

SUNDAY SERMON ON 26 AUGUST 1962

This week we celebrated a feast of Our Lady: the Immaculate Heart of Mary. This feast was the occasion for Pope Pius XII to consecrate the whole world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. We recall how in the following year, from 1942 onwards, a great trend went through the whole Church, through individual countries, dioceses and parishes, even through individual families, to consecrate themselves to the Sacred Heart. This followed the consecration of the world to the Immaculate Heart of Our Lady.

Let us recall why Pope Pius XII undertook this consecration. He spoke of the darkest hour in world history, which to a certain extent should be lit up and overcome by this consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The external incentive was the wish of Our Lady as expressed to the children at Fatima. Are we not convinced that the same situation repeats itself today? Must we not say that the darkest hour in world history has not yet been overcome? To the extent that we realise this, we feel urged to deepen and renew the consecration we have already made.

What do we understand by this consecration?

We made three main points: 1 What do we understand by consecration to Our Lady? 2 What do we understand by consecration to the Heart of Our Lady?

3 What do we understand by consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Our Lady?

By consecration we understand three things which actually together form a single great act of life.

In the first place there must be a perfect and irrevocable renunciation. What do we mean when we consecrate ourselves to Our Lady? We renounce ourselves forever. We no longer wish to belong to ourselves. We give Our Lady all rights over our person for time and eternity.

The second factor has thus already been mentioned - self-renunciation for the sake of total self-surrender. To whom do we give our bodies with their faculties, our health, and all that we are? To whom do we give the power and right to dispose of and rule over all we possess? Our Lady: In dependence on her we wish to use our health, our limbs, and dispose of our property. Self-rule no longer exists. The power of the world, sensuality, avarice, and the desire for power no longer exist in my life. No! We give all that we have and are and may possess in the future, to Our Lady, completely and without reserve. Come what may the world may entice us, we have given everything into the hands of Our Lady.

That brings us to the third element: this total and final self-renunciation and self-surrender is answered in that she takes possession of us forever.

She unites herself to our life and our being, to our possessions. Thereby she not only takes possession of us, she gives herself to us. Thus the consecration is a mutual Covenant of Love, a mutual exchange of hearts, of goods and of interests.

To the extent that we understand this, we realise how right those are who are of the opinion that the climax of devotion to Mary is such a consecration. I may pray to Our Lady to a certain extent, I may trust her, but the greatest expression of love is this surrender which is lived in everyday life.

The consecration, as we have just explained it, includes an entire treatise on Marian theology, and places Our Lady into the great supernatural cosmos. With that we have only thrown a little light on the consecration to Our Lady. We would also like to know what this consecration presupposes. Who makes such a consecration renouncing all his possessions, and to whom does he make it? Can one do it to benefit another? No. Whoever surrenders himself in this way can only do so to God, not to a creature.

But - we might well ask - how can we surrender ourselves to Our Lady? Is she God? Of course not! If I give myself or consecrate myself to a creature I can only do so on account of his nearness to God, only in as far as God is behind this creature. Thus I give myself so completely to a creature because of God. I do it to come more quickly to God, and in order to secure my being possessed by God with absolute certainty.

Perhaps we now ask ourselves: How can I give myself to Our Lady in this way? I think that we only understand the consecration to Our Lady as an expression of our consecration to God, as a security for our consecration to God and our longing to belong to him, only if we see Our Lady's place in the plan of redemption in the right light. She shares in a unique way in the royal might of the Eternal God, as well as in God's love. When I give myself so completely to somebody, it presupposes a certain immanence and transcendence.

Transcendence: God is over all, he has all power over us. However, this transcendence is complemented by his immanence. If I should give myself completely to somebody who possesses all power, and who is so far above me, and if this distance is not immediately complemented by his immediate loving nearness, I would be too afraid to do so. I must be convinced that the being to whom I give myself, and who has complete power over me, will only use this in my best interests.

How do we see Our Lady? She shares in a unique way in the power of the Eternal God. Her royal power extends over all creation. Her motherly power and her love is her immanence. She embraces us with her infinite love, and is ready to give her all for us. If I am convinced of the objective position of Our Lady in the

plan of redemption, it is not difficult to make it subjective through surrendering myself completely to her.

Therefore, it is worth our while to consider whether Our Lady really has this position. Is she the Queen of the universe? Queen in the actual meaning of the word? Does she share in God's ruling power? Does she rule? We may also ask what about her motherly love and nearness to us?

We have often discussed these questions. We know that Our Lady is Queen of the world, and shares in a unique way in the government of the world. She has a seat and a vote in the Council of the Triune God. Thus she is Queen not merely in the widest sense as the most noble creature ever created. When we call a rose the queen of flowers, or the lion the king of beasts, we do so in this sense. A queen in this sense is a being who is the most perfect or most proficient in a certain sphere. Thus we see Our Lady as Queen of the Apostles, as Queen of Martyrs, but this is insufficient to show the extent of her sovereignty. She is not only the most perfect creature, but all creatures are dependent on her, she has the power to rule in the objective order.

St Thomas once stated that the dignity in the order of being determines the power and majesty of a being. Our Lady, seen merely as a creature, has the highest dignity, even a certain infinite dignity, in the order of being. If this is the measure for her power and majesty, then she possesses an almost infinite power - also over our hearts. ...

We should try to see the dogmatic foundation of all this. The distance, this almost infinite greatness on its own, will not do. We must also be convinced that she is also truly our Mother. She has not only a mother's attitude, she is not only like a mother, she is truly our Mother. God could have created a better and more beautiful world, but not a greater Mother of the Lord. Perhaps we may interpret that saying in this way: He could have created a greater world, but not a greater Mother of Christianity, no Mother who could love the world and each creature with greater warmth and depth.

These are only a few poor words. We only guess vaguely at the fullness and beauty given her by God. We can and may surrender ourselves to her as the consecration demands, because of her objective position, and because of her participation in the royal might and power of Our Saviour, the only-begotten Son of God. She forms a deep and mysterious union with him. Now we understand the consequence which we may draw from her position. We recognise her high dignity and position. If this were not so we would never surrender ourselves to her.

This recognition is not only in theory but in practice, for we surrender ourselves entirely and forever to her person, her wish and her mission.

1 Her person. Why? Because of her indissoluble union with Christ and the Father. She exists only to draw us to Christ. Whoever consecrates himself to her, knows that it is only an expression of his surrender to God. He knows it is his best security for his surrender to God. Our Lady is the magnet of hearts. God uses her to catch us. Through Our Lady we give ourselves to him. She is the security and the means to remain eternally true to our consecration.

2 We surrender ourselves to her wishes. Her wishes are God's wishes. Whatsoever he says to you, do ye. Who is meant? Our Saviour, God. What he says - thus she supports God's wishes. She desires to bring our wishes into conformity with those of Almighty God. Whatsoever he says! Our Lady considers only God's wishes. This is the meaning of her life. At the same time she seeks out what is best for us. Therefore she influences God's will. We think of the wedding feast of Cana. Our Lord did not wish to work a miracle, but when she asked he did so, even though a purely human need was in question. She did it out of love for man. On the other hand Our Lady is also our advocate in the wishes of our hearts before Almighty God. Together with him she rules the world.

Let us recall her own example. How did she always answer God's wishes? With an Ecce, Fiat! She wishes to be the little handmaid of the Lord. Her whole being is orientated on the Father. Therefore Pope Pius X called her the easiest, the surest, and the shortest way, not only to attain an intimate love of Christ, but to become Father-centred. Originally that was the great law of the Church: Prayers were to be directed to the Father, not directly to the Son. We should be inwardly united to Christ, and with him to the Father; we should go to the Father in him, we should centre on the Father in Christ and with Christ. We still find this in the Liturgy. All the prayers of early Christianity were addressed to the Father, through Christ. Therefore if I wish to go to the Father, what must I do? Follow Our Lady. Then we serve the Father in Christ and with Christ. Ecce Ancilla!

We must once more learn how to achieve the correct fundamental relationship. How easily do we see God as the great Lord and ruler, but not in the simple and childlike attitude of service. That is the great tragedy of our times. What should our prayer be? A loving dialogue between the child and God, the recognition of his power and right to use and spend us. However, how is it in practice? There are two ways to pray: the wrong way and the right way. The second consists in repeating the Fiat. The wrong way is the virile, primitive, one-sided and manly way of speaking to God. What does it consist in? We feel we have not prayed if we have not talked to God. Usually we want to force our will on God. This is the primitive way. Our own will is constantly shouting, we want God to do our will. But genuine prayer is what Our Lady did: first she listened, then she obeyed.

It often seems as if we had a completely false picture of God. It is as though he were our grandfather. If we want something we start talking in order to win him over, to convince him of something and thus deprive him of his ability to make decisions. This is often the case with our prayers; and then we are of the opinion

that we have been praying. No. First learn to listen, we must let God speak and hear what he says --- then we have prayed well even if we have only listened. We think that we must force God, through our prayers, to do our will. And if God does not do our will we feel we no longer pray well. Who today can listen while he prays? Is there not a great buzz of voices within us? When we become outwardly silent we immediately start to talk inside - something on the radio or television impressed me. Then we no longer hear God's voice. How does his voice make itself known? Through world events, through circumstances and happenings. The Fiat of modern man is often no longer genuine and childlike. Fiat voluntas mea, we say. I force God, he must obey me!

How often do we not hear people say: I have often prayed God to help me educate my children, or return me to health, etc. I cannot understand God. Why? Because we no longer have the correct conception of God. We have forgotten that he has absolute power over us.

There is yet another form of prayer, a more feminine way. I sit in the corner and wait until God does this or that. And then I imagine how holy and pious I am. I see how modern man takes his fate into his own hands and purposefully pushes forward, while I sit and wait for God to do something He does not do it --- I want him to add a few centimetres to my height, but he does not do it.

God gives us a task - in the same way as Our Lady received one - and we should try with our whole strength and will to carry it out. I should realise when he does not fulfil my wishes that he has other plans. I then know that he wishes to educate me to become a strong personality. Outwardly small, inwardly great! Our Lady was the smallest on earth, and yet became the greatest in heaven. Why? God wants my humility, my independence of success or failure.

The consecration to Our Lady includes all this. It urges us into God's arms. It urges us to give ourselves forever to the person of Our Lady, to her wishes because they are God's wishes. It urges us to give ourselves forever to her mission because it is a divine mission. What is it? The re- newal of the world. Christ must be born again, Christ must be Lord of all times and all places.

Just as Our Lady once bore Christ, she should give birth to him again in our modern times. I may share in her mission. Therefore I should not constantly circle around myself and my little wishes. Each one of us is of the opinion that the world revolves around himself. No! We must circle around God. Christ must be born again wherever we are and whatever we are.

If we see our consecration to Our Lady in this light, we will realise that such a consecration is of unique importance in our lives. We realise the immense heights to which we should be led by the consecration. It becomes easy for us to prepare our consecration from inner conviction , as we are accustomed to do.

How do we address her? As Queen and Mother. By so doing we immediately recognise her place in the order of salvation. She is Queen. We give ourselves to her with all our faculties, so that she may transform us completely into Christ. First we must be formed into Christ, and then we can help her to transform the world into Christ --- That the world renewed by thee, May show thy Son true loyalty. Amen.