

**John Paul II: the Most Genuine Form of Devotion  
to the Blessed Virgin is Consecration to Her Immaculate Heart**

On March 25, 2001, the Feast of the Annunciation, Pope John Paul II stated: **“The most genuine form of devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary ... is consecration to her Immaculate Heart.”** This is a very clear, unambiguous statement; to understand it fully however, we need to know what both consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary is and what genuine devotion is. After exploring these two avenues, the benefits of a life lived in such a way will become increasingly clear.

First some definitions and clarifications.

The word consecration can be somewhat confusing, for it is used in such ways as to have more than one meaning. Think of a Church building, an altar or a chalice. These items are consecrated. Similarly, think of, if you have ever attended, the perpetual profession and solemn consecration of a religious Sister. Now think of the 33 day St. Louis de Montfort method of consecration to Mary. Obviously we are speaking of two different types of acts.

When a building, a table or a golden cup is consecrated, they is no longer, nor will it ever be again, just a building, a table or a golden cup. This special blessing often accompanied by an anointing with oil, changes the building into a Church, a table into an altar and a golden cup into a chalice. Never again can they be used for a worldly, earthly purpose and if they are it is a sacrilege. Imagine using a Church for a restaurant, an altar for a dining room table and a chalice to drink a coke. With our innate *sensus fidei*, that is, the sense of the faithful, we are repulsed.

Now think of the solemn consecration of a religious Sister at her perpetual profession. After having responded to her vocation, that is, by saying yes to the invitation to the Lord to follow Him along a narrower path and with undivided love to belong solely to Him, she professes her vows. After testing that vocation for at least three years while in the state of temporary vows, the Sister is then ready to answer definitively to the Lord's invitation. She professes her vows perpetually and then presents herself for solemn consecration. At this

point in the ceremony she kneels before the Bishop who stretches his hands over her and prays the consecration prayer. With this prayer *she* is changed.

The definition of the word consecration will be helpful at this point. We must go all the way back to the Latin. Consecration means to be made holy, to be set apart for a specific, holy purpose. The Church building, the altar, and the chalice have been set apart for a holy purpose. The Sister is also set aside for a specific purpose, a holy purpose. Just as the Church, the altar and the chalice can never again be used for a secular purpose, nothing the Sister does is ever again just worldly. Everything she does is consecrated because she is consecrated. Think of the altar breads and the mixed water and wine: after the consecratory prayer, there is not one crumb of bread or one drop of wine left on the altar. Every particle, every drop is consecrated, it becomes, substantially, the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ. So, likewise, every particle of the Sister is consecrated. That is why her lifestyle must be different – because she is different.

A side note, just as the Church building, the altar and the chalice can never not be consecrated, so too with the Sister. Even if she is dispensed from her vows, she is still consecrated. With a dispensation of vows the Church gives her permission to not live that consecration. That is something to think about isn't it?

The active party in these two examples is God Himself, through the instrument of the bishop who is His personal representative in the act he is performing. In these two examples, obviously and rightly, consecration is God's work and the result or effect of the action is pure gift.

On the other hand, consecration to Mary, even using the Louis de Montfort method of 33 days of preparation, is not the same. Consecration, that is, being made sacred, can only be God's work. We cannot, strictly speaking, consecrate, that is, make ourselves sacred. For this reason, some prefer to refer to this act as one of dedication or entrustment to Mary. Simply stated, consecration to Mary is surrendering and entrusting ourselves to the Heart of our Mother. We'll come back to this.

So what does genuine devotion, or to use the phrase St. Louis de Montfort made popular, what does true devotion mean? Most succinctly, true or genuine devotion to Mary means imitation of her. Devotion does not mean saying devotions. It means living a certain way; often times it means changing or converting from a one way to a better way. When Pope Benedict XVI was still Cardinal Ratzinger he wrote, “To be ‘devoted to the Immaculate Heart of Mary ... means to embrace the attitude of heart which makes the *fiat* the defining center of one’s whole life.” Our devotion must change our lives. If we are truly devoted to the Immaculate Heart of Mary we cannot carry on *status quo*, we must “embrace the attitude of heart which makes the *fiat* the defining center” of our lives. *Fiat* is the word of Mary’s Immaculate Heart; by changing our lives appropriately, may it also be the word of our hearts.

True devotion means imitating the one to whom you are devoted, and when speaking of Marian devotion this is expressed, to again quote Pope John Paul II, through “trusting prayer, enthusiastic praise and diligent imitation.” So here we have our program of imitation, of true devotion: trusting prayer, enthusiastic praise and diligent imitation.

What more trusting prayer have we ever heard than the five words Mary spoke to Jesus at Cana? “Son, they have no wine.” After a brief interchange with Jesus, she turned to the servants and said, “Do whatever He tells you.” If you remember that brief interchange, it didn’t sound too promising! On the surface his response sounded more like, “What business is this of mine?” Mary knew the deeper meaning as soon as she heard that He addressed her as “Woman.” He was not telling her He wouldn’t perform this miracle; He was telling her that with this miracle, He, the longed-for seed of the woman foretold in Genesis, would begin his hour.

“Son, they have no wine” and then “Do whatever He tells you.” That is trusting prayer. This passage from the Gospel of John also illustrates the reality that Mary knows our needs before we do. She is constantly praying for us, constantly bringing our need before Our Lord. Her prayer is trusting because it is always in conformity with God’s will. She cannot, nor does she want to pray for anything else. Speaking to the Lord, St. Augustine wrote in his autobiography, “Your best servant is he who is intent not so much on hearing his

petition answered, as rather on willing whatever he hears from you.” That is a servant who trusts that the Lord’s ways are better than our ways, they are all-good and beneficial to all.

We too should come before the Lord with confidence, presenting our needs and our petitions, praying with earnest for our intentions, ending all with the trusting words, “please answer these prayers according to your will;” and trust Him to act in the best way at the best time. Everything He allows or permits is for the greater holiness of all those involved and is part of a bigger, greater plan than we can possibly imagine.

Our “trusting prayer” should, in turn, become “enthusiastic praise”. Remember everything which comes to us each day is ordained or permitted by Him for our greater good, for our holiness, shouldn’t that encourage us to praise Him for everything? If we had eyes of faith to see this on a practical level then we would be more apt to fill our hearts and resound his praise with our lips.

Mary did not understand everything concerning Our Lord’s mission; nor did she comprehend fully all the words spoken of Him or by Him. She didn’t have to! She did, however, accept all of them, unquestioningly. Thus they all became an occasion of praise. She acknowledged His infinitely superior wisdom and love. Taking that as a matter of course, she did not have to understand every minute detail. She accepted and with that acceptance, she was able to grow in understanding – and that led to more praise! Her song known as the *Magnificat* is a beautiful expression of praise and thanksgiving. It would serve us well to pray with her often those words found in the first chapter of the Gospel of Luke, asking for a share in the same sentiments.

The third aspect of living an “intensely Marian life” is earnest imitation. Since he already spoke of her prayer life, here our late and great Holy Father seems to be referring specifically to her virtues. True devotion to Mary involves and revolves around the living of the Marian virtues, the virtues of her Immaculate Heart. Since these would be too many to list or enumerate, I will limit myself to what we refer to as her primary virtues: love, faith, purity, obedience and humility.

- **Mary's love:** She is known as the Mother of Fairest Love. How could we even describe the love of an immaculate heart, let alone imitate it? Simple! Love to capacity and your capacity will increase. Let that cycle repeat itself over and over again. Love to capacity and as your capacity increases, so must your love. We don't have to be complicated about this. What does it mean to love? It means to always will and work for the good of the one we love. This requires sacrifice on our part, for it will soon become obvious that willing and working for the good of another will not come by way of our personal comfort, pleasure and convenience. These are not the words Our Lord used to describe the Christian life. He said, "They will know you are my disciples by the love you have for one another." He also said, "If you will be my disciple, then deny yourself, pick up your cross and follow me." This is all about love! Love will bring us to the cross every time! Don't shirk it; embrace it and know that this is the infallible way of love. Calvary, the cross, was the perfect expression of God's love for us. It was not only the sacrifice of the Son, but also the sacrifice of the Father Who loved the world so much He sent His only Son into the world. Likewise, standing at the foot of the cross was Mary's greatest expression of love. Her steadfast presence there indicated her love for the Father and his divine will, her love for the Son Who poured out his blood for us, and her love for us, for whom Jesus suffered and died. Yes, seeing Mary standing at the foot of the cross can teach us much about loving. Sometimes all we can do for the one we love is to be with him and in that way share in the suffering. Additionally, St. Thomas Aquinas said the greatest act of charity is to pray for another. Loving is simple, it is just not easy.
- **Mary's faith:** Scripture tells us that Mary was blessed because she believed that the words spoken to her would be fulfilled. She was blessed because she had faith in the love, mercy and mighty works of God. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever," so, blessed will we be if we believe. As I said earlier, Mary's faith did not ask for explanations. If we have explanations, we don't need faith, we have surety. Trust in the Lord. He is all-good and all his ways are loving. He cannot do anything un-loving; He is not vengeful or malicious. Have faith in Him; trust Him in all things. Know that "all things work together for the good of those who love God." Scripture is full of lines like this. We have no reason to not trust Him, for He

wants our good and the good of all those we love, more than we possibly could. Pray like mad! Work like mad! and then trust that He will supply for all our deficiencies. You know, one of the most reassuring lines is from the prayer known as the *Act of Faith*: “I believe these and all the truths which the Holy, Catholic Faith teaches because You have revealed them Who can neither be deceived nor be deceived.” He doesn’t want to deceive us! He loves us infinitely and unconditionally; how can we possibly think that we know better than He does; how can we possibly think that He is not working and willing the good of all those we love and for ourselves. Think of that word “unconditional.” He loves us without reserve and regardless of what we do or say. Because He loves us infinitely in this way, we have absolutely no reason to not trust, to not have faith in Him. Imitate Mary’s faith; she never questioned; she never hesitated. Her faith enabled her to always say “yes.”

- **Mary’s purity:** When we hear or see the word purity, we tend to think of only one thing: the moral state of a person. Mary’s purity, which is described in the dogma of her Perpetual Virginity, is beyond question. She is “Virgin most pure” and “Virgin most chaste”; that is not the summation of what we mean when we speak of Mary’s purity. Think of gold. When it is pure it has no alloy, no other metal or contaminants within it, it is pure gold. Mary is pure. Another connotation refers to her single-heartedness. She gave her heart to God alone: purely, undividedly. Pure means “singly”. That which is pure cannot be divided; it is one. This is Mary’s purity. Everything she ever said or did was for God. We often refer to this as purity of intention; basically this means to do everything for God’s greater glory and honor, removing self advancement from everything. Do all for love of Him. If we live this way we will immediately see how our life changes, because, we must face it, we all like to do things that may not be for God’s greater honor and glory. If they are not, then we must not do them. To imitate Mary’s purity we must direct our lives in such a way that we always do, say, think or will what is for God’s greater honor and glory, not ours. When you are presented with a choice, ask yourself which option will give greater honor and glory to the One you love beyond all else, and do that.
- **Mary’s obedience:** St. John Eudes once stated, “God’s Will had absolutely no competition for possession of Mary’s entire heart.” Her purity of heart laid the

foundation for her perfect obedience. Never once did Mary even desire to act outside of God's will. Her obedience was the fruit of her love, for we always try to please the one we love. The pleasure of our beloved is our pleasure. Mary's only occupation, no matter what she was doing, was to keep her eyes constantly fixed on God, to discover His will, and, when she found what He wanted, to perform it (St. Bernadine of Siena). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says "To obey in faith is to submit freely to the word that has been heard, because its truth is guaranteed by God, who is Truth itself ... The Virgin Mary is its most perfect embodiment." In Mary there was no hesitation, no need for qualification, no checking the terms of the contract. Simply, with great trust, faith and purity of heart, she always said, "Yes, fiat." Her perfect faith and constant love necessitated her perfect obedience. We cannot say we believe or that we love if we do not obey. Obedience is the flower of our relationship with the Lord. Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep my commandments." Love is proven in deeds (1 Jn). The greater the love the more perfect the obedience. As was Jesus' life, so was Mary's life one long act of obedience: her vow of virginity, her betrothal to Joseph, her "yes" at the Annunciation, the trip to Bethlehem for the census, the night flight into Egypt – all of that before the Baby Jesus was even a year old. The list goes on even after the death and resurrection of her Son. She had been entrusted with the Church at the foot of the cross in the Acts of the Apostles we find her with the Apostles and disciples gathered around her in prayer and for motherly support. If we are truly praying and listening to the Lord in our prayer, if we are docile and receptive to his word, we will know what He wants us to do. Obedience means to listen. Listening implies doing.

- **Mary's humility:** The *Catholic Dictionary* defines humility as the supernatural virtue by which one attains the correct perception of one's relationship with God. Then it continues by saying, "The attitude of humility is: 'I am good only because of God's mercy.' Humility counters pride and seeks to serve God and others, as Mary did." This entry in the dictionary explicitly mentions Mary as the model of humility. Conceived immaculately, with an intellect unclouded by sin and a will unhindered by sinful tendencies, Mary's perception of her place and relationship with God was clear to her. She knew that without God and his grace she was nothing, that she was

completely dependent upon Him and that He is the giver of all good gifts. She claimed none of her goodness as her own work, but instead recognized that without God's mercy she would be the worst of sinners. Mary's profound humility enabled God to work in and through her. She did not stand in the way or place any obstacles in his path. She was empty of self and filled with God, her only ambition was to be of service to God and to anyone who was in need. This is still her attitude, so must it be ours.

Thus, so far, I have given you a quick summary of what it means to imitate Our Lady, of what it means to have a true devotion to her. None of us are where we want to be in this task; the important thing is to be committed and diligent. Want it, want it badly, desire it and it will become evident in your actions and soon become habitual.

Now, what does it mean to be consecrated or entrusted to Our Lady? According to Pope Pius XII, "Consecration to the Mother of God is a total gift of self, for the whole of life and for all eternity; and a gift which is not a mere formality or sentimentality, but effectual, comprising the full intensity of the Christian life, the Marian life." Then he adds, and this is a key point, "This consecration tends essentially to union with Jesus, under the guidance of Mary." Very simply stated, consecration to Mary means giving oneself to Jesus Christ through Mary. "It is to Jesus we then belong entirely, through Mary. It is the Spirit of Mary's total consecration to Jesus we must live" (Fr. Robert Fox, *Immaculate Heart of Mary: True Devotion*, 119).

Hence we see that Mary is not the goal but the guide! She leads all who have placed themselves under her guidance to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. She is always pointing us to the tabernacle. She keeps nothing for herself. Whenever we say "Mary" she says "Jesus". She gives everything to Him.

Practically speaking, consecration or entrustment is the surrendering of ourselves to Mary and in doing so we ask her to form and guide us. We try to allow within ourselves room for her interior disposition to take root in us, so her virtues I spoke of earlier may become ours also. And so we see the connection between devotion to and consecration to Mary, for

consecration is not simply the saying of a prayer, but it the living of a transformed life. Ultimately, a life in which we are gradually transformed into Jesus Christ himself so that we can say with St. Paul, “It is no longer I who lives, but Christ Who lives in me.” The means for this are simple, but as I am wont to say, not easy.

What must we do to consecrate ourselves to Mary? Place everything in her hands: your body, your soul, your merits, your prayers, your petitions, everything. Then trust her to dispense of them according to God’s will. She knows our needs better than we do; she knows those who are dear to us and those who most need our prayers. Most importantly, she knows God’s will much better than we ever could.

In fact, “The will of Mary is perfectly one with the will of God. The Heart of Mary is one with the Heart of Jesus. Mary wills nothing but what her Son, Jesus, wills. It is impossible for Mary to will anything that Jesus does not already will. By giving all to Mary, I will really be giving all to Jesus through Mary, and she in her motherly tenderness and love will purify whatever is weak and sinful in my humble gift of self. My gift will therefore be more pleasing to Jesus when given in Mary.” (Fox, 126).

So this consecration works two ways. We give everything to her and she forms us into true Christians. We can’t really beat that! Be confident in her abilities; be confident that she is taking an active role in your sanctification; be confident in seeking her assistance. It seems appropriate here to let St. Louis de Montfort remind us, it is most fitting that we go to God through Mary, since He chose her as the instrument through which He would come to us.

I have one last point I wish to explore: why did Pope John Paul specifically say “consecration to her Immaculate Heart” and not just say, to Mary? For this we return just briefly to the theme of Sister Joseph Mary’s talk on the meaning of the title *Immaculate Heart of Mary*. The title Immaculate Heart of Mary refers to the very person of Mary and all the grace, sanctity and love that flows from the Mother of Jesus to the human family. It is a means of salvation; the heart of Mary teaches us how to live the Christ-life, thus growing in holiness. Whatever is said of the Immaculate Heart of Mary must be interpreted in terms of her heart being inseparable from the Heart of her divine Son, to whom she points and to

whom she draws us. The Sacred Heart of Jesus is the Eucharistic Heart. Thus we see clearly see that the Immaculate Heart of Mary draws us to the Eucharist. The purpose of devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary is to love her Son and to lead us to the love of her Son, to the Sacrament of Love. Thus the meaning of devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary can be summed up in one word, and that is, LOVE.

Mary's heart is free from all hindrances to sin and the influence of evil; it is a fully functioning heart, a heart that is for others. Her heart is totally God's, thus she is totally God's – in her whole being. This is what we want to imitate. The Immaculate Heart of Mary is the way of the Church; learn to pray like Mary, believe like Mary, and love like Mary, then you, too, will be totally God's.

To reiterate, Pope John Paul said, "The most genuine form of devotion to the Blessed Virgin is consecration to her Immaculate Heart." My intention was to tie these two strands, authentic devotion and total consecration to her Immaculate Heart, together, and make a beautiful bow, resulting in the sincere desire of each of you to intensify in your own life your consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. If you have not yet made a consecration, it is my sincere hope that these nine evening of talks, devotions and most especially, of Adoration, have planted within you the desire to turn your life over to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Both Jesus and Mary want this. At Fatima Mary said, "Jesus wants to establish in the world devotion to my Immaculate Heart" (June 13, 1917) and later, Blessed Jacinta, as she was dying, repeated this desire of Our Lord's: "Tell everybody," she said, "that the Heart of Jesus wishes the Heart of Mary to be venerated at His side."

If you so desire to use it, we will have cards available in the back of Church with a prayer of Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Also, Pope John Paul II said that the authentic devotion and total consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary "is expressed by the humble sign of the Scapular." So, if you do not have one, you may also take one that will be available in the back of Church.