



Praying at Home with
THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

INTRODUCTION

Over the last few weeks we have had to shape the routines of our daily lives as never before. We have been isolated from family and friends; we have been fearful for those who are sick and for those who are dying; we have shared in the sorrow and bereavement of the loved ones of those who have died. All this we do in and through our faith, though at a time when our churches are closed and we are cut off from active participation in the Sacraments.

But through our faith and in our prayers we are never separated from God or from one another. We receive the grace of the Sacraments in our Spiritual Communion and our acts of Contrition as we promise to renew those personally in church in the Sacrament of Confession as soon as we are able. Moreover, we are supported and joined in our daily worship by the Saints who are now with God in glory.

Our Lady knew very well so much of what we are now experiencing and still trusted that God would bring good out of evil. She supports us with her prayers; she renews our faith in God's love and care; she shares our anxiety and our sorrows. I hope that this booklet will help all of us to have her by our side during the month of May, which so intimately joins us with her in prayer.

I am very grateful to the other clergy on the Executive of the Society of Mary for their help in producing these reflections and prayers and to Tom Middleton, whose idea it was. We share in the joys and sufferings of Mary's life, we pray with her at the foot of the Cross of Jesus and we are also filled with hope, alongside her, as we receive the gifts God shares with each of us.

With my love and prayers,

Fr Graeme Rowlands

Chaplain General of the Society of Mary

TRUST IN GOD

Fr Jonathan Beswick



Scripture Reading

Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.” And

Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

St Luke 1. 34-38

Reflection

Throughout Holy Scripture we encounter men, women and children who were called upon to place their trust in God, often in difficult or costly situations. Their actions make perfect sense to us now, because we have the advantage of knowing how each of the stories finishes: but at the time the various characters must have seemed crazy to those around them.

Think of Noah: who would build a great big ship in the middle of a desert and load their family and animals on board? Crazy! Until a flood comes along....Think of Abraham: who would take their

son up the mountainside to offer him to God in sacrifice? *Heartless* and crazy! Until God provides a ram for the sacrifice and then makes Abraham the father of nations. Think of Moses: who would lead their people out of danger to the edge of a great sea, without having a plan for crossing it? Madness! Until the Lord parts the waters for the Israelites to pass through, and closes them again over the heads of their pursuing enemies. And think of Mary: who, in their right mind, would listen to an angel bringing a message from God about becoming the mother of his Son? What about her reputation? What would her family think? What about their friends? We know how the story ends: in the wonder and joy of the empty tomb and the risen Lord Jesus, and then with Mary and the Apostles praying in the Upper Room at Pentecost. But who could have guessed that when the Archangel Gabriel disappeared after delivering his first message? Who could have guessed that at 3 o'clock in the afternoon on the first Good Friday?

As Mary gradually gathered the clues of what lay ahead for her and her child we are told that she “kept all these things and pondered them in her heart” (*St Luke 2.19*). Although she didn't know how the story would finish, day by day she placed her trust in God and in his word to her, and so the beauty of the Gospel of Jesus Christ unfolded around her.

Mary, above all others, has been the example to Christians of how we are each called to do likewise: whoever we are, whatever our life story or life stage. God calls us to trust in his purposes for us and for the world in which he has set us. There is so much uncertainty at the moment, with the daily news full of doom, gloom and rival versions of the best means for us to come through the crisis of coronavirus: in amongst it all, God is still at work and calling us to remain faithful in our changed lives of Christian faith and service. May Mary lead us onwards with her prayers and example.

Prayer

Holy Mary, Mother of my Lord,
in giving birth you remained a virgin,
in falling asleep you did not abandon the world:
rather you passed over into life,
for you are the Mother of Life itself.
You trusted in God's Word to you and became his handmaiden.
Watch over me, together with all your children,
as we call to you in our hour of need.
Help us to trust in the hidden purposes of God in our lives
and to see his hand at work around us each day.
We ask this through your Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

GRIEF AND BEREAVEMENT

Fr Sam McNally-Cross



The Iris, also called the *Fleur de Lis* or *sword lily* symbolizes Mary's sorrow and the sword that pierces her heart

Scripture Reading

Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

St John 19. 25-27

Reflection

Mary stood at the foot of the Cross and lifted her eyes to behold the image of her beloved son, Jesus. His body was beaten, tarnished by torture and now painfully pinned to that wood. As tears filled her eyes and rolled down her cheeks, the words that she heard so long before, the words of the Prophet Simeon in the temple - that a sword would pierce her own soul too - had now, she realised, come to fruition as his death, although bringing salvation to all, also brought grief to many, and to her especially.

Many who look upon Christian faith from the outside may be forgiven for thinking that the purpose of our faith is to live a good life, to be good. But an important part of what we believe is to have a good death - to prepare ourselves for what we know will come to each one of us at the end of our earthly life, however that may be.

Preparing for death is not something that is given too much attention, but it is wise for us to ponder it and make ready - not just practically but spiritually. Mary was given foresight by Simeon of what would occur to her child - that she would experience the most unnatural of orders - of a mother burying their son - and her experience of this means she is able to be a companion for us as we grieve during any bereavement.

As Mary stood at the foot of the cross in her own grief, so she stands with us in ours. When we are in pain, be it emotional or physical, no matter our age I am sure we have all wanted our mother to be with us. As Jesus said to the beloved apostle John, 'Behold your Mother'. He has given his own mother to us, to care for us and love us. Her experience of motherhood and grief, mingled in the suffering she experienced, provides us with a powerful intercessor in the face of death. As Jesus also said to Our Lady, 'Behold your son', he has given us to her too, and she is faithful to his command and her call, to love us and pray for us.

Grief turns our world upside down, all that we knew and loved and clung to is stripped away and a new 'normal' is born in the midst of great sorrow. Bereavement brings changes that we do not want and did not ask for - and, of course, the most common feeling is one of loneliness. Mary's example of grieving shows us a way to navigate this bewildering path. She is taken into the home of John, she is present at the gatherings of the Apostles, she is around those who loved Jesus closest and best. With them and for them she embodies the story of the Passion and, most importantly, the story of his life, from all those memories and moments that S. Luke says she treasured in her heart.

We are a people of stories: it is how our faith is taught, how holy lives are passed on and how our own salvation is proclaimed. In the death of our loved ones we may, through the pain of loss, not want to relive moments that remind us of their absence: but our

telling of those stories is a part of our eternal life. They live on in heaven with Christ; they live on earth in the hearts, minds and from the mouths of those who love them. Mary opens the treasury and pours out those memories she had preciousy stored.

Maximus the Confessor, in his writing 'The Life of the Virgin Mary' tells of her part in the story of the Passion, and also imagines Our Lady as a witness to the Resurrection. He writes that she was 'seized by love' and became inseparable from the tomb where the body lay. It is hard to imagine the devoted mother, who cradled her babe in the manger and held his body after His death on the cross would not be there at his grave also.

In this imagined scenario, Mary teaches us the importance of place - the connectedness of special places with special people - and her presence at the tomb of her Son is both for her a comfort and an act of devotion. Although the heart of our loved one may beat no longer, her Immaculate Heart beats for us and for all her children, as we grieve and mourn.

Our Lady of Sorrows, who shares our suffering, teach us enduring love and pray for us.

Prayer

Mary our Mother, who stood by the Cross of your Son and shared in his sufferings, pray for us that we have the strength and compassion we need to support all your children who need that comfort and love. We praise you for your faith, by which you accepted all that God had planned for you. We praise you for your hope which trusted that God would bring good out of evil. We praise you for your love, in bearing with Jesus the sorrows of his Passion.

Mother of God, stand by us in our trials and care for us in our needs: pray for us now, and at the hour of our death. Amen.

HOPEFUL ENDURANCE

Fr Graeme Rowlands



[FLOWER OF LILY.]

The Venerable Bede says that the whiteness of the petals of the Lily represent the physical purity of Our Lady, and the golden anthers the radiant light of her soul.

Scripture Reading

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

Acts 1. 12-14

Reflection

Mary prayed with the Apostles as they waited for the day of Pentecost. We have the benefit of hindsight, but it is important for us to remember that they did not know what would happen, how the Holy Spirit promised by Jesus would actually come or how long they would have to wait. So they simply carried out the Lord's command to pray and to wait. Waiting is sometimes a long and tedious process – waiting in the rain for a bus to come, waiting for a friend to turn up – the longer it goes on, the more irritated or anxious we become. Waiting can sometimes be a time of worrying that our worst fears will not become true, as when waiting for news of someone who is seriously ill. Waiting can, of course, be a time of expectation and hope. We are waiting now to

find out when and how our social isolation will end. But however it feels, however long it goes on, we need to remember that we are not doing this on our own. God is with us and, in his providence, he will sort it out. Mary will pray with us if we ask her to do so, as she was there in the upper room to support those frightened Apostles who still could not find the courage or the words to make sense of what they had seen and heard.

They joined in prayer with the rest of the tiny Christian community 'with the women...and his brothers' who could not actually be with them nor make contact with them. There were no means of communication apart from seeing someone and speaking to them. They could not send a letter, let alone an e-mail; they could not telephone them to ask how things were! But they were still together as they prayed and their communion with God brought them into communion with one another. We are, at the moment, having to discover new ways of praying together and fresh insights into how we can share in the Sacraments. It is very easy to feel isolated and alone, to lose the momentum and the zeal for the routines we have established in our prayers as we unite them with the daily offering of the Mass. Our endurance in this time must be filled with hope, just as it was for those separated members of the community, knowing that we are praying with Mary and the Apostles.

It was because they had prayed together and through the Holy Spirit which they had received that they were able to bear witness to their faith. One of the more remarkable consequences of the present troubles during the pandemic has been the coming together of little local communities for mutual support and care for those who particularly need it. After the initial extreme reaction of fear and wanting to be in control, during which all the supermarket shelves were stripped bare, even in London, even in my parish, the locals have formed themselves into small neighbourhood groups to help one another and anybody who is

particularly isolated. They have spoken to their neighbours for the first time; they have discovered what they are like, what they do; they are ready to give anything to help; they have started to pray more often, even at all. We need to ask Our Lady to pray with us now, that what we have learned and received and experienced will not be lost, as and when we return to 'normal' life. We need also to ask her to teach us what is essential in our lives and to show us how to witness more effectively to the faith we share as we play our part in building up those communities.

Prayer of S. John Paul II to Our Lady of Lourdes

Hail Mary, lowly handmaid of the Lord, glorious Mother of Christ!

Faithful Virgin, holy dwelling-place of the Word:
teach us to persevere in listening to the Word,
and to be docile to the voice of the Spirit,
attentive to his promptings in the depths of our conscience,
and to what he shows us in the events of history.

Hail Mary, woman of sorrows, Mother of the living!
Virgin spouse beneath the Cross, the new Eve,
be our guide along the paths of the world.
Teach us to experience and to spread the love of Christ,
to stand with you before the innumerable crosses
on which your Son is still crucified.

Hail Mary, woman of faith, first of the disciples!
Virgin Mother of the Church,
help us always to account for the hope that is in us,
with trust in human goodness and the Father's love.
Teach us to build up the world beginning from within:
in the depths of silence and prayer, in the joy of fraternal love,
in the unique fruitfulness of the Cross.

Holy Mary, Mother of us all, pray for us. Amen.

ANXIETY

Fr Simon Morris



Lily-of-the-valley is known as *Our Lady's Tears*, because it is said to have grown where she wept

Scripture Reading

After three days they found Jesus in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers. And when His parents saw Him, they were astonished. And His mother said to Him, “Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress.” And He said to them, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?”

St Luke 2. 46-49

Reflection

Even Mary did not know where Jesus was on this occasion and she was distressed. The basis of so much anxiety is uncertainty, feeling that we don't know whatever it is we want to know. There will always be things we don't know: that's part of human existence. We are not yet perfect and are constantly becoming. That process necessitates uncertainty. Thus we see Jesus reminding the disciples that information about the end of the world is not to be known by them (Acts 1:7). We can't worry about everything we don't know or we really would be in trouble!

A great tonic can be to focus on that which we do know. At the very least, it re-introduces into our consciousness the difference between the two: there are some things we do know and others we don't. We then have a choice on what we will focus on. Will we listen to God's promises, which we know to be true? Or will we listen to our fears, which could be a million miles away from reality? Sometimes when we are anxious about a decision it can be useful to be specific about what the worst case scenario is, not so as to focus on it, but because often even that wouldn't be too bad.

Breathing exercises are often said to be good for combating panic. 'In through the nose, out through the mouth,' I've found myself saying to people on different occasions. Undoubtedly it calms our bodies but it also helps us to focus on that which is real: we have been given life by God who therefore loves us, giving us free choice, the graces to make good decisions and the promise of redemption if we sin and confess those sins in penitence. All this is true and contains all we need to know. We know Mary focuses on what's important because St Luke tells us, 'Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.'

During the pandemic of recent times, our routines have been obliterated. I even found myself reading Dickens' *Little Dorrit* and wondering how all these characters could be travelling around and meeting up together, given the social distancing rules. The normality of lock down seemed all that could be real. Human beings are meant to have habits and routines: the good ones see us through crises, the bad ones are hard to kick. Mary and Joseph lose their Son on this journey, which is part of their annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Men and women travelled separately and so it is easy to see how each parent could have thought Jesus was with the other.

Often when we go places we know, we will have particular places we stop, particular food we take with us. For me, a pilgrimage to

Walsingham seems odd without a stop at the Stansted Services. The Holy Family's routine on this pilgrimage has been disrupted and it unnerves them. Let's be sure that we have habits, a rule of life, on which to anchor our life. How much do you give to the Church each month? When will you pray? When will you say the rosary? Don't leave these things to chance: have a rule of life, which will doubtless reduce anxiety. Start planning now what your devotional life will look like when lock down ends.

Prayer to reassure us of the efficacy of Mary's prayers for us, the *Memorare*

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary,
that never was it known that anyone who fled to your
protection, implored your help,
or sought your intercession, was left unaided.
Inspired by this confidence, I fly unto you,
O Virgin of virgins, my Mother.
To you do I come, before you I stand, sinful and sorrowful.
O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions,
but in your mercy, hear and answer me. Amen.

HEALING

Fr Philip Barnes



The marigold, known as *Mary's Gold* was used in a medieval medicine to ward off the plague. The gold of the flower symbolizes Mary's glory and place in heaven with the saints.

Scripture Reading

And Mary said,
“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.

For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant

Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring for ever.”

And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.

St Luke 1. 47-56

Reflection

After Mary greets her cousin Elizabeth she sings of the mercy of God. God's mercy is 'from generation to generation' she proclaims, and it comes to the aid of his people. What Mary *knows*

is that through the child she is bearing something is happening which will transform the world for ever. God is joining himself to humanity in a bond that can never be broken, and her Son, both God and man, will show to all people the intensity and immediacy of God's love.

That's one of the reasons why Our Lady is a companion when we pray for healing. She shows us that in Jesus God is with us as mercy and love, and that we are made for life with him. That's one of the reasons too why the Shrines of Mary are often associated with prayer for wholeness and healing. Think for a moment of our own Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham, and of the image in the Holy House. Mary holds her Divine Son on her lap but her eyes are turned towards us. She *sees* us, our needs, our anxieties, our prayer for those who are sick with this terrible virus. She sees us, and she opens her heart to God, praying that we will know what she *knows*, his mercy; and that like her, we too will know ourselves to be filled with God's grace.

For when we pray for healing we are praying that we may be filled with the life of God, that we might be changed, that we might be refreshed by the Spirit of life, and that sickness won't set a ceiling on our growth towards God. We might receive a simple answer to that prayer through a burden being lifted, a healing in our body made. But there are other ways we can understand healing. It could be that the healing gift we find is the freedom to inhabit a body which is mortal, limited, pained in all sorts of ways: discovering that this too is a place God through the Spirit inhabits and renews.

As you pray for healing know that the eyes of Our Lady are upon you, and that her hands and her heart are turned towards God for you. Ask her to pray that you may experience in your need the mercy of God, that with her you too may praise and magnify his holy name.

A Prayer from the Shrine at Lourdes

Mary, because you are the smile of God, the reflection of the light of Christ, the home of the Holy Spirit, because you chose Bernadette in her poverty, because you are the morning star, the door to heaven and the first resurrected being, we pray to you and entrust our lives to you at a time when so many men and women fear for their health. Assist the sick and the nursing staff, welcome those who have died and comfort their families.

Hail Mary...

Prayer to Our Lady of Walsingham

O Mary, recall the solemn moment when Jesus, your divine Son, dying on the cross confided us to your maternal care. You are our Mother; we desire ever to remain your devout children. Let us therefore feel the effects of your powerful intercession with Jesus Christ. Make your name again glorious in the Shrine at Walsingham, once renowned throughout our land by your visits, favours and many miracles.

Pray, O Holy Mother of God, for the conversion of England, restoration of the sick, consolation for the afflicted, repentance of sinners, peace to the departed. O Blessed Mary, Mother of God, Our Lady of Walsingham, intercede for us. Amen.

O Lord God, Word incarnate, Jesus of Nazareth, have mercy upon us.

The Sub Tuum Praesidium

The Church's oldest prayer to Our Lady, written after the Council of Ephesus in 431

Mother of God we fly to you, our shade and shelter on our pilgrim's way. Look kindly on our prayers, and turn not from us in our time of need. But free us from the dangers that beset us radiant and holy Virgin.

EXILE

Bishop Robert Ladds – *Superior General*



The pale blue flowers of *Rosemary* are said to have taken their colour from Our Lady's veil when she spread it over this bush. Legend also says that the plant provided shelter to the Holy Family during the flight into Egypt.

Scripture Reading

Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son."

St Matthew 2. 13-15

Reflection

From the moment of the Annunciation the life of Our Lady and S. Joseph changed, had been full of the unexpected and unimaginable. With S. Gabriel's *Ave*, this time of change gave us the cosmic *Fiat* of Our Lady; the inspiring words of Mary's Magnificat at the Visitation; the quiet wonder of the Birth of our Saviour at Bethlehem; and the glory of Christ's revealing at the Epiphany.

For the Holy Family then comes the urgent need to uproot. They must go into exile, leave behind all that is certain, familiar and predictable, and go forward into a time of uncertainty.

Like any human family, the Holy Family went into the unknown experiencing fear, dread and the loss of certainties. They left behind friends, family, livelihood and community. They had lost all those things that give shape and meaning to all our lives. But they had not lost the presence of God.

In all these things, the Holy Family was strong in Faith, Hope and Love. Their sufficiency God's Grace in obedience to His Will.

Faith enabled Our Lady's "Yes"; in Hope S Joseph undertook the care of the Mary and the Christ Child; Love inspired S Elizabeth and the unborn John to recognise the Word made flesh. In obedience shepherds responded to the Angelic Message and Magi to the following of a Star.

The God-given gifts that sustained the Holy Family in their exile in Egypt can be ours too.

The Salve Regina is among the most important Marian Devotion. "Poor banished children"; "Vale of tears", "this our exile" are phrases within the Prayer that join us with the experience of the Holy Family as their Flight into Egypt takes them into Exile. The Blessed Mother, Holy Joseph and the Lord Jesus go before us and go with us in all our ways.

The Salve Regina

Hail, holy Queen, Mother of Mercy,
Hail our life, our sweetness and our hope.
To thee do we cry, Poor banished children of Eve;
To thee do we send up our sighs,
Mourning and weeping in this vale of tears.
Turn then, most gracious advocate,
Thine eyes of mercy toward us;
And after this our exile,
Show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.

Ÿ Pray for us, O holy Mother of God,
R̄ That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Lord Jesus, Son of Mary and ward of S. Joseph,
as an infant you were made an exile;
you fled to Egypt with your Blessed Mother and Holy Joseph.
With your family you knew vulnerability in a foreign land,
seeking shelter and sustenance.

Be with me and all I love in these times of doubt, loss and fear;
give us understanding of others who must cross borders,
flee for safety and plead for support.

Give to us a heart of compassion, the grace of humane
response, and respect for the dignity of all.

For the sake of your Holy Name. Amen

Holy S. Joseph, protector of the Child Jesus,
whose protection is so great and strong;
whose intercession so powerful before the throne of God;
I place before you all my needs and intentions.
Assist me by your prayers and gain for me from your divine Son
all spiritual blessings and the gift of His everlasting life
Protect me Holy Joseph, as you protected the Christ Child,
that I may overcome the trials of this world and, in the joy of life
eternal, offer thanksgiving and homage to Christ,
in whose Name I pray. Amen