

Novena to Mary Help of Christians 2017



Let us prepare ourselves
**for the Feast
of Mary Help of Christians**

by interiorizing the Marian experience
**of Mother Laura Meozzi, Sr. Maria Romero, and
Sr. Nancy Pereira**

Presentation

The proposal for the novena in preparation to the Feast of Mary Help of Christians 2017 draws from the wealth of the Marian seminar held in Rome from September 23-28, 2013, on the topic: *Daughterhood: A Classification that Calls Out to the Marian Identity of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians*.

The seminar began with the telling of the experiences of *witnesses to Marian daughterhood*. The stories of three FMA who cultivated a special relationship with Mary were presented on that occasion: Mother Laura Meozzi, Sr. Maria Romero, and Sr. Nancy Pereira. They had understood, incarnated, and realized in their lives and in their educational works - in very different contexts and times - the ideal of an educator shaped by Mary Help of Christians.

Following the footsteps of these witnesses of daughterhood and focusing on their Marian experience in a prayerful way can be illuminating and the font of inspiration for us to live our identity as Daughters of Mary Help of Christians with gratitude.

The *novena* is organized into *three tridua*. In each triduum, we will allow ourselves to be guided by the Marian experience of one of the 3 FMA figures. The following are offered for each triduum:

- A line of Scripture and the Marian aspect, characteristic of the FMA presented
- *Meditation on how each FMA lived out her Marian identity* along with the invitation which arises from this consideration
- A concrete practice
- A Prayer of Entrustment to Mary for the entire novena
- For those who wish to know more about the figure and the life of these three FMA: the pages on the sanctity of Mother Laura Meozzi and Sr. Maria Romero (biographical sketch and other resources), which can be found on the Institute's website, will be of interest; for Sr. Nancy Pereira, we have attached hereto a short biographical sketch.

**Fervent Novena and Happy Feast of Mary Help of
Christians!**

First triduum: Mother Laura Meozzi (1873-1951)

*Discovering our being "Daughters of Mary" and
sharing in her motherhood*

«Behold, I am the servant of the Lord» (Lk. 1:38)



**The Marian experience of Mother Laura Meozzi:
Let daughterhood be joyfully interwoven with the beauty of motherhood**

Mother Laura Meozzi's bond with the Blessed Mother was lived in the simple things of daily life, without ostentation or extraordinary features, but it had an incisive effect on the life of the Sisters, the students, and those who visited the Community in which she lived.

Marian devotion, as she lived it and inculcated it in the Sisters, implies self-knowledge and understanding of the way to be and to act as FMA: a person open to God, to the world, to the young, and to her social reality. It is a way of being and acting marked by educational charity. In a conversation with a Salesian, almost summing up her life, Mother Laura confessed: "I make an effort to watch over myself so that I can merit that Mary Help of Christians Most Holy will always be beside me, as our Founder desired. This vigilance is a diligent and continuous one, and at the same time joy-filled and sweet... I have no other desire than this: i.e., that Mary Help of Christians might always be present among us, not with sorrow, but serenely, happy with Her Daughters."

Mother Laura was conscious of being a loving and faithful daughter of Mary and for this reason, Mary is her most tender mother. She knows that to be a daughter of Mary means to imitate her virtues and to have the heart of a mother. Her being profoundly "mother" sprung from the fact that she felt deeply that she was "daughter" to Mary Help of Christians. She attested to this in a very concrete way in one of her letters to the Sisters wherein she expressed her desire to celebrate Christmas with them. "I believe that it would be a most pleasing thing for all, especially for those who for some time now have not been able to see me personally to speak of their joys and their sorrows to the heart of a mother who loves each daughter and therefore perfectly understands all her needs... I will be present to each one of you in my thoughts and in my heart, and in a particular way, to whoever has greater need of my motherly affection."

She was truly mother to all. Her characteristic was that of motherly goodness. Making others happy was her happiness. Each one's pain was her own pain, felt in the depths of her most sensitive heart.

Mother Laura's Marian attitude of giving totally of herself for the good of others was noted and appreciated in the educational mission. She wished that the students also should grow in their love for Mary. She personally cared for the children with the

tenderness of the Blessed Mother. Because of this, witnesses were able to attest with joy: "*Where Mother was, there was love in abundance.*"

Let us conclude with Mother Laura Meozzi's message, which delineates her Marian physiognomy and which also ought to delineate the physiognomy of every educator: "We must honor Mary and love Her as no one else has loved Her; we need to set our hearts afire to warm that of others and to work with zeal and ardor for the salvation of souls. If souls are not at the center of our heart and we do not work for their salvation, we could never be Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Courage, therefore!... Let each one do what she can to save souls, to make themselves good, and to love Mary."

We are invited, along with Mother Laura Meozzi,...

... to renew our daughterhood and to share in the spiritual motherhood of Mary. Mary of Nazareth, chosen to be the Mother of God and of the Redeemer, is the beloved Daughter of the Father and the Temple of the Holy Spirit (*Lumen Gentium*, 53–54). Mary's response to the Annunciation of the Angel - "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord" (Lk. 1:38) - demonstrates her filial attitude and the acceptance of her motherhood, which will be fully accomplished at the foot of the Cross: "Woman, behold your son." With Mary of Nazareth, and following in the footsteps of Mother Laura Meozzi, we are all called to discover that we are "daughters" of Mary and that we are to enter into a motherhood filled with grace and into a profound, deep, and rich spiritual fecundity and, thus, to collaborate with God in His plan of salvation.

Concrete Practice:

«*We feel Mary present in our life and we entrust ourselves totally to Her*» (*FMA Constitutions*, art. 4).

- **I will take under consideration** my relationship with Mary: Do I feel that I am her daughter? How do I live this gift/task of sharing in Mary's spiritual motherhood in my educational mission?
- **I will thank** Mary because She accompanies me with Her maternal and merciful affection.

Prayer

«Hail, O Mary! Thank you for your help and your aid. I trust you, oh my Mother, and I will always trust you because you are my Mother and the Mother of God. Save my soul and give me health, if this be the Will of God»

(Prayer composed by Mother Laura Meozzi herself)

Second triduum: Sr. Maria Romero (1902-1977)

With Mary, living the inventiveness of charity

“Mary got up and went in haste to the hill country, to a city of Judea. Having entered into the house of Zechariah, She greeted Elizabeth” (Lk. 1:39)



“Everything through Mary, Mother of Jesus and my Mother”: The Inventiveness of Charity

For Sr. Maria Romero, the Blessed Mother is like a template, a mold, a Divine mold: placing oneself in this mold and letting it shape and transform one implies "receiving the features of Christ, true God." She knew how to abandon herself to Mary, Our Mother, just like "baby Jesus on Her maternal breast," so as to live and to walk with Mary and in Mary, moved by one concrete ideal – to be transformed into Her. From her filial love for Mary arose that "inventiveness of charity" which characterized the life of Sr. Maria Romero. Her relationship with her "*Mamacita Maria*" – as she affectionately called her – sustained her in moving ahead, with attentive and caring concern and ardent charity, collaborating in the spread of the Kingdom of God, occupying herself with the most poor, as Mary did when setting out on Her journey to visit Her cousin Elizabeth.

Sr. Maria knew how to translate educative love, especially towards teenagers, sprung from her granite hard faith in the Lord and the help of her Queen, into a work which was marked by creativity and very often by difficulties. John Paul II himself in his homily for her beatification in 2002, recalled the impetus behind the missionary work of Sr. Maria Romero: an impassioned love for God and trust in the help of the Blessed Mother. The result: an exemplary, apostolic woman who was mother to the poor, making those who were neediest her favorites while not excluding anyone.

She wrote down in a supplication to the Lord what she wanted to do without ceasing: "To dry the tears of those whom I encounter. To alleviate all bitterness and afflictions. To soften all harshness. To put a little balm on every wound... To smile upon all who are sad and in anguish. To give serenity to all who are troubled. To unite separated hearts... To give even one little piece of bread to all who hunger, a glass of water to all who thirst, a piece of clothing to all who are naked, and at least a place to lodge in my soul for all who are pilgrims. Let it happen, my God, that I might be able to give a ray of light to all who wander in darkness, to orient toward the good all those who are lost, to extend my hand to all those who are about to fall, and to raise up with gentleness all who have fallen..."

One certainty accompanied her all along her intense apostolate: "The Blessed Mother takes on and sees to everything." During her years of generous dedication to others, her life unfolded among prayer, joyous solidarity, and her relationship with Mary, the Help in difficult times and her model to reach her desired sanctity. After having spoken of the graces received from Mary when conceiving of and realizing her social works, Sr.

Maria Romero closes one of her writings in this way: "For this reason, at the end of this piece of writing, it is impossible not to say and not to repeat again with emotion the words of our Father and Founder: 'How good is Mary Help of Christians!'... 'She has done it all!'"

We are invited, along with Sr. Maria Romero,...

... to behold Mary of Nazareth in the Mystery of the Visitation so as to become like Her, a woman of charity, a missionary, and a teacher of solidarity to all, undertaking that journey with great love and courage. In the passage of the Visitation, Mary is the first missionary of Christ - bearer of peace, of joy, and of hope. The Visitation constitutes the first flash of Messianic joy borne by Jesus' presence in his Mother, Mary. It is that same joy which will be borne by the Gospel preached and witnessed to by so many missionaries in the name of Jesus, following the example of Mary. It was to this that Sr. Maria Romero gave witness.

Concrete Practice:

«In the Virgin Immaculate Help of Christians we will contemplate the fullness of donation to God and our neighbor» (FMA Constitutions, art. 44).

- At the time of the Magnificat, **I will thank** God for how much He has accomplished in the life of our Founders, in the life of Sr. Maria Romero and of so many FMA who have preceded us, and which He continues to accomplish in our life.
- **I will renew** my desire to live, together with Mary, the inventiveness of educational charity, witnessing to the foreseeing love of God.

Prayer

«Put your hand, my Mother, put it before mine»
(Prayer of Sr. Maria Romero)

Third triduum: Sr. Nancy Pereira (1923-2010)

With Mary, rediscovering the dignity of the family

«And the mother of Jesus was there... They have no more wine... Do whatever He tells you» (Jn. 2:1)



Help for families with the aid of Maria Auxilium Christianorum

"My vocation is to serve the poor." This motto of Sr. Nancy clearly expresses the purpose for which she embraced Salesian Religious Life: that of elevating her compatriots, especially the poorest, the women, and families to the dignity of the children of God. In this mission of drawing near to the poor and the needy, Sr. Nancy always sought to transmit her profound devotion and filial affection for Mary – in a totally particular way to women.

Like our Founder Don Bosco, Sr. Nancy began every one of her projects trusting in Mary's help: when she opened her Women's Welfare Center, she placed the statue of the Virgin Mary right in the center and then began her lessons in making lace. When she was animator of the community in Pallikonda, she acquired from the government some land on which to build some houses for poor people. There she placed a beautiful statue of Mary Help of Christians and entrusted these persons to Her maternal care. As soon as she had built the FIDES office, she placed a statue of Mary there with a message inviting all people to have recourse to the Blessed Mother. She wanted the FIDES staff to be consecrated to our Blessed Mother: "It is not enough," she used to say, "that we invoke Mary as our mother in moments of difficulty, we must also love Her, be humble, and live like Her. Just as the sun gives life to the world, so Mary, our Mother, gives light to us who work 'in darkness', showing us and giving us Jesus." When the Sisters were looking for new villages to which to expand their presence in their apostolic activity, she always responded: "If Mary wants it, we will go there."

As a Daughter of Mary Help of Christians, Sr. Nancy understood what her role was in all these activities: to be the visible hands of Mary for the thousands of women who were suffering and abandoned, for youth, for poor children, and for men.

The apple of her eye was always the family and, above all, women. With the help of Mary, Sr. Nancy succeeded in making light shine upon the face of so many women, canceling from their minds the idea of putting an end to their own life in moments of desperation and filling their hearts with living hope and joyous enthusiasm. She knew how to motivate them to continue on courageously in life, facing up to its challenges with great trust in Our Lady who walked with them and guided them on the way leading straight to the Lord.

Her life was always an austere one, lived in prayer and cultivating in herself and in others the spirit of true joy which, like Mary and in imitation of Her, rendered her a mother of the poor. For this reason, a Hindu, who admired her and who had helped her very much in her work for social development, stated about her: "Sr. Nancy is a replica of the Blessed Mother."

We are invited, along with Sr. Nancy Pereira,...

... to behold Mary of Nazareth at the wedding of Cana. During the wedding of Cana in Galilee, in the home of a young couple, we find the caring and merciful presence of Mary: "They have no more wine." Mary perceived their lack of wine with the sensitivity of a woman and of a Mother – a lack which would have put the spouses and their guests ill at ease. She is concerned about this and intercedes with the persuasive power of love so that Jesus might intervene. Following the example of Sr. Nancy, we are called to learn from Mary of Nazareth to be attentive, merciful, caring, and foreseeing mothers – to know when the "wine of love" is missing in the celebration of life. We are all called to direct to Jesus, in the company of Mary, whoever the Lord entrusts to us, especially the young, the poor, and families: "Do whatever He tells you." Jesus is the only one who is capable of transforming the water of our lives into precious wine. He alone can always refill the water jugs of our life at the font of His Merciful Love. Following the word that Jesus spoke to the servants at the wedding of Cana, "Fill the wine jars," Sr. Nancy filled the life of the poor through a holistic education and economic development.

Concrete Practice:

«We seek to make our own Her attitudes of faith, hope, charity, and of perfect union with Christ, and to open ourselves to the joyful humility of the "Magnificat" so as to be with Her "helpers," above all, among the young» (FMA Constitutions, art. 4).

- With what understanding do I live my being "a helper" with the Help of Christians?
- In these last three days of the novena, **I will thank** God for my family, for the families of my Sisters, for the families of our young people, and for the Family Spirit which we strive to live each day in Community.
- **I will pray** for those families that are in difficulty and experiencing moments of great suffering.

Prayer

«Thank you, Mary our Mother, for it is You who have done everything!»
(Sr. Nancy's favorite prayer of thanksgiving)

Entrustment to Mary
Novena to Mary Help of Christians 2017

Guide: *Let us entrust ourselves with a filial heart to Mary, our Help, so that She can strengthen us in our Salesian vocation and mission*

Guide: *Mary, You who at the annunciation of the Angel made yourself available to become the Mother of the Savior,*

All:
**protect in your maternal and merciful heart the Church,
Pope Francis, the Bishops, Priests, Religious,
and all the Members of the Salesian Family.
May they all discover that they are your sons and daughters
and share your motherhood, in a rich, spiritual fecundity.**

Guide: *Mary, You who in the Mystery of the Visitation became the proclaimer of salvation, the first Missionary of Christ,*

All:
**teach us to be missionaries of peace, of hope, and of joy like you,
setting out on the pathways of the world with great love and courage
so as to live that inventiveness of charity
and to make life blossom there where death reigns.
Make us faithful to our mission to be bearers of Christ to the young
and signs of the presence of God in the world.
Teach us to sing with joy and gratitude
our Magnificat to the Lord.**

Guide: *Mary, You who at the wedding of Cana revealed yourself to be a caring and merciful mother, directing all to Christ Your Son,*

All:
**help us live our Salesian vocation in fidelity
to be, like you, helpers among the young, especially the poorest.
Keep watch over the young with goodness and intercede with God for them,
for families, for those who are suffering, and for those who do not feel loved.
Do not allow the wine of love to be lacking in the life of families,
in the Institute, in the Church, and in the world.
Let your invitation be heard still today: "Do whatever He tells you"
so that all might find the road that leads to Jesus,
the Only One who can transform the water of their lives into good wine.
Amen!**

Attachment: Select Bibliography

1. To come to know better Mother Laura Meozzi

Anna ŚWIATEK, *Madre Laura Meozzi testimone di filialità mariana*, in M. FARINA – R. SIBOLDI – M. T. SPIGA (Edd.), *Filialità. Percorsi di riflessione e di ricerca*, Città del Vaticano, LEV, 2014, 59-80.

Brief biographical sketch and other resources and bibliography on the website of the Institute:

Sanctity: <http://www.cgfmanet.org/1.aspx?sez=1&sotsez=4&detsotsez=1&doc=10&lingua=2>

2. To come to know better Sr. Maria Romero

Mauricio VIQUEZ LIZANO, *Suor Maria Romero, testimone di filialità mariana*, in M. FARINA – R. SIBOLDI – M. T. SPIGA (Edd.), *Filialità. Percorsi di riflessione e di ricerca*, Città del Vaticano, LEV, 2014, 81-92.

Brief biographical sketch and other resources and bibliography on the website of the Institute:

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3. To come to know better Sr. Nancy Pereira

Giusy PEDÀ, *Il coraggio della dignità: Sr. Nancy Pererira*, San Paolo, Milano, 2004.

Theresa THOMAS, *My vocation is to serve the poor. A biography of Sister Nancy Pereira FMA*, Kristu Jyothi Publications, Bangalore, 2011.

Margaret MATHAI, *Suor Nancy Pererira (1923-2010). Aiuto dei Poveri con l'aiuto di Maria Ausiliatrice*, in M. FARINA – R. SIBOLDI – M. T. SPIGA (Edd.), *Filialità. Percorsi di riflessione e di ricerca*, Città del Vaticano, LEV, 2014, 93-123.

Brief Biographical Sketch: Sr. Nancy Pereira, a Woman on the Front Lines of Solidarity

Sr. Nancy Pereira was born in Pudukkuruchy, in the Indian state of Kerala, on August 14, 1923, and made her First Profession on January 6, 1945.

Sr. Nancy has been defined as the "The poor man's banker," and, by Pope Wojtyla: "Entrepreneur of the poor." She "was fully convinced that her vocation was to stay with the poor and dedicate herself to serving them. She loved all and sought to help people to make them aware of their rights and their responsibilities so that they might live their personal dignity as children of God. She did this with joy, involving many persons in her beneficent projects. Detached from herself, she lived poor so as to enrich the indigent." Following the logic of the adage, "If you give a poor man a fish, he will eat for a day, but if you teach them how to fish, he will eat for life," Sr. Nancy knitted together, beginning in the 1970s, a program for social rehabilitation and cultural emancipation. In 1993, she called this project FIDES (*Family Integral Development and Education Scheme*). This is a non-profit organization, which has as its goal and purpose the development and advancement of families living in the villages in the suburbs of Bangalore, along with the opening of the office "Funds for the poor," modeled on the pattern of the Grameen Bank's microcredit initiatives in Bangladesh. This program, which was integrated with the education of families, fostered the liberation of thousands of families and of entire villages from misery and from ethical and social degradation.

With a creative solidarity, she also founded numerous groups for the promotion and advancement of women [SHG (*Self-Help Group*)]. She also designed various programs for development and advancement [IGP (*Income-Generating Program*)] so that the poor would be able to live a worthy existence capable of reaching economic autonomy and of rediscovering their dignity.

The secret behind this intense apostolic life is prayer. Sr. Nancy used to say: "I learned to seek my answers to problems in prayer." "God has indicated to me through prayer the exact path to take." This also explains the rosary which she always held in her hand.

Sr. Nancy died on July 14, 2010, in her Community in Bangalore (India), at 86 years of age.

