

Women of Grace Journal

For Daily Prayer and Reflection



Mary's Spiritual Motherhood



Women of Grace® seeks to transform the world one woman at a time by affirming women in their dignity and vocation as daughters of God and in their gift of authentic femininity™ through ongoing spiritual formation.



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How to Use the Women of Grace Journal

Your *Women of Grace Journal For Daily Prayer and Reflection* helps you enter into a deepening experience of prayer and relationship with God through its daily *GraceLines* and accompanying articles. Uniquely, it also provides you with a place to record your thoughts, inspirations, insights, and illuminations. Thus, it becomes a treasured keepsake of your journey with God – a *personal* record of your own salvation history.

The following steps help you maximize your *Journal* experience:

1. Compose yourself for your time of prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to illumine your mind, open your heart, and help you be receptive to His movement within you. Remember, God is always with you. Place yourself in His presence.

2. Review the monthly theme and pray to receive the monthly grace. Grace is a gift given to us by God out of His abundant love. In fact, it is a share in the Divine Life itself. Daily prayer helps us be receptive to the grace God offers us, as do the sacraments and a virtuous life.

3. Pray the *GraceLine*. Read the *GraceLine* slowly. Ponder it in your heart. Let the mystery awaken and unfold within you by noting any words, phrases, ideas that move you in some way. Does it spark a memory? Give you a new insight? Instruct you? What is God saying to you through it? You may stay with a *GraceLine* for more than one day if you sense God at work in you through it.

4. Answer the questions in *For Reflection and journal your insights*. These questions are “prompters,” meant to help you dig deeply into the *GraceLine* to discover the grace meant just for you. Answer all of them or none of them depending on what the Holy Spirit is revealing to you.

Then record your insights, thoughts, and the movements of your heart in your *Journal*. This solidifies the grace you have received and provides you with a record of God’s transforming love in your life. Your personal “salvation history.”

5. Respond to God’s action within you through a prayer. This prayer should be a prayer of the heart. It is, in a way, your *fiat* or “yes” to God’s movement in you. It may be a prayer of thanksgiving. Sometimes, a prayer of repentance. You might pray for more insight or guidance, or your prayer could be a deep interior cry asking for God’s healing love and mercy. Know that God hears you with a ready and loving ear.

Grace Notes

Dear Sister in Christ,

Welcome to the Women of Grace Spiritual Motherhood Journal!

During this month in which we celebrate motherhood, Women of Grace® invites you to enter into the spiritual maternity of Our Blessed Mother, Mary. In a singular

way, she is both Mother of Our Lord and Mother of the Church, which extends to the entire communion of saints - the Church Militant (the faithful on earth), the Church Triumphant (the faithful in heaven) and the Church Suffering (the faithful in purgatory).

It is my hope that this thirty day journey into Our Lady's spiritual motherhood will help us to explore and better understand our own spiritual maternity. Each daily reflection contains a beautiful truth about what it means to cooperate in bringing salvation to the world. We discover how women are called to accomplish their providential role as spiritual mothers to "save the peace of the world."

I pray that this retreat is a time which will richly deepen your appreciation for the gift of your authentic femininity and spiritual maternity so that you can give yourself completely over to the plans of God "for such a time as this."

Faithfully Remain, Your Sister in Christ



Johnnette Benkovic Williams



"O My God! I ask you for myself and those dear to me the grace to fulfill perfectly your holy will and to accept for love of you the joys and sorrows of this passing life so that one day we may be reunited in heaven for all eternity. Amen."

-St. Therese of Lisieux
(pg. 94, Full of Grace Study Guide)

Theme



Mary is my spiritual mother who leads me into deepening union with her Son, Jesus Christ.

Grace



I pray for the grace to receive Mary as my spiritual mother and to entrust myself to her for all my necessities, especially my path to Jesus Christ, her Son.

Know the Faith

Forever our Mother



The woman came into the church, dressed in widow's black and weeping profusely. Her husband had just committed suicide and because he had neglected his faith during life, she felt certain his soul had been lost. But she had come to the right place for comfort. This was the church of the saintly Cure of Ars, St. John Vianney. When he saw the woman, he instantly understood her plight - and that of her husband.

"He is saved. He is in purgatory. We must pray for him," he told the woman. "Between the parapet of the bridge and the water he had time to make an act of

contrition. Our Lady obtained this grace for him even though he was irreligious because he sometimes joined you in your prayers at your May altar. This merited contrition and final pardon."

This story illustrates one of the most beloved aspects of Mary's spiritual motherhood - her care for our souls after death. Mary is a good mother *forever*. She refuses to leave us until we have been brought safely home to heaven and remains our advocate both in this life and the next.

As the Mother of the Church, Mary's motherhood extends to the entire communion of saints - the Church Militant (the faithful on earth), the Church Triumphant (the faithful in heaven) and the Church Suffering (the faithful in purgatory).

Mary has attested to this truth herself. During a revelation to St. Bridget (d. 1373), she identified herself as the "Mother of the Souls in Purgatory."

"I am the Mother of all those who are in the place of expiation," she told the saint. "My prayers mitigate the chastisements which are inflicted upon them for their faults."

Belief in Mary's intercession after death goes back to the earliest days of the Church. In the fourth century, St. Hilary of Poitiers (d. 368) said: "Even



Gregory the Great Seeking Mary's Intercession for the Poor Souls

though one has been a sinner, if he has been devoted to Mary, he shall not perish forever.”

The great St. Bonaventure (d.1274) was so confident in Mary’s role after death that he once prayed: “I ask thee, O Mary, for the glory of thy name, to come and meet my soul when it is departing from this world, and to take it in thine arms.”

Mary’s mediation is indeed perpetual and extends to the souls in Purgatory, says the Dominican theologian Father Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange.

“It is certain that the Mother of Mercy knows the needs of these souls . . . She can bring her satisfaction to the support of her prayers . . . she did not need it for herself but has given it all into the hands of the Church who distributes it to souls in the form of indulgences . . . Thus when the satisfaction of Mary is applied to the poor debtors of Purgatory, they have a kind of right to deliverance since they pay their debt with what is their own. . . She obtains also that her children on earth pray for her clients in Purgatory, offer good works for their intention, and have the sacrifice of redemption offered for them . . . She can obtain also that prayers destined for souls who do not need them or who are not capable of benefitting by them should be made available for the children of her special love.”

He also points out that according to St. Peter Damien (d. 1072), thousands of souls are released from Purgatory every year on the Feast of the Assumption due to Mary’s mediation, as well as on Christmas and Easter.

**“I ask thee, O Mary,
for the glory of thy
name, to come and meet
my soul when it is
departing from this
world, and to take it in
thine arms.” — St.
Bonaventure**

One of the most famous proofs of Mary’s care for the faithful in purgatory came during the 13th century when she appeared to a Carmelite priest named St. Simon Stock (d. 1235). Handing him a strip of brown wool cloth that would later become known as the Brown Scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, she told the dumbfounded priest, “This shall be the privilege for you and for all the Carmelites, that anyone dying in this habit shall be saved.”

As benevolent as this promise is, Our Lady returned in 1322 in a vision to Pope John XXII in which she added a new privilege to scapular wearers. “*I, the Mother of Grace, shall descend on the Saturday after their death, and whomsoever I shall find in Purgatory, I shall free.*”

Known as the Sabbatine (means Saturday) Privilege, sixteen popes not only approved this Privilege, but added their firm conviction that Our Lady indeed comes to the assistance of the suffering souls. As Pope Paul V wrote in the year 1613:

“It is lawful for the Carmelite Fathers to preach that Christians may piously believe in the help promised to

the Souls of the brethren and members of the Confraternity of the Blessed Virgin of Mt. Carmel, namely, that the Blessed Virgin will assist by her continual intercession, suffrages and merits and also by her special protection, particularly on the Saturday after death (which day has been consecrated to her by the Church) . . .”

One of the most stunning proofs of the efficacy of Mary’s scapular promise came during the canonization of the great Marian devotee, St. Alphonsus Ligouri. During the process of canonization, his casket was exhumed and found to contain nothing but dust -

. . . (T)housands of souls are released from Purgatory every year on the Feast of the Assumption due to Mary’s mediation, as well as on Christmas and Easter.

and a perfectly preserved brown scapular.

Because Our Lady is also the mother of sinners, she will do everything in her power to save all who die, even those who neglected God during their lives. Just as she did for the man who committed suicide during the time of St. John Vianney, she does the same for us today.

For example, in 1985, Father Steven Scheier, a parish priest from Kansas, suffered a broken neck during a head-on collision. He was thrown from the vehicle and lay unconscious on the road. As he hovered near death in the hospital, his parishioners joined together to pray the rosary for his recovery.

Months later, when he regained his memory of the crash, he suddenly remembered a conversation that took place between himself and the Lord while he was lying near death in a coma. “There was no tunnel experience or bright shining light. I did not see him but I heard his voice and he told me I had unconfessed mortal sin on my soul. He said, ‘For 12 years you have been a priest for yourself and you are going to hell.’ I knew he was right and I had made



my decision and there was nothing I could do about it.”

Just then, the Blessed Mother intervened, Fr. Schreier said. He suddenly heard a woman’s voice plead for a second chance so he could give glory to God. Father Scheier later learned that this revelation had taken place during the exact time that his parishioners were praying the rosary for his recovery.

This shouldn’t surprise us. Decades earlier in the same century, Mary appeared at Fatima and revealed her tender concern for the holy souls when

she told the children to add a special prayer to the end of each decade of the Rosary. “After the *Gloria Patri* of each decade, you will say, ‘O my Jesus, forgive us our sins! Save us from the fires of hell. Lead all souls to heaven, especially those in most need of your mercy.’”

With every rosary, Mary invites us to join her in the exercise of our spiritual maternity by remembering the poor souls who are still very much in need of our prayers. ❀

FOR STUDY AND REFLECTION:



The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that “All who die in God’s grace and friendship, but are still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven.”

Where did this teaching come from? Is it Scriptural? How can we help the suffering souls? For the answers to these questions, read the Catechism Nos. 1030-1032.

Mary Moments



Some of the most beloved and grace-filled feast days in the Catholic calendar are those that celebrate the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary. But how are these

feast days determined and who decides which ones we should observe?

Beginning with the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, which is celebrated on January 1, the Church celebrates the Presentation of the Lord on February 2, the Annunciation on March 25, the Assumption on August 15 and the Immaculate Conception on December 8. In between these dates, we celebrate other special Marian occasions such as Our Lady's appearance at Lourdes (February 11) and Guadalupe (December 12). We also mark the gift of her Rosary on October 7 and the Brown Scapular on July 16.

According to the Marian Library at the University of Dayton, Ohio, Marian feasts ultimately originate by ecclesial decision. "The Church decides whether they should be local, regional or universal, and what degree of solemnity should be attributed to them (solemnity, feast, memorial) depending on the importance of the theme celebrated."

There are four categories of Marian feasts:

1. Feasts based on events related in scripture (for example, the Annunciation)
2. Feasts that are the object of dogmatic statements (for example, the Immaculate Conception)
3. Feasts that arose thanks to popular devotion and/or some special event (for example, Our Lady of the Rosary and the Brown Scapular)
4. Feasts with geographical connection based on apparitions or other special events (for example, Our Lady of Lourdes and Our Lady of Guadalupe)

Solemnities are the highest degree and are usually reserved for the most important mysteries of faith such as Easter and Pentecost, and would be assigned to Marian feasts such as the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption. A feast honors a mystery or title of Our Lord or Our Lady, and a memorial is usually reserved to mark the feast days of saints.

Word to Know

Spiritual Mother - "Spiritual motherhood means a supernatural activity, received and subordinate, in the work of eternal salvation of another human being by which a created person receives and transmits to another person the divine life." – *Reverend Bertrand de Margerie, S.J.*



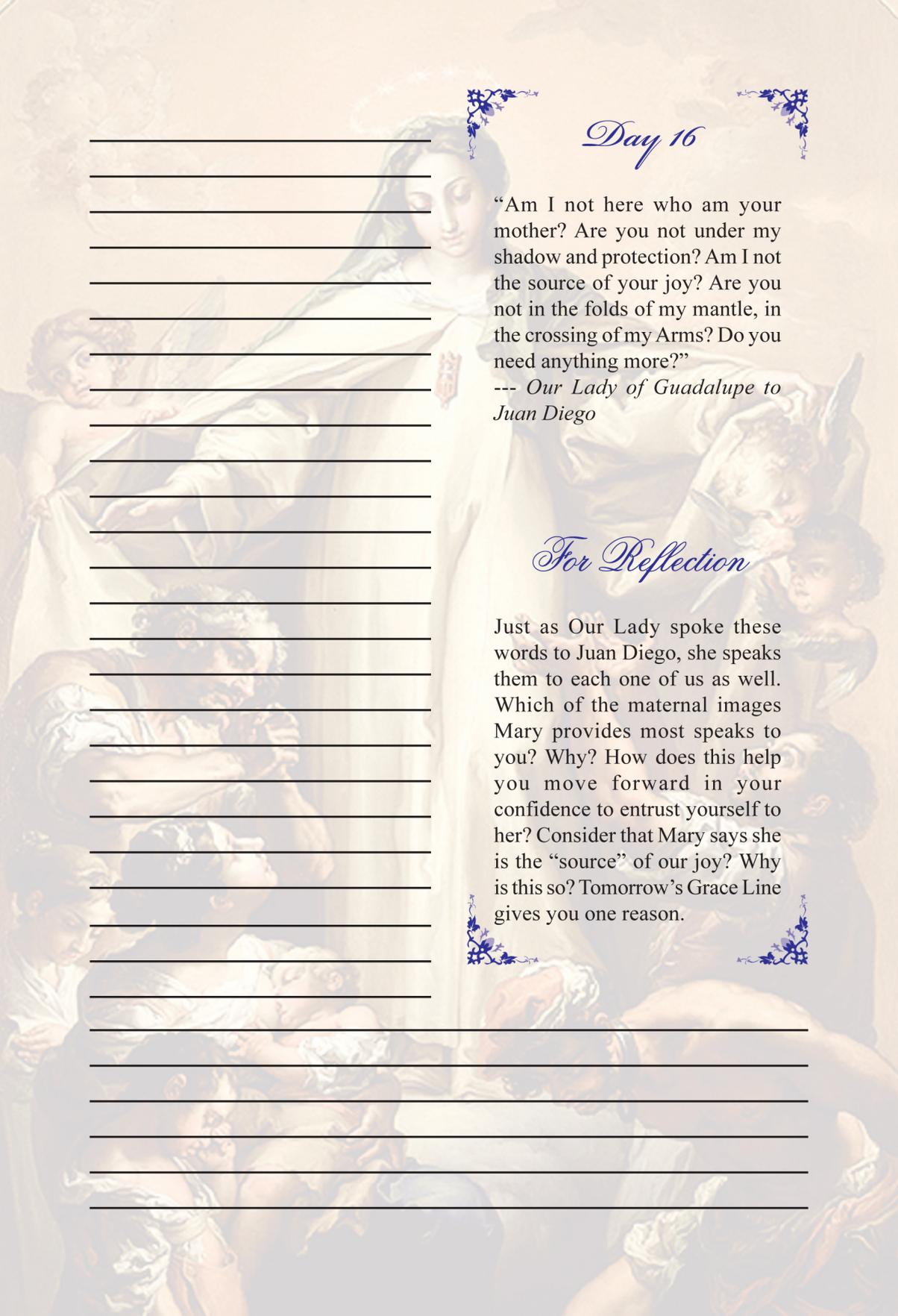
Day 15

“The conviction that Mary is close to those who are suffering or in situations of serious danger has prompted the faithful to invoke her as ‘**Benefactress.**’ The same trusting certainty is expressed in the most ancient Marian prayer with the words, “We fly to thy patronage, O holy Mother of God; despise not our petitions in our necessities but deliver us always from all dangers, O glorious and blessed Virgin” (from the Roman Breviary).” --- Pope John Paul II

For Reflection

Note the phrase, “trusting certainty.” List some reasons why you think the Blessed Mother is worthy of our trusting certainty. “Benefactress” is a woman who does good. As daughter of the Father, mother of the Son, and spouse of the Holy Spirit, why is Mary the exemplary benefactress? In what one way can you seek to emulate her today?





Day 16

“Am I not here who am your mother? Are you not under my shadow and protection? Am I not the source of your joy? Are you not in the folds of my mantle, in the crossing of my Arms? Do you need anything more?”

--- *Our Lady of Guadalupe to Juan Diego*

For Reflection

Just as Our Lady spoke these words to Juan Diego, she speaks them to each one of us as well. Which of the maternal images Mary provides most speaks to you? Why? How does this help you move forward in your confidence to entrust yourself to her? Consider that Mary says she is the “source” of our joy? Why is this so? Tomorrow’s Grace Line gives you one reason.

St. Catherine of Siena (1347-1380)

Doctor of the Church



The little girl stood in the middle of a country road outside Siena, Italy, her face turned toward the sky and her eyes wide with astonishment. There in the clouds stood Jesus, clad in the splendid robes of a pope and seated on a magnificent throne. He looked directly at her, smiling, His eyes full of the most enrapturing love she had ever encountered. It pierced her to the soul and filled her with an overwhelming desire to return His love with all her heart. Ever so regally, Jesus rose from the throne, stepped forward and made the Sign of the Cross over her head. A moment later, He disappeared.

So began the mystical life of St. Catherine of Siena, who was only six years old when she received this first of many visits from Our Lord.

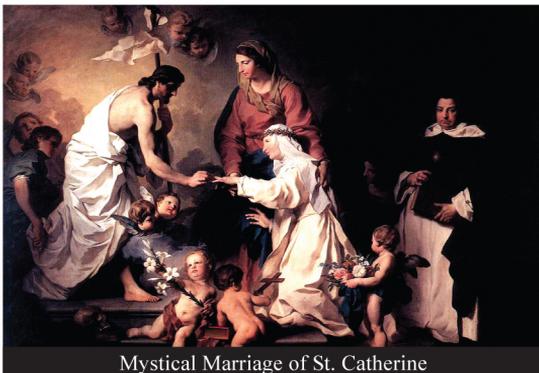
The youngest of 25 children born to Giacomo and Lapa Benincasa, she knew from early childhood that she wanted no one but Jesus. She would eventually

“ . . .(K)eeep this faith unspotted until you come to me in heaven and celebrate the marriage that has no end.”

*--- Our Lord to St. Catherine,
Shrove Tuesday c.1367*

entrust this desire to the Blessed Virgin, asking her heavenly mother to “give me as my Spouse the One I long for from my inmost heart, your own all-holy and only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.”

At the age of 12, when her parents selected a suitor for her, she let them know how serious she was about remaining a virgin for her beloved Spouse by shaving off her glorious blonde hair. For a time, her parents punished her for this stubbornness by forcing her to become the family “slave,” subjecting her to a long list of menial chores, but this didn’t last long. One day, her father walked by her room and saw her bent over the bed, motionless, in a state of deep prayer. He was just about to rebuke her when a white dove suddenly appeared and hovered over her head. From that moment on, he forbade the family to mistreat Catherine and allowed her to do as she pleased.



Mystical Marriage of St. Catherine

She was still a teen when she joined the Dominican Third Order and began to wear the black and white habit. Spending most of her time in prayer, she slept on boards and disciplined herself until late in the night. During this time, she told her confessor that Jesus appeared often to her physical senses and that she could hear His voice and see His body. He often brought His mother with Him while teaching her more about the faith than theologians could hope to learn in a lifetime.

On Shrove Tuesday evening, 1367, Jesus appeared to her and announced that He desired to celebrate their wedding. As He was speaking, the Blessed Mother appeared along with the Apostle John, St. Paul, St. Dominic and King David with his harp. While David played, the Virgin took Catherine's hand and presented her

to Jesus. Jesus took her hand and held up a gold ring with a sparkling diamond set in the midst of four pure white pearls. He slipped the ring onto her finger asking her to "keep this faith unspotted until you come to me in heaven and celebrate the marriage that has no end." For the rest of her life, Catherine was always able to see this ring on her finger, even though no one else could.

Not long after this, Jesus appeared to her again and said it was time for her to stop living the life of a hermit because He needed her to work for souls. "You must know that in these latter days there has been such an upsurge of pride, especially in the case of men who imagine themselves to be learned or wise, that my justice cannot endure them any longer," He told her. "To confound their arrogance, I will raise up women, ignorant and frail by nature, but endowed with strength and divine wisdom."

Catherine was to begin to exercise her role of spiritual motherhood and from that time on, she no longer lived in isolation. She began to go out into the town, tending the sick and poor, many of whom received miraculous healings at her hands.

This exposure caused word of her sanctity to spread far and wide. People began to visit her in her room at night, listening to her talk about God. Even priests sought her out, and she was not afraid to chastise those who were involved in the rampant corruption taking place in the Church at that time.

Two such clergymen, Brother Gabriel of Volterra and Father John Tantucci came to her room one day with the intention of testing her. They



Our Lady with St. Catherine of Siena (right) and St. Catherine of Alexandria.

fired questions at her, to which she always had the correct response. When they were done, she leaned forward and said, "How can you begin to understand anything that pertains to the kingdom of God? You who live for the world and seek to be honored by men Your great learning is no help to you or to others. It only harms you because you seek the shell and not the core For the sake of Jesus Christ crucified, do not live this way any longer!"

Brother Gabriel immediately fell to the floor and prostrated himself at her feet.

He and Father John repented and sold all that they owned, eventually becoming close friends with Catherine and traveling with her to Avignon and Rome.

The priests who received her humble but firm admonishments referred to themselves as having been "be-Catherined."

She became more and more concerned about the Church and the world and because she never learned to write, she began to dictate letters to city officials, prominent priests and bishops. She even wrote to the King of France telling him that it was God's will that he make peace with England so both countries could send their armies on a crusade.

Eventually Catherine, whose reputation as a holy woman was by now global in scope, struck up a regular correspondence with Pope Gregory XI. At the time, Gregory was living at Avignon, France, as had his six

predecessors. Catherine met him for the first time when the people of Florence sent her to France as their ambassador after the pope put the city under interdict. When she arrived and saw the lavishness of his quarters, she was disgusted and let him know it, urging him to return to Rome for his own good and the good of the Church. "Self love has poisoned the whole world and the mystic body of the Church," she told him.

Acting almost exclusively on Catherine's advice, Gregory returned to Rome in 1377, but it was not to bring peace to the Church. After Gregory died in 1378, a furor broke out over the election of a non-Roman, Urban VI, whose blunt manner quickly alienated everyone around him. Different factions in the Church chose to elect another pope, Clement VII, thus

beginning the great Western Schism that Catherine herself had foreseen.

She would not live to see the healing of this wound in the Church. She died in Rome on April 29, 1380. More than 300 of St. Catherine's letters have survived as well as *The Dialogue of Divine Providence*, a dialogue between a soul and God which she dictated to members of her circle between 1377 and 1378. She was canonized by Pope Pius II in 1461 and was declared a Doctor of the Church in 1970. 

"You who live for the world and seek to be honored by men Your great learning is no help to you or to others. It only harms you because you seek the shell and not the core"

--- St. Catherine of Siena

Our Lady of Prompt Succor



Our Lady's willingness to come to the aid of her children is legendary. It has earned her dozens of illustrious titles such as Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Our Lady of Never-Failing Help, Our Lady of Ever-Enduring Succor. But one such title that is particularly endearing to Americans is that of the patroness of the city of New Orleans, Our Lady of Prompt Succor.

This title originated with an Ursuline nun in France named Mother Saint Michel. In 1810, Sister Michel received a letter from her cousin, Sister St. Andre Madier, an Ursuline living in a convent in the city of New Orleans,

who asked her to come to America to help her struggling community. Even though religious communities in France were under extreme duress at the time, Sister Michel sensed the urgency in her cousin's request and knew she had to respond.

She made an immediate appeal to Bishop Fournier of Montpellier for permission to leave for America. However, having lost so many nuns during the French Revolution, he did not want to let her go. "The Pope alone can give this authorization," he told her.

He might as well have just said "no" because it was virtually impossible to communicate with the Pope Pius VII who was under arrest at the time and being held by Napoleon Bonaparte. His jailers had been given strict orders to allow no communication with the Holy Father.

But that didn't stop Sister Michel. She had great faith in the Virgin Mary and knew that if it was God's will, she would intervene to get her the permission she needed.

Sister Michel proceeded to write a letter to the pontiff asking permission to go to New Orleans. Knowing that there was no way of getting the letter out of France, she then knelt before a statue of Our Lady and prayed: "O Most Holy Virgin Mary, if you obtain a prompt and



Photos courtesy of the National Shrine of Our Lady of Prompt Succor, New Orleans, Louisiana

favorable answer to my letter, I promise to have you honored in New Orleans under the title of `Our Lady of Prompt Succor’.”

It took several months, but on the feast of St. Joseph, March 19, 1809, the letter left France and by some mysterious means, got into the hands of the Pope. His reply was dated April 28 and was written by a Cardinal who told Sister Michel: “Madame, I am charged by Our Holy Father, Pope Pius VII, to answer in his name. . . . His Holiness approves of your placing yourself at the head of your religious aspirants, to serve as their guide during the long and difficult voyage you are about to undertake.”

As soon as she received the letter, she had a statue carved in honor of Our Lady of Prompt Succor. It was blessed by none other than Bishop Fournier, who was so overwhelmed by the miracle he insisted upon blessing it himself.

The statue of Our Lady of Prompt Succor arrived in New Orleans, along with Sister St. Michel, on December 30, 1810, and it would not be long before Our Lady made a name for herself in that great city.

Two years after she arrived, a terrible fire ravaged the city with high winds blowing the flames directly toward the convent. The sisters were ordered to leave and just before they did so, Sister Anthony placed a small statue of Our Lady of Prompt Succor on the windowsill facing in the direction of the fire. “Our Lady of Prompt Succor, we are lost unless you hasten to our help!” she prayed. Almost instantly, the wind changed and the



Photos courtesy of the National Shrine of Our Lady of Prompt Succor, New Orleans, Louisiana

flames turned away from the convent. The nuns and all their possessions were spared.

Three years later, on January 8, 1815, General Andrew Jackson was about to face the British in the famous battle of New Orleans. On the night before the battle, the sisters and relatives of the soldiers about to go into battle spent the night in prayer before the statue of Our Lady of Prompt Succor. The next morning, as the brave soldiers entered the field of battle, Father William Dubourg, who would later become Bishop of New Orleans, offered a Mass for the troops. The Ursuline sisters promised Our Lady that if she would give the Americans victory, they would have a Mass of

Thanksgiving offered every year on that day.

Just after the consecration, a courier rushed into the chapel to say the enemy was in retreat. Apparently, the British had become confused in a fog and wandered into a swamp where they quickly became surrounded by the Americans who forced them to surrender. The congregation exploded in joy, concluded the Mass and sang a triumphant Te Deum to the Almighty.

True to their word, this spectacular miracle is celebrated every year on January 8 with a solemn Mass of Thanksgiving. On September 27, 1851, His Holiness, Pius IX, graciously authorized this celebration as the feast of Our Lady of Prompt Succor.

On June 13, 1928, the Sacred Congregation of Rites issued a decree approving and confirming the choice of Our Lady of Prompt Succor as the Principal Patroness of the City of New Orleans and the State of Louisiana. ❀



Our Lady of Perpetual Help

Prayer to Our Lady of Prompt Succor

Our Lady of Prompt Succor, ever Virgin Mother of Jesus Christ our Lord and God, you are most powerful against the enemy of our salvation. The divine promise of a Redeemer was announced right after the sin of our first parents; and you, through your Divine Son, crushed the serpent's head. Hasten, then, to our help and deliver us from the deceits of Satan (add your personal petition here). Intercede for us with Jesus that we may always accept God's graces and be found faithful to Him in our particular states of life.

As you once saved our beloved city from ravaging flames and our country from an invading army, have pity on us and obtain for us protection from hurricanes and all disasters. Assist us in the many trials that beset our path through life. Watch over the Church and the Pope as they uphold with total fidelity the purity of faith and morals against unremitting opposition. Be to us truly Our Lady of Prompt Succor now and especially at the hour of our death, that we may gain everlasting life through the merits of Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen

Know the Faith

Motherhood “According to the Spirit”



There is a type of motherhood to which all women are called, whether they choose to be physical mothers or to follow a celibate path. It is motherhood “according to the Spirit.”

“Spiritual motherhood takes on many different forms,” explains Pope John Paul II in his landmark document, *Mulieris Dignitatem*. It not only involves a mother’s concern for the spiritual wellbeing of her children, but also manifests itself in “concern for people, especially the most needy; the sick, the handicapped, the abandoned, orphans, the elderly, children, young people, the imprisoned and, in general, people on the margins of society.”

Our world is in desperate need of women who will answer this call. In the *Gospel of Life*, Pope John Paul II calls upon women to “rehumanize” a world turned cold and hard by hedonism to “teach others that human relations are authentic if they are open to accepting the other person: a person who is recognized and loved because of the dignity which comes from being a person and not from other considerations, such as usefulness, strength, intelligence, beauty or health.” This contribution, he says, is not only what the Church and humankind expect of women, but is “an indispensable prerequisite for an authentic cultural

change” that can replace the culture of death with a civilization of love.

An example of spiritual motherhood *par excellence* is the Blessed Mother who inspired holy women throughout history to fulfill this vital role. Contemporary saints such as Mother Teresa, St. Gianna Molla and Edith Stein prove that spiritual

motherhood is necessary in every generation.

But being a well-known saint is not a prerequisite to answering the call to spiritual motherhood. Millions of hidden souls

are doing so every day, each in her own special way.

Consider Mary Jo Copeland, a devout Catholic mother of 12 from Minneapolis, Minnesota who found herself with some spare time on her hands after her youngest started school. She decided to volunteer with the local Catholic Charities and helped feed and care for the poor. Perhaps because she had been raised in a dysfunctional home that was so bad she had to be moved into foster care in her teens, Mary Jo had an enormous capacity to relate to the suffering in the world around her. She quickly became known for making a personal connection with everyone she met.

“Kindness is a conversion,” she always said. “Your smile and outstretched



Mary Jo Copeland

hand are the beginning of a miracle.”

We must be bread broken and given, wine poured and shared, she says. “We must not be reservoirs that store up; we must be vessels that pour out.”

Mary Jo was a woman who practiced what she preached and eventually opened her own center in a 2,000 square-foot storefront with a \$5,000 a month budget. In that building she fed the hungry, clothed the naked, sheltered the homeless and gave new hope to thousands of people who, much like she once did, lived on a daily diet of hopelessness and despair. Twenty-five years later, her organization is caring for 20,000 people a month in three buildings in downtown Minneapolis on an operating budget of \$400,000 per month. In all this time, she has never taken a salary.

At the same time, hundreds of miles away, Charlotte Chiccarine, a 56 year-old mother of four from Lancaster, Pennsylvania was also living out her call to spiritual motherhood, but in a much different way.

“She was one of those ‘behind-the-scenes’ people,” said Helen McMonagle, a close friend who told Charlotte’s story during the Women of Grace Leadership Institute in Malvern this past summer. “She had an amazing eye for seeing who needed what and would take care of it without anyone knowing. She never wanted accolades.”

In 2000, during a trip to Italy with her family, the normally physically fit Charlotte found herself unable to keep up with the pace. A year later, she was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig’s disease.

Known as amyotrophic lateral sclerosis or ALS, it is a progressive and always fatal neurodegenerative disease that eventually robs a person of all voluntary muscle movement. The only parts of the body usually spared are the

eyes and the brain.

Charlotte was devastated by the diagnosis, yet she never complained, Helen said. “She never chose to suffer. She was never happy to have this cross, but she completely accepted it. She did not complain. Instead of asking ‘why me,’ it was more like ‘why not me?’”

As time went on, the disease began to take its toll. She went from a cane to a walker to a wheelchair. Gradually, the disease robbed her of her ability to move and to speak.

But as her body broke down, her desire to give only went deeper. “She was a total prayer warrior,” Helen said. “She knew that was her role.”

Even though Charlotte could not perform the corporal works of mercy like Mary Jo Copeland, there was nothing stopping her from fulfilling the spiritual works of mercy, and she did so with great relish, praying daily for priests, religious and the poor souls in purgatory. Prayer requests poured into her home from all over and every day at 3:00 p.m. her care givers knew to turn on EWTN so she could pray the Chaplet of Mercy and the Rosary.

She died at home on June 20, 2009 and her beautiful acceptance of the role of spiritual motherhood, like so many women before her, left the world a better place for us all.

FOR REFLECTION:

A good question for us to ask is “How is God asking me to be a spiritual mother today?” Is it through an act of kindness and my smile or through the extension of forgiveness to another? What sorrow or pain am I suffering now that can become a conduit of grace for another? What hungry stomach - or hungry soul - is God asking me to fill right now?

For Pondering

Mary, My Mother



I am not sure at what age I realized I didn't have a healthy and nurturing mother. Even before I was old enough to compare our relationship to that of other mothers and daughters, I felt a loneliness and fear that had no tangible source.

As I grew and witnessed mothers interacting with their children, saw the sparkle of joy in parents' eyes when they beheld them, or the devotion they had to them, what was missing in my life became evident - a mother who felt the same way about me.

It wasn't until after my father died when I was eight years old that the affects became more profound. And I certainly felt it greatly in my teens when I needed so much to have at least one parent present to guide me. I remember feeling utterly desolate and a great sense of fear and despair settled upon me.

It was during this time that I had an epiphany. Some might say it was simply the human instinct to survive showing me a way to safety. Others, divine intervention. I believe it was the latter.

Raised in a Catholic family and having attended Catholic school since the age of five, I was keenly aware and in awe of the Mother of Christ. I often recited the Rosary and held my beads

entwined through my fingers at night. She was the epitome of mothers, completely devoted to her Son, by His side every moment of His life and through His death...and after. And so I thought, "Couldn't Mary be my mother too?"

I had been taught in school and church that she was "Mother to us all," but I needed her in a more personal way. If I asked her, would she calm the place in me that was

swimming in fear, and fill the space that was lost in abandonment? I did ask and found that Our Most Holy of Mothers had been waiting for me through all of my sadness and despair.

From that moment forward, I began to talk to Mary as if she were my very own mother. If I felt alone or unprotected, I would imagine her sitting or walking beside me, holding my hand, fingering stray wisps of hair out of my



eyes. When I had questions or problems her actual voice could not answer, I knew I would survive whatever the outcome because she was protecting me as soundly and ferociously as a grizzly bear protects her cub.

The Virgin Mother became the blanket that wrapped me in love and safety at night, and the Woman who greeted me with pride in her eyes every morning. For the first time in my entire life, I felt as a child should - cherished. I believe with certainty it was Mother Mary who kept me from falling into what could have been a much more difficult and dangerous life. I remember thanking Jesus often for sharing his beautiful Mother with me.

Most recently, my mother has been diagnosed with dementia and has come to live with my husband and me. And though I understand now that she was shaped by her own insecurities and deeply troubled childhood, painful feelings sometimes creep up and threaten me. There have been moments during her care when I internally beg for a "thank you" or an "I love you" from her, or times when she speaks to me so terribly that it seems more than just part of her illness. And I find myself again reaching for Mary, asking her for comfort and protection, needing her embrace more than ever before, and finding Her arms as wide open as they were when I was a child. ✿

Flowers of the Fairest



Wild Strawberry - This delicate white flower, which signals the coming of a favorite berry, is known as the fruit of the Virgin Mary and of the blessed souls in heaven.

Mary, you are the mother of all souls. Please watch over me and my loved ones in this life so that we may one day rejoice with you forever in heaven. Amen.



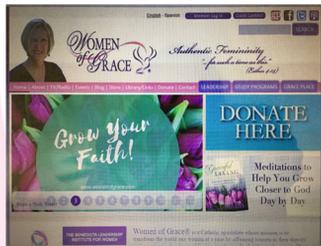
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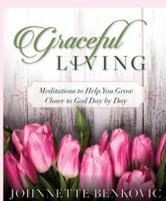
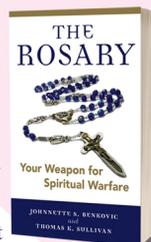


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The Rosary is much more than an optional Catholic devotion for the old and dying. In fact, it is a vibrant and powerful intercessory tool in the hands of valiant spiritual warriors. From the moment Our Lady entrusted it to St. Dominic early in the 13th century, the rosary has been at the heart of authentic Catholic devotion. It has also been an indispensable weapon in the hands of intercessors and those who actively resist the workings of the devil. In *The Rosary*, Johnette Benkovic, teams up with her producer and cohost Thomas K. Sullivan, the creator of the Warrior Rosary, to explore why the rosary is the weapon for such a time as this. Together, they've gathered some of the most astonishing historical and contemporary accounts of victories associated with the rosary, along with their own inspiring personal experiences. Readers will discover insights that will enhance their own experience of the rosary, including special prayers based on the lives and writings of the saints who understood it's power.



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