not act except through the Immaculata, his spouse. Hence, she is the Mediatrix of all the graces of the Holy Spirit."⁷² So, if we want to love Jesus completely, ardently, and perfectly — as did Mother Teresa — then we need his Spirit of Love, and Mary Immaculate brings him to us. Let us pray, "Mary, lend us your Heart. Bring us the Spirit. Pray that our hardened hearts would burn with love for Jesus. Help set our hearts on fire with love for him."

The second prayer is "*Keep me in your most pure heart.*" Or, stated more fully, one prays, "Immaculate Heart of Mary, keep me in your most pure heart, so that I may please Jesus through you, in you, and with you."⁷³ This part of Mother Teresa's consecration to Mary is the most profound. She's not just asking for Mary's heart to be in her but for her to be in Mary's heart! So, this is a prayer to love Jesus through Mary, in Mary, and with Mary. This is something more than simply having Mary lend us her heart. To understand and live it requires a loving dependence and profound union with Mary. The day after tomorrow, we'll cover what this means and how we get there. Tomorrow, we'll learn more about Mary's attitude of heart.

Today's Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, Living in Mary.

Keep me in her most pure and Immaculate Heart.

DAY 19

Heart-Pondering Prayer

Are you ready for your consecration to Mary? If not, then get ready! As I said in the beginning, after Consecration Day, everything changes. A gloriously new day dawns in our spiritual lives. Indeed, when we give Mary our "yes," she begins to arrange all the events and details of our lives in such beautiful, tender, and loving ways. So, we need to get ready. Specifically, we need to get ready to *recognize* the multitude of mercies that will come to us through her Spouse, the Holy Spirit.

Oftentimes, we don't recognize the many gifts that God pours out to us in our daily lives. What we do recognize are daily annoyances, burdens, difficulties, and inconveniences. These win our attention. These get us complaining. These get us in a bad mood and sap our energy. Wouldn't it be a tragedy if, after we started receiving even more gifts and graces through our consecration, we didn't change this negative attitude? Yes, it would be. So, we need to get ready, and Mother Teresa will help us.

Mother Teresa lived in some of the poorest environments on earth. She had to put up with burning heat, bad breath, stuffy rooms, nagging fatigue, endless responsibilities, bland food, hard beds, body odor, cold water bathing, and an agonizingly deep spiritual aridity. Yet, despite all this, she radiated joy. She smiled. She marveled at the good things God did in her life and in the lives of others, and she pondered the countless loving details arranged by Our Lady. Seeing and recognizing all this, she didn't complain.

How did Mother Teresa develop such a spiritual sensitivity and attitude of gratitude? What was her secret? Two things. First, she followed the example of Mary who was always "pondering in her heart" the "good things" that God was doing in her life (see Luke 2:19, 51). Of course, like Mother Teresa, Mary also lived in poverty and surely bore her share of darkness in prayer. Yet she also found God in the details, pondered his

goodness in her heart, and responded with praise: “*Magnificat!*” Indeed, she praised and thanked God in all things, because she found God in all things and pondered deeply in her heart his many signs of love.

Second, Mother Teresa followed the example of St. Ignatius of Loyola, the soldier saint and master of practical prayer. Specifically, she lived his method of making a daily examination of conscience (“examen”), whereby one reviews the day, at the end of the day, in the presence of the Lord. Contrary to what people often think about the examen, it’s not simply a laundry list of sins. In fact, Ignatius directs people to spend most of their time reflecting not on sins but on the blessings of the day. It’s really an exercise in recognizing the good things God is doing in our lives and how we are or are not responding to his love. It’s an imitation of Mary’s attitude of heart-pondering prayer. (To learn a method of making the examen, see this endnote.)⁷⁴

God is always showering his love and mercy down on us in so many ways. It’s important that we begin to recognize these blessings and thank him for them, especially because this shower of blessings is going to turn into a torrent of grace once we consecrate ourselves to Mary. So, let’s get ready. Let’s remember that, according to Mother Teresa, one important way that we live out our consecration is by recognizing God’s blessings and pondering them, with Mary, deeply in our hearts. Such heart-pondering prayer leads to praise and thanks, and praise and thanks sets us on fire with divine love.

Today’s Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, living in Mary.

Help me to recognize and ponder in my heart all the good you do for me.

DAY 20

A Consecration Covenant

Yesterday, I said we need to get ready for our consecration to Mary by learning to recognize all the blessings that will start pouring in. Today, we’ll be shifting gears a bit. We’ll be preparing for Consecration Day by reflecting on how serious a commitment Marian consecration really is. This is an important part of our preparation because the more seriously we take it, the more seriously the Mother of God will take it. Mother Teresa will be particularly helpful to us today; for she took her consecration to Mary very seriously.

Part of the reason Mother Teresa took her consecration so seriously has to do with her roots in Albanian culture. A key word in this culture is “*besa*.” Literally translated, this means “faith,” but its more complete meaning is “word of honor” and “to keep one’s promise.” Mother Teresa explains:

[*Besa*] means even if you have killed my father and the police are after you, if I have given you my word, then even if the police kill me, still I will not disclose your name.⁷⁵

In other words, to the mind of Mother Teresa, if you give your word to someone, you give yourself. Indeed, *besa* has a sacred character like a vow, oath, or covenant. Let’s reflect on that last word, “covenant.” This is how Mother Teresa described her consecration to Mary. It’s a word that has rich, biblical meaning: It describes the bond of relationship between God and his people throughout salvation history. Such a bond is more than a contract, as scripture scholar, Scott Hahn, explains:

[A] major difference between contracts and covenants may be discovered in their very distinctive forms of exchange. A contract is an exchange of property in the form of goods and services (“That is mine and this is yours”); whereas a covenant calls for the exchange of persons (“I am yours and you are mine”), creating a shared bond of interpersonal communion.⁷⁶

Another feature of a covenant is that it usually entails certain rights and obligations. For example, in the marital covenant, a husband and wife have the right to enjoy one another in the spousal embrace of self-giving love, but they also have the obligation to care for and support one another “in good times and bad.” Mother Teresa also understood her “Covenant of Consecration” with Mary as having certain rights and obligations, and she communicated this Marian spirituality to her religious family, the Missionaries of Charity.

Father Joseph Langford, MC, inspired by Mother Teresa’s teaching on the Covenant of Consecration, spells

out the details of a Missionary of Charity’s rights and duties in her relationship with Mary, listing 12 corresponding rights and duties. The list begins, significantly, with Mary having the duty to give “her spirit and heart” and ends with each Missionary of Charity having the “right” to enter into Mary’s heart and share her interior life. So, the two bookends of this covenant with Mary are Mother Teresa’s two prayers that we learned about earlier: “Lend me your heart” and “keep me in your most pure heart.” Everything in between is simply the terms of the relationship.

Let’s conclude, then, by pondering the Missionaries of Charity’s Consecration Covenant with Mary, beginning with its introductory paragraph:

*Moved by an ardent desire to live in the closest union with you possible in this life, so as to more surely and fully arrive at union with your Son; I hereby pledge to live the spirit and terms of the following Covenant of Consecration as faithfully and generously as I am able.*²⁷

MARY’S DUTIES	MY DUTIES
1. To give of her spirit and heart.	1. Total gift of all I have and am.
2. To possess, protect, and transform me.	2. Total dependence on her.
3. To inspire, guide, and enlighten me.	3. Responsiveness to her spirit.
4. To share her experience of prayer and praise.	4. Faithfulness to prayer.
5. Responsibility for my sanctification.	5. Trust in her intercession.
6. Responsibility for all that befalls me.	6. Accept all as coming from her.
7. To share with me her virtues.	7. Imitate her spirit.
8. To provide for my spiritual and material needs.	8. Constant recourse to her.
9. Union with her heart.	9. Remembrance of her presence.
10. To purify me and my actions.	10. Purity of intention; self-denial.
11. Right to dispose of me, of my prayers and intercessions and graces.	11. Right to avail myself of her and her energies for the sake of the kingdom.
12. Total freedom in and around me, as she pleases in all things.	12. Right to enter into her heart, to share her interior life.

Today’s Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, living in Mary.

Help me to ardently make a Covenant of Consecration with Mary.

DAY 21

'Be the One' (with Mary)

In case the list of 12 duties that we covered yesterday has got some of us feeling overwhelmed, today we'll focus on a simpler way of remembering the essence of Mother Teresa's consecration to Mary: "*Be the one.*" Or, more specifically, "Be the one, with Mary." What does this mean? The main clue comes from the Offertory verse (Ps 68:21) for the Mass of the Feast of the Sacred Heart:

My heart had expected reproach and misery. And I looked for one that would grieve together with me, and there was none: and I sought one that would console me, and I found none.⁷⁸

Mother Teresa responds, "Be the one." Be the one to console Jesus by satiating his burning thirst for love. She writes: Tell Jesus, "I will be the one." I will comfort, encourage and love Him. ... Be with Jesus. He prayed and prayed, and then He went to look for consolation, but there was none. ... I always write that sentence, "I looked for one to comfort Me, but I found no one." Then I write, "Be the one." So now you be that one. Try to be the one to share with Him, to comfort Him, to console Him. So let us ask Our Lady to help us understand.⁷⁹

That last sentence is key. We need Our Lady to help us understand the thirst of Jesus. She's the one who consoles him best. She's the spouse of the Consoler, the Holy Spirit. Through Mary, the Holy Spirit can help us understand what it means to be a consoler of the Heart of Jesus:

[Let] us try in a special way to come as close as the human heart can come to the Heart of Jesus and try to understand as much as possible Jesus' terrible pain caused to him by our sins and His Thirst for our love. ... Thank God our Lady was there to understand fully the thirst of Jesus for love. She must have straight away said, "I satiate Your thirst with my love and the suffering of my heart."⁸⁰

Yes, we can thank God for Our Lady. She teaches us to "be the one" with her, consoling Jesus on Calvary. She helps us to "straight away" say, "Jesus, I satiate Your thirst." But what exactly does this mean? What does it mean to satiate the thirst of Jesus? Two things: to console Jesus the Head of his Mystical Body and to console him in the members of his Body.

How do we console Jesus, the Head of the Body? By being apostles of joy, which means "to console the Sacred Heart of Jesus through joy," and we do this especially with Mary's joy. For Mother Teresa continues, "Please ask our Lady to give me her heart."⁸¹ Mary is the one who, despite her own trial of darkness, praises and thanks God in all things, smiles at him, and consoles him with her love. It's simple and beautiful. Mother summarizes it by her trademark three virtues: total surrender to God, loving trust, and perfect cheerfulness. Basically, it's to be as a child, with Mary, smiling at Jesus and loving him from the foot of the Cross.

Now, how do we console Jesus in the members of his Body? By recognizing their thirst. Everyone thirsts: rich and poor, young and old, believer and unbeliever. Everyone has a restless heart for God, for man is a restless thirst. To console Jesus in others is to respond to their suffering, especially to that deepest, most universal suffering: the thirst for love. We should respond to this thirst in others not with indifference but with a gentle smile that says, "I delight that you exist, and I, too, understand the pain of the thirst." Mother explains:

The greatest evil is the lack of love and charity, the terrible indifference towards one's neighbor. People today are hungry for love, for understanding love which is much greater and which is the only answer to loneliness and great poverty."⁸²

By accepting her own thirst (with Mary's help) and not running away from it, Mother Teresa could understand the thirst of others — both Jesus on the Cross and Jesus in her neighbor — and she became a true apostle of mercy and joy: a true missionary of charity.

Today's Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, living in Mary.

Help me to "be the one" to console Jesus with Mary.

A faint, light-colored illustration of a Sacred Heart with a sword piercing it, surrounded by roses and a banner. The heart is the central focus, with a sword piercing it from the top right. A banner with five roses is draped across the heart. The background consists of radiating lines, suggesting a halo or a sunburst.

WEEK FOUR
St. Pope John Paul II

During this fourth and final full week, we'll be focusing on the example and words of another great teacher of Marian consecration: St. Pope John Paul II. "The most Marian Pope," as he's been called, profoundly deepened the Church's understanding of Marian consecration. Building on the work of the Second Vatican Council, he provides us with a thoroughly biblical treatment of Marian consecration — which he also calls "entrustment" — and homes in on the idea that it's Mary's role to lead us into the mystery of Christ's redeeming love and self-consecration to the Father.

DAY 22

Mary's Gift of Mercy

In 1917, while World War I raged, the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to three shepherd children in Fatima, Portugal. She told them that the war would end but if people didn't convert, a worse war would follow and Russia would spread its errors throughout the world, causing more wars, martyrs, and persecutions of the Church. To prevent this, Mary asked that the Holy Father consecrate Russia to her Immaculate Heart and for people to make five consecutive "First Saturday" communions of reparation. In the end, she said, her Immaculate Heart would triumph.

It's interesting that Mary mentioned Russia. At the time, this was cause for confusion: Russia? Holy Russia? What errors would this devoutly Christian country spread throughout the world? And how could such a poor Russia exercise so much influence? (At this point in history, the Soviet revolution was in its infancy; the communist, atheist, totalitarian regime had not yet been established.)

After Mary gave her prophesy about Russia, the children saw a vision involving a "bishop dressed in white," who they understood to be the Pope. With great distress, they saw that he would suffer much and then be shot and killed. The children described what they saw only to Church authorities, who decided not to disclose it to the public. This became known as the last "secret" of Fatima.

Now, the very first apparition of Our Lady of Fatima happened on May 13, 1917, at 5 p.m. Exactly 64 years later, May 13, 1981, at 5 p.m., a small, open-air jeep rode out into St. Peter's Square, carrying Pope John Paul II, who warmly greeted pilgrims gathered in the square. At one point, the jeep stopped so the Pope could take a little girl into his arms. After he gave her back to her jubilant parents, the jeep continued on its way through the sea of waving, cheering pilgrims. Suddenly, a gunman fired two shots at the Pope from close range. The first bullet grazed his elbow. The second struck him in the abdomen and ricocheted inside him, shredding intestines and piercing his colon. Miraculously, the bullet missed the main abdominal artery by one tenth of an inch. Had it been struck or even grazed, John Paul would have bled to death on the way to the hospital. Realizing this blessing, the Pope stated that "One hand fired, and another guided the bullet."⁸³

What hand guided the bullet? John Paul believes it was the hand of Our Lady of Fatima (the May 13th anniversary was not lost on him). In fact, after the shooting, he asked for the envelope containing the last secret of Fatima, the one about the "bishop dressed in white." Then, with Fatima much on his mind, he thought to consecrate the world to Mary's Immaculate Heart as soon as possible, and he began composing an act of entrustment, which he solemnly prayed less than a month later. Even before this, within a week of the shooting, he repeated his own personal consecration to Mary in a recorded address to the pilgrims gathered in St. Peter's Square: "To you, Mary, I repeat: *Totus tuus ego sum.*"⁸⁴

On March 25, 1984, in St. Peter's Square, before the official statue of Our Lady of Fatima that had been flown in for the occasion, John Paul made a more solemn entrustment of the world to Mary's Immaculate Heart. He concluded the prayer with the following words:

Let there be revealed, once more, in the history of the world the infinite saving power of the redemption: the power of *merciful Love*! May it put a stop to evil! May it transform consciences! May your Immaculate Heart reveal for all the *light of Hope*!

After learning of the Pope's solemn entrustment, Sr. Lucia, the lone survivor of the three Fatima seers, declared that it fully satisfied Our Lady's original request. Five years later, the horrific, Soviet, totalitarian regime that had terrorized millions of people suddenly came to an end.

That victory won, the Pope didn't rest. What he once called the "century of tears" was far from over. To confront the ongoing evil and injustice in the world, he forcefully proclaimed, with growing frequency, the saving power of God's "*merciful Love*." His efforts to promote this message culminated in the establishment of the universal Feast of Divine Mercy Sunday in 2000 and a solemn Act of Entrustment of the world to Divine Mercy in 2002. Three years after this entrustment, the great Marian Pope, the great Mercy Pope, died on a first Saturday and the vigil of Divine Mercy Sunday. Mary had saved his life at the dawn of his pontificate so that, through him, her divine Son could lead the Church to the victory of Mercy and the triumph of her Immaculate Heart.

Today's Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, living in Mary.

Have mercy on us and on the whole world!

DAY 23

Maternal Mediation

As one of our guides to Consecration Day, St. John Paul II is a *triple gift*. Not only is he a Marian saint, like our other three guides; not only is he brilliant and thoroughly trained in theology, like de Montfort and Kolbe; but he is also a Pope. Therefore, his words carry the teaching authority of the successor of St. Peter ... and the authoritative weight of an Ecumenical Council! Well, this is true in the sense that his teachings on the Mother of God are deeply rooted in the authoritative Mariology of the Second Vatican Council. Because of this dependence on the Council, before we look to John Paul's teaching on Marian consecration, let's see what the Council has to say about Mary. (Tomorrow, we'll begin to ponder how John Paul builds on Vatican II's teaching.)

One can find the main Marian teachings of Vatican II in the last chapter of the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, known by its Latin title, *Lumen Gentium*. The heart of these teachings has to do with what's usually called Mary's "maternal mediation." Maternal mediation basically means that Mary is our spiritual mother (hence "maternal") who assists us from heaven with her prayers and motherly care to help bring us to God (hence "mediation"). While the term "maternal" should be familiar, "mediation" may need some explaining. A mediator is someone who stands between two people for the sake of bringing them into unity. Thus, Jesus Christ is a mediator. He is the one who, after the Fall, stands between God and fallen humanity to bring us back into communion with God. And there's only one, as St. Paul makes clear, "[T]here is one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ" (1 Tim 2:5).

If there's only one mediator between God and man, and if that one mediator is Jesus Christ, then why does the Second Vatican Council describe Mary as a mediator? Because God is generous. In other words, Jesus doesn't keep his role as mediator to himself. He wants Mary — and not just Mary, but all Christians — to share in his one mediation, though in subordinate ways. For instance, each of us shares in Christ's one mediation when we pray for one another "in Christ." I mentioned a similar point in the introduction when I wrote that God wants all of us to participate in his work of salvation. I also mentioned there that Mary has a uniquely important role in this work. Again, according to Vatican II, this special role is captured by the phrase "maternal mediation." Among creatures, Mary's role in the ongoing work of salvation is by far the most important. She was given such an important role "not from some inner necessity" on God's part but "from the divine pleasure."⁸⁵ Again, we see God's generosity in including us in the work of redemption, we the very same creatures he came to redeem. The following passage from *Lumen Gentium* summarizes Mary's cooperation in this work both when she was on earth and now as she is in heaven:

[T]he Blessed Virgin was on this earth the virgin Mother of the Redeemer, and above all others and in a singular way the generous associate

and humble handmaid of the Lord. She conceived, brought forth, and nourished Christ. She presented him to the Father in the temple, and was united with him by compassion as he died on the cross. In this singular way she cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope, and burning charity in the work of our Savior in giving back supernatural life to souls. Wherefore she is our mother in the order of grace.

This maternity of Mary in the order of grace began with the consent which she gave in faith at the annunciation and which she sustained without wavering beneath the cross, and lasts until the eternal fulfillment of all the elect. Taken up to heaven she did not lay aside this salvific duty, but by her constant intercession continued to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation. By her maternal charity, she cares for the brethren of her Son, who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and difficulties, until they are led to the happiness of their true home. Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked by the Church under the titles of Advocate, Auxiliatrix, Adjutrix, and Mediatrix. This, however, is to be so understood that it neither takes away from nor adds anything to the dignity and efficaciousness of Christ the one Mediator.⁸⁶

So, while on earth, Mary cooperated with God's plan of salvation "above all others," particularly by giving birth to and caring for Jesus. Now in heaven, Mary still cooperates in a special way in God's plan of salvation. Through her "constant intercession" and "maternal charity," she brings us grace, mercy, and the "gifts of eternal salvation." Tomorrow, we'll begin to see how John Paul develops this teaching on Mary's motherhood in the order of grace. For now, we can reflect on this great gift of God: Mary is our spiritual mother whose God-given task is to nurture us with tender care and the gifts and graces that come to us through her loving prayers.

Today's Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, living in Mary.

Fill my heart with praise to God for giving me Mary as my spiritual mother.

DAY 24

Mary's Retreat (Day One)

During this retreat, we've been pondering in our hearts certain truths of our faith that relate to Marian consecration. One might say we're on a kind of "pilgrimage of faith" leading up to Consecration Day. During her earthly life, Mary, too, was on a kind of retreat and pilgrimage of faith. She, too, pondered in her heart different truths related to Marian consecration. After all, she didn't discover all at once her vocation to be a spiritual mother and mediatrix. Like us, Mary needed to walk by faith while pondering in her heart. She, too, needed a time of preparation regarding her special role as our "mother in the order of grace."

Because Mary's maternal mediation is so central to a proper understanding of Marian consecration, we're going to spend the next few days making a retreat within our retreat. We'll do this by peering in on *Mary's retreat*. In other words, we're going to accompany Mary along the way that God led her to progressively discover her vocation to be our spiritual mother and mediatrix.

In some sense, Mary's retreat begins at the Annunciation. By her "yes" to God, her "*fiat*," she accepted her vocation to be the mother of Jesus. But did she also know that she was accepting the call to be the spiritual mother to all Christians as well? I don't know. What I do know is that the whole mystery of the Annunciation gave Mary something amazing to ponder, something that happens to be deeply related to Marian consecration and entrustment. Let me put it this way: Who was the first person to entrust himself to Mary? It wasn't St. Louis de Montfort. It was God the Father. John Paul explains, "For it must be recognized that before anyone else it was God himself, the Eternal Father, *who entrusted himself to the Virgin of Nazareth*, giving her his own Son in the mystery of the Incarnation."⁸⁷ Mary surely marveled at this act of humility on God's part. As she marveled and pondered it, might she have begun to have some inkling that God would later want the people he came to redeem to follow his example?

Mary had many other things to ponder during her preparation to be ever more completely our mother in the order of grace. The Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) offer several points of reflection that speak to Mary's spiritual motherhood. Take, for example, the passage in the Gospel of Mark (3:31-35) where Mary and Jesus' cousins are outside, wanting to see Jesus, and so they send for him and call to him. Jesus responds by asking, "Who are my mother and my brethren?" Then, looking at those sitting around him, he says "Here

are my mother and my brethren! Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother.” In giving this response, was Jesus being a bad son? No. He was being exactly the kind of son his Father wanted him to be. At the same time, he was preparing his mother for who he wanted her to be. Specifically, he was revealing to her the new filial bond of the kingdom that goes beyond the bonds of the flesh. In other words, he was pointing out the primacy of the spirit to the flesh, the primacy of the supernatural Fatherhood of God to the natural fatherhood (or motherhood) of man. It’s likely that Mary immediately grasped some of what Jesus was trying to teach her. After all, for years she had pondered in her heart another strange response of Jesus, the one he gave when she found him in the Temple after three days of sorrowful searching: “Did you not know I must be about my Father’s business?” (Lk 2:49).

During his public ministry, Jesus was indeed completely concerned with his Father’s business. Now, a key part of this business involved preparing his mother for her new role in God’s kingdom. Jesus knew that “in the dimension of the Kingdom of God and in the radius of the fatherhood of God” Mary’s motherhood “takes on another meaning.”⁸⁸ In the words reported by Mark that we read earlier, Jesus points to this meaning, “Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother.” We can be sure that Mary pondered this in her heart and that she realized that by these words, Jesus was not rejecting her but rather preparing her.

Can we be sure Jesus wasn’t rejecting Mary? Yes, we can. Even if Jesus’ words sound like he’s rejecting her, they aren’t. In fact, if we consider a similar passage in the Gospel of Luke (11:27-28), it’s clear that Jesus is actually *blessing* his mother. In this other passage, “a woman in the crowd raised her voice” and said to Jesus, “Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you.” Jesus responds in a way similar to what we read in Mark, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it.” At first reading, this may seem like a rebuke of Mary. But it’s not. After all, who heard the word of God and kept it better than Mary? Nobody. Thus, Jesus is actually blessing his mother, and she would have realized it.

Mary is an incredibly perceptive woman, and she paid close attention to Jesus’ every word and action. The subtleties of his teaching were not lost on her, and she progressively came to realize the unfolding mystery of her own unique motherhood:

[A]s the messianic mission of her Son grew clearer to her eyes and spirit, [Mary] herself as a mother became ever more open to *that new dimension of motherhood* which was to constitute her “part” beside her Son. Had she not said from the very beginning: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38)? Through faith Mary continued to hear and to ponder that word Thus in a sense Mary as Mother became *the first “disciple” of her Son*, the first to whom he seemed to say: “Follow me”⁸⁹

What a joy it must have been for Jesus to have *one disciple* who fully understood him. What a consolation to his Heart to find such attentiveness to God’s Word!

Tomorrow, we’ll reflect more on Mary’s attentiveness and how it led her to discover yet another aspect to her “part” beside her son in his work of salvation. This part does indeed involve, as John Paul wrote, a “new dimension of her motherhood.” Thus, at Cana, we’ll see that she gives *birth* to the faith of Jesus’ disciples by initiating his first miracle, which comes through her *motherly attentiveness* to human need.

Today’s Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, living in Mary.

Help me to be faithful to heart-pondering prayer, as was Mary.

DAY 25

Mary's Retreat (Day Two)

Yesterday, we began a “retreat within our retreat” by joining Mary’s retreat. In other words, we began to ponder the ways that Jesus prepared Mary to understand and fully embrace her new motherly role in the kingdom of God. Today, we continue this retreat at the wedding feast of Cana, where Mary’s motherly mediation gloriously shines forth. Let’s review the scene (Jn 2:1-12)

The mother of Jesus is at a wedding feast, and Jesus and his disciples are also invited — presumably because of Mary. The wine runs short. Mary notices this, and brings it to the attention of her Son, “They have no wine.” Jesus seems to rebuke her, “Woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” Mary nevertheless tells the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” The servants follow Jesus’ orders to fill stone jars with water. Then the water becomes wine, and the disciples believe.

Let’s now ponder deeply John Paul’s commentary on this scene. His words get to the heart of Mary’s role in our lives and explain why we should be seeking to consecrate ourselves to her:

[Cana] clearly outlines *the new dimension*, the new meaning of *Mary’s motherhood*. ... [It is] a new kind of motherhood according to the spirit and not just according to the flesh, that is to say *Mary’s solicitude for human beings*, her coming to them in the wide variety of their wants and needs. At Cana in Galilee there is shown only one concrete aspect of human need, apparently a small one of little importance (“They have no wine”). But it has a symbolic value: this coming to the aid of human needs means, at the same time, bringing those needs within the radius of Christ’s messianic mission and salvific power. Thus there is a mediation: Mary places herself between her Son and mankind in the reality of their wants, needs, and sufferings. *She puts herself “in the middle,”* that is to say *she acts as a mediatrix not as an outsider, but in her position as Mother*. She knows that as such she can point out to her Son the needs of mankind, and in fact, she “has the right” to do so.

Her mediation is thus in the nature of intercession: Mary “intercedes” for mankind. And that is not all. As a Mother she also *wishes the messianic power of her Son to be manifested*, that salvific power of his which is meant to help man in his misfortunes, to free him from the evil which in various forms and degrees weighs heavily upon his life... Another essential element of Mary’s maternal task is found in her words to the servants: “Do whatever he tells you.” *The Mother* of Christ presents herself as the *spokeswoman of her Son’s will*, pointing out those things which must be done so that the salvific power of the Messiah may be manifested. At Cana, thanks to the intercession of Mary and the obedience of the servants, Jesus begins “his hour.” At Cana Mary appears as believing in Jesus. Her faith evokes his first “sign” and helps to kindle the faith of the disciples... [T]he episode at Cana in Galilee offers us *a sort of first announcement of Mary’s mediation*, wholly oriented toward Christ and tending to the revelation of his salvific power.⁹⁰

I’d like to highlight a few important points from this passage for us to ponder. (1) Not by necessity but by God’s choice, “the handmaid of the Lord” who does the Father’s will perfectly has a “right” as mother and mediatrix to point out to her Son the needs of mankind. Shouldn’t we have recourse to such a powerful Mother of Mercy with regard to our own needs and intentions? (2) Mary needs servants who will obey her words, “Do whatever he tells you.” Are we ready to be her servants so Jesus can begin his “hour” in our day? (3) It’s clear from the words “Do whatever he tells you” that Mary’s role is “wholly oriented toward Christ” and tends to the revelation of his saving power. Mary’s mediation, therefore, is in union with and subordinate to the one mediation of Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Today’s Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, living in Mary.

Remind me to ask for Mary’s powerful intercession in my times of need.

DAY 26

Mary's Retreat (Day Three)

Yesterday, at the wedding feast of Cana, we saw a glorious example of Mary’s motherly mediation. After this event, Mary surely pondered it deeply in her heart and discovered much about her maternal mediation. Yet

Cana was not the most important part of her preparation. The “crowning moment” of her preparation — indeed, its full actualization — came at Calvary. At Calvary, Mary suffers with Christ. Through faith, she is “perfectly united with Christ in his self-emptying.” Through faith, she shares in the whole “shocking mystery” of his gift of himself out of love for us. Through faith, “the Mother shares in the death of her Son, in his redeeming death.”⁹¹ Before his death, Jesus has one more lesson for his perfect disciple, who has followed him to the Cross and fully accepted to suffer with him. Seeing her standing at the foot of the Cross next to his beloved disciple, John, he says, “Woman, behold, your son.” Then, to John, “Behold, your mother” (Jn 19:26-27). With these words, Jesus gives Mary as Mother “to every single individual and all mankind.”

According to John Paul, this “new motherhood of Mary” is “*the fruit of the ‘new’ love* which came to definitive maturity in her at the foot of the Cross, through her sharing in the redemptive love of her son.”⁹³ This “new love,” says John Paul, actually causes a “transformation” in Mary’s motherhood such that she burns even more with love for all those for whom Jesus suffered and died.

This idea that Mary, at the foot of the Cross, received a new, burning love for souls may remind us of Mother Teresa’s deep insight about Mary. Recall that, for Teresa, Mary is the one who took Jesus’ words “I thirst” most deeply to heart and that she helps others to take them to heart as well. Anyway, John Paul further reflects on Mary’s transformation in love:

[A]t the foot of the Cross there was ... accomplished her maternal *cooperation* with the Savior’s whole mission through her actions and sufferings. Along the path of this collaboration with the work of her Son, the Redeemer, Mary’s motherhood itself underwent a singular transformation, becoming even more imbued with “burning charity” toward all those to whom Christ’s mission was directed. Through this “burning charity,” which sought to achieve, in union with Christ, the restoration of “supernatural life to souls,” Mary *entered, in a way all her own, into the one mediation* “between God and men” *which is the mediation of the man Christ Jesus*.

At Calvary, Mary’s preparation is ended. She has received the full gift of her universal spiritual motherhood and mediation, which is a unique cooperation in Christ’s work of redemption and a sharing in his mediation. After Jesus’ death on the Cross, we don’t hear about Mary exercising her new motherhood until the day before Pentecost, when the apostles, together with “the women and Mary the mother of Jesus and his brethren” (Acts 1:14), are devoting themselves to prayer in the upper room. John Paul comments, “We see Mary prayerfully imploring the gift of the Spirit, who had already overshadowed her at the Annunciation.”⁹⁵ He goes on to point out that Mary is the “discreet yet essential presence” that indicates the path of “birth from the Holy Spirit” first at the Annunciation and now at the birth of the Church.

Mary’s new spiritual motherhood is deeply connected with the Church, “*with maternal love she cooperates in the birth and development’ of the sons and daughters of Mother Church.*”⁹⁶ This birth and development has its source in the Church’s sacramental life, where Mary’s motherly mediation is particularly present. For instance, Mary is surely interceding and active with her Spouse, the Holy Spirit, when the Spirit transforms us into members of Christ’s body at Baptism. Moreover, she is just as present and active with her Spouse at Mass; for it is at Mass that Christ’s “*true body born of the Virgin Mary*” becomes present.⁹⁷ Because of the centrality of the Eucharist in Christian faith and life, Mary is always striving to lead the faithful to it.

As we close today’s reflection, which concludes the three days of “Mary’s spiritual motherhood retreat,” we should keep in mind one important point: Mary’s new motherhood is not some vague or abstract sort of thing. It’s concrete and personal. And even though it’s universal, it’s also intensely particular. Mary is *your* mother. She is *my* mother. In this light, John Paul thinks it’s significant that Mary’s new motherhood on Calvary is expressed in the singular, “Behold, your son” *not* “Behold, your billions of spiritual children.” The Pope gets to the heart of it when he says, “Even when the same woman is the mother of many children, her personal relationship with each one of them is of the very essence of motherhood.”⁹⁸ In short: Mary is uniquely, particularly, personally your mother and my mother, and she doesn’t lose us in the crowd.

Today’s Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, living in Mary.

Thank you for the gift of my loving Mother, Mary.

DAY 27

Marian Entrustment (Part One)

Now that we've completed our three-day, mini-retreat with Mary, we should have a clearer sense of Mary's maternal mediation. This motherly mediation is the key that unlocks the whole theology of Marian consecration. And now that we have this key, we're ready to learn exactly what John Paul means by Marian consecration, or as he usually refers to it, "Marian entrustment." To begin, we need to go back to the foot of the Cross.

"Woman, behold, your son." With these words, Jesus is entrusting all of humanity to Mary's motherly care. He's making her the spiritual mother of all. And as we learned yesterday, Mary fully accepted this gift "with burning love."

Next, Jesus speaks to John, the beloved disciple, who represents all of us: "Behold, your mother." Jesus is now giving us a gift, the great gift of his mother as our spiritual mother. Do we accept this gift? Yes. At least we're trying to (otherwise, we wouldn't be making this retreat). But how do we accept it? This is the crucial question. According to Pope John Paul, the following Gospel text tells us how we are to accept Mary as our spiritual mother, "And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home" (Jn 19:27). The Pope describes this action with one word: "entrusting." We see an example of this in the person of John, who entrusted himself to Mary, who was herself entrusted to John by Christ, "Behold, your mother." John's entrusting of himself to Mary is *his response to Christ's command from the Cross*, but it's not only that. It's also *a response to Mary's "burning love" for us*: "entrusting is *the response* to a person's love, and in particular *to the love of a mother*." John Paul goes on to describe the nature of this entrusting of oneself to Mary:

Entrusting himself to Mary in a filial manner, the Christian, like the Apostle John, "welcomes" the Mother of Christ "into his own home" and brings her into everything that makes up his inner life, that is to say into his human and Christian "I": he "*took her to his own home*." Thus the Christian seeks to be taken into that "maternal charity" with which the Redeemer's Mother "cares for the brethren of her Son," "in whose birth and development she cooperates" in the measure of the gift proper to each one through the power of Christ's Spirit. Thus also is exercised that motherhood in the Spirit which became Mary's role at the foot of the Cross and in the Upper Room.⁹⁹

This entrusting of oneself to Mary, which the Pope beautifully describes as taking her "into one's own home," should be understood as our following of Christ's own example — he first entrusted himself to Mary at the Annunciation and then throughout the Hidden Life — and as his will for his disciples. After all, he himself initiates such entrustment, "Behold, your mother." But why does Christ do this? Is it that he wants to distance himself from us? No. He's bringing us closer to himself by giving us to the one who is closest to him, the same one who directs everything to him, "Do whatever he tells you."

Mary wants to act upon all those who entrust themselves to her as children. "And it is well known," says the Pope, "that the more her children persevere and progress in this attitude, the nearer Mary leads them to the 'unsearchable riches of Christ.'"¹⁰⁰ Again, this is so both because of the unique closeness of Mary to Christ and because of her special role of bringing others into the intimacy she shares with him.

Tomorrow, we'll see how this closeness of Mary to Christ, particularly in his consecration of himself for our sake, helps us make our own consecration to Christ. This is the whole purpose behind why we entrust ourselves to Mary: It's so she can bring us even closer to Christ through her powerful prayers and motherly love.

Today's Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, living in Mary.

Prepare me to entrust myself completely to Mary so she can bring me closer to Christ.

DAY 28

Marian Entrustment (Part Two)

Let's return to Fatima, where we started this week — but this time let's go with St. John Paul II.

Exactly one year after being shot in St. Peter's Square, John Paul went to Fatima “in order to give thanks that the mercy of God and the protection of the Mother of Christ” had saved his life.¹⁰¹ On that occasion, he delivered a heartfelt homily that's a rich source of the theology of Marian consecration and entrustment. The entire homily and Act of Entrustment are too long to cite here. So, I'm going to summarize. Specifically, I'm going to draw out from them the connection the Pope makes between consecration to Mary, Divine Mercy, and the redeeming consecration of Christ. Let's start with the connection between Mary and Divine Mercy.

Before we begin, a few things about Divine Mercy: (1) According to John Paul, Divine Mercy is the limit imposed by God on evil, the love of God in the face of evil; (2) Divine Mercy is symbolized by the pierced side of Christ and the blood and water that gushed forth from his side; (3) a central part of the modern Divine Mercy devotion is the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, which offers atonement and implores mercy for our sins and those of the whole world. In what follows, notice how these three aspects of Divine Mercy are central to the Pope's most important homily on Marian consecration.

The homily's context is the widespread, “almost apocalyptic” evil of our time, an evil that “menaces,” that is “spreading,” and that gathers “like a dark cloud over mankind.” The Pope confesses that this evil causes “trepidation” in his heart. Despite this, he finds hope in “a Love more powerful than evil” which no “sin of the world can ever overcome.” This Love he identifies as “merciful Love.”

And what about this *merciful Love*? What does it have to do with Marian consecration? Everything. It has everything to do with consecration because Mary is the one who brings us to the source of merciful Love. Mary is the one who brings us to the love that is more powerful than evil. Indeed, as John Paul says in his homily, consecration to the Immaculate Heart means “drawing near, through the Mother's intercession, to the very Fountain of Life that sprang from Golgotha.”¹⁰³ What is this fountain of life? The Pope identifies it as “the Fountain of Mercy.”¹⁰⁴ It's the pierced side of Christ from which blood and water flowed as a source of grace and mercy. And it's through this wound in Christ's Heart that “reparation is made continually for the sins of the world.” Moreover, through this Fountain of Mercy, we find “a ceaseless source of new life and holiness.”

The Pope goes on to explain that consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary means “returning to the Cross of the Son.” It means bringing the world and all its problems and sufferings to “the pierced Heart of the Savior” and thus “back to the very source of its Redemption.” It means bringing the world, through Mary, to Divine Mercy! The power of the Redemption, the power of merciful Love, “is always greater than man's sin and the ‘sin of the world’” and is “infinitely superior to the whole range of evil in man and the world.”

Now, Mary knows the power of the Redemption, the power of merciful Love, better than anyone. In fact, John Paul says she knows it “more than any other heart in the whole universe, visible and invisible.” Therefore, she calls us not only to conversion but “to accept her motherly help to return to the source of Redemption.” For again, Mary's task is to bring us to the Fountain of Mercy, to the pierced side of Christ, to his Merciful Heart. Essentially, then, consecrating ourselves to Mary “means accepting her help to offer ourselves and the whole of mankind”¹⁰⁶ to the infinitely Holy God. It means entrusting ourselves to she who was most united to Christ's own consecration: “Hail to you who are wholly united to the redeeming consecration of your Son!”¹⁰⁷ It means entrusting ourselves to Mary's prayers, that she may “help us to live with the whole truth of the consecration of Christ for the entire human family of the modern world.”¹⁰⁸ In other words, consecrating ourselves to Mary means relying on her motherly intercession to help us offer ourselves more fully to Christ in his own consecration for our redemption.

After putting himself and the world into Mary's hands and Heart, after giving himself to she who is most wholly united to Jesus' consecration, the Pope prays the heart of his act of entrustment. Let's conclude by pondering it deeply in our own hearts:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (Jn 3:16).

It was precisely by reason of this love that the Son of God consecrated himself for all mankind: “And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be consecrated in truth” (Jn 17:19).

By reason of that consecration the disciples of all ages are called to spend themselves for the salvation of the world, and to supplement Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is the Church (see 2 Cor 12:15; Col 1:24).

Before you, Mother of Christ, before your Immaculate Heart, I today, together with the whole Church, unite myself with our Redeemer in this his consecration for the world and for people, which only in his divine Heart has the power to obtain pardon and to secure reparation.¹⁰⁹

Today's Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, living in Mary.

Draw me in, with, and through Mary to the Fountain of Love and Mercy.



FINAL FIVE DAYS
Synthesis and Review

For four weeks, we've been reflecting on what Marian consecration is all about - and we've covered a lot of material. While our prayer program of daily pondering the text has helped us digest some of the information, we can still go deeper. To do this, we need what Pope John Paul calls Mary's "wise capacity for remembering and embracing in a single gaze of faith."¹¹⁰ We can develop this "wise capacity" by continuing what we've been doing all along, namely, pondering in our hearts (see Lk 2:19), but now with a more refined focus. To give us this more refined focus, for each week of the retreat, I've chosen three words that summarize a given week's teaching. So, over the next four days, we'll reflect on three words each day, pondering their meaning for Marian consecration. I'm confident that if we dedicate ourselves to this more refined prayer pondering, we'll be able to embrace the truth of Marian consecration "in a single gaze of faith." After these four days of review, we'll find a synthesis of what we've learned in a single formula of consecration that aims to capture the essence of Marian consecration.

DAY 29

St. Louis de Montfort

Three words summarize what we learned from St. Louis de Montfort: (1) Passion, (2) Baptism, and (3) Gift. Let's ponder each one in turn.

PASSION

Recall that St. Louis inherited his father's fiery temper. This could have led to disaster, but Louis consecrated himself to Jesus through Mary. He allowed Mary to take charge of his life and to do with him as she willed. And what did Mary do with him? She set him on fire. She transformed his unholy anger into a blazing holy fire. She acted with her Spouse, the Holy Spirit, to fill Louis with passion and zeal for Christ, and he proceeded to set all of Brittany on fire with a love for Jesus the Incarnate Wisdom — and not only Brittany. De Montfort's inspiring teaching blazed through the centuries, igniting saints, popes, and even poor sinners with a burning love for God.

We may not have been born with St. Louis's fiery temper, but we could all use a portion of his zealous spirit. We could all use a greater outpouring of the Holy Spirit, who stirs souls into flame and fills them with holy fire. How do we invite this fire? How do we call it down? By imitating de Montfort's example of going to Mary, depending on Mary, and being with Mary. For, as Louis himself says, when the Holy Spirit, Mary's spouse, finds a soul united to Mary, "He flies there. He enters there in His fullness; He communicates Himself to that soul abundantly, and to the full extent to which it makes room for His spouse."¹¹¹ The Holy Spirit wants to work his wonders even in our day. He wants to raise up new saints, great saints. Why, then, does he do so, so rarely? According to de Montfort, it's because he rarely finds in us a sufficiently great union with Mary. In this final stretch that leads to Consecration Day, may we go with great zeal to give ourselves completely to Mary and allow the Holy Spirit to fly to us and fill us with holy passion and fire.

BAPTISM

Saint Louis places his devotion to Mary squarely within the mystery of Christ. The best example of this is how he begins his formula for consecration with a renewal of baptismal vows; for Baptism is all about Christ. At Baptism, we're transformed into members of the Body of Christ, made into "other Christs."

Baptism also has to do with the Holy Spirit. I say this because it was the Holy Spirit who first formed Christ, and it is the Holy Spirit who continues to form other Christs — the members of Christ's Body — at every Baptism.

Now, who does the Holy Spirit use to form Christ? He uses Mary, even though he has no absolute need of her. So, for example, he made use of Mary at the Annunciation, which led to the birth of Jesus Christ our Savior. He made use of Mary just before Pentecost, which led to the birth of the Body of Christ, the Church. He makes use of Mary at every Baptism, which gives birth to "other Christs," the members of his Body. The Holy Spirit always makes use of Mary to give birth to Christ! And the more he finds a soul that is united to Mary "the more active and mighty He becomes in producing Jesus Christ in that soul, and that soul in Jesus Christ."¹¹²

It is fitting, then, that de Montfort has us renew our baptismal promises in the context of giving ourselves to Mary. For it is her job, with the Holy Spirit, to bring the grace of Baptism to its fulfillment. Baptism isn't the end; it's a marvelous beginning, a gloriously new morning. Yes, it transforms us, making us into members of Christ's Body — but there's more work to be done. Baptism is an already-but-not-yet reality. It already makes us into Christ (as a member of his Body) but not yet fully formed in Christ. After Baptism, we still have to grow in Christ, and it's Mary's job to oversee and nurture this growth, with the Spirit. Thus, there's no question of de Montfort's devotion to Mary "taking us away from Christ."¹¹³ Mary's whole goal is to lead us to Christ and to bring us to the point where we can say with St. Paul, "It is no longer I that live but Christ" (Gal 2:20). *The whole goal of true devotion to Mary is our ongoing, post-baptismal transformation in Christ.*

GIFT

If only we have the courage to give ourselves completely to Mary, then we'll experience Marian consecration as an incredible gift. Moreover, the more we give ourselves to her, the more we'll experience the greatness of this gift.

We give, and she gives back infinitely more. We give her our sinful selves, and she gives us her Immaculate Heart. We give her our own meager merits, and she not only augments and purifies them with her perfect love but gives us her infinitely greater merits and graces. We become empty after having given her all, and she fills us with the Spirit of God. She cares for our family, friends, and loved ones on our behalf — even better than we ourselves can. She anticipates our needs and orders every detail of our lives for the greater glory of God. The path of holiness with her is "a path of roses and honey" compared to walking it without being consecrated to her. Indeed, she makes even our crosses and trials into something sweet. Moreover, she protects us from temptation and the attacks of the evil one.

Belonging completely to Mary is the quickest, easiest, and surest way to Jesus. If we were to fully realize how great a gift consecration to Jesus through Mary is, we'd almost never stop smiling and praising God for giving it.

Today's prayer:

Spend the day pondering de Montfort's Marian teaching as it is summarized by these three words: Passion, Baptism, and Gift.

DAY 30

St. Maximilian Kolbe

Three words summarize what we learned from St. Maximilian Kolbe: (1) Mystery, (2) Militia, and (3) Love. Let's ponder each one in turn.

MYSTERY

Who are you, O Immaculate Conception? St. Maximilian gives us the key to this mystery: The Holy Spirit is the *uncreated* Immaculate Conception, and Mary is the *created* Immaculate Conception. She is perfectly united to the Holy Spirit, because she was conceived without sin, never sinned, and always does the will of God perfectly. She allows the Holy Spirit to overshadow her, take possession of her soul, and bear fruit through her. The Holy Spirit delights in always working in and through Mary to save all the other creatures made in God's image, first by bringing about the Incarnation in her womb and then by making use of her to form the image of her Son in all of the baptized. While Kolbe gives us the key to the mystery, he doesn't fully unlock it. Rather, he invites us to ponder ever more deeply the relationship between Mary and the Holy Spirit, a relationship that goes even deeper than that of marriage.

MILITIA

The name “Maximilian” means “the greatest.” Saint Maximilian Kolbe was given this name because his superiors recognized his immense natural and spiritual gifts. He accepted it because it corresponded to his heart of hearts: “I don’t just want to give God great glory but the *greatest* glory.”

Kolbe recognized that the greatest way to give glory to God is to unite oneself to the creature who glorifies God most perfectly, Mary Immaculate. He also realized that the way to give God the greatest glory is not to do so just as one person, but to have a whole army (“Militia”) of people who give God the greatest glory. In fact, he wanted this army of the Immaculate (“Militia Immaculata”) to eventually get the whole world to give God the greatest glory, through her, and as soon as possible.

While the goal of Kolbe’s program is the conversion of the whole world, it begins with oneself. One must first give himself completely to the Immaculata as her possession and property and stay in union with her and totally dependent on her. Then, one is to inspire others to give themselves to her and to live in total dependence on her, so she can use them as consecrated instruments to bring the whole world to the Merciful Heart of Jesus.

“Through the Immaculata we will attain the ultimate purpose of the [Militia Immaculata], that is, the greatest possible glory to God.”¹¹⁴

LOVE

Kolbe was united to Mary through a dependence of love. He tells us that we also ought to love the Immaculata. How? *By relying on her powerful intercession, experiencing her tender care, speaking to her from our hearts, letting ourselves be led by her, having recourse to her in all things, and trusting her completely.* Recall his words, “My dear, dear brothers, our dear little, little mother, the Immaculate Mary, can do anything for us. We are her children. Turn to her. She will overcome everything.”

When we experience Mary’s tender care for us, we’ll fall more in love with her. But we have to speak with her. We have to ask her. Yet what if, even after many signs of her love and care, we still don’t feel love for the Immaculata or her love for us? Kolbe explains:

Never worry that you do not feel this love. If you have the will to love, you already give a proof that you love. What counts is the will to love. External feeling is also a fruit of grace, but it does not always follow the will. Sometimes, my dear ones, the thought, a sad longing, as if a plea or a complaint, may occur to you: “Does the Immaculata still love me?” Most beloved children! I tell you all and each one individually, in her name (mark that: in her name!), she loves every one of you. She loves you very much and at every moment with no exception. This ... I repeat for you in her name.

Today’s Prayer:

Spend the day pondering Kolbe’s Marian teaching as it is summarized by these three words: [Mystery](#), [Militia](#), and [Love](#).

DAY 31

St. Mother Teresa

Three words summarize what we learned from St. Mother Teresa: (1) Thirst, (2) Heart, and (3) Covenant. Let's ponder each one in turn.

THIRST

... [Our Lady] was the first person to hear Jesus' cry "I Thirst" with St. John, and I am sure Mary Magdalen. Because Our Lady was there on Calvary, she knows how real, how deep is His longing for you and for the poor. Do we know? Do we feel as she? Ask her to teach Her role is to bring you face to face, as John and Magdalen, with the love in the Heart of Jesus crucified. Before it was Our Lady pleading with Mother, now it is Mother in her name pleading with you —"listen to Jesus' thirst."

Let us try in a special way to come as close as the human heart can come to the Heart of Jesus and try to understand as much as possible Jesus' terrible pain caused to him by our sins and His Thirst for our love. Thank God our Lady was there to understand fully the thirst of Jesus for love. She must have straight away said, "I satiate Your thirst with my love and the suffering of my heart."

So let us ask Our Lady to help us understand.

HEART

A key to Mother Teresa's understanding of consecration is "heart," specifically, the Immaculate Heart. Recall her two prayers to Mary, "Lend me your heart" and "Keep me in your most pure heart." Also, recall the importance of our imitating Mary's pondering heart. Let's start with the two prayers and then review Mary's heart-pondering attitude.

Lend me your heart. By this prayer, Mother Teresa was asking Our Lady to give her the love of her heart. In other words, she says "Mary, help me to love with the perfect love of your Immaculate Heart." Remember, Mother Teresa's passionate desire was to satiate the thirst of Jesus for love, and she wanted to do this in the best possible way. What better way to love Jesus than with the perfect, humble, immaculate heart of his mother? Here, Mother Teresa found the secret to living out her vocation to the full: "Mary, lend me your Immaculate Heart." *Keep me in your most pure heart.* Or, stated more fully, one prays, "Immaculate Heart of Mary, keep me in your most pure heart, so that I may please Jesus through you, in you, and with you."¹¹⁷ This part of Mother Teresa's consecration to Mary is the most profound. She's not just asking for Mary's heart to be in her but for her to be in Mary's heart! So, this is a prayer to love Jesus through Mary, in Mary, and with Mary. This is something more than simply having Mary lend us her heart. To understand this and live it requires a loving dependence and profound union with Mary. This is expressed more fully in the next section "covenant."

Pondering heart. Mother Teresa developed an "attitude of gratitude" by following the example of Mary who was always "pondering in her heart" the "good things" that God was doing in her life (see Luke 2:19, 51). Specifically, Mother Teresa followed this example through her fidelity to the examination of conscience. In other words, at the end of each day, she would ponder in her heart all the good things God had done for her that day and would reflect on how she was or was not fully responding to his love.

COVENANT

Moved by an ardent desire to live in the closest union with you [Mary] possible in this life, so as to more surely and fully arrive at union with your Son; I hereby pledge to live the spirit and terms of the following Covenant of Consecration as faithfully and generously as I am able.

MARY'S DUTIES	MY DUTIES
1. To give of her spirit and heart.	1. Total gift of all I have and am.
2. To possess, protect, and transform me.	2. Total dependence on her.
3. To inspire, guide, and enlighten me.	3. Responsiveness to her spirit.
4. To share her experience of prayer and praise.	4. Faithfulness to prayer.
5. Responsibility for my sanctification.	5. Trust in her intercession.
6. Responsibility for all that befalls me.	6. Accept all as coming from her.
7. To share with me her virtues.	7. Imitate her spirit.
8. To provide for my spiritual and material needs.	8. Constant recourse to her.
9. Union with her heart.	9. Remembrance of her presence.
10. To purify me and my actions.	10. Purity of intention; self-denial.
11. Right to dispose of me, of my prayers and intercessions and graces.	11. Right to avail myself of her and her energies for the sake of the kingdom.
12. Total freedom in and around me, as she pleases in all things.	12. Right to enter into her heart, to share her interior life.

Today's Prayer:

Spend the day pondering Teresa's Marian teaching as it is summarized by these three words: [Thirst](#), [Heart](#), and [Covenant](#).

DAY 32

[St. Pope John Paul II](#)

Three words summarize what we learned from St. John Paul II: (1) Mother, (2) "Entrust-ation," and (3) Mercy. Let's ponder each one in turn.

MOTHER

John Paul's teaching on Marian consecration not only carries with it his authority as Pope but also the authoritative weight of an Ecumenical Council, because he repeats and deepens Vatican II's teaching on Mary. Therefore, his teaching actually constitutes the mind and heart of the Church today, and we should pay particular attention to it. So what is the mind and heart of the Church telling us about Mary? It's pointing to Mary's maternal mediation. It's saying she's our mother in the order of grace. It's proclaiming the Good News that God has given us a spiritual mother who prayerfully, lovingly attends to our growth in grace and holiness. This new motherhood of Mary in the life of the Church, in the life of each one of us, is the constant, consoling, beautiful background to everything we've said about Marian consecration — or what John Paul often calls "entrustment."

ENTRUST-ACRATION

Seeing Mary standing at the foot of the Cross next to his beloved disciple, John, Jesus said, "Woman, behold, your son." Then, to John, "Behold, your mother" (Jn 19:26-27). These words summarize what we already

covered in the last point, that Mary is our spiritual mother. But then we read the next verse, “Then the disciple took her into his home.” Here is the heart of our response to Jesus entrusting us to Mary as our mother: We are to then entrust ourselves to her by taking her “into our homes.” In other words, we’re to take her into our inner life, into all that concerns us. We are to let her into our joys and sorrows, hopes and fears, plans and activities. When we let Mary into our lives, when we entrust ourselves to her care, she intercedes for us, consoles us, and gives us courage and strength to unite ourselves more fully to Jesus’ own consecration of himself for the life of the world. In other words, she brings us to the Cross of Jesus, which is the final meaning of Jesus’ self-consecration, and she inspires us to spend ourselves for the salvation of the world, to take up our part in the work of redemption. As we take up our cross, as we live within Christ’s own consecration, we may become spiritually thirsty, desolate, and tired. That’s when Mary carries us to the pierced side of Christ, the Fountain of Mercy, where we find a ceaseless source of strength and holiness.

Thus, to John Paul’s mind, entrustment to Mary leads to our consecration to Christ. In other words, one might say it’s a movement of “entrust-ation.”

MERCY

Ultimately, Marian consecration leads us to Divine Mercy. Acts of consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary lead to acts of trust in the Merciful Heart of Jesus. We see this in the story of Fatima and Pope John Paul, and especially in the Pope’s homily during his pilgrimage to Fatima in 1982, a pilgrimage of thanksgiving “to the mercy of God ... and the Mother of Christ” for having saved his life.

In that homily, John Paul repeatedly pointed out how Marian consecration leads us to the pierced Heart of Jesus, the Fountain of Mercy. This connection is part of the will of Jesus himself, who said to Sr. Lucia in 1936 that he wills the consecration to Mary’s Heart “because I want my whole Church to acknowledge that consecration [that my mother requested at Fatima] as a triumph of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, so that it may extend its veneration later on, and put the devotion to this Immaculate Heart beside the devotion to My Sacred Heart.”¹¹⁸ Jesus wants to extend veneration and devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary because she leads us most perfectly to him and helps us to receive the infinite mercy of his Heart.

Today’s Prayer:

Spend the day pondering John Paul’s Marian teaching as it is summarized by these three words: Mother, Entrust-ation, and Mercy.

DAY 33

Putting It All Together

For the last four days, we’ve been reviewing the last four weeks of our retreat. During these days, we’ve not only been reviewing the material, we’ve also begun to put together all that we’ve learned. I say we’ve *begun* to put it together. We’re probably not yet at a point where we can grasp the manifold truth of Marian consecration “in a single gaze,” as John Paul put it. To get to this point, a unifying statement may be helpful, something like the “First Principle and Foundation” that St. Ignatius of Loyola came up with to summarize and give clarity and focus to his spirituality.

Actually, I think we need more than just a statement. We need a prayer, something we can frequently repeat, even everyday, that not only reminds us of the meaning of our consecration but actually expresses the gift of ourselves to Jesus through Mary.

While several of the saints we’ve learned from during these past weeks have written excellent prayers or “formulas” of consecration, I’m not going to present their formulas here. (If you’re interested, I’ve included them in Appendix One.) Instead, I’m going to present an updated prayer of consecration that combines the main insights we’ve covered during the retreat. Even though I’m no saint, I feel confident to do this because I’m making use of the actual words and ideas of all four of the Marian saints of our retreat. Moreover, I feel emboldened to compose this new prayer because of the words of Pope Pius XII on the occasion of St. Louis de Montfort’s canonization:

True devotion ... aims essentially at union with Jesus under the guidance of Mary. *The form and practice of this devotion may vary according to time, place, and personal inclination.* Within the bounds of sound and safe doctrine, of orthodoxy and dignity of worship, *the Church leaves her children a just margin of liberty.* She is conscious that true and perfect devotion to Our Lady *is not bound up in any particular modes* in such a way that one of them can claim a monopoly over the others.¹¹⁹

Inspired by these words and taking the liberty the Pope gives us, I offer the following updated prayer of consecration that aims to capture the essentials of what we've learned during our retreat. Now, if it doesn't fit with your personal inclination, don't worry. You can always take the liberty to write your own prayer or use one written by the saints. Anyway, here's a summary statement of what we've learned, a statement that's also a prayer from the heart:

I, ___, a repentant sinner, renew and ratify today in your hands, O Immaculate Mother, the vows of my Baptism. I renounce Satan and resolve to follow Jesus Christ even more closely than before.

Mary, I give you my heart. Please set it on fire with love for Jesus. Make it always attentive to his burning thirst for love and for souls. Keep my heart in your most pure Heart that I may love Jesus and the members of his Body with your own perfect love.

Mary, I entrust myself totally to you: my body and soul, my goods, both interior and exterior, and even the value of all my good actions. Please make of me, of all that I am and have, whatever most pleases you. Let me be a fit instrument in your immaculate and merciful hands for bringing the greatest possible glory to God. If I fall, please lead me back to Jesus. Wash me in the blood and water that flow from his pierced side, and help me never to lose my trust in this fountain of love and mercy. With you, O Immaculate Mother — you who always do the will of God — I unite myself to the perfect consecration of Jesus as he offers himself in the Spirit to the Father for the life of the world. Amen.

Tomorrow, you'll consecrate yourself (or re-consecrate yourself) totally to

Jesus through Mary. And that's great! To do this, though, you'll need a prayer of consecration. Whether you use the one I just presented, one from the saints, or one of your own making, I encourage you to meditate on its meaning today. Such meditation on the prayer of consecration is a perfect preparation for Consecration Day.

By the way, you might want to read ahead to the first section of tomorrow's reading, entitled "Before the Consecration."

A white heart-shaped object, possibly a piece of fabric or a decorative item, is the central focus. It features a sword with a cross-guard resting on its upper right side and a row of five roses along its top edge. The heart is set against a background of white, pleated fabric that radiates outwards, creating a sunburst effect. The entire scene is rendered in a light, monochromatic style with soft shadows.

DAY OF CONSECRATION
**A Glorious New
Morning**

Before Consecration

Congratulations! You've made it to Consecration Day. Now get ready for a gloriously new morning in your spiritual life. Of course, you're already ready. You've been faithfully preparing for this moment for the last 33 days. So here are just three things I recommend by way of final preparation: (1) Make a good confession — but if you don't have time to do so before the consecration, then from your heart tell the Lord you're sorry for your sins, and make a resolution to go to confession as soon as you reasonably can. (2) Write out or print up the prayer of consecration, so you can sign it after you've recited it. (3) Get a miraculous medal to wear around your neck as a sign of your consecration — or at least keep one in your purse or wallet. (See explanation of the miraculous medal in Appendix Two.) Again, these three things are recommendations. They're not essential to the consecration.

Prayer of Consecration

Okay, so you're ready to make your consecration. Now you'll need the right prayer. You can use either the one that follows, one from the saints, or one that you write yourself. Whatever prayer you use, I recommend that you recite it after attending Mass or even after receiving Holy Communion (if there's time). If you can't get to Mass, you can still make the consecration — Mass is highly recommended but not essential. With or without Mass, after you recite the consecration prayer, I suggest that you sign it, date it, and keep it in a safe place. (When I renew my consecration annually, I like to recite the prayer from the original copy and then sign and date it again.) Anyway, once again, here's the *33 Days to Morning Glory* Prayer of Consecration that summarizes the main ideas of our four Marian giants:

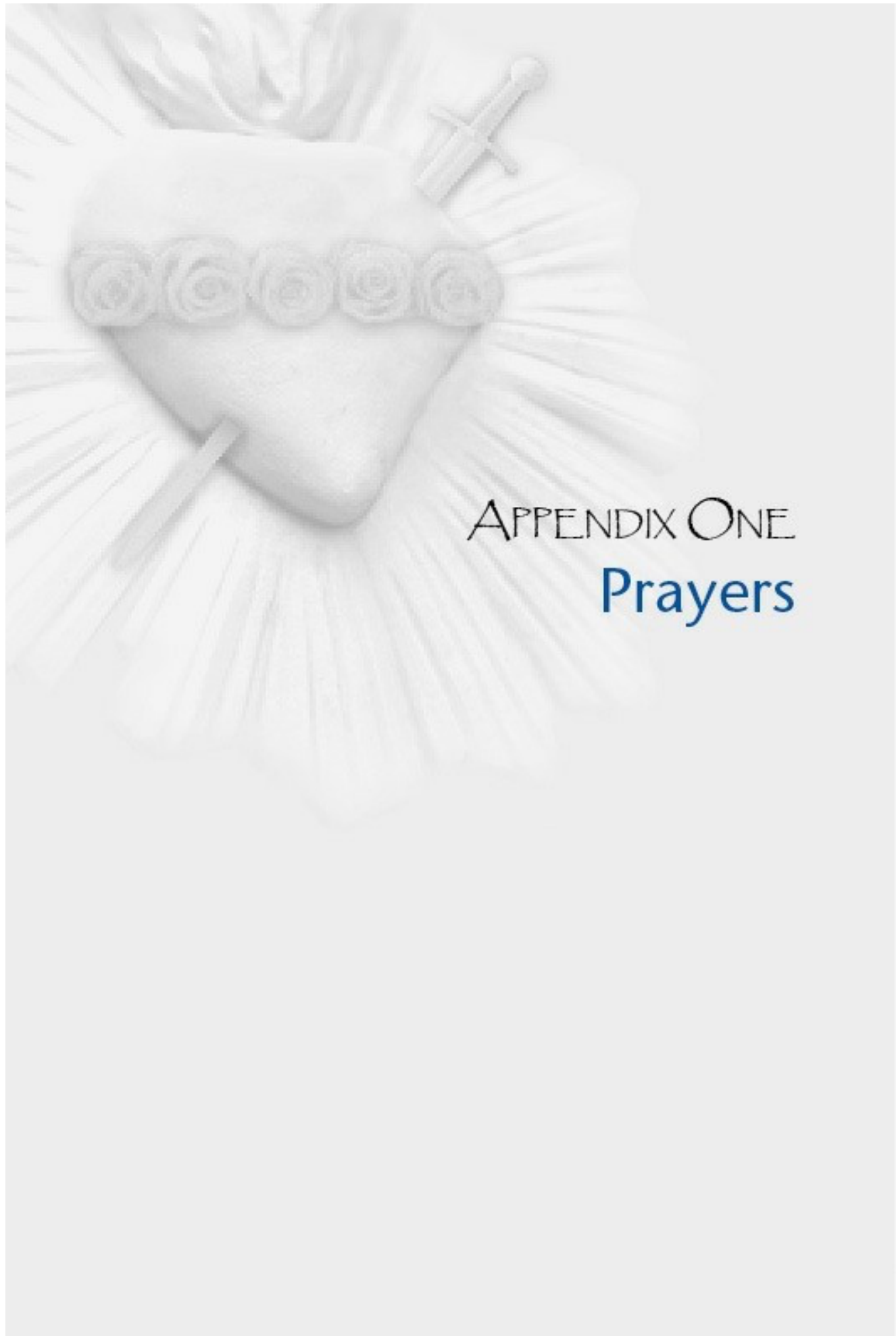
Prayer of Consecration

I, ___, a repentant sinner, renew and ratify today in your hands, O Immaculate Mother, the vows of my Baptism. I renounce Satan and resolve to follow Jesus Christ even more closely than before.

Mary, I give you my heart. Please set it on fire with love for Jesus. Make it always attentive to his burning thirst for love and for souls. Keep my heart in your most pure Heart that I may love Jesus and the members of his Body with your own perfect love.

Mary, I entrust myself totally to you: my body and soul, my goods, both interior and exterior, and even the value of all my good actions. Please make of me, of all that I am and have, whatever most pleases you. Let me be a fit instrument in your immaculate and merciful hands for bringing the greatest possible glory to God. If I fall, please lead me back to Jesus. Wash me in the blood and water that flow from his pierced side, and help me never to lose my trust in this fountain of love and mercy.

With you, O Immaculate Mother — you who always do the will of God — I unite myself to the perfect consecration of Jesus as he offers himself in the Spirit to the Father for the life of the world. Amen.



APPENDIX ONE
Prayers

Consecration Prayers

Morning Glory Consecration Prayer

I, ___, a repentant sinner, renew and ratify today in your hands, O Immaculate Mother, the vows of my Baptism. I renounce Satan and resolve to follow Jesus Christ even more closely than before.

Mary, I give you my heart. Please set it on fire with love for Jesus. Make it always attentive to his burning thirst for love and for souls. Keep my heart in your most pure Heart that I may love Jesus and the members of his Body with your own perfect love.

Mary, I entrust myself totally to you: my body and soul, my goods, both interior and exterior, and even the value of all my good actions. Please make of me, of all that I am and have, whatever most pleases you. Let me be a fit instrument in your immaculate and merciful hands for bringing the greatest possible glory to God. If I fall, please lead me back to Jesus. Wash me in the blood and water that flow from his pierced side, and help me never to lose my trust in this fountain of love and mercy.

With you, O Immaculate Mother — you who always do the will of God — I unite myself to the perfect consecration of Jesus as he offers himself in the Spirit to the Father for the life of the world. Amen.

Consecration Prayer of St. Louis de Montfort (Short version)

I, ___, a faithless sinner, renew and ratify today in thy hands the vows of my Baptism; I renounce forever Satan, his pomps and works; and I give myself entirely to Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Wisdom, to carry my cross after Him all the days of my life, and to be more faithful to Him than I have ever been before. In the presence of all the heavenly court I choose thee this day for my Mother and Mistress. I deliver and consecrate to thee, as thy slave, my body and soul, my goods, both interior and exterior, and even the value of all my good actions, past, present, and future; leaving to thee the entire and full right of disposing of me, and all that belongs to me, without exception, according to thy good pleasure, for the greater glory of God in time and in eternity. Amen.

Consecration Prayer of St. Maximilian Kolbe

O Immaculata, Queen of Heaven and earth, refuge of sinners and our most loving Mother, God has willed to entrust the entire order of mercy to you. I, ___, a repentant sinner, cast myself at your feet humbly imploring you to take me with all that I am and have, wholly to yourself as your possession and property. Please make of me, of all my powers of soul and body, of my whole life, death, and eternity, whatever most pleases you. If it pleases you, use all that I am and have without reserve, wholly to accomplish what was said of you: “She will crush your head,” and, “You alone have destroyed all heresies in the whole world.”

Let me be a fit instrument in your immaculate and merciful hands for introducing and increasing your glory to the maximum in all the many strayed and indifferent souls, and thus help extend as far as possible the blessed kingdom of the most Sacred Heart of Jesus. For wherever you enter you obtain the grace of conversion and growth in holiness, since it is through your hands that all graces come to us from the most Sacred Heart of Jesus.

V. Allow me to praise you, O Sacred Virgin.

R. Give me strength against your enemies.

Litany of Loreto

Lord have mercy on us.

Lord have mercy on us.

Christ have mercy on us.

Christ have mercy on us.

Lord have mercy on us.

Lord have mercy on us.

Christ, hear us.

Christ, graciously hear us.

God the Father of Heaven, *have mercy on us.*

God the Son, Redeemer of the world, *have mercy on us.* God the Holy Spirit, *have mercy on us.*

Holy Trinity, one God, *have mercy on us.*

Holy Mary, *pray for us.*

Holy Mother of God, *pray for us.*

Mother of the Church, *pray for us.*

Holy Virgin of virgins, *pray for us.*

Mother of Christ, *pray for us.*

Mother of divine grace, *pray for us.*

Mother most pure, *pray for us.*

Mother most chaste, *pray for us.*

Mother inviolate, *pray for us.*

Mother undefiled, *pray for us.*

Mother most amiable, *pray for us.*

Mother most admirable, *pray for us.*

Mother of good counsel, *pray for us.*

Mother of our Creator, *pray for us.*

Mother of our Redeemer, *pray for us.*

Virgin most prudent, *pray for us.*

Virgin most venerable, *pray for us.*

Virgin most renowned, *pray for us.*

Virgin most powerful, *pray for us.*

Virgin most merciful, *pray for us.*

Virgin most faithful, *pray for us.*

Mirror of justice, *pray for us.*

Seat of wisdom, *pray for us.*

Cause of our joy, *pray for us.*

Spiritual vessel, *pray for us.*

Vessel of honor, *pray for us.*

Singular vessel of devotion, *pray for us.*

Mystical rose, *pray for us.*

Tower of David, *pray for us.*

Tower of ivory, *pray for us.*

House of gold, *pray for us.*

Ark of the covenant, *pray for us.*

Gate of Heaven, *pray for us.*

Morning Star, *pray for us.*

Health of the sick, *pray for us.*

Refuge of sinners, *pray for us.*

Comforter of the afflicted, *pray for us.*

Help of Christians, *pray for us.*

Queen of Angels, *pray for us.*

Queen of Patriarchs, *pray for us.*

Queen of Prophets, *pray for us.*

Queen of Apostles, *pray for us.*

Queen of Martyrs, *pray for us.*

Queen of Confessors, *pray for us.*

Queen of Virgins, *pray for us.*

Queen of all Saints, *pray for us.*

Queen conceived without original sin, *pray for us.*

Queen of the most holy Rosary, *pray for us.*

Queen of the family, *pray for us.*

Queen of peace, *pray for us.*

Lamb of God, Who takes away the sins of the world: *Spare us, O Lord.*

Lamb of God, Who takes away the sins of the world: *Graciously hear us, O Lord.*

Lamb of God, Who takes away the sins of the world: *Have mercy on us.*

Pray for us, O holy Mother of God,

That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let us pray.

Grant, we beseech you, O Lord God, that we your servants, may enjoy lasting health of mind and body, and by the glorious intercession of the Blessed Mary, ever Virgin, be delivered from present sorrow and enter into the joy of eternal happiness. Through Christ our Lord.

R. Amen.