



Novena to the Immaculate Conception 2026

Day 5: Mystic Rose

Very good morning and a warm welcome to all on this fifth day of the novena to the Immaculate Virgin, this 4th of December in which we draw near to the Immaculate Heart of Mary to discover the mysteries that she wishes to unveil and reveal to us. And today we do this by contemplating our Mother as Mystical Rose, as that beautiful flower that fills with its fragrance the greatness of the garden of the Church.

We begin:

By the sign of the holy cross,

from our enemies deliver us, O Lord, our God.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Holy Father, eternal God, you willed to place the royal throne of your wisdom in the Virgin Saint Mary; enlighten your Church with the light of the Word of Life, so that she may shine with the strength of the truth and joyfully attain the full knowledge of your love.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Dear all, today we do not have a Gospel text within the novena, but we do have an excerpt from the book of the Song of Songs, a beautiful passage that manifests and unveils precisely the beauty of Our Mother the Virgin Mary, Mary Flower of Carmel, Mary Star of the Sea.

Already in tradition, Saint Ambrose and Saint Bernard see in the rose the symbol of Mary: a sign of beauty, a sign of fragrance and of holiness. And they see in the thorns of the rose that symbol of the suffering that the Immaculate Heart of Our Mother the Virgin had to endure. Saint Ildephonsus also affirms that Mary was made beautiful. Thus, in tradition Mary is contemplated as a figure of spiritual beauty and purity.

The biographers of Saint Bernadette Soubirous say that, knowing that she had already had the grace of contemplating the incomparable beauty of the Most Holy Virgin, when people asked her to describe her so as to capture the features of the Virgin – that figure we know and that many of us venerate with special affection – she, being unable to do so with human language, tried to define it by saying: “She is so beautiful that when one has seen her, even once, one would wish to die in order to see her again.” The same biographers recount that when the saint

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tried to imitate the smile and expression of the Virgin, her own face became most beautiful and angelic, causing great astonishment in those present.

Yesterday I said that Saint Elizabeth, moved by the same Holy Spirit, is able to recognize that beauty proper to the Virgin who has already conceived the Son of God and bears him in her womb, that beauty of the Virgin who has placed herself in the hands of the Holy Spirit of God, of the love of God, in order to fulfil the mission God has entrusted to her. Mary was preserved from all sin, kept pure and spotless in order to carry out that mission.

Turning to the testimony of Blessed Friar John Duns Scotus, he says that Mary had to be preserved, that her redemption was preservative, because in order to be redeemed she did not have to be freed, but was preserved from sin. God deigned to keep her clean and pure so that she could be the Mother of his Son.

Mary is preserved as the Immaculate in order to be the Mother of Jesus, the Messiah. She is preserved and free from every stain of original sin from the first instant of her conception. Our Mother the Church believes this and considers it a most special grace of God, who prepared her to be the pure tabernacle that would receive the Son of God. Mary, our Mother, is preserved from all sin, kept immaculate to be the Mother of the Redeemer.

She was preserved from original sin because her unique mission was to be the Mother of Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah, the Saviour of the world. She was preserved by the merits of Jesus Christ. Her preservation from sin was not by her own merits, but by the future redemption of that same Jesus, who redeemed her in a special way, preserving her instead of freeing her from sin after it had been committed.

Mary is kept immaculate, preserved pure, to be a model of holiness. Thus she becomes for us the perfect model of that holiness which we are called to attain through divine help by the grace of God. And it is clear that this Immaculate Conception, this most special grace of the Virgin, is of divine origin.

To be immaculate is a unique gift of God's grace that allowed our Mother to respond perfectly to the divine will and to be full of grace.

Allow me today, dear reader, to invite us to focus on the beauty of our Mother the Virgin. Stop. Look at an image of the Virgin for which you have special affection, or bring it to your memory. Look into her eyes. Look at her features, her face.

All theologians and saints have been very devoted to Mary, and the references to her beauty and loveliness in every sense would be endless. By way of a small brushstroke, I will quote for you a few accounts from some saints who have described that beauty of the Virgin which you and I are called to discover in our own personal lives.

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Saint Ambrose wrote an excellent portrait of the beauty of the Virgin. He said to us: “There was nothing somber or harsh in her look, not the slightest hint of pride in her bearing or in her way of walking. Nothing immoderate in her words or in the tone of her voice. In all her movements there was something so sublime that, as she walked, she seemed not so much to tread upon the earth as to ascend with each step to a new rung of perfection.”

Saint Thomas of Villanova also expressed precisely another aspect of the beauty of Our Most Holy Mother: the pure and immaculate Virgin made virgins of those who beheld her. Hers was a virginity fruitful in virginities. How beautiful it would be to allow ourselves to be seen by that profound gaze that purifies us, by that gaze that makes us think, every time we draw near to sin, of the pain that her Immaculate Heart had to suffer.

Saint Bonaventure likewise defines the beauty of the Virgin, alluding to the teaching of his master Alexander of Hales. He says that the Blessed Virgin, by her mere appearance, quenched in those who saw her every impulse of concupiscence.

Saint Ambrose also says that “so great was her grace that she not only preserved in herself the flower of her virginity, but also inspired in all who came near her a love of chastity. Just as she visited Saint John the Baptist, it is not surprising that this blessed child remained pure in body, since the Mother of the Lord had embalmed him for three months with the oil of her presence and the perfume of her beauty.”

Saint John Damascene expanded on this same idea: “How shall I describe the beauty of your face, your sweet joy and kindly conversation that flows from a heart all goodness and all purity?”

And Saint Francis de Sales, the Doctor of Love, praised the beauty of the Virgin by calling her the Dawn of the Eternal Day. He said: “Yesterday I became aware of the happiness of being a son, though unworthy, of our glorious Mother, Star of the Sea, beautiful as the moon.”

Dear brother, dear sister listening to this novena, today I encourage you to seek that gaze, to discover that gaze, to ask God for the grace of being looked upon under the attentive gaze of our Mother the Virgin. In such a sexualized world, in a world where so many hearts suffer the sin of impurity in its various forms, how important it would be to allow ourselves to be consoled, embraced and cared for by that maternal gaze, by that special care of our Mother the Virgin.

To please her today, so as to be able to work in our day today, perhaps overwhelmed by that profound gaze of the Virgin, I encourage you to learn, like our Mother, to look at others as God looks at them: with a pure heart, with a simple heart, without demanding anything, without judging; so that you may speak well of everyone, excuse everyone, forgive everyone; and if you are not, or we are not, capable of doing so, at least be capable of keeping silent and praying for those who need it, praying for those who perhaps cause you suffering.

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Dear all, let us pray together this volunteer's prayer, once again asking the Lord to set our hearts on fire for service, as he did with our Mother the Virgin, giving us the very sentiments of his own Heart and filling us with that goodness and purity of heart of the Virgin Mary, who knew how to communicate, as a mother in the home of Nazareth, to her Son Jesus Christ:

Lord Jesus, you who have called us to stand ready upon the frontiers of service and love for all, make yourself present among us so that we too may always be present wherever the cry of a human being is heard; make us generous in our self-giving, timely in our efforts and effective in helping others, instruments of good wherever we are needed forever. We ask your help, you who are the ideal of our lives and who live and reign for ever and ever.

Amen.

Let us pray.

O God, who by the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary prepared a worthy dwelling for your Son, we beg you that, just as you preserved her from every stain by virtue of the foreseen death of this same your Son, so too may you grant us that, through her intercession, we may come into your presence free from every fault, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Lord be with you.

And may the blessing of almighty God:

the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, descend upon you, keep you, and accompany you always.

Amen.

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