

Immaculate Conception Novena 2023

Each day leading up to the Immaculate Conception, you are invited to reflect on a passage from Scripture from the life of Mary and an excerpt from Fr. John Ayers that reflects on the preventive system through the example of Mary.

All excerpts are taken from the section “Immaculate Preventive System” in the pamphlet *Don Bosco Finds Mary in the Church* by John Ayers, S.D.B.

Fr. John Ayers introduces this section by stating “our Founder wanted Mary Immaculate to be regarded as the ideal of the “Preventive System.”

Day 1: Preventive System of Grace

Scripture: In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin’s name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, “Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you.” But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” (Luke 1:26-33)

Excerpt: By prevenient grace, God’s intervening assistance beforehand, Mary was preserved from every stain. So God’s Mother became first of the redeemed, the unique graced-one so highly favoured in this divine preventive system of grace.

Please take a moment of silence to pray for your intention.

O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee.

Day 2: Presence and Active Help

Scripture: On the third day there was a wedding in Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding. When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” [And] Jesus said to her, “Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come.” His mother said to the servers, “Do whatever he tells you.” (Luke 2:1-5)

Excerpt: Yet Mary’s role in scripture is more dynamic than exemplary. Her kind presence and active help pervade the Gospels when she intervenes at crisis-points. “And the Mother of Jesus was there” ... “And there stood by Mary, the Mother of Jesus.”

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Day 3: Help of Christians

Scripture: During those days Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, "Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled." (Luke 1:39-45)

Excerpt: At the Visitation, Cana, Calvary, and Pentecost she is alert to personal need or ecclesial distress, and in fact anticipates it beforehand by providing assistance. In the text, "And Mary rising up went with haste into the hill country," the early Church saw the prompt help under adverse conditions which characterizes grace, and the Church as Cooperator in grace: *L'Ausiliatrice*.

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Day 4: Adaptation

Scripture: When they had departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him." Joseph rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt. He stayed there until the death of Herod, that what the Lord had said through the prophet might be fulfilled, "Out of Egypt I called my son." (Matthew 2: 13-15)

Excerpt: Adaptation is her forte. Spontaneous and open to the Spirit, she can handle the unexpected and out of the ordinary. Egypt's exile, the temple search, the hostile hometown mob did not upset her equilibrium, though she is "troubled."

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Day 5: Loving Kindness

Scripture: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;
my spirit rejoices in God my savior.
For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness;
behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed.
The Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.

His mercy is from age to age
to those who fear him.
He has shown might with his arm,
dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart.
He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones
but lifted up the lowly.
The hungry he has filled with good things;
the rich he has sent away empty.
He has helped Israel his servant,
remembering his mercy,
according to his promise to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.” (Luke 1: 46-55)

Excerpt: God’s People in the Church community are everything for her. At the Annunciation, along the Via Crucis, in the Upper Room, at Easter’s Regina Caeli, alleluia, she is their representative or spokeswoman. She is steeped in the culture and religion of her own race.

The theme of her Servant Song (Magnificat) is proof enough of the gentle, loving kindness and practical help that made her the prototype for the Beatitudes. She is in her element among the poor Anawim.

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Day 6: Joy

Scripture: Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields and keeping the night watch over their flock. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were struck with great fear. The angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying:

“Glory to God in the highest
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

When the angels went away from them to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go, then, to Bethlehem to see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger. (Luke 2: 8-16)

Excerpt: Some twenty-seven times Luke’s Gospel calls to mind the ecstatic joy of Christ’s advent, most of it revolving around Mary’s presence as the Cause of Our Joy. The same Gospel is filled with familiarity, as it pervaded her family house at Nazareth.

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Day 7: Reason

Scripture: Each year his parents went to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, and when he was twelve years old, they went up according to festival custom. After they had completed its days, as they were returning, the boy Jesus remained behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Thinking that he was in the caravan, they journeyed for a day and looked for him among their relatives and acquaintances, but not finding him, they returned to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions, and all who heard him were astounded at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished, and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety." And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he said to them. He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus advanced wisdom and age and favor before God and man. (Luke 2: 41-52)

Excerpt: Absorbed in religion as the Daughter of Sion, emanating loving kindness from a grace-filled heart, Mary also brings reason into play. She exercises her free-will decisively, not as a robot, but after heartfelt pondering; an intelligent colleague and cooperator in every faith-mystery.

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Day 8: Salvation of Souls

Scripture: Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his home. (John 19: 25-27)

Excerpt: Assumed in the Paschal Mystery, she continues her ecclesial function as Mother of Grace. Always her activity, "the divine work of being a cooperator in the salvation of souls," remains subordinate to Christ's work, to the Church's mission.

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Day 9: Grace of Christ

Scripture: His mother and his brothers arrived. Standing outside they sent word to him and called him. A crowd seated around him told him, "Your mother and your brothers [and your sisters] are outside asking for you." But he said to them in reply, "Who are my mother and [my] brothers?" And

looking around at those seated in the circle he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. [For] whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.” (Mark 3: 31-35)

Excerpt: And so, on looking at Mary’s countenance and spiritual features, the Salesian Society recognises its own identity as religious, as educator. “Mary, Help of Christians is the Salesian Society.”

Not for a moment does this detract from the centrality of Christ in our work. The very lifeblood of our spirit is “*gratia Christi*,” the grace of Christ. Writing under our Founder's direction, Father Julius Barberis has left us our cue: “Jesus has left us the authentic principles and practices of all education. He came to educate the world. Let us follow these searchings of the Gospel, trying to do in our small way as Jesus did; nothing else. On this fundamental point is based all Don Bosco’s system. It is all so simple, so straightforward.”

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