

MI Monthly Formation(2) in Fr. Kolbe's Marian and Missionary Spirituality

Dear MI Members,

The grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. In February our spiritual goal, following the example of Mary, is to grow in listening and in deepening daily God's Word [1]. This month we want to focus our contemplation on Mary's attitude of listening to the Word of God and keeping it. As Pope John Paul II wrote, "Without any doubt, Mary is worthy of blessing by the very fact that she became the mother of Jesus according to the flesh ('Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that you sucked'), but also and especially because she believed it, because she was obedient to God, and because she 'kept' the word and 'pondered it in her heart' (cf. Lk 1:38, 45; 2:19,51) and by means of her whole life accomplished it." [2]

"To obey" in Latin is *ob-audire* that means "to hear" (*audire*) with a connotation of listening carefully and with a disposition of acting on it promptly. "The obedience of faith (Rom 16:26) must be given to God as He reveals Himself. By faith man freely commits his entire self to God, making the full submission of his intellect and will to God Who reveals, and willingly assenting to the Revelation given by Him. Before this faith can be exercised, man must have the grace of God to move and assist him; he must have the interior helps of the Holy Spirit, Who moves the heart and converts it to God, Who opens the eyes of the mind and makes it easy for all to accept and believe the truth. The same Holy Spirit constantly perfects faith by his gifts, so that Revelation may be more and more profoundly understood." [3]

For this reason the first front of action for the Militia member of the Immaculata is conversion and personal sanctification: the conquest of self for God [4]. Therefore the member of the MI, after the example of Mary, preserves in his/her own heart every irrelevant or crucial event of his/her daily life, in order to grasp it with the light of God's Word. In fact, if we don't listen to it, we cannot be true Christians. Listening to Holy Scripture is not a fashionable trend nor is it a desire to acquire knowledge, but an act of faith and trust in One Who reveals the secrets of His Kingdom to the childlike [5], as Mary was. Each of us is called to become a living Word of God for the salvation of all mankind.

But be careful! When I meditate on Scripture, I'm not merely reading a book, but I'm meeting a Person, the living God. Therefore, when I put myself in front of the Gospel, I have to place myself in an attitude of listening and let the Lord speak to me. He is the One Who has something to say and I place myself in an attitude of docility. Docility to understand, but first of all docility to live that Word (put it into practice). In other words, I welcome it as a way of life. In this way, step by step, I learn to live my Christian existence as an experience where I give God the primacy, the initiative, and where everything in my life is formed, organized and built in accordance with the project of salvation that is contained in God's Word.

When people begin a journey of faith, they start looking for God. The initiative belongs to them. But when they find Him, an overturning takes place: they give primacy to the Lord and no longer seek Him because they have already been found by God. From this moment on, the matter is let them be carried by the Lord Who they have met.

At this point Mary, the handmaid of the Lord, may be our best help, because in Her -and only in Her- the Word of God became flesh! Behold Fr. Kolbe's life secret: to strip ourselves of our self-centered nature in order to dress ourselves with the faith and humility of Mary of Nazareth. So, as She, we will be able to welcome Christ, the Word made flesh, in our lives, and to carry Him into the world.

As St. Maximilian said, "Let us put in Her our confidence, let us pray and go ahead in life with peace and serenity." [6]

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THE WAY OF HUMILITY

FEBRUARY Prayer Intention:

**That by imitating your openness and interior poverty we may make room for
the Word of God Who calls us to justice and conversion.**

**Following the example of Mary, the poor of Yahweh
Aim: to grow in daily listening and deepening of God's Word**

Begin the meeting with prayer as in your rule. The suggested reading for this month is a reading from the holy Gospel according to

Luke 8:18a.19 - 21

“Take care how you hear...Then his mother and his brothers came to him but were unable to join him because of the crowd. He was told: ‘Your mother and your brothers are standing outside and they wish to see you.’ He said to them in reply, ‘My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and act on it.’”

As we suggested last month, contemplating on the Word of God following the method illustrated in the side flap, would be very helpful.

Hints for contemplation

In this passage the Evangelist Luke presents Mary as an example for the disciple who listens to the Word of God and keeps it. The wider context of these few verses is the theme of welcoming the Word. This theme begins with the Parable of the Sower [7]. Jesus, explaining the parable to the disciples, describes the route that the Word of God must take to enter into man’s heart. To bear fruits the Word has to pass through four subsequent phases:

1. The journey begins with **listening**, but this isn’t sufficient because the devil can pluck the Word from one’s heart.

2. Listening can bring about **joy and enthusiasm**, but it is not sufficient because daily difficulties can stifle shallow enthusiasm.

3. The Word bears fruits only if people surpass the temptation of a superficial listening, of a fleeting eagerness and the **temptation of anxieties, of wealth and of life’s pleasures**.

4. The Word bears fruits only if it is accepted *‘with a generous and good heart*. [8] In the Bible the heart means the interior and vital capacity to welcome the Word. The heart is called *‘generous’* (perfect) because it embraces the Word and keeps it. And it is *‘good’* (pure) because it bears fruits through perseverance, especially during trials or persecutions.

The hundredfold of the fruit is linked with listening, with keeping the Word and with daily perseverance.

Mary is the concrete example of the disciple whom Jesus has presented in this parable of the Sower. Mary is the first of those **Who listen to and put into practice the Word of God**. The Infancy Narrative according to Matthew and Luke presents Mary in a constant attitude of comparison and relationship with the Word of God.

“Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” [9]

Mary expresses her complete availability to God and His Word.

“Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.” [10]

These ‘things’ are the words that shepherds said to Mary and Joseph after the birth of Jesus. It’s the Angelic announcement to the shepherds, the same that Mary has already heard in the Annunciation. Mary knows that in

those words there are the deepest mysteries. For this reason She keeps those words like a treasure in Her heart. She guards, compares and ponders them continually and carefully.

This is also very important **for us**. It’s not sufficient to listen to the Word once, but it’s necessary to listen to it everyday and to compare ourselves to it continually. Only in this way it can be a light and a guide on our paths [11].

“His mother kept all these things in her heart.” [12]

The question that Jesus asks His parents after being found in the temple of Jerusalem [13] is hard to understand. Indeed Luke says that *“They did not understand what he said to them.”* [14]

Also **Mary** doesn’t understand every word or act or choice of Her Son but, instead of grumbling, She always keeps His words and conserves and retains them in Her heart, as a seed that grows. During Her life Mary compared Herself with the Word of God many times. For this reason Luke presents Mary as the model of the Lord’s disciple.

All Christians, like Her, should keep the Word in their hearts, and learn to understand it little by little, applying it



in their lives. By constantly reflecting upon the welcomed Word, the heart becomes progressively lit up by the knowledge of the Lord.

“My mother and my brothers are those who hear the Word of God and act on it.” [15]

In this way Jesus reveals the true meaning of His family. The membership of Jesus’s family isn’t based on blood ties but on the welcoming of the Word of God. Therefore, it is open to all.

We also are invited to come into this family relationship through the obedient listening and the concrete acting of God’s Word in our lives. The Word of God becomes proclamation, good news **for me** when it concretely enlightens and steers my life, my family, my prayer group and my Parish. In this way we’ll truly become *“mothers and*

brothers” of Jesus. The means is the listening and the acting on that Word.

What is the secret of Mary’s availability to the Word of God? It is Her interior poverty, Her humility. From the very moment when Mary said “Yes” in the Annunciation, She took Her place among the *“poor of Yahweh”* who in the prayer of the Psalms awaited from God their salvation, placing all their trust in Him.[16]

When man puts all his trust and willingness in God, God can do great things in him and through him.

Lent is one of the most appropriate liturgical times for listening and deepening the Word of God and allowing it to convert us. But we need an open heart as Mary had; an heart simple and humble, courageous and trustful.

Let us appreciate the God’s Word as food that feeds our faith, hope and charity.

Method of praying the Word of God

1. **Invocation of the Holy Spirit**
2. **MI Prayer of Total Consecration**
3. **Listening to the Holy Scripture** (Someone proclaims aloud the suggested reading; all listen very carefully, if possible following in the Bible).
4. **Listen again to the Word of God, repeating the more important word or sentence** (Each person reads again a word or a sentence which has impressed him/her. At this time personal comments are not appropriate).
5. **Give the Lord sufficient time to speak to us** (Observe at least 5 minutes of silence/listening).
6. **Let us share what the Lord told us** (Each person explains briefly and simply what the Spirit suggested to him/her in the innermost self. Stick to the subject. Controversy, admonitions, engaging in ideological or theological discussion or speaking for others is not appropriate).
7. **Seek a common understanding and line of action** (What is the Lord asking of me? What does He want me to do in my daily life? What does He expect from our group? This may be a good time to consider any evangelical projects that the group may decide to pursue).
8. **A “Message for life”** (Choose a brief sentence from the reading that we have done and keep it on your mind and in your heart).
9. **Spontaneous prayers** (Each participant can say a brief prayer of thanksgiving or praise or a prayer asking for God’s grace and help).

For Personal Reflection

- * How do I reflect on God’s Word daily?
- * How much time do I devote to prayer and meditation?
- * What personal obstacles prevent the Word of God from fully bearing fruit in my life?
- * What attitudes do I need to improve in order to become more interiorly free as Mary was? And from which bonds should I free myself?

Texts for Further Reflection

Lk 1: 26-38; 2:1-20; 2: 41-52; 8: 4-18;

Mt 7: 24-27

CCC 64; 2619 **RM** 20 **LG** 55; 58

SK [17] 101; 97; 46.

See: **John Paul II, XXXV World Day for Peace 2002**, in: www.Vatican.va/Latest_en.htm

St. Maximilian Kolbe's Writings

"In our daily activities we should pay special attention to our interior life. It would be useless for us to exercise our intellect and fill our mind with innumerable, beautiful and essential notions, if we lacked an interior, filial relationship with the Immaculate, our Mother, Leader and Hope"

(SK 106).

"Therefore, the effectiveness of our work doesn't depend on our abilities, efforts or money, even if these are gifts of God, also useful for the apostolate, but only on the degree of our union with God. Should the latter weaken or fade, all the other means become useless. On the other hand, if our relationship with God remains vital, we shall have the rest without any difficulties" (SK 1071).

In her ideal of God's service and of service toward mankind **the Church** is inspired by the example of **Christ**. He embodies the character of the "Lord's Servant"(cf. Is 42:1-7; 49:1-9; 50: 4-11; 52:13; 53: 12) consecrated to the Father "to serve and to give his life as a ransom of many" (Mc 10:45). He is among us, his disciples, "as the one who serves" (Lk 22: 27b; cf. Jn 13:3-17).

The Church is also inspired by the example of the Blessed Virgin **Mary** Who, called by God to collaborate with the Incarnation, devoted herself totally as "the handmaid of the Lord" (Lk 1: 38) "to the person and work of her Son. Thus, in virtue of the grace of God Almighty, she put herself, under Him and together with Him in the service of the mystery of redemption" (cf. LG 56).

From MI General Statutes

Art. 13 The specific nature of the MI consists in promoting the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, namely: "to sow this truth in the hearts of all [...] and to take care of its growth and the fruits of sanctification" (SK 486), contributing to the Christian formation of consciences and to the new evangelization. Mary, sign of the victory over evil and death, "through her intimate participation in the history of salvation, while being preached and honored, calls believers to Her Son, to His sacrifice and to the love of the Father" (LG 65).

ABBREVIATIONS

CCC	Catechism of the Catholic Church, 10/11/1992
MI-GS	MI General Statutes, MI International Center, Rome, 10/16/1997
MC	Paulus VI, Marialis Cultus, Apostolic Exhortation, 02/02/1974
RM	John Paul II, Redemptoris Mater, Encyclical Letter, 03/25/1987
SK	Scritti Kolbe, Fr. Kolbe's writings
VWM	The Vatican Weekday Missal, St. Paul Editions, 1975

Dates to Remember

- 2 The Feast of the Presentation of the Lord *Consecrated Life's Day*: let us pray for Priests, Religious, Monks and Missionaries.
- 11 Our Lady of Lourdes - Plenary Indulgence for MI Members – *World Day of the Sick*.
- 12 Ash Wednesday – fast and abstinence– Beginning of the *Lenten Season*
- 17 In 1941, final arrest of Fr. Maximilian Kolbe

Footnotes

- [1] Cf. Militia of the Immaculate General Statutes (MI-GS), art. 7: "After the example of Mary, ...members of MI recognize the fundamental value of listening to the Word of God..."
- [2] Encyclical letter of John Paul II, *Mother of the Redeemer* (RM), No. 20
- [3] Vatican Council II, *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* (DV), No. 5; see also No. 6
- [4] See MI-GS, art. 10 #1
- [5] Cf. Lk 10:21; Mt 11:25
- [6] SK 935
- [7] Lk 8:4 - 15
- [8] Lk 8:15
- [9] Lk 1:38
- [10] Lk 2:19
- [11] "Your word is a lamp to guide me and a light for my path." (Ps 119:105)
- [12] Lk 2:51
- [13] "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know I had to be in my Father's house?" (Lk 2:49). See: RM, 17
- [14] Lk 2:50
- [15] Lk 8:21
- [16] Cf. Ps 25; 31; 35; 55. Cf. RM, 37 the second-last paragraph
- [17] See: "Stronger than Hatred", New City Press, New York, 1991
- [18] Fr. Luigi Faccenda, OFM CONV, Founder of the Fr. Kolbe Missionaries of the Immaculata, Secular Institute of Consecrated Life
- [19] MC, 20
- [20] November 21, 1973 – National Conference of Catholic Bishops, NN. 73-74

TRIDIUM in Preparation for the Feast of the PRESENTATION OF THE LORD February, 2

Introduction

This Feast, which originated in 4th century Jerusalem, was celebrated in Rome by the middle of the 5th century under the title, “Feast of the Meeting”; known also as *Candlemas Day*.

Forty days ago we celebrated the joyful feast of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. On February, 2 we will recall the holy day on which Mary presented Him in the temple in fulfillment of the law of Moses. Simeon and Anna came to the temple, recognized Christ as their Lord, and proclaimed Him with joy.

Let us prepare ourselves with Mary, Simeon and Anna to meet and welcome Christ the Lord as the Light of the Nations and of our lives.

Closing Prayer

O Immaculate Virgin Mary, tell me, how did you prepare yourself to present the Fruit of your womb to God through the hands of the old priest? You had deep faith in the salvific will of the Father, Who asked such a sacrifice of His Son made man. You had the most confident hope that the offering of your Child would bring salvation to the world. You were moved by the most loyal, pure, and sincere love. This love moved you to sacrifice yourself together with your Son, thus collaborating with Him in the restoration of the covenant between God and mankind, between the Father, Giver of every gift, and us sinners who had despised his gifts and commands. In this way you prepared yourself.



How should I now prepare myself?

Do I live my faith as God wants me to and as you teach me by your perfect example? You submitted to the law of purification even if you did not need to: How am I making reparation for my past? Am I always aware of my faults, especially of impurity, infidelity, rebellion, egoism, maybe even hatred and indifference toward others? Am I purifying myself in order to be worthy ‘to be Mary,’ to receive from God my salvation and sanctification, and to collaborate in the salvation and sanctification of others?

Virgin Mary, enfold me in your mantle and heal my wounds so that I may become a source of life and salvation for others. Amen.

Fr. Luigi Faccenda [18]

Readings

1st Day

“In the episode of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple (cf. Lk2:22-35), the Church, guided by the Spirit, has detected, over and above the fulfillment of the laws regarding the offering of the firstborn (cf. Ex13:11-16) and the purification of the mother (cf. Lv 12:6-8), a mystery of salvation related to the history of salvation. That is, she has noted the continuity of the fundamental offering that the Incarnate Word made to the Father when He entered the world (cf. Heb 15:5-7). The Church has seen the universal nature of salvation proclaimed, for Simeon, greeting in the Child the light to enlighten the peoples and the glory of the people Israel

(cf. Lk 2:32), recognized in Him the Messiah, the Savior of all... A mystery of salvation, therefore, that in its various aspects orients the episode of the Presentation in the Temple to the salvific event of the cross. But the Church herself, in particular from the Middle Ages onwards, has detected in the heart of the Virgin taking her Son to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (cf. Lk 2:22) a desire to make an offering, a desire that exceeds the ordinary meaning of the rite. A witness to this intuition is found in the loving prayer of St. Bernard: ‘Offer your Son, holy Virgin, and present to the Lord the blessed fruit of your womb. Offer for the reconciliation of us all the Holy victim which is pleasing to God’.”

From the Apostolic Exhortation “*Marialis Cultus*” of Pope Paul VI [19]

2nd Day

“In the episode of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple I see prefigured the infinite value of the consecration of mankind to the Heart of Mary. In fact, it is by means of the Son’s self-giving to his mother that the will of the Father and the work of the Holy Spirit are accomplished. I want to underline two ideas:

1. The consecration to Mary summarizes the fullness of the oblation gift. Within Her the Word of God begins His Redemption by means of suffering willed out of love. In fact, since the first ‘Yes,’ His whole life was a cross and martyrdom.

2. The one who consecrates oneself as a victim on the altar of Her Heart with salvific will and apostolic intentions, enters into the fullness of Christian and consecrated life. In fact, in Mary’s Heart the peoples encounter the Most Blessed Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit and learn how to live the three vows in the most perfect way.”

From Fr. Luigi Faccenda’s spiritual writings

3rd Day

St. Augustine writes: “More blessed was Mary in receiving the faith of Christ than in conceiving the flesh of Christ. For to her who said, ‘Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you,’ he replied, ‘Still more blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it’ (Lk 11:27-28). What in fact did their relationship profit his brethren according to the flesh who believed not him? So too, even the close relationship of motherhood would have profited Mary nothing had she not also more blessedly borne Christ in her heart than in her flesh....”

St. Augustine continues: ‘All holy virgins are, with Mary, mothers of Christ if they do his Father’s will. For in this even Mary is with greater praise and blessedness Christ’s Mother, according to the sentence, ‘Whoever does the will of my Father who is in heaven, the same is my brother and sister and mother’” (Mt 12:50). Commenting on this passage, Augustine explains: ‘All these relationships to himself he (Jesus) sets forth spiritually in the people whom he has redeemed. He has a brethren and sisters holy men and holy women, since they are co-heirs with him in the heavenly inheritance (Rom8:17). The whole Church is his mother, because she it is who brings forth his members, that is, his faithful by the grace of God. His mother too is every good person who does his Father’s will by means of charity, that is in labor for others until Christ be formed in them (Gal 4:15). And therefore Mary in doing God’s will is mother of Christ in the flesh, but spiritually she is both sister and mother... She is mother of the members of Christ, which we are, because through love she cooperated in the birth of the faithful in the Church, and they are members of that Head.’”

From A Pastoral Letter on the Blessed Virgin Mary, *Behold Your Mother Woman of Faith* [20]