

“Sister Anne” (Mary K.) Farran -- <https://houseofmaryomd.org>  
An improved “chapter” version is in preparation for a book publication.

### *Who is Mary?*

Good evening everyone! And hello to all our audio listeners!

The Tuesday talks Living a Marian life will be shorter than my talks on other talks to allow time for a rosary and fellowship, But these talks will be more intense, because I know that most of you have been striving to live a Marian life for quite some time. For at least three years some of you have been meeting weekly to pray the Rosary and share with one another the insights that you’ve acquired to help one another grow closer to Mary. And that’s why you’re here tonight, to pick up insights to help you deepen your union with Mary.

But what is driving you and so many other people? We are not alone. There are hundreds of thousands of men, women and children in every nation today, who also feel that they need to become closer to the Mother of God.

What’s the end game here? Is there some personal advantage we’re hoping for? A short cut to heaven. If you read classical spiritual books you’ll get the impression that this movement toward union with Mary is as old as the Church itself. After all, the Apostles were gathered around her on Pentecost. She was the rock at the foot of the cross while Peter the rock crumbled. Many saints along the centuries have declared that imitation of Mary’s virtues is the sure road to holiness for oneself, while other saints urged us to have recourse to Mary’s maternal intercession to obtain graces for others.

In the Middle Ages there was a custom of a feudal oath to Mary as one’s sovereign queen. The Carmelites in the 1200’s phrased their vows to “God and the Blessed Virgin Mary.” The oath was a promise to do something, to serve, to obey. Consecration is a step farther. It’s a gift of one’s entire being. Consecration “to Jesus through Mary” is basically the brain-child of Saint Louis-Marie Grignon DeMontfort. Spoiler: His radical ideas got him poisoned by Jansenist Catholics so he died in his forties. Consecration was a new idea and it seemed unbalanced. Even today it’s hard to understand. St. Louis DeMontfort wrote many works on Mary, but his jewel of jewels was “True Devotion to Mary”. He knew this book would be resisted by hell itself. “I clearly foresee that raging brutes will come in fury to tear with their diabolical teeth this little writing . . . or, at least to enclose it in the silence of a coffer in order that it may not appear”. Yet he was confident it would eventually bear fruit.

He was right. In the confusion of the times, it lay buried throughout the French Revolution and beyond. He died April 28, 1716. 126 years later it was discovered by one of his own DeMontfort priests. The year was 1842. This year is significant. We’ll come back to 1842 in a minute.

If you look at your Miraculous Medal, 1830 is inscribed on it, the year that the Blessed Virgin first delivered a public message for the world. She chose a young farm-girl postulant, St. Catherine Labouré. Her confessor and her religious superiors didn’t know what to think. There were no precedents, no Lourdes or Fatima or Rwanda yet; no way to look back and see how to handle messages for the world: . This was new territory in spiritual direction. Were they to take this young postulant seriously? After a couple of years of hesitation, the confessor presented the dilemma to the Archbishop of Paris. He decided to allow a some “Medals of the Immaculate Conception” to be made and distributed but without letting people know where they had come from. There were miracles right away, but the medal exploded in popularity in 1842.

At the beginning of this year a pious young man cajoled his Jewish friend to wear this new medal. Alphonse, scoffed at all religion, but his friend kept daring him so he put it on. Alphonse had only worn it a few days (maybe it was a few hours, I didn’t go back to check the details) when Mary appeared to him, exactly as She was depicted on his medal. She did not say anything, but light poured into his mind and he instantly understood many truths of the Faith. He wanted immediate baptism. Then he converted his brother. Then they both entered the seminary and were ordained for the Holy Land. This became a sensation throughout Rome and then Europe. The pope actually stepped in to get some verification on this private revelation. Now even grown men of the educated upper class were talking about the medal.

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So right at this sensational moment, there was another sensation. The original French version of *True Devotion* began to be read by everybody, at least in France. A new appreciation of Mary was born. Thousands of French Catholics joined a confraternity called the Children of Mary. They wore the medal, made a consecration to Mary and pledged to practice virtues pleasing to the Blessed Virgin. In 1858, just sixteen years later Bernadette of Lourdes described a lady in a grotto wearing a white dress and a blue sash, and some suggested it was a deceased “Child of Mary” because that’s the garb they wore in processions.

The Church had entered the modern Marian era with a bang. The next sensation was an apparition of Mary at LaSalette in 1846, then Lourdes in 1858, then Pontmain and on and on right up to the approved apparitions of Rwanda where Mary sang danced with high school girls in equatorial Africa, then went on to warn the country which was almost 90% Catholics, that if the tribes did not practice authentic charity and forgiveness, their country would deteriorate into violence. And it happened ten years later.

So this new era of apparitions with messages for the world was accompanied from the beginning by the writings and insights of St. Louis Marie DeMontfort. This is January 2017, the centenary of one of the richest Marian apparitions, Fatima. Where was DeMontfort in 1917? In Dublin, Ireland. A young civil servant named Frank Duff was working in the St. Vincent de Paul Society. Frank was introduced to a book by a friend. It was “The True Devotion to Mary”. Frank began to give talks. People desired to put the devotion into practice. A meeting was arranged: 8 pm September 7th, 1921, the eve of Our Lady’s birthday. The Legion of Mary was born. The Legion is almost a hundred years old now. In the era around WW II it was a massive worldwide movement where laypeople did dangerous work as missionaries in countries like China. They translated DeMontfort’s work into nearly every language around the globe.

I was a member of the Legion as a teenager and I made the consecration:

*I deliver and consecrate to thee, as thy slave, my body and soul, my goods, both interior and exterior, and even the value of my good actions past, present and future. I leave to thee the entire and full right to dispose of me and of all that belongs to me, without exception, as thou pleasest, to the greater glory of God*

I went on to become a Carmelite and pronounced my “feudal” oath to “God and Blessed Virgin Mary”. But I was a closet rebel. I wanted to love Mary, but I felt offended by her. Why was this Galilean girl in the middle of my union with God. All the books I read, even DeMontfort, kept affirming her prerogatives, her graces, her holiness, but all the theology books I read made it sound like God chose her arbitrarily. Who is Mary? It seemed to me that She was just lucky. Somebody had to be the mother of baby Jesus.

Life is a role of the dice, isn’t it? We can’t control who our parents will be, whether we’ll be handicapped, or get a good education. A friend of mine, who’s flown all over the world, told me that to be born in the United States was to win a lottery ticket. She was dumb-founded at how much we have, compared to most people who’s primary occupation is to find food for the day. Today 21,000 people will die of hunger and 125,000 will be aborted.

Was Mary just lucky to get picked for the best job ever, Mother of God and Queen of Heaven and Earth?

Was God reduced to making his selection from the small number of eligible girls who lived in Israel around 1 AD?

Or can God decide to place persons to be born in certain eras?

This question was important to me, because as hard as I tried, I just couldn’t conjure much respect for someone who got a free ride to holiness. It was hampering my devotion to Mary.

So I invested a lot of time delving into the theology of predestination and how it works in tandem with our free will, but that’s an intense subject so I’ll save that for another talk. Suffice it to say that I became convinced that Mary and Joseph and Peter and Andrew were all placed in Israel just as you and I have been placed in this country in this era of history. We each have a mission, a role to play. At last, I had come to be convinced that Mary was chosen because she was the most worthy person in all creation.

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In Carmel we go into extra solitude twice a year for ten days, once for a community retreat, and once for a private retreat. During the annual private retreat, except for Mass and community meals, I could spend the entire day in a hermitage surrounded by 3 lakes, 90 acres of woods and 900 entertaining squirrels. When I was about 36 or 37 (about twenty years ago because I'm 57 now) my private retreat encompassed the Feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. It was Saturday afternoon of that feast day and I was in prayer. Suddenly I was drawn into an experience that changed my life. I seemed to be given a participation in Mary's heart.

In her prayer she was focused on the pain of Yahweh. From the Garden of Eden onwards Yahweh had tried to give Himself in friendship to mankind, but down through the ages mankind, as a body, had not received his love. Have you ever done some historical research on Mary's particular era? The local king was a half Jew who had murdered several people in his family. Millions in the world were living under the yoke of Roman Gentile pagan domination. The Jewish High Priesthood was auctioned off by the Romans year by year to the highest bidder, when according to Levitical law it was supposed to be a lifetime office appointed by the Jewish king. The banking corruption in the temple was scandalous. Most of the priests were Sadducees who openly stated that they didn't believe in large portions of the Old Testament. For example they rejected all passages that mentioned angels. There was a lot of materialism in Mary's day. Many Jews just wanted God to bless their country and give them a nice life. Not much love of the true God among the people who had entered into covenant with Yahweh to be a witness to Him before the pagan world. It was really beyond sad.

Yet I clearly perceived that Mary wasn't sad for herself, but for God. Her empathy for the pain of his rejection became so intense that rose to a pitch and threatened to destroy her. She was only human and this was the pain of a divinity. I was feeling drawn into that pain of God and it was starting to become a scary vortex when something happened. Yahweh couldn't bear to see Mary in such agony. But the only way to stop her pain was to stop his own, because it was his pain that was paining her. She was grieving that He hadn't been received by mankind. In that moment, God had compassion on her and She conceived the love of God. In her own humanity, God was finally fully received by a human being. The agony merged into mutual ecstasy. This was the context of the Incarnation as it was revealed to me.

Okay, where is the part that the Archangel Gabriel asked her to become the Mother of God? “Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.” [Lk 1:31] The angel never actually asked her. He just presumed on her consent. He had already said that She was full of grace and the Lord was with her. Perhaps in that moment of agony and ecstasy she had conceived God in her heart, or maybe actually in the flesh also but she didn't realize it until the angel told her about it.

I'm not asking you to believe my personal understanding of the Annunciation, but I share it because I want you to benefit from a new perspective on this woman who is often portrayed as a spineless, uneducated, simple girl who was amazed to be chosen to have a baby who was the Son of God. Could it be that God was responding to the desires of an intensely passionate woman who was a true daughter of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? Those chosen patriarchs put up with all sorts of hardships and painful trials because of their hope that God would empower their descendants to become “a blessing for all the families of the earth” [Gn 12:3] Those men were selfless, strong, admirable. St. Therese, another passionate soul, wrote in her autobiography that her desire to save souls was a “veritable martyrdom”. She too was in agony until God blessed her. She would proclaim in her writings that St. John of the Cross was right when he said “that the soul obtains from Him as much as it hopes for from Him.” [Dark Night Ch 21.8] And on the same theme of strong confidence in God, St. Teresa of Avila kept telling her daughters to pray for great things, because God is a great God.

But Mary's intense desire wasn't fully alleviated, because the reception of Jesus was far from 100% in her day, and even up to the present. She lives in perpetual ecstasy in her union with God, but she lives in perpetual agony because She shares God's desire for union with every soul. As in Rev. 12, She is the great woman in the heavens, always in labor over souls. She is always presenting her pain to Him, really his own pain, to ask Him to draw down the Holy Spirit on souls who are far from his grace. And He is always bending over her, to take away her pain by offering fresh graces to those who had resisted grace.

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I practically melted into a puddle that day in the hermitage. Thenceforth I perceived Mary as a towering inferno of goodness, love, joy and agony. I wanted to relieve her of her burden, even as She endeavored to relieve Yahweh. The DeMontfort consecration was no longer enough. I didn’t want to just belong to her, to allow her to use me to help her save souls. No, I wanted to BE ONE WITH HER, to participate in her agonizing heart.

But I held back. Surely my desires were going too far! Perhaps this was heresy! Was I being carried away by my emotions? I talked about it with my confessor, and he assured me that I couldn’t love Mary too much. But I replied that he didn’t understand what I was asking. I blamed myself. I needed to describe that experience more precisely. Week after week I tried to add another nuance in human vocabulary to an impossibly subtle and spiritual experience. But he kept laughing and telling me to love Mary without hesitation, without any reservation. I told him I would find a more learned confessor. He recommended a Carmelite monk twice his age. But the whole scenario was repeated. He too said I couldn’t love Mary too much. But it wasn’t about LOVE, it was about UNION with a mere human being. Was this heresy or not?

I had no choice but to research the problem myself. We had a marvelous library in that monastery, and the monks nearby had an even larger library. I began to take notes as I read book after book after book. We only had manual typewriters at that time and for paper we cut up brown paper bags or used labels off cans. I had spent my first 13 years in another Carmel which had a softer concept of poverty and began to badly miss my old computer to help me deal with all these notes. Suddenly the monks next door voted to embark on a large liturgy project. They approached my prioress. If they provided the computer could Sr. Anne be their secretary? The new computer came with Bible software that included multiple translations in several languages, 4 Greek and Hebrew lexicons, concordances and commentaries. In the same month a business man began donating reams and reams of paper. I was going to need all this. Years of research lay ahead of me and I dove into it with enthusiasm.

The treatises on Mary over the centuries were sporadic and superficial. I realized I had to begin from the beginning. Mary’s role was to be the New Eve, but the Old Eve dropped out so early that we never saw what her vocation was supposed to look like. I can’t remember now if it took one year or three years of study, but I reached a moment where I could make that deeper consecration, namely to at least offer myself to be fully united with her heart. That moment came during a subsequent retreat when I kept saying “I want to be Mary!” It was a crazy idea. I was laughing at the absurdity but I couldn’t get rid of it. To distract myself I walked into the library, reached up at random and pulled a book off the shelf. I opened to a passage of St. Maximilian Kolbe telling his monks “Brothers, you must *be* Mary! You must preach about Mary. You must not stop talking about Mary, because so far, nothing about Mary has been said.” It was hyperbole. Much had been written about Mary, but it was only the tip of the iceberg. It was going to take much more prayer, reflection and study to gain a better understanding of her place in the Church.

Later on I’ll approach the question “Who is Mary?” from a doctrinal, scriptural or theological context, but I wanted to focus today on Mary’s personality. I don’t want her to be a stranger on a pedestal for you or some remote hero in the clouds. I wanted you to see that she’s alive, intense, and greatly interested in a personal relationship with each of you. She’s not limited by space and time.

I want to conclude with a gospel confirmation of the idea that we can really be identified with Mary. You may be familiar with the theological tradition that a priest is identified with Jesus in a special way. Here is a quote from Pope St. John Paul: “Dear friends, you are ontologically configured to Christ the Priest, to Him, head and shepherd, which is why we say in all truth, with the whole of Tradition, that every priest is *alter christus* .... At the moment of ordination you received a new mode of being.” [JPII Message to the 4th International Meeting of Priests, June 19, 1999]

*Alter Christus*, is Latin for another Christ. It’s hinted in St. Paul and I could refer you to entire documents on that, but do you know that the Gospel itself speaks of *Alter Maria*, another Mary?

Jn 19:25—Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother (Mary), and his mother’s sister, *Mary the wife of Clopas*, and Mary Magdalene. (That is, three Mary’s at the foot of the Cross: the Mother of God, the repentant Magdalene and then a third Mary.)

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Mt 27:61—[They] rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb, and departed. But Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (*altera Maria* in the Vulgate) were there, sitting opposite the sepulchre.

Mt 28:1 Now after the sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and *the other Mary* (*altera Maria*) went to see the sepulchre.

If you feel drawn to live a Marian life, you are drawn to be an *Altera Maria*.

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