

The Secret of Mary

by
Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort

Text
and
Integration
Exercises



TABLE OF CONTENT

Letter from the Superior General.....	4
Suggested Schedule for 2013	6
Presentation of the <i>Secret</i>	7
Introductory prayers	8
THE SECRET OF MARY	
1: Here is a Secret <i>SM 1-2</i>	9
2: Call to holiness <i>SM 3-5</i>	9
3: Why should we turn to Mary? <i>SM 6-23</i>	10
4: Devotion to Mary <i>SM 24-34</i>	14
5: Why consecrate oneself? <i>SM 35-42</i>	16
6: The heart of this spiritual path: entering into the spirit of dependence <i>SM 43-44</i>	18
7: How to live this spiritual path <i>SM 45-52</i>	19
8: The action of Mary in us <i>SM 53-59</i>	21
9: Exterior practices <i>SM 60-65</i>	23
10: The tree of life <i>SM 70-78</i>	25
THE FIVE MOVEMENTS OF THE ACT OF CONSECRATION	27
11: 1st movement: thanksgiving to Christ <i>LEW 223</i>	29
12: 2nd movement: acknowledging my infidelity <i>LEW 223</i>	30
13: 3rd movement: looking towards Mary, the faithful Virgin <i>LEW 224</i>	31
14: 4th movement: renewing my baptismal commitment <i>LEW 225-226</i>	32
15: 5th movement: choosing Mary as companion and guide on my journey <i>LEW 226-227</i>	33
PREPARATION FOR THE CONSECRATION	35
16: Considering the world	35
17: Considering my self	36
18: Considering Mary	37
19: Considering Jesus	38
THE CONSECRATION	
20: Celebration of the Consecration <i>LEW 223-227</i>	39

Rome,
1st January 2013
on the Feast of Mary Mother of God

Dear confreres and Montfortian associates,

We were encouraged by the members of the 2011 General Chapter to apply the proposition of the Chapter in the following manner:

“On the occasion of the 300th anniversary of the writing of the Treatise on True Devotion in 1622, and of the death of Montfort in 1820, we will establish a program permitting us to rediscover the fundamental writings of Montfort, through prayer and study, both individually and collectively.”

(Document of the 2011 Chapter, No. 2)

In 2012, we proposed to explore the faith of Mary, based on No. 214 of True Devotion. For the year 2013, we want to offer you a process that would allow us to make our own, at a deeper level, the Consecration proposed by Montfort by a reading of the Secret of Mary, accompanied by various aids for integration. A few years back, Father Gilles Dallaire offered such a process in an edition of the Secret (Mediaspaul, 1999). With his approval, we have built on his excellent work to prepare twenty modules for reflecting on and deepening the Secret of Mary and the process of Consecration itself.

These modules are organized in the following way:

- ten modules on the text itself of the Secret of Mary (modules 1 to 10);
- five modules based on the five movements of the consecration (modules 11 to 15);
- four modules on the preparation for the Consecration in the spirit of Montfort (modules 16 to 19);
- lastly, a final module giving suggestions for the actual celebration of the Consecration (module 20).

In addition to the text of Montfort, each module contains an integration exercise composed of three elements:

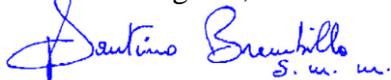
- listening to the Gospel,
- listening to my life,
- prayer.

We hope that these simple tools will help both the religious and the lay associates of the Montfortian family to make their own Montfort’s spiritual journey and to enter into it even more deeply. Our web site will offer all the modules, with both the text of Montfort and the integration exercises. We will

also make sure that a hard copy be sent to each local community. Below, we offer a suggested calendar which allows spreading the process over the whole of 2013.

In today's liturgy, we ask: "Grant, we pray, that we may experience the intercession of her, through whom we were found worthy to receive the author of life, our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son." Through this proposed spiritual journey may the Virgin Mary teach us to become, like her, the dwelling place of eternal and incarnate Wisdom.

Fraternal regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Santino Brembilla" with "s.m.m." written below it.

Fr Santino Brembilla s.m.m.
Superior General

**Suggested schedule for the reading and integration process
of the Secret of Mary in 2013**

Month	Modules	
THE SECRET OF MARY		
January	1: Here is a Secret 2: Call to holiness	SM1-2 SM 3-5
February	3: Why should we turn to Mary	SM 6-23
March	4: Devotion to Mary	SM 24-34
April	5: Why consecrate oneself 6: The heart of this spiritual path: entering into the spirit of dependence	SM 35-42 SM 43-44
May	7: How to live this spiritual path 8: The action of Mary in us	SM 45-52 SM 53-59
June	9: Exterior practices 10: The tree of life	SM 60-65* SM 70-78
THE FIVE MOVEMENTS OF THE ACT OF CONSECRATION		
July	11: 1st movement: thanksgiving to Christ 12: 2nd movement: acknowledging my infidelity	LEW 223 LEW 223
August	13: 3rd movement: looking towards Mary the faithful Virgin 14: 4th movement: renewing my baptismal commitment	LEW 224 LEW 225-226
September	15: 5th movement: choosing Mary as companion and guide on my journey	LEW 226-227
PREPARATION THE CONSECRATION		
October	16: Considering the World 17: Considering my Self	
November	18: Considering Mary 19: Considering Jesus	
THE CONSECRATION		
8 December	20: Celebration of the Consecration	LEW 223-227**

* Nos 66 to 69 of the Secret are in fact three prayers, respectively to Jesus, to the Holy Spirit and to Mary. They can be found in the integration exercise

** This celebration will be published in a separate leaflet.

PRESENTATION OF THE SECRET OF MARY

(The following introduction was published in the 1999 Canadian edition, Mediaspaul, pp 9-14.)

What is the ‘Secret of Mary’? It’s a “spiritual letter” of which we have two manuscript copies. Written around 1712, it was sent to a devout woman, perhaps the directress of a hospital in Nantes. It can be thought of as a summary of the *Treatise on True Devotion*.

This Letter was first published in 1868. It has been translated into some forty languages, with over 400 editions. Together with the *Treatise on True Devotion*, it is the most widely known work of Montfort.

This letter expresses well, in a brief form, the characteristic aspect of his spiritual path, which is turning to Mary and living a life of dependence on Jesus and Mary.

The title ‘*Secret of Mary*’ is not from Montfort, but it does express well the meaning of his message: a secret on the level of faith, on the level of the heart. It is a message inspired by the Spirit of God, one that engages the whole person in an intimate and deep relationship with the Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus and Mother of the Church (Nos 1-5).

It is by reading the Scriptures, through the numerous witnesses of a long tradition, especially in the saints, that Montfort discovered the maternal role of Mary. (Nos 6-20).

Montfort will bring to its full consequences the result of his readings. For him, Mary plays a maternal role in the life of each Christian who puts his trust in Her. This role goes far beyond simple intercession – which is accepted by all that is written in the Church tradition –. It is the action of God, through His Spirit, working in Her and through Her (No 21), because, as he says, in Mary, God’s action and presence are ‘proportioned’ to our state, our nature, our weakness, our need of a mother (no 20).

On the other hand, Mary cannot accomplish this role unless one gives oneself up to Her: the more we do so, the more the Holy Spirit will act through Her in us, to transform us into Jesus Christ: in this transformation, our baptism is fully realized (Nos 16-17).

Thus, Montfort offers us a unique spiritual process: an act of total surrender to Jesus, (a ‘consecration’, cf No 29), through the hands of Mary, so as to live continuously in total dependence on Jesus through His Mother (No 44). This manner of living has a unique feature: all our “spiritual activity” then consists in “letting” Mary act in us, and, through Her, the Spirit of God (Nos 51-52).

With Montfort, let us open this little book. “Here is a secret,” he tells us. Let us prepare our hearts, for it is only with the heart and the Spirit that we can understand it.

Gilles Dallaire s.m.m.

This edition of the Secret was based on the manuscript copy of the Daughters of Wisdom. As it aims to be a popular edition, the Latin texts have been omitted and a few modifications have been made. Integration exercises have been included and a renewed preparation to the Consecration is suggested at the end. Subtitles have been added to make the reading easier.

Totus tuus

**PRAYERS TO PREPARE ONESELF
TO THE READING OF THE SECRET OF MARY**

Veni Creator Spiritus

(translation: Robert Bridges, 1899)

1. Come, O Creator Spirit, come,
and make within our heart thy home;
to us thy grace celestial give,
who of thy breathing move and live.

2. O Comforter, that name is thine,
of God most high the gift divine;
the well of life, the fire of love,
our souls' anointing from above.

3. Thou dost appear in sevenfold dower
the sign of God's almighty power;
the Father's promise, making rich
with saving truth our earthly speech.

4. Our senses with thy light inflame,
our hearts to heavenly love reclaim;
our bodies' poor infirmity
with strength perpetual fortify.

5. Our mortal foes afar repel,
grant us henceforth in peace to dwell;
and so to us, with thee for guide,
no ill shall come, no harm betide.

6. May we by thee the Father learn,
and know the Son, and thee discern,
who art of both; and thus adore
in perfect faith for evermore.

AVE MARIS STELLA

*(Translation based on a cento from the Roman Breviary. (ref Raccolta, #321))*Hail, O Star of
the ocean,

God's own Mother blessed,
ever sinless Virgin,
gate of heav'nly rest

Taking that sweet Ave,
which from Gabriel came,
peace confirm within us,
changing Eve's name.

Break the sinners' fetters,
make our blindness day,
Chase all evils from us,
for all blessings pray.

Show thyself a Mother,
may the Word divine
born for us thine Infant
hear our prayers through thine.

Virgin all excelling,
mildest of the mild,

free from guilt preserve us
meek and undefiled.

Keep our life all spotless,
make our way secure
till we find in Jesus,

joy for evermore.

Praise to God the Father,
honour to the Son,
in the Holy Spirit,
be the glory one. Amen.

★1: HERE IS A SECRET...

No. 1-2

1. Here is a secret, chosen soul, which the most High God taught me and which I have not found in any book, ancient or modern. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, I am confiding it to you, with these conditions:

(1) That you share it only with people who deserve to know it because they are prayerful, give alms to the poor, do penance, suffer persecution, are unworldly, and work seriously for the salvation of souls.

(2) That you use this secret to become holy and worthy of heaven, for the more you make use of it the more benefit you will derive from it. Under no circumstances must you let this secret make you idle and inactive. It would then become harmful and lead to your ruin.

(3) That you thank God every day of your life for the grace he has given you in letting

you into a secret that you do not deserve to know.

As you go on using this secret in the ordinary actions of your life, you will come to understand its value and its excellent quality. At the beginning, however, your understanding of it will be clouded because of the seriousness and number of your sins, and your unconscious love of self.

2. Before you read any further, in an understandable impatience to learn this truth, kneel down and say devoutly the *Ave Maris Stella* ("Hail, O Star of the ocean"), and the "*Veni Creator Spiritus*", to ask God to help you understand and appreciate this secret given by him. As I have not much time for writing and you have little time for reading, I will be brief in what I have to say.

+ + **INTEGRATION** (no 1-2) + +

* **Listening to the Gospel**

At that time Jesus exclaimed, "I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to little children. Yes, Father, for that is what it pleased you to do." (Matthew 11:25-26)

* **Listening to my life**

- What kind of secret are we talking about? For the intellect or for the heart?
- How can I prepare my heart to receive this secret?

* **Prayer**

"Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful,
And kindle in them the fire of your love."

"Lord, send your Holy Spirit and all will be created,
and you will renew the face of the earth."

★2: CALL TO HOLINESS

No. 3-5

3. Chosen soul, living image of God and redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, God wants you to become holy like

him in this life, and glorious like him in the next.

It is certain that growth in the holiness of

God is your vocation. All your thoughts, words, actions, everything you suffer or undertake must lead you towards that end. Otherwise you are resisting God in not doing the work for which he created you and for which he is even now keeping you in being. What a marvellous transformation is possible! Dust into light, uncleanness into purity, sinfulness into holiness, creature into Creator, man into God! A marvellous work, I repeat, so difficult in itself, and even impossible for a mere creature to bring about, for only God can accomplish it by giving his grace abundantly and in an extraordinary manner. The very creation of the universe is not as great an achievement as this.

4. Chosen soul, how will you bring this about? What steps will you take to reach the high level to which God is calling you? The means of holiness and salvation are known to everybody, since they are found in the gospel; the masters of the spiritual life have

explained them; the saints have practised them and shown how essential they are for those who wish to be saved and attain perfection. These means are: sincere humility, unceasing prayer, complete self-denial, abandonment to divine Providence, and obedience to the will of God

5. The grace and help of God are absolutely necessary for us to practice all these, but we are sure that grace will be given to all, though not in the same measure. I say "not in the same measure", because God does not give his graces in equal measure to everyone, although in his infinite goodness he always gives sufficient grace to each. A person who corresponds to great graces performs great works, and one who corresponds to lesser graces performs lesser works. The value and high standard of our actions corresponds to the value and perfection of the grace given by God and responded to by the faithful soul. No one can contest these principles.

+ + INTEGRATION (no 3-5) + +

*** Listening to the Gospel**

"It is to the glory of my Father that you should bear much fruit and be my disciples. (...) For cut off from me you can do nothing." (John 15:8)

Jesus replied, "Things that are impossible by human resources, are possible for God." (Luke 18:27)

*** Listening to my life**

When I examine my life, what calls do I discover?

*** Prayer**

O LORD, you examine me and know me,
 you know when I sit, when I rise,
 you understand my thoughts from afar.
 You watch when I walk or lie down,
 you know every detail of my conduct.
 You created my inmost self, knit me together in my mother's womb.
 God, examine me and know my heart, test me and know my concerns.
 Make sure that I am not on my way to ruin,
 and guide me on the road of eternity. (*Psalm 139*)

★3: WHY SHOULD WE TURN TO MARY?

No. 6-23

6. It all comes to this, then. We must discover a simple means to obtain from God the grace needed to become holy. It is precisely this I wish to teach you. My contention is that you must first discover Mary if you would obtain this grace from God.

7. Let me explain:

(1) Mary alone found grace with God for herself and for every individual person. No patriarch or prophet or any other holy person of the Old Law could manage to find this grace.

8. (2) It was Mary who gave existence and life to the author of all grace, and because of this she is called the "Mother of Grace".

9. (3) God the Father, from whom, as from its essential source, every perfect gift and every grace come down to us, gave her every grace when he gave her his Son. Thus, as St Bernard says, the will of God is manifested to her in Jesus and with Jesus.

10. (4) God chose her to be the treasurer, the administrator and the dispenser of all his graces, so that all his graces and gifts pass through her hands. Such is the power that she has received from him that, according to St Bernardine, she gives the graces of the eternal Father, the virtues of Jesus Christ, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit to whom she wills, as and when she wills, and as much as she wills.

11. (5) As in the natural life a child must have a father and a mother, so in the supernatural life of grace a true child of the Church must have God for his Father and Mary for his mother. If he prides himself on having God for his Father but does not give to Mary the tender affection of a true child, he is an impostor and his father is the devil.

12. (6) Since Mary produced the head of the elect, Jesus Christ, she must also produce the members of that head, that is, all true Christians. A mother does not conceive a head without members, nor members without a head. If anyone, then, wishes to become a member of Jesus Christ, and consequently be filled with grace and truth, he must be formed in Mary through the grace of Jesus Christ, which she possesses with a fullness enabling her to communicate it abundantly to true members of Jesus Christ, her true children.

13. (7) The Holy Spirit espoused Mary and produced his greatest work, the incarnate Word, in her, by her and through her. He has never disowned her and so he continues to produce every day, in a mysterious but very real manner, the souls of the elect in her and through her.

14. (8) Mary received from God a unique dominion over souls enabling her to nourish them and make them more and more godlike. St Augustine went so far as to say that even in this world all the elect are enclosed in the womb of Mary, and that their real birthday is when this good mother brings them forth to eternal life. Consequently, just as an infant draws all its nourishment from its mother, who gives according to its needs, so the elect draw their spiritual nourishment and all their strength from Mary.

15. (9) It was to Mary that God the Father said, "Dwell in Jacob", that is, dwell in my elect who are typified by Jacob. It was to Mary that God the Son said, "My dear Mother, your inheritance is in Israel", that is, in the elect. It was to Mary that the Holy Spirit said, "Place your roots in my elect". Whoever, then, is of the chosen and predestinate will have the Blessed Virgin living within him, and he will let her plant in his very soul the roots of every virtue, but

especially deep humility and ardent charity.

MARY, THE MOULD OF GOD

16. (10) Mary is called by St Augustine, and is indeed, the "living Mould of God" . In her alone the God-man was formed in his human nature without losing any feature of the Godhead. In her alone, by the grace of Jesus Christ, man is made godlike as far as human nature is capable of it.

A sculptor can make a statue or a life-like model in two ways: (I) By using his skill, strength, experience and good tools to produce a statue out of hard, shapeless matter; (ii) By making a cast of it in a Mould. The first way is long and involved and open to all sorts of accidents. It only needs a faulty stroke of the chisel or hammer to ruin the whole work. The second is quick, easy, straightforward, almost effortless and inexpensive, but the Mould must be perfect and true to life and the material must be easy to handle and offer no resistance.

17. Mary is the great Mould of God, fashioned by the Holy Spirit to give human nature to a Man who is God by the hypostatic union, and to fashion through grace men who are like to God. No godly feature is missing from this Mould. Everyone who casts himself into it and allows himself to be moulded will acquire every feature of Jesus Christ, true God, with little pain or effort, as befits his weak human condition. He will take on a faithful likeness to Jesus with no possibility of distortion, for the devil has never had and never will have any access to Mary, the holy and immaculate Virgin, in whom there is not the least suspicion of a stain of sin.

18. Dear friend, what a difference there is between a soul brought up in the ordinary way to resemble Jesus Christ by people who, like sculptors, rely on their own skill and industry, and a soul thoroughly tractable,

entirely detached, most ready to be moulded in her by the working of the Holy Spirit. What blemishes and defects, what shadows and distortions, what natural and human imperfections are found in the first soul, and what a faithful and divine likeness to Jesus is found in the second!

MARY, THE PARADISE OF GOD

19. There is not and there will never be, either in God's creation or in his mind, a creature in whom he is so honoured as in the most Blessed Virgin Mary, not excepting even the saints, the cherubim or the highest seraphim in heaven.

Mary is God's garden of Paradise, his own unspeakable world, into which his Son entered to do wonderful things, to tend it and to take his delight in it. He created a world for the wayfarer, that is, the one we are living in. He created a second world - Paradise - for the Blessed. He created a third for himself, which he named Mary. She is a world unknown to most mortals here on earth. Even the angels and saints in heaven find her incomprehensible, and are lost in admiration of a God who is so exalted and so far above them, so distant from them, and so enclosed in Mary, his chosen world, that they exclaim: "Holy, holy, holy" unceasingly.

20. Happy, indeed sublimely happy, is the person to whom the Holy Spirit reveals the secret of Mary, thus imparting to him true knowledge of it. Happy the person to whom the Holy Spirit opens this enclosed garden for him to enter, and to whom the Holy Spirit gives access to this sealed fountain where he can draw water and drink deep draughts of the living waters of grace. That person will find only grace and no creature in this lovable creature. But he will find that the infinitely holy and exalted God is at the same time infinitely solicitous for him and understands his weaknesses. Since God is everywhere, he can be found everywhere, even in hell. But there is no place where God

can be more present to his creature and more sympathetic to human weakness than in Mary. It was indeed for this very purpose that he came down from heaven. Everywhere else he is the Bread of the strong and the Bread of angels, but living in Mary he is the Bread of children.

21. Let us not imagine, then, as some misguided teachers do, that Mary being simply a creature would be a hindrance to union with the Creator. Far from it, for it is no longer Mary who lives but Jesus Christ himself, God alone, who lives in her. Her transformation into God far surpasses that experienced by St Paul and other saints, more than heaven surpasses the earth.

Mary was created only for God, and it is unthinkable that she should reserve even one soul for herself. On the contrary she leads every soul to God and to union with him. Mary is the wonderful echo of God. The more a person joins himself to her, the more effectively she unites him to God. When we say "Mary", she re-echoes "God".

When, like St Elizabeth, we call her blessed, she gives the honour to God. If those misguided ones who were so sadly led astray by the devil, even in their prayer-life, had known how to discover Mary, and Jesus through her, and God through Jesus, they would not have had such terrible falls. The saints tell us that when we have once found Mary, and through Mary Jesus, and through Jesus God the Father, then we have discovered every good. When we say "every good", we except nothing. "Every good" includes every grace, continuous friendship with God, every protection against the enemies of God, possession of truth to counter every falsehood, endless benefits and unending headway against the hazards we

meet on the way to salvation, and finally every consolation and joy amid the bitter afflictions of life.

22. This does not mean that one who has discovered Mary through a genuine devotion is exempt from crosses and sufferings. Far from it! One is tried even more than others, because Mary, as Mother of the living, gives to all her children splinters of the tree of life, which is the Cross of Jesus. But while meting out crosses to them she gives the grace to bear them with patience, and even with joy. In this way, the crosses she sends to those who trust themselves to her are rather like sweetmeats, i.e. "sweetened" crosses rather than "bitter" ones. If from time to time they do taste the bitterness of the chalice from which we must drink to become proven friends of God, the consolation and joy which their Mother sends in the wake of their sorrows creates in them a strong desire to carry even heavier and still more bitter crosses.

23. The difficulty, then, is how to arrive at the true knowledge of the most holy Virgin and so find grace in abundance through her. God, as the absolute Master, can give directly what he ordinarily dispenses only through Mary, and it would be rash to deny that he sometimes does so. However, St Thomas assures us that, following the order established by his divine Wisdom, God ordinarily imparts his graces to men through Mary. Therefore, if we wish to go to him, seeking union with him, we must use the same means which he used in coming down from heaven to assume our human nature and to impart his graces to us. That means was a complete dependence on Mary his Mother, which is true devotion to her.

+ + INTEGRATION (no 6-23) + +

To assimilate this fundamental text, here are two ways of understanding it: through an analysis of details and through a short synthesis.

I. ANALYSIS OF DETAILS

Find one or more of the following elements in each number:

- a quote from the Bible (implicit or explicit),
- the authority of a holy person,
- one of the three persons of the Holy Trinity,
- a title given to Mary,
- a comparison or symbol.

Exercise:

Underline one or two keywords in each number.

II. A SHORT SYNTHESIS

1. Grounding himself in Scripture, as read through the tradition of the saints,
2. Montfort states that Mary holds a real **ROLE** in the life of Christians.
3. This role consists in transforming them in Christ.
4. This role has been willed by God.
5. This role is linked to her divine motherhood: she is the mother of the Church because she is the mother of Christ.
6. How is this possible? Because Mary is completely transformed in God. Therefore God is the one acting in her and through her.
- 7 Why does God want to act through Mary? Because thus, his divine action is more «proportionate» to our nature and weakness.
8. On what condition will God act through Mary? On the condition that we place ourselves in her dependence.
9. The more we submit to her, the more the Spirit will act through her in us.
10. That is why Montfort proposes a 'consecration' to Jesus through Mary, as the best mean to let the Spirit act in us.

Reading exercise:

Find the passage where each above affirmation is made.

*** Listening to the Gospel**

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother. Seeing his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing near her, Jesus said to his mother, 'Woman, this is your son.' Then to the disciple he said, 'This is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.

(John 19:25-27)

*** Listening to my life**

For me, who is Mary?

How do I perceive her?

Am I ready to take her into my 'home', like John?

*** Prayer**

Hail, Queen of heaven! Hail, Queen of angels. Hail, fertile stem. Hail, gate of heaven. Through you Light has come to our world.

Rejoice, glorious Virgin, most beautiful among women. Hail, radiant splendour: pray to Christ for us.

★4: DEVOTION TO MARY

No. 24-34

24. There are indeed several true devotions to our Lady. I do not intend treating of those which are false.

25. The first consists in fulfilling the duties of our Christian state, avoiding all mortal sin, performing our actions for God more through love than through fear, praying to our Lady occasionally, and honouring her as the Mother of God, but without our devotion to her being exceptional.

26. The second consists in entertaining for our Lady deeper feelings of esteem and love, of confidence and veneration. This devotion inspires us to join the confraternities of the Holy Rosary and the Scapular, to say the five or fifteen decades of the Rosary, to venerate our Lady's pictures and shrines, to make her known to others, and to enrol in her sodalities. This devotion, in keeping us from sin, is good, holy and praiseworthy, but it is not as perfect as the third, nor as effective in detaching us from creatures, or in practising that self-denial necessary for union with Jesus Christ.

27. The third devotion to our Lady is one which is unknown to many and practised by very few. This is the one I am about to present to you.

CONSECRATION TO JESUS THROUGH MARY

28. Chosen soul, this devotion consists in surrendering oneself in the manner of a slave to Mary, and to Jesus through her, and then performing all our actions with Mary, in Mary, through Mary, and for Mary.

Let me explain this statement further.

29. We should choose a special feast-day on which to give ourselves. Then, willingly and lovingly and under no constraint, we consecrate and sacrifice to her unreservedly our body and soul. We give to her our material possessions, such as house, family, income, and even the inner possessions of our soul, namely, our merits, graces, virtues and atonements.

Notice that in this devotion we sacrifice to Jesus through Mary all that is most dear to us, that is, the right to dispose of ourselves, of the value of our prayers and alms, of our acts of self-denial and atonements. This is a sacrifice which no religious order would require of its members. We leave everything to the free disposal of our Lady, for her to use as she wills for the greater glory of God, of which she alone is perfectly aware.

30. We leave to her the right to dispose of all the satisfactory and prayer value of our good deeds, so that, after having done so and without going so far as making a vow, we cease to be master over any good we do. Our Lady may use our good deeds either to bring relief or deliverance to a soul in purgatory, or perhaps to bring a change of heart to a poor sinner.

31. By this devotion we place our merits in the hands of our Lady, but only that she may preserve, increase and embellish them, since merit for increase of grace and glory cannot be handed over to any other person. But we give to her all our prayers and good works, inasmuch as they have intercessory

and atonement value, for her to distribute and apply to whom she pleases. If, after having thus consecrated ourselves to our Lady, we wish to help a soul in purgatory, rescue a sinner, or assist a friend by a prayer, an alms, an act of self-denial or an act of self-sacrifice, we must humbly request it of our Lady, abiding always by her decision, which of course remains unknown to us. We can be fully convinced that the value of our actions, being dispensed by that same hand which God himself uses to distribute his gifts and graces to us, cannot fail to be applied for his greatest glory.

32. I have said that this devotion consists in adopting the status of a slave with regard to Mary. We must remember that there are three kinds of slavery.

There is, first, a slavery based on nature. All men, good and bad alike, are slaves of God in this sense.

The second is a slavery of compulsion. The devils and the damned are slaves of God in this second sense.

The third is a slavery of love and free choice. This is the kind chosen by one who consecrates himself to God through Mary, and this is the most perfect way for us

human beings to give ourselves to God, our Creator.

33. Note that there is a vast difference between a servant and a slave. A servant claims wages for his services, but a slave can claim no reward. A servant is free to leave his employer when he likes and serves him only for a time, but a slave belongs to his master for life and has no right to leave him. A servant does not give his employer a right of life and death over him, but a slave is so totally committed that his master can put him to death without fearing any action by the law.

It is easy to see, then, that no dependence is so absolute as that of a person who is a slave by compulsion. Strictly speaking, no man should be dependent to this extent on anyone except his Creator. We therefore do not find this kind of slavery among Christians, but only among Muslims and pagans.

34. But happy, very happy indeed, will the generous person be who, prompted by love, consecrates himself entirely to Jesus through Mary as their slave, after having shaken off by baptism the tyrannical slavery of the devil.

+ + INTEGRATION (no 24-34) + +

*** Listening to the Gospel**

“If you wish to be perfect, go and sell your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” (Matthew 19:21)

“Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. What gain, then, is it for anyone to win the whole world and forfeit his life?” (Mark 8:35-36)

*** Listening to my life**

Can I identify in myself:

- what I hesitate to give up...
- what holds me back from committing myself.

*** Prayer**

Will I dare say YES, like you, Mary?

You are total welcome, total grace, the face of peace.

Will I dare say YES, like you, Mary,
blessed Mother of God?
When all seems to be night,
you bring the dawn of day.

Life can dance Love.

★5: WHY CONSECRATE ONESELF?

No. 35-42

35. I would need much more enlightenment from heaven to describe adequately the surpassing merit of this devotional practice. I shall limit myself to these few remarks:

1. In giving ourselves to Jesus through Mary's hands, we imitate God the Father, who gave us his only Son through Mary, and who imparts his graces to us only through Mary. Likewise we imitate God the Son, who by giving us his example for us to follow, inspires us to go to him using the same means he used in coming to us, that is, through Mary. Again, we imitate the Holy Spirit, who bestows his graces and gifts upon us through Mary. "Is it not fitting," remarks St Bernard, "that grace should return to its author by the same channel that conveyed it to us?"

36. 2. In going to Jesus through Mary, we are really paying honour to our Lord, for we are showing that, because of our sins, we are unworthy to approach his infinite holiness directly on our own. We are showing that we need Mary, his holy Mother, to be our advocate and mediatrix with him who is our Mediator. We are going to Jesus as Mediator and Brother, and at the same time humbling ourselves before him who is our God and our Judge. In short, we are practising humility, something which always gladdens the heart of God.

37. 3. Consecrating ourselves in this way to Jesus through Mary implies placing our good deeds in Mary's hands. Now, although these

deeds may appear good to us, they are oftendefective, and not worthy to be considered and accepted by God, before whom even the stars lack brightness.

Let us pray, then, to our dear Mother and Queen that having accepted our poor present, she may purify it, sanctify it, beautify it, and so make it worthy of God. Any good our soul could produce is of less value to God our Father, in winning his friendship and favour, than a worm-eaten apple would be in the sight of a king, when presented by a poor peasant to his royal master as payment for the rent of his farm. But what would the peasant do if he were wise and if he enjoyed the esteem of the queen? Would he not present his apple first to her, and would she not, out of kindness to the poor man and out of respect for the king, remove from the apple all that was maggoty and spoilt, place it on a golden dish, and surround it with flowers? Could the king then refuse the apple? Would he not accept it most willingly from the hands of his queen who showed such loving concern for that poor man? "If you wish to present something to God, no matter how small it may be," says St Bernard, "place it in the hands of Mary to ensure its certain acceptance."

38. Dear God, how everything we do comes to so very little! But let us adopt this devotion and place everything in Mary's hands. When we have given her all we possibly can, emptying ourselves completely to do her honour, she far surpasses our

generosity and gives us very much for very little. She enriches us with her own merits and virtues. She places our gift on the golden dish of her charity and clothes us, as Rebecca clothed Jacob, in the beautiful garments of her first-born and only Son, Jesus Christ, which are his merits, and which are at her disposal. Thus, as her servants and slaves, stripping ourselves of everything to do her honour, we are clad by her in double garments - namely, the garments, adornments, perfumes, merits and virtues of Jesus and Mary. These are imparted to the soul of the slave who has emptied himself and is resolved to remain in that state.

39. 4. Giving ourselves in this way to our Lady is a practice of charity towards our neighbour of the highest possible degree, because in making ourselves over to Mary, we give her all that we hold most dear and we let her dispose of it as she wishes in favour of the living and the dead.

40. 5. In adopting this devotion, we put our graces, merits and virtues into safe keeping by making Mary the depositary of them. It is as if we said to her, "See, my dear Mother, here is the good that I have done through the grace of your dear Son. I am not capable of keeping it, because of my weakness and inconstancy, and also because so many wicked enemies are assailing me day and night. Alas, every day we see cedars of Lebanon fall into the mire, and eagles which had soared towards the sun become birds of darkness, a thousand of the just falling to the left and ten thousand to the right. But, most powerful Queen, hold me fast lest I fall. Keep a guard on all my possessions lest I be robbed of them. I entrust all I have to you, for I know well who you are, and that is why I confide myself entirely to you. You are faithful to God and man, and you will not suffer anything I entrust to you to perish. You are powerful, and nothing can harm you or rob you of anything you hold."

"When you follow Mary you will not go astray; when you pray to her, you will not despair; when your mind is on her, you will not wander; when she holds you up, you will not fall; when she protects you, you will have no fear; when she guides you, you will feel no fatigue; when she is on your side, you will arrive safely home" (Saint Bernard). And again, "She keeps her Son from striking us; she prevents the devil from harming us; she preserves virtue in us; she prevents our merits from being lost and our graces from receding." These words of St Bernard explain in substance all that I have said. Had I but this one motive to impel me to choose this devotion, namely, that of keeping me in the grace of God and increasing that grace in me, my heart would burn with longing for it.

41. This devotion makes the soul truly free by imbuing it with the liberty of the children of God. Since we lower ourselves willingly to a state of slavery out of love for Mary, our dear Mother, she out of gratitude opens wide our hearts enabling us to walk with giant strides in the way of God's commandments. She delivers our souls from weariness, sadness and scruples. It was this devotion that our Lord taught to Mother Agnes de Langeac, a religious who died in the odour of sanctity, as a sure way of being freed from the severe suffering and confusion of mind which afflicted her. "Make yourself," she said, "my Mother's slave and wear her little chain." Shedid so, and from that time onwards her troubles ceased.

42. To prove that this devotion is authoritatively sanctioned, we need only recall the bulls of the popes and the pastoral letters of bishops recommending it, as well as the indulgences accorded to it, the confraternities founded to promote it, and the examples of many saints and illustrious people who have practised it. But I do not see any necessity to record them here.

+ + INTEGRATION (no 35-42) + +

*** Listening to the Gospel**

Jesus went down with them then and came to Nazareth and lived under their authority. (Luke 2:51)

*** Listening to my life**

How can my profound desires to live be fulfilled by dependence on Jesus through Mary?

*** Prayer**

We fly to thy patronage,
O holy Mother of God.

Despise not our prayers in our necessities,
but from all dangers deliver us always,
O glorious and blessed Virgin. Amen.

(This is the oldest known prayer to Mary, (circa 250. The title 'Mother of God' – Theotokos – is often used by Montfort)

**★6: THE HEART OF THIS SPIRITUAL JOURNEY:
ENTERING INTO THE SPIRIT OF DEPENDENCE**

No. 43-44

43. I have already said that this devotion consists in performing all our actions with Mary, in Mary, through Mary, and for Mary.

44. It is not enough to give ourselves just once as a slave to Jesus through Mary; nor is it enough to renew that consecration once a month or once a week. That alone would make it just a passing devotion and would not raise the soul to the level of holiness which it is capable of reaching. It is easy to enrol

in a confraternity; easy to undertake this devotion, and say every day the few vocal prayers prescribed. The chief difficulty is to enter into its spirit, which requires an interior dependence on Mary, and effectively becoming her slave and the slave of Jesus through her. I have met many people who with admirable zeal have set about practising exteriorly this holy slavery of Jesus and Mary, but I have met only a few who have caught its interior spirit, and fewer still who have persevered in it.

+ + INTEGRATION (no 43-44) + +

*** Listening to the Gospel**

“Unless you change and become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of Heaven.” (Matthew 18:1)

*** Listening to my life**

Dependence and maturity: how can I reconcile in myself these two realities?

*** Prayer**

O Mary, whose heart was filled with God,
I entrust to you my heart,
With all the joys and sorrows it contains.
Teach my heart a faith that dares,
A hope that never fails,
A love that does not count the cost.
O Mary, Queen of all hearts,
Be today the Queen of my heart.

★7: HOW TO LIVE THIS SPIRITUAL PATH?

No. 45-52

Act with Mary

45. 1. The essential practice of this devotion is to perform all our actions with Mary. This means that we must take her as the accomplished model for all we have to do.

46. Before undertaking anything, we must forget self and abandon our own views. We must consider ourselves as a mere nothing before God, as being personally incapable of doing anything supernaturally worthwhile or anything conducive to our salvation. We must have habitual recourse to our Lady, becoming one with her and adopting her intentions, even though they are unknown to us. Through Mary we must adopt the intentions of Jesus. In other words, we must become an instrument in Mary's hands for her to act in us and do with us what she pleases, for the greater glory of her Son; and through Jesus for the greater glory of the Father. In this way, we pursue our interior life and make spiritual progress only independence on Mary.

Act in Mary

47. 2. We must always act in Mary, that is to say, we must gradually acquire the habit of recollecting ourselves interiorly and so form within us an idea or a spiritual image of Mary. She must

become, as it were, an Oratory for the soul where we offer up our prayers to God without fear of being ignored. She will be as a Tower of David for us where we can seek safety from all our enemies. She will be a burning lamp lighting up our inmost soul and inflaming us with love for God. She will be a sacred place of repose where we can contemplate God in her company. Finally Mary will be the only means we will use in going to God, and she will become our intercessor for everything we need. When we pray we will pray in Mary. When we receive Jesus in Holy Communion we will place him in Mary for him to take his delight in her. If we do anything at all, it will be in Mary, and in this way Mary will help us to forget self everywhere and in all things.

Act through Mary

48. 3. We must never go to our Lord except through Mary, using her intercession and good standing with him. We must never be without her when praying to Jesus.

Act for Mary

49. 4. We must perform all our actions for Mary, which means that as slaves of this noble Queen we will work only for her, promoting her interests and her high renown, and making this the first aim in

all our acts, while the glory of God will always be our final end. In everything we must renounce self-love because more often than not, without our being aware of it, selfishness sets itself up as the end of all we work for. We should often repeat from the depths of our heart: "Dear Mother, it is to please you that I go here or there, that I do this or that, that I suffer this pain or this injury."

Warning

50. Beware, chosen soul, of thinking that it is more perfect to direct your work and intention straight to Jesus or straight to God. Without Mary, your work and your intention will be of little value. But if you go to God through Mary, your work will become Mary's work, and consequently will be most noble and most worthy of God.

51. Again, beware of doing violence to yourself, endeavouring to experience pleasure in your prayers and good deeds. Pray and act always with something of that pure faith which Mary

showed when on earth, and which she will share with you as time goes on. Poor little slave, let your sovereign Queen enjoy the clear sight of God, the raptures, delights, satisfactions and riches of heaven. Content yourself with a pure faith, which is accompanied by repugnance, distractions, weariness and dryness. Let your prayer be: "To whatever Mary my Queen does in heaven, I say Amen, so be it." We cannot do better than this for the time being.

52. Should you not savour immediately the sweet presence of the Blessed Virgin within you, take great care not to torment yourself. For this is a grace not given to everyone, and even when God in his great mercy favours a soul with this grace, it remains none the less very easy to lose it, except when the soul has become permanently aware of it through the habit of recollection. But should this misfortune happen to you, go back calmly to your sovereign Queen and make amends to her.

+ + INTEGRATION (no 45-52) + +

*** Listening to the Gospel**

"My food is to do the will of the one who sent me, and to complete his work." (John 4:34)

*** Listening to my life**

- What are my ordinary intentions?
- How do they need to be purified?

*** Prayer:** *Montfort, Hymn No 90, vv 34-35. 43. 51. 60* Hail Mary,
Admirable Mother of the Saviour,
May everything sing and proclaim
Your splendour!
You gave being
To your Master,
You form your Creator.

Hail Mary,
Full of grace and beauty,

Virgin brimming
With holiness.
Faithful Virgin,
Your patronage
Grants a sinner safety.

Hail Mary,
Our refuge and firm support
During our entire life,
Right up to death.
Dear Mistress,
Great Princess,
Bring us safely to shore.

Hail Mary,

Filled with the gifts of the Holy Spirit,
Share them with me, I beg you,
Without exception.
Dear Mistress,
Great Princess,
For the glory of Jesus Christ.

Hail Mary,
I offer you my poor heart,
I offer you my life
And my honour.
Allow, please,
That all good things pass
Through you to God, my Creator.

★8: THE ACTION OF MARY IN US

No. 53-59

53. Experience will teach you much more about this devotion than I can tell you, but, if you remain faithful to the little I have taught you, you will acquire a great richness of grace that will surprise you and fill you with delight.

54. Let us set to work, then, dear soul, through perseverance in the living of this devotion, in order that Mary's soul may glorify the Lord in us and her spirit be within us to rejoice in God her Saviour. Let us not think that there was more glory and happiness in dwelling in Abraham's bosom - which is another name for Paradise - than in dwelling in the bosom of Mary where God has set up his throne. (Abbot Gueric)

55. This devotion faithfully practised produces countless happy effects in the soul. The most important of them is that it establishes, even here on earth, Mary's life in the soul, so that it is no longer the soul that lives, but Mary who lives in it. In a manner of speaking, Mary's soul becomes identified with the

soul of her servant. Indeed when by an unspeakable but real grace Mary most holy becomes Queen of a soul, she works untold wonders in it. She is a great wonder-worker especially in the interior of souls. She works there in secret, unsuspected by the soul, as knowledge of it might destroy the beauty of her work.

56. As Mary is everywhere the fruitful Virgin, she produces in the depths of the soul where she dwells a purity of heart and body, a singleness of intention and purpose, and a fruitfulness in good works. Do not think, dear soul, that Mary, the most faithful of all God's creatures, who went as far as to give birth to a God-man, remains idle in a docile soul. She causes Jesus to live continuously in that soul and that soul to live in continuous union with Jesus. If Jesus is equally the fruit of Mary for each individual soul as for all souls in general, he is even more especially her fruit and her masterpiece in the soul where she is present.

57. To sum up, Mary becomes all things for the soul that wishes to serve Jesus Christ. She enlightens his mind with her pure faith. She deepens his heart with her humility. She enlarges and inflames his heart with her charity, makes it pure with her purity, makes it noble and great through her motherly care. But why dwell any longer on this? Experience alone will teach us the wonders wrought by Mary in the soul, wonders so great that the wise and the proud, and even a great number of devout people find it hard to credit them.

58. As it was through Mary that God came into the world the first time in a state of self-abasement and privation, may we not say that it will be again through Mary that he will come the second time? For does not the whole Church expect him to come and reign over all the earth and to judge the living

and the dead? No one knows how and when this will come to pass, but we do know that God, whose thoughts are further from ours than heaven is from earth, will come at a time and in a manner least expected, even by the most scholarly of men and those most versed in Holy Scripture, which gives no clear guidance on this subject.

59. We are given reason to believe that, towards the end of time and perhaps sooner than we expect, God will raise up great men filled with the Holy Spirit and imbued with the spirit of Mary. Through them Mary, Queen most powerful, will work great wonders in the world, destroying sin and setting up the kingdom of Jesus her Son upon the ruins of the corrupt kingdom of the world. These holy men will accomplish this by means of the devotion of which I only trace the main outlines and which suffers from my incompetence.

+ + INTEGRATION (no 53-59) + +

*** Listening to the Gospel**

Mary said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." (John 2:5)

*** Listening to my life**

What does it mean: to let Mary act in me?

***Prayer**

Prayer to Mary (S.M. Nos 68-69)

68. Hail, Mary, most beloved daughter of the eternal Father; hail, Mary, most admirable mother of the Son; hail, Mary, most faithful spouse of the Holy Spirit; hail, Mary, Mother most dear, Lady most lovable, Queen most powerful! Hail, Mary, my joy, my glory, my heart and soul. You are all mine through God's mercy, but I am all yours in justice. Yet I do not belong sufficiently to you, and so once again, as a slave who always belongs to his master, I give myself wholly to you, reserving nothing for myself or for others.

If you still see anything in me which is not given to you, please take it now. Make yourself completely owner of all my capabilities. Destroy in me everything that is displeasing to God. Uproot it and bring it to nothing. Implant in me all that you deem to be good; improve it and make it increase in me.

May the light of your faith dispel the darkness of my mind. May your deep humility take the place of my pride. May your heavenly contemplation put an end to the

distractions of my wandering imagination. May your continuous vision of God fill my memory with his presence. May the burning love of your heart inflame the coldness of mine. May your virtues take the place of my sins. May your merits be my adornment and make up for my unworthiness before God. Finally, most dearly beloved Mother, grant, if it be possible, that I may have no other spirit but yours to know Jesus and his divine will. May I have no soul but yours to praise and glorify the Lord. May I have no heart but yours to love God purely and ardently as you love him. 69. I do not ask for visions or revelations, for sensible devotion or even spiritual pleasures. It is your privilege to see God clearly in perpetual light. It is your privilege to savour the delights of heaven where nothing is without sweetness. It is your privilege to triumph gloriously in heaven at the right hand of your Son without further humiliation, and to command angels, men, and demons, without resistance on their part. It is your privilege to dispose at your own choice of all the good gifts of God without any exception.

Such, most holy Mary, is the excellent portion which the Lord has given you, and which will never be taken from you, and which gives me great joy. As for my portion here on earth, I wish only to have a share in yours, that is, to have simple faith without seeing or tasting, to suffer joyfully without the consolation of men, to die daily to myself without flinching, to work gallantly for you even until death without any self-interest, as the most worthless of your slaves. The only grace I beg you in your kindness to obtain for me is that every day and moment of my life I may say this threefold Amen: Amen, so be it, to all you did upon earth; Amen, so be it, to all you are doing now in heaven; Amen, so be it, to all you are doing in my soul. In that way, you and you alone will fully glorify Jesus in me during all my life and throughout eternity. Amen.

★9: EXTERIOR PRACTICES

No. 60-65

60. Besides interior practices, which we have just mentioned, this devotion has certain exterior practices which must not be omitted or neglected.

61. The **first** is to choose a special feast-day to consecrate ourselves through Mary to Jesus, whose slaves we are making ourselves. This is an occasion for receiving Holy Communion and spending the day in prayer. At least once a year on the same day, we should renew the act of consecration.

62. The **second** is to give our Lady every year on that same day some little tribute as a token of our servitude and dependence. This has always been the

customary homage paid by slaves to their master. This tribute could consist of an act of self-denial or an alms, or a pilgrimage, or a few prayers. St Peter Damian tells us that his brother, Blessed Marino, used to give himself the discipline in public on the same day every year before the altar of our Lady. This kind of zeal is not required, nor would we counsel it. But what little we give to our Lady we should at least offer with a heart that is humble and grateful.

63. The **third** practice is to celebrate every year with special fervour the feast of the Annunciation of our Lord. This is the distinctive feast of this devotion and

was chosen so that we might honour and imitate that dependence which the eternal Word accepted on this day out of love for us.

64. The **fourth** practice is to say every day, without the obligation of sin, the prayer entitled "The Little Crown of the Blessed Virgin", which comprises three Our Fathers and twelve Hail Marys, and to say frequently the Magnificat, which is the only hymn composed by our Lady. In the Magnificat we thank God for favouring us in the past, and we beg further blessings from him in the future. One special time when we should not fail to say it is during thanksgiving after Holy Communion. A person so scholarly as Gerson informs us that our Lady herself used to recite it in thanksgiving after Holy Communion.

65. The **fifth** is the wearing of a small blessed chain either around the neck, on the arm, on the foot, or about the body. Strictly speaking, this practice can be omitted without affecting the essential nature of the devotion, but just the same it would be wrong to despise or condemn it, and foolhardy to neglect it. Here are the reasons for wearing this external sign:

(1) It signifies that we are free from the baneful chains of original and actual sin which held us in bondage.

(2) By it we show our esteem for the cords and bonds of love with which our

Lord let himself be bound that we might be truly free.

(3) As these bonds are bonds of love, they remind us that we should do nothing except under the influence of love.

(4) Finally, wearing this chain recalls to us once more that we are dependent on Jesus and Mary as their slaves. Eminent people who had become slaves of Jesus and Mary valued these little chains so much that they were unhappy at not being allowed to trail them publicly like the slaves of the Muslims.

These chains of love are more valuable and more glorious than the necklaces of gold and precious stones worn by emperors, because they are the illustrious insignia of Jesus and Mary, and signify the bonds uniting us to them. It should be noted that if the chains are not of silver, they should for convenience' sake at least be made of iron.

They should never be laid aside at any time, so that they may be with us even to the day of judgement. Great will be the joy, glory and triumph of the faithful slave on that day when, at the sound of the trumpet, his bones rise from the earth still bound by the chain of holy bondage, which to all appearance has not decayed. This thought alone should convince a devout slave never to take off his chain, however inconvenient it may be.

+ + INTEGRATION (no 60-65) + +

*** Listening to the Gospel**

"Every year his parents used to go to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover." (Luke 2:41)

*** Listening to my life**

- What daily actions do I need in my life, in order to live as a consecrated person?
- What daily program of prayer can I realistically hold to?

* Prayer

Prayer to Jesus (SM No 66)

– Most loving Jesus, permit me to express my heartfelt gratitude to you for your kindness in giving me to your holy Mother through the devotion of holy bondage, and so making her my advocate to implore your Majesty on my behalf, and make up for all that I lack through my inadequacy.

Alas, O Lord, I am so wretched that without my dear Mother I would certainly be lost. Yes, I always need Mary when I am approaching you. I need her to calm your indignation at the many offences I have committed every day. I need her to save me from the just sentence of eternal punishment I have deservedly incurred. I need her to turn to you, speak to you, pray to you, approach you and please you. I need her to help me save my soul and the souls of others. In a word, I need her so that I may always do your holy will and seek your greater glory in everything I do.

Would that I could publish throughout the whole world the mercy which you have shown to me! Would that the whole world could know that without Mary I would now be doomed! If only I could offer adequate thanks for such a great benefit as Mary! She is within me. What a precious possession and what a consolation for me! Should I not in return be all hers? If I were not, how ungrateful would I be! My dear Saviour, send me death rather than I should be guilty of such a lapse, for I would rather die than not belong to Mary.

Like St. John the Evangelist at the foot of the Cross, I have taken her times without number as my total good and as often have I given myself to her. But if I have not done so as perfectly as you, dear Jesus, would wish, I now do so according to your desire. If you still see in my soul or body anything that does not belong to this noble Queen, please pluck it out and cast it far from me, because anything of mine which does not belong to Mary is unworthy of you.

★10: THE TREE OF LIFE

No. 70-78 This devotion is the Tree of Life

70. Have you understood with the help of the Holy Spirit what I have tried to explain in the preceding pages? If so, be thankful to God. It is a secret of which very few people are aware. If you have discovered this treasure in the field of Mary, this pearl of great price, you should sell all you have to purchase it. You must offer yourself to Mary, happily lose yourself in her, only to find God in her.

If the Holy Spirit has planted in your soul the true Tree of Life, which is the devotion that I have just explained, you should see carefully to its cultivation, so that it will yield its fruit in due season. This devotion is like the mustard seed of the Gospel, which is indeed the smallest of all seeds, but nevertheless it grows into a big plant, shooting up so high that the birds of the air, that is, the elect, come and make their nest in its branches. They repose there, shaded from the heat of the sun, and safely hidden from beasts of prey.

How to cultivate it

Here is the best way, chosen soul, to cultivate it:

71. This tree, once planted in a docile heart, requires fresh air and no human support. Being of heavenly origin, it must be uninfluenced by any creature, since a

creature might hinder it from rising up towards God who created it. Hence you must not rely on your own endeavours or your natural talents or your personal standing or the guidance of men. You must resort to Mary, relying solely on her help.

72. The person in whose soul this tree has taken root must, like a good gardener, watch over it and protect it. For this tree, having life and capable of producing the fruit of life, should be raised and tended with enduring care and attention of soul. A soul that desires to be holy will make this its chief aim and occupation.

73. Whatever is likely to choke the tree or in the course of time prevent its yielding fruit, such as thorns and thistles, must be cut away and rooted out. This means that by self-denial and self-discipline you must sedulously cut short and even give up all empty pleasures and useless dealings with other creatures. In other words, you must crucify the flesh, keep a guard over the tongue, and mortify the bodily senses.

74. You must guard against grubs doing harm to the tree. These parasites are love of self and love of comfort, and they eat away the green foliage of the Tree and frustrate the fair hope it offered of yielding good fruit; for love of self is incompatible with love of Mary.

75. You must not allow this tree to be damaged by destructive animals, that is, by sins, for they may cause its death simply by their contact. They must not be allowed even to breathe upon the Tree, because their mere breath, that is, venial

sins, which are most dangerous when we do not trouble ourselves about them.

76. It is also necessary to water this Tree regularly with your Communions, Masses and other public and private prayers. Otherwise it will not continue bearing fruit.

77. Yet you need not be alarmed when the winds blow and shake this tree, for it must happen that the storm-winds of temptation will threaten to bring it down, and snow and frost tend to smother it. By this we mean that this devotion to our Blessed Lady will surely be called into question and attacked. But as long as we continue steadfastly in tending it, we have nothing to fear.

Its lasting fruit: Jesus Christ
(Conclusion)

78. Chosen soul, provided you thus carefully cultivate the Tree of Life, which has been freshly planted in your soul by the Holy Spirit, I can assure you that in a short time it will grow so tall that the birds of the air will make their home in it. It will become such a good tree that it will yield in due season the sweet and adorable Fruit of honour and grace, which is Jesus, who has always been and will always be the only fruit of Mary.

Happy is that soul in which Mary, the Tree of Life, is planted. Happier still is the soul in which she has been able to grow and blossom. Happier again is the soul in which she brings forth her fruit. But happiest of all is the soul which savours the sweetness of Mary's fruit and preserves it up till death and then beyond to all eternity. Amen.

Qui tenet, teneat!
(Let him who possesses it, hold fast to it.)

+ + INTEGRATION (no 70-78) + +

*** Listening to the Gospel**

“What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it with? It is like a mustard seed which a man took and threw into his garden: it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air sheltered in its branches.” (Luke 13:18-19)

“A sower went out to sow his seed. Now as he sowed, some fell on the edge of the path and was trampled on; and the birds of the air ate it up. Some seed fell on rock, and when it came up it withered away, having no moisture. Some seed fell in the middle of thorns and the thorns grew with it and choked it. And some seed fell into good soil and grew and produced its crop a hundredfold.’ Saying this he cried, ‘Anyone who has ears for listening should listen!’”(Luke 8:5-8)

*** Listening to my life**

- Is there a time in my life when I felt more clearly that Jesus was sowing something in me, something called to grow?
- In today’s world, what prevents us the most from bearing fruit?
- What are the “fruits” most needed today in the world surrounding me ?

*** Prayer**

Prayer to the Holy Spirit (SM No 67)

– Holy Spirit, grant me all these graces. Implant in my soul the tree of true life, which is Mary. Foster it and cultivate it so that it grows and blossoms and brings forth the fruit of life in abundance. Holy Spirit, give me a great love and longing for Mary, your exalted spouse. Give me a great trust in her maternal heart and a continuous access to her compassion, so that with her you may truly form Jesus, great and powerful, in me until I attain the fullness of his perfect age. Amen.

★The 5 Movements of The Act of Consecration

Far from being a form of purely intellectual process, the Consecration proposed by Montfort is an invitation to enter into a story, the story that has been going on between God and Mary.

- 1. First, I become aware of the great love of God that brings him to give Himself to me.*
- 2. I realize that I have responded but little to this love: my baptism remains like a dead letter.*
- 3. But I can turn to Mary: a creature like myself, but a creature that has always been faithful.*
- 4. Through Her and with Her, I renew by baptismal commitment by giving myself entirely to Christ, as He gave Himself entirely to me.*
- 5. Aware of my fragility, I ask Mary to accompany me on my journey of faith.*

This story, which I desire to enter into, can be graphically shown in the following manner:

THE CONSECRATION TO JESUS THROUGH MARY,
ACCORDING TO MONTFORT: THE FIVE MOVEMENTS



1 I give thanks to Christ who gives himself to me totally through his incarnation.

2

I acknowledge my state as sinner, my unfaithfulness to my baptism.



3

I look to Mary, the Virgin faithful to the love of God, a creature in whom God emptied himself to come to us.



4

I renew my baptismal commitment and give myself totally to Christ through Mary,

5

I call upon Mary to be present to me along this transfiguration of my self into Christ.



★11: First Movement: Giving thanks to Christ

Montfort's text: (*LEW Nos 223*) Eternal and incarnate Wisdom, most lovable and adorable Jesus, true God and true man, only Son of the eternal Father and of Mary always Virgin, I adore you profoundly, dwelling in the splendour of your Father from all eternity and in the virginal womb of Mary, your most worthy Mother, at the time of your incarnation.

I thank you for having emptied yourself in assuming the condition of a slave to set me free from the cruel slavery of the evil one.

I praise and glorify you for having willingly chosen to obey Mary, your holy Mother, in all things, so that through her I may be a faithful slave of love.

+ + INTEGRATION (no 70-78) + +

*** Listening to the Gospel**

I slowly read Montfort's text two or three times. I underline the words that strike me. Then, I read the following text (Philippians 2: 5-11).

Make your own the mind of Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped. But he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming as human beings are; and being in every way like a human being, he was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross. And for this God raised him high, and gave him the name which is above all other names; so that all beings in the heavens, on earth and in the underworld, should bend the knee at the name of Jesus and that every tongue should acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

*** Listening to my life**

In what way does Montfort's text agree with that of Paul? What new element does Montfort bring?

*** Prayer**

I conclude with this prayer demanding Wisdom:

'God of our ancestors, Lord of mercy, who by your word have made the universe, and in your wisdom have fitted human beings to rule the creatures that you have made, to govern the world in holiness and saving justice and in honesty of soul to dispense fair judgement, grant me Wisdom, consort of your throne, and do not reject me from the number of your children. For I am your servant, son of your serving maid, a feeble man, with little time to live, with small understanding of justice and the laws. Indeed, were anyone perfect among the sons of men, if he lacked the Wisdom that comes from you, he would still count for nothing. 'You have chosen me to be king over your people, to be judge of your sons and daughters. You have bidden me build a temple on your holy mountain, and an altar in the city where you have pitched your tent, a copy of the holy Tent which you prepared at the beginning. With you is Wisdom, she who knows your works, she who was present when you made the world; she understands what is pleasing in your eyes and what agrees with your commandments. Dispatch her from the holy heavens, send her forth from your throne of glory to help me and to toil with me and teach me what is pleasing to you;

since she knows and understands everything she will guide me prudently in my actions and will protect me with her glory. Then all I do will be acceptable, I shall govern your people justly and be worthy of my father's throne. (*Wisdom 9:1-12*)

★12: Second Movement: Acknowledging my Infidelity

Montfort's text: (*LEW Nos 223*) But I must confess that I have not kept the vows and promises which I made to you so solemnly at my baptism. I have not fulfilled my obligations, and I do not deserve to be called your child or even your loving slave. Since I cannot lay claim to anything except what merits your rejection and displeasure, I dare no longer approach the holiness of your majesty on my own. That is why I turn to the intercession and the mercy of your holy Mother, whom you yourself have given me to mediate with you. Through her I hope to obtain from you contrition and pardon for my sins, and that Wisdom whom I desire to dwell in me always.

+ + INTEGRATION (no 70-78) + +

*** Listening to the Gospel**

I slowly read Montfort's text two or three times. I underline the words that strike me. Then, I read the following text (Romans 6:3-14).

You cannot have forgotten that all of us, when we were baptized into Christ Jesus, were baptized into his death. So by our baptism into his death we were buried with him, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glorious power, we too should begin living a new life. If we have been joined to him by dying a death like his, so we shall be by a resurrection like his; realizing that our former self was crucified with him, so that the self which belonged to sin should be destroyed and we should be freed from the slavery of sin. Someone who has died, of course, no longer has to answer for sin. But we believe that, if we died with Christ, then we shall live with him too. We know that Christ has been raised from the dead and will never die again. Death has no power over him any more. For by dying, he is dead to sin once and for all, and now the life that he lives is life with God. In the same way, you must see yourselves as being dead to sin but alive for God in Christ Jesus. That is why you must not allow sin to reign over your mortal bodies and make you obey their desires; or give any parts of your bodies over to sin to be used as instruments of evil. Instead, give yourselves to God, as people brought to life from the dead, and give every part of your bodies to God to be instruments of uprightness; and then sin will no longer have any power over you -- you are living not under law, but under grace.

*** Listening to my life**

According to Paul, by baptism we are like "living beings coming back from the dead". What aspects of my personality are instruments of death rather than life: certain attitudes I maintain, behaviours I have, thoughts I carry, that bring forth death rather than life?

*** Prayer**

– *I conclude by reciting Psalm 50 (paraphrase)*

Have mercy on me, O Lord,
for you are great hearted.
See my weakness, forgive my sins.
I acknowledge the evil I have done.
I have sinned against my brothers and sisters,
I refused to love them.
And I forgot about you, my Father, source of my life.
You see well, indeed, O Lord:
Evil is widespread in our world.
I was born and grew up
in a world contaminated by sin.
Here is my sacrifice: a heart broken with regret.
Here is my prayer: my hope and my love.
Here is my future: your tenderness and your forgiveness.
Create my heart anew, so it can love,
Create my joy anew, that it may glow,
Create my peace anew, come and save me.
Have mercy on me, O Lord,
for you are good hearted.
See my weakness, forgive my sins.

★13: Third Movement: Turning towards Mary, the Faithful Virgin

Montfort's text: (*LEW Nos 224*) I turn to you, then, Mary immaculate, living tabernacle of God, in whom eternal Wisdom willed to receive the adoration of both men and angels.

I greet you as Queen of heaven and earth, for all that is under God has been made subject to your sovereignty.

I call upon you, the unfailing refuge of sinners, confident in your mercy that has never forsaken anyone.

Grant my desire for divine Wisdom and, in support of my petition, accept the promises and the offering of myself which I now make, conscious of my unworthiness.

+ + INTEGRATION (no 70-78) + +

*** Listening to the Gospel**

I slowly read Montfort's text two or three times. I underline the words that strike me. Then, I read the following text (Luke 1:28.30.42-45).

The angel Gabriel said to Mary: "Rejoice, you who enjoy God's favour! The Lord is with you... You have won God's favour." Filled by the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth said: "Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord? ... Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled."

*** Listening to my life**

What does Montfort 'greet' in Mary? How is that similar to the way the angel Gabriel

and Elizabeth greet Mary?

*** Prayer**

Rejoice O Mary,
woman of our race,
through whom God gives himself to us.
Mary, Mother of the Light,
open our hearts to the light of Christ..

Mary,
Mother in the night,
Mother of a faith that searches,
from the beginning of the new creation,
you are the Mother of our faith.
Take us by the hand, take us by the heart
when doubt and distress fall upon us.

Be our daily joy.
Be our strength in faith
when we are suffering.
Be our peaceful hope
at the hour of our death
and guide us always
to our God and our Father. Amen

**★14: Fourth Movement
Renewal of my Baptismal Commitment**

Montfort's text: (*LEW Nos 225-226*)I, N...,

an unfaithful sinner, renew and ratify today through you my baptismal promises. I renounce for ever Satan, his empty promises, and his evil designs, and I give myself completely to Jesus Christ, the incarnate Wisdom, to carry my cross after him for the rest of my life, and to be more faithful to him than I have been till now.

This day, with the whole court of heaven as witness, I choose you, Mary, as my Mother and Queen. I surrender and consecrate myself to you, body and soul, with all that I possess, both spiritual and material, even including the spiritual value of all my actions, past, present, and to come. I give you the fullright to dispose of me and all that belongs to me, without any reservations, in whatever way you please, for the greater glory of God in time and throughout eternity.

Accept, gracious Virgin, this little offering of my slavery to honour and imitate the obedience which eternal Wisdom willingly chose to have towards you, his Mother. I wish to acknowledge the authority which both of you have over this little worm and pitiful sinner. By it I wish also to thank God for the privileges bestowed on you by the Blessed Trinity. I solemnly declare that for the future I will try to honour and obey you in all things as your true slave of love.

++ INTEGRATION (no 70-78) ++

*** Listening to the Gospel**

I slowly read Montfort's text two or three times. I underline the words that strike me.

Then, I read the following text (1Co 3:21-4:2)

So there is to be no boasting about human beings: everything belongs to you, whether it is Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, the world, life or death, the present or the future -- all belong to you; but you belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God. People should think of us as Christ's servants, stewards entrusted with the mysteries of God. In such a matter, what is expected of stewards is that each one should be found trustworthy.

*** Listening to my life**

– To express his relation to Christ and Mary, Montfort uses the image of 'slave' because, for him this is the symbol of most completely belonging to another person. What can I do now so that all that I am or that I do belongs more totally to God? – What Gospel passage reveals to me that Mary belongs totally to God? How can I live that?

*** Prayer**

I conclude with this prayer of Blessed Charles de Foucauld

My Father, I abandon myself into your hands; do with me what you will.

Whatever you may do, I thank you: I am ready for all, I accept all.

My Father, I abandon myself into your hands; do with me what you will.

Let only your will be done in me, and in all your creatures:

I wish no more than this, O Lord.

My Father, I abandon myself into your hands; do with me as you will.

Into your hands I commend my soul:

I offer it to you with all the love in my heart,

for I love you, Lord, and so need to give myself,

to surrender myself into your hands without reserve,

and with boundless confidence,

for you are my Father.

**★15: Fifth Movement:
Choosing Mary as my companion and guide
on my journey**

Montfort's text: (LEW Nos 226-227) O admirable Mother, present me to your dear Son as his slave now and for always, so that he who redeemed me through you, will now receive me through you.

227. Mother of mercy, grant me the favour of obtaining the true Wisdom of God, and so make me one of those whom you love, teach and guide, whom you nourish and protect as your children and slaves.

Virgin most faithful, make me in everything so committed a disciple, imitator, and slave of Jesus, your Son, incarnate Wisdom, that I may become, through your intercession and example, fully mature with the fullness which Jesus possessed on earth, and with the fullness of his glory in heaven. Amen.

++ INTEGRATION (no 70-78) ++

*** Listening to the Gospel**

I slowly reads Montfort's text two or three times. I underline the words that strike me. Then, I read the following text (Eph 1:9-20).

God has let us know the mystery of his purpose, according to his good pleasure which he determined beforehand in Christ, to bring about the fullness of the times: that he would bring everything together under Christ, as head, everything in the heavens and everything on earth. (...)

Now you too, in him, have heard the message of the truth and the gospel of your salvation, and having put your trust in it you have been stamped with the seal of the Holy Spirit of the Promise, who is the pledge of our inheritance, for the freedom of the people whom God has taken for his own, for the praise of his glory. (...) May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, give you a spirit of wisdom and perception of what is revealed, to bring you to full knowledge of him. May he enlighten the eyes of your mind so that you can see what hope his call holds for you, how rich is the glory of the heritage he offers among his holy people, and how extraordinarily great is the power that he has exercised for us believers; this accords with the strength of his power at work in Christ, the power which he exercised in raising him from the dead and enthroning him at his right hand, in heaven.

*** Listening to my life**

Montfort speaks of “fullness” and Paul speaks of “fulfilment”. At this moment of my life, what is least “fulfilled” in who I am? What part of me is least “full of Christ”?

*** Prayer**

– *I conclude with this hymn from Montfort (Hymn 87, vv 1, 5, 9-10, 12)*

1. Let us adore Jesus Alive in Mary's womb.

Consider with amazement The Almighty made tiny.

Adore God become infant Giving us life.

5. While totally attached To her undivided heart,
Which the slightest sin Had never sullied,
He painted there with no restraint His own authentic image.

9. They both seem to merge. How beautiful their union!
Mary is totally in Jesus, Her most faithful lover,
Or better, she no longer is, But Jesus alone in her.

10. Between these two hearts We warm our coldness,
Share their ardour, Their virtues, their graces.
Let us go, they love sinners, We shall find a place there.

12. O Jesus, our dear spouse, Our God, our brother,
Come, come, be born in us By your Holy Mother,
So that by you we can Go to your Father.

★Preparation for the Consecration

What Montfort proposes in his Secret, is a genuine spiritual path, or a very special way of living our Christian life and our baptism, in total dependence on Mary and Jesus.

Montfort distinguishes between the act of consecration itself and the lifestyle it engenders.

Before making the act of consecration, Montfort recommends that we prepare ourselves well for this celebration, so that it has a real influence on our Christian life. To that end, he proposes a thirty day preparation, which is not obligatory, but very useful in preparing us for this act and for entering on this spiritual path (cf TD Nos 227-231).

We could summarize this preparation as looking at four aspects of our reality, accompanied by prayer.

- considering the world*
- considering my self*
- considering Mary*
- considering Jesus*

You will find in the following pages suggested readings, reflections and prayers that can help you in living this preparation.

★16: Considering the world

Its values and counter-values in the light of the Gospel

* Considering the world at the light of the Gospel

- The prayer of Jesus (John 17)
- Hatred of the world (John 15: 18-28)
- The beatitudes (Matthew 5: 1-11)
- The new Law (Matthew 5: 12-48; 6:24; 7:13)

* Listening to my life

- When I look at the world, its values and counter-values, and I read the Gospel of Jesus, where do I stand?
What is my deep, radical choice: Jesus and his “wisdom”, or the “wisdom of the world»?

*Prayer

Prayer to the Holy Spirit
Holy Spirit,
Secret of God,
Creative breath,

Murmur of silence,
Renew the face of the world.
Renew the face of the world.
We have lost our way,
We have locked our frontiers
and closed our hearts
Renew the face of the world.
Renew the face of the world.

To our soul, give back joy,
to our steps, firmness,
to our eyes, clearness.
Renew the face of the world.
Renew the face of the world.

Soul of the world,
Eternal Love,
Cradle of peace,
Renew the face of the world.
Renew the face of the world.

Create in us Truth,
Maintain our pace,
Be our Wisdom.
Renew the face of the world.
Renew the face of the world.

*One can also say the Veni Creator, page
6*

★17: Considering my self

My resources and limitations, my spiritual journey, my desires

* Listening to the Gospel

- My riches, my limitations, my desires
- The call to follow Jesus (Matthew 9:12-22; 10:37-39)
- Jesus came for sinners (Matthew 9: 9-13; 11, 28-30)
- Jesus looking at me: «Peter, do you love me?» (John 21:15-19)
- the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32)

* Listening to my life

- How does God see my life?
- How do I see myself in the sight of God?
- Is my attitude towards God that of a child towards his or her father?

* Prayer

Prayer to Mary missionary

Virgin Mary,

here are my days:

fill them with your faith.

Here are my nights:

fill them with your peace.

Here is my heart:

fill it with the presence of your Son.

Here are my sorrows:

fill them with your strength.

Here are my joys:

fill them with your thanksgiving.

Here is my life and my death:

fill them with your love,

so that with you and like you,

in my most ordinary days

and my daily deeds,
I may be one with Jesus
and share in His mission.
AMEN

★18: Considering Mary

Both the first to believe and the first to follow Christ, companion of my journey

* Listening to the Gospel

- Mary in the Infancy narratives (Luke 1-2; Matthew 1-2)
- Mary in the Gospel of John (at Cana: John 2:1-12; at the Cross: 19: 23-27)
- Mary and the Church: at Pentecost (Acts 1:12-14; 1: 1-4);
in the fight against evil (Revelation 12)

* Listening to my life

- How do I see Mary?
- What image speaks to me most of Mary?
- What prayer helps me speak to her the most?

* Prayer

To Mary Queen of all Hearts

Hail Mary, heart filled with the presence of God.
Hail Holy Spouse, heart filled with tenderness.
Hail O believer of the Word, heart filled with hope.
Hail holy mother, heart filled with love.
You live now in the heart of God,
and are present to all your children.
Holy Mary, Mother of God,
I entrust my heart to you,
with its joys and its sufferings,
with its dreams and its fears.
Live in my heart
so that it may become more and more like yours:
filled with love despite indifference,
able to forgive despite evil,
lifted by faith despite all trials,
loving God beyond all wealth.
Give birth to Christ in me,
as he was born in you and through you.
And, at the hour of death,
Be present at my side, and guide me in peace
to the house of our Father. Amen

★19: Considering Jesus

Jesus of the Gospel, who is the one present to me and calling me

* Listening to the Gospel

- Peter's profession of faith (Matthew 16, 13-20)
- The decision of faith (John 6: 60-69)

*** Listening to my life**

- Jesus asks me: «For you, who am I?» (Matthew 16:15)
- Jesus asks me: «Do you also want to go away?» (John 6:67)

*** Prayer**

– *Jesus living in Mary (inspired by J.-J. Olier)*

O Jesus living in Mary,
come and live in me:
your strength in my weakness,
your love in my sinfulness,
your Spirit in my heaviness,
your faithfulness in my fickleness,
your truth in my illusions.
Come and grow in me,
as you grew in Mary.
Come in this world through me,
as you came through Mary:
in the power of the Spirit,
for the joy of humanity,
and for the glory of the Father.
Amen

★20: Celebration of the Consecration
(LEW Nos 223-227)

(This celebration will be published on a separate leaflet.)



Jotus tuus

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