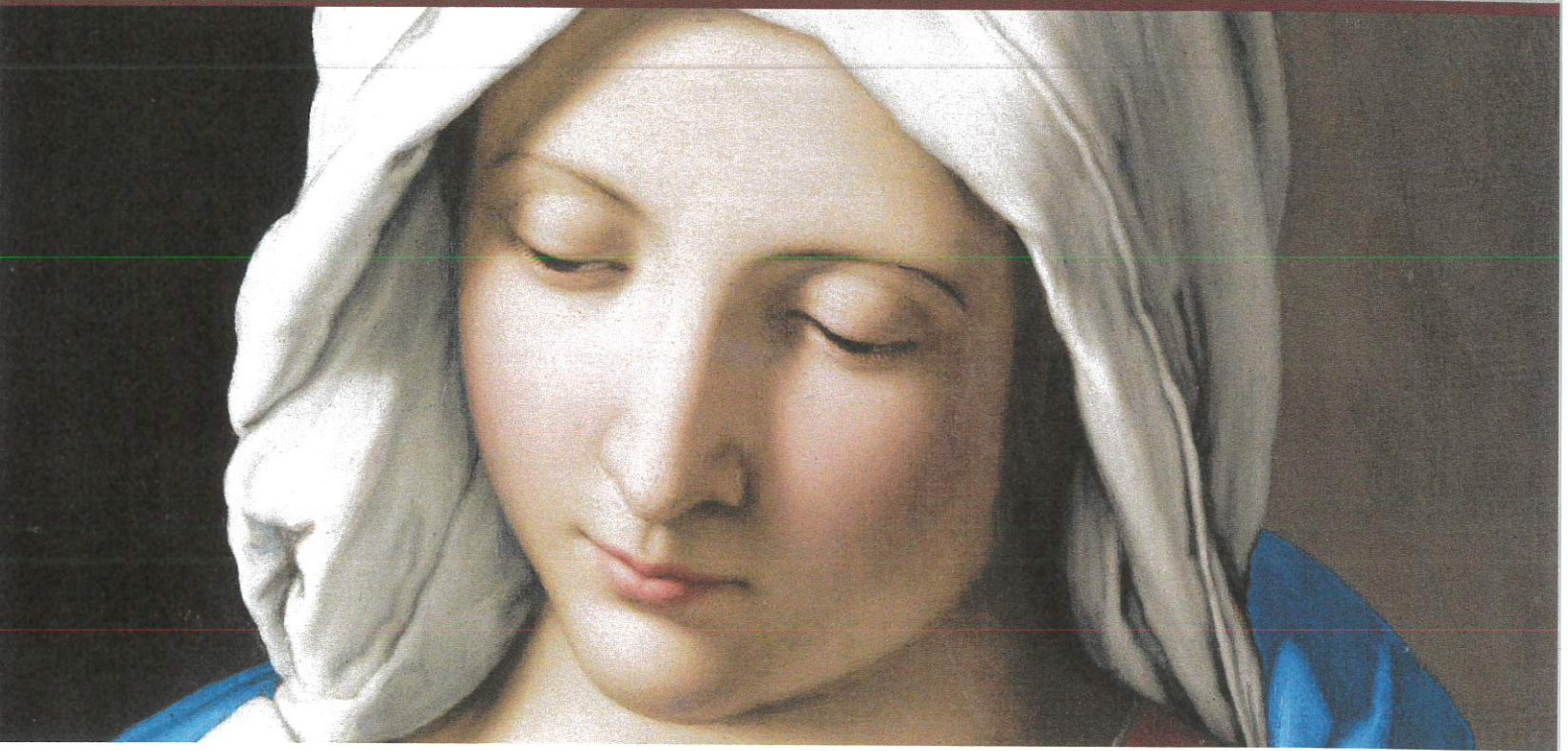




## SESSION 9

# Mary, the Mother of God



*Madonna at Prayer, Sassoferrato*

### SESSION OBJECTIVES

- To understand the figure of Mary, the Mother of God, and her role in salvation history
- To find in Mary the fulfillment of numerous Old Testament figures and prophecies
- To learn about Mary's motherhood, especially as seen in the story of Our Lady of Guadalupe
- To see how Mary always points to her divine Son, Jesus Christ

### STEP 1: Begin

#### OPENING PRAYER

Hail Mary, full of grace,  
the Lord is with thee.  
Blessed art thou amongst women  
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

Holy Mary, Mother of God,  
pray for us sinners,  
now and at the hour of our death.  
Amen.

— *The Hail Mary*

## INTRODUCTION

By her complete adherence to the Father's will, to his Son's redemptive work, and to every prompting of the Holy Spirit, the Virgin Mary is the Church's model of faith and charity. Thus she is a "preeminent and...wholly unique member of the Church"; indeed, she is the "exemplary realization" (typus) of the Church. (CCC 967, citing *Lumen gentium*, nos. 53 and 63)

Have you ever met someone who lives, breathes, and thinks a particular hobby or interest? If so, you know you probably won't walk away from a conversation with them without hearing about this passion. Mary's passion is Jesus Christ. Getting to know her will surely lead you to a more intimate knowledge of our Lord.

When Mary gave a wholehearted yes to God's plan, she showed her complete adherence to God's will. But her yes marked the beginning of a new life, throughout which "Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Luke 2:19). More than anyone else's life, Mary's life centered entirely on Jesus Christ, her Divine Son. He was constantly on her mind and ever-present in her heart. The more we get to know Mary, the more we will undoubtedly be drawn into her life's passion: her Son, Jesus.

As we discover Mary, we find ourselves asking who Mary is. And why do Catholics hold her in such a high and prominent place? How does the Old Testament help us to understand the figure of Mary and her role in salvation history? What does Mary's prayer, the Magnificat, teach us about the Mother of God and about the Christian life?

This session reflects on the mystery of Mary, the Mother of God. We consider her unique role in salvation history and the unique graces she was given to play her part in God's plan of redemption. All that Mary has and does is for the sake of her divine Son, Jesus Christ, bringing him into the world and into each and every human life. She, who gave an unreserved yes to being the mother of our Lord, continues to say yes to being our spiritual mother.

## STEP 2: Learn

### SETTING THE STAGE

In *La Crosse, Wisconsin*, the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe honors Mary, the Mother of God. By drawing attention to Mary under the title of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the shrine reminds us that Mary is the Mother of the Americas and the Star of the New Evangelization. Through prayer and sacrament, the shrine draws people closer to Jesus by placing before us Mary, our Mother, who points us towards her beloved Son and still says to us today, "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5).

Looking at Mary, how can we, her children, fail to let the aspiration to beauty, goodness, and purity of heart be aroused in us? Her heavenly candor draws us to God, helping us to overcome the temptation to live a mediocre life composed of compromises with evil, and directs us decisively towards the authentic good that is the source of joy.

— Benedict XVI, *Angelus Address*, December 8, 2005

Mothers occupy a central place in God's plan for human life, both our natural life and our life according to grace. God chose to redeem the world through a humble young woman who willingly became a mother: the natural mother of Jesus and, through him, the spiritual mother of each of his disciples. Does Mary's role make less of Jesus' gift of redemption? Is she an exception to the rule that all have sinned and stand in need of a redeemer? In this session, we will come to see that the more we learn about Mary and draw close to her, the better we will understand her divine Son, and the closer we will come to him.

**I. What is a mother? Consider one woman's remarkable place in our lives and in salvation history**

**II. Salvation History: The Annunciation was the most pivotal event in the history of mankind**

- A. We find Old Testament echoes
  - 1. Isaiah 7:14—a virgin will conceive and bear a son
  - 2. 2 Samuel 7—the throne of David will last forever
  - 3. Genesis 3—Mary begins to undo the knot of Eve's disobedience
- B. Mary has a singular grace that enables her to give God a wholehearted yes
- C. Mary's complete fidelity to God's will makes her the model for the Church and for our lives

**III. Pilgrimage: Mary, be a mother to us now**

- A. The wedding feast at Cana
  - 1. As an attentive mother, she notices a need and intervenes gently and persuasively
  - 2. She invites us to turn our gaze to her Son, Jesus: "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5)
- B. At the foot of the Cross
  - 1. The Cross reveals the meaning of: love one another as I have loved you "even as I have loved you ... love one another"
  - 2. To aid us in this challenge, Jesus gives us his mother, Mary, to be our mother as well
- C. The more we love Mary, as Jesus did, the more our hearts will rest in Jesus' Sacred Heart

**IV. Catechesis: Mary, Mother of the Church, continues to care for us**

- A. In 1531, Our Lady of Guadalupe appears for the first time to Saint Juan Diego
  - 1. This begins the most important moment in the evangelization of the Americas
  - 2. Mary says to Saint Juan Diego, "You are my ambassador"—these words apply to us, too

**V. *Lectio divina*: Luke 1:46–55, the Magnificat**

- A. Mary's greatness comes from God—humility acknowledges this
- B. God has great things in store for us—we acknowledge this with gratitude

## WORD MEANING:

# Immaculate Conception

The teaching, defined as a dogma, that explains Mary's unique redemption by Christ: from the first moment of her conception, she was preserved from the stain of Original Sin and was instead "full of grace" (Luke 1:28) so that she might be fittingly prepared to be the mother of the Divine Son of God.

The first thing which kindles ardor in learning is the greatness of the teacher. What is greater than the Mother of God? What more glorious than she whom Glory Itself chose?

— Saint Ambrose, *The Virgins*, II.2.7

## STEP 3: Engage

- 1) Consider the scene of the Annunciation, which is recounted in Luke's Gospel (Luke 1). The story brings to fulfillment many Old Testament stories and events. Which ones come to mind? What do these events suggest about Mary and her role? If the Old Testament is less familiar to you, what characteristics of a mother can you detect in the story of the Annunciation?

The video mentions a few Old Testament moments that come to fruition in the early chapters of Luke's Gospel: Genesis 3, Isaiah 7, and 2 Samuel 7. These are certainly fair game, and there is more to say about each. Beyond these, other Old Testament women can be instructive: Judith, Esther, Ruth, etc. Also, God inviting Moses to set his people free (Exod 3) has parallels to God inviting Mary to bring into the world the Messiah who will definitively set his people free. These various scenes, and others, highlight both the character of Mary, who has the virtues of each of these figures while also surpassing them, and her central role in salvation. God truly does great things through her. In addition to these Old Testament moments, the early chapters of Luke's Gospel also present some lovely characteristics that inform Mary's motherhood. Above all, Mary's receptivity to God's will informs her motherhood, part of which is modeling docility and faithfulness to the will of God. Her poise before the angel, her strength to embrace this lofty and challenging call, her generosity in going immediately to her kinswoman—these signs of strength and generosity also characterize Mary's motherhood and that of every mother. Finally, Mary's gratitude, exemplified in the Magnificat, sheds light on the profound gratitude every mother ought to feel before the gift of new life. These various characteristics teach us something about Mary's motherhood, motherhood in general, and the way of discipleship.

Leader

- 2) When we consider Mary's place in the Gospel, we find an interesting contrast: she does not appear often, but the moments when she does appear are always significant. What Gospel scenes can you recall involve Mary, and how are these scenes significant? What might this contrast teach us about Mary, and how might she lead us to Christ?

Leader

The discussion will ideally straddle the decisive role that Mary played in each scene and her humility, which puts God the Father and her Son, Jesus Christ, in first place. Mary's appearances in the Gospels almost always mark key points and central lessons. The Annunciation ushers in a marvelous new chapter in salvation history. The wedding at Cana presents Jesus' first public "sign," as the evangelist John calls it; Jesus begins to reveal his true identity as the divine Son of God, come to save the world from sin. At the Crucifixion, Jesus' love for us is fully revealed, and Mary is there; she witnesses his sacrifice, participates in it through her maternal suffering, and receives her role as mother of the beloved disciple and, through him, our mother as well. Her importance in the Gospel accounts is underscored by the Old Testament background and typology: from Eve to Judith to Bathsheba, etc. The book of Acts confirms Mary's central and ongoing role, placing her in the midst of the apostles at Pentecost. But Mary doesn't dominate these accounts by any stretch. She is there, powerfully present, but never in the spotlight. The greatness of her deeds is matched by the humility of her soul, and both point to her Son, Jesus, as her merciful redeemer and ours. Mary is always the woman of the Magnificat: because her soul magnifies the Lord (see Luke 1:46), so too does her entire life. Although this might seem like a paradox, this lesson is relevant to every Christian life: to live the Christian life is a great and noble thing, only possible through God's gift, which must be received with humility. We strive to imitate Christ, and in our moments of success, we thank him for the great work he is doing in us.

- 3) Our Lady of Guadalupe has been called the Star of the New Evangelization. When she appears to Saint Juan Diego, she tells him that he is to be an ambassador of Our Lady and of her Divine Son. Why is being an ambassador of Mary not opposed to being an ambassador of Jesus? Why does it instead lead to it?

Leader

For many, the idea of being an ambassador of Our Lady might be foreign or even challenging. Building on the last question, the conversation should focus on the centrality of Mary's role and her humility in accepting and carrying it out. Mary always points to Christ because her mission was, and remains, to bring Christ into the world so that we can encounter him. In fact, if an ambassador represents the one who sends him or her, then we cannot truly be Mary's ambassador if we don't point others to Christ. If we fail to exalt Christ, we do not truly represent Mary. Beyond this point, it might be helpful to discuss how Mary's appearance at Guadalupe was helpful in that specific context, and the reason some people and cultures might come to Christ more quickly through Mary rather than apart from her.

## STEP 4: Conclude

Mary treasured and pondered the mysteries of salvation, which led to her constant devotion to God's will. She brought Christ into the world and ushered in the time of salvation for all Christians. Thus, she is the model disciple, the prototype of the Church. We are invited to accept her and to love her as our mother. As we draw close to her, we will find her precious words ever more deeply impressed upon our hearts: "Let it be to me according to your word. ... My soul magnifies the Lord. ... Do whatever he tells you."



Queen of Angels, Bouguereau

### CLOSING PRAYER

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary,  
that never was it known  
that anyone who fled to thy protection,  
implored thy help, or sought thy intercession  
was left unaided.

Inspired by this confidence, I fly unto thee,  
O Virgin of virgins, my mother.

To thee do I come, before thee I stand,  
sinful and sorrowful.

O Mother of the Word Incarnate,  
despise not my petitions,  
but in thy mercy hear and answer me.

Amen.

— *The Memorare (based on a Marian prayer from the third century)*

### MEMORY VERSE

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in  
God my Savior, for he has regarded the low estate of  
his handmaiden. For behold, henceforth all generations  
will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great  
things for me, and holy is his name.

—LUKE 1:46-49

### CALL TO CONVERSION

To become more like Christ, we must meditate frequently and deeply on his life. When we place the words and deeds of the Lord before us, our lives are shaped by them more and more through charity. Praying the Rosary is a powerful aid in our efforts to conform our lives to Christ. Why is this?

The Rosary is a venerable and fruitful prayer that, in its essence, is an extended meditation on the central mysteries of Christ's life. Traditionally, an entire Rosary included three sets of Mysteries: the Joyful, the Sorrowful, and the Glorious Mysteries. The Joyful Mysteries run from the Annunciation to the Finding of Jesus in the Temple; the Sorrowful Mysteries cover the Agony in the Garden through the Crucifixion; and the Glorious Mysteries take us through the Resurrection and up to Mary's Assumption and Crowning as Queen of Heaven and Earth. In 2002, Pope Saint John Paul II added another set of mysteries—the Luminous—to emphasize the Christocentric character of the Rosary by contemplating the public ministry of Christ, from the Baptism in the Jordan to the Institution of the Eucharist.

The Rosary is a meditation on Christ's life, but it has a Marian character. We ask for Mary's intercession to help us pray well and to encounter Christ in this prayer. Not only that, but we pray alongside Mary, walking with her through these mysteries of salvation and striving to imitate her fidelity, generosity, and charity. The repetition of the Hail Mary throughout the Rosary indicates our closeness to Mary. But even the Hail Mary centers on Jesus: in the original Latin, the word "Jesus" is placed in the very center of the prayer, with fifteen words before it and fifteen after it. Even in these most Marian prayers, we are never far from Christ; on the contrary, we are focused on him, just as Mary was.

Consider your attitude toward the Rosary. Is it easy to embrace this prayer? Challenging? If challenging, what presents an obstacle? Ask the Lord to give you an open heart toward the Rosary, and then make an effort to add it to your daily prayer routine—whether just a few of the Rosary's Mysteries or the whole prayer. Regularly praying the Rosary is one of the most consistent counsels the Church and the saints give us, because of its special Marian ability to draw us close to Mary's Son.



*Our Lady of the Rosary,  
Charles Chambers*

## TREASURES FROM TRADITION

Look to the star of the sea, call upon Mary. ... In danger, in distress, in doubt, think of Mary, call upon Mary. May her name never be far from your lips, or far from your heart. ... If you follow her, you will not stray; if you pray to her, you will not despair; if you turn your thoughts to her, you will not err. If she holds you, you will not fall; if she protects you, you need not fear; if she is your guide, you will not tire; if she is gracious to you, you will surely reach your destination.

— Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, “In Praise of the Virgin Mother,” Sermon 2, 17

In ordinary human life, calling upon our mothers typically comes naturally. But in the order of grace, we can encounter a learning curve when it comes to calling upon Mary as our spiritual mother. In his homily, Saint Bernard reminds us of the value of cultivating this habit and growing in affection for our Blessed Mother.

No one would have loved Mary more than her Son, Jesus. But sometimes we forget about the ordinary ways of affection and tenderness between a child and a mother. What would this affection have looked like between Jesus and Mary? We might think of a toddler beaming with pride under his mother's loving gaze. Perhaps our thoughts turn to eyes large and glistening with tears, looking up into a mother's face as she tends to a wound. Or again, consider the love and gratitude expressed at a momentous occasion like a graduation. What affection and love our Lord must have for his Immaculate Mother!

Affection draws us toward Mary and makes it easier, and more natural, to call upon her. Ask



*Our Lady of Humility, Lippo di Dalmazio*

yourself how you can cultivate greater affection for Mary. Ask Jesus how he would like you to show love and affection for his mother. Maybe you can talk to her more often; maybe you can bring flowers to honor her in a church; maybe you can add a simple Hail Mary to your daily prayers. Whatever route you take, have confidence that as you call upon Mary, she will always be ready to respond with a mother's tender love.

## FOR FURTHER READING

Matthew 1, Luke 1–2, and John 19

*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 487–507 and 963–972

Pope Saint John Paul II, encyclical letter, *Redemptoris mater*

Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, nos. 52–68