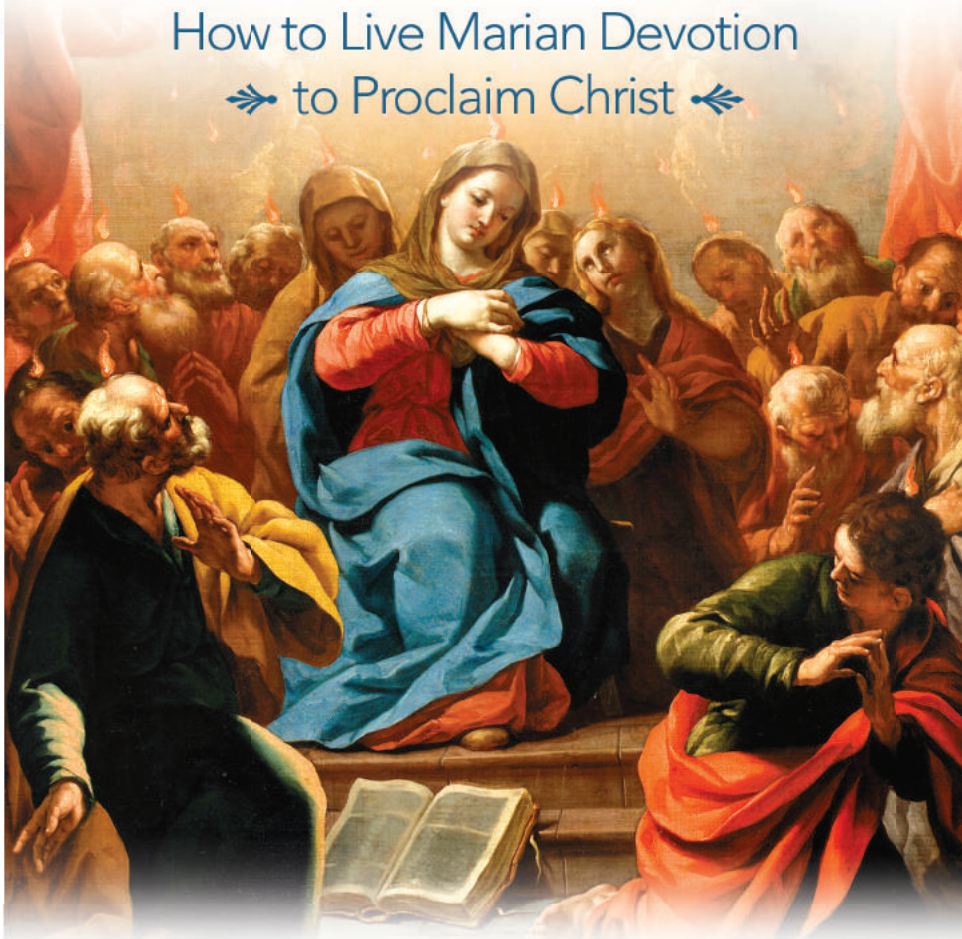


“...destined to be a classic!” —Donald H. Calloway, MIC

MARY MOTHER OF APOSTLES

How to Live Marian Devotion
➤ to Proclaim Christ ➤



Giuseppe Forlai

MARY, MOTHER OF APOSTLES

How to Live Marian Devotion
to Proclaim Christ

By Giuseppe Forlai

Foreword by Marianne Lorraine Trouvé, FSP



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To the brothers of Our Lady of Mercy
on the 175th anniversary of their foundation.



“My little children, for whom I am again
in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you” (Gal 4:19).



The task of the Virgin Mother is that of giving birth and gradually forming Jesus in all those who must be “conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom 8:29). Mary stands before us as Mother and teacher to give us marvelous proof of how one becomes a true disciple of Christ and to guide us to build our personality on the form of the Word.

Blessed James Alberione

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Foreword



“Within your wounds hide me.” That beautiful line from the prayer Soul of Christ has always fascinated me. Even in glory, Jesus Christ still bears the marks of his wounds, an eternal reminder of the suffering and weakness he endured out of love for us. In this book, Father Giuseppe Forlai says, *“Just as the risen Jesus willed to preserve in his glorious body the wounds of the nails, so Mary assumed into heaven body and soul, remains there with her perpetual compassionate sorrow”* (p. 21). That is why she is Mother of Mercy, a tender mother who understands our own wounds and sorrows. Forlai’s insight amazed me. How can Mary’s sorrows somehow still be alive? Isn’t she perfectly happy in heaven? Yes, but that doesn’t take away her compassionate heart, forged in her own earthly sufferings, especially on Calvary.

This book is full of such amazing insights. Forlai approaches Mary in a unique way that helps us understand not only who she is, but also how much she loves each one of us as her spiritual

child, and how we are called to imitate her in bringing Jesus to the world. He draws ideas from the French school of spirituality, especially Saint Louis de Montfort; from Saint John Paul II, and from Blessed James Alberione, founder of the Pauline Family.

Forlai takes up an important idea from the French school, namely, that we relive the mysteries of Christ spiritually in our own lives. This relies on a sound theology based in Saint Thomas Aquinas, that the sacred humanity of Christ is the source of all grace for us. When we come into contact with Christ through faith and the sacraments, he imparts to us the grace he merited in each event of his life, from his birth to his death, resurrection, and ascension. In this book, Forlai develops the role of Mary, who was associated with Jesus in those mysteries. That is why she is so important for our spiritual life.

We see in Forlai's reflections a synthesis of great Marian saints. Saint John Paul II's deep Marian devotion sprang from his reading of *True Devotion* by de Montfort. His motto *Totus Tuus* expresses his total consecration to Mary. But John Paul II enriched this through his personalist approach to spirituality. He emphasized Mary's total gift of self, her spousal love as virgin, mother, and spouse.

Blessed James Alberione made a unique contribution by giving Marian devotion a strong apostolic dimension. He expressed this with the title "Queen of the Apostles" which is meant to spur us on to evangelization. Alberione saw the icon of Mary at Pentecost, praying with the Apostles as they waited for the Holy Spirit, as an image of the apostolic mysticism that Marian devotion can develop in us. As soon as the Holy Spirit came to them,

the Apostles went out to preach the Word. Mary stayed behind the scenes, the gentle and hidden mother, yet she was the one who gave life to their preaching through her prayer. The more we make Mary a part of our life, the more effectively we too will be able to share with others the Good News about Jesus Christ.

MARIANNE LORRAINE TROUVÉ, FSP

February 11, 2018

Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes

Introduction



Lyon, France, August 2013. With Father Philip, we went to the Sainte-Foy quarter of Lyon, near Fourvière, where the Marian sanctuary dominates the splendid city, an astounding nursery of saints. Coming to the piazza, we split up to be free to visit the building, each at our own pace and according to our own interests. After a quick walk around the sanctuary, I went to the seventeenth-century chapel of Our Lady of Fourvière. The statue of the Virgin with Child welcomed me, but I was surprised by how small it was. The statue was almost completely hidden by the white gown that encircled it, as if it were a child who had just received baptism. It greatly contrasted with the impressive majesty of the eighteenth-century basilica. The paradoxes are also reflected in the stone, which mirrors what dwells in the human heart.

After some minutes of prayer, I noticed dozens of memorial plaques on the sanctuary walls and nave. I drew near and, despite

my ignorance of the French language, tried to understand the inscriptions. To my amazement, I discovered that many of these plaques commemorated the founders and foundresses of men's and women's religious congregations. They had begun their institutes in this holy place, or had often gone there to ask the Mother of the Lord for grace, light, and comfort in the many tribulations they would inevitably face as founders. I recalled that day in the Cenacle in the upper city of Jerusalem, where Mary prayed and interceded for the coming of the Spirit on the Apostles. In reality, that day has never ended in the life of the Church. Today, as then, the Mother of the Lord is present in every place where the Holy Spirit enkindles hearts and transforms limited and fearful people, even great public sinners, into apostles of the Kingdom. In my eyes the chapel of Fourvière had become like the Cenacle in Jerusalem. Here, too, the Spirit of the Risen One, through the presence of his servant, Mary, raised up new apostles—consecrated men and women dedicated to the missions, to the education of youth, to catechesis, to relieving the poor. I was enchanted at the thought of how contemporary our story is with that of Mary and the Apostles, as they lived in the days after Christ's resurrection.

Coming back to reality (but what is reality as opposed to the fleeting figure of this world?), Father Philip waited for me in the basilica's piazza. "Satisfied?" he asked. "Extremely!" I responded. But he didn't suspect the real reason for my satisfaction.

With this important and "unsettling" intuition, I returned to Rome, certain of having found the key to a problem. I could now unravel thoughts and desires, which, like a red thread, had been going through my mind and heart for about ten years in a

disconnected way. Finally I understood the most important and urgent need for the Christian community: to enter into a covenant with Mary. She invoked the Spirit upon us so that we would commit ourselves to giving the Church new apostles of the Gospel. That was my light at the end of the tunnel. Finally we were there: Mary truly is the form of the Word, born from her flesh. And she is that form so intensely that, in our turn, to bring Christ to the world, we must enter the form of Mary.

This brief book intends to develop “the grace of Lyon”—the theological and spiritual idea enclosed, like a pearl in a treasure chest, in the Marian titles Queen of Apostles, Queen of Pentecost, and Our Lady of the Cenacle. All these titles send us back to the same mysterious and life-giving reality about Mary that was intuited and developed by the great French school of spirituality¹ three centuries ago and more recently in Italy, by Blessed James Alberione, founder of the Pauline Family. Unfortunately, these schools of thought are often merely seen as outdated or abstract ideas. I hope that those who read these pages will grasp that this teaching about Mary is extremely serious and beautiful. We must take a step forward in understanding and knowing the Mother of the Lord, above all in her role as the Spirit’s collaborator in the

1. Founded by Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle (1575–1629), the French school taught the pursuit of holiness by emphasizing the person of Jesus, who lives his mysteries in us spiritually. It focused on the priesthood, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and devotion to the hearts of Jesus and Mary. Bérulle was a mystic, theologian, and statesman who helped bring about a great renewal in the Church in France. —*Ed.*

evangelical formation of all Christians, especially of priests and consecrated persons.

In the first chapter, I attempt to show the extraordinary reality of our being grafted in Christ by virtue of our Baptism. The

—•••—

*If God the Father
willed to give the world
the Redeemer through
Mary, he will
continue to do so until
the end of time.*

—•••—

Lord is the Living One who thinks, desires, and loves in the depths of every child of God. This adherence of our spirit with his is already prefigured in the events of his Mother's life. We could even say that Jesus lived and lives in Mary, since he was impressed in her from the very first moment of his virginal conception.

In the second chapter, I reflect on Mary's presence and mission in the Church. Her presence starts from the Incarnation of the Word and culminates in the miracle of Pentecost. Then it continues in time, thanks to the Holy Spirit, who forms and builds the Christian community so that it might generate other believers as children of the Heavenly Father.

Finally, in the third chapter, I trace the profile of an apostle formed at the school of the Virgin Mary in the Holy Spirit. It is a school of evangelical smallness, privilege, and powerful intimacy with her Son, Jesus. If God the Father willed to give the world the Redeemer through Mary, he will continue to do so until the end of time. God does not change his style or method.

The end of each chapter contains a brief summary of the content, along with some texts for meditation from the teaching of the popes and the writings of Saint Louis Grignion de Montfort (1673–1716)² and Blessed James Alberione (1884–1971).³ I hope this will be helpful to the reader. These pages call for deep reflection. Even if the language of the texts may sometimes sound dated, doubtless you will still be able to taste their beauty.

This brief work is more an appeal than a study, a starting point rather than a destination. It is a small contribution to outline the nature of the Christian apostle in the spirit of Mary. It is an “atmosphere” before being a book, with all the limits the reader certainly will find. Sometimes one can discover valuable objects even in ordinary and unattractive old boxes.

Dear reader, whoever you may be, I wish you the good will and discernment that will draw you, as Saint Louis de Montfort wished, to place yourself in the mold of Mary, the form of God. May Mary reproduce in you the features of the Divine Master, the unique and authentic Adorer and Missionary of the Father. If you think you cannot achieve this because you lack the strength or are too deeply marked by sin, throw your concerns on the Lord and confide in him. Let us together enroll in the school of Mary who has no greater glory than “to change great sinners into saints and apostles” (Blessed James Alberione).

2. An important member of the French school of spirituality, he founded the Company of Mary (priests), and the Daughters of Wisdom (sisters). Montfort emphasized total consecration to Mary. —*Ed.*

3. Italian priest and founder of the Pauline Family, Alberione emphasized the importance of the media for evangelization. —*Ed.*

Prayer to Mary, Queen of Apostles

It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation,
always and everywhere to give you thanks,
Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God,
on this memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary,
the first to proclaim Christ,
even before the Apostles.

Guided by the Holy Spirit,
she hastened to bring her Son to John,
that he might be sanctified and filled with joy.
It was the same Spirit
who made Peter and the other Apostles
fearless in preaching the Gospel to all nations,
with its saving message of life in Christ.

In our own day the Blessed Virgin
inspires by her example new preachers of the Gospel,
cherishes them with a mother's love,
and sustains them by her unceasing prayer,
so that they may bring the Good News of Christ the
Savior to all the world.⁴

4. *Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, vol. 1, Mass of Mary, Queen of the Apostles (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 102.

CHAPTER ONE

Jesus Living in Mary

*“Why do you look for the living among the dead?”
(Lk 24:5)*



Jesus, the Living One

To say “Jesus is alive!” is not to state the obvious, though it might seem so. He is alive not just in the sense of being a memory of some disciples or believers, or inspiring the ideas of some moralists, whether Catholic or secular. Jesus is alive in the sense that he is truly here now, while I write these lines and while someone reads them. Jesus is not only present but he is also contemporary with me, simultaneous with my action in the breath that allows me to live. He surrounds me and indwells me. He is in me, although outside of me, beyond my intelligence, as Saint

Augustine of Hippo wrote.¹ Jesus is seated at the center of my consciousness, but he cannot be captured. He is in the depths of my soul, not like water that stagnates, but like a fountain that springs up for eternal life (see Jn 4:14). All this is possible thanks to the gift of the Holy Spirit received at the moment of Baptism. Like a seed deposited in my soul, the life of the risen Christ can grow to full maturity until it occupies every corner of my mind, my will, and my affections.

This is not a fable or illusion. Certainly we can't be physically or psychologically aware of the presence of the Living One in us, but we can recognize it by its benefits. It's similar to the way I realize that I can see because light shows me objects. Similarly, I can understand that I possess the Spirit when I make acts of faith, hope, and love. Just as I do not lose my sight if I close my eyes or remain in the dark, the baptized do not lose Christ's seal in themselves because they are not aware of it or don't feel it interiorly.

This presence of the Living One does not violate our freedom. Only the devil possesses people's bodies without their permission, violating their liberty. On the contrary, as Saint Ignatius of Loyola wrote,² grace is always gentle, like a drop that falls on a sponge and is quietly absorbed. We have to try to make ourselves like sponges to absorb the sweet ointment of the Spirit, seeking to stay in contact with our inner truth and with the reality that surrounds us. We will see how this is possible through

1. See *Confessions*, VII, 10, 16.

2. See *Spiritual Exercises*, no. 335.

three points of meditation: Jesus, considered as the Living One; Jesus, who sacrificed himself for me; and, finally, Jesus, who wants to relive his mysteries in me.

Jesus Is the Wounded Living One

The life of Christ in me is an existence marked by *his* wounds, not only by mine. The Risen One is not an unblemished ghost, but a man whose transfigured flesh bears the nail marks from the cross—marks that shine like gems for his disciples (see Lk 24:39). The Risen One, who sits in glory at the right hand of the Father, is eternally the crucified. The Lamb who lives forever (see Rev 1:18) remains as if immolated, “as if it had been slaughtered” (Rev 5:6). The consequences of this truth for the spiritual life are immediately evident: Christ lives in me with his wounds! His wounds of love took the place of mine, which were caused by egoism. The stigmata of self-donation does not cancel out but transfigures human fragility. This is not poetry but pure Christian realism. Some “spiritual” persons spend their life in self-absorption. They make concessions to their fragility by excusing it as a mystical weakness, and they think that God closes his eye to everything. But that is not so. The Lord does not close his eyes. He opens them and looks upon us with mercy! And he desires that we stop gazing at our wounds and, instead, look at *his*, the only ones that save and that shine for eternal life. “Forget yourself” is the key. Whoever refuses to understand this truth will be blocked in their spiritual growth for a lifetime, exchanging awareness with a kind of egocentricity.

The wounded Living One wants to place his wounds over mine so that they might be absorbed by life (see 2 Cor 5:4). Therefore to *let Christ live in me* (see Gal 2:20) requires, on the one hand, that I free myself from the illusion of having to be “good” according to the spirit of the world. And on the other hand, it requires that I stop thinking that my troubled history or my falls are the center of the universe. Christ does not want me to be good in the world’s sense, but merciful, even toward myself. I too shall one day be a risen one, just as the Lord is, but always wounded, a living one stricken but not killed (see 2 Cor 4:9). At the same time, however, this does not authorize the Christian to transform his or her weak or dark side into the focal point of their interior life. The center always remains the Crucified Risen One.

Jesus Is for Me

The Living One is the only one “who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20). Writing to his disciple Timothy, Paul speaks of himself as one of the foremost sinners (see 1 Tim 1:15). He was not so much first in chronological order, but a prototype, a living example of someone who, in a radical way, needed the Father’s mercy more than anyone else did. Here we touch a crucial point in the experience of grace. Only a person who is ready to recognize his or her own sin, and the almost infinite possibilities of doing evil, can be open to the reality of the *inhabitation*, the indwelling in him or herself of the Risen One who enters the Cenacle’s closed doors and forgives every

debt rather than condemns. One such experience is so important that—to use an absurd example—if one could present oneself before God without sin and laden with merits, that would still not suffice to be saved (see Lk 18:9–14). For this reason (developing the idea [of how sin affects us]), Blessed John Henry Newman wrote that “we would have to experience what sin is in the beyond if we haven’t become aware of it now.”³ It is more important to open our eyes to what we are and to the malice that dwells in the mind than to focus on the account we will have to give for the faults we have committed. Then we will be able to make our own the cry of Saint Paul: “Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” (Rom 7:24). But those who gloss over sin and play games with God’s forgiveness, while relying on their own pitiful virtue as if they could compensate, do not even know what sin is about. For them, mercy is no more than the omission of a local police officer who pretends not to see cars wrongly parked on the spots reserved for the handicapped.⁴ But that is not God’s mercy. On the contrary, by forgiving, God omits nothing; he creates. He doesn’t look past us, but *within* us. In a real way, not a symbolic way, we can say that *Christ lives in the baptized in the form of his*

3. The author does not give a citation for this quote. We were unable to locate the source in Newman’s works. —*Ed.*

4. “Some men are only virtuous enough to forget that they are sinners without being wretched enough to remember how much they need the mercy of God.” Thomas Merton, *No Man Is an Island*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008), 209.

mercy. He immolates himself continually for the baptized person in the temple of intimacy created in his image and likeness. The Lord is in me in the sense that he is eternally *for me*! In this way the blood of Christ is effective beyond time and descends upon the arid ground of our arid life, suffocated by the evil we do (or don't do, but wish to do with all our heart!).

Jesus Is in Me

The Risen One does not only want to be *for me*, he also desires me to be so united with him as to reproduce in my flesh his own human experiences and form one spirit with him: "But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him" (1 Cor 6:17). Fénelon wrote, "it is too little to consider it ["Christ lives in me"] with the mind like an object. It is necessary to have him within oneself as a principle. As long as he is only an object, he is as it were outside of us. When he is the principle then he's within us, and little by little he takes up all the space of our ego."⁵

That is not to say that the baptized lose their identity, but that everything that they are and live—joy and sorrow, hope and disappointment, fruitfulness and failure, death and life—can be divinized, Christified, and thus transformed into pure grace. Even life's darkest events, which would otherwise be incidents to reject, can become sources of grace and consolation. We only

5. Francois Fénelon, *L'Amore disarmato. Antologia dale Lettere* (Milan: Pauline Books, 1996), 173. Fénelon (1651–1715) was a French archbishop and theologian who wrote many works on spirituality.

need to accept that the Living One takes them from us and makes them his own.

This grafting of Christ's life into ourselves is possible thanks to the mystery of the incarnation: the eternal Word took mortal flesh in the womb of Mary. All that is divine has descended into the human, and all that is human has been poured into the divine and transformed. The contact between the reality of God and the reality of flesh did not create a dissonant note but a harmony, because the Father created everything looking at the Son, in view of him (see Col 1:15–20). Thus, due to Christ, all creation incessantly breathes the world of grace. For this, Christ does not put himself alongside a person's life, but by right penetrates that person to his or her intimate depths: he is more "us" than we are ourselves! We need to have great love for the mystery of this "contact," which took place in the womb of the Virgin Mary. It is precisely this mystery that allows us to live all that happens to us in Christ. And this mystery allows the Word the freedom to incarnate himself continually in the baptized. The incarnation, however, does not happen only at the moment of Jesus' conception. The whole life of Jesus is a continual "incarnation" in the wandering ways of humanity. The Master of Nazareth is true

*A well-lived Christian
existence is that of
the baptized in whom
Christ relives all
of his mysteries.*

God and true man, and therefore all his earthly experiences are imbued with divinity. Living among us, the Son of God took on human existence. When he ascended to heaven after the resurrection, he brought humanity next to the Father forever. This truth has marvelous practical consequences. Since everything the Master lived is divinized, then the episodes or mysteries of his life, which we read about in the Gospel, have been “eternalized” because the divine never ends, it never sets, and it is never exhausted. The risen Jesus still incarnates himself, still gives himself in the Eucharist until the end of time, healing ills even today. He still speaks to us as to disciples—weeping, suffering, praying, loving without interruption. But this is possible because I freely offer myself to him, saying, “Lord I am sad, come yourself to live your sadness in me. I am consoled. Come in me to live your gratitude to the Father. I am dying, come to live your death in me,” and so on. In other words, a well-lived Christian existence is that of the baptized in whom Christ relives all of his mysteries. It is not merely a matter of being good or bad, free or slaves, healthy or sick, famous or unknown, *but much more simply, everything depends on being one in him* (see Gal 3:28).

Naturally, the Holy Spirit works this marvelous exchange of life that makes us contemporaries of Jesus. It is not due to the individual’s strength. This exchange occurs in such a way that the poor, earthly events of my life are changed into Jesus’, and his eternal and glorious mysteries are exchanged with mine. We stand before a marvelous reality that makes us exclaim with Saint Paul, “It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20).

Let us not believe, however, that this all happens instantly, or once and for all! Charles de Condren (1588–1641),⁶ the first successor of Cardinal de Bérulle at the head of the Oratory of France, listed four steps to this gradual process of *Christification*. I offer this modern adaptation as follows:

1. *Adhesion*. I must fix my gaze on a mystery of the life of Jesus that best interprets the situation I am living. It could be a teaching or an episode in the Gospels.
2. *Appropriation*. Next, I can enter more deeply into Jesus' sentiments, desires, and actions as I understand them from the Scriptures. I make them mine, bonding my state of soul to his.
3. *Dying to the old self (annihilation)*. If I appropriate the mystery in a true and heartfelt manner, my old self, interwoven with evil, must be unmasked and then die by "asphyxiation."
4. *Transformation*. The death of the old self leaves room for the new person created according to God, so that God's beloved Son might shine through.

6. Condren was an important member of the French school of spirituality, under whose leadership the French Oratory greatly expanded. Founded by Bérulle, the Oratory was an association of priests who lived in community for the sake of greater holiness. —*Ed.*