



Conference 2 | Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. We hear from the Gospel of St. John, standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his Mother's sister Mary, the wife of Clopus, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his Mother and the disciple whom He loved standing near, he said to his Mother, "Woman, behold your son." Then He said to the disciple, "Behold your Mother" and from that hour the disciple took her into his home. The theme of our retreat continues to be drawn from St. Paul's Letter to the Corinthians chapter 11 verse 1 where he says, "Be an imitator of me in as much as I am an imitator of Jesus Christ." So when we look at the Saints, we look at their lives and we see how it is that we see Christ fully alive in them. As Paul would also say, "it is no longer I who live but Christ who is fully alive in me." So when we look at the Saints, we look at them and say what is the virtue . . . what is the virtue that really seems to shine forth within this particular saying and we continue that theme for our retreat. . . a retreat especially during these Covid times, which I think make things a bit difficult upon all of us. What I would like to talk about today is. . . I would like to talk about in terms of virtue, a devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, especially in relationship to the Rosary.

The Saint I would like to offer to you today and hold up as our icon would be Pope St. John Paul II. We know that Pope St. John Paul II had just an outstanding devotion, a great devotion, a very deep devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, especially through the Rosary. So, let's think about who Pope St. John Paul II was going back to his early life, the young Karol Wojtyla. Karol Wojtyla was not immune to hardship or suffering or difficulty in his life. We know that in his own family, it was his mother, his father, and his brother. Before he was 10, his mother passed away, leaving him with just his father and brother. Not too long after that, his brother, who he was very close to as well, he passed away just leaving him alone with his father. As much as a father might try, it is hard for him to fill the role of a mother; and we know that to be for a single mother, too. It can be difficult for a single mother to try to fill the role of a father. It doesn't mean that they don't stop trying; they don't make some attempt at it, but it is difficult for them to do that, because that's not how we're made. Men are made to be more paternal and women are made to be more maternal. It's just how we are naturally made by God. It's part of the gifts that we have, that we're able to bring especially with parents in child rearing. So, not having this role of his mother in his life, Pope St. John Paul II's father, who's cause is being studied at this time as well as his wife's cause is being studied, Pope St. John Paul II's father tried to fill that void that was left in his life because if there is a void there . . . if we don't try to fill it up with something good, something else that doesn't belong there might fill it up. So, one of the ways he did that was by helping to foster a strong devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. He understood these words that we hear from St. John's Gospel where Jesus. . . some of His final words on the cross are "Behold your Mother. Behold your Son." In saying, "Behold your Mother", He is saying this to the beloved disciple. Now, we know this to be John the Evangelist, who is the beloved disciple. We know this to be the son of Zebedee, the brother of James the Greater; but, we also know that all of us, by virtue of our baptism, we become beloved sons and daughters, adopted sons and daughters, by virtue of our baptism, of God our Father. So, we become beloved of the Father. **So, when we hear those words He says to the beloved, "Behold your Mother", He didn't simply say them to St. John, but He says it to all of us. . . all of us who have been incorporated into the Body of Christ through our baptism.** As I said, Pope St. John Paul II's father understood this very well so he knew that if he was going to fill this void in the life. . . how better to fill



that than to fill it with the love and the care and the maternal protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary. So, what he did was he fostered a very very strong devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary for the young Karol Wojtyla. He even did that by yearly taking pilgrimages to special images, special shrines of Our Lady. The times that he would do it mostly around was the time of the Assumption. It's always a big time of tradition where people make pilgrimages. That's the time when people are out of school, vacations, holidays, different things like that. . . August 15th. So what he did was he understood that there was a void there and he wanted to fill it up; and, what better way to fill this maternal void, this lacking that the young Karol Wojtyla had in his life than to fill that up with the presence of the Blessed Virgin Mary, our Heavenly Mother. We hear that again from St. John's Gospel. That's where we come to understand that.

So, let's look at the life, at the different things that happened to him, that helped him when things were difficult, when he was suffering, when he experienced pain, whatever that it was that he would flee to his Mother. There are a couple of images that I offer to you: one is the image of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. If we look at the image of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, we see that our Lady is carrying our Lord as a child. We see that one of his sandals has fallen off; and as the tradition goes, that our Lord, as a boy, was having a dream, and He had a dream of the Passion. If we look at that image, too, we see the tools of the Passion. As it said, He was frightened, and it was a popular piety. He was frightened. So, what did He do? He ran to His Mother and she cradled Him in her arms and embraced Him until the fear went away. There is also that image in the Passion by Mel Gibson that kind of flashback to when our Lady is watching our Lord in His Passion and He falls and she sees that flashback of Him as a young child falling and skinning His knee and what does He do? He runs to her and she runs to Him. So, that was a lesson that Karol Wojtyla, the young Karol Wojtyla, was able to receive, to not run from her, but to run to her, to run to her love, and her care, and protection during very very difficult times thinking about the Nazi occupation, the horrible things. . .the atrocities that took place in his own country. We think about the Communist occupation and how difficult it was for the young Karol Wojtyla just to go to Seminary, to become ordained to become a priest, and then he became a priest, and then a bishop, and then became archbishop, a cardinal, and eventually the pope. He was always on their radar even in the midst of all the difficulties in his life. Where did he go? He always would go to our Lady. . .always would go to our Lady. I think especially during this pandemic, 2020 has not been a great year. I don't think anyone can say that it has been. It's been a very very difficult year. We've experienced death, sickness, hardship, and all sorts of horrible things. People have lost jobs, lost their homes, and horrible horrible things; and, I think that one of the lessons we can take from Pope St. John Paul II's model, or his devotion, **his virtue to the Blessed Virgin Mary is that we just don't flee, that we run to her and she will cradle us in her arms.** She will wrap us in her mantle, and she will watch over us and care for us. More importantly, she will love us. Why will she do that? She'll do that because she is our Mother. "Behold your Son. Behold your Mother." Let's look at the life of Pope St. John Paul II when he became a bishop.

When you become a bishop, there are some things you have to do. You have to choose things. You have to choose a coat of arms. I chose my coat of arms. It has three different crosses. . .the cross of St. James, the Fleur de Lis which stands for our Lady, as well as St. Joan of Arc, and finally the Tao Cross which stands for the Franciscans. You have to choose a motto. My motto is from the Epistle of St. James chapter 1 verse 22, "Be doers of the Word." So, these are things that you have to do, and you have to choose.



Pope St. John Paul II chose two very Marian themes. The first theme he chose was his coat of arms. His coat of arms is reminiscent of the gospel passage that we began with; and, that is, in his coat of arms, we have the cross and under the arm of the cross, we have the image of our Lady, the symbol for our Lady at the foot of the cross. It is very much like that where Jesus says, Behold your Mother. Behold your Son.”

The other thing that he chose was his motto. His motto is drawn from one of the great Marian Saints of our Church, Louis DeMontfort; and, that is **“Totus tuus”, totally yours, I am all yours.** We come to understand that through Louis DeMontfort’s consecration but also through the writings of Pope St. John Paul II, this great devotion that he had to our Lady. So, he entrusted everything to our Lady, even so much that in the year 1981 and the attempted assassination on his life, that the bullet miraculously missed any vital organs and his life was spared. He attributed that to the intercession of Our Lady of Fatima. The following year, he went back to Fatima; and, he took the bullet that the surgeons were able to remove and he brought it to the Shrine of Our Lady and that bullet is in the crown of our Lady even to this day. He entrusted that his life was spared because of our Lady. So, whether it was the difficulty of losing his mother, his brother, his father, all these at a very young age; whether it was under Nazi occupation, whether it was the atrocities of World War II, whether it was behind the Communist regime, when he became a priest, a bishop, an archbishop, a cardinal, and a pope, no matter what it was, he always entrusted everything to our Lady. Totally yours. . .Totus tuus.

Pope St. John Paul II, I think, is one of the great minds that the world has ever seen, too, especially in the last few hundred years. He was just an incredible philosophical mind. He wrote and wrote and wrote. He spoke about many many different topics and one of my favorite themes that he has essentially is that man finds his ultimate being in the person of Jesus Christ, which makes sense, because by no other name do we come to know salvation but under the name of Jesus Christ. Well, not too long before he passed away, Pope St. John Paul II gave us a beautiful Apostolic Letter. The Apostolic Letter was on the Rosary. I wanted to share with you some of the words that he said concerning the Rosary. He said, “the Rosary is my favorite prayer.” It is a marvelous prayer, marvelous in its simplicity and in its depth. In this prayer we repeat many times the words that the Virgin Mary heard from the Archangel and from her kinswoman, Elizabeth. The whole Church joins in these words against the background of the words “Ave Maria.” There pass before the eyes of the soul, the main episodes of the life of Jesus Christ. They are composed all together in the joyful, and the sorrowful, and the glorious mysteries, and they put us in the living communion with Jesus, through, and we could say, His Mother’s heart. At the same time, our hearts can enclose in these decades of the Rosary all the facts that make up the life of the individual, the family, the nation, the Church, and mankind. Personal matters and those of one’s neighbor, and particularly of those who are closest to us, or dearest to us, thus in the simple prayer of the Rosary, there beats the rhythm of human life.” Beautiful words written from the saintly man, literally a saintly man, and a man who was just a very very brilliant person. . .and for him to say it was his favorite prayer.

Now, I think sometimes people will look at the Rosary and they will say the Rosary is a prayer for little old ladies. I don’t want to downplay anyone. My mother is a little old lady who loves to pray the Rosary daily and I don’t want to downplay that at all. Many people say that is a prayer for little old ladies or it is a prayer just for little children and when we get a little older; it is something that we put away. Here we have someone like Pope St. John Paul II who is strong, a man’s man (that is what I really admired about him), very athletic, very outdoorsy brilliant man, very outgoing, very gregarious, and all these different



things, and his favorite prayer is the Rosary. I would say if his favorite prayer is the Rosary, then why can't it be our favorite prayer, as well? The Rosary, he said, while it is a Marian prayer, really, at the heart of it. . .it is a Christocentric prayer, a prayer that is centered upon Jesus Christ. **That would make sense that it is centered upon Jesus Christ all the while being a Marian prayer because whenever we look at our Lady, what does she do? Our Lady always points toward her Son.** One of the last words recorded by our Lady in the Scriptures, it comes from the wedding feast at Cana. . ."Do whatever it is that He tells you to do. So never does she point towards herself. Always does she point toward her Son. When Elizabeth sings the praises of her visiting, what does our Lady do? She doesn't sing, she doesn't talk about her own greatness, but she magnifies God. She sings her Magnificat, "My soul magnifies the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior," So, she always points toward her Son. She always leads us toward her Son, and she knows that that is her role. So, to pray the Rosary is to meditate upon particular events, mysteries of the life of our Lord but to do that through the prayer and through the eyes of the Blessed Virgin Mary because it makes sense. She always leads us toward her Son. So it is a Christocentric prayer. It is a Marian Prayer, but it's a Christocentric prayer. Pope St. John Paul II said that it is a Christocentric prayer. When we pray it we meditate upon the mysteries of the life of Jesus Christ. Even to use that word meditate . . . meditate is very different for us than what it might mean for the world or what it might mean for some eastern religions. Meditation is not simply emptying ourselves, emptying into this nothingness, but meditating for us is to contemplate, is to reflect, to consider particular events in the life of our Lord, of our Lady, and of the Saints. **So, to meditate when we pray the Rosary, it is to meditate, contemplate, and consider particular events in the life of our Lord. That's the whole purpose for it. So, when we do that, what we are doing is we are drawn deeper into these mysteries, mysteries which we will never fully comprehend, mysteries which we can never completely exhaust, but mysteries to which we can always go to drink from that wellspring, that fountain that will continue to nourish us, and strengthen us throughout our entire life.** So, it is his favorite prayer because it is a Christocentric prayer, it's a prayer that we pray to our Lady and through our Lady meditating upon the mysteries of the life of our Lord.

In this beautiful Apostolic Letter that Pope St. John Paul II gave to the world, he gave us a methodology that he believed helped us to better pray the Rosary. It is essentially a three-fold methodology. I want to talk about all three of those. . the approach that all fit together to help us to meditate and to go deeper into the mystery of Christ's life. First of all, when we pray the Rosary it is good for us to engage our senses. So if you think about that, how do we engage our senses? We engage our senses by seeing things, by hearing things, by tasting things, by smelling things. These are the ways in which we engage our senses. Think about it in our churches. When we walk in to our churches, we are able to see things, we are able to smell things, and we are able to hear things. There are things that engage our senses and what the intention is, is to draw us up so that we are not concerned solely about things of the earth, but our hearts and minds are set on the things of heaven. So they engage our senses. If you were to build a prison, what would you do? If you were to build a prison and this is how they build prisons. They would want simply flat walls, beige color, gray, really hard spaces. . .nothing to really incite the senses of the prisoners. They want to keep those senses suppressed. At church, we do the complete opposite. We want to incite the senses.

I remember one time in my very first assignment, there was a young boy in fifth grade and he was helping to clean the church. They were in the back cleaning the sacristy and young guys were all around the thurible where you put the incense and we use the incense during the Mass. Remember, the young



boy was fifth grade and he wasn't even Catholic, but went to a Catholic school; and, as they're cleaning it he simply said, "Do you smell that? It smells like heaven." That is what it is supposed to do. The things that we use for Mass, the things we use for liturgy are supposed to incite the senses and draw us deeper into the mystery so that our hearts and minds are set on the things which are above. Pope St. John Paul II said that this is something that we need to do as well. We need to incite the senses when we pray the Rosary.

He said one of the great ways that we can do that is through the use of icons. Here in my chapel, I have a number of different images. You can see the image of St. James the Greater on my right, and this is my patron saint as well as the patron saint of my chapel. When I look at that image and when I pray before that image, I'm reminded of St. James the Greater being called. I'm reminded of him leaving his nets and his father and following after Jesus. So I'm drawn deeper into his life which in turn leads me into a deeper relationship, a more intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. What the icons do is incite our senses and draws us deeper into the mystery. Pope St. John Paul II said that we should do that when we pray the Rosary. When we have a mystery of the Rosary, whatever the mystery might be, it is good for us to have an image in front of us because it helps us. It helps us to go deeper and deeper into the mystery.

One of the ways that I am able to do this, and you are probably able to do it as well, is through the use of a nice little Rosary booklet. The one that I use, at the beginning of each mystery, there is an image of that mystery. This mystery is the first one from the luminous mysteries, the Baptism of our Lord. It shows John the Baptist, our Lord, and the dove descending upon our Lord. So, these are really helpful for us. To have something like that if we aren't in a church that has an image of the mystery, if we are not at home, then we have them readily at our fingertips. This is something that we can always do. Sometimes you find good apps with that, too. They serve to draw us deeper into the mystery. So, he said that is one of the things that we do. **We are inciting the sense of eyesight. . .the things that we see.**

So, another way that is connected with that is when we come to a mystery, what do we do? "The First Glorious Mystery: The Resurrection of our Lord." So not only are we looking at it, we are announcing it. **So as we are announcing it and speaking it, we are hearing it with our very own ears.** We are inciting our senses. To do those three things, to see, to speak, and to hear, that draws us deeper into the mystery. We can do this all silently, we can do this all quietly but Pope St. John Paul II said this is an aid to help us go deeper into the mystery and that is the whole goal, to go deeper into our relationship with our Lord. Our Lady is always there present to help us to do that. So, the first way is to incite the senses. We hear, we speak, we see.

The second way, he said in which we can really take advantage of the Rosary to help us grow in our faith, is through the use of scripture. Now, St. Jerome, remember his famous line. St. Jerome says that "ignorance of the scriptures is ignorance of Jesus Christ." So if we flip that around, we can say that knowledge of the scriptures is knowledge of Jesus Christ. So if we are meditating upon the mystery of the Resurrection of our Lord, and as we announce that mystery, and we see that mystery; but, then we read a scripture passage that goes along with that, it allows us to go deeper into the mystery of Christ's life, especially this particular mystery is victory over sin and death in the resurrection. So, that was the second way in which Pope St. John Paul II said we can really help ourselves to take advantage of the Rosary.



So, again, first we see, we speak, we hear, and then the next is with the use of scripture. In this little scripture passage book, there are a lot of scripture passages. Sometimes in your Catholic Bible, in the back, you will have citations for the particular mystery. There are all sorts of different ways we can use these things to aid us in our growth in our spiritual life and in our devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary through the use of the Rosary.

So we speak, we hear, we see. We meditate upon scripture. Then the third way, the final way, and I would say this is the most difficult of all of them; and that is, allowing for silence. We live in a world where there is so much competing for our attention and the last thing we want to do or are able to do, it seems, is to simply be silent or to remain silent because there is so much that is competing for our attention. Now, whether it is people talking to us, whether it is things we have going on, whether it is things at our fingertips like our cell phones, computers, all those different things, but there really is a great need for silence.

Think about Elijah when he was fleeing for his life. How is it that he encounters the Living God? He doesn't encounter the Living God in all these theophanies, these great manifestations that were generally associated with God. What he does, as scripture says, is he encounters Him in the quiet, in the quiet of the whisper. The only way that he could have done that was to quiet himself first. If you want to listen to silence, there is no other way we can listen to it than by silencing ourselves first. Pope St. John Paul II said silence is integral to praying the Rosary. Silence is integral to the liturgy. **That is why the Church teaches us in her liturgical documents, that there is always to be, as she refers to it, "sacred silence" to be able to hear the voice of God.** Pope St. John Paul II said this is something that we have to do, that we have to provide for when we pray the Rosary. Now it might be a little difficult when we are praying it in a communal setting and a little easier when we are praying it by ourselves, but to think about this when I pray the Rosary, is this something that I do? I give you this as something of a model and I think it is somewhat helpful. For example, the fifth of the Luminous Mysteries: The Fifth Luminous Mystery (pause) The Institution of the Eucharist (pause). Before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knew that His hour had come to pass from the world to the Father. He loved His own in the world and He loved them to the end. (and pause). What we do is we allow the scriptures that we just read to speak to our hearts and enlighten on minds. As we gaze upon that image of the Institution of the Eucharist, we are transported back to the first Eucharist, the Last Supper. We remember that each and every time that we enter into the celebration of the Sacrifice of the Mass that we have a guaranteed encounter with the living Christ, especially in the Eucharist. So, to look for those opportunities within the mysteries, within the Rosary for silence and to meditate and to contemplate. . . again for us, meditation and contemplation is not pushing things out, or just thinking about nothingness, but rather it is being filled up and it is being filled up with the things of the Lord so we meditate and we contemplate and we think about the things of the Lord. So to provide those opportunities for silence is essential, it is important for all of us. So, three ways that Pope St. John Paul II gives to us: to speak, and to see, and to hear, to incite the senses, by the use of icons and by speaking the mysteries. The second is the use of scripture, because, when we read the scripture we have a guaranteed encounter with Christ. Knowledge of the scriptures is knowledge of Jesus Christ. The final one, as I said is probably the most difficult one of all, is silence. It is having that silence there and allowing ourselves to really meditate and contemplate mysteries in the life of our Lord. Pope St. John Paul II said the Rosary essentially is a Christocentric prayer. It is a Marian prayer, but it is a Christocentric prayer.



Friends, 2020 has been a very difficult year, it's been a horrific year. We've had to learn things such as social distancing which is very difficult to us social beings. We like being together. So, perhaps we haven't been able to be around our family as much as we would like. We haven't been able to see loved ones. Perhaps we have even experienced sickness ourselves or family or friend who has experienced sickness and I believe that all of us somehow in some way have experienced death and it has been a very very difficult year. What is it that we do with that? Do we flee from it? Do we run from it? Do we escape from it? I would say no, we don't do that. We have to be reminded that we are in the midst of it.

The icon or the model I would hold up for us is that of Pope St. John Paul II. In all of the difficulties that he experienced, the loss of his brother, the loss of his mother, the loss of his father and this all before he was a young man. Living under Nazi occupation, the atrocities that took place during World War II, the Godless regime of the Soviet empire, all these different things, **the difficulties that he experienced, even the attempted assassination on his life. . . what did he do? He didn't run away, but he ran toward. Who was it that he ran toward? He ran toward his Mother.** He ran toward our Mother. He ran toward our Lady. Our Lady, who was given to us by her Son from the cross. "Behold your Mother. Behold your Son." So, this beautiful virtue of devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, I would say, is an opportunity for us to imitate as St. Paul would say "Be an imitator of me as I am of Jesus Christ". So let us be an imitator of this great Saint, Pope St. John Paul II and the beautiful Marian devotion that he offers to each one of us.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Hail Mary. . .

Our Lady of Guadalupe, pray for us.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.