

Christmas Novena

16~24 December

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How to Pray This Novena

Set aside about ten minutes each day. Take your time over the words you read. Linger over a word or a phrase. Repeat it aloud or in silence. Let it rest in your mind and heart. Think about its meaning. Share your feelings with God, who is father and mother to us, to Jesus or to Mary. And wait quietly to see what comes into your mind and heart. Don't worry if nothing seems to be happening. People who know each other well don't need many words. God has our best interests at heart.

The prayer of Mary, the Magnificat, a joyful prayer of thanks to God, is an ideal preparation for Christmas, as it was her pre-Christmas prayer. The novena takes a line of her prayer for each day.

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Saturday, December 16

Scripture

‘My soul glorifies the Lord/my spirit exults in God my Saviour’ (Lk 1:46).

Reflection

Like all good spirituality the Magnificat begins with thanks. A full-hearted thanks from the young woman, Mary. No mealy-mouthed joy here.

The closeness of the coming of the Saviour expanded Mary’s life. Nothing could unbalance her joy, not even the public doubt about her pregnancy. Her joy was realistic as was her thanks.

St Ignatius says that the worst sin of all is ingratitude! We know that. How often we may say (or feel) ‘not even a word or a card of thanks’. God likes our gratitude. This was Mary’s constant prayer: no matter what, nothing, not even the poverty of her baby’s birth, blocked her thanks.

Prayer

I thank you Lord for your goodness and care for me, especially for (mention here something you are grateful for). Hail Mary ...

Sunday, December 17

Scripture

‘He looks on his servant in her lowliness; henceforth all ages will call me blessed’ (Lk 1:48).

Reflection

It’s not Mary’s graces or human qualities that make her blessed. It is her lowliness! A lowliness that did not put her down but raised her up. When we know our need for God, our need to trust and depend on others, our desire for justice and for peace – many things we cannot do for ourselves – then we are lowly and most blessed. All generations have called Mary blessed in her welcoming of Jesus as her son, and we know that the strength of God would guide her many times in her life.

Prayer

Make us love our lowliness as Mary welcomed hers, knowing that only in God is my soul at rest! Hail Mary ...

Monday, December 18

Scripture

‘The almighty works marvels for me, holy is his name’ (Lk 1:49).

Reflection

What might Mary have been grateful for? The marvels God had done for the people were very much part of her religious upbringing. God was close, working in the world. Also in her own life, as with Elizabeth, she shared the joys and fears of pregnancy and of her vocation. She must have shared with her cousin the big moment of the Annunciation. When she might doubt this now and in the future, she recalls

that God is near in the ups and downs of life. As we are grateful for God in our lives, we too share in his holiness.

Prayer

Father in heaven holy be your name. Holy is the name of everyone on earth because you are holy. Hail Mary ...

Tuesday, December 19

Scripture

‘His mercy is from age to age for those who revere him’ (Lk 1:50).

Reflection

God’s nature, deepest quality, his middle name, is mercy. In God, love’s centre is mercy. Mary knew this. As she prepared for the birth of her son, she began to realise that this birth had something to do with mercy. The life of her son would unfold with mercy; even the visitors to the crib went away with a sense of praise to God and trust in God. Mercy leads to praise and trust. As God was merciful to his people in the past, God will always be so. Prayer to Mary will bring us to the merciful God; as she herself is merciful in her regard of us. As we revere him, so we praise him.

Prayer

Be merciful to me Lord God this Christmas time. May mercy grow in my heart this time of year. Hail Mary ...

Wednesday, December 20

Scripture

‘He puts forth his arm in strength and scatters the proud hearted’ (Lk 1:51).

Reflection

We stretch out our arm to console, to point the way, to give something; a

way of expressing God’s saving help was that ‘he stretched out his arm’. We often say ‘with your strong arm and mighty hand give me a hand with this’. A strong arm can scatter something as God scatters our pride and pomposity. God likes the humble, people like Mary who know their place in his love and his call to her. She would be the same herself – her arm reaches out to save us gently when we need this. She looks on the proud of heart with sadness and with hope, that they will find the gentleness of God leading to gentleness of heart.

Prayer

Help me O Lord to trust in your care for me; this is your strength. May it give me courage and hope in life. Hail Mary ...

Thursday, December 21

Scripture

‘He casts the mighty from their thrones and raises the lowly’ (Lk 1:52).

Reflection

Mary was what might be called a lowly woman – she had no important role in society, was probably quite poor, but rich in her commitment to her God. She did not belong around the thrones of the mighty. Her life was ordinary. Mary would know like all of us that human honours don’t last forever. The lowly are raised, lifted up, as Jesus was lifted up through his death to risen life. Mary had said, ‘I am the servant of the Lord’ and that was all that mattered. It is all that matters now as she is with him, body and soul, in heaven.

Prayer

May the prayers of Mary, O Lord, bring me closer into your love. Hail Mary ...



Friday, December 22

Scripture

‘He fills the starving with good things, sends the rich away empty’ (Lk 1:53).

Reflection

This is a hope for Mary, that the poor in her locality and probably her family would no longer be hungry. Maybe the ‘starving’ are also people starving for love and friendship in the loneliness of busy urban life. The rich go away empty because often in our wealth we forget our dependence on God and each other for most of what is good in life. The call of Christmas is to open our hearts to the wavelengths of starvation in the life of many people. As Mary hoped in her prayer to make a difference to all in need, we hope the same and offer something today to help feed the hungry, house the homeless and welcome the refugee and stranger.

Prayer

Open my heart, O Lord, to notice the needs of so many around me, and respond as best I can. Hail Mary ...

Saturday, December 23

Scripture

‘He remembers Israel his servant, mindful of his mercy’ (Lk 1:54).

Reflection

When people felt God was angry with them, they often reminded him of his mercy, that he would remember he said things like ‘he casts our sins to the depths of the sea’. A great freedom is to know we are forgiven, by God and

indeed by others. Forgiveness is the fruit of mercy but mercy is even more. Mercy not only forgives but ‘covers over many sins’, and is full of the compassion that leads to forgiveness. When we recall great moments of forgiveness, we remember the great forgiveness of God, and forgiving gives God great joy.

Prayer

May we remember each other, O Lord, in all our needs and the needs of each other. Hail Mary ...

Sunday, December 24

Scripture

‘... the mercy promised to Abraham and his children forever’ (Lk 1:55).

Reflection

Mary had heard very often that mercy had been promised. This mercy of the Lord God would be for each of us forever. All we need is to look for this forgiveness and mercy and it is ours. I wonder did Mary realise that she now would be the mother of the saviour of mercy, and that she would be called the mother of mercy. She shares in the energy of divine forgiveness and we ask her to remember us ‘sinners, now and at the hour of our death’. Christmas lets us open the heart and soul to the joy of the Gospel, the blessedness of the closeness of Jesus and the protection always of God, father and mother to us.

Prayer

May I bring your kindness O Lord, into all I do and say today. Hail Mary ...