

Our Lady Undoer of Knots



Novena and Prayers

Beloved Devotion of Pope Francis

Our Lady Undoer of Knots

Novena and Prayers

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Introduction

The devotion to Our Lady Undoer (or Untier) of Knots, although not new, has become more popular lately because of Pope Francis. While studying in Germany in the 1980s, he came across a painting that depicts Mary patiently undoing the knots in a long cord. To the then Jorge Bergoglio, this picture portrayed how Mary can help us with the knots and tangles of our lives. He took a copy of the painting to Argentina, and he began to spread the devotion there. When he became pope, more people were inspired to take up this devotion and to ask Mary for her help under this title.

The Story Behind the Painting

Painted around 1700 by Johan Schmidtner, the original painting is found in the Church of Saint Peter in Augsburg, Germany. A priest named Father Langenmantel had commissioned the work to honor

Mary and to thank her for a favor received by his grandparents, who at one point were on the verge of divorce. The husband went to seek counsel from a Jesuit priest, Father Rem. During their talks they would pray together asking Mary's intercession. As they did so, Father Rem held up the husband's wedding ribbon,* untied its knots, and offered it to Mary. This was a symbolic way of entrusting the couple to Mary's tender intercession. The couple reconciled their differences and they lived together happily for the rest of their lives.

An Ancient Devotion Made New

A profound theology underlies this seemingly simple devotion. From early times Church writers have spoken of Mary as the New Eve. The Book of Genesis tells us that God created the first human couple in a state of happiness and grace. But they soon sinned. Eve listened to the tempter and ate the forbidden fruit, then gave it to her husband, Adam, who also ate it.

* Most likely part of a wedding tradition of the time. —*Ed.*

By their sin, Eve and Adam tangled not only their own lives, but all of human history. To undo this “knot,” God sent his Son to redeem the human race and save us from our sins. In order to carry out that plan, God chose Mary and asked her to cooperate in it. By her free consent, Mary brought the Savior into the world. It took a tremendous act of faith for Mary to do this, but she did. Because of her act of faith, salvation came to the world through Jesus. By her faith, Mary acted in a way exactly opposite to the way Eve had acted. Eve’s actions led to sin, but Mary’s actions to the Savior. Saint Irenaeus of Lyons, writing in the late second century, used the comparison of a knot in regard to this parallel between Eve and Mary. He said, “the knot of Eve’s disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary. For what the virgin Eve had bound fast through unbelief, this did the Virgin Mary set free through faith” (*Adversus haereses*, 3, 22). That is why we can say that Mary undoes the knot of sin.

How This Devotion Can Change Our Lives

When the serpent slithered up to Eve, he asked a question rooted in a lie: “Did God say, ‘You shall not

eat from any tree in the garden?’” (Gen 3:1). God had not forbidden them to eat the fruit of any tree, but only from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Eve’s first mistake was to answer the serpent without stopping to consider where this question was leading. Once she started talking to the devil, he easily persuaded her to sin.

At the Annunciation, on the other hand, Mary paused before responding to the angel’s message. The Gospel tells us: “But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be” (Lk 1:29). At first she didn’t respond at all. Instead, she waited for more information in order to discern what this message was really all about. She pondered. As she did so, she must have been listening to what the Holy Spirit was saying to her. Once Mary was sure the angel’s message was from God, she responded quickly with her “yes.”

Mary can help us untie the knots in our lives because she was so open to the grace of the Holy Spirit. As Saint John Paul II wrote, “The Holy Spirit can be said to possess an infinite creativity, proper to the Divine mind, which knows how to loosen the knots of human affairs, including the most complex and inscrutable” (*Catechesis*, April 24, 1991, 6). Mary

was filled with the Holy Spirit not only at the Annunciation, but also at Pentecost.

Just as Mary learned from the Holy Spirit, we can learn from Mary to pause and listen for the Holy Spirit's inspirations instead of acting impulsively. Mary can help us to cultivate the virtue of prudence or good judgment. That will help us to discern what the Holy Spirit is saying in our lives. Whatever intentions we bring to this novena, it is important to be open to what the Holy Spirit is saying in our hearts. Sometimes the Spirit will nudge us in ways that lead us closer to doing God's will. It might involve a change in our hearts. For example, if we are dealing with a troubled relationship, perhaps something in our own heart needs to change. When it does, the other person may be more open to change as well.

How to Use This Booklet

The tradition of praying for a particular intention for nine days goes back to the earliest days of the Church. After the Ascension, Mary and the apostles went to the upper room to await the coming of the Holy Spirit, as Jesus had told them to do. They prayed for nine days, and on the tenth day, Pentecost, they received the Holy Spirit.

This booklet includes the novena to Our Lady Undoer of Knots. You will also find here Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer modeled on the Liturgy of the Hours, which follows a pattern of psalms, Scripture readings, and intercessions. We suggest that during the novena you make time in your schedule to pray the Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer. You could either include the novena with your Morning or Evening Prayer, or simply pray it on its own. The option of praying the Rosary is included as part of the novena, if you have the time and wish to do so. While praying for yourself and your loved

ones, it is also good to remember the wider needs of the Church and the world. This opens our hearts, makes them more compassionate toward others, and draws down God's mercy on ourselves.

The most important aspect of our prayer is the faith we bring to it. As Jesus told us in the Gospel, "Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened" (Mt 7:7–8).

Morning Prayer

Morning Prayer is a time to give praise and thanks to God, to remind ourselves that he is the source of all beauty and goodness. Lifting one's heart and mind to God in the early hours of the day puts one's life into perspective: God is our loving Father and Creator who watches over us with tenderness and is always ready to embrace us with his compassion and mercy.

I will bless the Lord at all times.

His praise will be ever on my lips.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the
Holy Spirit,
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be
forever. Amen.

Psalm 119:145–152

God is always ready to help us.

With my whole heart I cry; answer me, O LORD.
I will keep your statutes.

I cry to you; save me,
 that I may observe your decrees.
I rise before dawn and cry for help;
 I put my hope in your words.
My eyes are awake before each watch of the night,
 that I may meditate on your promise.
In your steadfast love hear my voice;
 O LORD, in your justice preserve my life.
Those who persecute me with evil purpose draw
 near;
 they are far from your law.
Yet you are near, O LORD,
 and all your commandments are true.
Long ago I learned from your decrees
 that you have established them forever.
Glory to the Father . . .

Psalm 43

Prayer to God in time of trouble.

Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause
 against an ungodly people;
from those who are deceitful and unjust
 deliver me!

For you are the God in whom I take refuge;
 why have you cast me off?
Why must I walk about mournfully
 because of the oppression of the enemy?
O send out your light and your truth;
 let them lead me;
let them bring me to your holy hill
 and to your dwelling.
Then I will go to the altar of God,
 to God my exceeding joy;
and I will praise you with the harp,
 O God, my God.
Why are you cast down, O my soul,
 and why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
 my help and my God.
Glory to the Father . . .

The Word of God

Hosea 11:4

I led them with cords of human kindness,
 with bands of love.
I was to them like those
 who lift infants to their cheeks.
I bent down to them and fed them.

From prayer one draws the strength needed to meet the challenges of daily life as a committed follower of Jesus Christ, and as such to be a living sign of the Lord's loving presence in the world.

Intercessions

God, our Father and Creator, I praise and thank you for the gift of this new day. I place before you my needs and requests, asking you to grant them through the intercession of Our Lady Undoer of Knots.

Response: Lord, hear our prayer through the intercession of Mary, our Mother.

- God our Father, you gave Mary a deep faith and enabled her to accept the mission you invited her to, thus undoing the knot of original sin. Help me today to listen to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit and to act on them. **R.**
- You filled Mary with your Holy Spirit. Grant me the grace to grow more deeply in the life of the Spirit. **R.**
- Mary brought joy to the home of Elizabeth and Zechariah. Lord, grant us a share in that joy. **R.**

- The world is filled with the knots of sin, suffering, and every kind of difficulty. Through Mary's intercession undo these knots and bring peace to the world. **R.**
- Mary leads us to Jesus, her Son. May all those who have strayed from Jesus be brought back to him through Mary's loving care. **R.**

(Add your own general intentions and your particular intentions for this novena.)

Conclude your intercessions by praying to our Heavenly Father in the words Jesus taught us:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

Closing Prayer

Father in heaven, I praise you for the gifts of grace that you bestowed on Mary, my Mother. Through her intercession I present to you the knotty situations that are troubling me now. Increase my faith and open my

heart to receive with joy all the graces you desire to grant me. Hear my morning prayer and help me to live this day in company with Mary. May all that I do and say lead others to your love. I ask this through Jesus Christ, your Son. Amen.

Let us praise the Lord.
And give him thanks.