

Knowledge of the BVM

I will break this talk up into two main parts. The first part will be the necessity to put away sin in order to acquire knowledge of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The second part will consist of an explanation of the principle virtues of Mary that St. Louis gives in this part of the Consecration.

It is necessary to put away sin first in order to have knowledge of the Blessed Virgin Mary because she was completely without sin. In order to truly know someone it is not enough to have intellectual knowledge of them but practical knowledge as well. This means that in order to really know her we have to be like her, to live like her, to love like her. We know that she did not sin because the one thing that takes grace away from a soul is sin. This is because sin and grace are opposed: Romans 6:14 "For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace." We know from the Angel's greeting that Mary was full of grace. She wasn't just "pretty full," or "very full," she was totally and completely full of grace from the first moment of her conception.

In the first part of St. Louis de Montfort's prayer for the second week of the preparation for total consecration he prays to our Blessed Mother asking for the grace to be rid of everything that keeps him from her and to destroy in him everything that is displeasing to God. He prays this so that God can place and cultivate in him everything that is pleasing to her, which means St. Louis is asking to be purified of his sins so he can be full of grace just as Our Blessed Mother was.

We said that sin prevents us from having knowledge of the Blessed Virgin Mary and this is because knowledge is opposed to sin because sin is a turning away from God Who is Intelligence itself. So every time we sin we make ourselves dumber and weaker because we do violence to our intellect and will.

Let us break this down a bit in order understand it better. The object of my intellect is truth. God gave me intelligence in order to know the truth. The problem is that since I, and all of us, suffer from Original Sin, our will can override our intellect. Before the fall, all of our thoughts, desires, and actions were ordered to God. Among the gifts that Adam and Eve had in the state of original justice was perfect integrity (right ordering of the intellect and will). Since the fall, instead of being ordered to God man is now ordered or inclined to sin. Our tendency is toward sin, toward over-indulgence and toward seeking to fulfill our own desires. Our desires or appetites can override our intellect, what we know to be the truth.

For example, a man who sees a pile of cash on the table knows that the money is not his. His disordered will wants the money because he wants to use it to buy drugs or whatever other thing. He knows in his mind, when he is thinking about this, that this money is not his and that stealing is wrong because it is a violation of justice and this belongs to the natural law. Everyone knows that stealing is wrong but he cannot will to take the money under the aspect of evil. That is, he cannot will to steal it as an act of injustice. He can only will it under the aspect of the good. This means that he has to find reasons why this is a good act. He has to be able to

justify it somehow so that it becomes a good act. So his disordered will (metaphorically) says to his intellect, “Don’t look at the aspects of this situation that make this an injustice. Just see the money as a means to buying pleasurable things and so only see the act of taking this money as good.” The will forces the intellect to not look at those evil aspects, but the intellect knows they are there. It knows this is bad. The will is doing violence to the intellect by forcing it to ignore these aspects. Anytime violence is done to an object it weakens it. Willing evil weakens the intellect. In other words, sin makes us dumber. Sin is opposed to knowledge.

The good news is that God has a remedy for this. By giving us actual graces and by our cooperation with them God enlightens our mind so that we can know the truth and strengthens our will so that we can do the good. Grace is the antidote to sin. The more grace we have and the less we sin the more we will grow in knowledge and the more we can grow in love of the good. This is the proper way to re-order the disorder of sin.

This is not an instantaneous process. In fact, this is a long and laborious process that takes years of consistent effort and fidelity to the graces given throughout our lives. The end result, however is entirely worth it, that is, becoming virtuous, holy, and eventually getting to heaven. The more we respond to grace the more we will grow in virtues and holiness, the more we will be like Our Lady. In order to root out our vices we have to start practicing virtues.

Let us now consider the virtues of Our Lady that St. Louis de Montfort gives in the second week of the consecration. He lists:

1. Humility
2. Faith
3. Obedience
4. Continuous Mental Prayer
5. Mortification
6. Charity
7. Patience
8. Sweetness
9. Wisdom

St. Thomas Aquinas defines humility as:

- Willingness to live in accordance with the truth;
- Refrain of the irascible appetite from striving for excellence beyond one’s state;
- Not judging oneself greater than he is

This virtue is absolutely necessary for knowledge of Our Lady because she was always willing to live in accordance with the truth. She didn’t think of herself greater than she was. This is why she declares: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord” (Lk 1:38). She knew that this gift of being the Mother of God was precisely that, a gift. Without this humility you will always be fooling yourself into thinking you are better than you are and that you don’t need God which is extremely foolish because He Himself tells us, “without Me, you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5).

There is a kind of false humility that also needs to be avoided. False humility is thinking yourself great but putting on an exterior show to appear humble. A really humble person honestly believes themselves to be less than others. A falsely humble person thinks themselves better interiorly but acts humble exteriorly so that others praise them for their humility. The test of true humility is criticism. When a truly humble person is criticized they accept this in peace and often agree with the criticism and use it as further motivation to change. A person who has false humility will get extremely upset if someone criticizes them. They are looking only for praise and when they receive criticism instead they are interiorly and sometimes exteriorly shaken, upset, and disturbed.

In order to be truly humble we need to accept the fact that we are weak and dumb and we need God for everything. The more we realize we cannot do anything on our own, the more we rely on God and this is absolutely necessary for growing in grace and virtue.

Faith is the virtue by which one gives intellectual assent to the deposit of faith. This means that you are ready to believe anything and everything the Church teaches. It means you accept the authority of the Magisterium to teach and explain the Church's doctrine. If there is something the Church teaches that is difficult for you to accept the virtue of faith tells you that you need to change your life. Many times people who are leading sinful lives think the Church needs to change its teaching in order to accommodate their sin. In fact, this is why almost all heresies begin. This virtue means you accept the Church's judgment over your own.

Before the Annunciation, Our Lady thought she would finish her days childless but when the Angel came to ask her to be the Mother of God she immediately assented because she had the virtue of faith. She was ready and willing to believe the angel and accept that God's plan was better than her own.

One thing commonly done in Catholic circles is to criticize priests, bishops, and the Pope. As the clergy are guardians and teachers of the faith it will not do anyone any good to criticize, complain, or chastise us. I know that we deserve criticism. A lot of clergymen deserve a lot worse than that, but my point is that it will only harm you and others by complaining. If you want the clergy to change and the faith to be proclaimed in the way that Christ gave it to us, don't complain to any other person than Jesus Christ. It undermines people's faith in a subtle and insidious way to complain about the people who are supposed to be teachers of the faith.

Obedience is the virtue by which a person has a promptness of will to do the will of their superiors. The Blessed Virgin Mary showed this in immediately accepting God's plan for her. Knowing that it was from God she knew it to be the best thing and that which she most wanted to do.

You can practice this virtue by being obedient, even in the small things, to your boss or parish priest, to your parents, etc. The rule is that we should be obedient to our superiors in all things save sin. So if they told us to commit a sin then we cannot comply but in all other cases, even if it is totally ridiculous we should obey. St. Rita of Cascia was told by her superior to plant a stick and water it every day. She did just that and after a year of doing this the stick sprouted leaves and fruit, and today, almost 600 years later, it is alive and well and still producing fruit.

This is a hard truth for us stubborn people but we know from Scripture that “to obey is better than sacrifice” (1 Sam 15:22). This is why fulfilling your duties of state in life is so important. If you are a mother/father, an employee, a son/daughter you need to fulfill your duties.

The virtue of continuous mental prayer is continuously raising your mind and heart to God without prayer formulas. It means you are constantly speaking to God and offering all your actions and sufferings to God. We know Our Lady was constantly praying because the Gospel tells us, “she kept all these things in her heart” (Lk 2:19). She thought about them, meditated on them, and sought to carry out God’s will at all times.

By constantly directing our thoughts and actions to God our lives we take on a more supernatural resemblance instead of just a natural one.

The mortification of Our Lady meant she was willing to suffer. Anything and everything Our Lord wants us to suffer we should lovingly accept. This suffering comes in all kinds of ways so it is important that we see all suffering from God’s perspective, as a cross for us to carry for His glory. Patience goes along with mortification since patience is an ability to suffer evils well, i.e. without complaining.

Charity is willing the good of another. It means wanting and working for other people to get to heaven. It means that all of our thoughts, words, and actions are informed by a love of God and of our neighbor and a desire to do good to them. This means we should seek to glorify God and help other people to get to know God. Sweetness goes with charity because there is a delight that comes from helping others.

Wisdom is knowledge of things through their ultimate causes. This means that we see all things as God sees them. It means we have a supernatural perspective of life and we don’t just see the things of this world but the spiritual truths that are much more profound and more important for our salvation.