



33 Days
to
Morning
Glory

Retreat
Companion

Carol R. Younger, Ed. D.

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AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS A *RETREAT COMPANION*? A companion is someone who travels alongside you, a friend or a family member who shares your daily life and brings you the comfort of knowing you and lovingly accepting you as you are. Such a person remembers things you've said, experiences you've had, and people you've known. The companion reminds you of these things to encourage you, sometimes to challenge you, but always to let you know you are loved.

In some ways, a helpful friend or companion is a model for caregivers, nurses, and doctors in the medical field. In the business and education arenas, such people are called "mentors." Sometimes people even hire companions in such fields as sports and health training, where they're called "coaches." The support and assistance of such trained companions is often indispensable for achieving good health, business success, and victory on the field.

But there are other types of companions besides persons. A companion can be a handbook or a guide — for example, a handbook for soldiers or a bird watcher's guide. Journals are also justly called companions because, when we re-read them, they can recall for us significant lessons from the past, shine light on our present situation, and even help us better prepare for the future.

Now, a *retreat* companion is someone or something that accompanies us during a special time of prayer and spiritual growth. Such a companion helps us to pray. In other words, such a companion asks us leading questions and gives us food for thought. Through such aids to prayerful pondering, our companion helps us come to know and love the Lord more deeply and, at the same time, helps us get to know ourselves and where the Lord may be calling us to grow.

As we begin our 33-day retreat in preparation for Marian consecration, we'll be blessed to have lots of retreat companions. First, if we make the retreat in a group, we'll have *all the people in our weekly small group*. Through our discussions and times of group prayer, we'll come to know the goodness of the Lord by getting to know the great gift he gives us in Our Blessed Mother, Mary. Also, our meetings will help us work through obstacles, answer questions, and address difficulties that may come up along the way. Finally, together, we'll come to appreciate Mary's unique role in our spiritual lives and how she brings us to God.

During our retreat, not only will we have human companions but we'll also have *this book* as a retreat companion. This *Retreat Companion* combines many of the things just mentioned. In the writing spaces provided, it's a journal for recording and remembering our thoughts. Through its daily questions, it's an aid to prayerful pondering. In its weekly small-group sections, it's a guide for discussion and further prayer. All this in one short book — what a gift! Now let's learn how to use it.

HOW TO USE YOUR *RETREAT COMPANION*. Using your retreat companion is easy. Just follow these three simple steps:

1. Read the daily section from your retreat book, *33 Days to Morning Glory*, before turning to this *Retreat Companion*.
2. Pray the prayer for the week. (See "Regarding the Prayer for the Week" below.)

3. Read and answer the four daily retreat questions in the space provided after each question. If you need more space, you can use the “Notes” pages at the end of each week or begin writing in a personal journal. Don’t be afraid to answer questions that weren’t asked. The Holy Spirit may have personal spiritual counsel for *you*! Keep track of your random thoughts as well. (See “Regarding the Daily Questions” below.)

REGARDING THE PRAYER FOR THE WEEK. Each week of the retreat features a specific Marian prayer that we’ll pray together at each weekly small-group session. (For example, the first prayer is the *Angelus*.) The prayers reflect the deep, Marian piety that has marked the lives of so many Catholics. These four traditional prayers have been beloved for centuries but, sadly, in our own day, have largely been forgotten.

The Marian prayers for each week remind us of what’s been forgotten and provide communal prayer moments in our small-group meetings. Individually, you’ll pray the given prayer once a day, or more frequently — simply do what’s convenient for you. Just don’t “flame out” at the very beginning of the retreat trying to keep up a prayer marathon! Keep your focus on the most important prayer practice of the retreat, the prayerful pondering. During the retreat, a high quality of prayerful pondering wins out over a large quantity of vocal prayers.

REGARDING THE DAILY QUESTIONS. The questions in this *Retreat Companion* are not meant to be a quiz. You will not be graded on them. Don’t stress yourself about getting the right answer. In fact, it’s not about getting the “right answer” at all. The questions are simply there to help you prayerfully ponder in your heart, like Mary. Such prayerful pondering is the main prayer of the whole retreat.

So, with the questions of this *Retreat Companion* prompting you, you might record in it memories, responses, or even doodles and drawings. Sometimes you might write only: “I agree” or “I never thought of that before.” At other times, you might need to add more sheets of paper to record your thoughts. Then again, you might not write anything but simply continue to ponder the questions in your heart. (Still, we recommend that you write something in the *Retreat Companion*.) Remember, it’s not a quiz. There are no right answers. Moreover, nothing is really “required” except that you strive to ponder the teaching of the daily readings in your heart. Such prayerful pondering will bear fruit for yourself as you prepare for Consecration Day, and it will enrich the whole group because it prepares you to better participate during the times of small group discussion.

Before we continue on to the next section, there’s one very important point about “prayerful pondering:” It’s not something just for quiet time when you’re alone in your room. In fact, many people these days don’t seem to have much time for quiet prayer, especially not 33 days worth! So, what’s meant by “prayerful pondering” is simply keeping and reflecting on the content of the daily reading in our minds and hearts. Such prayerful pondering can be done in the midst of driving kids to school, cutting veggies, or taking a shower. The point is that during these 33 days, we strive to become what St. Ignatius of Loyola calls “contemplatives in action” and imitate Mary who “kept all these things, pondering them in her heart” (Lk 12:51).

CLOSING THOUGHTS. Preparation for consecration to Jesus through Mary is a time of special grace, and many of the graces of the retreat will come through the process of prayer and reflection. As part of this process, don't be afraid to ask God for understanding, consolation, and the grace to persevere. God wants to give these graces, and they're a sign of his delight that we're taking the time to draw close to the Heart of his mother and to his own Sacred and Merciful Heart.

The more prayer and thought you give to your preparation for Marian consecration, the more you'll get out of it. For example, the more you and your group share your *Companion* thoughts, the deeper will be your spiritual experience of the 33 days and Day of Consecration. As Fr. Gaitley says in his book, these days of retreat are not a vocal-prayer marathon. Rather, they're a time of prayerful pondering, and as we make these days together as a group, they become a journey of communion, a journey whereby we prepare our hearts to become one with the Heart of Mary as she loves Jesus with her own, perfect love.

Finally, I'd like to give praise to the Holy Spirit for his inspiration and consolations and thanks to Fr. Michael Gaitley, MIC, Kelly Wahlquist, and Sarah Chichester for their support in writing and editing this companion. Their devotion to Our Blessed Mother reinforces my own. For Mary's gift of our friendship in Jesus, I am very thankful.

Now, as for you who are about to embark on this 33-day retreat journey, I pray that the Holy Angels, at the command of Jesus, bring his grace in abundance for your preparation for consecration to him through his Blessed Mother!

To Jesus through Mary,

Carol Younger, Ed. D.

Feast of the Presentation of the Lord
February 2, 2012

PRACTICAL INFORMATION FOR GROUP RETREATS

1. The Retreat Coordinator

R*ETREAT COORDINATOR'S ROLE.* Retreat Coordinators are the people who coordinate a variety of different aspects of the Retreat. For example, they manage the announcement and publicity of the 33 Days to Morning Glory Retreat, schedule and prepare the room locations, may arrange for the pastor to include the retreat participants in special Masses at the beginning and on Consecration Day, may plan a parish reception after the consecration, and more. They select and train the small-group leaders before the beginning of the retreat as well. All this involves working with many key people at the parish, in addition to the participants making the retreat. There are many tips and timelines, descriptions of events, sample announcements, and other support materials on the website www.AllHeartsAfire.org.

The Retreat Coordinator for the 33 Days to Morning Glory Retreat should be thoroughly familiar with the *Retreat Coordinators' Guide* on the HAPP® website, www.AllHeartsAfire.org. The details of the HAPP® programs and the structure of the retreats are also on the website, as are tips on how to share information and answers in a supportive manner.

R*ETREAT COORDINATOR RESPONSIBILITIES.* For details on the retreat coordinator's responsibilities, see the *Retreat Coordinator's Guide* on the AllHeartsAfire.org website. Here is an overview of some of the information provided on the website that will be helpful to the Retreat Coordinator:

- Materials to be ordered
- Overview of the six weeks
- Ways to get the word out about Hearts Afire: Parish-based Programs
- Weekly session format
- Overview of Orientation and the first small-group meeting
- Small-group dynamics
 - The silent participant
 - The talkative participant
 - The sometimes-absent participant
- Small-group Leader's role
- Tips for answering questions
- Ideas for Consecration Day
 - Parish options
 - Individual options
- Parish opportunities for renewal and involvement

R*EGARDING CONSECRATION DAY.* The Retreat Coordinator should plan ahead for the actual day of consecration. If you are the Retreat Coordinator, you might want to read the section of the appendix “Before Consecration” right now. You will find it on page 129. Also, please review the information on concluding the 33 days in the *Retreat Coordinator's Guide* on www.AllHeartsAfire.org. In addition, if people are concerned about not ending the 33 days on the exact consecration date (many dates are posted on the website), tell them

not to worry. They can always continue their preparation by simply pondering in their hearts what they have learned and by daily praying the Rosary or the Chaplet of the Ten Evangelical Virtues of Mary (see pages 172-175 in *33 Days to Morning Glory*).

2. The Small-group Leader

Each small group will need a Small-group Leader. This leader is the hopeful, enthusiastic, dedicated person in a small group who works with the Retreat Coordinator by guiding the conversation within the small group, encouraging others to share, and even calling and e-mailing the members of the small group. At each weekly gathering, the Small-group Leaders arrive early, greet the members of their groups, know who's going to be absent and why, encourage prayer for one another, model answers and sharing, and make the retreat a reality week after week. The Small-group Leader guides the group through the weekly small-group session outline, which is at the end of each week's questions. They begin with "prayer," direct the discussion of the "personal response," and lead the concluding "petition."

3. Retreat Materials Needed

The Retreat Coordinator will need the following:

- *33 Days to Morning Glory Retreat Talks* (DVD set)
- Internet access to visit www.AllHeartsAfire.org for *Retreat Coordinators' Guide*, helpful videos, support materials, and blogs.

Each participant will need the following:

- *33 Days to Morning Glory: A Do-It-Yourself Retreat In Preparation for Marian Consecration*
- *33 Days to Morning Glory Retreat Companion*
- Recommended: Holy Bible (Catholic edition) and *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

4. The Weekly Meeting Format

Session Overview:

- 90 minutes (1.5 hours) total time:
 - 15-minute Large-group Opening with a 6-minute introduction talk on DVD, followed by small-group gatherings
 - 45-minute Small-Group sharing (drawing from the daily questions in the *Retreat Companion*)
 - 30-minute talk on DVD that illustrates the key points of each week and keeps them simple and livable

This weekly format is based on your reading the appropriate section of *33 Days to Morning Glory* first and then reading and answering the questions in the *Retreat Companion* that pertain to that section.

Large-group — Opening

(15 Minutes)

You'll begin each session by coming together in a large group. Within that large group, you'll begin with prayers and watch the 6-minute introduction for that session. This is also a great time for the Retreat Coordinator to make any announcements. Allow 15 minutes for this time and the transition of all participants to their small groups. (If the entire group consists only of one small group, then there's obviously no need to break up into smaller groups.)

Small-group — Sharing

(45 Minutes)

Small groups (about 6-10 people, depending on your group and available space) meet for a 45-minute discussion time that follows the small group session outlines at the end of each week. The small-group dynamic is perhaps the most important aspect of the retreat. Within a small-group setting, a true spirit of fellowship in Christ is fostered and developed. Without such friendship and fellowship in Christ, the isolated Christian may become paralyzed in his efforts at evangelization and stagnant in his faith. But with friendships in Christ, the members of his Mystical Body are connected in holiness to Christ and to one another in prayer and so are able to better receive his divine power! (see Mt 18:20). The friendships that you discover and nourish in your small group are important sources of support and encouragement on your journey to a deeper relationship with Christ.

Small-group Leaders: Be sure to read the Weekly Sessions at the end of each week in this *Retreat Companion* before each gathering. There the preselected focus questions for each week are listed. You will also want to register as a Small-group Leader on our website www.AllHeartsAfire.org to receive weekly, helpful tips that will help you make the most of your small-group experience.

The small-group time is divided as follows:

- A. PRAYER: This is the given week's prayer from the *Retreat Companion*. The group should pray it together.
- B. PERSONAL RESPONSE: Particular questions selected from the week will be used for small-group sharing.
- C. PETITION: The Small-group Leader will recite the daily closing invocations of the Holy Spirit within the group, and the members respond.

The above-mentioned prayer, personal-response questions, and petitions are provided in the *Retreat Companion* at the end of each week as the Small-group Session Outline.

Large-group — DVD

(30 Minutes)

Following the small-group discussion and prayer, participants reconvene in the large group for 30 minutes of guided retreat by Fr. Michael Gaitley, MIC, on DVD. Each session ends with prayer and Fr. Michael's invitation to make the insights gained and lessons learned

a part of one's spiritual life. After the DVD, the Retreat Coordinator may make announcements and briefly introduce the topic for the upcoming week and its corresponding prayer.

5. Outline of the Entire Retreat

WEEK 1 — Orientation and Introduction

[This week's meeting is different, because materials will need to be distributed and explained.]

WEEK 2 — St. Louis de Montfort

WEEK 3 — St. Maximilian Kolbe

WEEK 4 — Blessed Mother Teresa

WEEK 5 — St. John Paul II

WEEK 6 — Synthesis and Review, Consecration Day

[Note: While we highly recommend that this group retreat be made with others, it can be made with oneself. However, one would forgo the many benefits of the group dynamic. To make the retreat individually, one would need the DVD set and retreat book, *33 Days to Morning Glory*, in addition to this *Retreat Companion*.]

FIRST SMALL-GROUP MEETING

Normally, the questions for each week of the retreat are to be read, pondered, and answered *before* the weekly small group meeting. This week is an exception, because this is likely the first time you've met your *Retreat Companion!*

So, after the opening video from Fr. Gaitley this week (which is longer than usual because it's an orientation talk), you'll break into your small group for prayer and discussion. Then, sometime before the next meeting, you'll answer (or at least consider) the four questions (starting on page 15) that cover your reading for the introduction and the questions that cover your reading for St. Louis de Montfort. In other words, before the next meeting, you'll have about twice the reading and four more questions than usual. If this seems like a lot, don't worry. Just do the best you can, and if you can't get to all the questions, at least try to finish the reading before the next meeting.

SMALL-GROUP SESSION OUTLINE

~ Orientation and Introduction ~

A. Prayer

[Make sign of Cross: ✝]

1. Our Father..., Hail Mary..., Glory Be....
2. *Come, Holy Spirit, and be with us. We wish to contemplate the mysteries of Jesus and Mary in our lives as we prepare to make a total consecration of ourselves to Jesus through Mary. Amen.*

[Make sign of Cross: ✝]

B. Personal Response

My two most important reasons for making this retreat at this time are the following:

1. Personal

2. Spiritual

C. Petition

[Make sign of Cross: ✝]

[Leader] Come, Holy Spirit, living in Mary...

[Group response] Help me to make this retreat with generosity and zeal.

Come, Holy Spirit, living in Mary...

Prepare me to give myself fully to living out this true and solid devotion.

Come, Holy Spirit, living in Mary...

Give me the grace to reject Satan and follow Christ more closely.

Come, Holy Spirit, living in Mary...

Help me to give myself entirely to Jesus through Mary.

Come, Holy Spirit, living in Mary...

Help me be generous in giving all I have to Mary.

Come, Holy Spirit, living in Mary...

Help me to praise you for such a quick, easy, and secure path to holiness!

[Make sign of Cross: ✝]

PRE-RETREAT

Introduction and Orientation

[Read "Introduction" in *33 Days to Morning Glory*, pp. 15-27, and then prayerfully answer the following questions.]

- 1. Recall a special need in your life that you entrusted to the intercession of Mary or a favorite saint. (This is often known as a "special intention.") Maybe you prayed a novena¹ for it. Maybe the intention moved you to ask for help, for a blessing, or for an answer. What prayer or novena did you pray? What did you hope for? Was it for an answer? Were you answered in a way that surprised you? Consoled you? Was there a new insight from that prayer?

- 2. Life is lived so fast in this third millennium. Do you have concerns about putting 33 days into your already-full calendar for consecration preparation? What kind of practical help do you need to see that this really is possible and realistic? Where might you turn to get this help? Will someone else be able to help you find time — for example, through carpooling or help with shopping? Or is it simply a matter of you scheduling your time and priorities more efficiently?

3. Read Luke 2:19, 51. Like Mary, have you ever pondered something that happened to you or to someone else? What was it? Did you ask yourself why it happened to you? What came of that heart pondering? Was it a positive experience?

4. This preparation for consecration is similar to Mary’s heart pondering. There are no additional hours you need to set aside for pondering, because pondering can be done throughout the day. The readings simply fill and prepare your heart because of your prayerful reading of them. What time of day will you set aside for this reading? You can break it up into several sessions of reading each day if you need to. Select several “moments” when you will have the book beside you, and write them down here:

[At the end of each week, we'll provide you with an outline like the one below that complements each DVD session talk. These outlines are meant to help you remember points to ponder as you watch the talks.]

SESSION 1 — DVD NOTES

Orientation

How the Retreat Works:

- 1. Read = Read the brief section for each day.
- 2. Ponder = Ponder and reflect on the day's reading with the aid of the *Retreat Companion*.
- 3. Meet = Meet to discuss what you've pondered all week.

Introduction to Marian Consecration

A. The Goal

B. Three Big Ideas Summarized

- 1.

- 2.

- 3.

C. Three Stages

- 1.

- 2.

- 3.

D. Summary of Marian Consecration

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Notes