



The Blessed Virgin Mary, Untier of Knots

By Hedwig Lewis SJ

When he returned to Argentina following his doctoral studies in Germany, Jorge Mario Bergoglio SJ, now Pope Francis, took with him a particular fondness for a Marian devotion that he had encountered in Bavaria. Hedwig Lewis SJ introduces us to the increasingly popular devotion to ‘Mary Untier of Knots’.

‘*Mary Untier of Knots, pray for us*’ would be a strange-sounding invocation in the Litany to Our Lady to which we are so accustomed. In fact, devotion to the Blessed Virgin under this title has been common in parts of Germany for centuries. Recently, however, the world’s attention was drawn to it when Vatican Radio revealed that Pope Francis had championed the devotion decades ago in Argentina.

In the 1980s, while doing his doctoral studies in theology in Freiburg, Germany, as a Jesuit priest, Jorge Bergoglio saw a painting in a church in Augsburg entitled ‘*Mary Untier of Knots*’. He was so impressed by its stark symbolism that he took postcards of the image back with him to his home province of Argentina. He used to

enclose copies in every letter he sent out. An Argentinian artist-friend of his made an oil-on-canvas miniature painting of the picture, which was hung in the chapel of Colegio del Salvador in Buenos Aires where Bergoglio was posted. The college staff was so attracted by it that they persuaded the local pastor to get a larger copy made. This was displayed in the parish church of San Jose del Talar, in 1996. Eventually, devotion to Mary under the title ‘Untier of Knots’ spread across Latin America.

Shortly after Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger was elected pope, as Benedict XVI, the then-Cardinal Bergoglio presented the German-born pope with a silver chalice engraved with the image of Mary Untier of Knots along with that of Our Lady of Lujan, a popular Marian devotion in Argentina.

The Painting

The original Baroque painting of ‘*Mary Untier of Knots*’, by Johann George Melchior Schmidtner, dating from around 1700, is found in the church of St. Peter am Perlach, in Augsburg, Bavaria, Germany. It measures six feet in height and almost four feet in width.

The painting depicts Mary suspended between heaven and earth, resplendent with light. The Holy Spirit in the form of a dove is above her head, reminding us that she became Mother of God and full of grace by virtue of the third person of the Trinity. She is dressed resplendently in crimson, and a deep blue mantle representing her glory as Queen of the Universe. A crown of twelve stars

adorning her head signifies her Queenship of the Apostles. Her feet crush the head of the serpent indicating her part in the victory over Satan. She is surrounded by angels, signifying her position as Queen of the Angels and Queen of Heaven. In her hands is a knotted white ribbon, which she is serenely untying. Assisting her at the task are two angels: one presents the knots of our lives to her, while another angel presents the ribbon, freed from knots, to us.

The History

A German nobleman, Wolfgang Langenmantel (1568-1637) was distraught when his wife Sophia was planning to divorce him. To save the marriage, Wolfgang sought counsel from Fr. Jakob Rem, a Jesuit priest, respected for his wisdom and piety, at the University of Ingolstadt. On his fourth visit there on 28 September 1615, Wolfgang brought his 'wedding ribbon' to Fr. Rem. In the marriage ceremony of that time and place, the maid of honor joined together the arms of the bride and groom with a ribbon to symbolize their union for life. Fr. Rem, in a solemn ritual act, raised the ribbon before the image of 'Our Lady of the Snows', while at the same time untying its knots one by one. As he smoothed out the ribbon, it became dazzling white. This was taken as confirmation that their prayers were heard. Consequently, the divorce was averted, and Wolfgang remained happily married!

To commemorate the turn of the century in the year 1700, Wolfgang's grandson, Fr. Hieronymus Langenmantel, Canon of St. Peter am Perlach, installed a family altar in the church, as was customary then. He commissioned Johann Schmidtner to provide a painting to be placed over the altar. Schmidtner was

inspired by the story of Wolfgang and Fr. Rem, and so based his painting on that event. The image came to be venerated as Mary Untier of Knots. The painting has survived wars, revolutions, and secular opposition, and continues to draw people to it.

Devotion

In the 18th century the devotion to *Mary Untier of Knots* was localized to Germany. The devotion was augmented during the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant disaster (1986), when victims sought help through the intercession of *Mary Untier of Knots*. The first chapel to be named '*Mary Untier of Knots*' was constructed in 1989 in Styria, Austria. The image of Mary Untier of Knots at the main altar of the chapel was created by painter Franz Weiss, using the technique of painting under glass. It differed from the original, because the artist took as his theme the Chernobyl tragedy.

On December 8, 2000, a chapel dedicated to the Virgin Mary Untier of Knots was inaugurated in Formosa, Argentina. Since 1998, the devotion has been spreading in South America thanks to the booklet, **Mary, Undoer of Knots Novena**, published with ecclesiastical permission by Denis and Dr. Suzel Frem Bourgerie. It has been translated into twenty languages. The couple founded the National Sanctuary of the Virgin Mary Untier of Knots in Campinas (Sao Paulo), Brazil, in 2006.

The website '*Mary Undoer of Knots*' explains that the 'knots' Mary can untie, "**...are problems and struggles we face for which we do not see any solution...Knots of discord in our family, lack of understanding between parents and children, disrespect, violence, the knots of deep hurts between**

husband and wife, the absence of peace and joy at home. They are also the knots of anguish and despair of separated couples, the dissolution of the family, the knots of a drug addict son or daughter, sick or separated from home or God, knots of alcoholism, the practice of abortion, depression, unemployment, fear, solitude..."

Untie the Knots

An inspiring prayer that opens the above-mentioned novena sums up the role of the *Virgin Mary, Untier of Knots*:

Holy Mary, full of God's presence during the days of your life, you accepted with full humility the Father's will, and the Devil was never capable to tie you around with his confusion. Once with your Son you interceded for our difficulties, and, full of kindness and patience you gave us example of how to untie the knots of our life. And by remaining forever Our Mother, you put in order, and make clearer the ties that link us to the Lord. Holy Mother, Mother of God, and our Mother, to you, who untie with motherly heart the knots of our life, we pray to you to receive in your hands (name of person), and to free him/her of the knots and confusion with which our enemy attacks. Through your grace, your intercession, and your example, deliver us from all evil, Our Lady, and untie the knots that prevent us from being tied with God, so that we, free from sin and error, may find Him in all things, may have our hearts placed in Him, and may serve Him always in our brothers and sisters. Amen.

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Mary, Undoer of Knots

A once obscure, 300 year-old painting has become the fastest growing Marian devotion in the world today. Known in her German homeland as “Maria Knotenlöserin,” this beautiful sacred image by Catholic master painter Johann Schmidtner was inspired by a real German family’s story of marital disunity, struggle, intercession, and powerful reconciliation. *“Mary, Undoer of Knots”* is a favorite devotion of Pope Francis himself, and continues to spread throughout the world due to his influence.



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How this devotion started

To show us the mission granted to the Virgin Mary by Her Son, an artist Johann Melchior Georg Schmittndner painted Mary Undoer of Knots with great grace. Since 1700, his painting has been venerated in the Church of St. Peter in Perlack, Augsburg, Germany. It was originally inspired by a meditation of Saint Irenaeus (Bishop of Lyon and martyred in 202) based on the parallel made by Saint Paul between Adam and Christ. Saint Irenaeus, in turn, made a comparison between Eve and Mary, saying: **“Eve, by her disobedience, tied the knot of disgrace for the human race; whereas Mary, by her obedience, undid it.”**

But what are these knots? There are the problems and struggles we face for which we do not see any solution ... **knots of discord in your family, lack of understanding between parents and children, disrespect, violence, the knots of deep hurts between husband and wife, the absence of peace and joy at home. There are also the knots of anguish and despair of separated couples, the dissolution of the family, the knots of a drug addict son or daughter, sick or separated from home or God, knots of alcoholism, the practice of abortion, depression, unemployment, fear, solitude...** Ah, the knots of our life! How they suffocate the soul, beat us down and betray the heart's joy and separate us from God.

Day after day, more and more Christians kneel to pray to Her as soon as they meet the Mother of the Fair Love. Many families have become reconciled! Many diseases have been healed! Many spouses have returned to the Church! Many jobs have been given! Many conversions have taken place! Many Catholics have been on their knees praying and giving thanks for graces received from our sweet Mother. For that reason, Mary Who undoes the knots, Who was chosen by God to crush the evil with Her feet, comes to us to reveal Herself. ***She comes to provide jobs, good health, to reconcile families, because She wants to undo the knots of our sins which dominate our lives, so that – as sons of the King – we can receive the promises reserved for us from eternity. She comes with promises of victory, peace, blessings and reconciliation.***

1. Then, free from our knots – filled with happiness, we can be a testimony of the Divine Power in this world, like pieces of God's heart or small bottles of perfume exhaling mercy and love to our neighbor. Like ambassador of Jesus Christ and the Virgin of the fair love, we can rescue those who cry without any consolation, those who are lonely, tied with knots, who have no God, no Father nor Mother.

Mother of the Rising Sun, Immaculate, our Advocate, Helper in moments of affliction, Mother of God and made by Him our Mother, this is how Mary, Undoer of Knots is presented. Above all, She comes as the Queen of Mercy, the one who knows all about us, who has compassion for us and hurries to rescue us, praying for each one of us to Her beloved Jesus.

The Novena has the Cardinal ecclesiastical approval, receiving the NIHIL OBSTAT and IMPRIMATUR.

Imprimatur Paris Archdiocese

Novena to Our Lady Undoer of Knots



Unfailing Novena to the Virgin Mary Undoer of Knots

Instructions for praying the Novena to Mary, Undoer of Knots

Please note that there is a first part, composed of four steps, the last of which involves a separate meditation for each day of the novena; after the list of meditations, there is a second part of the novena, composed of three steps.

The Novena to Mary, Undoer of Knots

1. Begin each day of the Novena to *Mary, Undoer of Knots*, with the Sign of the Cross.
2. Make an Act of Contrition. Oh my God I am heartily sorry for having offended you. I detest all my sins because I dread the loss of Heaven and the pains of Hell. But most of all, because I offended you, oh my God, who are all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of your grace, to confess my sins, to do penance, and to amend my life. Amen.
3. Pray the first three decades of the rosary, with the appropriate mysteries for the day: Joyful, Sorrowful, Glorious.
4. Make the meditation of the day
5. Pray the last two decades of the rosary, with the appropriate mysteries for the day: Joyful, Sorrowful, Glorious.
6. Pray the Prayer to *Mary, Undoer of Knots*.
7. End each day of the Novena to *Mary, Undoer of Knots*, with the Sign of the Cross

Meditation for the First Day of the Novena to Mary, Undoer of Knots

Dearest Holy Mother, Most Holy Mary, you undo the knots that suffocate your children. Extend your merciful hands to me. I entrust to You today this knot [Mention your request here] and all the negative consequences that it provokes in my life. I give you this knot that torments me and makes me unhappy and so impedes me from uniting myself to You and Your Son Jesus, my Savior. I run to You, *Mary, Undoer of Knots*, because I trust you and I know that you never despise a sinning child who comes to ask you for help. I believe that you can undo this knot because Jesus grants you everything. I believe that you want to undo this knot because you are my Mother. I believe that You will do this because you love me with eternal love. Thank you, Dear Mother.

Mary, Undoer of Knots, pray for me.

Prayer to Mary, Undoer of Knots

Virgin Mary, Mother of fair love, Mother who never refuses to come to the aid of a child in need, Mother whose hands never cease to serve your beloved children because they are moved by the divine love and immense mercy that exists in your heart, cast your compassionate eyes upon me and see the snarl of knots that exist in my life. You know very well how desperate I am, my pain, and how I am bound by these knots. Mary, Mother to whom God entrusted the undoing of the knots in the lives of his children, I entrust into your hands the ribbon of my life. No one, not even the Evil One himself, can take it away from your precious care. In your hands there is no knot that cannot be undone. Powerful Mother, by your grace and intercessory power with Your Son and My Liberator, Jesus, take into your hands today this knot.

[Mention your request here]

I beg you to undo it for the glory of God, once for all. You are my hope. O my Lady, you are the only consolation God gives me, the fortification of my feeble strength, the enrichment of my destitution, and, with Christ, the freedom from my chains. Hear my plea. Keep me, guide me, protect me, o safe refuge!

Mary, Undoer of Knots, pray for me.

Meditation for the Second Day of the Novena to Mary, Undoer of Knots

Mary, Beloved Mother, channel of all grace, I return to You today my heart, recognizing that I am a sinner in need of your help. Many times I lose the graces you grant me because of my sins of egoism, pride, rancor and my lack of generosity and humility. I turn to You today, *Mary, Undoer of Knots*, for You to ask your Son Jesus to grant me a pure, divested, humble and trusting heart. I will live today practicing these virtues and offering you this as a sign of my love for You. I entrust into Your

hands this knot [*Mention your request here*] which keeps me from reflecting the glory of God.

Mary, Undoer of Knots, pray for me.

{*Recite Prayer to Mary, Undoer of Knots, see page 8*}

Meditation for the Third Day of the Novena to Mary, Undoer of Knots

Meditating Mother, Queen of heaven, in whose hands the treasures of the King are found, turn your merciful eyes upon me today. I entrust into your holy hands this knot in my life [*Mention your request here*] and all the rancor and resentment it has caused in me. I ask Your forgiveness, God the Father, for my sin. Help me now to forgive all the persons who consciously or unconsciously provoked this knot. Give me, also, the grace to forgive me for having provoked this knot. Only in this way can You undo it. Before You, dearest Mother, and in the name of Your Son Jesus, my Savior, who has suffered so many offenses, having been granted forgiveness, I now forgive these persons [*mention their names here*] and myself, forever. Thank you, *Mary, Undoer of Knots* for undoing the knot of rancor in my heart and the knot which I now present to you. Amen.

Mary, Undoer of Knots, pray for me.

{*Recite Prayer to Mary, Undoer of Knots, see page 8*}

Meditation for the Fourth Day of the Novena to Mary, Undoer of Knots

Dearest Holy Mother, you are generous with all who seek you, have mercy on me. I entrust into your hands this knot which robs the peace of my heart, paralyzes my soul and keeps me from going to my Lord and serving Him with my life. Undo this knot in my love [*Mention your request here*], O Mother, and ask Jesus to heal my paralytic faith, which gets downhearted with the stones on the road. Along with you, dearest Mother, may I see these stones as friends. Not murmuring against them anymore but giving endless thanks for them, may I smile trustingly in your power.

Mary, Undoer of Knots, pray for me.

{*Recite Prayer to Mary, Undoer of Knots, see page 8*}

Meditation for the Fifth Day of the Novena to Mary, Undoer of Knots

Mother, Undoer of Knots, generous and compassionate, I come to You today to once again entrust this knot [*Mention your request here*] in my life to you and to ask the divine wisdom to undo, under the light of the Holy Spirit, this snarl of problems. No one ever saw you angry; to the contrary, your words were so charged with sweetness that the Holy Spirit was manifested on your lips. Take away from me the bitterness, anger, and hatred which this knot has caused me. Give me, O dearest Mother, some of the sweetness and wisdom that is all silently reflected in your heart. And just as you were present at Pentecost, ask Jesus to send me a new presence of the Holy Spirit at this moment in my life. Holy Spirit, come upon me!

Mary, Undoer of Knots, pray for me.

{*Recite Prayer to Mary, Undoer of Knots, see page 8*}

Meditation for the Sixth Day of the Novena to Mary, Undoer of Knots

Queen of Mercy, I entrust to you this knot in my life [*Mention your request here*] and I ask you to give me a heart that is patient until you undo it. Teach me to persevere in the living word of Jesus, in the Eucharist, the Sacrament of Confession; stay with me and prepare my heart to celebrate with the angels the grace that will be granted to me. Amen! Alleluia!

Mary, Undoer of Knots, pray for me.

{*Recite Prayer to Mary, Undoer of Knots, see page 8*}

Meditation for the Seventh Day of the Novena to Mary, Undoer of Knots

Mother Most Pure, I come to You today to beg you to undo this knot in my life [*Mention your request here*] and free me from the snares of evil. God has granted you great power over all the demons. I renounce all of them today, every connection I have had with them, and I proclaim Jesus as my one and

only Lord and Savior. **Mary, Undoer of Knots**, crush the Evil One's head and destroy the traps he has set for me by this knot. Thank you, dearest Mother. Most Precious Blood of Jesus, free me!

Mary, Undoer of Knots, pray for me.

{**Recite Prayer to Mary, Undoer of Knots, see page 8**}

Meditation for the Eighth Day of the Novena to Mary, Undoer of Knots

Virgin Mother of God, overflowing with mercy, have mercy on your child and undo this knot [Mention your request here] in my life. I need your visit to my life, like you visited Elizabeth. Bring me Jesus, bring me the Holy Spirit. Teach me to practice the virtues of courage, joyfulness, humility, and faith, and, like Elizabeth, to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Make me joyfully rest on your bosom, Mary. I consecrate you as my mother, queen, and friend. I give you my heart and everything I have—my home and family, my material and spiritual goods. I am yours forever. Put your heart in me so that I can do everything Jesus tells me.

Mary, Undoer of Knots, pray for me.

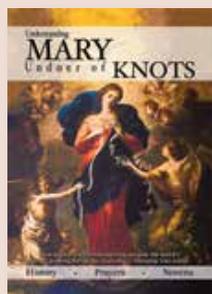
{**Recite Prayer to Mary, Undoer of Knots, see page 8**}

Meditation for the Ninth Day of the Novena to Mary, Undoer of Knots

Most Holy Mary, our Advocate, Undoer of Knots, I come today to thank you for undoing this knot in my life. You know very well the suffering it has caused me. Thank you for coming, Mother, with your long fingers of mercy to dry the tears in my eyes; you receive me in your arms and make it possible for me to receive once again the divine grace. **Mary, Undoer of Knots**, dearest Mother, I thank you for undoing the knots in my life. Wrap me in your mantle of love, keep me under your protection, enlighten me with your peace! Amen.

Mary, Undoer of Knots, pray for me.

{**Recite Prayer to Mary, Undoer of Knots, see page 8**}



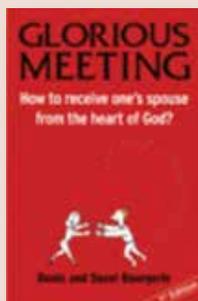
Understanding Mary Undoer of Knots

Learn the story behind this burgeoning devotion, see the original painting that inspired it,

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