

MARY, MY MOTHER

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. My Lord and my God, I firmly believe that you are here, that you see me, that you hear me. I adore you with profound reverence. I ask your pardon for my sins and the grace to make this time of prayer fruitful. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.

Lord, we ask you for the grace to bring to prayer the whole reason that we have you truly present with us. In addition to the will of your Father and the miraculous intervention of the Holy Spirit, you are here because this teenage girl, Mary of Nazareth, gave God a colossal yes—the greatest act of faith in the history of humankind. That is why the first praise Mary received was on account of her great faith. She believed that her yes would translate infinite, divine transcendence into the humanity of Christ. That's why he's called the *Word made flesh*. And God comes into our world through this yes that we contemplate when we pray the Angelus. And that she actually believed that this yes would bring Our Lord into our world and make God visible. Now we could talk to God as if he were one of our own, and he is. Jesus is like us in everything but sin. And we ultimately have the Holy Eucharist because Mary brought him into the world. And so, St. John Paul, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, established the institution of the Eucharist as a Marian mystery, a mystery of the Rosary. We ask you, Lord, to help us penetrate this gift we have. As we adore the Blessed Sacrament and focus our attention on Jesus truly present behind that veil of bread, or behind the appearance of bread, we ask you, Lord, to help us see your mother according to your desires and according to your design.

I was making a pilgrimage with a priest friend of mine and I had a bit of a mystical experience, but my style, perhaps, not the style of a classical mystic. Eddie's a friend of ours and we are both aware of the challenges of pastoral ministry, the challenges that we encounter in our pastoral work. And he wanted a quiet place, so, perhaps it wouldn't have been my first choice, but he wanted to go to a cemetery. There's plenty of shrines around and Marian churches but- and there was this big, beautiful statue of the Blessed Mother. And here's the mystical experience... about ten yards away there was a banner of a big, black W, and then I looked around the cemetery and there was little banners of the Cubs, you know, the Cubs logo. So that's my mystical experience. And as I was saying the Rosary, I said, well, W is such an appropriate letter next to the Blessed Virgin Mary— with the Blessed Virgin Mary, we win. And she is this great miracle worker, as- as symbolized in the Cubs logo, great miracle worker. She had to have intervened for- for them to have won the World Series. Anyway, so that's- that's my mystical experience. I hope I didn't disappoint anybody. And raising that to a supernatural level, when we look at Mary, we need to imagine that letter that has so much significance in the Chicago metropolitan area, the W. We win with her. What do we win? Well, we win this struggle to become holy and identified with Our Lord and we evangelize.

Circumstances have been such that I've been in close proximity to two official saints of the Church. I didn't merit it— right age, right place, right time. And I'm thinking first of St. John Paul, and if there's an image that comes to mind, it's an overarching image of Mary, the reverse W, at least in English, and other languages as well, Mary— and I remember arguably one of the greatest evangelizers of the history of the Church, St. John Paul, coming out, showing his face for the first time. I think he had been crying— sounded like he was crying. Some have verified that he was shaken, very reluctant to accept that new calling from God, but his senior Cardinal prevailed and persuaded him to accept for the Church, for his country. And it was the only time— I think it's almost safe to say it was probably objectively the only time he ever talked about fear. And when he came out for the first time he said that this new task was quite formidable and caused, it's not verbatim, but just aroused fear. And he mentioned, though, that the fear had been overcome. The intimidation had been overcome through his confidence in the Blessed Mother.

And another poignant recollection was people trying to figure out who he was, what he thought. And quickly people were saying, we don't know much about him but he's definitely someone Our Lady chose. And in the Roman newspapers, the way, you know, the sports sections are pretty popular here, Vatican news, Papal news is exciting there. And the write up was about his Coat of Arms, or his— his shield or whatever you call it, and that it was very different and it reflects maybe his culture— not very elegant either, you know. Usually, these shields have, you know, lily flowers or lions or deer or, you know, eagles, cross, swords, I don't know, but this would have just a big *M* and a cross and a motto directed to her. It wasn't a motto taken out of the Gospel. I think it was a motto taken out of a Marian saint by the name of St. Louis de Montfort which said *Totus Tuus*— that was the model, *I'm all yours*. And I recall, his younger days, you know, going on top of mountain peaks and planting statues of Our Lady there and honoring Mary on top of this column in the Piazza del Popolo, means the Square of the People, it was an image of the Immaculate Conception.

It is Our Lord's will— why is Mary so key for us? I mean, there's not this time of prayer more than a theology class, but literally the way Our Lord came to this world and comes to each and every one of us is through her. She's been the medium through which Jesus has come to us. And we're going to ask prayerfully, why? And the popular faith and the teachings of the Church is that God wants us to go to Jesus through her as well. We ask the question, Why, Lord? Guide us, enlighten us.

Why is Jesus called Word made flesh? Why is he called Word made flesh? He makes God visible through his humanity. What does his humanity say? Well, his humanity reveals the love of God the Father. Jesus— Jesus as the Divine Son, is the replica, is the mirror image of God the Father. And as he takes on flesh, his personality, his character, his reactions, his words, tell us about the love of God the Father. Why is a priest called *father*? Because he acts in the person of Christ and Christ as the mirror image of the Father. Why does Jesus call, sometimes, the Apostles, my children? Because he's the mirror image of God the Father. So, if you humanize God, what is he like? Look at Christ. And this removes nothing from the greatness and the grandeur of the humanity of Christ, but Mary reflects as well, in a certain sense, in an equal way, the love of the Father. And you will say, well, oh, you know, Christ is the culmination of revelation. Well, Mary is a

replica of Christ in his humanity as a woman. So, Mary is all about Christ too. Mary is another Christ. And Mary shows us the love of the Father. And so, Our Lord, as we contemplate the Eucharist, we see God's greatest gift which is the Eucharist. I mean, God can't do better than God. But intimately linked with the Eucharist, and you- the second greatest gift is his mother. That in a- reveals in a fuller way God's love for us. And so, God wants us to go to Christ through her.

St. Josemaria says in a meditation or homily he gave on Mary as Mother, because I want to know the "help menu." How do I- how do I connect with Mary? "Children, especially when they are small, here it goes, "look in the eyes of our mother, Mary. We never cease to be little because she opens to us the way to the Kingdom of Heaven which we'll own only be given to those who become little children. We should never separate ourselves from Our Lady. How should we honor her? By keeping close to her, talking to her, showing her that we love her, pondering in our hearts the scenes of her life on Earth and telling her about our struggles, successes, and failures."

The other saint is, some of you have met him, is Bl. Alvaro del Portillo. I guess a third one is St. Josemaria, though I never met, but you see his influence. In the center of Opus Dei, you won't walk into a room that doesn't have an image of Mary- that's done on purpose. That strongly encourages people to keep presence of her, and she leads us to him. And I would say the- at least in a contemporary way, one of the best, not the only one, but one of the best reflections on the life of Christ come from the pen of St. John Paul, come now, from Pope Francis, St. Josemaria. In fact, a non-Catholic told me how much he enjoyed reading *Christ Is Passing By* because, you know, it's so different than maybe typical Catholic religious literature. And I asked, well, what- you know, enlighten me, how is it different from Catholic literature? It's so Christ centered. I go, oh, really. And I don't buy it completely. But this- that's what he was sort of saying. It's so Christ-centered. It's so immersed in the Gospel. And I didn't want to ruin it, but I was inclined to say, well, it's because of his connection with Mary. Mary- Mary leads us to Christ. Mary, he- she's the way she- she, as Christ comes to us through her, we go to him through Mary. Pope Benedict, profound knowledge of the life of Our Lord, who's, you know, when he wrote the *Jesus of Nazareth*, he said he wanted to help all of us to contemplate the face of Christ- completely in love with Mary, very devoted to the Rosary.

What is Jesus saying? Well, to enter into this kingdom, into this heart of Christ, I need to become like a little child. What does that mean? I need to be devoted to Mary. We need to be children to be devoted to Mary. If we're overly sophisticated or pseudo-intellectual, we would have a problem with that. And I'm looking at Bl. Alvaro whose sanctity has been recognized by the Church and I would say my- the memory when I think of him, Marian years when I was in Rome, is, again, the Blessed Virgin Mary. And it was very engineered-ish in his Devotion to Mary. He was a very, very organized man and he would have a different aspiration every day. He would call it a password. Some of us would try to figure it out. And he said, you know, that's a personal question you're asking. But he would finally give in and tell us, just had just a series of aspirations. And he was- someone told me, he, you know, he'd have to- he had to do administrative work, and he would have a pile of papers and he was getting mildly frustrated because he was not having the presence of Mary that he wished to have. And he would try techniques- he would put a picture of Mary on

top of his pile and he would have to remove the little picture and say an aspiration. So, he's trying to say a lot of aspirations to Mary. And he said he started to get used to the picture because it was the same picture and then, you know, he would miss opportunities to say aspirations when he would take one paper and move it aside. And so, what he did was he started to vary the picture. He would move a picture and put a new one on. And on a natural level, one may say, well, is- is that what holiness is all about, you know, varying pick because of Our Lady. More than, you know, technique we see someone who is really pushing himself to honor Our Lady. Why? Because he's completely convinced of what I saw in today's pilgrimage, that W. Mary stands for victory.

And so the takeaway here is I need to give people an experience of Christ and witness Christ and attract people to Christ- I want to be more Marian and deal with her not in a routine way, but as a son, albeit a sinful son, daughter deals with their mother. And I just want to finish with reading these words of St. Josemaria: "If we truly got to know Mary Our Mother, how quickly the supernatural virtues would grow in us. It is not enough just to know she is our mother and to think and to talk about her as such. She is your Mother and you are her son. She loves you as if you were her only child in this world. Treat her accordingly. Tell her about everything that happens to you. Honor her and love her. No one will do it for you or as well as you if you do not do it yourself." And I finish, "I give you my word that if you set along this way, you will quickly discover all the love of Christ."

I thank you, my God, for the good resolutions, affections and inspirations you have communicated to me in this meditation. I ask your help in putting them into effect. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.



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