

One thing about doing the Lord's work: It doesn't always turn out according to our plans. For example, St. Louis surely had planned that his monument to Christ would last more than a day. Yet the saint **obediently accepted the destruction of his plans and blessed God**. Because of this kind of detachment from his own will and attachment to God's, Louis became an instrument used by God to accomplish even mightier works. So, although his physical monument was destroyed, Louis's teaching eventually became a huge edifice in the Church that exercised great influence on many Popes and on Catholic spirituality. Indeed, de Montfort's passionate labors paid off in the end, even if he didn't see the fruit himself.

As we are just beginning our preparation for consecration to Jesus through Mary, let's ponder some of the support various Popes have given to St. Louis's teaching. May the testimony of their support strengthen our resolve to journey on to Consecration Day, and may it help us to trust that our consecration truly will bear great fruit in our lives, even if we don't yet fully understand how.

- **Blessed Pope Pius IX** (1846-1878) stated that St. Louis's devotion to Mary is the best and most acceptable form.
- **Pope Leo XIII** (1878-1903) not only beatified de Montfort in 1888 but granted a Church indulgence to Catholics who consecrate themselves to Mary using de Montfort's formula. Moreover, this Pope was reportedly so influenced by St. Louis's efforts to spread the Rosary that he wrote 11 encyclicals on this preeminent Marian devotion.
- **Pope St. Pius X** (1903-1914), like Leo XIII, also recommended de Montfort's teaching on Mary to the faithful. In fact, he granted a plenary indulgence *in perpetuum* (in perpetuity) to anyone who would pray de Montfort's formula for Marian consecration, and he offered his own apostolic blessing to anyone

who would simply read *True Devotion*. This Pope so strongly encouraged the faithful to follow de Montfort's path of Marian devotion because he himself had experienced its power. In fact, in his Marian encyclical *Ad Diem Illum*, the saintly Pope expressed his own dependence on de Montfort in writing it, which becomes obvious when one compares it with *True Devotion*. The Pope's encyclical continually reflects the tone and spirit of de Montfort's classic work as evidenced by sentences like this: "There is no surer or easier way than Mary in uniting all men with Christ."

- **Pope Pius XI** (1922-1939) simply stated, "I have practiced this devotion ever since my youth."
- **Venerable Pope Pius XII** (1939-1958) canonized St. Louis in 1947 and, in his homily for the Mass of canonization, referred to de Montfort's Marian teaching as "solid and right." Then, when the Pope addressed the pilgrims who had come for the canonization, he said that de Montfort leads us to Mary and from Mary, to Jesus, thus summarizing the meaning of Marian consecration.
- **Blessed Pope John Paul II** (1978-2005) promoted de Montfort's teaching more than any other Pope. We'll learn more about this during the fourth week of the retreat. It's enough here to recall two amazing facts: First, that John Paul's papal motto was *Totus Tuus* ("totally yours"), which he took directly from de Montfort's shorter prayer of consecration; second, that John Paul described his reading of *True Devotion to Mary* as a "decisive turning point" in his life.

Today's Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, living in Mary.

Prepare me to give myself fully to living out this true and solid devotion.

DAY 3

De Montfort's Consecration (Part One)

Okay, so on the first day of this week, we asked for a greater passion and **zeal** in making our preparation for consecration. Then, yesterday, we pondered the incredible influence that de Montfort's brief life has had on the Church. The powerful testimony of authorities no less than **Popes** should have further fired our zeal and gotten us reflecting, "What is this amazingly influential teaching of a priest who only lived to be 43?" Of course, it's his teaching on Marian consecration, but what exactly does this mean?

Recall the summary of Marian consecration in the introduction to this retreat. There I presented consecration as our giving a "yes" to Mary, allowing her to fulfill in us her God-given task of forming us into other Christs. And that's all true. But there's more. Saint Louis gives two key emphases in his teaching on Marian consecration that expand what we've already read about it. These two emphases are (1) a renewal of our **baptismal** vows and (2) a particularly intimate **gift of ourselves to Mary**. Let's look at each of these in turn (one today and one tomorrow).

The day of our Baptism is the most significant in each of our lives. It's when we poor, sinful creatures are not only cleansed of sin but also given the amazing dignity and honor of being transformed into sons and daughters of the almighty God. On that joyous occasion, before we received this amazing grace, we solemnly promised (or if we were infants, others promised in our name) to reject Satan, and then we (or others in our name) professed our faith and commitment to Jesus Christ. Then, every Easter, we solemnly renew this promise and commitment. But do we keep it? Are we true to our word? No. We all sin. Sadly, we all give in to Satan's "poms and works" and reject Christ, at least in little ways.

Why does this happen? The simple answer is **original sin**: We have a fallen nature and we're prone to sin. That's true, but St. Louis invites us to go deeper and examine our consciences. If we do, we'll discover that a principal reason why we fall into sin is because of forgetfulness, forgetfulness of our

promise and commitment to Christ at Baptism. De Montfort suggests that if we were to personally and sincerely renew our baptismal vows and place them in the hands of Mary, then this act alone would go a long way in helping us overcome sin in our lives. Therefore, he makes such a renewal of vows an essential element of his prayer of consecration. In fact, in the very first paragraph of this prayer, he has us address Mary and pray to her as follows:

I, (name), a faithless sinner, renew and ratify today in thy hands the vows of my Baptism; I renounce forever Satan, his poms and works; and I give myself entirely to Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Wisdom, to carry my cross after Him all the days of my life, and to be more faithful to Him than I have ever been before.¹²

So, St. Louis has us attack sin right at its root — Satan and his poms and works — has us recommit our lives to Christ, and has us do all of this with and through Mary. **Why through Mary?** Because God has put enmity between her and Satan (see **Gen 3:15**), and Satan can't stand her. In fact, according to St. Louis, Satan fears her not only more than the angels and saints but, in a sense, even more than God himself! Why? Because, as he puts it, "Satan, being proud, suffers infinitely more from being beaten and punished by a little and humble handmaid of God, and **her humility humbles him more than the divine power.**"¹³ So, de Montfort gives us a practical and effective way to overcome sin in our lives: formally renounce Satan and recommit ourselves to Christ, through Mary.

We'll hear more about Mary's power over evil on the last day of this week. Tomorrow, we'll reflect on the second element of St. Louis's consecration, the particularly intimate gift of ourselves to Mary. Today, let's reflect on the promise we made at our Baptism to reject Satan and to love and follow Christ.

Today's Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, living in Mary.

Give me the grace to reject Satan and follow Christ more closely.