

COVID-19 AND CHURCH

To entrust or consecrate? The answer is found in Scripture

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Entrustment or consecration to Mary? The emergence of the coronavirus and the initiatives of bishops to implore the protection of Our Lady raise an age-old question, the terms of which must be well understood. Last March 25, in Fatima, Portugal and

Spain consecrated their entire nations to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary. On next May 1 also the US and Canada bishops will consecrate their nations to Mary, Mother of the Church. Meanwhile, again on May 1, Italian bishops will entrust their country to Mary at the Shrine of Caravaggio. On announcing the initiative, inspired by the submission of over 300 letters received from the faithful, Cardinal Gualtiero Bassetti, president of the Italian Bishops' Conference, said, "Why not dedicate our nation to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, [entrusting to her protection] all those suffering from this epidemic, all hospital workers? Why not entrust all of them and our whole nation?"

It is certainly good that the Italian bishops have responded to God's faithful.

The cardinal, however, is careful to avoid a verb used in the many requests sent his way: "to consecrate." Many people explicitly have asked to be consecrated, and not to be dedicated or entrusted, to Mary. This is no small difference, as we shall see. Furthermore, what the faithful sought was not due to some strange or fantastical idea, but in answer to what Mary has continually asked for decades during her numerous Church-recognized apparitions: to consecrate and be consecrated to her Immaculate Heart.

For some time now, in theological and hierarchical circles, it seems many are careful to sidestep consecration to Mary. What are their reasons? More or less the usual ones that we hear repeated by minimalist Mariological schools of thought: we consecrate ourselves only to God and, thus, we must avoid placing importance on figures as "equal or parallel" to God and Jesus Christ, etc. In other words, there is no co-redeemer, no mediator, and hence no Marian consecrations. This popular terminology is at best tolerated, but it must be carefully avoided in official acts and teachings.

The forerunner of this theological bent, who advocated eliminating terminology in reference to any true consecration to Mary, was the Spanish Jesuit theologian Fr. Juan Alfaro, SJ (1914-1993). In one of his communications to Marian congregations in 1963, Alfaro explained specifically that "a proper consecration is only made to a Divine Person because consecration is an act of *latria*, whose finality is only found in God." Hence he believed any Marian consecration must be considered in a broad or improper sense, "as our acknowledgment of our dependence on her, as an affirmation of her supreme dignity among created people." In essence, it an act of *entrustment*.

It is clear that such a misunderstanding couldn't help but lead to a replacement of the term "consecration" with that of "entrustment." Wary of consecration, entrustment become the sacred word. Still, simple believers continue consecrating

themselves, their families, and various activities to Mary, fortified by their supernatural instincts and belief in Heaven itself. They believe in the intercession of the Virgin Mary and of many saints like Montfort, Padre Pio and Maximilian Kolbe.

Consecration is a two-fold act: one of separation and another of total union.

Consecrating a Church means removing it from a profane use and then to dedicate it exclusively to the worship of God (it would be beneficial to recall this more often).

Religious consecration indicates a separation from the world in order to belong exclusively to God. There are many other similar examples.

It is clear, therefore, that the term *a quo* is a profane, worldly reality that one intends to leave, and the term *ad quem* is none other than God Himself, His service, and His worship. Hence, those who believe that consecration can only be to God might seem justified in their reasoning.

The point is, however, that God Himself has permitted that any consecration to Him may also pass through consecration to Mary. It is fundamental to understand that God's Will, especially during these troubled times in human history, is revealed all throughout Scripture. There are two bloodlines, two antagonistic lineages and progeny (cf. Gen 3:15): those who descend from the Woman and those who fall prey to the serpent and follow him. The two are eternal arch-nemeses: while Mary conquers, the serpent is vanquished. Only one is victorious. Only one is defeated. It is only those who claim descendancy from the Woman, Mary the Mother of God, can escape following the serpent, the devil.

We find the Woman "again" in the Book of Revelation, chapter 12. Here she is cloaked in rays of sun. We must lend special attention to verse 17: "Then the dragon was enraged at the Woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring—those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus." That bloodline, that very family lineage is not designated as that of God, of Jesus Christ, but as descending directly from a Woman.

In these two passages, God, in a certain sense, takes a step back and allows His people, the children to be redeemed by Christ, to be defined as descending from a Woman: those who are her offspring are also God's. What scandalizes certain theologians is, in fact, legitimized in Sacred Scripture. That this Woman is the Most Holy Virgin Mary is crystal clear in John's Gospel: first at the Wedding of Cana (John 2: 4) and then, even more significantly, while kneeling before the Cross (cf. Jn 19:26). Suffice it to say that Jesus asks one His disciples, John, to receive Mary as His own mother.