



Into the Depths

Christ's Gift: Mary Our Mother

As Catholics, we are typically brought up in a specific culture that gives Mary special emphasis, be it more or less the case. But, how much attention do or should we give her? Is Marian devotion something to keep, because she provides Catholics a sense of identity? Or, do Catholics see her role in the Bible as deserving of a little extra attention? These ideas are not wrong. But, as I was once taught by Fr. Louis Capporiccio, Mary is necessary for us! She is not merely a commodity. And, this is not to say God could not save humanity without her. But, it does acknowledge her necessity by reason of God's willing to save humanity with her. Her role in bringing souls to heaven far exceeds that of any other creature.

Jesus found Mary to be such a suitable helper, that He gave her to the disciple whom He loved moments before the end of His earthly life. Recall the words of Christ as he suffered on the cross, "Woman, behold your son." Then to the disciple whom he loved, "behold your mother." John stands in our stead; at the cross it is made explicit that mankind has a Mother in Mary. To borrow from St. Louis de Montfort, if a mother is fitting for the perils of this earthly journey, how much more necessary is a mother's care on the way to heaven. It is most fitting that we have a heavenly

Mother to raise, nurture, and guide us safely home. This spiritual mother is Mary.



Christ's gift to us demands a response. St. Louis de Montfort teaches there are many ways to give honor to Mary, but there exists a devotion that excels all in its perfection! He calls it "total consecration to Jesus through Mary." The entire point of the consecration is to give of oneself completely to Jesus. The word consecrate means a setting apart to make holy. Consecration is not something new. The Baptized have already been handed over to Jesus in consecration. In consecrating oneself anew through Mary you freely renew the vows to be faithful to God that were made on your behalf in Baptism. Part of this devotion's perfection consists in us giving ourselves to Jesus in the same way He chose to give Himself to us. Jesus' coming to us through Mary shows His desire for us to return to Him through Mary.

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Extraordinary Time

From Christmas to Ordinary time to Lent — all in the Year of Mercy

Does it seem like time is always speeding up? Within one month, we will pass from the Christmas season into ordinary time, then into Lent. I'm sure all of you spend time in prayer, living in the moment as well as you can despite the chaos and superficiality of the culture. As difficult as it is to live an interior life that is quietly mindful of God's presence, we are blessed that the Church gives us all kinds of external aids.

The colors of vestments, the use (or non-use) of the *Gloria* at Mass, and ashes on our forehead all help us interiorize the particular graces God wants to give us. Thanks to Pope Francis and Bishop Jenky, we have even *more* exterior signs that communicate God's grace this year. In this extraordinary jubilee Year of Mercy, we have

five Holy Doors in our diocese, through which you can receive a plenary indulgence. You used to have to travel to Rome to pass through a Holy Door, now you just have to go to Champaign, Bloomington, LaSalle, Peoria, or Rock Island. When you see these exterior signs of God's love and mercy, please say a prayer that we can have more priests — men whose very lives are meant to be a

sign of Christ's presence to his people. With priests, we have the sacraments, which are the ultimate signs of God's presence in this life. God is with us at all times, we need only be attentive to the signs of his love.

Saint Angela of Foligno and the Enlightenment of Penance by Anthony Lilles

Even though she died in 1309, Saint Angela of Foligno helps us appreciate the enlightenment that can come from a life of penance. It was a time not unlike our own. Epicureanism was destroying society even as great saints attempted to help their contemporaries see that there is so much more than the short term pleasures of the here and now. Saint Angela started out more on the Epicurean side of this equation. But because she responded to Christ's great love for her, she is now a witness to the truth: when we do our penance with contrition and love, we learn something about ourselves and about God that leads to a fullness of life and the freedom to love.

After several years of marriage with children and comfortable living, she was pierced to the heart by an awareness of her own sinfulness. She was afraid to make a full confession so she prayed to Saint Francis and asked him to help her find a confessor. And He did. Appearing to her in a dream, he told her that if she would only have asked sooner, he would have responded faster. The very next day she

heard a friar preaching and knew that this was the priest to whom she should confess. And she did. It was one of the first steps she took to begin anew her spiritual life — leaving a life of convenience to embrace a life of penance.

A beautiful lesson to draw from this very first part of her spiritual journey is the importance of making a full confession of our sins when we go to confession. Many are afraid to put all the cards on the table when they confess their sins. Some, like Saint Angela, even go to communion burdened with serious sin: drawn to Jesus but afraid to accept responsibility for their lives, they make their piety into a sham. In the midst of these kinds of struggles, the Mystic of Foligno draws our attention to the lack of peace we have with such lifeless religious practices. Praying, just as she did, to make a full confession already begins to open us to the new freedom Christ wants us to have: the freedom to live by the truth. As Pope Francis has explained, God never gets tired of granting his forgiveness. We are the one's who get tired of asking to be forgiven. *Continued on next page...*



Doors of Mercy around the Diocese

Cathedral of St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception
607 NE Madison Avenue, Peoria

~
St. Pius X Church
2502 29th Avenue, Rock Island

~
Sacred Heart Church
504 Fulton Street, Peoria

~
St. Robert Bellarmine Chapel at St. John Paul II Newman Center
501 South Main St. Normal

~
Shrine of the Most Holy Rosary
529 4th Street, LaSalle

~
St. John Chapel at the Newman Foundation
604 East Armory Avenue, Champaign

Passage to Pray With:

THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD

The people were filled with expectation, and all were asking in their hearts whether John might be the Christ. John answered them all, saying, "I am baptizing you with water, but one mightier than I is coming. I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."

After all the people had been baptized and Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "**You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.**" ~Luke 3:15-16; 21-22



Penance cont'd.

Saint Angela's prayer in the face of her awareness of her own sinfulness and need for forgiveness is an important witness in this regard. Jesus re-establishes our integrity through the Sacrament of Penance because His offering on the Cross establishes us in the truth when we accept this gift of love by faith.

Saint Angela's confession was a real beginning to her own conversion, a conversion that brought her into ever deeper intimacy with the Word of the Father. The further she went on this journey of faith, the more amazed she became over the love of God for her personally. This enlightenment made her want to respond with even deeper devotion. Here, she began to learn the wisdom of making progress.

The penitential life was never a legalistic exercise for Saint Angela but instead an enlightening one. There is a knowledge of the truth that rectifies our existence and helps us stand firm even when the whole world crashes down around us. Very early on after Saint Angela's conversion, there was a disaster in which her husband, mother and children all died, and she was left alone in the world. Rather than thinking that God had abandoned her and that all her efforts at holiness were in vain, she responded with faith and even more penance, grateful that the Lord would bless her with a new kind of opportunity to be dedicated to Him alone. Her new knowledge of Christ's love and of herself allowed her to make a new beginning.

Penance can be an expression of our love for God that sees us through sin and every other kind of trial. The absolution Christ grants us through the ministry of the priest can stir a deep gratitude in our hearts and open us to a wisdom not of this world. In carrying out our penance, our hearts can be pierced by the Lord's mercy. This enlightenment, like that experienced by Saint Angela at the beginning of her conversion, is a gift every soul can savor when penance is embraced with love.

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Quote of the Month

"Behold, now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor 6:2)." The words of the Apostle Paul ... resonate for us...with an urgency that does not allow omission or inaction. The word "now" repeated several times says that we cannot let this time pass us by, it is offered to us as a unique opportunity...The reconciliation offered to us has cost a high price, that of the cross raised on Golgotha, on which was hung the Son of God made man. In this immersion of God in human suffering and in the abyss of evil lies the root of our justification. The "return to God with all your heart" in our Lenten journey passes through the cross, following Christ on the road to Calvary, the total gift of self. It is a way on which to learn every day to come out more and more from our selfishness and our closures, to make room for God who opens and transforms the heart. ~ Pope Benedict XVI, Homily for Ash Wednesday 2013

THE LIFE OF PRAYER:

Fasting, prayer, and almsgiving, express conversion in relation to oneself, to God, and to others. Alongside the radical purification brought about by Baptism or martyrdom, other as means of obtaining forgiveness of sins are: effort at reconciliation with one's neighbor, tears of repentance, concern for the salvation of one's neighbor, the intercession of the saints, and the practice of charity "which covers a multitude of sins."

Conversion is accomplished in daily life by gestures of reconciliation, concern for the poor, the exercise and defense of justice and right, by the admission of faults to one's brethren, fraternal correction, revision of life, examination of conscience, spiritual direction, acceptance of suffering, endurance of persecution for the sake of righteousness. **Taking up one's cross each day and following Jesus is the surest way of penance.** (Catechism of the Catholic Church)

Mary has accompanied me throughout life, even before I recognized it. The Church where I was Baptized is dedicated to the Annunciation, and I received first communion at St. Mary's.

The Rosary was part of my first true spiritual devotion, and I attribute the most pivotal moment of my life to its grace. The event occurred on January 1st, the day I encountered Christ and the day the Church celebrates the solemnity of Mary the Mother of God. Still, my relationship to Mary, and in turn Jesus, would not be complete if I had not lovingly surrendered everything to her in return to give to Him.

Finally, the orientation towards Christ resulting from total consecration benefits vocation. Who, if not Mary, responded perfectly to God's call? To borrow another theme from St. Louis de Montfort, reaping a fruitful harvest of vocations will be one effect of cultivating

Mary, "the tree of true life," in our hearts. For more information on total consecration I recommend St. Louis de Montfort's book: True Devotion and for the consecration itself Preparation for Total Consecration. Another version of the consecration is 33 Days to Morning Glory authored by Fr. Michael Gaitley, MIC.



~Taylor Caputo Seminarian for the Diocese of Peoria

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