

Imitating Mary

Our Lady's evangelical virtues offer faithful a path to perfection.

by Dan Valenti

The Marians of the Immaculate Conception were the first community of religious men in Church history to be founded upon the Rule of the Ten Virtues of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God. The community was given that rule in 1699 by Pope Innocent XII and embraced it as the providence of God. Now, 309 years later, they remain the only male congregation so founded.

Holy men and women have long found Our Lady's Ten Virtues to be a source of consolation and encouragement. They have recommended the virtues to the faithful as a simplified and reliable path to holiness.

"It is no coincidence that no one else but Mary has been given to our religious community as a model," says Br. Andrew Maczynski, MIC. "We were called into existence by providence and, in our early history, were known as the Order of the Immaculate Conception. We Marians were called from our beginning to defend and emulate Our Lady's perfect holiness in her Immaculate Conception. That entailed venerating her and imitating her evangelical virtues."

The Gospels record the Ten Evangelical Virtues of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the Church employs them as evangelical models. They are:

- Purity (Mt 1:18, 20, 23; Lk 1:27, 34)
- Prudence (Lk 2:19, 51)
- Humility (Lk 1:48)
- Faithfulness (Lk 1:45; Jn 2:5)
- Devotion (Lk 1:46-7; Acts 1:14)
- Obedience (Lk 1:38; 2:21-2, 27)
- Poverty (Lk 2:7)
- Patience (Jn 19:25)
- Mercy (Lk 1:39, 56)
- Sorrow (Lk 2:35)

Unlike Mary, we will not achieve perfection in this life. Consequently, her Ten Virtues make excellent targets as we strive to get closer to a purified state. The virtues serve as both goals of and checkpoints for our progress along the spiritual road.

The key to using the Ten Virtues as a life model is that they are human virtues that fall within human capacity. You don't have to be a saint to live them or have heroic spiritual experiences. You only need a willingness to live your life in their light.

Common to each of the virtues is what can be called a "spirit of prayer." For Mary, every action, every thought and deed, every breath - the totality of her life - became an act of love for God. Her life became an extended definition of "prayer."

How can we emulate Mary? Through prayer, meditation, and good works done in trust, humility, and attentiveness, Br. Andrew says. Plus, never despise others who may lack any virtue. Rather, try to help them.

In short, do everything for love. That's making like Mary.