



The Immaculate Heart of Mary



The Rose of Purity

June 24, 2025



Welcome to the sixth night of our novena to the Immaculate Heart of Mary! Thank you for joining us as we prepare to celebrate the feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary on Saturday. Let us begin with a prayer. Hail Mary. Immaculate Heart of Mary, pray for us.

Tonight we turn our attention to Mary's purity, signified by one of the roses on her heart. As we study her Immaculate Heart, we learn more about our Lady. We are always studying her heart so that we can better imitate her. During this novena, we wish to share the fruit of our pondering on her heart.

As I begin my talk, I want to take us back to the Old Testament and look at a story that we are all familiar with, the story of Jacob and Esau, particularly, Jacob getting the blessing from Isaac over his older brother, Esau.

This story strikes our sensibilities. We like things to be just and fair. When we hear or read the story of Jacob tricking his brother, Esau, out of the blessing, we are a little peeved. Esau was the older of the twin brothers and Isaac had asked him to hunt for a meal so that he could receive his father's blessing. Instead Rebekah connives to get Jacob the blessing by disguising her favorite son in the trappings of Esau (Genesis 27). While earlier, Esau willingly sold his birthright for a bowl of stew (Genesis 25:29-34), his cries of anguish are pitiful; one wants to sympathize with this brother who has been tricked out of something so crucial and this was done by his close family members, his mother and his brother.

Of course, Jacob has to flee because the anger of his brother is so great. Jacob has the blessing of the firstborn and this blessing cannot be taken back. The birthright, which Jacob got earlier, gave him the place of his father after he had died but the blessing was spiritual; in this context, it gave the blessing of the Messiah in his line. On a side point, if you want to see some redemption from this story, you can read St. Louis de Montfort's work, *True Devotion*, as he gives an insightful allegory to this story.



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But let us go back to the person of “Jacob”. He receives his name at his birth because at his delivery he had been grasping the heel of Esau (Genesis 25:26). The understanding of the name is “heel” or “usurper”. Brothers trying to tackle each other, grabbing them by the feet in order to bring them down, all to get the last cookie. Some of us have seen this happen, I am sure. Definitely a story from childhood, hopefully, not from adulthood. This name truly fits Jacob; he is a duplicitous one. He is always seeking his own advantage, striving for the upper hand, in every situation. Since he cannot stay at home after this conspiracy, his mother instructs him to go to her family’s house where he can stay with his uncle, Laban (Genesis 28). Here Jacob gets a taste of his own medicine. The trickster is now the tricked, particularly when the bride he thought he married is switched on him (Genesis 29:25). The next few chapters of Genesis featuring Jacob and his uncle, Laban, are a back-and-forth contest of who can gain the upper hand.

Why we do not dismiss Jacob as a complete rascal is that he has a moment of redemption, a time and opportunity where he moves from being the deceiver to one who has encountered God and discovered God’s solicitude and care for him. So after the famous wrestling match between himself and God, his name is changed to indicate this conversion. He goes from Jacob or “deceiver” to Israel “one who contends with divine and human beings and prevails”. He has been purified and will always be reminded of this as he limps along life (Genesis 32:23-33). He is now able to be counted among the patriarchs.

What is so jarring about this initial story of Jacob and Esau is that we don’t like to be tricked or deceived. If Jacob had not had this encounter with God, he would be a difficult character to admire. We would find something lacking in him as a patriarch. Deep down, we want people to be honest and upfront, transparent. The worst thing to face in a relationship is that of being betrayed. Even outside our family, it is hurtful. We have all heard of the various scams that are out there, over the phone, over email, and we wish to stay far from them. We do not want to be taken advantage of.

There is something innate in us that we want honesty and truthfulness; we desire this purity, this purity that is so much a part of our Lady. We want to see it in ourselves and in each other. So this evening, we are going to explore what purity is, how we see it in Mary, why it is an important virtue and, to conclude, how we can live it out in our daily lives.

First, what is purity? Fr. John Hardon in his *Modern Catholic Dictionary*, defines it as “Freedom from anything that weakens or impairs or changes the nature of a being or its activity” (452). He then divides it into purity of faith, purity of intention, purity of conscience and purity of morals.

Josef Pieper, a Thomistic scholar, states, “Purity means that crystalline, morning-fresh artlessness and selflessness in relating to the world, as it becomes a

reality in the person when the shock of a deep pain brings him to the limits of existence or when the nearness of death touches him” (45). Despite what one experiences, a pure person will not be seeking his or her own gain in a situation.

Franciscan author and speaker, Fr. Benedict Groeschel, specifies,

Spiritual purity is not a static condition, an ultimate goal at which we can ever arrive in this life. Rather, it is something for which we constantly labor. Why do we face such a continuing struggle? Because we are human beings, fallen creatures whose minds need to be cleansed of worldly perceptions, whose hearts need to be cleansed of base desires. We are rather like the Jewish home on the eve of Passover that needs to be searched and purified of anything offensive to God. And after having been purged, our minds and hearts need to be immersed in God’s truth for a long soak to wash away any residue of the world’s filth (176).

He further states that the areas that need to be addressed are the areas of our perception, our understanding and our desire. The Poor Clare Abbess, Mother Mary Francis, sees the essential characteristics of the pure of heart as openness and truthfulness (101).

Finally, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 2518, states, “Pure in heart’ refers to those who have attuned their intellects and wills to the demands of God’s holiness, chiefly in three areas: charity; chastity or sexual rectitude; love of truth and orthodoxy of faith. There is a connection between purity of heart, of body, and of faith.”

Wow! That is quite the lesson on the virtue of purity. I really wanted to set the stage because it is easy to think that it is just about chastity. We have many a student who will tune out of a lesson on chastity and purity because he or she states, “I don’t have to worry about that because I’m going to get married.” We laugh because we all know, married, priests, sisters, that no one is excluded from the practice of the virtues of purity and chastity. This is something that involves the whole person. When a person is not pure, whether in their actions or intentions, this has great effects on our lives, our society. It can range from being cheated by an online scam or by one’s spouse; it all stems from the lack of purity.

Purity begins in the heart as Jesus states in Mark 7:20-23 when he declares all food clean. He addresses his audience, “But what comes out a person, that is what defiles. From within people, from their hearts, come evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly. All these evils come from within and they defile.” So then, it is on our hearts that we need to work. We read in the Catechism that it is in the heart “in the biblical sense of the depths of one’s being, where the person decides for or against God” (368).

Purity is an important virtue to live and we have the example of Mary to show us how to live it out. There are so many stories from the Gospels that illustrate this but we are going to focus on the Annunciation.

First, we have the characteristics of Mary as she is presented in the encounter with the angel, Gabriel; she was “a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin’s name was Mary” (Luke 1:27). When asked if she would become the mother of the Messiah, her response is, “How can this be, since I have no relations with a man” (Luke 1:34)? While Mary is betrothed to Joseph, she has made a vow of virginity that Joseph respects. She is wholeheartedly God’s. Once she understands how she can become a mother and remain a virgin, she gives her “fiat”, her yes. She only wants to fulfill the will of God.

Next, we turn to the angel’s salutation that we remember every time we say the “Hail Mary”. She is full of grace. The Lord is with her; she is pleasing to Him. Again, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God” (Luke 1:30). Mary is without sin, both original and actual. Never did sin touch her. She is all-pure in order to be a dwelling place for God. It is Mary’s holiness, a gift given her by God that has opened her to receive Jesus, the Son of God, into her womb. She is to be the mother of the Messiah; God is to take flesh in her womb.

Once Mary knows that this is God’s will for her, she submits wholeheartedly, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). In her purity, she sees God’s plan and her part in it. Her vision is not clouded by sin or selfishness. She only desires to do God’s will and this brings her great joy.

There are so many ways this purity of Mary is expressed in the writings of the Church and of the Saints. In the preface for the *Mass of The Immaculate Heart of Mary*, the Church prays, “You gave her an undivided and pure heart, that she might be worthy to be the Virgin Mother of your Son and to rejoice to see you for ever” (ICEL, 137).

St. Elizabeth of the Trinity saw this purity in our Lady; she writes, “There is one who knew this gift of God, one who did not lose a particle of it, one who was so pure and luminous that she seemed to be the Light itself. “Speculum Justitiae”. One whose life was so simple, so lost in God that there is hardly anything we can say about it.” (*I Have Found God*, 110). Mary is that beautiful reflection of the purity of God.

St. John Paul II viewed our Lady’s purity,

The special privilege God granted to Mary who is ‘all holy’ leads us to admire the marvels grace accomplished in her life. It also reminds us that Mary belonged always and completely to the Lord, and that no imperfection harmed her perfect harmony with God. Her earthly life

was therefore marked by a constant, sublime growth in faith, hope and charity. For believers, Mary is thus the radiant sign of divine mercy and the sure guide to the loftiest heights of holiness and Gospel perfection (107).

Our Thomistic scholar, Josef Pieper, notes, “Purity is the unreserved openness of the entire being, from which alone the word can be spoken: ‘Behold the handmaid of the Lord’ (Lk 1:38)” (45). It is in Mary’s undivided heart that she can be totally open to God’s will for her in her life.

Purity gives, impurity takes. The author, Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, expresses well the contrast between purity and impurity. For the pure one, “Gazing at the Other, it comes to forget itself. The impure heart traverses the world surrounded by mirrors, having only itself as sole object of contemplation. The pure heart loses itself in what it loves. For sheer admiration it has no time left to turn to itself, nor does it desire to” (200). This is what led Mary to go immediately to her cousin, Elizabeth, in order to help her in this time of need.

We have an idea of what purity is and how it is expressed in our Lady but what should also motivate us to desire the virtue of purity. Let us go to the sixth beatitude, “Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8). This beatitude might seem like something so remote, so far-reaching, reserved for the next life. Is this something even possible in this life? If it is possible in this life, what does it mean to see God?

We can see things through the eyes of God. We can see God in our neighbor. We can see God’s hand at work in the midst of our everyday life. We can recognize that God dwells within us and seek Him in the depths of our being.

We can see things through the eyes of God. Josef Pieper again gives us deep insight, “With good reason it is said: only he who has a pure heart can laugh in a freedom that creates freedom in others. It is no less true that only he who looks at the world with pure eyes experiences its beauty” (44). To the pure, all things are pure. It is easy to become cynical in this life and forget that God is in charge of all; he sends or permits in order to draw me closer to Himself. It is interesting that this life is a time of purification; what we don’t accomplish in this life will be purified in the next, namely, purgatory.

Dante in his Divine Comedy, *Purgatorio*, relates the process of purification that the soul encounters, particularly in what he struggled with in life, his predominant fault. Whether it is pride or lust, one will have to counter it with some action. Pride, being the worst of the seven deadly sins, is placed at the bottom of the mountain of purgatory; Dante was shown that the goal is to make it up the mountain. For pride, one is required to carry heavy boulders around and listen to these words of Mary “Be it done to me according to your word” (Barron, 87-88). Mary shows us how to counter

the vices; her life expressed great virtue. Now as regards the top of mount purgatory, that is where the sin of lust is placed. It is part of our culture to think that lust is worse than pride but it is the opposite. As lust is connected to purity, it is interesting to see that the soul being cleansed of this vice has to go through fire to be purified. Once the soul has made it through, it becomes light and is able to fly, fly to heaven (Barron, 99-101). There is a lightness that comes when we are purified, when we seek to live out purity (Mother Mary Francis, 101).

We can see God in our neighbor and seek to help them just as Mary did when she went to help her cousin or her guidance of the early Church after Jesus' Ascension. She was not about herself at these times but had a generosity that drew her out of herself.

We all suffer in this life. The virtue of purity helps us in the midst of that suffering. Pieper explains, "purity not only is the fruit of purification but also comprises in itself the readiness to accept God's purifications, perhaps terrible and deadly, with the brave openness of a trusting heart and so experiences its fertile and transforming power" (46). We learn to trust that God is in control of our lives and He is a loving Father who desires the best for us.

To see God dwelling within us, I turn to St. Elizabeth of the Trinity who explained in a letter, "It seems to me that my mission in heaven will be to draw souls to an interior recollection by helping them to come out of themselves and adhere to God in a very simple and completely loving movement. And to help them to stay in this great inner silence enables God to cast them in his image and to transform them into himself" (*Letters*, 360). We need to spend time each day in prayer to understand this great mystery of the indwelling of God in our soul.

So how can we live out purity? Why is it so difficult for us to live out? Why do we struggle with sincerity? We really want to be who we appear to be, a follower of Christ. But that is the difficulty, it is not always easy to follow Christ, to trust all that God is doing in our lives. When things get difficult, I resort to the words, "Jesus, I trust in you." But I know that I do not always let those words penetrate my heart. I tend to want to look after myself, my own advantage, afraid that God will not provide for me those things that I need. Let us continually look at those areas where we tend not to trust our Lord, let us look at all of the times that our Lord has provided for us in our need. At the end of each day, let us review the list of blessings he has given us, both great and small. By living in a spirit of gratitude, we will grow in trust, we will believe in our hearts that He will continue to provide for us each and every day, through each difficulty and suffering.

As we look at this virtue for our entire life, we realize that purity is much more than the virtue of chastity. In reality, purity goes much deeper; it is about the type of

person one is. What is the motivation behind one's actions; is one about getting ahead or is it about the other, namely God and neighbor.

We need to ask for the grace of purity, purity of body and purity of intention. We want an integrated life, one that is whole and not in many different pieces. Mary shows us through her wholehearted service to God, even when this took her to the foot of the Cross (John 19:25); this is where those words she uttered at the Annunciation were fulfilled, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done unto me as you have said" (Luke 1:38). She proclaimed her "fiat" once again!

We need to pray for this assistance. Each day the Sisters pray as part of their communal prayers, the **Prayer for Holiness**. It was written by an American mystic, Marie-Rose Ferron who lived in the early part of the twentieth century. It was adopted by Mother Joanne and perfectly expresses how we can let Mary help purify us through the virtue of purity. I am going to read it to you now; please, listen to these words and note the places where you feel our Lady is drawing you into a closer connection to her and to her Son.

Immaculate Heart of Mary, perfect model of sanctity, take my soul and mold it according to your sublime perfections. Purify my heart and set it free from every obstacle to holiness, so that detached from self and the pleasures of sense, it may be adorned by you with the virtues and perfections of your own Immaculate Heart. Then lead my soul to that divine intimacy which alone can satisfy the immense capacity for love and union with which God has created the human heart. From you I confidently hope for this grace of holiness, and I entrust to your Immaculate Heart my eternal destiny and the sanctification of priests. Amen.

I pray that this virtue of our Lady's heart will be one that you will understand more and strive to adopt ever more readily. I pray that you will turn to our Lady during those struggles of wanting to be self-sufficient and of wanting to do things apart from God.

I am going to conclude with a story, a contrast between the purity of Our Lady and the impurity of the evil one. It comes from a letter written by our Father Founder, Fr. Joaquin Masmitjá. When he wrote this letter, it had been over ten years since he had sent a group of ten IHM Sisters to California in order to start a house on the west coast of the United States. He writes,

No doubt the evil one has worked hard to prevent its progress because, for a long time, while trying to help a certain person, I have heard voices in the confessional which furiously said to me, 'You will not succeed in your efforts in the Indies,' meaning

California, of course. Again I heard, "We have been there long before you." I said "Yes, my desire is that the Congregation will spread far and wide." Besides, to the horrible cries and words were added heavy pounding with both hands on the wooden frame of the confessional swaying it to and fro in such a way that it seemed impossible for it not to be broken into pieces. The voice spoke again, "There is much tribulation among the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart." But I answered them as I did on another occasion more than thirty years ago, that the most holy Virgin was only one and had more power than all of them put together. The proof is that the Congregation has steadily increased from the beginning.

Yes, the Virgin is one, pure, single-hearted, dedicated, and on and on; the evil one is many, deceitful and divided. Let us turn to our Lady for help in this battle. Just as she has kept a faithful band of her daughters, now in Kansas not in California, let us trust her to lead us to the fire of her Son's Heart that will purify us and make us her faithful children. Amen. Glory be...

Thank you!

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