

# **The Perfect Consecration to Jesus Christ through Mary According to the Teachings of St. Louis Marie de Montfort By Fr. Thomas Steinke**

## **The Importance of Making the Consecration to Jesus through Mary**

I am basing my conference today on the book "True Devotion to Mary" which is universally acclaimed as the single greatest and most theologically authoritative book on the Blessed Virgin Mary ever to have been written. In it De Montfort says that "the formation and education of the great saints who will come at the end of the world are reserved to her, for only this singular and wondrous virgin can produce in union with the Holy Spirit singular and wondrous things."<sup>1</sup> Literally, you could be one of those great saints and will be one of those great saints if you live out this consecration. After today's talk, you should have a very good idea of how to live out this consecration and thus become a great saint.

## **Papal Support**

I want to begin by talking about the importance of making the consecration to Mary according to the method of St. Louis Marie de Montfort. Since as Catholics we believe the Holy Spirit guides the Church in its papal documents, I want to establish papal support for this devotion. Pope Leo XIII encouraged everyone to make acts of consecration to the Virgin Mary based on the method of Saint Louis de Montfort. He also beatified de Montfort in 1888, adopted de Montfort's Marian terminology (calling Mary the "*Mediatrix*" and "*Co-Redemptrix*"), and wrote no less than ten encyclicals on the Rosary. His successor Pope St. Pius X, in 1904, wrote his key Marian encyclical, *Ad Diem Illum*, adopting much of the language and sentiments of De Montfort's book, "True Devotion," and even granted the Apostolic Blessing to all who read De Montfort's great treatise on the Blessed Virgin. Pope Benedict XV also provided strong support for De Montfort's Marian consecration<sup>2</sup> and Pope Pius XII canonized de Montfort in 1947.

Pope St. John Paul II took his papal motto, "Totus Tuus," from De Montfort's Latin prayer of total consecration to the Blessed Virgin and claimed that his reading of "True Devotion" marked a "decisive turning point" in his life. More specifically, he says "As is well known, (in) my episcopal coat of arms ... the motto *Totus tuus* is inspired by the teaching of St. Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort. These two words express total belonging to Jesus through Mary: "Tuus totus ego sum, et omnia mea tua sunt." ("I am all Yours, and all that I have is Yours.") . . . "This Saint's teaching has had a profound influence on the Marian devotion of many of the faithful and on my own life." De Montfort's spirituality would forever shape his person, priesthood and papacy. In his encyclical letter *Redemptoris Mater*, he specifically recommends the Marian spirituality of St. Louis Marie de Montfort. So the first point I want to make is that the Church is strongly recommending this devotion.

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<sup>1</sup> St. Louis Marie De Montfort, *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, #36.

<sup>2</sup> Miravalle, Mark, *Introduction to Mary* 1993, ISBN 978-1-882972-06-7, pp 164-167.

## The Theological Foundation

Next I want to explain the theological foundation for the personal consecration to Mary which was explained by Pope John Paul II in his encyclical letter *Redemptoris Mater*. He quotes John 19:27 where Jesus “said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” And then Scripture says “from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.” Building on this, he said that the word “home” refers to the spiritual and inner life of believers and thus “to take Mary into one’s home” signifies a filial entrustment to her as mother in every aspect of our lives. John Paul II suggested that St. John be an example of how every Christian should respond to the gift of the spiritual motherhood of Mary. Accordingly, God willed that Mary would have a special role in our Christian life when he gave her to us as our spiritual mother at the foot of the Cross (In 19:27). It is a universal role assigned to her by God: All Christians of every age are to “take her into their home” i.e., into their hearts, minds and into every aspect of their lives.

Theologian Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, a professor at the Angelicum (where he taught the future Pope John Paul II starting when he was 26 years old) studied and analyzed various forms and stages of Marian devotions. He designated personal consecration to Mary as the highest level among these devotions. In his theological analysis, Marian devotions are categorized into stages from beginner to advanced as follows:

- “The first degree consists in praying to the Blessed Virgin from time to time, honoring her as the Mother of God, saying, for example, the Angelus with true recollection every time it rings.”
- “The second degree consists in having more perfect sentiments of veneration, confidence, and love for Mary. They lead us to the daily recitation of at least one of the three parts of the Rosary.”
- “The third degree of the true devotion to Mary, that proper to proficient, consists in consecrating oneself entirely to our Lord through her.”<sup>3</sup> Note that he links each of these levels of devotion to higher stages of the spiritual life:<sup>4</sup>

So every human being is called to have a devotion to the Mother of God and the highest form of devotion is the total consecration I am about to explain. The rest of this conference will be based on the chapter in the book “True Devotion to Mary” entitled “The Perfect Consecration to Jesus Christ.” It will include a practical explanation of what De Montfort’s devotion entails.

## Why can Mary uniquely lead us to the Most Perfect Union with Jesus Christ?

Why do we say that consecration to Mary is the perfect consecration to Jesus Christ? First, the Church sees Mary not as the end of this devotion, but as someone who will guide souls to her

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<sup>3</sup> Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ages of the Spiritual life*, cf. Chap., Devotion to Mary in Proficients.

<sup>4</sup> Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ages of the Spiritual life*, cf. Chap., Devotion to Mary in Proficients.

Son, especially to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. John Paul II says “The piety of the Christian people has always very rightly sensed a profound link between devotion to the Blessed Virgin and worship of the Eucharist. . . Mary guides the faithful to the Eucharist.”<sup>5</sup> Often I’ll encounter people who do not go to daily Mass, nor do they pray the rosary every day and they want advice on what they should do to deepen their spiritual life. Now simply speaking, daily Mass is by far the greatest means of growing closer to God. But I also understand that the desire to go to daily Mass is a grace from God, indeed one of the greatest graces. So instead of advising them to go to daily Mass, I’ll ask to say the rosary every day and if possible go to daily Mass (i.e., if they have the grace). I know from experience that if they are truly devoted to Our Lady, she will lead them to attend Mass more frequently when they are best proportioned to profit from it. And generally speaking, if they don’t have a devotion to Our Lady, they will never go to daily Mass anyway.

Why is Mary particularly effective in leading souls to union with Jesus Christ? Well, one answer is that it is part of God’s providential plan to give us His mother as the most effective means to draw us nearer to Him as explained above. Nevertheless, in some sense, it is like any area of expertise. If you want to know how to write, Shakespeare would have been one of the finest teachers; if you want to know how to compose Mozart would have been one of the best teachers. Why because they knew the art, the method of writing and composing in the most perfect manner. Now De Montfort says that “of all God’s creatures Mary is the most conformed to Jesus.” In the Apostolic Constitution entitled *Ineffabilis Deus* written by Pope Pius IX to solemnly define the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, he says that Mary’s sanctity is “far above all the angels and saints” even saying that one cannot even imagine a greater sanctity.<sup>6</sup> So it follows that since the Mother of God knows and loves Jesus more than any other human being, she is the one who can best teach us how to know and love Jesus. She is going to make us more and more like her son or to use the words of De Montfort “to conform, unite and completely consecrate us to Jesus Christ.” So the most fundamental aspect of this devotion is that a “true devotion to Mary” will unite us to her son, which is synonymous with making us holy.

Moreover, as De Montfort noted earlier in the book, this devotion to Holy Mary “is the easiest, fastest, safest path and most perfect way to union with Jesus in which Christian perfection consists”<sup>7</sup> Our salvation culminates in an unimaginable happiness. Since our only purpose here on earth is to know and love God in this life so that we can have perfect happiness with him in the next<sup>8</sup>, one can see why it is very very very important to live out of this devotion. Who wouldn’t want to take the easiest, safest and fastest route to perfect happiness? Through the authority of the Papacy spelled out above, one can say that this is the infallible teaching of the Catholic Church, but perhaps more convincingly the experience of millions of souls.

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<sup>5</sup> Pope St. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, #44.

<sup>6</sup> Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus* The actual wording in the English translation is: “Therefore, far above all the angels and all the saints so wondrously did God endow her with the abundance of all heavenly gifts poured from the treasury of his divinity that this mother, ever absolutely free of all stain of sin, all fair and perfect, would possess that fullness of holy innocence and sanctity than which, under God, one cannot even imagine anything greater, and which, outside of God, no mind can succeed in comprehending fully.”

<sup>7</sup> St. Louis Marie De Montfort, *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, #152.

<sup>8</sup> See *The Baltimore Catechism: The Purpose of Man's Existence*

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."<sup>9</sup> 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 simply the best way!<sup>10</sup>

## What does Consecration to Mary Entail?

I thought I'd begin this section with an explanation of what we mean by consecration in general and then explain the particular consecration we make to Mary. Consecration in its most basic meaning means to set aside for a sacred purpose. The Catholic Encyclopedia defines it as "an act by which a thing is separated from a common and profane to a sacred use, or by which a person or thing is dedicated to the service and worship of God by prayers, rites, and ceremonies."<sup>11</sup> When, in 1899, Pope Leo XIII consecrated the world to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, he explained it this way: "For we, in dedicating ourselves, not only recognize and accept His rule explicitly and freely, but we actually testify that if that which we give were ours, we would most willingly give it, and we ask Him to graciously accept from us that very thing, even though it is already His."<sup>12</sup>

What we are concerned with here is consecration in the way Pope Leo XIII described it. In other words, in consecration we acknowledge that Our Lord already has most full rights over us. He has full rights over us for two reasons: First, because He created us out of nothing; secondly, because He redeemed us from the slavery of Satan. So we already owe Him everything, and He would not need to reward us at all. But yet we say that we beg Him now to kindly accept our service out of love whereby we propose to totally give everything back to Him in order to serve Him better.

What do we mean when we say that we consecrate ourselves to Mary? It means consecrating or giving everything we have, interior and exterior, to her. More specifically, De Montfort says it requires us to consecrate

1. Our body with its senses and members
2. Our soul with its faculties
3. Our present material possessions and all we shall acquire in the future
4. Our interior and spiritual possessions, that is, our merits, virtues, and good actions of the past, the present, and the future.

"In other words," he says, "we give her all that we possess both in our natural life and in our spiritual life, as well as everything we shall acquire in the future in the order of nature, of grace, and of glory in heaven."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, #60.

<sup>10</sup> The preceding section is a high level explanation of why Our Lady leads to a perfect union with Jesus Christ. It best explains section #120.

<sup>11</sup> Schulte, Augustin Joseph. "Consecration." The Catholic Encyclopedia. Vol. 4. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908. 1 Oct. 2014 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04276a.htm>>.

<sup>12</sup> Pope Leo XIII, *Annum sacrum*, May 15, 1899. ASS 41.649.

<sup>13</sup> De Montfort, *True Devotion*, #121.

## The Practical Application of this Devotion

The practical application of this devotion is what De Montfort calls “a perfect renewal of the vows and promises of holy baptism. . . We renounce the devil, the world, sin and self as expressed in the act of consecration.”<sup>14</sup> This is inseparably linked to when we say we give her “our body with its senses and members” and “our soul with all its faculties.” Fundamentally, it means we use our body and soul to serve the Lord. It means we strive to become virtuous in every aspect of our life. It means practicing all the virtues that are consistent with agape love, the kind of love used to define Christian charity. One could make an examination of the progress of our consecration based on the text of 1 Cor. 13:4-7: “Love (agape) is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” Since the degree of sanctity and the degree of love are identical, this is a good representation of the final goal of Mary’s spiritual formation program, so to say.

But more specifically, he says that the devotion consists in “renouncing the devil the world the sin and the self.”<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, first I am going to talk about what it means to renounce the world and then the devil although they are somewhat interconnected.

### We must renounce the World

When we speak of rejecting the world, we do not mean the world as such, for it can be occasion for goodness or evil. We speak of the world as an enemy of Christianity and an obstacle to one’s sanctification. The worldly spirit is characterized by an excessive attachment to created things. By created things, I mean anything that is not God. Today, perhaps the vast majority of the world is infested with a spirit that seeks only the pleasures and satisfactions that can be had from created things. The worldly spirit is manifested in many ways.

The first and perhaps most deadly way the worldly spirit is manifested is the false maxims of the world. This is where Satan has very effectively deceived the world. Most people really believe that happiness can be secured with money, fame, pleasure, comfort, or power. The world’s most basic precept is to enjoy life, to make the most out of it, to go for the gusto, so to say. This goes directly counter to the most fundamental purpose of our life: to become a loving person, to sacrifice our life for others. John Paul II says, “The capacity of expressing love, that love in which the person becomes a gift and—by means of this gift—fulfills the meaning of his being and existence. Let us recall here the text of the last Council which declared that man . . . ‘can fully discover his true self only in a sincere giving of himself.’”<sup>16</sup> So one should strive to objectively examine one’s interior attitude. Do you believe money, fame or pleasure leads to happiness or sacrificing your life for others out of love for God and neighbor? The world believes the former, the latter is actually the truth.

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<sup>14</sup> De Montfort, *True Devotion*, #126.

<sup>15</sup> De Montfort, *True Devotion*, #126

<sup>16</sup> John Paul II, *The Human Person Becomes a Gift in the Freedom of Love*, General Audience, 1/16/1980.

There is also a perversion of values: somebody who is deceitful in his business practices or knows how to cheat on his taxes is a good business man; an agnostic or an atheist is intellectually mature; those who reject objective moral norms are said to be free from oppressive moral restraints; promiscuous men are considered masculine. Evil is presented in a very positive light. So the immoral characters on television shows seem nice, funny, and caring; they are presented in a very attractive manner. On the other hand, the religious person is often someone who is dangerous or very strange. If a priest or sister is interviewed on television, normally it is one who has turned away from the teachings of the Magisterium.<sup>17</sup> The world exalts sinful conduct to the status of a fundamental right (e.g., same sex marriage or legalized abortion).

The second manifestation of a worldly spirit is the ridicule and persecution of those who are sincerely trying to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ. Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the United States was more or less a God-fearing country. My mother said she knew one person growing up who got divorced and everybody knew to stay away from her. Back then, if people cussed or lived an immoral life, everybody would stay away from them saying they have the devil in them (and rightly so, I might add). Today, the table has turned and Satan is indeed the prince of the world. Now if a high school kid tries to wear a t-shirt that says “Jesus Christ, King of Kings, Lord of Lord,” to a “normal” high school party, he better be prepared to be persecuted and ridiculed. This is because, in essence, the kids who are leading an immoral life (i.e., committing sensual sins, cussing, stealing, lying, not going to Church) are unwittingly servants of Satan. And Satan knows what he is doing. He will send the best-looking kids, the best athletes, the most intelligent kids, the smartest kids, to brutally attack the kid. They will be shunned, mocked, and ostracized until and unless they start committing mortal sins, (i.e., doing drugs, drinking, sleeping around) then they are okay, “normal,” not “religious freaks.” What is truly abnormal has now become the norm. Millions of our youth are losing their faith at secular universities under these diabolical attacks. We all know people who went to a bad high school or university and lost their faith.

In the work environment, the servants of the devil use off-color humor, often lewd, and if you don't participate or don't laugh, they say, “What is wrong with her? Ah, she's living in her little Christian bubble.” There is the habitual gossip that they constantly endeavor to lure you into. About the only conversation that is taboo is God, totally taboo in school (one can get fired for that) and certainly frowned upon in the majority of work environments. Try to publicly speak out against sin and you are intolerant and judgmental.<sup>18</sup> Families who are generous in raising many children are publicly scorned. They are deemed as being either fools or irresponsible.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See Fr. John Hardon, *The Strategy of the Devil in Demonic Temptations*, Fr. Hardon archives (online).

<sup>18</sup> See Antonio Royo Marin, OP, *The Theology of Christian Perfection*, p. 260-270. This book gives a comprehensive treatment of the road to perfection.

<sup>19</sup> In Scripture, children are always seen as a blessing: “Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate” (Psalms 127:3-5).

## We must renounce the Devil

Next, I want to talk about the demonic influence. De Montfort quotes St. Thomas as say that “Men vow in baptism to renounce the devil and all his seductions.”<sup>20</sup> St. Paul tells us to “Draw your strength from the Lord and from his mighty power. Put on the armor of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the Devil. For our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens” (Ephesians 6:10-13).

Just like Christ has a mystical body of followers, so does Satan and they are hell-bent on destroying the mystical body of Christ. The Devil, in some ways, is the most powerful enemy we have in the spiritual life. By his very nature, he is our tempter. The devil varies his strategy, proportions it to those he is tempting. His basic philosophy with evil people is to let them follow their base inclinations. He gets them to believe there is no such thing as sin; the only sin is anything that inhibits their self-centered activity. He deceives them into believing that a faithful Christian life is silly, or boring, or just too difficult. The Christian’s life is seen as oppressive. Conversely, evil is portrayed as good, as very appealing. In this way, Satan attempts to deceive us with the lies of worldly wisdom through the unbelieving world around us as explained above. He is an expert at inciting the fleshly desires within us through his followers in the world. Without a doubt, internet pornography is diabolically inspired. He can provide his followers with money and pleasure, but not happiness.

How do we combat Satan? Fr. John Hardon gives the following councils:

- The first thing to understand is that although demons cannot read our mind, they are experts at reading our body language. In this respect, “Our emotional expressions, in what we say, how we react, how we allow our feelings to manifest themselves in our body can be dangerous.”
- The devil is especially influential in mastering those who are afraid of him. It manifests a lack of faith in the power of God.
- Fr. Hardon give this very strong recommendation. He says “never engage the Devil in conversation. I mean never. I have enough experience of people foolish enough to engage in conversation with the Devil who have suffered disastrous consequences as a result.”
- Be strong in your faith...if we exercise our faith courageously undertaking what we believe God wants us to do, we can never be afraid of the consequences. God’s grace in our lives is more powerful than all the Demons in Hell.
- He says “without devotion to Mary, we are not able to cope with the Devil, not today.”<sup>21</sup>

I would add the following and I’m sure Fr. Hardon would agree:

- Pray to St. Michael and our guardian angel especially during times of temptation because often a demon is inspiring the temptation. If one directs his mind and will to a saint, an angel, or a demon, they can hear us, so it does not matter whether our prayer is vocal or mental.

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<sup>20</sup> De Montfort, *True Devotion*, #126

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Fr. John Hardon, *The Strategy of the Devil in Demonic Temptations*, Fr. Hardon archives (online).

- Receive Holy Communion as much as possible. There is nothing Satan fears more than the Real Presence of Jesus Christ. Moreover, the holier we become the less power demons will have in our lives and the frequent and fervent reception of Holy Communion is the best means to advance on the road to sanctity.
- Inasmuch as it is possible, avoid spending a lot of time with people who are not in a state of grace, i.e., those who do not practice their faith. They cannot go up to the supernatural level, but they will try to drag you down to their baser level. Of course, with family members, it is different, but still recognize that Satan will try to use them to make you less fervent in your faith. If you've just had a conversion and most of your friends are far away from God, you need to develop new friendships within the mystical body of Christ, friends that lead you to God, instead of away from God. The exception is, of course, when you are evangelizing, you must engage in conversation with them and at all times you should strive to be kind to everyone. The goodness they see in you may spur on their conversion.
- Practically speaking, live out your consecration to Mary and she will protect you from satanic attacks. Similarly, if you happen to fall, call on Our Lady and she will help get you back to confession.
- Avoid the occasion of sin. The main reason people fall into sin from a state of grace is a strong impulse to sin that is triggered by our surroundings. If you put yourself in the occasion of sin, demons are experts at triggering that impulse. It is a physiological impulse that is very difficult to go against. It can be part of God's providence that you need to learn this by experience and thus become more prudent in the future.

## **Why the Devil is said to be the Prince of the World**

The Devil inspires others to work for him; he is highly organized and has been incredibly successful. The Devil uses civil authority to war against the followers of Christ by inspiring our political leaders. Marshall McLuhan, a Canadian philosopher and an expert on communication theory and the media said "The modern media are engaged in a Luciferian conspiracy against the truth." And this is indeed profoundly true. I remember Fr. John Hardon used to say that if you read the papers, watch television and listen to the news and believe what you hear, you've lost your faith.

The facts back up Fr. Hardon's conclusion. The Culture and Media Institute examined the morning, evening, late night and weekend news programs on all three broadcast networks, all issues of the three leading weekly news magazines (Newsweek, Time and U.S. News and World Report), and four programs aired on taxpayer-funded National Public Radio (Morning Edition, Weekend Edition, All Things Considered and Talk of the Nation).

CMI found 105 stories either featuring atheism or introducing the views of atheists while reporting on other issues. Among the key findings:

- § 80 percent (17 out of 21) of feature stories about atheism or atheists had a positive tone, exemplified by Time's December 3<sup>rd</sup> story on a Sunday school for atheists. 20 percent were neutral. No feature stories were negative.



- § Atheists were used to challenge religious viewpoints more than journalists used religious viewpoints to challenge atheism. Fifty-four percent of atheist-themed stories included a religious counterpoint, but 71 percent of the Christian-themed stories included atheist counterpoints or were written from an atheistic perspective. The most striking example was Newsweek's choice of avowed atheist and Mother Teresa-basher Christopher Hitchens to critique a book detailing Mother Teresa's spiritual struggles.
- § Atheism stories or commentaries by atheists were present in 51 percent (25 of 49) of the issues of Newsweek and 35 percent (17 out of 49) of the issues of Time. This included features, mentions in stories on other issues and groupings of letters to the editor from atheists. In sharp contrast, only one issue of U.S. News and World Report referred to atheism.<sup>22</sup>

## **We consecrate our Body with all its Sense and Members**

I now want to talk about how we consecrate “our body with all its sense and members.” On account of original sin our body has evil inclinations. It is what St. Paul means when he says “I have a law in my body that wars against the law in my mind causing me to sin” (Ro. 7:23). Or again, “For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want.” (Gal. 5:17). Accordingly, St. Thomas Aquinas said that the virtue of prudence requires us to have a virtue not only in the mind, but in some sense in the body too.<sup>23</sup>

Let me explain how the latest scientific evidence is showing how the body rebels against the mind. Neuroscientists have identified how we develop cravings for certain pleasures. After we experience a pleasure from anything there is a huge neurological spike in brain activity associated with that pleasure. Interestingly, eventually this neurological spike happens when one just puts oneself in the environment where one could experience the pleasure and this causes a very powerful impulse to seek that pleasure. As the impulse gets stronger and stronger, you become addicted. With this scientific evidence, we can now see more clearly the good counsel of the Church in saying we must avoid the occasion of sin, even if we have no intention of sinning. This is the type of physiological addiction that occurs in cocaine and heroin addiction, but also in internet pornography addiction. Once the impulse hits the addict is in big trouble. They’ve done studies with alcoholics, even some who had been to rehab sixty times and could not quit. If they put an electronic device in their brain to block the impulse they can quit cold turkey. They can then look at a beer and not drink it, which would have been impossible for them before blocking the impulse.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Culture and Media Institute, *Apostles of Atheism: Executive Summary*, <http://www.mrc.org/special-reports/apostles-atheism-executive-summary>

<sup>23</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 50, a. 3: “The sensitive powers can be considered in two ways: first, according as they act from natural instinct: secondly, according as they act at the command of reason. According as they act from natural instinct, they are ordained to one thing, even as nature is; but according as they act at the command of reason, they can be ordained to various things. And thus there can be habits in them, by which they are well or ill disposed in regard to something.”

<sup>24</sup> Charles Duhigg, *The Power of Habit*, 19-75. The influence of cravings on habit formation has also been confirmed by research at Cornell, the University of Michigan and New Mexico State University. “In 2007, Mueller, the German Neurologist, and his colleagues at the University of Magdeburg implanted small electrical devices inside the brains of five alcoholics who had repeatedly tried to give up booze. The alcoholics in the study

Let me give you a common everyday example of where we have these little physiological addictions. Remember these addictions are especially associated with pleasure and eating is one of most common experiences of pleasure in our lives. Did you ever notice how people from different countries really think the food from their countries is the best? So people from El Salvador say pupusas are the best food. People from Argentina like empanadas, and people from Mexico think hot sauce is the best tasting food. But everybody says the way their mother made it was the best. What they have is a little physiological addiction to the foods that have given them pleasure in the past. Did you ever notice at a restaurant that sometimes you want to order something different, but you get an impulse to get the thing you always order there? In order to tame our body to be accord with the spirit, we need to change these impulses so that we get them when we do virtuous activities. So fight off the impulse to get a double bacon cheeseburger and order a salad. If you do that for a while, the impulse will change so that your body will desire the salad and that can help you develop the virtue of temperance.

## **De Montfort says We Must Deny Self: The Role of Mortification**

These evil bodily inclinations are one of the reasons why De Montfort says that we must deny self.<sup>25</sup> It is very difficult to fight off evil impulses. Self-denial and mortification are necessary in order to bring the flesh into subjection. Worldly people ridicule such mortification, but St. John of the Cross said that if anyone tells you that you can be perfect without practicing external mortifications, you should pay him no heed. Even if he worked miracles to confirm what he says, you should regard them as illusions.<sup>26</sup>

Generally speaking, the most difficult struggles have to do with the most powerful natural inclinations. God attached pleasure to the things we need to do to survive. So everybody likes to eat, sleep, and there is an intense pleasure associated with the procreative act. The pleasures associated with food and drink and sexual relations are especially prone to be disordered because of their intensity (by disordered, I mean not used in a way that leads us to the end for which we were created).

The greatest challenge for the majority of struggling souls is chastity. Saint Alphonsus Liguori has written that, in his judgment, most of the souls in hell are there because of unrepentant sins against chastity. Our Lady of Fatima confirms this in saying that “more souls go to Hell because of sins of the flesh than for any other reason.” Sister Lucia, the last living Fatima seer, said this refers primarily to sins against chastity, also called sins of impurity, such as fornication, masturbation, adultery, homosexual behavior. The reason for this statement is not because sins against chastity are the most grievous sins, but because they are the most common and, as Sister

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had each spent at least six months in rehab without success. One of them had been to detox more than sixty times. . . The devices implanted in the men’s heads were positioned inside their basal ganglia---the same part of the brain where the MIT researchers found the habit loop---and emitted an electrical charge that interrupted the neurological reward that triggers habitual cravings. After the men recovered from the operation, they were exposed to cues that had once triggered alcoholic urges, such as photos of beer or trips to a bar. Normally, it would have been impossible for them to resist a drink. But the devices inside their brains “overrode” each man’s neurological cravings. They didn’t touch a drop. . . The man who had gone to detox sixty times never had another drink.” P. 72-73.

<sup>25</sup> De Montfort, *True Devotion*, #126.

<sup>26</sup> St. John of the Cross, *Letters*, par. 20.

Lucia noted, "because of conscience," since sins of impurity are less likely to be repented of than other sins.

Perhaps the most important kind of mortification is to fight off these powerful natural impulses by fasting, immediately fighting off impure thoughts, and other forms of self-denial. Every time we deny our body we take a step forward in making it submissive to the spirit. St. Anthony Mary Claret talks about the importance of mortification in his autobiography. He says, "I can see St. Paul mortified himself and said so publicly: "I chastise my body..." All the saints down to this day have done so. Rodriguez relates that the Blessed Virgin told St. Elizabeth of Hungary that ordinarily no spiritual grace comes to the soul except by means of prayer and bodily affliction. There is a maxim, 'Give me blood and I will give you spirit.'" Later he gives us some principles to govern our mortification. He says, "The greater the sacrifice involved, the more meritorious. . . any act of virtue [is]. A man's merit will be greater depending on the greater the pleasure he abstains from, the greater the repugnance he has to overcome, the greater the intensity and length of the pain he has to bear, the greater the human respect he has to set aside, and the greater the sacrifices he has to make---provided he does all and bears all for the love of virtue and the greater glory of God."<sup>27</sup>

## **The Perfect Renewal of our Baptismal Promises conforms us to Jesus Christ**

Biblically, the world, the flesh and the devil are the causes of sin. De Montfort concurs saying that "the chief source of moral disorders and the consequent eternal loss of Christians springs from forgetfulness of [the baptismal promises] . . . and indifference to it."<sup>28</sup>

In our baptism, we renounce the world, the flesh, and devil which involves rejecting the secular viewpoint of reality, subduing our flesh, and fighting off the temptations of the devil. If we have "the perfect renewal of the vows and promises of holy baptism" which is the most essential part of the consecration you are most in conformity with Jesus Christ who never sinned because you are avoiding the sins associated with this three-fold temptation. It is crucial to understand that with this devotion you should be making progress on the road to eternal life or you do not have a true devotion to Mary, you are not living out your consecration.

## **The Consecration of our Material Possessions**

Next "we consecrate to her "our present material possessions and all we shall acquire in the future."<sup>29</sup> This might be the most difficult part of the consecration for those living in the United States and especially for some of those living in the Silicon Valley.

The perfection of this consecration demands that we practice Gospel poverty and that certainly is not a popular message, not during these times, not in this country. The message is radical. Jesus invites the rich young man to "Go, sell what you have and give to the poor and you will have

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<sup>27</sup> St. Anthony Mary Claret, *The Autobiography of St. Anthony Mary Claret*.

<sup>28</sup> De Montfort, *True Devotion*, #131.

<sup>29</sup> De Montfort, *True Devotion*, #121.

treasure in heaven” (Mark 10:21). He praises the widow for contributing all that she had as an offering to God. (Mark 12:44). He warns his disciples not to store up their treasures on earth, but to store up treasures for heaven (Luke 12:16-21). His Apostles established a community which supported each other through the sharing of material gifts (Acts 2:44-45).

The nature of the Gospel message is to detach one’s self from one’s possessions and give to the poor. Unfortunately, it is difficult to find many examples of the evangelical poverty ideals lived out among lay Christians today. Too often, we are worried about the same things as our secular counterparts, job security, retirement savings, the newest electronics, etc. Often, even though we are financially secure, these are the very things we bring to prayer. Help me to buy that nice big house on the corner, the Gospel of prosperity. Fr. Thomas Dubay says, “We see pictures in magazines of skin-covered skeletons and pronounce how wretched it is, yet we continue with extravagant amusements, expensive vacations, unnecessary travel, lavish wardrobes, elegant drinking and dining.”<sup>30</sup> Pope Francis explains how this erodes the spiritual life:

“Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. God’s voice is no longer heard, the quiet joy of his love is no longer felt, and the desire to do good fades.”<sup>31</sup>

The principle for the use of things is given to us in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius whereby I use things “only inasmuch” as they lead me to the end for which I was created. Using slightly different wording, the Catechism says the same thing. It states that all Christians are called to:

direct their affections rightly, lest they be hindered in their pursuit of perfect charity by the use of worldly things and by an adherence to riches which is contrary to the spirit of evangelical poverty (CCC 2545).

Possessions are useful to us only if we use them the way God intends. We should all spend some time in front of the Blessed Sacrament and prayerfully discern if we are storing up treasures on earth or treasures in heaven, if we are using our resources for the glory of God or for self-glorification. If there are areas where we have overindulged, we should commit to spending less so that we can free up money to give support to the poor or the kingdom of God.

For those who are already giving to charity, ask yourself if you support the Church and the poor out of your excess or your want? In other words, are you willing to change your lifestyle by eating out less, buying less expensive clothes, houses or cars so that you can support the poor? The apostle James admonishes us that it is our duty to clothe the naked and feed the hungry (James 2:15-16). Do we take this admonition seriously or are we only worried about our needs?

Evangelical poverty is not about seeing how much we can give up, but desiring to do God’s will so as to advance on the road to perfection and wealth and pleasure can be major obstacles. We must always remember that we are merely pilgrims whose goal is heaven, not the biggest house on the block.

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<sup>30</sup> Fr. Thomas Dubay, *Happy are you Poor*

<sup>31</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, #2.

For further study on this topic, I highly recommend Fr. Thomas Dubay's book, *Happy are You Poor*. However, I warn you, only read this book if you are willing to change your way of life. He pulls no punches in calling all Christians to embrace God's call to simplicity and a life of joy. I am particularly worried that some of us will make the same mistake as the rich man in the Gospel and walk away from this teaching.

## **We give our Interior and Spiritual Possessions**

The last thing we consecrate to Our Lady is "our interior and spiritual possessions, that is, our merits, virtues, and good actions of the past present and future."<sup>32</sup> He says, "Note here that two things must be considered regarding our good works, namely, satisfaction and merit or, in other words, their satisfactory or prayer value and their meritorious value. The satisfactory or prayer value of a good work is the good action in so far as it makes condign atonement for the punishment due to sin or obtains some new grace. The meritorious value or merit is the good action in so far as it merits grace and eternal glory. Now by this consecration of ourselves to the Blessed Virgin we give her all satisfactory and prayer value as well as the meritorious value of our good works, in other words, all the satisfactions and the merits."<sup>33</sup>

## **Why do we give her our merits, graces and virtues?**

De Montfort says, "We give her our merits, graces and virtues, not that she might give them to others, for they are, strictly speaking, not transferable, because Jesus alone, in making himself our surety with his Father, had the power to impart his merits to us. But we give them to her that she may keep, increase and embellish them for us"<sup>34</sup>

In order to understand what happens to the merits we give away to Mary, we must make the distinction between condign merit and congruous merit. Condign merit is merit in the strict sense of the word. It supposes an equality between service and return and thus it really merits a reward. Congruous merit, owing to its inadequacy and the lack of intrinsic proportion between the service and the recompense, claims a reward only on the ground of equity. The congruous merit we are talking about is based on friendship with God and presupposes we are in state of grace. God gives grace to some people because of others who are his friends (i.e., are in a state of grace).<sup>35</sup>

That which has been merited condignly, like sanctifying grace and the corresponding infused virtues we give her to preserve, "increase and embellish for us." Strictly speaking, merit for increase of grace and glory cannot be handed over to any other person. Reginald Garrigou-LaGrange explains that "Our merits *de condigno* which constitute a right in justice to an increase of grace and to eternal glory are incommunicable. . . If we offer our merits *de condigno* to Mary, it is not in order that she may give them to others but that she may keep them for us, that she may

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<sup>32</sup> De Montfort, *True Devotion*, #121.

<sup>33</sup> De Montfort, *True Devotion*, #122.

<sup>34</sup> De Montfort, *True Devotion*, #122.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Pohle, Joseph. "Merit." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 10. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911. 28 Oct. 2014 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10202b.htm>>.

help us to make them bear fruit, and if, we have the misfortune to lose them by mortal sin, that she may obtain for us the grace of really fervent contrition.”<sup>36</sup>

She will preserve them by obtaining actual graces<sup>37</sup> for us which we need to avoid sins. She will increase them by sending us trials that are perfectly proportioned to our spiritual strength and then giving us the grace to persevere according to God’s will. Moreover, it will be made much easier through Mary. De Montfort says, “‘Even along the way of Mary there are stern battles and great difficulties; but our good Mother makes herself so near and present to her faithful servants to enlighten them in their doubts, to strengthen them in their fears, and to sustain them in their battles, that in truth the Virgin’s way to Jesus is a way of roses and honey compared with all others.’ The Saint adds that the truth of this can be seen from the lives of the Saints who have followed this way most particularly: St. Ephrem, St. John Damascene, St. Bernard, St. Bonaventure, St. Bernardine of Siena, [and] St. Francis de Sales.”<sup>38</sup>

I saw an interesting analogy online. It is like she is protecting our bank account for heaven, helping it to grow larger and larger. Should we go bankrupt, i.e., mortal sin, she will bail us out by getting us to go to confession. If we live out our consecration, our bank account should grow rapidly. In fact, De Montfort says, “This devotion is a short way to discover Jesus, either because it is a road we do not wander from, or because . . . we walk along this road with greater ease and joy, and consequently with greater speed. We advance more in a brief period of submission to Mary and dependence on her than in whole years of self-will and self-reliance.”<sup>39</sup>

## **How do we give her our merits, good works and satisfactions?**

The kinds of merits we offer to Our Lady to use as she sees fitting are the graces we merit congruously, i.e., out of our friendship with God. These are our prayers and our sacrifices that we make on behalf of other souls. We may pray for our wayward son and she may use the graces to aid a soul on their deathbed. Nevertheless, we do not have to worry about our loved ones because Mary will never be outdone in generosity, she will always help our loved ones more than any help we have given her.

Sticking with the analogy, you might think of this as depositing graces in a checking account and Our Lady writes the checks. We give up the right of determining the application of our good works. “I am all yours and all that I have is yours.” The graces we merit from all of our rosaries, novenas, fasting and other forms of self-denial are hers to use as she sees fit. In this respect, we want to supply Our Lady with a huge checking account in order to best fulfill our consecration to her. After all, we have given her complete control over our body and soul and she does not want us to lie around idle. So don’t “be surprised if she sends us crosses---proportionate, of course, to our strength---to make us really work hard for the salvation of souls.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Reginald Garrigou-LaGrange, *The Mother of the Savior and our Interior Life*, p. 259.

<sup>37</sup> An actual grace is anytime God enlightens the mind or strengthens the will.

<sup>38</sup> Reginald Garrigou-LaGrange, *The Mother of the Savior and our Interior Life*, p. 262.

<sup>39</sup> De Montfort, *True Devotion*, #155.

<sup>40</sup> Reginald Garrigou-LaGrange, *The Mother of the Savior and our Interior Life*, p. 260.

To live out a total consecration to Mary means to give oneself completely into her hands by an entire gift of oneself. Pius XII says this entails that one "conform [one's] whole life to her direction and desires."<sup>41</sup> There are several clear advantages to this method:

## **The Advantages of Handing over the Rights of our Merits to Mary**

Mary knows how to best maximize the graces we give to her whereas we frequently, if not usually would wish they be applied in a less efficacious way. For instance, we might pray for a better job, but Mary knows that the position we want will damage our soul so she applies our merited graces elsewhere. Garrigou-Lagrange says that "Mary knows the obligation of charity better than we do . . . There may even be some among our relatives and friends on earth and in Purgatory who have urgent need of prayers and satisfactions, without our knowing who they are. Mary, however, knows who they are, and she can help them out of our good works if we have put them at her disposal."<sup>42</sup> So perhaps we pray for our cousin Harry who is not disposed to accept the grace and Mary knows that our spouse is undergoing a strong temptation and she saves them from falling into sin.

Regardless, we can be sure that the value of our actions will be dispensed by her in the most productive possible way. This is certain since all graces are being distributed through her as the *Mediatrix* of all graces. She cannot fail to apply our humble merits for his greatest glory and in accordance with his most perfect will. We ourselves could never act with such merciful wisdom as the Mother of the Church.

Moreover, a prayer request to God has power in proportion to the holiness or love of the one petitioning. St. James tells us that "the prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects" (James 5:16). Pope Pius IX, in speaking of Mary's holiness (and, therefore, her love, for these are always equal) wrote that it is so great that "none greater under God can be thought of, and no one, except God, can comprehend it."<sup>43</sup> Since Mary is presenting all our petitions, they have infinitely more power. Our merits receive a higher reward when presented to Jesus through Mary than if we had gone directly to Jesus. It is the same way with our virtues. Supernatural virtues can only be increased by God. However, God gives this increase because of the good acts we perform. So, when Mary purifies our acts, by inspiring us to unite our intentions with hers, and to put the same love into them that she did, she thereby merits more grace for us and thus augments our virtues.

## **A Few Final Thoughts.**

I hope at this point that you can see that this consecration is a call to perfection so it is not going to be a walk in the park. But that is a necessary part of becoming a saint. St. Therese told her sister, "Don't believe that when I'm in heaven I'll let ripe plums fall into your mouths. This isn't what I had, nor what I desired. You will perhaps have great trials, but I'll send you lights which

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<sup>41</sup> Pius XII, Depuis le 8 décembre, September 5, 1954 (To Marian Congress at Brussels, where a total act of consecration to Mary was being made). Cited from *The Pope Speaks*, 1954, 3.282.

<sup>42</sup> Reginald Garrigou-LaGrange, *The Mother of the Savior and our Interior Life*, p. 261.

<sup>43</sup> Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*, December 8, 1854.

will make you appreciate and love them.”<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, consecration to Mary is still the easiest way to achieve this. Like Therese, she will send you “lights” to help you understand reality and this is a great consolation.

I like to think of the consecration as an understanding between you and the Mother of God. It is just understood that she can do whatever she wants with your petitions even though many of your petitions will be the same after the consecration. Moreover, you can turn to her and ask her to remember your intentions. I do it all the time. Someone asks me to pray for them and I say I’ll tell Our Lady and she’ll remember to offer it up with Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross at my next Mass.

The gist of it is the renewal of our baptismal vows in the sense that we are really striving to live them out. We need to be constantly seeking God’s will and once it is made known to us, assuming that Our Lady will give us the grace to carry it out if we make the initial effort. The consecration entitles us, so to say, to Mary’s aid in carrying out God’s will and that is especially true when we have a heavy cross. One must have the attitude of St. Therese who said, “Many souls say: ‘I don’t have the strength to accomplish this sacrifice.’ Let them do then what I did! Exert a great effort. God never refuses the first grace that gives one the courage to act; afterwards, the heart is strengthened and one advances from victory to victory.” We must have the same attitude. We make a great effort and Our Lady will make sure we advance from victory to victory.

The consecration is not just prayers, nor is it primarily prayers, it is giving our life totally to God in everything we do. So if you are not growing in faith, hope and charity, if you are not making progress in the spiritual life, you are not really striving to live out your consecration to Mary. But if you are, you will make very rapid progress and be forever grateful that the Mother of God gave you the grace to be one of her chosen consecrated souls.

The daily consecration prayer contains a summary of De Montfort’s teachings. The prayer is not meant to be just mere words, but words backed up by a tremendous effort to fulfill them.

## **De Montfort Consecration Prayer**

I, N. [Name], a faithless sinner- renew and ratify today in thy hands the vows of my Baptism; I renounce forever Satan, his pomps and works; and I give myself entirely to Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Wisdom, to carry my cross after Him all the days of my life, and to be more faithful to Him than I have ever been before.

In the presence of all the heavenly court I choose thee this day for my Mother and Mistress. I deliver and consecrate to thee as Thy slave, my body and soul, my goods, both interior and exterior, and even the value of all my good actions, past present and future; leaving to thee the entire and full right of disposing of me, and of all that belongs to me, without exception, according to Thy good pleasure for the greatest glory of God, in time and in eternity.

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<sup>44</sup> St. Therese, *Her Last Conversations*, p. 94.