

make a check on this particular point for a brief time in the course of our nightly examination of conscience.

If we try

There is a great rule in the spiritual life to the effect that if we are trying we are succeeding. It is true of all our religious duties. It is particularly true of trying to live in union with Mary.

While we are honestly making efforts we should never give way to discouragement. Our very efforts are the guarantee of our success, even though we seem to fail so often, even though our progress seems so negligible.

But on the other hand we *must* be making efforts. We must be trying. We must not delude ourselves into mistaking mere wishful thinking for effort. God helps those who help themselves. We must do our reasonable best in a sensible

manner. We should be at *least* as practical in catering for our spiritual needs as we are for our temporal ones.

The preceding suggestions are an attempt to bring method into living a life of dependence on Our Lady. But it should be noted that they are not more than suggestions. They appeal to the writer of these lines. They may not appeal to the reader. In any case, if they are tried they can be modified or changed according to one's own needs and preferences.

The important thing is that we should combine an intense trust in God's help, manifested by ardent prayer, with a serious attempt at being sensible in this task and privilege of living in dependence on Our Lady.

God helps those who help themselves.

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Living the Consecration

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In Montfort's True Devotion, the Consecration to Our Lady is but the first step. The next and far more important part is trying to live according to the spirit of that Consecration. Here is a practical and realistic approach to the problem.

WHEN a person wants to be a lawyer or a doctor or a bricklayer, he settles down to a steady grind at both the theory and the practice of his chosen career. But when Catholics want to be holy, which is their chosen career for all eternity, they sit round uttering pious platitudes and contenting themselves with mere wishful thinking! When people decide that they want to live in entire dependence on Mary, that they want to reflect her virtues, her love of God in their lives, they wonder what can be done about it except to say an odd prayer ... and wish!

It is true that God could work a miracle and change instantaneously a sinner into a saint (like He did for St. Paul). It is true that miraculously a person could be granted the rare privilege of living a life of utter dependence on God's Mother (as apparently happened to St. Louis Marie de Montfort) ... But it is equally true (neither more nor less) that God could work a miracle to turn a person into a first-class pianist or linguist or bricklayer. God *could*, but normally God

does not, because there is another very true saying that God helps those who help themselves.

If we really try to be a good musician or lawyer or doctor, and if we are willing to do all the necessary spade-work, then we can be reasonably certain that, with the help which God will give us, we shall succeed.

And if we want to be holy, or if we want to acquire some special virtue, or if we want to live a life of dependence on God's Mother, we can be *absolutely* certain of success if (but only if) we do our best, if we set about our task in a sensible, practical manner, if we keep at it methodically and perseveringly.

God helps those who help themselves.

Painstaking Prayer

And so once we have consecrated ourselves entirely and without reserve to Our Lady we need to set about living this consecration in a methodical way. God

may give us some extraordinary grace once we start. It is very likely that He will show us spiritual short-cuts to arriving at a life of union with His Mother. But all that depends on His Will. In any case it will probably only come much later, after we have tried in a human, sensible fashion to do our best in carrying out the obligations we contracted in our consecration.

We trust that our remarks thus far about odd prayers have not been misunderstood. Make no mistake about it. A life of dependence on God's Mother is, as St. Louis-Marie says, a *Secret of sanctity* that is revealed to us by the Holy Ghost. We must pray. But it is not sufficient to pray in fits and starts. If we *really want* to live our consecration we must pray urgently and incessantly. We should be willing to put ourselves out considerably in order to make novenas and go on pilgrimages to obtain this great grace for ourselves.

That is the first and most important effort we must make – sustained, painstaking prayer.

Abiding Realisation

After God's grace, the most necessary condition for success in the art of living in union with Mary is to acquire the mentality that, by virtue of our consecration, we belong to Mary. It is difficult to express this idea. An illustration might help, though it suffers the fate of all illustrations in that it fails to illustrate perfectly.

When a girl gets married she is changed for ever. Outwardly she appears

to be the same. Inwardly all her virtues and qualities, all her defects and weaknesses remain. And yet she is different. She knows, permanently and decidedly, that she is no longer free, that she belongs to her husband. She does not need to go round repeating that truth to herself - she *knows*, and she acts in accordance with that knowledge.

So in a similar way, we need to acquire the abiding realisation that we belong to Our Lady and that we should in consequence be trying to do the things that are pleasing to her. Unfortunately, this permanent realisation normally does not result from a single act of consecration as it does from a single marriage ceremony. It needs, except by special privilege of grace, to be acquired, laboriously and methodically.

Renewing Our Consecration

The first step along the road to developing a life of union with Mary is to acquire the habit of reminding ourselves that we belong to her. The most obvious way is by renewing the act of consecration with some brief formula such as, *I am all thine, my Queen and my Mother, and all that I have is thine*. It is, however, not necessary to repeat it in words. A thought, a remembrance will do.

We must have fixed and frequent times for recalling our consecration to mind - when we rise in the morning, before certain actions, at special times during the day, when we retire at night. These times should be arranged with a good deal of care, at least in the beginning.

It is often helpful to devise little ways of reminding ourselves, like putting familiar objects in unfamiliar places or even having recourse to the time-honoured practice of tying knots in our handkerchief. The trouble is that all these devices rapidly become so familiar that they fail to act as reminders. Yet surely it should not be beyond our ingenuity to discover new ways from time to time.

Secret of Sanctity

Once we have begun to develop the habit of renewing the consecration of ourselves to Our Lady, the next step should be to try and let this fact influence the action we are doing at the time. When we remember that we belong to God's Mother it should strike us that we ought therefore to try to please her in the action that we are then doing. The whole point of dedicating ourselves to her is so that we can serve her.

Examples abound. If we recall our consecration when it is time to rise in the morning it should be apparent, even to the most obtuse among us, that Our Lady would prefer us to be prompt and generous rather than slothful and lazy. At work, if we remember that we belong to God's Mother it should be obvious that she wants us to be efficient and painstaking and honest. The thought that we have given ourselves to Mary should in our conversation, make us charitable; in our sufferings, patient and cheerful; in our homes, pleasant and helpful. In fact, it should influence whatever we are doing.

Here we are getting to the very centre and core of this method of spirituality. Thought of in this way, it is obviously a

powerful means of sanctifying even the most commonplace of our actions. And the conscious sanctification of ordinary actions is the secret of all sanctity. Hence we cannot expect to succeed perfectly right from the beginning. We can only try, knowing our very efforts will please our Mother, and knowing too that she will lead us on in her own good time.

Concentrating our Energies

On this point particularly, we need to be sensible and practical. It is unlikely that God is going to work a miracle to transform us suddenly into great saints. And so it is unlikely that we shall succeed in letting the remembrance of our consecration influence *all* our actions. Hence it is a good thing to concentrate on one of our actions at a time, to try to do *that* action in union with Our Lady.

The first thing is to choose what we shall concentrate on. It must be something quite definite - a short period of the day or some daily happening. Then we should ask ourselves, *How would Our Lady act if she were in my place*, or at least, *How does she want me to act?*

When the time comes we should start by recalling that we have given ourselves to Mary. This can be done in a flash, simply by a thought. Then we should endeavour to act and to speak and even to think during the particular action in the way we know would be most pleasing to Our Lady.

We shall not always be very successful. We may even forget altogether. But the important thing is that we should be trying. For this reason it is a good idea to