

ACT FOR MARY

CONTINUED:

58. As it was through Mary that God came into the world the first time in a state of self-abasement and privation, may we not say that it will be again through Mary that he will come the second time? For does not the whole Church expect him to come and reign over all the earth and to judge the living and the dead? No one knows how and when this will come to pass, but we do know that God, whose thoughts are further from ours than heaven is from earth, will come at a time and in a manner least expected, even by the most scholarly of men and those most versed in Holy Scripture, which gives no clear guidance on this subject.

59. We are given reason to believe that, towards the end of time and perhaps sooner than we expect, God will raise up great men filled with the Holy Spirit and imbued with the spirit of Mary. Through them Mary, Queen most powerful, will work great wonders in the world, destroying sin and setting up the kingdom of Jesus her Son upon the ruins of the corrupt kingdom of the world. These holy men will accomplish this by means of the devotion of which I only trace the main outlines and which suffers from my incompetence.

5. Exterior practices

60. Besides interior practices, which we have just mentioned, this devotion has certain exterior practices which must not be omitted or neglected.

Consecration and its renewal

61. The first is to choose a special feast-day to consecrate ourselves through Mary to Jesus, whose slaves we are making ourselves. This is an occasion for receiving Holy Communion and spending the day in prayer. At least once a year on the same day, we should renew the act of consecration. Offering of a tribute in submission to the Blessed Virgin

62. The second is to give our Lady every year on that same day some little tribute as a token of our servitude and dependence. This has always been the customary homage paid by slaves to their master. This tribute could consist of an act of self-denial or alms, or a pilgrimage, or a few prayers. St Peter Damian tells us that his brother, Blessed Marino, used to give himself the discipline in public on the same day every year before the altar of our Lady. This kind of zeal is not required, nor would we counsel it. But

what little we give to our Lady we should at least offer with a heart that is humble and grateful. A Special Celebration of the Feast of the Annunciation

63. The third practice is to celebrate every year with special fervor the feast of the Annunciation of our Lord. This is the distinctive feast of this devotion and was chosen so that we might honor and imitate that dependence which the eternal Word accepted on this day out of love for us. The Saying of the Little Crown and the Magnificat.

64. The fourth practice is to say every day, without the obligation of sin, the prayer entitled "The Little Crown of the Blessed Virgin", which comprises three Our Fathers and twelve Hail Marys, and to say frequently the Magnificat, which is the only hymn composed by our Lady. In the Magnificat we thank God for favoring us in the past, and we beg further blessings from him in the future. One special time when we should not fail to say it is during thanksgiving after Holy Communion. A person so scholarly as Gerson informs us that our Lady herself used to recite it in thanksgiving after Holy Communion.

The wearing of a little chain

65. The fifth is the wearing of a small, blessed chain either around the neck, on the arm, on the foot, or about the body. Strictly speaking, this practice can be omitted without affecting the essential nature of the devotion, but just the same it would be wrong to despise or condemn it, and foolhardy to neglect it. Here are the reasons for wearing this external sign:

- (1) It signifies that we are free from the baneful chains of original and actual sin which held us in bondage.
- (2) By it we show our esteem for the cords and bonds of love with which our Lord let himself be bound that we might be truly free.
- (3) As these bonds are bonds of love, they remind us that we should do nothing except under the influence of love.
- (4) Finally, wearing this chain recalls to us once more that we are dependent on Jesus and Mary as their slaves.

Eminent people who had become slaves of Jesus and Mary valued these little chains so much that they were unhappy at not being allowed to trail them publicly like the slaves of the Muslims. These chains of love are more valuable and more glorious than the necklaces of gold and precious stones worn by emperors, because they are the illustrious insignia of Jesus and Mary and signify the bonds uniting us to them. It should be noted that if the chains are not of silver, they should for convenience' sake at least

be made of iron. They should never be laid aside at any time, so that they may be with us even to the day of judgement. Great will be the joy, glory and triumph of the faithful slave on that day when, at the sound of the trumpet, his bones rise from the earth still bound by the chain of holy bondage, which to all appearance has not decayed. This thought alone should convince a devout slave never to take off his chain, however inconvenient it may be.

SUPPLEMENT

A. PRAYER TO JESUS

66. Most loving Jesus, permit me to express my heartfelt gratitude to you for your kindness in giving me to your holy Mother through the devotion of holy bondage, and so making her my advocate to plead with your Majesty on my behalf, and make up for all that I lack through my inadequacy. Alas, O Lord, I am so wretched that without my dear Mother I would certainly be lost. Yes, I always need Mary when I am approaching you. I need her to calm your indignation at the many offences I have committed every day. I need her to save me from the just sentence of eternal punishment I have deservedly incurred. I need her to turn to you, speak to you, pray to you, approach you and please you. I need her to help me save my soul and the souls of others. In a word, I need her so that I may always do your holy will and seek your greater glory in everything I do. Would that I could publish throughout the whole world the mercy which you have shown to me! Would that the whole world could know that without Mary I would now be doomed! If only I could offer adequate thanks for such a great benefit as Mary! She is within me. What a precious possession and what a consolation for me! Should I not in return be all hers? If I were not, how ungrateful would I be! My dear Savior, send me death rather than I should be guilty of such a lapse, for I would rather die than not belong to Mary. Like St. John the Evangelist at the foot of the Cross, I have taken her times without number as my total good and as often have I given myself to her. But if I have not done so as perfectly as you, dear Jesus, would wish, I now do so according to your desire. If you still see in my soul or body anything that does not belong to this noble Queen, please pluck it out and cast it far from me, because anything of mine which does not belong to Mary is unworthy of you.

67. Holy Spirit, grant me all these graces. Implant in my soul the tree of true life, which is Mary. Foster it and cultivate it so that it grows and blossoms and brings forth the fruit of life in abundance. Holy Spirit, give me a great love and longing for Mary, your exalted spouse. Give me a great trust in her maternal heart and a continuous access to her compassion, so that with her you may truly form Jesus, great and powerful, in me until I attain the fullness of his perfect age. Amen.

B. PRAYER TO MARY (FOR HER FAITHFUL SLAVES)

68. Hail, Mary, most beloved daughter of the eternal Father; hail, Mary, most admirable mother of the Son; hail, Mary, most faithful spouse of the Holy Spirit; hail, Mary, Mother most dear, Lady most lovable, Queen most powerful! Hail, Mary, my joy, my glory, my heart and soul. You are all mine through God's mercy, but I am all yours in justice. Yet I do not belong sufficiently to you, and so once again, as a slave who always belongs to his master, I give myself wholly to you, reserving nothing for myself or for others. If you still see anything in me which is not given to you, please take it now. Make yourself completely owner of all my capabilities. Destroy in me everything that is displeasing to God. Uproot it and bring it to nothing. Implant in me all that you deem to be good; improve it and make it increase in me. May the light of your faith dispel the darkness of my mind. May your deep humility take the place of my pride. May your heavenly contemplation put an end to the distractions of my wandering imagination. May your continuous vision of God fill my memory with his presence. May the burning love of your heart inflame the coldness of mine. May your virtues take the place of my sins. May your merits be my adornment and make up for my unworthiness before God. Finally, most dearly beloved Mother, grant, if it be possible, that I may have no other spirit but yours to know Jesus and his divine will. May I have no soul but yours to praise and glorify the Lord. May I have no heart but yours to love God purely and ardently as you love him.

69. I do not ask for visions or revelations, for sensible devotion or even spiritual pleasures. It is your privilege to see God clearly in perpetual light. It is your privilege to savor the delights of heaven where nothing is without sweetness. It is your privilege to triumph gloriously in heaven at the right hand of your Son without further humiliation, and to command angels, men, and demons, without resistance on their part. It is your privilege to dispose at your own choice of all the good gifts of God without any exception. Such, most holy Mary, is the excellent portion which the Lord has given you, and which will never be taken from you, and which gives me great joy. As for my portion here on earth, I wish only to have a share in yours, that is, to have simple faith without seeing or tasting, to suffer joyfully without the consolation of men, to die daily to myself without flinching, to work gallantly for you even until death without any self-interest, as the most worthless of your slaves. The only grace I beg you in your kindness to obtain for me is that every day and moment of my life I may say this threefold Amen: Amen, so be it, to all you did upon earth; Amen, so be it, to all you are doing now in heaven; Amen, so be it, to all you are doing in my soul. In that way, you and you alone will fully glorify Jesus in me during all my life and throughout eternity. Amen.

IV. THE CARE AND GROWTH OF THE TREE OF LIFE,

HOW BEST TO CAUSE MARY TO LIVE AND REIGN IN OUR SOULS

A. The holy slavery of love. The Tree of life.

70. Have you understood with the help of the Holy Spirit what I have tried to explain in the preceding pages? If so, be thankful to God. It is a secret of which very few people are aware. If you have discovered this treasure in the field of Mary, this pearl of great price, you should sell all you have to purchase it. You must offer yourself to Mary, happily lose yourself in her, only to find God in her. If the Holy Spirit has planted in your soul the true Tree of Life, which is the devotion that I have just explained, you should see carefully to its cultivation, so that it will yield its fruit in due season. This devotion is like the mustard seed of the Gospel, which is indeed the smallest of all seeds, but nevertheless it grows into a big plant, shooting up so high that the birds of the air, that is, the elect, come and make their nest in its branches. They repose there, shaded from the heat of the sun, and safely hidden from beasts of prey.

B. How to cultivate it

Here is the best way, chosen soul, to cultivate it:

71. (1) This tree, once planted in a docile heart, requires fresh air and no human support. Being of heavenly origin, it must be uninfluenced by any creature, since a creature might hinder it from rising up towards God who created it. Hence you must not rely on your own endeavors or your natural talents or your personal standing or the guidance of men. You must resort to Mary, relying solely on her help.

72. (2) The person in whose soul this tree has taken root must, like a good gardener, watch over it and protect it. For this tree, having life and capable of producing the fruit of life, should be raised and tended with enduring care and attention of soul. A soul that desires to be holy will make this its chief aim and occupation.

73. Whatever is likely to choke the tree or in the course of time prevent its yielding fruit, such as thorns and thistles, must be cut away and rooted out. This means that by self-denial and self-discipline you must sedulously cut short and even give up all empty pleasures and useless dealings with other creatures. In other words, you must crucify the flesh, keep a guard over the tongue, and mortify the bodily senses.

74. (3) You must guard against grubs doing harm to the tree. These parasites are love of self and love of comfort, and they eat away the green foliage of the Tree and frustrate the fair hope it offered of yielding good fruit; for love of self is incompatible with love of Mary.

75. (4) You must not allow this tree to be damaged by destructive animals, that is, by sins, for they may cause its death simply by their contact. They must not be allowed

even to breathe upon the Tree, because their mere breath, that is, venial sins, which are most dangerous when we do not trouble ourselves about them.

76. (5) It is also necessary to water this Tree regularly with your Communions, Masses and other public and private prayers. Otherwise, it will not continue bearing fruit.

77. (6) Yet you need not be alarmed when the winds blow and shake this tree, for it must happen that the storm-winds of temptation will threaten to bring it down, and snow and frost tend to smother it. By this we mean that this devotion to our Blessed Lady will surely be called into question and attacked. But as long as we continue steadfastly in tending it, we have nothing to fear.

C. Its lasting fruit: Jesus Christ

78. Chosen soul, provided you thus carefully cultivate the Tree of Life, which has been freshly planted in your soul by the Holy Spirit, I can assure you that in a short time it will grow so tall that the birds of the air will make their home in it. It will become such a good tree that it will yield in due season the sweet and adorable Fruit of honor and grace, which is Jesus, who has always been and will always be the only fruit of Mary. Happy is that soul in which Mary, the Tree of Life, is planted. Happier still is the soul in which she has been able to grow and blossom. Happier again is the soul in which she brings forth her fruit. But happiest of all is the soul which savors the sweetness of Mary's fruit and preserves it up till death and then beyond to all eternity. Amen.

"Let him who possesses it, hold fast to it."