



*Devotion to the Immaculate and Sorrowful Heart of Mary
according to Father Masmítja,
founder of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary*

Saturday, June 22, 2019

An Intense Devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary

I would like to start with a word association: Benedictines, Dominicans, Redemptorists, Servites. You are probably aware that these are colloquial titles of various well-known religious communities. All four of these religious communities have a profound and tender devotion to Mary. In fact, if we were to broaden the number from these four to every religious community that has ever existed in the whole history of the Church, which would number in the hundreds, we would find something very interesting. Every single religious community has begun, develops and operates under the signs of Mary and has a devotion to her.¹ Did you know that?

Fr. Alberto Rum in his article on the Marian spirituality of religious institutes noted that “Each [religious institute] sounds a special note in the Church’s perpetual praise of Mary. Each [order] throws light on a facet of that celestial beauty of Mary mirrored in the beauty of the Church.”² From this statement, we can affirm that every single religious community has devotion to Mary. Yet, there is an additional nuance we can glean from this quote. Even though every religious community has a devotion to Mary, no institute has the exact same devotion as another. To take the point further, even among religious communities that have a specifically Marian character especially those that are named after Our Lady, for example our community of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, there is an intentional distinction in how this devotion is both understood and lived. What a marvelous array of devotion.





Imagine this reality for just a moment. What a wonderful truth this reveals about Mary.

Even with the hundreds of religious communities that exist and the hundreds of unique expressions of devotion to Mary that have been offered, we still fall short of exhausting the celestial beauty of Mary.

For those who know our Community and our Sisters, it would be beneficial to examine whether they know the distinctive note that we as IHMs offer in the Church's perpetual praise of Mary. As members of this religious institute, our Sisters are also called to thoughtfully ponder this question: "How are we personally living out the devotion that is called for by the unique Marian character of our charism?" This reality is where I would like to focus our attention tonight. What is particular about our Marian devotion as Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary? Secondly, how might the special gift of our charism serve as a means of inspiration for our Sisters and for each of you in your relationship with Mary?

The teaching on religious life is very clear that because of our particular IHM charism, which is specifically Marian in character, we must achieve "something more" in regards to devotion to Mary.³ This "something more" was communicated to us by our founder Fr. Joaquin Masmitja. He was the first to receive the charismatic gift of our Institute, and he faithfully conveyed it to our Sisters through the Constitutions. As I was preparing for this talk, I was struck in a new and deeper way, by the marked distinction between our unique charism including the devotion that we as IHMs have to Mary and the comparison that can be made with other religious congregations, especially those that are Marian in character, and are also dedicated to the Blessed Mother.

Let us investigate the difference. It is apparent in religious institutes named after Our Lady, that devotion to Mary occupies an important place in the piety of the community. Yet, in some of these communities, their devotion to Mary is not necessarily the goal or the reason why the community was founded.⁴ Their mission may actually be more apostolic or charitable. In contrast, as IHMs, not only are



we named after Our Lady, but our devotion to Mary is so distinguishing that it is actually the very spirit and life by which our community exists.⁵ This beautiful aim was directly assigned to our community by Fr. Masmijtja, and it permeates everything about our community.⁶ Our devotion to Mary forms the essence of our identity as a religious institute. The Heart of Mary is the spirit of our community.

I will offer a few examples from an extensive study that was published about our community by Fr. Juan Manuel Lozano to explain this point. The inspiration for our community was actually initiated by Mary herself.⁷ Fr. Masmijtja recounted his experience of praying before an image of the pieta and how he received the gift of our charism through Our Lady's intercession. From the very beginning, Fr. Masmijtja placed our community under the protection of Mary.⁸ He intentionally instructed the Sisters to contemplate Mary's Heart and her cooperation with Christ in His mission of redemption.⁹ He explained to the Sisters that all of the apostolic efforts and plans of the institute were integrally connected to this contemplative union with Mary and through Mary with Christ.¹⁰ In addition, every good work performed by the Sisters and the Institute essentially came to fruition through Mary's powerful and motherly intercession. These are just a few illustrations, but the humble truth still stands. The Heart of Mary is the life and spirit of our institute.

Fr. Masmijtja offered the Sisters the Constitutions to direct them in living out the charism and in fostering devotion to Mary. He also wrote numerous letters to the Sisters in which one finds many indications of his own personal devotion to Mary. It is quite heartening to read his letters and to see evidences of how his own devotion intensified throughout the years. He referred to Mary frequently in his letters and he included her in his greetings.¹¹ Whenever he mentioned Jesus' name, Fr. Masmijtja also included Mary's name.¹² He understood the unequalled intimacy and the exquisitely transcendent character of the love and union shared by their two hearts. He didn't want them to be separated even in his writings.



One of the greatest gifts that Fr. Masmitja gave to the Sisters to assist them in living their devotion to Mary was his own example. His relationship with Mary was the best model by which all of the Sisters could learn the art of fostering a deep, loving, and lasting devotion to Mary.¹³ I have often thought of how inspiring it would have been to meet Fr. Masmitja. His biographers describe him as an extremely virtuous and holy man. What a gift it would have been to learn how to love Mary by witnessing the lived example of one of her great devotees, our very own Father founder.

Through our charism, we can see that devotion to Mary and to her Heart is meant to be lived, and it is to be lived intensely. I would like to venture into this topic more directly in the last part of the talk. Today, our community and each one of our Sisters endeavors to answer this great call. We are eagerly striving to deepen our understanding of how we as IHMs are called to the “something more” in our devotion to Mary. We personally ponder how to live devotion to Mary and how to make our devotion something meaningful and real. Growing in our relationship with Mary touches both the mind and the heart. It entails a dynamic relationship that is both transcendent and immanent.

As I was reading through the study of our Community, I was intrigued by another point about our community’s foundation that I had never noticed before. I was already aware that Fr. Masmitja zealously directed the Sisters to honor Mary and her heart in a special way and to spread devotion to Mary among the people of God. Furthermore, he encouraged the Sisters to meditate on the cruel sword of Sorrow that pierces Mary’s heart and to obtain from the divine Mercy interior grace for sinners as Mary did. Yet, I had not realized that in all of his writings, Fr. Masmitja never offered a theological doctrine of devotion to the Immaculate Heart.¹⁴

The reason why this caught my attention is because devotion to Mary and the theological and doctrinal understanding of Our Lady has been developing throughout time. Fr. Masmitja did not explain why he did not offer a theological doctrine of devotion to the Immaculate Heart. Yet, it is interesting to



note that his lived example of devotion to Mary and his communication of our charism, providentially allowed for receptivity to and appropriation of the theological doctrines that were expounded upon before he founded the community and all of the developments that have commenced afterwards.

Thus, in our community, through prayer and discernment, we have taken great efforts to study and to internalize the great doctrinal truths that have been revealed about Our Lady. True devotion to Mary is always grounded in and guided by sound doctrine about Mary. During our initial formation, our Sisters take a class in Mariology. We seek to better understand the mystery of who Mary is and her special vocation by studying Sacred Scripture, Sacred Tradition, and the teachings of the Magisterium. We also consider the various Marian apparitions throughout history. We employ many other resources throughout our initial and ongoing formation from the writings of the saints and other scholars to nourish our minds with the truths of the faith about Mary and to help us to know her better.

After learning about Our Lady, one cannot help but come to a deep admiration of her greatness. Yet, esteem for Mary is not enough. Why? Salvation History shows us, from the very beginning, how God prepared for Mary to assume her unique role in relation to both God and man. She is the “Woman” (Gen 3:15, John 2:4, John 19:26). The one who is “Full of Grace” (Luke 1:28). She has a singular relationship with the Trinity as Daughter of the God the Father, Mother of God the Son, and Spouse of the Holy Spirit. Because of this, God also ordained for Mary to have a transcendent and unparalleled relationship with every human being. She did not create this relationship nor did we. It is by divine design that the relation between Mary and the Christian is one of mother and child.¹⁵ Thus, Mary has a very powerful sway over the human soul not because of nature, but because of the order of grace.¹⁶ This divine arrangement exists whether we acknowledge it or not. Are we aware of the magnitude and the implications of this reality? Once we are aware of it, are we convicted enough to respond to this God-designed relationship between Mary and our soul?



In response to this truth, Fr. Masmitja invited the Sisters to a perpetual and total participation in Mary's sublime life and to be a sign that was living and operative.¹⁷ This bidding is not just for our Sisters. The Lord extends this invitation to relationship with Mary to every soul and it takes on a special character at our baptism.¹⁸ Each one of us is invited to be a living icon of Mary. To think, speak, and act like Mary. To love God and all men as Our Lady does. This is no small order! How is this possible? The only fitting way to respond to this supernatural reality is to deliberately participate in our relationship with Mary.¹⁹ The best way to cultivate this relationship is through a fervent consecration.²⁰

I was 18 when I recognized this divine arrangement and that I was called to a deeper relationship with Mary. It was also a time in my life where I greatly desired to respond to her in this relationship. I was encouraged to use St. Louis de Montfort's *33 Day Preparation for Total Consecration*. All of our Sisters also use this or another similar form of preparation for consecration. I began the preparation and found myself striving to persevere through what felt like on the spiritual level hurricanes, tornados, and thick muddy trenches. It sounds like I am exaggerating, but that is a pretty close description of what was going on interiorly. There seemed to be a lot of spiritual obstacles in the way of my preparation to offer myself to Our Lady through this total self-donation. I finally made it to the day of my consecration. I don't know if I thought it was going to be like a switch that turned on and all of a sudden, I would be "totally devoted" to Mary. Yet, I do remember that after the day of my consecration and as time carried on, the luster of my devotional response seemed to dwindle. I prayed the rosary every day, and I invoked Our Lady through other special daily prayers. Yet, there still seemed to be something lacking. The next year, I repeated the process. I remember encountering many of the same interior challenges during the preparation time. Amazingly, I made it through, and I renewed my complete and total self-gift to Our Lady. I tried to keep up the practice of yearly renewal, and in between times, I continued my daily devotional practices in honor of Mary. Yet, I remember always feeling like something was missing. Over



the years, I studied about Our Lady, and I put forward my best efforts at times and my half-hearted efforts at other times to come to know and love her more. After reflecting back upon this journey, I recognize now, that I didn't fully understand the fundamental key to consecration. It was the answer to that lingering idea that "something is missing", but I didn't know what that "something" was.

I thought that if I had a reverence for Mary, invoked her name, visited her shrines, performed daily practices in her honor, and even tried to imitate her virtues, then that was enough. All of those practices that I employed were very good and they are highly encouraged. Yet, what I didn't understand was that in themselves, they fall short of the full extent of the devotion that I was being called to. In all actuality, it is the devotion that everyone is called to. We are talking about the nature of "true" devotion to Mary. No one is called to have just an ordinary devotion to Mary. Remember God's divine arrangement. Every soul is created for the depths of devotion to God and to Our Lady. We are called by God and through his design to totally abandon our souls to Mary; to live in a state of perpetual consecration; to experience a loving fusion of souls with Mary.²¹ God prepared her for this universal vocation from the moment of her conception and she is living it fully. However, for so many of us, her children, we are not fully living out our part in this relationship.

What is true devotion to Mary? A great way to answer that question is by looking at the essence of consecration. Qualities of a deeply lived consecration include: thanking Mary, praising Mary, thinking of her, imitating her, identifying yourself with her, and inviting her into every aspect of your life, which includes all the exterior and the interior facets.²² One consecrated to Mary, allows himself to be immersed into her very heart and soul.²³ Studies have shown that the best way to learn a language is by full immersion. What a coincidence. The same applies for the spiritual life. The best way to grow in your devotion to Mary and to live your consecration to her is also by full immersion. The last quality of a deeply lived consecration that I would like to consider is embracing the belief in our mind and forming



the movement in our heart to turn away from rugged independence on ourselves and our personal resources and to surrender ourselves to a total and radical dependence on Mary.²⁴

I think this total dependence on Mary is the most challenging for adults because it is the exact opposite of how we live on the natural level. From the time we are born, we progress steadily on the natural level towards a greater independence from our mothers. This is good and healthy and it is the way we were created. However, when it comes to the spiritual life, this natural reality, which we are so familiar with, does not work. In the spiritual life, we are to strive to become entirely dependent upon the Lord and Our Lady for everything. The best analogy for this supernatural reality would be the state of a child never leaving its mother's womb.²⁵ By God's design, we are called to a radical spiritual dependency on our Heavenly Mother. God bestowed upon Mary such sublime gifts in the order of grace that she would be the vessel through which the spiritual life of every single soul would be nurtured. It is good for us to be aware that self-sufficiency in the spiritual life offends God, and it presents real obstacles to our spiritual growth.²⁶ It dangerously counters our ability to deepen our devotion to Mary.

Are we willing in humility to acknowledge our awkwardness in God's presence, the clumsiness of our prayers, the admixture of selfishness in everything we do, and how much we need Mary to help us approach Our Lord in his unequalled sanctity?²⁷ Furthermore, we should consider the feebleness of our faith. We are surrounded by an environment of relativism, materialism, and atheism. It penetrates into every pour of society. Love of truth and the worship of God have become weak. We need Mary. "It has been said that the whole faith of the nascent Church was concentrated in her soul."²⁸ Mary stands before us as the perfect pattern of faith. In comparison to God, Mary remains as nothing. Yet, in comparison to all his creatures she is the greatest, and He has wrought more in her than in any other creature. "The Church herself receives from Mary's fullness as Mary shares in Christ's fullness."²⁹

To be totally dependent requires a process of emptying. May we today respond to the conviction to offer to the Holy Spirit our emptiness. It is an attribute of God to create something out of nothing.



Give Mary who is spouse of the Holy Spirit and the refulgence of his grace, the unbounded permission to help you offer your soul to God, to be open to his action, to be stripped of your fallen human perceptions, to be divested of all false self-love and then through her to receive the outpouring of his grace that perpetually flows from God through the Heart of Mary to you.³⁰

St. Louis de Montfort said that when the Holy Spirit finds Mary his bride in a soul, he flies there and enters there in his fullness and he communicates himself to that soul abundantly.³¹

Should you really give yourself to Mary completely, fully, without reserve? I pray that you will respond with a jubilant yes! Then, the next question that I would like to leave you with to ponder especially during holy hour is “How?” How can I live an intense devotion to Mary and to her Heart? Ask Mary to help you to know what you need to do today to give yourself more fully to her and through her to live totally for Christ.

¹ Father Alberto Rum, S.M.M., “Institutes of Marian Inspiration. The Marian Spirituality of Religious Institutes,” in *Religious in the Footsteps of Mary*, (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1987), 66.

² Rum, “Institutes of Marian Inspiration,” 66.

³ Rum, “Institutes of Marian Inspiration,” 76.

⁴ Juan Manuel Lozano, *The Immaculate Heart Sisters. A Historical and Doctrinal Study on their Mission and Spirit in the Church*, 41.

⁵ Lozano, *The Immaculate Heart Sisters*, 41.

⁶ Lozano, *The Immaculate Heart Sisters*, 41.

⁷ Lozano, *The Immaculate Heart Sisters*, 42.

⁸ Lozano, *The Immaculate Heart Sisters*, 42.

⁹ Lozano, *The Immaculate Heart Sisters*, 42.

¹⁰ Lozano, *The Immaculate Heart Sisters*, 42.

¹¹ Lozano, *The Immaculate Heart Sisters*, 54.

¹² Lozano, *The Immaculate Heart Sisters*, 54.

¹³ Lozano, *The Immaculate Heart Sisters*, 54.

¹⁴ Lozano, *The Immaculate Heart Sisters*, 49.

¹⁵ *The Official Handbook of the Legion of Mary* (Louisville, KY: Concilium Legionis Mariae, 1953), 128

¹⁶ *Legion of Mary*, 128.

¹⁷ Rum, “Institutes of Marian Inspiration,” 80.

¹⁸ Rum, “Institutes of Marian Inspiration,” 80.

¹⁹ *Legion of Mary*, 129.

²⁰ *Legion of Mary*, 130.

²¹ Monsignor L.J. Suenens, *Theology of the Apostolate* (Dublin, Ireland: Cahill and Co.), 44.

²² *Legion of Mary*, 130.

²³ *Legion of Mary*, 130.

²⁴ *Legion of Mary*, 130.

²⁵ Suenens, *Theology of the Apostolate*, 33.

²⁶ Suenens, *Theology of the Apostolate*, 8.

²⁷ Suenens, *Theology of the Apostolate*, 8.

²⁸ Suenens, *Theology of the Apostolate*, 102.

²⁹ Suenens, *Theology of the Apostolate*, 106.

³⁰ Suenens, *Theology of the Apostolate*, 8.

³¹ St. Louis de Montfort, *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Bayshore, NY: Montfort Publications, 1975), 14-15.