

## NOVENAS

### WHERE DOES THE PRACTICE COME FROM?

You can read a long history of novenas and their origins in the Catholic Encyclopedia. It is on line at:

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11141b.htm>

But a simple explanation within that text tells us ....

*As Jesus was about to ascend to heaven, he told the apostles to remain in Jerusalem until they had received the Holy Spirit. While waiting, they devoted themselves to prayer (Acts 1:14).* The Church celebrates the Ascension of Jesus on a Thursday and nine days later the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Sunday. The Church began to set aside prayer for nine days in remembrance of those original nine days of prayer. The word novena comes to us from Latin, the language of the Romans. "Novem" was their word for the number 9.

### WHAT IS A NOVENA?

Novena's are devotional prayers repeated nine successive times (e.g for 9 days; once a week for 9 weeks) to obtain graces for special intentions. Everyone can pray for the same thing (example for justice and peace) or for their private intentions. We will be praying for our private intentions.

## HISTORY OF OUR LADY OF PERPETUAL HELP NOVENA

In the fifteenth century a wealthy merchant lived on the island of Crete in the Mediterranean Sea. He had in his possession a beautiful painting of Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

How he got the picture is not known. Had he stolen it from the shrine where it had been publicly venerated for centuries? Had he been entrusted with it for safe-keeping because the enemies of Christianity had been conquering eastern Europe? History does not say. In any case, the merchant was determined that this picture would not be destroyed as so many others had been.

Painted on wood, the picture measures 21 by 17 inches and is said to be a copy of the famous original painted by St. Luke. St. Luke's picture had been taken to Constantinople and had been venerated as miraculous for centuries. It was destroyed in 1453 when Constantinople was captured by the Turks. The faithful in Crete did not want this to happen to their picture of Mary. The merchant decided to take the picture to Italy. He packed his belongings, settled his business and boarded a vessel sailing for Rome. After the vessel was well on its way, a violent storm arose. The sailors and all on board feared the worst. The merchant quickly got out his picture of Our Lady, held it aloft and called on her for help. Our Lady answered his prayer with a miracle. The sea grew calm, and the vessel reached the port of Rome safely.

The merchant had a dear friend living in Rome. He decided to spend some time with his friend before moving on. He joyfully displayed our Lady's picture and told his friend that some day the whole world would pay honor to Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

Some time later, the merchant became very ill. When he felt that his days were numbered, he called his friend to his bedside and begged him to promise that after his death, he would place Our Lady's picture in a suitable church so that it could be venerated publicly. The friend promised.

Although he had meant to carry out the merchant's dying wish, the man neglected to do so. His wife had taken a great liking to the picture and persuaded him to keep it safe under their roof. But Divine Providence had not brought the picture to Rome for the veneration of one family, but for the veneration of the world, as the merchant had prophesied.

Our Lady appeared to the man on three different occasions, telling him that he must put her picture in a

church. Then the man became gravely ill and died. The man's wife was very attached to the picture and tried to convince herself that it was safest under her own roof. So she put off parting with it. One day, her six-year-old daughter came rushing to her with the news that a beautiful, shining Lady had appeared to her while she was looking at the picture.

The Lady had told her to tell her mother and grandfather that Our Lady of Perpetual Help wanted to be placed in a church. As the widow was wondering what church should be given the painting, heaven sent the answer. Our Lady appeared to the little girl again and told her to tell her mother that she wanted the picture placed in the church between the Basilica of St. Mary Major and that of St. John Lateran. That church was the Church of St. Matthew, the Apostle.

The lady went quickly to see the superior of the Augustinians, who had been entrusted with the care of St. Matthew's. She informed him of the circumstances connected with the picture. On March 27, 1499 the picture was carried to the church in solemn procession. On the way from the widow's house to the church, a man touched the picture and regained the use of his paralyzed arm. The picture was hung over the high altar in the church and for about three hundred years it remained there. Loved and venerated by all in Rome as a truly miraculous picture, it was a means of countless miracles, cures and needed graces.

In 1789, Napoleon and his army captured Rome. He exiled Pope Pius VII and, under pretext of strengthening the defenses of Rome, destroyed thirty churches, St. Matthew's Church was one of these. Napoleon ordered it to be leveled to the ground. The church and many venerable relics and statues were completely destroyed to the dismay and grief of the Romans. The picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Help disappeared. One of the Augustinian priests had secretly taken the picture away just in time. When Pius VII finally returned to Rome, he gave the Augustinians the monastery of St. Eusebius and later the house and church of St. Mary's in Posterula. A famous picture of Our Lady of Grace was already enshrined in St. Mary's in Posterula. So the miraculous picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Help was placed in the Augustinians' private chapel. For sixty-four years it remained there in the chapel, almost forgotten.

In the meantime, at the request of the Pope, the superior general of the Redemptorists set up his headquarters in Rome. Land was purchased, and a monastery and the Church of St. Alphonsus were built. One of the priests, the historian of the house, made a special study of the section in Rome where they were living. In his research, he came across many references to the old Church of St. Matthew and the miraculous picture of Our Lady Of Perpetual Help. One day he gave the other priests the information he had discovered: that their present church, St. Alphonsus, was built on the ruins of St. Matthew's, where a miraculous picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Help had been publicly venerated for centuries. Among his hearers was Fr. Michael Marchi, who had served Mass many times as a boy in the chapel of the Augustinians in Posterula. There in the chapel he had seen the miraculous picture. An old lay brother, who had lived at St. Matthew's and whom he had often visited, had told him many times of the miracles worked by Our Lady, and he would always add: "Mind, Michael, our Blessed Lady of St. Matthew's is the same picture that is in the private chapel. Don't forget it." Fr. Michael related all that he had learned from the old lay brother. Through this incident, the Redemptorists had come to know of the existence of the picture, but they did not know its history, nor did they know that our Lady wished it to be publicly honored in a special place.

That very year, through an inspirational sermon preached by a Jesuit about the ancient picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, they learned the history of the picture and that Our Lady wished it to be venerated between the Church of St. Mary Major and that of St. John Lateran. The holy Jesuit deplored the fact that for the last sixty years the picture, which had been so famous for miracles and cures, had disappeared and that there were no accounts of cures being worked in the area. He felt that this was because the picture was no longer exposed to the public veneration of the faithful. He pleaded with his hearers, asking that if anyone knew where the picture was they would acquaint the possessor with Our Lady's wish.

The Redemptorist Fathers longed to see the miraculous picture restored to public veneration and in their own

Church of Alphonsus, if possible. They entreated their superior general to try to obtain the picture for St. Alphonsus' Church. After some deliberation and time, the superior decided to ask for the intervention of the Holy Father, Pope Pius IX. He related the history of the painting and submitted his petition. The Holy Father listened attentively. He loved Our Lady dearly and was happy to see her honored. He took his pen and wrote out his wish that the miraculous picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Help be returned to be shared by St. Mary Major and St. John Lateran. He also commissioned the Redemptorists to make Our Lady of Perpetual Help known everywhere.

None of the Augustinians living at that time had known St. Matthew. Some had forgotten the history of the picture in their chapel; others had never known it. Once they knew the history and the Holy Father's wish, they willingly complied with Our Lady's desire. They had been her custodians, and now they were giving her back to the world under the care of other custodians. Divine Providence had set the stage. At the request of the Holy Father, the Redemptorists gave the Augustinians another painting to replace the miraculous one.

The picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Help was carried in solemn procession through the beautifully bedecked streets of Rome before being placed over an altar especially built for its veneration. The happiness of the Roman people was evident. The enthusiasm and joyous manifestations of the twenty thousand who thronged the flower-strewn streets for the procession proved their deep devotion to God's Mother. Every hour of the day, people of all classes could be seen before the picture, begging Our Lady of Perpetual Help to hear their prayers and to obtain mercy for them. Many miracles and graces were recorded daily.

Today, devotion to Our Lady of Perpetual Help has spread throughout the world. Churches have been dedicated in her honor, shrines have been built, and devotional groups have been established. Her picture is known and loved near and far.

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