

NOVENAS

*All these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer,
together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus,
and with his brothers. ~ Acts 1:14*



NOVENA IS A PRAYER that is said for a particular intention for nine consecutive days or once a week for nine consecutive weeks. The tradition of novenas finds its source at the beginning of the Church when the Lord commanded the apostles to return to Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit. From the day of his Ascension until Pentecost,

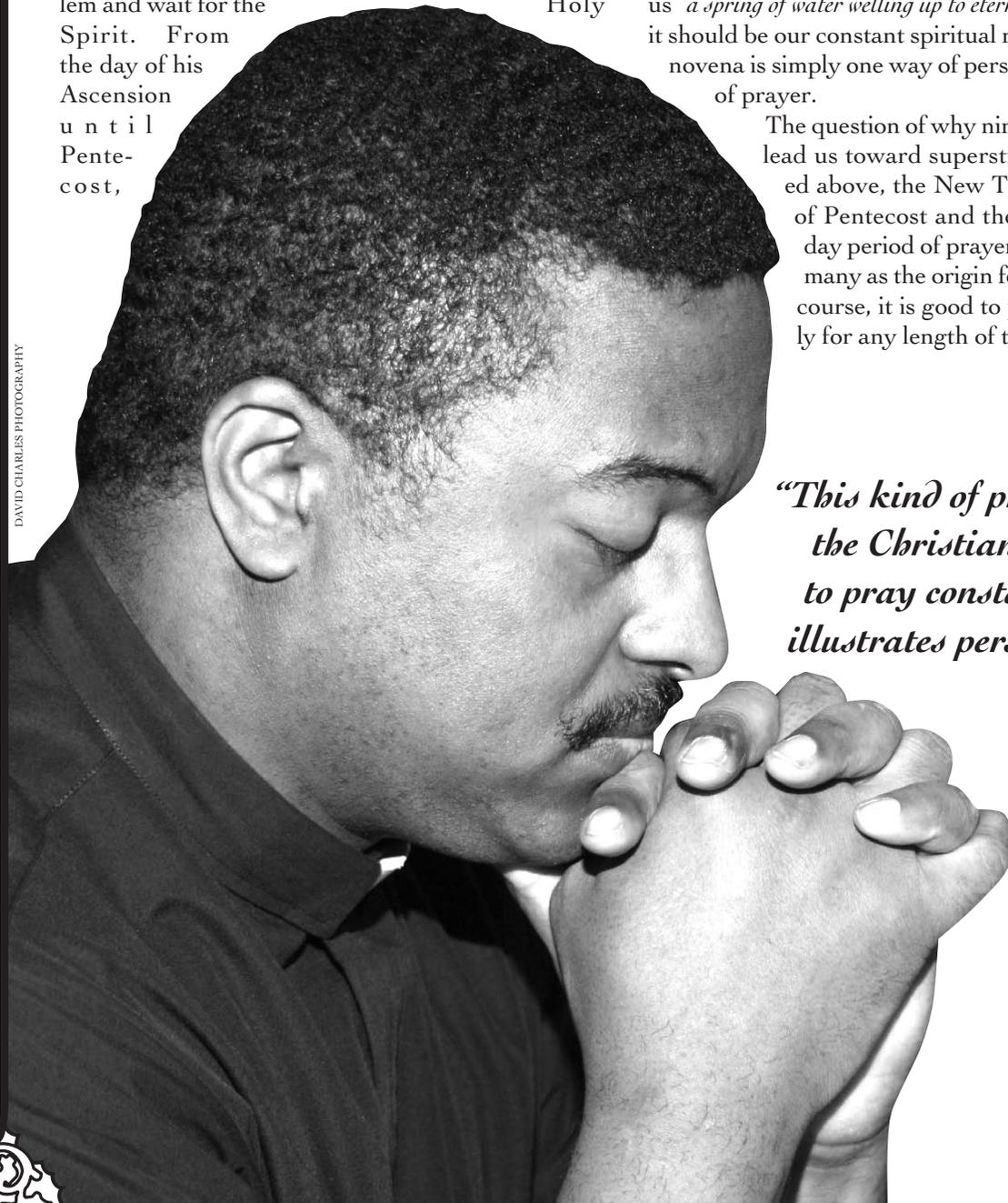
Mary and the apostles, and other disciples waited in prayer for nine days until the Holy Spirit fell on them.

The practice of praying novenas is a way of fulfilling the apostles command to “*pray constantly*” (1 Thes 5:17). The habit of prayer should become in us “*a spring of water welling up to eternal life*” (Jn 4:14); it should be our constant spiritual nourishment. The novena is simply one way of persevering in this life of prayer.

The question of why nine days should not lead us toward superstition. As indicated above, the New Testament account of Pentecost and the preceding nine-day period of prayer has been seen by many as the origin for the novena. Of course, it is good to pray consecutively for any length of time. It shows the

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Christian’s resolve to pray constantly and illustrates perseverance of the kind typified in the Gospel parable of the man asking his neighbor for bread: *“I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him whatever he needs.... For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened”* (Lk 11:8-10).

There is no magic attached to the number nine. In fact, many can attest to receiving the answer to their prayer before the nine days are finished. If this happens, it is good to finish the novena as a way of giving thanks to God.

Many devotional booklets have been printed containing traditional novenas; some examples include the Novena to the Holy Spirit prayed before Pentecost, the Christmas Novena, the Novena to St. Joseph and the Novena to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Also, many Catholics make a novena annually before the feast day of their patron saint or of another they find inspiring. These booklets are meant to aid in the practice of novenas; however, some Christians are more inclined to pray spontaneously and make up their own prayer which they repeat for the novena. This practice is also encouraged.

(CCC 1674-1676)



Icon of Mary and Jesus, c. early 14th century