

Homily for the Feast of the Ascension
May 13, 2018
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A **novena** (from latin: *novem*, "nine") is an ancient tradition of devotional prayer in Christianity, consisting of private or public prayers repeated for nine successive days or weeks. During a novena, the devotees make petitions, implore favors, or obtain graces by worshiping Jesus Christ, and asking for intercessions of the Virgin Mary or the saints of the faith. My grandson is making his First Communion and is preparing with a Novena. He is anxious and each time we pray he asks, "How many more grandpa?" Anticipation is a tool of God.

The Pentecost Novena which began last Thursday is the first and most ancient of all novenas, nine days of prayer. After Jesus' Ascension into heaven, He commanded His disciples to come together in the upper room to devote themselves to constant prayer. They prayed for nine days before receiving the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.

Traditionally, in these or similar words, those to receive Confirmation pray nine days for the coming of the Holy Spirit and the gifts promised by Jesus: For the Spirit of Wisdom that we may despise the perishable things of this world and aspire only after the things that are eternal; the Spirit of Understanding to enlighten our mind with the light of the divine truth; the Spirit of Counsel that we may ever choose the surest way of pleasing God and gaining heaven; the Spirit of Fortitude that we may bear our cross with Christ and that we may overcome with courage all the obstacles that oppose our salvation; the Spirit of Knowledge that we may know God and know ourselves and grow perfect in the study of the Saints; the Spirit of Piety that we may find the service of God sweet and amiable, and the Spirit of Fear

of the Lord that we may be filled with a loving reverence towards God and may dread in any way to displease Him. Mark us, dear Lord, with the sign of Your true disciples and animate us in all things with Your Spirit. Amen.

In the teachings of the catholic faith, we often note that, we do not become a Christian on our own, but by being born thru Baptism and nurtured in the faith, in the midst, of the People of God, that is the Church. Parents and godparents pledge to keep the light of Christ burning in the heart of the child being Baptized. The Church then, is a true mother who gives us life in Christ and, in the communion of the Holy Spirit, brings us into a common life with our brothers and sisters. Mother Church nourishes and sustains us with the sacraments; she illuminates us with the light of the Gospel, orients us to the good, encourages us in moments of darkness and defends us from the snares of evil, exhorting us to vigilance so as not to succumb to its seductions.

Addressing the thousands of pilgrims gathered in St. Peter's Square to hear his weekly address, Pope Francis began by pointing to the mother of Jesus, the Roman Pontiff explained that "The model of maternity for the Church is the Virgin Mary who in the fullness of time conceived through the Holy Spirit and gave birth to the Son of God." Mary's motherhood continues through the Church, who gives birth to sons and daughters of God through baptism, and whom she nourishes through the Word of God. The birth of Jesus in the womb of Mary as firstborn of many brothers and sisters is a prelude of the new life that Christians receive in baptism.

Pope Francis observed how Jesus "gave the Gospel to the Church" in order to "bring forth new life by generously proclaiming his word and winning other sons and daughters for God our Father." As a mother, he explained, the Church

“nurtures us throughout life by illuminating our path with the light of the Gospel and by sustaining us with the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist. With this nourishment, we are able to choose the good and be vigilant against evil and deceit and overcome the difficult moments of life with courage and hope, this is the Church: a mother who has at heart the good of her children.” Pope Francis explained that since we are all a part of the Church, we have the call “to live this same spiritual, maternal attitude toward our brothers and sisters.” Let's not forget that in the Church we are all baptized, and that her maternity is also expressed in our ability to welcome, to forgive, and to instill courage and hope. Francis invited all present to invoke the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, praying that we can “learn from her that tenderness which allows us to be witnesses of maternity of the Church.” Today we celebrate the Feast of the Ascension of our Lord into Heaven and our own tradition of honoring all that is great about a mother's love for her child. And we hear in today's Gospel that Jesus must ascend to the Father, but He promises to send the Advocate, the Holy Spirit to guide and protect us. The Spirit will guide and protect us just like a mother would do.

So today, we give thanks to God for the gift of all mothers whose children are created in the image and likeness of God. We give thanks to God for all the wonderful, grace-filled mothers who raise their children with faith, hope, and love. And in a special way, we honor all those women who have been called by God to rise above life's imperfect circumstances to become wonderful, grace-filled “Moms” to so many fortunate children. The work of the Christian mother is a continuation of the work of Jesus who ***“Opened the Apostles' and disciples' minds to understand what the Old Testament had prophesied about the Messiah.”*** A Christian mother's ministry is her mothering, her opening of her baby's eyes to love.

Many of us can say that our mothers are a reflection, of the work of the continuing presence of Jesus, as the Holy Spirit, in our hearts and lives. There is no higher calling than to be used by God to reach persons for Christ, and this is the opportunity that every mother has with her children. Do not then let Mother's Day be just one day rather let Mother's Day become a perpetual novena for the next nine days and beyond. Just as the Pentecost Novena is the mother of all Novenas let us remember that our mothers were present for our first breath of life and her eyes were the first in which we saw love. All children place your hands over you mom's and offer this prayer for her: Hail Mary.