

WITH MARY IMMACULATE, THE FATHER'S BELOVED DAUGHTER

REDISCOVERING AND TAKING ON EACH DAY OUR FILIAL IDENTITY

**Novena to the Immaculate: November 29-December
7, 2016¹**



INTRODUCTION

Article 44 of the *Constitutions* reminds us that "Mary, Mother of God and of the Church is actively present in our life and in the history of the Institute. Trusting in the word of Don Bosco: 'It is Mary who guides us', we will cultivate for her a grateful and filial love and we will commit ourselves to pass this on to the young people." During this novena, let us put ourselves at the school of Mary, the Beloved Daughter of the Father, so as to learn from her how to be sons and daughters and to take on this filial identity in our daily life.

(We will follow an itinerary divided into three parts, with the suggestion that it be used during the Marian prayer moment of our morning prayers.² Every part, in its turn, is subdivided into three more parts which will permit us to reflect, to pray, and to put these into action.

It is hoped that we will review our effort during the Examination of Conscience in the evening so as to verify our living of the itinerary each day. If possible, we recommend that this inspiring contribution to the novena, offered in an attachment, be read in its entirety.

Each Community can also look for an opportune moment for mutual sharing on the theme of the novena.

The introduction suggested at the beginning of every part can be read and commented upon at the Good Night the evening before).

PART I: We contemplate Mary, the mirror of our filial identity

(This introduction might serve as the motivating thought for the itinerary to be followed in this part and can also be read at the Good Night on the preceding day)

At the conclusion of his Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict XVI invites the Church to look to Mary, the Mother of the Lord as "the mirror of all sanctity". Paraphrasing the words of the Holy Father, let us compare ourselves with Mary during this novena, contemplating her as the mirror of our filial identity.

One's identity is built by interacting with others and constitutes the prerequisite for every fecund relationship. From this perspective, to state that Mary is the mirror of our identity is an invitation to gaze on her so as to recognize ourselves, to get our bearings as Christians, and to reproduce in our lives today

¹ Prepared by Sr. Martha Séide. (see Martha SÉIDE, Per una generazione filiale. La via mariana dell'educazione, in FARINA Marcella-SIBOLDI Rosangela-SPIGA Maria Teresa, Filialità. Percorsi di riflessione e di ricerca, Città del Vaticano, LEV 2014, 312-331).

² Those Communities which celebrate the novena with the educating community will find the most opportune moment and way to adapt the content so that the young people might also have the opportunity to reflect and to pray on the theme of being sons and daughters - something characteristic of Christian life.

her filial characteristics. For us Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, it is a call to compare ourselves with her in being *daughters, sisters, and mothers*. Behaving as daughters, as sisters, and as mothers are three characteristic relational dimensions that bring us back to the essence of our charismatic identity at the service of the younger generations. At the heart of it, we are speaking about becoming profoundly aware of and taking on our existence and our filial vocation with all that these imply.

Prayer of Entrustment (*for each day of the novena*)

O Virgin Immaculate Help of Christians,
To You, the Beloved Daughter of the Father,
Mother of Jesus and Our Mother,
we entrust ourselves with faith and filial love.

You Immaculate, You All Beautiful!
We contemplate you, Mary, the mirror of our filial identity.
Raise up in us a renewed commitment to take on
the demands of our identity as daughters.
With you and like you, we recognize ourselves as daughters of the Father.
Teach us to live fraternity
Valuing our bond with all creatures.

You Immaculate, You All Pure!
In you we rediscover the fecundity of our filial life.
Virgin, Disciple of the Son, at your school
we renew our consecration to the Lord;
help us to live the radical nature of the Gospel Counsels
so as to be witnesses like you of our filial life.

You Immaculate, Full of Grace!
In You we contemplate the maternal icon of our life as daughters.
Help us take on motherhood as a gift and a task
so as to be the "womb" that safeguards life,
the hospitable and welcoming home for the young,
for our Sisters, and for all the persons who cross our path in life.

You Immaculate, Help of Christians!
In you we find our Teacher and Guide.
Help us to interiorize those filial traits
which urge us on to be perseverant in prayer,
intensifying our communion with the Father,
and which open us up to Christ present in our brothers and sisters and in every other reality.

You Immaculate Mother,
Educator of Jesus and of all Christians!
We place ourselves at your school to allow ourselves to be educated

and to learn how to educate to a life of prayer, communion, and service
so as to be the reflection of your filial countenance
in our educating communities, in the Salesian Family,
in the Church, and in society.

Amen

November 29

To rediscover (*this might serve as an introduction to the Angelus during the novena*)

With Mary and like Mary, we recognize ourselves as being sons and daughters of the Father

As the "Beloved Daughter", Mary invites each human person to welcome God's Fatherhood and, as a consequence, to recognize one's own identity as a son or daughter. In this sense, invoking God as Father means rediscovering oneself as a person created in the image and likeness of the Son and re-created in Him as a child of the Father. This implies the capacity to "live the attitudes of dependence, of gratitude, and of obedience. To be a son or a daughter is nothing other than to give a joyous and total response of love to a Love which precedes us."

The daughterhood of the young woman of Nazareth offers us the ability to respond in the freedom of faith to the Divine call. Mary, as "the free woman who answers in a responsible and prompt way at the moment of the Annunciation reveals the ultimate vocation of the human person: a loving communion in dialogue with God the Father, through the Son, and in the Holy Spirit."

Moreover, her experience of being a daughter allows us to rediscover in each person his or her identity as one created and redeemed by Christ through His total and free self-giving. In this way, She, the New Daughter of Zion, the one Full of Grace, constitutes for humanity an example of a person who is totally fulfilled because She is the "new creation". In addition, Mary re-entrusts Creation to humanity - both as a life space which is to be protected, not abused, and as a place for praising God and for serving our brothers and sisters.

Brief moment of silence

To pray

Let us contemplate the Mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God with the greeting of the Angel to the Virgin Mary, the mirror of our filial identity:

The Angelus is recited or sung, as desired

Prayer of Entrustment

To Mary, the Beloved Daughter of the Father, we entrust our commitment to take on our filial identity in our daily life: (*please see p. 2 for the Entrustment Prayer for the Novena*)

To Live

Today I will take some time to ponder anew God's Fatherhood so as to thank the Father for the gift of having been chosen from all eternity to be his daughter in the Son.

November 30

To rediscover (*this might serve as an introduction to the Angelus during the novena*)

With Mary and like Mary, we take on our sisterhood and brotherhood

As sons and daughters of the same Father, we form but one family. Being a son or daughter is therefore the prerequisite and the foundation of our fraternal relationships because one cannot be a sister or a brother without being a son or daughter. This implies the ability to overcome all barriers so as to live love and fraternal solidarity in a credible form.

This was the same for Mary and Jesus in their filial nature. It involved their entire life; it was not just one facet of their reality but the most human and the most religious way to live life. Therefore, Mary, as the first sister teaches us to take on fraternity as both a gift and a task. From her, one can learn how to be sister and brother - capable of creating, even if it takes effort, that true family atmosphere wherein each one always seeks to welcome the other with respect, with esteem, and with understanding, in an attitude of open and familiar dialogue, of benevolence, and of true and fraternal friendship. With her, one can build a family with members who value how much each one gives and permits them to give the best of themselves in order to build house-communion day after day.

Brief period of silence

To pray (*this might serve as an introduction to the Angelus during the novena*)

Let us contemplate the Mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God with the greeting of the Angel to the Virgin Mary, the mirror of our filial identity:

The Angelus is recited or sung, as desired

Prayer of Entrustment

To Mary, the Beloved Daughter of the Father, we entrust our commitment to take on our filial identity in our daily life... (*please see p. 2 for the Entrustment Prayer for the Novena*)

To live

During a moment of personal prayer, I will call to mind my experience of fraternal life, I will thank the Father for all the persons whom He has given me as sisters and brothers and I will pray for all those with whom I have a hard time living fraternity. Today I will seek to accomplish some gesture which expresses my commitment to take on fraternity in my daily life after the manner of Mary.

December 1

To rediscover (*this might serve as an introduction to the Angelus during the novena*)

With Mary and like Mary, the Mother of the Son, we learn motherhood

From the perspective of being daughters, Motherhood and daughterhood are so closely tied as to permit us to state that Mary is daughter for the purpose of becoming mother and, in becoming mother, brings to completion her being daughter.

Jesus' words to His Mother from the Cross, "*Woman, behold your son!*" and those to His Disciple, "*Behold your Mother!*" come to confirm the uniqueness and the universality of this decidedly new motherhood, inasmuch as it moves from being a physical motherhood to a spiritual one. From the Cross, Jesus seems to invite his pain-filled mother to put down her pain to rediscover her motherhood – her most authentic motherhood and her capacity to love. It is an invitation to live her vocation to be a mother as a source of strength for protecting, guarding, regenerating, and making life flourish where death prevails. At the foot of the Cross, listening to her Son, Mary learns that kind of motherhood that gives hospitality and regenerates life.

From her we can learn to be that welcoming space for the young; we can learn the motherhood which is wounded by the sufferings in our world but which generates new life because it is welcomed with love. She is Mother because She generates our identity as daughter, sister, and mother and invites us to welcome motherhood as a gift, just as She did.

Brief period of silence

To pray (*this might serve as an introduction to the Angelus during the novena*)

Let us contemplate the Mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God with the greeting of the Angel to the Virgin Mary, the mirror of our filial identity:

The Angelus is recited or sung, as desired

Prayer of Entrustment

To Mary, the Beloved Daughter of the Father, we entrust our commitment to take on our filial identity in our daily life... (*please see p. 2 for the Entrustment Prayer for the Novena*)

To live

In order to live at the school of Mary at the foot of the Cross, I will make my day a place to welcome the young, my Sisters, and all those persons who will cross my path.

PART II: With Mary we rediscover the fecundity of filial life

(This introduction might serve as the motivating thought for the itinerary to be followed in this part and can also be read at the Good Night on the preceding day)

“The sister or brother who finds in Mary an ‘*older sister*’ to help and guide him or her in living out the discipleship of the *sequela Christi*, follows her, taking on her sentiments so as to collaborate with all in the building of her Son's Family. She demonstrates in this way the fecundity of filial life; that is, the fact that filial life is not merely a passive acceptance of a gift of grace which is totally extraneous to a person. Rather, it is the overabundant gushing forth of that grace in the ever-renewed ‘Here I am’ of the Son before the Father.”

If difficulties in relationships continue to be a major problem in families, in Communities of Consecrated Life, and in social groups still today, it is a sign that we are as yet far from incarnating our filial reality. For this reason, we must have both the courage necessary to make a healthy and realistic evaluation and the audacity to seek out adequate strategies to improve the situation. The road is clear for anyone who does not accept “sterility” and who decides to live the fecundity of a mother or a father. Mary of Nazareth, the Woman of fruitful relationships, teaches us the way of fecund motherhood.

December 2

To rediscover *(this might serve as an introduction to the Angelus during the novena)*

With Mary at the school of her Son, we rediscover the profound sense of Discipleship

In such a relationship which takes so much commitment, learned from Mary, the daughter, sister, and mother, one can discover the profound meaning of the Gospel Counsels and learn from her, the First Disciple, to abandon oneself in faith to the unique love of the Father in following the Son. In fact, Mary is certain that God the Father thought of her with love from all eternity; this raises up in her that filial trust/abandon which permits her to answer "Yes," at the Annunciation of the Angel. Her poverty/littleness is welcomed and lived with serenity because it is precisely in her poverty that She discovers the reason of the Father's predilection for her and then responds with sentiments of praise, of gratitude, and of love.

Brief period of silence

To pray *(this might serve as an introduction to the Angelus during the novena)*

Let us contemplate the Mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God with the greeting of the Angel to the Virgin Mary, the maternal icon of filial life:

The Angelus is recited or sung, as desired

Prayer of Entrustment

To Mary, the Beloved Daughter of the Father, we entrust our commitment to take on our filial identity in our daily life... *(please see p. 2 for the Entrustment Prayer for the Novena)*

To live

Today, at the school of Mary, the Disciple of the Son, we renew our consecration to the Lord and commit ourselves to live the "Here I am," and the "Vado io!" with humility.

December 3

To rediscover *(this might serve as an introduction to the Angelus during the novena)*

We contemplate Mary as the mother who welcomes the son and allows herself to be welcomed by the son

The giving over of the Disciple to Mary and of Mary to the Disciple helps us understand the value of motherhood and of being sons and daughters as gifts, in addition to the power of a mutual welcome and acceptance. According to Ronchi, the Mariological principle states that this 'criterion of welcome' enters into the very structure of Christian experience: "to those who have welcomed Him He has given the power to become children of God." (Jn. 1:12)

These remarks motivate us to welcome Mary as mother and, as Ronchi says, to take her into our home like the Disciple so as to rediscover our identity: "The disciple took her to himself, as part of his precious belongings. This is what gives direction to every disciple. John sets the standard of our attitude regarding Mary. It is not Mary who receives protection and hospitality in the homes of the disciples: it is She who comes as a treasure trove into our homes, as identity in your search for identity. Take her among the things which tell you who you are for She is your definition; take her among those things which are most your own. You are like Mary, a person who has received an Annunciation; you are like Mary, the House of God; you are like Mary the Joy-filled Believer; you are like her, the Giver of wine and of joy; you are like her, a Wounded and Fruitful motherhood that generates life; you are like her, the Mother of Christ and the Mother of countless sons and daughters. She is your identity. Mary is mother because She pronounces and generates your identity as a believer."

Brief period of silence

To pray *(this might serve as an introduction to the Angelus during the novena)*

Let us contemplate the Mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God with the greeting of the Angel to the Virgin Mary, the maternal icon of filial life:

The Angelus is recited or sung, as desired

Prayer of Entrustment

To Mary, the Beloved Daughter of the Father, we entrust our commitment to take on our filial identity in our daily life... *(please see p. 2 for the Entrustment Prayer for the Novena)*

To live

Today's exercise is to welcome Mary as John did. I will learn from her to be mother to all persons whom I encounter during the day.

December 4

To rediscover (*this might serve as an introduction to the Angelus during the novena*)

To be the reflection of the filial countenance of Mary

To be the reflection of Mary's filial countenance is to be a witness to her filial life. The believer who commits herself to be the reflection of Mary's filial countenance, the "Beloved Daughter," is a person who is interiorly unified not through her own strength but through that of the Holy Spirit. She is capable of living a profound communion with the Father and finds in His Will her only glory. In this sense, the unified person never feels alone or lost because she knows herself to be a daughter who is never abandoned or rejected; rather, she knows she is one who is chosen, and blessed by the Father from the very creation of the world. "From here springs forth the lively feeling of the Father's Providence who takes care of all His children (*see* Mt. 6:25-34; I Pt. 5:6) calling them according to His design for glory." (*see* Rm. 8:28-30)

In this sense, the Marian way of giving witness is that of giving oneself totally by uniting oneself to the offering of the Son all the way to the Cross. At the foot of the Cross, Mary teaches strength and courage to those who have received "no discount" on the price of suffering. She teaches how one can live the period of the Cross and how one can stand at the foot of the infinite Crosses where Christ is still crucified in His Brothers. The believer who is educated to giving filial witness according to the Marian way reaches the understanding that the "Lord will protect His children always - not *from* suffering, but rather *in* suffering - just as He protected His Son Jesus not *from* death, but *in* death." This conviction, nourished by the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist, "the bread of the children," enables the believer to face life with serenity.

Brief period of silence

To pray (*this might serve as an introduction to the Angelus during the novena*)

Let us contemplate the Mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God with the greeting of the Angel to the Virgin Mary, the maternal icon of filial life:

The Angelus is recited or sung, as desired

Prayer of Entrustment

To Mary, the Beloved Daughter of the Father, we entrust our commitment to take on our filial identity in our daily life... (*please see p. 2 for the Entrustment Prayer for the Novena*)

To live

Today we commit ourselves to be the reflection of the maternal goodness of Mary in the total gift of ourselves and in accepting difficulties, uniting ourselves to the offering of Jesus on the Cross.

PART III: With Mary to educate ourselves and others in filial life

(This introduction might serve as the motivating thought for the itinerary to be followed in this part and can also be read at the Good Night on the preceding day)

From the filial perspective, to be the reflection of Mary's being daughter is to take on her filial characteristics, to reproduce them in our personal life, and thus to collaborate in generating them in the life of the younger generations through education. What are the traits of this filial life that need to be passed on through education? They are easily recognizable in the three dimensions of the Christian life: *diakonia, koinonia, and martyria*. Consequently, *service, communion, prayer and witness - all the way to martyrdom* - converge in this one action: rendering oneself open to the Holy Spirit so as to be able to "clothe ourselves with the Son" by responding "yes" to the call of the Father.

For this reason, to educate ourselves and others to filial life implies educating to the ability to relate. These are transversal axes which become *prayer* in our relationship with God and *communion, service, and witness all the way to martyrdom* in our relationship with others. During this final part of our novena, let us put ourselves at the school of Mary to allow ourselves to be educated in such a way as to be able to educate the young to filial life.

December 5

To rediscover *(this might serve as an introduction to the Angelus during the novena)*

With Mary, to educate ourselves and others to prayer as the breath of filial life

To educate ourselves and others to prayer as the breath of filial life is taking to ourselves, yet again, and reinforcing our filial identity; i.e., rediscovering the value of fatherhood/motherhood along the process of one's personal growth. Therefore, prayer is a way of being and it is the ability to pronounce, on one side, a word of faith: "I believe in You"; and, on the other side, to listen to a word that generates life: "You are my Son." It concerns a dialogue which makes "otherness" show forth in its most profound reality and which opens up, therefore, to mutual trust. In this dynamic, prayer becomes entrustment and the regenerative force for the other because becoming a son or a daughter in its fullest sense is not only shouting "*Abbá, Father,*" but also saying "Our Father."

From the filial perspective, to educate ourselves and others to prayer is to open oneself to all the riches of being in relationship with the Other (the One and Triune God) and with others (people and all of Creation). Mary, *the person of relationship*, invites us to open ourselves to the Transcendent One and to respect for others. As the first Disciple of the Son, She takes on His prayer and She, too, becomes a teacher of prayer. From the Annunciation to the Visitation, from Cana to Golgotha, from Easter to Pentecost, She shows her perseverance in prayer. Her experience is a call for educators to accompany the younger generations to a profound experience of God so as to be, in their turn, a luminous reflection of sonship and of daughterhood.

Brief period of silence

To pray (*this might serve as an introduction to the Angelus during the novena*)

Let us contemplate the Mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God with the greeting of the Angel to the Virgin Mary, the educator to filial life:

The Angelus is recited or sung, as desired

Prayer of Entrustment

To Mary, the Beloved Daughter of the Father, we entrust our commitment to take on our filial identity in our daily life... (*please see p. 2 for the Entrustment Prayer for the Novena*)

To live

Today, we commit ourselves to being "perseverant in prayer with Mary and like Mary, so as to intensify our communion with the Father and to open ourselves to Christ, who is present in our brothers and sisters and in every other reality." (*Constitutions, Art. 37*)

December 6

To rediscover (*this might serve as an introduction to the Angelus during the novena*)

With Mary to educate ourselves and others to relationship

The task of *educating ourselves and others to relationship* must become a communion among sons and daughters (*koinonia*). He who is a son is constantly conformed in the Holy Spirit to the One who is the Firstborn among many brothers. (*see Rm. 8:29*) Union with the Son increases proportionally and in step with one's union with the other sons and daughters. This means that not only our relationship with God permits communion with our brothers and sisters but also that mutual love allows the relationship which man establishes with God to be authentically filial.

Mary lived this reciprocity in relationships to the full. As a person who, in her essence, is relational with God and with neighbor, She invites educators to form their students to solidarity and to love. This implies the need to break down barriers and fences so as to build bridges and make connections, to network, and to communicate with others. As a person of communion, Mary urges all to be in solidarity with all. As Mother, she participates fully in that dream so dear to her Son - to promote unity among all believers. (*see Jn. 17 and 10:20*) In the face of all the difficulties which impede us from attaining peace in the world and from creating communion and collaboration in our society, in our families, and in our Communities, Mary educates us not to retreat and not to become discouraged but to believe each day in the common plan that the Father has for each member of His Church.

Brief period of silence

To pray (*this might serve as an introduction to the Angelus during the novena*)

Let us contemplate the Mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God with the greeting of the Angel to the Virgin Mary, the educator to filial life:

The Angelus is recited or sung, as desired

Prayer of Entrustment

To Mary, the Beloved Daughter of the Father, we entrust our commitment to take on our filial identity in our daily life... *(please see p. 2 for the Entrustment Prayer for the Novena)*

To live

I will identify in myself those resources which help me live communion and those obstacles which most frequently impede me from living in serene relationship with others. I will choose one small practice which will help me to be, like Mary, a woman of communion.

December 7

To rediscover *(this might serve as an introduction to the Angelus during the novena)*

With Mary to educate ourselves and others to service

According to the very words of the Son, service is the dominant note in His being in the world and it is the modality according to which He lives His Sonship: "I stand among you as one who serves." (Lk. 22:27; see Mt. 20:28; and Jn. 1:1-20) Therefore, from the filial perspective, *educating ourselves and others to service* goes beyond sporadic volunteering or philanthropic solidarity on certain occasions. It means imparting an education which enables persons to be close to others, just as Jesus teaches us in the Parable of the Good Samaritan; i.e., to be attentive to overcome the hurriedness of legalistic activism so that we can become aware of the other who is on our path and who is calling out to us for help - to allow ourselves to take compassion on him and care for him. The intensity of filial service takes on the meaning of the Love of Christ in which the "right to the very end" is not understood only as perseverance throughout time but as the gift of self in a *total, irrevocable, and unconditional manner*.

Mary took on this style of filial service completely. In this time of globalization, She educates us and calls us to educate the young to defeat and put an end to the stronghold of death so as to promote a life which is characterized by service to our brothers and sisters. The person who follows Christ in the service of education is so available and open to God's plan that he becomes, like Mary, His collaborator, in the total, irrevocable, and unconditional gift of self by uniting himself to the Son in the work of the salvation of humanity.

Brief period of silence

To pray *(this might serve as an introduction to the Angelus during the novena)*

Let us contemplate the Mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God with the greeting of the Angel to the Virgin Mary, the educator to filial life:

The Angelus is recited or sung, as desired

Prayer of Entrustment

To Mary, the Beloved Daughter of the Father, we entrust our commitment to take on our filial identity in our daily life... *(please see p. 2 for the Entrustment Prayer for the Novena)*

To live

Today I will make myself available to serve whoever might have need of my help. I will not retire for the evening without having offered my service to someone.

December 8: The Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception

Introduction to the *Angelus*

During this holy journey of Advent, the Church has us venerate Mary, the Beloved Daughter of the Father, as the one who, through grace, was kept untouched by evil. The Immaculate becomes for us the sign of certain hope and She witnesses to us that evil will not have the final word.

Mother Mazzarello used to exhort [the Sisters]: “*We are drawing near to the Feast of the Immaculate. Our Rule asks us to celebrate it with great solemnity. But beyond this, it ought to be one of the most beautiful feasts for us who are Mary’s Daughters.*”

Taking this exhortation of Mother Mazzarello to heart, let us celebrate the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception by showing our immense gratitude to our Virgin Mother who, by her unconditional "Yes" opened the way to Salvation.

From her let us learn to live our Daughterhood and to pronounce without hesitation and with generosity our "Here I am!" to the Lord at every moment of our life.

Angelus sung

Prayer of Entrustment

To Mary, the Beloved Daughter of the Father, we entrust our commitment to take on our filial identity in our daily life... *(please see p. 2 for the Entrustment Prayer)*