

Generous Souls

Introduction

Dearest brother, dearest sister, whoever you are, you are invited to this preparation to consecrate yourself to Mary in maternal slavery of love, according to the teaching of Saint Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort. It is intended primarily for those who wish to begin a path of true conversion. People often ask: **"Father, I want to change my life... I want to leave sin... I want to know my faith better..."** or even, **"I know almost nothing"...** **"but I don't know where to start"**.

In short: this preparation is for anyone seeking a concrete and effective means to strive for holiness, regardless of their state in life.

Do not be afraid of the requirements. As with everything, there will be moments when it will be a bit challenging, but it will be easily achievable by anyone who desires to reach Jesus through Mary.

Mary is a Secret

While the world tries to attract you by offering means and secrets for a more comfortable, carefree life—one that is far from God and your eternal destiny—arousing in you a craving for greater material benefits, you, on the other hand, are about to discover a **"secret"** [1] that will bring to your soul **"so many riches and so many graces that you will be amazed, and your soul will be filled with joy"** [2].

The Holy Spirit revealed this secret to Saint Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort, as he himself affirms, and he wishes to share it only with those **"generous souls"** [3] who are willing to commit to learning and practicing it, through two writings: *True Devotion to Mary* and *The Secret of Mary*.

"Here is a secret, O predestined soul, that the Most High has revealed to me and that I have not found in any book, old or new. I entrust it to you in the name of the Holy Spirit" [4].

If the **"secret"** is also revealed to you, you will be able to enjoy the fruits of holiness that it produces.

Let us see what this secret consists of. Saint Louis-Marie writes:

"Just as there are natural secrets to quickly, cheaply, and easily accomplish certain natural operations, so too there are secrets in the order of grace to quickly, sweetly, and easily accomplish supernatural operations, such as stripping oneself of self, filling oneself with God, and becoming perfect. The devotion I wish to reveal is one of these secrets of grace"[5].

In simpler terms: this promises a means that will make easy what is difficult in our religion. We want to be saints... but the renunciations that holiness requires are challenging. This Secret will make that burden light. It will make it even "sweet" to deny ourselves, to courageously take up the cross, to fight against temptations... it will help us easily to *"fill ourselves with God and become perfect"*. A great author writes:

"Thus, from the practice of holy slavery, we can very legitimately expect inner freedom, liberation from scruples, a magnificent development of our divine life, and progress toward God through a short, secure, and easy path: all of this is union with God and with Mary, or a means to reach Her; from which it follows that this expectation, this desire, this hope, is ultimately an act of true charity toward God and toward His Most Holy Mother"[6].

The Secret is Mary

This Secret, which easily produces fruits of the highest holiness, is a person: the Most Holy Mary. She is the secret and «a mystery of grace unknown even to the most learned and spiritual among Christians!» (TVD 21). She is the Mother of God, the one who makes the path to Jesus easy and sweet.

Someone might say that Mary is not a secret... A good Christian would say they know and love her. Saint Louis-Marie does not deny this, but from what has been revealed to him, Mary is so much greater than we can conceive that we must humbly acknowledge that her person will always remain a «mystery of grace in this sense, little known even to Christians!» [7].

We must recognize and admit something fundamental: «it is therefore right and necessary to repeat with the Saints: "DE MARIA NUMQUAM SATIS." Mary **has not yet been sufficiently praised, exalted, honored, loved, and served**. She deserves more praise, respect, love, and service» [8]. Only those who understand this «will know that Mary is the safest, easiest, shortest, and most perfect way to go to Jesus Christ, and they will offer themselves to her, body and soul, without any reservation, so as to belong in the same way to Jesus Christ» [9]. But we must enter into this mystery, which is her person, her perfections, but not only that: it is fundamental to know what she does out of love for each of us. Saint John of Ávila writes:

When we are told about Mary: "Oh! How beautiful God has made her in body, and even more so in soul!" We rejoice and bless God. But when we learn that she grants us her favors, that she always prays to her Son for us so that He may sustain and protect us, that this Mother always has her merciful eyes upon us... this makes us rejoice even more.

Lady, shall we dare to entrust our salvation to You? Shall we dare to place the salvation of our souls in Your hands? What makes us think that we will not be disappointed by You? Let her fruits speak. Let what Mary has done for us answer, and look at the fruit of her womb. Contemplate the Blessed

Sacrament, which was formed in her womb [10].

It is evident that entering into Mary does not mean avoiding Jesus but rather going to Him through the Mother. “Do you want to know what the Mother is like? Look at the Son,” says Saint Eucherius, as quoted by Saint Alphonsus.

Entering into this mystery means coming to know more deeply the greatness of the Most Holy Mary, so as to esteem and love her as she deserves. This is the purpose of this preparation for a total, unconditional consecration into her arms, offering her not only our persons and our actions but even the *merit* of our good works, so that she may use them as their sovereign Mistress.

Firm Resolution to Sanctify Yourself

Here is the *Secret* of a holy, happy, and secure life under the protection of the Most Holy Mary. Let us therefore begin this journey, remembering that Saint Louis-Marie insists that the only true purpose of this preparation is the pursuit of holiness. The *Secret*, in fact, should not be revealed except to those who “deserve it,” meaning those who truly seek a path of conversion, or if they have already left sin, those who genuinely seek holiness with determination.

Predestined soul, I entrust this Secret to you on the condition that you use it to become wholly holy and heavenly, for this secret only becomes great in proportion to how much a soul makes use of it. Beware, therefore, of remaining idle, doing nothing; my secret would turn into poison and become your condemnation.

"Thank God every day of your life for the grace He has granted you by revealing to you a secret that you in no way deserved to know, and of which you will better understand the value and excellence as you use it in the ordinary actions of life" (SM, n.1).

We must immediately thank God, who, through this preparation, wants to make us partakers of this *Secret* or *Mystery*, if we prefer to call it that, and at the same time, we must take action. Laziness in this area means losing the fruits of true devotion. «Great soul and generosity... offering one's own freedom,» as Saint Ignatius of Loyola required, are essential conditions to enter into this spirit.

Although “few” will enter into the spirit of this consecration, Saint Louis-Marie hopes to find “generous souls” who will give themselves without any reservation.

We have not yet explained what this consecration consists of. We are merely setting the conditions for knowing *the Secret*... Let us conclude this first introductory part with a brief exhortation from Father Hupperts:

A slave of Mary who is logical and consistent in their actions is a saint, a great saint, with the holiness required, it is true, of all the baptized, but which is now demanded of us for a new and powerful reason: our

Consecration to Jesus through Mary. **Holiness is made wonderfully easier for us**, because all this striving toward the austere spirit of the Gospel is illuminated by the smile of our Mother and filled with her encouraging influence (Hupperts).

Does This Devotion Add New Obligations?

Anyone who wants to move from sin to grace often asks: “Where should I begin?” The same question arises for someone who lives in grace but considers themselves lukewarm, mediocre, and wants to increase their fervor, to be more generous with God. What means should be used?

But before this question, there is always the concern: “Will I be able to fulfill these duties?”

We must immediately dispel this fear.

In fact, the commitment of this devotion is nothing other than the «perfect renewal of the vows and promises of holy baptism» [11]. What every Christian *must commit to* is the same thing that one obliges themselves to in this devotion:

At baptism, by their own mouth or through their godfather and godmother, they solemnly renounced Satan, his temptations, and his works, and they chose Jesus Christ as their master and sovereign Lord, in order to depend on Him as a slave of love. This is precisely what happens in this devotion: one renounces (as stated in the act of consecration) the devil, the world, sin, and oneself, and one gives themselves entirely to Jesus Christ through the hands of Mary. And one does even more [12].

This devotion does not add any particular obligations but leads one to fulfill the ones we already have through baptism. Under this Marian perspective, these obligations gain even more merit and perfection because the baptismal promises are realized in an easy and sweet way. And through Mary, and through the offering we will make of our entire person and all our works to her, they will acquire, by her intercession, greater merit and perfection.

Why is this devotion the “best”?

The saint leaves no room for doubt. He proposes this devotion « because it is the best and most sanctifying »[13].

It would be impossible to say everything about consecration in this initial introduction, but you will

gradually understand if you faithfully follow this preparation. However, even at the end of this journey, the *Secret of Mary* cannot be fully grasped by us. Yet, we know that this devotion is the best *because it is the one taught by Christ himself*.

Founded on the Word of God, we are certain that it is the will of the Son that His Mother be the Mediatrix of all His saving acts. As Saint John Paul II affirmed, God wanted Mary to "actively collaborate" with her merits in the Incarnation, the birth, the Presentation in the Temple, and the thirty years of hidden life. We find Mary during Jesus' preaching, at the foot of the Cross. Tradition teaches that Jesus appeared to her first, and when He sent the Holy Spirit to the Church on Pentecost, she was among the Apostles. Thus, since at Cana of Galilee, Jesus was compelled to perform His first miraculous signs through the intercession of His Mother, He will accomplish all His mysteries through Mary. If the Son of God chose to submit Himself in this way to His Mother: « How highly is God glorified when, to please Him, we submit to Mary, following the example of Jesus Christ, our only model! »[14], exclaims Saint Louis-Marie.

"My heart has suggested what I have written with particular joy, to show that the divine Mary has remained unknown until now, **and this is one of the reasons why Jesus Christ is not yet known as He should be**. If, then, as is certain, the knowledge and reign of Christ must be established in the world, it will necessarily be the effect of the knowledge and reign of the Most Holy Virgin Mary, who gave Him to the world the first time and will make Him shine forth the second"[15].

Therefore, if we want Christ to reign, there is only one way: « Jesus Christ began and continued His miracles through Mary, and through Mary, He will continue them until the end of time »[16]. Saint Augustine said: "The world was unworthy of receiving the Son of God directly from the hands of the Father. He gave Him to Mary so that the world might receive Him through her."

Summarizing the conviction of the saint of Montfort:

Whoever, then, wishes to advance on the path of perfection and surely and perfectly encounter Jesus Christ (...) let him embrace "with a generous heart and an open soul" this devotion to the Most Holy Virgin, which he perhaps did not know before. Let him enter this excellent way, previously unknown to him, which I am pointing out: "I show you a more excellent way." It is a way traced by Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Wisdom, our only Head. By following it, the member of this Head cannot go astray. It is an **easy** way, due to the fullness of grace and the anointing of the Holy Spirit that fills it. Walking upon it, one does not grow weary or turn back. It is a **short** way: in a short time, it leads us to Jesus Christ. It is a **perfect** way: on its path, there is no mud, no dust, not the slightest stain of sin. Finally, it is a **secure** way, by which one reaches Jesus Christ and eternal life in a straight and sure manner, without deviating to the right or to the left. Let us therefore take

this path and walk on it day and night, until we reach the fullness of the age of Jesus Christ[17].

Generous souls!

Saint Louis-Marie often indicates that the devotion he offers must be embraced with a "generous heart and an open soul," paraphrasing in some way the fifth annotation of the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius. The fact that devotion to Mary makes supernaturally difficult operations easy does not mean it is "recommended for the lazy." A noble heart and magnanimity towards her are required for such fruits to be possible.

Perhaps this preparation of nine months (or less, depending on each person's possibilities) may seem too demanding, but if we consider the goods we will receive from it and have a noble heart, every sacrifice and commitment should seem like a small price to pay.

The promised fruit is the secure path to eternal salvation and Christian perfection! The road to Heaven, always marked by the Cross, will become sweeter and easier to carry because our Heavenly Mother will be beside us, and with her and for her, we will bear it.

If only everyone knew about this gift!

[112] How well my effort would be spent if this little writing, falling into the hands of a well-disposed Christian, born of God and of Mary and "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man," revealed and inspired in him, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, the excellence and value of the true and solid devotion to Mary, which I am about to set forth! If I knew that my guilty blood could serve to make these truths penetrate hearts in honor of my beloved Mother and august Sovereign, of whom I am the last of sons and slaves, I would use it instead of ink to trace these characters. Indeed, I hope in this way to find souls who, through their fidelity to the practice I teach, will make up for my dear Mother and Sovereign for the damage suffered because of my ingratitude and unfaithfulness.

[113] I feel more than ever driven to believe and hope in all that I have deeply imprinted in my heart and have been asking God for so many years: sooner or later, the holy Virgin will have more than ever children, servants, and slaves of love, and through this means, Jesus Christ, my beloved Lord, will reign more than ever in hearts.

Without commitment and generosity

there will be no fruits

Having experienced the wonders of grace that the consecration in maternal slavery of love produces, arises the lament of Saint de Montfort, who states that this devotion « will not be understood by everyone »[18]...

His experience leads him to a sad realization. « I have found many people who, externally, have entered into this slavery with admirable fervor; but I have found few who have embraced its spirit, and even fewer who have persevered in it »[19].

Some will stop at its external aspect and go no further, and these will be the majority. Others, a small number, will enter into its depths but will only climb one step. Who will ascend the second? Who will reach the third? And finally, who will remain there permanently? Only the one to whom the Spirit of Jesus reveals this secret »[20].

However, this does not mean that everyone will live it poorly. Few, very few of those who consecrate themselves will truly live this devotion well... but at the same time, he declared, « I do indeed hope to find generous souls »[21] who will be faithful to the practices of this devotion.

In this preparation, we specifically want to distance ourselves from that “majority” who live this devotion in an external and superficial way. Despite « the great difficulty of entering into the spirit of this devotion »[22], we are convinced that with God’s grace and our docile cooperation, the Holy Spirit will place us in the happy state of being « interiorly dependent and slaves of the Most Holy Virgin and of Jesus through her »[23].

But without effort, there will be no fruits. We therefore want to make every effort to live this devotion interiorly, proving ourselves to be true children, servants, and slaves of Mary, something that can only be achieved with great dedication: « If the Holy Spirit has planted in your soul the true Tree of Life, which is the devotion I have explained to you, you must take great care in cultivating it, so that it may bear its fruit in due time »[24]. He further adds: « The soul in which this Tree is planted must be ceaselessly occupied in watching over it and contemplating it, like a good gardener. For this tree, being alive and meant to bear fruit for eternal life, must be cultivated and made to flourish through constant attention and contemplation of the soul; **it is indeed proper for a soul that aspires to become perfect to think about it continuously, to make it its principal occupation** »[25].

How is this preparation carried out?

We will essentially follow the 33 steps indicated by the saint to prepare for the consecration. We have already created a booklet that can always be useful.

But now we propose dedicating a whole week of reflection to each of these points. The preparation will thus last a full 9 months. In fact, we want to offer a more demanding, more generous preparation so that the fruits of the consecration in you and in us may shine forth even more

strongly for the glory of God and the praise of Mary.

In every area of life, preparation is required for what is important. Before a great honor, a great benefit, one must prepare for it. If, for example, you were invited to a party, you would have to wear appropriate clothing, wash what is stained, and bring a gift to the host. Likewise, if you wanted to taste an exquisite quality wine, the glass should be clean in order to fully savor its taste.

The same applies to the Montfortian consecration. What it produces is too great, too important, of immeasurable value. By giving ourselves and the merit of our actions, Mary « responds with the ineffable gift of her entire self »[26]. How could we receive her with a soul that is impure and without the proper attention to such a loving guest?

This devotion, when faithfully practiced, produces countless effects in the soul. The main one is to establish the life of Mary within it, so that it is no longer the soul that lives, but the Virgin who lives in it, because **the soul of Mary becomes, so to speak, its own soul**. Now, when, through an ineffable yet true grace, the divine Mary is Queen in a soul, what wonders does she not accomplish there!

Giving oneself to her requires preparation, but even more so, one must prepare the soul to receive the gift that she makes of herself to us. Two fundamental things are required: purification and readiness for this mutual exchange between my person and Mary.

Purification. From what?

From the spirit of the world contrary to the spirit of Christ. Mary is the shortest way to reach Jesus. But even She cannot reign in a heart that still loves the world: *"The world hates me"* (Jn 15:18). Saint Louis-Marie notes that «the world is indeed so corrupted that even religious hearts are almost necessarily covered, if not with its mud, at least with its dust»[27]. This is the first purpose of the preparation. Saint Louis-Marie recommends a spiritual exercise (or retreat) of «at least twelve days to rid oneself of the spirit of the world»[28], which in practice can be a bit difficult. That is why we will guide you with some lessons and spiritual practices for the same purpose indicated by the saint.

Then, purification must continue from:

- ☑ **attachment to sin.** «The actual sins we have committed, whether mortal or venial, even if forgiven, have increased our concupiscence, weakness, inconstancy, and corruption, leaving residues in our soul»[29].
- ☑ **interior disorder.** We often realize our inner “disorder”... confusion in ideas, weakness in will, selfishness even in our best works, temptations against Faith: *For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing* (Rom 7:18). That is why those who draw closer to God, like the saints, see their own sinfulness more clearly, just as a pane of glass appears dirtier the closer it gets to the sun. Considering this truth, the saint asks: «Is it surprising, then, that Our Lord has said that whoever wishes to follow Him must renounce himself and hate his own life? That *“whoever*

loves his life will lose it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life”? Christ, Infinite Wisdom, does not give commands without reason»*[30].

We will dedicate a little more than half of this preparation to this purification, following the instructions of Saint Louis-Marie, detesting the disorder and sin within us:

During the first week, they will direct all their prayers and works of piety towards obtaining self-knowledge and contrition for their sins, and they will do everything in a spirit of humility. To this end, if they wish, they may meditate on what I have already said about our evil inclinations and consider themselves, during this week, as snails, slugs, toads, swine, serpents, and goats. They may also meditate on these three thoughts from Saint Bernard: “Consider what you were: a corrupt seed; what you are: a filthy vessel; what you will be: the food of worms.” They will pray to Our Lord and His Holy Spirit to enlighten them, saying: “Lord, let me see”; or: “Let me know myself”; or even: “Come, Holy Spirit.” They will recite daily the litanies of the Holy Spirit, along with the prayer that follows, as mentioned in the first part of this work. They will turn to the Holy Virgin and ask Her for this great grace, which must be the foundation of all others, and therefore they will say every day *Ave Stella Maris* and Her litanies[31].

We will guide you with the corresponding lessons and some practices of piety that may be useful to you.

Disposing the soul.

The soul not only needs to remove what is contrary to it but also to become docile and attentive to what this devotion produces within us.

That is why Saint Louis-Marie, after the twelve days dedicated to renouncing the spirit of the world and one week devoted to knowing and emptying oneself, asks to dedicate another two weeks to:

«Filling oneself with Jesus Christ

through the

Most Holy Virgin»[32].

The first of these last two weeks is entirely dedicated to Mary, imploring the Holy Spirit to help us know her mystery so that we may esteem and love her more. Here, we will focus particularly on how to live this consecration.

The second is dedicated to Jesus, whom we want to reach more easily through this devotion. We

must acquire a knowledge of Jesus and Mary that, according to St. Ignatius, is “internal,” meaning intimate, engaging in a dialogue with both, so that we may “love them more and follow them.” Therefore, in addition to the lessons you will hear, you should dedicate some time to personal dialogue with each of them and frequently invoke the Holy Spirit to enlighten you.

May the Most Holy Virgin protect you on this new and great journey you are about to embark upon!

^[1] Cfr. San Luigi Maria Grignon di Monfort, il Segreto di Maria, n. 1. D’ora in poi SM. ^[2] SM, n. 53 ^[3] Cfr. Trattato della vera devozione, n. 133. 138. D’ora in poi TVD. ^[4] Cfr. SM, n. 1 ^[5] TVD 82 ^[6] Hupperts, Fondamenti e pratica della vita mariana, ver pagina 21. ^[7] Cfr. TVD 33. ^[8] TVD 10 ^[9] TVD 55 ^[10] San Juan De Avila, Sermone 58. Octava del Corpus, Opera Omina Vol III, pag 780. ^[11] TVD 120. ^[12] TVD 126. ^[13] TVD 82. ^[14] TVD 18. ^[15] TVD 13. ^[16] TVD 19. ^[17] TVD 168. ^[18] TVD, n.119. ^[19] SM 44. ^[20] TVD 119. ^[21] TVD 112 ^[22] SM 44. ^[23] Ibid. ^[24] SM 70. ^[25] SM 72. ^[26] TVD 144. ^[27] TVD 89. ^[28] TVD 227. ^[29] TVD 79. ^[30] TVD 80. ^[31] TVD 228. ^[32] TVD 227.