

Day One:

1. Place yourself in God's presence

2. **Ask Him for the grace you seek:** to acquire knowledge of yourself and sorrow for your sins.

3. **Introduction:** *"Lord, that I may see,"* (Lk 18:41).

St. Louis de Montfort introduces us into this week of preparation saying, "During the first week³ they should offer up all their prayers and acts of devotion to acquire knowledge of themselves and sorrow for their sins" (*True Devotion*, 228).

Self-knowledge is indispensable for maturity. No one can mature in their spiritual, emotional, or psychological lives without knowing themselves. The same must be said for our life in Christ. It is not enough to know our goal (union with Christ); we must also know where we stand in relation to that goal. Maturity in Christ is a lifelong process, and so self-knowledge is the compass, telling us whether or not we are heading the right direction.

Self-knowledge is not necessarily a "Christian" ideal either. It can be considered classical wisdom as well. As St. John Paul II reminded us in his encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, "*Know yourself* was carved on the temple portal at Delphi, as testimony to a basic truth to be adopted as a minimal norm by those who seek to set themselves apart from the rest of creation as "human beings", that is as those who 'know themselves'" (1). Thus, we should understand that self-knowledge is a gift from God, bestowed upon each of us through our human nature. In other words, if we do not "know ourselves" then we are not living according to the Divine plan written on our hearts. We are failing, so to speak, in living out our own humanity. This is a natural aspect. Obviously, within the context of a preparation for Marian consecration, we must focus on the supernatural motives behind self-knowledge. Nevertheless, it is worth recognizing that the supernatural always builds on the natural. Grace always builds on nature. Sanctification is always built on maturation.

4. Today's Meditation:

As a means of helping us know ourselves these next seven days, I propose we turn to the one we are seeking to consecrate ourselves to: Mary. We will consider Mary's virtues, and then compare our own wealth of virtue, or if we are truly honest, our lack thereof.

The first of Mary's virtues that we should consider is her crowning virtue: *humility*. Mary's very first appearance in the Scriptures speak of her humility. She is greeted by the angel Gabriel as "full of grace" (Lk 1:28). Upon hearing this greeting, St. Luke tells us that she was "greatly troubled" by these words (1:29). If we understand this to mean that Mary was embarrassed or confused, then we are missing the point.

St. Thomas Aquinas teaches us, "it should be known that in ancient times it was an especially great event when an angel appeared to men, so that men might show them reverence, for they deserve the greatest praise. It was written in praise of Abraham that he received angels hospitably and that he

³ Our first 12 days were considered by St. Louis de Montfort as "preliminary" days. He understands that if we want to be filled with Christ, through Mary, we must first be emptied of the world. It's just like filling a glass with water; we must first empty out its contents and clean it before filling it with pure water to quench our thirst.

showed them reverence. But it was never heard that an angel showed reverence to a man until he saluted the blessed virgin, saying reverently, Hail” (*On the Angelic Salutation*).

Mary’s not embarrassed or confused, but humbled, which is why St. Luke then tells us that she “considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be” (1:29).

“Now observe both the modesty and wisdom of the Virgin,” writes one of the Greek Fathers, “the soul, and at the same time the voice. When she heard the joyful words, she pondered them in her mind, and neither openly resisted through unbelief, nor forthwith lightly complied; avoiding equally the inconstancy of Eve, and the insensibility of Zacharias.”

In other words, Mary acts in genuine humility. Acting with modesty and wisdom is humble.⁴ She neither repeats Eve’s pride nor Zacharias’ doubt. She knows God’s greatness and she knows her littleness, which is why this greeting surprises her, and yet in her humility she wants to accept it. This is affirmed a few passages later, when Mary gives her consent: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord... *Fiat!*” (1:38). As Bishop Boussuet writes, “Her high rank is covered with the mantle of servitude.” She is “full of grace”, exceeding all men and angels, and yet she is the “handmaid of the Lord”.

Questions to guide your meditation:

Why is genuine humility such an important virtue for the spiritual life? What is Mary’s humility like? Am I humble? How can I be more humble?

St. Thomas Aquinas teaches, “Humility restrains the appetite from aiming at great things against right reason (*Summa*, II-II, 161, 1, ad. 3). Do I know God’s goodness? Do I recognize that all good things in me come from Him? Or do I “aim” at great things in life as if they entirely depended on me?

- Today’s Prayer -

*HAIL, O Star of the ocean,
God's own Mother blest,
ever sinless Virgin,
gate of heav'nly rest.*

*Taking that sweet Ave,
which from Gabriel came,
peace confirm within us,
changing Eve's name.*

*Break the sinners' fetters,
make our blindness day,
Chase all evils from us,
for all blessings pray.*

*Show thyself a Mother,
may the Word divine*

*born for us thine Infant
bear our prayers through thine.*

*Virgin all excelling,
mildest of the mild,
free from guilt preserve us
meek and undefiled.*

*Keep our life all spotless,
make our way secure
till we find in Jesus,
joy for evermore.*

*Praise to God the Father,
honor to the Son,
in the Holy Spirit,
be the glory one. Amen.*

⁴ See St. Thomas Aquinas’ explanation of humility in the *Summa*, II-II, q. 161, a. 1.