True Devotion *to* Mary

A CONSECRATION TO JESUS THROUGH THE BLESSED MOTHER

by SAINT LOUIS DE MONTFORT

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VIGILAT

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A Consecration to Jesus Through the Blessed Mother

Saint Louis de Montfort

Translated from the French by
Frederick William Faber, D.D.

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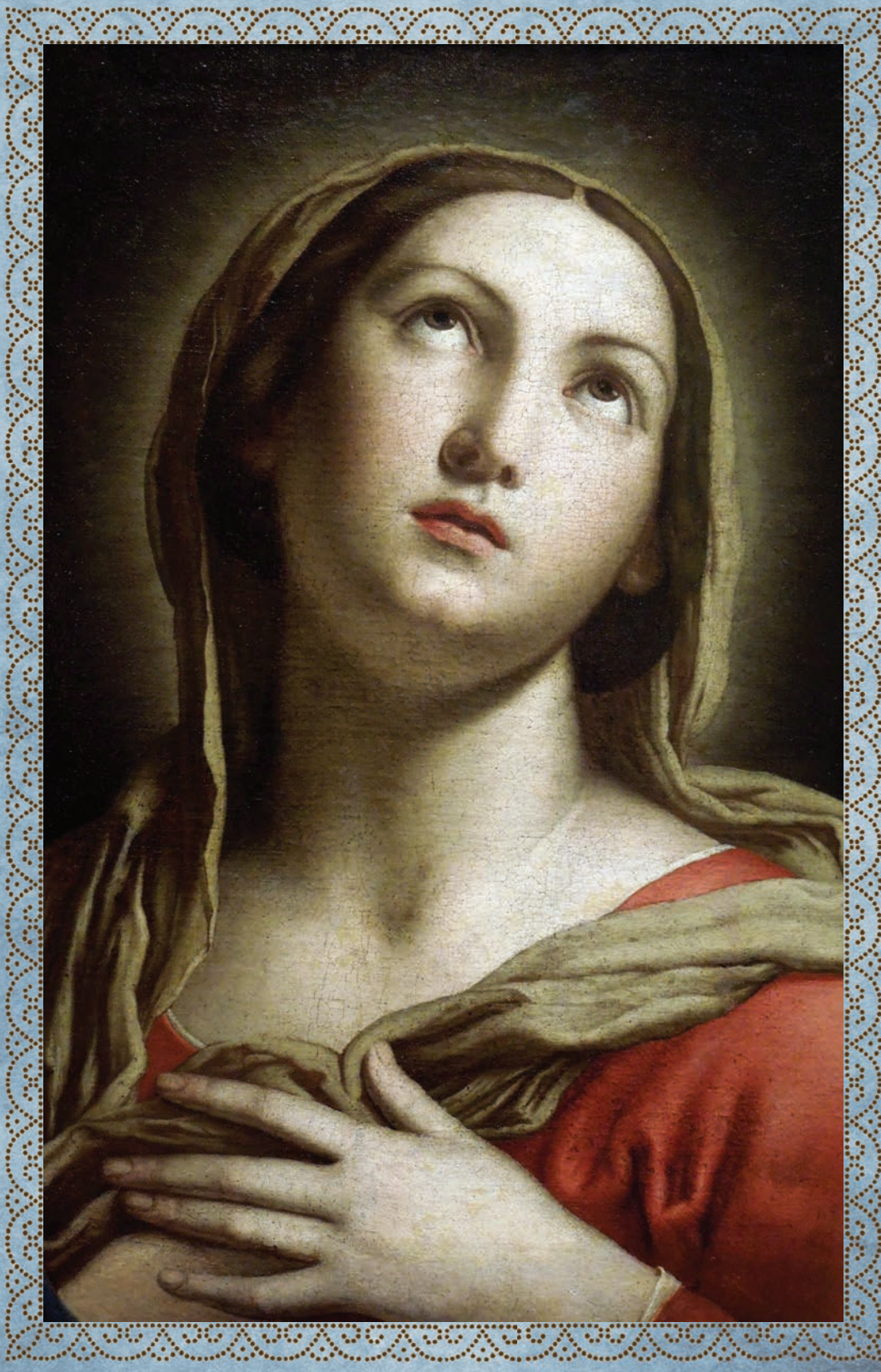
PREVIOUS PAGE: *The Virgin Adoring the Christ Child with Two Saints.*
OPPOSITE: *Praying Madonna* by Giovanni Battista Salvi da Sassoferrato.

NEXT PAGES: *Saint Mary (the Blessed Virgin) with the Christ Child, Saint Joseph, and a Family as Donors.* Color lithograph by F.S. Hanfstaengl after Titian.



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LE VENERABLE LOUIS-MARIE GRIGNON DE MONTFORT
FONDATEUR DE L'INSTITUT DES FRERES MISSIONNAIRES DE LA COMPAGNIE DE MARIE
ET DE LA CONGREGATION DES FILLES DE LA SAGESSE

PREFACE TO THE ILLUSTRATED EDITION

By the middle of the third century after Christ's birth, veneration of the Virgin Mary was an established tradition in both the Eastern and Western churches. This is perhaps best exemplified by the prayer to her, the *Sub tuum praesidium*, found in Egypt in 1917 on a piece of papyrus that dated from about AD 250. A few generations later, in 325, after Emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Milan (313) that granted Christians religious tolerance, he convened the First Council of Nicene, where the Virgin birth of Jesus was declared to be dogma. In the late 4th century, as Bishop of Milan, St. Ambrose's extolled Mary's life and faith as a model for Christians to follow.

Because tradition held that the Apostle John took Mary to Ephesus to live out her natural life, it, along with Rome, where early frescos in the catacombs show the Virgin holding the Christ Child in her arms or on her lap became the center of devotion to the Virgin. A little over a century after the Nicene Council, in 431, the Emperor Theodosius II summoned the First Council of Ephesus, held at the purpose-built Church of Mary, when the Virgin was declared to be Mother of God.

In the 6th and 7th centuries, Eastern Orthodox icons of Mary began to show her with a halo, and by the early 8th century Pope John VII was using the church Santa Maria Antiqua, where a fresco shows Mary as Queen of Heaven, as the see of the Church of Rome. Later in the 8th century, at the Second Council of Nicene, it was declared the images such as these should be venerated. A century later, in Ireland, Mary is shown, as Madonna holding the Infant Jesus, with a halo in the *Book of Kells*. It is no accident that the image in the *Book of Kells* closely resembles Byzantine icons since there were very few images of Mary in Western Europe at this time. It wasn't until her image began to appear in monasteries as panel

OPPOSITE: Saint Louis Marie de Montfort with Blessed Marie Louise Trichet during the foundation of the Daughters of the Wisdom congregation.

paintings that secular communities started to request them for their churches as well.

Mary's image became more important to the populous at large as her role as Mediatrix grew in the Early Middle Ages, as evidenced in the writings and teachings of Bernard of Clairvaux. About this time, European royalty and nobles commissioned books of hours with Illuminations that presaged the numerous appearances of the Virgin in Renaissance art. Cathedrals such as Notre-Dame in Paris and Chartres Cathedral were dedicated to her. A little later, in the 15th and 16th centuries, the artists Fra Angelico, Piero della Francesca, Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, and others brought the image of the Virgin and Christ Child to a wider audience. These works helped to popularize her in her role as intercessor and elevated her importance with the Catholic faithful.

In early October 1571, the naval forces of the Holy League, consisting of the Papal States, the Kingdom of Spain, along with the Republic of Genoa and other Italian kingdoms and duchies, decisively won the Battle of Lepanto over the ships of the Ottoman Empire when they fought a sea battle in the Gulf of Paltras, off the coast of the Greece. The Holy League had prayed to the Virgin Mary for intercession with God for victory, so they were quick to credit her for their success. As a result, Pope Pius V declared the 7th of October the feast day now celebrated as the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary.

On January 31, 1673, one of the Virgin's greatest advocates, and author of the text that follows, Louis-Marie Grignon de la Bacheleraie, was born in the small town of Montfort-la-Canne. At the age of eleven, he went to Rennes to enroll in the College of Saint Thomas à Becket where he stayed for eight years. At the end of his schooling in Rennes, he felt a calling to study for the priesthood at St. Sulpice Seminary in Paris. When he arrived in Paris, he lived among the poor and attended to their physical and spiritual needs while pursuing his theological studies at the Sorbonne. After two years of hard work, he became ill and entered the hospital for a period before he was appointed librarian, which gave him time to study the veneration of angels and the Virgin Mary's place in the life of a Christian.

Ordained as a priest in June 1700, he was assigned to Nantes, but in November of that year, he joined the Dominicans and began to preach at retreats about the Blessed Virgin. He was also appointed chaplain of the hospital at Poitiers where he met Blessed Marie Louise Trichet. Later, in 1715, he formed the Daughters of Wisdom, which he placed under her supervision to teach children and care for the poor. He thought himself not well-suited to the work of a hospital chaplain, and so made a pilgrimage to Rome to ask the Holy Father for guidance. Pope Clement XI received him and recognized his true calling when he appointed him an Apostolic Missionary and sent him back to France. There he preached in missions all over Brittany, but he also made time to write a number of devotional works, including this one.

His natural life was short; he died on April 28, 1716, at the age of forty-three, but his accomplishments were many. He was the founder of three congregations; the Company of Mary, the Daughters of Wisdom, and the Brothers of Gabriel, and was the author of *True Devotion to Mary*, *The Love of Eternal Wisdom*, and *Secret of the Rosary*.

Montfort's spirituality focused on "consecration to Jesus in Mary," and its influence was felt by many Christian leaders that followed. Pope Pius IX recommended the *True Devotion to Mary* as the best form of Marian devotion, and in 1888 Pope Leo XIII declared him "Blessed." In 1947, Pope Pius XII canonized him, so that now the saint's birthplace and tomb are pilgrimage destinations.

In 1845, William Frederick Faber, a former Anglican rector, followed John Henry Newman (later John Cardinal Newman) into the Catholic Church. Faber fell seriously ill shortly thereafter, and during his recovery, he began to study the veneration of the Virgin Mary. When he was ordained a priest in 1847, he determined to make Montfort's *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin* available in English, and this is his translation.

NEXT PAGES: *The Holy Family with a Shepherd* by Tiziano Vecelli (Titian).