

Introduction to St. Louis Marie de Montfort's Theology of Mary

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The Church for two millennia has fostered a love for the Blessed Virgin Mary first based on the fact that she is the Mother of God who consented to her ministry of giving birth, and raising with St. Joseph, the Son of God made man. She was supremely prepared for this ministry over the God-man by an unimaginable degree of grace ("full of grace," the name given to Mary by Gabriel the archangel implying her superiority of her over him). Slowly the whole Church came to recognize that she was never touched by original sin (the immaculate conception). As a result of these two extraordinary gifts, Mary was able to merit grace in an extraordinary way for herself and for the whole mystical body of Christ by her simple acts of housecleaning and her more profound heroic acts such as suffering love at the cross. Given all these realities, she would become our mother as well, begun at the annunciation and consummated at the cross when Jesus told her to accept St. John as her "son", a profound symbol for all of us who are disciples of Jesus Christ. Therefore, as Queen of heaven and earth, our Mother in the spirit intercedes for us not only when we turn to her but even when we fail to do so. However, the more we accept her as our mother in the spirit, the more she brings graces to us that we may not deserve from her son because she is all merciful in a different way than her son yet dependent upon him even in heaven.

In the seventeenth century, many theologians thought of Mary as the spouse of God the Father. St. Louis Marie disagreed with them and maintained that she was rather the spouse of the Holy Spirit who first gave her the gifts of grace. She in turn now "distributes his gifts and graces to whom she wills, in the measure she wills, how she wills and when she wills" (article 25 of *True Devotion*).

Those of you who are about to take a long journey into the writings of St. Louis Marie de Montfort's teaching on Mary need to be prepared lest an authentic devotion to Mary turns into mariolotry (an adoration of Mary who is a creature) with the result of devaluing the love of Jesus and his Church. Also, it must be kept in mind that his thought is not just old fashioned conservative piety for women who have too much leisure on their hands. Keeping in mind that of all the theological writings of the twentieth century, his work was undoubtedly the most popular, the most translated and the most influential, more so than St. Therese of Lisieux, St. Josemaria Escriva or even St. Thomas Aquinas. Pope St. John Paul was the saint who in a special way embodied this teaching in his life both the words and example of St. Louis de Montfort as well as did St. Maximilian Kolbe at Auschwitz.

Paradoxically, Montfort's understanding of the love for Mary leads one to a greater love and service of our Lord Jesus Christ because Mary was the best disciple of Jesus, and icon of his virtues. When Mary consented to become the Mother of God at the annunciation by St. Gabriel, she represented the entire human race in grave need of redemption and salvation from sin, death and the evil one. For this reason alone, we can say that Mary began the process or journey of humankind's trek to achieving the ultimate end of life's trials and tribulations, heaven itself. If she would have said "no" to the angel bearing God's desire to become a man, we might still be waiting for a redeemer.

Why did we humans need a redeemer in the first place? Due to the original sin of Adam primarily and Eve secondarily, the human race of itself could not erase this absence of sanctifying grace, achieve heaven, grow in virtue because this absence left us with the disability to live by reason and will alone due to a kind of darkness of mind, weakness of will and the tendency of the emotions to rule decision making. The insults given to God and his rights by original sin and the personal sins of human kind, past, present and future could not be atoned for fully and completely by a creature because they are infinite, so to speak. They insult and take away God's glory by violating his rights over us in disobeying the innate principles of the moral life as articulated by the moral precepts found in the Old and New Testament. Therefore God himself joined to a human nature fulfilled this task by suffering physical violence as penance, taking upon himself all the atonement due to the past, present and future sin and doing more than enough atonement for the evil of sin.

It is one thing for Christ to wipe out sin in essence and quite another for someone to accept what he did by faith, and allow him to apply forgiveness and the infusion of sanctifying grace to themselves. When that happens, accepting his redemption becomes our salvation in principle, though we then plod through in life doing his will under grace but often imperfectly since sanctifying grace does not take away the all effects of original and personal sin. Since this is the case, the Church teaches us that the punishments due to sin are meant to purify these left-overs of sin from our minds, wills, imaginations and memories. As a result of cooperating in prayer, fasting, works of mercy and enduring life's many scourges or trials with complete trust in God's love, we become more unified and our dignity as images of God and new creations by grace becomes enhanced.

As de Montfort teaches us, the love of Mary "sweetens" the crosses of life. They do not necessarily disappear but rather becomes occasions of even greater divine favors than which we cannot imagine and often do not recognize in this life. As we try to cooperate with them, "...through Mary, with Mary, in Mary," then we become capacitated to embrace divine providence, "more perfectly through Jesus Christ, with Jesus Christ, in Jesus and for Jesus" ((article 258 of *True Devotion*). The whole purpose of "giving ourselves "entirely to the Blessed Virgin" is so that we might "belong entirely to Jesus Christ through her" (article 121).

Giving ourselves to Mary in an act of consecration then, that is, our merits, our prayers, petitions and "the daily grind of life" is truly a deepening of our baptismal promises renewed every Easter at Mass because ultimately it is a personal consecration to Jesus Christ. When we give up our desire to control even how our prayers are to be answered and to whom they meant to be for, She always respects the very order of justice and love that flows from the various bonds we have with parents, spouses, children, blood relatives, friends, acquaintances, and even enemies. No matter what we do not see or understand, our prayers become fruitful in ways we do not know now when they are united to her by the de Montfort consecration.

Now the journey of appropriating true devotion to Mary through the writing of St. Louis Marie de Montfort begins. To discover the riches of following Christ as a child of Mary via St. Louis Marie de Montfort, Anne Collins' outline will be a great resource wading through these deep theological waters.