

Walking with Mary on the Path to Holiness

Monday, June 15, 2020 ~ Mary and Total Consecration



Through Mary

True devotion to Our Lady is a way of life, and this beautiful, devoted life can be summarized in the words: through, with, for and in. We'll look at what each of these mean in our spiritual lives. The phrase "To Jesus Through Mary" was popularized by St. Louis de Montfort, whose writings and consecration preparation have gained popularity in recent years. To understand how to live through Mary, as in all things Marian, we go to Jesus. Jesus was the first person to go through Our Lady. He could have chosen to redeem us any number of ways. What did He choose, though? He chose to come to us through Mary. If there were a better way for Him to come to us, He would have come that way. He chose to come through Our Lady because it is the best way. People who denigrate Our Heavenly Mother are insulting Christ, saying that He chose less than a perfect way to come to us, as if any of us would know better! We need to trust Him and imitate Him in all things. He came through her. At the Visitation, He came to John the Baptist through Mary, and John encountered Jesus through Mary. This pattern of through Mary follows through all ages.

In imitation of Our Lord, we need to go through her. He has shown us that she is the perfect bridge between us and God. She is not a go-between, someone we must talk to because we can't go to Jesus directly. Rather, she is the bridge that connects, someone who facilitates a stronger relationship with Our Lord. We need her to assist us in approaching Our Lord. Our Lady helps us to overcome all blindnesses that hinder our trust in Our Lord. What does this look like in our daily spiritual life?

Through Mary gives directionality to our lives. We allow her to lead us, and where does she lead us? Always, ever, only to Jesus. She is incapable of anything else, so there's nothing to

fear with following her unquestioningly. We offer all of ourselves and all we have to Our Lord through Mary. What does she do with what we offer? She clothes our offering with her love. It's not that our offering isn't good enough. Jesus lovingly accepts anything we desire to give Him. Rather, Our Lady assists us in offering ourselves, all that we are and all that we have, giving it to Him unreservedly. She makes it easier, more peaceful. She grants clarity of vision, so we see how the love of Our Lord overshadows what He is asking, and we give out of desire and love rather than out of cold obligation. She teaches us Who Our Lord really is: Mercy, Love, which enables us to give our lives more totally to Him.

A few examples illustrate my next point. One of our Sisters had to have surgery and wanted to wear her brown scapular into the operating room. She asked various technicians as they prepped her for surgery. None of them answered her. They didn't want to tell her no, and they didn't think they could tell her yes. Finally, a nurse arrived, let's call her Ann, and when she was asked, she said Sister could wear her scapular, and if anyone questioned it, tell them Ann said it was okay!

Sometimes, when I am running late, I wish I had a police escort so traffic would clear for me and I could have permission to speed. We Sisters have various stories of people letting us in the back way, showing us a short cut, or security guards letting us into places not normally open to the public at shrines.

As I was reflecting on this talk, I was thinking that Our Lady is very much like the nurse in the hospital, a police escort, or like so many other individuals who have assisted us throughout the years. She clears obstacles, makes the way smoother, finds paths that we would never know of on our own. I surrender my will to hers, trusting that her way is better, smoother, more perfect than my way. She shows me how to surrender to Christ: as He wills, when He wills, as long as He wills, in the way He wills. This is what it means to go through Mary. We surrender our will to her, and she teaches us how to be perfectly docile to Our Lord, as we see at the Wedding at Cana, and the result is miraculous!

With Mary

We are called to live with Mary. While Through Mary gives directionality, With Mary is about her presence. This might seem simple, but it is really a profound way of living. As with the aspect of through Mary, Our Lord is the one who lived with her first and most perfectly. We can spend much fruitful time meditating of their life together in Nazareth. At the Cross, Jesus points us to St. John the Beloved in this aspect of Marian devotion, living life with Mary. Growing up, when I heard the Gospel account of the Crucifixion, I always thought it was very beautiful to picture John the Beloved taking Mary into his home after Jesus said, “Behold your Mother.” In my Hispanic family, all of my relatives had multiple images of Our Lady in the home, the car, on their persons. Her motherly presence has always been very real to me. I grew up knowing she was watching me, and I welcomed her into my home. When I went to college, I made sure to have an image of her in my dorm. This is good and beautiful. In recent years, however, Pope Benedict has been a catalyst to bring me further into the aspect of living with Mary.

A few years ago, I came across a homily from Pope Benedict about John and Mary at the Foot of the Cross, and Benedict said that the common translation, “From that hour, the disciple took her into his home” fell short of the fuller meaning of this passage. He said that John took her into his inner life. Upon further research into Pope Benedict’s writings, and St. John Paul as well, I found that the original Greek states that John took her “into his own.” Into his own means all that John can count as his own – his concerns, worries, work, friends, loved ones, responsibilities. From that hour, John didn’t just welcome Our Lady into his home to live with him, which would have been quite impressive. He received her as his mother, TOTALLY, into HIS OWN. He shows us what it is to LIVE WITH her.

Of course, this affects how I live. Imagine how saying Mass for her would have affected how St. John the Beloved said Mass. Praying WITH her would have affected how he prayed, all in a profoundly positive way. In her presence, I can follow her lead, lean on her, and imitate her in all things. Aware of her presence, I will be less likely to say things I will regret later. She shows me how to interact and approach Our Lord and others. She prompts me to express love and kindness, to be gentle, to see others as she does. She protects, guides, assists and lovingly mothers us. She gently points out, moment by moment, THIS way, THIS moment, THIS time. It is

very specific and personal. All of my own is hers: My concerns, worries, dreams, desires, loved ones, work, joys, sorrows, everything. It's hers. She is *with* me, in all of life. I am never alone, never unnoticed. I am always loved.

For Mary

Through Mary gives directionality, with Mary is about presence. For Mary concerns purpose or motivation. Living for Mary makes devotion to Mary practical. In movements such as the Militia Immaculata or the Legion of Mary, interior devotion bursts forth into loving, fruitful service. For Mary is the motivation and purpose of all of our apostolic endeavors as IHM Sisters, such as this Novena! As always, Our Lord is a perfect example of living for Mary. My favorite t-shirt design for our Handmaids Marian formation group for high schoolers is from a few years ago. On the back of the shirt is a drawing of Jesus as a toddler reaching up to hand His Mother a flower, which she bends over to receive. The caption reads, "Devotion to Mary began with Jesus." He would have delighted, as any child does, in offering things for His Mother to show her how He loves her.

I've recently been reading the writings of St. Maximilian Kolbe. Everything he wrote, everything he did, was Marian. Over and over in his journal are entries such as: I am feeling ill, and I know the journey will be taxing, but the Immaculata wants it. That's the end of the debate: Mary wants it. He could and would do anything for her. Love of her helped him to overcome all his human weakness and follow through with what he knew was Our Lord's will, which is what made him a Saint.

The desire to live for Mary is what has given rise to so many beautiful Marian devotions. Shrines, statues, processions, wearing medals and scapulars, praying Rosaries and May crownings are all examples of doing things for Our Lady, for her honor and to spread devotion to her. She is honored and the faithful receive beautiful formation that raises awareness of what it is to be her child.

For Mary also purifies our intention. Whenever we are involved in serving, there will come a time when we are disheartened and struggle with feelings of defeat or failure. If I am working in order to get a lot of people to show up to an event, or if I am working in order to

produce a certain outcome, yes, I will experience failure, and this failure will be difficult to handle. It will feel as if all my efforts were mistaken, that I had made a mistake to undertake such a project, or perhaps it would be better if I just quit and let someone else try. Or, with success, I can experience harmful pride. If, however, I do everything for Mary, I can trust in the fruit regardless of the visible outcome. I will have more energy for troubleshooting and adjusting because I am not weighed down by worldly pressure. When success comes, if I was truly working for Mary, this intention can save me from pride. The success is hers, not mine, and I grow in dependency and trust and gratitude in her rather than growing in unhealthy pride and self-reliance. I don't work to impress others, for fame, for various types of improvement, but for YOU, my Mother. Do with this what you will. Bring it to richer fruit than I ever could on my own. You can make success out of failure, or touch hearts much more deeply than I ever could without you. It's yours. I do it for you.

In Mary

Living through Mary gives direction, living with Mary gives us her presence, living for Mary gives us purpose and motivation. Finally, living in Mary nurtures us in the depths of our soul. When we live in Mary, we find within her Heart a place where we can abide. In her Heart, we find peace, safety and rest. To learn how to live in Mary we absolutely must turn to Our Lord.

All of Jesus' life is valuable for contemplation, to study and imitate every moment of His life, even those not explicitly described in Scripture. Pope Paul VI, among others, wrote and preached eloquently on what he called "the school of Nazareth," the life of the Holy Family while Jesus was growing up. As I mentioned earlier, Jesus chose the most perfect way to redeem us, becoming a baby and spending thirty years in family life before beginning His public ministry.

We can go back to His infancy, and even farther, to the point of contemplating Our Lord in the womb of Our Lady. We ponder His conception in the womb of Our Blessed Mother every Solemnity of the Annunciation on March 25th, every time we pray the Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary, and every time we pray the Angelus. None of Our Lord's time on Earth was wasted, not

even the time He spent in Our Lady's womb. And so we go to Him, seeking to know what it is to live in Mary.

It's a peaceful darkness, totally receptive. He was totally dependent on her for everything. All He knew was safety, rest and nourishment, all provided by Our Lady. In her, His Heart became stronger and He grew into an ever more mature being. This was His time of most rapid growth, from a single cell to a newborn baby. In Mary, we can receive all of these things: safety, rest, nourishment, growth, formation of our hearts, we can learn how to experience peace and trust in darkness.

St. Maximilian Kolbe wrote about contemplating Our Lord in the womb of Our Blessed Mother. Our Lady of Guadalupe appeared with Our Lord. Where was He? In her womb. Spend some time contemplating this mystery, that Our Lord became this small for us, what He received from Our Lady, and what that teaches me about devotion to her. Jesus told us, "Unless you become like a little child..." St. Therese popularized the treasures of spiritual childhood. These lessons run deep, and we can fittingly say that we want to be dependent and trusting in Our Lord and Our Lady as a child, and even as an infant or a babe in the womb.

How do we approach this mystery of living in Mary, being wholly dependent on her, receiving profoundly from her? Living in Mary is receptive. It is a gift. We foster the desire, and we ask for it, seek it, with hearts full of hope. Ask Our Lady and Our Lord to teach you how to be as receptive to Our Lady as Jesus was. Open your heart to receive this gift. Contemplate Our Lord's dependence on Our Lady, and learn from Him how to rely on her. She has SO MUCH to bestow on us. She is Mother.

Conclusion

This talk is meant to give a bird's eye view, a vision of a lived Marian devotion at a deep level: *Totus Tuus*. Marian devotion is not to be contrived, complicated or confusing, but it can be if we focus on external practices *more than* on a devoted way of life. Like a good Mother, Our Lady brings the best out of our hearts. She brings clarity and simplicity to clear out anything contrived, complicated or confusing. True Devotion is a way of life, of living fully, not a burdensome practice or obligation. We want to live joyfully as a child of Mary. If you want to

progress in True Devotion to Our Lady, ask questions of her and Our Lord. Run to her, as a child does, for guidance. Spend time with her. Ask her to reveal herself to you as your personal Mother.

She loves you uniquely, with a love that is only for you. She doesn't love you with a generic love that impersonally goes out to all humanity because Our Lord ordered so on the Cross. He didn't turn His Mother over to be used. He lovingly placed each of us individually into her care, knowing that we could receive personally from her. He enables her to love each of us uniquely and perfectly. Go to her: in success, with gratitude; in failure, with honesty; in any difficulty, seeking aid; in joys, with an eagerness to share. St. Maximilian Kolbe summarizes the result of this devotion well: "To let her into all hearts, to bring her into being within all hearts, that by entering those hearts and taking most perfect possession of them, she may there give birth to the sweet Jesus, God, and there raise Him to perfect age. What a beautiful mission!"