

“Out of the Abundance of the Heart the Mouth Speaks”

Tenth Annual Novena to the Immaculate Heart of Mary

The Fruit of Her Pondering: the Words of Our Lady

Mother Marie Bernadette, IHM

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The Great Jubilee Year of 2000 was a profound moment in the life of the Church. Pope John Paul II had prepared us for three years so that the moment of grace would be realized in each of us. One request he made of us was to make the year “intensely Eucharistic.” Searching for a way to do this for ourselves as well as helping others, we asked permission of Bishop Olmsted to have a public novena in preparation for the Feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. As Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary we are convinced of the truth that the saints teach us: Mary and devotion to her, ALWAYS brings the faithful, and even the soon to be faithful, to her Son. She never remains in the limelight by herself.

And so, for 10 years now we have been praying this novena publicly and inviting all our friends to join with us, presenting our needs and holy desires to Our Lady whose will is indisputably united with that of Her Son, and who distributes His graces accordingly.

It does us, the Sisters, *good*; it inspires us to see so many of you here to pray with us and to grow in our devotion to Mary and to the Eucharistic Lord. Some of you were with us that first year; several of you here have been with us every year! You have watched, with us, this endeavor grow from participants numbering about 15 to this crowd!

We started out using the basement of our convent on the Bishop Carroll campus and our Chapel there; seating about 40 people, in a Chapel that comfortably seated 18, to using this parish hall and this parish Church. In celebration and in thanksgiving of God’s blessings upon this annual gathering, we are going to have a door prize each evening ... so hold on to those tickets. We will pray for a winner when we break for refreshments.

Voices united in prayer forming one voice, is very pleasing to Our Lord. He says in the gospel of Matthew: “Amen I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything for

which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father. For where two or three are gathered in my name there am I in the midst of them” (18:19-20).

It is *good* to bring your daily needs *and* your extraordinary needs to the most powerful intercessor after Christ Himself. Some graces are freely bestowed; some have to be asked for. Let’s not be reticent! Let the Lord be generous to you. Remember the gospel accounts of miracles; Jesus, every time but once, asked the individual to express his or her need: “show your withered hand;” “What do you want of me?” “That I may see, Lord.” The examples are numerous. Let us ask, and it will be given; we will seek and we will find, we will knock and the door will be opened to us according to God’s good pleasure. He will not give us a stone when we ask for bread or a scorpion when we ask for an egg. Trust Him to give us what we need. He knows better than we do. St. Teresa of Avila said that the only thing that limits God’s generosity in giving is our ability to receive. Ask Him. He will give you what is best, what will fulfill your greatest need. He assures us, “Whatever you ask for in prayer with faith, you will receive” (Matthew 21:22).

One of the reasons we made this novena public – besides wanting to increase Eucharistic devotion – was to grow in our devotion to Our Lady as well. St. Louis de Montfort, the all time expert on Marian devotion, tells us there are five characteristics of Marian devotion. These characteristics of true devotion are:

1. Interior: established firmly in mind and heart. Is it second nature to inwardly turn to Mary, seeking her counsel; do you speak to her throughout the day?
2. Tender: reflecting the tender, respectful love of a child for its mother. Do you approach Our Lady as a real person; remember that she is alive and active in the world, waiting to be invited into your thoughts and your lives.
3. Holy: prompting you to avoid sin and practice virtue. Does your devotion to Our Lady direct your actions? The scapular is a good reminder; as children of Mary we want to please her and avoid all that displeases her.
4. Constant: strengthening the soul in good so that you do not abandon your spiritual practices. Just like our mothers had to remind us to do our chores or our

homework, does your devotion to Our Lady remind you to fulfill your spiritual obligations and do your daily duty for the love of God?

5. Disinterested: enabling you to rise above yourself and your self-centered interests, seeking God and His glory. Our devotion to Our Lady should help us realize that though we are selfish by nature, by “super”-nature, that is, grace, we are called to give of ourselves however God desires of us, building up the Kingdom, working for the good of others.

Ask yourself where your devotion needs to improve: interior, tender, holy, constant and disinterested, and use these nine days to begin the habit.

Ultimately, however, and I know that St. Louis de Montfort would agree, the goal of devotion, that is, its purpose and its end, is imitation. True devotion to Our Lady does not only consist in loving her, in praying to her, but ultimately in imitating her who most perfectly imitated Jesus Christ.

For this transformation to take place, we have to live a more reflective life. We shouldn't operate on automatic pilot or by default. Stop and reflect. Ask yourself which course of action would Mary take? How would she respond? What would she do? We have to take full advantage of our choices. When presented with two options we first discern good and evil; if both choices are good, then we ask which is the most Mary-like.

Her virtues are her crown and it is a crown she offers to us as well. We want to practice the Marian virtues and help you practice them as well: her charity, her humility, her docility and obedience, her purity and single-heartedness, all of these and more are trademarks of Our Lady. To imitate her we must practice these virtues. Hopefully these presentations will give you new insight on how to do this.

Imitation of Mary demands that we remember who she is! She is not a statue or a pretty picture. She is a living person, body and soul in heaven, and she is intensely interested in each of us.

It is with this in mind that we have prepared our presentations. We want to be inspired to convert! To become more Mary-like. It is our hope that these talks will show you how to better imitate Our Lady. If you learn something new along the way that is a plus!

True devotion leads to imitation.

With all that said, I would like to use the remaining time to introduce the theme for this year's novena presentations: *The Words of Our lady: The Fruit of Her Pondering*. I could have just as easily entitled the series *From the Abundance of the Heart the Mouth Speaks* (Lk 6:45b).

Mary spoke only four times in Scripture: at the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Finding in the Temple and at the Wedding Feast in Cana.

1. 3 sentences at the Annunciation (Lk 1:26-38). After the Angel Gabriel asked her to become the Mother of God she said:
 - a. How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" (Lk 1:34). After he explained the power of the Most High and the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, she gave the perfect reply:
 - b. Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. (Lk 1:38)
 - c. May it be done to me according to your word. (Lk 1:38b). She didn't understand but she said "yes". What a perfect example for us.
2. Upon being greeted by Elizabeth at the visitation, Mary sang her Magnificat, her song of praise and thanksgiving (Lk 1:46-55). These words can only come from a humble heart, a heart filled with the love of God, from one whose heart is awe struck by the action of the Lord in her life.

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
My Spirit rejoices in God my Savior
For He has looked with favor on His lowly servant.

From this day all generations will call me blessed:
The Almighty has done great things for me,
And holy is His Name.

He has mercy on those who fear Him
In every generation.

He has shown the strength of His arm,
He has scattered the proud in their conceit.

He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
And has lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things,
And the rich He has sent away empty.

He has come to the help of His servant Israel
For He has remembered His promise of mercy,
The promise He made to our fathers,
To Abraham and his children for ever

3. There is silence then for 12 years. The next time she speaks is at the finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple. She says two sentences after the trauma of missing her Child for three days.
 - a. Son, why have you done this to us? (Lk 2:48)
 - b. Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety. (Lk 2:48). Her heart was deeply puzzled, she sought understanding; the Child's reply can sound like a rebuke, but when examined more closely we see they are opening the doors of for Mary's universal vocation.
4. Finally, she spoke two sentences at Cana (Jn 2:1-12)
 - a. They have no wine. (Jn 2:3b). After these words we hear Our Lord's response: "What has this to do with me?" And then we see the utter trust of Our Lady. She knew she did not have to answer that question; she knew His heart and He knew hers, and so she says to the waiters:
 - b. Do whatever He tells you. (Jn 5b)

All in all, on four different occasions she spoke a total of seven sentences and sang a hymn of praise to the Lord. So infrequently did she speak that there are no recorded words in either the Gospel of Matthew or Gospel of Mark. She who has been put before us as our model, guide, and protectress, spoke so infrequently! This in itself is a good lesson for us. What is more effective: words or witness? What speaks more loudly: speech or action? When we look at a magazine or a newspaper, what do we look at first? Pictures. What we do and what we say should be communicating the same message, but the one mode of communication proves the authenticity of the other. St. Joseph, the second greatest saint, patron and protector of the universal Church, has no recorded words in Scripture. But he does make very important decisions and takes appropriate action. Before I get off track, let me repeat my point for emphasis: Mary spoke few words; her actions were always communicating the same message as her few words. Words and deed form an integral response to God's direction and the fulfillment of His Will.

Secondly, isn't it true that when someone speaks few words we listen to them more closely? Isn't it true that when one speaks few words, often times, they are more profound? Usually they are more thought out and complete. They are memorable and worthy of remembering. In relation to homilies, the Sisters often refer to the short, stabbing ones as "zingers"!

How true this is of Mary's words. Her words are not empty or idle chatter! Three times in Scripture, each time in the Gospel of Luke, it is recorded that "Mary pondered in heart" the meaning of the words spoken to her or the events she witnessed and experienced. At the words of Gabrielle, she wondered what they meant; when the shepherds visited the Holy Family in the stable after the birth of the Divine Child and when she and St. Joseph found the Child Jesus in the Temple. Scripture tells us, "She pondered all these things in her heart." She consulted the Lord; she presented Him with her perplexities; she let Him reveal the deeper meanings of these words and events. When she spoke, she did so to help us understand that as well. Her words are sure and steady guides for our life of prayer and our growth in virtue as well a sound guiding principle for all of the 1000s of decisions we have to make every day.

“Of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.” What was “the abundance” of Mary’s heart? Here is the question! Where your treasure is, there is your heart (Lk 12:34). What was Mary’s treasure, her abundance? The attention of Mary’s heart, her eyes, her focus were always on the Lord. What was He telling her? How was He directing her? What was He asking of her? The words of Mary’s heart bespeak her love, devotion, docility and direction. Listening closely to her we can learn how to do this, how to live this way as she did. As the most perfect disciple of her Son, she is also the perfect model for all of us.

Her few words are filled to running over and with meaning. Like all of Scripture, their depths will never be exhausted, but, nonetheless, they are worthy of exploration. Meditating upon them and studying them is beneficial to us all. It was said of St. Dominic that he only spoke to God or of God. How much more can this be said of Mary.

We have just celebrated liturgically the Paschal Mystery: the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Our Lord. When He ascended in glory He said, “I am with you always, until the end of the age” (Matthew 28: 20b). What is the first thing we think of? The Eucharist! He remains with us: Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity. Also, He dwells in us and with us. He has not left us. Depend on this. Know it in the depths of your heart.

At the Last Supper He made us another promise: “I will not leave you orphans” (Jn 14:18). Who is an orphan? A child without a parent. He has not left us orphans. On the Cross He gave us His greatest treasure: He gave us Mary, His Mother. “When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, behold your son.’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother.’” She is our Mother. Mothers love, nurture, care for, and encourage their children. She will do so for us if we let her. She continues to guide us.

The second half of our series of presentations will give evidence of this guidance. We will be using some of her words from the most famous of her apparitions through history. I already quoted one this evening! In Paris in 1830, to St. Catherine Labore, Mary said, “Come to the foot of the altar and pray [to the Blessed Sacrament]; some graces are only given when they are asked for.”

Other apparitions we will be referring to are those of Our Lady of Guadalupe from the 16th century in Mexico, her apparitions to St. Bernadette in Lourdes in the 19th century, and finally to the children of Fatima, Lucia and Blessed Francisco and Jacinta, in the early 20th century.

All of these words, though they do not bear the weight of Scripture are true reflections of Scripture and sure guides – or the Church would not have given Her approval to the apparitions and the messages.

To conclude this introductory talk, I want to call your attention to a line spoken by Our Lady at Fatima; she told the children: “My Immaculate Heart will be your refuge and the way that will lead you to God.” For 10 years now we have tried to make this message more widely known through these novena presentations. She is our refuge: you can always entrust your cares, anxieties, your very self to her and trust in her loving care and protection. Her Immaculate Heart is our way, our sure fire way, to God. Never will true devotion to her lead you astray or leave you without the assistance you really need.

Even the very schedule of our evenings has been arranged to communicate and spread this message and point us in the right direction: devotion to Mary, true devotion to Mary, can only lead us to her Divine Son, our Eucharistic Lord, and so we move from speaking about her, or as in your case, listening to words about Mary, to the Eucharistic presence of Her Son, to praying through her to Him. We ask her to purify our intentions and petitions, to align them to His Holy Will and fulfill them for His greater glory, our sanctification and the eternal good of all involved.

So – out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks – I must have had a heart-full!