

MARY, THE HELP OF CHRISTIANS

MARY, HELP OF CHRISTIANS

AND THE

Fourteen Saints Invoked as Holy Helpers

Instructions, Legends, Novenas,
and Prayers

WITH

Thoughts of the Saints for Every Day
in the Year

COMPILED BY

REV. BONAVENTURE HAMMER, O.F.M.

TO WHICH IS ADDED AN APPENDIX ON THE

Reasonableness of Catholic Ceremonies
and Practices

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Preface

THE contents of the following pages are based on the Catholic doctrine of the veneration and invocation of the saints, and of the efficacy of the prayer of intercession. The legends of the individual "Holy Helpers" were compiled from authors whose writings have the approval of the Church.

In compliance with the decrees of Pope Urban VIII of 1625, 1631, and 1634, the compiler formally declares that he submits everything contained in this little book to the infallible judgment of the Church, and that he claims no other than human credibility for the facts, legends, and miracles related, except where the Church has otherwise decided.

THE COMPILER.

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PART I

**The Veneration and Invocation of Saints,
and the Efficacy of Prayer**

“Remember your prelates who have spoken the word of God to you; whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation” (*Heb. xiii. 7*).

“Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me, as I also am of Christ” (*1 Cor. iv. 16*).



PRESENTATION OF MARY IN THE TEMPLE.

CHAPTER I

The Veneration and Invocation of Saints

IN THE Creed of the Council of Trent, which the Catholic Church places before the faithful as the Rule of Faith, we read: "I firmly believe that the saints reigning with Christ are to be venerated and invoked."

The Church therefore teaches, first, that it is right and pleasing to God to venerate the saints and to invoke their intercession; and second, that it is useful and profitable to eternal salvation for us to do so.

The veneration of the saints is useful and profitable to us. Men conspicuous in life for knowledge, bravery, or other noble qualities and unusual merits are honored after death. Why, then, should Catholics not be permitted to honor the heroes of their faith, who excelled in the practice of supernatural virtue and are in special grace and favor with God? That this veneration is profitable to us is evident from the fact that the example of the saints incites us to imitate them to the best of our ability.

The veneration of the saints is not only in full accord with the demands of reason, but we are, moreover, enjoined explicitly by Holy Scripture

to venerate the memory of the holy patriarchs and prophets: "Let us now praise men of renown, and our fathers in their generation" (*Ecclus.* xlv. 1). "And their names continue for ever, the glory of the holy men remaining unto their children" (*Ecclus.* xlvi. 15).

Reason and Holy Scripture, then, are in favor of the veneration of the saints. We find it practised, therefore, also in the early Church. She was convinced from the very beginning of its propriety and utility. As early as the first century the memorial day of the martyrs' death was observed by the Christians. They assembled at the tombs of the sainted victims of pagan cruelty and celebrated their memory by offering up the Holy Sacrifice over their relics. We know this not only from the testimony of the earliest ecclesiastical writers, as Origen, Tertullian, and St. Cyprian, but also from the history of St. Ignatius the Martyr (d. 107), and of St. Polycarp of Smyrna (d. 166). Over one hundred panegyrics of various saints written by St. Augustine are still extant.

And why should it not be right and useful to invoke the *intercession* of the saints? Everybody deems it proper to ask a pious friend for his prayers. St. Paul the Apostle recommended himself to the prayers of the faithful (*Rom.* xv. 30), and God Himself commanded the

friends of Job to ask Him for His intercession that their sin might not be imputed to them (*Job* xlii. 8). How, then, can it be wrong or superfluous to invoke the intercession of the saints in heaven? The saints are *willing* to invoke God's bounty in our favor, for they love us. They are *able* to obtain it for us, because God always accepts their prayer with complacency. That they really hear our prayer and intercede with God for us is clearly shown by many examples in Holy Scripture. And if, according to the testimony of St. James (v. 16), the prayer of the just man here on earth availeth much with God, how much more powerful, then, must be the prayer of the saints, who are united with God in heaven in perfect love and are, so to say, partakers of His infinite goodness and omnipotence?

A most striking proof of the efficacy of the prayers of the saints is the numerous miracles wrought and the many favors obtained at all times through their intercession. Among these miracles are a great number whose authenticity was declared by the Church after the most scrupulous and strict investigation, as the acts of canonization prove.

That the invocation of the saints was a practice of the early Church is proved by the numerous inscriptions on the tombs of the Roman catacombs preserved to this day. We read there, for

instance, on the tomb of Sabbatius, a martyr, "Sabbatius, O pious soul, pray and intercede for your brethren and associates!" On another tomb is inscribed, "Allicius, thy spirit is blessed; pray for thy parents!" And again, "Jovianus, live in God, and pray for us!"

We have also the testimony of one of the greatest thinkers and Protestant philosophers, Leibnitz, for the claim that the veneration and invocation of the saints is founded in reason, on Holy Scripture, and on the tradition of the Church. He writes: "Because we justly expect great advantage by uniting our prayers with those of our brethren here on earth, I can not understand how it can be called a crime if a person invokes the intercession of a glorified soul, or an angel. If it be really idolatry or a detestable cult to invoke the saints and the angels to intercede for us with God, I do not comprehend how Basil, Gregory Nazianzen, Ambrose, and others, who were hitherto considered saints, can be absolved from idolatry or superstition. To continue in such a practice would indeed not be a small defect in the Fathers, such as is inherent in human nature—it would be an enormous public crime. For if the Church, even in those early times, was infected with such abominable errors, let any one judge for himself what the Christian faith would eventually come to. Would not Gamaliel's prop-

osition, to judge whether Christ's religion be divine or human from its effects, result in its disfavor?"

But whilst the Catholic Church practises and recommends the veneration and invocation of the saints, she does not teach us to honor and invoke them as we do God, nor to pray to them as we do to Him. She makes a great distinction.

The veneration of the saints differs from the worship of God in the following:

1. We *adore* God as our supreme Lord. We *honor* the saints as His faithful servants and friends.

2. We *adore* God for His own sake. We *honor* the saints for the gifts and prerogatives with which God endowed them.

Therefore there is a difference between the prayer to God and the invocation of the saints. We pray to God asking Him to help us by His omnipotence: we pray to the saints to help us by their intercession with God.

Our veneration of the saints should consist, primarily, in the imitation of their virtues. It is truly profitable only when we are intent upon following their example; for only by imitating their virtues shall we share their eternal bliss in heaven. A veneration which contents itself with honoring the saints without imitating their vir-

tues is similar to a tree that produces leaves and blossoms, but bears no fruit.

The saints themselves desire that we should follow their example. Each of them, so to say, exhorts us with St. Paul, "Be ye followers of me, as I also am of Christ (1 *Cor.* iv. 16). There is no age, no sex, no station in life for which the Catholic Church has not saints, whose example teaches us to avoid sin and to observe faithfully the commandments of God and the Church at this or that age, or in this or that station. Therefore the principal object of our invocation of the saints ought to be the obtaining of their help in following their example. Thus we shall move them to come to our aid all the more readily.

CHAPTER II

Efficacy of the Intercession of the Saints

NOTHING is more consoling and comforting than the assurance that in the saints of heaven we have powerful protectors and advocates with God. Through their intercession they obtain for us from Him the grace to lead a virtuous life and to gain heaven.

However, is there any reasonable doubt that the saints are able to render us such a service? In virtue of the communion of saints, which comprises the Church militant on earth, the Church suffering in purgatory, and the Church triumphant in heaven, all members of the Church are members of one body, whose head is Christ. Hence the saints are united with us in spirit, though separated from us in body. United with Christ, they are imbued with a superior knowledge, and through Him, the All-Knowing, they know everything that concerns us, and for which we have recourse to them in prayer.

Our confidence in the intercessory power of the saints is founded on their relation to God and to us. As friends of God they have influence with Him now, even more than during their sojourn on earth, because their intercessory power is one

of their glorious prerogatives in heaven. Their love of God and their charity for their fellow-men, and the zeal for the salvation of souls resulting therefrom, together with their conformity with Christ, induces them to use their influence readily in our favor. Because God dispenses His gifts according to His own adorable will, it may please Him to grant a certain favor at the particular intercession of a certain saint; hence it is not superstition to invoke His aid in such cases. Moreover, we justly place our confidence in saints whom we have selected to be our special patrons, or who were given us as such by ecclesiastical authority.

By the intercession of the saints the mediatorship of Christ is not set aside or restricted. The power of intercession, the intercession itself, and its invocation are an effect of the grace of Christ; therefore He remains our only mediator. God remains Our Lord and Father, although men share in His lordship and paternity; for all power and authority comes from God, who is pleased to operate in His creatures through other creatures. Hence, only a dependent mediatorship can be ascribed to the saints. Whoever admits that the living can pray for each other can not denounce the intercession of the saints as an usurpation of the mediatorship of Christ. The saints are not the authors and dispensers of grace and heavenly

gifts, but they are able to obtain them for us from God.

The saints, moreover, do not only pray for mankind in general, but for their clients in particular. As co-reigners with Christ, the denizens of heaven have knowledge of the conditions and events of His kingdom; hence the saints may pray for us individually; therefore it is permissible and profitable for us to invoke them. It is obvious that the knowledge of individual occurrences does not mar the bliss of the saints. How they gain this knowledge is not clear to the spiritual authors; but most of them incline to the view that they attain it by direct divine mediation. God reveals our condition and our invocation to the saints.

Can we doubt the willingness of the saints to aid us by their intercession? According to St. Paul, charity is the greatest of all virtues. If, then, the saints, whilst on earth loved their fellow-men, cared for and prayed for them, how much more will they do so now, when their charity is perfected? They, too, were pilgrims on earth, who had to suffer the adversities and miseries of life and therefore know by experience how sorely in need of divine assistance we poor mortals are. Persons who have themselves experienced trials have more compassion for the adversities of others. Therefore it is certain that

the saints have compassion on us, that they wish our prayers to be heard and bring them before the throne of God. "The saints," says St. Augustine, "being secure of their eternal welfare, are intent upon ours." Holy Scripture establishes this beyond doubt, saying that the saints bring the prayers of the faithful before the throne of God (*Apoc.* v. 8).

Or is there any one that doubts the *efficacy* of the saints' prayer with God? At any rate, we must concede that their prayer is more effectual than ours; for they are confirmed in justice, and therefore friends and favorites of God, whilst we are sinners, of whom Holy Scripture says, "The Lord is far from the wicked, and He will hear the prayers of the just" (*Prov.* xv. 29). On this subject, let us hear St. Basil in his panegyric on the Forty Martyrs: "You often wanted to find an intercessor: here you have forty who intercede unanimously for you. Are you in distress? Have recourse to the holy martyrs. Rejoicing, do the same. The former that you may find relief, the latter that you may continue to prosper. These saints hear the mother praying for her children, the wife invoking aid for her sick or absent husband. O brave and victorious band, protectors of mankind, generous intercessors when invoked, be our advocates with God!"

There is no doubt, then, that during our earthly

pilgrimage the saints are our intercessors with God. True, we know that there is One who guides our destinies and whose providence watches over all; but who would not choose, also, to have a friend already abiding with God, sharing His bliss and confirmed for ever in His grace, and who therefore is in a position to aid us, and certainly will do so if we invoke Him?

The following is an example illustrating the power of the saints' intercession with God:

Basilides was one of the guards that led St. Potamiana to a martyr's death. Whilst the rest of the soldiers and the crowd of spectators insulted the holy virgin, he treated her with great respect and protected her from the assaults of the rabble. The martyr thanked him for his kindness, and promised to pray for him when she came into God's presence. A few days after her death the grace of God touched Basilides' heart, and he professed himself a Christian. His comrades at first imagined that he was jesting. But when he persevered in the confession of the Faith, he was brought before the judge, who sentenced him to be beheaded next day. Taken to prison, he was baptized, and at the appointed time, executed.

What else but the intercession of the saint whom he had befriended obtained for this heathen the grace of the Faith and martyrdom? Convinced of the power of the intercession of the

saints, Origen writes: "I will fall on my knees, and because I am unworthy to pray to God on account of my sins, I will invoke all the saints to come to my aid. O ye saints of God, I, filled with sadness, sighing and weeping, implore you; intercede for me, a miserable sinner, with the Lord of mercies!"

CHAPTER III

For What the Intercession of the Saints May and Should be Invoked

IT IS obvious that there are objects to attain which we ought *not* to pray. We shall try to specify them as follows:

1. *We may not pray for things that are evil or injurious in themselves, or injurious on account of circumstances.* Amongst these are comprised all those that are opposed to the salvation of the person praying, or of some one else. It is contrary to the very idea of prayer that God should grant to His creature anything evil, anything that is in itself, and not only by abuse, harmful. Prayer, according to the rules of morality, must have for its object only the attainment of whatever is good and profitable, and only then is it heard by God.

2. *Things completely indifferent are not comprised in the efficacy of prayer. Hence prayer imploring for temporal goods is heard only inasmuch as they relate to the salvation of souls.* Reason, as well as faith, teaches us that God orders all His actions first for the promotion of His glory, and secondly for the salvation of souls. Matters, therefore, that are either in general, or

on account of circumstances, positively indifferent, must be excluded from the general plan of God's providence when there is question of His positive agency, and not simply of His permission. It is obvious that temporal goods, such as health, wealth, etc., are classed with things indifferent, in as far as they are not connected with the moral order.

Thus considered, the various goods of the temporal order do, or at least may, under certain conditions, co-operate unto man's salvation, and then they belong to the supernatural order. As such, the efficacy of prayer in their regard must be judged according to the principles applying to the latter.

3. *All those things which any one can obtain himself without extraordinary effort, are not comprised within the scope of prayer.* This restriction results from the very nature of prayer. Obviously, prayer is not the only means by which man can obtain those things which, on the one hand, he momentarily does not possess, and which, on the other hand, are necessary or advantageous for his supernatural life. As a rule, man can, by labor and application, procure his sustenance. Persons unable to work can have recourse to the charity of their fellow-men, and will, as a rule, find the necessary assistance. In regard to salvation, it must first be ascertained

whether in many or at least in some cases, the faithful co-operation with the graces which God gives to all men is not sufficient.

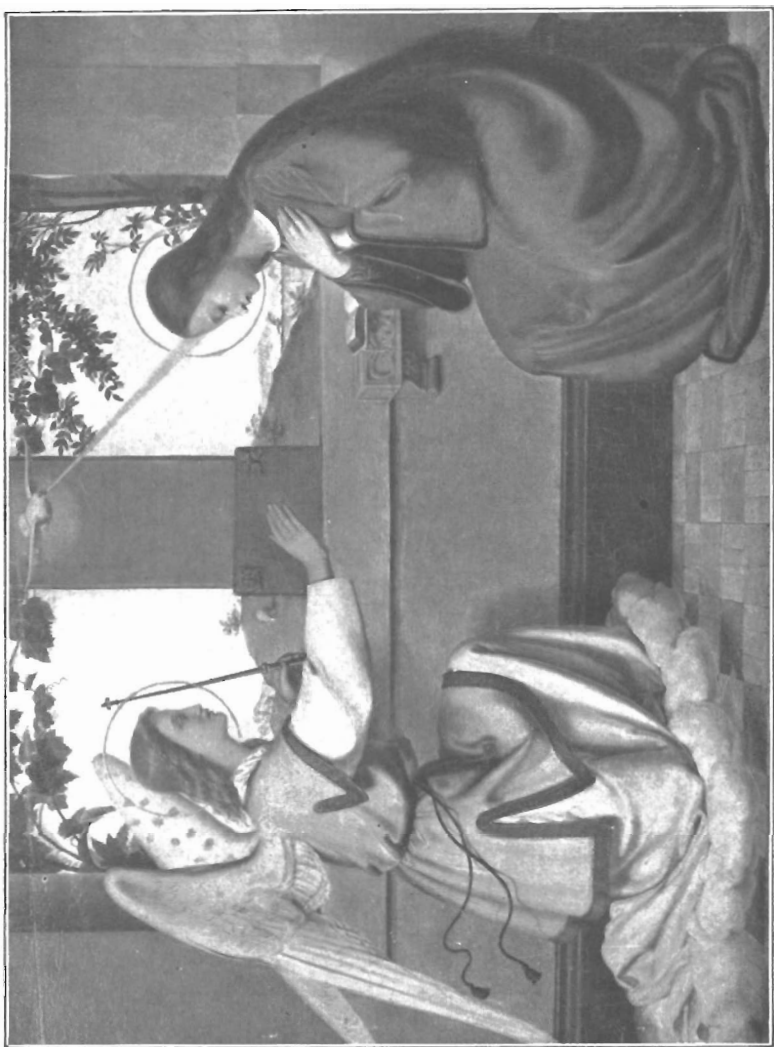
Considered from this view, we may, and even must, in a certain sense say: When there is question of attaining specified goods and specified graces, prayer is often not the primary, but only the secondary and subordinate means. From this premise follows that God in His wise providence does not have regard for our prayer when we easily can help ourselves, either by our own exertion and industry, or by the faithful co-operation with graces already received, or by the reception of the holy sacraments. This self-evident idea is expressed in Holy Scripture as follows, "Because of the cold the sluggard would not plow; he shall beg therefore in the summer, and it shall not be given him" (*Prov.* xx. 4). For this reason formal miracles are, as a rule, not to be expected from the efficacy of prayer. God ordained the world and its course in such a manner, that mankind in general and each individual in particular can be provided, without the intervention of a miracle, with all things necessary for their temporal and eternal welfare.

Theologians, therefore, teach that to ask God for a miracle, generally, is the same as to tempt Him. This rule, however, admits of exceptions. And if we may, in exceptional cases, ask for

miracles, we may, logically, expect them; for miracles in general are not excluded from the plan of divine Providence. They are rather an essential part of the existing order of God's government of the world. At most we may say: As miracles of their nature belong among the extraordinary manifestations of Providence, they are not obtained by the prayer of each and every one, but only in exceptional cases.

However, if we consider how feeble and helpless man's nature is, even with the assistance of divine grace, we may not apply the above principles too strictly. This, for the following reason: Cases in which we can not help ourselves with the aid of the grace given us are rare. Therefore God gives us, in reward of our confident prayer, not only that which is strictly necessary, but also that which is profitable and conducive to our welfare. This being so, the logical deduction is, that God is willing to hear our prayer not only when we, of ourselves, are totally incapable of helping ourselves, but also when great difficulties beset us in this our self-help. Hence, in a certain sense, we may maintain that in the work of our salvation prayer and its efficacy must be considered, together with the sacraments, as one of the chief means, and not as a mere accessory.

This limitation of the main principle is founded on the generality of the divine promises concern-



ing the hearing of prayer, and on the great goodness and bounty of God in which these promises originated. When man, after making use of all the means placed at his disposal, can not help himself, a cry for help sent to Heaven is not presumptuous or unreasonable, and therefore the hope of being heard is not unfounded or vain.

CHAPTER IV

The Qualities of Prayer

FOR greater convenience of explanation, we condense the various qualities of prayer taught by theologians as conditions of its efficacy into the following four: (1) Devotion; (2) Confidence; (3) Perseverance; (4) Resignation to the will of God.

Treating of prayer, some theological authors demand, above all, the intention of praying. This intention is indeed so necessary that it does not belong to the qualities or attributes of prayer, but to its very essence. For whosoever has not the intention or will to pray may recite a formula of prayer with the greatest attention, yet does not really and truly pray.

Again, the teachers of the spiritual life tell us that prayer must be "in the name of Jesus." This being a condition insisted upon by our divine Lord Himself, it also belongs to the essence of prayer. It means that we offer up our prayer to God in the name of Jesus His Son, that is, with reference to Him and in the firm confidence that we shall be heard on His account and because of His promises. Again, to pray in the name of Jesus

means to pray according to His manner and in His spirit.

We now proceed to explain the qualities of true prayer:

1. *Devotion*.—What is meant by devotion in prayer? Devotion in prayer means: (*a*) that our prayer must be *attentive*; that is, the person praying must direct his thoughts as uninterruptedly as possible to his prayer, *viz.*, to the formula he uses to state the object of his desires, and above all to God, to whom his prayer is directed. (*b*) The person praying must know and acknowledge his own needs, and that of himself he has no claims whatsoever on God, and thus engender in himself sentiments of true humility. (*c*) These sentiments must, moreover, embrace reverence for God and the acknowledgment of dependence on Him, thus giving to prayer the character of piety. (*d*) All this must culminate in full abandonment to God, the Giver of all good things. This abandonment is an essential part of our divine cult.

As to the question whether devotion, and what grade of it, is necessary in prayer, and whether prayer without it loses its entire efficacy, and especially its imploring efficiency, it is evident that prayer without devotion is ineffective; it is simulation. An example of this, that is, of a man pretending to pray and not praying in reality, is given us in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican

(*Luke* xviii. 10-12). To determine accurately what grade of devotion, that is, what degree of attention, humility, and piety is necessary to render prayer from a formality into a reality, is possible only when all the circumstances, dispositions, and qualities of mind of the person praying can be taken into account. Suffice it to remark that when all the other conditions, together with the intention of praying, combine, strict but reliable theologians declare that the true essence of prayer is compatible with a less degree of attention and recollection.

2. *Confidence*.—There is no doubt but that strong confidence, or the firm hope of being heard, contributes much to the perfection of prayer and renders it especially effective. Therefore confidence, like devotion or attention, must be reckoned among the essential qualities or attributes of prayer. For it is inconceivable that a rational being should resolve on presenting a petition when he has not the least hope of its being granted. In this case his petition would be entirely useless, and therefore irrational. Again, it is inconceivable that God should have regard for a prayer or the petition of a man who has absolutely no confidence in His mercy. A prayer without confidence is hypocrisy, rather than true and sincere supplication. If we address a petition to God without the confidence that He can and will grant

it, He must rather feel offended than honored thereby. How, then, shall He feel moved to grant us new benefits? If we nevertheless receive them, it is the effect of His bountiful goodness, and not the result of our sham prayer.

Therefore, to be effective, our prayer must be inspired by confidence. The apostle St. James inculcates this, saying: "But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering; for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, which is moved and carried about by the wind. Therefore let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord" (*James* i. 6-7). By these words the apostle designates not a common and ordinary confidence, but one firm and steadfast. At the same time he speaks in general; that is, his words have reference not only to extraordinary petitions, but to everything for which we are accustomed to pray.

Moreover, the explicit and positive promises made by Christ in regard to prayer manifestly have the purpose of inspiring the person praying with firm confidence and the sure hope of being heard. If, then, our prayer be wanting in this quality, we do not pray in the spirit of Christ, nor in the terms in which we ought to pray, and can not claim the fulfilment of His promises.

3. *Perseverance*.—To understand properly in how far perseverance is a quality of prayer, we must, above all, know what may be the objects

of our prayer. Of these there are three classes. To the first class belong those cases in which a person needs divine help at the present moment or at least at a time definitely near, and seeks it through prayer. Such a petition would be, for instance, to obtain the necessary and effective aid of divine grace for overcoming an existing transient temptation, or the conversion of a certain sinner approaching death. To the second class belongs the avoidance of temporal evils, or of continuous temptations, or the conversion of a certain sinner now in good health. To the third class belong such benefits which can be granted only for a later period, perhaps at the hour of death. The grace of final perseverance is the foremost among these.

Having stated the preliminary conditions, the answer to the question of perseverance in prayer is:

a. Inasmuch as our prayer is directed toward the attainment of benefits of the first class, that is, of graces which we need immediately, perseverance can obviously not be an essential condition of our prayer. Either we can not attain our object by prayer, or a transient prayer which has the other necessary qualities must suffice for its attainment. The first supposition is contrary to the divine promises; therefore the alternative must stand.

b. When there is question of benefits and graces of the second and third class, we must concede that perseverance or continuance in prayer is neither impossible, nor is it unreasonable. God is willing to grant us His almighty help, but at the same time He desires that we, being convinced of its necessity, implore it all the more eagerly, and thereby become more worthy to receive it when He shall be pleased to grant our petitions. Therefore

4. *Resignation to the will of God* is a necessary condition for the efficacy of our prayer. This quality of our prayer needs no lengthy explanation; its application to prayer is self-evident.

Finally the petition for a certain benefit, in order to be reasonable and permissible, must include the following two attributes: (*a*) The object prayed for must not be harmful, but profitable; (*b*) it must not be opposed to the will of God.

Conclusions.—Careful observation will convince us that prayer is often wanting in one or more of the above qualities. Often that which one seeks to obtain by prayer is not promotive of God's glory and of the salvation of souls, even considered from a human point of view, much less in the designs of Providence.

In cases where the object of prayer in itself presents no difficulties, it is often defective for want of devotion or perseverance. But oftenest

our prayer is wanting in confidence and trust, which want originates in the feeble faith of the person praying, or in too little reliance on the promises of Christ and in the merits of His redemption. Thus there is nothing to surprise us if we are not heard.

Again, we must never forget that very many, and generally the most precious gifts of divine grace are bestowed secretly. Remember the many and great benefits conferred daily and hourly by God on mankind, universally and individually. Considering them, it is presumption to maintain that in a special case the prayer of the Church, or of a community, or of an individual, was not granted. The opposite is fully proved by the goodness, bounty, and mercy which God shows so profusely to us.

We must, moreover, never lose sight of the principle that the promises made to prayer concern directly only the supernatural order of salvation. To the goods of the temporal order they are applicable only relatively. If we, therefore, experience that our prayers relative to temporal things remain unheard, we must, instead of doubting the divine promises, be firmly convinced that the attainment of the object for which we prayed was, under the circumstances, not conducive to our real welfare. We must, moreover, be convinced that God, in order not to leave our peti-

tion ungranted, conferred on us some other real benefit.

Finally, when the refusal of our prayer is clearly and unmistakably established, the reasons for this may be the following: (*a*) Perhaps the person praying was wanting in effort, or in cooperation with graces formerly received, a deficiency which can not be repaired by prayer alone. (*b*) Or the prayer itself is wanting in one or the other necessary qualities, especially in confidence. (*c*) God does not intend to refuse the desired grace, but, for reasons of His own, delays it. (*d*) God gives us in place of what we asked some other grace more salutary to us.

PART II

Mary, the Help of Christians

**Prayers in Preparation for the Principal Feasts
of the Blessed Virgin**

“Holy Mary, aid the miserable, assist the desponding, strengthen the weak, pray for the people, plead for the clergy, intercede for the devout female sex. Let all who have recourse to thee experience the efficacy of thy help!”—HOLY CHURCH.

Rules for the Proper Observance of Novenas

By St. Alphonsus Liguori

1. THE soul must be in the state of grace; for the devotion of a sinful heart pleases neither God nor the saints.

2. We must persevere, that is, the prayers for each day of the novena must never be omitted.

3. If possible, we should visit a church every day, and there implore the favor we desire.

4. Every day we ought to perform certain specified acts of exterior self-denial and interior mortification, in order to prepare us thereby for the reception of grace.

5. It is most important that we receive holy communion when making a novena. Therefore prepare yourself well for it.

6. After obtaining the desired grace for which the novena was made, do not omit to return thanks to God and to the saint through whose intercession your prayers were heard.

On the Manner of Reading the Meditations and Observing the Practices

HOLY SCRIPTURE says, "Before prayer prepare thy soul; and be not as a man that tempteth God" (*Eccles.* xviii. 23). Therefore place yourself in the presence of God, invoke the assistance of the Holy Ghost, and make a most sincere act of contrition for your sins. Offer up to God your will, your intellect, and your memory, so that your prayer may be pleasing to God and serve to promote your spiritual welfare.

Then read the meditation slowly, reflecting on each point of the thought or mystery treated, and consider what you can learn from it, and for what grace you ought to implore God. This is the principal object to be attained by mental prayer.

Never rise from your prayer without having formed some special resolution for practical observance. The practices at the end of each consideration in the following novenas will aid you to do so. Finally, ask for grace to carry out effectively your good purposes, and thank God for enlightening your mind during the meditation.

Introduction

Mary, the Help of Christians

NO CATHOLIC denies that Our Lord Jesus Christ is the only mediator through whose merits we became reconciled to God. Nevertheless, it is a doctrine of our faith that God willingly grants us grace if the saints, and especially the Blessed Virgin Mary, the queen of saints, intercede for us. If the saints, during their life on earth, were so potent with God that through their prayers the blind obtained sight, the deaf hearing, and the dumb speech, that the sick of all conditions were healed, the dead restored to life, and the most obstinate sinners converted; if thousands of other miracles in the order of nature and of grace were performed through their intercession; what, then, will not *she* obtain for us from God, whose virtue and merits transcend those of all the saints, and who did more for the greater honor and glory of God than they all? Mary is the queen of saints not only because she is the Mother of the Most High, but also because her sanctity is more perfect than theirs, and she therefore thrones above them all in heaven. Hence the favor with which God regards her, and con-

sequently the power of her intercession with Him is so much the greater.

If Mary's sanctity thus impressively illustrates the potency of her intercession, the contemplation of her dignity as the Mother of God does still more so. Mary brought forth Him who is the Almighty. She calls Him her Son, who by the word of His omnipotence created from out of nothing the whole world with all its beauties, and who can call into being countless millions of other worlds. She calls Him her Son, whose throne is heaven and whose footstool is the earth, who governs all nature with almighty power and reveals His name to mankind through the most astounding miracles. In a word, Mary calls Him her Son, whose omnipotence fills heaven and earth; and this great, almighty God, who honors her as His Mother and has wrought in her such great things, will He not heed her word of intercession, and hear her pleading for those who have recourse to her? On earth He was subject to her. Her intercession moved Him to exercise His omnipotent power at the wedding feast at Cana; and now, when He has glorified and raised her up so high He would let her invoke Him in vain? No, it is inconceivable that God should not hear the prayers of His Mother!

The holy Fathers and Doctors of the Church vie with each other in proclaiming the power of



THE BLESSED VIRGIN VISITS ST. ELIZABETH.

Mary's intercession with the Heart of her divine Son. Some say that having been subject to her on earth, He desires to be so in heaven, inasmuch as to refuse her nothing she asks. Hence St. Bernard calls her the "Intercessory Omnipotence." Indeed, when all the angels and saints in heaven join in supplication to God, their prayers are but those of servants; but when Mary prays her intercession is that of His Mother.

Therefore we can not sufficiently thank God for having given us in Mary so powerful an advocate. St. Bernard aptly says: "The angel announces, 'thou hast found grace before God.' O supreme happiness! Mary shall always find grace. And what else could we wish? If we seek grace, let us seek it through Mary; for what she seeks, she finds. Never can she plead ineffectually."

God, then, who in His infinite mercy has been pleased to provide for all our needs, desires through Mary to console us, to comfort us, to remove all distrust, to strengthen our hope. How consoling to him who calls upon God in sore distress, or implores His pardon for sins committed, is the thought that at the throne of divine Mercy he has in Mary an advocate as mighty as she is gracious, who supplements his great unworthiness by her sublime dignity, and who makes good the defects of his prayer by her intercession!

Therefore St. Bonaventure exclaims: "Verily, great is Our Lord's mercy! That we, through fear of our divine Judge, depart not forever from Him, He gave us His own Mother for our advocate and mediatrix of grace."

I

Novena in Honor of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

INDULGENCES

To ALL the faithful who by themselves or with others, in church or at home, with at least contrite heart and devotion, shall make this novena: (1) 300 days indulgence for each of the nine days; (2) a plenary indulgence on one day of the novena or of the eight days following it. (Pius IX, January 5, 1849.) Conditions: Confession, communion, and prayer, according to the intentions of the Holy Father.

Remark.—Whenever, in the following pages, an indulgence is said to be granted “under the usual conditions,” these conditions are the same as above.

Note.—The above indulgences may also be gained for making the novena at any other time of the year, and are not attached to any prescribed formula of prayer. The same applies to all other novenas in honor of the Blessed Virgin.

FIRST DAY

The Predestination of the Blessed Virgin Mary

PREPARATORY PRAYER

IN THY conception, O Virgin Mary, thou wast immaculate; pray for us to the Father, whose Son Jesus, conceived in thy womb by the Holy Ghost, thou didst bring forth.

Indulgence. 200 days, every time. (Pius VI, November 21, 1793.)

MEDITATION

HOLY Church, our Mother, purposely gathered into the season of Advent everything which might contribute to assist us in preparing for the coming of the Redeemer. Purity of heart is the most necessary and helpful requirement for receiving God worthily, and for participating in the fruits of our Redemption through Christ. To remind us of this, Holy Church celebrates the feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, this primary feast of purity, in Advent.

The Church, moreover, intends to remind us that the coming of Christ, our promised Redeemer, depended on the consent of the Blessed Virgin. The Redeemer could not appear before she was born of whom He was to be born. The aurora must precede the rising sun. Thus also Mary, the spiritual aurora, had to be conceived and born before the appearance of the Sun of Justice in this world.

PRACTICE

IN MARY appeared the woman who was to crush the serpent's head, who was to repair by her willing co-operation with God's designs the damage wrought by the disobedience of our first parents, and who was to become our mother and mighty advocate with God.

The designs of God concerning Mary were fully accomplished. God also has designs concerning us. Our life was planned by Him from all eternity, and we were destined to co-operate with Him harmoniously and conscientiously in working out our salvation. Have we corresponded with God's designs? Did we not oppose them by yielding to our evil inclinations and passions? What a disparity between God's intentions concerning us and our own co-operation, between His merciful designs and our cowardly resistance to them!

PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

O GOD, who through the immaculate conception of the Virgin didst prepare a worthy dwelling-place for Thy divine Son; grant that, as in view of Thy Son Thou didst preserve her from all taint, so Thou wouldst vouchsafe unto us that cleansed from all sin by her intercession we too may arrive at Thine eternal glory. Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

Litany of Loreto (p. 322).

Prayer

BEHOLD, Virgin immaculate, at thy sacred feet I bow, while my heart overflows with joy in union with thine own, because from eternity thou wast the Mother-elect of the eternal Word,

and was preserved stainless from the taint of Adam's sin. Forever praised, forever blessed be the Most Holy Trinity, who in thy conception poured out upon thy soul the riches of that matchless privilege. I humbly pray thee, most gracious Mother, obtain for me the grace to overcome the bitter results of original sin. Make me victorious over them, that I may never cease to love my God.

Hail Mary, etc.

Ejaculation

O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee!

Indulgence. 100 days, once a day. (Leo XIII, March 25, 1884.)

SECOND DAY

Mary's Immaculate Conception

Preparatory Prayer (p. 51).

MEDITATION

ACCORDING to the definition of Pope Pius IX, the immaculate conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary is that privilege by which she was preserved, in view of the merits of our Saviour Jesus Christ, from original sin in the first moment of her conception.

By solemnly proclaiming the dogma of Mary's immaculate conception, the Church confirmed anew the fundamental principles of Christianity which in our times are so frequently attacked, derided, or forgotten. God reserved the solemn proclamation of this dogma, which seemingly has no practical bearing on the Christian life, for our age, to recall to our mind the doctrines resulting from it.

PRACTICE

The most important of these doctrines is that of original sin, which to-day is rejected by many as a debasement of human nature, and is forgotten by others as having no practical influence on our moral state. By the promulgation of the doctrine of the immaculate conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Church solemnly declares and defines as an article of faith, that the Blessed Virgin Mary is conceived without the stain of original sin by a special privilege and grace of God. If, then, Mary's sinlessness is an exception, the general rule remains in force, and all other human beings enter this world in the state of original sin.

Thus, by the proclamation of the dogma of the immaculate conception, the Church combats human pride and sensuality, the foremost vices of the age.

Prayer of the Church (p. 53).

Litany of Loreto (p. 322).

Prayer

MARY, unsullied lily of heavenly purity, I rejoice with thee, because at thy conception's earliest dawn thou wast full of grace and endowed with the perfect use of reason. I thank and adore the ever-blessed Trinity, who gave thee such high gifts. I am overwhelmed with shame in thy presence, to see myself so poor in grace. O thou who wast filled with heavenly grace, impart some portion of it to my soul, and make me share the treasures of thy immaculate conception.

Hail Mary, etc.

Ejaculation (p. 54).

THIRD DAY

Mary, the Victrix of Satan

Preparatory Prayer (p. 51).

MEDITATION

THE immaculate conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary inaugurated the fulfilment of the divine promise made to our first parents in paradise in the words addressed to the serpent: "I

shall put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed; she shall crush thy head" (*Gen.* iii. 15). Mary is the woman in whom Satan never had a part. Her intimate connection with God was announced by the angel: "Hail, full of grace; the Lord is with thee." Now was fulfilled the saying of the Psalmist, "The Most High hath sanctified His own tabernacle. God is in the midst thereof, it shall not be moved: God will help it in the morning early" (*Ps.* xlv. 5-6). Mary was chosen to be the glorious tabernacle of the Son of God "in the morning early," that is, in the first moment of her existence. God called her into being that she might assume the exalted dignity of the Mother of His Son, and therefore granted her the singular privilege of exemption from original sin. In her were fulfilled Solomon's prophetic words of praise, "Thou art all fair, O my love, and there is not a spot in thee" (*Cant.* iv. 7). It was in view of her Son's merits applied to her beforehand that God thus produced in her the image of the new man regenerated in the Holy Ghost.

PRACTICE

THE spirit of darkness holds mankind enslaved, but one human being escapes him. A destructive fire lays waste the whole earth, but one tree remains unscathed. A terrible tyrant conquers the whole world, but one fortified city repels

his assaults. This human being retaining liberty, this tree escaping destruction, this city repelling the enemy's attack is the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Will the almighty and merciful God, who has accomplished such great things in Mary, who has selected her for His Mother, not listen to her prayers when she intercedes for us? St. William of Paris exclaims: "No other created being can obtain for us so many and so great graces from God as His Mother. By the all-powerful might of her intercession He honors her not only as His handmaid, but also as His Mother." Therefore we ought not be surprised when the holy Fathers maintain that a single sigh of Mary is more effective with God than the combined intercession of all the angels and saints. If, then, Mary's power is so great, she will surely hear us when we invoke her help in our combat with Satan. Having conquered him herself, she will also help us to conquer him.

Prayer of the Church (p. 53).

Litany of Loreto (p. 322).

Prayer

MARY, thou mystical rose of purity, my heart rejoices with thine at the glorious triumph which thou didst gain over the infernal serpent by thy immaculate conception, and because thou wast conceived without stain of original sin. I

thank and praise with my whole heart the ever-blessed Trinity, who granted thee this glorious privilege; and I pray thee to obtain for me strength to overcome all the wiles of the infernal foe, and never to stain my soul with sin. Be thou mine aid; make me, by thy protection, victorious over the common foe of our eternal welfare.

Hail Mary, etc.

Ejaculation (p. 54).

FOURTH DAY

Mary without Actual Sin

Preparatory Prayer (p. 51).

MEDITATION

MARY conceived without sin is the most blessed daughter of the eternal Father, the real and true Mother of the divine Son, the elect spouse of the Holy Ghost. But in the world, in what condition do we behold her? She dwells not in a splendid palace; she is not surrounded by a retinue of servants ready at every moment to do her bidding; she is not exempt from trials and suffering. On the contrary, she is poor; she lives in obscurity, and suffered so much on earth that, without shedding her blood, she merits to be styled the queen of martyrs. Her heart was

transfixed with the sword of sorrow. Mary is not exempt from tribulations and adversity; but one thing God does not permit to touch her, *i.e.*, sin. Hence Holy Church applies to her the words, "Thou art all fair, O my love, and there is not a spot in thee" (*Cant.* iv. 7).

PRACTICE

ALTHOUGH we were not preserved from sin like Mary, yet God in His ineffable goodness and mercy granted us the grace to be cleansed from sin and to be clothed with the garment of sanctifying grace in Baptism. No treasure of the world can be compared with this prerogative. But as we bear this grace in a fragile vase, we must be most careful to protect and preserve it in ourselves and others from all danger. Let the Blessed Virgin Mary be our example. Well knowing the inestimable value of the grace conferred upon her, she guarded it with the greatest care. Although exempt from concupiscence and "full of grace," she was so distrustful of herself as if she were in continual danger. How much more, then, must we use precaution to preserve in ourselves and in others this treasure of grace, since we feel in ourselves constantly the law of the flesh, which resists the law of the spirit, and urges us on to evil, whilst the world and the devil never weary in placing snares for us in order to accomplish our ruin. Therefore let us have re-

NOVENA—THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION 61

course to Mary, and invoking her aid bravely resist all temptations.

Prayer of the Church (p. 53).

Litany of Loreto (p. 322).

Prayer

WIRROUR of holy purity, Mary, Virgin immaculate, great is my joy while I consider that, from thy immaculate conception, the most sublime and perfect virtues were infused into thy soul, and with them all the gifts of the Holy Ghost. I thank and praise the Most Holy Trinity, who bestowed on thee these high privileges. I pray thee, gentle Mother, obtain for me grace to practise virtue, and to make me worthy to become partaker of the gifts and graces of the Holy Ghost.

Hail Mary, etc.

Ejaculation (p. 54).

FIFTH DAY

Mary, Full of Grace

Preparatory Prayer (p. 51).

MEDITATION

MAN'S relation to God as His child was severed by sin. The beautiful image of God imprinted on man's soul was disfigured by it. But with the immaculate conception of Mary, a being full of grace, an object of God's supreme com-

placency entered this world. After the lapse of four thousand years God, in His wisdom, power, and love, for the first time again created a human being in that state in which He had originally created our first parents. Mary, from the first moment of her existence was, in virtue of the sanctifying grace infused into her soul, most intimately united with God, and endowed with the most precious gifts of heaven. Because she was predestined to become the Mother of the Redeemer of mankind, it was befitting that she should unite in herself all the gifts becoming to such an ineffable dignity. Hence she surpassed in grace and holiness all other created beings, and was consecrated a worthy temple of the incarnate Word. Therefore she was saluted by the angel as "full of grace," and the Church, in our behalf, addresses the Almighty: "O God, who through the immaculate conception of the Virgin didst prepare a worthy dwelling-place for Thy divine Son; grant, that, as in view of the death of that Son Thou didst preserve her from all taint, so Thou wouldst vouchsafe unto us that, cleansed from all sin by her intercession, we too may arrive at Thine eternal glory."

PRACTICE

THE world considers men according to their rank and station, their wealth and knowledge. God recognizes in them but one difference, that

