

The Thirty Days' Preparation



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St. Louis Marie wanted to make sure that the Act of Consecration to Jesus and Mary, which is the basis of the True Devotion, should have a profound effect on the life of the one making it. And so he strongly urged that thirty days be spent in preparing for this important event. These days of preparation dispose the soul to receive God's special graces. They are a kind of prolonged prayer for help. And especially they mark the solemnity and importance of the Consecration.

Consequently, while not essential, the preparation is much to be counselled before embracing this devotion to Our Lady. It can also be profitably renewed each year before the renewal of our Act of Consecration.

IT is important to note, right from the start, that the Preparation is not obligatory. The only essential thing in this devotion is (1) to have the intention of giving oneself entirely to Jesus through Mary (hence the actual formula of consecration can vary), and (2) to make some attempt afterwards to remember, and to act in accordance with, the fact that we belong to Mary. Thus a person wishing to embrace this devotion should not be scrupulous if, for some reason or another, anything is omitted or curtailed in the Preparation.

However, the days spent in preparing for this important act of consecration can be very profitable, and are much to be counselled. These lines are written to facilitate the Preparation, especially for

people who may not have other books at their disposal.

General Idea

In his *Treatise on True Devotion*, St. Louis Marie advises us to spend twelve days in trying to rid ourselves of the spirit of the world, and then to pass the next three weeks in seeking to know ourselves, to know Our Lady and, in the last week, to know Our Lord. The more mathematically inclined amongst us may be tempted to object that the total days required would then be thirty-three. However, Montfort implies, when speaking of knowing ourselves, that by a week he means only six days. Why this should be so is difficult to understand. But there it is. Traditionally the time for

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preparing for the Consecration is *at least* thirty days.

During that time we are supposed to *be doing something* – namely, emptying ourselves of that spirit which is opposed to the true Christian spirit and in its place putting knowledge of self, of Mary and of Jesus. To enable us to do this St. Louis Marie counsels us to pray and to meditate.

(i) *To Pray*

The first thing, therefore, is prayer. The Saint himself suggests certain prayers for the last three weeks of Preparation (he dealt with the first twelve days in some introductory pages which have since been lost). As we come to each part we shall indicate the prayers he suggests. But on this point, it is good to remind ourselves that no particular prayer is essential. If we do not possess a book containing a certain prayer, then in all simplicity we should say a similar one that we know.

The important thing is *that we should pray* for the particular grace envisaged in each period. And because we know, from long and humiliating experience, how inconstant and vacillating we can be, it will be necessary *to fix in advance* exactly what we intend doing during each of the thirty days' Preparation. We must not take chances on our fervour or good intentions. Before we start, let us have an outline of prayer that will sanctify each day and which will form, as it were, a barrage of supplication to obtain for us the graces we seek during the Preparation.

We should not need reminding that the most powerful prayer that we can make to obtain the grace of freeing ourselves from the spirit of the world or of knowing ourselves or Our Lord is offering our Mass and Communion for this intention. And while Our Saviour is still present within us we should ask Him, urgently and perseveringly, to help us to understand and to acquire the grace that we seek in each period.

Each day, too, we should try to say at least five decades of the Rosary for the same intention, and more if we can do so conveniently.

It will not be possible for everybody to carry out all these suggestions. Let each do what he can. Thus if we are unable to go to Holy Communion, perhaps we should make a special visit to the Blessed Sacrament instead. But, above all we must determine in advance some plan of prayer that we shall follow, some outline into which the rest of our prayers will fit.

(ii) *To Meditate*

The second thing that we should do each day is to reflect and think, so that in our minds a steadying conviction is gradually formed. Here, too, we need to be practical and sensible. We must not leave things to the whim of the moment. We need to plan in advance.

If we arrange things carefully, it should be possible to find a few minutes each day when we shall deliberately set out to think over some point connected with the period on which we are engaged. We would suggest that at least five

The Consecration Day

THE day of our consecration to Jesus through Mary must be a special day. St. Louis Marie asks for the following things:

(1) We should choose some important feast of Our Lady on which to make our consecration. The most obvious choice is the feast of the Incarnation (25th March) when God willed to make Himself entirely dependent on Mary by becoming her unborn Babe. However, if this feast is still a long way off when once we decide to dedicate ourselves to Jesus and Mary, it is better to choose some other feast.

(2) We should endeavour to go to confession just before the great day, offering up this Sacrament to obtain the grace of being faithful to our consecration.

(3) On the day itself we should, if at all possible, receive Our Lord in Holy Communion. St. Louis Marie urges us to do so in union with Our Lady, according to the method he indicates in *The True Devotion* (No. 266).

(4) After Holy Communion, while Our Lord is still present within us, we should then recite the solemn formula of consecration as composed by St. Louis Marie. We should sign this consecration, and keep it as an important document to remind us of our new status. An alternative way is to copy on the back of a holy picture the two central paragraphs embodying the essence of the consecration, beginning with the words, "*I, (N.N.), an unfaithful sinner,*" to the words, "*in time and in eternity.*"

(5) Finally, on this great day we should perform some special act of homage to Jesus and Mary, such as an alms or perhaps a little pilgrimage to some nearby church or shrine of Our Lady

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Him frequently and properly in Holy Communion, to see if we honour Him by going to Benediction and by making visits.

Another source of fruitful reflection would be to think over the life of Christ on earth, in order to discover for ourselves the examples of willing, loving dependence on His Mother that He set for us. It was this thought that led St. Louis Marie and countless other saintly souls to resolve to give themselves entirely to Mary in order to follow more

closely the example of our Divine Model.

There are many other subjects we might reflect upon. We must be on our guard against wanting to meditate on too much in too short a time. There will be, God willing, other years when we can make again the thirty days' Preparation before renewing the act of Consecration. Besides, there is nothing against, and very much for, the idea of devoting a few minutes each day to prayerful reflection on the lines we have suggested, even apart from the thirty days' Preparation.

minutes be set apart for this deliberate act of reflection. But that is only a minimum – a quarter or even half an hour would be better.

Prayerful reflection is always difficult, even at the best of times. Hence we should try to minimize the difficulties by choosing a secluded place for our meditation. A church is an obvious choice, though any quiet room will do.

This period of meditation is very important. It should take precedence over all our other private prayers and devotions. For it is only through convictions born of prayerful reflection that we shall rid ourselves of the spirit of the world and of pride and be able to base our life and conduct on the example of Jesus and Mary.

It is not necessary to think of different subjects for each of the thirty days. It is sufficient if we reflect on *something* that will help us to rid ourselves of worldliness, to know ourselves, etc., even if we spend several days thinking over the same point.

Finally, it is much to be desired that during these thirty days a short time be devoted each day to reading a portion of Montfort's *True Devotion* and *Secret of Mary*. They form, as it were, the official source of knowledge of this devotion.

Ridding Self of Worldliness

During this period we should try to recite each day the hymns, "Come, Holy Ghost" and "Hail, thou Star of Ocean." As a practice we could profitably avoid all worldly amusements for these twelve days.

Normally people find the greatest difficulty in the first twelve days of the Preparation. This is partly because the time allotted is double that of each of the other periods. But the main cause of difficulty is, we suspect, because the end in view is not clearly understood.

Ridding self of the spirit of the world does not mean blinding oneself to the beauty and the joys of this life. It does not mean that we must renounce for ever the cinema, dances, social events.

The spirit of the world is that mentality which leads people to consider that this life is more important than eternity. It is that outlook which over-emphasises the importance of anything that brings riches, comfort, pleasure in this world and which minimizes, if it does not altogether ignore, the importance of providing for our life in the next world.

Once we begin to examine ourselves on this point we are due for some nasty shocks. We are going to get panic-stricken as we realise how little we do to provide for a happy eternity, in comparison with how much we do for the things of this life. In other words we are going to discover how completely the spirit of the world dominates and grips us.

Hence, during these first twelve days, let us pray constantly for the grace of judging everything from the point of view of eternity, for the grace of thinking, speaking, behaving like people *who really do believe* that this life is only meant to be a preparation for our *real* life that is to come.

For *at least* five minutes each day think and reflect on thoughts that will give you the right outlook on this life and on eternity ... Think, phrase by phrase, of the answer to the Catechism question, “Why did God make you?” Think of the length of eternity. Think of the comparative brevity of the longest life on this earth. Think of the imminence of your approaching death.

After a short time you will find that one such thought is “working” ... Get hold of it, and for the rest of the first period think and reflect and pray as much as you can about it.

You will find that it is ridding you, bit by bit, of the spirit of the world.

Knowing Self

In the second period of the Preparation, on each of the six days we should say the Litany of the Holy Ghost (or the hymn “Come Holy Ghost” if the Litany is not available), the hymn, “Hail, thou Star of Ocean” and the Litany of Loreto. As a practice of piety we could profitably spend a few minutes each day examining our conscience.

Self-knowledge is a most rare accomplishment. Even the wisest and holiest people live in a world of illusion about themselves. Because it is so much easier to know others than to know ourselves, a practical way of learning about ourselves is to reflect on what those who are in a position to know say about us. In spite of the excuses that vanity and self-love will suggest, there is probably a good deal of truth in the opinion that such people have formed

about us.

We might even be able to ask some trustworthy person to tell us frankly our chief faults and weaknesses. The operative word is *trustworthy*. Not everybody will do. An obvious choice would be our confessor if he knows us well.

On each of these six days we should employ the precious time of prayerful reflection in reminding ourselves that we are made by God and for God. Everything we are, everything we possess, everything we do has been given by God. At every instant God needs to uphold us in existence, as well as all other people and things, including those we now see and use. If we get this idea in our minds it will give us what we might call “basic humility.” It will certainly enable us to realise how little praise or merit is due to us, even for our more notable achievements.

Another salutary thought is to reflect on the goodness of God to us in the past, on how He has arranged all things with loving care for our greater good, on how He has been so patient and merciful in our regard, on how we have rejected Him, neglected Him, offended Him. We might have done so much for Him. How little we have actually done!

Or perhaps we might remind ourselves of our constant need of God’s grace, of how we cannot do a single thing that could lead to Heaven, either for ourselves or for others, without special supernatural help from God.

If we pray much and reflect much

during these six days we shall gradually begin to know ourselves. And knowing ourselves, we shall realise how much we need the help of Our Lady in order to imitate and love her Son.

Knowing Mary

During the next six days we should recite daily the same prayers as in the preceding week, adding as many extra decades of the Rosary that we conveniently can, saying them at all odd moments at our disposal. There is a beautiful prayer to Our Lady composed by St. Louis Marie near the end of The Secret of Mary. This, too, could be recited on each of the six days.

As a practice we should choose some little action that we perform several times each day, and try to do it in the way that Our Lady wants.

“Mary,” says St. Louis Marie, “is the all-excelling masterpiece of the Most High, the knowledge and possession of which He has reserved for Himself.” During these six days dedicated to acquiring knowledge of Our Lady we must ask God by insistent prayer to grant this knowledge to us.

During the time of prayerful reflection we could perhaps meditate on the Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary, trying to realise what happiness and glory each contains for God’s Mother. Or we might reflect on that sad meeting of the Son and the Mother on the way to Calvary, and remind ourselves that just as Mary was the only one who recognised and adored the Divinity of Jesus at that moment, so He was the only one who saw in her all

the dignity and greatness and love that God had put there. There is source for much fruitful meditation in that thought.

There are many other subjects we might think about during this week. The important thing is that we should spend some time each day trying to reflect on something about Our Lady.

Knowing Christ

On each of the last six days before the Consecration we should say the same prayers as above, only substituting the Litany of the Holy Name of Jesus for the Litany of Loreto, and in place of the prayer to Mary saying the prayer to Jesus, composed by St. Augustine as given in a footnote to No. 67 (The True Devotion).

As a practice we could try to do something each day in honour of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

As much as possible during this last week we should centre our prayers and our thoughts on Jesus present in the Blessed Sacrament, telling ourselves that He is living in *our* town, in *our* parish.

During the time of prayerful reflection we could meditate on the Sorrowful Mysteries or the Stations of the Cross, in order to understand something of that immense love that led God to suffer and die for us.

Or we might reflect continually on that startling yet consoling fact that our God dwells in our midst looking like bread and wine. At this point we could profitably examine ourselves to see how we react to this fact, to see if we receive