

33-Day Preparation for
Total Consecration to
Jesus Through Mary

Following the itinerary of Saint Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort with
selections of writings from the Popes and Saints

Introduction

Saint Louis de Montfort set forth a revolution of spirituality in teaching us about Marian consecration and giving us a 33-day plan to prepare our souls for that big step.

What is this consecration? He described this consecration as being a form of “slavery” to Mary. Slavery means that we do nothing without her. We choose not to have a will apart from hers. He even invites us to wear a chain to signify that close bond with her. He elaborated the various consequences of that bond, saying that we share everything with her including our prayers, our intentions, our actions, and our merits. Fundamentally he is saying that we choose to become totally dependent on her: we receive everything through her and share everything with her.

At first this sounds radical and may even sound a little scary or seem like a lot of work. As we come to understand the way the spirit of the world has infected our thinking, however, and as we get in touch with our own woundedness, we come to discover that this is a merciful gift from heaven. It is a sweet path of salvation. In fact, it is better than we could have ever hoped for! What it means is that there is a sweet, loving, perfect mother who actually wants to live in this kind of close relationship with us. It is really what we always wanted. If we accept her invitation, we will find all the healing and happiness we always longed for. To understand this, we have to take a step back and reflect on how we got where we are.

The principal consequence of original sin is a fearful grasping after independence and repeatedly seeking a security that is in our own control. In the beginning it was not so. God made us for relationship—first of all with Himself (“then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” —Gen 2:7) and then also with each other (“It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” —Gen 2:18). These relationships were deeply ruptured by the fall, when man and woman sought to become gods without God (Gen 3:1-7). All efforts to achieve immortality through medicine, science or magic are a consequence of this. The original sin is behind all our efforts to earn love through our accomplishments or to control our lives through our own power. It is the source of all our unhappiness, emptiness, and fear. It is fundamentally a denial of our being—we did not create ourselves and we do not have sole power over our destiny. We simply cannot exist without God and trying to do so is a contradiction that splits us in two.

The problem is that living in relationship requires trust and our trust has been broken over and over, starting from our first infant cry that went unanswered. Our psyches are blistered with broken trust. To whom can we turn for healing?

Fortunately God does not leave us in the wilderness of isolation nor does He merely ask us to try harder or get over it. Further, He does not expect us to find our way home on our own, which would only exacerbate the problem. Rather He reveals Himself as a Father who is trustworthy and He sends us His Son to adopt us into His family and bring us home. This is the adventure of salvation.

Jesus adopts us into His Divine Family so that, in Him, we have God as our Father. But because it is not good for the man to be alone (i.e. without human relationships), Jesus also adopts us into His human family, which means that we have a human father and mother as well. In fact, we have two sets of human fathers and mothers. Rather, we have at least two sets of parents,

because God also entrusts to numerous men and women the gift of reflecting fatherhood and motherhood for us.

In this adventure, we must relearn trust and dependence. It is always a risk—we have the scars to prove it. To help us with this, in addition to the imperfect human mother who gave us birth, God also sends us the Blessed Virgin Mary, a perfect human mother, to fill out any gaps left in us by our birth-mother's limitations. Mary is the first redeemed—from the moment of her conception. She is without sin. That means that she will never fail us nor forget us nor abandon us nor forsake us. She will never break our trust. In this way, she teaches us to trust again and helps to heal our wounds of broken trust.

We also receive a human father in Saint Joseph, Mary's most chaste spouse. He is the human father God made for Jesus. He is the human father who perfectly formed the humanity of Jesus, as He matured, i.e. as He "increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man." (Luke 2:52) For that reason Saint Joseph is also the best human father for us. He builds on all the good things our dads did and he fills out all the holes they left when their limitations prevented them from being the father we needed them to be.

Now we are in a better position to understand Marian consecration. Most fundamentally it is a choice to be a child like Jesus. In other words we are choosing to be a child of Mary and Joseph. This is not a perfect description yet though, because a child can still be willful and wander away. The dependence that we are invited to is more radical: we are invited to be the *infant* of Mary and Joseph. We can think of His birth in Bethlehem. Jesus did not provide for Himself, but rather He let them feed Him and hold Him and even change His diapers. We can think of the Flight into Egypt and how helpless Jesus was. He did not protect Himself, but rather let Himself be carried to safety by Mary and Joseph who saved Him from Herod's wrath.

Saint Louis de Montfort invited us to go even one step further. He wrote, "Mary has received from God a special dominion over souls, in order to nourish them and to make them grow up in God. Saint Augustine even says, that all the predestinate are *in the womb of Mary*, and that they are not born, until the good Mother brings them forth into life eternal. Consequently, as the child draws all its nourishment from its mother, who gives it to it in proportion to its weakness, so in like manner do the predestinate draw all their spiritual nourishment and all their strength from Mary." (*Secret of Mary* #8)

Even more helpless than an infant, we are invited to be held in the most perfect embrace of the most loving mother as a child in the womb. This is the radical quality of our trust, our abandonment to the one who always perfectly lives in accord with the will of God. She is the perfect mother who will only nourish the child in her womb with the best of foods and who turns every squirming movement of that tiny child into a beautiful expression of love for God. In this way we have reframed Total Consecration to Mary, without losing anything, no longer as a scary slavery, but now as the perfect embrace and safe protection provided by a mother for an infant in her womb.

In the following pages we embark on a 33-day preparation for Marian consecration after the model given to us by Saint Louis de Montfort. We spend the first twelve days emptying ourselves of the spirit of the world. We follow that with a week focused on self-knowledge then a week focused on knowledge of Mary and finally a week focused on knowledge of Jesus. After 33 days of preparation we are ready to make a consecration on the 34th day. We recommend spending at least 10 minutes every day on this preparation for Consecration. That will include time to read the teaching provided and to reflect on it as well as reciting some prayers to ask God's grace for this process. Whether you are making this journey for the first time or renewing your consecration, it can be a process of profound conversion if you open your heart

to that.

We conclude with an encouraging word from Saint Louis de Montfort, reminding us that the paradise of Mary's womb is a place of wonders and especially fashioned according to each one's weakness where we are only expected to be a little child. This preparation opens up to us the Secret of Mary, in whom we draw closest to our loving God. There is a place for everyone there in the bosom of our loving mother:

Happy, and a thousand times happy, is the soul here below to which the Holy Ghost reveals, and makes known, the Secret of Mary; to which He opens this «garden enclosed,» by permitting it to enter it; to which He gives access to this «fountain sealed up,» by suffering it to draw from it, and to drink deep draughts of the living waters of grace! Such a soul will find God Alone without any creature, in this most sweet creature; but God at the same time infinitely holy and exalted, infinitely condescending and proportioned to its weakness. Since God is everywhere, He may be found everywhere, even in hell; but there is no place in which the creature can find Him nearer to itself, and more proportioned to its weakness, than in Mary, for it was for this end that He came down into her bosom. Everywhere else He is the Bread of the Strong, the Bread of Angels, but in Mary He is the Bread of children.

Emptying ourselves of the spirit of the world - Introduction

One of the consequences of original sin is that we have been tainted by a spirit of the world. That spirit of independence, self-sufficiency, and grasping at control is very much with us. We need to see it intellectually as far as we are able. For this we seek the wisdom God gave us through one of the greatest teachers of our time, Pope Benedict XVI. This will help to expose the taint of original sin that has invaded our thinking. We also need the grace to turn away from it. For this we must pray earnestly. Some other forms of self-sacrifice will help us well. In this regard we can target those areas that further the spirit of the world. Intellectually we would do well to fast from content on media that propagates the lies—TV, Facebook, Netflix, secular news sources and other forms social media reinforce the thinking that is poisoned by original sin. We can also cut back on those things and activities we turn to as a substitute for prayer. That could include comfort food, alcohol, shopping, romance novels, over-exercising, excessive work, or others. Some self-knowledge is important here and also consultation with a close spiritual friend or spiritual director.

Prayers - Emptying the spirit of the world

Veni Sancte Spiritus

(Roman Missal translation)

Holy Spirit, Lord of light,
from the clear celestial height
thy pure beaming radiance give.

Come, thou Father of the poor,
come with treasures which endure;
come, thou light of all that live!

Thou, of all consolers best, thou,
the soul's delighted guest,
dost refreshing peace bestow;

Thou in toil art comfort sweet;
pleasant coolness in the heat;
solace in the midst of woe.

Light immortal, light divine,
visit thou these hearts of thine,
and our inmost being fill:

If thou take thy grace away,
nothing pure in man will stay;
all his good is turned to ill.

Heal our wounds, our strength renew;
on our dryness pour thy dew;
wash the stains of guilt away:

Bend the stubborn heart and will;
melt the frozen, warm the chill;
guide the steps that go astray.

Thou, on us who evermore
thee confess and thee adore,
with thy sevenfold gifts descend:

Give us comfort when we die;
give us life with thee on high;
give us joys that never end. Amen.

Ave Maris Stella

Hail, bright star of ocean,
God's own Mother blest,
Ever sinless Virgin,
Gate of heavenly rest.

Taking that sweet Ave
Which from Gabriel came,
Peace confirm within us,
Changing Eva's name.

Break the captives' fetters,
Light on blindness pour,
All our ills expelling,
Every bliss implore.

Show thyself a Mother;
May the Word Divine,
Born for us thy Infant,
Hear our prayers through thine.

Virgin all excelling,
Mildest of the mild,
Freed from guilt, preserve us,
Pure and undefiled.

Keep our life all spotless,
Make our way secure,
Till we find in Jesus,
Joy forevermore.

Through the highest heaven
To the Almighty Three,
Father, Son and Spirit,
One same glory be. Amen.

Sub Tuum Praesidium

We fly to thy protection, O holy Mother of God, despise not our petitions in our necessities, but deliver us always from all dangers, O glorious and blessed Virgin.

Radiating Christ

(By Blessed Cardinal John Henry Newman)

Dear Jesus, help me to spread Your fragrance wherever I go.

Flood my soul with Your spirit and life.

Penetrate and possess my whole being so utterly, that my life may only be a radiance of Yours.

Shine through me, and be so in me that every soul I come in contact with may feel Your presence in my soul.

Let them look up and see no longer me, but only Jesus!

Stay with me and then I shall begin to shine as You shine, so to shine as to be a light to others.

The light, O Jesus, will be all from You; none of it will be mine.

It will be you, shining on others through me.

Let me thus praise You the way You love best, by shining on those around me.

Let me preach You without preaching, not by words but by my example, by the catching force of the sympathetic influence of what I do, the evident fullness of the love my heart bears to You.
Amen.

Litany of Penance

(By Blessed Cardinal John Henry Newman)

Lord, have mercy on us. Christ, 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 Ghost, have mercy on us.
 Holy Trinity, one God, have mercy on us.
 Incarnate Lord, have mercy on us.
 Lover of souls, have mercy on us.
 Saviour of sinners, have mercy on us.
 Who didst come to seek those that were lost, have mercy on us.
 Who didst fast for them forty days and nights, have mercy on us.
 By Thy tenderness towards Adam when he fell, have mercy on us.
 By Thy faithfulness to Noe in the ark, have mercy on us.
 By Thy remembrance of Lot in the midst of sinners, have mercy on us.
 By Thy mercy on the Israelites in the desert, have mercy on us.
 By Thy forgiveness of David after his confession, have mercy on us.
 By Thy patience with wicked Achab on his humiliation, have mercy on us.
 By Thy restoration of the penitent Manasses, have mercy on us.
 By Thy long suffering towards the Ninevites, when they went in sackcloth and ashes. Have mercy on us.
 By Thy blessing on the Maccabees, who fasted before the battle, have mercy on us.
 By Thy choice of John to go before Thee as the preacher of penance, have mercy on us.
 By Thy testimony to the Publican, who hung his head and smote his breast, have mercy on us.
 By Thy welcome given to the returning Prodigal, have mercy on us.
 By Thy gentleness with the woman of Samaria, have mercy on us.
 By Thy condescension towards Zacchaeus, persuading him to restitution, have mercy on us.
 By Thy pity upon the woman taken in adultery, have mercy on us.
 By Thy love of Magdalen, who loved much, have mercy on us.
 By Thy converting look, at which Peter wept, have mercy on us.
 By Thy gracious words to the thief upon the cross, have mercy on us.
 We sinners, Beseech Thee, hear us.
 That we may judge ourselves, and so escape Thy judgment, We beseech Thee, hear us.
 That we may bring forth worthy fruits of penance, We beseech Thee, hear us.
 That sin may not reign in our mortal bodies, We beseech Thee, hear us.
 That we may work out our salvation with fear and trembling, We beseech Thee, hear us.
 Son of God, We beseech Thee, hear us.
 Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, Spare us, O Lord.
 Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, Graciously hear us, O Lord.
 Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.
 Christ, hear us. Christ, graciously hear us.
 O Lord, hear our prayer. And let our cry come unto Thee.

Let us pray:

Grant, we beseech Thee, O Lord, to Thy faithful, pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their offenses, and also serve Thee with a quiet mind, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Day 1 - Dependence on God

A Reading from the Book of Genesis:

Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons. (Genesis 3:1-7)

From Pope Benedict XVI's homily for the Immaculate Conception, December 12, 2005:

If we set ourselves with the believing and praying Church to listen to this text, then we can begin to understand what original sin, inherited sin, is and also what the protection against this inherited sin is, what redemption is.

What picture does this passage show us? The human being does not trust God. Tempted by the serpent, he harbours the suspicion that in the end, God takes something away from his life, that God is a rival who curtails our freedom and that we will be fully human only when we have cast him aside; in brief, that only in this way can we fully achieve our freedom.

The human being lives in the suspicion that God's love creates a dependence and that he must rid himself of this dependency if he is to be fully himself. Man does not want to receive his existence and the fullness of his life from God.

He himself wants to obtain from the tree of knowledge the power to shape the world, to make himself a god, raising himself to God's level, and to overcome death and darkness with his own efforts. He does not want to rely on love that to him seems untrustworthy; he relies solely on his own knowledge since it confers power upon him. Rather than on love, he sets his sights on power, with which he desires to take his own life autonomously in hand. And in doing so, he trusts in deceit rather than in truth and thereby sinks with his life into emptiness, into death. Love is not dependence but a gift that makes us live. The freedom of a human being is the freedom of a limited being, and therefore is itself limited. We can possess it only as a shared freedom, in the communion of freedom: only if we live in the right way, with one another and for one another, can freedom develop.

We live in the right way if we live in accordance with the truth of our being, and that is, in accordance with God's will. For God's will is not a law for the human being imposed from the outside and that constrains him, but the intrinsic measure of his nature, a measure that is engraved within him and makes him the image of God, hence, a free creature.

If we live in opposition to love and against the truth - in opposition to God - then we destroy one another and destroy the world. Then we do not find life but act in the interests of death. All this is recounted with immortal images in the history of the original fall of man and the expulsion of man from the earthly Paradise.

Reflection:

Where can you see this thinking in your own life? In what ways are you suspicious of love? Unwilling to ask for help? Rebellious against God's law? Do you fear that God wants to take something away from you? Are you willing to rely on Him for everything? In what ways do

you seek a security in your own control?

A baby in the womb is so radically dependent on the mother, but also so perfectly provided for. God has given us in Mary and in the Church a Mother who wants to provide for everything as she forms us in her womb.

Prayers:

Veni Sancte Spiritus
Ave Maris Stella or Sub Tuum Praesidium
Litany of Penance or Radiating Christ

Day 2 - Original sin poisons our thinking

A Reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Philippians:

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. (Phil 2:1-8)

From Pope Benedict XVI's homily for the Immaculate Conception, December 12, 2005:

Dear brothers and sisters, if we sincerely reflect about ourselves and our history, we have to say that with this narrative [in Gen 3:1-7] is described not only the history of the beginning but the history of all times, and that we all carry within us a drop of the poison of that way of thinking, illustrated by the images in the Book of Genesis.

We call this drop of poison "original sin". Precisely on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, we have a lurking suspicion that a person who does not sin must really be basically boring and that something is missing from his life: the dramatic dimension of being autonomous; that the freedom to say no, to descend into the shadows of sin and to want to do things on one's own is part of being truly human; that only then can we make the most of all the vastness and depth of our being men and women, of being truly ourselves; that we should put this freedom to the test, even in opposition to God, in order to become, in reality, fully ourselves.

In a word, we think that evil is basically good, we think that we need it, at least a little, in order to experience the fullness of being. We think that Mephistopheles - the tempter - is right when he says he is the power "that always wants evil and always does good" (J.W. von Goethe, Faust I, 3). We think that a little bargaining with evil, keeping for oneself a little freedom against God, is basically a good thing, perhaps even necessary.

If we look, however, at the world that surrounds us we can see that this is not so; in other words, that evil is always poisonous, does not uplift human beings but degrades and humiliates

them. It does not make them any the greater, purer or wealthier, but harms and belittles them.

Reflection:

Do I ever think that if I am “too good” life will be boring? Do I think that goodness is boring? Do I try to leave a little room for evil in my life, maybe on the weekend or just on Friday night or on vacation or after everyone has gone to bed? Am I only good when my spouse is nearby or an authority figure? Do I gloss over my sinfulness and justify it, even in the Confessional, with a phrase like, “Boys will be boys,” or “You gotta have a little fun!” Can I hear God calling me to a deeper conversion, to shut down these outlets and pursue goodness more whole-heartedly? No one lived a more exciting life than Jesus and Mary, starting from when Jesus was conceived in the womb of Mary at the Annunciation and then she carried Him to her cousin Elizabeth. When we are willing to live in such a constant dependent relationship with Mary by being in her womb, life becomes more exciting, full and rich.

Prayers:

Veni Sancte Spiritus
Ave Maris Stella or Sub Tuum Praesidium
Litany of Penance or Radiating Christ

Day 3 - Save us from the prideful presumption of self-sufficiency

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke:

[T]he Pharisees and their scribes murmured against his disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” And Jesus answered them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” (Luke 5:30-32)

From Pope Benedict XVI Urbi et Orbi Christmas Message 2011:

This is how Christ is invoked in an ancient liturgical antiphon: “O Emmanuel, our king and lawgiver, hope and salvation of the peoples: come to save us, O Lord our God”. Veni ad salvandum nos! Come to save us! This is the cry raised by men and women in every age, who sense that by themselves they cannot prevail over difficulties and dangers. They need to put their hands in a greater and stronger hand, a hand which reaches out to them from on high. Dear brothers and sisters, this hand is Christ, born in Bethlehem of the Virgin Mary. He is the hand that God extends to humanity, to draw us out of the mire of sin and to set us firmly on rock, the secure rock of his Truth and his Love (cf. Ps 40:2).

This is the meaning of the Child’s name, the name which, by God’s will, Mary and Joseph gave him: he is named Jesus, which means “Saviour” (cf. Mt 1:21; Lk 1:31). He was sent by God the Father to save us above all from the evil deeply rooted in man and in history: the evil of separation from God, the prideful presumption of being self-sufficient, of trying to compete with God and to take his place, to decide what is good and evil, to be the master of life and death (cf. Gen 3:1-7). This is the great evil, the great sin, from which we human beings cannot save ourselves unless we rely on God’s help, unless we cry out to him: “Veni ad salvandum nos! – Come to save us!”

Reflection:

God does not answer prayers that cause us to need Him less. He is trying to save us from being alone and from needing no one. Generally when we go to an earthly physician, we hope that it will work well enough that we never need to see him again. This is not the approach of the Divine Physician—He seeks to treat us so that we never try to go without Him again, because He Himself is the cure. Let us reflect on the ways we try to use God in order to need God less. A baby in the womb is so radically dependent on his/her mother, but never better off by being outside of the womb. Even if a baby must be born prematurely, the doctors care for it best by creating a womb-like environment as much as possible. But a baby with a perfect, loving mother cannot find a better place to grow in love and life than in the womb. This is true for us with Mary as well, until we are ready to be born into Eternal Life (which is a new kind of womb where God is in us and we are in God).

Prayers:

Veni Sancte Spiritus
Ave Maris Stella or Sub Tuum Praesidium
Litany of Penance or Radiating Christ

Day 4 - God hears our cry

A Reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans:

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. So then it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me. ...

So then, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. (Romans 7:15-20; 8:12-17)

From Pope Benedict XVI Urbi et Orbi Christmas Message 2011:

This is the great evil, the great sin, from which we human beings cannot save ourselves unless we rely on God’s help, unless we cry out to him: “Veni ad salvandum nos! – Come to save us!” The very fact that we cry to heaven in this way already sets us aright; it makes us true to ourselves: we are in fact those who cried out to God and were saved (cf. Esth [LXX] 10:3ff.). God is the Saviour; we are those who are in peril. He is the physician; we are the infirm. To realize this is the first step towards salvation, towards emerging from the maze in which we have been locked by our pride. To lift our eyes to heaven, to stretch out our hands and call for help is our means of escape, provided that there is Someone who hears us and can come to our assistance. Jesus Christ is the proof that God has heard our cry. And not only this! God’s love for us is so strong that he cannot remain aloof; he comes out of himself to enter into our midst and to share

fully in our human condition (cf. Ex 3:7-12). The answer to our cry which God gave in Jesus infinitely transcends our expectations, achieving a solidarity which cannot be human alone, but divine. Only the God who is love, and the love which is God, could choose to save us in this way, which is certainly the lengthiest way, yet the way which respects the truth about him and about us: the way of reconciliation, dialogue and cooperation.

Reflection:

Do I recognize that I cannot save myself? Do I believe that God will always hear my cry? Can I see that Jesus Himself is the answer to my cry, that He is God who has come close to me and He will never abandon me. He is my Savior.

We are crying for a home, crying to belong, crying for the things we need to grow, crying to make sense of the pain and find support, crying for others. When we cry out, Mary responds to us and brings us into her arms and even into that tighter, safer more beautiful embrace in her womb. In coming to share our human condition, Jesus made her womb the perfect place for all our needs to met and also the place that we can always find Him, who is always the Son of Mary.

Prayers:

Veni Sancte Spiritus
Ave Maris Stella or Sub Tuum Praesidium
Litany of Penance or Radiating Christ

Day 5 - God reveals himself to the childlike

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew:

At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. (Matthew 11:25-27)

From Benedict XVI's homily to the International Theological Commission (Dec. 1, 2009):

We have heard that our Lord praises the Father because he concealed the great mystery of the Son the Trinitarian mystery, the Christological mystery from the wise and the learned, from those who did not recognize him. Instead he revealed it to children, the *nèpioi*, to those who are not learned, who are not very cultured. It was to them that this great mystery was revealed. ...[I]n our time there have also been "little ones" who have understood this mystery. Let us think of St Bernadette Soubirous; of St Thérèse of Lisieux, with her new interpretation of the Bible that is "non-scientific" but goes to the heart of Sacred Scripture; of the saints and blessed of our time: St Josephine Bakhita, Bl. Teresa of Calcutta and St Damien de Veuster. We could list so many! But from all this the question arises: "Why should this be so?". Is Christianity the religion of the foolish, of people with no culture or who are uneducated? Is faith extinguished where reason is kindled? How can this be explained? Perhaps we should take another look at history. What Jesus said, what can be noted in all the centuries, is true. Nevertheless, there is a "type" of lowly

person who is also learned. Our Lady stood beneath the Cross, the humble handmaid of the Lord and the great woman illumined by God. And John was there too, a fisherman from the Sea of Galilee. He is the John whom the Church was rightly to call "the theologian", for he was really able to see the mystery of God and proclaim it: eagled-eyed he entered into the inaccessible light of the divine mystery. So it was too that after his Resurrection, the Lord, on the road to Damascus, touches the heart of Saul, one of those learned people who cannot see. He himself, in his First Letter to Timothy, writes that he was "acting ignorantly" at that time, despite his knowledge. But the Risen One touches him: he is blinded. Yet at the same time, he truly gains sight; he begins to see. The great scholar becomes a "little one" and for this very reason perceives the folly of God as wisdom, a wisdom far greater than all human wisdom. We could continue to interpret the holy story in this way. Just one more observation. These erudite terms, *sofòi* and *sinetòi*, in the First Reading are used in a different way. Here *sofia* and *sìnesis* are gifts of the Holy Spirit which descend upon the Messiah, upon Christ. What does this mean? It turns out that there is a dual use of reason and a dual way of being either wise or little.

...

Then there is the other way of using reason, of being wise—that of the man who recognizes who he is; he recognizes the proper measure and greatness of God, opening himself in humility to the newness of God's action. It is in this way, precisely by accepting his own smallness, making himself little as he really is, that he arrives at the truth. Thus reason too can express all its possibilities; it is not extinguished but rather grows and becomes greater. *Sofia* and *sìnesis* in this context do not exclude one from the mystery that is real communion with the Lord, in whom reside wisdom and knowledge and their truth.

Let us now pray that the Lord will give us true humility. May he give us the grace of being little in order to be truly wise; may he illumine us, enable us to see his mystery in the joy of the Holy Spirit.

Reflection:

Do I see my own littleness? Do I see the greatness of God? Let us pray for true humility and the grace of littleness.

Mary's womb is the Seat of Wisdom where we can be both little and wise. It is where we learn the Wisdom of Jesus who saved us by becoming small and weak. When we place ourselves in Mary's womb and do all of our reasoning from that perspective, we take ourselves less seriously, empty out our intellectual pride and learn to delight in the wonders of God. We can think of the Baby Jesus in Mary's lap as He reaches out to discover the world from that place of perfect love and safety.

Prayers:

Veni Sancte Spiritus
Ave Maris Stella or Sub Tuum Praesidium
Litany of Penance or Radiating Christ

Day 6 - The sign of a child

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke:

And in that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around

them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased." (Luke 2:8-14)

Pope Benedict XVI's Midnight Mass Homily 2006:

We have just heard in the Gospel the message given by the angels to the shepherds during that Holy Night, a message which the Church now proclaims to us: "To you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger" (Lk 2:11-12). Nothing miraculous, nothing extraordinary, nothing magnificent is given to the shepherds as a sign. All they will see is a child wrapped in swaddling clothes, one who, like all children, needs a mother's care; a child born in a stable, who therefore lies not in a cradle but in a manger. God's sign is the baby in need of help and in poverty. Only in their hearts will the shepherds be able to see that this baby fulfils the promise of the prophet Isaiah, which we heard in the first reading: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder" (Is 9:5). Exactly the same sign has been given to us. We too are invited by the angel of God, through the message of the Gospel, to set out in our hearts to see the child lying in the manger. God's sign is simplicity. God's sign is the baby. God's sign is that he makes himself small for us. This is how he reigns. He does not come with power and outward splendour. He comes as a baby – defenceless and in need of our help. He does not want to overwhelm us with his strength. He takes away our fear of his greatness. He asks for our love: so he makes himself a child. He wants nothing from us other than our love, through which we spontaneously learn to enter into his feelings, his thoughts and his will – we learn to live with him and to practise with him that humility of renunciation that belongs to the very essence of love. God made himself small so that we could understand him, welcome him, and love him.

Reflection:

Let us meditate on the little God who comes to us and welcome him into our arms and our hearts and love him.

We learn to see Him better as we become more like Him. When we choose to become little and we accept our weakness we draw closer to the Baby Jesus in the womb of Mary. As we love Him, we enter into his feelings, his thoughts and his will and we enter into the heart and into the womb of Mary, to whom He first entrusted His life. We find ourselves pressed up against Him like two twins in the womb, experiencing His paradise in that place of perfect love.

Prayers:

Veni Sancte Spiritus
Ave Maris Stella or Sub Tuum Praesidium
Litany of Penance or Radiating Christ

Day 7 - Victory through love, patience, not power

A Reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans:

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning with labor pains together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. (Romans 8:18-25)

Pope Benedict XVI's Inaugural homily April 25, 2005:

In the Ancient Near East, it was customary for kings to style themselves shepherds of their people. This was an image of their power, a cynical image: to them their subjects were like sheep, which the shepherd could dispose of as he wished. When the shepherd of all humanity, the living God, himself became a lamb, he stood on the side of the lambs, with those who are downtrodden and killed. This is how he reveals himself to be the true shepherd: "I am the Good Shepherd . . . I lay down my life for the sheep", Jesus says of himself (Jn 10:14f). It is not power, but love that redeems us! This is God's sign: he himself is love. How often we wish that God would make show himself stronger, that he would strike decisively, defeating evil and creating a better world. All ideologies of power justify themselves in exactly this way, they justify the destruction of whatever would stand in the way of progress and the liberation of humanity. We suffer on account of God's patience. And yet, we need his patience. God, who became a lamb, tells us that the world is saved by the Crucified One, not by those who crucified him. The world is redeemed by the patience of God. It is destroyed by the impatience of man.

Reflection:

Do I wish for the destruction of my enemies? Do I pray that God would show Himself the stronger and strike decisively against those who could hurt me? Do I suffer because of God's patience? Try to make an act of trust that God is taking care of everything and working out His plan of salvation. Make an act of love to unite your sufferings to the sufferings of Christ. The first threat that Jesus faced was from King Herod. We can think of the helplessness of Jesus when He was threatened by Herod's power. He was effectively still in the womb of Mary, with no voice, no understanding, no plan, no defense. Rather than destroying Herod, Joseph was warned in a dream and He took Mary and the child and went to Egypt. He remained hidden and helpless. Learning the patience of Mary's little lamb is so hard but also possible when we can place our trust in Mary and Joseph that they take care of us as they took care of Jesus.

[Prayers:](#)

Veni Sancte Spiritus
Ave Maris Stella or Sub Tuum Praesidium
Litany of Penance or Radiating Christ

Day 8 - Light dispels darkness

A Reading from the Book of Genesis:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.

And God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day. (Gen 1:1-5)

Pope Benedict XVI's Easter Vigil homily 2012:

What is the creation account saying here? Light makes life possible. It makes encounter possible. It makes communication possible. It makes knowledge, access to reality and to truth, possible. And insofar as it makes knowledge possible, it makes freedom and progress possible. Evil hides. Light, then, is also an expression of the good that both is and creates brightness. It is daylight, which makes it possible for us to act. To say that God created light means that God created the world as a space for knowledge and truth, as a space for encounter and freedom, as a space for good and for love. Matter is fundamentally good, being itself is good. And evil does not come from God-made being, rather, it comes into existence only through denial. It is a "no". At Easter, on the morning of the first day of the week, God said once again: "Let there be light". The night on the Mount of Olives, the solar eclipse of Jesus' passion and death, the night of the grave had all passed. Now it is the first day once again – creation is beginning anew. "Let there be light", says God, "and there was light": Jesus rises from the grave. Life is stronger than death. Good is stronger than evil. Love is stronger than hate. Truth is stronger than lies. The darkness of the previous days is driven away the moment Jesus rises from the grave and himself becomes God's pure light. But this applies not only to him, not only to the darkness of those days. With the resurrection of Jesus, light itself is created anew. He draws all of us after him into the new light of the resurrection and he conquers all darkness. He is God's new day, new for all of us.

But how is this to come about? How does all this affect us so that instead of remaining word it becomes a reality that draws us in? Through the sacrament of baptism and the profession of faith, the Lord has built a bridge across to us, through which the new day reaches us. The Lord says to the newly-baptized: Fiat lux – let there be light. God's new day – the day of indestructible life, comes also to us. Christ takes you by the hand. From now on you are held by him and walk with him into the light, into real life. For this reason the early Church called baptism photismos – illumination.

Reflection:

Saint Louis de Montfort reminded us that Baptism is an entrance into Mary's womb. That is the place where we learn a new logic, where we are enlightened as to the real power, providence and plan of God. It is where we first draw close to Christ, like a twin with Him in the womb and we are formed with Him by the Holy Spirit and we become another Christ. Have I allowed the logic of God to be fully formed in me? Do I allow a new light from God to rise up in my mind and heart? Do I believe that, "Life is stronger than death, good is stronger than evil, love is stronger than hate, truth is stronger than lies?" Will I take Christ's Hand again, as I once did in Baptism, and allow myself to be illumined by the light of His Love? Let us do that especially by making a Profession of Faith and recite the Creed.

Prayers:

Profession of faith (I believe in one God...)

Veni Sancte Spiritus
Ave Maris Stella or Sub Tuum Praesidium
Litany of Penance or Radiating Christ

Day 9 - Hope in suffering

A reading from the letter of Saint Paul to the Colossians:

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church, of which I became a minister according to the divine office which was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we proclaim, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man mature in Christ. For this I toil, striving with all the energy which he mightily inspires within me. (Colossians 1:24–29)

Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical *Spe Salvi* #39

To suffer with the other and for others; to suffer for the sake of truth and justice; to suffer out of love and in order to become a person who truly loves—these are fundamental elements of humanity, and to abandon them would destroy man himself. Yet once again the question arises: are we capable of this? Is the other important enough to warrant my becoming, on his account, a person who suffers? Does truth matter to me enough to make suffering worthwhile? Is the promise of love so great that it justifies the gift of myself? In the history of humanity, it was the Christian faith that had the particular merit of bringing forth within man a new and deeper capacity for these kinds of suffering that are decisive for his humanity. The Christian faith has shown us that truth, justice and love are not simply ideals, but enormously weighty realities. It has shown us that God —Truth and Love in person— desired to suffer for us and with us. Bernard of Clairvaux coined the marvellous expression: *Impassibilis est Deus, sed non incompassibilis*—God cannot suffer, but he can suffer with. Man is worth so much to God that he himself became man in order to suffer with man in an utterly real way—in flesh and blood—as is revealed to us in the account of Jesus's Passion. Hence in all human suffering we are joined by one who experiences and carries that suffering with us; hence *con-solatio* is present in all suffering, the consolation of God's compassionate love—and so the star of hope rises. Certainly, in our many different sufferings and trials we always need the lesser and greater hopes too—a kind visit, the healing of internal and external wounds, a favourable resolution of a crisis, and so on. In our lesser trials these kinds of hope may even be sufficient. But in truly great trials, where I must make a definitive decision to place the truth before my own welfare, career and possessions, I need the certitude of that true, great hope of which we have spoken here. For this too we need witnesses—martyrs—who have given themselves totally, so as to show us the way— day after day. We need them if we are to prefer goodness to comfort, even in the little choices we face each day—knowing that this is how we live life to the full. Let us say it once again: the capacity to suffer for the sake of the truth is the measure of humanity. Yet this capacity to suffer depends on the type and extent of the hope that we bear within us and build upon. The saints were able to make the great journey of human existence in the way that Christ had done before them, because they were brimming with great hope.

Reflection:

In our humanity, apart from God, solitude becomes like a tomb for us where there are dead and

dying things. But as Christ enters into our solitude it becomes like a womb for us, where we are little and loved and there is life and growth. In this way, every suffering, every threat, every difficulty becomes only a reminder that I am in the womb of Mary, with Jesus. As things become more intense and the pressure increases, it is only because I am growing and drawing closer to birth, which is a victorious emergence into Eternal Life.

Do I have the certitude of the great hope that will not fail—Jesus Christ? Do I find strength in that hope even to suffer for the sake of truth and for the sake of others? Let us reflect on the little hopes and the great hope in our lives and then make an act of hope:

O my God, relying on Your almighty power and infinite mercy and promises, I hope to obtain pardon of my sins, the help of Your grace and life everlasting, through the merits of Jesus Christ, my Lord and Redeemer. Amen.

Prayers:

Veni Sancte Spiritus

Ave Maris Stella or Sub Tuum Praesidium

Litany of Penance or Radiating Christ

Day 10 - True Love

A Reading from the First Letter of Saint John:

Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. (1 John 4:7-12)

From Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical letter *Deus Caritas Est* (God is Love):

Nowadays Christianity of the past is often criticized as having been opposed to the body; and it is quite true that tendencies of this sort have always existed. Yet the contemporary way of exalting the body is deceptive. *Eros*, reduced to pure "sex", has become a commodity, a mere "thing" to be bought and sold, or rather, man himself becomes a commodity. This is hardly man's great "yes" to the body. On the contrary, he now considers his body and his sexuality as the purely material part of himself, to be used and exploited at will. Nor does he see it as an arena for the exercise of his freedom, but as a mere object that he attempts, as he pleases, to make both enjoyable and harmless. Here we are actually dealing with a debasement of the human body: no longer is it integrated into our overall existential freedom; no longer is it a vital expression of our whole being, but it is more or less relegated to the purely biological sphere. The apparent exaltation of the body can quickly turn into a hatred of bodiliness. Christian faith, on the other hand, has always considered man a unity in duality, a reality in which spirit and matter compenetrates, and in which each is brought to a new nobility. True, *eros* tends to rise "in ecstasy" towards the Divine, to lead us beyond ourselves; yet for this very reason it calls for a path of ascent, renunciation, purification and healing.

Concretely, what does this path of ascent and purification entail? How might love be experienced so that it can fully realize its human and divine promise? Here we can find a first, important indication in the Song of Songs, an Old Testament book well known to the mystics. According to the interpretation generally held today, the poems contained in this book were originally love-songs, perhaps intended for a Jewish wedding feast and meant to exalt conjugal love. In this context it is highly instructive to note that in the course of the book two different Hebrew words are used to indicate “love”. First there is the word *dodim*, a plural form suggesting a love that is still insecure, indeterminate and searching. This comes to be replaced by the word *ahabà*, which the Greek version of the Old Testament translates with the similar-sounding *agape*, which, as we have seen, becomes the typical expression for the biblical notion of love. By contrast with an indeterminate, “searching” love, this word expresses the experience of a love which involves a real discovery of the other, moving beyond the selfish character that prevailed earlier. Love now becomes concern and care for the other. No longer is it self-seeking, a sinking in the intoxication of happiness; instead it seeks the good of the beloved: it becomes renunciation and it is ready, and even willing, for sacrifice.

Reflection:

We see the intensity of God’s *eros* when He overshadows Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit and becomes Incarnate in her womb. We also see that His first encounter with our human nature is in our littleness and helplessness—He first becomes Incarnate in the womb of Mary. It is not the seductive power of our sexuality that first attracts Him nor does He encounter us first in the ecstatic experiences of sexual intimacy. He meets us first in weakness, in littleness, in the womb of Mary. His *eros* drives Him to empty Himself in *agape* and unite Himself with our most fragile human experiences.

Does this correspond to my idea of love? Where did I get my idea about what love is? Do I buy into the lie that sex is simply a bodily experience without a meaning or spiritual implication? Do I see the goodness of *eros* and also the way that it must be purified by *agape*? Let us reflect on any distortions in our view of love and then make an act of love:

O my God, I love you above all things, with my whole heart and soul, because you are all good and worthy of all my love. I love my neighbor as myself for the love of you. I forgive all who have injured me and I ask pardon of all whom I have injured.

Prayers:

Veni Sancte Spiritus
Ave Maris Stella or Sub Tuum Praesidium
Litany of Penance or Radiating Christ

Day 11 - A Christian interpretation of reality

A Reading from the Book of Revelation:

And I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals; and I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, and I wept much that no one was found

worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. Then one of the elders said to me, "Weep not; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals." (Rev 5:1-5)

From Pope Benedict XVI's General Audience on 12 September, 2012:

What do these symbols mean? They remind us of the way to take to be able to interpret the events of history and of our own life. By raising our gaze to God's Heaven, in a constant relationship with Christ, opening our hearts and minds to him in personal and community prayer, we learn to see things in a new light and to perceive their truest meaning. Prayer is, as it were, an open window that enables us to keep our gaze turned to God, not only to remember the destination towards which we are bound but also to let God's will illuminate our earthly pilgrimage and help us live it with intensity and commitment.

How does the Lord guide the Christian community to a deeper interpretation of history? First of all by asking it to consider the present that we are living in realistically. The Lamb then opens the first four seals of the scroll, and the Church sees the world in which it is inserted, a world in which there are various negative elements. There are the wicked deeds of men and women, such as acts of violence that stem from the desire to possess, to dominate each other, even to the point of self-destruction (the second seal); or injustice, because people fail to respect the laws that they have given themselves (the third seal). To these are added the evils that human beings must suffer, such as death, hunger and pestilence (the fourth seal).

In the face of these all too often dramatic situations the ecclesial community is asked never to lose hope, to believe firmly that the apparent omnipotence of the Evil One comes up against the real almightiness which is God's. And the first seal which the Lamb breaks open contains this very message. John recounts: "And I saw, and behold, a white horse, and its rider had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer" (Rev 6:2). God's power that cannot only offset evil but can actually overcome it, entered human history. The colour white refers to the Resurrection: God made himself so close that he came down into the darkness of death to illuminate it with the splendour of his divine life; he took the evil of the world upon his own shoulders to purify it with the fire of his love.

How can we develop in this Christian interpretation of reality? The Book of Revelation tells us that prayer nourishes this vision of light and of deep hope in each one of us and in our communities: it invites us not to let ourselves be overcome by evil, but to overcome evil with good, to look at the Crucified and Risen Christ who associates us with his victory. The Church lives in history, she does not withdraw into herself but courageously continues on her journey through difficulty and suffering, forcefully asserting that in the end evil does not overcome good, that darkness does not conceal God's splendour. This is an important point for us; as Christians we can never be pessimistic; we know well that on our journey through life we often encounter violence, falsehood, hatred and persecution, but this does not discourage us. Prayer teaches us above all to see God's signs, his presence and his action, indeed, to be lights of goodness ourselves, spreading hope and showing that the victory is God's.

Reflection:

How do I see reality? Do I try to develop a Christian interpretation of reality through prayer or do I let the evening news or my favorite pundits form my interpretation of reality? Do I give in to pessimism or cynicism? Do I try to overcome evil with good? Do I believe that God wins the victory and that He makes all things new?

God turned our human logic on its head when He chose to enter this world in hiddenness and weakness, not as a powerful King or a mighty warrior, but as a tiny infant in the womb of Mary. He kept this posture through His whole life, until He died as a King crowned with thorns and a warrior armed only with a Cross. By remaining spiritually in the womb of Mary, we can see the fingerprints of God in history and face future trials with hope through the eyes of the true infant King.

Prayers:

Veni Sancte Spiritus
Ave Maris Stella or Sub Tuum Praesidium
Litany of Penance or Radiating Christ

Day 12 - The Great Hope: Love redeems us

A Reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans:

We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. ... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 8:28;35-39)

From Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical *Saved in Hope (Spe Salvi)*:

Francis Bacon and those who followed in the intellectual current of modernity that he inspired were wrong to believe that man would be redeemed through science. Such an expectation asks too much of science; this kind of hope is deceptive. Science can contribute greatly to making the world and mankind more human. Yet it can also destroy mankind and the world unless it is steered by forces that lie outside it. On the other hand, we must also acknowledge that modern Christianity, faced with the successes of science in progressively structuring the world, has to a large extent restricted its attention to the individual and his salvation. In so doing it has limited the horizon of its hope and has failed to recognize sufficiently the greatness of its task—even if it has continued to achieve great things in the formation of man and in care for the weak and the suffering.

It is not science that redeems man: man is redeemed by love. This applies even in terms of this present world. When someone has the experience of a great love in his life, this is a moment of "redemption" which gives a new meaning to his life. But soon he will also realize that the love bestowed upon him cannot by itself resolve the question of his life. It is a love that remains fragile. It can be destroyed by death. The human being needs unconditional love. He needs the certainty which makes him say: "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:38-39). If this absolute love exists, with its absolute certainty, then—only then—is man "redeemed", whatever

should happen to him in his particular circumstances. This is what it means to say: Jesus Christ has “redeemed” us. Through him we have become certain of God, a God who is not a remote “first cause” of the world, because his only-begotten Son has become man and of him everyone can say: “I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20). In this sense it is true that anyone who does not know God, even though he may entertain all kinds of hopes, is ultimately without hope, without the great hope that sustains the whole of life (cf. Eph 2:12). Man's great, true hope which holds firm in spite of all disappointments can only be God—God who has loved us and who continues to love us “to the end,” until all “is accomplished” (cf. Jn 13:1 and 19:30). Whoever is moved by love begins to perceive what “life” really is.

Reflection:

Do I ask too much of science? Do I place too much hope in medicine and technology? Have I experienced a moment of redemption through a great love in my life? Have I experienced also the fragility of this love? Do I believe in an absolute love that is not threatened by death, namely the love of God revealed in Christ Jesus?

I can learn the unconditional love of God revealed in Jesus Christ by being pressed up against Him as His twin in the womb of Mary. As much as I face uncertainties in life, I do not face them alone. As much as I struggle with suffering and groan for redemption, I know that I am only going through preparation for birth and Christ is with me and goes before me as the first-born. No baby is stillborn from the womb of Mary.

Prayers:

Veni Sancte Spiritus
Ave Maris Stella or Sub Tuum Praesidium
Litany of Penance or Radiating Christ

Week of Knowledge of Self - Introduction

After emptying ourselves of the spirit of the world, Saint Louis de Montfort asks us to spend a week deepening our self-knowledge before looking more deeply at who Mary and Jesus are in the coming weeks. Who are we then? By Baptism we can confidently say that we are beloved children of God. We are baptized into Jesus Christ and so we share His Sonship with the Father. We have also been freed from sin by Baptism, but we know that we continue to struggle with weakness, imperfection and even sin. It is good and healthy to expose our weaknesses, failures and sins so that we can receive the grace of a life-giving repentance and deepen the reality of our dependence on God's merciful Fatherhood. And, of course, at the same time as we recognize our status as children of the Heavenly Father in Christ Jesus, we recognize that we are also children of His Mother Mary. So throughout this week, we alternate between looking at our dignity as children of God and looking at how we are still little and being formed in the womb and Mary as we see our weaknesses, imperfections and sins.

Prayers - Knowledge of Self

Ave Maris Stella

Hail, bright star of ocean,
God's own Mother blest,
Ever sinless Virgin,
Gate of heavenly rest.

Taking that sweet Ave
Which from Gabriel came,
Peace confirm within us,
Changing Eva's name.

Break the captives' fetters,
Light on blindness pour,
All our ills expelling,
Every bliss implore.

Show thyself a Mother;
May the Word Divine,
Born for us thy Infant,
Hear our prayers through thine.

Virgin all excelling,
Mildest of the mild,
Freed from guilt, preserve us,
Pure and undefiled.

Keep our life all spotless,
Make our way secure,
Till we find in Jesus,
Joy forevermore.

Through the highest heaven

To the Almighty Three,
Father, Son and Spirit,
One same glory be. Amen.

Sub Tuum Praesidium

We fly to thy protection, O holy Mother of God, despise not our petitions in our necessities, but deliver us always from all dangers, O glorious and blessed Virgin.

Dominican Litany of Humility

(By Br. Joseph Martin Hagan, OP — original post is [here](#))

O Jesus, meek and humble of heart, teach me.

From all pride and its effects, *deliver me, Jesus.*

From coveting greatness for its own sake or to excess, *etc.*

From contempt of You and Your law,

From a puffed-up self-image,

From claiming to be a self-made man,

From ingratitude for Your gifts,

From thinking that I have earned Your gifts by my effort alone,

From boasting of having what I do not have,

From excusing my faults while judging others,

From wishing to be the sole possessor of the skills I have,

From setting myself before others,

From all vainglory, *deliver me, Jesus.*

From craving praise for its own sake, *etc.*

From looking for flattery,

From withholding glory from You,

From showing off to the harm of my neighbor,

From presumption and false self-confidence,

From boastfulness,

From hypocrisy,

From the excessive need to be fashionable,

From obstinacy and contention,

From disobedience,

From all false humility, *deliver me, Jesus.*

From forfeiting my dignity as a child of God, *etc.*

From burying the talents that You gave me,

From an unreasonable fear of failure,

From avoiding my true vocation,

From despair at my weakness,

In the ways of humility, *teach me, Jesus.*

To know my limits and my strengths, *etc.*

To acknowledge the depravity of my past sins,

To acclaim You as the author of all the good I do,

To put my confidence in You,

To be subject to You and Your Church,

To be subject to others for Your sake,

To revere Your presence in others,

To rejoice in Your gifts in others, even the gifts unseen,

To do great things by Your help and for Your glory, *strengthen me, Jesus.*

To seek greatness in heavenly things and lasting virtue, *etc.*

To do my best even when unnoticed,

To put my share of Your gifts at Your service,
To be neither puffed up by honor nor downcast by shame,
To do penance for my sins and those of others,
Above all, to strive to love You with all my being,
And to love my neighbor as myself,
In Your name, I pray. Amen.

Litany of the Holy Spirit

Litany of the Holy Spirit

Lord, have mercy on us, Christ have mercy on us.
Lord, have mercy on us. Father all powerful, have mercy on us.
Jesus, Eternal Son of the Father, Redeemer of the world, Save us.
Spirit of the Father and the Son, boundless Life of both, Sanctify us.
Holy Trinity, Hear us.
Holy Spirit, Who proceedest from the Father and the Son, Enter our hearts.
Holy Spirit, Who art equal to the Father and the Son, Enter our hearts.
Promise of God the Father, have mercy on us.
Ray of heavenly light, have mercy on us.
Author of all good, have mercy on us.
Source of heavenly water, have mercy on us.
Consuming Fire, have mercy on us.
Ardent Charity, have mercy on us.
Spiritual Uncction, have mercy on us.
Spirit of love and truth, have mercy on us.
Spirit of wisdom and understanding, have mercy on us.
Spirit of counsel and fortitude, have mercy on us.
Spirit of knowledge and piety, have mercy on us.
Spirit of the fear of the Lord, have mercy on us.
Spirit of grace and prayer, have mercy on us.
Spirit of peace and meekness, have mercy on us.
Spirit of modesty and innocence, have mercy on us.
Holy Spirit, the Comforter, have mercy on us.
Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier, have mercy on us.
Holy Spirit, Who governs the Church, have mercy on us.
Gift of God the Most High, have mercy on us.
Spirit Who fills the universe, have mercy on us.
Spirit of the adoption of the children of God, have mercy on us.
Holy Spirit, Inspire us with horror of sin.
Holy Spirit, Come and renew the face of the earth.
Holy Spirit, Shed Your Light into our souls.
Holy Spirit, Engrave Your law in our hearts.
Holy Spirit, In flame us with the flame of Your love.
Holy Spirit, Open to us the treasures of Your graces.
Holy Spirit, Teach us to pray well.
Holy Spirit, Enlighten us with Your heavenly inspirations.
Holy Spirit, Lead us in the way of salvation.
Holy Spirit, Grant us the only necessary knowledge.
Holy Spirit, Inspire in us the practice of good.
Holy Spirit, Grant us the merits of all virtues.
Holy Spirit, Make us persevere in justice.
Holy Spirit, Be our everlasting reward.

Lamb of God, You take away the sins of the world, Send us Your Holy Spirit.
Lamb of God, You take away the sins of the world, Pour down into our souls the gifts of the Holy Spirit.
Lamb of God, You take away the sins of the world, Grant us the Spirit of wisdom and piety.

Come, Holy Spirit! Fill the hearts of Your faithful, And enkindle in them the fire of Your love.

Let us pray:

Grant, O merciful Father, that Your Divine Spirit may enlighten, inflame and purify us, that He may penetrate us with His heavenly dew and make us fruitful in good works, through Our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son, Who lives and reigns with You in the unity of the same Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer of Entrustment to the Womb of Mary

Almighty God, Heavenly Father,
who have placed me, by Baptism, in the womb of the Virgin Mary
beneath her Immaculate Heart
to be together with your Son
and ever more conformed to Him by the power of the Holy Spirit,
grant that I may whole-heartedly embrace my dependence on you
as I place all my trust in my Mother Mary.
May I never scorn my weakness which your Son also assumed,
but may I always be grateful to be little and helpless,
knowing that without you I can do nothing.
Beneath the veil of Saint Joseph her spouse,
may I find in her a refuge against every danger
and in her womb a hiding place invisible to the ancient foe.
May I know that I am loved perfectly like Jesus by Joseph and Mary,
those parents, who, receiving everything from You,
will always provide for all of my needs.
Through the same Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Day 13 - Sharing Christ's Sonship

A Reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Galatians:

But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir. (Gal 4:4-7)

From Pope Saint John Paul II's Letter *Tertio Millenio Adveniente* # 8:

The religion which originates in the mystery of the Redemptive Incarnation, is the religion of "dwelling in the heart of God", of sharing in God's very life. Saint Paul speaks of this in the

passage already quoted: "God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' " (Gal 4:6). Man cries out like Christ himself, who turned to God "with loud cries and tears" (Heb 5:7), especially in Gethsemane and on the Cross: man cries out to God just as Christ cried out to him, and thus he bears witness that he shares in Christ's sonship through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, whom the Father has sent in the name of the Son, enables man to share in the inmost life of God. He also enables man to be a son, in the likeness of Christ, and an heir of all that belongs to the Son (cf. Gal 4:7). In this consists the religion of "dwelling in the inmost life of God", which begins with the Incarnation of the Son of God. The Holy Spirit, who searches the depths of God (cf. 1 Cor 2:10), leads us, all mankind, into these depths by virtue of the sacrifice of Christ.

Reflection:

As we practice the religion that dwells in the heart of God, we also remember that the heart of God dwells in the womb of Mary. The great dignity that has been given to us by Christ is that we can share in the inmost life of God by sharing in Christ's Sonship. Because the Son of God has also become the Son of Mary, we learn His Sonship by going back to the starting point of the God-man, in the womb of Mary. There we allow ourselves to be formed by the Holy Spirit, the artisan of the Incarnation. There we discover that we have an Eternal Father in God and we have a tender Mother in Mary. This is our foundation, our starting point, our identity, which does not depend on our accomplishments, which we have not earned and which no one can take away. Like a baby in the womb, it is pure gift. We can only receive it and choose to keep growing as the little children of Mary God has called us to be.

Prayer:

Ave Maris Stella or Sub Turm Praesidium
Dominican Litany of Humility
Litany of the Holy Spirit
Prayer of Entrustment to the Womb of Mary

Day 14 - Remaining little

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew:

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them, and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 18:1-4)

When Saint Therese of Lisieux was asked on her death bed what it means to remain little, she replied:

"It is to recognize our nothingness, to expect everything from God as a little child expects everything from her father; it is to be disquieted about nothing, and not to be set on making our [own] living. Even among the poor, they give the child what is necessary, but as soon as she grows up, her father no longer wants to feed her and says: 'Work now, you can take care of yourself.'

"It was so as not to hear this that I never wanted to grow up, feeling that I was incapable of making my [own] living, the eternal life of heaven.

"To be little is not attributing to oneself the virtues that one practices, believing oneself capable of anything, but recognizing that God places this treasure in the hands of His little child to be

used when necessary; but it remains always God's treasure. Finally, it is not to become discouraged over one's faults, for children fall often, but they are too little to hurt themselves very much." (St. Therese of Lisieux, Her Last Conversations, pp. 138-139)

Reflection:

How do I view myself? Am I impressed with my virtues, accomplishments, skills, gifts, degrees, salary, moral perfection, knowledge, eloquence of speech? Do I recognize that everything I have I have received, even my own life, my own being? Do I get discouraged over my faults? Do I beat myself up when I fail or do I cast myself into the hands of God, trusting in the infinite love of my Heavenly Father? Do I allow my failures to remind me that I am simply a little child in Mary's womb, still developing with a long way to go?

Prayer:

Ave Maris Stella or Sub Turm Praesidium
Dominican Litany of Humility
Litany of the Holy Spirit
Prayer of Entrustment to the Womb of Mary

Day 15 - Not judging

A Reading from the Letter of Saint James:

"God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you men of double mind. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to dejection. Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you.

Do not speak evil against one another, brethren. He that speaks evil against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you that you judge your neighbor? (James 4:6b-12)

From Saint Dorotheos of Gaza:

If we have true love with sympathy and patient labor, we shall not go about scrutinizing our neighbor's shortcomings. As it is said, 'Love covers up a multitude of sins', and again, 'Love thinks no evil ... hides everything,' etc. As I said, if we have true love, that very love should screen anything of this kind, as did the saints when they saw the shortcomings of men. Were they blind? Not at all! But they simply would not let their eyes dwell on sins. Who hated sin more than the saints? But they did not hate the sinners at the same time, nor condemn them, nor turn away from them, but they suffered with them, admonished them, comforted them, gave them remedies as sickly members, and did all they could to heal them. Take a fisherman: when he casts his hook into the sea and a large fish takes the bait, he perceives first that the fish struggles violently and is full of fight, so he does not try to pull it in immediately by main force for the line would break and the catch would be lost in the end. No! He plays out the line and, as he says, allows the fish to run freely, but when he feels the line slacken and the first struggles have calmed down, he takes up the slack line and begins, little by little, to draw him in. So the

holy fathers, by patience and love, draw the brother and do not spurn him nor show themselves unfriendly towards him, but as a mother who has an unruly son does not hate him or turn away from him but rules him with sweetness and sometimes does things to please him, so they always protect him and keep him in order and they gain a hold on him so that with time they correct the erring brother and do not allow him to harm anyone else, and in doing so they greatly advance towards the love of Christ. What did the blessed Ammon do when those brothers, greatly disturbed, came to him and said, 'Come and see, Father. There is a young woman in brother X's cell!' What tenderness he showed to the erring brother. What great love there was in that great soul. Knowing that the brother had hidden the woman in a large barrel, he went in, sat down on it, and told the others to search the whole place. And when they found nothing he said to them, 'May God forgive you!' And so dismissing them in disgrace, he called out to them that they should not readily believe anything against their neighbor. By his consideration for his brother he not only protected him after God but corrected him when the right moment came. For when they were alone he laid on him the hand with which he had thrown the others out, and said, 'Have a care for yourself, brother'. Immediately the other's conscience pricked him and he was stricken with remorse, so swiftly did the mercy and sympathy of the old man work upon his soul.

Let us, therefore, strive to gain this love for ourselves, let us acquire this tenderness towards our neighbor so that we may guard ourselves from wickedly speaking evil of our neighbor, and from judging and despising him. Let us help one another, as we are members one of another. Which of us, having a wound on his hand or foot, or any other member, would despise it and cut it off, even if it turned septic? Would he not rather bathe it and take away the poison and put a plaster on it, sign it with the cross, apply a relic, and pray and beg the saints to pray for its cure...

Reflection:

Do I put myself in judgment over others? Do I presume to know what is happening in the heart of my brothers and sisters? Do I presume to know their motives and intentions? Do I know the degree of their freedom or the grace they are receiving? Do I choose to chastise rather than to pray? Do I rush to condemn rather than to cover the sin and entice to forgiveness through mercy? Mary takes all sinners into her womb and loves them. She realizes that we are all small and not yet fully formed. She chooses to nourish us and love us rather than to condemn us or abort us. She can teach us to do the same for others.

Prayer:

Ave Maris Stella or Sub Turm Praesidium
Dominican Litany of Humility
Litany of the Holy Spirit
Prayer of Entrustment to the Womb of Mary

Day 16 - Beloved sinners; a dignified embarrassment

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke:

There was a man who had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that falls to me.' And he divided his living between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took his journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in loose living. And when he had spent everything, a great famine arose in that country, and he began to be in want. So he went and joined himself to one of the

citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine. 16 And he would gladly have fed on the pods that the swine ate; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants."' And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to make merry. (Luke 15:11-24)

From Pope Francis's Retreat Meditation on June 2, 2016:

Let us think for a moment about the "embarrassed dignity" of this prodigal yet beloved son. If we can serenely keep our heart balanced between those two extremes – dignity and embarrassment – without letting go of either of them, perhaps we can feel how the heart of our Father beats with love for us. It was a heart beating with worry, as he went up onto the roof to look out. What was he looking at? The possible return of his son... In that moment, in that place where dignity and embarrassment exist side by side, we can perceive how our Father's heart beats. We can imagine that mercy wells up in it like blood. He goes out to seek us sinners. He draws us to himself, purifies us and sends us forth, new and renewed, to every periphery, to bring mercy to all. That blood is the blood of Christ, the blood of the new and eternal covenant of mercy, poured out for us and for all, for the forgiveness of sins. We contemplate that blood by going in and out of his heart and the heart of the Father. That is our sole treasure, the only thing we have to give to the world: the blood that purifies and brings peace to every reality and all people. The blood of the Lord that forgives sins. The blood that is true drink, for it reawakens and revives what was dead from sin.

In our serene prayer, which wavers between embarrassment and dignity, dignity and embarrassment, both together, let us ask for the grace to sense that mercy as giving meaning to our entire life, the grace to feel how the heart of the Father beats as one with our own. It is not enough to think of that grace as something God offers us from time to time, whenever he forgives some big sin of ours, so that then we can go off to do the rest by ourselves, alone. It is not enough. ... the important thing is that each of us feel that fruitful tension born of the Lord's mercy: we are at one and the same time sinners pardoned and sinners restored to dignity. The Lord not only cleanses us, but crowns us, giving us dignity.

Reflection:

Pope Francis wrote earlier in this meditation, "Mercy, seen in feminine terms, is the tender love of a mother who, touched by the frailty of her newborn baby, takes the child into her arms and provides everything it needs to live and grow (rahamim)." More precisely, rahamim is closely related to the Hebrew word for womb *rehem*. Learning to balance embarrassment and dignity is another way of describing how we remain in the womb of Mary. We are very small in her womb and we feel how underdeveloped and incapable we are. At the same time, we are in the Seat of Wisdom and we share a home with the Almighty Lord, Jesus Christ as we are being formed into His likeness. We are embarrassed by our weakness, but dignified in the nobility God freely gives us—wrapped in his royal robe and wearing the ring of his royal dignity.

[Prayer:](#)

Ave Maris Stella or Sub Turm Praesidium

Dominican Litany of Humility
Litany of the Holy Spirit
Prayer of Entrustment to the Womb of Mary

Day 17 - Pastoral acedia

A Reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Philippians:

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let all men know your forbearance. The Lord is at hand. Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Phil 4:4-7)

From Pope Francis's Apostolic Exhortation The Joy of the Gospel (*Evangelii Gaudium*):

At a time when we most need a missionary dynamism which will bring salt and light to the world, many lay people fear that they may be asked to undertake some apostolic work and they seek to avoid any responsibility that may take away from their free time. For example, it has become very difficult today to find trained parish catechists willing to persevere in this work for some years. Something similar is also happening with priests who are obsessed with protecting their free time. This is frequently due to the fact that people feel an overbearing need to guard their personal freedom, as though the task of evangelization was a dangerous poison rather than a joyful response to God's love which summons us to mission and makes us fulfilled and productive. Some resist giving themselves over completely to mission and thus end up in a state of paralysis and acedia.

The problem is not always an excess of activity, but rather activity undertaken badly, without adequate motivation, without a spirituality which would permeate it and make it pleasurable. As a result, work becomes more tiring than necessary, even leading at times to illness. Far from a content and happy tiredness, this is a tense, burdensome, dissatisfying and, in the end, unbearable fatigue. This pastoral acedia can be caused by a number of things. Some fall into it because they throw themselves into unrealistic projects and are not satisfied simply to do what they reasonably can. Others, because they lack the patience to allow processes to mature; they want everything to fall from heaven. Others, because they are attached to a few projects or vain dreams of success. Others, because they have lost real contact with people and so depersonalize their work that they are more concerned with the road map than with the journey itself. Others fall into acedia because they are unable to wait; they want to dominate the rhythm of life. Today's obsession with immediate results makes it hard for pastoral workers to tolerate anything that smacks of disagreement, possible failure, criticism, the cross.

And so the biggest threat of all gradually takes shape: "the gray pragmatism of the daily life of the Church, in which all appears to proceed normally, while in reality faith is wearing down and degenerating into small-mindedness". A tomb psychology thus develops and slowly transforms Christians into mummies in a museum. Disillusioned with reality, with the Church and with themselves, they experience a constant temptation to cling to a faint melancholy, lacking in hope, which seizes the heart like "the most precious of the devil's potions". Called to radiate light and communicate life, in the end they are caught up in things that generate only darkness and inner weariness, and slowly consume all zeal for the apostolate. For all this, I repeat: Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the joy of evangelization! (*Evangelii Gaudium*)

#81-83)

Reflection:

Do I fearfully guard my free time? Am I afraid of being asked to give too much? Have I lost the joy of the Gospel and the joy of sharing the Gospel? Have I become disillusioned with the Church, with my ministry, with others or with myself? If I feel that I cannot do it alone, I am exactly right. Sometimes we settle for that which we believe we can accomplish on our own. When we do that we set our sights so low that we quickly lose inspiration and motivation. Although we are very small, with Mary's help, by the grace of God we can truly do great things. In fact, if we remain in Mary's womb, we really let her do great things and we consent to do them with her, as Jesus did when Mary took Him to greet her cousin Elizabeth. Are we willing to accept whatever Mary wants to do with us to spread the Gospel and bring Good News to the poor?

Prayer:

Ave Maris Stella or Sub Turm Praesidium
Dominican Litany of Humility
Litany of the Holy Spirit
Prayer of Entrustment to the Womb of Mary

Day 18 - Christian "diseases"

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke:

[H]e told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man brought forth plentifully; and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' And he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns, and build larger ones; and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." (Luke 12:16-21)

From Pope Francis's Address to the Roman Curia on December 22, 2014:

The disease of thinking we are "immortal", "immune" or downright "indispensable", neglecting the need for regular check-ups. A Curia which is not *self-critical*, which does not keep up with things, which does not seek to be more fit, is a sick body. A simple visit to the cemetery might help us see the names of many people who thought they were immortal, immune and indispensable! It is the disease of the rich fool in the Gospel, who thought he would live forever (cf. *Lk* 12:13-21), but also of those who turn into lords and masters, and think of themselves as above others and not at their service. It is often an effect of the pathology of power, from a superiority complex, from a narcissism which passionately gazes at its own image and does not see the image of God on the face of others, especially the weakest and those most in need.^[8] The antidote to this plague is the grace of realizing that we are sinners and able to say heartily: "We are unworthy servants. We have only done what was our duty" (*Lk* 17:10). Another disease is the "Martha complex", excessive busy-ness. It is found in those who immerse themselves in work and inevitably neglect "*the better part*": sitting at the feet of Jesus (cf. *Lk* 10:38-42). Jesus called his disciples to "*rest a while*" (cf. *Mk* 6:31) for a reason, because neglecting needed rest leads to stress and agitation. A time of rest, for those who have

completed their work, is necessary, obligatory and should be taken seriously: by spending time with one's family and respecting holidays as moments of spiritual and physical recharging. We need to learn from Qohelet that "for everything there is a season" (3:1-15). ... The disease of gossiping, grumbling and back-biting. I have already spoken many times about this disease, but never enough. It is a grave illness which begins simply, perhaps even in small talk, and takes over a person, making him become a "sower of weeds" (like Satan) and in many cases, a cold-blooded killer of the good name of our colleagues and confrères. It is the disease of cowardly persons who lack the courage to speak out directly, but instead speak behind other people's backs. Saint Paul admonishes us to *do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent*" (Phil 2:14-15). Brothers, let us be on our guard against the terrorism of gossip!

Reflection:

We can see how dangerous these "diseases" are when we see that we are in the womb of Mary. When we introduce diseases into the womb, we make that environment toxic and it poisons ourselves as well as others. This damages our own growth as well as the growth of others and if it becomes serious enough, it causes a kind of spiritual abortion. Boasting about our importance can be quickly corrected by remembering that we are infants in the womb—we are not that impressive, we are completely dependent on Mary and we are certainly no more important than all our twins who share the womb with us. Likewise, the idolatry of activism is ridiculous when we realize how limited we are in the womb of Mary. And the toxicity of gossip raises the pH in the womb to dangerous levels and stunts our growth. We can feel the poison of negativity in the amniotic fluid where we are swimming.

Am I impressed with myself? Do I think I am immortal or irreplaceable? Do I work too much, causing me to neglect prayer and proper rest? Do I engage in the terrorism of gossip and make comments that destroy the reputation of others? Let us become little and accept our beloved insignificance in the womb of Mary—our lives do not matter much to the world, but they matter tremendously to our Mother!

Prayer:

Ave Maris Stella or Sub Turm Praesidium
Dominican Litany of Humility
Litany of the Holy Spirit
Prayer of Entrustment to the Womb of Mary

Day 19 - Called to holiness

A Reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Thessalonians:

Finally, brethren, we beg and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you learned from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, you do so more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification:† that you abstain from immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like heathens who do not know God; that no man transgress, and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we solemnly forewarned you. For God has not called us for uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you. (1Thess 4:1-8)

From Pope Saint John Paul II's Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*:

It is necessary ... to rediscover the full practical significance of Chapter 5 of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, dedicated to the "universal call to holiness". The Council Fathers laid such stress on this point, not just to embellish ecclesiology with a kind of spiritual veneer, but to make the call to holiness an intrinsic and essential aspect of their teaching on the Church. The rediscovery of the Church as "mystery", or as a people "gathered together by the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit", was bound to bring with it a rediscovery of the Church's "holiness", understood in the basic sense of belonging to him who is in essence the Holy One, the "thrice Holy" (cf. *Is* 6:3). To profess the Church as holy means to point to her as *the Bride of Christ*, for whom he gave himself precisely in order to make her holy (cf. *Eph* 5:25-26). This as it were objective gift of holiness is offered to all the baptized. But the gift in turn becomes a task, which must shape the whole of Christian life: "This is the will of God, your sanctification" (*1 Th* 4:3). It is a duty which concerns not only certain Christians: "All the Christian faithful, of whatever state or rank, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity".

...[S]ince Baptism is a true entry into the holiness of God through incorporation into Christ and the indwelling of his Spirit, it would be a contradiction to settle for a life of mediocrity, marked by a minimalist ethic and a shallow religiosity. ...

As the Council itself explained, this ideal of perfection must not be misunderstood as if it involved some kind of extraordinary existence, possible only for a few "uncommon heroes" of holiness. The ways of holiness are many, according to the vocation of each individual. I thank the Lord that in these years he has enabled me to beatify and canonize a large number of Christians, and among them many lay people who attained holiness in the most ordinary circumstances of life. The time has come to re-propose wholeheartedly to everyone this high standard of ordinary Christian living: the whole life of the Christian community and of Christian families must lead in this direction. It is also clear however that the paths to holiness are personal and call for a genuine "training in holiness", adapted to people's needs. ... This training in holiness calls for a Christian life distinguished above all in the art of prayer. (Novo Millennio Ineunte #30-32)

Reflection:

"Baptism is a true entry into the holiness of God," and Baptism is also an immersion into the womb of Mary. All who are in her womb are given all they need to become holy. Holiness involves letting ourselves be formed into the likeness of Christ in the womb of Mary, doing everything with her. The high standard of ordinary Christian living can often seem daunting, but it becomes so much easier when we realize that it simply means remaining with our Mother and letting her form us in holiness into her Son.

[Prayer:](#)

Ave Maris Stella or Sub Turm Praesidium
Dominican Litany of Humility
Litany of the Holy Spirit
Prayer of Entrustment to the Womb of Mary

Knowledge of Mary - Introduction to the Week

From Pope Saint John Paul II's Apostolic *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* #14:

Christ is the supreme Teacher, the revealer and the one revealed. It is not just a question of learning what he taught but of “*learning him*”. In this regard could we have any better teacher than Mary? From the divine standpoint, the Spirit is the interior teacher who leads us to the full truth of Christ (cf. *Jn* 14:26; 15:26; 16:13). But among creatures no one knows Christ better than Mary; no one can introduce us to a profound knowledge of his mystery better than his Mother. The first of the “signs” worked by Jesus – the changing of water into wine at the marriage in Cana – clearly presents Mary in the guise of a teacher, as she urges the servants to do what Jesus commands (cf. *Jn* 2:5). We can imagine that she would have done likewise for the disciples after Jesus' Ascension, when she joined them in awaiting the Holy Spirit and supported them in their first mission. Contemplating the scenes of the Rosary in union with Mary is a means of learning from her to “read” Christ, to discover his secrets and to understand his message. This school of Mary is all the more effective if we consider that she teaches by obtaining for us in abundance the gifts of the Holy Spirit, even as she offers us the incomparable example of her own “pilgrimage of faith”. As we contemplate each mystery of her Son's life, she invites us to do as she did at the Annunciation: to ask humbly the questions which open us to the light, in order to end with the obedience of faith: “Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to your word” (*Lk* 1:38).

Reflection:

As we set out on this next week of preparation, we shift our gaze to Mary, our Mother and Teacher and we learn from her, particularly by meditating with her and in her on the mysteries of the Rosary. Praying the Rosary is an essential part of this week of preparation and we will find it is an essential part of living in the womb of Mary, where we are formed into the full maturity of Christ. Likewise, as Pope Saint John Paul II teaches us, we need the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Gifts of the Holy Spirit are essentially the qualities of Christ (His Wisdom, His Knowledge, His Fortitude, etc.) and they are woven into the heart and soul of the one who is formed in Mary's womb. So we continue to ask the Holy Spirit each day for His sevenfold gift as He will allow Him to shape us into Christ in the womb of Mary.

Prayers - Knowledge of Mary

Litany of Loretto

Lord, have mercy on us. Christ, 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 Ghost, have mercy on us.
Holy Trinity, one God, have mercy on us.
Holy Mary, Pray for us.
Holy Mother of God, 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 Savior, Pray for us.
 Mother of the Church, 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 assumed into heaven, Pray for us.
 Queen of the most holy Rosary, Pray for us.
 Queen of families, Pray for us.
 Queen of peace, Pray for us.
 Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, Spare us, O Lord.
 Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, Graciously hear us, O Lord.
 Lamb of God, Who takest 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, O Lord God, we beseech Thee, that we Thy servants may rejoice in continual health of mind and body; and through the glorious intercession of Blessed Mary ever Virgin, be freed from present sorrow and enjoy eternal gladness. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Veni Sancte Spiritus

(Roman Missal translation)

Holy Spirit, Lord of light,
from the clear celestial height
thy pure beaming radiance give.

Come, thou Father of the poor,
come with treasures which endure;
come, thou light of all that live!

Thou, of all consolers best, thou,
the soul's delighted guest,
dost refreshing peace bestow;

Thou in toil art comfort sweet;
pleasant coolness in the heat;
solace in the midst of woe.

Light immortal, light divine,
visit thou these hearts of thine,
and our inmost being fill:

If thou take thy grace away,
nothing pure in man will stay;
all his good is turned to ill.

Heal our wounds, our strength renew;
on our dryness pour thy dew;
wash the stains of guilt away:

Bend the stubborn heart and will;
melt the frozen, warm the chill;
guide the steps that go astray.

Thou, on us who evermore
thee confess and thee adore,
with thy sevenfold gifts descend:

Give us comfort when we die;
give us life with thee on high;
give us joys that never end. Amen.

Litany of the Holy Spirit

Litany of the Holy Spirit

Lord, have mercy on us, Christ have mercy on us.

Lord, have mercy on us. Father all powerful, have mercy on us.

Jesus, Eternal Son of the Father, Redeemer of the world, Save us.

Spirit of the Father and the Son, boundless Life of both, Sanctify us.

Holy Trinity, Hear us.

Holy Spirit, Who proceedest from the Father and the Son, Enter our hearts.

Holy Spirit, Who art equal to the Father and the Son, Enter our hearts.

Promise of God the Father, have mercy on us.
Ray of heavenly light, have mercy on us.
Author of all good, have mercy on us.
Source of heavenly water, have mercy on us.
Consuming Fire, have mercy on us.
Ardent Charity, have mercy on us.
Spiritual Unction, have mercy on us.
Spirit of love and truth, have mercy on us.
Spirit of wisdom and understanding, have mercy on us.
Spirit of counsel and fortitude, have mercy on us.
Spirit of knowledge and piety, have mercy on us.
Spirit of the fear of the Lord, have mercy on us.
Spirit of grace and prayer, have mercy on us.
Spirit of peace and meekness, have mercy on us.
Spirit of modesty and innocence, have mercy on us.
Holy Spirit, the Comforter, have mercy on us.
Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier, have mercy on us.
Holy Spirit, Who governs the Church, have mercy on us.
Gift of God the Most High, have mercy on us.
Spirit Who fills the universe, have mercy on us.
Spirit of the adoption of the children of God, have mercy on us.
Holy Spirit, Inspire us with horror of sin.
Holy Spirit, Come and renew the face of the earth.
Holy Spirit, Shed Your Light into our souls.
Holy Spirit, Engrave Your law in our hearts.
Holy Spirit, In flame us with the flame of Your love.
Holy Spirit, Open to us the treasures of Your graces.
Holy Spirit, Teach us to pray well.
Holy Spirit, Enlighten us with Your heavenly inspirations.
Holy Spirit, Lead us in the way of salvation.
Holy Spirit, Grant us the only necessary knowledge.
Holy Spirit, Inspire in us the practice of good.
Holy Spirit, Grant us the merits of all virtues.
Holy Spirit, Make us persevere in justice.
Holy Spirit, Be our everlasting reward.
Lamb of God, You take away the sins of the world, Send us Your Holy Spirit.
Lamb of God, You take away the sins of the world, Pour down into our souls the gifts of the Holy Spirit.
Lamb of God, You take away the sins of the world, Grant us the Spirit of wisdom and piety.

Come, Holy Spirit! Fill the hearts of Your faithful, And enkindle in them the fire of Your love.

Let us pray:

Grant, O merciful Father, that Your Divine Spirit may enlighten, inflame and purify us, that He may penetrate us with His heavenly dew and make us fruitful in good works, through Our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son, Who lives and reigns with You in the unity of the same Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer of Entrustment to the Womb of Mary

Almighty God, Heavenly Father,
who have placed me, by Baptism, in the womb of the Virgin Mary
beneath her Immaculate Heart
to be together with your Son
and ever more conformed to Him by the power of the Holy Spirit,
grant that I may whole-heartedly embrace my dependence on you
as I place all my trust in my Mother Mary.
May I never scorn my weakness which your Son also assumed,
but may I always be grateful to be little and helpless,
knowing that without you I can do nothing.
Beneath the veil of Saint Joseph her spouse,
may I find in her a refuge against every danger
and in her womb a hiding place invisible to the ancient foe.
May I know that I am loved perfectly like Jesus by Joseph and Mary,
those parents, who, receiving everything from You,
will always provide for all of my needs.
Through the same Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Day 20 - The Rosary helps consecrate us to Mary

A Reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Galatians:

For a good purpose it is always good to be made much of, and not only when I am present with you. My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you! (Gal 4:18-19)

From Pope Saint John Paul II's Apostolic Letter on the Rosary (*Rosarium Virginis Mariae* #15):

Christian spirituality is distinguished by the disciple's commitment to become conformed ever more fully to his Master (cf. *Rom* 8:29; *Phil* 3:10,12). The outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Baptism grafts the believer like a branch onto the vine which is Christ (cf. *Jn* 15:5) and makes him a member of Christ's mystical Body (cf. *1Cor* 12:12; *Rom* 12:5). This initial unity, however, calls for a growing assimilation which will increasingly shape the conduct of the disciple in accordance with the "mind" of Christ: "Have this mind among yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus" (*Phil* 2:5). In the words of the Apostle, we are called "to put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (cf. *Rom* 13:14; *Gal* 3:27).

In the spiritual journey of the Rosary, based on the constant contemplation – in Mary's company – of the face of Christ, this demanding ideal of being conformed to him is pursued through an association which could be described in terms of friendship. We are thereby enabled to enter naturally into Christ's life and as it were to share his deepest feelings. In this regard Blessed Bartolo Longo has written: "Just as two friends, frequently in each other's company, tend to develop similar habits, so too, by holding familiar converse with Jesus and the Blessed Virgin, by meditating on the mysteries of the Rosary and by living the same life in Holy Communion,

we can become, to the extent of our lowliness, similar to them and can learn from these supreme models a life of humility, poverty, hiddenness, patience and perfection" (*I Quindici Sabati del Santissimo Rosario*, 27th ed., Pompei, 1916, 27.)

In this process of being conformed to Christ in the Rosary, we entrust ourselves in a special way to the maternal care of the Blessed Virgin. She who is both the Mother of Christ and a member of the Church, indeed her "pre-eminent and altogether singular member", (*Lumen Gentium* #53) is at the same time the "Mother of the Church". As such, she continually brings to birth children for the mystical Body of her Son. She does so through her intercession, imploring upon them the inexhaustible outpouring of the Spirit. Mary is *the perfect icon of the motherhood of the Church*. The Rosary mystically transports us to Mary's side as she is busy watching over the human growth of Christ in the home of Nazareth. This enables her to train us and to mold us with the same care, until Christ is "fully formed" in us (cf. *Gal* 4:19). This role of Mary, totally grounded in that of Christ and radically subordinated to it, "in no way obscures or diminishes the unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power" (*Lumen Gentium* #60) This is the luminous principle expressed by the Second Vatican Council which I have so powerfully experienced in my own life and have made the basis of my episcopal motto: *Totus Tuus*. (Cf. First Radio Address *Urbi et Orbi* (17 October 1978): AAS 70 (1978), 927) The motto is of course inspired by the teaching of Saint Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort, who explained in the following words Mary's role in the process of our configuration to Christ: "*Our entire perfection consists in being conformed, united and consecrated to Jesus Christ*. Hence the most perfect of all devotions is undoubtedly that which conforms, unites and consecrates us most perfectly to Jesus Christ. Now, since Mary is of all creatures the one most conformed to Jesus Christ, it follows that among all devotions that which most consecrates and conforms a soul to our Lord is devotion to Mary, his Holy Mother, and that the more a soul is consecrated to her the more will it be consecrated to Jesus Christ" (*Treatise on True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary*) Never as in the Rosary do the life of Jesus and that of Mary appear so deeply joined. Mary lives only in Christ and for Christ!

Reflection:

"The Rosary mystically transports us to Mary's side." Is there ever a time that we do not need to be at Mary's side? We are like babies in the womb who need constant support, nourishment, love and protection from our Mother. Is our life ever made better by being away from Mary? And as Pope Saint John Paul II taught us, when we are at Mary's side she will always train us and mold us until Christ is fully formed in us. Even as we simply hold the beads of the Rosary, we can hold Mary's hand. By contemplating Christ with Mary as we pray the Rosary, "we are thereby enabled to enter naturally into Christ's life and as it were to share his deepest feelings." Let us enter into this adventure of discovery then, exploring the interior life of Christ through contemplating His Mysteries with Mary in the Rosary.

Prayer:

Litany of the Holy Spirit or Veni Sancte Spiritus
Rosary (or at least one decade) followed by the Litany of Loreto
Prayer of Entrustment to the Womb of Mary

Day 21 - Mary - abandoned to God becomes our Mother

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke:

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end." And Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no husband?" And the angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible." And Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her. (Luke 1:26-38)

From Pope Benedict XVI's homily for the Immaculate Conception, Dec 8, 2005:

This is something we should indeed learn on the day of the Immaculate Conception: the person who abandons himself totally in God's hands does not become God's puppet, a boring "yes man"; he does not lose his freedom. Only the person who entrusts himself totally to God finds true freedom, the great, creative immensity of the freedom of good.

The person who turns to God does not become smaller but greater, for through God and with God he becomes great, he becomes divine, he becomes truly himself. The person who puts himself in God's hands does not distance himself from others, withdrawing into his private salvation; on the contrary, it is only then that his heart truly awakens and he becomes a sensitive, hence, benevolent and open person.

The closer a person is to God, the closer he is to people. We see this in Mary. The fact that she is totally with God is the reason why she is so close to human beings.

For this reason she can be the Mother of every consolation and every help, a Mother whom anyone can dare to address in any kind of need in weakness and in sin, for she has understanding for everything and is for everyone the open power of creative goodness. Mary thus stands before us as a sign of comfort, encouragement and hope. She turns to us, saying: "Have the courage to dare with God! Try it! Do not be afraid of him! Have the courage to risk with faith! Have the courage to risk with goodness! Have the courage to risk with a pure heart! Commit yourselves to God, then you will see that it is precisely by doing so that your life will become broad and light, not boring but filled with infinite surprises, for God's infinite goodness is never depleted!"

...[L]et us thank the Lord for the great sign of his goodness which he has given us in Mary, his Mother and the Mother of the Church. Let us pray to him to put Mary on our path like a light that also helps us to become a light and to carry this light into the nights of history. Amen.

Reflection:

Pope Benedict XVI encourages us that by drawing closer to God we are not diminished by our dependence but rather strengthened, sanctified and even divinized. "The person who turns to God does not become smaller but greater, for through God and with God he becomes great, he becomes divine, he becomes truly himself." When we are in the womb of Mary with Jesus, people can only see our beautiful pregnant Mother and they know that inside her is her divine Son. In other words, when they look at us, they see her and imagine Him. It is a great risk to

remain so little in her womb—with faith, with goodness, with a pure heart. It is a risk that opens us up to the adventure of infinite surprises. We find ourselves carried by Mary into completely new places and far beyond our own capacity. We develop her sensitivities and her charity in our relationships with others.

Prayer:

Litany of the Holy Spirit or Veni Sancte Spiritus
Rosary (or at least one decade) followed by the Litany of Loreto
Prayer of Entrustment to the Womb of Mary

Day 22 - The weak are formed into Christ

A Reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians:

And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; so that we may no longer be children, tossed back and forth and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love. (Eph 4:11-16)

St Louis de Montfort wrote in *The Secret of Mary*:

Mary has received from God a special dominion over souls, in order to nourish them and to make them grow up in God. Saint Augustine even says, that all the predestinate are in the womb of Mary, and that they are not born, until the good Mother brings them forth into life eternal. Consequently, as the child draws all its nourishment from its mother, who gives it to it in proportion to its weakness, so in like manner do the predestinate draw all their spiritual nourishment and all their strength from Mary. ...

Mary is called by Saint Augustine, and indeed is the living mould of God, *forma Dei*, that is to say, it is in her alone, that the God-Man was naturally formed without losing any feature, so to speak, of His Godhead; and it is also in her alone that man can be properly, and in a life-like way, formed into God, so far as human nature is capable of this by the grace of Jesus Christ. Now, a sculptor may make a statue or likeness after nature in two ways: 1. out of some hard and shapeless material, by making use of his skill, his strength, his knowledge, and good instruments; 2. he may cast it in a mould. The first manner is long and difficult, and subject to many accidents: it often happens that a mere blow of the hammer or chisel, awkwardly given, is enough to spoil the whole work. The second manner is quick, easy, and gentle, without trouble or expense, provided the mould be perfect, and a good natural likeness, and the material used offer no resistance to the hand.

Mary is the great mould of God, made by the Holy Ghost, in order to form a God-Man by the Hypostatic Union, and a Man-God by grace. In this mould, no feature of the Godhead is wanting; whoever is cast in it, and allows himself to be freely handled, receives therein all the

features of Jesus Christ, who is True God. And this is done in a gentle manner, and in proportion to his human weakness, without much agony or labour; in a sure manner, without fear of illusion, for the devil has never had, and never will have, access to Mary; and lastly, in a holy and spotless manner, without the shadow of the least stain of sin. Oh! what a difference there is between a soul formed in Jesus Christ by the ordinary ways, that is to say, by trusting, like the sculptor, to mere natural skill and ingenuity, and a soul thoroughly tractable, really detached, and well molten, which, without in any way leaning upon itself, suffers itself to be cast in Mary, and to be handled by the Holy Ghost! How many stains, how many defects, how much darkness, how many illusions, how much of what is merely natural, and human, is there in the first soul; and how pure, how divine, and like to Jesus Christ, is the second!

Reflection:

As the Fathers of the Church affirmed, God became man that man might become God. This is already an unbelievable gift, but we might be suspicious that this only applies to some men and women, perhaps only to the strong, to those who are nearly saints already. Our Catholic Christian tradition denounces that deception, however, and affirms that Christ came so that all might be saved and that all might grow up into Christ. Saint Louis de Montfort elaborates on this sound doctrine and encourages us to see that weakness makes it even easier for us, because we are supernaturally drawn to the safest place, the womb of Mary. Furthermore, that womb is the most perfect place to be formed into Christ, because that is precisely the place that Christ was formed. When we feel our weakness, our littleness, our poverty and we are tempted to give up or get discouraged, we can find refuge and consolation in the womb of Mary. Then we can remember what Saint Louis teaches us, that that is the best place to be formed perfectly into saints, into Christ Himself.

Prayer:

Litany of the Holy Spirit or Veni Sancte Spiritus
Rosary (or at least one decade) followed by the Litany of Loreto
Prayer of Entrustment to the Womb of Mary

Day 23 - The Holy Name of Mary

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke:

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. (Luke 1:26-27)

From a homily by Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, Abbot and Doctor:

“And the Virgin's name was Mary.” Let us speak a little about this name, which is said to mean “star of the sea,” and which so well befits the Virgin Mother. Rightly is she likened to a star. As a star emits a ray without being dimmed, so the Virgin brought forth her Son without receiving any injury. The ray takes naught from the brightness of the star, nor the Son from His Mother's virginal integrity. This is the noble star risen out of Jacob, whose ray illumines the whole world, whose splendor shines in the heavens, penetrates the abyss, and, traversing the whole earth, gives warmth rather to souls than to bodies, cherishing virtues, withering vices. Mary is that bright and incomparable star, whom we need to see raised above this vast sea, shining by her merits, and giving us light by her example.

All of you, who see yourselves amid the tides of the world, tossed by storms and tempests rather than walking on the land, do not turn your eyes away from this shining star, unless you want to be overwhelmed by the hurricane. If temptation storms, or you fall upon the rocks of tribulation, look to the star: Call upon Mary! If you are tossed by the waves of pride or ambition, detraction or envy, look to the star, call upon Mary. If anger or avarice or the desires of the flesh dash against the ship of your soul, turn your eyes to Mary. If troubled by the enormity of your crimes, ashamed of your guilty conscience, terrified by dread of the judgment, you begin to sink into the gulf of sadness or the abyss of despair, think of Mary. In dangers, in anguish, in doubt, think of Mary, call upon Mary. Let her name be ever on your lips, ever in your heart; and the better to obtain the help of her prayers, imitate the example of her life: Following her, you will not stray; invoking her, you will not despair; thinking of her, you will not wander; upheld by her, you will not fall; shielded by her, you will not fear; guided by her, you will not grow weary; favored by her, you will reach the goal. And so you will experience in yourself how good is that saying: "And the Virgin's name was Mary."

Reflection:

The first word many children speak is the name of their mother. As Saint Bernard teaches us, this is the word we must practice most while we are in the womb of Mary. It is in speaking her name that we will remain her little children, always crying out to our Mama. We need to practice saying her Name and calling on her in our best times and in our worst times. When things go well, we know we have done everything in her, from her womb. When things go poorly, we know how much help we need and we call on her to soothe our guilty conscience. Let us think of those times we are most tempted to despair, most prone to wander, most in danger of going astray, most lost, fearful or weary and practice saying her Name, the Name of Mary.

Prayer:

Litany of the Holy Spirit or *Veni Sancte Spiritus*
Rosary (or at least one decade) followed by the Litany of Loreto
Prayer of Entrustment to the Womb of Mary

Day 24 - Mary and the Church

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to John:

[S]tanding by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home. After this Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfil the Scripture), "I thirst." (John 19:25-28)

From Pope Francis's Apostolic Exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel (Evangelii Gaudium #285-286)*:

On the cross, when Jesus endured in his own flesh the dramatic encounter of the sin of the world and God's mercy, he could feel at his feet the consoling presence of his mother and his friend. At that crucial moment, before fully accomplishing the work which his Father had entrusted to him, Jesus said to Mary: "Woman, here is your son". Then he said to his beloved friend: "Here is your mother" (Jn 19:26-27). These words of the dying Jesus are not chiefly the

expression of his devotion and concern for his mother; rather, they are a revelatory formula which manifests the mystery of a special saving mission. Jesus left us his mother to be our mother. Only after doing so did Jesus know that “all was now finished” (*Jn 19:28*). At the foot of the cross, at the supreme hour of the new creation, Christ led us to Mary. He brought us to her because he did not want us to journey without a mother, and our people read in this maternal image all the mysteries of the Gospel. The Lord did not want to leave the Church without this icon of womanhood. Mary, who brought him into the world with great faith, also accompanies “the rest of her offspring, those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus” (*Rev 12:17*). The close connection between Mary, the Church and each member of the faithful, based on the fact that each in his or her own way brings forth Christ, has been beautifully expressed by Blessed Isaac of Stella: “In the inspired Scriptures, what is said in a universal sense of the virgin mother, the Church, is understood in an individual sense of the Virgin Mary... In a way, every Christian is also believed to be a bride of God’s word, a mother of Christ, his daughter and sister, at once virginal and fruitful... Christ dwelt for nine months in the tabernacle of Mary’s womb. He dwells until the end of the ages in the tabernacle of the Church’s faith. He will dwell forever in the knowledge and love of each faithful soul”. (Isaac of Stella, *Sermo 51*: PL 194, 1863, 1865.)

Mary was able to turn a stable into a home for Jesus, with poor swaddling clothes and an abundance of love. She is the handmaid of the Father who sings his praises. She is the friend who is ever concerned that wine not be lacking in our lives. She is the woman whose heart was pierced by a sword and who understands all our pain.... As she did with Juan Diego, Mary offers [us] maternal comfort and love, and whispers in [our] ear: “Let your heart not be troubled... Am I not here, who am your Mother?” (*Nican Mopohua*, 118-119.)

Reflection:

After Jesus gave us His Mother to be our Mother, the Gospel says that He knew all was finished. Mary is able to turn the stable of our hearts into a home for Jesus, no matter how poor we feel we are. He knew that we needed a Mother to make the journey of Christian faith. In Mary we have a Mother and in the Church we have Mother. As Blessed Isaac of Stella taught us, what we can say about Mary, we can say about the Church. In one of the Church’s sacramentals of healing, the priest prays for the one who “ad Ecclesiae sinum recurrit,” (seeks refuge in the womb of the Church). The womb of Mary is the womb of the Church and that is the place of true liberation and healing. Through Marian consecration we come to see our relationship with the Church as being in the womb of our Mother and we discover the consolation and transformation that come from being so rooted in grace and surrounded by prayer.

Prayer:

Litany of the Holy Spirit or Veni Sancte Spiritus
Rosary (or at least one decade) followed by the Litany of Loreto
Prayer of Entrustment to the Womb of Mary

Day 25 - Mary, our fiercely compassionate Mother

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke:

So he told them this parable: “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes

home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.' Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. (Luke 15:3-7)

From Pope Benedict XVI's homily for the Immaculate Conception, December 8, 2005:

In her, God has impressed his own image, the image of the One who follows the lost sheep even up into the mountains and among the briars and thornbushes of the sins of this world, letting himself be spiked by the crown of thorns of these sins in order to take the sheep on his shoulders and bring it home.

As a merciful Mother, Mary is the anticipated figure and everlasting portrait of the Son. Thus, we see that the image of the Sorrowful Virgin, of the Mother who shares her suffering and her love, is also a true image of the Immaculate Conception. Her heart was enlarged by being and feeling together with God. In her, God's goodness came very close to us.

Reflection:

We see how fiercely Mary protects her children. We think of the saintly mothers throughout history, who, like Mary, would lay down their lives to protect their babies in the womb. Saint Gianna Beretta Molla and Chiara Corbella Petrillo and so many other Mary-like mothers laid down their lives to protect the babies in their wombs. Our Mother Mary loves us even more than that. When we speak of being in the womb of Mary, we know there is no pain or threat we face that she does not share with us. We know that her fiercely maternal heart fights vigorously to protect us. We know that she will never abandon us, no matter what the cost to her might be.

[Prayer:](#)

Litany of the Holy Spirit or Veni Sancte Spiritus
Rosary (or at least one decade) followed by the Litany of Loreto
Prayer of Entrustment to the Womb of Mary

Day 26 - Mary, our refuge

A Reading from the Book of Revelation:

And a great sign appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; she was with child and she cried out in her pangs of birth, in anguish for delivery. And another sign appeared in heaven; behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems upon his heads. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, that he might devour her child when she brought it forth; she brought forth a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which to be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days. (Rev 12:1-6)

From Pope Francis's Homily for a Mass at St Mary Major Basilica for the Translation of the Miraculous Image of Mary, *Salus Populi Romani*:

The Christian people have understood, from the very beginning, that in difficulties and trials we need to turn to our Mother, as the most ancient Marian hymn has it: Beneath your

protection, we seek refuge, O Holy Mother of God; do not despise our petitions in our necessities, but deliver us always from all dangers, O Glorious and Blessed Virgin. Amen. We seek refuge. Our fathers in faith taught that in turbulent moments we should gather under the mantle of the Holy Mother of God. At one time those who were persecuted and in need sought refuge with high-ranking noble women: when their cloak, regarded as inviolable, was held out as a sign of welcoming, protection had been granted. So it is for us with regard to Our Lady, the highest woman of the human race. Her mantle is always open to receive us and gather us. The Christian East reminds us of this, where many celebrate the Protection of the Mother of God, who in a beautiful icon is depicted with her mantle sheltering her sons and daughters and covering the whole world. Monks of old recommended, in times of trial, that we take refuge beneath the mantle of the Holy Mother of God: calling upon her as "Holy Mother of God" was already a guarantee of protection and help, this prayer over and again: "Holy Mother of God", "Holy Mother of God" ... Just like this.

This wisdom, that comes to us from far off, helps us: the Mother protects the faith, safeguards relationships, saves those in storms and preserves them from evil. Where our Mother is at home, the devil does not enter in. Where our Mother is at home, the devil does not enter in. Where our Mother is present, turmoil does not prevail, fear does not conquer. Which of us does not need this, which of us is not sometimes distressed or anxious? How often our heart is a stormy sea, where the waves of our problems pile up and the winds of our troubles do not stop blowing! Mary is our secure ark in the midst of the flood. It will not be ideas or technology that will give us comfort or hope, but our Mother's face, her hands that caress our life, her mantle that gives us shelter. Let us learn how to find refuge, going each day to our Mother.

Reflection:

Mary's mantle is another image for her womb. We are invited to stay under the mantle of Mary, in the womb of Mary. "Where our Mother is at home, the devil does not enter in...fear does not conquer." Our Mother is always "at home" when we are in her womb. She wants us not only to find refuge there each day, but as constantly as a baby finds refuge in its mother's womb. The key is to spiritually press this against those places of anxiety and distress in our hearts. Remember the last time you were distressed and place it in our Lady's womb. Remember the things that make you anxious and place them in our Mother's womb. Let your anxious parts feel her firm support, secure refuge, tender caresses and absolutely safety from any spiritual harm.

Prayer:

Sub tuum praesidium: Beneath your protection, we seek refuge, O Holy Mother of God; despise not our petitions in our necessities, but deliver us always from all dangers, O Glorious and Blessed Virgin. Amen.

Litany of the Holy Spirit or Veni Sancte Spiritus

Rosary (or at least a decade) followed by the Litany of Loreto

Prayer of Entrustment to the Womb of Mary

Week of Knowledge of Jesus Christ - Introduction

The culmination of Marian consecration according to the model of Saint Louis de Montfort is really consecration to Jesus Christ. It is a total consecration to Jesus Christ through Mary. For this reason our journey of preparation concludes with a week focused on Jesus Christ. He is, after all the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. He is our Savior and Lord. Saint Louis de Montfort simply intuited that a sweet and easy path to total consecration to Jesus Christ would be through Mary. As we have meditated, that happens particularly through the womb of Mary. That is where the God-man was formed and so that is where the “man-gods” can be formed. Jesus Christ is God by nature, but He makes us sharers in His divinity, i.e. “God” by grace. That process of divinization is gradual and the mold is the womb of Mary. So we enter into the womb of Mary not simply out of love for Mary, but in order to be transformed into Christ her Son.

As we have focused on throughout this preparation, a major obstacle for us is the concupiscence of original sin, which fundamentally drives us to become god without God. We seek control and self-sufficiency. We want to depend on God only insofar as it moves us to a point that we no longer need to depend on Him. We do the same with others. We are resistant to entering into truly interdependent relationships that are committed and eternal. Because of the wounds of broken trust, we always keep escape routes open in case things do not work out. Total consecration to Jesus Christ is a decision to close the escape routes in our relationship with God. It is a total consecration, involving our whole mind, heart, body and soul. It involves this moment and we promise all the moments in the future as well, in time and in eternity. We make this total consecration through Mary and as we place ourselves in her womb, we let ourselves develop the qualities of Jesus Christ her Son. We need to develop especially the counter-cultural qualities that reverse the pattern of original sin. These are qualities of trust and dependency on God. We develop this trust through prayer and we develop it also through our interdependent relationships with others. That too is part of the life of Jesus. He placed in His life in the hands of others, starting with Mary and Joseph and extending to His Apostles and disciples. He placed His life so radically in their hands that He gave them power to take His life away, but He never took His trust and love away.

In this Week of Knowledge of Jesus Christ, we focus on the way that Jesus became poor, little, weak and dependent. We focus on His powerlessness in His earthly life and His dependency on others and we focus on His ongoing powerlessness in the Eucharist and the dependency and trust that He still gives to us in our response to His Eucharistic Presence. We also focus on the illumination He brings us in the Resurrection and ultimately the way He made Himself subject to death. After each day’s meditation we pray a Litany of Powerlessness, focusing on the way that Jesus who always had the power of God truly emptied Himself and subjected Himself to our human limitations, becoming powerless like us. We pray that we might lovingly embrace that powerlessness that He embraced and find all our power in our trust in God. We pray also a litany of Jesus living in the womb of Mary, deepening our reflection on how He “consecrated” Himself to Mary in this way. Thirdly, we meditate on the humility of Jesus in Eucharistic Presence through the words of Saint Thomas Aquinas. If it is possible, it would be an excellent final preparation to attend Mass each day this week and offer that Prayer of Saint Thomas after Communion. And lastly we continue our prayer of Entrustment to the Womb of Mary.

Prayers - Knowledge of Jesus Christ

Litany of Powerlessness

A proud and self-reliant man rightly fears to undertake anything, but a humble man becomes all the braver as he realizes his own powerlessness; all the bolder as he sees his own weakness, for all his confidence is in God, who delights to reveal his almighty power in our infirmity and his mercy in our misery. ~St. Francis de Sales

Through your choosing to do nothing on your own, but only what you see your Father doing,
(Jn 5:19)

Jesus, Lord of Lords, save us.

Through your choice to become a tiny embryo enclosed in the womb of your mother Mary
unable to even breathe on your own,
Jesus, Creator of the Universe, save us.

By your submission to the limitations of time when you exist in eternity
Jesus, the Alpha and Omega, save us.

Through your choice to become the lost sheep sought out by the shepherds who "left the 99" on
the night of your birth,
Jesus, the Good Shepherd, save us.

Through your need to be nourished at your Mother's breast when you are "a table laden with
abundance"
Jesus, Eucharistic Feast, save us.

Through your defencelessness during the flight into Egypt, when you had to rely on Joseph's
protection,
Jesus, our Deliverer, save us.

By the dependence of your childhood in the home of Mary and Joseph, when you needed their
time, attention and love,
Jesus, our Provider, save us.

By your obedience to Mary and Joseph when you have dominion over the universe,
Jesus, Ruler of All Nations, save us.

Through your refusal to turn "stones into bread" when you were famished after 40 days in the
desert, though you later multiplied the loaves for your hungry disciples,
Jesus, Bread of Life, save us.

Through your desperate request to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane to save you from
the sufferings that you anticipated,
Jesus, our Savior, save us.

For surrendering yourself to the judgment of Pontius Pilate,
Jesus, our Just Judge, save us.

Through your choice to be identified as a criminal and a blasphemer, causing the high priest to

tear his robe,
Jesus, our Great High Priest, save us.

Through your silence, “opening not your mouth”(Is 53:7) in defense, as you were accused unjustly,
Jesus, The Word , save us.

By not resisting a crown of thorns, you who crown us with glory and honor (Ps 8:5)
Jesus, King of Kings, save us.

Through the weakness you experienced on the way of the cross causing you, through whose strength we can do all things (Phil 4:13), to fall three times to the ground,
Jesus, Our Stronghold, save us.

Through your acceptance of Simon’s help on the Way of the Cross when you carry the whole world on your shoulders
Jesus, Strength of Pilgrims, save us.

Through surrendering yourself to the gibbet of the cross when you have exalted us with great power
Jesus, Enthroned on the Praises of Israel, save us.

Through your refusal to “save yourself” as the crowds jeered at you while you hung upon the cross, yet promising to “save us from the hands of our enemies” (Lk 1:74)
Jesus, Source of Eternal Salvation, save us.

Through your refusal to demand justice and your choice to forgive and make excuses for your friends and enemies who crucified you
Jesus, our Justice, save us.

Through the deep thirst you suffered as you cried out from the cross, when you had miraculously drawn water from a rock to quench the Israelites’ thirst in the desert.
Jesus, Source of Living Water, save us.

Through submitting yourself to the greatest abandonment possible, that of your true Father, yet never leaving the temple of our hearts and promising to be with us until the end of the age,
Jesus, Son of God, save us.

By your entering into our greatest moment of powerlessness: death, and allowing it, for a moment, to appear victorious
Jesus, Author of Life, save us.

Through your raising the only son of the widow of Nain, yet letting your dead body remain in the arms of your widowed mother,
Jesus, the Resurrection and the Life, save us.

Through your choice to remain imprisoned in tabernacles throughout the world, yet breaking our chains of sin and death
Jesus, our Freedom, save us.

Let us pray.

Jesus, our Savior and Redeemer,

even though you are all-powerful, you embraced our human powerlessness throughout your life on earth and you embrace it still in the Eucharist. You did nothing of your own will, but only that of your Father's. Help us, who are intrinsically powerless, to abandon our illusions of control and self-sufficiency, and give us the humility to relinquish our own wills and plans so that like you, Jesus, we will do nothing on our own, but only the Father's will, and by always asking your help, we may find true freedom and perfect power. Amen

Litany to Jesus Christ living in the womb of Mary

Jesus Christ, knit so wonderfully in the womb of Mary.

Have mercy on us.

Jesus, conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of Mary.

Have mercy on us.

Jesus, uniquely Man from the moment of conception in the womb of Mary,

Have mercy on us.

Jesus, present at Creation, created in the womb of Mary,

Have mercy on us.

Jesus, through Whom the world was made, formed in the womb of Mary,

Have mercy on us.

Jesus, Word made flesh, taking on a human body in the womb of Mary,

Have mercy on us.

Jesus, revealed by God the Father, concealed in the womb of Mary,

Have mercy on us.

Jesus, subject to human development in the womb of Mary,

Have mercy on us.

Jesus, Whose precious Blood first flowed through tiny arteries and veins in the womb of Mary,

Have mercy on us.

Jesus, hidden nine months in the womb of Mary,

Have mercy on us.

Jesus, Only begotten of the Father, assuming flesh in the womb of Mary,

Have mercy on us.

Jesus, begotten by God, nourished by the substance and blood of Thy Most Holy Mother in the womb of Mary,

Have mercy on us.

Jesus, leaping from eternity into time, in the womb of Mary,

Have mercy on us.

Jesus, revealing with His Father and the Holy Spirit all wisdom and knowledge to His Most Holy Mother, in the womb of Mary,

Have mercy on us.

Jesus, aware of His role as Redeemer in the womb of Mary,

Have mercy on us.

Jesus, Sanctifier of His Precursor from the womb of Mary,

Have mercy on us.

Jesus, Eternal Word, Divine Child, embraced by the Father, in the womb of Mary,

Have mercy on us.

Jesus, raising His Mother to the heights of sanctification, in the womb of Mary,

Have mercy on us.

Jesus, everlasting delight of Heaven, in the womb of Mary,

Have mercy on us.
 Jesus, manifesting His Incarnation to His Holy Mother, in the womb of Mary,
 Have mercy on us.
 Jesus, adored and contemplated by His Mother in the sanctuary of the womb of Mary,
 Have mercy on us.
 Jesus, before Whom the Angels prostrated themselves, in the womb of Mary,
 Have mercy on us.
 Jesus, in Whom the very Angels beheld the humanity of the Infant God and the union of the
 two natures of the Word in the virginal womb of Mary,
 Have mercy on us.
 Jesus, our Protector and Savior, asleep in the inviolable womb of Mary,
 Have mercy on us.
 Jesus, Whose Holy Limbs first budded in the womb of Mary,
 Have mercy on us.
 Jesus, Whose Sacred Heart first began beating in the womb of Mary,
 Have mercy on us.
 Jesus, Whose Godhead the world cannot contain, weighing only a few grams in the womb of
 Mary,
 Have mercy on us.
 Jesus, Whose Divine Immensity, once measuring only tenths of an inch in the womb of Mary
 Have mercy on us.
 Jesus, Whose Divine Grasp outreaches the universe, cradled in the womb of Mary,
 Have mercy on us.
 Jesus, Sacrificial Lamb, docile Infant in the womb of Mary,
 Have mercy on us.
 Jesus, Who was to suffer the agony and passion of death, accepting the human capacity for pain
 and grief, in the womb of Mary,
 Have mercy on us.
 Jesus, foretelling His Eucharist Presence, in the womb of Mary,
 Have mercy on us.

Jesus, Lamb of God, in the womb of Mary,
 Spare us, O Lord.
 Jesus, Holy Innocent in the womb of Mary,
 Graciously hear us, O Lord.
 Jesus, Son of God and Messiah in the womb of Mary,
 Have mercy on us, O Lord.

Prayer Before Communion by Saint Thomas Aquinas

Almighty and Eternal God, behold I come to the sacrament of Your only-begotten Son, our Lord
 Jesus Christ. As one sick I come to the Physician of life; unclean, to the Fountain of mercy; blind,
 to the Light of eternal splendor; poor and needy to the Lord of heaven and earth. Therefore, I
 beg of You, through Your infinite mercy and generosity, heal my weakness, wash my
 uncleanness, give light to my blindness, enrich my poverty, and clothe my nakedness. May I
 thus receive the Bread of Angels, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, with such reverence and
 humility, contrition and devotion, purity and faith, purpose and intention, as shall aid my
 soul's salvation.

Grant, I beg of You, that I may receive not only the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of our
 Lord, but also its full grace and power. Give me the grace, most merciful God, to receive the
 Body of your only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary, in such a manner that I

may deserve to be intimately united with His mystical Body and to be numbered among His members. Most loving Father, grant that I may behold for all eternity face to face Your beloved Son, whom now, on my pilgrimage, I am about to receive under the sacramental veil, who lives and reigns with You, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, world without end. Amen.

Day 27 - Jesus is little, near and real

From the Book of the Prophet of Isaiah:

Thus says the Lord:
Heaven is my throne
and the earth is my footstool;
what is the house which you would build for me,
and what is the place of my rest?
All these things my hand has made,
and so all these things are mine,
says the Lord.
But this is the man to whom I will look,
he that is humble and contrite in spirit,
and trembles at my word. (Is 66:1-2)

From Pope Francis's Homily in Czestochowa, July 28, 2016:

God saves us, then by making himself *little, near and real*. First God makes himself *little*. The Lord, who is "meek and humble of heart" (Mt 11:29), especially loves the little ones, to whom the kingdom of God is revealed (Mt 11:25); they are great in his eyes and he looks to them (cf. Is 66:2). He especially loves them because they are opposed to the "pride of life" that belongs to the world (cf. 1 Jn 2:16). The little ones speak his own language, that of the humble love that brings freedom. So he calls the simple and receptive to be his spokespersons; he entrusts to them the revelation of his name and the secrets of his heart. Our minds turn to so many sons and daughters of your own people, like the martyrs made the defenseless power of the Gospel shine forth, like those ordinary yet remarkable people who bore witness to the Lord's love amid great trials, and those meek and powerful heralds of mercy who were Saint John Paul II and Saint Faustina. Through these "channels" of his love, the Lord has granted priceless gifts to the whole Church and to all mankind. It is significant that this anniversary of the baptism of your people exactly coincides with the Jubilee of mercy.

Then too, God is *near*, his kingdom is at hand (cf. Mk 1:15). The Lord does not want to be feared like a powerful and aloof sovereign. He does not want to remain on his throne in heaven or in history books, but loves to come down to our everyday affairs, to walk with us. As we think of the gift of a millennium so filled with faith, we do well before all else to thank God for having walked with your people, having taken you by the hand, as a father takes the hand of his child, and accompanied you in so many situations. That is what we too, in the Church, are constantly called to do: to listen, to get involved and be neighbours, sharing in people's joys and struggles, so that the Gospel can spread every more consistently and fruitfully: radiating goodness through the transparency of our lives.

Finally, *God is real*. Today's readings make it clear that everything about God's way of acting is real and concrete. Divine wisdom "is like a master worker" and "plays" (cf. Prov 8:30). The Word becomes flesh, is born of a mother, is born under the law (cf. Gal4:4), has friends and goes

to a party. The eternal is communicated by spending time with people and in concrete situations. Your own history, shaped by the Gospel, the Cross and fidelity to the Church, has seen the contagious power of a genuine faith, passed down from family to family, from fathers to sons and above all from mothers and grandmothers, whom we need so much to thank. In particular, you have been able to touch with your hand the real and provident tenderness of the Mother of all, whom I have come here as a pilgrim to venerate and whom we have acclaimed in the Psalm as the “great pride of our nation” (*Jud15:9*).

Reflection:

“The little ones speak his own language...” and we can imagine how twin babies communicate in such a simple way in the womb or how a baby in the womb communicates so simply with his mother. The language of love is always simple—gestures of tenderness, embraces, a mother feeding her baby with her body, a mother holding her baby in her arms. This is the first language that Jesus spoke—a language of touch, of food, of kisses and embraces. And it is the last language that He and we speak in our last moments of life. Likewise, if we let ourselves be little, we can feel the nearness of Jesus who draws close to our weakness to bring the tender touch of the Father and the realness of Jesus who does not settle for ideas, but turns them into gestures of love. All this happens when we allow ourselves to be little and enfolded in the love of Mary’s womb.

Prayers:

Litany of the Powerlessness of Jesus
Litany of Christ Living in the Womb of Mary
Prayer of St Thomas Aquinas before Holy Communion
Prayer of Entrustment to the Womb of Mary

Day 28 - Christ became poor

A Reading from the Second Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians:

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. (2 Cor 8:9)

From Pope Francis Message for Lent 2014:

[Christ] does not reveal himself cloaked in worldly power and wealth but rather in weakness and poverty: “though He was rich, yet for your sake he became poor ...”. Christ, the eternal Son of God, one with the Father in power and glory, chose to be poor; he came amongst us and drew near to each of us; he set aside his glory and emptied himself so that he could be like us in all things (cf. *Phil 2:7; Heb 4:15*). God’s becoming man is a great mystery! But the reason for all this is his love, a love which is grace, generosity, a desire to draw near, a love which does not hesitate to offer itself in sacrifice for the beloved. Charity, love, is sharing with the one we love in all things. Love makes us similar, it creates equality, it breaks down walls and eliminates distances. God did this with us. Indeed, Jesus “worked with human hands, thought with a human mind, acted by human choice and loved with a human heart. Born of the Virgin Mary, he truly became one of us, like us in all things except sin.” (*Gaudium et Spes #22*).

By making himself poor, Jesus did not seek poverty for its own sake but, as Saint Paul says “*that by his poverty you might become rich*”. This is no mere play on words or a catch phrase. Rather, it sums up God’s logic, the logic of love, the logic of the incarnation and the cross. God did not let

our salvation drop down from heaven, like someone who gives alms from their abundance out of a sense of altruism and piety. Christ's love is different! When Jesus stepped into the waters of the Jordan and was baptized by John the Baptist, he did so not because he was in need of repentance, or conversion; he did it to be among people who need forgiveness, among us sinners, and to take upon himself the burden of our sins. In this way he chose to comfort us, to save us, to free us from our misery. It is striking that the Apostle states that we were set free, not by Christ's riches but *by his poverty*. Yet Saint Paul is well aware of the "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (*Eph 3:8*), that he is "heir of all things" (*Heb 1:2*).

So what is this poverty by which Christ frees us and enriches us? It is his way of loving us, his way of being our neighbour, just as the Good Samaritan was neighbour to the man left half dead by the side of the road (cf. *Lk 10:25ff*). What gives us true freedom, true salvation and true happiness is the compassion, tenderness and solidarity of his love. Christ's poverty which enriches us is his taking flesh and bearing our weaknesses and sins as an expression of God's infinite mercy to us. Christ's poverty is the greatest treasure of all: Jesus' wealth is that of his boundless confidence in God the Father, his constant trust, his desire always and only to do the Father's will and give glory to him. Jesus is rich in the same way as a child who feels loved and who loves its parents, without doubting their love and tenderness for an instant. Jesus' wealth lies in his being *the Son*; his unique relationship with the Father is the sovereign prerogative of this Messiah who is poor. When Jesus asks us to take up his "yoke which is easy", he asks us to be enriched by his "poverty which is rich" and his "richness which is poor", to share his filial and fraternal Spirit, to become sons and daughters in the Son, brothers and sisters in the firstborn brother (cf. *Rom 8:29*).

It has been said that the only real regret lies in not being a saint (L. Bloy); we could also say that there is only one real kind of poverty: not living as children of God and brothers and sisters of Christ...

Reflection:

Jesus came to share His wealth with us. Pope Francis explains the wealth of Jesus: "Jesus' wealth is that of his boundless confidence in God the Father, his constant trust..." and he further clarifies: "Jesus' wealth lies in his being the Son; his unique relationship with the Father..." To share this wealth with us, Jesus became poor. He accepted human love in place of divine love: the love of Joseph and the love of Mary. He accepted human parents and human helplessness instead of His divine Father and His divine power. But because He could not actually lose His divine Father or His Father's divine power, He actually filled the poverty of human love from human parents with divine love. Now we too, who are poor, can experience the wealth of Christ, because we can call His Father "our Father" and we can learn about His Fatherhood from our human fathers and mothers and we can receive glimpses of divine love through our experiences of impoverished human love. And so our human experience has been radically transformed because Jesus has entered fully into it and blessed all of it as the way to receive His wealth—His boundless confidence in the Father and the richness of the Father's love. "Jesus is rich in the same way as a child who feels loved and who loves its parents, without doubting their love and tenderness for an instant." And in opening Mary's womb for us to share His experience, He opens the door for us to share in that richness.

Prayers:

Litany of the Powerlessness of Jesus
Litany of Christ Living in the Womb of Mary
Prayer of St Thomas Aquinas before Holy Communion
Prayer of Entrustment to the Womb of Mary

Day 29 - Saints on the Humility of Jesus in the Eucharist

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to John:

For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me. This is the bread which came down from heaven, not such as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live for ever." This he said in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum.

Many of his disciples, when they heard it, said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples murmured at it, said to them, "Do you take offense at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of man ascending where he was before? It is the Spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are Spirit and life. But there are some of you that do not believe." For Jesus knew from the first who those were that did not believe, and who it was that would betray him. And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."

After this many of his disciples drew back and no longer walked with him. Jesus said to the Twelve, "Will you also go away?" (John 6:55-67)

From various saints about the humility of Jesus in the Eucharist:

Saint Francis wrote to his brothers:

"O admirable height and stupendous condescension! O humble sublimity! O sublime humility! that the Lord of the universe, God and the Son of God, so humbles Himself that for our salvation He hides Himself under a morsel of bread. Consider, brothers, the humility of God and pour out your hearts before Him, and be humbled that you may be exalted by Him. Do not therefore keep back anything for yourselves that He may receive you entirely who gives Himself up entirely to you.

Saint Faustina wrote in her Diary (Entry #80):

O Jesus, Divine Prisoner of Love, when I consider Your love and how You emptied Yourself for me, my senses fail me. You hide Your inconceivable majesty and lower Yourself to miserable me. O King of Glory, though You hide Your beauty, yet the eye of my soul rends the veil. I see the angelic choirs giving You honor without cease, and all the heavenly Powers praising You without cease, and without cease they are saying: Holy, Holy, Holy.

Oh, who will comprehend Your love and Your unfathomable mercy toward us! O Prisoner of Love, I lock up my poor heart in this tabernacle, that it may adore You without cease night and day. I know of no obstacle in this adoration, and even though I be physically distant, my heart is always with You. Nothing can put a stop to my love for You. No obstacles exist for me. O my Jesus, I will console You for all the ingratitude, the blasphemies, the coldness, the hatred of the wicked, the sacrileges. O Jesus, I want to burn as a pure offering and to be consumed before the throne of Your hiddenness. I plead with You unceasingly for poor dying sinners.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta said:

"The humility of Jesus can be seen in the crib, in the exile to Egypt, in the hidden life, in the inability to make people understand Him, in the desertion of His apostles, in the hatred of His persecutors, in all the terrible suffering and death of His Passion, and now in His permanent state of humility in the tabernacle, where He has reduced Himself to such a small particle of bread that the priest can hold Him with two fingers. The more we empty ourselves, the more room we give God to fill us."

Saint Therese of Lisieux rejoiced in the Communion of Midnight Mass:

“God would have to work a little miracle to make me grow up in an instant, and this miracle He performed on that unforgettable Christmas day. On that luminous night which sheds such light on the delights of the Holy Trinity, Jesus, the gentle, little Child of only one hour, changed the night of my soul into rays of light. On that night when He made Himself subject to weakness and suffering for love of me, He made me strong and courageous, arming me with His weapons. Since that night I have never been defeated in any combat, but rather walked from victory to victory, beginning, so to speak, “to run as a giant”!

Reflection:

Do we see the humility of Jesus who continually comes to us in a way that makes us easily overlook Him? We cannot tell the difference between a consecrated host and an unconsecrated host—our senses cannot tell the difference between Jesus and a simple piece of bread. Do we promote ourselves? Are we offended when others do not know who we are? Do we push ourselves forward to make sure we are seen or correct others when they do not acknowledge our credentials. Do we feel self-important? Do we see how contrary these attitudes are to the humility of Jesus who remains anonymously, invisibly hidden beneath the appearance of bread and even then hidden away in a Tabernacle? This is how the baby is in the womb, especially a baby so small that the mother does not even appear to be pregnant. Are we willing to be so small, so hidden, so overlooked as to be a tiny, tiny baby in the womb of Mary? If so, then we are drawing closer to fulfilling the command of Jesus, “Be imitators of me, for I am meek and humble of heart.” (Matthew 11:29)

Prayers:

We pray first with Mother Teresa: “Mary, mother of Jesus, give us your heart, so beautiful, so pure, so immaculate, so full of love and humility, that we may be able to receive Jesus in the bread of life, love him as you love him, and serve him in the distressing disguise of the poor.”

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Day 30 - Mary, the Eucharist and the Incarnation

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke:

And Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I have no husband?” And the angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. (Luke 1:34-35)
And he took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” And likewise the chalice after supper, saying, “This chalice which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.” (Luke 22:19-20)

From Pope Saint John Paul II’s Apostolic Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* #55:

In a certain sense Mary lived her Eucharistic faith even before the institution of the Eucharist, by the very fact that she offered her virginal womb for the Incarnation of God's Word. The Eucharist, while commemorating the passion and resurrection, is also in continuity with the incarnation. At the Annunciation Mary conceived the Son of God in the physical reality of his body and blood, thus anticipating within herself what to some degree happens sacramentally in every believer who receives, under the signs of bread and wine, the Lord's body and blood. As a result, there is a profound analogy between the Fiat which Mary said in reply to the angel, and the Amen which every believer says when receiving the body of the Lord. Mary was asked to believe that the One whom she conceived "through the Holy Spirit" was "the Son of God" (Lk 1:30-35). In continuity with the Virgin's faith, in the Eucharistic mystery we are asked to believe that the same Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of Mary, becomes present in his full humanity and divinity under the signs of bread and wine.

"Blessed is she who believed" (Lk 1:45). Mary also anticipated, in the mystery of the incarnation, the Church's Eucharistic faith. When, at the Visitation, she bore in her womb the Word made flesh, she became in some way a "tabernacle" – the first "tabernacle" in history – in which the Son of God, still invisible to our human gaze, allowed himself to be adored by Elizabeth, radiating his light as it were through the eyes and the voice of Mary. And is not the enraptured gaze of Mary as she contemplated the face of the newborn Christ and cradled him in her arms that unparalleled model of love which should inspire us every time we receive Eucharistic communion?

...

What must Mary have felt as she heard from the mouth of Peter, John, James and the other Apostles the words spoken at the Last Supper: "This is my body which is given for you" (Lk 22:19)? The body given up for us and made present under sacramental signs was the same body which she had conceived in her womb! For Mary, receiving the Eucharist must have somehow meant welcoming once more into her womb that heart which had beat in unison with hers and reliving what she had experienced at the foot of the Cross.

Reflection:

Every Mass brings us to the womb of Mary, where Christ first became present in His Body and Blood. Every Tabernacle is a copy of that first Tabernacle, which is Mary's womb, where Christ spent the first nine months of His life. If we want to be close to Jesus in His Body and Blood, even to hide ourselves away in the Tabernacle with Him, then we can do that by consecrating ourselves to Mary, by hiding away in her womb. Jesus remains there in all His hiddenness and littleness, in that first Tabernacle. Are we too big too fit, too full of ourselves, too busy with the things of the world? Or can we let ourselves be hidden in love to find the Hidden Love who remains wrapped in love? Can we allow ourselves to be confined to God's will, which is nothing other than the womb, than the heart of Mary, who was always freely confined to God's will? Mary teaches us to make a home in ourselves for Jesus, a Tabernacle, a womb in our hearts for Him to remain always. We do that by uttering with her our Yes to God's will...Fiat.

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Day 31 - God seeks man in the womb of Mary

From the Holy Gospel according to Luke:

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." So he told them this parable: "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.' Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. (Luke 15:1-7)

From Pope Saint John Paul II's Letter *Tertio Millenio Adveniente* #7:

In Jesus Christ God not only speaks to man but also seeks him out. The Incarnation of the Son of God attests that God goes in search of man. Jesus speaks of this search as the finding of a lost sheep (cf. Lk 15:1-7). It is a search which begins in the heart of God and culminates in the Incarnation of the Word. If God goes in search of man, created in his own image and likeness, he does so because he loves him eternally in the Word, and wishes to raise him in Christ to the dignity of an adoptive son. God therefore goes in search of man who is his special possession in a way unlike any other creature. Man is God's possession by virtue of a choice made in love: God seeks man out, moved by his fatherly heart.

Why does God seek man out? Because man has turned away from him, hiding himself as Adam did among the trees of the Garden of Eden (cf. Gen 3:8-10). Man allowed himself to be led astray by the enemy of God (cf. Gen 3:13). Satan deceived man, persuading him that he too was a god, that he, like God, was capable of knowing good and evil, ruling the world according to his own will without having to take into account the divine will (cf. Gen 3:5). Going in search of man through his Son, God wishes to persuade man to abandon the paths of evil which lead him farther and farther afield. "Making him abandon" those paths means making man understand that he is taking the wrong path; it means overcoming the evil which is everywhere found in human history. Overcoming evil: this is the meaning of the Redemption. This is brought about in the sacrifice of Christ, by which man redeems the debt of sin and is reconciled to God. The Son of God became man, taking a body and soul in the womb of the Virgin, precisely for this reason: to become the perfect redeeming sacrifice. The religion of the Incarnation is the religion of the world's Redemption through the sacrifice of Christ, wherein lies victory over evil, over sin and over death itself. Accepting death on the Cross, Christ at the same time reveals and gives life, because he rises again and death no longer has power over him.

Reflection:

God is seeking us! He is looking for you. He wants to bring you home. He longs for us, thirsts for us. Where does He go looking? Where we are most helpless, most powerless, most weak, hurting, lost, forgotten, abandoned, overlooked and hidden. When we are feeling so small that we could fit into a womb, because we are so ashamed that we shrivel up and hide in our sinfulness, because we are so belittled by the harshness and domination of others, or because we feel so weak and insignificant, that is when Christ is seeking us. He becomes small like us. He takes on our sins, the rebukes of the powerful and the weakness of our humanity. He seeks us in the womb of Mary, embracing all the littleness of and pain of being human that He might fill it with all the sweetness of divine love.

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Day 32 - Christ brings us life and light in Baptism

From the Holy Gospel According to Matthew:

Now after the sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone, and sat upon it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. Behold, I have told you." So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Hail!" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see me." (Matthew 28:1-10)

From Pope Benedict XVI's homily for the Easter Vigil 2006:

His death was an act of love. At the Last Supper he anticipated death and transformed it into self-giving. His existential communion with God was concretely an existential communion with God's love, and this love is the real power against death, it is stronger than death. The Resurrection was like an explosion of light, an explosion of love which dissolved the hitherto indissoluble compenetration of "dying and becoming". It ushered in a new dimension of being, a new dimension of life in which, in a transformed way, matter too was integrated and through which a new world emerges. ...

The great explosion of the Resurrection has seized us in Baptism so as to draw us on. Thus we are associated with a new dimension of life into which, amid the tribulations of our day, we are already in some way introduced. To live one's own life as a continual entry into this open space: this is the meaning of being baptized, of being Christian. This is the joy of the Easter Vigil. The Resurrection is not a thing of the past, the Resurrection has reached us and seized us. We grasp hold of it, we grasp hold of the risen Lord, and we know that he holds us firmly even when our hands grow weak. We grasp hold of his hand, and thus we also hold on to one another's hands, and we become one single subject, not just one thing. I, but no longer I: this is the formula of Christian life rooted in Baptism, the formula of the Resurrection within time. I, but no longer I: if we live in this way, we transform the world. It is a formula contrary to all ideologies of violence, it is a programme opposed to corruption and to the desire for power and possession.

From Pope Benedict XVI's homily for the Easter Vigil 2008:

Through his radical love for us, in which the heart of God and the heart of man touched, Jesus Christ truly took light from heaven and brought it to the earth – the light of truth and the fire of love that transform man's being. He brought the light, and now we know who God is and what God is like. Thus we also know what our human situation is: what we are, and for what

purpose we exist. When we are baptized, the fire of this light is brought down deep within ourselves. Thus, in the early Church, Baptism was also called the Sacrament of Illumination: God's light enters into us; thus we ourselves become children of light. We must not allow this light of truth, that shows us the path, to be extinguished. We must protect it from all the forces that seek to eliminate it so as to cast us back into darkness regarding God and ourselves. Darkness, at times, can seem comfortable. I can hide, and spend my life asleep. Yet we are not called to darkness, but to light. In our baptismal promises, we rekindle this light, so to speak, year by year. Yes, I believe that the world and my life are not the product of chance, but of eternal Reason and eternal Love, they are created by Almighty God. Yes, I believe that in Jesus Christ, in his incarnation, in his Cross and resurrection, the face of God has been revealed; that in him, God is present in our midst, he unites us and leads us towards our goal, towards eternal Love. Yes, I believe that the Holy Spirit gives us the word of truth and enlightens our hearts; I believe that in the communion of the Church we all become one Body with the Lord, and thus we encounter his resurrection and eternal life. The Lord has granted us the light of truth. This light is also fire, a powerful force coming from God, a force that does not destroy, but seeks to transform our hearts, so that we truly become men of God, and so that his peace can become active in this world.

Reflection:

Christ's Resurrection has changed everything. He has come down to take our hand and He has come down to illumine the way. He helps us navigate the treacherous paths of life, picking us up and walking with us even across the threshold of death, when the time comes for us. Because He has come and changed us into Himself through Baptism, we are never alone, "we grasp hold of the risen Lord, and we know that he holds us firmly even when our hands grow weak." We do not need to fear our weakness, but it becomes the point at which we meet Him. When we were most desperate He came to us and took us by the hand. When the night was darkest, He came to us and brought us the light of heaven. "Now we know who God is and what God is like." Now we have a fire from heaven that warms us and transforms our hearts. This is the fire that first burned in the Heart of Mary who was the first redeemed. This is the fire that warmed the Infant God in her womb and warms each of us of us who choose to rest in her womb, beneath her Immaculate Heart.

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Day 33 - Jesus Dies, the Word is Silenced

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew:

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. And Joseph took the body, and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock; and he rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb, and departed. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb. (Mt 26:57-61)

From Pope Saint John Paul II's Address in Turin May 24, 1998:

The Shroud is also an image of powerlessness: the powerlessness of death, in which the ultimate consequence of the mystery of the Incarnation is revealed. The burial cloth spurs us to measure ourselves against the most troubling aspect of the mystery of the Incarnation, which is also the one that shows with how much truth God truly became man, taking on our condition in all things, except sin. Everyone is shaken by the thought that not even the Son of God withstood the power of death, but we are all moved at the thought that he so shared our human condition as willingly to subject himself to the total powerlessness of the moment when life is spent. It is the experience of Holy Saturday, an important stage on Jesus' path to Glory, from which a ray of light shines on the sorrow and death of every person. By reminding us of Christ's victory, faith gives us the certainty that the grave is not the ultimate goal of existence. God calls us to resurrection and immortal life.

The Shroud is an image of silence. There is a tragic silence of incommunicability, which finds its greatest expression in death, and there is the silence of fruitfulness, which belongs to whoever refrains from being heard outwardly in order to delve to the roots of truth and life. The Shroud expresses not only the silence of death but also the courageous and fruitful silence of triumph over the transitory, through total immersion in God's eternal present. It thus offers a moving confirmation of the fact that the merciful omnipotence of our God is not restrained by any power of evil, but knows instead how to make the very power of evil contribute to good. Our age needs to rediscover the fruitfulness of silence, in order to overcome the dissipation of sounds, images and chatter that too often prevent the voice of God from being heard.

Reflection:

Like all of us, Jesus ended as He began: helpless, powerless, and silent. This was His victory. He never fled from the limitations of our humanity, from His first moment in Mary's womb to His last breath on the Cross, He lived our humanity to its extremes. He drank the full cup of our humanity all the way to the dregs. As Saint John Paul II reminds us, this comforts us in knowing that we are never alone when we experience the weakness and powerlessness that is a part of being human. We are never abandoned by the One who can share it with us and so also carry us through it. And just as Jesus was accompanied in His weakest moments by Mary His Mother, He gives her to us to accompany us in the same way. When we feel most weak and poor, we can know that we are safely enclosed in the womb of Mary who always loves us and cares for us.

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Day 34 - Total Consecration to Jesus through Mary

After 33 days of preparation, we are ready to make, or renew our consecration to Jesus through Mary. Saint Louis de Montfort has several encouragements for how to live this day. His recommendations are outlined concisely in his book *True Devotion to Mary* and repeated in various places on the internet such as [here](#), where you can also find some practices to follow after making the Consecration. The most important recommendation to follow is regarding the Sacraments: there is no better preparation than a humble and sincere Sacramental Confession

and a devout participation in the Holy Eucharist including Sacramental Communion. If it is not possible, for some reason, to receive the Sacraments, at least make a sincere act of contrition and a spiritual Communion.

The text for the Consecration can also be found at the link above or a more modern translation can be found [here](#). It is beneficial to write out the Consecration for the sake of investing more love and attention in the words and solemnizing this important moment of prayer. Typesetting with a word processor and printing out a copy that you can sign is also appropriate.

Finally, we provide a slightly altered version of Saint Louis de Montfort's Total Consecration to Jesus through Mary that captures all the depth and theological importance while adjusting the language slightly to favor the loving image of being in the womb as opposed to the less palatable image of slavery. As expressed in the Introduction at the beginning of our journey, there is no greater "slavery" than being in the womb. A baby in the womb is totally helpless with no will other than the will of the Mother. A baby in the womb is totally dependent on the Mother. And yet there are none of the negative connotations about being in the womb as compared with the many distortions that are found with "slavery." We recognize that slavery is also a biblical concept and it is not problematic theologically, but especially in light of our American history with slavery, it can be distracting from the essence of Consecration which is about love and trust and carries none of the risks or ambiguity of the term slavery.

One other adjustment in the prayer of Total Consecration is more corrective. Though certainly well-intended by Saint Louis de Montfort, the notion that Jesus would reject or despise us and the idea that Mary is somehow a better mediator or a more merciful advocate than her Son is contrary to Catholic teaching. Saint Louis de Montfort likely expressed things in this way according to the cultural idioms of his time and to inspire greater trust in our Lady, but his expression is in danger of reinforcing false images of Jesus that could undermine our absolute trust in His Infinite Mercy. For this reason, we adjust that sentence of Saint Louis de Montfort's formula. We leave it to our readers to decide which formula for Consecration they would prefer, but we offer this especially for the sensitive souls who need more comfort and trust than harshness and fear.

Total Consecration to Jesus through Mary

Eternal and incarnate Wisdom, most lovable and adorable Jesus, true God and true man, only Son of the eternal Father and of Mary always Virgin, I adore you profoundly, dwelling in the splendour of your Father from all eternity and in the virginal womb of Mary, your most worthy Mother, at the time of your incarnation.

I thank you for having emptied yourself in assuming the condition of a slave to set me free from the cruel slavery of the evil one. I praise and glorify you for having willingly chosen to obey Mary, your holy Mother, in all things, so that through surrendering all my power and self-determination by dwelling in her womb I may always be your faithful lover.

But I must confess that I have not kept the vows and promises, which I made to you so solemnly at my baptism. I have not fulfilled my obligations, and I do not deserve to be called your child or even your loving slave.

Because I have turned away from you in my sins and I feel so little and poor in my weakness, I do not feel great enough to approach your divine Majesty, but I do feel that I can approach you in your littleness as you dwell in Mary's womb. That is why I turn to the intercession and the

mercy of your holy Mother, whom you yourself have given me to be my meeting place with you. Through her, in her womb, I hope to obtain from you contrition and pardon for my sins, and that Wisdom whom I desire to dwell in me always.

I turn to you, then, Mary Immaculate, living tabernacle of God, in whom eternal Wisdom willed to receive the adoration of **men, women and angels.** I greet you as Queen of heaven and earth, for all that is under God has been made subject to your sovereignty. I call upon you, the unfailing refuge of sinners, confident in your mercy that has never forsaken anyone. Grant my desire for divine Wisdom and, in support of my petition, accept the promises and the offering of myself, which I now make, conscious of my littleness.

I, _____, an unfaithful sinner, renew and ratify today through you my baptismal promises. I renounce forever Satan, his empty promises, and his evil designs, and I give myself completely to Jesus Christ, the incarnate Wisdom, to carry my cross after him for the rest of my life, and to be more faithful to him than I have been till now.

This day, with the whole court of heaven as witness, I choose you, Mary, as my Mother and Queen. I surrender and consecrate myself to you, body and soul, with all that I possess, both spiritual and material, even including the spiritual value of all my actions, past, present, and to come. I give you the full right to dispose of me and all that belongs to me, without any reservations, in whatever way you please, for the greater glory of God in time and throughout eternity. I entrust myself to your loving, maternal care with the same total abandon as the Baby Jesus who chose to dwell in your womb.

Accept, gracious Virgin, this little offering of myself, to honour and imitate the obedience, which eternal Wisdom willingly chose to have towards you, his Mother. I wish to acknowledge the authority which both of you have over this pitiful sinner. By it I wish also to thank God for the privileges bestowed on you by the Blessed Trinity. I solemnly declare that for the future I will try to honor and obey you in all things as an infant in your womb. O admirable Mother, present me to your dear Son as His little twin in your womb, so that he who redeemed me through you, will now receive me through you.

Mother of mercy, grant me the favour of obtaining the true Wisdom of God, and so make me one of those whom you love, teach and guide, whom you nourish and protect as your own infant in your womb.

Virgin most faithful, make me in everything so committed a disciple, imitator, and twin infant of Jesus, your Son, incarnate Wisdom, that I may become, through your intercession and example, fully mature with the fullness which Jesus possessed on earth, and with the fullness of his glory in heaven. Amen.