

St Louis Marie de Montfort

True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin



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TREATISE ON TRUE DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN INTRODUCTION OF SAINT LOUIS MARIE

1. It was through the Blessed Virgin Mary that Jesus came into the world, and it is also through her that he must reign in the world.
2. Because Mary remained hidden during her life she is called by the Holy Spirit and the Church "Alma Mater", Mother hidden and unknown. So great was her humility that she desired nothing more upon earth than to remain unknown to herself and to others, and to be known only to God.
3. In answer to her prayers to remain hidden, poor and lowly, God was pleased to conceal her from nearly every other human creature in her conception, her birth, her life, her mysteries, her resurrection and assumption. Her own parents did not really know her; and the angels would often ask one another, "Who can she possibly be?", for God had hidden her from them, or if he did reveal anything to them, it was nothing compared with what he withheld.
4. God the Father willed that she should perform no miracle during her life, at least no public one, although he had given her the power to do so. God the Son willed that she should speak very little although he had imparted his wisdom to her.

Even though Mary was his faithful spouse, God the Holy Spirit willed that his apostles and evangelists should say very little about her and then only as much as was necessary to make Jesus known.
5. Mary is the supreme masterpiece of Almighty God and he has reserved the knowledge and possession of her for himself. She is the glorious Mother of God the Son who chose to humble and conceal her during her lifetime in order to foster her humility. He called her "Woman" as if she were a stranger, although in his heart he esteemed and loved her above all men and angels. Mary is the sealed fountain and the faithful spouse of the Holy Spirit where only he may enter. She is the sanctuary and resting-place of the Blessed Trinity where God dwells in greater and more divine splendour than anywhere else in the universe, not excluding his dwelling above the cherubim and seraphim. No creature, however pure, may enter there without being specially privileged.
6. I declare with the saints: Mary is the earthly paradise of Jesus Christ the new Adam, where he became man by the power of the Holy Spirit, in order to accomplish in her wonders beyond our understanding. She is the vast and divine world of God where unutterable marvels and beauties are to be found. She is the magnificence of the Almighty where he hid his only Son, as in his own bosom, and with him everything that is most excellent and precious. What great and hidden things the all-powerful God has done for this wonderful creature, as she herself had to confess in spite of her great humility, "The Almighty has done great things for me." The world does not know these things because it is incapable and unworthy of knowing them.
7. The saints have said wonderful things of Mary, the holy City of God, and, as they themselves admit, they were never more eloquent and more pleased than when they spoke of her. And yet they maintain that the height of her merits rising up to the throne of the Godhead cannot be perceived; the breadth of her love which is wider than the earth cannot be measured; the greatness of the power which she wields over one who is God cannot be conceived; and the depths of her profound humility and all her virtues and graces cannot be sounded. What incomprehensible height! What indescribable breadth! What immeasurable greatness! What an impenetrable abyss!
8. Every day, from one end of the earth to the other, in the highest heaven and in the lowest abyss, all things preach, all things proclaim the wondrous Virgin Mary. The nine choirs of angels, men and women of every age, rank and religion, both good and evil, even the very devils themselves are compelled by the force of truth, willingly or unwillingly, to call her blessed.

According to St. Bonaventure, all the angels in heaven unceasingly call out to her: "Holy, holy, holy Mary, Virgin Mother of God." They greet her countless times each day with the angelic greeting, "Hail, Mary", while prostrating themselves before her, begging her as a favour to honour them with one of her

requests. According to St. Augustine, even St. Michael, though prince of all the heavenly court, is the most eager of all the angels to honour her and lead others to honour her. At all times he awaits the privilege of going at her word to the aid of one of her servants.

9. The whole world is filled with her glory, and this is especially true of Christian peoples, who have chosen her as guardian and protectress of kingdoms, provinces, dioceses, and towns. Many cathedrals are consecrated to God in her name. There is no church without an altar dedicated to her, no country or region without at least one of her miraculous images where all kinds of afflictions are cured and all sorts of benefits received. Many are the confraternities and associations honouring her as patron; many are the orders under her name and protection; many are the members of sodalities and religious of all congregations who voice her praises and make known her compassion. There is not a child who does not praise her by lisping a Hail Mary. There is scarcely a sinner, however hardened, who does not possess some spark of confidence in her. The very devils in hell, while fearing her, show her respect.

10. And yet in truth we must still say with the saints: *De Maria numquam satis* : We have still not praised, exalted, honoured, loved and served Mary adequately. She is worthy of even more praise, respect, love and service.

11. Moreover, we should repeat after the Holy Spirit, "All the glory of the king's daughter is within", meaning that all the external glory which heaven and earth vie with each other to give her is nothing compared to what she has received interiorly from her Creator, namely, a glory unknown to insignificant creatures like us, who cannot penetrate into the secrets of the king.

12. Finally, we must say in the words of the apostle Paul, "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has the heart of man understood" the beauty, the grandeur, the excellence of Mary, who is indeed a miracle of miracles of grace, nature and glory. "If you wish to understand the Mother," says a saint, "then understand the Son. She is a worthy Mother of God." *Hic taceat omnis lingua* : Here let every tongue be silent.

13. My heart has dictated with special joy all that I have written to show that Mary has been unknown up till now, and that that is one of the reasons why Jesus Christ is not known as he should be.

If then, as is certain, the knowledge and the kingdom of Jesus Christ must come into the world, it can only be as a necessary consequence of the knowledge and reign of Mary. She who first gave him to the world will establish his kingdom in the world.

PART I: TRUE DEVOTION TO OUR LADY IN GENERAL

CHAPTER ONE

NECESSITY OF DEVOTION TO OUR LADY

1. Mary's part in the Incarnation

14. With the whole Church I acknowledge that Mary, being a mere creature fashioned by the hands of God is, compared to his infinite majesty, less than an atom, or rather is simply nothing, since he alone can say, "I am he who is". Consequently, this great Lord, who is ever independent and self-sufficient, never had and does not now have any absolute need of the Blessed Virgin for the accomplishment of his will and the manifestation of his glory. To do all things he has only to will them.

15. However, I declare that, considering things as they are, because God has decided to begin and accomplish his greatest works through the Blessed Virgin ever since he created her, we can safely believe that he will not change his plan in the time to come, for he is God and therefore does not change in his thoughts or his way of acting.

16. God the Father gave his only Son to the world only through Mary. Whatever desires the patriarchs may have cherished, whatever entreaties the prophets and saints of the Old Law may have had for 4,000

years to obtain that treasure, it was Mary alone who merited it and found grace before God by the power of her prayers and the perfection of her virtues. "The world being unworthy," said Saint Augustine, "to receive the Son of God directly from the hands of the Father, he gave his Son to Mary for the world to receive him from her."

The Son of God became man for our salvation but only in Mary and through Mary.

God the Holy Spirit formed Jesus Christ in Mary but only after having asked her consent through one of the chief ministers of his court.

17. God the Father imparted to Mary his fruitfulness as far as a mere creature was capable of receiving it, to enable her to bring forth his Son and all the members of his mystical body.

18. God the Son came into her virginal womb as a new Adam into his earthly paradise, to take his delight there and produce hidden wonders of grace.

God-made-man found freedom in imprisoning himself in her womb. He displayed power in allowing himself to be borne by this young maiden. He found his glory and that of his Father in hiding his splendours from all creatures here below and revealing them only to Mary. He glorified his independence and his majesty in depending upon this lovable virgin in his conception, his birth, his presentation in the temple, and in the thirty years of his hidden life. Even at his death she had to be present so that he might be united with her in one sacrifice and be immolated with her consent to the eternal Father, just as formerly Isaac was offered in sacrifice by Abraham when he accepted the will of God. It was Mary who nursed him, fed him, cared for him, reared him, and sacrificed him for us.

The Holy Spirit could not leave such wonderful and inconceivable dependence of God unmentioned in the Gospel, though he concealed almost all the wonderful things that Wisdom Incarnate did during his hidden life in order to bring home to us its infinite value and glory. Jesus gave more glory to God his Father by submitting to his Mother for thirty years than he would have given him had he converted the whole world by working the greatest miracles. How highly then do we glorify God when to please him we submit ourselves to Mary, taking Jesus as our sole model.

19. If we examine closely the remainder of the life of Jesus Christ, we see that he chose to begin his miracles through Mary. It was by her word that he sanctified Saint John the Baptist in the womb of his mother, Saint Elizabeth; no sooner had Mary spoken than John was sanctified. This was his first and greatest miracle of grace. At the wedding in Cana he changed water into wine at her humble prayer, and this was his first miracle in the order of nature. He began and continued his miracles through Mary and he will continue them through her until the end of time.

20. God the Holy Spirit, who does not produce any divine person, became fruitful through Mary whom he espoused. It was with her, in her and of her that he produced his masterpiece, God-made-man, and that he produces every day until the end of the world the members of the body of this adorable Head. For this reason the more he finds Mary his dear and inseparable spouse in a soul the more powerful and effective he becomes in producing Jesus Christ in that soul and that soul in Jesus Christ.

21. This does not mean that the Blessed Virgin confers on the Holy Spirit a fruitfulness which he does not already possess. Being God, he has the ability to produce just like the Father and the Son, although he does not use this power and so does not produce another divine person. But it does mean that the Holy Spirit chose to make use of our Blessed Lady, although he had no absolute need of her, in order to become actively fruitful in producing Jesus Christ and his members in her and by her. This is a mystery of grace unknown even to many of the most learned and spiritual of Christians.

2. Mary's part in the sanctification of souls

22. The plan adopted by the three persons of the Blessed Trinity in the Incarnation, the first coming of Jesus Christ, is adhered to each day in an invisible manner throughout the Church and they will pursue it to the end of time until the last coming of Jesus Christ.

23. God the Father gathered all the waters together and called them the seas (maria). He gathered all his graces together and called them Mary (Maria). The great God has a treasury or storehouse full of riches in which he has enclosed all that is beautiful, resplendent, rare, and precious, even his own Son. This immense treasury is none other than Mary whom the saints call the "treasury of the Lord". From her fullness all men are made rich.

24. God the Son imparted to his mother all that he gained by his life and death, namely, his infinite merits and his eminent virtues. He made her the treasurer of all his Father had given him as heritage. Through her he applies his merits to his members and through her he transmits his virtues and distributes his graces. She is his mystical channel, his aqueduct, through which he causes his mercies to flow gently and abundantly.

25. God the Holy Spirit entrusted his wondrous gifts to Mary, his faithful spouse, and chose her as the dispenser of all he possesses, so that she distributes all his gifts and graces to whom she wills, as much as she wills, how she wills and when she wills. No heavenly gift is given to men which does not pass through her virginal hands. Such indeed is the will of God, who has decreed that we should have all things through Mary, so that, making herself poor and lowly,, and hiding herself in the depths of nothingness during her whole life, she might be enriched, exalted and honoured by almighty God. Such are the views of the Church and the early Fathers.

26. Were I speaking to the so-called intellectuals of today, I would prove at great length by quoting Latin texts taken from Scripture and the Fathers of the Church all that I am now stating so simply. I could also instance solid proofs which can be read in full in Fr. Poiré's book "The Triple Crown of the Blessed Virgin". But I am speaking mainly for the poor and simple who have more good will and faith than the common run of scholars. As they believe more simply and more meritoriously, let me merely state the truth to them quite plainly without bothering to quote Latin passages which they would not understand. Nevertheless, I shall quote some texts as they occur to my mind as I go along.

27. Since grace enhances our human nature and glory adds a still greater perfection to grace, it is certain that our Lord remains in heaven just as much the Son of Mary as he was on earth. Consequently he has retained the submissiveness and obedience of the most perfect of all children towards the best of all mothers.

We must take care, however, not to consider this dependence as an abasement or imperfection in Jesus Christ. For Mary, infinitely inferior to her Son, who is God, does not command him in the same way as an earthly mother would command her child who is beneath her. Since she is completely transformed in God by that grace and glory which transforms all the saints in him, she does not ask or wish or do anything which is contrary to the eternal and changeless will of God. When therefore we read in the writings of Saint Bernard, Saint Bernardine, Saint Bonaventure, and others that all in heaven and on earth, even God himself, is subject to the Blessed Virgin, they mean that the authority which God was pleased to give her is so great that she seems to have the same power as God. Her prayers and requests are so powerful with him that he accepts them as commands in the sense that he never resists his dear mother's prayer because it is always humble and conformed to his will.

Moses by the power of his prayer curbed God's anger against the Israelites so effectively that the infinitely great and merciful Lord was unable to withstand him and asked Moses to let him be angry and punish that rebellious people. How much greater, then, will be the prayer of the humble Virgin Mary, worthy Mother of God, which is more powerful with the King of heaven than the prayers and intercession of all the angels and saints in heaven and on earth.

28. Mary has authority over the angels and the blessed in heaven. As a reward for her great humility, God gave her the power and the mission of assigning to saints the thrones made vacant by the apostate angels who fell away through pride.

Such is the will of almighty God who exalts the humble, that the powers of heaven, earth and hell, willingly or unwillingly, must obey the commands of the humble Virgin Mary. For God has made her queen of heaven and earth, leader of his armies, keeper of his treasures, dispenser of his graces, worker of his

wonders, restorer of the human race, mediatrix on behalf of men, destroyer of his enemies, and faithful associate in his great works and triumphs.

29. God the Father wishes Mary to be the mother of his children until the end of time and so he says to her, "Dwell in Jacob", that is to say, take up your abode permanently in my children, in my holy ones represented by Jacob, and not in the children of the devil and sinners represented by Esau.

30. Just as in natural and bodily generation there is a father and a mother, so in the supernatural and spiritual generation there is a father who is God and a mother who is Mary. All true children of God have God for their father and Mary for their mother; anyone who does not have Mary for his mother, does not have God for his father. This is why the reprobate, such as heretics and schismatics, who hate, despise or ignore the Blessed Virgin, do not have God for their father though they arrogantly claim they have, because they do not have Mary for their mother. Indeed if they had her for their mother they would love and honour her as good and true children naturally love and honour the mother who gave them life.

An infallible and unmistakable sign by which we can distinguish a heretic, a man of false doctrine, an enemy of God, from one of God's true friends is that the heretic and the hardened sinner show nothing but contempt and indifference for our Lady. He endeavours by word and example, openly or insidiously - sometimes under specious pretexts - to belittle the love and veneration shown to her. God the Father has not told Mary to dwell in them because they are, alas, other Esaus.

31. God the Son wishes to form himself, and, in a manner of speaking, become incarnate every day in his members through his dear Mother. To her he said: "Take Israel for your inheritance." It is as if he said, God the Father has given me as heritage all the nations of the earth, all men good and evil, predestinate and reprobate. To the good I shall be father and advocate, to the bad a just avenger, but to all I shall be a judge. But you, my dear Mother, will have for your heritage and possession only the predestinate represented by Israel. As their loving mother, you will give them birth, feed them and rear them. As their queen, you will lead, govern and defend them.

32. "This one and that one were born in her." According to the explanation of some of the Fathers, the first man born of Mary is the God-man, Jesus Christ. If Jesus Christ, the head of mankind, is born of her, the predestinate, who are members of this head, must also as a necessary consequence be born of her. One and the same mother does not give birth to the head without the members nor to the members without the head, for these would be monsters in the order of nature. In the order of grace likewise the head and the members are born of the same mother. If a member of the mystical body of Christ, that is, one of the predestinate, were born of a mother other than Mary who gave birth to the head, he would not be one of the predestinate, nor a member of Jesus Christ, but a monster in the order of grace.

33. Moreover, Jesus is still as much as ever the fruit of Mary, as heaven and earth repeat thousands of times a day: "Blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus." It is therefore certain that Jesus is the fruit and gift of Mary for every single man who possesses him, just as truly as he is for all mankind. Consequently, if any of the faithful have Jesus formed in their heart they can boldly say, "It is thanks to Mary that what I possess is Jesus her fruit, and without her I would not have him." We can attribute more truly to her what Saint Paul said of himself, "I am in labour again with all the children of God until Jesus Christ, my Son, is formed in them to the fullness of his age." Saint Augustine, surpassing himself as well as all that I have said so far, affirms that in order to be conformed to the image of the Son of God all the predestinate, while in the world, are hidden in the womb of the Blessed Virgin where they are protected, nourished, cared for and developed by this good Mother, until the day she brings them forth to a life of glory after death, which the Church calls the birthday of the just. This is indeed a mystery of grace unknown to the reprobate and little known even to the predestinate!

34. God the Holy Spirit wishes to fashion his chosen ones in and through Mary. He tells her, "My well-beloved, my spouse, let all your virtues take root in my chosen ones that they may grow from strength to strength and from grace to grace. When you were living on earth, practising the most sublime virtues, I was so pleased with you that I still desire to find you on earth without your ceasing to be in heaven. Reproduce yourself then in my chosen ones, so that I may have the joy of seeing in them the roots of your invincible faith, profound humility, total mortification, sublime prayer, ardent charity, your firm hope and all your

virtues. You are always my spouse, as faithful, pure, and fruitful as ever. May your faith give me believers; your purity, virgins; your fruitfulness, elect and living temples."

35. When Mary has taken root in a soul she produces in it wonders of grace which only she can produce; for she alone is the fruitful virgin who never had and never will have her equal in purity and fruitfulness. Together with the Holy Spirit Mary produced the greatest thing that ever was or ever will be: a God-man. She will consequently produce the marvels which will be seen in the latter times. The formation and the education of the great saints who will come at the end of the world are reserved to her, for only this singular and wondrous virgin can produce in union with the Holy Spirit singular and wondrous things.

36. When the Holy Spirit, her spouse, finds Mary in a soul, he hastens there and enters fully into it. He gives himself generously to that soul according to the place it has given to his spouse. One of the main reasons why the Holy Spirit does not work striking wonders in souls is that he fails to find in them a sufficiently close union with his faithful and inseparable spouse. I say "inseparable spouse", for from the moment the substantial love of the Father and the Son espoused Mary to form Jesus, the head of the elect, and Jesus in the elect, he has never disowned her, for she has always been faithful and fruitful.

3. Consequences

37. We must obviously conclude from what I have just said:

First, that Mary received from God a far-reaching dominion over the souls of the elect. Otherwise she could not make her dwelling-place in them as God the Father has ordered her to do, and she could not conceive them, nourish them, and bring them forth to eternal life as their mother. She could not have them for her inheritance and her possession and form them in Jesus and Jesus in them. She could not implant in their heart the roots of her virtues, nor be the inseparable associate of the Holy Spirit in all these works of grace. None of these things, I repeat, could she do unless she had received from the Almighty rights and authority over their souls. For God, having given her power over his only-begotten and natural Son, also gave her power over his adopted children - not only in what concerns their body - which would be of little account - but also in what concerns their soul.

38. Mary is the Queen of heaven and earth by grace as Jesus is king by nature and by conquest. But as the kingdom of Jesus Christ exists primarily in the heart or interior of man, according to the words of the Gospel, "The kingdom of God is within you", so the kingdom of the Blessed Virgin is principally in the interior of man, that is, in his soul. It is principally in souls that she is glorified with her Son more than in any visible creature. So we may call her, as the saints do, Queen of our hearts.

39. Secondly, we must conclude that, being necessary to God by a necessity which is called "hypothetical", (that is, because God so willed it), the Blessed Virgin is all the more necessary for men to attain their final end. Consequently we must not place devotion to her on the same level as devotion to the other saints as if it were merely something optional.

40. The pious and learned Jesuit, Suarez, Justus Lipsius, a devout and erudite theologian of Louvain, and many others have proved incontestably that devotion to our Blessed Lady is necessary to attain salvation. This they show from the teaching of the Fathers, notably St. Augustine, St. Ephrem, deacon of Edessa, St. Cyril of Jerusalem, St. Germanus of Constantinople, St. John Damascene, St. Anselm, St. Bernard, St. Bernardine, St. Thomas and St. Bonaventure. Even according to Oecolampadius and other heretics, lack of esteem and love for the Virgin Mary is an infallible sign of God's disapproval. On the other hand, to be entirely and genuinely devoted to her is a sure sign of God's approval.

41. The types and texts of the Old and New Testaments prove the truth of this, the opinions and examples of the saints confirm it, and reason and experience teach and demonstrate it. Even the devil and his followers, forced by the evidence of the truth, were frequently obliged against their will to admit it. For brevity's sake, I shall quote one only of the many passages which I have collected from the Fathers and Doctors of the Church to support this truth. "Devotion to you, O Blessed Virgin, is a means of salvation which God gives to those whom he wishes to save" (St. John Damascene).

42. I could tell many stories in evidence of what I have just said.

(1) One is recorded in the chronicles of St. Francis. The saint saw in ecstasy an immense ladder reaching to heaven, at the top of which stood the Blessed Virgin. This is the ladder, he was told, by which we must all go to heaven.

(2) There is another related in the Chronicles of St. Dominic. Near Carcassonne, where St. Dominic was preaching the Rosary, there was an unfortunate heretic who was possessed by a multitude of devils. These evil spirits to their confusion were compelled at the command of our Lady to confess many great and consoling truths concerning devotion to her. They did this so clearly and forcibly that, however weak our devotion to our Lady may be, we cannot read this authentic story containing such an unwilling tribute paid by the devils to devotion to our Lady without shedding tears of joy.

43. If devotion to the Blessed Virgin is necessary for all men simply to work out their salvation, it is even more necessary for those who are called to a special perfection. I do not believe that anyone can acquire intimate union with our Lord and perfect fidelity to the Holy Spirit without a very close union with the most Blessed Virgin and an absolute dependence on her support.

44. Mary alone found grace before God without the help of any other creature. All those who have since found grace before God have found it only through her. She was full of grace when she was greeted by the Archangel Gabriel and was filled with grace to overflowing by the Holy Spirit when he so mysteriously overshadowed her. From day to day, from moment to moment, she increased so much this twofold plenitude that she attained an immense and inconceivable degree of grace. So much so, that the Almighty made her the sole custodian of his treasures and the sole dispenser of his graces. She can now ennoble, exalt and enrich all she chooses. She can lead them along the narrow path to heaven and guide them through the narrow gate to life. She can give a royal throne, sceptre and crown to whom she wishes. Jesus is always and everywhere the fruit and Son of Mary and Mary is everywhere the genuine tree that bears that Fruit of life, the true Mother who bears that Son.

45. To Mary alone God gave the keys of the cellars of divine love and the ability to enter the most sublime and secret ways of perfection, and lead others along them. Mary alone gives to the unfortunate children of unfaithful Eve entry into that earthly paradise where they may walk pleasantly with God and be safely hidden from their enemies. There they can feed without fear of death on the delicious fruit of the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They can drink copiously the heavenly waters of that beautiful fountain which gushes forth in such abundance. As she is herself the earthly paradise, that virgin and blessed land from which sinful Adam and Eve were expelled she lets only those whom she chooses enter her domain in order to make them saints.

46. All the rich among the people, to use an expression of the Holy Spirit as explained by St. Bernard, all the rich among the people will look pleadingly upon her countenance throughout all ages and particularly as the world draws to its end. This means that the greatest saints, those richest in grace and virtue will be the most assiduous in praying to the most Blessed Virgin, looking up to her as the perfect model to imitate and as a powerful helper to assist them.

47. I said that this will happen especially towards the end of the world, and indeed soon, because Almighty God and his holy Mother are to raise up great saints who will surpass in holiness most other saints as much as the cedars of Lebanon tower above little shrubs. This has been revealed to a holy soul whose life has been written by M. de Renty.

48. These great souls filled with grace and zeal will be chosen to oppose the enemies of God who are raging on all sides. They will be exceptionally devoted to the Blessed Virgin. Illumined by her light, strengthened by her food, guided by her spirit, supported by her arm, sheltered under her protection, they will fight with one hand and build with the other. With one hand they will give battle, overthrowing and crushing heretics and their heresies, schismatics and their schisms, idolaters and their idolatries, sinners and their wickedness. With the other hand they will build the temple of the true Solomon and the mystical city of God, namely, the Blessed Virgin, who is called by the Fathers of the Church the Temple of Solomon and the City of God. By word and example they will draw all men to a true devotion to her and though this will make many enemies, it will also bring about many victories and much glory to God alone. This is what God

revealed to St. Vincent Ferrer, that outstanding apostle of his day, as he has amply shown in one of his works.

This seems to have been foretold by the Holy Spirit in Psalm 58: "The Lord will reign in Jacob and all the ends of the earth. They will be converted towards evening and they will be as hungry as dogs and they will go around the city to find something to eat." This city around which men will roam at the end of the world seeking conversion and the appeasement of the hunger they have for justice is the most Blessed Virgin, who is called by the Holy Spirit the City of God.

4. Mary's part in the latter times

49. The salvation of the world began through Mary and through her it must be accomplished. Mary scarcely appeared in the first coming of Jesus Christ so that men, as yet insufficiently instructed and enlightened concerning the person of her Son, might not wander from the truth by becoming too strongly attached to her. This would apparently have happened if she had been known, on account of the wondrous charms with which Almighty God had endowed even her outward appearance. So true is this that St. Denis the Areopagite tells us in his writings that when he saw her he would have taken her for a goddess, because of her incomparable beauty, had not his well-grounded faith taught him otherwise. But in the second coming of Jesus Christ, Mary must be known and openly revealed by the Holy Spirit so that Jesus may be known, loved and served through her. The reasons which moved the Holy Spirit to hide his spouse during her life and to reveal but very little of her since the first preaching of the gospel exist no longer.

1) God wishes to make Mary better known in the latter times.

50. God wishes therefore to reveal Mary, his masterpiece, and make her more known in these latter times:

(1) Because she kept herself hidden in this world and in her great humility considered herself lower than dust, having obtained from God, his apostles and evangelists the favour of being made known.

(2) Because, as Mary is not only God's masterpiece of glory in heaven, but also his masterpiece of grace on earth, he wishes to be glorified and praised because of her by those living upon earth.

(3) Since she is the dawn which precedes and discloses the Sun of Justice Jesus Christ, she must be known and acknowledged so that Jesus may be known and acknowledged.

(4) As she was the way by which Jesus first came to us, she will again be the way by which he will come to us the second time though not in the same manner.

(5) Since she is the sure means, the direct and immaculate way to Jesus and the perfect guide to him, it is through her that souls who are to shine forth in sanctity must find him. He who finds Mary finds life, that is, Jesus Christ who is the way, the truth and the life. But no one can find Mary who does not look for her. No one can look for her who does not know her, for no one seeks or desires something unknown. Mary then must be better known than ever for the deeper understanding and the greater glory of the Blessed Trinity.

(6) In these latter times Mary must shine forth more than ever in mercy, power and grace; in mercy, to bring back and welcome lovingly the poor sinners and wanderers who are to be converted and return to the Catholic Church; in power, to combat the enemies of God who will rise up menacingly to seduce and crush by promises and threats all those who oppose them; finally, she must shine forth in grace to inspire and support the valiant soldiers and loyal servants of Jesus Christ who are fighting for his cause.

(7) Lastly, Mary must become as terrible as an army in battle array to the devil and his followers, especially in these latter times. For Satan, knowing that he has little time - even less now than ever - to destroy souls, intensifies his efforts and his onslaughts every day. He will not hesitate to stir up savage persecutions and set treacherous snares for Mary's faithful servants and children whom he finds more difficult to overcome than others.

51. It is chiefly in reference to these last wicked persecutions of the devil, daily increasing until the advent of the reign of anti-Christ, that we should understand that first and well-known prophecy and curse of God uttered against the serpent in the garden of paradise. It is opportune to explain it here for the glory of the Blessed Virgin, the salvation of her children and the confusion of the devil. "I will place enmities between you and the woman, between your race and her race; she will crush your head and you will lie in wait for her heel" (Gen. 3:15).

52. God has established only one enmity - but it is an irreconcilable one - which will last and even go on increasing to the end of time. That enmity is between Mary, his worthy Mother, and the devil, between the children and the servants of the Blessed Virgin and the children and followers of Lucifer.

Thus the most fearful enemy that God has set up against the devil is Mary, his holy Mother. From the time of the earthly paradise, although she existed then only in his mind, he gave her such a hatred for his accursed enemy, such ingenuity in exposing the wickedness of the ancient serpent and such power to defeat, overthrow and crush this proud rebel, that Satan fears her not only more than angels and men but in a certain sense more than God himself. This does not mean that the anger, hatred and power of God are not infinitely greater than the Blessed Virgin's, since her attributes are limited. It simply means that Satan, being so proud, suffers infinitely more in being vanquished and punished by a lowly and humble servant of God, for her humility humiliates him more than the power of God. Moreover, God has given Mary such great power over the evil spirits that, as they have often been forced unwillingly to admit through the lips of possessed persons, they fear one of her pleadings for a soul more than the prayers of all the saints, and one of her threats more than all their other torments.

53. What Lucifer lost by pride Mary won by humility. What Eve ruined and lost by disobedience Mary saved by obedience. By obeying the serpent, Eve ruined her children as well as herself and delivered them up to him. Mary by her perfect fidelity to God saved her children with herself and consecrated them to his divine majesty.

54. God has established not just one enmity but "enmities", and not only between Mary and Satan but between her race and his race. That is, God has put enmities, antipathies and hatreds between the true children and servants of the Blessed Virgin and the children and slaves of the devil. They have no love and no sympathy for each other. The children of Belial, the slaves of Satan, the friends of the world, - for they are all one and the same - have always persecuted and will persecute more than ever in the future those who belong to the Blessed Virgin, just as Cain of old persecuted his brother Abel, and Esau his brother Jacob. These are the types of the wicked and of the just. But the humble Mary will always triumph over Satan, the proud one, and so great will be her victory that she will crush his head, the very seat of his pride. She will unmask his serpent's cunning and expose his wicked plots. She will scatter to the winds his devilish plans and to the end of time will keep her faithful servants safe from his cruel claws.

But Mary's power over the evil spirits will especially shine forth in the latter times, when Satan will lie in wait for her heel, that is, for her humble servants and her poor children whom she will rouse to fight against him. In the eyes of the world they will be little and poor and, like the heel, lowly in the eyes of all, down-trodden and crushed as is the heel by the other parts of the body. But in compensation for this they will be rich in God's graces, which will be abundantly bestowed on them by Mary. They will be great and exalted before God in holiness. They will be superior to all creatures by their great zeal and so strongly will they be supported by divine assistance that, in union with Mary, they will crush the head of Satan with their heel, that is, their humility, and bring victory to Jesus Christ.

2) Devotion to Mary is especially necessary in the latter times.

55. Finally, God in these times wishes his Blessed Mother to be more known, loved and honoured than she has ever been. This will certainly come about if the elect, by the grace and light of the Holy Spirit, adopt the interior and perfect practice of the devotion which I shall later unfold. Then they will clearly see that beautiful Star of the Sea, as much as faith allows. Under her guidance they will perceive the splendours of this Queen and will consecrate themselves entirely to her service as subjects and slaves of love. They will experience her motherly kindness and affection for her children. They will love her tenderly and will

appreciate how full of compassion she is and how much they stand in need of her help. In all circumstances they will have recourse to her as their advocate and mediatrix with Jesus Christ. They will see clearly that she is the safest, easiest, shortest and most perfect way of approaching Jesus and will surrender themselves to her, body and soul, without reserve in order to belong entirely to Jesus.

56. But what will they be like, these servants, these slaves, these children of Mary?

They will be ministers of the Lord who, like a flaming fire, will enkindle everywhere the fires of divine love. They will become, in Mary's powerful hands, like sharp arrows, with which she will transfix her enemies.

They will be as the children of Levi, thoroughly purified by the fire of great tribulations and closely joined to God. They will carry the gold of love in their heart, the frankincense of prayer in their mind and the myrrh of mortification in their body. They will bring to the poor and lowly everywhere the sweet fragrance of Jesus, but they will bring the odour of death to the great, the rich and the proud of this world.

57. They will be like thunder-clouds flying through the air at the slightest breath of the Holy Spirit. Attached to nothing, surprised at nothing, troubled at nothing, they will shower down the rain of God's word and of eternal life. They will thunder against sin, they will storm against the world, they will strike down the devil and his followers and for life and for death, they will pierce through and through with the two-edged sword of God's word all those against whom they are sent by Almighty God.

58. They will be true apostles of the latter times to whom the Lord of Hosts will give eloquence and strength to work wonders and carry off glorious spoils from his enemies. They will sleep without gold or silver and, more important still, without concern in the midst of other priests, ecclesiastics and clerics. Yet they will have the silver wings of the dove enabling them to go wherever the Holy Spirit calls them, filled as they are with the resolve to seek the glory of God and the salvation of souls. Wherever they preach, they will leave behind them nothing but the gold of love, which is the fulfilment of the whole law.

59. Lastly, we know they will be true disciples of Jesus Christ, imitating his poverty, his humility, his contempt of the world and his love. They will point out the narrow way to God in pure truth according to the holy Gospel, and not according to the maxims of the world. Their hearts will not be troubled, nor will they show favour to anyone; they will not spare or heed or fear any man, however powerful he may be. They will have the two-edged sword of the word of God in their mouths and the blood-stained standard of the Cross on their shoulders. They will carry the crucifix in their right hand and the rosary in their left, and the holy names of Jesus and Mary on their heart. The simplicity and self-sacrifice of Jesus will be reflected in their whole behaviour.

Such are the great men who are to come. By the will of God Mary is to prepare them to extend his rule over the impious and unbelievers. But when and how will this come about? Only God knows. For our part we must yearn and wait for it in silence and in prayer: "I have waited and waited."

CHAPTER TWO

IN WHAT DEVOTION TO MARY CONSISTS

1. Basic principles of devotion to Mary

60. Having spoken briefly of the necessity of devotion to the Blessed Virgin, I must now explain what this devotion consists in. This I will do with God's help after I have laid down certain basic truths which throw light on the remarkable and sound devotion which I propose to unfold.

First principle: Christ must be the ultimate end of all devotions

61. Jesus, our Saviour, true God and true man must be the ultimate end of all our other devotions; otherwise they would be false and misleading. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and end of everything. "We labour," says St. Paul, "only to make all men perfect in Jesus Christ."

For in him alone dwells the entire fullness of the divinity and the complete fullness of grace, virtue and perfection. In him alone we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing; he is the only teacher from whom we must learn; the only Lord on whom we should depend; the only Head to whom we should be united and the only model that we should imitate. He is the only Physician that can heal us; the only Shepherd that can feed us; the only Way that can lead us; the only Truth that we can believe; the only Life that can animate us. He alone is everything to us and he alone can satisfy all our desires.

We are given no other name under heaven by which we can be saved. God has laid no other foundation for our salvation, perfection and glory than Jesus. Every edifice which is not built on that firm rock, is founded upon shifting sands and will certainly fall sooner or later. Every one of the faithful who is not united to him is like a branch broken from the stem of the vine. It falls and withers and is fit only to be burnt. If we live in Jesus and Jesus lives in us, we need not fear damnation. Neither angels in heaven nor men on earth, nor devils in hell, no creature whatever can harm us, for no creature can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. Through him, with him and in him, we can do all things and render all honour and glory to the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit; we can make ourselves perfect and be for our neighbour a fragrance of eternal life.

62. If then we are establishing sound devotion to our Blessed Lady, it is only in order to establish devotion to our Lord more perfectly, by providing a smooth but certain way of reaching Jesus Christ. If devotion to our Lady distracted us from our Lord, we would have to reject it as an illusion of the devil. But this is far from being the case. As I have already shown and will show again later on, this devotion is necessary, simply and solely because it is a way of reaching Jesus perfectly, loving him tenderly, and serving him faithfully.

63. Here I turn to you for a moment, dear Jesus, to complain lovingly to your divine Majesty that the majority of Christians, and even some of the most learned among them, do not recognise the necessary bond that unites you and your Blessed Mother. Lord, you are always with Mary and Mary is always with you. She can never be without you because then she would cease to be what she is. She is so completely transformed into you by grace that she no longer lives, she no longer exists, because you alone, dear Jesus, live and reign in her more perfectly than in all the angels and saints. If we only knew the glory and the love given to you by this wonderful creature, our feelings for you and for her would be far different from those we have now. So intimately is she united to you that it would be easier to separate light from the sun, and heat from the fire. I go further, it would even be easier to separate all the angels and saints from you than Mary; for she loves you ardently, and glorifies you more perfectly than all your other creatures put together.

64. In view of this, my dear Master, is it not astonishing and pitiful to see the ignorance and short-sightedness of men with regard to your holy Mother? I am not speaking so much of idolaters and pagans who do not know you and consequently have no knowledge of her. I am not even speaking of heretics and schismatics who have left you and your holy Church and therefore are not interested in your holy Mother. I am speaking of Catholics, and even of educated Catholics, who profess to teach the faith to others but do not know you or your Mother except speculatively, in a dry, cold and sterile way.

These people seldom speak of your Mother or devotion to her. They say they are afraid that devotion to her will be abused and that you will be offended by excessive honour paid to her. They protest loudly when they see or hear a devout servant of Mary speak frequently with feeling, conviction and vigour of devotion to her. When he speaks of devotion to her as a sure means of finding and loving you without fear or illusion, or when he says this devotion is a short road free from danger, or an immaculate way free from imperfection, or a wondrous secret of finding you, they put before him a thousand specious reasons to show him how wrong he is to speak so much of Mary. There are, they say, great abuses in this devotion which we should try to stamp out and we should refer people to you rather than exhort them to have devotion to your Mother, whom they already love adequately.

If they are sometimes heard speaking of devotion to your Mother, it is not for the purpose of promoting it or convincing people of it but only to destroy the abuses made of it. Yet all the while these persons are devoid of piety or genuine devotion to you, for they have no devotion to Mary. They consider the Rosary and the Scapular as devotions suitable only for simple women or ignorant people. After all, they say, we do not need them to be saved. If they come across one who loves our Lady, who says the rosary or

shows any devotion towards her, they soon move him to a change of mind and heart. They advise him to say the seven penitential psalms instead of the Rosary, and to show devotion to Jesus instead of to Mary.

Dear Jesus, do these people possess your spirit? Do they please you by acting in this way? Would it please you if we were to make no effort to give pleasure to your Mother because we are afraid of offending you? Does devotion to your holy Mother hinder devotion to you? Does Mary keep for herself any honour we pay her? Is she a rival of yours? Is she a stranger having no kinship with you? Does pleasing her imply displeasing you? Does the gift of oneself to her constitute a deprivation for you? Is love for her a lessening of our love for you?

65. Nevertheless, my dear Master, the majority of learned scholars could not be further from devotion to your Mother, or show more indifference to it even if all I have just said were true. Keep me from their way of thinking and acting and let me share your feelings of gratitude, esteem, respect and love for your holy Mother. I can then love and glorify you all the more, because I will be imitating and following you more closely.

66. As though I had said nothing so far to further her honour, grant me now the grace to praise her more worthily, in spite of all her enemies who are also yours. I can then say to them boldly with the saints, "Let no one presume to expect mercy from God, who offends his holy Mother."

67. So that I may obtain from your mercy a genuine devotion to your blessed Mother and spread it throughout the whole world, help me to love you wholeheartedly, and for this intention accept the earnest prayer I offer with St. Augustine and all who truly love you.

Prayer of Saint Augustine

O Jesus Christ, you are my Father, my merciful God, my great King, my good Shepherd, my only Master, my best helper, my beloved friend of overwhelming beauty, my living Bread, my eternal priest. You are my guide to my heavenly home, my one true light, my holy joy, my true way, my shining wisdom, my unfeigned simplicity, the peace and harmony of my soul, my perfect safeguard, my bounteous inheritance, my everlasting salvation.

My loving Lord, Jesus Christ, why have I ever loved or desired anything else in my life but you, my God? Where was I when I was not in communion with you? From now on, I direct all my desires to be inspired by you and centred on you. I direct them to press forward for they have tarried long enough, to hasten towards their goal, to seek the one they yearn for.

O Jesus, let him who does not love you be accursed, and filled with bitterness. O gentle Jesus, let every worthy feeling of mine show you love, take delight in you and admire you. O God of my heart and my inheritance, Christ Jesus, may my heart mellow before the influence of your spirit and may you live in me. May the flame of your love burn in my soul. May it burn incessantly on the altar of my heart. May it glow in my innermost being. May it spread its heat into the hidden recesses of my soul and on the day of my consummation may I appear before you consumed in your love. Amen.

Second principle: We belong to Jesus and Mary as their slaves

68. From what Jesus Christ is in regard to us we must conclude, as St. Paul says, that we belong not to ourselves but entirely to him as his members and his slaves, for he bought us at an infinite price - the shedding of his Precious Blood. Before baptism, we belonged to the devil as slaves, but baptism made us in very truth slaves of Jesus.

We must therefore live, work and die for the sole purpose of bringing forth fruit for him, glorifying him in our body and letting him reign in our soul. We are his conquest, the people he has won, his heritage.

It is for this reason that the Holy Spirit compares us: 1) to trees that are planted along the waters of grace in the field of the Church and which must bear their fruit when the time comes; 2) to branches of the vine of which Jesus is the stem, which must yield good grapes; 3) to a flock of sheep of which Jesus is the Shepherd, which must increase and give milk; 4) to good soil cultivated by God, where the seed will spread

and produce crops up to thirty-fold, sixty-fold, or a hundred-fold. Our Lord cursed the barren fig-tree and condemned the slothful servant who wasted his talent.

All this proves that he wishes to receive some fruit from our wretched selves, namely, our good works, which by right belong to him alone, "created in Jesus Christ for good works". These words of the Holy Spirit show that Jesus is the sole source and must be the sole end of all our good works, and that we must serve him not just as paid servants but as slaves of love. Let me explain what I mean.

69. There are two ways of belonging to another person and being subject to his authority. One is by ordinary service and the other is by slavery. And so we must use the terms "servant" and "slave". Ordinary service in Christian countries is when a man is employed to serve another for a certain length of time at a wage which is fixed or agreed upon. When a man is totally dependent on another for life, and must serve his master without expecting any wages or recompense, when he is treated just like a beast of the field over which the owner has the right of life and death, then it is slavery.

70. Now there are three kinds of slavery; natural slavery, enforced slavery, and voluntary slavery. All creatures are slaves of God in the first sense, for "the earth and its fullness belong to the Lord". The devils and the damned are slaves in the second sense. The saints in heaven and the just on earth are slaves in the third sense. Voluntary slavery is the most perfect of all three states, for by it we give the greatest glory to God, who looks into the heart and wants it to be given to him. Is he not indeed called the God of the heart or of the loving will? For by this slavery we freely choose God and his service before all things, even if we were not by our very nature obliged to do so.

71. There is a world of difference between a servant and a slave. 1) A servant does not give his employer all he is, all he has, and all he can acquire by himself or through others. A slave, however, gives himself to his master completely and exclusively with all he has and all he can acquire. 2) A servant demands wages for the services rendered to his employer. A slave, on the other hand, can expect nothing, no matter what skill, attention or energy he may have put into his work. 3) A servant can leave his employer whenever he pleases, or at least when the term of his service expires, whereas the slave has no such right. 4) An employer has no right of life and death over a servant. Were he to kill him as he would a beast of burden, he would commit murder. But the master of a slave has by law the right of life and death over him, so that he can sell him to anyone he chooses or - if you will pardon the comparison - kill him as he would kill his horse. 5) Finally, a servant is in his employer's service only for a time; a slave for always.

72. No other human state involves belonging more completely to another than slavery. Among Christian peoples, nothing makes a person belong more completely to Jesus and his holy Mother than voluntary slavery. Our Lord himself gave us the example of this when out of love for us he "took the form of a slave". Our Lady gave us the same example when she called herself the handmaid or slave of the Lord. The Apostle considered it an honour to be called "slave of Christ". Several times in Holy Scripture, Christians are referred to as "slaves of Christ".

The Latin word "servus" at one time signified only a slave because servants as we know them did not exist. Masters were served either by slaves or by freedmen. The Catechism of the Council of Trent leaves no doubt about our being slaves of Jesus Christ, using the unequivocal term "Mancipia Christi", which plainly means: slaves of Christ.

73. Granting this, I say that we must belong to Jesus and serve him not just as hired servants but as willing slaves who, moved by generous love, commit themselves to his service after the manner of slaves for the honour of belonging to him. Before we were baptised we were the slaves of the devil, but baptism made us the slaves of Jesus. Christians can only be slaves of the devil or slaves of Christ.

74. What I say in an absolute sense of our Lord, I say in a relative sense of our Blessed Lady. Jesus, in choosing her as his inseparable associate in his life, glory and power in heaven and on earth, has given her by grace in his kingdom all the same rights and privileges that he possesses by nature. "All that belongs to God by nature belongs to Mary by grace", say the saints, and, according to them, just as Jesus and Mary have the same will and the same power, they have also the same subjects, servants and slaves.

75. Following therefore the teaching of the saints and of many great men we can call ourselves, and become, the loving slaves of our Blessed Lady in order to become more perfect slaves of Jesus. Mary is the means our Lord chose to come to us and she is also the means we should choose to go to him, for she is not like other creatures who tend rather to lead us away from God than towards him, if we are over-attached to them. Mary's strongest inclination is to unite us to Jesus, her Son, and her Son's strongest wish is that we come to him through his Blessed Mother. He is pleased and honoured just as a king would be pleased and honoured if a citizen, wanting to become a better subject and slave of the king, made himself the slave of the queen. That is why the Fathers of the Church, and St. Bonaventure after them, assert that the Blessed Virgin is the way which leads to our Lord.

76. Moreover, if, as I have said, the Blessed Virgin is the Queen and Sovereign of heaven and earth, does she not then have as many subjects and slaves as there are creatures? "All things, including Mary herself, are subject to the power of God. All things, God included, are subject to the Virgin's power", so we are told by St. Anselm, St. Bernard, St. Bernardine and St. Bonaventure. Is it not reasonable to find that among so many slaves there should be some slaves of love, who freely choose Mary as their Queen? Should men and demons have willing slaves, and Mary have none? A king makes it a point of honour that the queen, his consort, should have her own slaves, over whom she has right of life and death, for honour and power given to the queen is honour and power given to the king. Could we possibly believe that Jesus, the best of all sons, who shared his power with his Blessed Mother, would resent her having her own slaves? Has he less esteem and love for his Mother than Ahasuerus had for Esther, or Solomon for Bathsheba? Who could say or even think such a thing?

77. But where is my pen leading me? Why am I wasting my time proving something so obvious? If people are unwilling to call themselves slaves of Mary, what does it matter? Let them become and call themselves slaves of Jesus Christ, for this is the same as being slaves of Mary, since Jesus is the fruit and glory of Mary. This is what we do perfectly in the devotion we shall discuss later.

Third principle: We must rid ourselves of what is evil in us

78. Our best actions are usually tainted and spoiled by the evil that is rooted in us. When pure, clear water is poured into a foul-smelling jug, or wine into an unwashed cask that previously contained another wine, the clear water and the good wine are tainted and readily acquire an unpleasant odour. In the same way when God pours into our soul, infected by original and actual sin, the heavenly waters of his grace or the delicious wines of his love, his gifts are usually spoiled and tainted by the evil sediment left in us by sin. Our actions, even those of the highest virtue, show the effects of it. It is therefore of the utmost importance that, in seeking the perfection that can be attained only by union with Jesus, we rid ourselves of all that is evil in us. Otherwise our infinitely pure Lord, who has an infinite hatred for the slightest stain in our soul, will refuse to unite us to himself and will drive us from his presence.

79. To rid ourselves of selfishness, we must first become thoroughly aware, by the light of the Holy Spirit, of our tainted nature. Of ourselves we are unable to do anything conducive to our salvation. Our human weakness is evident in everything we do and we are habitually unreliable. We do not deserve any grace from God. Our tendency to sin is always present. The sin of Adam has almost entirely spoiled and soured us, filling us with pride and corrupting every one of us, just as leaven sours, swells and corrupts the dough in which it is placed. The actual sins we have committed, whether mortal or venial, even though forgiven, have intensified our base desires, our weakness, our inconstancy and our evil tendencies, and have left a sediment of evil in our soul.

Our bodies are so corrupt that they are referred to by the Holy Spirit as bodies of sin, as conceived and nourished in sin, and capable of any kind of sin. They are subject to a thousand ills, deteriorating from day to day and harbouring only disease, vermin and corruption.

Our soul, being united to our body, has become so carnal that it has been called flesh. "All flesh had corrupted its way". Pride and blindness of spirit, hardness of heart, weakness and inconstancy of soul, evil inclinations, rebellious passions, ailments of the body, - these are all we can call our own. By nature we are prouder than peacocks, we cling to the earth more than toads, we are more base than goats, more envious

than serpents, greedier than pigs, fiercer than tigers, lazier than tortoises, weaker than reeds, and more changeable than weather-cocks. We have in us nothing but sin, and deserve only the wrath of God and the eternity of hell.

80. Is it any wonder then that our Lord laid down that anyone who aspires to be his follower must deny himself and hate his very life? He makes it clear that anyone who loves his life shall lose it and anyone who hates his life shall save it. Now, our Lord, who is infinite Wisdom, and does not give commandments without a reason, bids us hate ourselves only because we richly deserve to be hated. Nothing is more worthy of love than God and nothing is more deserving of hatred than self.

81. Secondly, in order to empty ourselves of self, we must die daily to ourselves. This involves our renouncing what the powers of the soul and the senses of the body incline us to do. We must see as if we did not see, hear as if we did not hear and use the things of this world as if we did not use them. This is what St. Paul calls "dying daily". Unless the grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain and does not bear any good fruit. If we do not die to self and if our holiest devotions do not lead us to this necessary and fruitful death, we shall not bear fruit of any worth and our devotions will cease to be profitable. All our good works will be tainted by self-love and self-will so that our greatest sacrifices and our best actions will be unacceptable to God. Consequently when we come to die we shall find ourselves devoid of virtue and merit and discover that we do not possess even one spark of that pure love which God shares only with those who have died to themselves and whose life is hidden with Jesus Christ in him.

82. Thirdly, we must choose among all the devotions to the Blessed Virgin the one which will lead us more surely to this dying to self. This devotion will be the best and the most sanctifying for us. For we must not believe that all that glitters is gold, all that is sweet is honey, or all that is easy to do and is done by the majority of people is the most sanctifying. Just as in nature there are secrets enabling us to do certain natural things quickly, easily and at little cost, so in the spiritual life there are secrets which enable us to perform works rapidly, smoothly and with facility. Such works are, for example, emptying ourselves of self-love, filling ourselves with God, and attaining perfection.

The devotion that I propose to explain is one of these secrets of grace, for it is unknown to most Christians. Only a few devout people know of it and it is practised and appreciated by fewer still. To begin the explanation of this devotion here is a fourth truth which is a consequence of the third.

Fourth principle: It is more humble to have an intermediary with Christ

83. It is more perfect because it supposes greater humility to approach God through a mediator rather than directly by ourselves. Our human nature, as I have just shown, is so spoilt that if we rely on our own work, effort and preparedness to reach God and please him, it is certain that our good works will be tainted and carry little weight with him. They will not induce him to unite himself to us or answer our prayers. God had his reasons for giving us mediators with him. He saw our unworthiness and helplessness and had pity on us. To give us access to his mercies he provided us with powerful advocates, so that to neglect these mediators and to approach his infinite holiness directly and without help from any one of them, is to be lacking in humility and respect towards God who is so great and holy. It would mean that we have less esteem for the King of kings than for an earthly king or ruler, for we would not dare approach an earthly king without a friend to speak for us.

84. Our Lord is our Advocate and our Mediator of redemption with God the Father. It is through him that we must pray with the whole Church, triumphant and militant. It is through him that we have access to God the Father. We should never appear before God, our Father, unless we are supported by the merits of his Son, and, so to speak, clothed in them, as young Jacob was clothed in the skin of the young goats when he appeared before his father Isaac to receive his blessing.

85. But have we no need at all of a mediator with the Mediator himself? Are we pure enough to be united directly to Christ without any help? Is Jesus not God, equal in every way to the Father? Therefore is he not the Holy of Holies, having a right to the same respect as his Father? If in his infinite love he became our security and our Mediator with his Father, whom he wished to appease in order to redeem us from our

debts, should we on that account show him less respect and have less regard for the majesty and holiness of his person?

Let us not be afraid to say with St. Bernard that we need a mediator with the Mediator himself and the divinely-honoured Mary is the one most able to fulfil this office of love. Through her, Jesus came to us; through her we should go to him. If we are afraid of going directly to Jesus, who is God, because of his infinite greatness, or our lowliness, or our sins, let us implore without fear the help and intercession of Mary, our Mother. She is kind, she is tender, and there is nothing harsh or forbidding about her, nothing too sublime or too brilliant. When we see her, we see our own human nature at its purest. She is not the sun, dazzling our weak sight by the brightness of its rays. Rather, she is fair and gentle as the moon, which receives its light from the sun and softens it and adapts it to our limited perception.

She is so full of love that no one who asks for her intercession is rejected, no matter how sinful he may be. The saints say that it has never been known since the world began that anyone had recourse to our Blessed Lady, with trust and perseverance, and was rejected. Her power is so great that her prayers are never refused. She has but to appear in prayer before her Son and he at once welcomes her and grants her requests. He is always lovingly conquered by the prayers of the dear Mother who bore him and nourished him.

86. All this is taken from St. Bernard and St. Bonaventure. According to them, we have three steps to take in order to reach God. The first, nearest to us and most suited to our capacity, is Mary; the second is Jesus Christ; the third is God the Father. To go to Jesus, we should go to Mary, our mediatrix of intercession. To go to God the Father, we must go to Jesus, our Mediator of redemption. This order is perfectly observed in the devotion I shall speak about further on.

Fifth principle: It is difficult to keep the graces received from God

87. It is very difficult, considering our weakness and frailty, to keep the graces and treasures we have received from God.

1. We carry this treasure, which is worth more than heaven and earth, in fragile vessels, that is, in a corruptible body and in a weak and wavering soul which requires very little to depress and disturb it.

88. 2. The evil spirits, cunning thieves that they are, can take us by surprise and rob us of all we possess. They are watching day and night for the right moment. They roam incessantly seeking to devour us and to snatch from us in one brief moment of sin all the grace and merit we have taken years to acquire. Their malice and their experience, their cunning and their numbers ought to make us ever fearful of such a misfortune happening to us. People, richer in grace and virtue, more experienced and advanced in holiness than we are, have been caught off their guard and robbed and stripped of everything. How many cedars of Lebanon, how many stars of the firmament have we sadly watched fall and lose in a short time their loftiness and their brightness!

What has brought about this unexpected reverse? Not the lack of grace, for this is denied no one. It was a lack of humility; they considered themselves stronger and more self-sufficient than they really were. They thought themselves well able to hold on to their treasures. They believed their house secure enough and their coffers strong enough to safeguard their precious treasure of grace. It was because of their unconscious reliance on self - although it seemed to them that they were relying solely on the grace of God - that the most just Lord left them to themselves and allowed them to be despoiled. If they had only known of the wonderful devotion that I shall later explain, they would have entrusted their treasure to Mary, the powerful and faithful Virgin. She would have kept it for them as if it were her own possession and even have considered that trust an obligation of justice.

89. 3. It is difficult to persevere in holiness because of the excessively corrupting influence of the world. The world is so corrupt that it seems almost inevitable that religious hearts be soiled, if not by its mud, at least by its dust. It is something of a miracle for anyone to stand firm in the midst of this raging torrent and not be swept away; to weather this stormy sea and not be drowned, or robbed by pirates; to

breathe this pestilential air and not be contaminated by it. It is Mary, the singularly faithful Virgin over whom Satan had never any power, who works this miracle for those who truly love her.

2. Marks of false and authentic devotion to Mary

90. Now that we have established these five basic truths, it is all the more necessary to make the right choice of the true devotion to our Blessed Lady, for now more than ever there are false devotions to her which can easily be mistaken for true ones. The devil, like a counterfeiter and crafty, experienced deceiver, has already misled and ruined many Christians by means of fraudulent devotions to our Lady. Day by day he uses his diabolical experience to lead many more to their doom, fooling them, lulling them to sleep in sin and assuring them that a few prayers, even badly said, and a few exterior practices, inspired by himself, are authentic devotions. A counterfeiter usually makes coins only of gold and silver, rarely of other metals, because these latter would not be worth the trouble. Similarly, the devil leaves other devotions alone and counterfeits mostly those directed to Jesus and Mary, for example, devotion to the Holy Eucharist and to the Blessed Virgin, because these are to other devotions what gold and silver are to other metals.

91. It is therefore very important, first, to recognise false devotions to our Blessed Lady so as to avoid them, and to recognise true devotion in order to practise it. Second, among so many different forms of true devotion to our Blessed Lady we should choose the one most perfect and the most pleasing to her, the one that gives greater glory to God and is most sanctifying for us.

1. False devotion to our Lady

92. There are, I find, seven kinds of false devotion to Mary, namely, the devotion of (1) the critical, (2) the scrupulous, (3) the superficial, (4) the presumptuous, (5) the inconstant, (6) the hypocritical, (7) the self-interested.

Critical devotees

93. Critical devotees are for the most part proud scholars, people of independent and self-satisfied minds, who deep down in their hearts have a vague sort of devotion to Mary. However, they criticise nearly all those forms of devotion to her which simple and pious people use to honour their good Mother just because such practices do not appeal to them. They question all miracles and stories which testify to the mercy and power of the Blessed Virgin, even those recorded by trustworthy authors or taken from the chronicles of religious orders. They cannot bear to see simple and humble people on their knees before an altar or statue of our Lady, or at prayer before some outdoor shrine. They even accuse them of idolatry as if they were adoring the wood or the stone. They say that as far as they are concerned they do not care for such outward display of devotion and that they are not so gullible as to believe all the fairy tales and stories told of our Blessed Lady. When you tell them how admirably the Fathers of the Church praised our Lady, they reply that the Fathers were exaggerating as orators do, or that their words are misrepresented. These false devotees, these proud worldly people are greatly to be feared. They do untold harm to devotion to our Lady. While pretending to correct abuses, they succeed only too well in turning people away from this devotion.

Scrupulous devotees

94. Scrupulous devotees are those who imagine they are slighting the Son by honouring the Mother. They fear that by exalting Mary they are belittling Jesus. They cannot bear to see people giving to our Lady the praises due to her and which the Fathers of the Church have lavished upon her. It annoys them to see more people kneeling before Mary's altar than before the Blessed Sacrament, as if these acts were at variance with each other, or as if those who were praying to our Lady were not praying through her to Jesus. They do not want us to speak too often of her or to pray so often to her.

Here are some of the things they say: "What is the good of all these rosaries, confraternities and exterior devotions to our Lady? There is a great deal of ignorance in all this. It is making a mockery of

religion. Tell us about those who are devoted to Jesus (and they often pronounce his name without uncovering their heads). We should go directly to Jesus, since he is our sole Mediator. We must preach Jesus; that is sound devotion." There is some truth in what they say, but the inference they draw to prevent devotion to our Lady is very insidious. It is a subtle snare of the evil one under the pretext of promoting a greater good. For we never give more honour to Jesus than when we honour his Mother, and we honour her simply and solely to honour him all the more perfectly. We go to her only as a way leading to the goal we seek - Jesus, her Son.

95. The Church, with the Holy Spirit, blesses our Lady first, then Jesus, "Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus." Not that Mary is greater than Jesus, or even equal to him - that would be an intolerable heresy. But in order to bless Jesus more perfectly we should first bless Mary. Let us say with all those truly devoted to her, despite these false and scrupulous devotees: "O Mary, blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus."

Superficial devotees

96. Superficial devotees are people whose entire devotion to our Lady consists in exterior practices. Only the externals of devotion appeal to them because they have no interior spirit. They say many rosaries with great haste and assist at many Masses distractedly. They take part in processions of our Lady without inner fervour. They join her confraternities without reforming their lives or restraining their passions or imitating Mary's virtues. All that appeals to them is the emotional aspect of this devotion, but the substance of it has no appeal at all. If they do not feel a warmth in their devotions, they think they are doing nothing; they become upset, and give up everything, or else do things only when they feel like it. The world is full of these shallow devotees, and there are none more critical of men of prayer who regard the interior devotion as the essential aspect and strive to acquire it without, however, neglecting a reasonable external expression which always accompanies true devotion.

Presumptuous devotees

97. Presumptuous devotees are sinners who give full rein to their passions or their love of the world, and who, under the fair name of Christian and servant of our Lady, conceal pride, avarice, lust, drunkenness, anger, swearing, slandering, injustice and other vices. They sleep peacefully in their wicked habits, without making any great effort to correct them, believing that their devotion to our Lady gives them this sort of liberty. They convince themselves that God will forgive them, that they will not die without confession, that they will not be lost for all eternity. They take all this for granted because they say the Rosary, fast on Saturdays, are enrolled in the Confraternity of the Holy Rosary or the Scapular, or a sodality of our Lady, wear the medal or the little chain of our Lady.

When you tell them that such a devotion is only an illusion of the devil and a dangerous presumption which may well ruin them, they refuse to believe you. God is good and merciful, they reply, and he has not made us to damn us. No man is without sin. We will not die without confession, and a good act of contrition at death is all that is needed. Moreover, they say they have devotion to our Lady; that they wear the scapular; that they recite faithfully and humbly every day the seven Our Fathers and seven Hail Marys in her honour; that sometimes they even say the Rosary and the Office of our Lady, as well as fasting and performing other good works.

Blinding themselves still more, they quote stories they have heard or read - whether true or false does not bother them - which relate how people who had died in mortal sin were brought back to life again to go to confession, or how their soul was miraculously retained in their bodies until confession, because in their lifetime they said a few prayers or performed a few pious acts, in honour of our Lady. Others are supposed to have obtained from God at the moment of death, through the merciful intercession of the Blessed Virgin, sorrow and pardon for their sins, and so were saved. Accordingly, these people expect the same thing to happen to them.

98. Nothing in our Christian religion is so deserving of condemnation as this diabolical presumption. How can we truthfully claim to love and honour the Blessed Virgin when by our sins we pitilessly wound,

pierce, crucify and outrage her Son? If Mary made it a rule to save by her mercy this sort of person, she would be condoning wickedness and helping to outrage and crucify her Son. Who would even dare to think of such a thing?

99. I declare that such an abuse of devotion to her is a horrible sacrilege and, next to an unworthy Communion, is the greatest and the least pardonable sin, because devotion to our Lady is the holiest and best after devotion to the Blessed Sacrament.

I admit that to be truly devoted to our Lady, it is not absolutely necessary to be so holy as to avoid all sin, although this is desirable. But at least it is necessary (note what I am going to say), (1) to be genuinely determined to avoid at least all mortal sin, which outrages the Mother as well as the Son; (2) to practise self-restraint in order to avoid sin; (3) to join her confraternities, say the Rosary and other prayers, fast on Saturdays, and so on.

100. Such means are surprisingly effective in converting even the hardened sinner. Should you be such a sinner, with one foot in the abyss, I advise you to do as I have said. But there is an essential condition. You must perform these good works solely to obtain from God, through the intercession of our Lady, the grace to regret your sins, obtain pardon for them and overcome your evil habits, and not to live complacently in the state of sin, disregarding the warning voice of conscience, the example of our Lord and the saints, and the teaching of the holy gospel.

Inconstant devotees

101. Inconstant devotees are those whose devotion to our Lady is practised in fits and starts. Sometimes they are fervent and sometimes they are lukewarm. Sometimes they appear ready to do anything to please our Lady, and then shortly afterwards they have completely changed. They start by embracing every devotion to our Lady. They join her confraternities, but they do not faithfully observe the rules. They are as changeable as the moon, and like the moon Mary puts them under her feet. Because of their fickleness they are unworthy to be included among the servants of the Virgin most faithful, because faithfulness and constancy are the hallmarks of Mary's servants. It is better not to burden ourselves with a multitude of prayers and pious practices but rather adopt only a few and perform them with love and perseverance in spite of opposition from the devil the world and the flesh.

Hypocritical devotees

102. There is another category of false devotees of our Lady, - hypocritical ones. These hide their sins and evil habits under the mantle of the Blessed Virgin so as to appear to their fellow-men different from what they are.

Self-interested devotees

103. Then there are the self-interested devotees who turn to her only to win a court-case, to escape some danger, to be cured of some ailment, or have some similar need satisfied. Except when in need they never think of her. Such people are acceptable neither to God nor to his Mother.

104. We must, then, carefully avoid joining the critical devotees, who believe nothing and find fault with everything; the scrupulous ones who, out of respect for our Lord, are afraid of having too much devotion to his Mother; the exterior devotees whose devotion consists entirely in outward practices; the presumptuous devotees who under cover of a fictitious devotion to our Lady wallow in their sins; the inconstant devotees who, being unstable, change their devotional practices or abandon them altogether at the slightest temptation; the hypocritical ones who join confraternities and wear emblems of our Lady only to be thought of as good people; finally, the self-interested devotees who pray to our Lady only to be rid of bodily ills or to obtain material benefits.

2. Marks of authentic devotion to our Lady

105. After having explained and condemned false devotions to the Blessed Virgin we shall now briefly describe what true devotion is. It is interior, trustful, holy, constant and disinterested.

106. First, true devotion to our Lady is interior, that is, it comes from within the mind and the heart and follows from the esteem in which we hold her, the high regard we have for her greatness, and the love we bear her.

107. Second, it is trustful, that is to say, it fills us with confidence in the Blessed Virgin, the confidence that a child has for its loving Mother. It prompts us to go to her in every need of body and soul with great simplicity, trust and affection. We implore our Mother's help always, everywhere, and for everything. We pray to her to be enlightened in our doubts, to be put back on the right path when we go astray, to be protected when we are tempted, to be strengthened when we are weakening, to be lifted up when we fall into sin, to be encouraged when we are losing heart, to be rid of our scruples, to be consoled in the trials, crosses and disappointments of life. Finally, in all our afflictions of body and soul, we naturally turn to Mary for help, with never a fear of importuning her or displeasing our Lord.

108. Third, true devotion to our Lady is holy, that is, it leads us to avoid sin and to imitate the virtues of Mary. Her ten principal virtues are: deep humility, lively faith, blind obedience, unceasing prayer, constant self-denial, surpassing purity, ardent love, heroic patience, angelic kindness, and heavenly wisdom.

109. Fourth, true devotion to our Lady is constant. It strengthens us in our desire to do good and prevents us from giving up our devotional practices too easily. It gives us the courage to oppose the fashions and maxims of the world, the vexations and unruly inclinations of the flesh and the temptations of the devil. Thus a person truly devoted to our Blessed Lady is not changeable, fretful, scrupulous or timid. We do not say however that such a person never sins or that his sensible feelings of devotion never change. When he has fallen, he stretches out his hand to his Blessed Mother and rises again. If he loses all taste and feeling for devotion, he is not at all upset because a good and faithful servant of Mary is guided in his life by faith in Jesus and Mary, and not by feelings.

110. Fifth, true devotion to Mary is disinterested. It inspires us to seek God alone in his Blessed Mother and not ourselves. The true subject of Mary does not serve his illustrious Queen for selfish gain. He does not serve her for temporal or eternal well-being but simply and solely because she has the right to be served and God alone in her. He loves her not so much because she is good to him or because he expects something from her, but simply because she is lovable. That is why he loves and serves her just as faithfully in weariness and dryness of soul as in sweet and sensible fervour. He loves her as much on Calvary as at Cana. How pleasing and precious in the sight of God and his holy Mother must these servants of Mary be, who serve her without any self-seeking. How rare they are nowadays! It is to increase their number that I have taken up my pen to write down what I have been teaching with success both publicly and in private in my missions for many years.

111. I have already said many things about the Blessed Virgin and, as I am trying to fashion a true servant of Mary and a true disciple of Jesus, I have still a great deal to say, although through ignorance, inability, and lack of time, I shall leave infinitely more unsaid.

112. But my labour will be well rewarded if this little book falls into the hands of a noble soul, a child of God and of Mary, born not of blood nor the will of the flesh nor of the will of man. My time will be well spent if, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, after having read this book he is convinced of the supreme value of the solid devotion to Mary I am about to describe. If I thought that my guilty blood could help the reader to accept in his heart the truths that I set down in honour of my dear Mother and Queen, I, her most unworthy child and slave, would use it instead of ink to write these words. I would hope to find faithful souls who, by their perseverance in the devotion I teach, will repay her for the loss she has suffered through my ingratitude and infidelity.

113. I feel more than ever inspired to believe and expect the complete fulfilment of the desire that is deeply engraved on my heart and what I have prayed to God for over many years, namely, that in the near or distant future the Blessed Virgin will have more children, servants and slaves of love than ever before, and that through them Jesus, my dear Lord, will reign more than ever in the hearts of men.

114. I clearly foresee that raging beasts will come in fury to tear to pieces with their diabolical teeth this little book and the one the Holy Spirit made use of to write it, or they will cause it at least to lie hidden in the darkness and silence of a chest and so prevent it from seeing the light of day. They will even attack and persecute those who read it and put into practice what it contains. But no matter! So much the better! It even gives me encouragement to hope for great success at the prospect of a mighty legion of brave and valiant soldiers of Jesus and Mary, both men and women, who will fight the devil, the world, and corrupt nature in the perilous times that are sure to come.

"Let the reader understand. Let him accept this teaching who can."

3. Principal practices of devotion to Mary

115. There are several interior practices of true devotion to the Blessed Virgin. Here briefly are the main ones:

(1) Honouring her, as the worthy Mother of God, by the cult of hyperdulia, that is, esteeming and honouring her more than all the other saints as the masterpiece of grace and the foremost in holiness after Jesus Christ, true God and true man.

(2) Meditating on her virtues, her privileges and her actions.

(3) Contemplating her sublime dignity.

(4) Offering to her acts of love, praise and gratitude.

(5) Invoking her with a joyful heart.

(6) Offering ourselves to her and uniting ourselves to her.

(7) Doing everything to please her.

(8) Beginning, carrying out and completing our actions through her, in her, with her, and for her in order to do them through Jesus, in Jesus, with Jesus, and for Jesus, our last end. We shall explain this last practice later.

116. True devotion to our Lady has also several exterior practices. Here are the principal ones:

(1) Enrolling in her confraternities and joining her sodalities.

(2) Joining religious orders dedicated to her.

(3) Making her privileges known and appreciated.

(4) Giving alms, fasting, performing interior and exterior acts of self-denial in her honour.

(5) Carrying such signs of devotion to her as the rosary, the scapular, or a little chain.

(6) Reciting with attention, devotion and reverence the fifteen decades of the Rosary in honour of the fifteen principal mysteries of our Lord, or at least five decades in honour of the Joyful mysteries - the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Birth of our Lord, the Purification, the Finding of the Child Jesus in the temple; or the Sorrowful mysteries: the Agony in the Garden, the Scourging, the Crowning with thorns, the Carrying of the Cross, and the Crucifixion; or the Glorious mysteries: The Resurrection of our Lord, the Ascension, the Descent of the Holy Spirit, the Assumption of our Lady, body and soul, into heaven, the Crowning of Mary by the Blessed Trinity.

One may also choose any of the following prayers: the Rosary of six or seven decades in honour of the years our Lady is believed to have spent on earth; the Little Crown of the Blessed Virgin in honour of her crown of twelve stars or privileges; the Little Office of our Lady so widely accepted and recited in the Church; the Little Psalter of the Blessed Virgin, composed in her honour by St. Bonaventure, which is so heart-warming, and so devotional that you cannot recite it without being moved by it; the fourteen Our Fathers and Hail Marys in honour of her fourteen joys. There are various other prayers and hymns of the Church, such as, the hymns of the liturgical seasons, the Ave Maris Stella, the O Gloriosa Domina ; the Magnificat and other prayers which are found in all prayer-books.

(7) Singing hymns to her or teaching others to sing them.

(8) Genuflecting or bowing to her each morning while saying for example sixty or a hundred times, "Hail Mary, Virgin most faithful", so that through her intercession with God we may faithfully correspond with his graces throughout the day; and in the evening saying "Hail Mary, Mother of Mercy", asking her to obtain God's pardon for the sins we have committed during the day.

(9) Taking charge of her confraternities, decorating her altars, crowning and adorning her statues.

(10) Carrying her statues or having others carry them in procession, or keeping a small one on one's person as an effective protection against the evil one.

(11) Having statues made of her, or her name engraved and placed on the walls of churches or houses and on the gates and entrances of towns, churches and houses.

(12) Solemnly giving oneself to her by a special consecration.

117. The Holy Spirit has inspired saintly souls with other practices of true devotion to the Blessed Virgin, all of which are conducive to holiness. You can read of them in detail in "Paradise opened to Philagia", a collection of many devotions practised by holy people to honour the Blessed Virgin, compiled by Fr. Paul Barry of the Society of Jesus. These devotions are a wonderful help for souls seeking holiness provided they are performed in a worthy manner, that is:

(1) With the right intention of pleasing God alone, seeking union with Jesus, our last end, and giving edification to our neighbour.

(2) With attention, avoiding wilful distractions.

(3) With devotion, avoiding haste and negligence.

(4) With decorum and respectful bodily posture.

4. The Perfect Practice

118. Having read nearly every book on devotion to the Blessed Virgin and talked to the most saintly and learned people of the day, I can now state with conviction that I have never known or heard of any devotion to our Lady which is comparable to the one I am going to speak of. No other devotion calls for more sacrifices for God, none empties us more completely of self and self-love, none keeps us more firmly in the grace of God and the grace of God in us. No other devotion unites us more perfectly and more easily to Jesus. Finally no devotion gives more glory to God, is more sanctifying for ourselves or more helpful to our neighbour.

119. As this devotion essentially consists in a state of soul, it will not be understood in the same way by everyone. Some - the great majority - will stop short at the threshold and go no further. Others - not many - will take but one step into its interior. Who will take a second step? Who will take a third? Finally who will remain in it permanently? Only the one to whom the Spirit of Jesus reveals the secret. The Holy Spirit himself will lead this faithful soul from strength to strength, from grace to grace, from light to light, until at length he attains transformation into Jesus in the fullness of his age on earth and of his glory in heaven.

PART II: THE PERFECT DEVOTION TO OUR LADY

CHAPTER THREE

THE PERFECT CONSECRATION TO JESUS CHRIST

1. A complete consecration to Mary

120. As all perfection consists in our being conformed, united and consecrated to Jesus it naturally follows that the most perfect of all devotions is that which conforms, unites, and consecrates us most completely to Jesus. Now of all God's creatures Mary is the most conformed to Jesus. It therefore follows that, of all devotions, devotion to her makes for the most effective consecration and conformity to him. The more one is consecrated to Mary, the more one is consecrated to Jesus.

That is why perfect consecration to Jesus is but a perfect and complete consecration of oneself to the Blessed Virgin, which is the devotion I teach; or in other words, it is the perfect renewal of the vows and promises of holy baptism.

121. This devotion consists in giving oneself entirely to Mary in order to belong entirely to Jesus through her. It requires us to give:

- (1) Our body with its senses and members;
- (2) Our soul with its faculties;
- (3) Our present material possessions and all we shall acquire in the future;
- (4) Our interior and spiritual possessions, that is, our merits, virtues and good actions of the past, the present and the future.

In other words, we give her all that we possess both in our natural life and in our spiritual life as well as everything we shall acquire in the future in the order of nature, of grace, and of glory in heaven. This we do without any reservation, not even of a penny, a hair, or the smallest good deed. And we give for all eternity without claiming or expecting, in return for our offering and our service, any other reward than the honour of belonging to our Lord through Mary and in Mary, even though our Mother were not - as in fact she always is - the most generous and appreciative of all God's creatures.

122. Note here that two things must be considered regarding our good works, namely, satisfaction and merit or, in other words, their satisfactory or prayer value and their meritorious value. The satisfactory or prayer value of a good work is the good action in so far as it makes condign atonement for the punishment due to sin or obtains some new grace. The meritorious value or merit is the good action in so far as it merits grace and eternal glory. Now by this consecration of ourselves to the Blessed Virgin we give her all satisfactory and prayer value as well as the meritorious value of our good works, in other words, all the satisfactions and the merits. We give her our merits, graces and virtues, not that she might give them to others, for they are, strictly speaking, not transferable, because Jesus alone, in making himself our surety with his Father, had the power to impart his merits to us. But we give them to her that she may keep, increase and embellish them for us, as we shall explain later, and we give her our acts of atonement that she may apply them where she pleases for God's greater glory.

123. It follows then:

(1) that by this devotion we give to Jesus all we can possibly give him, and in the most perfect manner, that is, through Mary's hands. Indeed we give him far more than we do by other devotions which require us to give only part of our time, some of our good works or acts of atonement and penances. In this devotion everything is given and consecrated, even the right to dispose freely of one's spiritual goods and the satisfactions earned by daily good works. This is not done even in religious orders. Members of religious orders give God their earthly goods by the vow of poverty, the goods of the body by the vow of chastity, their free will by the vow of obedience, and sometimes their freedom of movement by the vow of

enclosure. But they do not give him by these vows the liberty and right to dispose of the value of their good works. They do not despoil themselves of what a Christian considers most precious and most dear - his merits and satisfactions.

124. (2) It follows then that anyone who in this way consecrates and sacrifices himself voluntarily to Jesus through Mary may no longer dispose of the value of any of his good actions. All his sufferings, all his thoughts, words, and deeds belong to Mary. She can then dispose of them in accordance with the will of her Son and for his greater glory. This dependence, however, is without detriment to the duties of a person's present and future state of life. One such duty, for example, would be that of a priest who, by virtue of his office or otherwise, must apply the satisfactory or prayer value of the Holy Mass to a particular person. For this consecration can only be made in accordance with the order established by God and in keeping with the duties of one's state of life.

125. (3) It follows that we consecrate ourselves at one and the same time to Mary and to Jesus. We give ourselves to Mary because Jesus chose her as the perfect means to unite himself to us and unite us to him. We give ourselves to Jesus because he is our last end. Since he is our Redeemer and our God we are indebted to him for all that we are.

2. A perfect renewal of baptismal promises

126. I have said that this devotion could rightly be called a perfect renewal of the vows and promises of holy baptism. Before baptism every Christian was a slave of the devil because he belonged to him. At baptism he has either personally or through his sponsors solemnly renounced Satan, his seductions and his works. He has chosen Jesus as his Master and sovereign Lord and undertaken to depend upon him as a slave of love. This is what is done in the devotion I am presenting to you. We renounce the devil, the world, sin and self, as expressed in the act of consecration, and we give ourselves entirely to Jesus through Mary. We even do something more than at baptism, when ordinarily our god-parents speak for us and we are given to Jesus only by proxy. In this devotion we give ourselves personally and freely and we are fully aware of what we are doing.

In holy baptism we do not give ourselves to Jesus explicitly through Mary, nor do we give him the value of our good actions. After baptism we remain entirely free either to apply that value to anyone we wish or keep it for ourselves. But by this consecration we give ourselves explicitly to Jesus through Mary's hands and we include in our consecration the value of all our actions.

127. "Men," says St. Thomas, "vow in baptism to renounce the devil and all his seductions." "This vow," says St. Augustine, "is the greatest and the most indispensable of all vows." Canon Law experts say the same thing: "The vow we make at baptism is the most important of all vows." But does anyone keep this great vow? Does anyone fulfil the promises of baptism faithfully? Is it not true that nearly all Christians prove unfaithful to the promises made to Jesus in baptism? Where does this universal failure come from, if not from man's habitual forgetfulness of the promises and responsibilities of baptism and from the fact that scarcely anyone makes a personal ratification of the contract made with God through his sponsors?

128. This is so true that the Council of Sens, convened by order of the Emperor Louis the Debonair to remedy the grave disorders of Christendom, came to the conclusion that the main cause of this moral breakdown was man's forgetfulness of his baptismal obligations and his disregard for them. It could suggest no better way of remedying this great evil than to encourage all Christians to renew the promises and vows of baptism.

129. The Catechism of the Council of Trent, faithful interpreter of that holy Council, exhorts priests to do the same and to encourage the faithful to remember and hold fast to the belief that they are bound and consecrated as slaves to Jesus, their Redeemer and Lord. "The parish priest shall exhort the faithful never to lose sight of the fact that they are bound in conscience to dedicate and consecrate themselves for ever to their Lord and Redeemer as his slaves."

130. Now the Councils, the Fathers of the Church and experience itself, all indicate that the best remedy for the frequent lapses of Christians is to remind them of the responsibilities of their baptism and have them

renew the vows they made at that time. Is it not reasonable therefore to do this in our day and in a perfect manner by adopting this devotion with its consecration to our Lord through his Blessed Mother? I say "in a perfect manner", for in making this consecration to Jesus they are adopting the perfect means of giving themselves to him, which is the most Blessed Virgin Mary.

131. No one can object that this devotion is novel or of no value. It is not new, since the Councils, the Fathers of the Church, and many authors both past and present, speak of consecration to our Lord or renewal of baptismal vows as something going back to ancient times and recommended to all the faithful. Nor is it valueless, since the chief source of moral disorders and the consequent eternal loss of Christians spring from the forgetfulness of this practice and indifference to it.

132. Some may object that this devotion makes us powerless to help the souls of our relatives, friends and benefactors, since it requires us to give our Lord, through Mary, the value of our good works, prayers, penances, and alms-giving.

To them I reply:

(1) It is inconceivable that our friends, relatives and benefactors should suffer any loss because we have dedicated and consecrated ourselves unconditionally to the service of Jesus and Mary; it would be an affront to the power and goodness of Jesus and Mary who will surely come to the aid of our relatives, friends and benefactors whether from our meagre spiritual assets or from other sources.

(2) This devotion does not prevent us from praying for others, both the living and the dead, even though the application of our good works depends on the will of our Blessed Lady. On the contrary, it will make us pray with even greater confidence. Imagine a rich man, who, wanting to show his esteem for a great prince, gives his entire fortune to him. Would not that man have greater confidence in asking the prince to help one of his friends who needed assistance? Indeed the prince would only be too happy to have such an opportunity of proving his gratitude to one who had sacrificed all that he possessed to enrich him, thereby impoverishing himself to do him honour. The same must be said of our Lord and our Lady. They will never allow themselves to be outdone in gratitude.

133. Some may say, perhaps, if I give our Lady the full value of my actions to apply it to whom she wills, I may have to suffer a long time in purgatory. This objection, which arises from self-love and from an unawareness of the generosity of God and his holy Mother, refutes itself.

Take a fervent and generous soul who values God's interests more than his own. He gives God all he has without reserve till he can give no more. He desires only that the glory and the kingdom of Jesus may come through his Mother, and he does all he can to bring this about. Will this generous and unselfish soul, I ask, be punished more in the next world for having been more generous and unselfish than other people? Far from it! For we shall see later that our Lord and his Mother will prove most generous to such a soul with gifts of nature, grace and glory in this life and in the next.

134. We must now consider as briefly as possible: (1) The motives which commend this devotion to us, (2) the wonderful effects it produces in faithful souls, and (3) the practices of this devotion.

CHAPTER FOUR

MOTIVES WHICH RECOMMEND THIS DEVOTION

1. By it we give ourselves completely to God

135. This first motive shows us the excellence of the consecration of ourselves to Jesus through Mary.

We can conceive of no higher calling than that of being in the service of God and we believe that the least of God's servants is richer, stronger, and nobler than any earthly monarch who does not serve God. How rich and strong and noble then must the good and faithful servant be, who serves God as unreservedly and as completely as he possibly can! Just such a person is the faithful and loving slave of Jesus in Mary. He has indeed surrendered himself entirely to the service of the King of kings through Mary, his Mother,

keeping nothing for himself. All the gold of the world and the beauties of the heavens could not recompense him for what he has done.

136. Other congregations, associations, and confraternities set up in honour of our Lord and our Blessed Lady, which do so much good in the Church, do not require their members to give up absolutely everything. They simply prescribe for them the performance of certain acts and practices in fulfilment of their obligations. They leave them free to dispose of the rest of their actions as well as their time. But this devotion makes us give Jesus and Mary all our thoughts, words, actions, and sufferings and every moment of our lives without exception. Thus, whatever we do, whether we are awake or asleep, whether we eat or drink, whether we do important or unimportant work, it will always be true to say that everything is done for Jesus and Mary. Our offering always holds good, whether we think of it or not, unless we explicitly retract it. How consoling this is!

137. Moreover, as I have said before, no other act of devotion enables us to rid ourselves so easily of the possessiveness which slips unnoticed even into our best actions. This is a remarkable grace which our dear Lord grants us in return for the heroic and selfless surrender to him through Mary of the entire value of our good works. If even in this life he gives a hundredfold reward to those who renounce all material, temporal and perishable things out of love for him, how generously will he reward those who give up even interior and spiritual goods for his sake!

138. Jesus, our dearest friend, gave himself to us without reserve, body and soul, grace and merits. As St. Bernard says, "He won me over entirely by giving himself entirely to me." Does not simple justice as well as gratitude require that we give him all we possibly can? He was generous with us first, so let us be generous to him in return and he will prove still more generous during life, at the hour of death, and throughout eternity. "He will be generous towards the generous."

2. It helps us to imitate Christ

139. Our good Master stooped to enclose himself in the womb of the Blessed Virgin, a captive but loving slave, and to make himself subject to her for thirty years. As I said earlier, the human mind is bewildered when it reflects seriously upon this conduct of Incarnate Wisdom. He did not choose to give himself in a direct manner to the human race though he could easily have done so. He chose to come through the Virgin Mary. Thus he did not come into the world independently of others in the flower of his manhood, but he came as a frail little child dependent on the care and attention of his Mother. Consumed with the desire to give glory to God, his Father, and save the human race, he saw no better or shorter way to do so than by submitting completely to Mary.

He did this not just for the first eight, ten or fifteen years of his life like other children, but for thirty years. He gave more glory to God, his Father, during all those years of submission and dependence than he would have given by spending them working miracles, preaching far and wide, and converting all mankind. Otherwise he would have done all these things.

What immeasurable glory then do we give to God when, following the example of Jesus, we submit to Mary! With such a convincing and well-known example before us, can we be so foolish as to believe that there is a better and shorter way of giving God glory than by submitting ourselves to Mary, as Jesus did?

140. Let me remind you again of the dependence shown by the three divine Persons on our Blessed Lady. Theirs is the example which fully justifies our dependence on her. The Father gave and still gives his Son only through her. He raises children for himself only through her. He dispenses his graces to us only through her. God the Son was prepared for mankind in general by her alone. Mary, in union with the Holy Spirit, still conceives him and brings him forth daily. It is through her alone that the Son distributes his merits and virtues. The Holy Spirit formed Jesus only through her, and he forms the members of the Mystical Body and dispenses his gifts and his favours through her.

With such a compelling example of the three divine Persons before us, we would be extremely perverse to ignore her and not consecrate ourselves to her. Indeed we would be blind if we did not see the need for Mary in approaching God and making our total offering to him.

141. Here are a few passages from the Fathers of the Church which I have chosen to prove what I have just said: "Mary has two sons, the one a God-man, the other, mere man. She is Mother of the first corporally and of the second spiritually" (St. Bonaventure and Origen).

"This is the will of God who willed that we should have all things through Mary. If then, we possess any hope or grace or gift of salvation, let us acknowledge that it comes to us through her" (St. Bernard).

"All the gifts, graces, virtues of the Holy Spirit are distributed by the hands of Mary, to whom she wills, when she wills, as she wills, and in the measure she wills" (St. Bernardine).

"As you were not worthy that anything divine should be given to you, all graces were given to Mary so that you might receive through her all graces you would not otherwise receive" (St. Bernard).

142. St. Bernard tells us that God, seeing that we are unworthy to receive his graces directly from him, gives them to Mary so that we might receive from her all that he decides to give us. His glory is achieved when he receives through Mary the gratitude, respect and love we owe him in return for his gifts to us. It is only right then that we should imitate his conduct, "in order", as St. Bernard again says, "that grace might return to its author by the same channel through which it came to us".

This is what we do by this devotion. We offer and consecrate all we are and all we possess to the Blessed Virgin in order that our Lord may receive through her as intermediary the glory and gratitude that we owe to him. We deem ourselves unworthy and unfit to approach his infinite majesty on our own, and so we avail ourselves of Mary's intercession.

143. Moreover, this devotion is an expression of great humility, a virtue which God loves above all others. A person who exalts himself debases God, and a person who humbles himself exalts God. "God opposes the proud, but gives his graces to the humble." If you humble yourself, convinced that you are unworthy to appear before him, or even to approach him, he condescends to come down to you. He is pleased to be with you and exalts you in spite of yourself. But, on the other hand, if you venture to go towards God blindly without a mediator, he vanishes and is nowhere to be found. How dearly he loves the humble of heart! It is to such humility that this devotion leads us, for it teaches us never to go alone directly to our Lord, however gentle and merciful though he may be, but always to use Mary's power of intercession, whether we want to enter his presence, speak to him, be near him, offer him something, seek union with him or consecrate ourselves to him.

3. It obtains many blessings from our Lady

144. The Blessed Virgin, mother of gentleness and mercy, never allows herself to be surpassed in love and generosity. When she sees someone giving himself entirely to her in order to honour and serve her, and depriving himself of what he prizes most in order to adorn her, she gives herself completely in a wondrous manner to him. She engulfs him in the ocean of her graces, adorns him with her merits, supports him with her power, enlightens him with her light, and fills him with her love. She shares her virtues with him - her humility, faith, purity, etc. She makes up for his failings and becomes his representative with Jesus. Just as one who is consecrated belongs entirely to Mary, so Mary belongs entirely to him. We can truthfully say of this perfect servant and child of Mary what St. John in his gospel says of himself, "He took her for his own."

145. This produces in his soul, if he is persevering, a great distrust, contempt, and hatred of self, and a great confidence in Mary with complete self-abandonment to her. He no longer relies on his own dispositions, intentions, merits, virtues and good works, since he has sacrificed them completely to Jesus through his loving Mother. He has now only one treasury, where all his wealth is stored. That treasury is not within himself: it is Mary. That is why he can now go to our Lord without any servile or scrupulous fear and pray to him with great confidence. He can also share the sentiments of the devout and learned Abbot Rupert, who, referring to the victory which Jacob won over an angel, addressed our Lady in these words, "O Mary, my Queen, Immaculate Mother of the God-man, Jesus Christ, I desire to wrestle with this man, the Divine Word, armed with your merits and not my own."

How much stronger and more powerful are we in approaching our Lord when we are armed with the merits and prayers of the worthy Mother of God, who, as St. Augustine says, has conquered the Almighty by her love!

146. Since by this devotion we give to our Lord, through the hands of his holy Mother, all our good works, she purifies them, making them beautiful and acceptable to her Son.

(1) She purifies them of every taint of self-love and of that unconscious attachment to creatures which slips unnoticed into our best actions. Her hands have never been known to be idle or uncreative. They purify everything they touch. As soon as the Blessed Virgin receives our good works, she removes any blemish or imperfection she may find in them.

147. (2) She enriches our good works by adorning them with her own merits and virtues. It is as if a poor peasant, wishing to win the friendship and favour of the king, were to go the queen and give her an apple - his only possession - for her to offer it to the king. The queen, accepting the peasant's humble gift, puts it on a beautiful golden dish and presents it to the king on behalf of the peasant. The apple in itself would not be a gift worthy of a king, but presented by the queen in person on a dish of gold, it becomes fit for any king.

148. (3) Mary presents our good works to Jesus. She does not keep anything we offer for herself, as if she were our last end, but unfaithfully gives everything to Jesus. So by the very fact we give anything to her, we are giving it to Jesus. Whenever we praise and glorify her, she sings today as she did on the day Elizabeth praised her, "My soul glorifies the Lord."

149. At Mary's request, Jesus accepts the gift of our good works, no matter how poor and insignificant they may be for one who is the King of kings, the Holiest of the holy. When we present anything to Jesus by ourselves, relying on our own dispositions and efforts, he examines our gift and often rejects it because it is stained with self-love, just as he once rejected the sacrifices of the Jews because they were imbued with selfish motives.

But when we present something to him by the pure, virginal hands of his beloved Mother, we take him by his weak side, in a manner of speaking. He does not consider so much the present itself as the person who offers it. Thus Mary, who is never slighted by her Son but is always well received, prevails upon him to accept with pleasure everything she offers him, regardless of its value. Mary has only to present the gift for Jesus graciously to accept it. This is what St. Bernard strongly recommended to all those he was guiding along the pathway to perfection. "When you want to offer something to God, to be welcomed by him be sure to offer it through the worthy Mother of God, if you do not wish to see it rejected."

150. Does not human nature itself, as we have seen, suggest this mode of procedure to the less important people of this world with regard to the great? Why should grace not inspire us to do likewise with regard to God? He is infinitely exalted above us. We are less than atoms in his sight. But we have an advocate so powerful that she is never refused anything. She is so resourceful that she knows every secret way to win the heart of God. She is so good and kind that she never passes over anyone no matter how lonely and sinful.

Further on, I shall relate the story of Jacob and Rebecca which exemplifies the truths I have been setting before you.

4. It is an excellent means of giving glory to God 151. This devotion, when faithfully undertaken, is a perfect means of ensuring that the value of all our good works is being used for the greater glory of God. Scarcely anyone works for that noble end, in spite of the obligation to do so, either because men do not know where God's greatest glory is to be found or because they do not desire it. Now Mary, to whom we surrender the value and merit of our good actions, knows perfectly well where God's greatest glory lies and she works only to promote that glory. The devout servant of our Lady, having entirely consecrated himself to her as I have described above, can boldly claim that the value of all his actions, words and thoughts is used for the greatest glory of God, unless he has explicitly retracted his offering. For one who loves God with a pure and unselfish love and prizes God's glory and interests far above his own, could anything be more consoling?

5. It leads to union with our Lord

152. This devotion is a smooth, short, perfect and sure way of attaining union with our Lord, in which Christian perfection consists.

(a) This devotion is a smooth way. It is the path which Jesus Christ opened up in coming to us and in which there is no obstruction to prevent us reaching him. It is quite true that we can attain to divine union by other roads, but these involve many more crosses and exceptional setbacks and many difficulties that we cannot easily overcome. We would have to pass through spiritual darkness, engage in struggles for which we are not prepared, endure bitter agonies, scale precipitous mountains, tread upon painful thorns, and cross frightful deserts. But when we take the path of Mary, we walk smoothly and calmly.

It is true that on our way we have hard battles to fight and serious obstacles to overcome, but Mary, our Mother and Queen, stays close to her faithful servants. She is always at hand to brighten their darkness, clear away their doubts, strengthen them in their fears, sustain them in their combats and trials. Truly, in comparison with other ways, this virgin road to Jesus is a path of roses and sweet delights. There have been some saints, not very many, such as St. Ephrem, St. John Damascene, St. Bernard, St. Bernardine, St. Bonaventure, and St. Francis de Sales, who have taken this smooth path to Jesus Christ, because the Holy Spirit, the faithful Spouse of Mary, made it known to them by a special grace. The other saints, who are the greater number, while having a devotion to Mary, either did not enter or did not go very far along this path. That is why they had to undergo harder and more dangerous trials.

153. Why is it then, a servant of Mary might ask, that devoted servants of this good Mother are called upon to suffer much more than those who serve her less generously? They are opposed, persecuted, slandered, and treated with intolerance. They may also have to walk in interior darkness and through spiritual deserts without being given from heaven a single drop of the dew of consolation. If this devotion to the Blessed Virgin makes the path to Jesus smoother, how can we explain why Mary's loyal servants are so ill-treated?

154. I reply that it is quite true that the most faithful servants of the Blessed Virgin, being her greatest favourites, receive from her the best graces and favours from heaven, which are crosses. But I maintain too that these servants of Mary bear their crosses with greater ease and gain more merit and glory. What could check another's progress a thousand times over, or possibly bring about his downfall, does not balk them at all, but even helps them on their way. For this good Mother, filled with the grace and unction of the Holy Spirit, dips all the crosses she prepares for them in the honey of her maternal sweetness and the unction of pure love. They then readily swallow them as they would sugared almonds, though the crosses may be very bitter. I believe that anyone who wishes to be devout and live piously in Jesus will suffer persecution and will have a daily cross to carry. But he will never manage to carry a heavy cross, or carry it joyfully and perseveringly, without a trusting devotion to our Lady, who is the very sweetness of the cross. It is obvious that a person could not keep on eating without great effort unripe fruit which has not been sweetened.

155. (b) This devotion is a short way to discover Jesus, either because it is a road we do not wander from, or because, as we have just said, we walk along this road with greater ease and joy, and consequently with greater speed. We advance more in a brief period of submission to Mary and dependence on her than in whole years of self-will and self-reliance. A man who is obedient and submissive to Mary will sing of glorious victories over his enemies. It is true, his enemies will try to impede his progress, force him to retreat or try to make him fall. But with Mary's help, support and guidance, he will go forward towards our Lord. Without falling, retreating and even without being delayed, he will advance with giant strides towards Jesus along the same road which, as it is written, Jesus took to come to us with giant strides and in a short time.

156. Why do you think our Lord spent only a few years here on earth and nearly all of them in submission and obedience to his Mother? The reason is that "attaining perfection in a short time, he lived a long time", even longer than Adam, whose losses he had come to make good. Yet Adam lived more than nine hundred years!

Jesus lived a long time, because he lived in complete submission to his Mother and in union with her, which obedience to his Father required. The Holy Spirit tells us that the man who honours his mother is

like a man who stores up a treasure. In other words, the man who honours Mary, his Mother, to the extent of subjecting himself to her and obeying her in all things will soon become very rich, because he is amassing riches every day through Mary who has become his secret philosopher's stone.

There is another quotation from Holy Scripture, "My old age will be found in the mercy of the bosom". According to the mystical interpretation of these words it is in the bosom of Mary that people who are young grow mature in enlightenment, in holiness, in experience and in wisdom, and in a short time reach the fullness of the age of Christ. For it was Mary's womb which encompassed and produced a perfect man. That same womb held the one whom the whole universe can neither encompass nor contain.

157. (c) This devotion is a perfect way to reach our Lord and be united to him, for Mary is the most perfect and the most holy of all creatures, and Jesus, who came to us in a perfect manner, chose no other road for his great and wonderful journey. The Most High, the Incomprehensible One, the Inaccessible One, He who is, deigned to come down to us poor earthly creatures who are nothing at all. How was this done?

The Most High God came down to us in a perfect way through the humble Virgin Mary, without losing anything of his divinity or holiness. It is likewise through Mary that we poor creatures must ascend to almighty God in a perfect manner without having anything to fear.

God the Incomprehensible, allowed himself to be perfectly comprehended and contained by the humble Virgin Mary without losing anything of his immensity. So we must let ourselves be perfectly contained and led by the humble Virgin without any reserve on our part.

God, the Inaccessible, drew near to us and united himself closely, perfectly and even personally to our humanity through Mary without losing anything of his majesty. So it is also through Mary that we must draw near to God and unite ourselves to him perfectly, intimately, and without fear of being rejected.

Lastly, He who is deigned to come down to us who are not and turned our nothingness into God, or He who is. He did this perfectly by giving and submitting himself entirely to the young Virgin Mary, without ceasing to be in time He who is from all eternity. Likewise it is through Mary that we, who are nothing, may become like God by grace and glory. We accomplish this by giving ourselves to her so perfectly and so completely as to remain nothing, as far as self is concerned, and to be everything in her, without any fear of illusion.

158. Show me a new road to our Lord, pave it with all the merits of the saints, adorn it with their heroic virtues, illuminate and enhance it with the splendour and beauty of the angels, have all the angels and saints there to guide and protect those who wish to follow it. Give me such a road and truly, truly, I boldly say - and I am telling the truth - that instead of this road, perfect though it be, I would still choose the immaculate way of Mary. It is a way, a road without stain or spot, without original sin or actual sin, without shadow or darkness,. When our loving Jesus comes in glory once again to reign upon earth - as he certainly will - he will choose no other way than the Blessed Virgin, by whom he came so surely and so perfectly the first time. The difference between his first and his second coming is that the first was secret and hidden, but the second will be glorious and resplendent. Both are perfect because both are through Mary. Alas, this is a mystery which we cannot understand, "Here let every tongue be silent."

159. (d) This devotion to our Lady is a sure way to go to Jesus and to acquire holiness through union with him.

(1) The devotion which I teach is not new. Its history goes back so far that the time of its origin cannot be ascertained with any precision, as Fr. Boudon, who died a holy death a short time ago, states in a book which he wrote on this devotion. It is however certain that for more than seven hundred years we find traces of it in the Church.

St. Odilo, abbot of Cluny, who lived about the year 1040, was one of the first to practise it publicly in France as is told in his life.

Cardinal Peter Damian relates that in the year 1076 his brother, Blessed Marino, made himself the slave of the Blessed Virgin in the presence of his spiritual director in a most edifying manner. He placed a rope around his neck, scourged himself and placed on the altar a sum of money as a token of his devotion

and consecration to our Lady. He remained so faithful to this consecration all his life that he merited to be visited and consoled on his death-bed by his dear Queen and hear from her lips the promise of paradise in reward for his service.

Caesarius Bollandus mentions a famous knight, Vautier de Birback, a close relative of the Dukes of Louvain, who about the year 1300 consecrated himself to the Blessed Virgin.

This devotion was also practised privately by many people up to the seventeenth century, when it became publicly known.

160. Father Simon de Rojas of the Order of the Holy Trinity for the Redemption of Captives, court preacher to Philip III, made this devotion popular throughout Spain and Germany. Through the intervention of Philip III, he obtained from Gregory XV valuable indulgences for those who practised it.

Father de los Rios, of the Order of St. Augustine, together with his intimate friend, Father de Roias, worked hard, propagating it throughout Spain and Germany by preaching and writing. He composed a large volume entitled "Hierarchia Mariana", where he treats of the antiquity, the excellence and the soundness of this devotion, with as much devotion as learning.

The Theatine Fathers in the seventeenth century established this devotion in Italy and Savoy.

161. Father Stanislaus Phalacius of the Society of Jesus spread this devotion widely in Poland.

Father de los Rios in the book quoted above mentions the names of princes and princesses, bishops and cardinals of different countries who embraced this devotion.

Father Cornelius a Lapide, noted both for holiness and profound learning, was commissioned by several bishops and theologians to examine it. The praise he gave it after mature examination, is a worthy tribute to his own holiness. Many other eminent men followed his example.

The Jesuit Fathers, ever zealous in the service of our Blessed Lady, presented on behalf of the sodalities of Cologne to Duke Ferdinand of Bavaria, the then archbishop of Cologne, a little treatise on the devotion, and he gave it his approval and granted permission to have it printed. He exhorted all priests and religious of his diocese to do their utmost to spread this solid devotion.

162. Cardinal de Bérulle, whose memory is venerated throughout France, was outstandingly zealous in furthering the devotion in France, despite the calumnies and persecutions he suffered at the hands of critics and evil men. They accused him of introducing novelty and superstition. They composed and published a libellous tract against him and they - rather the devil in them - used a thousand stratagems to prevent him from spreading the devotion in France. But this eminent and saintly man responded to their calumnies with calm patience. He wrote a little book in reply and forcefully refuted the objections contained in it. He pointed out that this devotion is founded on the example given by Jesus Christ, on the obligations we have towards him and on the promises we made in holy baptism. It was mainly this last reason which silenced his enemies. He made clear to them that this consecration to the Blessed Virgin, and through her to Jesus, is nothing less than a perfect renewal of the promises and vows of baptism. He said many beautiful things concerning this devotion which can be read in his works.

163. In Fr. Boudon's book we read of different popes who gave their approval to this devotion, the theologians who examined it, the hostility it encountered and overcame, the thousands who made it their own without censure from any pope. Indeed it could not be condemned without overthrowing the foundations of Christianity. It is obvious then that this devotion is not new. If it is not commonly practised, the reason is that it is too sublime to be appreciated and undertaken by everyone.

164. (2) This devotion is a safe means of going to Jesus Christ, because it is Mary's role to lead us safely to her Son; just as it is the role of our Lord to lead us to the eternal Father. Those who are spiritually-minded should not fall into the error of thinking that Mary hinders our union with God. How could this possibly happen? How could Mary, who found grace with God for everyone in general and each one in particular, prevent a soul from obtaining the supreme grace of union with him? Is it possible that she who was so completely filled with grace to overflowing, so united to Christ and transformed in God that it became necessary for him to be made flesh in her, should prevent a soul from being perfectly united to him?

It is quite true that the example of other people, no matter how holy, can sometimes impair union with God, but not so our Blessed Lady, as I have said and shall never weary of repeating. One reason why so few souls come to the fullness of the age of Jesus is that Mary who is still as much as ever his Mother and the fruitful spouse of the Holy Spirit is not formed well enough in their hearts. If we desire a ripe and perfectly formed fruit, we must possess the tree that bears it. If we desire the fruit of life, Jesus Christ, we must possess the tree of life which is Mary. If we desire to have the Holy Spirit working within us, we must possess his faithful and inseparable spouse, Mary the divinely-favoured one whom, as I have said elsewhere, he can make fruitful.

165. Rest assured that the more you turn to Mary in your prayers, meditations, actions and sufferings, seeing her if not perhaps clearly and distinctly, at least in a general and indistinct way, the more surely you will discover Jesus. For he is always greater, more powerful, more active, and more mysterious when acting through Mary than he is in any other creature in the universe, or even in heaven. Thus Mary, so divinely-favoured and so lost in God, is far from being an obstacle to good people who are striving for union with him. There has never been and there never will be a creature so ready to help us in achieving that union more effectively, for she will dispense to us all the graces to attain that end. As a saint once remarked, "Only Mary knows how to fill our minds with the thought of God." Moreover, Mary will safeguard us against the deception and cunning of the evil one.

166. Where Mary is present, the evil one is absent. One of the unmistakable signs that a person is led by the Spirit of God is the devotion he has to Mary, and his habit of thinking and speaking of her. This is the opinion of a saint, who goes on to say that just as breathing is a proof that the body is not dead, so the habitual thought of Mary and loving converse with her is a proof that the soul is not spiritually dead in sin.

167. Since Mary alone has crushed all heresies, as we are told by the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Office of B.V.M.), a devoted servant of hers will never fall into formal heresy or error, though critics may contest this. He may very well err materially, mistaking lies for truth or an evil spirit for a good one, but he will be less likely to do this than others. Sooner or later he will discover his error and will not go on stubbornly believing and maintaining what he mistakenly thought was the truth.

168. Whoever then wishes to advance along the road to holiness and be sure of encountering the true Christ, without fear of the illusions which afflict many devout people, should take up with valiant heart and willing spirit this devotion to Mary which perhaps he had not previously heard about. Even if it is new to him, let him enter upon this excellent way which I am now revealing to him. "I will show you a more excellent way."

It was opened up by Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Wisdom. He is our one and only Head, and we, his members, cannot go wrong in following him. It is a smooth way made easy by the fullness of grace, the unction of the Holy Spirit. In our progress along this road, we do not weaken or turn back. It is a quick way and leads us to Jesus in a short time. It is a perfect way without mud or dust or any vileness of sin. Finally, it is a reliable way, for it is direct and sure, having no turnings to right or left but leading us straight to Jesus and to life eternal.

Let us then take this road and travel along it night and day until we arrive at the fullness of the age of Jesus Christ.

6. It gives great liberty of spirit

169. It gives great liberty of spirit - the freedom of the children of God - to those who faithfully practise it. Through this devotion we make ourselves slaves of Jesus by consecrating ourselves entirely to him. To reward us for this enslavement of love, our Lord frees us from every scruple and servile fear which might restrict, imprison or confuse us; he opens our hearts and fills them with holy confidence in God, helping us to regard God as our Father; he inspires us with a generous and filial love.

170. Without stopping to prove this truth, I shall simply relate an incident which I read in the life of Mother Agnes of Jesus, a Dominican nun of the convent of Langeac in Auvergne, who died a holy death there in 1634.

When she was only seven years old and was suffering great spiritual anguish, she heard a voice telling her that if she wished to be delivered from her anguish and protected against all her enemies, she should make herself the slave of our Lord and his Blessed Mother as soon as possible. No sooner had she returned home than she gave herself completely to Jesus and Mary as their slave, although she had never known anything about this devotion before. She found an iron chain, put it round her waist and wore it till the day she died. After this, all her sufferings and scruples disappeared and she found great peace of soul.

This led her to teach this devotion to many others who made rapid progress in it - among them, Father Olier, the founder of the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice, and several other priests and students from the same seminary. One day the Blessed Virgin appeared to Mother Agnes and put a gold chain around her neck to show her how happy she was that Mother Agnes had become the slave of both her and her Son. And St. Cecilia, who accompanied our Lady, said to her, "Happy are the faithful slaves of the Queen of heaven, for they will enjoy true freedom." *Tibi servire libertas.*

7. It is of great benefit to our neighbour

171. It is of great benefit to our neighbour, for by it we show love for our neighbour in an outstanding way since we give him through Mary's hands all that we prize most highly - that is, the satisfactory and prayer value of all our good works, down to the least good thought and the least little suffering. We give our consent that all we have already acquired or will acquire until death should be used in accordance with our Lady's will for the conversion of sinners or the deliverance of souls from Purgatory.

Is this not perfect love of our neighbour? Is this not being a true disciple of our Lord, one who should always be recognised by his love? Is this not the way to convert sinners without any danger of vainglory, and deliver souls from Purgatory by doing hardly anything more than what we are obliged to do by our state of life?

172. To appreciate the excellence of this motive we must understand what a wonderful thing it is to convert a sinner or to deliver a soul from Purgatory. It is an infinite good, greater than the creation of heaven and earth, since it gives a soul the possession of God. If by this devotion we secured the release of only soul from Purgatory or converted only one sinner in our whole lifetime, would that not be enough to induce any person who really loves his neighbour to practise this devotion?

It must be noted that our good works, passing through Mary's hands, are progressively purified. Consequently, their merit and their satisfactory and prayer value are also increased. That is why they become much more effective in relieving the souls in Purgatory and in converting sinners than if they did not pass through the virginal and liberal hands of Mary. Stripped of self-will and clothed with disinterested love, the little that we give to the Blessed Virgin is truly powerful enough to appease the anger of God and draw down his mercy. It may well be that at the hour of death a person who has been faithful to this devotion will find that he has freed many souls from Purgatory and converted many sinners, even though he performed only the ordinary actions of his state of life. Great will be his joy at the judgement. Great will be his glory throughout eternity.

8. It is a wonderful means of perseverance

173. Finally, what draws us in a sense more compellingly to take up this devotion to the most Blessed Virgin is the fact that it is a wonderful means of persevering in the practice of virtue and of remaining steadfast.

Why is it that most conversions of sinners are not lasting? Why do they relapse so easily into sin? Why is it that most of the faithful, instead of making progress in one virtue after another and so acquiring new graces, often lose the little grace and virtue they have? This misfortune arises, as I have already shown, from the fact that man, so prone to evil, so weak and changeable, trusts himself too much, relies on his own strength, and wrongly presumes he is able to safeguard his precious graces, virtues and merits.

By this devotion we entrust all we possess to Mary, the faithful Virgin. We choose her as the guardian of all our possessions in the natural and supernatural sphere. We trust her because she is faithful,

we rely on her strength, we count on her mercy and charity to preserve and increase our virtues and merits in spite of the efforts of the devil, the world, and the flesh to rob us of them. We say to her as a good child would say to its mother or a faithful servant to the mistress of the house, "My dear Mother and Mistress, I realise that up to now I have received from God through your intercession more graces than I deserve. But bitter experience has taught me that I carry these riches in a very fragile vessel and that I am too weak and sinful to guard them by myself. Please accept in trust everything I possess, and in your faithfulness and power keep it for me. If you watch over me, I shall lose nothing. If you support me, I shall not fail. If you protect me, I shall be safe from my enemies."

174. This is exactly what St. Bernard clearly pointed out to encourage us to take up this devotion, "When Mary supports you, you will not fail. With her as your protector, you will have nothing to fear. With her as your guide, you will not grow weary. When you win her favour, you will reach the port of heaven." St. Bonaventure seems to say the same thing in even more explicit terms, "The Blessed Virgin," he says, "not only preserves the fullness enjoyed by the saints, but she maintains the saints in their fullness so that it does not diminish. She prevents their virtues from fading away, their merits from being wasted and their graces from being lost. She prevents the devils from doing them harm and she so influences them that her divine Son has no need to punish them when they sin."

175. Mary is the Virgin most faithful who by her fidelity to God makes good the losses caused by Eve's unfaithfulness. She obtains fidelity to God and final perseverance for those who commit themselves to her. For this reason St. John Damascene compared her to a firm anchor which holds them fast and saves them from shipwreck in the raging seas of the world where so many people perish through lack of such a firm anchor. "We fasten souls," he said, "to Mary, our hope, as to a firm anchor." It was to Mary that the saints who attained salvation most firmly anchored themselves as did others who wanted to ensure their perseverance in holiness.

Blessed, indeed, are those Christians who bind themselves faithfully and completely to her as to a secure anchor! The violent storms of the world will not make them founder or carry away their heavenly riches. Blessed are those who enter into her as into another Noah's ark! The flood waters of sin which engulf so many will not harm them because, as the Church makes Mary say in the words of divine Wisdom, "Those who work with my help - for their salvation - shall not sin." Blessed are the unfaithful children of unhappy Eve who commit themselves to Mary, the ever-faithful Virgin and Mother who never wavers in her fidelity and never goes back on her trust. She always loves those who love her, not only with deep affection, but with a love that is active and generous. By an abundant outpouring of grace she keeps them from relaxing their effort in the practice of virtue or falling by the wayside through loss of divine grace.

176. Moved by pure love, this good Mother always accepts whatever is given her in trust, and, once she accepts something, she binds herself in justice by a contract of trusteeship to keep it safe. Is not someone to whom I entrust the sum of a thousand francs obliged to keep it safe for me so that if it were lost through his negligence he would be responsible for it in strict justice? But nothing we entrust to the faithful Virgin will ever be lost through her negligence. Heaven and earth would pass away sooner than Mary would neglect or betray those who trusted in her.

177. Poor children of Mary, you are extremely weak and changeable. Your human nature is deeply impaired. It is sadly true that you have been fashioned from the same corrupted nature as the other children of Adam and Eve. But do not let that discourage you. Rejoice and be glad! Here is a secret which I am revealing to you, a secret unknown to most Christians, even the most devout.

Do not leave your gold and silver in your own safes which have already been broken into and rifled many times by the evil one. They are too small, too flimsy and too old to contain such great and priceless possessions. Do not put pure and clear water from the spring into vessels fouled and infected by sin. Even if sin is no longer there, its odour persists and the water would be contaminated. You do not put choice wine into old casks that have contained sour wine. You would spoil the good wine and run the risk of losing it.

178. Chosen souls, although you may already understand me, I shall express myself still more clearly. Do not commit the gold of your charity, the silver of your purity to a threadbare sack or a battered old chest, or the waters of heavenly grace or the wines of your merits and virtues to a tainted and fetid cask, such as

you are. Otherwise you will be robbed by thieving devils who are on the look-out day and night waiting for a favourable opportunity to plunder. If you do so all those pure gifts from God will be spoiled by the unwholesome presence of self-love, inordinate self-reliance, and self-will.

Pour into the bosom and heart of Mary all your precious possessions, all your graces and virtues. She is a spiritual vessel, a vessel of honour, a singular vessel of devotion. Ever since God personally hid himself with all his perfections in this vessel, it has become completely spiritual, and the spiritual abode of all spiritual souls. It has become honourable and has been the throne of honour for the greatest saints in heaven. It has become outstanding in devotion and the home of those renowned for gentleness, grace and virtue. Moreover, it has become as rich as a house of gold, as strong as a tower of David and as pure as a tower of ivory.

179. Blessed is the man who has given everything to Mary, who at all times and in all things trusts in her, and loses himself in her. He belongs to Mary and Mary belongs to him. With David he can boldly say, "She was created for me", or with the beloved disciple, "I have taken her for my own", or with our Lord himself, "All that is mine is yours and all that is yours is mine."

180. If any critic reading this should imagine that I am exaggerating or speaking from an excess of devotion, he has not, alas, understood what I have said. Either he is a carnal man who has no taste for the spiritual; or he is a worldly man who has cut himself off from the Holy Spirit; or he is a proud and critical man who ridicules and condemns anything he does not understand. But those who are born not of blood, nor of flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God and Mary, understand and appreciate what I have to say. It is for them that I am writing.

181. Nevertheless, after this digression, I say to both the critics and the devout that the Blessed Virgin, the most reliable and generous of all God's creatures, never lets herself be surpassed by anyone in love and generosity. For the little that is given to her, she gives generously of what she has received from God. Consequently, if a person gives himself to her without reserve, she gives herself also without reserve to that person provided his confidence in her is not presumptuous and he does his best to practise virtue and curb his passions.

182. So the faithful servants of the Blessed Virgin may confidently say with St. John Damascene, "If I confide in you, Mother of God, I shall be saved. Under your protection I shall fear nothing. With your help I shall rout all my enemies. For devotion to you is a weapon of salvation which God gives to those he wishes to save."

CHAPTER FIVE

BIBLICAL FIGURE OF THIS PERFECT DEVOTION:

REBECCA AND JACOB

183. The Holy Spirit gives us in Sacred Scripture, a striking allegorical figure of all the truths I have been explaining concerning the Blessed Virgin and her children and servants. It is the story of Jacob who received the blessing of his father Isaac through the care and ingenuity of his mother Rebecca.

Here is the story as the Holy Spirit tells it. I shall expound it further later on.

The Story of Jacob

184. Several years after Esau had sold his birthright to Jacob, Rebecca, their mother, who loved Jacob tenderly, secured this blessing for him by a holy stratagem full of mystery for us.

Isaac, realising that he was getting old, wished to bless his children before he died. He summoned Esau, who was his favourite son, and told him to go hunting and bring him something to eat, in order that he might then give him his blessing. Rebecca immediately told Jacob what was happening and sent him to fetch two small goats from the flock. When Jacob gave them to his mother, she cooked them in the way

Isaac liked them. Then she dressed Jacob in Esau's clothes which she had in her keeping, and covered his hands and neck with the goat-skin. The father, who was blind, although hearing the voice of Jacob, would think that it was Esau when he touched the skin on his hands.

Isaac was of course surprised at the voice which he thought was Jacob's and told him to come closer. Isaac felt the hair on the skin covering Jacob's hands and said that the voice was really like Jacob's but the hands were Esau's. After he had eaten, Isaac kissed Jacob and smelt the fragrance of his scented clothes. He blessed him and called down on him the dew of heaven and the fruitfulness of earth. He made him master of all his brothers and concluded his blessing with these words, "Cursed be those who curse you and blessed be those who bless you."

Isaac had scarcely finished speaking when Esau came in, bringing what he had caught while out hunting. He wanted his father to bless him after he had eaten. The holy patriarch was shocked when he realised what had happened. But far from retracting what he had done, he confirmed it because he clearly saw the finger of God in it all. Then, as Holy Scripture relates, Esau began to protest loudly against the treachery of his brother. He then asked his father if he had only one blessing to give. In so doing, as the early Fathers point out, Esau was the symbol of those who are too ready to imagine that there is an alliance between God and the world, because they themselves are eager to enjoy, at one and the same time, the blessings of heaven and the blessings of the earth. Isaac was touched by Esau's cries and finally blessed him only with a blessing of the earth, and he subjected him to his brother. Because of this, Esau conceived such a venomous hatred for Jacob that he could hardly wait for his father's death to kill him. And Jacob would not have escaped death if his dear mother Rebecca had not saved him by her ingenuity and her good advice.

Interpretation of the story

185. Before explaining this beautiful story, let me remind you that, according to the early Fathers and the interpreters of Holy Scripture, Jacob is the type of our Lord and of souls who are saved, and Esau is the type of souls who are condemned. We have only to examine the actions and conduct of both in order to judge each one.

(1) Esau, the elder brother, was strong and robust, clever, and skilful with the bow and very successful at hunting.

(2) He seldom stayed at home and, relying only on his own strength and skill, worked out of doors.

(3) He never went out of his way to please his mother Rebecca, and did little or nothing for her.

(4) He was such a glutton and so fond of eating that he sold his birthright for a dish of lentils.

(5) Like Cain, he was extremely jealous of his brother and persecuted him relentlessly.

186. This is the usual conduct of sinners:

(1) They rely upon their own strength and skill in temporal affairs. They are very energetic, clever and well-informed about things of this world but very dull and ignorant about things of heaven.

187. (2) And they are never or very seldom at home, in their own house, that is, in their own interior, the inner, essential abode that God has given to every man to dwell in, after his own example, for God always abides within himself. Sinners have no liking for solitude or the spiritual life or interior devotion. They consider those who live an interior life, secluded from the world, and who work more interiorly than exteriorly, as narrow-minded, bigoted and uncivilized.

188. (3) Sinners care little or nothing about devotion to Mary, the Mother of the elect. It is true that they do not really hate her. Indeed they even speak well of her sometimes. They say they love her and they practise some devotion in her honour. Nevertheless, they cannot bear to see anyone love her tenderly, for they do not have for her any of the affection of Jacob; they find fault with the honour which her good children and servants faithfully pay her to win her affection. They think this kind of devotion is not necessary for salvation, and as long as they do not go as far as hating her or openly ridiculing devotion to her they believe they have done all they need to win her good graces. Because they recite or mumble a few

prayers to her without any affection and without even thinking of amending their lives, they consider they are our Lady's servants.

189. (4) Sinners sell their birthright, that is, the joys of paradise, for a dish of lentils, that is, the pleasures of this world. They laugh, they drink, they eat, they have a good time, they gamble, they dance and so forth, without taking any more trouble than Esau to make themselves worthy of their heavenly Father's blessing. Briefly, they think only of this world, love only the world, speak and act only for the world and its pleasures. For a passing moment of pleasure, for a fleeting wisp of honour, for a piece of hard earth, yellow or white, they barter away their baptismal grace, their robe of innocence and their heavenly inheritance.

190. (5) Finally, sinners continually hate and persecute the elect, openly and secretly. The elect are a burden to them. They despise them, criticise them, ridicule them, insult them, rob them, deceive them, impoverish them, hunt them down and trample them into the dust; while they themselves are making fortunes, enjoying themselves, getting good positions for themselves, enriching themselves, rising to power and living in comfort.

191. Jacob, the younger son, was of a frail constitution, gentle and peaceable and usually stayed at home to please his mother, whom he loved so much. If he did go out it was not through any personal desire of his, nor from any confidence in his own ability, but simply out of obedience to his mother.

192. He loved and honoured his mother. That is why he remained at home close to her. He was never happier than when he was in her presence. He avoided everything that might displease her, and did everything he thought would please her. This made Rebecca love him all the more.

193. He was submissive to his mother in all things. He obeyed her entirely in everything, promptly without delay and lovingly without complaint. At the least indication of her will, young Jacob hastened to comply with it. He accepted whatever she told him without questioning. For instance, when she told him to get two small goats and bring them to her so that she might prepare something for his father Isaac to eat, Jacob did not reply that one would be enough for one man, but without arguing he did exactly what she told him to do.

194. He had the utmost confidence in his mother. He did not rely on his own ability; he relied solely on his mother's care and protection. He went to her in all his needs and consulted her in all his doubts. For instance, when he asked her if his father, instead of blessing him, would curse him, he believed her and trusted her when she said she would take the curse upon herself.

195. Finally, he adopted, as much as he could, the virtues he saw in his mother. It seems that one of the reasons why he spent so much time at home was to imitate his dear mother, who was so virtuous, and to keep away from evil companions - who might lead him into sin. In this way, he made himself worthy to receive the double blessing of his beloved father.

196. It is in a similar manner that God's chosen ones usually act. They stay at home with their mother - that is, they have an esteem for quietness, love the interior life, and are assiduous in prayer. They always remain in the company of the Blessed Virgin, their Mother and Model, whose glory is wholly interior and who during her whole life dearly loved seclusion and prayer. It is true, at times they do venture out into the world, but only to fulfil the duties of their state of life, in obedience to the will of God and the will of their Mother.

No matter how great their accomplishments may appear to others, they attach far more importance to what they do within themselves in their interior life, in the company of the Blessed Virgin. For there they work at the great task of perfection, compared to which all other work is mere child's play. At times their brothers and sisters are working outside with great energy, skill and success, and win the praise and approbation of the world. But they know by the light of the Holy Spirit that there is far more good, more glory and more joy in remaining hidden and recollected with our Lord, in complete and perfect submission to Mary than there is in performing by themselves marvellous works of nature and grace in the world, like so many Esaus and sinners. Glory for God and riches for men are in her house.

Lord Jesus, how lovely is your dwelling-place! The sparrow has found a house to dwell in, and the turtle-dove a nest for her little ones! How happy is the man who dwells in the house of Mary, where you were the first to dwell! Here in this home of the elect, he draws from you alone the help he needs to climb the stairway of virtue he has built in his heart to the highest possible points of perfection while in this vale of tears. "How lovely is your dwelling-place, Lord, God of hosts!"

197. The elect have a great love for our Lady and honour her truly as their Mother and Queen. They love her not merely in word but in deed. They honour her not just outwardly, but from the depths of their heart. Like Jacob, they avoid the least thing that might displease her, and eagerly do whatever they think might win her favour. Jacob brought Rebecca two young goats. They bring Mary their body and their soul, with all their faculties, symbolised by Jacob's two young goats, 1) so that she may accept them as her own; 2) that she may make them die to sin and self by divesting them of self-love, in order to please Jesus her Son, who wishes to have as friends and disciples only those who are dead to sin and self; 3) that she may clothe them according to their heavenly Father's taste and for his greater glory, which she knows better than any other creature; 4) that through her care and intercession, this body and soul of theirs, thoroughly cleansed from every stain, thoroughly dead to self, thoroughly stripped and well-prepared, may be pleasing to the heavenly Father and deserving of his blessing.

Is this not what those chosen souls do who, to prove to Jesus and Mary how effective and courageous is their love, live and esteem the perfect consecration to Jesus through Mary which we are now teaching them?

Sinners may say that they love Jesus, that they love and honour Mary, but they do not do so with their whole heart and soul. Unlike the elect, they do not love Jesus and Mary enough to consecrate their body with its senses and their soul with its passions.

198. They are subject and obedient to our Lady, their good Mother, and here they are simply following the example set by our Lord himself, who spent thirty of the thirty-three years he lived on earth glorifying God his Father in perfect and entire submission to his holy Mother. They obey her, following her advice to the letter, just as Jacob followed that of Rebecca, when she said to him, "My son, follow my advice"; or like the stewards at the wedding in Cana, to whom our Lady said, "Do whatever he tells you."

Through obedience to his mother, Jacob received the blessing almost by a miracle, because in the natural course of events he should not have received it. As a reward for following the advice of our Lady, the stewards at the wedding in Cana were honoured with the first of our Lord's miracles when, at her request he changed water into wine. In the same way, until the end of time, all who are to receive the blessing of our heavenly Father and who are to be honoured with his wondrous graces will receive them only as a result of their perfect obedience to Mary. On the other hand, the "Esau" will lose their blessing because of their lack of submission to the Blessed Virgin.

199. They have great confidence in the goodness and power of the Blessed Virgin, their dear Mother, and incessantly implore her help. They take her for their pole-star to lead them safely into harbour. They open their hearts to her and tell her their troubles and their needs. They rely on her mercy and kindness to obtain forgiveness for their sins through her intercession and to experience her motherly comfort in their troubles and anxieties. They even cast themselves into her virginal bosom, hide and lose themselves there in a wonderful manner. There they are filled with pure love, they are purified from the least stain of sin, and they find Jesus in all his fullness. For he reigns in Mary as if on the most glorious of thrones. What incomparable happiness! Abbot Gueric says, "Do not imagine there is more joy in dwelling in Abraham's bosom than in Mary's, for it is in her that our Lord placed his throne."

Sinners, on the other hand, put all their confidence in themselves. Like the prodigal son, they eat with the swine. Like toads they feed on earth. Like all worldlings, they love only visible and external things. They do not know the sweetness of Mary's bosom. They do not have that reliance and confidence which the elect have for the Blessed Virgin, their Mother. Deplorably they choose to satisfy their hunger elsewhere, as St. Gregory says, because they do not want to taste the sweetness already prepared within themselves and within Jesus and Mary.

200. Finally, chosen souls keep to the ways of the Blessed Virgin, their loving Mother - that is, they imitate her and so are sincerely happy and devout and bear the infallible sign of God's chosen ones. This loving Mother says to them "Happy are those who keep my ways", which means, happy are those who practise my virtues and who, with the help of God's grace, follow the path of my life. They are happy in this world because of the abundance of grace and sweetness I impart to them out of my fullness, and which they receive more abundantly than others who do not imitate me so closely. They are happy at the hour of death, which is sweet and peaceful for I am usually there myself to lead them home to everlasting joy. Finally, they will be happy for all eternity, because no servant of mine who imitated my virtues during life has ever been lost.

On the other hand, sinners are unhappy during their life, at their death, and throughout eternity, because they do not imitate the virtues of our Lady. They are satisfied with going no further than joining her confraternities, reciting a few prayers in her honour, or performing other exterior devotional exercises.

O Blessed Virgin, my dear Mother, how happy are those who faithfully keep your ways, your counsels and your commands; who never allow themselves to be led astray by a false devotion to you! But how unhappy and accursed are those who abuse devotion to you by not keeping the commandments of your Son! "They are accursed who stray from your commandments."

Services of our Lady to her faithful servants

201. Here now are the services which the Virgin Mary, as the best of all mothers, lovingly renders to those loyal servants who have given themselves entirely to her in the manner I have described and following the figurative meaning of the story of Jacob and Rebecca.

1. She loves them.

"I love those who love me." She loves them:

- a) Because she is truly their Mother. What mother does not love her child, the fruit of her womb?
- b) She loves them in gratitude for the active love they show to her, their beloved Mother.
- c) She loves them because they are loved by God and destined for heaven. "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."
- d) She loves them because they have consecrated themselves entirely to her and belong to her portion, her inheritance. "In Israel receive your inheritance."

202. She loves them tenderly, more tenderly than all the mothers in the world together. Take the maternal love of all the mothers of the world for their children. Pour all that love into the heart of one mother for an only child. That mother's love would certainly be immense. Yet Mary's love for each of her children has more tenderness than the love of that mother for her child.

She loves them not only affectively but effectively, that is, her love is active and productive of good like Rebecca's love for Jacob -and even more so, for Rebecca was, after all, only a symbolic figure of Mary. Here is what this loving Mother does for her children to obtain for them the blessings of their heavenly Father:

203. 1) Like Rebecca she looks out for favourable opportunities to promote their interests, to ennoble and enrich them. She sees clearly in God all that is good and all that is evil; fortunate and unfortunate events; the blessings and condemnations of God. She arranges things in advance so as to divert evils from her servants and put them in the way of abundant blessings. If there is any special benefit to be gained in God's sight by the faithful discharge of an important work, Mary will certainly obtain this opportunity for a beloved child and servant and at the same time, give him the grace to persevere in it to the end. "She personally manages our affairs," says a saintly man.

204. 2) She gives them excellent advice, as Rebecca did to Jacob. "My son, follow my counsels." Among other things, she persuades them to bring her the two young goats, that is, their body and soul, and to

confide them to her so that she can prepare them as a dish pleasing to God. She inspires them to observe whatever Jesus Christ, her Son, has taught by word and example. When she does not give these counsels herself in person, she gives them through the ministry of angels who are always pleased and honoured to go at her request to assist one of her faithful servants on earth.

205. 3) What does this good Mother do when we have presented and consecrated to her our soul and body and all that pertains to them without excepting anything? Just what Rebecca of old did to the little goats Jacob brought her. (a) She kills them, that is, makes them die to the life of the old Adam. (b) She strips them of their skin, that is, of their natural inclinations, their self-love and self-will and their every attachment to creatures. (c) She cleanses them from all stain, impurity and sin. (d) She prepares them to God's taste and to his greater glory. As she alone knows perfectly what the divine taste is and where the greatest glory of God is to be found, she alone without any fear of mistake can prepare and garnish our body and soul to satisfy that infinitely refined taste and promote that infinitely hidden glory.

206. 4) Once this good Mother has received our complete offering with our merits and satisfactions through the devotion I have been speaking about, and has stripped us of our own garments, she cleanses us and makes us worthy to appear without shame before our heavenly Father.

She clothes us in the clean, new, precious and fragrant garments of Esau, the first born, namely, her Son Jesus Christ. She keeps these garments in her house, that is to say, she has them at her disposal. For she is the treasurer and universal dispenser of the merits and virtues of Jesus her Son. She gives and distributes them to whom she pleases, when she pleases, as she pleases, and as much as she pleases, as we have said above.

She covers the neck and hands of her servants with the skins of the goats that have been killed and flayed, that is, she adorns them with the merits and worth of their own good actions. In truth, she destroys and nullifies all that is impure and imperfect in them. She preserves and enhances this good so that it adorns and strengthens their neck and hands, that is, she gives them the strength to carry the yoke of the Lord and the skill to do great things for the glory of God and the salvation of their poor brothers.

She imparts new perfume and fresh grace to those garments and adornments by adding to them the garments of her own wardrobe of merits and virtues. She bequeathed these to them before her departure for heaven, as was revealed by a holy nun of the last century, who died a holy death. Thus all her domestics, that is, all her servants and slaves, are clothed with double garments, her own and those of her Son. Now they have nothing to fear from that cold which sinners, naked and stripped as they are of the merits of Jesus and Mary, will be unable to endure.

207. 5) Finally, Mary obtains for them the heavenly Father's blessing. As they are the youngest born and adopted, they are not really entitled to it. Clad in new, precious, and sweet-smelling garments, with body and soul well-prepared and dressed, they confidently approach their heavenly Father. He hears their voice and recognises it as the voice of a sinner. He feels their hands covered with skins, inhales the aroma of their garments. He partakes with joy of what Mary, their Mother, has prepared for him, recognising in it the merits and good odour of his Son and his Blessed Mother.

a) He gives them a twofold blessing, the blessing of the dew of heaven, namely, divine grace, which is the seed of glory. "God has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing," and also the blessing of the fertility of the earth, for as a provident Father, he gives them their daily bread and an ample supply of the goods of the earth.

b) He makes them masters of their other brothers, the reprobate sinners. This domination does not always show in this fleeting world, where sinners often have the upper hand. "How long shall the wicked glory, mouthing insolent reproaches?" "I have seen the wicked triumphant and lifted up like the cedars of Lebanon." But the supremacy of the just is real and will be seen clearly for all eternity in the next world, where the just, as the Holy Spirit tells us, will dominate and command all peoples.

c) The God of all majesty is not satisfied with blessing them in their persons and their possessions, he blesses all who bless them and curses all who curse and persecute them.

2. She provides for all their needs

208. Our Lady's charity towards her faithful servants goes further. She provides them with everything they need for body and soul. We have just seen that she gives them double garments. She also nourishes them with the most delicious food from the banquet table of God. She gives them the Son she has borne, the Bread of Life, to be their food. "Dear children," she says in the words of divine Wisdom, "take your fill of my fruits," that is to say, of the Fruit of Life, Jesus, "whom I brought into the world for you." "Come," she repeats in another passage, "eat the bread which is Jesus. Drink the wine of his love which I have mixed" for you with the milk of my breasts.

As Mary is the treasurer and dispenser of the gifts and graces of the Most High God, she reserves a choice portion, indeed the choicest portion, to nourish and sustain her children and servants. They grow strong on the Bread of Life; they are made joyful with the wine that brings forth virgins. They are carried at her breast. They bear with ease the yoke of Christ scarcely feeling its weight because of the oil of devotion with which she has softened its wood.

3. She leads and guides them

209. A third service which our Lady renders her faithful servants is to lead and direct them according to the will of her Son. Rebecca guided her little son Jacob and gave him good advice from time to time, which helped him obtain the blessing of his father and saved him from the hatred and persecution of his brother Esau. Mary, Star of the sea, guides all her faithful servants into safe harbour. She shows them the path to eternal life and helps them avoid dangerous pitfalls. She leads them by the hand along the path of holiness, steadies them when they are liable to fall and helps them rise when they have fallen. She chides them like a loving mother when they are remiss and sometimes she even lovingly chastises them. How could a child that follows such a mother and such an enlightened guide as Mary take the wrong path to heaven? Follow her and you cannot go wrong, says St. Bernard. There is no danger of a true child of Mary being led astray by the devil and falling into heresy. Where Mary leads, Satan with his deceptions and heretics with their subtleties are not encountered. "When she upholds you, you will not fall."

4. She defends and protects them

210. The fourth good office our Lady performs for her children and faithful servants is to defend and protect them against their enemies. By her care and ingenuity Rebecca delivered Jacob from all dangers that beset him and particularly from dying at the hands of his brother, as he apparently would have done, since Esau hated and envied him just as Cain hated his brother Abel.

Mary, the beloved Mother of chosen souls, shelters them under her protecting wings as a hen does her chicks. She speaks to them, coming down to their level and accommodating herself to all their weaknesses. To ensure their safety from the hawk and vulture, she becomes their escort, surrounding them as an army in battle array. Could anyone surrounded by a well-ordered army of say a hundred thousand men fear his enemies? No, and still less would a faithful servant of Mary, protected on all sides by her imperial forces, fear his enemy. This powerful Queen of heaven would sooner despatch millions of angels to help one of her servants than have it said that a single faithful and trusting servant of hers had fallen victim to the malice, number and power of his enemies.

5. She intercedes for them

211. Finally, the fifth and greatest service which this loving Mother renders her faithful followers is to intercede for them with her Son. She appeases him with her prayers, brings her servants into closer union with him and maintains that union.

Rebecca made Jacob approach the bed of his father. His father touched him, embraced him and even joyfully kissed him after having satisfied his hunger with the well-prepared dishes which Jacob had brought him. Then inhaling most joyfully the exquisite perfume of his garments, he cried: "Behold the fragrance of my son is as the fragrance of a field of plenty which the Lord has blessed." The fragrance of

this rich field which so captivated the heart of the father, is none other than the fragrance of the merits and virtues of Mary who is the plentiful field of grace in which God the Father has sown the grain of wheat of the elect, his only Son.

How welcome to Jesus Christ, the Father of the world to come, is a child perfumed with the fragrance of Mary! How readily and how intimately does he unite himself to that child! But this we have already shown at length.

212. Furthermore, once Mary has heaped her favours upon her children and her faithful servants and has secured for them the blessing of the heavenly Father and union with Jesus Christ, she keeps them in Jesus and keeps Jesus in them. She guards them, watching over them unceasingly, lest they lose the grace of God and fall into the snares of their enemies. "She keeps the saints in their fullness" (St. Bonaventure), and inspires them to persevere to the end, as we have already said.

Such is the explanation given to this ancient allegory which typifies the mystery of predestination and reprobation.

CHAPTER SIX

WONDERFUL EFFECTS OF THIS DEVOTION

213. My dear friend, be sure that if you remain faithful to the interior and exterior practices of this devotion which I will point out, the following effects will be produced in your soul:

1. Knowledge of our unworthiness

By the light which the Holy Spirit will give you through Mary, his faithful spouse, you will perceive the evil inclinations of your fallen nature and how incapable you are of any good apart from that which God produces in you as Author of nature and of grace. As a consequence of this knowledge you will despise yourself and think of yourself only as an object of repugnance. You will consider yourself as a snail that soils everything with its slime, as a toad that poisons everything with its venom, as a malevolent serpent seeking only to deceive. Finally, the humble Virgin Mary will share her humility with you so that, although you regard yourself with distaste and desire to be disregarded by others, you will not look down slightly upon anyone.

2. A share in Mary's faith

214. Mary will share her faith with you. Her faith on earth was stronger than that of all the patriarchs, prophets, apostles and saints. Now that she is reigning in heaven she no longer has this faith, since she sees everything clearly in God by the light of glory. However, with the consent of almighty God she did not lose it when entering heaven. She has preserved it for her faithful servants in the Church militant. Therefore the more you gain the friendship of this noble Queen and faithful Virgin the more you will be inspired by faith in your daily life. It will cause you to depend less upon sensible and extraordinary feelings. For it is a lively faith animated by love enabling you to do everything from no other motive than that of pure love. It is a firm faith, unshakable as a rock, prompting you to remain firm and steadfast in the midst of storms and tempests. It is an active and probing faith which like some mysterious pass-key admits you into the mysteries of Jesus Christ and of man's final destiny and into the very heart of God himself. It is a courageous faith which inspires you to undertake and carry out without hesitation great things for God and the salvation of souls. Lastly, this faith will be your flaming torch, your very life with God, your secret fund of divine Wisdom, and an all-powerful weapon for you to enlighten those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death. It inflames those who are lukewarm and need the gold of fervent love. It restores life to those who are dead through sin. It moves and transforms hearts of marble and cedars of Lebanon by gentle and convincing argument. Finally, this faith will strengthen you to resist the devil and the other enemies of salvation.

3. The gift of pure love

215. The Mother of fair love will rid your heart of all scruples and inordinate servile fear. She will open and enlarge it to obey the commandments of her Son with alacrity and with the holy freedom of the children of God. She will fill your heart with pure love of which she is the treasury. You will then cease to act as you did before, out of fear of the God who is love, but rather out of pure love. You will look upon him as a loving Father and endeavour to please him at all times. You will speak trustfully to him as a child does to its father. If you should have the misfortune to offend him you will abase yourself before him and humbly beg his pardon. You will offer your hand to him with simplicity and lovingly rise from your sin. Then, peaceful and relaxed and buoyed up with hope you will continue on your way to him.

4. Great confidence in God and in Mary

216. Our Blessed Lady will fill you with unbounded confidence in God and in herself:

1) Because you will no longer approach Jesus by yourself but always through Mary, your loving Mother.

2) Since you have given her all your merits, graces and satisfactions to dispose of as she pleases, she imparts to you her own virtues and clothes you in her own merits. So you will be able to say confidently to God: "Behold Mary, your handmaid, be it done unto me according to your word."

3) Since you have now given yourself completely to Mary, body and soul, she, who is generous to the generous, and more generous than even the kindest benefactor, will in return give herself to you in a marvellous but real manner. Indeed you may without hesitation say to her, "I am yours, O Blessed Virgin, obtain salvation for me," or with the beloved disciple, St. John, "I have taken you, Blessed Mother, for my all." Or again you may say with St. Bonaventure, "Dear Mother of saving grace, I will do everything with confidence and without fear because you are my strength and my boast in the Lord," or in another place, "I am all yours and all that I have is yours, O glorious Virgin, blessed above all created things. Let me place you as a seal upon my heart, for your love is as strong as death." Or adopting the sentiments of the prophet, "Lord, my heart has no reason to be exalted nor should my looks be proud; I have not sought things of great moment nor wonders beyond my reach; nevertheless, I am still not humble. But I have roused my soul and taken courage. I am as a child, weaned from earthly pleasures and resting on its mother's breast. It is upon this breast that all good things come to me."

4) What will still further increase your confidence in her is that, after having given her in trust all that you possess to use or keep as she pleases, you will place less trust in yourself and much more in her whom you have made your treasury. How comforting and how consoling when a person can say, "The treasury of God, where he has placed all that he holds most precious, is also my treasury." "She is," says a saintly man, "the treasury of the Lord."

5. Communication of the spirit of Mary

217. The soul of Mary will be communicated to you to glorify the Lord. Her spirit will take the place of yours to rejoice in God, her Saviour, but only if you are faithful to the practices of this devotion. As St. Ambrose says, "May the soul of Mary be in each one of us to glorify the Lord! May the spirit of Mary be in each one of us to rejoice in God!" "When will that happy day come," asks a saintly man of our own day whose life was completely wrapped up in Mary, "when God's Mother is enthroned in men's hearts as Queen, subjecting them to the dominion of her great and princely Son? When will souls breathe Mary as the body breathes air?" When that time comes wonderful things will happen on earth. The Holy Spirit, finding his dear Spouse present again in souls, will come down into them with great power. He will fill them with his gifts, especially wisdom, by which they will produce wonders of grace. My dear friend, when will that happy time come, that age of Mary, when many souls, chosen by Mary and given her by the most High God, will hide themselves completely in the depths of her soul, becoming living copies of her, loving and glorifying Jesus? That day will dawn only when the devotion I teach is understood and put into practice. Ut

adveniat regnum tuum, adveniat regnum Mariae: "Lord, that your kingdom may come, may the reign of Mary come!"

6. Transformation into the likeness of Jesus

218. If Mary, the Tree of Life, is well cultivated in our soul by fidelity to this devotion, she will in due time bring forth her fruit which is none other than Jesus. I have seen many devout souls searching for Jesus in one way or another, and so often when they have worked hard throughout the night, all they can say is, "Despite our having worked all night, we have caught nothing." To them we can say, "You have worked hard and gained little; Jesus can only be recognised faintly in you." But if we follow the immaculate path of Mary, living the devotion that I teach, we will always work in daylight, we will work in a holy place, and we will work but little. There is no darkness in Mary, not even the slightest shadow since there was never any sin in her. She is a holy place, a holy of holies, in which saints are formed and moulded.

219. Please note that I say that saints are moulded in Mary. There is a vast difference between carving a statue by blows of hammer and chisel and making a statue by using a mould. Sculptors and statue-makers work hard and need plenty of time to make statues by the first method. But the second method does not involve much work and takes very little time. St. Augustine speaking to our Blessed Lady says, "You are worthy to be called the mould of God." Mary is a mould capable of forming people into the image of the God-man. Anyone who is cast into this divine mould is quickly shaped and moulded into Jesus and Jesus into him. At little cost and in a short time he will become Christ-like since he is cast into the very same mould that fashioned a God-man.

220. I think I can very well compare some spiritual directors and devout persons to sculptors who wish to produce Jesus in themselves and in others by methods other than this. Many of them rely on their own skill, ingenuity and art and chip away endlessly with mallet and chisel at hard stone or badly-prepared wood, in an effort to produce a likeness of our Lord. At times, they do not manage to produce a recognisable likeness either because they lack knowledge and experience of the person of Jesus or because a clumsy stroke has spoiled the whole work. But those who accept this little-known secret of grace which I offer them can rightly be compared to smelters and moulders who have discovered the beautiful mould of Mary where Jesus was so divinely and so naturally formed. They do not rely on their own skill but on the perfection of the mould. They cast and lose themselves in Mary where they become true models of her Son.

221. You may think this a beautiful and convincing comparison. But how many understand it? I would like you, my dear friend, to understand it. But remember that only molten and liquefied substances may be poured into a mould. That means that you must crush and melt down the old Adam in you if you wish to acquire the likeness of the new Adam in Mary.

7. The greater glory of Christ

222. If you live this devotion sincerely, you will give more glory to Jesus in a month than in many years of a more demanding devotion. Here are my reasons for saying this:

1) Since you do everything through the Blessed Virgin as required by this devotion, you naturally lay aside your own intentions no matter how good they appear to you. You abandon yourself to our Lady's intentions even though you do not know what they are. Thus you share in the high quality of her intentions, which are so pure that she gave more glory to God by the smallest of her actions, say, twirling her distaff, or making a stitch, than did St. Laurence suffering his cruel martyrdom on the grid-iron, and even more than all the saints together in all their most heroic deeds! Mary amassed such a multitude of merits and graces during her sojourn on earth that it would be easier to count the stars in heaven, the drops of water in the ocean or the sands of the sea-shore than count her merits and graces. She thus gave more glory to God than all the angels and saints have given or will ever give him. Mary, wonder of God, when souls abandon themselves to you, you cannot but work wonders in them!

223. 2) In this devotion we set no store on our own thoughts and actions but are content to rely on Mary's dispositions when approaching and even speaking to Jesus. We then act with far greater humility than others

who imperceptibly rely on their own dispositions and are self-satisfied about them; and consequently we give greater glory to God, for perfect glory is given to him only by the lowly and humble of heart.

224. 3) Our Blessed Lady, in her immense love for us, is eager to receive into her virginal hands the gift of our actions, imparting to them a marvellous beauty and splendour, and presenting them herself to Jesus most willingly. More glory is given to our Lord in this way than when we make our offering with our own guilty hands.

225. 4) Lastly, you never think of Mary without Mary thinking of God for you. You never praise or honour Mary without Mary joining you in praising and honouring God. Mary is entirely relative to God. Indeed I would say that she was relative only to God, because she exists uniquely in reference to him.

She is an echo of God, speaking and repeating only God. If you say "Mary" she says "God". When St. Elizabeth praised Mary calling her blessed because she had believed, Mary, the faithful echo of God, responded with her canticle, "My soul glorifies the Lord." What Mary did on that day, she does every day. When we praise her, when we love and honour her, when we present anything to her, then God is praised, honoured and loved and receives our gift through Mary and in Mary.

CHAPTER SEVEN

PARTICULAR PRACTICES OF THIS DEVOTION

1. Exterior Practices

226. Although this devotion is essentially an interior one, this does not prevent it from having exterior practices which should not be neglected. "These must be done but those not omitted." If properly performed, exterior acts help to foster interior ones. Man is always guided by his senses and such practices remind him of what he has done or should do. Let no worldling or critic intervene to assert that true devotion is essentially in the heart and therefore externals should be avoided as inspiring vanity, or that real devotion should be hidden and private. I answer in the words of our Lord, "Let men see your good works that they may glorify your Father who is in heaven." As St. Gregory says, this does not mean that they should perform external actions to please men or seek praise; that certainly would be vanity. It simply means that we do these things before men only to please and glorify God without worrying about either the contempt or the approval of men.

I shall briefly mention some practices which I call exterior, not because they are performed without inner attention but because they have an exterior element as distinct from those which are purely interior.

1. Preparation and Consecration

227. Those who desire to take up this special devotion, (which has not been erected into a confraternity, although this would be desirable), should spend at least twelve days in emptying themselves of the spirit of the world, which is opposed to the spirit of Jesus, as I have recommended in the first part of this preparation for the reign of Jesus Christ. They should then spend three weeks imbuing themselves with the spirit of Jesus through the most Blessed Virgin. Here is a programme they might follow:

228. During the first week they should offer up all their prayers and acts of devotion to acquire knowledge of themselves and sorrow for their sins.

Let them perform all their actions in a spirit of humility. With this end in view they may, if they wish, meditate on what I have said concerning our corrupted nature, and consider themselves during six days of the week as nothing but sails, slugs, toads, swine, snakes and goats. Or else they may meditate on the following three considerations of St. Bernard: "Remember what you were - corrupted seed; what you are - a body destined for decay; what you will be - food for worms."

They will ask our Lord and the Holy Spirit to enlighten them saying, "Lord, that I may see," or "Lord, let me know myself," or the "Come, Holy Spirit". Every day they should say the Litany of the Holy

Spirit, with the prayer that follows, as indicated in the first part of this work. They will turn to our Blessed Lady and beg her to obtain for them that great grace which is the foundation of all others, the grace of self-knowledge. For this intention they will say each day the Ave Maris Stella and the Litany of the Blessed Virgin.

229. Each day of the second week they should endeavour in all their prayers and works to acquire an understanding of the Blessed Virgin and ask the Holy Spirit for this grace. They may read and meditate upon what we have already said about her. They should recite daily the Litany of the Holy Spirit and the Ave Maris Stella as during the first week. In addition they will say at least five decades of the Rosary for greater understanding of Mary.

230. During the third week they should seek to understand Jesus Christ better. They may read and meditate on what we have already said about him. They may say the prayer of St. Augustine which they will find at the beginning of the second part of this book. Again with St. Augustine, they may pray repeatedly, "Lord, that I may know you," or "Lord, that I may see." As during the previous week, they should recite the Litany of the Holy Spirit and the Ave Maris Stella, adding every day the Litany of the Holy Name of Jesus.

231. At the end of these three weeks they should go to confession and Holy Communion with the intention of consecrating themselves to Jesus through Mary as slaves of love. When receiving Holy Communion they could follow the method given later on. They then recite the act of consecration which is given at the end of this book. If they do not have a printed copy of the act, they should write it out or have it copied and then sign it on the very day they make it.

232. It would be very becoming if on that day they offered some tribute to Jesus and his Mother, either as a penance for past unfaithfulness to the promises made in baptism or as a sign of their submission to the sovereignty of Jesus and Mary. Such a tribute would be in accordance with each one's ability and fervour and may take the form of fasting, an act of self-denial, the gift of an alms or the offering of a votive candle. If they gave only a pin as a token of their homage, provided it were given with a good heart, it would satisfy Jesus who considers only the good intention.

233. Every year at least, on the same date, they should renew the consecration following the same exercises for three weeks. They might also renew it every month or even every day by saying this short prayer: "I am all yours and all I have is yours, O dear Jesus, through Mary, your holy Mother."

2. The Little Crown of the Blessed Virgin

234. If it is not too inconvenient, they should recite every day of their lives the Little Crown of the Blessed Virgin, which is composed of three Our Fathers and twelve Hail Marys in honour of the twelve glorious privileges of Mary. This prayer is very old and is based on Holy Scripture. St. John saw in a vision a woman crowned with twelve stars, clothed with the sun and standing upon the moon. According to biblical commentators, this woman is the Blessed Virgin.

235. There are several ways of saying the Little Crown but it would take too long to explain them here. The Holy Spirit will teach them to those who live this devotion conscientiously. However, here is a simple way to recite it. As an introduction say: "Virgin most holy, accept my praise; give me strength to fight your foes", then say the Creed. Next, say the following sequence of prayers three times: one Our Father, four Hail Marys and one Glory be to the Father. In conclusion say the prayer Sub tuum - "We fly to thy patronage".

3. The Wearing of Little Chains

236. It is very praiseworthy and helpful for those who have become slaves of Jesus in Mary to wear, in token of their slavery of love, a little chain blessed with a special blessing.

It is perfectly true, these external tokens are not essential and may very well be dispensed with by those who have made this consecration. Nevertheless, I cannot help but give the warmest approval to those who wear them. They show they have shaken off the shameful chains of the slavery of the devil, in which

original sin and perhaps actual sin had bound them, and have willingly taken upon themselves the glorious slavery of Jesus Christ. Like St. Paul, they glory in the chains they wear for Christ. For though these chains are made only of iron they are far more glorious and precious than all the gold ornaments worn by monarchs.

237. At one time, nothing was considered more contemptible than the Cross. Now this sacred wood has become the most glorious symbol of the Christian faith. Similarly, nothing was more ignoble in the sight of the ancients, and even today nothing is more degrading among unbelievers than the chains of Jesus Christ. But among Christians nothing is more glorious than these chains, because by them Christians are liberated and kept free from the ignoble shackles of sin and the devil. Thus set free, we are bound to Jesus and Mary not by compulsion and force like galley-slaves, but by charity and love as children are to their parents. "I shall draw them to me by chains of love" said God Most High speaking through the prophet. Consequently, these chains are as strong as death, and in a way stronger than death, for those who wear them faithfully till the end of their life. For though death destroys and corrupts their body, it will not destroy the chains of their slavery, since these, being of metal, will not easily corrupt. It may be that on the day of their resurrection, that momentous day of final judgement, these chains, still clinging to their bones, will contribute to their glorification and be transformed into chains of light and splendour. Happy then, a thousand times happy, are the illustrious slaves of Jesus in Mary who bear their chains even to the grave.

238. Here are the reasons for wearing these chains:

a) They remind a Christian of the promises of his baptism and the perfect renewal of these commitments made in his consecration. They remind him of his strict obligation to adhere faithfully to them. A man's actions are prompted more frequently by his senses than by pure faith and so he can easily forget his duties towards God if he has no external reminder of them. These little chains are a wonderful aid in recalling the bonds of sin and the slavery of the devil from which baptism has freed him. At the same time, they remind him of the dependence on Jesus promised at baptism and ratified when by consecration he renewed these promises. Why is it that so many Christians do not think of their baptismal vows and behave with as much licence as unbelievers who have promised nothing to God? One explanation is that they do not wear external sign to remind them of these vows.

239. b) These chains prove they are not ashamed of being the servants and slaves of Jesus and that they reject the deadly bondage of the world, of sin and of the devil.

c) They are a guarantee and protection against enslavement by sin and the devil. For we must of necessity choose to wear either the chains of sin and damnation or the chains of love and salvation.

240. Dear friend, break the chains of sin and of sinners, of the world and the worldly, of the devil and his satellites. "Cast their yoke of death far from us." To use the words of the Holy Spirit, let us put our feet into his glorious shackles and our neck into his chains. Let us bow down our shoulders in submission to the yoke of Wisdom incarnate, Jesus Christ, and let us not be upset by the burden of his chains. Notice how before saying these words the Holy Spirit prepares us to accept his serious advice, "Hearken, my son," he says, "receive a counsel of understanding and do not spurn this counsel of mine."

241. Allow me here, my dear friend, to join the Holy Spirit in giving you the same counsel, "These chains are the chains of salvation". As our Lord on the cross draws all men to himself, whether they will it or not, he will draw sinners by the fetters of their sins and submit them like galley-slaves and devils to his eternal anger and avenging justice. But he will draw the just, especially in these latter days, by the chains of love.

242. These loving slaves of Christ may wear their chains around the neck, on their arms, round the waist or round the ankles. Fr. Vincent Caraffa, seventh General of the Society of Jesus, who died a holy death in 1643, carried an iron band round his ankles as a symbol of his holy servitude and he used to say that his greatest regret was that he could not drag a chain around in public. Mother Agnes of Jesus, of whom we have already spoken, wore a chain around her waist. Others have worn it round the neck, in atonement for the pearl necklaces they wore in the world. Others have worn chains round their arms to remind them, as they worked with their hands, that they are the slaves of Jesus.

4. Honouring the mystery of the Incarnation

243. Loving slaves of Jesus in Mary should hold in high esteem devotion to Jesus, the Word of God, in the great mystery of the Incarnation, March 25th, which is the mystery proper to this devotion, because it was inspired by the Holy Spirit for the following reasons:

a) That we might honour and imitate the wondrous dependence which God the Son chose to have on Mary, for the glory of his Father and for the redemption of man. This dependence is revealed especially in this mystery where Jesus becomes a captive and slave in the womb of his Blessed Mother, depending on her for everything.

b) That we might thank God for the incomparable graces he has conferred upon Mary and especially that of choosing her to be his most worthy Mother. This choice was made in the mystery of the Incarnation. These are the two principal ends of the slavery of Jesus in Mary.

244. Please note that I usually say "slave of Jesus in Mary", "slavery of Jesus in Mary". We might indeed say, as some have already been saying, "slave of Mary", "slavery of Mary". But I think it preferable to say, "slave of Jesus in Mary". This is the opinion of Fr. Tronson, Superior General of the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice, a man renowned for his exceptional prudence and remarkable holiness. He gave this advice when consulted upon this subject by a priest.

Here are the reasons for it:

245. a) Since we live in an age of pride when a great number of haughty scholars, with proud and critical minds, find fault even with long-established and sound devotions, it is better to speak of "slavery of Jesus in Mary" and to call oneself "slave of Jesus" rather than "slave of Mary". We then avoid giving any pretext for criticism. In this way, we name this devotion after its ultimate end which is Jesus, rather than after the way and the means to arrive there, which is Mary. However, we can very well use either term without any scruple, as I myself do. If a man goes from Orléans to Tours, by way of Amboise, he can quite truthfully say that he is going to Amboise and equally truthfully say that he is going to Tours. The only difference is that Amboise is simply a place on the direct road to Tours, and Tours alone is his final destination.

246. b) Since the principal mystery celebrated and honoured in this devotion is the mystery of the Incarnation where we find Jesus only in Mary, having become incarnate in her womb, it is appropriate for us to say, "slavery of Jesus in Mary", of Jesus dwelling enthroned in Mary, according to the beautiful prayer, recited by so many great souls, "O Jesus living in Mary".

247. c) These expressions show more clearly the intimate union existing between Jesus and Mary. So closely are they united that one is wholly the other. Jesus is all in Mary and Mary is all in Jesus. Or rather, it is no longer she who lives, but Jesus alone who lives in her. It would be easier to separate light from the sun than Mary from Jesus. So united are they that our Lord may be called, "Jesus of Mary", and his Mother "Mary of Jesus".

248. Time does not permit me to linger here and elaborate on the perfections and wonders of the mystery of Jesus living and reigning in Mary, or the Incarnation of the Word. I shall confine myself to the following brief remarks. The Incarnation is the first mystery of Jesus Christ; it is the most hidden; and it is the most exalted and the least known.

It was in this mystery that Jesus, in the womb of Mary and with her co-operation, chose all the elect. For this reason the saints called her womb, the throne-room of God's mysteries.

It was in this mystery that Jesus anticipated all subsequent mysteries of his life by his willing acceptance of them. Consequently, this mystery is a summary of all his mysteries since it contains the intention and the grace of them all.

Lastly, this mystery is the seat of the mercy, the liberality, and the glory of God. It is the seat of his mercy for us, since we can approach and speak to Jesus through Mary. We need her intervention to see or speak to him. Here, ever responsive to the prayer of his Mother, Jesus unfailingly grants grace and mercy to all poor sinners. "Let us come boldly before the throne of grace."

It is the seat of liberality for Mary, because while the new Adam dwelt in this truly earthly paradise God performed there so many hidden marvels beyond the understanding of men and angels. For this reason, the saints call Mary "the magnificence of God", as if God showed his magnificence only in Mary.

It is the seat of glory for his Father, because it was in Mary that Jesus perfectly atoned to his Father on behalf of mankind. It was here that he perfectly restored the glory that sin had taken from his Father. It was here again that our Lord, by the sacrifice of himself and of his will, gave more glory to God than he would have given had he offered all the sacrifices of the Old Law. Finally, in Mary he gave his Father infinite glory, such as his Father had never received from man.

5. Saying the Hail Mary and the Rosary

249. Those who accept this devotion should have a great love for the Hail Mary, or, as it is called, the Angelic Salutation.

Few Christians, however enlightened, understand the value, merit, excellence and necessity of the Hail Mary. Our Blessed Lady herself had to appear on several occasions to men of great holiness and insight, such as St. Dominic, St. John Capistran and Blessed Alan de Rupe, to convince them of the richness of this prayer.

They composed whole books on the wonders it had worked and its efficacy in converting sinners. They earnestly proclaimed and publicly preached that just as the salvation of the world began with the Hail Mary, so the salvation of each individual is bound up with it. This prayer, they said, brought to a dry and barren world the Fruit of Life, and if well said, will cause the Word of God to take root in the soul and bring forth Jesus, the Fruit of Life. They also tell us that the Hail Mary is a heavenly dew which waters the earth of our soul and makes it bear fruit in due season. The soul which is not watered by this heavenly dew bears no fruit but only thorns and briars, and merits only God's condemnation.

250. Here is what our Blessed Lady revealed to Blessed Alan de Rupe as recorded in his book, *The Dignity of the Rosary*, and as told again by Cartagena: "Know, my son, and make it known to all, that lukewarmness or negligence in saying the Hail Mary, or a distaste for it, is a probable and proximate sign of eternal damnation, for by this prayer the whole world was restored."

These are terrible words but at the same time they are consoling. We should find it hard to believe them, were we not assured of their truth by Blessed Alan and by St. Dominic before him, and by so many great men since his time. The experience of many centuries is there to prove it, for it has always been common knowledge that those who bear the sign of reprobation, as all formal heretics, evil-doers, the proud and the worldly, hate and spurn the Hail Mary and the Rosary. True, heretics learn to say the Our Father but they will not countenance the Hail Mary and the Rosary and they would rather carry a snake around with them than a rosary. And there are even Catholics who, sharing the proud tendencies of their father Lucifer, despise the Hail Mary or look upon it with indifference. The Rosary, they say, is a devotion suitable only for ignorant and illiterate people.

On the other hand, we know from experience that those who show positive signs of being among the elect, appreciate and love the Hail Mary and are always glad to say it. The closer they are to God, the more they love this prayer, as our Blessed Lady went on to tell Blessed Alan.

251. I do not know how this should be, but it is perfectly true; and I know no surer way of discovering whether a person belongs to God than by finding out if he loves the Hail Mary and the Rosary. I say, "if he loves", for it can happen that a person for some reason may be unable to say the Rosary, but this does not prevent him from loving it and inspiring others to say it.

252. Chosen souls, slaves of Jesus in Mary, understand that after the Our Father, the Hail Mary is the most beautiful of all prayers. It is the perfect compliment the most High God paid to Mary through his archangel in order to win her heart. So powerful was the effect of this greeting upon her, on account of its hidden delights, that despite her great humility, she gave her consent to the incarnation of the Word. If you say the Hail Mary properly, this compliment will infallibly earn you Mary's good will.

253. When the Hail Mary is well said, that is, with attention, devotion and humility, it is, according to the saints, the enemy of Satan, putting him to flight; it is the hammer that crushes him, a source of holiness for souls, a joy to the angels and a sweet melody for the devout. It is the Canticum of the New Testament, a delight for Mary and glory for the most Blessed Trinity. The Hail Mary is dew falling from heaven to make the soul fruitful. It is a pure kiss of love we give to Mary. It is a crimson rose, a precious pearl that we offer to her. It is a cup of ambrosia, a divine nectar that we offer her. These are comparisons made by the saints.

254. I earnestly beg of you, then, by the love I bear you in Jesus and Mary, not to be content with saying the Little Crown of the Blessed Virgin, but say the Rosary too, and if time permits, all its fifteen decades, every day. Then when death draws near, you will bless the day and hour when you took to heart what I told you, for having sown the blessings of Jesus and Mary, you will reap the eternal blessings in heaven.

6. Praying the Magnificat

255. To thank God for the graces he has given to our Lady, her consecrated ones will frequently say the Magnificat, following the example of Blessed Marie d'Oignies and several other saints. The Magnificat is the only prayer we have which was composed by our Lady, or rather, composed by Jesus in her, for it was he who spoke through her lips. It is the greatest offering of praise that God ever received under the law of grace. On the one hand, it is the most humble hymn of thanksgiving and, on the other, it is the most sublime and exalted. Contained in it are mysteries so great and so hidden that even the angels do not understand them.

Gerson, a pious and learned scholar, spent the greater part of his life writing tracts full of erudition and love on the most profound subjects. Even so, it was with apprehension that he undertook towards the end of his life to write a commentary on the Magnificat which was the crowning point of all his works. In a large volume on the subject he says many wonderful things about this beautiful and divine canticum. Among other things he tells us that Mary herself frequently recited it, especially at thanksgiving after Holy Communion. The learned Benzoni, in his commentary on the Magnificat, cites several miracles worked through the power of this prayer. The devils, he declares, take to flight when they hear these words, "He puts forth his arm in strength and scatters the proud-hearted".

7. Contempt of the world

256. Mary's faithful servants despise this corrupted world. They should hate and shun its allurements, and follow the exercises of the contempt of the world which we have given in the first part of this treatise.

2. Special interior practices for those who wish to be perfect

257. The exterior practices of this devotion which I have just dealt with should be observed as far as one's circumstances and state of life permit. They should not be omitted through negligence or deliberate disregard. In addition to them, here are some very sanctifying interior practices for those souls who feel called by the Holy Spirit to a high degree of perfection. They may be expressed in four words, doing everything through Mary, with Mary, in Mary, and for Mary, in order to do it more perfectly through Jesus, with Jesus, in Jesus, and for Jesus.

Through Mary

258. We must do everything through Mary, that is, we must obey her always and be led in all things by her spirit, which is the Holy Spirit of God. "Those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God," says St. Paul. Those who are led by the spirit of Mary are children of Mary, and, consequently children of God, as we have already shown. Among the many servants of Mary only those who are truly and faithfully devoted to her are led by her spirit.

I have said that the spirit of Mary is the spirit of God because she was never led by her own spirit, but always by the spirit of God, who made himself master of her to such an extent that he became her very spirit. That is why St. Ambrose says, "May the soul of Mary be in each one of us to glorify the Lord. May

the spirit of Mary be in each one of us to rejoice in God." Happy is the man who follows the example of the good Jesuit Brother Rodriguez, who died a holy death, because he will be completely possessed and governed by the spirit of Mary, a spirit which is gentle yet strong, zealous yet prudent, humble yet courageous, pure yet fruitful.

259. The person who wishes to be led by this spirit of Mary:

1) Should renounce his own spirit, his own views and his own will before doing anything, for example, before making meditation, celebrating or attending Mass, before Communion. For the darkness of our own spirit and the evil tendencies of our own will and actions, good as they may seem to us, would hinder the holy spirit of Mary were we to follow them.

2) We should give ourselves up to the spirit of Mary to be moved and directed as she wishes. We should place and leave ourselves in her virginal hands, like a tool in the hands of a craftsman or a lute in the hands of a good musician. We should cast ourselves into her like a stone thrown into the sea. This is done easily and quickly by a mere thought, a slight movement of the will or just a few words as, "I renounce myself and give myself to you, my dear Mother." And even if we do not experience any emotional fervour in this spiritual encounter it is none the less real. It is just as if a person with equal sincerity were to say - which God forbid! - "I give myself to the devil." Even though this were said without feeling any emotion, he would no less really belong to the devil.

3) From time to time during an action and after it, we should renew this same act of offering and of union. The more we do so, the quicker we shall grow in holiness and the sooner we shall reach union with Christ, which necessarily follows upon union with Mary, since the spirit of Mary is the spirit of Jesus.

With Mary

260. We must do everything with Mary, that is to say, in all our actions we must look upon Mary, although a simple human being, as the perfect model of every virtue and perfection, fashioned by the Holy Spirit for us to imitate, as far as our limited capacity allows. In every action then we should consider how Mary performed it or how she would perform it if she were in our place. For this reason, we must examine and meditate on the great virtues she practised during her life, especially:

1) Her lively faith, by which she believed the angel's word without the least hesitation, and believed faithfully and constantly even to the foot of the Cross on Calvary.

2) Her deep humility, which made her prefer seclusion, maintain silence, submit to every eventuality and put herself in the last place.

3) Her truly divine purity, which never had and never will have its equal on this side of heaven.

And so on for her other virtues.

Remember what I told you before, that Mary is the great, unique mould of God, designed to make living images of God at little expense and in a short time. Anyone who finds this mould and casts himself into it, is soon transformed into our Lord because it is the true likeness of him.

In Mary

261. We must do everything in Mary. To understand this we must realise that the Blessed Virgin is the true earthly paradise of the new Adam and that the ancient paradise was only a symbol of her. There are in this earthly paradise untold riches, beauties, rarities and delights, which the new Adam, Jesus Christ, has left there. It is in this paradise that he "took his delights" for nine months, worked his wonders and displayed his riches with the magnificence of God himself. This most holy place consists of only virgin and immaculate soil from which the new Adam was formed with neither spot nor stain by the operation of the Holy Spirit who dwells there. In this earthly paradise grows the real Tree of Life which bore our Lord, the fruit of Life, the tree of knowledge of good and evil, which bore the Light of the world.

In this divine place there are trees planted by the hand of God and watered by his divine unction which have borne and continue to bear fruit that is pleasing to him. There are flower-beds studded with a variety of beautiful flowers of virtue, diffusing a fragrance which delights even the angels. Here there are meadows verdant with hope, impregnable towers of fortitude, enchanting mansions of confidence and many other delights.

Only the Holy Spirit can teach us the truths that these material objects symbolise. In this place the air is perfectly pure. There is no night but only the brilliant day of the sacred humanity, the resplendent, spotless sun of the Divinity, the blazing furnace of love, melting all the base metal thrown into it and changing it into gold. There the river of humility gushes forth from the soil, divides into four branches and irrigates the whole of this enchanted place. These branches are the four cardinal virtues.

262. The Holy Spirit speaking through the Fathers of the Church, also calls our Lady the Eastern Gate, through which the High Priest, Jesus Christ, enters and goes out into the world. Through this gate he entered the world the first time and through this same gate he will come the second time.

The Holy Spirit also calls her the Sanctuary of the Divinity, the Resting-Place of the Holy Spirit, the Throne of God, the City of God, the Altar of God, the Temple of God, the World of God. All these titles and expressions of praise are very real when related to the different wonders the Almighty worked in her and the graces which he bestowed on her. What wealth and what glory! What a joy and a privilege for us to enter and dwell in Mary, in whom almighty God has set up the throne of his supreme glory!

263. But how difficult it is for us to have the freedom, the ability and the light to enter such an exalted and holy place. This place is guarded not by a cherub, like the first earthly paradise, but by the Holy Spirit himself who has become its absolute Master. Referring to her, he says: "You are an enclosed garden, my sister, my bride, an enclosed garden and a sealed fountain." Mary is enclosed. Mary is sealed. The unfortunate children of Adam and Eve driven from the earthly paradise, can enter this new paradise only by a special grace of the Holy Spirit which they have to merit.

264. When we have obtained this remarkable grace by our fidelity, we should be delighted to remain in Mary. We should rest there peacefully, rely on her confidently, hide ourselves there with safety, and abandon ourselves unconditionally to her, so that within her virginal bosom:

1) We may be nourished with the milk of her grace and her motherly compassion.

2) We may be delivered from all anxiety, fear and scruples.

3) We may be safeguarded from all our enemies, the devil, the world and sin which have never gained admittance there. That is why our Lady says that those who work in her will not sin, that is, those who dwell spiritually in our Lady will never commit serious sin.

4) We may be formed in our Lord and our Lord formed in us, because her womb is, as the early Fathers call it, the house of the divine secrets where Jesus and all the elect have been conceived. "This one and that one were born in her."

For Mary

265. Finally, we must do everything for Mary. Since we have given ourselves completely to her service, it is only right that we should do everything for her as if we were her personal servant and slave. This does not mean that we take her for the ultimate end of our service for Jesus alone is our ultimate end. But we take Mary for our proximate end, our mysterious intermediary and the easiest way of reaching him.

Like every good servant and slave we must not remain idle, but, relying on her protection, we should undertake and carry out great things for our noble Queen. We must defend her privileges when they are questioned and uphold her good name when it is under attack. We must attract everyone, if possible, to her service and to this true and sound devotion. We must speak up and denounce those who distort devotion to her by outraging her Son, and at the same time we must apply ourselves to spreading this true devotion. As a reward for these little services, we should expect nothing in return save the honour of belonging to

such a lovable Queen and the joy of being united through her to Jesus, her Son, by a bond that is indissoluble in time and in eternity. Glory to Jesus in Mary! Glory to Mary in Jesus! Glory to God alone!

SUPPLEMENT

THIS DEVOTION AT HOLY COMMUNION

Before Holy Communion

- 266.** 1) Place yourself humbly in the presence of God.
- 2) Renounce your corrupt nature and dispositions, no matter how good self-love makes them appear to you.
- 3) Renew your consecration saying, "I belong entirely to you, dear Mother, and all that I have is yours."
- 4) Implore Mary to lend you her heart so that you may receive her Son with her dispositions. Remind her that her Son's glory requires that he should not come into a heart so sullied and fickle as your own, which could not fail to diminish his glory and might cause him to leave. Tell her that if she will take up her abode in you to receive her Son - which she can do because of the sovereignty she has over all hearts - he will be received by her in a perfect manner without danger of being affronted or being forced to depart. "God is in the midst of her. She shall not be moved."

Tell her with confidence that all you have given her of your possessions is little enough to honour her, but that in Holy Communion you wish to give her the same gifts as the eternal Father gave her. Thus she will feel more honoured than if you gave her all the wealth in the world. Tell her, finally, that Jesus, whose love for her is unique, still wishes to take his delight and his repose in her even in your soul, even though it is poorer and less clean than the stable which he readily entered because she was there. Beg her to lend you her heart, saying, "O Mary, I take you for my all; give me your heart."

During Holy Communion

267. After the Our Father, when you are about to receive our Lord, say to him three times the prayer, "Lord, I am not worthy." Say it the first time as if you were telling the eternal Father that because of your evil thoughts and your ingratitude to such a good Father, you are unworthy to receive his only-begotten Son, but that here is Mary, his handmaid, who acts for you and whose presence gives you a special confidence and hope in him.

268. Say to God the Son, "Lord, I am not worthy", meaning that you are not worthy to receive him because of your useless and evil words and your carelessness in his service, but nevertheless you ask him to have pity on you because you are going to usher him into the house of his Mother and yours, and you will not let him go until he has made it his home. Implore him to rise and come to the place of his repose and the ark of his sanctification. Tell him that you have no faith in your own merits, strength and preparedness, like Esau, but only in Mary, your Mother, just as Jacob had trust in Rebecca his mother. Tell him that although you are a great sinner you still presume to approach him, supported by his holy Mother and adorned with her merits and virtues.

269. Say to the Holy Spirit, "Lord, I am not worthy". Tell him that you are not worthy to receive the masterpiece of his love because of your lukewarmness, wickedness and resistance to his inspirations. But, nonetheless, you put all your confidence in Mary, his faithful Spouse, and say with St. Bernard, "She is my greatest safeguard, the whole foundation of my hope." Beg him to overshadow Mary, his inseparable Spouse, once again. Her womb is as pure and her heart as ardent as ever. Tell him that if he does not enter your soul neither Jesus nor Mary will be formed there nor will it be a worthy dwelling for them.

After Holy Communion

270. After Holy Communion, close your eyes and recollect yourself. Then usher Jesus into the heart of Mary: you are giving him to his Mother who will receive him with great love and give him the place of honour, adore him profoundly, show him perfect love, embrace him intimately in spirit and in truth, and perform many offices for him of which we, in our ignorance, would know nothing.

271. Or, maintain a profoundly humble heart in the presence of Jesus dwelling in Mary. Or be in attendance like a slave at the gate of the royal palace, where the King is speaking with the Queen. While they are talking to each other, with no need of you, go in spirit to heaven and to the whole world, and call upon all creatures to thank, adore and love Jesus and Mary for you. "Come, let us adore."

272. Or, ask Jesus living in Mary that his kingdom may come upon earth through his holy Mother. Ask for divine Wisdom, divine love, the forgiveness of your sins, or any other grace, but always through Mary and in Mary. Cast a look of reproach upon yourself and say, "Lord, do not look at my sins, let your eyes see nothing in me but the virtues and merits of Mary." Remembering your sins, you may add, "I am my own worst enemy and I am guilty of all these sins." Or, "Deliver me from the unjust and deceitful man." Or again, "Dear Jesus, you must increase in my soul and I must decrease." "Mary, you must increase in me and I must always go on decreasing." "O Jesus and Mary, increase in me and increase in others around me."

273. There are innumerable other thoughts with which the Holy Spirit will inspire you, which he will make yours if you are thoroughly recollected and mortified, and constantly faithful to the great and sublime devotion which I have been teaching you. But remember, the more you let Mary act in your Communion the more Jesus will be glorified. The more you humble yourself and listen to Jesus and Mary in peace and silence - with no desire to see, taste or feel - then the more freedom you will give to Mary to act in Jesus' name and the more Jesus will act in Mary. For the just man lives everywhere by faith, but especially in Holy Communion, which is an action of faith.