

Autumn 2024

# THE GOLDEN THREAD



THE IMMACULATE TODAY



AVE  
MARIA

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Forms for the Franciscan Mass Association, and for all Novenas can be found at the following website: [www.thegreyfriars.org](http://www.thegreyfriars.org)

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*Franciscan Mass Association,  
Redclyffe Road,  
Urmston,  
Manchester,  
M41 7LG.*

My dear friends,

All Peace & Good!

It has been a while! The last edition of *The Golden Thread* to be published was the Winter 2023–4 issue. The reason for this hiatus lies in the fact that, since the Spring of 2024, I have been very much involved in helping to develop our Conventual Franciscan Marian Apostolate, and this has developed in ways that I could never have foreseen or imagined. Since the publishing of previous edition of *The Golden Thread*, I have become the 'Special Delegate of the Militia of the Immaculata in Great Britain & Ireland'.

A little background might be helpful here. The Militia of the Immaculata (M.I.) was founded, in Rome, on 16th October 1917, by Saint Maximilian Maria Kolbe, OFM Conv. (along with six of his Conventual Franciscan confreres). Today, the M.I. is an approved International Public Association of the Faithful (under the Dicastery for the Laity, the Family and Life) with its own General Statutes approved by the Church (most recently, in 2015). The M.I. is open to all Catholic laity, clerics and to consecrated persons. The giving of oneself completely to Mary Immaculate in the spirit of the M.I. is a conscious and dynamic commitment to follow Christ after the example of Mary, and by so doing, to grow in faith, hope and charity in such a way as to put oneself – entirely and without reserve – at the service of Christ's salvific mission. Every true Marian movement and devotion has, at its heart and ever before its eyes, the burning desire to bring all people to the knowledge and love of Christ.

I have been charged with helping to establish the M.I. in Great Britain and Ireland. To this end – and with the help of many wonderful and dedicated people – a new website has been developed and launched ([www.militiaoftheimmaculata.co.uk](http://www.militiaoftheimmaculata.co.uk)), an enrolment record inaugurated, and certificates and literature produced. For around six months now, I have been busy enrolling scores of new members. This has been a tremendously exciting time, and has required a huge investment of prayer, time and hard work. I am hugely grateful to everyone who keeps myself, the friars and all our friends and benefactors in their prayers. For those who wish to read more about the Militia of the Immaculata and for those who might consider enrolling as a member, I have reserved the final few pages of this edition of *The Golden Thread* to present information regarding the M.I.

As special delegate of the M.I. in Great Britain and Ireland, it is my responsibility to look at ways of providing the M.I. Apostolate with resources that are directed towards its mission. As such, this is the last edition of *The Golden Thread* online magazine. From henceforth my efforts will be directed at producing an M.I. newsletter. Its purpose will be to keep the members of the M.I. informed about the Apostolate, and will also contain some Marian reflections. The newsletter will be available on the M.I. website ([www.militiaoftheimmaculata.co.uk](http://www.militiaoftheimmaculata.co.uk)).

Fr Gerard Mary Toman, OFM Conv.

## Belonging

‘Most High, all-powerful, good Lord,  
Yours are the praises, the glory, and the honour, and all blessing,  
To You alone, Most High, do they belong,  
and no human is worthy to mention Your name.’

St Francis of Assisi: *Canticle of the Creatures*, §1

It is with great joy that I present this final issue of *The Golden Thread* – on the important theme of *belonging*. To know that one truly *belongs*, is a fundamental human need; knowing that one *is loved* and that one *belongs* allows for a person to feel strengthened, affirmed, encouraged and protected. For us Christians, there can be the risk that we take our ‘belonging’ for granted: *in Christ*, we belong to the Triune God of Love, and *through Christ* we belong to one another in His Mystical Body, the Church.

‘Discipleship is our essential vocation as Christians. Belonging to Jesus, loving Him, learning from Him and responding to Him in love are what give meaning to our lives. Discipleship gives us a sense of identity as members of the church, as having a mission in life.’

D. Marmion, SM, M. J. Mullaney & S. Ryan (eds), *Models of Priestly Formation*

‘Intimate communion of personal love and life with Christ means that all who cling to Christ also belong to one another, just as one member of our physical body forms a part of the others’.

Edith Stein / St Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, OCD, Martyr, *The woman as a guide in the Church*, 1932

However, the redeeming power of this fundamental truth of our Christian faith can easily be sidelined, and its salvific reach can so easily be overlooked. There are Christian marriages in which spouses no longer feel that *reciprocal belonging* to one another in Christ (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:5; Mk. 10:8; Eph. 5:31). The same is true, unfortunately, in religious life. There are some consecrated persons who, though they remain canonically within a given religious institute, have long stopped feeling like they belong; they have lost the joy of *belonging to Christ* within the wider framework of consecrated charity and fraternity. More broadly still, whenever the Church finds herself wounded by internal divisions (especially acrimonious theological, liturgical or pastoral disputes), members of the warring parties can begin to feel like they no longer belong within the wider, universal Church. In such situations, as the intrinsic desire ‘to belong’ doesn’t subside, this longing often drives people to wander away from full-communion with the body of Christ, seeking an affirmation and identity within groups that ultimately can only limit and wound them.

In my role as Rector of our House of Studies in Oxford, I am always looking for ways in which I can better guide, encourage, affirm and support the men

whom God has entrusted to our Order, and concerning whom, we have the responsibility to form properly: as Christians, as Franciscans, and as men. I eagerly read literature which can help the friars to both build and maintain an environment in which the healthy, rounded, Catholic formation of men can take place. In one such book that I was recently reading, I made a note of the following:

‘The human person is a social being, made for community. No virtue can be developed in man without a community in which those virtues can be lived out. Some sense of belonging to a real, concrete, tangible community must be present for a Human Formation program to be effective’.

Cameron Thompson, *Handbook of Human Formation*, 2014

In other words, all of us have a human need to be part of a healthy ‘community’; we need to belong to something bigger than ourselves if we are to flourish as God has called us to, and if we are to come to the redeeming knowledge of the fact that, in God’s eyes, while we walk this earth, we are never orphans or beyond His Fatherly offer of grace and mercy.

For consecrated religious, our primary experience and expression of ‘community’ is the common-life: shared prayers, shared meals, shared ministry, shared struggles, shared joys, shared fraternal time. For many of Christ’s faithful, the ‘community’ which they experience most intimately and often is that of family life. There are many other ‘communities’ that Christians enjoy and draw strength and encouragement from: parish life, apostolates (i.e. the Militia of the Immaculata or St Vincent de Paul Society) and even such things as book clubs, sports teams and knitting groups. When we know that we *belong* to Christ – the Tree of Life – we can branch out (or spread roots!) throughout the whole of society, helping to sanctify and claim for Our Lord our families, our workplaces and our social clubs. If our lives are aflame with the Holy Spirit, if we rejoice in belonging to Christ, then in all of the other communities of which we are members, we can help draw people to the deepest and most fulfilling sense of belonging possible – that of belonging to God, and in light of this, belonging to all those who belong to Him.

The hugely important role that a ‘sense of belonging’ plays in helping people to live healthy, fruitful, fulfilled lives is something that now garners increasing attention in the secular world. While recently reading a textbook (*Psychopathology and Psychotherapy*), I took note that the phrase ‘sense of belonging’ was referenced fifteen times. The book explored several perspectives including one which held that ‘to belong’ is a basic human motivation, and that many problems encountered by people in their daily lives can often be understood as being the result of one of two realities, either:

1. of not experiencing a sense of belonging, *or*
2. as a result of experiencing unhealthy ways of belonging.

While reading another textbook, I made a note of the following observation,

‘belonging is essential for our psychological and physical health and can play a role in the way we think and interact with the world. The way we engage with others is central to our humanity.’

Kelly-Ann Allen, *The Psychology of Belonging*, 2020

Such literature underlines the links that often stretch between one’s sense of belonging (or not) and one’s experience of loneliness, isolation or depression. At this point, our minds, hearts and prayers go out to all the people who, for whatever reason or circumstance, no longer feel that they belong. As we thank God for the many blessings and gifts we have received from His Fatherly hands, it does us good to remember that none of us are a product of himself or herself alone:

‘most of us have economic and civic ties; we have familial and social networks that protect us from anonymity and powerlessness. Even if family and home are less sturdy today than in the past, we have multiple relationships which give us some places of connection or belonging’.

Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*, 1999

As Christians, simply seeking for close proximity with Our Lord, in and of itself, is not enough. This has nothing to do with any insufficiency in God (which is not possible), but rather is rooted in the Good News Himself. Christ has taught us to imitate Him, and Jesus never lived only for Himself, but came to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many (Cf. Matt. 20:28; Mk. 10:45; Jn. 13:1–17). As Jesus looked for the lost sheep, so must we. As Jesus sought out those who were judged not to belong (be they ‘unclean’ Jews or pagans barred from approaching the God of Israel), so must we. So, therefore, as we want to throw both arms around Christ we should do so. However, while keeping one arm around Our Lord, we should then use our other arm to bring another person to Him. This is what it means to belong to God, namely, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our strength and with all our mind, and to love our neighbour as ourself (Cf. Matt. 22:37–38; Mk. 12:28–34; Lk. 10:27).

The aim of this edition of *The Golden Thread* is to provide, albeit in a simple and summarised manner, the Christian perspective on ‘belonging’: to Whom do we belong and why does this make all the difference? To conclude, attention will be given to outlining how it is that Marian consecration allows us to better appreciate what it means to belong to Christ. Here, the writings of St Maximilian Kolbe will be used to help clarify and deepen our understanding of what it means ‘to belong’ to the Immaculata through our making a Total Consecration of oneself to her.

## Belonging: Sacred Scripture

To those who seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness, He [Christ] has promised to give all else besides. Since *everything indeed belongs to God*, he who possesses God wants for nothing, if he himself is not found wanting before God’.

St Cyprian, Treatise on the Lord’s Prayer, §21

‘all that is good belongs to God’

Pope Francis: Angelus address, 13 June 2021

The Book of Genesis teaches us how God is the Creator of everything that exists, and that everything God made was, in the beginning, ‘good’ (Cf. Genesis 1). Throughout the word of God, as written down, one finds the truth that everything good belongs to God.

- ‘Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it’ (Deut. 10:14).
- ‘Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is thine’ (1 Chron. 29:11).
- ‘Who then is he that can stand before Me? Who has given to Me, that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is Mine’ (Job. 41:10–11).
- ‘The earth is the Lord’s and the fulness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein’ (Ps. 24:1).

Interestingly, after the new fire has been blessed during the Easter Vigil, and when the priest is gently cutting a cross into the new paschal candle with a stylus, the fifth thing the priest announces is: ‘All time belongs to Him [Christ]’ (*Roman Missal*, p.345).

In creating the material universe, God made only one creature in His image and likeness – man (male and female, Cf. Gen. 1:26–27). Being the only creature on earth to be willed into existence, by God, for its own sake (cf. Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, §24.3) man can be said to belong to God in a unique and intimate manner. From the beginning, God invited men into communion with Himself and, through the unifying power of this love, into communion with one another. Having been willed into creation by God, having been blessed by God with the capacity both *to know* and *to love*, men and women possess an intrinsic dignity that surpasses that of all other earthly creatures:

‘the [human] person is . . . a possession of God. He belongs to God . . . in this belonging to God-the-Creator . . . the human person possesses himself and determines himself.’

Karol Wojtyła / Pope St John Paul II, *Love and Responsibility*, 1960

However, the Book of Genesis (Gen. 3) also teaches us that, after Adam and Eve had sinned (in disobeying God through eating of the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil), death and difficulty entered the world. With the Fall of Adam, there is now something which certainly doesn't belong to God – and was never of His making – namely, sin, and the decay and death (both material and spiritual) that have arisen through it.

In the beginning, Adam and Eve had belonged entirely to God; after sinning, they had chosen to belong to the devil instead. Ever since, the sin of mankind's first parent has affected all of humanity which has subsequently laboured under the weight and effects of Original Sin. All humanity, that is, except the Blessed Virgin Mary and her Divine Son, Jesus Christ.

'the Most Holy Virgin, Mother of God, through prevision of the merits of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, had never been subjected to Original Sin, but had been entirely preserved from the stain with which we are all born.'

Pope Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*, Apostolic Constitution defining the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, §7

In fidelity to the express words and commands of Our Lord and Saviour, the Catholic Church has always taught that the Sacrament of Baptism is necessary for salvation. Why? It is because 'Baptism, by imparting the life of Christ's grace, erases Original Sin and turns a man back towards God' (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, CCC. §405). However, even in the baptised, many of the consequences of Original Sin still afflict our fragile human nature (which remains weakened and inclined towards evil). However, if the baptised – aided by God's grace – remain in God's friendship, they no longer belong to the devil, but to God.

'We do not belong to ourselves, but, as the Apostle says, are entirely His [Christ's], as His members and His slaves, whom He has bought at an infinitely dear price – the price of all His Blood. Before Baptism we belonged to the devil, as his slaves; but Baptism has made us true slaves of Jesus Christ, who have no right to live, to work, or to die, except to bring forth fruit for that God-Man, to glorify Him in our bodies, and to let Him reign in our souls, because we are His conquest, His acquired people, and His inheritance.'

St Louis Marie de Montfort, *True Devotion to Mary*, §68

Before we look at the sacred writings of the New Testament, it should be noted that, in the original Greek, no single verb straightforwardly corresponds to the English verb 'to belong'. Instead, several Greek verbs – when conjugated within a given context – can render a similar understanding to our notion of the verb. In other instances, noun cases and declensions indicate what pertains to what, and who belongs to whom. This is important because, depending on which English translation the reader uses, one might find their



scriptural text slightly different to the text presented in this edition of *The Golden Thread* (i.e. The Revised Standard Edition: Second Catholic Edition, Ignatius Press, 2002).

In John's Gospel (Jn. 3:30–31), we find John the Baptist saying the following:

'He [Christ] must increase, but I must decrease. He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth *belongs* to the earth, and of the earth he speaks; He who comes from heaven is above all.'

The Baptist's words here ' . . . he who is of the earth *belongs* to the earth . . . ' are the inspired words of God, Who is speaking through the voice of His greatest Prophet to reiterate a profound truth, namely, that without Christ, without His saving grace won for us on the cross, humanity can have no claim on Heaven and can harbour no hope of eternal life with God. Again, in the Book of Genesis (Gen. 3:17–19), after Adam had sinned, God outlined, to Adam directly, the consequences of his sin:

'cursed is the ground because of you . . . in the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return'.

Fallen man, left to himself and unaided by divine help, *belongs* to this fallen world. This is a truth we must never disregard or forget; it should fill each of us with a desire to bring all people to Christ, to proclaim the necessity of baptism for salvation and to ensure that everyone we meet comes to the knowledge that Christ died for all (cf. 2 Cor. 5:14–15) so that all may come, through Him, to belong to God as His adopted children.

Later in John's Gospel (Jn. 10:26–30) we hear Jesus speak the following to a group of hard-hearted Jews who were questioning Him, without desiring to accept what He was teaching:

'Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.'"

Those who have received the saving waters of baptism and who, aided by God's grace, have not obstinately refused Christ's invitation to communion and conversion of life, are members of His flock: we *belong* to Christ. Indeed, we belong to Christ – first and foremost – because Christ has received His flock from God His Father. Here, the words of the Solemn Intercessions on Good Friday for Christian Unity are particularly poignant (*Roman Missal*):

Almighty ever-living God,  
who gather what is scattered  
and keep together what you have gathered,  
look kindly on the flock of your Son,  
that those whom one Baptism has consecrated  
may be joined together by integrity of faith  
and united in the bond of charity.  
Through Christ our Lord.

## St Paul

Several New Testament writings of St Paul contain particular reflections on the spiritual significance of ‘belonging’.

Written in around 57AD, St Paul’s *First Letter to the Corinthians* aimed at addressing various disputes that had arisen within the early-Christian community in Corinth – a city steeped in pagan Greek and Roman culture; a lack of reverence, abuses, laxity and unchaste behaviour had all been brought to Paul’s attention. The Apostle wanted to correct these matters within the wider context of faith in Christ. To address the cracks of division that had arisen with the Church community, Paul wrote (1 Cor. 1:12–13):

‘For it has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there is quarrelling among you, my brethren. What I mean is that each one of you says, “I belong to Paul,” or “I belong to Apollos,” or “I belong to Cephas,” or “I belong to Christ.” Is Christ divided?’

Here St Paul is highlighting how it is that, in our lives of faith, a misunderstanding regarding our sense of belonging can have significant adverse consequences. It is Christ Who is the head of the Church, and we belong to Him. It is only *in* and *through* Jesus that we, as His followers, can be said to belong to one another.

In his *Letter to the Romans* (written several years later), St Paul aimed at fostering a sincere unity of love between Christians of different backgrounds (both Jewish and Gentile). Paul reminds the diverse Church in Rome that, as everyone needs Christ, it is Christ Who defines and unifies His flock. In this epistle the Apostle acknowledges that, regarding the Israelites (Rom. 9:4–5),

‘to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all.’

But St Paul, even from his epistle’s opening salutation, makes it clear that belonging to Jesus goes radically beyond sharing a cultural or hereditary association with Our Lord. Instead, Jesus invites people to share in His Divine life, and to become, in Him, a new people of God (Rom. 1:4–6):

‘Jesus Christ our Lord, through Whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of His name among all the nations, including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.’

Here, St Paul is reminding the faithful that, as Christians, we don't simply profess a name/identity with a group. Instead, we *belong* to Jesus through having a share in His Spirit, for ‘anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him’ (Rom. 8:9). Our belonging to Christ, then, cannot be understood in a strictly personal sense. Using an analogy drawn from marriage, the Apostle highlights how (Rom.7:4):

‘my brethren, you have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to Him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God.’

The baptised, therefore, do not belong to Jesus in a limited or restrictive sense. Rather, it is through belonging to Christ that we belong to one another. As living and unified members of His body, the Church, Christ uses the mutual love and reciprocity that exists among His followers to help bring about His plan of salvation for all.

‘An integrated and self-realised person is one who has internalised the attitude of poverty, which is that all things belong to God and find meaning in Christ.’

Sr Jennifer Slater, OP, *A Theological Anthropology of Self-Realisation*, 2011

## **Belonging: The Church**

One of the desires of the Council Fathers at Vatican II (Second Vatican Council, 1962–65) was to seek to rediscover within the Church – and promote afresh among Christ's faithful – the peerless importance of the Sacrament of Baptism as a consecrating and saving action which:

- forms the likeness of Christ in the baptised person,
- seals the baptised person as belonging to Christ and makes of them a partaker in His kingly priesthood,
- makes the baptised person a child of God and a sharer in the divine nature,
- makes the baptised person one with the body of Christ, incorporating them into the Church and thus constituting them among the People of God,
- allows the baptised person to die to sin, saving them from slavery of the devil and his errors,
- helps in commissioning the baptised person to evangelise the world
- opens the doors of salvation to the baptised person.

All the baptised, therefore, must realise their dignity, in Christ – each belongs, firstly to God, and through Christ, to one another in His Body. Although there exists, within the Church, by God’s design, different gifts, diverse vocations, different ranks, varying degrees of participation in the one priesthood of Christ, nevertheless, *all* the baptised belong – equally – within the body of Christ. The baptised are all called, each in the manner proper to them, to help sanctify the world, and each has received an equal privilege of faith through the justice of God. Therefore, in both the dignity *and* in the activity common to all the faithful for the building up of the Church, all the baptised share a true equality.

*Lumen Gentium* (LG) – Vatican II’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Church – describes how (LG. §13.1):

‘All men are called to belong to the new people of God. Wherefore this people, while remaining one and only one, is to be spread throughout the whole world and must exist in all ages, so that the decree of God’s will may be fulfilled.’

We are reminded, here, that belonging to Christ isn’t like belonging to a private club or being a member of an exclusive clique; Church membership – thank goodness – isn’t limited to those who might look and sound like us, or to those whose company we prefer. God, instead, wills that every single person embrace and accept Christ as mankind’s only Saviour and Redeemer. Jesus Himself commanded His Apostles to (Matt. 28:19–20):

‘Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.’

As the Catechism teaches us, becoming a disciple of Jesus means ‘accepting the invitation to belong to God’s family, to live in conformity with His way of life’ (CCC. 2233).

Pope [St] Paul VI gave the closing speech at the Second Vatican Council on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception (8 December 1965). Later, in his Christmas message for that same year, reflecting on the theme of ‘belonging’, the Pontiff described how:

‘The dominant mood of the Council was inspired by the gospel image of the shepherd setting out in pursuit of the lost sheep, allowing himself no peace until he has found it. The awareness that mankind, represented with touching simplicity by the straying sheep, belongs to the Church was the guiding principle of the Council. For mankind, by a universally valid decree, does belong to the Church . . . mankind belongs to her by right of love, since the Church, no matter how distant or uncooperative or hostile mankind may be, can never be excused from loving the human race for which Christ shed His blood.’

Walter M. Abbott, SJ (ed.), *The Documents of Vatican II*, 1966

Pope Francis has made many observations on the theme of belonging. To ensure that this edition of *The Golden Thread* does not become too lengthy, focus will be placed on just two of the Pope's observations; these have been selected because they help to provide a careful balance.

The first example is taken from a homily Pope Francis delivered during Holy Mass in the Chapel of his Vatican residence (Domus Sanctae Marthae). In the homily, which has now been titled '*Being Christian means belonging to the People of God*', Francis preached the following:

'Christianity is *belonging* to a people, a people chosen by God, freely. If we do not have this consciousness of belonging to a people, we will be ideological Christians . . . if we do not have a consciousness of belonging to a people, we are not true Christians . . . The sense of being elite is what does us so much harm, and we lose that sense of belonging to the holy, faithful People of God . . . A self-styled Christian who does not have this sense is not a true Christian; he is a bit particular and feels justified without the people . . . If someone were to ask me: "What do you think is the way Christians deviate today and always? What do you think is the most dangerous deviation Christians can make?", I would say without a doubt: the lack of memory of belonging to a people. When this is lacking, there is dogmatism, being moralistic, ethnicism and elitist movements.'

Pope Francis, *Homily*, 7 May 2020

In this homily, Pope Francis is underlining a very important aspect of what 'belonging' means from the Christian perspective. If we, as followers of Christ, don't see ourselves – through Him, with Him and in Him – as *belonging to one another* as God's People, then we are living a life untethered to everything that gives it meaning. A separatist inclination is incompatible with the unity that God calls His People to, and it is utterly foreign to the true meaning of discipleship in the Lord, Who beseeched us to 'love one another; even as I have loved you . . . By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another' (Jn. 13:34–35). There is, therefore, no political cause, no liturgical preference, no charism or devotion that can justify us separating ourselves, to any degree, from the rest of Christ's Body, the Church. The flock of Jesus is one flock, and there is no pasture that can compare with the one that the Lord has prepared for those who belong to Him and that, through His body the Church, belong to one another.

The second example of Pope Francis reflecting on the theme of 'belonging' is also taken from a homily he gave, this time during Holy Mass on the Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God. Here, Francis taught the following:

'Where there is a mother, there is unity, there is belonging, belonging as children. To begin the year by recalling God's goodness in the maternal face of Mary, in the maternal face of the Church, in the faces of our own

mothers, protects us from the corrosive disease of being “spiritual orphans”. It is the sense of being orphaned that the soul experiences when it feels motherless and lacking the tenderness of God, when the sense of belonging to a family, a people, a land, to our God, grows dim . . . Celebrating the feast of the Holy Mother of God makes us smile once more as we realise that we are a people, that we belong, that only within a community, within a family, can we as persons find the “climate”, the “warmth” that enables us to grow in humanity, and not merely as objects meant to “consume and be consumed”. To celebrate the feast of the Holy Mother of God reminds us that we are not interchangeable items of merchandise or information processors. We are children, we are family, we are God’s People.’

Pope Francis, *Homily*, 1 January 2017

Elevated by this wonderful Marian reflection on the theme of ‘belonging’, we turn now to the writings of St Maximilian Kolbe.

### **Kolbe: Belonging to the Immaculata**

As a Conventual Franciscan friar, priest and missionary, St Maximilian Kolbe was always looking for ways to better help explain, to God’s People, the wonders and joys of having a mother in Our Lady. He promoted Total Consecration to Our Lady as the surest and most perfect way of ‘belonging’ to the Immaculata. His reasoning was this:

1. we desire perfect union with God,
2. Mary Immaculate is the creature closest to God,
3. If we belong to Mary, as she belongs entirely to God, we also will belong entirely to God.

Let’s see what St Maximilian writes about this:

‘What is unlimited love for the Immaculata? She is the closest to God, while we are the closest to her, and therefore, through her, to God Himself. God gave us this white stairway and wants us to reach Him by climbing it. Or rather He wants her to take us up to Him as she holds us close to her motherly breast. These, however, are nothing but images, similes, analogies. The reality is incomparably more beautiful, more sublime, divine . . . She is Mother to us and . . . to God. Where, then, is her place? And ours as well? Of us who are her possessions, her property! Also, she penetrates our soul and directs its faculty with unlimited power. We truly belong to her therefore, we are always and everywhere with her.’

461: *Writings*, Oct. 1932

‘the more one belongs to the Immaculata, the more openly and freely one can approach the wounds of the Savior, the Eucharist, the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, and God the Father.’

603: *Writings*, Nov. 1934

‘Let us deepen our belonging to the Immaculata more every day and, in her and through her, to Jesus and to God, but not next to her. We do not serve God the Father, Jesus, and the Immaculata separately, but God in and through Jesus, Jesus, in the Immaculata and through the Immaculata. That is, we serve the Immaculata in a direct, unlimited and exclusive manner. But with her, in her, and through her we serve Jesus, and with Him, in Him, and through Him God the Father.’

634: *Writings*, July 1935

As the above reflections make clear, for Kolbe, the rationale and implications of consecrating oneself to the Blessed Virgin went far beyond what might be termed a type of static/logistical dynamic (i.e. nearness to God, proximity to perfection); choosing to belong to Mary is always a choice of the will to seek for a loving relationship – a union of heart and of soul. By consecrating ourselves to the Immaculata we *belong to her* and as such, the Blessed Virgin can use our gifts, strengths and energies most powerfully for the building up of the Kingdom of God. As Kolbe writes,

‘She alone can do with us what she likes, because we belong to her completely.’

469: *Writings*, Dec. 1932

‘The more we belong to the Immaculata, the more perfectly we will love and understand the Heart of Jesus, God the Father, and the whole Most Holy Trinity.’

605: *Writings*, Nov. 1934

For Kolbe, the choice to consecrate oneself to Mary is both a profoundly intimate/personal decision of the will (with enormous implications for one’s own soul and vocation) yet also it is a decision which has a corporate/evangelical thrust. We consecrate ourselves to the Immaculate so that we belong to her; in belonging to her, the Blessed Virgin not only works on us to instruct and perfect us, but also uses us to preach Christ to all people.

‘Neither through affliction nor through sadness, but always with joy will we draw others more to the Immaculata, not so much with words, but rather with our life, since we are the possession and property of the Immaculata; we are M.I. How could one ever be sad if one belongs to her? That does not mean we may never stumble, but if we do stumble, we must behave like knights of the Immaculata and never lose courage.’

609: *Writings*, Dec. 1934

This final edition of *The Golden Thread* on the theme of belonging ends with a review of the Militia of the Immaculata (M.I.). If you feel drawn to making your Total Consecration to Mary Immaculate and if are interested in enrolling in the M.I. please don't hesitate to get in touch at:

[contact@militiaoftheimmaculata.co.uk](mailto:contact@militiaoftheimmaculata.co.uk)



## **Militia of the Immaculata (M.I.)**

‘the essence of the M.I. lies in the unlimited consecration to the Immaculata. We are to be her servants, children, slaves . . . In a word, we must belong to her in every respect, must be hers as closely and as perfectly as possible, be somehow the same as herself. But he who loves the Immaculata selflessly, who loves her not for himself, but for her only, cannot be content merely to love her. Rather, he will make sure that others love her as well, that they also may belong to her in every respect, become her own just as he is hers, or even more fully . . . That is why the essence of the M.I. is to belong to her in every respect.’

St Maximilian Kolbe, 634: *Writings*, July 1935

The M.I. was founded, in Rome, on 16 October 1917, by Saint Maximilian Kolbe, OFM Conv. and his six of his Conventual Franciscan confreres. Today, the M.I. is an approved International Public Association of the Faithful (under the Dicastery for the Laity, the Family and Life) with its own General Statutes approved by the Church (most recently, in 2015). The M.I. is open to the laity, clerics and to consecrated persons. The giving of oneself completely to the Immaculata in the spirit of the M.I. is a conscious and dynamic commitment to follow Christ after the example of Mary, and by so doing, to grow in faith, hope and charity in such a way as to put oneself – entirely and without reserve – at the service of Christ’s salvific mission.

### **The Mission of the M.I.**

The M.I. was defined by St Maximilian Kolbe as ‘a global vision of Catholic life in a new form, consisting in the bond with the Immaculata, our universal Mediatrix before Jesus’ (1220: *Writings*, Dec. 1937). The M.I. aims to promote the extension of the Reign of Christ in the world through the action of the Immaculata, encouraging all Christians to unite themselves to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and to place themselves at her service in the mission that she has as Mother of the Church. The members of the M.I. make the mission of the Church their own. The specific feature of the M.I. consists in living the Church’s mission of evangelising the world through the Gospel of Christ, and to do so in the hands of Mary and after her immaculate and perfect example.

### **Commitment in our life**

To be consecrated to the Blessed Virgin Mary without limit, to daily renew our consecration to the Immaculata with refreshed zeal and to participate in the M.I.’s mission in the Church and the world.

## **The M.I.: Three fronts of action**

There are three fronts of action for the members of the Militia of the Immaculata:

1. oneself
2. one's surroundings
3. the world.

The mission of the person who chooses to belong to the M.I. begins by them cooperating with the grace of God in order to embrace conversion of one's own life and the seeking of personal sanctification. From there, their mission ever widens until they seek to embrace every person and the entire world.

## **How to enrol in the M.I.**

After sufficient preparation, one may recite of the act of consecration, receive the Miraculous Medal and enrol in the M.I. The name of the new member is then inscribed in the register of the M.I. Association.

*Membership of the M.I. is open to anyone who:*

1. is a baptised member of the Catholic Church
2. has reached the age of reason (aged seven or older)
3. is willing and prepared to give themselves completely to Mary Immaculate: body and soul, human abilities and spiritual gifts.

*Practical steps*

1. Select a date on which you would like to make your *Total Consecration* to the Immaculata. This date will also be one *Enrolment Date* (i.e. the date on which one's name will be recorded in the official register of the M.I.) The date chosen should, preferably, be a Marian feast day.
2. Prepare properly to make the Total Consecration. In order to prepare oneself for the Consecration to Mary, one should pray the Rosary daily and engage in spiritual reading. There are a variety of resources available from the M.I. to ensure proper *spiritual preparation* has taken place before one's Total Consecration. Shortly before a person makes their Total Consecration, it is strongly encouraged that he or she makes a sincere and well-prepared for Sacramental Confession.
3. Marian Consecration. If at all possible, on the day of one's Total Consecration to the Immaculata (and M.I. Enrolment), one should strive to attend Holy Mass and to receive Our Blessed Lord in the Holy Eucharist. For the consecration itself, one should recite the Official Act of Consecration composed by St Maximilian Kolbe. One should give oneself wholeheartedly to Our Lady so as to let her Mystical Spouse – the Holy Spirit – guide one on the path to holiness with her. On this day, one should implore Our Lady and St Maximilian to show one how one may serve the Lord as an instrument of His Divine Love and Mercy in one's life. From this day forward, one should be ready to share with everyone the gift one has received through having totally consecrated oneself to the Immaculata.

Subject to the usual conditions (see below: Plenary Indulgences for Members of the M.I.), a plenary indulgence is granted by the Church for enrolment in the M.I. This special gift was bestowed on the M.I. by Pope Pius XI in 1926.

### **Spiritual benefits of enrolment in the M.I.**

Belonging – entirely and completely – to Mary Immaculate is the spiritual benefit of making a Total Consecration of oneself to her, and of enrolling in the M.I. By enrolling in the M.I., one joins an International Public Association of the Faithful whose sole purpose and mission consists in collaborating in the conversion and sanctification of all mankind, under the maternal reign of Mary, and thus helping to obtain, the greatest glory of the Most Holy and Undivided Trinity. Belonging to the M.I. means to give oneself completely to the Immaculata: body and soul, human abilities and spiritual gifts. Can anything be more wonderful than to love Jesus with the heart of Mary? Can there be any spiritual benefit more beautiful and profound than entrusting oneself entirely to the Mother of God, and so belonging to her completely?

### **Plenary indulgences for members of the M.I.**

Members of the M.I. can also receive plenary indulgences on the following dates:

- the anniversary of one's M.I. enrolment
- 11 February
- 25 March
- 13 May
- 15 August
- 4 October
- 16 October
- 27 November

following the usual conditions: complete detachment from sin, sacramental confession, reception of Holy Communion, and prayers for the Holy Father. Although prayers for the Pope's intentions are left to the choice of the faithful, an 'Our Father', 'Hail Mary' and 'Glory be' are suggested. These indulgences were granted to the M.I. by the Apostolic Penitentiary by means of a Decree dated 24 October 1967.

### **Knights at the Foot of the Cross**

Persons who suffer ('Knights at the Foot of the Cross') constitute a significant presence in the M.I. and therefore are an important area of M.I. apostolate. Their consecration to the Immaculata, by offering up their own sufferings, makes the entire Association a participant in the redemptive mystery of Christ and renews its missionary thrust.

## Daily observance

M.I. members daily renew their Total Consecration to the Immaculata, and they also pray the following prayer: 'O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you, and for all those who do not have recourse to you, especially the enemies of holy Church, and all those recommended to you', together with the intentions suggested monthly by the International Centre. As a sign of their own belonging to the M.I. members wear their *Miraculous Medal* with faith (cf. Kolbe, 21: *Writings*) and pray a daily Rosary.

## Holiness, prayer and sacrifice

The M.I. affirms the pre-eminence of the interior life, according to the mind of St Maximilian Kolbe: 'First of all, be dedicated completely to your own spiritual life, so that you may give yourself completely to all . . . by way of overabundance' (cf. Kolbe, 971, 980: *Writings*). Always and everywhere, all members of the M.I. are aware of being missionaries. They are such in the measure in which they live their union with Christ the Redeemer after the example of Mary. In recognising that the true missionary is one committed to the way of holiness, they give primacy of place to the evangelical means of prayer, sacrifice and the witness of their life. They also take it upon themselves to distribute the Miraculous Medal, which St Maximilian Kolbe strongly recommended as a sign of Mary's maternal concern for each human being.

## Marian Witness

M.I. members live their mission above all by witness in their ordinary activities and in the various sectors of social activity in which they are immersed, permeating with an evangelical spirit every human reality. In every environment in which they live and work, they are called to promote the protection of life from conception to natural death, to offer themselves in service to the integral dignity of the person, and to set forth the values of fraternity, justice and solidarity.

## Belonging to the Immaculata

The following quotations are taken from the writings of St Maximilian Kolbe:

- 'we unite ourselves to her [the Immaculata]; we become her instruments; we belong to her and actually become one with her. The M.I. act of consecration illustrates these ideas.' (*Various Writings* 991, 23 April 1933, Vol. II)
- 'each of us [ought] to devote ourselves every day to enhancing in ourselves our consecration to the Immaculata. In fact, the more perfectly we belong to her, the more freely she will be able to direct us herself. No more effective action could ever be conceived.' (*Letters* 603, 1934, Vol. I)

- ‘We are servants, children, slaves, knights, and everything, everything, everything to the Immaculata. In a word, we belong to her, we are hers in every way, hers every day more! . . . the more we belong to the Immaculata, the more perfectly we will love and understand the Heart of Jesus, God the Father, and the whole Most Holy Trinity.’ (*Letters* 605, 1934, Vol. I)
- ‘We belong to her . . . because we are consecrated to her and we have never recanted our consecration.’ (*Letters* 643, 1935, Vol. I)
- ‘By means of the Immaculata, our acts of love [become] without stain, since they belong to her, just as we [belong to her].’ (*Various Writings* 1298, 1940, Vol. II)

Around the world the M.I. carries out its mission in the name of the Church in various ways, including (but not limited to):

- Regular local meetings for youth, families and adults, known as M.I. Villages
- Retreats (one-day, weekend or week-long)
- M.I. leadership formation programmes
- Pilgrimages to Kolbean sites in Italy and Poland
- M.I. Pilgrimages to World Youth Days
- Presentations on Our Lady and St Maximilian for all age groups, in parishes and schools
- Ministry to the sick, the disadvantaged, and the incarcerated
- Participation in pro-life ministry
- Radio and television broadcasting promoting Marian consecration
- Regular newsletter/e-newsletter and other printed and online resources.



SAINT ANTHONY  
PRAY FOR US