

ALLOCUTIO March 2015, Fr. Justin Ford, Senatus Spiritual Director



In Part 1, Chapter 2 of *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, St Louis de Montfort speaks about the marks of false devotion to Mary, and then the marks of authentic devotion. Last month we considered three kinds of *false* devotion that he deals with – that of the critical, of the scrupulous and of the superficial. Today we look at the remaining four: (i) the presumptuous; (ii) the inconstant; (iii) the hypocritical; and (iv) the self-interested.

First, the **presumptuous**. It's worth quoting from St Louis at some length on this, because he views it as the worst and most dangerous kind of false devotion. So by 'the presumptuous', he means 'sinners who give full rein to their passions or their love of the world, and who, under the fair name of Christian and servant of Our Lady, conceal pride, avarice, lust, drunkenness, anger, swearing, slandering, injustice and other vices. They sleep peacefully in their wicked habits, without making any great effort to correct them, believing that their devotion to Our Lady gives them this sort of liberty.'

"'God is good and merciful,'" they say. "'We will not die without confession, and a good act of contrition at death is all that is needed.'" 'They wear the scapular...sometimes they even say the Rosary...as well as fasting and performing other good works. Blinding themselves still more, they quote stories they have heard – whether true or false does not bother them – which relate how people who had died in mortal sin were brought back to life again to go to confession...Others were supposed to have obtained from God at the moment of death, through the merciful intercession of the Blessed Virgin, sorrow and pardon for their sins...Accordingly, these people expect the same thing to happen to them.'

Now, of course, prayer to Our Lady is the most wonderful way for even the most hardened sinner to find the way of true repentance and conversion. And we can never predict what the mercy of God can bring about. But as Jesus warns us again and again in the gospels, we can't take it for granted. So he pleads with us, repent. When we come before him, when we come before his mother – sincerely resolved, sincerely begging for the grace of true conversion; not later but right now, without dangerous delay – that's when we truly open our hearts to receive the graces that heaven so much wants to pour upon us.

This devotion of the presumptuous St Louis declares to be 'a horrible sacrilege and, next to an unworthy communion, is the greatest and the least pardonable sin, because devotion to Our Lady is the holiest and best after devotion to the Blessed Sacrament.' 'If Mary made it a rule to save by her mercy this sort of person, she would be condoning wickedness and helping to outrage and crucify her Son. Who would even dare to think of such a thing?'

The next kind of false devotion is what St Louis calls the devotion of the **inconstant**, whose devotion to Our Lady is practised in fits and starts. 'Sometimes they appear ready to do anything to please Our Lady, and then shortly afterwards they have completely changed. They start by embracing every devotion to Our Lady. They join her confraternities, but they do not faithfully observe the rules. They are as changeable as the moon, and like the moon Mary puts them under her feet.'

This inconstant devotion partly happens because we take on too much too soon. So St Louis concludes with this wise advice: 'It is better not to burden ourselves with a multitude of prayers and pious practices but rather adopt only a few and perform them with love and perseverance.'

We have to consider carefully the devotions and prayers we take upon ourselves, determining with God's grace what we need to do to persevere. That way we make ourselves ready for the temptation to let things fall by the wayside as soon as we become a bit weary of our prayers.

Then St Louis briefly mentions the sixth kind of false devotion, that of the **hypocritical**. These, he says, 'hide their sins and evil habits under the mantle of the Blessed Virgin so as to appear to their fellow-men different from what they are.' These days in a less Catholic society there might seem to be less temptation to pretend to be devout, when so many people wouldn't really respect devotion in the first place. But even so, the temptation still remains to try to look good and holy even just in front of our fellow legionaries or fellow parishioners.

Finally, there is the false devotion of the **self-interested**, who turn to Our Lady only 'to escape some danger, to be cured of some ailment, or have some similar need satisfied. Except when in need they never think of her.' 'Such people,' St Louis says, 'are acceptable neither to God nor to his Mother.'

That purely self-interested approach to prayer actually tries to use God or Mary basically as a kind of instrument or tool for achieving our own purposes. Certainly we should ask God and Our Lady for help in all our necessities. But this needs to be part of the bigger picture in which we genuinely love them for who they are, not merely for how we can supposedly get something out of them. And when we do love God for who he is then we'll sincerely be saying to

him, 'Thy will be done' – not simply, 'God, please make sure that my will is done', which is the devotion of the self-interested.

Reflecting on all these kinds of false devotion is a good examination of conscience for legionaries, who have the special profession of devotion to Our Lady. So we listen again as St Louis sums them up: 'the *critical* devotees, who believe nothing and find fault with everything; the *scrupulous* ones who, out of respect for our Lord, are afraid of having too much devotion to his Mother; the *exterior* devotees whose devotion consists entirely in outward practices; the *presumptuous* devotees who under cover of a fictitious devotion to Our Lady wallow in their sins; the *inconstant* devotees who, being unstable, change their devotional practices or abandon them altogether at the slightest temptation; the *hypocritical* ones who join confraternities and wear emblems of Our Lady only to be thought of as good people; finally the *self-interested* devotees who pray to Our Lady only to be rid of bodily ills or to obtain material benefits.' If we keep reflecting on all these as an examination of conscience, then with God's help we can gradually purify our devotion to Our Lady and make sure it remains the authentic devotion that God wants so much for us.