NOVENA TO THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

ST. JOSEMARIA INSTITUTE

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St. Josemaria Escriva dedicated his priestly life to helping men and women of all backgrounds to understand that *ordinary life can be holy and full of God* – naturally and simply, living in the middle of the world dedicated to one's work and family, sharing in the needs and interests of one's neighbor and society, respecting the freedom of every person, and striving towards holiness.

The St. Josemaria Institute seeks to increase devotion to St. Josemaria and to share his message among all men and women who desire to find meaning and happiness in their daily lives by growing closer to God. Our hope is that people everywhere will have the opportunity to hear the message of St. Josemaria and accept the challenge he set forth in the first point of his spiritual classic, *The Way*: "Don't let your life be sterile. Be useful. Blaze a trail. Shine forth with the light of your faith and of your love… light up all the ways of the earth with the fire of Christ that you carry in your heart."

INTRODUCTION

Blessed Pius IX formally instituted the celebration of the Immaculate Conception when he proclaimed this dogma on December 8, 1854. Affirming the constant faith of the Church, he expressed in that definition, the exact meaning of the truth of Mary's Immaculate Conception: that she was conceived free from the stain of Original Sin. This feast has been celebrated in the East, and also in many places in the West, since the eighth century. This privilege of Mary is the most beautiful fruit of her Son's Redemption. Chosen as mother of the Savior, Mary received the benefits of salvation from the moment of her conception. Christ came to take away the sin of mankind; he did not allow it to contaminate Mary. The sanctity of our Blessed Mother is a model for all Christians. We seek her intercession that we may be rid of our sins and achieve sanctity.

The novena to the Immaculate Conception is a custom that flourished in the Church as a way of preparing for the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception (December 8). St. Josemaria Escriva encouraged everyone to practice this devotion and to do so personally in whatever way they thought best. Therefore, in addition to special prayers and readings, our devotion can also include a greater effort to keep up a constant conversation with Our Lady and to put loving care into our prayer and daily tasks.

During the novena, we can also help our family members, friends and acquaintances to come closer to Jesus Christ through Mary, reminding them as St. Josemaria said: "You are not alone. — Neither you nor I can ever find ourselves alone. And even less if we go to Jesus through Mary, for she is a Mother who will never abandon us" (*The Forge*, no. 249).

In this *Novena to the Immaculate Conception* from the St. Josemaria Institute, you will find prayers and readings for each day as well as brief reflections from St. Josemaria. If you would like to receive the daily novena prayers by email, please sign up at www.stjosemaria.org.

FIRST DAY | NOVEMBER 30
MARY, THE NEW EVE

INTRODUCTORY PRAYER

Lord God, may our gifts be sanctified by the Holy Spirit, who formed the Blessed Virgin Mary to be a new creation and sent down upon her the dew of heavenly grace, so that her womb might bear the fruit of our salvation, Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

READING: GENESIS 3:1-6,13-15

The serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden; neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate. Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent beguiled me, and I ate." The Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all cattle, and above all wild animals; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

CONSIDERATION FROM ST. JOSEMARIA ESCRIVA

"Thou art all fair and in thee there is no stain. —Thou art a garden enclosed, my sister, Spouse, an enclosed garden, a sealed fountain. —*Veni: coronaberis*. —Come: thou shalt be crowned (Cant 4:7, 12 and 8). If you and I had had the power, we too would have made her Queen and Lady of all creation. A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman with a crown of twelve stars upon her head. —Clothed with the sun. —The moon at her feet (Apoc 12:1). Mary, Virgin without stain, has repaired the fall of Eve: and she crushed the head of the infernal serpent with her immaculate heel. Daughter of God, Mother of God, Spouse of God. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit crown her as the rightful Empress of the Universe. And the Angels render homage unto her as her subjects... and the patriarchs and the prophets and the Apostles... and the martyrs and the confessors and the virgins and all the saints... and all sinners and you and I" (*Holy Rosary*, no. 15).

The Holy Rosary may be prayed.

CONCLUDING PRAYER

O God, who by the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin prepared a worthy dwelling for your Son, grant, we pray, that, as you preserved her from every stain by virtue of the Death of your Son, which you foresaw, so, through her intercession, we, too, may be cleansed and admitted to your presence. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

SECOND DAY | DECEMBER 1
MARY, FULL OF GRACE

INTRODUCTORY PRAYER

O God, who willed that at the message of an Angel your Word should take flesh in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary, grant that we, who pray to you and believe her to be truly the Mother of God, may be helped by her interceding before you. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

READING: LUKE 1:26-33

The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end."

CONSIDERATION FROM ST. JOSEMARIA ESCRIVA

"What we are looking for is happiness; not a momentary happiness, but one that is deep and lasting and both human and supernatural. There is one creature who achieved such happiness here on earth because she is God's masterpiece: our most holy Mother Mary. She lives now and is protecting us. She is there, body and soul, with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. She is the same person who was born in Palestine, who gave herself to God while still a child, who received the message from St Gabriel the Archangel, who gave birth to our Savior and who stood beside him at the foot of the Cross.

In her, all ideals become a reality; but this should not make us think that her sublime greatness makes her inaccessible to us. She is the one who is full of grace and the sum of all perfections; and she is also our Mother. Her power before God is such that she can obtain anything we ask for, and, like any mother, she wants to answer our prayers. Like any mother also, she knows and understands our weaknesses. She encourages us and makes excuses for us. She makes the way easy for us and, even when we think there is no possible solution for our worry, she always has one ready to offer us" (*Friends of God*, no. 292).

The Holy Rosary may be prayed.

CONCLUDING PRAYER

O God, who by the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin prepared a worthy dwelling for your Son, grant, we pray, that, as you preserved her from every stain by virtue of the Death of your Son, which you foresaw, so, through her intercession, we, too, may be cleansed and admitted to your presence. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

THIRD DAY | DECEMBER 2
MARY, THE HANDMAID OF THE LORD

INTRODUCTORY PRAYER

Lord God, when your Son came down from heaven, Mary had conceived him in her heart before she conceived him in her womb: grant that by holy and just deeds we may show forth in our lives the Christ whom we have received by faith, and who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

READING: LUKE 1:34-38

And Mary said to the angel, "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" And the angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible." And Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

CONSIDERATION FROM ST. JOSEMARIA ESCRIVA

"Let us turn our eyes towards Mary. No creature ever surrendered herself to the plans of God more humbly than she. The humility of the ancilla Domini, the handmaid of the Lord, is the reason we invoke her as causa *nostrae laetitiae*, cause of our joy. After Eve had sinned through her foolish desire to be equal to God, she hid herself from the Lord and was ashamed: she was sad. Mary, in confessing herself the handmaid of the Lord, becomes the Mother of the divine Word, and is filled with joy. May the rejoicing that is hers, the joy of our good Mother, spread to all of us, so that with it we may go out to greet her, our Holy Mother Mary, and thus become more like Christ, her Son" (*Friends of God*, no. 109).

The Holy Rosary may be prayed.

CONCLUDING PRAYER

O God, who by the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin prepared a worthy dwelling for your Son, grant, we pray, that, as you preserved her from every stain by virtue of the Death of your Son, which you foresaw, so, through her intercession, we, too, may be cleansed and admitted to your presence. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

FOURTH DAY | DECEMBER 3
MARY, BLESSED AMONG WOMEN

INTRODUCTORY PRAYER

Lord, our God, Savior of the human family, you brought salvation and joy to the house of Elizabeth through the visit of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Ark of the new Covenant. We ask that, in obedience to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we too may bring Christ to others and magnify your name by the praise of our lips and the holiness of our lives. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

READING: LUKE 1:39-44

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy."

CONSIDERATION FROM ST. JOSEMARIA ESCRIVA

"The divine Motherhood of Mary is the source of all the perfections and privileges with which she is endowed. Because of it, she was conceived immaculate and is full of grace; because of it, she is ever virgin, she was taken up body and soul to heaven and has been crowned Queen of all creation, above the angels and saints. Greater than she, none but God. 'The Blessed Virgin from the fact that she is the Mother of God has a certain infinite dignity which comes from the infinite good, which is God.' There is no danger of exaggerating. We can never hope to fathom this inexpressible mystery; nor will we ever be able to give sufficient thanks to our Mother for bringing us into such intimacy with the Blessed Trinity" (*Friends of God*, no, 276).

The Holy Rosary may be prayed.

CONCLUDING PRAYER

O God, who by the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin prepared a worthy dwelling for your Son, grant, we pray, that, as you preserved her from every stain by virtue of the Death of your Son, which you foresaw, so, through her intercession, we, too, may be cleansed and admitted to your presence. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

FIFTH DAY | DECEMBER 4
MARY, MODEL OF FAITH

INTRODUCTORY PRAYER

All-holy Father, eternal God, in your goodness you prepared a royal throne for your Wisdom in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary; bathe your Church in the radiance of your life-giving Word, that it may press forward on its pilgrim way in the light of your truth, and so come to the joy of a perfect knowledge of your love. God of wisdom, in your desire to restore us to your friendship after we had lost it by sin, you chose the Blessed Virgin Mary as the seat of your Wisdom. Grant through her intercession that we may seek not the folly of the wise but the loving service that marks out the poor in spirit. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

READING: LUKE 1:45-56

[And Elizabeth exclaimed:] "And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord." And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is on those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm, he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, he has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity for ever." And Mary remained with her about three months, and returned to her home.

CONSIDERATION FROM ST. JOSEMARIA ESCRIVA

"'Lord, I do believe! I have been brought up to believe in you. I have decided to follow you closely. Repeatedly during my life I have implored your mercy. And repeatedly too I have thought it impossible that you could perform such marvels in the hearts of your children. Lord, I do believe, but help me to believe more and better!' Let us address this same plea to Our Lady, Mother of God and our Mother, and Teacher of faith: 'Blessed art thou for thy believing; the message that was brought to thee from the Lord shall have fulfillment'" (*Friends of God*, no. 204).

The Holy Rosary may be prayed.

CONCLUDING PRAYER

O God, who by the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin prepared a worthy dwelling for your Son, grant, we pray, that, as you preserved her from every stain by virtue of the Death of your Son, which you foresaw, so, through her intercession, we, too, may be cleansed and admitted to your presence. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

SIXTH DAY | DECEMBER 5
MARY, CO-REDEMPTRIX

INTRODUCTORY PRAYER

Lord our God, in your eternal wisdom you fill out the passion of Christ through the suffering that his members endure in the many trials of this life. As you gave his mother strength in her agony to stand by the cross of your Son, grant that we too may bring loving comfort to others in their distress of mind or body. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

READING: LUKE 2:25-35

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And inspired by the Spirit he came into the Temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel." And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed."

CONSIDERATION FROM ST. JOSEMARIA ESCRIVA

" It is with good reason that the Popes have called Mary Co-Redemptrix. 'So fully, in union with her suffering and dying Son, did she suffer and nearly die; so fully, for the sake of the salvation of men, did she abdicate her mother's rights over her Son, and immolate him, insofar as it was in her power, to satisfy the justice of God, that it can rightly be said that she redeemed mankind together with Christ.' This gives us a deeper understanding of that moment in the Passion of Our Lord, which we shall never tire of meditating: *Stabat autem iuxta crucem Iesu mater eius*, 'there, standing by the cross of Jesus, was his Mother'. I expect you have noticed how some mothers, moved by a legitimate pride, are quick to appear alongside their children when success comes their way, when they receive some public acclaim. But there are other mothers who, even at times like these, stay in the background, showing their love silently. This was Mary's way, and Jesus knew it" (*Friends of God*, no 287).

The Holy Rosary may be prayed.

CONCLUDING PRAYER

O God, who by the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin prepared a worthy dwelling for your Son, grant, we pray, that, as you preserved her from every stain by virtue of the Death of your Son, which you foresaw, so, through her intercession, we, too, may be cleansed and admitted to your presence. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

SEVENTH DAY | DECEMBER 6
MARY, THE FIRST OF THOSE WHO HEARD THE WORD OF GOD AND DID IT

INTRODUCTORY PRAYER

Lord our God, you sent your Son from heaven into the womb of the Blessed Virgin to be your saving word and our bread of life: grant that like Mary we may welcome Christ, by treasuring his words in our hearts and celebrating in faith the deep mysteries of our redemption. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

READING: LUKE 11:27-28

As he said this, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, “Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that you sucked!” But he said, “Blessed, rather, are those who hear the word of God and keep it!”

CONSIDERATION FROM ST. JOSEMARIA ESCRIVA

“Our Mother had meditated deep and long on the words of the holy men and women of the Old Testament who awaited the Savior, and on the events that they had taken part in. She must have marveled at all the great things that God, in his boundless mercy, had done for his people, who were so often ungrateful. As she considers the tenderness shown time after time by God towards his people, Mary's immaculate Heart breaks out in loving words, 'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior, for he has looked graciously upon the lowliness of his handmaid.' The early Christians, children of this good Mother, learned from her; we can, and we ought to do likewise” (*Friends of God*, no. 241).

The Holy Rosary may be prayed.

CONCLUDING PRAYER

O God, who by the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin prepared a worthy dwelling for your Son, grant, we pray, that, as you preserved her from every stain by virtue of the Death of your Son, which you foresaw, so, through her intercession, we, too, may be cleansed and admitted to your presence. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

EIGHTH DAY | DECEMBER 7
MARY, MEDIATRIX OF ALL GRACES

INTRODUCTORY PRAYER

O God, whose Son, dying on the altar of the Cross, willed that the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, whom he had chosen as his Mother, should be our Mother also, graciously grant, we pray, that we, who fly to her protection, may find comfort by invoking our Mother's name. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

READING: JOHN 2:1-11

On the third day there was a marriage at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; Jesus also was invited to the marriage, with his disciples. When the wine failed, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Now six stone jars were standing there, for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the steward of the feast." So they took it. When the steward of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, "Every man serves the good wine first; and when men have drunk freely, then the poor wine; but you have kept the good wine until now." This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

CONSIDERATION FROM ST. JOSEMARIA ESCRIVA

"The Gospel passages about our Lady show her as the Mother of Jesus, following her Son step by step, playing a part in his redemptive mission, rejoicing and suffering with him, loving those whom Jesus loves, looking after all those around her with maternal care. Just think, for example, of the marriage at Cana. Our Lady was a guest at one of those noisy country weddings attended by crowds of people from many different villages. But she was the only one who noticed the wine was running out. Don't these scenes from Christ's life seem familiar to us? The greatness of God lives at the level of ordinary things. It is natural for a woman, a housewife, to notice something was lacking, to look after the little things which make life pleasant. And that is how Mary acted" (*Christ is Passing By*, no. 141).

The Holy Rosary may be prayed.

CONCLUDING PRAYER

O God, who by the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin prepared a worthy dwelling for your Son, grant, we pray, that, as you preserved her from every stain by virtue of the Death of your Son, which you foresaw, so, through her intercession, we, too, may be cleansed and admitted to your presence. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

NINTH DAY | DECEMBER 8
MARY, MOTHER OF GOD AND OUR MOTHER

INTRODUCTORY PRAYER

O God, Father of mercies, whose Only Begotten Son, as he hung upon the Cross, chose the Blessed Virgin Mary, his Mother, to be our Mother also, grant, we pray, that with her loving help your Church may be more fruitful day by day and, exulting in the holiness of her children, may draw to her embrace all the families of the peoples. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

READING: JOHN 19:23-27

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus they took his garments and made four parts, one for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was without seam, woven from top to bottom; so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfill the scripture, "They parted my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots." So the soldiers did this. But standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near her, 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.

CONSIDERATION FROM ST. JOSEMARIA ESCRIVA

"John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, brought Mary into his home, into his life. Spiritual writers have seen these words of the Gospel as an invitation to all Christians to bring Mary into their lives. Mary certainly wants us to invoke her, to approach her confidently, to appeal to her as our mother, asking her to 'show that you are our mother.'

But she is a mother who anticipates our requests. Knowing our needs, she comes quickly to our aid. If we recall that God's mercies come to us through the hands of our Lady, each of us can find many reasons for feeling that Mary is our mother in a very special way" (*Christ is Passing By*, no. 140).

The Holy Rosary may be prayed.

CONCLUDING PRAYER

O God, who by the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin prepared a worthy dwelling for your Son, grant, we pray, that, as you preserved her from every stain by virtue of the Death of your Son, which you foresaw, so, through her intercession, we, too, may be cleansed and admitted to your presence. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.