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Week Three

Mary's Role: Bringing Others to Jesus

From the earliest days of Christianity, the Blessed Virgin Mary has played a prominent role in salvation history. She has been a primary channel for conversion, through whom people receive Christ and experience his healing power.

Mercy. Through the intercession of Our Lady of Guadalupe in the sixteenth century, some nine million native Mexicans converted to Catholicism (simultaneously, the exact number was leaving the European Church because of the Protestant Reformation). Thousands have been converted through their experience of Mary through apparitions such as Fatima, La Sallette and Lourdes.

One of the most phenomenal conversions wrought by the hand of Mary was that of Alphonse Ratisbonne on January 20, 1842. Alphonse was a Jewish agnostic who disdained Christianity. A Catholic friend convinced him to agree to an "experiment." Alphonse would wear the Miraculous Medal given to us by Our Lady of Rue de Bac in 1830 and recite the *Memorare* prayer . . . and see what would or would not happen.

Soon after, the Virgin appeared to him in a brilliant light at Sant'Andrea delle Fratte Basilica in Rome. Alphonse received such an infusion of grace and knowledge that he instantly became a believer and was able to receive Baptism ten days later without catechesis. Afterwards, he became a priest and missionary in the Holy Land.

Consecration and the Civilization of Love

On January 20, 1917, a young Conventual Franciscan heard the conversion story of Alphonse Ratisbonne. It inspired Friar Maximilian Kolbe to recognize the powerful role that God had given Mary in the work of leading people to conversion and holiness. Maximilian understood that the Miraculous Medal symbolized her active presence in the Church as Mediatrix of all the graces that flow from the Heart of Christ.

On October 16, 1917, he was ready to put these Marian insights into action. He gathered together six Franciscan companions to establish the Militia of the Immaculata (MI). The MI would embrace all ages and all vocations in the Church, stirring each person to form an intimate relationship with Mary. Its means would be the Act of Total Consecration and the wearing of the Miraculous Medal. The movement now numbers millions of members worldwide. It binds Catholics together around one compelling vision of evangelization through union with Mary Immaculate.

The ultimate goal of the MI and Marian consecration is to bring about the reign of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and hasten the conversion of individuals, families, society and the entire world into a "civilization of love" as called for by Pope St. John Paul II.

Mary Intercedes for Us as Mother

At Nazareth, Mary's *fiat*—her willing "yes"—to becoming the Mother of God (Lk 1:26-30) led to the humble stable of Bethlehem, where she mediated to the world Jesus, the instrument of salvation (Lk 2:1-20). At Cana, Mary instructed the wine steward—instructs Christians of every era—to "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:1-11). In doing so, she initiated Jesus' public ministry and first miracle. She also foreshadowed her role as Advocate for God's People, who are represented by the needy wedding party.

In the upper room at Pentecost, Mary was actively involved in another birth, that of the Christian Church, Christ's body. St. Luke intentionally singles her out as praying "with one mind" with the Apostles (Acts 1:14, 2:1-4). The result was the Holy Spirit overshadowing the apostles as he did earlier to the Virgin at the Annunciation, giving them courage to preach Jesus to the ends of the earth.

Catholics see the Pentecost event as foundational for understanding Mary as "Mother of the Church" (Catechism of the Catholic Church No. 975). Indeed, Jesus Himself from the Cross gives to us Mary as our spiritual Mother when he says to John, his beloved disciple (another symbol of God's beloved Church): "This is your mother" (Jn 19:26). John from that moment "took her into his home" (19:27). We, too, should take Our Lady into our hearts and homes through reverent devotion and, in particular, through total consecration to her.

Mary, Instrument of Conversion

The Virgin Mary's intercessory role did not stop in apostolic times. The Second Vatican Council teaches that "she did not lay aside her saving office" but continues to petition for the needs of God's people before the throne of her Son as "Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix" (*Lumen Gentium* No. 62). Examples of her powerful influence in human history abound.

According to St. Bonaventure, St. Francis of Assisi received the grace to live the Gospel life through the intercession of Mary, Mother of

M A R I A N
Consecration

Preparation for Individual and Parish Marian Consecration in the Spirit of St. Maximilian Kolbe