

## The Modern Popes and Mary's Immaculate Heart

Tonight we are going to explore four modern Popes, two from the nineteenth century, Pope Pius IX and Pope Leo XII, and two from the twentieth, Pope Pius XII and Pope Paul VI. In twenty minutes or so, that is about all I can do. Let us know if you want more some other time, but not tonight!

In seeing the Popes' devotion, both in their personal lives and in papal statements, we see that IHM devotion is not just a pious practice. Yes, it is a private devotion, but a very highly esteemed one that Popes themselves practiced in their personal lives and taught to the world.

### *Life of Pope Pius IX*

We begin with Pope Pius IX. *Giovanni Maria* or, John Mary Matai came into this world on May 13, 1792, of a noble family. As a little boy, he heard and learned prayers from his mother for the deliverance of Pope Pius VI, who had been kidnapped.

One day, when he was only six, his mother had taken him to the Cathedral, to the altar of Our Lady of Good Hope. His mother said very solemnly "I give you to the Madonna. She will keep you. All your brothers have chosen the world, but I give you to the heavenly Mother." Little John Mary looked at his mother as she continued, "Love her, John Mary, and she will love you." The little boy replied, "I do, mamma and I will."

After that day his mother gave him a little cross of lemonwood material. That cross never left him, recalling to him how he had been consecrated to Mary. During his classes at St. Michael's school, where he studied, exercised and attended Mass daily, he found a yearning to be part of God's army.

One day his classmates found him writhing on the floor. The doctor examined him and said he had an incurable condition: epilepsy. With several other fits following, his aspiration for the priesthood seemed dim.

However, he applied for the seminary, which accepted him. He prayed to the Virgin day and night for a cure. When Napoleon kidnapped both the Pope-again-and imprisoned his uncle-bishop, stressors and consequently his epilepsy returned. An Italian draft ensued, which meant seminarians as well, and the youthful Giovanni applied, but was rejected for his epilepsy.

After the short-lived war, John Mary returned to the seminary and was individually tutored in philosophy and theology. He would go to every shrine of Mary that happened to be on his route: "Heal me for His work, Mother! Let me serve Him."

It seemed as if Mary was deaf, for he had a most humiliating epileptic fit, falling into the filth of the gutter, as if he were dying. A Cardinal stopped with his coach and picked him up. This unfortunate episode in Rome caused much talk; the poor young John Mary could no longer wear his cassock publicly.

Amazingly, Pope Pius VII summoned John Mary to a private audience. This holy pope could respond quickly to the sorrows of others, having personally known many. After opening up his anguishing frustration of wanting to serve God, but having epilepsy, the Pope said these words that the future Pope Pius IX embraced:

Confide in the heart of that beloved Mother whose name you  
bear. Recommend yourself to her powerful help.  
I feel sure this cross will pass from you.

His devoted mother encouraged her son to pray at the House of Loreto, the house where Jesus, Mary and Joseph lived and where many miracles had taken place. John Mary did so, but

with much dryness in his prayer. At this house, on the 8th day, his heart awoke and he prayed, kneeling at the picture painted by St. Luke: "Mother, make me well! Then let me carry my crosses with a calm heart so long as I am your servant & His. I will glorify your name all the days of my life!"

After this prayer, he felt cured. The attacks lessened in number, and the intervals between them grew greater and greater until they finally ceased. Thanks to his mother's fervent, nocturnal vigils to Our Lady, his cure was complete and he became a priest. Pius VII was correct in his prophecy that he would be able to serve Our Lord, and John Mary preserved throughout his life a strong love for Mary.

He was ordained, sent to South America as an apostolic delegate, reformed a Catholic Hospital, and was made Bishop, then Cardinal of Spoleto.

When Pope Gregory XVI died, to his chagrin, his fellow cardinals named him Pope & he begged them to rethink their decision. However, he consented to take office.

Two years after taking office, he escaped from sieges and attacks from revolutionaries who wanted to take the Papal States away from him. He therefore had to work from the Kingdom of Naples, who supported him.

Exiled from the Vatican, he carried on business as usual, in his safe spot in Naples, away from the violence in Rome.

#### *Teaching on the Immaculate Heart of Mary*

Historians commonly state that his greatest contribution was his making the teaching of the Immaculate Conception a dogma. He initiated this step in exile, as he delivered through writing his wishes, but also desiring to know what his bishops throughout the world thought. In 1849, he stated, "From our (the papal we) tenderest youth, nothing has been more dear or more precious to our hearts than to honor the most Blessed Virgin Mary from our inmost soul and to do all...to promote Her name. We rely, above all, on the hope that the most Blessed Virgin Mary, who has been raised by her most exalted merits above all the choirs of angels, who has crushed the head of the old serpent and who placed between Christ and the Church, has rescued the Christian people from the greatest calamities of every kind, will compassionate, with the enlarged affection of her maternal heart, our most bitter trials..."

"With the enlarged affection of her maternal heart..." At this time period, devotion to Mary's Heart was assumed; moreover, the Pope and bishops realized it was through her Heart that triumph would come over the growing assaults of atheism, materialism and indifferentism.

The Bishops from all over the world, assented joyfully to this desire of the Pope. (Our own Founder in Spain, Fr. Joaquin Masmitjá, wrote the statement in erudite Latin for his newly appointed Bishop, who asked him to assist in governing the Gerona diocese.)

One can see immediately the obvious reference to Mary's Heart, by this time commonly known and loved. Also, of course, by making the teaching of Mary's Immaculate Conception infallible, he also asserted that she possessed a heart filled with love greater than all the angels and saints. By the time the bishops responded, the dogma of the Immaculate Conception was formally defined in the Vatican, where Pope Pius IX resided.

#### *Life of Pope Leo XIII*

After Pope Pius IX died, the conclave elected Cardinal Joachim Pecci, who is known to weep and cry out, "It is not the tiara you give me, but death!" It was 1878, and he was a frail man of 68. However, before proceeding to his great work on Mary, let us quickly survey his life.

Born the sixth of seven children on March 2nd, 1810, his parents named him “Joachim Vincent”. His highly religious parents lavished much love, and his mother Anna kept a watchful eye on this one who, as she phrased it, “danced with life”.

When he & his brother Joseph were sent away to school to Viterbo to develop their obvious brilliant intellects, Joachim wrote to his mother asking for prayers and images of the saints. It was his mother’s dearest wish that he become a priest.

His mother died when Joachim was still a young boy. Joseph Pecci entered the Jesuit order. Later, after his father died, Joachim heard a call to the priesthood in 1836.

In 1843 the now Monsignor Pecci, appointed as papal nuncio for Brussels, a country that was looked upon with suspicion, won the respect of the King and Queen, as he did almost everyone by his quick wit, graciousness, and prayer-filled life. Pope Pius IX appointed him as Bishop of Perugia, then as Cardinal and he remained there for 32 years.

(Although he truly acted as a father to his priests, he was most tender with his seminarians, and was known to surprise the seminary with visits to the classes. A funny story actually happened: One day, a priest professor, running to class, prayed that the Bishop would not be at the back of the room, where he usually stood on such visits. The professor entered his room and looked at the back...no bishop. Then he looked at the podium...there was the Bishop conducting a lecture! I am sure that priest was not ever late again!)

Pope Pius IX died in 1878. On February 19, 1878, the next day, the white smoke finally rose. “*Habemus Papam*”, announced a prelate. “We have a Pope.” He took the name Leo XIII, having been very fond of Leo XII, who reigned while he was a youth.

Extremely brilliant and pastorally effective, this new Pope emerged not only in a time of anti-clericalism, but of diabolical hatred of religion and God Himself, coming from such persons as Karl Marx, who had written in 1848 “The Communist Manifesto”. Although much can be said about this pope who reigned for 25 years, I will limit myself to his devotion to and spread of Marian practices.

### *Teachings of Pope Leo XIII*

Just as Pius IX was famous for his teaching on the Immaculate Conception, so Pope Leo XIII was instrumental in reviving the Rosary, as a “spiritual weapon against evil forces”. And just as Our Lady appeared in Lourdes to the young St. Bernadette during the reign of Pope Pius IX, so did she appear in Naples to another young girl during the reign of Leo XIII.

During his pontificate, in 1886, Our Lady appeared to a young girl from Naples named Fortuna Agrelli, whose father was a military commander. Fortuna had suffered for thirteenth months excruciating pains in the stomach, which the best doctors could not remedy. Her relatives and she prayed a Novena of rosaries and Mary appeared, as she did on a picture in Pompeii, with St. Dominic on one side and St. Catherine of Siena on the other. Our Lady was giving the rosary to St. Dominic, and the scapular to St. Catherine.

Fortuna said, “Queen of the Most Holy Rosary, restore me to health. I have prayed a rosary to be cured; please cure me.” Our Lady answered her, “Child, you have invoked me by various titles & have always obtained favors from me; since now you have called me by that title so pleasing to me, “Our Lady of the Holy Rosary, I can no longer refuse you the favor you want; for this name is most precious and dear to me.” In short, the title, “Our Lady of the Rosary” appealed to Mary’s Heart.

“After praying three Rosary novenas of petition, and three of thanksgiving, as Our Lady directed her, she was cured.” According to one commentary, this miracle of the Rosary made a

very deep impression on Pope Leo XIII and greatly contributed to the fact that in so many circular letters he urged all Christians to love the Rosary and say it fervently.”

He wrote 21 documents on Our Lady; he made October the month of the Holy Rosary, and firmly exhorted his bishops to promote the Rosary. Consequently, an increased devotion to the Rosary flourished in the world, thanks to Leo XIII.

In one encyclical, the fourth Rosary encyclical, he wrote of all the evils the Church is suffering, and the spectacle of so many souls being lost by apostasy & religious indifference & he proclaimed the Rosary above all other devotions. In another encyclical he talks about himself:

“for the holy reverence we (papal we) have experienced from our tenderest years, has grown greater and has taken firmer hold of our soul with our advancing age...during the long, busy, & dangerous days through which we have passed We have ever had recourse to her... We directed toward her heart Our anxious & attentive looks, placing in her heart all hope, fear, joy, sorrow....”

He wrote 12 rosary encyclicals, including one just on the “family rosary”. In all of this, the heart was assumed, for when we pray with our hearts, we are going to the very Heart of our Mother in the private prayer most pleasing to her heart.

### *Life of Pope Pius XII*

March 2nd seems a favorite date for popes to be born, for Eugene Mary Pacelli---the future Pope Pius XII---entered this life on March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1876. His parents, Phillip and Virginia Pacelli, already had two children and joyfully welcomed Eugene. At the Baptism, three days later, little Eugene howled wildly as his great-priest uncle, Msgr. Giuseppe Pacelli named him Eugene Mary. It is also interesting to note that “pacelli” means “peace” and he strived to bring peace to a war torn world, especially through spreading devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

As we all know, the moment a child notices anything his character begins to be formed. In this his mother plays an almost solo role as she leads her baby out of the dark confusion surrounding it. We can certainly see this in the last two popes covered.

Virginia Pacelli was not only a devoted mother, but deeply religious. She truly believed the only reason we are born is to serve God. So little Eugene was conscious of God almost as soon he was conscious of hunger, and in this household, prayer was more important than food.

Virginia fostered a great love for the Blessed Virgin Mary in her son, a love which grew stronger through the years. One day this child of hers would have the joy of proclaiming that Mary was assumed body and soul (recall soul is synonymous with heart) into heaven.

In Italian homes, street corners, and even offices, it is not unusual to find a shrine to the Madonna or to some saint. Of course the Pacellis had their own shrine, but little Eugene wanted his own! He made it himself, with an altar on which he put a fine white linen napkin, pieces of lace and silver vases that he joyfully wheedled out of his mother & his adoring older sister. He kept the vases filled with flowers, and where he played at religious ceremonies, candles burned in silver candlesticks on his altar.

When he went to and from the *Chiesa Nuova*, his school, he would pass the Church of the *Gesu* that contained the famous shrine and painting, “Our Lady of the Way”. One day Eugene was so late in coming home that his mother really worried. She went out, looking up and down the narrow twisting streets of Rome. She did not know why, but she turned into the Church of the *Gesu*. There was her little boy kneeling before the painting of Our Lady. “What do you do

in the Church for so long?” Mama Pacelli asked. “I don’t know’, Eugene replied, “I just tell Her everything.”

When Eugene turned 15, his father decided it was time to choose a profession. Eugene did not know, but his father did: law, a family tradition. After going to a State school imbued with secular materialistic philosophy, and refuting it, he had to take some time off; he got sick.

He went on a four day silent retreat, & he found his vocation: the priesthood.

Eugene’s most glorious Easter in his life occurred on April 2nd, 1899: his ordination day. Fittingly, he celebrated his first Mass in the largest Marian Shrine in the world, the Church of Saint Mary Major. He entrusted his priesthood to Mary as he had entrusted his youth.

Peers of Eugene say his only ambition was to be a parish priest, so one can imagine his delight at being assigned to the parish of the *Chiesa Nuova*, where he had once served as an altar boy. He loved teaching catechism to children & listening to their first attempts to say their prayers. After 2 years of ordination, he was told, “we need you as a diplomat to represent the Holy See.” Father Pacelli was not really attracted to this. “But this is not why I became a priest...my desire was and is to work among the people of my parish.” “Well,” replied the Monsignor, “They also serve Him who work in the administration of the Church. We feel you will be more valuable because of our special qualifications in our department.” And the Church was right, since for years he served the Holy See as an astute diplomat, then Cardinal and finally Secretary of State.

On March 2nd, 1939, his birthday, Cardinal Pacelli, was elected Vicar of Christ. War broke out shortly after, despite Pius XII’s personal pleading to both Hitler and Mussolini for negotiations.

### *Teachings of Pope Pius XII*

During the atrocities of the Second World War, Pope Pius XII directed the faithful to address the Queen of the Most Holy Rosary, declaring that, “In thee and in thy Immaculate Heart, at this grave hour of human history, do we put our trust; to thee we consecrate ourselves, not only with all of the Holy Church...but also with the whole world, torn by discords, agitated with hatred, the victim of its own iniquities.”

Pope Pius XII made this act of consecration twice in the same year. The first time, he spoke on radio in Portuguese. His audience: the thousands of pilgrims who had come to Fatima on October 13, 1942, to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the closing apparition of Our Lady.

The Pope of Peace repeated the consecration in St. Peter’s Basilica on December 8, 1942. In both acts of consecration, the Pontiff openly responded to the most formal revelation of God’s will at Fatima, to establish devotion to Mary’s Immaculate Heart throughout the world. Moreover, in the act of consecration in Rome, the Pope made an allusion to Russia.

Ten years later, on July 7, 1952, Pope Pius XII issued the Encyclical *Sacro Vergente Anno*, addressed to the Russians. He dedicated and consecrated “all the peoples of Russia to that same Immaculate Heart”, as he had done a decade earlier for the whole world. This was a direct response to the request of Our Lady, Made at Fatima in 1917.

The capstone of the Pope’s message to the Russian nation: the fulfillment, to the letter, of Our Lady of Fatima’s request for consecrating Russia to her Immaculate Heart.

“So that our fervent prayers and yours should more easily be answered, just as some years ago we consecrated the whole human race to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, so today we consecrate and dedicate in a very special manner all the peoples of Russia to this Immaculate Heart...and we implore this most clement mother to obtain from her Son light for your minds,

and for your souls the strength and courage by which you will be able to avert & conquer all errors and godlessness.

### *Life of Pope Paul VI*

Pope Paul VI entered this world as the second son of George and Judith Montini, Giovanni Battista, or John Baptist. His birth, traumatized his father, for he almost lost this second son and his beloved wife. George, a journalist and intellectual, placed his Faith as primary and prayed ardently. At last, both John and Judith became better. He immediately uttered prayers of gratitude, and arranged for his son's baptism 4 days later.

Giovanni, a frail baby, had to be wet-nursed. He stayed for 13 months at the wet-nurse's home, and she had three children who loved him and called him "Battista". The nick-name "Battista" stuck, even as a priest.

Battista and his brother Ludovico accompanied their mother to daily Mass at *Santa Maria della Grazie*, Holy Mary of Grace. One day in Santa Maria he went with his mother who sat in a pew, knitting. He sat quietly besides her as he had been taught to do, but he had reached the age of asking questions. "Don't you pray?" he asked. "Don't you say the Hail Mary?" His mother shook her head. "Not today," she replied. "I came only to keep the Blessed Mother company."

Each of her sons shared this quiet time with their mother, learning it is not necessary to always storm heaven, but to place oneself quietly in the presence of the Blessed Mother. They learned, too, a quiet certainty in those simple visits, an unquestioning faith in a world beyond the senses, a world in which friends dwelt, sharing the friendship of God.

At almost six years old, Battista remembers the adults talking one summer July night and suddenly news came that Pope Leo XIII had died. He remembers how the atmosphere changed to sadness and that all immediately went to the Church to pray the Rosary for the deceased Pope.

In one address, Pope Paul VI reminisced about an inscription he used to look at as a schoolboy. "A memory as a schoolboy brings back to mind a building overlooking the old school courtyard, surmounted by a statue of Our Lady. At the foot of the statue was an inscription in large letters: "Look down from on high on your children." The inscription was always before us as we looked at the facade of that beautiful building, beneath which we played and got ready for school and life. Although war has destroyed the house, our memory still has engraved in it that short inscription, dedicated to Mary, placed with the sky as its background and addressed to us boys, Yes, Mary, called to share the heavenly glory of Her Son, still "looks down from on high on her children."

During the Italian draft for World War II, he found rejection. He decided to become a priest, was accepted into the seminary, but had to be sent home to study as an invalid. This was not the 1st time; often he was sent home from school, missing out on social activities.

Once he was assisting Mass and was asked to sing the responses. Shocked, he said, "I can't sing...I'm tone deaf." What will you do when you become a bishop, then asked the Monsignor, prophetically.

"The best seminary is the home". This was literally true, in the case of young Montini. Because of his health, he attended class but lived at home. The tone of conversations was high: his father taught him from his earliest days to seek truth and proclaim it clearly. In his spare time Battista taught children and youth, and loved them. It was as if the deprivation he had experienced was balanced in his work with young people especially.

During the month of May, Mary's month, he was ordained, no longer a Montini but a man for all men.

First assigned to parish work, the Holy See recognized his capacity for diplomatic service and he studied in the Academy, while also working with young university students in Catholic Action. He was singularly successful in both. He was then assigned as the Bishop of Milan, and gradually made a Cardinal. He was elected on June 18, 1963.

#### *Teaching as a Pope*

Although the Pope had given 31 written addresses on Our Lady, we shall focus on one.

Do you recall Pope Pius XII's consecration of the World and then of Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary?

Twelve years later on November 21, 1964, Pope Paul VI spoke to all the assembled bishops at the Second Vatican Council. He took this occasion to reconsecrate the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Addressing her as *Auxilium Episcoporum*, "Help of Bishops", he recalled the previous consecration of his predecessor, Pius XII. Then he pronounced his own prayer to Our Lady:

O Mary, while acknowledging Jesus Christ as the one true Savior,  
we entrust the whole human race to your Immaculate Heart.  
Deliver mankind.

The Pope told the Council Fathers that he was sending the Golden Rose on a special mission to Fatima. In this way, he would officially associate his act of consecration with the Blessed Virgin's request in Portugal.

With all of our Popes of modern age, let us join with them: Immaculate Heart of Mary, pray for us!

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