

## ALLOCUTIO May 2015 - Fr. Justin Ford, Senatus Spiritual Director



St Louis de Montfort concludes Part 1 of *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin* by commending a long series of devotional practices.

It's not necessary for us to carry out every single one of the practices he mentions in order to have true devotion, and I don't think that it was his intention to teach that. They're of different levels of importance, and perhaps a few of the practices he mentions seem more particular to his own time and place. But that there actually are *some* specific forms of devotion is obviously very important.

Earlier we've spoken of St Louis' 'marks' of authentic devotion to Our Lady, and of false devotion. So authentic devotion, we recall, is *interior, trustful, holy, constant and disinterested*. But important though those categories are, in a way they're abstract ideas. They don't have much meaning unless they get expressed in actual specific

prayers and actions. It doesn't mean much to say we have an interior and trustful love of Our Lady if there are no specific prayers we ever say to her. So St Louis' list of specific devotions makes it very real and concrete.

He first speaks about *interior* practices before turning to *exterior* practices. These are things that can be carried out simply in our own minds, or concern the motives that can inspire our actions in general. The eight interior practices are these:

- (i) honouring Our Lady as the worthy Mother of God, esteeming her more than all the other saints as the masterpiece of grace and the foremost in holiness after Jesus Christ, true God and true man;
- (ii) meditating on her virtues, her privileges and her actions;
- (iii) contemplating her sublime dignity;
- (iv) offering to her acts of love, praise and gratitude;
- (v) invoking her with a joyful heart;
- (vi) offering ourselves to her and uniting ourselves to her;
- (vii) doing everything to please her;
- (viii) beginning, carrying out and completing our actions through her, in her, with her and for her in order to do them through Jesus, in Jesus, with Jesus and for Jesus, our last end.

Unless our love for Our Lady expresses itself in forms like these practices, it is more like just a theory, something we think would be a good thing but that we haven't yet really put into action. It would be like saying we love a family member – but never telling them so, never doing anything special for them, never spending time in their company. But in contrast, how wonderful to have as many of these interior practices as possible gradually become a habitual part of our life and thought!

St Louis then lists a series of possible *exterior* practices of devotion. We recall the general principle: most important is what is interior, what happens in our heart. But as Catholics we especially understand that what is interior normally and appropriately also finds exterior expression. Our devotion is incarnational: it unites body and soul.

So, these are the twelve exterior practices listed by St Louis:

- (i) Enrolling in Our Lady's confraternities and joining her sodalities. (We can surely include under the sort of thing St Louis had in mind membership of the Legion of Mary itself, so much inspired by all his teachings.)
- (ii) Joining religious orders dedicated to her. (That's doubtless not God's calling for most of us, if we're talking about taking full religious vows. But of course, what a wonderful way of pleasing God, what a vocation to be blessed with!)
- (iii) Making her privileges known and appreciated. (Certainly, that's part of what we do in our Legion apostolate.)
- (iv) Giving alms, fasting, performing interior and exterior acts of self-denial in her honour.
- (v) Carrying such signs of devotion to her as the rosary or the scapular.
- (vi) Reciting the Rosary (and similar prayers) with attention, devotion and reverence.
- (vii) Singing hymns to her or teaching others to sing them.
- (viii) Bowing to her each morning while saying for example sixty or a hundred times, "Hail Mary, Virgin most faithful", so that through her intercession with God we may faithfully correspond to his graces during the day, and in the evening saying "Hail Mary, Mother of Mercy", asking her to obtain God's pardon for the sins we have

committed during the day. (When I first read this one, I have to admit I thought it sounded extravagant, something more suited maybe to 18th century France. But really, if it's done with real attention and devotion – not just the mindless repetition that Jesus warns against – then it's surely a simple and beautiful way of keeping our mind lovingly fixed on our Blessed Mother for an extended time, and obtaining her intercession with God.)

- (ix) Taking charge of her confraternities, decorating her altars, crowning and adorning her statues.
- (x) Carrying her statues or having others carry them in procession, or keeping a small one on one's person as an effective protection against the evil one.
- (xi) Having statues made of her, or her name engraved in prominent places.
- (xii) Solemnly giving oneself to her by a special consecration. (Special consecration is what St Louis will speak about in the whole second part of his book.)

So: a whole series of possible ways to show love and honour for Our Lady. We don't have to do all of them. But if we hardly ever did *any* of them then we might question the reality of our devotion.

St Louis concludes by reminding us of the necessary spirit and manner in which we should do all these things: 'These devotions are a wonderful help for souls seeking holiness provided they are performed in a worthy manner, that is: (1) with the right intention of pleasing God alone, seeking union with Jesus, our last end, and giving edification to our neighbour. (2) With attention, avoiding wilful distractions. (3) With devotion, avoiding haste and negligence. (4) With decorum and respectful bodily posture.'

That concludes the First Part of St Louis' book, 'True Devotion to Our Lady in General' Next we'll turn to his Second Part, 'The Perfect Devotion to Our Lady.'