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Most Amiable

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Mother Most Amiable

By R. J. ROCHE, O.P.
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Mother Most Amiable!



TO help in increasing devotion to the Blessed Virgin is a sure way of grace for our own souls and the souls of others. True, our Catholic people already love Mary; devotion to her springs from the very heart of Christianity and is entwined with the life and history of the Church, yet there is always room for more intense devotion. It is God's will that we should give ourselves entirely to her guidance. Many years ago Father Faber, the celebrated convert, wrote: "God is pressing for a greater, a wider, a stronger devotion to Mary." The words are equally true to-day, for God is always pressing for greater devotion to the Virgin Mother. He has established her as the Mother of Divine Grace and the Gate of Heaven. If this poor world of ours is to return to God, it must be through Mary.

In this booklet are set forth a few simple thoughts on the loveliness of Mary and on the whole-hearted manner in which her children ought to rely on her. Perhaps the reader will be encouraged to do what in him lies for the spread of intense devotion to our Most Amiable Mother. By doing so he will render a real service to his fellow men in these days of turmoil. The grace that comes through Mary can subdue human passions and bend even the proudest wills. May we all realise that the strength of Heaven is at her call, and may each one of us contribute to the world's welfare and to God's glory by a "greater, wider and stronger" devotion to her.

R.J.R.

Mother Most Amiable!

MARY IS OUR MOTHER

A NON-CATHOLIC once said to the writer that he could not understand why Catholics are so intimately at home in their devotions to the Blessed Virgin. "They speak to her," he said, "as calmly and confidently as if she were their mother."

That is exactly what we believe. Mary is our Mother, and has as much right to the title as our natural mothers have. To realise this truth is one of the treasures of Catholic education: whosoever lives up to the conviction that the Blessed Virgin Mary is truly his mother is rich beyond all dreams and is wise with the wisdom of Heaven.

In saying that Mary is our Mother we do not mean only that she has adopted us and loves us with a love *resembling* that of a natural mother. Mary's relationship to us goes far deeper. A mother by adoption, although she may love the children deeply and sincerely, can never be quite the same as a natural mother: the fact always remains that the children were not born of her. Adoption in the ordinary sense is only an external arrangement: it does not change natural facts. And, for the same reason, the children who are adopted are not expected to resemble their foster-parents nor to have for them the intense filial affection that springs from the impulse of birth.

Mary is truly our Mother, the Mother of our souls: not that she has created our souls, for creation is the work of God alone, but that their supernatural life has come through her as truly as the physical life of the body comes through our natural parents. Our supernatural life is the life of grace. Grace causes the soul to live before God and to be capable of actions meritorious of eternal life. Grace may be called the life-force of the soul, and all grace comes through the hands of Mary.¹

¹ See "Mother of Divine Grace;" Dominican Publications, 8d.

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To understand this more fully, recall to mind that owing to original sin every soul comes into this world devoid of grace. It is alive in the sense that it is able to feel and, in due time, to use its reasoning powers, but it can do nothing whatsoever towards attaining the Kingdom of Heaven. Supernaturally, it is as dead as a still-born infant is physically dead.

At Baptism a miracle happens, the miracle of supernatural birth, the soul is born again in Christ. The poor, lifeless soul is joined on to Christ, the dead branch is grafted on the Vine, and at once the sap, the life-force or grace of Christ flows into it. The soul is now alive supernaturally, it becomes capable of performing actions which by God's gracious bounty will merit eternal life. The Eternal Father sees the soul as a part or member of His Divine Son, and therefore also as His own child and with Christ a co-heir of Heaven.¹

And this supernatural birth of ours comes to us through Mary. Our Lord, in His love for Mary and for us, has willed that it should be so. Such is the common teaching of Catholic theologians and writers, and hence she has every right to be addressed by the sweet name of Mother, the Mother of our souls.

For us then there is no orphanhood, nor loneliness in life: we have a wonderful Mother, who prepares for us a place in Heaven. Sometimes we hear people say how fortunate are, for instance, the living sisters of Saint Thérèse (The Little Flower) because they have a sister who is a canonized saint, or those families of whom some infant member has died in baptismal innocence. But there is no need for us to envy those fortunate ones. We all share a greater gift: we have in Heaven a Mother who is not only a saint but the greatest of all the saints, and she is also the Mother of our Saviour. Each one of us can say: "I am Mary's child, I belong to her as truly as Our Lord does. She loves my soul with a love as truly maternal as the love she has for Him. She delights to see me grow in virtue; she will grieve if I commit even one deliberate venial sin." Herein we have a very tender additional motive for avoiding all sin; not only does sin offer injury to Almighty God, but it hurts the loving heart

¹ Romans VIII. 17.

of our Mother, and we, as dutiful children, will avoid causing her the least pain or anxiety.

As we kneel by our bedsides to examine our consciences at night, we turn our eyes to some little picture or statue of Mary, and we can almost read the expression in her eyes as we confess to her how we have conducted ourselves during the day. She smiles encouragingly on us if we have succeeded in overcoming some temptation, or she looks gently sad if we have preferred our own will to her guidance.

WE ARE BRETHERN OF JESUS

Because we are Mary's children we are also the brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ. In this there is no exaggeration: it is not a mere oratorical statement, but a solid truth.

Sometimes two persons who are quite unrelated to each other are spoken of as being "just like brothers (or sisters)", but we know that such a statement is not to be taken literally: it is only a way of saying that they are very close friends; they share each other's thoughts, affection, resources, but they are not and never can be truly brothers or sisters: a mother's love cannot be shared with those who are not born of the same womb.

Our Lord's relationship to us is quite different. We are really His brothers and sisters, because His Mother is really ours also. It is our own Brother Who has redeemed us, Whose grace is the life of our souls, and Who will one day be our Judge. Our sins cannot alter this fact.

We know that our Brother will look upon us with eyes of pity and affection and mercy. He cannot see us without being reminded of His Mother: to Him we are always the younger children, wayward and wilful indeed but always His brethren. Because He is our Brother He makes allowance for our weakness and our poverty. He is more than willing to forgive, and even to find excuse for us if excuse be possible.

This truth of our close and real relationship with Our Divine Lord is a foundation of the virtue of Hope. Because we are His own brethren we confidently hope to obtain from Him "pardon of all our sins, grace to do the good works which He has commanded, and eternal happiness in the life to come." And in this glorious act of loving hope we

turn grateful eyes to our Mother Mary, for it is through her that we are brethren of Jesus.

MARY IS THE MOTHER MOST AMIABLE

"Mother Most Amiable" is one of the most appealing titles we have for Our Lady: in it the soul of the Church seeks to express the great depth of our veneration and affection. Mary is the most lovable of mere human persons, a mother whom it is easy to love, whose affection brightens for us the vale of tears and on whose prayers we, her children, build our hopes of eternal life. Our Divine Lord Himself is, of course, the most delightful and lovable Being Who ever adorned this world. He had only to say to men: "Follow Me," and they left all things and followed Him; and through the centuries of Christianity countless men and women and little children have been willing to leave all things and to lay down their lives for love of Him. And, after Our Lord, no name appeals more powerfully to the Christian heart than that of Mary His Most Amiable Mother. She attracts us by every gracious quality that can ennoble human nature and make it worthy of affection: unselfishness, affection, tenderness, tact, unbounded generosity. Her heart is big enough for all the world. No one has loved mankind, even the most degraded and most unworthy sinners, as tenderly and as patiently as Mary; no one has followed them so persistently with prayers and pleadings; no one has been so generous with gifts. Her patience is inexhaustible; she never utters a word of reproach no matter what our conduct has been; she receives us with open arms, she tells us of Our Divine Lord's love and mercy and sends us to Him that we may experience it for ourselves.

SIMPLICITY OF MARY'S LIFE

The simplicity of Mary's domestic life enhances her charm. She who was the most honoured of women followed the ordinary round of a working woman's life. Had she lived and moved amongst people whom the world calls the higher classes there might be some barrier or restraint between her and us; but because she was poor and lived among the poor we feel at our ease with her. Her domestic

tasks were the ordinary routine duties of a humble home: she was the perfect Mother devoted to the perfect Son, and to the gentle St. Joseph. She has sanctified forever the relations between every mother and her family. She has shown herself lovable in the smallest details, in all the familiar things that make up our own lives. She has left us an example which appeals to every soul, sanctifies every household duty of parent or child, and brings the love of Heaven to the humblest homes of earth.

HER RESEMBLANCE TO OUR LORD

That Mary bore a family likeness to Jesus is probable, and there seems to be at least some tradition to this effect. St. Epiphanius has given us a brief description of her personal appearance. He says that "she was of middle stature, her face oval, her eyes brilliant and of an olive tint; her eyebrows arched and black; her hair was of a pale brown; her complexion fair as wheat. She spoke little, but always frankly and affably; she was not troubled in her speech, but grave, courteous, tranquil. Her dress was without ornament." It is not a satisfying description, but we treasure it, for to us who love Mary every little detail is of interest. We can think of Our Lady as having the same manner as her Son, the same sweetness. Sons are like their mothers and mothers are like their sons in many ways, and we may be reasonably sure that Our Lord endowed His Mother with many of the same natural qualities that adorned Himself. Like Him, she must have been one who, had we known her, would win our hearts' love.

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

The beauty of Mary's soul is far more enchanting than that of her natural qualities; she is so far above us that in this life we cannot hope to know fully the treasures of her soul: that knowledge will be for us one of the joys of Heaven where we shall know the Mother fully in the Son. If we are at a loss for words in speaking of the baptismal innocence of an ordinary little child, what shall we find to say of Mary's immaculate soul? She is the only perfectly sinless human creature; she is the loveliest flower that ever bloomed on earth. We are not worthy to sound her praises;

we are dazzled by her splendour. Our eyes are too weak to gaze upon her; our hearts are not big enough to love her as we ought. Poets and preachers have exhausted the resources of language in trying to describe her, and have failed. No words can be coined in any language of men to tell of the wonderful dignity and unspeakable purity of Mary; human speech cannot do justice to her loveliness. There is little use in saying that she is lovelier than the rose or lily, purer than the snowflake: all such comparisons are inadequate; there is nothing on earth by which to measure the loveliness of Mary. All that we can say of her comes to this: that after Our Lord Himself she is the most perfect and most beautiful being who ever lived on earth; above all other creatures she is the chosen daughter of God the Father, God's own beauty is mirrored in her soul. Pope Pius IX, the Pontiff whose greatest glory it is to have defined the Immaculate Conception, writes: "God bestowed upon Mary an abundance of heavenly graces greater than that granted to the angels and much greater than that granted to all the saints." These are measured words, yet they can scarcely be stronger; they are more impressive than oratorical statements which might be suspected of exaggeration or inaccuracy.

INTENSITY OF MARY'S MATERNAL LOVE FOR US

We have already seen that Our Blessed Lady's love for us is the love of a mother for her children: with one great act of maternal love she embraces her entire family, namely, Our Divine Lord, to whom she gave physical birth, and then the rest of us to whom she gave supernatural birth as members of His Mystical Body.¹ It is then correct to say that Mary loves Our Lord and loves us with the same kind of affection—namely, with maternal love. Now her love for Jesus is something altogether beyond our power to imagine. We have never known anything like it; our poor selfish hearts are too narrow for it. Perhaps we have sometimes

¹ The expression "Mystical Body of Christ" will be found sufficiently explained in Dom Columba Marmion's *Christ the Life of the Soul* (p. 87, note 5). It is enough to say here that the Mystical Body is composed of all the faithful who are united by grace to Christ as their Head.

seen a picture by some famous artist, representing Mary holding the Divine Child in her arms, and have marvelled at the artist's skill in reproducing Mary's expression of adoring love. Yet, what is it to the reality? What artist can depict the love of the Immaculate Mother for the Incarnate Beauty of the Son of God? How she must love Him! He is supremely lovable; she has a perfect heart. Her heart was made to love Him! She, more than any of the saints, is aware of all the beauty of Him, for He is the fruit of her womb. She saw Him daily throughout His life: she knows His thoughts, His love for men. Often in the private life must He have spoken to her of His Divine plans for men. She loved Him all the more because men rejected Him. She saw Him mocked, His beauty defiled. Her sublime soul, untouched by dross of earth, gave itself to Him in perfect surrender.

And now say: Mary loves me, too, as her child: she sees me as a part of Jesus, a member of Him: the life that He brought from Heaven stirs in my soul. Her heart yearns for me: her arms reach out to enfold me; she offers me a refuge from all danger; she will carry me safely on my way if only I will permit her.

MARY HAS SUFFERED FOR US

Her love for us is all the greater on account of what we have cost her. It is said that the more pain a mother suffers in the birth of her child the more ardently does she cherish it. And Mary our Mother suffered a long martyrdom in order to give us supernatural life. Although she did not actually die a death of blood she suffered more than any of the martyrs or saints: she underwent unspeakable agony at the sight of Our Lord's sufferings. "All that the nails and lance produced in the Body of Christ, maternal love caused in the heart of Mary," says St. Bernard. We know that some of the saints such as St. Francis of Assisi and St. Catherine of Siena were allowed as a great privilege to share in the Passion and to receive in their bodies the mystic imprint of nails and spear and crown of thorns. If such was the privilege of the saints, how much greater reason was there that His Blessed Mother should share in the Passion, that the sorrows and agony of Our Blessed Lord

should have a counterpart in her soul. In the long list of those who have been scourged or tortured or burned or crucified or devoured by wild beasts for Christ's sake, there is none whose sufferings approached those of Mary, for there is none whose whole mind and heart were so closely united to His as were the mind and heart of Mary.

Not only was her soul harrowed by beholding the physical torment of Our Saviour and feeling it sympathetically in her own body, but she entered into His agony of mind: His hatred of sin and His shrinking from the burthen of it in Gethsemane; the sweat of Blood; the sadness at the treason of Judas; the insults and injuries heaped on Him in the trials before Caiphas and Pilate; the Way of the Cross and the final desolation of Calvary. In so far as a creature could, she shared in all the loneliness and deadly bitterness of the Passion; she, too, was made sorrowful even unto death in those last hours of Our Saviour's mortal life.

THE LEGACY OF CALVARY

It was at the very peak of her sorrows that Mary heard the gentle words: "Behold thy Son." Our Lord was dying, the world had rejected Him, men's heartlessness had broken His heart. Mary's own heart was riven at the sight of His desolate death. The prophecy of Simeon was fulfilled: the sword of sorrow had pierced her soul:

*By the Cross her station keeping,
Stood the mournful Mother weeping.*

Our Lord chose this dreadful moment to proclaim to the world that Mary is the Mother of Men. It was as if He said to her: "Mother, my love for souls is so great that I have even permitted you, my loved Mother, to join with me in suffering for them; our united pains are the price of their birth to grace. Now I leave them in your keeping: be a Mother to them as you have been to Me."

The words "Behold thy Son" were not an empty form. They were spoken out of the fulness of the Sacred Heart and are treasured in Mary's heart. We are the little children born to her amid the pangs of Calvary. Our salvation is in her hands: she watches over each one of us from the cradle to the grave. Amid all our struggles, falls and fresh beginnings, we know that we can rely on her to raise us up once more. Her one desire is for our sanctification, she wishes

us to grow like unto Christ; she longs to see His virtues in us: His gentleness, His patience, His charity, so that each one of us may be in truth a Christian—that is to say, another Christ, and like St. Paul, she may say: "My little children of whom I am in labour again until Christ be born in you."¹

HOW WE OUGHT TO LOVE MARY

We ought to love Mary as a child loves its mother: our souls should embrace her even as Jesus embraced her of old. "Son, behold thy Mother," said Our Lord to us from the Cross. How wonderfully kind is Our Lord in inviting us to share His own love for the Immaculate Virgin Mother! We are to enter into His Heart and our souls are to be set on fire by His own filial love for Mary. Thus does He seek to purify all human affection by raising it above all the petty selfish loves of earth.

Who am I that I should dream of understanding and sharing the love of Jesus for Mary? How dare I aspire to it? Shall pygmies stretch hands to the stars or creatures seek to penetrate the mysteries of God? Yet Our Lord persists in His generosity. The very grace that He gives us through Mary will work a great change in us; He Himself will teach us how Mary's children should love her, and Mary in her turn will teach us to love Him. We cannot indeed hope to love her as perfectly as He does; yet we can offer her a lesser degree of the same kind of love, namely, the love of a little child for its mother. Whenever we look towards Our Lord we shall think of Mary His Mother; whenever we think of Mary our Mother we shall think also of that other Child Who walked by her side of old, and Who is our Brother.

OUR LOVE FOR MARY SHOULD BE BOUNDLESS

There is no limit to the love we offer to Mary, for there is no limit to the grace of God from which it flows. The beginning of devotion to Mary is given to us in Baptism. As soon as that Sacrament is received there is something of Our Lord in us: His supernatural life flows into our souls. We begin to be like Him, to share His dispositions: we are

¹ Gal. IV, 19.

ready to turn to Mary and to address her by the sweet name of Mother.

As we grow older sanctifying grace fructifies in our souls: we receive further increases of it in the Sacrament of Penance, the Eucharist and Confirmation; day after day actual graces, too, are showered upon us. Increased grace means increased resemblance to Christ; our dispositions become more like His; we love Mary in the same way as He loves her; we are growing up in Christ. We shall have attained our full stature when we love Mary perfectly, and that will be only when Christ fully lives in us. With the love of Mary, love of all the virtues grows correspondingly: devotion to her is the short way to holiness; Our Lord smiles on His Mother's Friends and lavishes His choicest favours on them.

MARY AND THE APOSTOLATE

Whosoever would be of service to souls, be he priest or layman, must himself be devoted to Mary and must seek to implant this devotion in the hearts of others. All earnest apostolic workers know by experience that devotion to her does far more good than books or sermons, no matter how brilliant. From the very beginning, the Church of God has relied on Mary's intercession to bring God's blessing on all apostolic labours. Mary was with the Apostles in their preparation for the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and when they went forth on their Mission she continued to assist them by her prayers. With the apostolic missionaries of our own day it is the same. The men and women who go forth to heathen lands and whose who minister at home depend on Mary. Their lives and labours are under her patronage; they know well that if she is with them their work will be successful. There is an invisible power working in souls, and that power is divine grace given through Mary. Daily one sees examples of it: a sick-call comes in the nick of time, a heart is touched, a prodigal returns, a soul dies in grace. Some missionary priest or layman for that matter, may be the instrument of that conversion or happy death, but the real cause under God is Mary the Mistress and zealous mother of souls. It is she who gathers beneath her mantle all the poor benighted and scattered souls for whom her Son has died. Where human pleading

fails, Mary succeeds. In her own gentle, motherly way she unfolds the meaning of Bethlehem and of all Our Lord's life and death; she touches the hardest hearts and leads souls to sincere and permanent repentance.

It is then a work of truly apostolic charity to spread devotion to Mary. Let us commend all sinners to her and ask her to bless the work of all who labour for souls in the Apostolate. If by our prayers or personal suggestions we succeed in causing even a single extra Hail Mary to be said, we shall have rendered a real and solid service to souls.

MARY MAKES HOLINESS ATTRACTIVE

St. Thomas of Aquin' has some very interesting remarks on the subject of cheerfulness in the service of God. He says that "devotion ought to cause gladness in the soul" because it brings the soul close to God. As God is the source of all happiness, there should be no melancholy in serving Him. One wonders if the Angelic Doctor was thinking of certain gloomy souls, who, in spite of pious practices, retain unpleasant characteristics: they are reserved, cold, unsmiling, unaffectionate, even harsh. Instead of attracting to the service of God, they are apt to repel us from aspiring to it.

True holiness should be a source of edification and of happiness to the beholder. All the saints were lovable human beings: they were gentle, warm-hearted, unselfish; they spent themselves for others; no matter how severely they may have suffered in body or mind they always had a smile and a kind word for their fellow-men; always they diffused the "good odour of Christ" whose "goodness and kindness" were such a contrast to the spirit of His time.

Our Blessed Lady, greatest of the saints, is also the most attractive of them all. She possesses the most beautiful human disposition, purified, perfected, made sublime by grace. We cannot help loving her, and being attracted by her holiness. Speaking humanly, we may say that Our Lord could scarcely have done for us anything more tender and more appealing than to set this lovely Mother before our eyes. After Himself, the very graciousness of her fosters

¹ Summa, II^a II^a, Q. 82, a. 4.

² St. Paul to Titus, III. 4.

most powerfully the love of holiness. In her we see human nature made most amiable by union with Christ. Through her, Christ makes His way into our hearts.

MARY IS OUR GUIDE

We live in a world that is reeling from the wounds of past and present wars. It is a puzzling world; old vices are called by new and misleading names; deceitful words are used to lure men away from God; pride is called independence, and sensuality is called freedom. One might almost say that the writ of God no longer runs in the affairs of men: men claim the right to direct human conduct independently of Him.

Through such an insane world we must make our way. And, under God, our guide is the Blessed Virgin Mary. She is our Protector, our Advisor, our Mother. She has our eternal interests at heart: she possesses the knowledge and the prudence whence wise counsels spring. Of her are true the words of Ecclesiasticus, ch. 24, v. 7: "Her thoughts are more vast than the sea, and her counsels more deep than the ocean." Of a truth, such a guide is to be lovingly obeyed, a guide whose counsels come from Our Divine Lord Himself.

MARY AND YOUTH

To the youth of the present generation belongs the future. On them and on their attitude to the problems of life will depend largely the world's weal or woe, temporal and spiritual. If they are guided by Mary, their decisions will be wise and the future will be safe. It is for them to lay aside all preconceived notions, and to listen to her with an open mind: she knows the dangers, she counsels reflection and restraint. Let us do nothing, attempt nothing, decide nothing, without consulting her. Especially in the critical moments, such as the selection of a state of life, let us have recourse to her who is the mouthpiece of Eternal Wisdom.

MARY AND VOCATIONS

Mary takes a particular and most affectionate interest in all those who are called to the ecclesiastical or religious life. Her Divine Son offers to set His seal upon them: they will belong to Him. They have seen His outstretched beckoning hand and heard His voice calling on them to follow Him.

throughout life they will never know loneliness, because they will have His company. That divine call or vocation is the highest honour; the service of God in any capacity, however humble, is the noblest use that man can make of whatever strength or talent God gives to him. God does not need men, but He deigns to make use of men; He leaves His cause largely in human hands. To-day that divine cause is attacked on many sides. The Catholic Church is engaged in a struggle, a struggle that on her side is one of suffering and endurance. Two rival forces, the forces of Christ and anti-Christ, are approaching a climax of conflict. Of the final issue of that conflict there can be no doubt: the gates of hell cannot prevail against the Church of God. Meantime, the Divine Lover of souls invites many youths and maidens to accept the vocation of serving Him. Vocation accepted and faithfully followed is a protection in life and a pledge of predestination. May Mary the Mother Most Amiable direct all our aspirants, fully enlighten their minds, and obtain for them the great courage of unselfish renunciation.

MARY AND THE WORLD

All of us, no matter what our place in the world, carry responsibilities. No one moves through life altogether alone; our actions concern others as well as ourselves in time and in eternity. Worldly wisdom and human prudence may help us to some extent, but they do not suffice. We like to think of ourselves as "men of the world," but let us remember that no one can be truly a man of this world unless he is a man of the other world first. Since this world exists only for the sake of the other world, it is right and just that everything in it be weighed and judged in the light of that other world. And so even in matters that may seem to be purely secular, we turn humbly and simply to our heavenly Mother for guidance.

We pray to her for our country and for all other countries. In the affairs of nations we cannot separate the temporal from the spiritual. War itself is not a mere temporal matter: it is not concerned only with the possession of territories or the vindication of a nation's honour. There is something higher always involved, namely, the good of souls, the supremacy of the Kingdom of God. Kingdoms of

earth may crumble and nations may decay, but of God's right to reign in the souls of men there is no end.

Such must be our view of the world and of all that is in it; hence we pray that the men who mould the policy of nations may be guided always by Mary. Through her the King of Peace came into this world. To-day the world awaits a new conversion, and that conversion cannot be brought about by force or argument but only by the grace that flows from Calvary and which will be won by the loving prayers of Mary. She stands remote from the world's din, peaceful, unruffled, yet deeply sympathetic with human sorrow. May she inspire the warring nations and the warring classes with Christian counsels. Amid the turmoil of the times, amid the clouds that veil the future, we look to her under God as to our Star of Hope shining over a distracted world.

COMPLETE DEVOTION TO MARY

We have already seen that our love for Mary should be boundless; it remains now to consider how that love should be expressed in practical devotion to her in the spirit of one of her most devoted servants, St. Louis Mary Grignon de Montfort. True devotion to Mary, he tells us, must be *complete*; there must be no holding back of anything even in the smallest degree. A devotion that is not whole-hearted, or that consists only in praying to her when we are hard pressed spiritually or temporarily, is not enough: it does not give due recognition to her position as Chief Steward in God's Kingdom. We have to recognise that Our Lord has placed all His treasures at her disposal, she is the Queen of Grace and the Mistress of Souls; there is no salvation except through her, there is no damnation for those who really belong to her.

What do we mean by saying that there is no damnation for those who really belong to Mary? Do we Catholics think that we shall infallibly be saved if we are devout to her, even though our conduct be sinful in other ways? Emphatically we do not believe anything of the kind. Devotion of that sort would be superstitious and presumptuous.

There is no taint of superstition in our attitude to Mary. Her name is not a mere charm or talisman, as if the saying of a few formal prayers left us free to continue in our evil

habits. The Catholic position is that true devotion to Mary and habits of deliberate sin cannot exist in the soul at the same time. One excludes the other. The true servant of Mary follows her guidance, and in doing so he avoids sin. Mary gradually forms in him the counterpart of Christ.

True devotion to Mary consists in handing oneself over to her completely and permanently so that she may do as she pleases with us: we no longer belong to ourselves but to her. We lay aside our own will and desires, we do not wish to have even a thought of our own, but seek only to share her thoughts and to carry out her desires. She on her part takes us into her heart; she explains to us the virtues of Christ, she guides our every step, she whispers to us at every moment, warning us and guarding us against all dangers and deceits.

When a person is thus completely devoted to Mary there can be no question of sinful conduct of any kind, the protection of Mary enters so deeply into every faculty of the soul that sin is altogether excluded. And if the soul perseveres to the end of life in obeying Mary, of a certainty there can be no question of its damnation.

THE SECRET OF MARY

It is of this close association with the Blessed Virgin that St. Louis Mary de Montfort writes in his little book, *The Secret of Mary*. He takes up the thought of St. Augustine who calls Our Lady "The Mould of God", because in her sacred person was formed the human Body of the Incarnate Word, and applies it to her spiritual motherhood of us. Our souls, says St. Louis Mary, must be moulded by Mary if we are to become like unto Christ, for she is the Mother divinely appointed to shape us to this likeness. In order that she may do so, we must submit ourselves entirely to her, there must be a complete merging of ourselves in Mary, we must enter into her very soul and endeavour to see all things through her eyes.

Such is the climax of devotion to Mary. How far removed it is from the saying of a few more or less formal prayers in her honour, from limiting ourselves to external acts of homage, and even from half-hearted and spasmodic

attempts to imitate her in some one direction whilst we continue to go on our own way in others.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS OF SAINT GRIGNON DE MONTFORT

The book, *Secret of Mary*, should be read carefully by all who are attracted to the complete following of Mary. He shows what intimate association with Mary means in practice. It means, he says, that all our actions are done *through* Mary and *with* Mary and *in* Mary. This amounts to performing all our actions in union with her intentions, and under her eyes, and becoming instruments in her hands so that it is she who acts through us in all our undertakings.

Take, for instance, our duty of prayer. It matters not whether we are priests saying the Divine Office or little children at morning and night prayers. We know our unworthiness and our frequent distractions; we do not deserve to be heard, we cannot keep our thoughts fixed for more than a few minutes at a time. But when our prayers are said *through* Mary everything is changed: she makes up for our shortcomings. In beginning our prayer, we make a sincere, earnest effort at recollection, and at the same time we ask Our Lady to allow our prayers pass *through* her. And Mary takes our poor words and makes her own of them: they become *her* prayers. Our Lord receives them as if uttered by His Blessed Mother. It is as if she signed her name to our petitions and substituted her voice for ours. Her fervour makes up for our coldness and her perfect attention makes up for our distractions. Thus our poor efforts are purified and made acceptable, for how can Our Lord refuse to hear the perfect prayer of His Blessed Mother!

The thought of our union with Mary is in itself a great help to pray well: we feel that Our Mother is beside us and her very nearness strengthens us to banish all distractions and irreverence.

The same principle of doing everything through Mary applies to all actions; the woman of the house at her domestic tasks, the girl in office or factory, the workingman at his labour: all offer their actions through Mary to God, so that their work is presented to the Almighty as if coming from Mary herself and is therefore immensely increased in

value. We know that the value of an action before God depends not on the greatness of the action itself, but on the degree of love of God that inspires it. Thus, for example, a humble action, such as the sweeping of a room, if performed with perfect love of God, is more meritorious than the government of a kingdom performed with a low degree of charity. Now Mary's charity is perfect; ours is very imperfect. Therefore we ask the Blessed Virgin to take our ordinary actions, to cover them with her mantle, and to offer them to the Most High as if they were her own. Thus our actions acquire a marvellous value before God: our poor commonplace lives are transformed by the infusion of the perfect charity of Nazareth.

IN UNION WITH MARY AND IN MARY

To perform our duties with Mary means to perform them in her company, with her as helper and instructress. Thus in preparing for Confession we think of her as actually present at our side, helping us in the examination of conscience, suggesting motives of contrition, showing us how to set about the amendment of our lives, and encouraging us in the actual confession of our sins. Before Confession we say to Mary: "Mother dear, I know that I am, a sinner, I have caused pain to Our Lord and to you. Help me now to remember all my sins and to be truly sorry for them. I want to see my sins as you see them, in all their hideousness, and to shrink from them as you do." And we shall find in practice that she will help us, even as an earthly mother helps her little son to prepare for Confession. In her company, Confession is not a burthen but a source of happiness, and our happiness is all the greater for the knowledge that we have pleased our dear Mother.

In a similar way we prepare for Holy Communion and we make our thanksgivings afterwards with Mary. To help us get ready for the reception of the Eucharist is a joy to her: she would wish our souls to be cleansed even as her own soul was made immaculate for the coming of Our Lord. As we make our little acts of love and sorrow and adoration, she will whisper to us. No earthly mother can derive greater joy and consolation from the First Communion of her little child than Mary does from the worthy Communions of each of us. As we approach the rails she walks by our side: she

helps us to remain recollected whilst Our Lord is given to us; in the supreme moment of Communion she adores Her Divine Son within us. A new bond of affection is formed between her and us: she loves us because we have become for a brief while His tabernacles.

And she will make our thanksgiving with us. Sometimes owing to weariness of body or of mind we may find it hard to pray after Holy Communion, but the company of Mary will overcome the difficulty. She will call upon the stars of heaven to do Him homage on our behalf, and when thoughts and words fail us, she will tell Jesus of all the things we ought to say to Him.

We can hear Mass, too, and visit the Blessed Sacrament or be present at Benediction in Mary's company. We are as little children who are too young to adore or to pray unassisted, but our Mother assists us, and how can Our Lord refuse to bless the children whom She presents to Him.

These are but a few examples of what it means to live our inner or spiritual life with Mary. There is no reason why we should not enjoy her company also in all our temporal activities, which indeed will cease to be merely temporal when they are sanctified by being performed in union with her. Whatever we do with a good intention can be done in her company. Whether we work or rest, eat or drink, we can do all in the certainty that her approving smile will sanctify our actions.

Finally, Blessed de Montfort explains that to perform one's actions in Mary is to perform them under her direction in obedience to her and in complete dependence on her. Thus we avoid the danger of self-seeking: personal motives do not influence us, our actions guided by Mary are for God's glory alone, for Mary has only one end in view, namely, the reign of Christ in the hearts of men.

WE OUGHT NEVER BE DISCOURAGED

Gradually Mary moulds her children to the image of Our Lord. Not in a week or a year will the battle be won, for Mary's poor children of earth are often wayward, our nature is very weak, we forget our promises: there will be struggles, perhaps occasional lapses. But let us never give in to discouragement. It is not easy to abandon ourselves completely

so that Mary may reign in us as the Vicereine of Christ. Life is a warfare and he would be a coward-soldier who would surrender because of set-backs. Cowardice is pardonable in those who have only their own weakness to rely on, but not in us who rely on the Blessed Virgin: through her our strength is the strength of God.

UNION WITH MARY FOSTERS HUMILITY

You will observe how this complete devotion to Mary tends to foster a very deep humility. In fact, it is founded on humility, on the great truth that of ourselves we have no strength nor virtue whatsoever. The more complete and perfect our devotion to Mary, the deeper must be the fundamental humility. If we grow in grace, the honour is Our Lady's; if we fail, the dishonour is our own, we have not been faithful to her. There is no room left for spiritual pride. Graces may be given to us most generously, in a measure heaped up and running over, but we do not attribute them to any merit of our own, we have done nothing to deserve them, it is Mary's holiness that has given value to the actions performed through her and with her and in her. In fact, the greater the gifts of God to us, the more profound is our humility; the very bounty of God enables us to see more clearly our own nothingness. The gifts of God are so marvellous that we know they simply cannot be due to us, but are given out of His loving Heart because of Mary's pleading. And as humility grows deeper in us, we become more and more pleasing to God and more amenable to His grace. It was Mary's own humility that made her attractive in the eyes of God; in the sublime honour of the Incarnation she was able to say: "He hath regarded the humility of His andmaid . . . and hath exalted the humble."¹

CONSECRATION OF OURSELVES TO MARY

The foregoing details about living in union with Our Lady are useful for an understanding of the Act of Complete Consecration to her. This Act is not a new form of devotion to Mary; traces of it can be found in some very early spiritual writings, but it is chiefly associated with the name of Saint Grignon de Montfort who did much for its

¹ Luke, II. 48.

propagation. Somewhat quaintly he calls it the "slavery" of the soul to Mary. It is, however, a slavery of love, a willing subjection to a gracious Mistress; the soul loves and trusts Our Lady so completely that it willingly abandons all its own rights of every kind, in so far as they can be abandoned, and relies on her for every need. "The act of consecration," says Blessed de Montfort, "consists in the complete giving of self in a state of serfdom to Mary, and through Mary to Jesus." It is really the climax and summing up of his advice about doing everything *through, with and in* Mary; not only our actions, but our whole being, our soul and its merits; all become associated with the holy person of the Blessed Virgin.

ACT OF CONSECRATION FURTHER EXPLAINED

The Act of Consecration is an heroic offering. In ancient times a slave had no rights of his own, he belonged utterly to his master. The "slave" of Mary belongs body and soul to Jesus through her. In the first place we offer up through her our temporal goods: house, possessions, income, reserving not as much "as one farthing, one hair." All have come to us from God, they really belong to Him, we give to Him what is already His own. And in the second place we sacrifice our spiritual goods: our merits (in so far as it is possible to do so), the right "of disposing of the value of our prayers, alms, mortifications and good works. This we do by leaving the entire disposal of them to the Blessed Virgin, who will apply them as she thinks fit, to the greatest glory of God, which she alone knows perfectly."¹

In this manner we give to Mary everything we can possibly give her, to be used as she pleases. Our own rights are completely and permanently renounced. So thorough is the renunciation that after having made this Act, we cannot devote the satisfactory value of our good works to any purpose of our own, such as the conversion of a sinner or the relief of a soul in Purgatory, without permission of Mary our Mistress.

¹ Saint de Montfort: *Secret of Mary.*

WE RECEIVE MORE THAN WE GIVE

The Act of Consecration should be made without hope of any other recompense than the honour of belonging to Jesus Christ through Mary. Nevertheless, in actual fact our Act is rewarded, and lavishly. Mary, generous Mother, does not allow us to suffer for giving away our possessions. In return for the little that we can give, "she will bestow a great favour on us; she will share all, even her merits and her virtues with us." By the grace that will come through her, our good actions will be made more meritorious; these new merits will bring further grace, and so on indefinitely. Thus the soul is being constantly enriched. We do far more for ourselves through Mary than if we had retained our good works. As Saint Grignon de Montfort says, the soul of the slave of Jesus and Mary, stripped of self and faithful in his surrender, is richly clad in the merits and virtues of Jesus and Mary.

Thus the "slave of Mary" becomes the freeman of Christ by the graces that come to him from Christ through Mary.

THE LEGION OF MARY AND THE ACT

The Legion of Mary is doing much to spread and explain true devotion to Our Lady in the spirit of Saint Grignon de Montfort. At the Legion gatherings called *Actes*, each Legionary renews his profession of fealty to Mary, the Legion Commander, in the words: "I am all thine, my Queen, my Mother, and all that I have is thine." This formula expresses the spirit of Saint de Montfort's True Devotion to Mary: it is a complete renunciation of all personal goods and interests, a total subjection of self to our Blessed Lady. Like any other form of words often repeated by large numbers of people, as happens at Legion ceremonies, this formula needs to be meditated on and explained from time to time if its recitation is not to become more or less mechanical and a matter of routine. Rightly appreciated by Legionaries and their Auxiliaries, it does wonders for the glory of Mary by bringing home to our people the beauty of dedicating one's whole life to Mary.

¹ Saint de Montfort: *Secret of Mary.*

Her name is being graven more and more deeply on the Catholic heart; through the Legion's apostolate is fostered that wider, stronger devotion for which, as Father Faber says, God is pressing, and for the sake of which these pages have been written. Now that the forces of evil are massed together in their fierce attack on Christianity, the soldiers of Christ rely altogether on Mary, their great Commander, who is appointed to crush the serpent's head.

FRUITS OF COMPLETE DEVOTION

The fruits of complete devotion to Mary may be summed up as: Security in life and in death. This is what we would expect through the intercession of her who prays for us "now and at the hour of our death" and who is all-powerful with God on behalf of her loving and obedient children. "Mary," says Saint de Montfort, once established as Queen of the Soul, pours into it "a purity of heart and of body, a purity of intention and fruitfulness in good works . . . She will make our soul live for Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ live in us . . . She enlightens it by her pure faith, deepens the heart by her humility, dilates it and sets it aglow by her charity, purifies it by her purity, ennobles it and enlarges it by her motherly care." Thus, in return for giving ourselves to Mary, she gives herself to us and forms the image of Her Divine Son in our hearts. Such is our encouragement to give ourselves completely to Mary.

Even though we consecrate ourselves to Mary, we may not experience the full fruits of it at once, owing perhaps to lack of wholeheartedness or of perseverance. But it is certain that the fruits exist and await our efforts. Nor are these fruits reserved for privileged persons such as priests and monks and nuns; they are for all who fully and truly give themselves to Mary.

The so-called "secret" is not really a secret, but lies in full sight of all. Mary herself explains it to her children and leads them on from the first Hail Mary to the full knowledge of "marvels beyond the belief of the wise and the proud."

¹ Saint de Montfort: *Secret of Mary*.

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