

NOVENA IN HONOR OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
in the Spirit of St. Maximilian Kolbe

Opening prayer to the Immaculata

I greet you, ever-blessed Virgin, Mother of God throne of grace, miracle of almighty power! I greet you, sanctuary of the most Holy Trinity and Queen of the universe, Mother of mercy and refuge of sinners! Most loving Mother, attracted by your beauty and sweetness and by your tender compassion, I confidently turn to you, and beg of you to obtain for me of your dear Son the favor I request in this novena (here mention you request). Obtain for me also, Queen of Heaven, the most lively contrition for my many sins and the grace to imitate closely those virtues which you practiced so faithfully especially humility, purity, and obedience. Above all I beg you to be my mother and protectress, to receive me into the number of your devoted children, and to guide me from your high throne of glory. Do not reject my petitions, Mother of mercy! Have pity on me, and do not abandon me during life or at the moment of my death. Daughter of the Eternal Father, Mother of the Eternal Son, Spouse of the Holy Spirit, temple of the adorable Trinity, pray for me. Immaculate and tender Heart of Mary, refuge of the needy and hope of sinners, filled with the most lively respect, love, and gratitude, I devote myself forever to your service, and I offer you my heart with all that I am and all that belongs to me. Accept this offering, sweet Queen of Heaven and earth, and obtain for me of your dear Son, Jesus Christ, the favors I ask through your intercession in this novena. Obtain for me also a tender, generous, constant love of God, perfect submission to his adorable will, the true spirit of a Christian, and the grace of final perseverance. **R. Amen.**

Day 1: The Immaculata's Relationship to the Trinity

Reading: From all eternity the Father begets the Son, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and Son. This life of the most Holy Trinity is re-echoed in numberless and various ways by the creatures that issue from God's hands. . . . Every act of love in God comes forth from the Father through the Son and the Holy Spirit. God creates, maintains in existence, gives life and growth in the natural as well as in the supernatural order. In his love God supports in existence all his innumerable limited created resemblances; and the love-reaction that is provoked in the creature can return to the Father only through the Holy Spirit and the Son. . . Among creatures, the summit of this love that goes back to God is the Immaculata, the one being totally with-out any stain of sin, all beautiful, all divine. At no time did her will ever deviate from God's will. With all its strength, her will was always at one with his. In her there came about the marvelous union of God with creation (Kolbe's "Sketches for a Book," 1940).

Meditation: Cultivating a personal relationship with each member of the Holy Trinity is an obligation for every individual. May the Immaculata's love-response to each of the Three Divine Persons serve as a model and stimulus for each of us.

Closing Prayer of Identification with the Immaculata O Immaculate Conception, Mary, my Mother, live in me, act in me, speak in and through me. Think your thoughts in my mind, love through my heart. Give me your own dispositions and feelings. Teach, lead and guide me to Jesus. Correct, enlighten and expand my entire personality and life. Replace me with yourself. Incline me to constant adoration and thanksgiving; pray in and through me. Let me live in you and keep me in this union always. Amen.

Day 2: The Immaculata as Spouse of the Holy Spirit

Reading: United to the Holy Spirit as his Spouse, the Immaculata is one with God in an incomparably more perfect way than can be predicated of any other creature. What sort of union is this? It is above all an interior union, a union of her essence with the "essence" of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit dwells in her, lives in her. This was true from the first instant of her existence. It was always true; it will always be true. In what does this life of the Spirit in Mary consist? He himself is uncreated Love in her; the Love of the Father and of the Son, the Love by which God loves himself, the very love of the most Holy Trinity. He is a fruitful love, a "Conception." Among creatures made in God's image the union brought about by married love is the most intimate of all (cf. Mt 19:6). In a much more precise, more interior, more essential manner, the Holy Spirit lives in the soul of the Immaculata, in the depths of her very being. He makes her fruitful, from the very first instant of her existence, all during her life, and for all eternity.

Meditation: To grow in daily awareness of the Holy Spirit's presence within us is a constant challenge that God gives to each and all of us. May the Immaculata's perfect life in the Holy Spirit cause a sharpening of our own attentiveness to his presence at the core of our inner selves.

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constant adoration and thanksgiving; pray in and through me. Let me live in you and keep me in this union always. Amen.

Day 3: The Immaculata's Place in God's Plan of Creation and Salvation

Reading: The Immaculata appears in this world, without the least stain of sin, the masterpiece of God's hands, full of grace. God, the most Holy Trinity, beholds the lowliness (i.e., the humility, the root of all her other virtues) of his handmaid, and "does great things" for her (cf. Lk 1:49). God the Father gives her his own Son to be her Son; God the Son descends into her womb; and God the Holy Spirit forms the body of Christ in the womb of this most pure virgin. "And the Word was made flesh" (Jn 1:14). The Immaculata becomes the Mother of God. The fruit of the love of God in his Trinitarian life and of Mary the Immaculata, is Christ, the God-man. Hence forth all the other sons of God must be modeled after this first Son of God, the God-man, the infinite One. They must reproduce his traits; by imitating Christ souls reach sanctity. . . . This is the union brought about by the spousal love of the soul for Christ, through its re-semblance to him, and by God's action. But if anyone does not wish to have Mary Immaculate for his Mother, he will not have Christ for his Brother. . . . Since the firstborn Son, the God-man was conceived only with the specific consent of the most Blessed Virgin, the same must hold true for all men, who must be conformed to their first model in all things.

Meditation: From all eternity, God has designed a unique plan for each one of us, no two being identical. His ultimate aim is that we all be fully united to the Lord. May the Immaculata, from her unique position in God's plan, foster our growing conformity to Christ.

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Day 4: The Immaculata's Self-Understanding

Reading: When our Blessed Mother was asked by Bernadette to tell her name, she answered, "I am the Immaculate Conception"; this is the Immaculata's definition of herself (Conference, 26 July 1931). By these luminous words (at Lourdes) she tells us not only that she was immaculate in her conception, but beyond this that she is the Immaculate Conception as such. Some-thing white is one thing; the whiteness of a thing is some-thing else. Something perfect is one thing; the perfection of a thing is something else. When God said to Moses, "I am the one who is," God was telling him: "What is proper to my essence is that I should always be, by my very nature, of myself, with no other principle of being." The Immaculate Virgin, of course, was created by God; she is a creature; she is a conception; still, she is the Immaculate Conception! What depths of mystery lie hidden in those words!

Meditation: In our contemporary world, great emphasis is placed on the importance of getting to "know one-self." May the Immaculata's example of authentic self-understanding lead each of us to find our own true meaning as participants in the very being of God.

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Day 5: The Immaculata's Dignity as a Human Person

Reading: The Mother of God is a creature. It follows that all she is, she has from God. But she is God's most perfect creature. For this reason, the homage paid to her is, by the very nature of the case, paid to God him-self. If we admire a statue, we honor the artist who created this masterpiece. If we honor Mary most holy we honor God. The more we pay homage to the divine perfections found in Mary, the more perfect is our homage to God; this is perfectly in order, since God created her in the highest state of perfection.

Meditation: The greatness of every work of art is directly proportionate to the mastery of the artist who forms it. Accordingly, the dignity of every human person derives from God who has created each of us in his image. May the Immaculata teach us always to mirror, as she did, the dignity and perfection of our God.

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Day 6: The Immaculata's Sinlessness

Reading: Who then are you, O Immaculate Conception? Not God, of course, because he has no beginning. Not an angel, created directly out of nothing. Not Adam, formed out of the dust of the earth (Gn 2:7). Not Eve, molded from Adam's rib (Gn 2:21). Not the Incarnate Word, who exists before all ages, and of whom we should use the word "conceived" rather than "conception." Humans do not exist before their conception, so we might call them created "conceptions." But you, O Mary, are different from all other children of Eve. They are conceptions stained by original sin; whereas you are the unique, Immaculate Conception.

Meditation: Confronting the reality of sin is one of the fundamental struggles that we face in daily life. May the Immaculata, the sinless New Eve, confirm our hope in the victorious liberation from sin which Christ, the New Adam, won for each of us.

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Day 7: The Immaculata's Discipleship

Reading: The Immaculata is God's instrument. With full consciousness and total willingness she allows God to govern her; she consents to his will, desires only what he desires, and acts according to his will in the most perfect manner, without failing, without ever turning aside from his will. She makes perfect use of the powers and privileges God has given her, so as to fulfill always and in everything whatever God wants of her, purely for love of God, One and Three. This love of God reaches such a peak that it bears the divine fruits proper to God's own love. Her love for God brings her to such a level of union with him that she becomes the Mother of God. The Father confides to her his Son; the Son descends into her womb; and the Holy Spirit fashions out of her perfectly pure body the very body of Jesus.

Meditation: The only way to guarantee that we are on the "right track" in our everyday activities is to listen to God's Word and live it out. That's discipleship! May the Immaculata's discipleship of total conformity to God's Word inspire us to be similar instruments of his will

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Day 8: The Immaculata's Fruitfulness

Reading: God sends to us the one who personifies his love: Mary, the spouse of the Spirit—a spirit of maternal love—immaculate, all beautiful, spotless, even though she is our sister, a true daughter of the human race. God confides to her the communication of his mercy to souls. He makes of her the Mediatrix of the graces merited for us by her divine Son, for she is full of grace, the mother of all souls born of grace, reborn, and always being reborn, becoming ever more godlike.

Meditation: Productivity is one of the chief "virtues" upheld by modern society as a measure of worldly success. May the Immaculata give witness to each of us that her (and our) ongoing spiritual fruitfulness in bearing Christ to others is a far greater achievement than material productivity.

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Day 9: The Immaculata's Fullness of Love

Reading: The Immaculata never knew the slightest stain; in other words, her love was always full, without flaw. She loved God with all her being, and from the first instant of her existence her love united her with God so perfectly that on the day of

the Annunciation the angel could say to her, "Full of grace! the Lord is with you!" (cf. Lk 1:28). She is, then, God's creature, God's image, God's child, and in all these respects she is all this in the most perfect manner possible among the ranks of mere creatures. Intelligent creatures love God in a conscious manner; through this love they unite themselves more and more closely with him, and so find their way back to him. The creature most completely filled with this love, filled with God himself, was the Immaculata. . . . In the Holy Spirit's union with Mary we observe more than the love of two beings; in one there is all the love of the Blessed Trinity; in the other, all of creation's love. So it is that in this union heaven and earth are joined; all of heaven with all the earth, the totality of eternal love with the totality of created love. It is truly the summit of love.

Meditation: To channel all our spiritual, physical, and psychological energies into their fullest human expression means simply to love God as totally as possible. May the Immaculata's flawless love of God prod each of us to channel our love in that same ultimate direction.

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