On the 8th of December, we celebrate the beauty of the Virgin Mary, and since it is an important feast day, we prepare for it 9 days ahead of time. We call it the novena to the Immaculate Conception. To live it each day, we offer you texts from the Gospel for your personal prayer, along with some ideas from Saint Josemaría and Pope Francis: we can learn so much from their affection for Our Lady.
Gospel of Luke 1: 26-31

“In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin’s name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, ‘Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you.’ But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus.’”

God prepared Mary for the mission he was to entrust to her care: he made her all beautiful, singular, without stain: in other words, immaculate. She was born without the original sin that all of us have due to the fall of Adam and Eve, our first parents.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN THAT MARY IS “IMMACULATE”? From all eternity, before the creation of the world, God chose Mary, a young girl from Nazareth, to be the Mother of Jesus, the Son of God.
“But Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?’ And the angel said to her in reply, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.’”

“Our Mother listens, and asks a question to understand better what the Lord is asking of her. Then she gives her firm reply: Fiat! Be it done unto me according to thy word! This is the fruit of the best freedom of all, the freedom of deciding in favour of God.”

“Mary as a good mother teaches us to be, like her, capable of making definitive decisions… in the full freedom with which she said ‘yes’ to the plan God had for her life… Let us not be afraid of life commitments, commitments that take up and concern our entire life! In this way our life will be fruitful! And this is freedom: to have the courage to make these decisions with generosity.”

Ask Our Lady to help you have a big and generous heart like hers, available for whatever God wants for your life, knowing that, though it may mean making sacrifices at times, God always wants the best for us, so that we will be happy.
And she replied:
Be it done to me as you wish

"Mary said, ‘Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.’ Then the angel departed from her.”

Gospel of Luke 1: 38
To know what God wants of you and to respond like Mary, it helps to spend time before God in silence, reading and meditating the Bible. For example, you can pick a passage from the Gospel, read it slowly, and talk with God about how what’s being narrated there (the gestures of Jesus, the apostles’ reactions, the parables…) all have something to do with your life today.

“Don’t forget, my friend, that we are children. The Lady of the sweet name, Mary, is withdrawn in prayer. You, in that house, are whatever you want to be: a friend, a servant, an onlooker, a neighbour… —I, at this moment, don’t dare to be anything. I hide behind you; full of awe, I contemplate the scene: … ‘Be it done unto me according to Thy word’ (Luke 1:38). By the enchantment of this virginal phrase, the Word was made flesh… I still have time to tell my God, before anyone else does: Jesus, I love You.”

“Today is the right day to thank the Lord and to ask ourselves: am I a man or woman of ‘yes’ or a man or woman of ‘no’? Or am I a man or woman who looks away, so as not to respond?” May the Lord grant us the grace to take this path of men and women who knew how to say ‘yes’.”

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And Jesus, who is God and Man, is conceived in her womb

“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

Gospel of Matthew 1:20-21
“The beginning of the way, at the end of which you will find yourself completely carried away by love for Jesus, is a trusting love for Mary… I invite you to discover it for yourself, showing your love for Mary, opening your heart to her, confiding to her your joys and sorrows, asking her to help you recognize and follow Jesus.”

“(Our Lady) tells us to do what she did: not to squander the gift you have received, but to treasure it in your heart so it can grow and bear fruit, with the help of the Holy Spirit. In this way, each of you, for all your limitations and failings, can be a witness to Christ wherever you live: at home, in your parishes, in your associations and groups, and your places of study, work, service, entertainment… wherever God’s providence will lead you.”

Many times your Mother Mary will have suggested that you help someone in need, that you smile when you don’t feel like it, that you say sorry when you get angry with someone... and a thousand other things that, perhaps, you haven’t even realized. To thank her, you can leave her a surprise by putting some flowers close to an image of hers, in your parish, school, or home...
“And Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.”

“Now, in front of the infant Jesus, we can continue our personal examination of conscience. Are we ready to try to make our life a model and an example to our brothers, the rest of men, our equals? Are we ready to be other Christs? It’s not enough to say that we are... Are you living the life of Christ, in your everyday life in the middle of the world? Doing God’s work is not just a pretty phrase. It is an invitation to spend ourselves for Love’s sake.”

“Mary saw many difficult moments in her life, from the birth of Jesus, when ‘there was no place for them in the inn’, to Calvary. And like a good mother she is close to us, so that we may never lose courage before the adversities of life, before our weakness, before our sins: she gives us strength, she shows us the path of her Son.”

Our Lady will never leave us. As a good mother, she tells Jesus all the good things that you do and she understands when you fall. It’s worthwhile staying close to her. Do you know what a scapular is? It might be helpful to carry one around with you.
Our Lady fulfills the laws given by God

“When the days were completed for their purification according to the law of Moses, they took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord… Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, ‘Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted, and you yourself a sword will pierce’.”

“When the days of the Mother’s purification are accomplished, according to the Law of Moses, the Child must be taken to Jerusalem, to be presented to the Lord (Luke 2:22). … Just think: She — the Immaculate! — submits herself to the Law as if she were defiled. Through this example, foolish child, will you learn to obey the Holy Law of God, regardless of any personal sacrifice?”

“Mary is the Mother of Yes. Yes to God’s dream, yes to God’s care, yes to God’s will. It was a yes that, as we know, was not easy to live. A yes that bestowed no privileges or distinctions. Simeon told her in his prophecy: ‘a sword will pierce your heart’ (Lk 2:35) and indeed it did. That is why we love her so much. We find in her a true Mother, one who helps us to keep faith and hope alive in the midst of complicated situations.”

Mary, help me to fulfill my duties with love, to study well for love of God and to be able to serve the others. If you want, have an image of your Mother Mary close to you and look at it when you get uneasy or when you are tempted to be distracted by anything else to keep you from studying
“After they had completed its days, as they were returning, the boy Jesus remained behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it.”

“When his parents saw him, they were astonished, and his mother said to him, ‘Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety.’ And he said to them, ‘Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?’ But they did not understand what he said to them. He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart.”

“Let us try to imitate her, talking to Our Lord, conversing like two people in love about everything that happens to us, even the most insignificant incidents. Nor should we forget that we have to weigh them, consider their value, and see them with the eyes of faith, in order to discover the Will of God.”

“Mary helps us to understand what it means to be a disciple of Christ... Her first act was to listen to God... She followed Jesus, listening to every word that issued from his lips. She kept all those things in her heart and became the living memory of the signs worked by God’s Son to awaken our faith. But it is not enough simply to listen. That is certainly the first step, but listening then needs to be translated into concrete action.”

God speaks to us through the needs of others. You can ask Our Lady to open your eyes and ears to be able to notice these calls from God in so many moments throughout the day: when your parents need help, when you see a needy person on the street, when you realize that a friend is not doing well, when someone asks you a favor...
Mary notices the needs of others, with Jesus

“On the third day there was a wedding in Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding. When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, ‘They have no wine.’ [And] Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come.’ His mother said to the servers, ‘Do whatever he tells you’.”

Gospel of John 2: 1-5
“In the middle of the rejoicing at the feast in Cana, only Mary notices that they are short of wine... A soul will notice even the smallest details of service if, like her, it is alive with a passion for helping its neighbour, for God.”

“Dear friends, we have come to knock at the door of Mary’s house. She has opened it for us, she has let us in and she shows us her Son. Now she asks us to ‘do whatever he tells you’. Yes, Mother, we are committed to doing whatever Jesus tells us! And we will do it with hope, trusting in God’s surprises and full of joy. Amen.”

When you don’t know how to act, you can ask Our Lady: what would you do in my situation? How can I be better? What can I say to this person who shared this worry with me? What do you think of my reaction to this problem? She will teach you to respond as Jesus would.
“Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, behold, your son.’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother.’ And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.”

Gospel of John 19: 25-27
Mothers know everything about their children even without being told. Before going to bed, pray three Hail Mary’s each night, asking Our Lady that she protect you and keep your heart, body and soul clean of impurity and sin, so that you learn to love truly.

“Ecce mater tua! — Behold thy mother! — He gives us His Mother for our own. Earlier they had offered Him wine mingled with gall, and when He had tasted it, He would not drink (Matt 27:34). Now He thirsts... for love, for souls. Consummatum est. — It is consummated (John 19:30). Foolish child, look: all this... He has suffered it all for you... and for me. — Can you keep from crying?”

“Mary... is the Mother who patiently and lovingly brings us to God, so that he can untangle the knots of our soul by his fatherly mercy. We all have some of these knots and we can ask in our heart of hearts: What are the knots in my life? ‘Father, my knots cannot be undone!’ ... All the knots of our heart, every knot of our conscience, can be undone. Do I ask Mary to help me trust in God’s mercy, to undo those knots, to change? She, as a woman of faith, will surely tell you: ‘Get up, go to the Lord: he understands you’.”
Jesus takes his Mother, body and soul, to heaven

“A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.”

Revelation 12: 1
"Jesus wants to have His Mother, body and soul, in Heaven. —And the heavenly Court, arrayed in all its splendour, hail Our Lady. —You and I —children after all— take the train of Mary’s magnificent blue cloak, and so we can watch the marvellous scene. The most Blessed Trinity receives and showers honours on the Daughter, Mother, and Spouse of God…”

“Mary’s journey to heaven began with the ‘yes’ spoken in Nazareth in response to the Heavenly Messenger’s announcement of God’s will to her. And in reality it is just like this: every ‘yes’ to God is a step toward Heaven, toward eternal life. Because this is what the Lord wants: that all his children may have life in abundance! God wants us all with him, in his house!”

The great day has arrived: we can congratulate Our Lady, celebrate this feast day with joy, and think of a gift to offer her: a smile, praying the Rosary with affection, making a small act of service at home and doing it for her, with your brothers and sisters… and remember: what mothers most like is that their children love each other!
Virgin most holy and immaculate, to you, the honour of our people, and the loving protector of our city, do we turn with loving trust.

You are all-beautiful, O Mary! In you there is no sin.

Awaken in all of us a renewed desire for holiness: May the splendour of truth shine forth in our words, the song of charity resound in our works, purity and chastity abide in our hearts and bodies, and the full beauty of the Gospel be evident in our lives.

You are all-beautiful, O Mary! In you the Word of God became flesh.

Help us always to heed the Lord’s voice: May we never be indifferent to the cry of the poor,
or untouched by the sufferings of the sick and those in need; may we be sensitive to the loneliness of the elderly and the vulnerability of children, and always love and cherish the life of every human being.

You are all-beautiful, O Mary! In you is the fullness of joy born of life with God.

Help us never to forget the meaning of our earthly journey: May the kindly light of faith illumine our days, the comforting power of hope direct our steps, the contagious warmth of love stir our hearts; and may our gaze be fixed on God, in whom true joy is found.

You are all-beautiful, O Mary! Hear our prayer, graciously hear our plea: May the beauty of God’s merciful love in Jesus abide in our hearts, and may this divine beauty save us, our city and the entire world. Amen.