



**Week one**

# What is Marian consecration?

**W**hen something or someone is said to be “consecrated,” this means it is set apart by God for his exclusive use; it becomes holy. (The word comes from the Latin *consecrare*: *con*-together + *secrare*-sacred.)

What are some things consecrated to God?

## *Baptism: Our First Consecration*

The church we worship in is consecrated, set apart for the use of God. During the Sacred Liturgy, bread and wine are consecrated by the power of the Holy Spirit through the words of Jesus spoken by an ordained priest. These natural elements then become the Body and Blood of Jesus: “holy things for holy people,” as the Eastern liturgy expresses. All baptized Catholics have been consecrated. At Baptism, we become “new creations” (2 Cor 5:17), incorporated into God’s chosen people. We are changed forever, pledged to the exclusive service *of* God, *by* God.

However, baptismal consecration represents only the germ of consecration. Because God has chosen us, and “his call is irrevocable” (Rom 11:29), we are summoned to a lifetime of Christian holiness. But God does not do anything in us or to us without our cooperation. We must continually give ourselves to God, to ask for, and to seek, holiness on a daily basis, until it becomes a natural habit that lasts a lifetime.

## *Mary, Model of Consecrated Christians*

Our ability to continually respond to God’s call to sanctity can be ensured in no better way than through consecration to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Mary is our perfect model of Christian discipleship. She forever points us to Jesus, saying, “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:5). She is the sinless one, immaculately conceived, who always said “yes” to whatever God requested. Mary, the Mother of God, is also the matchless example of how to carry Christ close to our hearts and give birth to him in our own time.

By consecrating ourselves to Mary, we become “willing instruments” in her hands, as St. Maximilian Kolbe taught, to bring about the Reign of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. But is this just pious sentiment, with no connection to the real world? Not at all. To understand the tremendous power of Marian consecra-

tion, we must first understand the truth about Mary’s nature and the tremendous role God has given her to play in salvation history.

## *Mary, Spouse of the Holy Spirit*

Because of her Immaculate Conception, Mary is entirely fit to be filled with the Holy Spirit like no other creature. Scripture tells us she is “full of grace” (Lk 1:28) whom all generations will call “blessed” (1:48). As the spotless dwelling place of Jesus, the God-man, theologians call her the “Ark of the New Covenant.” Mary is also called “Spouse of the Holy Spirit” because of this intimate relationship with the third person of the Trinity that can never be broken or undermined.

Because of her exulted union with the Holy Spirit, St. Maximilian taught that the Spirit acts *exclusively* through Mary in his role of dispensing graces of Jesus’ redemption. This was an entirely unique way of explaining the Church’s longstanding belief that Mary is the “Mediatrix,” or channel, of all the graces that flow from the Godhead. (See Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 62, and Pope John Paul II, *Mother of the Redeemer*, no. 40).

By linking our lives to Mary’s through consecration, said Maximilian, we too become channels of grace and “spouses” of the Holy Spirit, “overshadowed by the power of the Most High” (Lk 1:35). Like Mary, we become intimately united to the Trinity and powerful “co-redeemers,” or cooperators, with Jesus in bringing about the salvation of the world.

Marian consecration thus becomes the ideal way to fulfill our sacred vows made at Baptism and which we renew at Confirmation. Maximilian summarized our Christian mission in the beautiful expression: “To win the world for the Immaculata, and as soon as possible.”

## *We are All Called to Consecration*

As Vatican II teaches, calling upon Mary’s intercession “does not hinder in any way the immediate union of the faithful with Christ, but on the contrary fosters it” (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 60). Therefore, coming “To Jesus through Mary” through our Marian consecration is not an *extraordinary* way of worshipping God and bringing about our final sanctification. It is the *best* way!

# MARIAN CONSECRATION

PREPARATION FOR INDIVIDUAL AND PARISH MARIAN CONSECRATION IN THE SPIRIT OF ST. MAXIMILIAN KOLBE



**Week two**

# Marian devotion and consecration: Ancient and esteemed expressions of faith

**B**efore discovering how rich devotion to the Blessed Virgin reaches back to the earliest days of the Church, perhaps we should first ask, “Exactly what is ‘devotion to Mary?’”

### *Worthy of the Highest Regard*

First of all, there is an eternity of distinction between devotion and adoration. In classical theology, adoration is known as *latria*, and *latria* is reserved exclusively for God. *Dulia*, on the other hand, is the term used for devotion or honor, for instance the honor we pay to the Church’s canonized saints because of their zeal for holiness and their outstanding natural virtues. Technically, *dulia* is rightfully given to any person who exhibits admirable qualities. Virtuous family members, or even the national heroes such as Washington and Lincoln, are deserving of *dulia*.

*Hyperdulia* is a more exalted level of devotion, reserved for a created person who rises above any other. Only one person has the right to *hyperdulia*—the Blessed Virgin Mary. Mary is the only human born without Original Sin—“our tainted nature’s solitary boast,” wrote the poet Wordsworth. Because of her utter purity, she was worthy of passing on to Jesus his spotless human nature. Mary never wavered from doing the will of God, always teaching us to “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:5).

For these and other reasons, the Blessed Virgin warrants our utmost veneration. But it cannot be stated more firmly: *hyperdulia* is entirely inferior to adoration and must never be confused with it. Adoration, again, is deserved only by God.

### *Mary Prefigured in Scripture*

“From the earliest times the Blessed Virgin is honored under the title Mother of God,” says the Second Vatican Council (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 66). In fact, preparation was being made by the Holy Spirit for the veneration of Mary long before the Church’s conception.

It quickly became clear to the first Christian theologians that the heroines of the Old Testament—Rebecca, Rachel, Judith and others—are all “figures” of Mary. This means their praiseworthy traits foreshadow those of

the Virgin’s, who in her spotless person brings them to fulfillment. The woman of Gen 3:15, who has “enmity” with the serpent, is a figure of Mary. So is the virgin who will conceive and bear a son, from Isaiah 7:14.

If the Holy Spirit, the divine author of Scripture, chose to foreshadow Mary in the Jewish Bible, is it any wonder that he implanted in the heart of the infant Church the impulse to show her the highest honor?

### *Early Church Images of Mary*

History certainly bears this out. Paintings found in the catacombs of Rome show that devotion to Mary existed as early as around 150. One image in the St. Agnes catacomb represents Mary as “Mother of the Church,” as she stands between the apostles Peter and Paul with outstretched arms. St. Justin Martyr in this same century began developing a theology of Mary as the “New Eve”: In giving us Jesus, Mary participates in giving supernatural life to the Church and helps to repair the damage of the first Eve.

The earliest known prayer to Our Lady dates back to possibly the 200s. The *Sub Tuum Praesidium* (*Under Your Protection*) was discovered in 1917 on an ancient Egyptian papyrus. It proves that early Christians believed that Mary was an advocate in heaven for God’s people, able to intercede for her children on earth:

We turn to you for protection,  
Holy Mother of God.  
Listen to our prayers  
and help us in our needs.  
Save us from every danger,  
Glorious and Blessed Virgin.

This prayer also shows that Mary was being addressed as *Theotokos*—Mother of God—long before the Council of Ephesus of 431 approved of the title. Here is a clear example of the *sensus fidelium*—the inherent faith sense of the Christian people—at work, preparing the way for a formal ratification by the Magisterium. Quite possibly the *Sub Tuum Praesidium* reflects a tradition from the first century, and therefore a teaching of the original apostles.

*(continued)*

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### *Marian Consecration “Makes Progress” Within the Church*

The *Sub Tuum* is important for constructing a proper theology of total consecration to Mary. We see third century followers of Jesus showing a childlike inclination to seek refuge “under the mantle of Mary,” Mother of God and the Church. As one Marian theologian writes, “If [the prayer] does not speak of belonging to Mary, it surely is not far removed from this concept.”

After the pronouncement of the Council of Ephesus comes a tremendous outburst of Marian devotion, which includes a deepening understanding of Marian dependence. This progression reveals the Holy Spirit at work through Sacred Tradition, guiding the Church “into all truth” as Jesus promised (Jn 16:13). The Second Vatican Council describes this dynamic process most profoundly:

The Tradition that comes from the apostles makes progress in the Church, with the help of the Holy Spirit. There is a growth in insight into the realities and words that are being passed on. Thus, as the centuries go by, the Church is always advancing towards the plenitude of divine truth, until eventually the words of God are fulfilled in her. (*Dei Verbum*, no. 8)

The next recorded expression of this “growth in insight” concerning Marian dependence is by St. Idelfonsus of Toledo, in the 600s. He writes of being a “servant of the handmaid of the Lord” who is worthy of such high homage because “you have become the Mother of my Lord.” Another major witness is St. John Damascene, a Doctor of the Church from the 700s. He calls himself a “slave of the Mother of God” and explicitly recommends consecrating ourselves to her: “Virgin Mother of God, let us bind our souls, as to a steadfast and immovable anchor, to the hope that you are for us. Let us *consecrate* to you our spirit and soul, our body, our whole person. . . . Rule over and direct at your discretion all that concerns us.”

Fulbert of Chartres in the 1000s continues this Spirit-led evolution. He states that even at our baptismal consecration to Christ we are being entrusted to Mary’s protective care. “Remember, O Lady, that in Baptism I was consecrated to the Lord. . . . Watch over the one who has been handed over to you; keep safe the one who has been committed to your protection.” In the same century St. Odilo writes of Mary’s potent intercession: “From this day and hereafter take me into your service and in all my affairs be at my side as a most merciful *advocate*.”

## **Consecration does not stop at Mary but is Christ-directed; it is really consecration to Jesus, and by extension, to the Holy Trinity.**

St. Bernard of Clairvaux exhorts in the twelfth century that “With her protection, there is nothing to fear. Under her leadership, you will succeed. With her encouragement, all is possible.” Bernard goes so far as to say that Mary is the “neck” through which flow all the graces of Jesus as head of the Church, and through which all of our petitions ascend back to the Savior.

It follows, then, that by forming a relationship of complete dependence on Mary, she makes available to us in a special way the awesome power of the Godhead and has intercessory access as does no other created being, angel or saint.

### *Modern Apostles of Consecration*

The practice of total consecration to Mary is more fully developed in the modern era by Marian apostles such as St. Louis de Montfort (1673-1716), Venerable William Chaminade (1761-1850) and St. Maximilian Kolbe (1894-1941). Pope John Paul II highly recommends an “act of entrustment” to Mary as a sure way of growing closer to Jesus. His papal motto is a rousing *Totus Tuus*—“Totally yours, Mary!”

It is critical to point out that every proponent of Marian dependence, without

a doubt, states that consecration does not stop at Mary but is Christ-directed; it is really consecration to Jesus, and by extension, to the Holy Trinity, as in the case of St. Bernard above. St. Maximilian speaks for all when he says, “The object of all devotion is God. Devotion to Mary is a direct means to this end. We pass with Mary to the Other.”

Every method of consecration is equally worthy, too, though terminology and emphasis may differ. For instance, Kolbe prefers to use “possession and property” and bases his theology on the Immaculate

Conception, whereas de Montfort uses “slave” and does not speak of Mary as conceived without sin since the doctrine had not yet been proclaimed in his day. De Montfort’s consecration centers on the individual; Kolbe’s involves joining the Militia Immaculata, an international movement of spirituality, and sharing in its collective benefits.

Nevertheless the overall intent is the same: consecration is a total giving over of oneself to Mary without reserve. In response, she forms us into herself, the perfect disciple, and elevates our natural gifts while inspiring us to holiness and fruitful service within the Church.

### *Consecration is “Highly Esteemed”*

As we have seen, Marian devotion and consecration are firmly rooted in the solid ground of Sacred Tradition. Their roots go deeply, stretching back almost two millennia, perhaps to the time of the apostles. This is why the Second Vatican Council confidently and unambiguously recommends that veneration to Mary in all its legitimate forms be “generously fostered . . . highly esteemed . . . and religiously observed” (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 67).

Including, of course, total consecration to Mary.

# Mary's role: Bringing others to Jesus



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From the earliest days of Christianity, the Blessed Virgin Mary has played a prominent role in salvation history. She has been a primary channel for conversion, through whom people receive Christ and experience his healing power.

### *Mary Intercedes for Us as Mother*

At Nazareth, Mary's *fiat*—her willing “yes”—to becoming the Mother of God (Lk 1:26-30) led to the humble stable of Beth-lehem, where she mediated to the world Jesus, the instrument of salvation (Lk 2:1-20). At Cana, Mary instructed the wine steward—instructs Christians of every era—to “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:1-11). In doing so, she initiated Jesus’ public ministry and first miracle. She also foreshadowed her role as Advocate for God’s People, who are represented by the needy wedding party.

In the upper room at Pentecost, Mary was actively involved in another birth, that of the Christian Church, Christ’s body. St. Luke intentionally singles her out as praying “with one mind” with the apostles (Acts 1:14, 2:1-4). The result was the Holy Spirit overshadowing the apostles as he did earlier to the Virgin at the Annunciation, giving them courage to preach Jesus to the ends of the earth.

Catholics see the Pentecost event as foundational for understanding Mary as “Mother of the Church” (*Catholic Catechism*, no. 975). Indeed, Jesus himself from the Cross gives to us Mary as our spiritual Mother when he says to John, his beloved disciple (another symbol of God’s beloved Church): “This is your mother” (Jn 19:26). John from that moment “took her into his home” (19:27). We, too, should take Our Lady into our hearts and homes through reverent devotion and, in particular, through total consecration to her.

### *Mary, Instrument of Conversion*

The Virgin Mary’s intercessory role did not stop in apostolic times. The Second Vatican Council teaches that “she did not lay aside her saving office” but continues to petition for the needs of God’s people before the throne of her Son as “Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix” (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 62). Examples of her powerful influence in human history abound.

According to St. Bonaventure, St. Francis of Assisi received the grace to live the Gospel life through the intercession of Mary, Mother of Mercy. Through the intercession of Our Lady

of Guadalupe in the sixteenth century, some nine million native Mexicans converted to Catholicism (simultaneously, the exact number was leaving the European Church because of the Protestant Reformation). Thousands have been converted through their experience of Mary through apparitions such as Fatima, LaSalette and Lourdes.

One of the most phenomenal conversions wrought by the hand of Mary was that of Alphonse Ratisbonne on January 20, 1842. Alphonse was a Jewish agnostic who disdained Christianity. A Catholic friend convinced him to agree to an “experiment.” Alphonse would wear the Miraculous Medal given to us by Our Lady of Rue de Bac in 1830 and recite the *Memorare* prayer . . . and see what would or would not happen.

Soon after, the Virgin appeared to him in a brilliant light at Santa Andrea delle Fratte Church in Rome. Alphonse received such an infusion of grace and knowledge that he instantly became a believer was able to receive Baptism ten days later without catechesis. He later became a priest and missionary in the Holy Land.

### *Consecration and the Civilization of Love*

On January 20, 1917, a young Conventual Franciscan heard the conversion story of Alphonse Ratisbonne. It inspired Friar Maximilian Kolbe to recognize the powerful role that God had given Mary in the work of leading people to conversion and holiness. Maximilian understood that the Miraculous Medal symbolized her active presence in the Church as Mediatrix of all the graces that flow from the Heart of Christ.

On October 16, 1917, he was ready to put these Marian insights into action. He gathered together six Franciscan companions to establish the Militia of the Immaculata (MI). The MI would embrace all ages and all vocations in the Church, stirring each person to form an intimate relationship with Mary by means of the Act of Total Consecration and the wearing of the Miraculous Medal. The movement now numbers millions of members worldwide. It binds Catholics together around one compelling vision of evangelization through union with Mary Immaculate.

The ultimate goal of the MI and Marian consecration is to bring about the reign of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and hasten the conversion of individuals, families, society and the entire world into a “civilization of love” as called for by our late, Pope John Paul II.



*Week four*

# Why should I consecrate myself to Mary?

The year was 1917. A young Conventual Franciscan seminarian in Rome witnessed a profane Freemasons' demonstration against the Catholic Church and the Pope under the very windows of the Vatican, and his sense of justice and love for the Church was aroused. The event inspired Friar Maximilian Kolbe to found the Militia of the Immaculata (MI) movement of Catholic evangelization along with six other seminarians on October 16, 1917.

The MI method of outreach was simple. It would encourage "each and every soul" to make a total consecration of themselves to the Immaculate Virgin Mary. This formal act of self-giving would result in personal sanctification, the conversion of Church opponents and ultimately the universal reign of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

### *What is Total Consecration to Mary?*

Consecration means setting yourself aside for service to God. The Church has always advocated consecrating yourself to Jesus Christ through the Blessed Virgin, the perfect model of discipleship. Ancient witnesses include St. Ildephonsus of Toledo and St. John Damascene; modern promoters include St. Louis de Montfort, late Pope John Paul II and St. Maximilian Kolbe.

Marian consecration is not an archaic spirituality but is a living and active means of advancing the Faith as a People of God. In 1992, John Paul developed our understanding of this devotion even further. By dying for another in the Auschwitz concentration camp and "consecrating his life to the Immaculate Virgin," St. Maximilian has become, he suggests, a "prophet and a sign of the new era, the civilization of love." Here, John Paul is clearly endorsing the Kolbean example of Marian consecration as a critical element of "new evangelization" for the third Christian millennium, and Saint Maximilian in heaven as a primary intercessor.

### *Am I Ready to Consecrate Myself and Join the MI?*

The Spirit of the Militia of the Immaculata is the spirit of continual conversion. Not everyone who enrolls as a member understands

perfectly in the beginning the power of this consecration. But when lived in the spirit of willingness and humility, the Immaculata will elevate your natural gifts and inspire you to holiness and fruitful service within the Church.

Consecrating yourself to Mary through the ideal of St. Maximilian will be one of the most important days of your life. You will be placing yourself under the mantle of Mary's protective care as the Immaculate Conception, Mother of the Church and Mediatrix of All Graces. Through total consecration you become a cooperator with Mary in the work of building up and renewing the Church of the third millennium. She will enlighten your mind, guide your will, empower your efforts and intercede for you in a special way before the throne of the Father.

You will also share in the intercessory prayers of the Militia of the Immaculata religious communities, who pray daily for the success of the MI movement and the sanctification of its members.

Finally, you will have the support that comes from being a part of an international movement of spirituality. You will have access to Militia of the Immaculata conferences and resource materials, to its national magazine, *Immaculata*, and to regular mailings from the national office on how to better live out your consecration.

### *How Do I Enroll in the MI?*

Fill out the KFC consecration form attached to the brochure and fulfill the requirements of Reconciliation and Holy Communion. This bulletin insert is part of the preparation process.

After enrolling in the MI, you will receive a frameable membership certificate.

### Contact:

MI Prison Ministry  
1600 W. Park Ave.  
Libertyville, IL 60048-2593  
847-367-7800, ext. 256  
prisonministry@marytown.com

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