

## CONTENTS

Preface x

Introduction xiii

1. **Blessed Virgin Mary:** A Spiritual Mother for Us All **1**
2. **Zita of Lucca:** Diligence in Domestic Tasks **7**
3. **Gerard Majella:** Good Health in Pregnancy and Childbirth **13**
4. **Francis de Sales:** Living a Devout Life **19**
5. **Monica:** Mothering with Prayer **26**
6. **Joseph:** Answering God's Will in Our Daily Work **33**
7. **Sebastian:** Caring for Our Bodies through Physical Fitness **39**
8. **Francis of Assisi:** Renewal of Faith **45**
9. **Elizabeth of Portugal:** A Loving Marriage and Peaceful Family Relationships **51**
10. **John Bosco:** Total Dedication to the Education of Our Children **57**
11. **John Paul II:** Reverencing the Gift of Our Sexuality **63**
12. **Jerome:** A Love for and Devotion to Sacred Scripture **70**
13. **Margaret of Scotland:** Paving a Way to Heaven for Our Families **76**
14. **Benedict of Nursia:** Writing Our Rule of Life **82**
15. **Gianna Beretta Molla:** Respecting the Dignity of All Human Life **89**
16. **Alphonsus de Liguori:** Finding Peace in Christ **95**
17. **Maria Goretti:** Protection for Our Children **101**
18. **Théodore Guérin:** Trusting God in Following Our Vocations **107**

19. **Teresa of Avila:** Living Holiness in Our Humanity **113**
20. **André Bessette:** Seeking Kinship with the Communion of Saints **120**
21. **Jane Frances de Chantal:** Supporting Those Who Parent Alone **126**
22. **Matthew:** Serving as Good Stewards of Our Family Finances **133**
23. **Chiara “Luce” Badano:** Finding Grace in Our Challenges **140**
24. **Mary of the Cross MacKillop:** Fidelity to the Church and Her Teachings **146**
25. **Thomas More:** Finding Blessings in a Blended Family **152**
26. **Margaret Clitherow:** Ethical Practice of Our Occupations **158**
27. **Damien of Molokai:** Being the Touch of God for Others **164**
28. **Thérèse of Lisieux:** A Missionary’s Heart **171**
29. **Louis Martin and Marie-Azélie Martin:** Appreciating Our Parents and Spiritual Mentors **177**
30. **Isidore of Seville:** Employing Technology to Inspire and Educate **184**
31. **Bernadette Soubirous:** Finding Healing in Our Faith **190**
32. **Elizabeth Ann Seton:** A Continual Spirit of Conversion **197**
33. **Anne and Joachim:** Loving and Respecting Our Grandparents and the Elderly **203**
34. **Rose Venerini:** Educating to Set Free **209**
35. **Dymphna:** Finding Relief for Those Suffering with Mental Health Issues **216**
36. **Frédéric Ozanam:** Serving Others with Compassion **223**
37. **John the Apostle:** Treasuring the Gift of Our Friendships **229**

38. **Catherine of Bologna:** Using Our Creative Gifts to Give Glory to God **235**
39. **Maximilian Kolbe:** Relief for Those Struggling with Addictions **241**
40. **Teresa Benedicta of the Cross:** Finding Hope in Our Crosses **247**
41. **John Mary Vianney:** Appreciating Our Clergy and Our Faith Family **253**
42. **Clare of Assisi:** Embracing a Simple Existence **260**
43. **Joan of Arc:** Courage in the Face of Adversity **266**
44. **Patrick:** A Heart for Evangelization **272**
45. **Katharine Drexel:** Fostering a Spirit of Tolerance **279**
46. **Anthony of Padua:** Speaking with Our Actions **286**
47. **Josephine Bakhita:** Freedom from Enslavement and an End to Human Trafficking **292**
48. **Ignatius of Loyola:** Living for the Greater Glory of God **298**
49. **Frances Xavier Cabrini:** Bearing Christ's Love to the Marginalized **304**
50. **Martha of Bethany:** Serving with Grace, Generosity, and Hospitality **310**
51. **Kateri Tekakwitha:** Seeing the True Beauty of God in Our Natural Surroundings **316**
52. **Teresa of Calcutta:** Seeing the Face of Christ in Those We Serve **322**

Index of Saint Names **328**

Index of Feast Days and Memorials **329**

Index of Patronages **331**

Index of Companions for Your Heart, Mind, Body, and Soul **333**

1.

# Blessed Virgin Mary

*A Spiritual Mother for Us All*



First Century

**Patronage:** Mothers

**Memorials:** January 1 (Mary, Mother of God), March 25 (Annunciation),  
August 15 (Assumption), December 8 (Immaculate Conception)

## THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY'S STORY

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The ancient tradition of the Church tells us that Mary was the daughter of Anne and Joachim. She first appears in the Bible in the first chapter of Matthew's gospel with the story of the angel's appearance to Joseph, when the angel instructed him not to divorce his betrothed wife as he intended, because the child she bore was from God. In the first chapter of Luke's gospel, we find the more detailed story of Mary's early life. She was living in Nazareth and betrothed to Joseph when the archangel Gabriel announced to her that she was to be the Mother of

God. She visited and helped care for her elderly cousin Elizabeth during her pregnancy and traveled with Joseph to Bethlehem, where she gave birth to Jesus. After the Holy Family took refuge in Egypt to protect Jesus from King Herod, Mary returned to Nazareth with Joseph and raised Jesus according to the customs and beliefs of her Jewish faith. She was present with Jesus as he began his public ministry at the wedding feast of Cana and at his crucifixion, where he gave her to the care of Saint John. After Jesus' Ascension, she was among the first members of the Christian community. The Church regards the Blessed Mother so highly that in 1950 Pope Pius XII promulgated the dogma of the assumption, declaring that after Mary's earthly life was complete she was taken to the glory of heaven, body and soul.

#### LESSONS FROM MARY

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How does one write a book about the saints and not include the Blessed Virgin Mary, the mother of our Savior and the world's first and best Christian? There is so much to say, and yet no words can adequately capture the role of Mary, our "New Eve," Mother to the Church and Mother of the Word Incarnate. I love to look at depictions of Mary in art from around the world—portrayed in every age, skin color, and garb—and realize that she is indeed mother to each of us, regardless of the constraints of time and location. Her goal has always been to lead us into more perfect communion with her son. And yet at the same time, she is for so many of us a spiritual support—a true mom, a spiritual sister, a best friend.

Mary's *fiat*, her "yes" to what surely must have been a moment of terror and anxiety looking at a future full of the unknown, makes her the perfect disciple. In those moments when following Christ feels too difficult, while I am aiming to open my life fully to God's plan instead of my own and making sacrifices to do the right thing, Mary's simple statement, "May it be done to me according to your word," is the only guidebook I need.

My good friend Martha and I have talked many times about how we'd love to sit down to coffee with Mary and ask her to tell us *her* version of the story—the realities of a life marked by great joys and the most piercing of sorrows. What trust and faith enabled her to face

being pregnant and unwed in a society that clearly would have rejected her? How proud was she at the moment she saw Jesus teaching in the synagogue or performing his first miracle at Cana? Did she feel sad as he grew into his own and left her behind to spread his Gospel of love? How could she bear the grief of seeing her son be put to death?

Martha and I may never get our dreamed-of coffee date, but the good news is that Mary is fully present to me at every moment of every day, waiting to take my hand and carry me to her son. From those painful mothering moments with sick and sleepless babies to my current emotional roller coaster as I watch my sons mature and prepare to leave me for lives of their own, she is at my side as a confidante and friend, a mother. Fearless and yet tenderhearted, human and yet untouched by sin, Mary was, is, and always will be the first and best Catholic mom.

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#### TRADITIONS

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The Rosary, one of the Church's greatest devotional prayers, encourages the faithful to meditate upon the mysteries of Christ's life and key moments in the life of his mother, Mary. Around the world, Catholics venerate Mary with prayer, processions, and religious imagery. She is known by hundreds of titles and is the focus of dozens of devotions, great works of art, and numerous hymns. Many miracles have been attributed to her intercession, particularly in places of her apparitions like Lourdes, Guadalupe, and Fatima.

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#### MARY'S WISDOM

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My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior. For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness; behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed.

—Luke 1:46–47

THIS WEEK WITH SCRIPTURE

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**Sunday:** Luke 1:38

Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.

*I am your handmaid, Father. Help me to hear and to answer your will for my life.*

**Monday:** Acts 1:14

All these devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

*Mary, help me to follow your perfect example of prayer and lead me to your son, Jesus.*

**Tuesday:** Luke 2:34–35

Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted (and you yourself a sword will pierce) so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

*In my sorrow, Lord, help me to find consolation in your unending love.*

**Wednesday:** Luke 2:19

And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.

*My God, you alone know the inner workings of my heart. In your goodness, hear and answer me.*

**Thursday:** Luke 1:45

Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.

*Jesus, equip me to believe more fully the truth of your promises.*

**Friday:** Luke 1:46–47

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;  
my spirit rejoices in God my savior.

*My spirit rejoices in you, Lord.*

**Saturday:** John 2:5

Do whatever he tells you.

*Emmanuel, I want to do your Father's will as Mary did. I  
will follow her and hold her hand as she draws me to you.*

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SAINT-INSPIRED ACTIVITIES

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***For Mom***

In your prayer corner or other quiet place, create a small altar for Mary with a holy card, medal, statue, or other image of her. Speak to the Blessed Mother in prayer, focusing on the Church's Marian traditions including the Rosary, Hail Mary, and Hail Holy Queen.

***With Children***

Plant a "Mary Garden" with flowers named for Our Lady, or display a rose in your home and pray a decade of the Rosary as a family.

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A PRAYER FOR OUR FAMILY

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Pray as a family each day this week:

Blessed Mother Mary,  
you said "yes" to God and in doing so became mother to our Savior  
Jesus Christ.  
Help us to follow your example of discipleship  
by following and loving Jesus as you did.



We ask your intercession on behalf of the poor and the suffering,  
and for peace in our world.

Be with us in our celebrations

and those moments when life is painful and difficult.

Help us to accept God's perfect plan for our lives.

Take our hands and lead us to your son, Jesus.

Amen.

#### SOMETHING TO PONDER

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In what ways is Mary a spiritual mother to you? How does she draw you closer to her son, Jesus Christ, and mentor you in your own life as a mom?