

Novena for the feast of the Immaculate Conception

Texts by St Josemaria



November 30: Mary, full of grace

Friends of God, 292

She is the one who is full of grace and the sum of all perfections; and she is also our Mother. Her power before God is such that she can obtain anything we ask for, and, like any mother, she wants to answer our prayers. Like any mother also, she knows and understands our weaknesses. She encourages us and makes excuses for us. She makes the way easy for us and, even when we think there is no possible solution for our worry, she always has one ready to offer us.

Perhaps some of you might be thinking that the ordinary comings and goings of your working day are not going to help you much to stay close to someone as pure as Our Lady. But I would just ask you to reflect a little. What are we looking for all the time in things we do, even without thinking about it especially? If we are motivated by the love of God and we work with a right intention, then we are seeking whatever is good and clean, whatever brings peace to our conscience and happiness to our soul. Yes, you might say, but don't we still have our faults? Indeed, but it is precisely by acknowledging our faults that we are able to see, more clearly than ever, just what our goal has to be. What we are looking for is happiness; not a momentary happiness, but one that is deep and lasting, and both human and supernatural.

There is one creature who achieved such happiness here on earth because she is God's masterpiece: our most holy Mother Mary. She lives now and is protecting us. She is there, body and soul, with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Holy Rosary, 4th joyful mystery

When the days of the Mother's purification are accomplished, according to the Law of Moses, the Child must be taken to Jerusalem, to be presented to the Lord (Luke 2:22). And this time it will be you, my friend, who will carry the cage with the doves (Luke 2:24). Just think: She – Mary Immaculate! – submits to the Law as if she were defiled. Through this example, foolish child, will you learn to obey the Holy Law of God, regardless of any personal sacrifice?

Purification! You and I surely do need purification! Atonement, and more than atonement, Love. Love as a searing iron to cauterize our souls' uncleanness, and as a fire to kindle with divine flames the wretched tinder of our hearts.

Friends of God, 189

Let us turn to her, *tota pulchra!* – all beautiful! – taking to heart the advice I gave many years ago to those who felt uneasy in their daily struggle to be humble, pure, sincere, cheerful and generous. "All the sins of your life seem to be rising up against you. Don't give up hope! On the contrary, call your holy Mother Mary, with the faith and abandonment of a child. She will bring peace to your soul."



PRAYER

It's fair, gentle Lady, for me to ask you for a present, a proof of your affection: contrition, compunction for my sins, sorrow of love. Hear me, O Lady, my life, my hope. Take me by the hand – and if there is anything in me now that is displeasing to my Father-God, make me see it, and between the two of us we'll tear it out.

Personal notes, October 7, 1932

December 1: Mother of us all, Mother of each of us

Friends of God, 276

The divine Motherhood of Mary is the source of all the perfections and privileges with which she is endowed. Because of it, she was conceived immaculate and is full of grace; because of it, she is ever virgin, she was taken up body and soul to heaven and has been crowned Queen of all creation, above the angels and saints. Greater than she, there is none but God. "The Blessed Virgin, from the fact that she is the Mother of God, has a certain infinite dignity which comes from the infinite good which is God." There is no danger of exaggerating. We can never hope to fathom this inexpressible mystery; nor will we ever be able to give sufficient thanks to our Mother for bringing us into such intimacy with the Blessed Trinity.

Furrow, 801

There is no heart more human than that of a person overflowing with supernatural sense. Think of Holy Mary, who is full of grace, daughter of God the Father, Mother of God the Son, spouse of God the Holy Spirit. Her heart has room for all humanity and makes no distinction or discrimination. Every person is her son or her daughter.

Christ is Passing By, 140

John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, brought Mary into his home, into his life. Spiritual writers have seen these words of the Gospel as an invitation to all Christians to bring Mary into their lives. Mary certainly wants us to invoke her, to approach her confidently, to appeal to her as our mother, asking her to "show that you are our mother." But she is a mother who anticipates our requests. Knowing our needs, she comes quickly to our aid. If we recall that God's mercies come to us through the hands of our Lady, each of us can find many reasons for feeling that Mary is our mother in a very special way.

Christ is Passing By, 143

Because Mary is our mother, devotion to her teaches us to be authentic sons and daughters: to love truly, without limit; to be simple, without the complications which come from selfishly thinking only about ourselves; to be happy, knowing that nothing can destroy our hope. "The beginning of the way, at the end of which you will find yourself completely carried away by love for Jesus, is a trusting love for Mary." I wrote that many years ago, in the introduction to a short book on the rosary, and since then I have often experienced the truth of those words. I am not going to complete that thought here with all sorts of reasons. I invite you to discover it for yourself, showing your love for Mary, opening your heart to her, confiding to her your joys and sorrows, asking her to help you recognize and follow Jesus.



PRAYER

Mother, we thank you for your intercession before Jesus. Without you we would not have been able to reach Him. How true it is that one always goes to Jesus and returns to Him through Mary!

The Way, Critical-Historical edition, note on n. 514

December 2: Mary, teacher of prayer

Christ is Passing By, 174 The Lord will grant you the ability to discover many other aspects of the faithful response to grace of the blessed Virgin. And to know these facets of her life is to want to imitate them: her purity, her humility, her fortitude, her generosity, her fidelity... But now I want to speak to you of an aspect that in a way encompasses all the others because it is a condition for spiritual growth. I'm speaking of her life of prayer.

To take advantage of the grace which our Mother offers us today, and to follow up at any time the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, the shepherd of our souls, we ought to be seriously committed to talking with God. We cannot take refuge in the anonymous crowd. If interior life doesn't involve a personal encounter with God, it doesn't exist – it's as simple as that. There are few things more at odds with Christianity than superficiality. To settle down to routine in our Christian life is to dismiss the possibility of becoming a contemplative soul. God seeks us out, one by one. And we ought to answer him, one by one: "Here I am, Lord, because you have called me."

We are ordinary Christians. We work at the most varied professions. All our activity takes place amid everyday circumstances. Everything follows a customary rhythm in our lives. The days seem the same, even monotonous. But don't forget that our condition which is apparently so common has a divine value. God is interested in everything we do, because Christ wishes to become incarnate in our things, to vivify from within even our most insignificant actions.

Christ is Passing By, 174 Review these thoughts in your prayer. Take occasion of them to tell Jesus that you adore him. And thus you have a formula to become contemplatives in the middle of the world, amid the noises of the street, at all times and in all places. This is the first lesson we should learn in the school of intimacy with Christ. And in this school, Mary is the best teacher, because the Virgin always kept this attitude of faith, of supernatural vision, regardless of what happened around her: "And his mother kept all these words in her heart."

Friends of God, 241 Our Mother had meditated deep and long on the words of the holy men and women of the Old Testament who awaited the Saviour, and on the events that they had taken part in. She must have marvelled at all the great things that God, in his boundless mercy, had done for his people, who were so often ungrateful. As she considers the tenderness shown time after time by God towards his people, Mary's immaculate Heart breaks out in loving words, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour, for he has looked graciously upon the lowliness of his handmaid." The early Christians, children of this good Mother, learned from her; we can, and we ought to do likewise.



PRAYER

Let us ask the blessed Virgin to make us contemplatives, to teach us to recognize the constant calls from God at the door of our heart. Let us ask her now: "Our mother, you brought to earth Jesus, who reveals the love of our Father God. Help us to recognize him in the midst of the cares of each day. Stir up our mind and will so that we may listen to the voice of God, to the calls of grace."

Christ is Passing By, 174

December 3: Mary, woman of faith

Friends of God, 284 She teaches us to have faith. “Blessed art thou for thy believing,” were the words of greeting uttered by her cousin Elizabeth when Our Lady went up into the hill country to visit her. Mary’s act of faith had been a wonderful one, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to thy word.” When her Son was born she contemplated the greatness of God on earth: a choir of angels was present, and not only the shepherds, but also important men of this world came to adore the Child. Afterwards, however, the Holy Family had to flee to Egypt, to escape Herod’s murderous intent. Then, silence; thirty long years of simple, ordinary life, just like that of any other home in a small village in Galilee.

Friends of God, 204 Lord, I do believe! I have been brought up to believe in you. I have decided to follow you closely. Repeatedly during my life I have implored your mercy. And repeatedly too I have thought it impossible that you could perform such marvels in the hearts of your children. Lord, I do believe, but help me to believe more and better!
Let us address this same plea to Our Lady, Mother of God and our Mother, and Teacher of faith: “Blessed art thou for thy believing; the message that was brought to thee from the Lord shall have fulfilment.”

Christ is Passing By, 173 The Virgin did not merely pronounce her fiat; in every moment she fulfilled that firm and irrevocable decision. So should we. When God’s love gets through to us and we come to know what he desires, we ought to commit ourselves to be faithful and loyal – and then be so in fact. Because “not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven.”

Christ is Passing By, 172 Don’t forget: if God exalted his Mother, it is equally true that he did not spare her pain, exhaustion in her work or trials of her faith. A village woman one day broke into praise for Jesus, exclaiming: “Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nourished you!” Jesus said in reply: “Rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it.” It was a compliment to his Mother on her *fiat*, her “be it done.” She lived it sincerely, unstintingly, fulfilling its every consequence, but never amid fanfare, rather in the hidden and silent sacrifice of each day.



PRAYER

“Mother!” Call her again and again. She is listening, she sees you in danger perhaps, and with her Son’s grace she, your holy Mother Mary, offers you the refuge of her arms, the tenderness of her embrace. Call her, and you will find yourself with added strength for the new struggle.

The Way, 516

December 4: Mary, Mother of Fair Love

Friends of God, 277 "I am the Mother of fair love, and of fear, and of knowledge and of holy hope." These are the lessons which Mary reminds us of today. The lesson of fair love, of living a clean life, of having a sensitive and passionate heart, so that we may learn to be faithful in our service to the Church. This is no ordinary love. It is Love itself. There is no room here for betrayal, or calculation, or forgetfulness. It is a fair, a beautiful love, because its beginning and end is God, who is thrice Holy, who is all Beauty, all Goodness and all Greatness.

But there is also a reference to fear. For myself, the only fear I can imagine is that of turning away from Love. God Our Lord certainly does not want us to be inhibited, timid or lukewarm about our dedication to him. He wants us to be daring, courageous and refined. When the sacred text speaks of fear here I am reminded of a complaint we find elsewhere in Scripture, "I searched for my heart's love, but found him not."

This can happen, if one has not yet fully understood what it means to love God. Then our hearts can be swayed by things which do not lead to Our Lord and so we lose sight of him. At other times it may be Our Lord who hides himself. He knows the reason why. In such cases, he will be encouraging us to seek him more earnestly and, when we find him, we shall be able to cry out with joy, "I took hold of him and I will never let him go."

The Way, 144 The spotless purity of John's whole life makes him strong before the Cross. The other apostles fly from Golgotha: he, with the Mother of Christ, remains. Don't forget that purity strengthens and invigorates the character.

Friends of God, 183 This heart of ours was born to love. But when it is not given something pure, clean and noble to love, it takes revenge and fills itself with squalor. True love of God, and consequently purity of life, is as far removed from sensuality as it is from insensitivity, and as far from sentimentality as it is from heartlessness or hard-heartedness.

The Way, 902 Why don't you give yourself to God once and for all... really..., now?

Christ is Passing By, 187 Mary, the holy Mother of our King, the Queen of our heart, looks after us as only she knows how. Mother of mercy, throne of grace: we ask you to help us compose, verse by verse, the simple poem of charity in our own life and the lives of the people around us; it is "like a river of peace." For you are a sea of inexhaustible mercy: "All streams run to the sea, but the sea is never full."



PRAYER

At this very moment, you should trustingly beg Our Lady, as you accompany her in the solitude of your heart, without saying anything out loud: "Mother, this poor heart of mine rebels so foolishly! If you don't protect me..." And she will help you to keep it pure and to follow the way to which God has called you.

Friends of God, 180

December 5: Holy Mary, our hope

Friends of God, 286 Mary teaches us to hope. She proclaimed: "All generations will call me blessed." Humanly speaking, how could she hope for such a thing? Who was she, in the eyes of the men and women of her time? The great heroines of the Old Testament – Judith, Esther, Deborah – won a measure of human glory even here on earth, for they were acclaimed and exalted by the people. Mary's throne, by contrast, like that of her Son, is the Cross. During the rest of her life, until she was taken body and soul into Heaven, what most impresses us about her is her quiet presence. St Luke, who knew her well, describes her as being close to the first disciples, in prayer. This was the way she lived to the end of her days on earth, she who was to be praised by all creatures for all eternity.

What a contrast between Our Lady's hope and our own impatience! So often we call upon God to reward us at once for any little good we have done. No sooner does the first difficulty appear than we start to complain. Often we are incapable of sustaining our efforts, of keeping our hope alive. Why? Because we lack faith. "Blessed art thou for thy believing; the message that was brought to thee from the Lord shall have fulfilment."

Friends of God, 221 Let us be full of hope! This is the great thing about being a contemplative soul. We live by Faith, Hope and Love, and Hope makes us powerful. Do you remember what St John says? "I am writing to you, young men, because you are strong and the word of God abides in you, and you have conquered the evil one." God is urging us on, for the sake of the eternal youthfulness of the Church and of all mankind. You have the power to transform everything human into something divine, just as King Midas turned everything he touched into gold!

Do not ever forget that after death you will be welcomed by Love itself. And in the love of God you will find as well all the noble loves which you had on earth. Our Lord has arranged for us to spend this brief day of our earthly existence working and, like his only-begotten Son, "doing good." Meanwhile we have to be on our guard, alert to the call St Ignatius of Antioch felt within his soul as the hour of his martyrdom approached. "Come to the Father," come to your Father, who anxiously awaits you.



PRAYER

Let us ask Holy Mary, *Spes Nostra*, our hope, to kindle in us a holy desire that we may all come together to dwell in the house of the Father. Nothing need disturb us if we make up our minds to anchor our hearts in a real longing for our true fatherland. Our Lord will lead us there with his grace, and he will send a good wind to carry our ship to the bright shores of our destination.

Friends of God, 221

December 6: Mary, our refuge and our strength

Friends of God, 288 When it comes to the scandal of the Sacrifice of the Cross, Mary is there, hearing with sadness how “the passers-by blasphemed against him, tossing their heads, ‘Come now, they said, you would destroy the temple and build it up in three days, rescue yourself; come down from that cross, if you are the Son of God’.” Our Lady is there listening to the words of her Son, united to him in his suffering, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” What could she do? She united herself fully with the redemptive love of her Son, and offered to the Father her immense sorrow, which pierced her pure Heart like a sharp-edged sword.

Jesus is comforted anew by the quiet, loving presence of his Mother. Mary does not shout; she does not run about frantically. *Stabat*: she is there, standing next to her Son. It is then that Jesus looks at her, and then turning his gaze to John he exclaims, “Woman, this is thy son.” Then he said to the disciple, “This is thy Mother.” In the person of John, Christ is entrusting all men to his Mother, and especially his disciples: those who were to believe in him.

Felix culpa the Church sings. Happy fault, that has brought us so great and wonderful a Redeemer. Happy fault, we could add, which has merited that we should receive Mary as our Mother. Now we are safe. Nothing should worry us now, because Our Lady, the crowned Queen of heaven and earth, is omnipotent in her supplication before our Father God. Jesus cannot deny anything to Mary, nor to us, who are children of his own Mother.

The Way, 508 Marvel at Mary’s courage: at the foot of the Cross, with the greatest of human sorrows – there is no sorrow like her sorrow – filled with fortitude. And ask her for that same strength, so that you too can remain beside the Cross.

The Way of the Cross, 13th Station, 3 Don’t let discouragement enter into your apostolate. You haven’t failed, just as Christ didn’t fail on the Cross. Take courage!... Keep going, against the tide, protected by Mary’s Immaculate and Motherly Heart: *Sancta Maria, refugium nostrum et virtus!*, you are my refuge and my strength. Hold your peace. Be calm... God has very few friends on earth. Don’t yearn to leave this world. Don’t shy away from the burden of the days, even though at times we find them very long.

Friends of God, 141 You should realise that God wants you to be glad and that, if you do all you can, you will be happy, very, very happy, although you will never be a moment without the Cross. But that Cross is no longer a gallows. It is the throne from which Christ reigns. And at his side is his Mother, – our Mother too. The Blessed Virgin will obtain for you the strength that you need to walk decisively in the footsteps of her Son.



PRAYER

Say to her: Mother, my Mother – yours, because you are hers on many counts – may your love bind me to your Son’s Cross: may I not lack the Faith, nor the courage, nor the daring, to carry out the will of our Jesus.

The Way, 497

December 7: Mary, our teacher in everyday life

Christ is Passing By, 173 We must imitate her natural and supernatural refinement. She is a privileged creature in the history of salvation, for in Mary “the Word became flesh and dwelled among us.” But she is a reserved, quiet witness. She never wished to be praised, for she never sought her own glory. Mary is present at the mysteries surrounding the infancy of her Son, but these are “normal” mysteries, so to speak. When the great miracles take place and the crowds acclaim them in amazement, she is nowhere to be found. In Jerusalem when Christ, riding a little donkey, is proclaimed king, we don’t catch a glimpse of Mary. But after all have fled, she reappears next to the Cross. This way of acting bespeaks personal greatness and depth, the sanctity of her soul.

Christ is Passing By, 172 To become God-like, to be divinized, we must begin by being very human, accepting from God our condition as ordinary men and women, and sanctifying its apparent worthlessness. That is how Mary lived. She who is full of grace, the object of God’s pleasure, exalted above all the angels and the saints, lived an ordinary life. Mary is as much a creature as we are, with a heart like ours, made for joy and mirth as well as suffering and tears. Before Gabriel communicates God’s plan to her, our Lady does not know she has been chosen from all eternity to be the Mother of the Messiah. She sees herself as a humble creature. That is why she can acknowledge, with full humility, that “he who is mighty has done great things” in her.

Christ is Passing By, 148 We can’t forget that Mary spent nearly every day of her life just like millions of other women who look after their family, bring up their children and take care of the house. Mary sanctifies the ordinary everyday things – what some people wrongly regard as unimportant and insignificant: everyday work, looking after those closest to you, visits to friends and relatives. What a blessed ordinariness, that can be so full of love of God! For that’s what explains Mary’s life – her love. A complete love, so complete that she forgets herself and is happy just to be there where God wants her, fulfilling with care what God wants her to do. That is why even her slightest action is never routine or vain but, rather, full of meaning. Mary, our mother, is for us both an example and a way. We have to try to be like her, in the specific circumstances in which God wants us to live.



PRAYER

We turn to Our Lady for protection, because we can be quite sure that each of us, in our own state in life – priest or lay-person, single, married or widowed – if we are faithful in the daily fulfilment of our duties, will achieve victory on this earth, the victory of being always loyal to Our Lord. And afterwards we will reach Heaven and rejoice for ever in the friendship and love of God, with the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Prayer before Our Lady of Guadalupe, 24 May 1970

December 8: Our Lady Queen of Apostles

Christ is Passing By, 145 If we have this filial contact with Mary, we won't be able to think just about ourselves and our problems. Selfish personal problems will find no place in our mind. Mary brings us to Jesus, and Jesus is "the firstborn among many brothers." And so, if we know Jesus, we realize that we can live only by giving ourselves to the service of others. Christians can't be caught up in personal problems; they must be concerned about the universal Church and the salvation of all souls.

Christ is Passing By, 145 If we are imbued with this spirit, our conversations with God eventually aid other people, even though they may begin on an apparently personal level. And if we take our Lady's hand, she will make us realize more fully that all men and women are our brothers and sisters – because we are all children of that God whose daughter, spouse and mother she is.

Christ is Passing By, 149 Be daring. Count on the help of Mary, Queen of Apostles. Without ceasing to be a mother, our Lady is able to get each of her children to face their own responsibilities. Mary always does the immense favour of bringing to the Cross, of placing face to face with the example of the Son of God, those who come close to her and contemplate her life. It is in this confrontation that Christian life is decided. And here Mary intercedes for us so that our behaviour may lead to a reconciliation of the younger brother – you and me – with the firstborn Son of the Father.

Many conversions, many decisions to give oneself to the service of God have been preceded by an encounter with Mary. Our Lady has encouraged us to look for God, to desire to change, to lead a new life. And so her counsel "Do whatever he tells you" has turned into real self-giving, into a Christian vocation, which from then on enlightens all our personal life.



PRAYER

Mary, who brought Jesus up and accompanied him through his life and is now beside him in heaven, will help us recognize Jesus as he crosses our path and makes himself present to us in the needs of our fellow men.

***Sancta Maria, spes nostra, ancilla Domini, sedes sapientiæ, ora por nobis!*, Holy Mary, our hope, handmaid of the Lord, seat of wisdom, pray for us!**

Christ is Passing By, 149