

CONSECRATING CANADA TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

INSIGHTS FOR ADULT CATECHESIS



WHAT IS A MARIAN CONSECRATION AND WHY CONSECRATE CANADA TO OUR LADY?

Q 1. In what way are we already consecrated to God?

Through the gift of Baptism, we are reborn, both spiritually and sacramentally, and become children of God. The other Sacraments of Christian Initiation, Confirmation and the Eucharist, strengthen and nourish our life of faith, leading us into an even deeper relationship with Christ through his grace. Through each of these Sacraments, we experience the joy of living as sons and daughters dedicated to the Lord, sharing in his divine life, joining ourselves to his Passion, Death, and Resurrection, and receiving the free and empowering help that God gives us to respond to his call to become disciples, temples of the Holy Spirit, and members of his Church.¹

As baptized persons, young and old, we are called to follow Christ through a life of holiness and service, to witness and evangelize, spreading the Kingdom of God in our midst. When we strive to follow Christ, despite our personal and communal weaknesses and failings, we embody more fully our vocation as “*a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people*” (1 Peter 2:9). Informed and motivated thus by our God-given identity, as Christians we look daily to the teachings of Christ and his Church to shape how we think, decide, and act. It is not easy to respond to life’s challenges and trials in a manner which is coherent and deeply faithful to Christ. With the unfailing help of the Holy Spirit, however, we can turn to the Father for divine assistance, not only at the crossroads of our life, but at every moment.

The first and foremost way of understanding what consecration means comes from the viewpoint of God himself, for it is he who consecrates us before all else. Through Baptism, God makes us his adoptive children and confers on us his very own holiness of life and love. With God’s sanctifying and healing grace, we are made partakers of his Trinitarian life, enabling us to believe in him, to hope in him, and to love him through the theological virtues; we live and act under the promptings and with the gifts of the Holy Spirit; we grow in goodness through the moral virtues.²

A second, complementary way of understanding consecration is from the viewpoint of our human and Christian experience. Living in holiness and truth, we share in God’s life and love. To consecrate ourselves to him personally, then, is to make a faith-filled decision in which our response to God’s love for us is uniquely our own. A personal act of consecration is a means of further appropriating our Christian calling and continuing to abide in God’s grace. It is the renewal of our first consecration at Baptism in the particular form of a personal pledge, made willingly in faith, to live in more profound communion with Our Lord, committing ourselves to him and his Kingdom with greater fervour. It is an entrustment of our entire being to God, including all that we are and do, that we may belong to him more fully and to open ourselves even more to his grace in our lives. Christ Jesus is the best and prime example of what it means to consecrate oneself to God and to his will.

¹ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1212-1419.

² Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1266.

Q 2. How is the Virgin Mary a model of holiness?

Mary, the Mother of Jesus, holds an eminent and irrevocable place of honour in our faith tradition because of the unique and undeniable role she played in salvation history as attested in Sacred Scripture. Mary was graced in a most unique and immaculate way at her conception and lived in that holiness all her life. She is the model for our journey of faith because, more than any other person, she was attentive to the Lord's voice and answered her own vocation with an unconditional "yes" to his Word (Luke 1:38). By God's wisdom, providence, and free initiative, she became the Mother of God-Incarnate, as well as the first and perfect disciple of her only begotten Son, Jesus. Faithfully following Christ with an undivided heart, she persevered as a woman of faith to the foot of the Cross, where the dying Redeemer conferred upon her another vocation, making her the spiritual Mother of all of Christ's disciples. We read in Saint John's Gospel of this admirable, mutual entrusting of the Mother of Jesus and the "beloved disciple," the latter indeed representative of all future disciples of the Lord: "*When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, 'Woman, behold, your son!' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.*" (John 19:26-27). At Pentecost, where Mary interceded with the Apostles for the gift of the Spirit, the Church was born, Christ's Mystical Body sent out into the world; and Mary was present as pre-eminent member and loving Mother of the Church. In each of these vocations – Mother of Christ, Mother of all disciples, Mother of the Church – Mary's life was and remains the model of the sequela Christi, a Latin expression meaning "to follow in Christ's footsteps."

Today, the Blessed Mother continues to shine forth in the community of believers as the perfect example, icon, and model of what it means to live by faith, to welcome grace, and to cooperate with the Lord in the fulfilment of his plan of salvation. In their joint statement to mark the Marian Year of 1954, the Bishops of Canada likewise underscored the contemporary significance of Mary as a paradigm of Christian living:

Mary is, for all generations, the perfect example of redeemed humanity which has recovered its original integrity; and moreover, for our own generation which seeks to do away with God, she is the model of the creature which abandons itself entirely and unconditionally to the will of its Creator. . . . Thus, dear Brethren, far from diminishing the majesty of God, true devotion to Mary "exalts the humility of a handmaid" (Luke 1:48), and proposes the ideal of a humanity freely and totally submitted to divine action. That is why our generation which is witnessing the rebellion of man against God turns now to the Blessed Virgin with such an ardent yearning.³

Indeed, Mother of the Church and our Mother in the order of grace, Mary continues to intercede on our behalf, presenting our petitions, prayers and needs to her Son, and

³ Canadian Catholic Conference, *Statement of the Canadian Hierarchy*, 12-14 October 1954.

encouraging us in our faith journey by her example and maternal mediation.⁴ It is fitting, therefore, that we should lovingly turn to her, “*who from the beginning had given herself without reserve to the person and work of her Son, could not but pour out upon the Church, from the very beginning, her maternal self-giving. After her Son’s departure, her motherhood remains in the Church as maternal mediation: interceding for all her children, the Mother cooperates in the saving work of her Son, the Redeemer of the world.*”⁵

Q 3. How can we be consecrated to the Blessed Mother?

Consecrating ourselves to Mary is truly a privileged and effective way of living our ecclesial and personal faith in Christ. In entrusting ourselves to Mary’s maternal care and protection, we benefit from her intercession, joining our feeble efforts to her powerful prayers and her closeness to Jesus. Mary helps us through her companionship and counsel. When we love his blessed Mother, Our Lord looks more favourably upon us, showering us with abundant graces and blessings. With Mary by our side, uniting herself to our prayers, we are more pleasing in God’s sight. Thanks to his Mother, to whom he gave a share in the work of redemption and ongoing sanctification which he continues to accomplish in our lives, our communion with Christ deepens and our life of grace increases. The Mother of Jesus always leads us to her Son; and the more we are trustingly and lovingly devoted to her, the more we are conformed to and united with the Son in the Spirit. Since God willed that the Saviour should come to us through the loving consent and active faith of the Mother, so we return to him with the aid and accompaniment of the same Mother.

Q 4. How might the consecration of Canada to the Blessed Virgin Mary benefit our country?

There are a significant number of dioceses and eparchies, parishes, schools, towns and cities, streets, buildings, groups and movements, and varied institutions in Canada that bear the name of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The humble maiden of Nazareth is undeniably part and parcel of our Christian heritage and religious history.⁶

⁴ Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, National Liturgy Office, “Mary, Mother of our Lord,” 2006: “The Church invites us to base our devotion to Mary on the Scriptures that speak of her and of her relationship to Jesus. Our prayer – with Mary and to Mary – leads us to a deeper sharing in the liturgy, the worship Jesus gives to the Father, the worship we give to God in his name. Our devotion to Mary leads us to love God as she did: as the mother of Jesus, as the first to believe in him, his first disciple. She is inseparably linked to the saving activity of Jesus, her Son.”

⁵ Saint John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater*, 40.

⁶ In the 20th century, many countries were consecrated to Our Lady, including Canada in 1947. Often, these acts of Marian consecration were inspired by the messages from apparitions at Fatima. Conspicuous among the many Marian consecrations that took place, are that of Pope Pius XII on 31 October 1942; Pope Saint John Paul II on 13 May 1982, 16 October 1983 (Synod of Bishops), 25 March 1984 to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, which he made in union with all the Bishops of the world, and 8 October 2000 (during the Jubilee of Bishops), following the Eucharist, in unison with Bishops, an “Act of Entrustment” to the Blessed Virgin Mary. On 12 May 2010, Pope Benedict XVI consecrated all priests and, on 13 October 2013, Pope Francis consecrated the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

During his pontificate, Pope Saint John Paul II underscored the rightful and loving place of honour that Mary occupies at the heart of the Church.⁷ On 25 March 1987, he published the Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater* to remind Christians of the beauty and importance of looking to Mary with love and welcoming her into our lives as mother, guide, confidante, and companion on the journey of faith. He spoke of the abundant fruits that are born from bearing an authentic devotion to her. He likewise emphasized her special role of interceding with her Son and before the Father on behalf of the Church and of all humanity. The third part of his Encyclical presents a splendid summary of Mary's *maternal mediation*, following the profound insights and authoritative teaching on the subject found in Chapter 8 of the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*.⁸ At the dawn of the third millennium, accompanied by many Bishops, Pope Saint John Paul II consecrated the Bishops, the Church, and the world to the Blessed ever Virgin Mary, asking her to watch over the new era that was to begin: "*Here we stand before you to entrust to your maternal care ourselves, the Church, the entire world. Plead for us with your beloved Son that he may give us in abundance the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth which is the fountain of life.*"⁹

As we journey on the path of daily conversion and sanctification, marked by faith, hope, love and the work of grace, it becomes necessary at certain times to express and reaffirm our deep desire for a better, fuller, more authentic life, truly free from distress and the effects of sin. We do this annually at the celebration of the Easter Vigil when we renew our Baptismal promises, thus renewing our consecration to God, which was first sealed by the Lord when we were baptized.

The human need to renew and rekindle one's love and commitment is similarly reflected in the experience of loving couples who renew their marriage vows on the anniversary of their first sacred commitment to each other. As the Order of Christian Matrimony suggests, they may ask for a renewal of God's blessings on themselves and their family. Similarly, as a way of progressing in our walk of faith, we entrust and dedicate ourselves to Our Lady so that the grace of Baptism may continue to bear fruit and we may be more open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in our lives who bestows every good gift and blessing upon us.

In consecrating our country to God, or even ourselves and our families, we are but imitating how Christ chose to be united to us and our humanity. Consecration to Mary allows for an even greater partaking in the gifts of the Spirit and solicits a more profound personal commitment to Christ. In order that we might grow in holiness and be active partners in building the Kingdom, it is fitting, therefore, that we should turn to Mary to intercede with God. In imploring Our Lady's help, that our country may be protected and that our people

⁷ Many Popes prior to Saint John Paul II emphasized the dignity of the Virgin Mary on numerous occasions, and some of them also carried out consecratory actions in relation to her. The Orthodox Churches likewise have always honoured Mary with great devotion under the title *Theotokos*, Mother of God. Moreover, there has recently been renewed interest in Mary's role in salvation history, in the communion of Saints and in Marian devotion among Anglicans, Lutherans and other Reformed Churches. For example, see Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, "The Seattle Statement. Mary: *Grace and Hope in Christ*", 2 February 2004, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/angl-comm-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20050516_mary-grace-hope-christ_en.html.

⁸ Saint John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater*, 38-50. See also the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, Chapter 8, 52-69.

⁹ Saint John Paul II, *Act of Entrustment to Mary* on the occasion of the Jubilee of Bishops in Rome, 8 October 2000.

may be more greatly disposed to the Good News of salvation, we welcome with joy and enthusiasm the joys of discipleship in the work of the New Evangelization. At a time when our country discerns great social changes, addresses urgent needs, is confronted with life-altering challenges, and strives to build a just society, consecrating it to Our Lady will allow for new dynamism to be born in the hearts of believers and will call down more abundant graces for all.¹⁰

Q 5. In summary, what can we say about the meaning of consecrating Canada to the Blessed Virgin Mary?

Having been baptized and answering the call of our faith, before the Father of all mercies in the name of Christ and in the Holy Spirit, we place ourselves, our loved ones, and our country under the protective mantle of Our Lady, the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of Jesus our Saviour, the Mother of God, the Mother of the Church, and our spiritual Mother. As a pledge in faith, we entrust ourselves to the very woman who, through her free and pure consent at the Annunciation, singularly collaborated in the plan that God should become Incarnate and present in our world as one like us in all things but sin.¹¹ The consecration of Canada to Our Lady will enrich our faith, allow a more abundant outpouring of God's spiritual and temporal gifts on us, and enable us even more to fulfill our calling and mission. Ultimately, consecration to Mary, which springs from a more fervent, more committed, and more sustained life of prayer and devotion in which the Blessed Mother plays a unique and loving role, points and leads to a renewed spirit and understanding of family, Church, and the need for societal engagement.¹²

Contemplated in the episodes of the Gospels and in the reality which she already possesses in the City of God, the Blessed Virgin Mary offers a calm vision and a reassuring word to modern man, torn as he often is between anguish and hope, defeated by the sense of his own limitations and assailed by limitless aspirations, troubled in his mind and divided in his heart, uncertain before the riddle of death, oppressed by loneliness while yearning for fellowship, a prey to boredom and disgust. She shows forth the victory of hope over anguish, of fellowship over solitude, of peace over anxiety, of joy and beauty over boredom and disgust, of eternal visions over earthly ones, of life over death.¹³

¹⁰ Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, 62: "Taken up to heaven she did not lay aside this salvific duty, but by her constant intercession continued to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation. By her maternal charity, she cares for the brethren of her Son, who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and difficulties, until they are led into the happiness of their true home. Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked by the Church under the titles of Advocate, Auxiliatrix, Adjutrix, and Mediatrix. This, however, is to be so understood that it neither takes away from nor adds anything to the dignity and efficaciousness of Christ the one Mediator."

¹¹ Cf. Hb 4:15.

¹² Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines*, "Consecration and Entrustment to Mary," 204: "The history of Marian devotion contains many examples of personal or collective acts of 'consecration or entrustment to the Blessed Virgin Mary' (*oblatio, servitus, commendatio, dedicatio*). They are reflected in the prayer manuals and statutes of many associations where the formulas and prayers of consecration, or its remembrance, are used. The Roman Pontiffs have frequently expressed appreciation for the pious practice of 'consecration to the Blessed Virgin Mary' and the formulas publicly used by them are well known. Louis Grignon [de] Montfort is one of the great masters of the spirituality underlying the act of 'consecration to Mary'. He 'proposed to the faithful consecration to Jesus through Mary, as an effective way of living out their baptismal commitment.' Seen in the light of Christ's words (cf. John 19, 25-27), the act of consecration is a conscious recognition of the singular role of Mary in the Mystery of Christ and of the Church, of the universal and exemplary importance of her witness to the Gospel, of trust in her intercession, and of the efficacy of her patronage, of the many maternal functions she has, since she is a true mother in the order of grace to each and every one of her children."

¹³ Blessed Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus*, 57.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTIONS SEE:

- Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, Chapter 8
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 963-975; 2617-2619; 2673-2679
- Blessed Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation on Marian devotion, *Marialis cultus*
- Saint John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater*
- Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy Principles and Guidelines*, 2001
- Pascal-Raphael Ambrogi et Dominique Le Tourneau, *Dictionnaire encyclopédique de Marie*, “Consécration à Marie”, éd. Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 2015, p. 324-328
- New Catholic Encyclopedia, “Consecration, Personal”, CUA, Washington, DC, 1967, p. 209
- Father Johann Roten, S.M., “Meaning of consecration”, <https://udayton.edu/imri/mary/c/consecration-meaning-of.php>
- Msgr. Arthur Calkins, “Marian Consecration and Entrustment”, <http://www.christendom-awake.org/pages/calkins/marian-consecration-part1.htm>

