



Mary: Vision of Hope
Prayers and Reflections

The Cover and Division Pages

Stained Glass Windows first appeared in churches in 700 A.D. Images of Mary in stained glass appear more than any other woman throughout history.

It was also during this First Millennium that early Christian documents defined the roles of Mary as Woman, Wife, Mother, Widow, and World Leader. These roles of Mary also become the stained glass artwork for the cover and division pages of Mary: Vision of Hope.

Section Dividers – Stained Glass Pictures

Mary as Woman: Window of the Church of St. Alysios in Somers Town, London

Mary as Wife and Mother: Holy Family on Stained Glass Christmas Card, The Printery House

Mary as Widow: St. Brendan's Church in Offaly, Ireland.

Mary as World Leader: Public Domain

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FOREWORD

“Fear Not!” God uses this answer to people’s prayers 365 times in the Bible. God’s answer to our prayers, with **“Fear Not!”** empowers us to become **A Vision of Hope** in our world.

Who best exemplifies **A Vision of Hope**? **MARY!** Mary is the person closest to Jesus. She is the ideal disciple and role model for us of what it means to **“Fear Not!”**

“Learn from Mary to seek Jesus.” This quote was written by Origen, a third century theologian. Origen challenges us to deepen our relationship with Jesus by imitating Mary.

Mary’s first role was that of a **woman**. Mary demonstrates that we should constantly be evolving as people of prayer.

As Mary matured, she became the **wife** of Joseph and **mother** to Jesus. When Joseph died, she was Joseph’s **widow**.

When Jesus was crucified, Mary accompanied her only Son to His death on the Cross. When Jesus rose from the dead, Mary was the first person, whom Jesus visited.

When God sent the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Mary was there. When Mary was assumed into Heaven body and soul, **God was there**.

Mary is recognized as a **world leader**. Mary is the patroness of 59 countries in the world, including the United States. May, August and October are 31 day months dedicated to Mary. People from all walks of life seek her prayers. Her answer to all our prayers is **“Fear Not!”**

By understanding Jesus and Mary more, we will become a vision of hope in our world today. As we pray through these reflections, we should begin our prayer periods by asking Jesus for the grace to **“Fear Not!”** and **“To introduce us to Mary as He wants us to know her.”**

Sincerely,

OPENING REFLECTION - Mary In My Life

Reflection

When I was four years old, my dad was very sick; my exhausted mother was angry with my inability to help around the house. I remember standing on my bed to embrace the 16” statue of Mary. As I put her head into my face holding her blue gown, I renounced my own mother and told Mary **SHE** was my **REAL** mother. In many ways, the scenario describes my full ‘life’ with the Mother of Jesus.

I turn to Mary when my functioning fails, when I’m afraid, and when I need to sink into an emotional pool of support and maternal protection. With Mary, I find a place of rest. My relationship with Mary is personal. Both my great grandmother and my grandmother told me of ‘seeing Mary’, so apparitions of Mary in my family are part of my ‘tradition’. Just a fact, not a phenomenon. Mary supports when she is needed.

The statues of Our Lady of Divine Providence conjure an image of the kind woman I yearn to be. My mother contended Mary had to be a disciplinarian to shape the toddler Jesus. What an insight for me into my mother’s spiritual practice! An understanding of Mary’s life held deep meaning for my mother. She even spoke of the widowed Mary when she herself was widowed in her early 40’s.

Mary, for me, has been a mother, a role model, a confidante, a teacher about how to grow into a woman of integrity and cope with the unexpected.

I’ve never had an intense devotion to Mary, but my own ‘way’ has been influenced by this woman who knew Jesus, who taught, supported, and loved Jesus. I want this closeness of relationship with Jesus.

Prayer Practice

- Ask yourself - Who has Mary been for me?
- As we pray these reflections, may we come to understand what Eckhart said – “We are all mothers of Jesus, because Jesus is always waiting to be born.”

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Mary as Woman



Mary As Woman - Reflection 1

“The soul that loves God has its rest in God and in God alone. In all the paths that men walk in the world, they do not attain peace until they draw nigh to hope in God.

-Saint Isaac the Syrian, Homily 56, 89

Reflection

One of my first thoughts in prayer was to search for the meaning of Mary’s name. “Hebrew Baby Names” came up as did “Christian Reverence” titles. The meanings in Hebrew were “wished for child” which I remembered as the legend goes, Anna and Joachim had waited for longingly; “Rebellion” which was the animosity of the Jewish people with the Romans and vice versa, at the time; and “Bitter”, with my interpretation, as the long-waiting for the Savior to come, or as later would reveal Mary at the foot of the cross.

The Christian reverence title for Mary is “Beloved Lady”, a term I find particularly endearing. Thus, the following characteristics are my view of the perfection I see in Mary as woman and of how I strive to be:

Prayerful, loving, gentle, supportive to a husband and Son...
patient with the unknown and mysterious, questioning in faith, persistent in hope, a valiant woman!

Prayer Practice

As we pray during this stressful, trying time of sickness, dying, and death, let us pray with Mary to be loving, reaching out in kindness to our family, friends, and neighbors. So, we can bring prayer, hope, gentleness, and thankfulness to all those in need and those who have helped us during our present struggles.

- What title of Mary is your favorite?
- How will you speak with her in prayer?

Mary as a Woman - Reflection 2

“Be it done unto me according to your Word.”-Lk 1:38

Reflection

As I reflect on who Mary is for me, I realize that I have been on a lifelong journey with this woman of God.

My journey began as a child with May Crowning’s and Sodality. As an adult I was unable to relate to her as an Ideal Perfect Woman. We renewed our relationship through our mutual experience of motherhood with all its joys and sorrows, but became estranged again in my later years.

Reading Elizabeth A. Johnson’s book, **Truly Our Sister**, opened me to new ways of seeing, valuing and being with Mary unrealized before. To see Mary as a Woman first; as our sister who responded to God’s call not just initially (“Let it be done unto me according to your Word.”); but throughout her life as seen in Bethlehem; her Exile in Egypt; Losing Jesus at age 12; Cana, her misunderstanding of her son’s mission (Mk 3:20); the rejection of her son in Nazareth; and finally Jesus’ Crucifixion.

What is true for Mary is true for each one of us. I see her as a woman who is WITH us as we struggle to continue to faithfully respond to God’s call in the daily living out of our lives. I have always longed for a fellow traveler who KNOWS the call; who tries to live it; and desires to share the journey. I have found one in Mary of Nazareth.

Prayer Practice

Who is Mary of Nazareth to ME? ... Do we have a history?

Mary as Woman - Reflection 3

“For with God nothing is impossible. And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; Be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her” - Luke 1:37-38

Reflection

Mary said, **“YES”**. And, that **“YES”** changed the world forever. When the angel first came to her, she was fearful. When he explained his purpose, she had questions. After his explanation Mary accepted God’s plan for her completely and without doubt. She knew that with God nothing is impossible. With faith, hope and love, Mary fully accepts the gift of new life in her and for all of us.

In my life I have had to learn to be humble enough to let go of my self-reliance and open to the path God has in store for me each day. I began developing this openness by first learning to ask for help--help from God to do for me what I cannot do for myself. In response, God’s grace came into my life, and I gave thanks. Asking for help and saying “Thank you” became the bookends of my daily life. Saying **“YES”** came a few years later. As I approached life primarily with fear and defensiveness, “No” was my first answer. As I opened to God’s grace, I received the gift of a life filled with faith, hope, and love. All I needed to do was to say **“YES”** to God’s invitation and try to do His Will. Today I began my day asking for “Help”. I live through the gift of each day responding with **“YES”**! I close the day with “Thank You.”

Prayer Practice

Throughout the day when you confront moments of confusion and fear... pause... take a deep breath ... and say **“YES!”** Wait ... and listen knowing that God will open a new path for you.

Mary as Woman - Reflection 4

“And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”- Luke 1:45

Reflection

Making the decision to have a child couldn't have been much different in Mary's day than it is now. While the practicalities may have been different, she still had to consider how it would affect her life. Did she have dreams of doing something else? There is documentation that some women of ancient Judaism were known to be leaders, businesswomen, and students of the Torah **Women's Bible Commentary**, WJK Press, 2012, p. 498. Women today are expected to plan what their vocation will be.

Would Mary have worried about her and the baby's health, considering that mortality in childbirth was common? Today, the issue of health care is a constant concern for young families.

For Mary, the stigma of birthing a child without being married might have resulted in being shunned by her community. Unwed motherhood is not stigmatized as much today, but it is still an economic consideration.

Both women in Mary's time and women today must consider what supports will be there to help them through the birthing and through the growth and development of the child. Having a child is a huge decision.

Thinking about this choice, Mary is aware of the disparities in life, the difficult decisions that we are often faced with. Her Song of Praise (Lk. 1:46-55) indicates her yearning for a better world, a sense that she has been gifted with possibility, and the faith that God will partner with her to do this impossible task.

Prayer Practice

Ask God: “What impossible thing are you inviting me to partner with you to do?”

Mary as Woman - Reflection 5

“Under your mercy we take refuge, O Mother of God. Do not reject our supplications in necessity, but deliver us from danger, [O you] alone pure and alone blessed.” Sub Tumu Praesidium, From Rylands Papyrus, Egypt (3rd century).

Reflection

Only a woman can bring forth new life in the way that God has designed in God’s great, creative manner. Only a woman can intercede in a self-absorbed world. Only a woman such as Mary could have brought forth the Son of the Father. Only in responding “Yes”, as Mary did, can we come to full appreciation of God’s call to each of us. A woman’s gentleness and concern for her children is the way of God. A mother is merciful to her children because of such a love that can only bring mercy.

Prayer Practice

- Each morning ask Mary to intercede in someone’s life that she may guide them to her son Jesus, the Christ.
- When you find yourself unable to speak to God, for any reason, ask Mary to speak for you. She is the Mother of God.
- When you find yourself in fear of any kind, place your fears in Mary’s care, as a mother cares for her child.

Mary as Woman-Reflection 6

Reflection

The 2005 issue of the National Geographic featured an article entitled "How the Virgin Mary Became the Most Powerful Woman in the World." Her appearances had astonished people in all parts of the world. Countless miracles of healing were cited as proof of her intercessory power. However, little was mentioned about those, who had hoped for a miracle, and were left disappointed.

Perhaps the greatest miracle is what happens when our hope does not seem to be fulfilled. The real miracle is learning to believe that our loving God never ceases to bring good out of the dark and painful events of our lives. I wonder if the youthful Mary could fully fathom the words of an aged Simeon when she was told: "...And you yourself a sword will pierce so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed." (Lk.2:35)

Mary, the most powerful woman in the world, suffered with Jesus because she loved Him so deeply. She felt the pain of His rejection, unfulfilled hopes, betrayal and tragic death on the Cross. What she didn't understand, she "...pondered in her heart". (Lk2:19) I sometimes wonder if Mary was certain that Jesus would rise from the dead. The sword that pierced her heart opened her to a profound awareness of our human doubts and vulnerabilities.

Mary is a wounded healer. We can turn to her because she understands. The thoughts of many hearts are revealed to her, and she reveals to us the heartbeat of God. Mary taught Jesus how to pray. She will also teach us if we are willing to pray with her. Mary has a powerful way of pondering. I know she will lead us to the Risen Christ. Mary is the most Powerful Woman in the World!

Prayer Practice

1. Search the Internet for a modern litany for Mary.
2. Pray the litany you found.
3. Now, ponder the ways Mary can reveal her power.

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Mary as Woman - Reflection 7 **“Who I Was Born to Be”**

Reflection

Today, while reflecting upon the life of Mary as a child, I recalled a song I first heard in a workshop sponsored by WVIS - “Music and Masks: Metaphors of Transcendence”. Sister Donna Marie Beck, CSJ, one of the facilitators, used this song music to aid the participants to look within – to find ‘who they were born to be’.

I wondered how Mary learned who she was born to be? Mary spent her childhood from age 3 to 12 in the temple. Her days were spent in prayer, learning scripture (sometimes even discussing them with the elders) and chores around the temple. Many days when her daily chores were done, she could be found just outside the gates of the temple giving food and clothing to the poor and the elderly, tending the sick. Following Mary’s example, other girls in the temple joined her in aiding the poor and elderly. (https://www.sol.com.au/kor/21_01.htm)

When Mary turned fourteen it was time for her to marry. Her childhood preparation days were coming to an end. How would she use her childhood preparation to fulfil her role as wife, mother, widow, world leader?

Was Mary learning who she was born to be? What was she learning? What qualities was she developing?

Prayer Practice

1. You may wish to listen to “Who I Was Born to Be” by Susan Boyle
<https://youtu.be/eeiPu0tMbXc>
2. How would Mary use her childhood preparation to fulfil her role as wife, mother, widow, world leader?
3. What preparation has helped YOU to become “Who YOU were born to be?”

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Mary as Wife and Mother



Mary as Wife and Mother - Reflection 1

“I am the Lord's servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” – Luke 1:38

Reflection

It is my belief that each of us is created with abilities and interests which, if nurtured, will make us a person who is happy, the person “we were meant to be.” Truly something easier said than done – it’s that matter of identifying one’s innate abilities and then applying them.

In many cases, we can develop our abilities with training. Sometimes we learn by doing – practicing driving a car comes to mind. Sometimes we learn by studying. And, there are times when we have no preparation, and simply do the best we can, based on who we are and the capabilities God gives us. With me so far?

Working in my yard several years ago, I saw a little girl pushing a baby carriage up the hill. In the carriage was a doll to whom the girl was talking. The girl was preparing to be a mother.

That girl reflected one way our culture prepares girls to be mothers. Surely Mary’s culture had its own techniques. Mary’s expecting to be a mother is the result of society’s preparation. Her responding to the angel, as she did, shows God within her.

I see Mary being the person she was meant to be.

Are you the person you are meant to be? If not, what stands in the way?

Prayer Practice

Lord Jesus, help me to see You in myself and to see my calling. Guide me to be the best I can be.

Mary as Wife and Mother - Reflection 2

**“Mother Mary comes to me speaking words of wisdom, Let It Be”
Sir Paul McCartney**

Reflection

Connecting with Mary, as mother, provides me solace and place to rest when I am overwhelmed with fear for my children. From her I receive strength and hope.

When Jesus was 12 years old, His parents were returning home from Jerusalem and could not find Him. After searching for three days in Jerusalem, they found Him in the temple. For five days their 12-year old son was missing. Mary and Joseph must have been frantic with fear and dread. When they found Him, Mary asked why Jesus had done this to them and explained they had been in much distress. What relief Mary and Joseph must have felt. I am sure they explained the necessity of parents knowing where their children are.

When I think of Mary, at the foot of the foot of the cross, watching her son suffer until He was dead, my heart breaks for her. The horror of watching a child in excruciating pain and dying is beyond comprehension. She would have probably preferred physical pain to the emotional pain she was experiencing, and she would have changed places with Him in half a second.

I have been in fearful and heartbreaking situations with my children. At those times, I need to remember the fear of a lost child and the helplessness of easing a son's pain happened to Mary also. That is when I need her comfort the most. I need her help so I can feel hope.

Prayer Practice

Listen to Mary say to you “Fear Not, simply Let it Be”.

Mary as Wife and Mother - Reflection 3

Reflection

When I was visiting Ely Cathedral in England, I was horrified to see decapitated sculptures in the Lady Chapel that was devoted to the Virgin Mary. The Chapel was desecrated during the hundred years of the English Reformation. Such division, such anger, such destructiveness surely is not of God!

Sadly, in our Protestant tradition, we have not done much to revere the mother of Jesus, nor have we readily accepted female spiritual leaders. I remember, even when I was young and unchurched, thinking the very idea of women "priests" was wrong.

I think God is still chuckling to have called me to become a minister. People in my first congregation did not want a female pastor, but they eventually accepted me. Rather than the orthodox teachings of sin/salvation, I taught about spiritual birth into wholeness.

In order to increase awareness of the sacred feminine, I recently facilitated a spirituality group using Rev. Carol Howard Merritt's Advent devotional **I Am Mary**. Although men were invited to participate, only women from three Protestant denominations attended. It was as if we were graced by the Holy Mother; we reconnected to our long-departed earthly mothers; we spoke of mystical encounters; we revealed deep hurts; we felt a shared sense of our value as women.

Recognizing the importance of Mary, Our Mother, helped us expand our feminine connection to one another in ways that brought us healing and hope.

Prayer Practice

Spend time remembering the important women in your life and how they graced your life.

Mary as Wife and Mother - Reflection 4

**“When I find myself in times of trouble, Mother Mary comes to me,
speaking words of wisdom, let it be...” Paul McCartney**

Reflection

The lyrics of some popular songs mysteriously find their way into our hearts and minds without significant intention. When I first heard this popular song by the Beatles, I found it irresistible, to call on the virgin Mary with these simple words.

As an expectant mother, I could not imagine that Mary did not experience the same worries and fears as I was feeling. I began to ask Mary to come to me, to be with me, and speak words of wisdom and intercede for me to her Son. I found a soothing reassurance that this holy woman understood my fears. I felt a personal connection with her.

As my children grew, I found myself frequently asking Mary to come to me, in my hour of frustration, fear or confusion, for I knew she had to have experienced the same as she raised her Son. I found her presence a true comfort as I released my fears and rested in a new trust.

I had a gentle relationship with Mary until the night when I screamed for her, demanding that she come to me. We had just learned of the death of our son. I knew she would know my grief. I called to her many times in the months to follow. She listened, as I poured out my heartbroken existence, searching for my center, again.

Prayer Practice

Find a quiet place to allow stillness for several minutes, identifying your present emotion. Ask Mary to come to you. Tell her of your emotion and ask her to intercede to her Son for you. Discover if your emotion can be replaced with trust.

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Mary as Wife and Mother - Reflection 5

Reflection

Jesus and his disciples are walking on a dusty road, joking and singing to pass the time.

Jesus starts singing, “There was a young maiden so comely and fair...”

His friends think, what He is about to sing, might be a bawdy ballad and start laughing and poking each other. But, as He continues, singing the entire song they realize He is singing about His mother-Mary.

*There was a young maiden so comely and fair
that all the young men would have wanted her there.*

*She had a heart that was gracious and good
she told them she'd share it if they understood.*

*Why a rose has its thorns and the sun goes away?
How a babe can be born just to wither away?*

*They gave her no answers those ardent young men
so she set her sights on the far horizon.*

*Till a stranger she knew shone a light in her eyes
and asked her to become the eternal Bride.*

*She bore Him a son who grew just as she was
and they gave all they had for the kingdom of love.*

“Jesus’ Song of His Mother,” Liz Deal, 2015

Prayer Practice

Imagine yourself in this scene with Jesus and His followers.

1. How do you react to this intimate and playful song?
2. Jesus praises His mother’s desire for truth, her integrity, and her loving generosity,
3. What aspect of Mary’s character speaks hope to you today?

Mary as Wife and Mother - Reflection 6

Dearest Jesus,

I ask you to introduce me to Mary, Your Mother, as You want me to know her. Use my reflection about Mary for the greater service of Christ. AMEN.

Luke 2:7 “and she gave birth to a son, her first-born. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in the living-space.”

John 19:25 “Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Cleopas, and Mary of Magdala.”

Reflection

I offer liberal arts music classes at Duquesne University. This semester we unexpectedly moved our classes from face-to-face instruction to remote learning via internet. **My advice to students has been simple: please persist and stay the course.**

Mary, the mother of Jesus, is an exemplar of persistence and “staying the course.” As a mother, Mary was with Jesus at the beginning and end of His life. Mary, the wife of Joseph, was with her husband from their betrothal through his death. She experienced the joy of giving birth to baby Jesus and the heartbreak and sorrow of His crucifixion. As a wife and mother, Mary showed loyalty, stamina, and commitment. **In short, she persisted and stayed the course.**

Prayer Practice

Dear God,

We ask you for the strength to be grateful for our blessings; and to have hope and show persistence through the difficult challenges that life brings us. Please help us imitate Mary’s loyalty, stamina, commitment and persistence to our loved ones and our Savior.

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Mary as Wife and Mother - Reflection 7

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

- John 1:1, 14

Reflection

Mary and I have had a difficult relationship. She has been a model of a perfect wife and mother. Emphasis in my circles has been on her as a submissive, obedient and trusting woman. This has been a model I have fought battles with as a feminist. The model of Deborah, a warrior leader; or Lydia, a business supporter; or even Mary Magdalene, prostitute turned disciple...these were models I preferred. I am not a perfect wife or mother.

Yet, in recent years, Mary has grown on me. In John's gospel, the “Word of God” is not referencing words of Scripture but Jesus. Mary bore the “Word of God” in her womb. She became a human partner in God's incarnation of Jesus Christ. Without her, Jesus would not be human. Without her, Jesus would not “become flesh and dwell among us”. Mary was a willing partner in God's plan. And in this way, the Word of God was manifest to us.

I am Mary. At my best, I dance with God in the romance that is human and divine love. I am pregnant with the Word of God in me, growing into the fullness of God's intention. Each new phase of my life, again, I am invited to love God with my willing spirit. As Mary, I discover new, improbable potential for life and love that becomes flesh in and around me.

Prayer Practice

Consider in Prayer with journaling:

- Are you dancing with God's intention for your life?
- What is God growing in you?

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Mary as Widow



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARTS

Mary as Widow - Reflection 1

Reflection

“ALMANAH” is the Hebrew word for “WIDOW”. The root “Alem,” means “unable to speak”. In ancient times, the laws and traditions were such that widows could not speak for themselves. Generally, they were dependent upon the care and protection of male relatives who had legal authority to speak on their behalf.”-**The Order of Widows** by M. Cathleen Kaveny (2005). At the time of Jesus’ crucifixion, we assume that Mary’s spouse, Joseph, was deceased, and Jesus was the male relative responsible for Mary. As a loving Jewish son, moments before His death, Jesus entrusted His beloved mother to His disciple John, knowing she would be cared for and cherished in His absence.

Widows hold a very special place in my heart! My beloved Mother became a widow at the age of 54. My whole family accompanied Mom as she entered widowhood. “But Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart.”-Luke 2:19. Mary was an “**Almanah**”. What was she unable to speak? What did she ponder in her heart?

I imagine her experience was much like my Mom’s. Did she undergo phases of shock, bewildered misery, profound sadness, grief and despair - first, over the loss of her spouse and secondly, by the brutal death of her son and protector? Did she encounter fear and apprehension for what the future held? Was she fretful over financial issues? Did she articulate her thoughts and feelings to those around her allowing them to comfort her, or did she silently ponder all things in her heart? Did she surrender all things through prayer, relying not on her own understanding, but trusting God would provide for her?

Prayer Practice

Let us turn to our Heavenly Advocate and consoler:

“Holy Spirit, as we ask you to bring consolation to all widows. Heal their broken hearts, replace their sorrow with joy. Give them the graces necessary to handle all responsibilities in their households. Send them helpers; beacons of light through their dark tunnel of loneliness and despair. As they lift their eyes and prayers to heaven, hear and understand all things they are unable to speak. Bless and protect them with your loving and compassionate embrace. Amen”

Mary as Widow - Reflection 2

Reflection

Mary, the blessed mother of Jesus, ...the vision of Hope, strength and courage from whom we have an example of how to stand strong in the face of difficulty. We read about Mary's early life as the Mother of Jesus, and how there must have been glimpses of the great Man of God He would become; from the day she and her cousin, Elizabeth met and Elizabeth's baby leaped in her womb.

I have no doubt she realized, ... when He slipped away from them in the marketplace, that one day she would have to release her Son and allow Him to be about the Father's work; furthermore He actually acknowledged His assignment; that He was 'sent' into the world to bring salvation to as many as would believe on His name.

Mary followed His ministry, as evidenced at the wedding of Cana, when Jesus turned water into wine... saying "Do whatever He tells you to do."

But, Ah! At the cross of Calvary, we see Mary the epitome of a Vision of Hope, who released her dying Son back into the bosom of the Father with full assurance that His dying would only be but a few days... that He would not leave her comfortless, as He has not left us comfortless, holding fast to His Words to rise again with all power in His hands.

Prayer Practice

Father give us the hope that was instilled in Mary and the vision of our Lord's promise, to rise again in our hearts so that we might say:

'O Death where is thy Sting, O' Grave where is they Victory?

- 1 Corinthians 15: 55

Mary as Widow - Reflection 3

When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple 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. - John 19:26-27

Reflection

Keeping with the theme, Mary as a Widow, Scripture says of the plight of a widow as not a kind one. Shelter, food, resources to survive would have been questions that bombarded the mind of any in this potential situation. Yet, Mary stood at the cross with unwavering trust - that God would provide her needs.

As I wrote these words, I soon realized that these questions were once my questions that were asked over a 40-year marriage. This slow death and becoming invisible came to an end the day I walked away from the marriage, choosing life and trusting that God would provide. At the urging of a friend, I sought an annulment. As painful as the process was—healing began! Never had I felt so loved, accepted, and filled with hope. When I reread the quote at the top of this page years later, I did recognize Mary’s presence as the **Giver**.

I pray the quote gives breath to what I have attempted to share. In 2015 I became a widow of a marriage of only a few years. In my loss, solace came from the **HOPE** given by another **widow**.

Prayer Practice

1. Give hope to one person each day.
2. Show respect for basic needs-starting at home.
3. Sacrifice 3 minutes to listen to the Holy Scriptures - one verse at a time.

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Mary As Widow-Reflection 4

“Once Herod realized that he had been deceived by the astrologers, he became furious and ordered the massacre of all boys two years old and under.”- Matthew 2:16

Reflection

Widowhood is often a grief-filled time in woman’s life, especially if the woman has not only lost her husband but also her only child. Since Mary experienced the deaths of Joseph and Jesus within a short amount of time, it is inevitable she would become an advocate for widows and children.

During the early 1500’s in Mexico, every fifth child was offered as a human sacrifice to the pagan gods. Mary heard the cries of the mothers, whose children were being slaughtered and sacrificed. When she also remembered how the Holy Innocents had been slaughtered to appease Herod when Jesus was born, she decided to intercede.

She began appearing and speaking to a peasant named Juan Diego, people began asking Juan Diego what Mary said. He stated she said:

“Let not your heart be disturbed. Do not fear sickness, or anguish or death. Am I not here, I who am your Mother?”

When word of Our Lady’s appearances spread throughout Mexico, the people repented; the barbaric slaughter of innocent children ceased; and people converted to Christianity.

Prayer Practice

Prayerfully listen to Mary saying to you what she said to Juan Diego in the quote above. Once you finish allowing her words to resonate throughout your entire being, and you have had time to listen within your heart, offer a closing prayer of gratitude for what Mary revealed to you.

Mary as a Widow - Reflection 5

“Mary joined the Apostles in the Upper Room where they “devoted themselves with one accord to prayer.” (Acts 1:14).

Reflection

We don't know exactly when Joseph died. Yet, we know that it's difficult losing a loved one at any time of life, especially a spouse whom you have lived with and shared joy, happiness, and peace.

But, being a widow was especially difficult in ancient Israel when widows had to depend on family and friends for their survival. Yet, we also know that Mary's life, while difficult as a widow, was filled of compassion, love, nurturing, and following the “Will of God.”

[\(https://catholicmom.com/2018/08/13/mary-was-a-widow/\)](https://catholicmom.com/2018/08/13/mary-was-a-widow/)

From the time she said “Yes, let it be done unto me,” to her compassionate trip to her older cousin Elizabeth to help her during her pregnancy; to supporting Jesus at the Wedding of Cana, his first miracle; to following and accepting the Will of God during Jesus' ministry; and later in the Upper Room devoting herself to prayer, Mary was a true example of discipleship. And, if we consider all the saints, we would need to place her at the top of the list. As we often pray to the saints asking them to pray with us, let us also include praying to Mary, the ultimate saint and disciple.

Prayer Practice

As we move forward today, let's take a moment periodically and ask Mary:

“Mary, pray with me, please! Help guide me as I ask for your Son's will for me today. And help me remember your actions in helping others, so I might do the same!”

Mary as Widow - Reflection 6

Today we must have the courage to look on our Lady as a symbolic figure. These times through which we are living also carry the blessing and mystery of God. It is only a matter of waiting ... – Alfred Delp, SJ

Reflection

Mary was a human being who experienced the same emotions as we do today, from joy and peace to sorrow and fear. As a widow, Mary would have felt sadness and loneliness without her husband with whom she created a home and nurtured Jesus. At the time she lived, she would have needed to depend on her family and friends. Life could have been scary and uncertain.

Sounds like the times we are living today during this global pandemic. Like Mary, my emotions range from joy and peace to sorrow and fear. At times I feel lonely and miss the hugs of my loved ones. I have experienced fear due to the uncertainty of the situation and not knowing what the future will look like. When these feelings arise, I often look to Mary and how she lived a life devoted to a loving God who always offers us blessings if we are open to them. Like Mary, I must wait to see what these will be.

Prayer Practice

- Prayer Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55)
- Ponder how Mary gave thanks for God's mercy and goodness throughout all of history.
- Journal about how God has guided you through a past challenging experience and how you can reframe a current difficult/challenging experience to see God's blessings in it.

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Mary as Widow - Reflection 7
“Hail Mary full of grace, the Lord is with you”

Reflection

When Jesus was only about 6 weeks old, Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the temple to present Him for a blessing, expecting this to be a joyful time. Imagine the emotional surprise when Simeon voiced that a “sword of sorrow” would pierce Mary’s heart! Think of the Pieta, that poignant statue of Mary’s receiving her murdered child after three hours on the cross!

The feast of the Presentation boldly proclaims Mary’s self-giving love. When Mary heard Simeon’s prediction, it must have shaken her soul with dread.

Like Mary, we may be led into untold grief. What will be our response? Will we accept and trust in God’s plan for us?

Recall the Joys that came to Mary. She saw Jesus, risen from the dead. She was with the disciples when the Holy Spirit came to each of them on Pentecost, and Mary was assumed into heaven to be with Jesus forever.

Prayer Practice

- Take a few moments to recall your joys and/or sorrows.
- Speak with Mary about them.
- Ask for the grace to accept God’s plan for you.

Mary as World Leader



Mary as World Leader-Reflection 1

“Mary held all these things in her heart...” - Luke 2:19

Reflection

For many years I have been in leadership roles. As I reflect on past experiences, I wonder: what were the most important things, that I took away from those wonderful experiences?

As I look to Mary, however, I see not only strength, silence and deep humility, but one who, like so many leaders, carry in their hearts, experiences which they cannot share. Difficult and challenging as this is, I see her as a model of compassionate, true leadership. Not the successes of the desire of a normal leader, but the example of one in utmost humility. It is she who shows us the way. Certainly, Mary’s leadership is one of listening to others such as at the wedding feast of Cana, and trusting that Jesus can and will answer her prayer. It is one of wondering what has happened to Jesus in the temple, what to do; what to say. It is one of accepting what is before her; a life changed by the angel’s visit; confusion at both the Annunciation; and the finding of Jesus in the temple. It is one of maintaining confidences, knowing that Jesus was in fact the Messiah. What leader does not suffer in the face of injustice, rejection and misunderstanding as Mary did at the death of her Son. Who, in fact as a leader, does not mentor, teach and model for others, as Jesus was mentored, taught and modeled by his Mother? We look to Mary as leader, as one who in all humility lived fully a life chosen for her by the Father. Mary by her example shows us the way. May we live life fully, listening to the call of the Father at each moment as we, too, lead as did Mary!

Prayer Practice

May each of us, leaders in our own way, stand in the mystery of life, like Mary and ask God to give us a peace of heart, as was hers, as we pray:

“Mary, lead us, guide us, bring us to your Son. Give us direction and new beginnings for our life while abiding in the strength of Your Son. Mary, show us the way.”

Mary as a World Leader - Reflection 2
“In a gentle way, you can shake the world.”-Mahatma Gandhi

Reflection 23

A simple “Yes”, breathed from Mary’s lips, brought to life the most profound revolution the world will ever witness. Without armies or weapons, speeches or diplomatic corps, a courageous young woman offered herself completely to God and forever changed the course of human history.

When Mary answered “Yes” to God, she unconditionally invited Jesus into her life and in due time, introduced Him to the world. Without fireworks or a marching band, but under a twinkling star and a heavenly choir of angels, Mary gave birth to the Son of God and ushered in the Kingdom of Heaven.

For all those, who embraced her Son, love would prove more powerful than hate; giving would bring more joy than receiving; and life would triumph over death. By simply saying “Yes” to God, Mary brought Jesus Christ and the promise of salvation to the entire world. No world leader, whether despot or dreamer, has offered such eternal hope, peace and freedom to mankind.

Prayer Practice

Spend a few minutes alone with God in prayerful contemplation. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Have I, like Mary, welcomed Jesus unconditionally into my life?

- Have I, like Mary, introduced Jesus to others?

Mary as World Leader - Reflection 3

“Observe, my son (or daughter), and reject not your mother’s teaching. Keep them fastened over your heart always.”

-Proverbs 6:20 and 21.

Reflection

- (1) Listen to Our Father and Jesus,**
- (2) Seek Their advice in prayer, and**
- (3) Follow what They tell you to do**

These were three teachings about the Father that Mary taught Jesus early in Jesus life. He even applied Mary’s teachings when He fed 4,000 people by changing seven loaves of bread and a few fishes when there was a shortage of food (Matthew 15). Mary wants us to apply these three actions, she taught Jesus, to not only solve our problems, but to also find solutions in our troubled worlds today.

This reminder of His three teachings, coming from Mary, His mother, should reinforce the importance of these three pieces of advice for us too.

Mother’s Day originated in West Virginia in the early 1900’s. Not only do we, as a state, recognize the importance of womanhood and motherhood on the second Sunday in May of each year; but we also use this day to seek advice from our mothers during religious services, Mother’s Day celebrations, family gatherings, and even at the graves of the women, we value in our lives.

However, Mother’s Day should never be limited to just one day. We should seek Mary’s intercessions and prayers every day.

Prayer Practice

More phone calls are made on Mother’s Day than on any other day of the year according to History.com.

As our Prayer Practice, we are being asked to imitate Jesus, who sought His mother’s intercessions and prayers, as part of our prayer life, starting today.

Mary as World Leader - Reflection 4
**“You see before you the Lord’s servant,
let it happen to me as you have said.” - Luke 1:38**

Reflection

Mary is recognized as a leader in all the countries in this world. Leaders seek her help in many ways, from the simple requests of a blessing to the complex help needed to settle world problems. Mary is the type of person who wins the hearts of all by her simple spirit, and unassuming simplicity. This spirit of hers is what has attracted the young and old and will continue to do so.

The power of Mary is based on her deep love for her Son Jesus and her love for each and every one of us.

What does power mean to you? What does leadership mean to you? I feel these are two important questions we should spend time thinking over as we see Mary as a world leader.

She found her role because to mother means to nurture relationships. Good leadership nourishes relationships and allows them to grow. Mary provides a nurturing space. She is sensitive to the needs of all. Mary saw to individual needs of each person. Look at the Wedding Feast, she knew just how to have Jesus help the young couple. Knowing and loving the people of God, and those people whom God places in our lives. Edith Stein wrote, “The women’s soul is fashioned as a shelter in which other souls may unfold.”

Prayer Practice

1. What is it in Mary that I find so attractive?
2. How can I do this in practical ways today and every day?

Mary as World Leader - Reflection 5

**“I say “yes” my Lord, in all the good times, in all the bad times.
I say “yes” my Lord, to every word you speak.” ~ Dona Pena**

Reflection

Mary sets forth an example to all of us to say “**Yes**” to what God asks of us in each of the moments of our lives. At the first miracle at the wedding feast Cana, she instructs those there to “Do whatever He tells you.” Mary sets the example for all of us as disciples of Jesus, to follow where Jesus leads us. Mary models to all of us to lead the world by saying “**Yes**” to proclaiming and living the Gospel in our lives through our witness and action.

When we say “**Yes**” to taking care of the homeless, when we say “**Yes**” to supporting those who are vulnerable among us, we lead like Mary. Mary challenges us to look to the example of her Son, who proclaimed that the Kingdom of God is realized when we forgive, seek peace, end violence, shelter the widow and the orphan, and treat all as God’s beloved children. Mary calls all of the world to lead with a resounding “**Yes**” to building the Kingdom of God, where all have a place; all are beloved; all are holy in the eyes of God!

Prayer Practice

Where are you called to say “**Yes**” to God’s call in your life and by doing so lead like Mary?

Where will your “**Yes**” proclaim the Kingdom of God, here and now in our world?

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Mary as World Leader – Reflection 6

“Leaders build bridges.” -Old Welsh Proverb

Reflection

Why is Mary the most influential leader in the world today? The answer lies in this Old Welsh Proverb, “**Mary builds bridges!**”

From the time of her Annunciation to her Assumption into Heaven, Mary is a bridge builder. She encourages us to build bridges too.

- When the angel Gabriel tells Mary, that she will conceive and bare Jesus, she immediately goes to her cousin Elizabeth to begin building the bridge between John the Baptist, Jesus and the future of the church.
- At the Wedding Feast at Cana, she builds the bridge that takes Jesus from His private prayer ministry to His public ministry of prayer into action, healing, and peace-making.
- When Jesus is resurrected from the dead, He probably appears to Mary, His Mother, first. Mary becomes the first person to experience the bridge building Christ, from His birth, teachings, sufferings, death, Resurrection and Ascension.
- As the Holy Spirit descends upon all disciples at Pentecost, Mary, as the first disciple, who is closest to Jesus, is the first person to receive the Holy Spirit. She further exemplifies how to build bridges to bring about the kingdom of God.

Prayer Practice

- Ask yourself, “How can I imitate Mary by being a bridge builder in our world today?”
- As you prepare for the work, that God has given you to do today, ask yourself, “How can God use me to be a bridge builder in this sacred work?”
- Then ask God to show you what kind of bridge He wants you to build.
- When the bridge is finished, thank God for this bridge.

Mary as World Leader - Reflection 7
**“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those
who are crushed in spirit.” -Psalm 34:18**

Reflection

In Jesus’ time, any words uttered by a person on the cross was considered to have the force of a last will and testament. Jesus gave His mother to the apostle John, but He also gave her to us, for all time. And, like, her **fiat** to God and the Angel Gabriel, she obeyed her Son. Like Mary, we are called to have a heart full of compassion for all whom we meet.

When I reflect upon Mary’s youthfulness and caring for the body of her son, as in the Pieta, we are all called to that same level of empathy for the people we meet in our lives.

Deacons are trained in formation to focus on liturgy, homily and charitable works. One evening in January, I answered a phone call from a woman who was clearly in distress about an issue, and I listened prayerfully for over an hour. Waking up very early the next morning, I looked outside to find a field of fallen snow, where the moonlight sparkled on the surface, like a thousand stars in Mary’s crown. I realized that my real vocation is to embrace all who have a broken heart and have compassion with them as Mary did with Jesus. The essence of our lives is not in doing and achieving, but in listening and caring for all the broken-hearted. Mary’s joy for all of us, is that we bear witness to the brokenness in the people we meet.

Prayer Practice

On May 1 of this year, both Canada and the United States were re-consecrated to Mary, Mother of the Church. May we all hold up in prayer the vulnerable, the broken hearted, those who are ill and their caregivers, especially during this current virus pandemic.

Closing Reflection

Mary pondered all these things in her heart -Luke 2:19

Reflection

Mary models for us how to ponder our experiences that Covid19 imposed upon us. Embedded in our “social distancing” are the basic tools for building an authentic Christian lifestyle, a new normal. Where and how was Christ in those lifestyle changes we had to make? In God’s will is our peace and wellbeing for example:

- **Slow down** – one tank of gas served me 14 days.
- **Listen to our stories**—sharing meals and social media
- **Silence**- both within one’s environment’ and within one’s self (mind and heart). Silence is God’s first language. God wants to teach us His language.
- **Solitude**—everyone needs some “my space”. Some serious self-reflection, prayer, meditation. Alone time with God who loves you.
- **Surrender**—Covid19 created severe changes in lifestyle. It also created a felt need to entrust our lives to God who loves, protects and provides. **Cast your cares upon the Lord and He will support you.** (1PETER 5:7)
- **Service**—Love one another as I have loved you. (John 13: 34)

Prayer Practice

The VISION OF HOPE, that Mary the Mother of the Church offers us is this: Letting our relationship with Mary and Jesus work for us.

- Mary’s prayer: Let your word and your Spirit happen in me
- Jesus prayer: Father, into your hands I entrust my Spirit. (Luke 23:46) Father, let this cup of suffering pass...not my will but yours be done. (Luke 22:42)
- Holy Spirit: Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me. Melt me, mold me, fill me, and use me. Fall afresh on me.

Concluding Reflection

My mom was extraordinarily sentimental. She had a knack for saving items from our childhood, which she found meaningful. One such item was a letter I wrote to “Our Blessed Lady”. Viewing this letter written at the age of 7, now from a 70 year-old lens is quite illuminating. What stands out to me is my desire then to have a relationship with Mary. I signed the letter: “Your friend!”

Mary has truly been a friend. As a youth, I was taught to pray the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary. I appreciate the titles bestowed upon her. “Mother of Christ”, “Mother of Good Counsel”, “Virgin Most Faithful”. These statements reflect who Mary should be in the life of all Christians. Her attributes are the virtues to which we all should aspire.

Mary models the title “World Leader”. I remembered traveling to two places of pilgrimage: The Shrine of Our Lady of Knock in County Mayo, Ireland; and the image of Our Lady of Czestochowa in Poland. What these places hold in common is a portal into the mystery; relationship with Mary and her Son; reverence for; and a desire to deepen in faith.

Fatima, Lourdes, Medjugorje also are indeed holy ground, becoming symbolic touch stones reminding us of Mary, our Mother, who cares deeply for the children of God. Mary always reminds us of God’s mercy and constant call of conversion. Countless pilgrims from all over the world draw near to be renewed and strengthened by the faith and devotion of Mary.

In our troubled world, these titles given to Mary in the Litany of the Blessed Virgin are most fitting: “Health of the Sick”, “Comforter of the Afflicted”, “Help of Christians”. May we take time to ponder in our hearts who Mary is for us today. May we appreciate and deepen in our awareness of Mary as Advocate, Intercessor, and Portal to the Heart of Christ.

Prayer Practice

Contemplate being in the home of Mary, Joseph and Jesus. What do you experience in their presence?

Pray either the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary or The Luminous Mysteries of the Rosary.

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