What Is a Novena and How Do I Pray One?

- A novena is a 9-day prayer, offered up for a specific petition.
- This spiritual significance of praying for 9 consecutive days comes from the 9 days the apostles prayed between the Ascension and Pentecost.
- The Church's liturgical calendar includes feast days to commemorate saints. Traditionally, a novena to a particular saint is prayed for the 9-day period leading up to his or her feast day. (For example, the Novena to St. Lucy is from December 4th-12th. Her feast day is on December 13th.)
- An important clarification: praying to the saints does not mean we are worshipping them. Worship belongs to God alone. Praying to the saints means we are asking them to pray to God on our behalf, similar to how we ask loved ones on earth to pray for us. Canonized saints are a part of the Church Triumphant, meaning we know they're in Heaven, enjoying a special closeness to God that we long for here on Earth. Therefore, it makes sense to ask for their intercession.
- To pray a novena, first decide on a specific intention to pray for. You are welcome to pray for anything or anyone close to your heart. If you're unsure, it might make sense to do a little research on the particular saint you're praying to. This might help you come up with an intention specific to the saint's life story. (For example, if you were praying the St. Peregrine Novena, you might offer this up for a loved one with cancer as St. Peregrine is the patron saint of those with cancer.)
- Of course, as with other prayers, we pray with hope that our requests will be granted, but understand we might not receive the answer we want or receive a clear answer when we would like. Ultimately, we pray with the understanding that God's will reigns. We make our petitions known to Him while also trusting that His plans are greater than our own.

I highly recommend setting a plan in place to make sure you don't miss a day! If you know another participant, you can text one another as a daily reminder. Alternatively, you can set a daily reminder in your phone to include it in your morning or evening prayers. If you do forget a day, no need to stress since this is an act of faith, not superstition. God knows your heart. If desired, you can pray the novena prayer twice in one day or simply extend the 9-day period by one more day to make up for the missed day.