



MARIAN Consecration

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

Week Two

Marian Devotion and Consecration: Ancient and esteemed expressions of faith

Before discovering how rich devotion to the Blessed Virgin reaches back to the earliest days of the Church, perhaps we should first ask, “Exactly what is ‘devotion to Mary?’”

Worthy of the Highest Regard

First of all, there is an eternity of distinction between devotion and adoration. In classical theology, adoration is known as *latría*, and *latría* is reserved exclusively for God. *Dulia*, on the other hand, is the term used for devotion or honor, for instance the honor we pay to the Church’s canonized saints because of their zeal for holiness and their outstanding natural virtues. Technically, *dulia* is rightfully given to any person who exhibits admirable qualities. Virtuous family members, or even the national heroes such as Washington and Lincoln, are deserving of *dulia*.

Hyperdulia is a more exalted level of devotion, reserved for a created person who rises above any other. Only one person has the right to *hyperdulia*—the Blessed Virgin Mary. Mary is the only human born without Original Sin—“our tainted nature’s solitary boast,” wrote the poet Wordsworth. Because of her utter purity, she was worthy of passing on to Jesus His spotless human nature. Mary never wavered from doing the will of God, always teaching us to “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:5).

For these and other reasons, the Blessed Virgin warrants our utmost veneration. Nonetheless, devotion to her cannot be stated more firmly: *hyperdulia* is entirely inferior to adoration and must never be confused with it. Adoration, again, is deserved only by God.

Mary Prefigured in Scripture

“From the earliest times, the Blessed Virgin is honored under the title Mother of God,” says the Second Vatican Council (*Lumen Gentium* No. 66). In fact, preparation was being made by the Holy Spirit for the veneration of Mary long before the Church’s conception.

It quickly became clear to the first Christian theologians that the heroines of the Old Testament—Rebecca, Rachel, Judith and others—are all “figures” of Mary. This means their praiseworthy traits foreshadow those of

the Virgin’s, who in her spotless person brings them to fulfillment. The woman of Gen 3:15, who has “enmity” with the serpent, is a figure of Mary. So it is the virgin who will conceive and bear a son, from Isaiah 7:14.

If the Holy Spirit, the Divine Author of Scripture, chose to foreshadow Mary in the Jewish Bible, is it any wonder that He implanted in the heart of the infant Church the impulse to show her the highest honor?

Early Church Images of Mary

History certainly calls this to mind. Paintings found in the catacombs of Rome show that devotion to Mary existed as early as around 150 AD. One image in the St. Agnes catacomb represents Mary as “Mother of the Church,” as she stands between the apostles Peter and Paul with outstretched arms. St. Justin Martyr in this same century began developing a theology of Mary as the “New Eve”: In giving us Jesus, Mary participates in giving supernatural life to the Church and helps to repair the damage of the first Eve.

The earliest known prayer to Our Lady dates back to possibly the 200s. The *Sub Tuum Praesidium* (Under Your Protection) was discovered in 1917 on an ancient Egyptian papyrus. It proves that early Christians believed that Mary was an advocate in heaven for God’s people, able to intercede for her children on earth:

We turn to you for protection,
Holy Mother of God.
Listen to our prayers
and help us in our needs.
Save us from every danger,
Glorious and Blessed Virgin.

This prayer also shows that Mary was being addressed as *Theotokos*—Mother of God—long before the Council of Ephesus of 431 AD approved of the title. Here is a clear example of the *sensus fidelium*—the inherent faith sense of the Christian people—at work, preparing the way for a formal ratification by the Magisterium. Quite possibly the *Sub Tuum Praesidium* reflects a tradition from the first century, and therefore a teaching of the original Apostles.

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Marian Consecration “Makes Progress” Within the Church

The *Sub Tuum* is important for constructing a proper theology of total consecration to Mary. We see third century followers of Jesus showing a childlike inclination to seek refuge “under the mantle of Mary,” Mother of God and the Church. As one Marian theologian writes, “If [the prayer] does not speak of belonging to Mary, it surely is not far removed from this concept.”

After the pronouncement of the Council of Ephesus comes a tremendous outburst of Marian devotion, which includes a deepening understanding of it. This progression reveals the Holy Spirit at work through Sacred Tradition, guiding the Church “into all truth” as Jesus promised (Jn 16:13). The Second Vatican Council describes this dynamic process most profoundly:

“The Tradition that comes from the apostles makes progress in the Church, with the help of the Holy Spirit. There is a growth in insight into the realities and words that are being passed on. Thus, as the centuries go by, the Church is always advancing towards the plenitude of divine truth, until eventually the words of God are fulfilled in her (*Dei Verbum* No. 8).

The next recorded expression of this “growth in insight” concerning Marian dependence is by St. Ildephonsus of Toledo, in the seventh century. He writes of being a “servant of the handmaid of the Lord” who is worthy of such high homage because “you have become the Mother of my Lord.” Another major witness is St. John Damascene, a Doctor of the Church from the eighth century. He calls himself a “slave of the Mother of God” and explicitly recommends consecrating ourselves to her: “Virgin Mother of God, let us bind our souls, as to a steadfast and immovable anchor, to the hope that you are for us. Let us consecrate to you our spirit and soul, our body, our whole person. . . . Rule over and direct at your discretion all that concerns us.”

Fulbert of Chartres in the 1000s continues this Spirit-led evolution. He states that even at our baptismal consecration to Christ we are being entrusted to Mary’s protective

care. “Remember, O Lady, that in Baptism I was consecrated to the Lord. . . . Watch over the one who has been handed over to you; keep safe the one who has been committed to your protection.” In the same century St. Odilo writes of Mary’s potent intercession: “From this day and hereafter take me into your service and in all my affairs be at my side as a most merciful advocate.”

the Holy Trinity, as in the case of St. Bernard above. St. Maximilian speaks for all when he says, “The object of all devotion is God. Devotion to Mary is a direct means to this end. We pass with Mary to the Other.”

Every method of consecration is equally worthy, too, though terminology and emphasis may differ. For instance, Kolbe prefers to use “possession and property”

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St. Bernard of Clairvaux exhorts in the twelfth century that “With her protection, there is nothing to fear. Under her leadership, you will succeed. With her encouragement, all is possible.” Bernard goes so far as to say that Mary is the “neck” through which flow all the graces of Jesus as head of the Church, and through which all of our petitions ascend back to the Savior.

It follows, then, that by forming a relationship of complete dependence on Mary, she makes available to us in a special way the awesome power of the Godhead and has intercessory access as does no other created being, angel or saint.

Modern Apostles of Consecration

The practice of total consecration to Mary is more fully developed in the modern era by Marian apostles such as St. Louis de Montfort (1673-1716), Venerable William Chaminade (1761-1850) and St. Maximilian Kolbe (1894-1941). Pope St. John Paul II highly recommends an “act of entrustment” to Mary as a sure way of growing closer to Jesus. His papal motto was a rousing *Totus Tuus*—“Totally yours, Mary!”

It is critical to point out that every proponent of Marian dependence, without a doubt, states that consecration does not stop at Mary but is Christ-directed; it is really consecration to Jesus, and by extension, to

and bases his theology on the Immaculate Conception, whereas de Montfort uses “slave” and does not speak of Mary as conceived without sin since the doctrine had not yet been proclaimed in his day. De Montfort’s consecration centers on the individual; Kolbe’s involves joining the Militia of the Immaculata, an international movement of spirituality, and sharing in its collective benefits.

Nevertheless, the overall intent is the same: consecration is a total giving over of oneself to Mary without reserve. In response, she forms us into herself, the perfect disciple, and elevates our natural gifts while inspiring us to holiness and fruitful service within the Church.

Consecration is “Highly Esteemed”

As we have seen, Marian devotion and consecration are firmly rooted in the solid ground of Sacred Tradition. Their roots go deeply, stretching back almost two millennia, perhaps to the time of the Apostles. This is why the Second Vatican Council confidently and unambiguously recommends that veneration to Mary in all its legitimate forms be “generously fostered, highly esteemed and religiously observed” (*Lumen Gentium* No. 67). Including, of course, total consecration to Mary.