

Her life is full of mysteries,
discover them!



CELEBRATE A YEAR WITH OUR LADY
**MIRACLES, MYSTERIES,
& MARY**

relevant
radio

Bringing Christ to the world
through the media

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INTRODUCTION

Dear Friend of Relevant Radio,

Still wondering what to resolve for your New Year? Take it to Mary!

Many of our most popular saints – John Paul II, Mother Teresa, Josemaría Escrivá, and Maximilian Kolbe – had lifelong devotions to the Blessed Mother. They spent time learning, praying, and teaching others about the intercessory power and maternal love Mary has to offer. And they have all become incredible, earth-shaking saints because of it!

In this exclusive e-book, *Miracles, Mysteries, & Mary*, you'll explore Mary's intercession in human history from historical apparitions to everyday insights – month by month, all year long!

In the words of St. Maximilian Kolbe, “our dependence on Mary is greater than we imagine. We receive graces, absolutely all of them, from God through the Immaculate, who is our universal mediatrix (mediator of grace) with Jesus.”

I hope you enjoy this special spiritual and devotional companion! Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us!



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. Rocky".

Rev. Francis Joseph Hoffman, JCD
Chairman and CEO



Humans, universally, have many worries. In 1917, Pope Benedict XV surely had his fair share. Serving as pope during World War I, the Influenza epidemic, and the Russian Revolution, he knew that the world desperately needed a beacon of peace. There had to be something, or someone, who could placate the feeling of reigning uncertainty.

He chose to put his faith in the perfect model of peace: Our Lady herself, Queen of Peace.

This title comes, in part, from a title we hold for Jesus: Prince of Peace. Reconciling the world through His Crucifixion, Jesus' Mother accompanied Him at the foot of His cross. He brings all together in His sacrifice, and Mary, as the chosen Mother of God, is therefore the Queen of Peace. She intercedes on our behalf so that we may know peace through her Son.

Queen of Peace comes from Mary's divine association, but the image comes from a young French man named Jean de Joyeuse. Knowing that

as Christ brings peace, so does His Mother, he gifted his bride Françoise de Voisins a unique statue of Mary. Holding an olive branch in one hand and the Prince of Peace Himself in the other, the statue became an heirloom for the next 200 years before finding a home with the Capuchin Franciscans in Paris. It was renamed *Notre Dame de la Paix* – Our Lady of Peace.

***...Mary, as the
chosen Mother of
God, is therefore
the Queen of Peace.***

After surviving a French revolution, a theological conflict with the Jansenist heresy, and the incredible growth of Catholicism in France, the statue was ceremonially crowned by the Archbishop of Paris in 1906. Today, three statues of the Queen of Peace exist, one of which is in Honolulu.

Benedict XV was simply adding to its longstanding legacy as a symbol of joy, stability, and peace when he added the title to Litany of Loreto in

1917. In doing so, he also offered a new reminder of her presence in an ever-shifting world.

A Mass commemorating Our Lady in this name, asking for her continued intercession for peace to reign in the world, was added shortly thereafter. We can remain confident that Our

Lady hears our prayers and intercedes on our behalf. As Benedict XVI wrote almost ninety years later in *The Human Person, The Heart of Peace*, “May Mary show us, in her Son, the Way of peace, and enlighten our vision, so that we can recognize Christ’s face in the face of every human person, the heart of peace!”



Image credit: Daniel Ramirez from Honolulu, USA Statue of Our Lady of Peace, CC BY 2.0, Wikimedia Commons.

Statue of Our Lady of Peace in front of the Cathedral of Our Lady of Peace in Honolulu, HI.



Image credit: Vivida Photo PC / Shutterstock.com

On the morning of February 11th, 1858, Bernadette Soubirous, her sister, and a neighbor ventured out into the mountainous landscape of Lourdes to gather firewood. Two powerful gusts of wind interrupted Bernadette as she shed her shoes and stockings to cross the Gave de Pau River. Noting the unusual stillness of the trees, Bernadette looked around the Massabielle Grotto across the bank for answers.

In the Grotto's high, rounded alcove stood a young Lady draped in white and blue, soft yellow roses adorning her feet. Light poured out of the hollowed rock behind her, and she held a rosary. Bernadette tried to make the Sign of the Cross, prepared to ward off the vision, but the Lady simply smiled and invited her to pray the Rosary. The girl obliged and was determined to keep this apparition – and the ones which followed – a secret.

But word of Bernadette's strange behavior and a miraculous apparition swept through Lourdes and beyond. Against her parents' wishes and under

“I do not promise you happiness in this life, but in the next.”

town scrutiny, Bernadette faithfully fulfilled the Blessed Mother's request that she return to the Grotto for the following weeks. The young girl relayed Mary's words to the crowds, her call for prayer and penance, and her promise to a joy-filled Bernadette: “I do not promise you happiness in this life, but in the next.”

Believers and skeptics alike watched, unnerved at Bernadette's ecstatic behavior. On February 25th, the young girl elicited shock and dismay as she began to dig in the cold, wet ground of the Massabielle. Amazement quickly flooded the dumbfounded crowd as a small spring of muddy water bubbled up through the dirt.

These waters, still flowing to this day, sparked international attention with claims of miraculous healings. The Grotto was forcibly closed to pilgrims, then reopened by Emperor Napoleon III in battles over the site's legitimacy.

Was this truly Our Lady, and were these truly healing waters? Or were these visions and healings an elaborate hoax? The best way to find out was to ask directly. On March 25th, after being prompted for her name by Bernadette several times, Our Lady finally replied, “I am the Immaculate Conception.”

Bernadette imparted this answer in confusion. She had no formal religious education. But the day’s theologians would have had this name fresh in their minds, as the Marian dogma of the Immaculate Conception, Mary’s sinless conception, had been declared four years earlier. This name prompted a Church investigation and, after two years of interviews, visits, and prayer, it was decided that Our Lady really had appeared in Lourdes.

With 70 Church-verified healings, thousands upon thousands of pilgrims pour into the Massabielle each year to pray and be touched by its healing waters. Many bring large candles and leave them at the site as reminders of their intentions and all that the intercession of Our Lady has done for them. The humble town of Lourdes has become an international center for healing, penance, and devotion to Our Lady.



The statue within the rock cave at Massabielle in Lourdes, where St. Bernadette witnessed Our Blessed Mother.

Image credit: Ancoay / Shutterstock.com



Image credit: Zyankarlo / Shutterstock.com

Guard Hill provides a scenic panorama of the French coastal city of Marseilles along the Mediterranean Sea. One can see for miles in any direction, both the compact city and the vibrant blue waves. Perhaps most importantly, one could stand on Guard Hill and see oncoming weather.

Awareness of inclement weather is often a matter of sink-or-float for the inhabitants of a port city. Fishing especially relies on the daily weather for its catch; sunny days yield a different catch than cloudy days, and impending rain showers are the definition of high-risk, often high-reward days at sea. But rainy days could quickly – and easily – become full-blown thunderstorms.

One poor fisherman found himself caught in such a storm. His mast broken, sails tearing, and water filling his craft faster than he could bail, all hope seemed lost for this 12th-century fisherman. He looked back to his city, still pondering his options, and saw something which surprised him. Amid the turbulent storm, on a shallow rocky crag framing Marseilles' bay, a woman

in white was extending her hand to him, unbothered by the wind raging around her.

...a woman in white was extending her hand to him, unbothered by the wind raging around her.

The fisherman did what anyone in crisis would do: he prayed fervently for her help.

Almost immediately, his ship righted. A friendly wind carried his craft to shore, and the moment it grounded he fell to his knees and thanked the Blessed Mother for her intercession. He ran to tell his family what had happened – and, most importantly, that he was safe.

The story of the fisherman's rescue flooded through the town faster than a tide coming in. Other seafarers began to come forward with similar stories – broken ships, falling overboard, and treacherous waters which washed

away at the appearance of the woman on the rocks.

In agreement that this was indeed the kind hand of the Blessed Mother, a statue was crafted in her honor in 1213. It was completed five years later and placed on the rocks where she was seen and stayed there until it was moved to the top of Guard Hill. The ancient fort that had once resided on the highest natural point of Marseilles became a chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Mariners in 1544.

Her miracles in Marseilles continued; according to popular tradition, the town took the newly-created statue (the first having been destroyed shortly after the chapel's dedication) of Mary and processed through the streets during the Cholera outbreak in 1832. To their relief, the epidemic waned and vanished within a few days.

Once called “Our Lady of Mariners”, intrigued and thankful pilgrims gave her another name: Notre Dame de la Garde – Our Lady of the Guard. Even today, the church-turned-basilica named in her honor still carries boat replicas left by thankful mariners and their families as reminders of Our Lady’s helping hand.



**Notre-Dame-de-la-Garde
(Our Lady of the Guard), the
basilica in Marseille, France.**

Image credit: Gubin Yury / Shutterstock.com



APRIL 27

FEAST OF OUR LADY OF MONTSERRAT



MIRACLES, MYSTERIES,
& MARY

Today we celebrate Our Lady of Montserrat, a mysterious statue hidden away in Catalonia, Spain, for nearly 200 years.

“La Jerosolimitana”, or “the native of Jerusalem”, as she was first called, was handcrafted out of wood, decorated colorfully, and gilded with gold around 50 AD. It is commonly believed that the image was given as a gift to Saint Eteri, a disciple of Saint James the Great and the Bishop of Barcelona. Centuries later, this three-foot-tall image of Madonna and Child became the beloved icon of Catalonia and the surrounding regions.

***She’s revered as
one of several
Black Madonnas
worldwide.***

Candles surrounded the statue day and night; their ever-present smolder is believed to have turned “La Jerosolimitana” into “La Moreneta”, or “the dark-skinned one”, the smoky

flames browning the Madonna and Child’s complexion. Restorers have painted their skin dark to match ever since. She’s revered as one of several Black Madonnas worldwide.

It was only for safekeeping that this staple devotion was hidden away; in 718 when the Saracen invasion reached inland to the region of Catalonia, Christian resistance kept the army at bay for three years. As their defensive force began to dwindle, they prioritized protecting their holy items, especially their beloved Marian statue.

The high, isolated peaks of nearby Montserrat (in Catalan, “serrated mountain”) made passage treacherous and invasion very difficult. This hardly-accessible series of narrow mountains and even narrower mountain passes had an abundance of natural caves – a perfect hiding spot for Catalonia’s precious treasure. But after the threat had passed and Christianity began to re-emerge, La Moreneta’s hiding spot proved almost too perfect: she remained hidden, her location a mystery for almost 180 years.



The famous Black Madonna of Montserrat in Barcelona, Catalonia.

Image credit: Misburg3014 - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, Wikimedia Commons

In 880, a group of shepherds near Montserrat reported seeing visions of an image much like their beloved statue nearby after staying in the mountainous caves, and as news spread, others came to investigate. After six consecutive Saturday visions and almost two centuries of being lost, Our Lady of Montserrat was finally found.

The people were so overjoyed they sought to bring the image in procession through the valleys which held the kingdoms of Valencia and Mercia – but it seemed that the Blessed Mother had other plans; no matter what was tried, Our Lady of Montserrat wouldn't move off the mountain. Even when the Benedictines

moved into their mountainside monastery, which still exists today, local tradition tells us that they had to build around Our Lady of Montserrat at her post!

Saint Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuit order, visited Montserrat set on being a battle hero; after a night of prayer, he left his sword by the altar, now determined to become a spiritual warrior. Since then, many saints have been among pilgrims to this site. Similar statues and replicas can also be found in Torreciudad, Tortuga, and Trinidad to name a few. But one thing is for certain: if you're looking for Our Lady of Montserrat, you'll always find her keeping watch from her mountainside of Catalonia.

Our Lady of Montserrat

The statue, still on display at the Monastery in Montserrat, is believed to have been venerated so often by candlelight that it darkened the wooden statue – **making her known as one of the world's 'Black Madonnas.'** Since her rediscovery, several other similar Black Madonnas have been found in the Spanish mountains.

Mary and Jesus wear golden crowns and are seated in a position known as **"The Throne of Wisdom."** In this position, Mary serves as a throne for the Son of God, Who represents divine wisdom incarnate.



In Mary's right hand is **an orb, representing the universe.** It is the only part of the statue that is accessible to pilgrim hands for veneration.

With His right hand, the Christ Child gives a blessing. With His left hand, He holds a pineapple, **a symbol of eternal life and fruitfulness.**

CELEBRATE A YEAR WITH OUR LADY

MIRACLES, MYSTERIES, & MARY

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On May 13th, 1917, hope for Catholics in Portugal, held under Freemason authority, made herself known with a flash of lightning. Our Lady appeared to three shepherd children in the field of Cova da Iria outside of Fatima – Lúcia, Jacinta, and Francisco. She said, firstly, that they would be rewarded in Heaven for their earthly sufferings; secondly, she requested that they pray the Rosary daily for world peace; and thirdly, Our Lady wished to meet the children in the field on the thirteenth of each month for six months.

Lúcia, Jacinta and Francisco obeyed and, as rumored apparitions and miracles began to circulate, gathered a following of hopeful Catholics and wary Freemason authorities. Mary's messages consistently asked for fervent prayer for peace worldwide, for the end to World War I, for the conversion of sinners and the conversion of Russia, who would "spread her errors throughout the world, raising wars and persecutions of the Church". In a single summer, the children received a vision of hell, predictions of their own returns to

Heaven, and foreshadowing that their prayers for the end of World War I would be answered – but there would be more wars to come.

The Freemasons had had enough by August; the mayor of Fatima imprisoned the visionaries on August 13th in the hopes that it would halt their rendezvous with Our Lady. But she simply appeared six days later with another request: "Pray, pray very much and make sacrifices for sinners. For many souls go to Hell because there is no one to pray for them."

As the apparitions continued, Freemasonry's hold started to crumble; bold faith began to permeate the citizens of Portugal, and thousands upon thousands flocked to Fatima to join the children as Our Lady spoke to them.

Seventy thousand pilgrims met a cold, rainy October 13th with songs to the Blessed Mother as they awaited her appearance. The skies cleared at noon as Our Lady revealed herself by another name: [Our Lady of the Rosary](#). She re-emphasized her call

to prayer, and then the sun spun three times. Each rotation lasted almost four minutes and bathed the crowd in a rainbow of colors; the sun zigzagged across the sky, descended to the crowd, and miraculously returned to the clouds as if nothing happened. Every pilgrim left with dry clothes.

That “unexplained phenomenon” (as many secular papers wrote) was the last spark for the rekindling of the powerful Catholic presence in Portugal. Within weeks, bishops returned from exile, military chaplaincy was reinstated, and relations with the Vatican resumed. A Catholic statesman was elected just nine

years after the concluding apparition, Freemasonry fell out of favor, and Portugal settled into profound peace after a decade of conflict.

Since then, over four million pilgrims visit Fatima annually to pray for peace in our world and their own lives. Four popes have visited the site – one with Sister Lúcia herself – and three have consecrated the world to Our Lady’s Immaculate Heart, the most recent having been March 25th, 2022. With her timeless message of future hope, Our Lady reminds us that, no matter what may happen in our lives, “my Immaculate Heart will triumph”.

Procession of Candles at the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Fatima, Portugal.





The origins of Our Lady of Perpetual Help (or Our Lady of Perpetual Succor) are about as varied as the countries in which she is venerated. Some believe that the walnut-wood icon was written sometime between 1325 and 1480 in Crete; others believe Saint Lazarus the Iconographer wrote it sometime in the ninth century; still other traditions attest that it comes from the hand of Saint Luke himself.

Even with different beginnings, all converge into two agreed-upon details: the icon ended up at Keras Kardiotissas Monastery in 1498 and was stolen by a merchant for his private collection in 1499. Although it may have been providential, noted Father Mikhailo Kuzma, a regular guest on *Morning Air* and pastor for Immaculate Conception Ukrainian Byzantine Church: an invasion of Crete shortly thereafter put the monastery's sacred art and space at risk. "Maybe by stealing it, he might have saved it."

The icon only stayed in the merchant's private collection for a year. When he kept it, despite being urged by Our Lady in dreams not to hold onto it, he quickly fell ill and passed. His family kept the icon and Our Lady visited

once again, asking that the icon be given to a church for public exposure. This time, she revealed her name and intentions to the merchant's six-year-old daughter.

When she said that "Holy Mary of Perpetual Help" should be given to the church of San Matteo on Esquiline Hill in Rome, the family placed the icon back in the public eye. It remained in San Matteo for 300 years and was affectionately called the "Madonna di San Matteo". When war threatened Rome's timeless art and countless churches, the icon was hidden in a way reminiscent of [Our Lady of Montserrat](#) – tucked away in another church for almost 70 years after a papal request for its safety.

In 1865, Pope Pius IX brought it out of hiding and gave possession of the holy icon to the Redemptorists. He had one request: that Holy Mary of Perpetual Help be revealed to the whole world. The icon was restored and coronated the following year; copies were then distributed to Redemptorist parishes worldwide and devotion to this Marian icon skyrocketed, especially in Poland and Ukraine.



Image credit:
Renata Sedmakova / Shutterstock.com

Our Mother of Perpetual
Help, a 15th Century
Marian Byzantine icon.

“The Redemptorists did a heck of a job,” Father Kuzma commented, thinking of his Ukrainian roots, “almost every family in western Ukraine knows that icon. It’s found in many homes and is precious.”

He continued, pointing out the clarity of the icon’s purpose: “Her name indicates what she’s about. You can go to her any time, and you can be assured she’s going to help you.”

For Father Kuzma, this icon reminds him of his grandmother. “I see my grandmother praying in front of that icon, praying and fasting. And I feel strongly that Our Lady chose to answer my grandmother’s prayers to call forth a vocation from me – a kid who hadn’t even thought about the priesthood.”

This gold leaf and twice-restored icon is unique, even among Byzantine depictions of the Blessed Mother. Her

pose is the *Hodegetria*, “indicator of the way”; she points to Jesus, from the tilt of her head to the position of her hand as she holds Him.

What makes Our Lady of Perpetual Help especially unique is that Jesus is also holding onto His Mother. The tools of the Crucifixion surround Mary and Jesus (St. Michael holding the spear, the rod, and the wine-soaked sponge at left, and St. Gabriel holding the three-barred cross at right), his sandal falling off His foot and a perturbed face show us that He makes haste to His mother, His consolation. By experiencing this icon, we are also being invited to find consolation and help in Mary’s arms.

“She’s looking at us,” Father Kuzma tells us. “Come hold onto her hand, like Jesus is holding onto her hand. Go to Our Lady, she will hold you. She is the safest place in the world.”

Our Lady of Perpetual Help

The Archangels Michael and Gabriel each hold instruments of Christ’s Crucifixion. In the upper left, St. Michael holds the spear, wine-soaked sponge, and the crown of thorns. In the upper right, St. Gabriel holds the cross and the nails.

The gold background of the icon is thought to symbolize the triumph and glory of the Resurrection.



The Child Jesus appears frightened by instruments that foreshadow His future Passion and leans into His Mother for consolation.

The Christ Child wraps His hands around the hand of Our Blessed Mother and one sandal falls from His foot as He turns toward her in haste.



CELEBRATE A YEAR WITH OUR LADY

MIRACLES, MYSTERIES, & MARY





Image credit: Renata Sedmakova / Shutterstock.com

Promises and striving to keep them are essential parts of our lives. When we love something – even when we simply want something – it’s engrained in us to set goals, make sacrifices, persevere, and (ideally) obtain our sought-after reward. If we’re very dedicated, we grow in the process as well. On today’s feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, we’re reminded that spiritual rewards can be met similarly, by the grace of God and some help from Our Lady.

Mount Carmel in Israel is a significant spiritual and scriptural space. Many prophets reference it, and some say that Elijah even foreshadowed Christ’s Incarnation and Mary’s role in it here (1 Kings 18:41-44). The following centuries saw contemplative hermits flock to the site. Pulling from the example of Elijah, the “Brothers of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel” formed, and eventually became the central foundation of the Carmelite order.

A Saracen invasion captured Mount Carmel in 1238 (the Seventh Crusade), forcing the order to found new

communities with a new Rule of Life in Europe. One of these took root in Aylesford, England, under the new leadership of prior (later Saint) Simon Stock. In a vision he received on July 16th, 1251, Our Lady gave Stock the Brown Scapular, saying, “take this Scapular, it shall be a sign of salvation, a protection in danger and a pledge of peace. Whosoever dies while wearing this scapular shall not suffer eternal fire.”

“Whosoever dies while wearing this scapular shall not suffer eternal fire.”

Scapulars, as we wear them, are small and humble fabric squares with depictions of Our Lady and Jesus, and it is in its humility that powerful promises come to life. Each Brown Scapular has the words of Our Lady to Simon Stock sewn in – a promise of reconciliation and expedited union with God after death. But the scapular also serves as an avenue of Marian intercession in our earthly lives.

Wearing one opens us to Mary's guiding influence and, having striven to live by her example, further helps us as we enter eternal life.

What may be a surprise is that the Brown Scapular emulated an extant earthly garment. "Scapulars" (from the Latin *scapulae* for "shoulders") are sleeveless garments worn over the shoulders by religious; in the Carmelite order, it was often reminiscent of Marian devotion. The Brown Scapular simply opened the devotion to any who wished to be clothed in Mary's protective mantle – and the "garment" of love for her Son.

To wear a scapular is to keep two important promises: to lead a good Christian life, filled with habitual prayer and service, and to wear the scapular faithfully. If we strive to sustain these each day, our eternal reward is likely greater than when we began: in life, we will foster a deeper love and devotion to God through His Mother, and in death, have an opportunity for final repentance and a shorter time before we are fully united with God once more.



Our Lady of Mount Carmel
by Pietro Novelli, 1641.



The site of today's Marian celebration is a must-visit for any world-traveling Catholics. Santa Maria Maggiore (St. Mary Major) is not only a papal basilica (alongside its neighbor, St. John Lateran, and St. Peter in Vatican City), it's the largest church dedicated to Mary in Rome. It attracts millions of visitors annually with its spectacular artwork, famous burials, and historic architecture... as well as its utterly unique summer miracle.

A Roman patrician named John and his wife consulted with Pope Liberius in 352 A.D. in regards to the legacy of their wealth. Having no children, the pontiff encouraged the couple to use their blessings to honor God and His Mother. So John and his wife earnestly prayed for Mary's guidance, and on August 4th the same year, she appeared to John in a dream and clearly articulated her direction.

A church was to be built in her honor in a location of her choosing, she revealed to John – and to Pope Liberius, who had a very similar dream. In it, she promised to reveal the church's spot with an undeniable sign

of her guiding hand: a late summer snowfall.

When morning came on August 5th, John and his wife found pristine, clear snow on Esquiline Hill (one of seven notable hills which comprised Rome). The glittering outline of this miracle became the floor plan for the Patriarchal Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, funded entirely by the astounded Roman couple.

...she promised to reveal the church's spot with an undeniable sign of her guiding hand: a late summer snowfall.

The basilica was dedicated on August 5th, 435 A.D. – the feast of Our Lady of the Snows (or, in Latin, Saint Mary *ad Nives*) – by Pope Sixtus III. It is one of the seven pilgrim churches of Rome, and although the validity of its founding legend has been questioned

by historians, Our Lady of Snows is still frequently celebrated by tourists and locals alike; at the conclusion of the annual Solemn High Mass commemorating its dedication, white rose petals drop like snowflakes from Santa Maria Maggiore's high dome.

The oldest Marian work inside is *Salus Populi Romani* ("Protectress of the Roman People"), traditionally believed to have been created by Saint Luke (similar to one origin story of Our Lady of Perpetual Help) and is a simple yet powerful design of Madonna and Child; one of the more recent works, added to the collection shortly after its creation,

is Guido Galli's Ave Regina Pacis.

Also known as the Liberian basilica after its dedicating pope, Saint Mary of the Crib, or its patronal feast name, of Our Lady of the Snows, this Patriarchal Basilica is famous worldwide for the marvelous artwork and the spectacular legend, which has inspired over 150 churches to be named for the miracle in Italy alone. It serves as an immense reminder that Mary's intercession is incredibly powerful, and that her guidance is certainly varied – devotionals, dreams, and even snowfall in summer!





SEPTEMBER 15 FEAST OF OUR LADY OF SORROWS



MIRACLES, MYSTERIES, & MARY

Today the Church reflects upon the sufferings of Mary, most notably remembered through the Seven Sorrows and the Seven Sorrows Rosary (popularized by the Servite and Dominican Orders). But for many of us, meditating upon these pivotal sorrows that accompanied the Son of God's life and ministry can present a challenge to our joy-filled and hopeful faith.

The Gospels give us the Seven Sorrows upon which we typically meditate, moments which are "pivotal" in the life of Mary and Jesus: the Prophecy of Simeon (Luke 2:35); the Flight into Egypt (Matthew 2:13); the Loss of the Child Jesus in Jerusalem (Luke 2:46-48); Mary meeting Jesus on the way to Calvary (Luke 23:27); the Crucifixion and Death of Jesus (John 19:25-27); Mary receiving the Body of Jesus from the Cross (an implication in John 19:38 that has been utilized for images like the *Pietà*); and the Burial of Jesus (an implication in Luke 23:55-56).

When we live these sorrows ourselves, we gain a new perspective on each of these mysteries. But how can we

relate to, or even understand, these if we have not yet experienced – or may never experience – some of these mysteries? How do we reconcile them with the joyful faith we know and practice?

Fr. Edward Looney, an officer of the Mariological Society of America and devoted mariologist, suggests some ways in which we may still find comfort in these sorrows, no matter our familiarity with them, and even meditate upon them with joy and hope. The feast's original twelfth-century name, Our Lady of Compassion (from Latin roots meaning, "to suffer with"), clearly indicated that the Mother of God, who knew joy and connection with God free from Original sin, still knew the heartbreaks that we regularly address: Our Lady is no stranger to suffering, and yet in her anguish she holds hope in God, trust in His plan, peace in His providence, and comfort for her children on earth (given in John 19:25-27: "Behold your son...behold your mother").

He recommends meditating on the many sorrows within litanies, such

as the Litany of the Immaculate Heart or the Litany to Our Lady of Seven Sorrows. The repetition, as well as the variety of titles and names we are given, may turn our hearts to new directions and insights.

“At different points in our lives, we’re going to resonate with Our Lady of Sorrows...”

“At different points in our lives, we’re going to resonate with Our Lady of Sorrows,” Fr. Looney reflected from his own experience and his extensive studies into everyday Marian devotions, “Seven sorrows is just the beginning. A sorrow of Mary could also be Jesus leaving to begin His ministry, the death of Joseph... when you experience

[sorrows], like Mary experienced them, you’ll be able to say, “Mary, be close to me now”. You know that Mary knows what it’s like.”

What is also important to remember about these sorrows is many are companions to great joy. The Presentation of Jesus is, overall, a very joyful ritual; Mary and Joseph find Jesus after days of searching, safe and teaching in the Temple in Jerusalem; the Resurrection follows quickly after the Passion of Christ. In each of those sorrows, hope can be found.

Let us approach Our Lady each day, in our joys and sorrows, big and small, for a new heart and a new hope for all that is to come. Let us lean on Our Mother of Compassion, knowing that she has shared in our joys and our sorrows, and find a new tenderness for our sufferings and those around us.





Image credit: Tracyl Christianson / TracylChristianson.com

When Adele Brise received her first communion in Belgium, she decided to devote herself to Our Lady and educating children in the Catholic faith.

Her plan was thrown for a loop when she and her parents emigrated in the summer of 1853, creating a farm just outside Luxembourg, Wisconsin. The next six years Adele spent taking wheat to the mill and walking to Mass every Sunday; in 1859, a Lady stopped her in the middle of the Wisconsin wilderness.

She sent Adele forth with a promise of her own: “Go and fear nothing, I will help you.”

Donned in white, the silent Lady appeared on Adele’s path through Robinsonville. The following week she appeared again, and Adele’s friends rightfully urged her to discuss the vision with the local priest. He

suggested she ask questions, much like Bernadette had in [Lourdes](#) the year prior; what was the Lady’s purpose?

Adele was prepared with a question when the Lady appeared a few weeks later: “In the name of God, who are you and what do you want with me?”

The Queen of Heaven revealed herself and gave Adele her mission: “You received Holy Communion this morning and that is well. But you must do more. ...Gather the children in this wild country and teach them what they should know for salvation. Teach them their catechism, how to sign themselves with the sign of the Cross, and how to approach the sacraments.”

Mary remembered that first communion promise. She sent Adele forth with a promise of her own: “Go and fear nothing, I will help you.”

Adele ventured on foot up to fifty miles away to help local families with household chores in exchange for the privilege of educating their children. In the following years, the faithful

she had inspired built a convent, a school, and a large wooden chapel to accommodate the pilgrims and growing faithful, with “Notre Dame de Bon Secours, Priez Pour Nous” – “Our Lady of Good Help, Pray for Us” inscribed over the door.

Twelve years after the final apparition, the Great Peshtigo Fire set northern Wisconsin ablaze. Smoke towered through the air for miles, fire damage and heat exhaustion setting in over the livestock and the villages. Villagers flocked to the wooden chapel with rosaries and hymns. They processed around the sanctuary with the chapel's statue of Mary in spite of the heat and

smoke. The blaze reached the fence of the shrine but was extinguished by a miraculous overnight rain.

160 years later, the apparitions were officially approved, spearheaded by Archbishop David L. Ricken. He wrote: “The effects of these endeavors by her and many others have lasted these many years with such major spiritual benefit to so many people. ...I encourage the faithful to frequent this holy place as a place of solace and answered prayer.”

Let us remember that Mary is our good help each day, that with her guidance we may go forth and fear nothing.

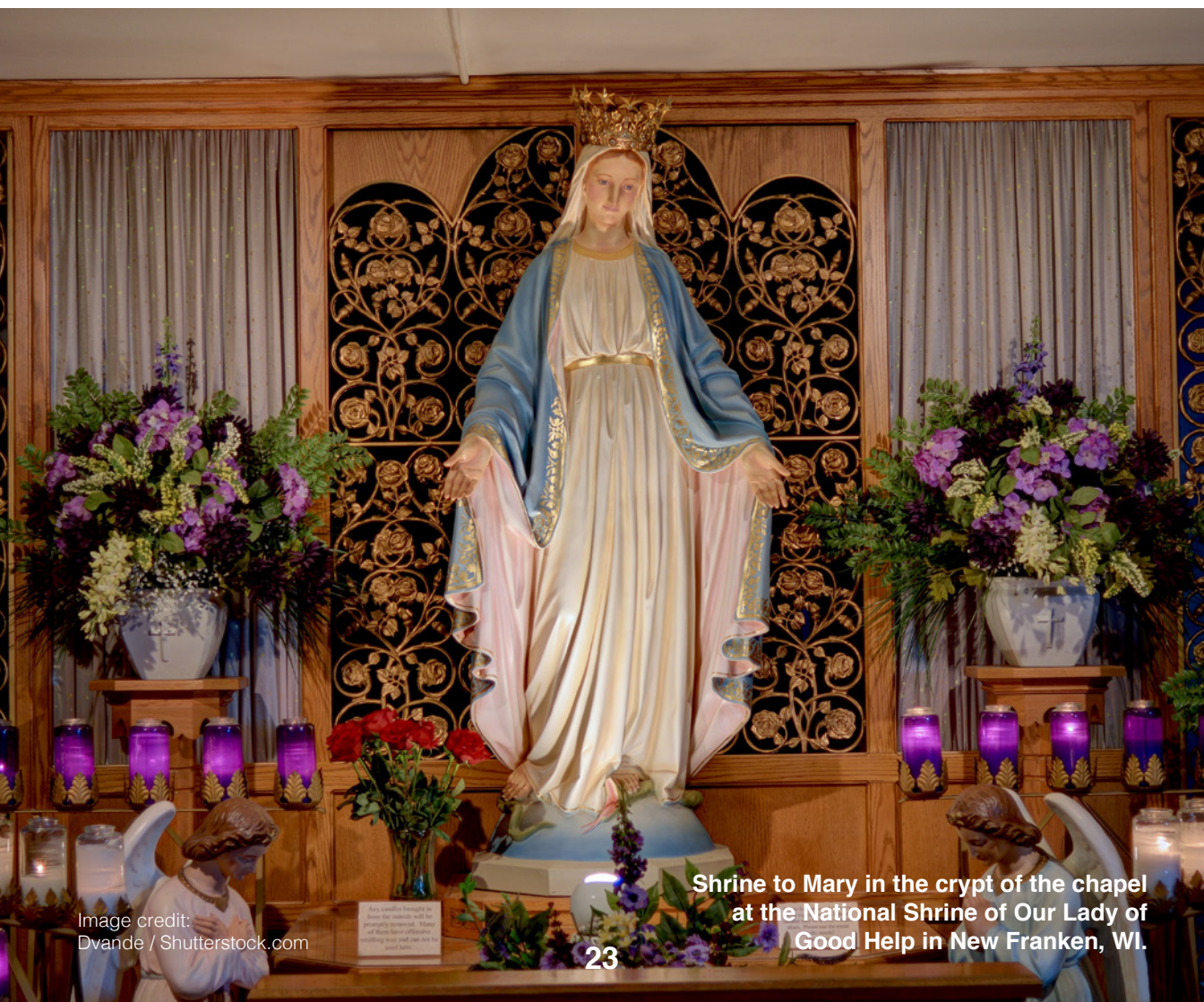




Image credit: Kibeho-sanctuary.com

Our Lady of Kibeho is the only Church-approved Marian apparition in the fifty-four nations of continental Africa. Spanning eight years and three visionaries at Kibeho College in Rwanda, it all began on November 28th, 1981, when Our Lady appeared to seventeen-year-old Alphonsine Mumureke while she was serving other children: “She could have chosen me when I was in a chapel praying the Rosary. But she chose me, to come to me, when I was serving.”

Mary appeared to twenty-year-old Nathalie Mukamazimpaka in January 1982 in the very public setting of the school’s courtyard; then, in what many accounts say was a result of skepticism that she was actually appearing, Mary came in visions to twenty-one-year-old Marie Claire Mukangango, who had been recorded as bullying Alphonsine for her visions, in March. The Blessed Mother appeared to be floating, but as the visits continued the paradise in which she appeared to the students became a field of flowers – flowers which, many have concluded, may represent the people of Kibeho. Crowds of curious

locals and pilgrims began to gather in the school courtyard within the same month. As their numbers grew, the flowers in which Our Lady appeared multiplied.

In August of 1982, the only year in which all three students were visited by Mary, she showed them a vision of impending conflict and urged them to pray for unity and spread her messages to them far and wide. Visits to Nathalie emphasized this dire need for sacrificial penance and ceaseless prayer (which Nathalie still practices today at the Sanctuary in Kibeho), and the year of visions to Marie Claire called the Seven Sorrows of Mary to universal attention. Its companionship to the Rosary, she relayed, would not only enlighten devotees to identify their sins and temptations but, with the grace of God and Our Lady’s intercession, would also foster strength and a deep desire for closeness with God – a closeness which would deeply encourage them to avoid sin.

Alphonsine’s visions concluded exactly eight years to the day later, November 28th in 1989, but public devotion

had surfaced and spread as early as 1982. Bishop Augustin Misago of the newly founded Diocese of Gikongoro approved devotion in 1988, and while the Church investigated, Pope Saint John Paul II paid the visionaries a visit in 1990. He encouraged the Church at large to turn to Mary, who is the most simple and sure guide to holiness and unity. The Sanctuary of Our Lady of Kibeho (at its original construction, devoted to Our Lady of Sorrows) was completed in just over a year, opening in 1992.

The impending conflict foreshadowed in 1982 came forth 12 years later as the Rwandan genocide, which forced as many as 2 million to flee (including Alphonsine and Nathalie) and took the lives more than 800 thousand (including Marie Claire); yet even in the darkness of the violence, impossibly

heightened tensions and long-lasting consequences, stories of Our Lady of Kibeho's protection and intercession surfaced in survivors.

The apparitions of Our Lady of Kibeho were officially approved in 2001, and a statue was chosen in 2003 through a collaborative contest with local artists, a jury of religious experts, and Nathalie Mukamazimpaka.

Kibeho became a gathering point for those who returned to Rwanda, looking for God and His Mother in all that they had endured. Still today, Our Lady of Kibeho reminds pilgrims of constant prayer, sacrificial penance, and miracles in the greatest of sufferings. She is the beacon of light that guides in darkness, always bringing us to Christ for strength, for peace, for unity, and for consolation.

Statue of Our Lady of Kibeho at the place of apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ, Kibeho, Rwanda.





The following article was written by **Cale Clarke**, host of *The Faith Explained* program and on *The Cale Clarke Show* on Relevant Radio.

Today's great Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of Mary is a doctrine that is misunderstood by many. If you have ever correctly explained this teaching to someone else, congratulations! You're well ahead of many Catholics.

The Immaculate Conception is often confused with the Virginal Conception of Jesus, at the Annunciation (which we celebrate on March 25 —9 months before Christmas, natch). And PSA for my fellow football fans: please note that today's feast has nothing to do with legendary Pittsburgh Steeler Franco Harris' "Immaculate Reception"!

Here's the actual definition, straight from Blessed Pope Pius IX, "Pio Nono" himself:

We declare, pronounce, and define that the doctrine which holds that the most Blessed Virgin Mary, in

the first instance of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin, is a doctrine revealed by God and therefore to be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful.

—*Ineffabilis Deus*, Apostolic Constitution of Pope Pius IX solemnly defining the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, December 8, 1854.

One of the things I strive to do in both *The Faith Explained* program and on *The Cale Clarke Show* is to show the biblical basis of our Catholic faith. In the Annunciation account in Luke's Gospel, when the archangel Gabriel greets Mary, it marks the only recorded incident in the Bible when an angel greets someone by their title, not their name: "Hail, Full of Grace, the Lord is with you" (Lk. 1:28). This, of course, is also the first line of the Hail Mary, with the second line, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb", stemming from Luke

1:42. So much for the ridiculous argument that the Hail Mary is “unbiblical”!

Speaking of the phrase, “Full of Grace”, in the original Greek of Luke’s Gospel, it is an interesting term: kecharitomene. It means, literally, “one who has been made full of God’s grace” (biblical translations that render this term “highly favored one”, or something to that effect, don’t cut it). It’s a past perfect term, meaning that, at some point in the past, Mary was made perfectly full of God’s grace. This

***Mary was reserved
free from all stain
of Original sin. If
one is perfectly
full of the grace of
God, there is no
room for sin.***

condition extends out into the future, into eternity. This is exactly what the Immaculate Conception is all about – that, from the first moment of her existence, Mary was preserved free from all stain of Original sin. If one is perfectly full of the grace of God, there is no room for sin.

This harkens back to the original “Gospel” that followed the Original Sin. It’s called the “protoevangelium” (“first Gospel”) that appears right after Adam and Eve fell into Satan’s trap. God says to the serpent, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike at your head, while you



strike at his heel” (Genesis 3:15). Now, the “woman” ultimately can’t be Eve, because enmity means “total opposition”. Eve was already under the sway of Satan, due to her sin. No, this points forward to Mary, the new Eve — which is why Jesus (the new Adam) calls her “woman” in John’s Gospel. She is a powerful help to us in our own battle against the enemy.

O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee!



BONUS

MICHELANGELO'S PIETÀ

MIRACLES, MYSTERIES, & MARY

One of the most famous sculptures of the Blessed Virgin Mary is humbly tucked into a corner chapel in St. Peter's Basilica, Vatican City. Commonly crowded with pilgrims, the *Pietà* has the privilege of being the only work Michelangelo Buonarroti signed throughout his extensive career and, for 522 years, has served three different purposes in the public eye.

After four tumultuous years of war between Italy and the French monarchy, King Louis XII decided that amends needed to be made with the Holy See. While he arranged advantageous marriages and political appointments, he tasked his Rome-based Cardinal, Jean de Bilhères de Lagraulas, with a permanent union of another kind: an artistic peace offering restating France's allegiance to the Church.

The Cardinal commissioned 24-year-old Michelangelo, a new arrival from the recently dissolved Republic of Florence, to create a sculpture that precisely blended both cultures. The *Pietà* was just that: a French image with roots in the Middle Ages,

fashioned out of Italian marble and placed in the traditionally French chapel in St. Peter's Basilica, the Chapel of St. Petronilla. Unveiled just in time for the 1500 Jubilee Year, it served its purpose as an artistic unification – and that of a funerary monument for its commissioner.

The image is as surprisingly serene as it is heart-wrenching, but also invites feelings of hope and anticipation.

While its original location as a funerary detail is still debated, the image of the Madonna and her crucified Child is speculated to have been used to mark the cardinal's original resting place after his death in 1499. The *Pietà* served as a remembrance of the man who had asked for its creation.

Its third, perennial purpose, is simply providing a chance to meditate upon the Crucifixion's aftermath with a



Image credit:
Massimo Santi / Shutterstock.com

Michelangelo's *Pietà*
in St. Peter's Basilica.

focus on Mary; Mary, who had willingly mothered, raised, and faithfully followed Jesus through His life, ministry, and sacrifice on the Cross.

The *Pietà*'s name doubles as both "piety" and "pity" – in Latin and Italian, respectively. It evokes sorrow in its viewers, but the longer one gazes upon it, the more they are drawn to prayer. Even the Blessed Mother is the picture of tranquility, accepting of her Son's sacrifice as He lays in her arms; in her Fiat, Mary accepted whatever came for her family and her Son, even if His death was the sacrifice to redeem the world.

The image is as surprisingly serene as it is heart-wrenching, but also invites feelings of hope and anticipation.

Michelangelo masterfully created a piece where viewers may feel different emotions every time they view it, simply depending on the details they focus on. Often, viewers might feel several different emotions at once!

Over its years of study by artists and scholars, many intriguing details have emerged with accompanying questions. And while some of the finer details of Michelangelo's masterpiece may remain mysteries, it seems the perfect opportunity for viewers to make their own insights. After all, the events of Christ's life, death, and Resurrection are mysteries to us; perhaps Michelangelo intentionally kept some details for viewer interpretation.

Michelangelo's *Pietà*

Eucharistic Allusion: Mary's hands aren't touching the bare skin of Christ, thanks to some strategic draping. This is reminiscent of the Benediction ending Adoration, where the priest holds up the monstrance with a veil between his hands and the Body of Christ.

Trinitarian Shape: The overall shape of the sculpture is triangular, which gives it a harmonious symmetry and draws the eye to Mary's face. A trinitarian shape is also one that typically denotes completion or perfection.



Foreshadowing the Resurrection? Christ's right hand creates a fold in the fabric as if He's grabbing it. Was it simply a stylistic choice? Or was Michelangelo alluding to the Resurrection?

Mary is proportionally larger than Christ. This can be interpreted as being symbolic of just how much grace and stability, comfort and support the Blessed Mother provides for us.

CELEBRATE A YEAR WITH OUR LADY

MIRACLES, MYSTERIES, & MARY

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Amid the turmoil of World War I, Pope Benedict XV called upon Our Lady, Queen of Peace as a place for all to rest in times of unrest. The devotion welled up from the everyday people and communities, was perfectly timed for the conflict of the 1910s, and is one invocation we regularly return to, even today. Most recently, we called upon Mary, Queen of Peace in March 2022 with a new consecration of the world to her Immaculate Heart. Pope Francis renewed this ongoing consecration before a statue commissioned by his World War I predecessor: Ave Regina Pacis (“Hail, Queen of Peace”) in Santa Maria Maggiore, on Esquiline Hill in Rome.

Pope Benedict XV encouraged a great devotion to Our Lady and asking for peace in her Son from the beginning of his papacy in 1914 to the end in 1922. In 1918, he commissioned Roman sculptor Guido Galli to truly cement Queen of Peace for all to see. The completed project, a few years past a century old, exudes a poignant reminder for all who see it. The marble statue sits upon a multicolored throne and features four

important characters. The first is the Blessed Mother herself, her hand up in the universal call to cease or wait. She holds Jesus, the second character, Who seems mere seconds from dropping an olive branch – a timeless symbol of peace. But He seems to be waiting for something. And He isn’t the only one: The third character at the feet of Mary is a dove, which doubles as the Holy Spirit and a second sign of peace. The dove looks up at Our Lady from its spot by the viewer, wings spread, as if it, too, is waiting on her word.

We see, from standing... at the foot of the statue that all is on pause as Our Lady awaits our participation.

Our Lady looks down intently, from this sculpture full of almost-action, to the fourth character: the viewer. We see, from standing – or in the case of Pope Francis earlier this year, praying



Ave Regina Pacis "Hail, Queen of Peace" in Santa Maria Maggiore.

– at the foot of the statue that all is on pause as Our Lady awaits our participation.

Peace requires active participation. We must both ask for and actively take part in perpetuating it through prayer and action. The best way to do so is just as Ave Regina Pacis directs us: going humbly before God and His Mother, imploring them for assistance.

Peace is a long-standing desire, as told by this statue and the rising of

Queen of Peace from the everyday faithful. She is the bestower of the gift from God. Each day we have opportunity to pray for and strive for peace on any level – our families, our city, our world, or for one another. But change only begins when we ask for it, and to earnestly ask, we must first desire.

Each day, pray to desire the gift of peace deep in your heart – peace for our world, our country, our community and ourselves.

“Ave Regina Pacis” Statue

Guido Galli (1918) Located in St. Mary Major in Rome

The Child Jesus dangles an olive branch (a universal symbol for peace) as though He might drop it. Some theorize that this symbolizes Christ awaiting His Mother's permission to grant peace to the world.

A dove (another symbol of peace, but also of the Holy Spirit) gazes intently up at the olive branch.



AVE · REGINA · PACIS

Mary makes eye contact with the viewer on the ground – and her hand held high towards the viewer beckons attention.

This image is full of potential action – the dove waits to fly, Christ waits to drop the branch, and Mary waits for us to choose God and to choose peace.

Inscription: Ave Regina Pacis, “Hail, Queen of Peace”.



CELEBRATE A YEAR WITH OUR LADY

MIRACLES, MYSTERIES, & MARY



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