



Novena to Saint Theodore Guerin for Saint Theodore Guerin High School

By Fr. Dale W. Ehrman

What is a novena?

A novena is a nine-day period of private or public prayer to obtain special graces, to implore special favors, or to make special petitions. (Novena is derived from the Latin "novem", meaning nine.)

According to the Catholic encyclopedia, this practice of nine successive days of prayer originated in France and Spain in the Middle Ages as a means of preparing for the Feast of Christmas. Later this was extended to other feasts and as a way to pray for special needs.

The Novena to Saint Theodore Guerin provides a structured way to develop a closer relationship with the patroness of our school. Each day of the novena has an intention or particular need, a reflection and brief prayer.

This novena may be prayed starting on Sept. 24, the nine days before her feast day of Oct. 3, or any nine days when seeking special intercession from Mother Guerin.

Day 1

Intention: For Catholic Education in the Diocese of Lafayette and throughout Indiana

Reflection

In October of 1840, Mother Guerin (then Sr. St. Theodore) and five other sisters, arrived in Indiana and immediately began a school for girls at St. Mary-of-the-Woods. By 1856 she, and the Sisters of Providence, had established schools throughout Indiana, from Evansville to Fort Wayne. Mother Guerin believed that in addition to educating children in the various academic disciplines the mission of Catholic education is teaching the faith and how to live it. It was without question the foundation of all of her schools.

Mother Guerin knew that Catholic education meant preparing young person's soul as well as their mind. Students in her schools learned the Catholic faith, prepared to receive the Sacraments and celebrated them whenever possible. Her sacrifice and commitment changed the lives of her students and through them countless others.

There is much we can learn from her example of commitment, courage and sacrifice. We, too, are called to prepare our young men and women for the future through strong and faithful Catholic schools. We need God's grace to assist us in supporting our Catholic schools.

Prayer

Courageous Mother Guerin, you traveled halfway across the world to bring the message of Christ and Catholic education to the people of Indiana. Thank you planting the seeds of faith through Catholic education. Pray for the Catholic schools, in our diocese and across Indiana that we may always remember our responsibility of teaching our young people the Catholic faith and other disciplines from a Catholic perspective. Obtain for our Catholic schools the grace they need to prosper and be places where the truth of Christ and His Church is lived and taught.

Day 2

Intention: For the Donors and Benefactors of Saint Theodore Guerin High School

Reflection

The sisters, led by Sr. St. Theodore, left France with very little except their faith and a profound trust that God would provide for their needs. Throughout their travel they received generously from many people, mostly strangers. Sr. St. Theodore recognized these gifts as coming from the hand of God. They were expressions of Divine Providence. Her trust that God would provide for their needs continued throughout her life and ministry. She depended upon and received the generosity of many people. Her community of sisters and the many schools they established were only possible as a result of God providing resources through generous benefactors and donors. This did not mean Sr. St. Theodore thought that help simply fell from the sky. In 1843, as superior of her new community, Mother Guerin traveled back to France seeking financial support for her sisters and her schools. She won the favor of Amelia Queen of France who donated generously to Mother Guerin from her own means and also sought the support of others in France.

Mother Guerin knew God would move in the hearts of others to provide and He did. She also prayed for those who were generous in supporting the work of God. She wrote, "... you have had a share in the prayers which we do not fail a single day to offer up for our benefactors."

Both trust in God and prayer for donors and benefactors are expressions of the recognition that the hand of God does indeed provide for the needs of our school. Our school cannot exist without the generosity of donors. We all need God's grace to be generous in supporting the work of our school.

Prayer

Faithful Mother Guerin, You always trusted that God would provide for your needs, even when there seemed few options available. We thank you for your prayers. We thank God for the many ways He has provided for our high school through the generosity and sacrifice of so many people. Pray for our donors and benefactors that God will bless them with an abundance of grace. May their generosity store up for them the goods of heaven and may God reward them for assisting in the important ministry of educating our young men and women in the faith. Obtain for them the grace of seeing the fruits of their generosity.

Day 3

Intention: For the Parents and Families of the Students of St. Theodore Guerin High School

Reflection

It is in the family that one first learns faith and how to love. The family is called the “domestic Church.” Born Ann-Therese Guerin Oct. 2, 1798 in Brittany, France, Mother Guerin was the oldest of four, with one sister and two brothers in a strong Catholic family. Her family first taught her the Catholic faith and she excelled in living it, even as a child. Her faith certainly helped her cope with the loss of her brothers and father in her youth and her mother as a young woman. It was in her family that Mother Guerin first learned of the self-sacrificing charity that was so much a part of her life.

In her new country Mother Guerin’s family became her fellow sisters and she loved them as mother. She missed them greatly when her duties called her to be separated from them for long periods of time. In one of her letters written from France in 1843 she calls her sisters “my children in the ‘Woods.’” Mother Guerin’s schools became family to the students who came there to live and study. Mother Guerin knew well the need for charity in the family and the challenges of raising children. She wrote, “Nearly everybody imagines that it is a very easy thing to raise a child.” The students who came to her schools she loved as a mother and taught her sisters to love them in the same maternal, self-sacrificing way.

Strong and faith-filled families are the first and primary schools of faith. When students experience charity, self-sacrifice and strong faith at home they more readily learn in school. Given the challenges of family life today, our families need God’s grace to be places of faith and schools of self-sacrifice. We need to remember Mother Guerin’s example and seek her prayerful intercession

Prayer

Loving Mother Guerin, You first learned charity and faith at home in your family. Later you took these lessons and taught them to your new family, the Sisters of Providence, and to the students in your schools. Pray for the families of our students, may their homes be places of charity and self-sacrifice. May God grant them grace to be strong in their faith and love and committed to the truth by what they say and do. Obtain for them the grace necessary to be strong, faith-filled families.

Day 4

Intention: For the Faculty and Staff of St. Theodore Guerin High School

Reflection

Mother Guerin and the first Sisters of Providence dedicated their lives for the students who came to be educated by them. They were well educated themselves and those who came to Indiana were experienced teachers. Their teaching methods were proven and recognized as effective. Still, it was faith that guided the teaching. Mother Guerin counseled her sisters, "Love the children first, and then teach them."

Educating young people was more than a career for Mother Guerin and the Sisters of Providence. It was a sacred ministry to which they were called. Mother Guerin reminded her sisters that, "All you teach the children must be taught for the greater glory of God and for the good of the children."

The ministry of Catholic education continues at Saint Theodore Guerin High School under the patronage of Mother Guerin. Our faculty and staff are also called by God to the ministry of Catholic education. They need the wisdom and prayers of Mother Guerin for their important ministry.

Prayer

Loving, Mother Guerin, your life as an educator both in France and the woods of Indiana reflected your love for your students and commitment to them as an educator. Pray for our faculty and staff, may God fill their hearts with a love for young men and women with whom they are entrusted. Pray that God will grant them the wisdom, patience, charity and other virtues they need to teach them effectively. Obtain for them the grace to necessary for their ministry of education.

Day 5

Intention: For the Administration and Leadership of Saint Theodore Guerin High School

Reflection

From the moment she left France Mother Guerin assumed a role of leadership among her sisters. Her responsibilities grew upon her arrival in Indiana and as her community grew and established schools across Indiana.

Mother Guerin knew the challenges and responsibility of leadership. She faced chronic illness, tragedy, and financial hardship, conflict with her local bishop, injustice and religious bigotry. Yet, she continually responded with humility, self-sacrifice and deep trust in God. She wrote to her sisters, "Let us beg of God that he would continue to show us his will, and let us promise to follow it with all our heart." Hers was a leadership grounded in prayer.

Mother Guerin never exercised leadership without prayer and trust in God. Her leadership depended on Divine Providence and as such she could be confident that the work was God's and not simply hers. She wrote, "I now await in peace what our Lord will ordain for the future of our institution."

Leadership is no easier today than it was for Mother Guerin. While there are countless methods, systems and seminars on effective leadership skills, Mother Guerin's example shows us that when you pray and trust in God leadership takes on its proper role. Effectiveness and success are left to God with whom all things are possible.

Prayer

Trusting Mother Guerin, You led your sisters from France to Indiana and established schools amidst countless challenges. Your leadership depended upon God and his will. Pray for our administrators and school leadership, may they hear God's voice and discern His will for our school. Give them courage to have the humility, self-sacrifice and trust that you did and the determination to follow God lead as they lead us. Obtain from God the grace they need to lead our school according to God's will.

Day 6

Intention: That the students of Saint Theodore Guerin High School will excel in their academic studies.

Reflection

Within nine months of arriving in Indiana Mother Guerin began her first school. The girls' academy at St. Mary-of-the-Woods was a small, remote boarding school but still emphasized academics. Students were taught a variety of subjects from Reading, Geography, English, Music, Art, various sciences and Rhetoric. Academic scholarship and study were expected. Students were challenged to do their best through frequent examinations and finals at yearend. The academy at St. Mary-of-the-Woods soon became a top school in Indiana.

Mother Guerin knew how a strong Catholic education was a benefit to each student and to the Church and world. This holds true today. To the degree each student excels in their studies they will realize their God given potential and contribute to our world. Our students need God's grace to excel in their academic studies.

Prayer

Wise and prudent Mother Guerin, Your courage and vision helped establish schools of the highest academic quality. Pray for our students, that through God's grace they will discover and develop their academic talents and excel in their studies as young scholars. After receiving their secondary education may they continue to learn and use their gifts to serve others and build a better world. Obtain for them the grace to excel in their academic studies.

Day 7

Intention: That the students of Saint Theodore Guerin High School will excel in service to their neighbor.

Reflection

Mother Guerin's was a life of service to others. She served her sisters, her students, the poor and those who came for help. She knew the blessings of serving others and wrote, "You will be happy yourself in making others happy." Not that this was always easy. She realized that any service to others involves sacrifice. She also wrote, "There are very few persons who understand how difficult it is to serve their neighbor" Mother Guerin was able to make sacrifices for others because of her love of Christ and her trust that Christ takes care of those who serve him. Her dependence on Providence guided her service to others.

In our often self-centered or individualistic world serving our neighbor can be seen as an outdated or fringe activity for those who are "ultra-religious." When seen as essential to our faith and when done with trust in God serving others is indeed a blessing to both the one served and the one who is doing the serving. Our students will excel in serving their neighbor as they follow Mother Guerin's example of sacrifice and heed her words of trusting in God's blessing to those who serve Christ in their brothers or sisters. Our students need God's grace to accomplish this.

Prayer

Generous Mother Guerin, you did not hesitate to serve and give to others because you so trusted in God care. Pray for our students that they may have generous hearts. May they trust in God's providential care and see sacrificing for others as an opportunity to show Christ's love. Obtain for them the grace to excel in service to their neighbor.

Day 8

Intention: That the students of Saint Theodore Guerin High School will excel as leaders.

Reflection

For Mother Guerin leadership meant loving those for whom God had given her to care. She never saw her role as the one who had the power or who necessarily made the decisions. On most important matters she consulted her sisters and even asked that they vote. She was their advocate, advisor, and spiritual guide. Never was it a matter of being “in charge.” She led with love and care, always as a servant. She wanted the best for each sister and didn’t expect more than each could give, as she wrote, “The talent of a good Superior is... to require of each one only what she can give.”

It is easy for young people to see leadership as simply the one who gets to make all the decisions or the person who is recognized in charge of the group. This was not Mother Guerin’s leadership. She was a servant leader in the model of Jesus Christ.

As our students learn how to lead and what leadership is all about they can look to Mother Guerin as one who knew how to best lead as Christ has taught us. The greatest one among you is the one who serves. Our students will excel as servant leaders as they take these words of Jesus heart just as Mother Guerin did. They need God’s grace to learn to excel as leaders who serve.

Prayer

Servant Mother Guerin, you were a servant leader to your sisters and students through your tireless work and loving concern. Pray for our students, that God will help them learn that regardless of their gifts, leadership is about being a servant. May they see in you an example and inspiration to accept the self-sacrifice necessary for true Christian leadership. Obtain for them the grace to excel as leaders in the model of Christ.

Day 9

Intention: That the students of Saint Theodore Guerin High School will excel in knowing and living their Catholic faith.

Reflection

Mother Guerin always saw teaching and living faith as the focus of Catholic education. She delighted in the baptism of some of their students. She realized the importance of teaching faith to children and young people. It wasn't only about preparing them for the future. It was about capturing the vitality and energy of youth and using it for God and his glory in the present. Mother Guerin wrote, "Ah, it is when we are young that we can do something for our salvation and for our neighbor's."

These neighbors were not just strangers down the street but were those with whom she lived and worked. She wrote in 1854 about the girls of her school returning home to educate their parents in the Catholic faith. "Their [the students' parents] daughters, brought up in our school where there is, I may say, a good spirit, return home like little apostles." Her students learned the Catholic faith and took it home.

Learning the Catholic faith and how to live it is why Catholic schools exist. Mother Guerin committed her life and those of the Sisters of Providence for that mission. Our students are called to know and live their faith and take it to the world. We pray that they will excel in this, the most important aspect, of their education at Saint Theodore Guerin High School High School. Our students need God's grace to know and live their faith.

Prayer

Faith-filled and devoted Mother Guerin, you taught the truths of the Catholic faith by to children, young people and your fellow sisters. Faith was the most important subject taught in your schools. More importantly, you taught others the faith by how you lived your life. Pray for our students that God may grant them trust in you and the truths of our Catholic faith. May their faith grow and be strong so they may be good and courageous examples to others. Obtain for them the grace to excel in knowing and living their Catholic faith.