

Novena to the Mother of God For the Nation

Catholics turn instinctively for help to the Mother of God in times of need. During the difficult years of persecution at the hands of the Roman Empire, Christians prayed the *Sub Tuum Praesidium*. This simple prayer was written, it seems, in the East, likely in Egypt, before the year A.D. 250. It gives voice to the Christian's confidence in the Blessed Virgin:

We fly to your patronage, O holy Mother of God; despise not our prayers in our necessities, but ever deliver us from all dangers, O glorious and blessed Virgin.

The prayer bears testimony to the Church's faith that Jesus Christ is God and Mary is the Mother of God and the mother of Christ's disciples (John 19:25-27). Her maternal relationship to Christ and to all the members of his body is the foundation of Christians' confidence in her ability to help her children on earth who face any danger.

From the foundation of the United States of America, our bishops have expressed great trust in Mary's motherly protection. In 1792, for instance, America's first Roman Catholic bishop, the Most Rev. John Carroll of Baltimore, chose the Blessed Mother as the patroness of the United States and entrusted the newly created nation to her care. On May 13, 1846, the bishops unanimously chose Mary, under the title of "The Immaculate Conception," as the patroness of our land. When the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception was dedicated in Washington, D.C., in 1959, the bishops again solemnly entrusted the country to her. Their prayer is well worth our consideration:

Most Holy Trinity: Our Father in heaven, who chose Mary as the fairest of your daughters; Holy Spirit, who chose Mary as your spouse; God the Son, who chose Mary as your Mother; in union with Mary, we adore your majesty and acknowledge your supreme, eternal dominion and authority.

Most Holy Trinity, we put the United States of America into the hands of Mary Immaculate in order that she may present the country to you. Through her we wish to thank you for the great resources of this land and for the freedom which has been its heritage. Through the intercession of Mary, have mercy on the Catholic Church in America. Grant us peace. Have mercy on our president and on all the officers of our government. Grant us a fruitful economy born of justice and charity. Have mercy on capital and industry and labor. Protect the family life of the nation. Guard the precious gift of many religious vocations. Through the intercession of our Mother, have mercy on the sick, the poor, the tempted, sinners — on all who are in need.

Mary, Immaculate Virgin, our Mother, patroness of our land, we praise you and honor you and give ourselves to you. Protect us from all harm. Pray for us, that acting always according to your will and the will of your divine Son, we may live and die pleasing to God. Amen.

With these same sentiments, Catholics in 2012 turn to the Mother of God for help. Many of the values that shaped our country from the beginning seem to be at risk. Our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, and the American bishops have noted the erosion of religious freedom in the United States, the first value guaranteed by the Constitution. Other fundamental truths are also in danger: the God-given right to life of every unborn child, the value of virginity until marriage for our young people and the virtue of chastity for everyone, the very definition of marriage as the indissoluble bond between a man and a woman who are open to receive new life from God, and

the responsibility of all to care for the disabled and the elderly until God calls them to himself. There are many other issues, but these alone point to the importance of prayer and discernment.

Mary helps us, as no other, to stand in awe before the mystery of human conception and birth, for God himself was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and carried in her womb for nine months with love beyond description. Mary gave birth to God-made-man and nursed him at her breasts. We see in Mary at one and the same time the beauty of virginity, spousal love and motherhood — a motherhood that Christ extended to the entire human race.

Throughout her life and most especially as she stood with him on Calvary, Mary cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope and burning charity in the work of the Savior in giving back supernatural life to souls. Wherefore, she is our Mother in the order of grace (Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 61). As such, Mary is the image and model of the Church as virgin, bride and mother. She teaches all Christians the meaning of discipleship. Her passing from this life to heaven was a sharing in Christ's death, resurrection and ascension and the promise of our resurrection on the Last Day.

It has rightly been said that there is more love in Mary's heart than evil in the world. This is the meaning of the angel Gabriel's greeting: "Rejoice, Full of Grace" (Luke 1:28). Mary is the woman chosen by God to be his mother and ours, but also to be the chief human enemy — the nemesis — of the evil one (Genesis 3:15, Revelation 12). From her place in heaven, the Blessed Mother is eager to help her children in their struggles. The bishops at Vatican Council II expressed this consoling truth:

Taken up to heaven, the Blessed Virgin did not lay aside her salvific duty, but by her constant intercession continued to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation. By her maternal charity, she cares for the brethren of her Son, who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and difficulties, until they are led into the happiness of their true home (Lumen Gentium, 62).

This "Novena to the Mother of God for the Nation" will remind us of some of the central truths of the faith, in particular, the incarnation, passion, death and resurrection of the Lord and Mary's unique role in our salvation. It will be, in a way, a catechism lesson that challenges us to a deeper conversion to Christ and a more generous life of charity. With these intentions in mind, we shall turn to Mary and meditate on the graces of her life:

Day 1: The Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God

Day 2: Mary's Desire for Virginity

Day 3: The Annunciation

Day 4: The Visitation

Day 5: The Divine Motherhood of Mary

Day 6: The Wedding Feast of Cana

Day 7: Mary at Calvary

Day 8: Mary and the Mystery of Easter

Day 9: The Assumption of Mary Into Heaven

In 2012, the novena will help us prepare for the feast of the Holy Rosary on Oct. 7. During these nine days of prayer, which will begin on Sept. 29, we shall encounter many friends who will accompany us and pray with us for our country: the archangels Michael, Gabriel and Raphael (9/29), St. Jerome (9/30), St. Thérèse of Lisieux (10/1), All the Guardian Angels (10/2), St. Francis of Assisi (10/4), and St. Bruno and Blessed Marie Rose Durocher (10/6).

The proximity of the novena to the 2012 presidential election will offer an opportunity to pray for all our government officials and seek divine assistance in the elec-

tions. The novena will fulfill the mandate of St. Paul, as stated in his First Letter to Timothy:

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way. This is good, and it is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:1-4).

In future years, the novena may be used to prepare for any Marian solemnity or feast: Mary, Mother of God (1/1), The Annunciation (3/25), The Visitation (5/31), The Assumption (8/15), the Queenship of Mary (8/22), The Sorrow of Mary (9/15), The Presentation of Mary in the Temple (11/21), The Immaculate Conception (12/8) and Our Lady of Guadalupe, Queen of the Americas (12/12). Because of the pro-life motif that runs throughout the nine days of prayer, the "Novena for the Nation" may also be used to prepare for various pro-life activities such as the March for Life in Washington, D.C., in late January.

When our Blessed Mother appeared to St. Catherine Labouré in 1830 at the Rue du Bac in Paris, she modeled the medal of the Immaculate Conception that is popularly known as *The Miraculous Medal*. Mary stood on a globe, which Catherine understood to be the world. As Mary's arms reached out to embrace her children, bright rays of light cascaded from her hands into the world. St. Catherine asked her: *Please tell me, what is this light?* The Blessed Virgin responded, *The light is the grace of my Son*. Catherine was troubled because some rays of light did not flow into the world. She asked what this might mean. Mary said, *Those are graces people fail to seek from me*.

Here is a wonderful secret of prayer: Christ wants us to go humbly to his Mother in search of his help. This is precisely what we are doing in the "Novena to the Mother of God for the Nation." Everyone who joins in these nine days of prayer has his or her own needs. Each person should remember to pray for the intentions of all. Through the charity of EWTN, a great multitude of people will gather with confidence to pray for the assistance of the Mother of God and, with her, to worship the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We await a powerful outpouring of the graces of heaven through Mary's hands.

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The novena, additional suggestions of prayers and actions and information on EWTN's coverage of the novena can be found at ReligiousLiberties.org/novena/.

Sept. 29 / Day 1: The Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God

Prayer

We fly to your patronage,
O holy Mother of God;
Despise not our prayers in our necessities,
But ever deliver us from all dangers,
O glorious and blessed Virgin.

Reflection

Since God creates an immortal soul through the conjugal union of man and woman, the conception of every human person is sacred. He loves every person into being — even when the conception is an act of lust or violence.

When the Virgin Mary was conceived in the womb of her mother, God created her immortal soul and filled her with his divine life. In the Immaculate Conception, God uniquely redeemed Mary by preserving her from Original Sin through the foreseen merits of Christ, the Savior.

From the first moment of her life, Mary was wholly beautiful, full of grace (Luke 1:28), without any trace of self-centeredness, any inclination to sin and with unparalleled freedom to love God and all other people.

In her conception, God armed Mary to destroy the kingdom of Satan (Genesis 3:15). The charity of Christ filled Mary from the first moment of her existence — in the safety of her mother's womb.

Blessed Pope Pius IX proclaimed the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in these words: "We declare, pronounce and define that the doctrine which holds that the most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instance of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was

preserved free from all stain of original sin is a doctrine revealed by God and therefore to be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful."

The good news of the Immaculate Conception is that there is more love in Mary's sinless soul than there is evil in the world. In her Immaculate Conception, God empowered Mary to say Yes freely to his plan of salvation in Christ and to help us, her sons and daughters, to say Yes, too.

Prayer

God, almighty Father, at the moment of our conception, you loved each of us into life. You loved Mary wondrously in her immaculate conception, preserving her from inheriting the sin of Adam through the foreseen merits of the Savior. You prepared Mary in her conception to be the Mother and partner of your Son and our loving mother. Give all people an ever deeper reverence for your presence and creative action in human conception. Help all to recognize the evil of abortion and contraception and all sins which offend our Creator, God. In Mary's maternal embrace, may every American foster reverence for human life in our nation. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Additional Suggestions

- Attend Mass and receive holy Communion each day of the novena.
- Receive the sacrament of penance.
- Read Scripture and pray the Rosary each day.
- Make a donation or do something practical to help the poor.
- Encourage as many people as possible to participate in the novena.



IMMACULATE CONCEPTION FROM TREASURY OF BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS: OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS BY JULIUS SCHNORR VON CAROLSFELD, DOVER PUBLICATIONS, INC.

"You are wholly beautiful, my beloved, and without a blemish."

— Song of Songs 4:7



ANNUNCIATION FROM DORE'S LIFE OF JESUS, DOVER PUBLICATIONS, INC.

And Mary said to the angel, "How shall this be, since I have no husband?"

— Luke 1:34



Sept. 30 / Day 2: Mary's Desire for Virginity

Prayer

We fly to your patronage,
O holy Mother of God;
Despise not our prayers in our necessities,
But ever deliver us from all dangers,
O glorious and blessed Virgin.

Reflection

Long before the angel Gabriel brought Mary the message that God had chosen her to be the Mother of his Son, she had resolved to give herself entirely and exclusively — in the gift of perpetual virginity.

Mary knew that God had entered into a covenant — a family bond — with the people of Israel on Mount Sinai. Although the Lord had remained faithful to the covenant promises, Israel had not.

By repeatedly breaking the commandments of God, her people had shown herself to be an adulterous spouse. Mary, painfully aware of the history of Israel, as told by the prophets, yearned to make reparation for the sins of her people by loving God as his faithful bride.

Here is Pope John Paul II's description of Mary's desire to remain a virgin throughout her life:

"Mary herself wanted to be the personal image of that absolutely faithful bride, totally devoted to the divine Bridegroom, and, therefore, she became the beginning of the new Israel in her spousal heart. ... She confirms and strengthens a consecration already in effect, which becomes the abiding condition of her life. She, in fact, replies to the Angel of the Annunciation: 'How will this come about, since I am a virgin?' (Luke 1:34); as if to say: I am a virgin devoted to God, and I do not intend to leave my spouse, because I do not think that

God wills it — he who is so jealous of Israel, so severe with anyone who betrays him, so persistent in his merciful call to reconciliation! Mary is well aware of her people's infidelity, and she wants personally to be a bride who is faithful to her most beloved divine Spouse."

God sent the angel Gabriel to the town of Nazareth to tell Mary that he had accepted her desire to belong exclusively to him and, in fact, was the source of that desire. Mary's longing for a life of virginity was, in fact, a response to God's faithful love. The angel tells Mary that she would conceive God's Son as a virgin through the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit. She is to be simultaneously a virgin, bride and mother. Her freely chosen virginity allowed Mary to belong totally to Christ as his Mother and totally to each of us as our loving mother. The Blessed Virgin Mary witnesses that the beautiful value of virginity is always for the sake of spousal love and motherhood!

Prayer

Almighty and ever-living God, Mary gave herself to you unreservedly through the gift of her virginity. As she loved Jesus with an undivided heart, she continues to love and serve all of her children on earth. Through her example, instill in all the members of your Church a deeper appreciation of the value of virginity. Help all to understand that virginity is the perfect gift that spouses give to each other on their wedding day. Inspire many young men and women to embrace a life of consecrated celibacy or virginity in the priesthood and consecrated life. Teach us all the meaning of your Son's words: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Oct. 1 / Day 3: The Annunciation

Prayer

We fly to your patronage,
O holy Mother of God;
Despise not our prayers in our necessities,
But ever deliver us from all dangers,
O glorious and blessed Virgin.

Reflection

Scholars speculate that Mary was likely a teenager when Gabriel came from heaven with God's message of salvation. That day, God revealed to Mary her vocation and her role in the salvation of the world. He revealed to her that he had a Son who would come into the world to save all people from sin, death and the dominion of Satan. God asked Mary, the New Eve, to be the virgin Mother of his eternal Son. His plan depended on her "Yes!" God willed to open the floodgates of mercy for the human race through Mary's consent to be the virgin Mother of God-made-man. God, who needs no one to accomplish his purposes, willed to send his Son to us through Mary's assent of faith.

Mary stood before God as a representative of the people of Israel and, indeed, of the entire human race. At that moment, everything depended upon her fiat — her Yes — let it be done to me according to your will. At the Second Vatican Council, the Church stressed Mary's active participation in the redemption of the world.

The Council Fathers recalled the words of St. Irenaeus of Lyon, a bishop of the second century:

"Mary, a daughter of Adam, consenting to the divine Word, became the mother of Jesus, the one and only Mediator. Embracing God's salvific will with a full heart and impeded by no sin, she devoted herself totally as a handmaid of the Lord to the person and work of her Son, under him and with him, by the grace of almighty God, serving the mystery of redemption. Rightly, therefore, the Holy Fathers see her as used by

God not merely in a passive way, but as freely cooperating in the work of human salvation through faith and obedience. For, as St. Irenaeus says, she, 'being obedient, became the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race.' Hence, not a few of the early Fathers gladly assert in their preaching, 'The knot of Eve's disobedience was untied by Mary's obedience; what the virgin Eve bound through her unbelief, the Virgin Mary loosened by her faith.' Comparing Mary with Eve, they call her 'the Mother of the living,' and still more often they say: 'Death through Eve, life through Mary'" (*Lumen Gentium*, 56).

Through the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, Mary embraced Christ first in her mind through faith, then in her heart through hope and charity — and finally in her body by a miracle that only God could accomplish. She eagerly consented to her virginal motherhood with the full awareness that her child would be named Jesus because he will save his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21). Through her fiat, Mary gave us Jesus and is, therefore, in God's plan, the human cause of our salvation. We owe everything good in our lives to Mary, the Cause of Our Joy.

Prayer

God, almighty Father, when Mary surrendered herself to your word, she conceived Christ first in her mind through faith, in her heart through hope and love, and finally in her body through the marvelous operation of your Holy Spirit. By her eagerness to be the mother of your Son, she opened the floodgates of your merciful love for all men and women. May she help all people to live by faith, hope, love and obedience to your will. May she remind us always that you want to bring salvation to our brothers and sisters through our faith and good works. Help us to accept fully our responsibility to combat the culture of death and foster the culture of life in our American society. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.



THE ANNUNCIATION FROM TREASURY OF BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS: OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS BY JULIUS SCHNORR VON CAROLSFELD, DOVER PUBLICATIONS, INC.

And Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord."

Let it be done to me according to your word."

— Luke 1:38



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Oct. 2 / Day 4: The Visitation

Prayer

We fly to your patronage,
O holy Mother of God;
Despise not our prayers in our necessities,
But ever deliver us from all dangers,
O glorious and blessed Virgin.

Reflection

Mary, carrying the eternal Son of God in her womb, went with haste to visit her aged relative Elizabeth and her husband, Zechariah. The angel Gabriel had told Mary that Elizabeth was also pregnant: "Behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For with God nothing is impossible" (Luke 1: 36-37).

St. Luke, it would seem, saw 2 Samuel 6, the Old Testament account of King David's transfer of the Ark of the Covenant from the hill country of Judah to Jerusalem, fulfilled in the Visitation account. St. Luke's intention was to present Mary, making the journey to visit her cousin Elizabeth, as the true Ark of the Covenant — the new dwelling place of God among his people.

Here are some points of comparison: When Jewish people came into the presence of the Ark of the Covenant, they would let out a joyful shout, a certain holy noise reserved exclusively to honor God's presence in the ark. When Mary entered her kinswoman's house and greeted her, Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry. Elizabeth used almost the exact words that King David had used when he realized the significance of the ark coming to his house: "And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" Finally, whereas David danced and leaped before the old Ark of the Covenant, it was John the

Baptist in his mother's womb who danced and leaped before the presence of God in his new Ark of the Covenant, Mary!

This text casts brilliant light on the meaning of the Annunciation and Mary's fiat. Through Mary's assent of faith to the word of the angel, the eternal Son of God came down from heaven to dwell in her womb. The Ark of the Covenant constructed at God's command by Moses and Aaron is only a type — a foreshadowing of Mary, the true dwelling place of God. Elizabeth, Zechariah and the unborn John the Baptist are blessed by Jesus living in Mary. Elizabeth blessed Son and Mother three times: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."

Prayer

Almighty and ever-living God, the Virgin Mary is the new Ark of the Covenant. During the nine months of her pregnancy, she carried your Son-made-man in her virginal womb. From his royal throne, Christ began to bring his people salvation. After his birth, which did not diminish his mother's virginal integrity, but sanctified it, he continued to dwell in Mary through grace and charity with an unparalleled intensity. Father, we beg you to send Mary to visit the United States, calling all to faith in Christ's gospel of life and conversion from sin. May she help all to understand that her conception of Christ in Nazareth and her wondrous child-birth in Bethlehem point to the inviolable sanctity of every conception and birth. May she help those women who have had abortions to find God's forgiveness and healing. Father, turn the hearts of all advocates of contraception and abortion to Christ, the Lord of Life. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.



VISITATION FROM TREASURY OF BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS: OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS BY JULIUS SCHNORR VON CAROLSFELD, DOVER PUBLICATIONS, INC.

In those days, Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.

And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord." And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior."

— Luke 1:39-47



DIVINE MOTHER, CHRIST IS BORN FROM TREASURY OF BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS: OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS BY JULIUS SCHNORR VON CAROLSFELD, DOVER PUBLICATIONS, INC.

Lo, the star which the Wise Men had seen in the East went before them, till it came to rest over the place where the Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy; and going into the house, they saw the Child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

— Matthew 2: 9-11

Oct. 3 / Day 5: The Divine Motherhood of Mary

Prayer

We fly to your patronage,
O holy Mother of God;
Despise not our prayers in our necessities,
But ever deliver us from all dangers,
O glorious and blessed Virgin.

Reflection

Cardinal James Gibbons, archbishop of Baltimore from 1877 to 1921, explained to his flock why Catholics delight to honor Mary with the title "Mother of God":

"When we call the Blessed Virgin the Mother of God, we assert our belief in two things: First, that her Son, Jesus Christ, is true man, else she were not a mother. Second, that he is true God, else she were not the Mother of God. In other words, we affirm that the second Person of the Blessed Trinity, the Word of God, who in his divine nature is from all eternity begotten of the Father, consubstantial with him, was in the fullness of time again begotten, by being born of the Virgin, thus taking to himself, from her maternal womb, a human nature of the same substance with hers.

"But it may be said the Blessed Virgin is not the Mother of the Divinity. She had not, and she could not have, any part in the generation of the Word of God, for that generation is eternal; her maternity is temporal. He is her Creator; she is his creature. Style her, if you will, the Mother of the man Jesus or even of the human nature of the Son of God, but not the Mother of God.

"I shall answer this objection by putting a question. Did the mother who bore us have any part in the production of our soul? Was not this nobler part of our being the work of God alone? And yet who would for a moment dream of saying 'the mother of my body' and not 'my mother'?"

"The comparison teaches us that the terms 'parent' and 'child,' 'mother' and 'son,' refer to the persons and not to the

parts or elements of which the persons are composed. Hence, no one says: 'The mother of my body,' 'the mother of my soul'; but, in all propriety, 'my mother,' the mother of I who live and breathe, think and act, one in my personality, though uniting in it a soul directly created by God and a material body directly derived from the maternal womb. In like manner, as far as the sublime mystery of the Incarnation can be reflected in the natural order, the Blessed Virgin, under the overshadowing of the Holy Ghost, by communicating to the second Person of the Blessed Trinity, as mothers do, a true human nature of the same substance with her own, is thereby really and truly his Mother.

"It is in this sense that the title of 'Mother of God,' denied by Nestorius, was vindicated to her by the General Council of Ephesus, in 431; in this sense, and in no other, has the Church called her by that title."

Prayer

God, our almighty Father, by becoming a man, your Son revealed the goodness and holiness of human conception, pregnancy and birth. With tender maternal love, the Virgin Mary conceived your eternal Son, carried him beneath her heart and brought him to birth. No intervention of yours in human history illustrates more clearly the greatness and dignity of woman than the Incarnation. May Mary help all to believe that the man she bore, Jesus Christ, is truly your eternal Son-made-man. May she help all to appreciate the wonder of conception, pregnancy and birth. Draw all women in our society to her motherly embrace. Help them understand that their children are created by you at the moment of their conception and belong to you in this life and in the next. Father, protect all women from attacks against their maternal fecundity. Guard them from those who war against them and their dignity through the promotion of contraception, sterilization and abortion. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Oct. 4 / Day 6: The Wedding Feast of Cana

Prayer

We fly to your patronage,
O holy Mother of God;
Despise not our prayers in our necessities,
But ever deliver us from all dangers,
O glorious and blessed Virgin.

Reflection

The first explicit mention of the Mother of Jesus in St. John's Gospel is at a wedding feast. Mary arrived at the week-long celebration before Jesus. When he arrived, Mary immediately brought him a concern: "They have no wine." She wanted everyone, especially the newlyweds and their families and friends, to enjoy the wedding celebration. Certainly, Mary felt the embarrassment of the young couple and was confident in bringing their need to Jesus. He responded to her intercession — yes, this is a powerful instance of Mary's maternal mediation. By changing water into wine, Jesus performed the first great miracle of his public ministry.

St. John notes that Jesus acted to witness to his divinity for the apostles: "This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him." Before the miracle, the apostles thought of Jesus as a rabbi, a kind of professor of the Torah. Seeing the water turn into wine before their eyes, the apostles experienced Jesus' glory as Messiah and Lord and began to believe in him. By her intercession, Mary obtained saving faith for those chosen to be the first priests of the Church. Mary, even then, understood her right to bring every human and spiritual need into the presence of her Son. Then in Cana, and now in heaven, the Mother of God desires her Son to reveal his power as Messiah and Lord of all creation and to save his people.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church connects the first miracle of Jesus and the sacrament of matrimony: "On the threshold of his public life, Jesus performs his first sign — at

his mother's request — during a wedding feast. The Church attaches great importance to Jesus' presence at the wedding at Cana. She sees in it the confirmation of the goodness of marriage and the proclamation that thenceforth marriage will be an efficacious sign of Christ's presence" (1613). Mary in heaven continues to bring the human and spiritual needs of families into the radius of Christ's messianic power.

Prayer

Mother Mary, at Cana you showed that you are the mother of many children. You understood the pain felt by the poor and turned to your Son for help. Filled with the Spirit of God, you also wanted Jesus' apostles to share your faith in him. You understood that the absence of faith is the worst poverty any person ever experiences. You also knew that only God can give the gift of faith. Bringing these needs to Jesus in prayer, rich wine flowed through the small village of Cana, and the strong wine of faith flooded the hearts of the apostles.

Mary, we all have needs, great and small. We are poor in material resources and in spiritual goods. We beg you to bring all of our needs to Jesus. You never ask for anything that will harm your children. Jesus never refuses any request you bring to him. Pray especially for our families that are torn apart by marital infidelity, domestic violence, flaws in parental love and the pain caused by contraception, sterilization and abortion. Help all to understand that the sacrament of matrimony was instituted by your Son so that man and wife, in loving one another, may encounter his grace and bring forth children for the Kingdom. Pray for your sons and daughters who bear the heavy burden of same-sex attraction. Help them discover the freedom chastity imparts and its beauty. Mary, pray that our families may live in harmony and love as you lived with Jesus and Joseph in your home in Nazareth. Mary, we need you to be our mother, the mother of all families. Amen.

On the third day there was a marriage at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; Jesus also was invited to the marriage, with his disciples. When the wine failed, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Now, six stone jars were standing there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding 20 or 30 gallons. Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the steward of the feast." So they took it. When the steward of the feast tasted the water now become wine — and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew) — the steward of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, "Every man serves the good wine first; and when men have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now." This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

— John 2:1-11

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Oct. 5 / Day 7: Mary at Calvary

Prayer

We fly to your patronage,
O holy Mother of God;
Despise not our prayers in our necessities,
But ever deliver us from all dangers,
O glorious and blessed Virgin.

Reflection

As Mary stood close to her crucified Son, she suffered everything he suffered in her heart. God asked a great deal of Mary on Calvary. He asked her to believe, even though there was not human reason to believe, what he had spoken to her through the angel Gabriel 30 years earlier: "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his Kingdom, there will be no end" (Luke 1:32-33).

God asked the Blessed Mother to consent to the sacrifice of Christ by offering Jesus to the Father in an act of worship and in joining her own sufferings to his for our salvation. The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council beautifully described Mary's maternal work on Calvary: "In a wholly singular way, Mary cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope and burning charity in the work of the Savior restoring supernatural life to souls. Wherefore, she is our Mother in the order of grace" (*Lumen Gentium*, 61).

To reveal that Mary at the foot of the cross was in labor, giving birth to the Church, Jesus said: "Woman, behold your son!" And to the Beloved Disciple, who represented each of us: "Behold, your

mother!" The ancient Christian writer Origen of Alexandria wrote: "For if Mary, as those declare, who with sound mind extol her, had no other son but Jesus, and yet Jesus says to his mother, 'Woman, behold your son,' and not 'Behold, you have this son also,' then he virtually said to her, 'Behold, this is Jesus, whom you bore.' Is it not the case that everyone who is perfect lives himself no longer, but Christ lives in him? If Christ lives in him, then it is said of him to Mary, 'Behold, your son, Christ'" (*On John*, Book 1, 6).

St. John then observes, "And from that hour the disciple took her to his home." Scripture scholars note that the text could be translated literally as: "From that hour the disciple took her into his own." Christ wants all his beloved disciples to enter into a son-mother, daughter-mother relationship with his Mother, the first and most perfect of his disciples. The disciple takes her into his intimacy, asking her to teach him the ways of Christ. Blessed John Paul II based his understanding of consecration to Jesus through Mary on this one verse of Scripture: "The disciple took her into his own." Sts. Louis de Montfort and Maximilian Kolbe had taught him the importance of total consecration to Jesus through Mary. These three holy priests will also help us to give everything to Jesus through Mary.

It is so important in our perilous times to make an act of total consecration of oneself to Jesus through the Blessed Virgin. Through this act of self-offering, the Christian gives Christ everything through Mary: body, soul, all material possessions and occupations, and every spiritual gift. Through consecration, the Christian freely becomes Mary's servant and slave, so as to belong totally to Jesus.

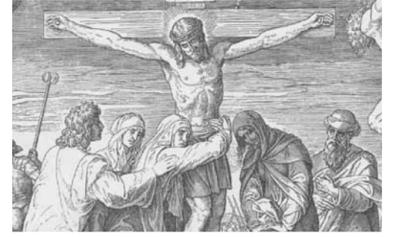
Unlike the slavery to sin, this freely chosen slavery is the only bondage that brings true freedom and peace. By giving everything to Christ through Mary, the Christian is confident that the Holy Spirit will use him to crush the head of Satan (Genesis 3:15) and prepare for the reign of Jesus Christ.

Prayer of Consecration of St. Maximilian Kolbe

O Immaculate Mary, Queen of Heaven and Earth, refuge of sinners and our most loving Mother, God has willed to entrust the entire order of mercy to you. I, (name), a repentant sinner, cast myself at your feet, humbly imploring you to take me, with all that I am and have, wholly to yourself as your possession and property. Please make of me, of all my powers of soul and body, of my whole life, death and eternity, whatever most pleases you.

If it pleases you, use all that I am and have without reserve wholly to accomplish what was said of you: "She will crush your head," and "You alone have destroyed all heresies in the whole world." Let me be a fit instrument in your immaculate and merciful hands for introducing and increasing your glory to the maximum in all the many strayed and indifferent souls, and thus help extend as far as possible the blessed Kingdom of the most Sacred Heart of Jesus. For wherever you enter, you obtain the grace of conversion and growth in holiness, since it is through your hands that all graces come to us from the most Sacred Heart of Jesus.

V. Allow me to praise you, O Sacred Virgin.
R. Give me strength against your enemies.
Amen.



MARY AT CALVARY, JESUS DIES ON THE CROSS FROM TREASURY OF BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS: OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS BY JULIUS SCHNORR VON CAROLSFELD, DOVER PUBLICATIONS, INC.

Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary, the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing near, 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 to his own home.

— John 19:25-27



MARY EASTER MYSTERY, THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST FROM TREASURY OF BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS: OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS BY JULIUS SCHNORR VON CAROLSFELD, DOVER PUBLICATIONS, INC.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve. Then he appeared to more than 500 brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James; then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

— 1 Corinthians 15:3-7

Oct. 6 / Day 8: Mary and the Mystery of Easter

Prayer

We fly to your patronage,
O holy Mother of God;
Despise not our prayers in our necessities,
But ever deliver us from all dangers,
O glorious and blessed Virgin.

Reflection

Saturday is Mary's day. The origin of this custom seems to be the sense among Christians that Mary alone believed firmly in Christ's resurrection from the dead once his body was laid in the tomb on Holy Saturday. All of the other disciples were, at best, distraught and confused by Jesus' promise that he would rise from the dead. Mary alone did not falter in her faith. It is precisely this faith that the Church honors each Saturday of the year.

Blessed John Paul II explained in a general audience address that Mary was very likely the first disciple to see and embrace the risen Lord:

"Indeed, it is legitimate to think that the Mother was probably the first person to whom the risen Jesus appeared. Could not Mary's absence from the group of women who went to the tomb at dawn (Mark 16:1; Matthew 28:1) indicate that she had already met Jesus? This inference would also be confirmed by the fact that the first witnesses of the Resurrection, by Jesus' will, were the women who had remained faithful at the foot of the cross and therefore were more steadfast in faith. Indeed, the Risen One entrusts to one of them, Mary Magdalene, the message to be passed on to the apostles (John 20:17-18). Perhaps this fact, too, allows us to think that Jesus showed himself first to his Mother, who had been the most faithful and had kept her faith intact when put to the test. Lastly, the unique and special character of the Blessed Virgin's presence at Calvary and her perfect union with the Son in his suffering on the cross seem to postulate a very particular sharing on her part in the mystery of the Resurrection" (May 21, 1997).

The Scriptures tell us that after Christ ascended into heaven, Mary remained with the apostles as they awaited the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14). She was with the Twelve on Pentecost and, with them, received the Holy Spirit. The Twelve received the Spirit for their work of preaching the Gospel and baptizing people of every nation. Mary received the Holy Spirit for her mission as mother of Christ's disciples. Until the end of the world, Mary,

Mother of the Church, will help her children live by faith, spread the faith and work tirelessly for the conversion of all men and women to Christ.

St. Louis de Montfort in his masterpiece, *True Devotion to Mary*, explains that Mary, assumed into heaven, shares her faith with her children on earth:

"Mary will share her faith with you. Her faith on earth was stronger than that of all the patriarchs, prophets, apostles and saints. Now that she is reigning clearly in God by the light of glory. However, with the consent of almighty God, she did not lose it when entering heaven. She has preserved it for her faithful servants in the Church militant. Therefore, the more you gain the friendship of this faithful Virgin, the more you will be inspired by faith in your daily life" (214).

Catholics today need to be strengthened by Mary to stand firm in the fight for the protection of human life from conception to natural death and the preservation of the religious freedom guaranteed to American citizens by the Constitution. May she who has been chosen by God to crush the head of the ancient serpent (Genesis 3:15) accomplish the renewal of faith and apostolic zeal in our land through the labor of Catholics dedicated to the Gospel.

Prayer

Confer, O Lord, on us, who serve beneath the standard of Mary, that fullness of faith in you and trust in her to which it is given to conquer the world. Grant us a lively faith, animated by charity, which will enable us to perform all our actions from the motive of pure love of you and ever to see you and serve you in our neighbor; a faith, firm and immovable as a rock, through which we shall rest tranquil and steadfast amid the crosses, toils and disappointments of life; a courageous faith which will inspire us to undertake and carry out without hesitation great things for your glory and for the salvation of souls; a faith which will be our Pillar of Fire — to lead us forth united; to kindle everywhere the fires of divine love; to enlighten those who are in darkness and in the shadow of death; to inflame those who are lukewarm; to bring back life to those who are dead in sin; and which will guide our own feet in the way of peace. So that, when the battle of life is over, all of Mary's children, without the loss of any one, may be gathered together in the Kingdom of your love and glory. Amen.

(Adapted from *Tessera* of the Legion of Mary)

Oct. 7 / Day 9: The Assumption of Mary Into Heaven

Prayer

We fly to your patronage,
O holy Mother of God;
Despise not our prayers in our necessities,
But ever deliver us from all dangers,
O glorious and blessed Virgin.

Reflection

In his homilies on our Blessed Mother, St. Francis de Sales preached that Mary was perfectly one with Christ on Calvary in his worship of the Father. She offered him lovingly back to the Father, and she offered her sufferings for her children. The saint tells us that Mary would have died with Christ on Calvary had her Son not prevented her. Jesus willed that she stay for some time with the Church on earth after his ascension into heaven and share in his death of love later.

When the time willed by God arrived, Mary died a natural death — but a death that was consciously an act of worshipful love. The Mother of God longed with her whole being to be with Jesus in his Kingdom. When the moment of death came, she offered herself as Jesus had offered himself to the Father at the moment of his death. Entrusting herself into his embrace, Mary, on fire with the Holy Spirit, transformed her death into an act of love of the Father — a Eucharistic act of worship in, through and with Christ.

Preserved from the corruption of the grave, Mary was raised from the dead by Christ and taken, body and soul, into the glory of heaven. In 1950, Pope Pius XII solemnly defined that the assumption of Mary is an integral part of the Chris-

tian Revelation: "By the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, of the blessed apostles Peter and Paul, and by our own authority, we pronounce, declare and define it to be a divinely revealed dogma: that the Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed, body and soul, into heavenly glory."

Mary's dormition, that is, her death, resurrection and assumption into glory, are a source of hope for Christians, who believe in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council taught: "As the Mother of Jesus, glorified in body and soul in heaven, is the image and beginning of the Church as it is to be perfected in the world to come, so too does she shine forth on earth until the day of the Lord shall come, as a sign of sure hope and solace to the people of God during its sojourn on earth" (*Lumen Gentium*, 68). From her place in heaven, Mary intercedes with and through Christ for all of the needs of her children on earth.

Prayer

Mary, Mother of God, and our dear Mother, be with us at the hour of our death. Help us understand that, by dying for us, your Son transformed death into an act of worship of the Father — a sacred moment of passage from this life to the next; a moment determined by God alone. Fortified by the sacraments of the Church, help us to die as you did — in an act of love and self-offering for the salvation of others. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen. (Adapted from *Tessera* of the Legion of Mary)



ASSUMPTION OF MARY, THE NEW HEAVEN AND NEW EARTH FROM TREASURY OF BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS: OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS BY JULIUS SCHNORR VON CAROLSFELD, DOVER PUBLICATIONS, INC.

Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple; and there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and heavy hail. A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and on her head a crown of 12 stars.

— Revelation 11:19-12:1