

For four weeks, we've been reflecting on what Marian consecration is all about — and we've covered a lot of material. While our prayer program of daily pondering the text has helped us digest some of the information, we can still go deeper. To do this, we need what Pope John Paul calls Mary's "wise capacity for remembering and embracing in a single gaze of faith." We can develop this "wise capacity" by continuing what we've been doing all along, namely, pondering in our hearts (see Lk 2:19), but now with a more refined focus.

To give us this more refined focus, for each week of the retreat, I've chosen three words that summarize a given week's teaching. So, over the next four days, we'll reflect on three words each day, pondering their meaning for Marian consecration. I'm confident that if we dedicate ourselves to this more refined prayer pondering, we'll be able to embrace the truth of Marian consecration "in a single gaze of faith." After these four days of review, we'll find a synthesis of what we've learned in a single formula of consecration that aims to capture the essence of Marian consecration.

DAY 29: St. Louis de Montfort

Three words summarize what we learned from St. Louis de Montfort: (1) Passion, (2) Baptism, and (3) Gift. Let's ponder each one in turn.

PASSION

Recall that St. Louis inherited his father's fiery temper. This could have led to disaster, but Louis consecrated himself to Jesus through Mary. He allowed Mary to take charge of his life and to do with him as she willed. And what did Mary do with him? She set him on fire. She transformed his unholy anger into a blazing holy fire. She acted with her Spouse, the Holy Spirit, to fill Louis with passion and zeal for Christ, and he proceeded to set all of Brittany on fire with a love for Jesus the Incarnate Wisdom — and not only Brittany. De Montfort's inspiring teaching blazed through the centuries, igniting saints, popes, and even poor sinners with a burning love for God.

We may not have been born with St. Louis's fiery temper, but we could all use a portion of his zealous spirit. We could all use a greater outpouring of the Holy Spirit, who stirs souls into flame and fills them with holy fire. How do we invite this fire? How do we call it down? By imitating de Montfort's example of going to Mary, depending on Mary, and being with Mary. For, as Louis himself says, when the Holy Spirit, Mary's spouse, finds a soul united to Mary, "He flies there. He enters there in His fullness; He communicates Himself to that soul abundantly, and to the full extent to which it makes room for His spouse." The Holy Spirit wants to work his wonders even in our day. He wants to raise up new saints, great saints. Why, then, does he do so, so rarely? According to de Montfort, it's because he rarely finds in us a sufficiently great union with Mary.

In this final stretch that leads to Consecration Day, may we go with great zeal to give ourselves completely to Mary and allow the Holy Spirit to fly to us and fill us with holy passion and fire.

BAPTISM

Saint Louis places his devotion to Mary squarely within the mystery of Christ. The best example of this is how he begins his formula for consecration with a renewal of baptismal vows; for Baptism is all about Christ. At Baptism, we're transformed into members of the Body of Christ, made into "other Christs." Baptism also has to do with the Holy Spirit. I say this because it was the Holy Spirit who first formed Christ, and it is the Holy Spirit who continues to form other Christs — the members of Christ's Body — at every Baptism.

Now, who does the Holy Spirit use to form Christ? He uses Mary, even though he has no absolute need of her. So, for example, he made use of Mary at the Annunciation, which led to the birth of Jesus Christ our Savior. He made use of Mary just before Pentecost, which led to the birth of the Body of Christ, the Church. He makes use of Mary at every Baptism, which gives birth to "other Christs," the members of his Body. The Holy Spirit always makes use of Mary to give birth to Christ! And the more he finds a soul that is united to Mary "the more active and mighty He becomes in producing Jesus Christ in that soul, and that soul in Jesus Christ."

It is fitting, then, that de Montfort has us renew our baptismal promises in the context of giving ourselves to Mary. For it is her job, with the Holy Spirit, to bring the grace of Baptism to its fulfillment. Baptism isn't the end; it's a marvelous beginning, a gloriously new morning. Yes, it transforms us, making us into members of Christ's Body — but there's more work to be done. Baptism is an already-but-not-yet reality. It already makes us into Christ (as a member of his Body) but not yet fully formed in Christ. After Baptism, we still have to grow in Christ, and it's Mary's job to oversee and nurture this growth, with the Spirit. Thus, there's no question of de Montfort's devotion to Mary "taking us away from Christ." Mary's whole goal is to lead us to Christ and to bring us to the point where we can say with St. Paul, "It is no longer I that live but Christ" (Gal 2:20). *The whole goal of true devotion to Mary is our ongoing, post-baptismal transformation in Christ.*

GIFT

If only we have the courage to give ourselves completely to Mary, then we'll experience Marian consecration as an incredible gift. Moreover, the more we give ourselves to her, the more we'll experience the greatness of this gift.

We give, and she gives back infinitely more. We give her our sinful selves, and she gives us her Immaculate Heart. We give her our own meager merits, and she not only augments and purifies them with her perfect love but gives us her infinitely greater merits

and graces. We become empty after having given her all, and she fills us with the Spirit of God. She cares for our family, friends, and loved ones on our behalf — even better than we ourselves can. She anticipates our needs and orders every detail of our lives for the greater glory of God. The path of holiness with her is "a path of roses and honey" compared to walking it without being consecrated to her. Indeed, she makes even our crosses and trials into something sweet. Moreover, she protects us from temptation and the attacks of the evil one.

Belonging completely to Mary is the quickest, easiest, and surest way to Jesus. If we were to fully realize how great a gift consecration to Jesus through Mary is, we'd almost never stop smiling and praising God for giving it.

Today's prayer:

Spend the day pondering de Montfort's Marian teaching as it is summarized by these three words: Passion, Baptism, and Gift.