



Novena to the Immaculate Conception 2026

Day 7: Refuge of Sinners

Good evening to all on this seventh day of the Novena to the Immaculate Conception, this seventh day, December 6th, on which we contemplate Mary as Refuge of Sinners.

I would like to apologize to all listeners for not having been able to send this audio earlier this morning, but I was in Zaragoza with parishioners from the parish, where we went, before the pillar of Our Mother the Virgin, precisely for this: to ask the Lord's forgiveness for our sins, to go to confession, receive Communion, and obtain the plenary indulgence in this Year of Hope.

Looking to Mary as the morning star, as a shining beacon that guides us along the way—sinners yet full of hope—we begin today's novena.

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.

O God, who sent your Son, the Word of salvation and heavenly Bread of life, from heaven to the womb of the Virgin Mary, grant that we may receive Christ as she did, keeping his words in our heart and celebrating his mysteries in faith.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Dear all, the Gospel text we contemplate today in the novena, from Luke 2:25–35, ends with some words of the aged Simeon to the Virgin Mary:

“Simeon blessed them—Saint Joseph and the Virgin—and said to Mary his mother: ‘This child is destined for the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign of contradiction, and a sword will pierce your own soul too, so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.’”

One edition of the Jerusalem Bible gives this passage the title “Mary, Co-Redemptrix with Christ.” Without entering into debates and disputes regarding the recent document issued by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, Mater Populi Dei, which restricts this traditional use in reference to Our Mother the Virgin, let us contemplate her pierced Heart precisely to see how she mediates between her Son Jesus Christ, God the Father, and humanity; how she is united to Christ's work of redemption, as the Second Vatican Council beautifully explains in that precious

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chapter 8 of *Lumen gentium*, where it presents Christ as the sole Redeemer and Mary as His Mother. Let us go further and see what implication that pierced Heart has in our lives.

Tradition has always contemplated Mary as Consolation of the Afflicted, Refuge of Sinners, highlighting her intercessory and compassionate dimension. Saint Ephrem, Saint Bernard, and Saint Alphonsus Maria de Liguori call her “refuge of the wretched” and “advocate of sinners.” How beautiful it is to recognize oneself, in the hands of the Virgin, as clumsy, perhaps miserable, and certainly a sinner, yet looked upon by the Lord.

“A sword will pierce your heart.” Mary’s “yes” is for us a source of hope, because we know that in her suffering, she also takes on our sin; in her sorrow she suffers for our sin, but knowing that she is called to be the Mother of God. She knows she must be our mother and, as a good mother, she accepts even that sacrifice, allowing her heart to be pierced. That is why, dear listener, dear brother, dear sister, it is so important that we be able to recognize ourselves as sinners while holding Mary’s hand.

A sinner, yes—but a saved sinner. A sinner, yes—but a loved sinner. I remember in the seminary there was a wall painting representing the Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Mercy, with the inscription *Redemptrix Captivorum*—Redeemer of Captives. How many times have we prayed in the litanies, “Mary, Refuge of Sinners, Comfort of the Afflicted, Help of Christians,” and now also “Comfort of Migrants”? How many times have we really turned to Our Mother seeking that consolation our soul needs? It is joyfully striking how insistent Jesus is in His constant call to sinners. The Son of Man has come to seek and save what was lost. It is not the healthy who need a physician, but the sick.

And here our Mother the Virgin plays a fundamental role. Mary’s mission is not to soften divine justice—God is always good and merciful, as today’s meditation text reminds us. Our Lady’s mission is to dispose our hearts so that we may receive the countless graces the Lord has prepared for us. “You seduced me, Lord, and I let myself be seduced.” This is the true captivity of the Christian heart. This is the true captivity Mary was willing to undergo for the redemption of humanity, so that we might be made children in the Son and be able to call ourselves children of God.

Saint Jerome recounts how, in a locution he experienced, he saw the Lord asking him for something. Today’s meditation text relates that the Lord asked him for everything he had, what was most precious to him. In an inner dialogue, Jerome tries to give the Lord all his wisdom and learning.

“It is not enough,” the Lord says to him. “Give me what is of greatest value for you.”

“I will give you my works, the concrete fruit of all that knowledge you have given me, Lord.”

“It is not enough,” says the Lord.

“I don’t know what else to give you, Lord,” Saint Jerome answers.

“Give me your sins.”

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Saint Alphonsus Maria de Liguori teaches that the principal task the Lord entrusted to our Mother, the Virgin, is to exercise mercy, and that Mary places all her prerogatives at the service of this mission. Mary is the one who gently moves us to recognize that the only thing that truly belongs to each of us is our sin. To you and to me, as in Saint Jerome's vision, He says: "Give me your sin, give me all that you have."

Mary had everything, because she had been preserved from sin; she could offer her heart entirely. But your heart and mine are attached to so many things, they suffer from so many things, bearing those lacks and limps that are part of life, and that is the only thing we can truly give the Lord. "Give it to me—give me your sin." Saint John Henry Newman says that we must never let the idea take root in our minds that God is a harsh and severe master.

The image of a harsh God can only be formed by someone who would behave in that way themselves—angry, hard, and cold toward whoever they feel has offended them for whatever reason. But God is not like that. God loves us more, seeks us more, and all the more the worse our situation is. That is how it is, my dear friend who is listening: the worse we are, the more we are sought by God our Lord.

What a paradox, as the recently proclaimed Doctor of the Church explains. The more horrible you see yourself, the more needy the Lord sees you—and the more beautiful you are in His eyes. Faced with the ugliness of sin, He knows the beauty with which He endowed you in Baptism. Mary, our Mother in the Upper Room, helps us remember this. Mary in the Upper Room, as with the apostles, the disciples, and the holy women, helps us recall that original beauty given to us in Baptism so that we may enjoy the blessedness of heaven.

How many captivities we have, don't we? Mary is Redeemer of Captives; Mary is Refuge of Sinners, Consoler of the Afflicted, and Help of Christians. A Christian is one who, under Mary's gaze, feels challenged to imitate her Son.

And that is our mission. That is why, during these days of the novena, Mary is set before us as a model of self-giving, generosity, fidelity, courage, and boldness. Holy Mary, our Hope, look upon us with compassion, teach us to go continually to Jesus, and if we fall, help us as a Mother to rise again and return to Him by confessing our faults and sins.

That is what this sacrament is for—the sacrament to which He calls us. I must tell you that it has been truly beautiful to bring these parishioners to the Pilar, to that basilica of Our Lady of the Pillar, to the feet of Holy Mary, our Mother, to place all of you there alongside these parish children and be able to rest at the Virgin's feet.

Our Patron, the Apostle James, weary of the hardness and stubbornness of the Spaniards, was on the verge of giving up. "Where are you going, James?" James clings to the pillar of the Virgin to fulfill the mission that had been entrusted to him.

Today, cling to her pillar, to the pillar of our Mother, so that you may go on walking. If you are prostrate, do not focus on your prostration; cling to the pillar to rise and begin to walk. If you

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have stumbled, hold on to the pillar of the Virgin so you can stand up and continue along the path of salvation.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church says in paragraph 969: “This motherhood of Mary in the order of grace continues uninterruptedly from the consent which she loyally gave at the Annunciation and which she sustained without wavering beneath the cross, until the eternal fulfillment of all the elect. Taken up to heaven, she did not lay aside this saving office but by her manifold intercession continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation. Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked in the Church under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix.”

What peace it gives us, our Mother, to know that you sit beside your Son Jesus and say to Him: “Look at this son of yours, look at this daughter of yours; help them, come to their aid, look at what is happening to them, look at the state of their heart.” Let yourself be cared for by Mary.

I encourage you today, in the hours that remain, to prepare to look at yourself as a sinner. Stop and recognize yourself as a sinner. Look at Mary, your Mother, and allow yourself to be looked at by her in your sin.

Approach the sacrament of confession as soon as you reasonably can. Perhaps it has been a long time since you last did so. Take special care with sacramental Communion. For whatever reason, perhaps you do have the habit of going to confession—then take special care with sacramental Communion. Try to make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, and if you cannot, foster spiritual communion.

We finish, dear all, with the Volunteer’s Prayer, asking the Lord truly to place us in the midst of the world as a source of hope, as Mary is for each one of us:

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.

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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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