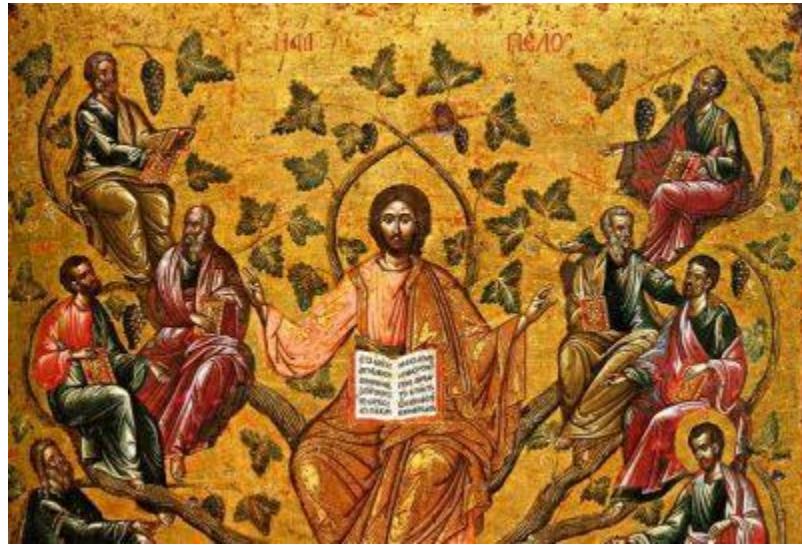
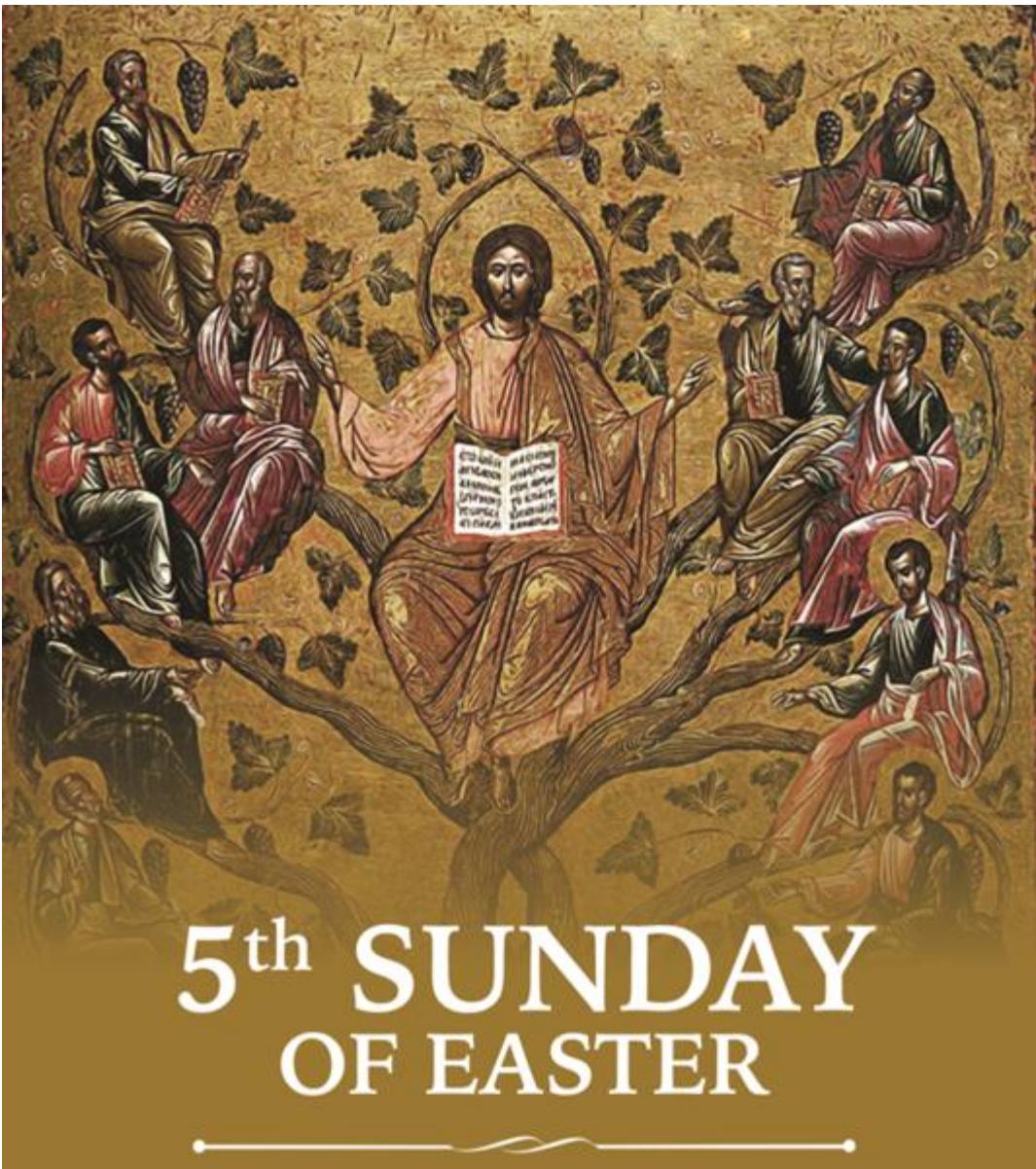


PASTOR'S MEANDERINGS
FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER (A)

9 – 10 MAY 2020





5th SUNDAY OF EASTER

SUNDAY REFLECTION

The Eucharist is the sacrament of Jesus' sacrifice of His whole life, death and resurrection, through which He offers thanksgiving to His Father for everything which He has received from Him. In our communion we are given to participate in this unique priestly and sacrificial action of Jesus. Here and now we exercise our royal priesthood in and through Him, praising and thanking God the Father, in the Holy Spirit, for all of His gifts to us – especially that of Jesus Himself. What we are doing now, however, represents what we are called to do throughout the whole of our lives and in the details of our daily existence: to praise and thank God by our behavior, to make our action coincide with our contemplation and prayer. We are a Eucharistic people.

STEWARSHIP: “Those who have faith in Me will do the works I do, and far greater than these,” Jesus tells His disciples. That’s quite an assignment for us as Christian stewards!

READINGS FOR THE SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

17 MAY '20

Acts 8:5-8, 14-17: The growth of the early church continues as Philip is welcomed by the Samaritans and they receive the Holy Spirit.

1 Pt. 3:15-18: Jesus suffered and died for the sake of our sins and has been raised to life in the Spirit.

Jn. 14:15-21: Jesus promises His disciples that He will be with us and alive in us through His Spirit of truth.

PAPAL INTENTION FOR MAY

That, faithful in their service to the Word and the poor, may be an invigorating symbol for the entire Church

WHAT WAS THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RECONSECRATION OF THE U.S. TO THE VIRGIN MARY ON 1 MAY OF THIS YEAR?

On May 1 of this year the US Conference of Bishops along with the Canadian Conference of Bishops re-consecrated the two countries to the Virgin Mary. This action was reported here and that evening's prayer service incorporated that re-consecration in its format. This action on the part of the bishops may have a longer lasting impact than merely turning in prayer at this particular moment in the midst of confronting the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In its April 23 announcement of this event the USCCB stated that "Through a collective dedication or entrustment of a nation to Mary, an act of consecration is meant to be a reminder to the faithful of the Blessed Mother's witness to the Gospel and to ask for her effective intercession before her Son on behalf of those in need,"

What does that mean for each of us, the average person in the pew? When we consecrate ourselves to God through the Blessed Mother, we are making a powerful invitation for them to be more a part of our lives. The importance of this invitation cannot be understated.

Before this current crisis, we had other crises. Certainly, some of us may feel like we are struggling, going without the sacraments and, dealing with the various limitations that have been imposed on our normal routines. In one way or another it has left us with the feeling that we have been stripped of the comforts and habits that helped us feel like we were moving ahead in life with some degree of success, too.

But it helps to keep in mind what our culture was like leading up to this pandemic. Some of our most heated debates revolved around identity politics. It seemed we would get wrathfully angry at one another at the mere mention of a name. It was dangerous territory.

And this health crisis that is causing unprecedented sickness, death, and economic collapse is now exacerbating it all. At a time when we should feel some kind of solidarity as vulnerable human beings, we watch the same old anger seemingly get worse.

So how can Mary help? She's our mother! An ancient view of her role as exemplified by Christ's words to her and St. John as they stood at the foot of the Cross. As the mother of God, who carried Jesus in her womb and raised Him and lived with Him and walked with Him in His passion and held Him in His death, there is no sorrow she does not know, there is no injustice unfamiliar to her.

When people are being their most irrational out of fear, she is near. She felt the grave, horrific consequences of the sickness of sin in every fiber of her being. There is no one who could understand every kind of grief and anxiety we are facing more than our Blessed Mother. Our ancestors in the faith knew this and understood this characteristic of the Virgin and naturally gravitated to her in a way that has been lost to a degree in our own era. One in which we may, as in the past, find comfort.

There's also a beautiful calendar alignment, as the re-consecration came just days after St. Louis Marie de Montfort's April 28 feast day. God used him to make consecration to Mary part of Church tradition. And as often happens with those things that are "of God," it came with considerable suffering for him, as those around him persecuted him for his rigorous piety. He talked about making ourselves "slaves" to our Blessed Mother, a phrase that may arouse suspicion in contemporary language. But when we consider that she is the most perfect disciple of Jesus, closer to Him than anyone who has ever lived on this earth, isn't that precisely who we want to model our lives on?

Teach me your ways, Mary!

With the re-consecration that took place on 1 May, a month traditionally dedicated to Mary, this is precisely what we as a nation were petitioning. We can recall the words of St. De Montfort, who famously said that "the surest, easiest, shortest, and the most perfect means" to becoming a saint is consecrating oneself to Jesus through Mary.

In his popular Marian consecration book based on St. De Montfort, "*33 Days to Morning Glory*," Father Michael Gaitley quotes St. De Montfort as assuring that "if we establish solid devotion to our Blessed Lady, it is only to establish more perfectly devotion to Jesus Christ, and to provide an easy and secure means for finding Jesus Christ."

Who would not want to go along that path? Especially now in a time of such uncertainty? "Consecration to Mary is a Cristo-centric act of faith, hope and love that stirs the Lord's heart, and our heart," points out Kathleen Beckman, editor of "*When Women Pray*"..."

"Re-consecration to Mary reminds me of when a married couple renews their vows to one another," says Beckman, whose chapter in the book is on having a Marian heart, receptive to all God has to offer.

Beckman also points out that "over time we are at different stages of friendship with Jesus and Mary, and so in the spiritual life that is always growing, each time that we recommit to Mary and Jesus, it's possible to grow deeper in faith, hope and love."

For Father Edward Looney, author of "*A Heart Like Mary's*" and "*Our Lady of Good Help: A Prayer Book for Pilgrims*", the re-consecration brings to mind the figure of the "disciple that Jesus loved."

"In the gospel of John, it records Jesus' entrustment of Mary to John and John to Mary. John stands in place of us all," says Father Looney. "I see Marian consecration as a way for believers to explore the meaning and come to accept Mary as their mother. The saints have often said that God wishes to dispense grace to the world through the intercession and mediation of Mary. Consecration is us giving our lives to Jesus through the hands of Mary." According to Father Looney, who is a priest of Green Bay, Wisconsin, the U.S. and Canadian bishops haven't invented anything new here.

He also said that "When an individual makes a consecration to Mary, it is customary and recommended to go through the process and re-consecrate oneself," "It is a renewal and

reminder of Mary's role in our lives. Every time we pray the 'Memorare,' we ask Mary to 'Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary.' Re-consecration in a sense isn't just a reminder for ourselves, but also a reminder to Mary to not forget us who are her children."

Consecration is a statement of faith and has a rich history, even in our country. In their announcement, the bishops recalled that the first bishop of the United States, John Carroll, had a devotion to Mary and placed the new nation under her protection in 1792. She would later be named our patroness as a country.

Fr. Looney recalls one of many other examples that you won't find in many history books, like "the Ursuline nuns in New Orleans who during the Battle of New Orleans promised each year to pray the '*Te Deum*' in gratitude for an end to the battle. More than 200 years later, on the feast of Our Lady of Prompt Succor, the people gather at the Ursuline Convent and fulfill this promise."

In this time of the coronavirus, Father Looney believes, "we are in essence asking Mary to be our mother, advocate, an intercessor. We ask her to watch over our country, obtain healings, and to ask Jesus to do something miraculous. In desperate times, we turn to heavenly aid and assistance, realizing we cannot do it on our own."

"As the country is re-consecrated to Mary, it is an opportunity for us to renew our Marian devotion and maybe add something extra during the month of May." As an example praying the rosary and adding the prayers Pope Francis has suggested reflecting on at the end of its recitation.

We can also renew our personal and family consecrations to Jesus through Mary and add acts of reparation to our days during May, "offering up of suffering, releasing anxiety and fear to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. What took place on the 1st opens the opportunity for all of us as a community of faith to turn to the Virgin entrusting ourselves and everyone in our nation to the loving care of God through Our Lady's intercessory prayers and asking her that as we move forward, every day be spent loving our neighbor and seeing Christ in every unwelcome surprise. Our Mother is a fierce protector against sickness, evil and darkness. This should be a cause of joy and peace — even in a crisis."

WHY THIS DEDICATION OF THE MONTH OF MAY TO MARY

It has often been forgotten by Catholics themselves, and therefore it is not surprising that those who are not Catholic often have a completely wrong conception of Catholic devotion to the Mother of God. They imagine, and sometimes we can understand their reasons for doing so, that Catholics treat the Blessed Virgin as an almost divine being in her own right, as if she had some glory, some power, some majesty of her own that placed her on a level with Christ Himself. They regard the Assumption of Mary into heaven as a kind of apotheosis placed in the Redemption would seem to be equal to that of her Son. +++ But this is all completely contrary to the true mind of the Catholic Church.+++ It forgets that Mary's chief glory is in her nothingness, in the fact of being the "Handmaid of the Lord," as one who in becoming the Mother of God acted simply in loving submission to His command, in the pure obedience of faith. She is blessed not because of some mythical pseudo-divine prerogative, but in all her

human and womanly limitations as one who has believed. It is the faith and the fidelity of this humble handmaid, "full of grace" that enables her to be the perfect instrument of God, and nothing else but His instrument. The work that was done in her purely the work of God. "He that is mighty hath done great things in me." The glory of Mary is purely and simply the glory of God in her. And she, like anyone else, can say that she has nothing that she has not received from Him through Christ.

As a matter of fact, this is precisely her greatest glory: that having nothing of her own, retaining nothing of a "self" that could glory in any- thing for her own sake, she placed no obstacle to the mercy of God and in no way resisted His love and His will. Hence she received more from Him than any other saint. He was able to accomplish His will perfectly in her, and His liberty was in no way hindered or turned from its purpose by the presence of an egotistical self in Mary. She was and is in the highest sense a person precisely because, being "immaculate," she was free from every taint of selfishness that might obscure God's light in her being. She was then a freedom that obeyed Him perfectly and in this obedience found the fulfillment of perfect love. The genuine significance of Catholic devotion to Mary is to be seen in the light of the Incarnation itself. The Church cannot separate the Son and the Mother. Because the Church conceived of the Incarnation as God's descent into flesh and into time, and His great gift of Himself to His creatures, she also believes that the one who was closest to Him in this great mystery was the one who participated most perfectly in the gift. When a room is heated by an open flame, surely there is nothing strange in the fact that those who stand closest to the fireplace are the ones who are warmest. And when God comes into the world through the instrumentality of one of His servants, then there is nothing surprising about the fact that His chosen instrument should have the greatest and most intimate share in the divine gift.

Mary, who was empty of all egotism, free from all sin, was as pure as the glass of a very clean window that has no other function than to admit the light of the sun (Son). If we rejoice in that light, we implicitly praise the cleanness of the window. And of course it might be argued that in such a case we might well forget the window altogether. This is true. And yet the Son of God, in emptying Himself of His majestic power, having become a child, abandoning Himself in complete dependence to the loving care of a human Mother, in a certain sense draws our attention once again to her. The Light has wished to remind us of the window, because He is grateful to her and because He has an infinitely tender love, it is certainly a great grace and a privilege, and one of the most important aspects of this privilege is that it enables us to some extent to appreciate the mystery of God's great love and respect for His creatures.

That God should assume Mary into heaven is not just a glorification of a "Mother Goddess." Quite the contrary, it is the expression of the divine love for humanity, and a very special manifestation of God's respect for His creatures, His desire to do honor to the beings He has made in His own image, and most particularly His respect for the body which was destined to be the temple of His glory. If Mary is believed to be assumed into heaven, it is because we too are one day, by the grace of God, to dwell where she is. If human nature is glorified in her, it is because God desires it to be glorified in us too, and it is for this reason that His Son, taking flesh, came into the world.

In all the great mystery of Mary, then, one thing remains most clear: that of herself she is nothing, and that God has for our sakes delighted to manifest His glory and His love in her.

It is because she is, of all the saints, the most perfectly poor and the most perfectly hidden, the one who has absolutely nothing whatever that she attempts to possess as her own, that she can most fully communicate to the rest of us the grace of the infinitely selfless God. And we will most truly possess Him when we have emptied ourselves and become poor and hidden as she is, resembling Him by resembling her.

And all our sanctity depends on her maternal love. The ones she desires to share the joy of her own poverty and simplicity, the ones whom she wills to be hidden as she is hidden, are the ones who share her closeness to God.

Among Catholics, May is most well-known as “Mary’s Month,” a specific month of the year when special devotions are performed in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Why is that? How did May become associated with the Blessed Mother?

There are many different factors that contributed to this association. First of all, in ancient Greece and Rome the month of May was dedicated to pagan goddesses connected to fertility and springtime (Artemis and Flora, respectively). This, combined with other European rituals commemorating the new season of spring, led many Western cultures to view May as a month of life and motherhood. This was long before “Mother’s Day” was ever conceived, though the modern celebration is closely related to this innate desire to honor maternity during the spring months.

In the early Church there is evidence of a major feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary celebrated on the 15th of May each year, but it wasn’t until the 18th century that May received a particular association with the Virgin Mary. According to the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, “The May devotion in its present form originated at Rome where Father Latomia of the Roman College of the Society of Jesus, to counteract infidelity and immorality among the students, **made a vow at the end of the eighteenth century to devote the month of May to Mary**. From Rome the practice spread to the other Jesuit colleges and thence to nearly every Catholic church of the Latin rite.”

Dedicating an entire month to Mary wasn’t a new tradition, as there existed a prior tradition of devoting 30 days to Mary called *Tricesimum*, which was also known as “Lady Month.”

Various private devotions to Mary quickly became widespread during the month of May, as it is recorded in the *Raccolta*, a publication of prayers published in the mid-19th century.

It is a well-known devotion, to consecrate to most holy Mary the month of May, as the most beautiful and florescent month of the whole year. This devotion has long prevailed throughout Christendom; and it is common here in Rome, not only in private families, but as a public devotion in very many churches. Pope Pius VII, in order to animate all Christian people to the practice of a devotion so tender and agreeable to the most blessed Virgin, and calculated to be of such great spiritual benefit to themselves, granted, by a Rescript of the Segretaria of the Memorials, March 21, 1815 (kept in the Segretaria of his Eminence the Cardinal-Vicar), to all the faithful of the Catholic world, who either in public or in private should honor the Blessed Virgin with some special homage or devout prayers, or other virtuous practices.

In 1945, Pope Pius XII solidified May as a Marian month after establishing the feast of the Queenship of Mary on May 31st. After the Second Vatican Council, this feast was moved to August 22, while May 31st became the feast of the Visitation of Mary.

The month of May is one rich in tradition and a beautiful time of the year to honor our heavenly mother.

The tradition of dedicating the month of May to Mary, came about in the 13th century, however there are earlier antecedents. Some say because it was created to replace various pagan cults. The actual reason is the fact that this month is the time when spring is at the height of its beauty. Spring is also connected with nature renewing itself. In her way, Mary gave new life to the world when she gave birth to our savior Jesus Christ.

The link between Mary and the month of May became popular among the members of the Jesuit Order — by 1700 it had a firm hold among their students at the Roman College and a short time later it was publicly celebrated in the Gesu Church in Rome. From there it spread to the rest of the Church.

The pious practice of honoring Mary during the month of May has been especially promoted by the Popes. Pius XII made frequent reference to it and in his great Encyclical *on the Sacred Liturgy Mediator Dei*. He characterized it as one of "other exercises of piety which although not strictly belonging to the Sacred Liturgy, are nevertheless of special import and dignity, and may be considered in a certain way to be an addition to the liturgical cult: they have been approved and praised over and over again by the Apostolic See and by the Bishops"

Natural Context

The tradition of dedicating the month of May to Our Lady is centuries old, dating back at least 700 years. Blessed Pope Paul VI wrote an encyclical on the month of May, focusing on the Virgin Mary. He wrote that the piety of the faithful has long dedicated the month of May to the Mother of God. He stated in his encyclical, *Mense Maio*:

We are delighted and consoled by this pious custom associated with the month of May, which pays honor to the Blessed Virgin and brings such rich benefits to the Christian people. Since Mary is rightly to be regarded as the way by which we are led to Christ, the person who encounters Mary cannot help but encounter Christ likewise.

The reason for dedicating May to Our Lady is associated with the particular season of the year. May is certainly known for its springtime beauty (at least in the Northern Hemisphere). It is associated with flowers and blossoms, with trees which spring back to life, and grass which sprouts. It brings to mind the idea of promise and hope, of new life. Blessed John Henry Newman offers various reasons why May in particular is dedicated to Our Lady in "[Meditations and Devotions](#)". He states:

The first reason is because it is the time when the earth bursts forth into its fresh foliage and its green grass after the stern frost and snow of winter and the raw atmosphere and the wild wind and rain of the early spring. It is because the blossoms are upon the trees and the flowers are in the gardens. It is because the days have got long, and the sun rises early and sets late. For such gladness and

joyousness of external Nature is a fit attendant on our devotion to her who is the Mystical Rose and the House of Gold.

Blessed Newman admits that sometimes May is a rainy, cool month. However, it always remains a month of promise and hope, the prelude to summer, the season of light. It is in this sense that it represents Mary. She reflects the light of Christ.

In classic western culture, both Greek and Roman, May was connected with the beginning of new life. This ancient belief led to May being associated with the motherhood of Mother Earth and thus to motherhood in general. It is for this reason that Mother's Day is celebrated in May in many countries. This connection between May and motherhood led Christians to adopt May as the month of our Lady, the Mother of God and our heavenly Mother. She brought life into the world by giving birth to her Son, Jesus, who brought about a new spring.

Liturgical Context

May is normally part of the Easter season, the period of fifty days which lasts from Easter to Pentecost. During this time we celebrate the Lord's Resurrection from the dead, a celebration which culminates with his Ascension to the Father and the sending of the Holy Spirit to the Church on Pentecost. It is a fitting time to dedicate to the Blessed Virgin Mary, to recall her intense joy over her Son's Resurrection and the comfort and guidance she gave to the Apostles during this difficult period.

During the Easter season, Mary's presence in the beginnings of the Church is emphasized. She was present in the first community of disciples. In [Acts 1:14](#), she was present with the Apostles in the upper room as they prayerfully waited for the descent of the Holy Spirit with hopeful expectation. As Pope St. John Paul II stated in [Redemptoris Mater](#), "Mary was in the Upper Room, where the Apostles were preparing to take up this mission with the coming of the Spirit of Truth: she was present with them. In their midst Mary was "devoted to prayer" as the "mother of Jesus" (cf. Acts 1:13-14), of the Crucified and Risen Christ." Her maternal presence was humble and discreet but fundamental. Among them, she acted as a guide, an exceptional witness of the mystery of Christ, a role she had since His conception and birth, as well as a model of true faith.

Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI vividly described Mary's maternal presence among the disciples after Jesus' Resurrection. [He stated](#):

In the days that followed the Lord's resurrection, the Apostles stayed together, comforted by Mary's presence, and after the ascension, they persevered with her in prayerful expectation of Pentecost. Our Lady was a mother and teacher to them, a role that she continues to play for Christians of all times...

The Easter season is a fitting time to recall Mary's immense joy over her Son's Resurrection and to rediscover her role as mother and teacher in our lives. Mary has a unique role in the God's plan of salvation and in the Church. She consented to the coming of the Savior and cooperated in developing His mission. She brought Him into the world, raised Him and lovingly stood by His side during the years of His hidden life. She supported Him during His public ministry in a quiet way, beginning at Cana, where by her intercession Jesus performed His first miracle ([John 2:1-12](#)). She cooperated in His work, even uniting her own suffering with that of her Son, standing at the foot of His cross. Mary was Jesus' first disciple, humbly following Him during every step of His journey and mission. She trusted in God completely and lived by His grace. She is our model of true discipleship and of complete faith.

During the Easter season we are more aware of Mary's motherly presence and love. It is perhaps for this reason that popular tradition has dedicated the month of May, which falls during this liturgical season, to Our Blessed Mother.

Turning to Our Heavenly Mother

The Blessed Virgin Mary offered the disciples her prayers, motherly care, and witness. She continues to offer us her motherly love and intercession. During this month of May, let us rediscover her maternal role in each of our lives. Let us offer our spiritual mother our sincere prayers, that just as she aided the first Apostles with her prayers, she may also guide and intercede for us in our journey of faith. Let us learn from her how to love and trust God completely and how to be faithful witnesses of the risen Lord.

OK, THEN WHY THE CROWNING?

If, like myself you grew up in a Catholic community in the 1950's, a May crowning is nothing new to you.

Usually on the first weekend of May the second graders made their First Communion, were rushed home to celebrate but only after the mandatory pictures had been taken and then pulled out of our white suits and the girls white dresses and veils so that they would not be wrinkled or dirtied. Because, Sunday night there was the May Crowning, when we were back in church in those white suits with the Buster Brown Collars with the fluffy bow ties, (look it up on Google) and the girls in their multi-petticoated white dresses and veils processing into the church, angelically, with our candles with the exception of one girl from the class who had been selected to crown Mary. she was escorted in by a court of eighth grade girls who were probably there to make sure that she didn't kill herself ascending and descending the long wobbly steps that were jury-rigged to Mary's Side altar while she was wearing her mother's wedding dress that had been hurriedly altered so it sort of fit. In the process with all of the pomp that a German parish could provide she somehow got a large gold crown studded with gems on to the large statue of the Immaculate Conception. On one level we can look back on this ceremony and find the humor but at the same time there was something awe inspiring that the whole parish came out for this event with an intensity of faith in the underlying purpose and did so with the degree of solemnity that was clearly visible.

But like many Catholic traditions, this one has gone by the wayside in most communities. And while it's only a nice tradition, there's something powerful in those communal memories, especially the ones that form our souls.

When you grew up around Eucharistic processions, it's hard not to take a knee before the Blessed Sacrament. And many who may rarely make it to church might find themselves smiling fondly at the thought of crowning Mary their Queen.

This devotion isn't just about assenting to the mystery of Mary's Queenship, the idea that as the mother of the King of Heaven she is the Queen of Heaven. Certainly, the crown offers that symbolism, and it's nothing to be shrugged at. But we're not crowning her with gold and diamonds, we're crowning her with flowers. It's not a queen's coronation, but a mom's.

What made those celebrations held in our youth in that community back in Pa. or, for that matter the ones that have been held here in these past years isn't the flower crown woven specially by a parishioner or ordered specially from the florist to fit her fiberglass head, it's the

flowers lovingly placed before her (some carefully grown, others purchased, others picked at the last minute.

What is important and a revelatory moment for the rest of us is the attitude of the children picking just the right flower from their garden, or perhaps with their parents help at the store so they can find the perfect thing for Mary—this is what's most beautiful. This old Catholic tradition teaches little ones to look for something beautiful to offer to their Mother in Heaven. It teaches them to love her in a tangible way. And it is also a teaching moment in how that love is expressed to their mothers at home.

What this action provides for all who participate actively or as observers is a tangible way for them to love the Blessed Mother. And when we participate, it's a way for them/us to become like children again – her children.

MOTHER'S DAY

Needless to say today is Mother's Day. According to the History Channel, the observance has roots in ancient Greece and Rome; in Europe when, on the fourth Sunday in Lent, the faithful were encouraged to return to their "mother church" for a special service; and in the suffragette and peace movement during the time of the Civil War. It was officially recognized in the United States by President Woodrow Wilson in 1908. This second Sunday in May has become a popular day to honor an important relationship.

Mother's Day, as celebrated in the United States, is a secular holiday – this is not to say that the Church does not have a deep love and devotion to our mothers of the Catholic faithful and all mothers. Motherhood is the recognition of life. In the creative aspect of the human person, man and woman come together to image God by bringing forth life. This is something we celebrate without ceasing.

In the Church, we celebrate the Solemnities of Mary, Mother of God, the Assumption, the Immaculate conception; we show our love and devotion through private liturgies such as the rosary, dedications to Our Lady, and many devotions. Our recognition of the Virgin Mother of God as the Mediatrix of all graces and the Co-Redemptrix is in a more fitting way, our celebration of all motherhood.

Celebration of Mother's Day is important in our culture as it is in our faith. In the Catholic Church, we recognize the importance of putting our faith into our action. I encourage you to take the opportunity today to do something charitable for your mother, something charitable for mothers in the community, to recognize and thank God for the gift of life, and to speak with the Virgin Mother.

To all the moms in the parish and outside the parish – through the intercession of the Virgin Mother, I pray that you have a blessed Mother's Day.

To Jesus through Mary,

WEEKDAY REFLECTIONS

FIFTH WEEK OF EASTER

Indwelling of the Trinity

Monday of the Fifth Week of Easter

“Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him.” (Jn. 14:23)

Children seem to get it. They seem to understand that God dwells in their hearts. Of course if you asked them how they know this they may look at you with a confused look and not know how to respond. But, nonetheless, somehow they do understand that God dwells within them. So what would you say if someone asked you, “How do you know that God comes and makes His dwelling within you?” Perhaps you also may be at a loss for words to describe this incredible mystery of our faith. Do you believe this to be true? That God wants to make your heart and soul His dwelling place? If so, how does this happen?

By the gift of faith we, like little children, just know that God wants to dwell within us. We know that He wants to possess our souls, speak to us, strengthen us, lead us and guide us. We know, by the gift of faith, that God is real and desires the deepest and most intimate relationship with us. We just know.

The good news is that faith leads to understanding. This means that the more we are attentive to the voice of God speaking within us, leading and guiding us, the more we begin to understand His indwelling presence. As St. **you** Augustine said, “Faith is to believe what do not see. The reward of faith is to see what you believe.” Faith in God’s indwelling presence leads us to the answer of the question above. The answer is one that God and God alone can give to us. We can share our faith with others, give witness to His presence in our lives, and give those around us the answer to that question through faith. How do I know God dwells within me? The answer: Because I see Him there, I speak to Him there, and He speaks to me. Reflect, today, upon the Lord living within you. Let Him speak to you and, in that ever deepening

conversation, allow His Indwelling Presence to grow and to become manifest to others. God wants to not only dwell within you, He also wants to shine through you.

Lord, come live in my heart. Make my heart Your dwelling place. Help me to see You there, to meet You there, to converse with You and to love You in my soul. Jesus, I trust in You.

A Troubled Heart

Tuesday of the Fifth Week of Easter

“Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.” (Jn. 14:27)

What a wonderful reminder that we all need to hear on a regular basis. “Do not let your heart be troubled.” And “Do not let your heart be afraid.” How often do you follow that advice? Interestingly, it’s actually more than advice. It’s a command of love from our Lord. He wants to be clear and wants us to know that a fearful and troubled heart is not of Him. To be troubled

and fearful is a great burden and weighs us down. Jesus desperately wants us to be free of these burdens. He wants us to be free so that we can experience the joy of life. So what is it that burdens you in life the most? Is there something in your life that you obsess about, are angry about, can't let go of or that tends to dominate your life? Or perhaps your burden is more subtle. Perhaps there is nothing that overwhelms you but, instead, is a constant burden in a small way, always there in the background. These burdens can be quite difficult when they last from year to year.

The first step to freedom is to see the burden for what it is. Identify it and seek to identify the underlying cause. If the cause of your burden is your own sin, repent of it and seek Confession. This is the best way to experience immediate freedom.

If, however, your burden is the result of another's actions or some situation in life that is out of your control, then you are in a unique position to surrender to our Lord, giving Him complete control of this situation. Freedom is found in total surrender, trust and abandonment to His will.

Spend some time today reflecting upon that which burdens you the most in life. What is it that weighs heavily upon you? It is this, more than anything else, that Jesus wants to enter into and lift for you. He wants you free so that you can experience the joy that He has to offer you in life.

Lord, I want to be free. I want to experience the joy You have in store for me. When the burdens of life weigh me down, help me to turn to You in my need. Jesus, I trust in You.

Being Pruned

Wednesday of the Fifth Week of Easter

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit, and everyone that does he prunes so that it bears more fruit." (Jn. 15:1-2)

Are you willing to let yourself be pruned? Pruning is necessary if a plant is to produce an abundance of good fruit or beautiful flowers. If, for example, a grapevine is left to grow without pruning, it will produce many small grapes that are good for nothing. But if care is taken to prune the vine, the maximum number of good grapes will be produced.

Jesus uses this image of pruning to teach us a similar lesson in bearing good fruit for His Kingdom. He wants our lives to be fruitful and He wants to use us as powerful instruments of His grace in the world. But unless we are willing to go through the purification of spiritual pruning from time to time, we will not be the instruments that God can use.

Spiritual pruning takes the form of letting God eliminate the vices in our lives so that the virtues can be properly nourished. This is especially done by letting Him humble us and strip away our pride. This can hurt, but the pain associated with being humbled by God is a key to spiritual growth. By growing in humility, we grow ever more reliant upon the source of our nourishment rather than relying upon ourselves, our own ideas and our own plans. God is infinitely wiser than us and if we can continually turn to Him as our source, we will be far stronger and better prepared to let Him do great things through us. But, again, this requires that we let Him prune us.

Being spiritually pruned means we actively let go of our own will and our own ideas. It means we give up control over our lives and let the master grower take over. It means we trust Him far more than we trust ourselves. This requires a true death to ourselves and a true humility by

which we acknowledge we are completely reliant upon God in the same way a branch is reliant upon the vine. Without the vine, we shrivel and die. Being firmly attached to the vine is the only way to life.

Pray this day that you will let the Lord prune away all that is not of Him in your life. Trust in Him and His divine plan and know that this is the only path to bearing the good fruit God wants to bear through you.

Lord, I pray that You prune away all my pride and selfishness. Purify me of my many sins so that I can turn to You in all things. And as I learn to rely upon You, may You begin to bear an abundance of good fruit in my life. Jesus, I trust in You.

Unlimited and Unconditional Love

Thursday of the Fifth Week of Easter

“As the Father loves me, so I also love you.” (Jn. 15:9)

There are three beautiful insights we should take from this passage.

First, the love of the Father for the Son is perfect in every way. It is unconditional and all-consuming. It's total and selfless. In receiving the Father's love, Jesus receives all He needs. Second, the love Jesus receives from the Father cannot be contained. It cannot be kept to Himself. The love of the Father is such that it overflows from Jesus' heart. It is this overflowing love that pours forth from Jesus to us.

Third, a key thing to ponder in this is that this overflowing love, now given to us, cannot be contained within us either. It must overflow from our hearts to others. Therefore, if we are to be true recipients of the love of the Father and the Son, we must in turn let that love pour forth onto others in an “unlimited” and “unconditional” way.

Think about it. “Unlimited.” “Unconditional.” Is this truly possible? Is it possible to be so radical and total in our love of others? Yes, it's possible only if the love we speak of originates in the heart of the Father, given to the Son, and then poured out upon us to distribute freely. Reflect, today, upon the fact that the love you are called to share with others originates in the Heart of the Father in Heaven. The first and most important step in learning to love with the Father's Heart is to let God love you. This can be very hard to do. It can be hard to let God love you, to receive that love, and to let it affect you deeply. But if you can continually let God love you with His perfect love, you will start to see that this love automatically flows forth from you as if it were an overflowing river of grace and mercy.

Lord, I do love You and know that I am loved by You. Help me to be open to Your love. Help me to let that love sink in so that it may also overflow from my heart to others. Jesus, I trust in You.

You Are Chosen

Friday of the Fifth Week of Easter

“It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain.” (Jn. 15:16)

Children love to play games. When a game is organized between two teams, kids will often line up and wait to be chosen. Each child hopes to be chosen first. It is affirming to be wanted for the team. When a child is chosen last this can be difficult and hurtful.

This reveals the desire within each of us to belong and to be wanted. The good news is that God does choose each one of us. He wants us as a member of His family and He wants us to belong to Him. This is essential to understand and, when it is understood, it is very affirming. It is a good spiritual practice to regularly reflect upon the fact that God chose us even before we were born. He knew us from all eternity and set His eyes upon us, longing to bring us into His fold. We need to understand this, accept it and believe it. We do belong.

God not only chooses us to belong to Him, He also chooses us for His mission. He wants to use us to go and bear fruit for His Kingdom. He wants to use us for a sacred purpose and a divine calling. Being a member of His “team” means that our lives have purpose and meaning. No matter how “unqualified” we may feel at times to make a difference, we must remember that God does not see us that way. Rather, He sees the infinite potential within each of us and chooses to use that potential for the building up of His Kingdom.

Reflect, this day, on two short phrases: “I have chosen you” and “Go and bear fruit.” Accepting your call from God will change your life and will also change the lives of those whom you are called to serve.

Lord, I know You have chosen me. I accept Your call in my life. I accept the fact that You have appointed me to fulfill Your mission in a unique and glorious way. Help me to continually say “Yes” to Your call. Jesus, I trust in You.

Persecution

Saturday of the Fifth Week of Easter

“Remember the word I spoke to you, ‘No slave is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.” (Jn. 15:20)

Do you want to be like Jesus? If so, beware of what that means. It’s easy to think that the closer we grow to Christ the more we will be loved and understood by the world. We can think that everyone will see our holiness and admire it and all will be good and easy in life.

But all we have to do is look at the life of Christ to know this is not the case. He was obviously perfect in every way. As a result, He was treated with great malice and persecution. It’s hard to fathom the dark truth that they actually killed Him. In the dark of the night, He was arrested, given a mock trial, found guilty and sentenced to death. His punishment was then carried out immediately.

Why did they do this to the Son of God? Why would someone so perfect and merciful in every way be so cruelly treated?

If we were there, as His first followers, we would have most likely been shocked, frightened, scandalized and confused. We may have thought that Jesus messed up and lost hope in Him. But His plan was perfect in every way and His plan did centrally involve Him enduring false accusations and malicious persecution. And by freely accepting this abuse, He redeemed the world.

So back to the original question, “Do you want to be like Jesus?” This is a tough question when we look at it in the light of what happened to Him. “No slave is greater than his master.” “If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.” These are tough sayings to accept and agree to.

Persecution is something from which we should not run. We should not despair if it happens and we should not hold our head low. Why? Because persecution is a clear sign that we are

following in the footsteps of our Master. We are more deeply united to Christ as a result of persecution than we could ever realize.

The key is to know that God intends to use all maltreatment for good if we let Him. And we let Him use it for good when we surrender it to Him and receive it freely, not begrudgingly. Our response must be to “rejoice and be glad” that we have been found worthy to follow in the steps of our Divine Lord.

Ponder today any form of persecution or injustice you suffer for the sake of your faith and embrace of the Gospel. The Lord wants to use that if you let Him.

Lord, I do surrender to You all that weighs me down. I give any suffering I receive for being Your follower. May I not only imitate You in Your suffering, but also in Your willing embrace of it. Jesus, I trust in You.

PRAYERS

NOVENA PRAYER FOR AN END TO THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

O Mary, full of grace, Patroness of this nation and Mother of the Church, in this time of illness and worldwide need we seek your intercession for the human family before your Son’s throne of grace and mercy. We ask for strength in adversity, health in weakness, and comfort in sorrow. Help us, O Blessed Mother, to be filled with confidence and trust in the tender compassion of our God. Let us not be afraid, like our own Saint Marianne Cope, who entrusted her life and ministry among the outcasts of society into the care of our Divine Physician.

Continue to watch over all who are sick as well as those who care for them and give wisdom to all who are seeking a cure. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

A PRAYER IN GRATITUDE FOR OUR MOTHERS

Good and Gentle God,
we pray in gratitude for our mothers and for all the women of theory who have joined with you in the wonder of bringing forth new life. You who became human through a woman, grant to all mothers the courage they need to face the uncertain future that life with children always brings.

Give them the strength to live and to be loved in return, not perfectly, but humanly.
Give them the faithful support of husband, family and friends as they care for the physical and spiritual growth of their children.
Give them joy and delight in their children to sustain them through the trials of motherhood.
Most of all, give them the wisdom to turn to you for help when they need it most.

- Author Unknown



“Quick, act casual.”

Mother’s Day at Mass

April 30, 2019 by [Amy Welborn](#)

Mother’s Day is still over a week away, but I thought I’d toss this out there, especially for any priests who might wander by. It’s a repeat of an old post, but still, I think, worth considering:



My mother & a friend in Nogales, 1950's.

The question of how to “recognize” mothers at a Mother’s Day Mass is a fraught one.

There is, of course, the view (*mine*) that everything that happens at Mass should relate only to the liturgical year. Stop doing all the other stupid things, thanks. As a community, we’re free to celebrate whatever in whatever way we choose outside of Mass, but when it comes to Very Special Mass in Honor of Very Special Groups of *any* sort – scouts, moms, dads, youth, ‘Muricans....I’m against it.

But of course, over the years, American sentimental pop culture creeps into the peripheries of liturgical observance, and quite often, here we are at Mass on the second Sunday of May, with the expectation that the Moms present must be honored.

I mean...*I went to the trouble to go to Mass for the first time in four months to make her happy...you'd better honor her....*

This is problematic, however, and it’s also one of those situations in which the celebrant often feels that he just can’t win. No matter what he does, *someone* will be angry with him, be hurt, or feel excluded.

Because behind the flowers and sentiment, Mother’s Day is very hard for a lot of people – perhaps it’s the most difficult holiday out there for people in pain.

So when Father invites all the moms present to stand for their blessing at the end of Mass and the congregation applauds....who is hurting?

- Infertile couples
- Post-abortive women
- Post-miscarriage women
- Women whose children have died
- People who have been abused by their mothers
- People with terrible mothers, even short of outright abuse
- Women have placed children for adoption
- People who’ve recently lost their mothers. Or not so recently.
- Women who are not now and might never be biological or adoptive mothers and who wonder about that and are not sure about how they feel about it.

And then there are those of us who value our role as mothers, but who really think Mother’s Day is lame and would just really prefer that you TRY TO GET ALONG FOR ONE STUPID DAY instead of giving me some flowers and politely clapping at Mass.

So awkward.

Nope. Making Mothers stand up, be blessed and applauding them (*the worst*) at Mass is a bad idea for a lot of reasons.

It's not that people should expect to be sheltered from the consequences of their choices and all that life has handed them when they enter the church doorway.

The Catholic way is the *opposite* of that – after all, the fundamental question every one of us carries is that of death, and every time we enter a Catholic church we are hit with that truth, sometimes more than life-sized.

No, the question is more: Catholic life and tradition has a lot to say and do when it comes to parenthood – in ways, if you think about it, that aren't sentimental and take into account the limitations of human parenthood and **root us**, no matter how messed-up our families are or how distant we feel from contemporary ideals of motherhood – **in the parenthood of God**. Live in that hope, share it, and be formed by *that*, not by commercially-driven American pop culture.

So here's a good idea. It happened at my parish a couple of years ago, and is the standard way of recognizing the day.

Because we're not walled off from the broader culture. People enter into that sacred space carrying everything with them, and Christ seeks to redeem all of it. So knowing that Mother's Day permeates the culture, accepting it, but also accepting that motherhood and parenthood in general is far more complex than the greeting cards and commercials let on, and that people come bearing, not only motherhood-related joy, but motherhood-related pain as well – the Body of Christ embraces and takes it all in.

So, quite simply, at the end of Mass as we were standing for the final blessing, the celebrant mentioned that it was Mother's Day (it hadn't been mentioned before this), and said that as such, it was an appropriate day to pray for our mothers, living and deceased, and to ask our Blessed Mother for her intercession for them and for us. *Hail Mary...*

Done.

And done in a way that, just in its focus, implicitly acknowledges and respects the diversity of experiences of motherhood that will be present in any congregation, and, without sentiment or awkward overreach, does that Catholic thing, rooted in tradition – offers the whole mess up, in trust.

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