

THE MONTH OF
MARY ACCORDING
TO THE SPIRIT OF
ST. FRANCIS DE SALES

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THE MONTH OF MARY ACCORDING TO THE SPIRIT OF ST. FRANCIS DE SALES

THIRTY-ONE CONSIDERATIONS
WITH EXAMPLES, PRAYERS, ETC.

Don Caspar Gilli

Translated and abridged from
the Italian by a sister of the Institute of Charity

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FIRST DAY

Mary, a Model of Perfect Self-Denial from Her Birth

LET all who are devout to the most holy Virgin approach the cradle in which lies the royal infant, Mary. Consider attentively this sacred child, and you will see how perfectly she practises every virtue. Ask the Angels, the Cherubim and Seraphim, who surround her, if they equal this little creature in perfection, and they will all reply that they are immensely inferior to her in graces, in merits, and in virtue. Contemplate, Children of Mary, those heavenly spirits around her cradle, and you will hear them repeat in ecstasies of admiration of her beauty the words of the Cantic of Canticles: *Who is she that goeth up by the desert as a pillar of smoke of aromatical spices of myrrh, and frankincense . . . Who is she that cometh forth as the morning rising, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army set in battle array?*

This virgin child is not yet glorified, but glory is already promised her; she expects it, not like others, in hope, but with certainty. On this account the celestial

spirits, enraptured by such incomparable perfection, cease not to celebrate her praises.

Meanwhile, this most perfect Virgin lies in her poor crib, and there practises, in a most special manner, the virtue of self-abnegation. Consider, I beseech you, how, amidst angelic praises, she wishes to appear like all other children of Adam. Who will not be filled with admiration and love, to behold Mary in her cradle, full of grace, endowed with the perfect use of reason from the first instant of her Immaculate Conception, able to meditate upon the perfections of God, filled with His love, and entirely resigned to His holy will; and yet, notwithstanding such privileges, wishing to be considered and treated as a poor little infant, without in any way manifesting the precious gifts she possessed? O my God! how attractive is such a spectacle; and not only attractive, but wonderful; and how clearly does it convince us of her perfect renunciation of all that savours of worldly pomp and glory and ambition!

The second kind of abnegation which this august Virgin teaches us to practise, is the renunciation of the flesh, of which in her nativity and infancy she offers us most moving examples. Children are obliged to make many sacrifices, and the more they are attended to, the more are their affections and inclinations opposed.

These mortifications, nevertheless, are not occasions of merit to them, for they have not yet acquired the use of reason. But the most holy Virgin, being endowed from her infancy with the perfect use of reason, exercised the virtue of self-abnegation in a wonderful degree, enduring voluntarily all these contradictions and mortifications.

The third kind of renunciation is that of our own judgment and will, even in things which seem to us better than those that are commanded us. This includes what is most difficult and meritorious in the way of Christian perfection. How excellently did the most holy Virgin practise this abnegation in her nativity! Although possessed of the use of reason, she never made use of her liberty to manifest it. We always see in her a constant state of dependence. When she goes to the Temple she is led by her parents; through obedience to them she gives her hand to a humble carpenter, although she had consecrated her virginity to God. She leaves Nazareth for Bethlehem, flees into Egypt, and returns to Nazareth; and in all these journeys, as well as in all the other vicissitudes of her life, she maintains perfect subjection and docility. She even assists at the death of her Son and her God, through submission to the decrees of Heaven, her will being

perfectly united to that of the Eternal Father. It was not by constraint, but with the full concurrence of her will, that she assented to the death of this Divine Son, and with humble resignation embraced and adored a hundred times that Cross upon which she saw, without shedding a tear, her only Son expire. What abnegation do we not find in the most holy Virgin! The tender loving soul of this most sorrowful Mother was pierced by unheard-of dolours; indeed, who can ever describe the pains and anguish of her most sacred heart, as she stood immovable at the foot of the Cross? She knew that the Eternal Father willed that Jesus Christ should thus die, and that she should be present at His death, and this knowledge gave her strength to stand there and endure it all.

In imitation of Mary, let us resolve to die to everything and to our own will, that we may live for God alone. Jesus Christ tells us to deny ourselves, to take up our cross and to follow Him. The way of perfection is a Calvary, where it is necessary to crucify ourselves continually, in company with our Saviour; thus forcing nature to die, that grace may live and reign within us. In a word, it is necessary to strip ourselves of the old Adam, and clothe ourselves with the new Adam, and this cannot be done without suffering. I will not

deceive you; Christian perfection is difficult, and very great courage is required for so high an undertaking. This perfection consists in an entire self-abnegation, and in a total renunciation of all earthly things.¹

O my God! when will Our Lady be, as it were, born in our hearts? As for myself I see clearly that I am quite unworthy of such a favour; and as for you, what are your sentiments? Her Divine Son was born in a stable. Let us take courage and prepare Him a place in our hearts; a place made deep by humility, low by simplicity, and wide by charity. It is such a heart as this that Our Lady loves to visit, She dwells willingly near the manger and at the foot of the Cross. Little matters it to her that she lives unknown in Egypt, provided her Divine Child lives with her.

Whether our Lord sends us to the right or to the left, or howsoever He treats us, or makes us as a sign against which all the evils of the world are turned, we will never abandon Him until He has blessed us with eternal blessing. Let us be assured that He is never so

1 In the way of prayer, at first everything seems painful, and with good reason; because it is a continual war against ourselves. But when we set to work, our Lord on His side assists us so powerfully, and loads us with so many favours, that all the pains and labours of this life become as nothing.—*St. Teresa.*

near to us as when He appears to be furthest from us; never does He guard us with more jealousy than when He seems to abandon us, and never does He engage in combat with us, but to take more intimate possession of our heart, and load us with His blessings. Meanwhile, let us go on; let us walk through the valley of humble virtues, and how many roses shall we not find amongst the thorns! Charity, which shines in the midst of the most trying afflictions, as well interior as exterior, the lily of purity, the violet of mortification, and how many more! But the lowly virtues that are dearest to me are these three: meekness of heart, poverty of spirit, simplicity of life, together with the practices of visiting the sick, serving the poor, consoling the afflicted, and such like. However, all must be done without solicitude, and in true liberty of spirit. Our arms are not long enough to reach to the cedars of Lebanon—let us then be content with the hyssop that grows in the valleys.

SPIRITUAL FLOWERS

There shall come forth a rod from the root of Jesse, says Isaias, and a flower shall rise up from its root. This root, writes St. Jerome, is the Mother of the Saviour; a

plain and simple root, but fruitful in its unity, like the Eternal Father. The flower of this root is Jesus Christ, *like to a flower of the field and to a lily of the valley*. This flower is possessed of as many leaves as there are functions and examples. If you wish to have the flower you must first bend the stem by your prayers. If this flower rises high through the excellence of its Divinity be not afraid; because through excess of love its stem may be bowed.—*St. Bonaventure*.

I am firmly resolved to desire no other heart than that which shall be given me by this Mother of hearts, this Mother of holy love. O my God! how much do I desire not to lose sight, not even for an instant, of this gracious Star, during the whole course of my journey!—*St. Francis de Sales*.

As the lily has no fixed season for its growth, but flowers sooner or later, according to its depth in the earth, in like manner the heart which aspires to Divine Love will blossom very late, and with much difficulty, if it be absorbed in earthly cares. However, if it be attached to the world only so far as is necessary for its engagements in life, it will flourish in charity and spread around it gracious fragrance.—*The same*.

EXAMPLE

The Miraculous Medal of the Immaculate Conception

Perhaps I can relate nothing more suitable in regard to the origin of this celebrated medal, so justly styled '*miraculous*,' than by transcribing the letter addressed to the author of the book, 'Mary Conceived without Sin,' by the spiritual Director of the Sister of Charity to whom the medal was revealed:

'Paris, 17th March, 1834.

'Towards the close of the year 1830, Sister M., a novice of one of the communities in Paris, dedicated to the service of the Poor, saw, whilst in prayer, a picture representing the Blessed Virgin, standing with her arms extended. She wore a white garment, a blue and silver cloak, and a veil coloured like the aurora, whilst rays of dazzling splendour issued from her hands. At the same time the Sister heard these words: "These rays are the symbol of the graces which Mary obtains in favour of mankind; and that part of the globe upon which they fall with

greater abundance is France." Around the picture was written the invocation, "*O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you.*" The Sister having considered it for a moment, cast her eyes upon the other side of the picture, and saw the letter "*M*" surmounted by a Cross, and below it, the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. Then the voice said again: "*A medal must be struck according to this model; and whoever shall wear it, properly blessed and indulgenced, shall be protected by the Mother of God in a most special manner,*"

"The novice came quickly to narrate the vision to me; and I, supposing it to be a mere pious illusion, simply addressed a few words to her upon true devotion to Mary, pointing out to her that the imitation of her virtues ever was, and will be, the true means of honouring her.

'After about six months, she had the same vision, and I made her the same reply. Finally, after another interval of six months, she saw the picture again, and heard the same words, except that the voice expressed

how much it displeased the Blessed Virgin that there was so much delay in having the medal struck.

‘This time, however, I attached greater importance to the revelation, without allowing the novice to perceive it; and I began to reflect and fear lest I was not seconding the designs of her who is so justly invoked by the Church under the sweet name of “Refuge of Sinners.”

‘A short time afterwards I had the opportunity of seeing the Archbishop, and gave him an accurate account of these visions. He answered me that “he saw nothing whatever objectionable in this medal being struck, as it was conformable to the faith of the Church and to the piety of the faithful towards the Mother of God; and that it might certainly contribute to the promotion of her honour.”

The medal was finally struck in the month of June, 1832.

‘In one of the three visions, the novice asked if it were not necessary to insert some words on that part of the medal

where the letter “M” and the Cross, with the two Hearts, are represented; but she was answered that these objects spoke with sufficient eloquence to the faithful soul.

‘When the medal was struck, it was quickly circulated amongst the Sisters of Charity, who, when they learnt its origin, wore it with much devotion, and began to hang it on the necks of the sick under their charge, and these shortly experienced happy results. Three cures and three conversions were wrought in a miraculous manner in Paris, and in the diocese of Meaux. Then the desire to possess the *miraculous medal*, or the medal *that cures*, became universal. Mothers of families gave it as a New Year’s gift to their children, and as a preservative to their innocence. As soon as it became known in a place, pious persons hastened to become possessed of it. But what greatly surprised and edified me, from the beginning of its propagation, was that all the children of two of our provinces agreed together to take this medal as the protection of their youth. In many places

entire populations addressed themselves to their Pastor to procure it; and, at Paris, an officer purchased sixty for as many private soldiers who had asked him for it.

‘Whilst the medal was miraculously propagated in all classes and provinces, the most consoling accounts were sent me by the Parish Priests, Vicar-Generals, and even by Bishops. They say that *“it reanimates fervour in populous towns as well as in the country; it gains our entire confidence; we look upon it as a means sent by Providence to enkindle faith, which in our days has so visibly decreased; and in reality it daily awakens this faith in many hearts, in which it seemed to be extinguished; it re-establishes peace and concord in many families; and there is no one who wears this medal who does not experience its salutary effects.”*

Not only in France which is specially under the protection of Mary Most Holy did the faithful of every age, sex, and condition, rival one another in zeal and solicitude to possess the *miraculous* medal; it spread also like lightning throughout Switzerland, Piedmont, Spain,

Italy, Belgium, England, America, in the Levant, and even in China; and we can certify that in the present day the number of these medals exceeds thirty millions. In every place it is asked for by indifferent Christians, by obstinate sinners, by the impious, by Protestants, Jews, and Turks, and worn with veneration. Heaven grant that it may not be without fruit!—that she, to whom the Church applies those words of Holy Scripture, *‘He who shall find Me shall find life, and have salvation from the Lord,’* may conduct and confirm us in the way of salvation!

Plenary Indulgences at the hour of death, and on all the principal festivals of the year, and on the feasts of the Apostles are attached to this medal when blessed by anyone who possesses the faculty.

Prayer.—O Lovely Child, who, in your happy Nativity, didst console the world, rejoice Heaven, terrify hell, and become the relief of sinners, the consolation of the afflicted, the health of the sick, and the joy of all men, I entreat you, with all the fervour of my soul, to be spiritually born in my heart through your holy love. Attach my soul once for all to your happy service, and my heart to yours, that my life may be adorned with the virtues which will render me dear to you. O Mary!

produce in me the salutary effects of your sweet name, and obtain that the invocation of this holy name may be my strength in sufferings, my hope in dangers, my shield in spiritual conflicts, and my support and comfort in the agonies of death. May it be honey to my mouth, music to my ears, and the only joy of my heart! Amen.

Aspiration.—Morning Star, pray for me.

Practice.—Visit the altar of the Blessed Virgin, after having adored the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar.