

□ Reading time: 31 min.

This 2025 Novena to Mary Help of Christians invites us to rediscover ourselves as children under Mary's maternal gaze. Each day, through the great apparitions – from Lourdes to Fatima, from Guadalupe to Banneaux – we contemplate an aspect of her love: humility, hope, obedience, wonder, trust, consolation, justice, gentleness, dream. The meditations by the Rector Major and the prayers of the “children” accompany us on a nine-day journey that opens the heart to the simple faith of the little ones, nourishes prayer, and encourages us to build, with Mary, a healed world full of light, for ourselves and for all those who seek hope and peace.

Day 1 - Our Lady of Lourdes

Being Children - Humility and faith

Children trust, children rely on others. And a mother is close by, always. You see her even if she is not there.

As for us, are we able to see her?

Little Bernadette Soubirous

11 February 1858. I had just turned 14. It was a morning like any other, a winter's day. We were hungry, as always. There was this cave, with a black mouth; in the silence I felt a rush of air. The bush moved, shaken by some force. And then I saw a young woman, in white, no taller than me who greeted me with a slight bow of her head; at the same time she moved her outstretched arms away from her body a little, opening her hands, like the statues of Our Lady; I was afraid. Then it occurred to me to pray: I took the rosary beads that I always carry with me and began to say the rosary.

Mary showed herself to her daughter Bernadette Soubirous. She who could neither read nor write; she who spoke in dialect and did not go to catechism class. A poor girl, pushed around by everyone in the village, yet ready to trust and rely on others, like someone who has nothing. Nothing to lose. Mary entrusted her secrets to her and did so because she trusted her. She treated her with loving kindness, spoke to her kindly, and said ‘please’ to her. And Bernadette let herself go and believed her, just like a child does with its mother. She believed in her promise that Our Lady **would make her happy not in this world, but in the next.** She remembered this promise for the rest of her life. A promise that would allow her to face all her

difficulties with her head held high, with strength and determination, doing what Our Lady asked her to do: pray, always pray for all of us sinners. She also made a promise: she would look after Mary's secrets and give voice to her request for a Shrine in the place where Mary appeared. And as she lay dying, Bernadette smiled, thinking back to Mary's face, her loving gaze, her silences, her few but intense words, and above all, that promise. And she still felt like a daughter, the daughter of a Mother who keeps her promises.

Mary, the Mother who promises.

You, who promised to become the mother of humanity, stayed your children, starting with the youngest and the poorest. You drew close to them and revealed yourself to them.

Have faith: Mary will also shows herself to us if we are able to strip ourselves of everything.

The Rector Major's words

We can say that the Virgin Mary is a beacon of humility and faith for us, accompanying us through the centuries, accompanying our lives, accompanying the experience of each and every one of us. Let us not forget, however, that Mary's humility is not simply outward modesty, it is not a facade, but rather a profound awareness of her smallness before the greatness of God.

Her 'yes, here am I, the servant of the Lord' spoken before the angel is an act of humility, not presumption. It is the trusting abandonment of someone who recognises herself as an instrument in God's hands. Mary does not seek recognition; Mary simply seeks to be a servant, placing herself in the last place with silence, humility and simplicity that we find disarming. This humility, this radical humility, is the key that opened Mary's heart to divine grace, allowing the Word of God, with his greatness and immensity, to become incarnate in her human womb.

Mary teaches us to place ourselves as we are, with our humility, without pride, without needing to depend on our authority or self-referentiality, placing ourselves freely before God so that we may receive fully, with freedom and openness, like Mary; so that we may live his will with love. This is the second point, this is Mary's faith. The humility of the servant places her on a constant path of unconditional adherence to God's plan, even in the darkest, most incomprehensible moments, which means courageously facing the poverty of her experience in the cave at Bethlehem, the flight into Egypt, the hidden life in Nazareth, but above all at the foot of the cross where Mary's faith reaches its peak.

There, beneath the cross, with a heart pierced by pain, Mary does not waver, Mary

does not fall, Mary believes in the promise. Her faith, then, is not a passing feeling, but a solid rock on which the hope of humanity, our hope, is founded. Humility and faith in Mary are inextricably linked.

Let us allow Mary's humility to enlighten our human condition, so that faith may also sprout in us, so that, recognising our smallness before God, we do not abandon ourselves because we are small, we do not allow ourselves to be overcome by presumption, but we place ourselves there, like Mary, with an attitude of great freedom, with an attitude of great openness, recognising our dependence on God, living with God in simplicity but at the same time in greatness. Mary therefore urges us to cultivate a serene, firm faith, capable of overcoming trials and trusting in God's promise. Let us contemplate the figure of Mary, humble and believing, so that we too may say our yes generously, as she did.

As for us, are we able to grasp her promises of love with the eyes of a child?

The prayer of an unfaithful child

Mary, you who show yourself to those who are able to see...
make my heart pure.

Make me humble, little, able to lose myself in your mother's embrace.

Help me rediscover how important the role of a child is and mark my steps.

You promise, I promise in a covenant that only a mother and child can make.

I will fall, mother, you know that.

I won't always keep my promises.

I won't always trust you.

I won't always be able to see you.

But you will stand there in silence, smiling, your arms and hands outstretched.

And I will take the rosary and pray with you for all children like me.

Hail Mary...

Day 2 - Our Lady of Fatima Being Children - Simplicity and Hope

Children trust, children rely on others. And a mother is close by, always. You see her even if she is not there.

As for us, are we able to see her?

The little shepherd children in Cova di Iria

In Cova di Iria around 1:00 pm, the sky opened and the sun appeared. Suddenly, at about 1.30 pm, the improbable happened: before an astonished crowd, the most spectacular, grandest and most incredible miracle that has happened since biblical times took place. The sun began a frantic and frightening dance that would last more than ten minutes. A very long time.

Three little shepherd children, simple and happy, were there and spread news of the miracle that shocked millions of people. Nobody could explain it, from scientists to people of faith. Yet, three children saw Mary, heard her message. And they believed it, they believed the words of the woman who showed herself and asked them to return to Cova di Iria every 13th of the month. They do not need explanations because they placed all their hope in Mary's repeated words. A difficult hope to keep alive, one which would have frightened any child: Our Lady revealed suffering and world conflicts to Lucia, Jacinta and Francesco. Yet they had no doubt: those who trust in the protection of Mary, the mother who protects, can face everything. And they knew this so well; they knew it first-hand, risking being killed so as not to betray the word they gave to their heavenly mother. The three little shepherd children were ready for martyrdom, imprisoned and threatened with a pot of boiling oil.

They were afraid:

"Why do we have to die without hugging our parents? I'd like to see Mum."

Yet they decided to keep hoping, believing in a love greater than themselves:

"Do not be afraid. We will offer this sacrifice for the conversion of sinners. It would be worse if Our Lady never came back."

"Why don't we say the Rosary?"

A mother is never deaf to the cries of her children. And the children placed their hope in her. Mary, Mother who protects, stayed with her three children from Fatima and saved them by keeping them alive. And today she still protects all her children around the world who go on pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima.

Mary, the Mother who protects.

You, who have taken care of humanity from the moment of the Annunciation, have remained beside your simplest and most hopeful children. You drew close to them and revealed yourself to them.

Place your hope in Mary: she will be able to protect you.

The Rector Major's words

The Virgin Mary, hope and renewal

The Virgin Mary is the dawn of hope, an inexhaustible source of renewal. Contemplating the figure of Mary is like turning our gaze towards a bright horizon, a constant invitation to believe in a future full of grace. And this grace is transformative. Mary is the personification of Christian hope in action. Her unshakeable faith in the face of trials, her perseverance in following Jesus to the cross, her confident expectation of the resurrection are the most important things for me. They are a beacon of hope for all humanity.

In Mary, we see how certainty is, so to speak, the confirmation of the promise of a God who never fails to keep his word. That pain, suffering and darkness do not have the last word. That death is overcome by life.

Mary, then, is hope. She is the morning star announcing the coming of the sun of justice. Turning to her means entrusting our expectations and aspirations to a motherly heart that presents them with love to her risen Son. In some way, our hope is sustained by Mary's hope. And if there is hope, then things do not remain as they were before. There is renewal. The renewal of life. By welcoming the incarnate Word, Mary made it possible to believe in God's hope and promise. She made possible a new creation, a new beginning.

Mary's spiritual motherhood continues to generate us in faith, accompanying us on our journey of growth and inner transformation.

Let us ask Mary for the grace necessary so that this hope that we see fulfilled in her may renew our hearts, heal our wounds, and enable us to pass beyond the veil of negativity to embark on a journey of holiness, a journey of closeness to God. Let us ask Mary, the woman who stands with the apostles in prayer, to help us today, believers and Christian communities, so that we may be sustained in faith and open to the gifts of the Spirit, so that the face of the earth may be renewed.

Mary urges us never to resign ourselves to sin and mediocrity, but, filled with the hope fulfilled in her, to long for a new life in Christ. May Mary continue to be our model and support so that we may always believe in the possibility of a new beginning, of an inner rebirth that conforms us ever more closely to the image of her son Jesus.

The prayer of an unfaithful child

As for us, are we able to hope in her and be protected with the eyes of a child?

The prayer of a discouraged child

Mary, you who show yourself to those who are able to see...
make my heart simple and full of hope.
I trust you: protect me in every situation.
I entrust myself to you: protect me in every situation.
I listen to your word: protect me in every situation.
Give me the ability to believe the impossible and do everything in my power
to bring your love, your message of hope and your protection to the whole world.
And please, my Mother, protect all humanity, even those who do not yet recognize
you.

Hail Mary...

Day 3 - Our Lady of Guadalupe **Being Children - Obedience and dedication**

Children trust, children rely on others. And a mother is close by, always. You see her
even if she is not there.
As for us, are we able to see her?

Young Juan Diego

*Juan Diego," said the Lady, "the little favourite among my children..." Juan sprang
to his feet.*

"Where are you going, Juanito?" asked the Lady.

*Juan Diego replied as politely as he could. He told the Lady that he was going to the
church of Santiago to hear the Mass in honour of the Mother of God.*

*"My beloved child," said the Lady, "I am the Mother of God, and I want you to listen
to me carefully. I have a very important message to give you. I want a church to be
built on this spot, from where I can show my love to your people.*

A gentle, simple and tender dialogue like that of a mother with a child. And Juan
Diego obeyed: he went to the bishop to report what he had seen but he did not
believe him. Then the young man returned to Mary and explained what had
happened. Our Lady gave him another message and urged him to try again, and so
on and so forth. Juan Diego obeyed, he did not give up: he would complete the task
that the heavenly Mother was entrusting him with. But one day, overcome with the
problems of life, he was about to skip the appointment with Our Lady: his uncle was
dying. **"Do you think I would forget someone I love so much?" Mary healed**

his uncle, while Juan Diego obeyed once again:

"My beloved child," the Lady said, "go up to the top of the hill where we first met. Cut and pick up the roses you will find there. Put them in your tilma (cloak) and bring them to me. I'll tell you what you have to do and say." Despite knowing that there were no roses growing on that hill, and certainly not in winter, Juan ran all the way to the top. And there was the most beautiful garden he had ever seen. Castilian roses, still shining with dew, stretched as far as the eye could see. He gently cut the most beautiful blooms with his stone knife, filled his cloak, and quickly returned to where the Lady was waiting for him. The Lady took the roses and placed them back in Juan's tilma. Then she tied it behind his neck and said, "This is the sign the bishop wants. Quickly, go to him and don't stop along the way."

The image of Our Lady had appeared on the cloak and at the sight of this miracle, the bishop was convinced. And today the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe still preserves this miraculous effigy.

Mary, the Mother who does not forget

You, who do not forget any of your children, leave no one behind, have looked upon the young people who have placed their hopes in you. You drew close to them and revealed yourself to them.

Obey even when you do not understand: a mother does not forget, a mother does not leave you on your own.

The Rector Major's words

The Virgin Mary, motherhood and compassion

Mary's motherhood does not end with her yes that made the incarnation of the Son of God possible. Certainly, that moment is the foundation of everything, but her motherhood is a constant attitude, a way of being for us, of relating to the whole of humanity.

Jesus on the cross entrusts John to her with the words, 'Woman, behold your son,' symbolically extending her motherhood to all believers of all times.

Mary thus becomes the mother of the Church, the spiritual mother of each one of us.

We see how this motherhood manifests itself in tender and thoughtful care, in constant attention to the needs of her children and in a deep desire for their good. Mary welcomes us, nourishes us with her expression of fidelity, protects us under her mantle. Mary's motherhood is an immense gift that brings us closer to her; we

feel her loving presence accompanying us at every moment.

Mary's compassion is the natural corollary of her motherhood. Compassion is not simply a superficial feeling of pity, but a profound participation in the pain of others, a 'suffering with'. We see it manifested in a touching way during her son's passion. In the same way, Mary does not remain indifferent to our pain; she intercedes for us, consoles us, and offers us her maternal help.

Thus, Mary's heart becomes a safe refuge where we can lay down our burdens and find comfort and hope. Motherhood and compassion in Mary become, so to speak, two sides of the same human experience in our favour, two expressions of her infinite love for God and for humanity.

Her compassion is then the concrete manifestation of her being a mother, compassion as a consequence of motherhood. Contemplating Mary as a mother opens our hearts to the hope that finds its fullest expression in her. Our Heavenly Mother who loves us.

Let us ask Mary to see her as a model of authentic humanity, of a motherhood capable of 'feeling with', capable of loving, capable of suffering with others, following the example of her son Jesus, who for love of us suffered and died on the cross.

The prayer of an unfaithful child

As for us, are we sure that a mother never forgets, just as children do?

The prayer of a lost child

Mary, you who show yourself to those who are able to see...
make my heart obedient.

When I'm not listening, please insist.

When I don't come back, please come and look for me.

When they do not forgive me, please teach me forgiveness.

Because we human beings get lost and we will always get lost

But you don't forget us, your wandering children.

Come and get us,

come and take us by the hand.

We do not and cannot be alone here.

Hail Mary...

Day 4 - Our Lady of La Salette

Being Children - Amazement and reflection

Children trust, children rely on others. And a mother is close by, always. You see her even if she is not there.

As for us, are we able to see her?

Little Melanie and Maximin from La Salette

On Saturday, September 19, 1846, the two boys climbed the slopes of Mount Planeau, above the village of La Salette, each leading four cows to graze. Halfway there, near a small spring, Melanie was the first to see a ball of fire on a pile of stones, "as if the sun had fallen there", and she pointed it out to Maximin. From that shining sphere a woman began to appear, sitting with her head in her hands, her elbows on her knees, deeply sad. Faced with their astonishment, the Lady stood up and in a soft voice, but in French, said to them, "Come closer, my children, do not be afraid, I am here to tell you great news." Heartened, the boys approached and saw that the figure was crying.

A mother announced great news to her children and did so in ears. Yet the youngsters were not surprised by these tears. They listened, in the tenderest of moments between a mother and her children. Because even mothers are sometimes worried, because even mothers entrust their children with their own feelings, thoughts and reflections. And Mary entrusted a great message to the two little shepherds, poor and neglected in their affection: "I am worried about humanity, I am worried about you, my children, who are distancing yourselves from God. And life away from God is a complicated, difficult life, made up of suffering." That is why she was crying. She cried like any mother and told her youngest and purest children a message as amazing as it was great. A message to be proclaimed to everyone, to be brought to the world.

And they would do so, because they could not keep such a beautiful moment for themselves: the expression of a mother's love for her children must be proclaimed to everyone. The Shrine of Our Lady of La Salette, which stands on the site of the apparitions, lays its foundations on the revelation of Mary's pain in the face of the pilgrimage of her sinful children.

Mary, the Mother who proclaims/who tells us who she is

You, who give yourself completely to your children so much that you are not afraid to tell them about yourself, have touched the hearts of your youngest children, who are able to reflect on your words and welcome them in wonder. You drew close to them and revealed yourself to them.

Be amazed at a mother's words: they will always be the most authentic.

The Rector Major's words

The Virgin Mary, love and mercy

Do we feel this dimension of Mary, these two dimensions? Mary is the woman whose heart overflows with love, attention and also mercy. We feel that she is a harbour, a safe refuge in times of difficulty or trial.

Contemplating Mary is like immersing ourselves in an ocean of tenderness and compassion. We feel surrounded by an environment, by an inexhaustible atmosphere of comfort and hope. Mary's love is a maternal love that embraces all of humanity, because it is a love that has its roots in her unconditional yes to God's plan.

By welcoming her son into her womb, Mary welcomed God's love. As a result, her love knows no boundaries or distinctions; it bends over human frailty and misery with infinite delicacy. We see this manifested in her attention to Elizabeth, in her intercession at the wedding at Cana, in her silent, extraordinary presence at the foot of the cross.

Behold, Mary's love, this maternal love, is a reflection of God's own love, a love that draws near, that consoles, forgives, never tires, never ends. Behold, Mary teaches us that to love means to give oneself completely, to be close to those who suffer, to share the joys and sorrows of our brothers and sisters with the same generosity and dedication that animated her heart. Love, mercy.

Mercy then becomes the natural consequence of Mary's love, a compassion, we might say, that is visceral, when faced with the sufferings of humanity, the world. We look at Mary, we contemplate her, we encounter her with her maternal gaze and we feel it resting on our weaknesses, on our sins, on our vulnerability, without aggression, indeed with infinite tenderness. It is an immaculate heart, sensitive to the cry of pain.

Mary is a mother who does not judge, does not condemn, but welcomes, consoles and forgives. We feel that Mary's mercy is a balm for the wounds of the soul, something that warms the heart. Mary reminds us that God is rich in mercy and never tires of forgiving those who turn to him with a contrite, serene, open and willing heart.

Love and mercy in the Virgin Mary merge in an embrace that envelops the whole of humanity. Let us ask Mary to help us open our hearts to God's love, as she did, and to let this love fill our hearts, especially when we feel most in need, most weighed down by trials and difficulties. In Mary, we find a tender and powerful mother, ready to welcome us into her love and to intercede for our salvation.

The prayer of an unfaithful child

As for us, are we still able to wonder like a child when faced with a mother's love?

The prayer of a distant child

Mary, you who show yourself to those who are able to see...

make my heart capable of compassion and conversion.

In silence, I find you.

In prayer, I hear you.

In reflection, I discover you.

And faced with your words of love, Mother, I am amazed
and discover the strength of your connection to humanity.

Far from you, who will hold my hand in times of difficulty?

Far from you, who will comfort me in my tears?

Far from you, who would advise me when I am taking a wrong turn?

I will return to you, as one with you.

Hail Mary...

Day 5 - Catherine's Medal

Being Children - Trust and prayer

Children trust, children rely on others. And a mother is close by, always. You see her even if she is not there.

As for us, are we able to see her?

Little Catherine Labouré

On the night of July 18, 1830, around 11:30, she heard herself called by name. It was a child who told her, "Get up and come with me." Catherine followed the child. All the lights were on. The chapel door opened as soon as the child touched it with his fingertips. Catherine knelt down.

At midnight Our Lady came and sat in the armchair next to the altar. "Then I jumped up near her, at her feet, on the steps of the altar, and I placed my hands on her knees," Catherine said. "I stayed like this, I don't know how long. I thought it was the sweetest moment of my life..."

"God wants to entrust you with a mission," the Virgin said to Catherine.

Catherine, who lost her mother at 9 years of age, was not resigned to living without her mother. And she approached the Mother of Heaven. Our Lady, who was already

looking at her from afar, would never abandon her. In fact, she had big plans for her. She, her caring and loving daughter, would have a great mission: to live an authentic Christian life, a personal relationship with God that was strong and firm. Mary believed in the potential of her child and entrusted her with the Miraculous Medal, capable of interceding and working graces and miracles. An important mission, a difficult message. **Yet Catherine was not discouraged. She trusted her Heavenly Mother and knew that she would never abandon her.**

Mary, the Mother who gives confidence

You, who are trusting, and entrust missions and messages to each of your children, have accompanied them on their journey as a discreet presence, remaining close to all, but especially to those who have experienced great suffering. You drew close to them and revealed yourself to them.

Trust: a mother will always entrust you only with tasks that you can complete and will be by your side all the way.

The Rector Major's words

The Virgin Mary, trust and prayer

The Virgin Mary presents herself to us as a woman of unshakeable trust, a powerful intercessor through prayer. Contemplating these two aspects, trust and prayer, we see two fundamental dimensions of Mary's relationship with God.

We can say that Mary's trust in God is a golden thread that runs through her entire existence, from beginning to end. That 'yes' pronounced with awareness of the consequences is an act of total abandonment to the divine will. Mary entrusts herself, Mary lives her trust in God with a heart firmly fixed on divine providence, knowing that God would never abandon her.

So, for us, in our daily lives, looking to Mary, this abandonment, which is not passive but active and trusting, is an invitation not to forget our anxieties and fears, but in some way to look at everything in the light of God's love, which in Mary's case never failed, and neither will it fail in our lives. This trust leads to prayer, which we can say is almost the breath of Mary's soul, the privileged channel of her intimate communion with God. Trust leads to communion. Her life of abandonment was a continuous dialogue of love with the Father, a constant offering of herself, of her concerns, but also of her decisions.

The visit to Elizabeth is an example of prayer that becomes service. We see Mary accompanying Jesus to the cross, after the Ascension we see her in the Upper Room united with the Apostles in fervent expectation. Mary teaches us the value of

constant prayer as a consequence of total and complete trust, abandoning oneself into God's hands, precisely to encounter God and live with God.

Trust and prayer and Mary Most Holy are closely interconnected. A deep trust in God gives birth to and brings forth persevering prayer. Let us ask Mary to be our example so that we may feel urged to make prayer a daily habit because we want to feel continually abandoned in God's merciful hands.

Let us turn to her with filial trust so that, imitating her, imitating her trust and perseverance in prayer, we may experience the peace that only when we abandon ourselves to God can we receive the graces necessary for our journey of faith.

The prayer of an unfaithful child

As for us, are we able to trust unconditionally like children?

The prayer of a mistrustful child

Mary, you who show yourself to those who are able to see...
make my heart capable of praying.

I am unable to hear you, open my ears.

I am unable to follow you, guide my steps.

I am unable to keep faith with what you wish to entrust to me; make my soul steadfast.

The temptations are many, let me not give in.

The difficulties seem insurmountable, let me not fall.

The contradictions of the world shout loudly, let me not follow them.

I, your worthless child, am here for you to use.

Making me an obedient child.

Hail Mary...

Day 6 - Our Lady of Sorrows of Kibeho Being Children - Suffering and healing

Children trust, children rely on others. And a mother is close by, always. You see her even if she is not there.

As for us, are we able to see her?

Little Alphonsine Mumiremana and her companions

The story began at 12:35 on a Saturday, November 28, 1981, in a boarding school

run by local Sisters, attended by just over a hundred girls in the area. A rural, poor school, where one learned to become a teacher or secretary. The building was not equipped with a Chapel and, therefore, there was not a particularly strong religious atmosphere. That day all the girls from the school were in the refectory. The first of the group to "see" was 16-year-old Alphonsine Mumureke. According to what she herself wrote in her diary, she was serving her companions at the table, when she heard a female voice calling her: "My daughter, come here." She headed for the corridor, next to the refectory, and there a woman of incomparable beauty appeared to her. She was dressed in white, with a white veil over her head, which hid her hair, and which seemed joined to the rest of the dress, which had no seams. She was barefoot and her hands were clasped on her chest with her fingers pointing towards the sky.

Subsequently, Our Lady appeared to other of Alphonsine's school friends who at first were sceptical but then, faced with Mary's appearance, they had to reconsider. Mary, speaking to Alphonsine, described herself as the Lady of Sorrows of Kibeho and told the children about all the cruel and bloody events that would soon take place with the outbreak of war in Rwanda. **The sorrow would be great, but so too would be the consolation and healing from that sorrow, because she, the Lady of Sorrows, would never leave her children in Africa on their own. The children remain there, stunned by these visions, but they believed in this mother who reached out her arms to them, calling them "my children."** They knew that only in her would there be consolation. And in order to pray that the consoling mother would alleviate the suffering of her children, a shrine dedicated to Our Lady of Sorrows of Kibeho was erected, now a place marked by extermination and genocide. And Our Lady continues to be there and embrace all her children.

Mary, the Mother who consoles

You, who comforted your children like John beneath the cross, have looked upon those who live in suffering. You drew close to them and revealed yourself to them. Do not be afraid to go through suffering: the mother who consoles will wipe away your tears.

The Rector Major's words

The Virgin Mary, suffering and invitation to conversion

Mary is an emblematic figure of suffering transfigured, and a powerful invitation to

conversion. When we contemplate her painful journey, it is a silent yet eloquent warning, a profound call to review our lives and our choices, and a call to return to the heart of the Gospel. The suffering that runs through Mary's life, like a sharp sword, prophesied by the elderly Simeon, marked by the disappearance of the Child Jesus, to the indescribable sorrow at the foot of the cross, Mary experiences all this, the weight of human fragility and the mystery of innocent suffering in a unique way. Mary's suffering was not sterile suffering, passive resignation, but in some way we notice that there is an activity, a silent and courageous offering, united with the redemptive sacrifice of her son Jesus.

When we look at Mary, the woman who suffers, with the eyes of our faith, that suffering, rather than depressing us, reveals the depth of God's love for us, which is visible in Mary's life. Mary teaches us that even in the most acute pain we can find meaning, a possibility for spiritual growth, which is the fruit of union with the Paschal Mystery.

Thus, from the experience of transfigured pain, a powerful call to conversion emerges. Looking at Mary, contemplating how she endured so much for love of us and for our salvation, we too are called not to remain indifferent to the mystery of redemption.

Mary, the gentle and motherly woman, urges us to abandon the ways of evil and embrace the path of faith. Mary's famous words at the wedding at Cana, 'Do whatever he tells you', still resound for us today as an urgent invitation to listen to the voice of Jesus in times of difficulty, in times of trial. In times of unexpected and unknown situations.

We immediately notice that Mary's suffering is not an end in itself, but is intimately linked to the redemption wrought by Christ. Her example of faith is unshakeable in pain. May it be a light and guide for us to transform our sufferings into opportunities for spiritual growth and to respond generously to the urgent call to conversion, so that the depth that still resounds in the heart of every person, the invitation of God, of a God who loves us, may find meaning, an outlet and growth through Mary's intercession, even in the most difficult moments, in the most painful moments.

The prayer of an unfaithful child

As for us, do we let ourselves be comforted like children?

The prayer of a suffering child

Mary, you who show yourself to those who are able to see...
make my heart capable of healing.

When I am down, hold out your hand to me, Mother.

When I feel broken, put the pieces back together, Mother.
When suffering takes over, open me to hope, Mother.
Because I am not only seeking healing for my body, but also realising how much my heart
needs peace.
Lift me up from the dust, Mother.
Lift me up and all your children who are in distress.
Those beneath bombing,
those who are persecuted,
those who are unjustly imprisoned,
those who are harmed in rights and dignity,
those whose lives are cut short too soon.
Lift them up and console them.
because they are your children. Because we are your children.

Hail Mary...

Day 7 - Our Lady of Aparecida Being Children - Justice and dignity

Children trust, children rely on others. And a mother is close by, always. You see her even if she is not there.

As for us, are we able to see her?

The little fishermen Domingos, Felice and Joao

At dawn on October 12, 1717, Domingos Garcia, Felipe Pedroso and Joao Alves pushed their boat into the waters of the Paraiba River that flowed near their village. They didn't seem lucky that morning: they cast their nets for hours without catching anything. They had almost decided to give up when Joao Alves, the youngest, wanted to give it one last try. So he cast his net into the waters of the river and slowly pulled it up. There was something there, but it wasn't a fish... it looked more like a piece of wood. When he freed it from the meshes of the net, the piece of wood turned out to be a statue of the Virgin Mary, unfortunately minus its head. Joao threw the net back into the water and this time, pulling it up, he found another piece of rounded wood entangled in it that looked just like the head of the same statue: he tried to put the two pieces together and realized that they matched perfectly. As if obeying an impulse, Joao Alves threw the net back into the water and, when he tried to pull it up, he realized he couldn't do it, because it was full of

fish. His companions threw cast nets into the water in turn and the fishing that day was really abundant.

A mother sees the needs of her children, Mary saw the needs of the three fishermen and went to their rescue. Her children gave her all the love and dignity that can be given to a mother: they put the two pieces of the statue back together, placed it on a hut and turned it into a shrine. From the top of the hut, Our Lady of Aparecida – which means She Appeared – saved one of her slave sons who was running away from his masters: she saw his suffering and restored his dignity. And today, that hut is the largest Marian shrine in the world and bears the name of the Basilica of Our Lady of Aparecida.

Mary, the Mother who sees

You, who have seen the suffering of your abused children, starting with the disciples, have stood beside your poorest and most persecuted children. You drew close to them and revealed yourself to them.

Do not hide from a mother's gaze: she also sees into your most hidden desires and needs.

The Rector Major's words

The Virgin Mary, dignity and social justice

The Virgin Mary is a mirror of fully realised human dignity, silent but powerful and inspiring for a just sense of social life. Reflecting on the figure of Mary in relation to these themes reveals a profound and surprisingly relevant perspective.

Let us look to Mary, the woman full of dignity, as a gift that helps us today to see her original purity, which does not place her on an inaccessible pedestal but reveals Mary in the fullness of that dignity to which we all feel a little attracted, called. Contemplating Mary, we see shining forth the beauty and nobility, precisely the dignity of the human being, created in the image and likeness of God, free from the game of sin, fully open to divine love, a humanity that is not lost in details, in superficial things.

We can say that Mary's free and conscious 'yes' is the gesture of self-determination that elevates Mary to the level of God's will, entering in some way into God's logic. Her humility then makes her even freer, far from being diminished by humility. Mary's humility becomes an awareness of the true greatness that comes from God. Here, then, is this dignity that Mary helps us to see how we are living it in our daily lives. The theme of social justice may seem less explicit, but from a careful

contemplative reading of the Gospel, especially the Magnificat, we can grasp, feel and encounter the revolutionary spirit that proclaims the overthrow of the powerful from their thrones and the raising up of the humble, that is, the reversal of worldly logic and God's privileged attention to the poor and hungry.

These words flow from a humble heart, filled with the Holy Spirit. We can say that they are a manifesto of social justice ante litteram, a foretaste of the kingdom of God, where the last will be first.

Let us contemplate Mary so that we may feel attracted to this dignity that is not limited to closing in on itself but is a dignity that in the Magnificat challenges us not to remain closed in our own logic but to become open, praising God and seeking to live the gift we have received for the good of humanity, with dignity for the good of the poor and for the good of those who are rejected by society.

The prayer of an unfaithful child

As for us, do we hide or do we say everything like children do?

The prayer of a child who is afraid

Mary, you who show yourself to those who are able to see...
make my heart capable of restoring dignity.

In a time of trial, look at my shortcomings and make them whole.

In a time of fatigue, look at my weaknesses and heal them.

In a time of waiting, look at my impatience and heal it.

So that when I look at my brothers and sisters I can look at their shortcomings and make them whole,

see their weaknesses and heal them, feel their impatience and heal it.

Because nothing cares like love and no one is as strong as a mother seeking justice for her children.

And then I too, Mother, will stop at the foot of the hut, look with confident eyes at your image and pray for the dignity of all your children.

Hail Mary...

Day 8 - Our Lady of Banneaux

Being Children - Gentleness and everyday life

Children trust, children rely on others. And a mother is close by, always. You see her even if she is not there.

As for us, are we able to see her?

Little Marietta of Banneaux

On January 18, Marietta was in the garden, praying the rosary. Mary came and took her to a small spring on the edge of the forest, where she said, "This spring is for me", and invited the little girl to immerse her hand and the rosary in it. Her father and two other people followed Marietta in all her gestures and words with indescribable amazement. And that same evening the first to be conquered by Banneaux's grace was Marietta's father, who ran to go to confession and receive the Eucharist: he had not been to confession since his first communion.

On January 19, Marietta asked, "Ma'am, who are you?" "I am the Virgin of the poor." At the spring, she added, "This spring is for me, for all the nations, for the sick. I come to console them!"

Marietta was a normal girl who lived her days like all of us, like our children, our grandchildren. Hers was a small and unknown village. She prayed that she would stay close to God. She prayed to her Heavenly Mother to keep the bond with her alive. **And Mary spoke to her gently, in a place familiar to her.** She would appear to her several times, confide secrets to her and tell her to pray for the conversion of the world: this was a strong message of hope for Marietta. All children are embraced and consoled by their Mother, all the sweetness that Marietta found in the "Gentle Lady" she passed on to the world. And from this encounter came a great chain of love and spirituality that found its fulfilment in the Shrine of Our Lady of Banneaux.

Mary, the Mother who stays beside us

You who remained beside your children without ever losing a single one, have enlightened the daily path of the simplest people. You drew close to them and revealed yourself to them.

Abandon yourself into Mary's embrace: do not be afraid, she will comfort you.

The Rector Major's words

The Virgin Mary, education and love

The Virgin Mary is an incomparable teacher of education, because she is an inexhaustible source of love, and those who love educate, truly educate those they love.

Reflecting on the figure of Mary in relation to these two pillars of human and spiritual growth, we have here an example to contemplate, to take seriously, to

incorporate into our daily choices.

The education that emanates from Mary is not made up of precepts or formal teachings but is manifested through her example of life. A contemplative silence that speaks, her obedience to God's will, both humble and great, her profound humanity.

Here, the first educational aspect that Mary communicates to us is that of listening. Listening to the word of God, listening to that God who is always there to help us, to accompany us. Mary keeps this in her heart, meditates on it carefully, encourages attentive listening to the word of God and, in the same way, to the needs of others. Mary teaches us that humility which does not choose to remain detached and passive, but rather the humility which, while recognising our smallness before God's greatness, places us as people who are active in his service. Our hearts are open to truly be those who accompany, living the plan that God has for us.

Mary is an example that helps us to let ourselves be educated by faith. She teaches us perseverance, remaining steadfast in love for Jesus, even at the foot of the cross. Education and love. Behold, Mary's love is the beating heart of her existence. It continues to be for us. Every time we draw close to Mary, we feel this maternal love that extends to all of us. It is a love for Jesus that becomes a love for humanity. Mary's heart opens with the infinite tenderness that she receives from God, which she communicates to Jesus and to her spiritual children.

Let us ask the Lord that in contemplating Mary's love, which is a love that educates, we may allow ourselves to be moved to overcome our selfishness and our closed attitudes and to open ourselves to others. In Mary, we see a woman who educates with love and who loves with a love that is educational. Let us ask the Lord to give us the gift of love, which is the gift of his love, which in turn is a love that purifies us, sustains us and makes us grow, so that our example may truly be an example that communicates love and, by communicating love, we may allow ourselves to be educated by her and let her help us so that our example may also educate others.

The prayer of an unfaithful child

As for us, are we able to abandon ourselves as children do?

The prayer of a child of our times

Mary, you who show yourself to those who are able to see...

make my heart gentle and docile.

Who will put me back together after breaking under the weight of the crosses I carry?

Who will bring light back to my eyes after seeing the ruins of human cruelty?

Who will alleviate the sufferings of my soul, after the mistakes I have made on my journey?

Mother, only you can comfort me.

Hold me tight and keep me with you to keep me from falling apart.

Let my soul rest in you and find peace like a child in its mother's arms.

Hail Mary...

Day 9 - Mary Help of Christians Being Children - Building and dreaming

Children trust, children rely on others. And a mother is close by, always. You see her even if she is not there.

As for us, are we able to see her?

Little John Bosco

At the age of 9, I had a dream. All my life this remained deeply impressed on my mind. In this dream I seemed to be near my home in a very large yard. A crowd of children were playing there. Some were laughing, some were playing games, and quite a few were swearing. When I heard these evil words, I jumped immediately amongst them, and tried to stop them by using my words and my fists. At that moment, a dignified man appeared, a nobly-dressed adult.

"You will have to win these friends of yours not by blows but by gentleness and love."

"Who are you, ordering me to do the impossible?"

"Precisely because it seems impossible to you, you must make it possible through obedience and the acquisition of knowledge."

"Where, by what means can I acquire knowledge?"

"I will give you a teacher. Under her guidance you can become wise. Without her all wisdom is foolishness."

At that moment I saw a lady of stately appearance standing beside him. She was wearing a mantle that sparkled all over as though covered with bright stars.

"This is the field of your work. Make yourself humble, strong and energetic. And what you will see happening to these animals in a moment is what you must do for my children.

I looked around again and where before I had seen wild animals, I now saw gentle lambs. They were all jumping and bleating as if to welcome that man and lady. At

that point, still dreaming, I began crying. I begged the lady to speak so that I could understand her, because I did not know what all this could mean. She then placed her hand on my head and said, "In good time you will understand everything."

Mary guided and accompanied young John Bosco throughout his life and mission. He, a child, thus discovered his vocation from a dream. He would not understand it but he would let himself be guided. He would not understand it for many years but in the end he would be aware that "she did everything". And his mother, both the earthly and the heavenly one, would be the central figure in the life of this son who would provide bread for his children. And after meeting Mary in his dreams, John Bosco, by then a priest, would build a Shrine to Our Lady so that all her children can rely on her. And he would dedicate it to Mary Help of Christians, because she had been his safe haven, his constant help. Thus, all those who enter the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians in Turin are taken under the protective mantle of Mary who becomes their guide.

Mary, a Mother who accompanies/guides

You who accompanied your son Jesus throughout his journey, offered yourself as a guide to those who listened to you with the enthusiasm that only children can have. You drew close to them and revealed yourself to them.

Let yourself be accompanied: your Mother will always be by your side to show you the way.

The Rector Major's words

The Virgin Mary, our help in conversion

The Virgin Mary is a powerful and silent help on our journey of growth. It is a journey that constantly needs to free itself from whatever blocks its growth. It is a journey that must continually renew itself, so as not to turn back or stop in the dark corners of our existence. This is conversion.

Mary's presence is a beacon of hope, a constant invitation for us to continue walking towards God, helping our hearts to remain focused on God and his love. Reflecting on Mary, on her role, means discovering Mary who does not impose, who does not judge, but rather supports, encourages, with her humility, with her maternal love, helping our hearts to remain close to her so that we may draw ever closer to her son Jesus, who is the way, the truth and the life.

Mary's 'yes' at the Annunciation, which opens up the history of salvation to humanity, remains valid for us too. Her intercession at the Wedding at Cana

supports those who find themselves in unexpected, unprecedented situations. Mary is a model of continuous conversion. Her life, a life of the Immaculate, was a gradual adherence to God's will, a journey of faith that led her through joys and sorrows, culminating in the sacrifice of Calvary.

Mary's perseverance in following Jesus becomes an invitation for us to live this continuous closeness, this inner transformation, which we know well is a gradual process, but one that requires constancy, humility and trust in God's grace.

Mary helps us in our conversion through her attentive and focused listening to the Word of God. Listening that helps us find the strength to abandon the ways of sin, because we recognise the strength and beauty of walking towards God. Let us turn to Mary with filial trust, because this means that, while recognising our frailties, our sins and our faults, we want to foster those desires for change. A change of heart that seeks to let itself be accompanied by the maternal heart of Mary. And in Mary, let us find that precious help to discern the false promises of the world and rediscover the beauty and truth of the Gospel. May Mary, the Help of Christians, be for all of us a constant help in discovering the beauty of the Gospel. And in accepting to walk towards goodness, the greatness of God's word, alive in our hearts so that we can communicate it to others.

The prayer of an unfaithful child

As for us, are we capable of being taken by the hand like children?

The prayer of a motionless child

Mary, you who reveal yourself to those who are able to see...

make my heart capable of dreaming and building.

I who do not let anyone else help me.

I who get discouraged, lose patience and never believe I have built anything.

I who always believe I am a failure.

Today I want to be a son or daughter who can give you their hand, my Mother to be accompanied on life's paths.

Show me my field,

show me my dream

and make sure that in the end I too can understand everything and recognise that you were there

in my life.

Hail Mary...