



A YEAR
WITH
MARY

DAILY MEDITATIONS
ON THE
MOTHER OF GOD

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CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA



A YEAR WITH MARY

The Daily Readings

Of Mary, there is never enough!

St. Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort was one of the Church's greatest promoters of devotion to Our Lady. To those who would suggest that Mary should not have a prominent role in Christian faith and practice, he responds that we can never say enough about her.



Every day from one end of the earth to the other, in the highest heights of the heavens and in the profoundest depths of the abysses, everything preaches, everything publishes, the admirable Mary! The nine choirs of angels, men of all ages, sexes, conditions and religions, the good and the bad—even the demons themselves, willingly or unwillingly—are compelled by the force of truth to call her “blessed.”

St. Bonaventure tells us that all the angels in heaven cry out incessantly to her: “Holy, holy, holy, Mother of God and Virgin”; and that they offer to her, millions and millions of times a day, the angelical salutation, *Ave Maria*, prostrating themselves before her, and begging of her in her graciousness to honor them with some of her commands. Even St. Michael, as St. Augustine says, although the prince of the heavenly court, is the most zealous in honoring her and causing her to be honored.

The whole earth is full of her glory, especially among Christians, by whom she is taken as the protector of many kingdoms, provinces, dioceses, and cities. Many cathedrals are consecrated to God under her name. There is not a church without an altar in her honor, not a country nor a canton where there are not some miraculous images of her.

After that, we must cry out with the saints: “*De Maria numquam satis*”—“Of Mary, there is never enough!”

—St. Louis de Montfort, *True Devotion to Mary*

IN GOD'S PRESENCE, CONSIDER . . .

Is devotion to Jesus' mother a part of my devotion to Jesus? Have I considered how her unique role in the world's salvation deserves my gratitude and praise?

CLOSING PRAYER

From a prayer of St. Alphonsus Liguori: *I love you, Mary, my Mother, and I wish I could speak with a thousand tongues, so that all might know your greatness, your holiness, your mercy, and the love with which you love all those who love you.*

Mary takes us to Jesus

St. Louis de Montfort assures us that devotion to Mary is not a distraction from devotion to Jesus. Nor does he consider his mother a rival whose honor somehow detracts from his own.



If we're establishing sound devotion to our Blessed Lady, it's only in order to establish devotion to our Lord more perfectly, by providing a smooth but certain way of reaching Jesus Christ. If devotion to Our Lady distracted us from our Lord, we'd have to reject it as an illusion of the Devil. But this is far from being the case. This devotion is necessary, simply and solely because it's a way of reaching Jesus perfectly, loving him tenderly, and serving him faithfully.

Here I turn to you for a moment, dear Jesus, to complain lovingly to your divine Majesty that the majority of Christians, and even some of the most learned among them, fail to recognize the necessary bond that unites you and your Blessed Mother. Lord, you are always with Mary, and Mary is always with you. She can never be without you, because then she would cease to be what she is.

Dear Jesus, would it please you if we were to make no effort to give pleasure to your mother because we're afraid of offending you? Does devotion to your holy mother hinder devotion to you? Does Mary keep for herself any honor we pay her?

Is she a rival of yours? Is she a stranger having no kinship with you? Does pleasing her imply displeasing you? Does giving ourselves to her constitute a deprivation for you? Is love for her a lessening of our love for you?

Keep me from this way of thinking and acting, and let me share your feelings of gratitude, esteem, respect, and love for your holy mother. I can then love and glorify you all the more, because I'll be imitating and following you more closely.

—St. Louis de Montfort, *True Devotion to Mary*

IN GOD'S PRESENCE, CONSIDER . . .

Do any of my family members or friends claim that devotion to Mary dishonors Jesus? How might these insights help me make a reasonable reply to that claim?

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, thank you for giving us your Blessed Mother to be our mother. Holy Mary, thank you for always leading us to your divine Son.

Prayer to Mary is good and right

St. Alphonsus Liguori, one of the great Marian theologians, notes that it's an article of the Catholic faith that we can and should call on Mary and the other saints to pray for us. And it's only reasonable to do so.



It's not only lawful but beneficial to invoke and pray to the saints—and more especially to the queen of saints, the most holy and ever-blessed Virgin Mary—so that they may obtain for us God's grace. This is an article of faith. It has been defined by ecumenical councils, against heretics who condemned it as injurious to Jesus Christ, who is our only Mediator. But if the prophet Jeremiah after his death prayed for Jerusalem (see 2 Mc 15:14); if the elders in the Book of Revelation presented the prayers of the saints to God (see Rv 6:8); if St. Peter promises his disciples that after his death he will be mindful of them (see 2 Pt 1:15); if holy Stephen prays for his persecutors (see Acts 7:59); if St. Paul prays for his companions (see Acts 27:24; Eph 2:16; Phil 1:4; Col 1:3)—in short, if the saints can pray for us, why can't we ask the saints to intercede for us? St. Paul recommends himself to the prayers of his disciples: “Brethren, pray for us” (1 Th 5:25). St. James exhorts us to pray one for another: “Pray one for another, that you may be healed” (Jas 5:16). So we can do the same.

No one denies that Jesus Christ is our only mediator of justice, and that he by his merits has obtained our reconciliation with God. But, on the other hand, it is impious to assert that God is not pleased to grant graces at the intercession of his saints, and more especially of Mary his mother, whom Jesus desires so much to see loved and honored by all.

Who can pretend that the honor bestowed on a mother doesn't redound to the honor of the son? For this reason St. Bernard says, “We must not imagine that we obscure the glory of the Son by the great praise we lavish on the mother; for the more she is honored, the greater is the glory of her Son.”

—St. Alphonsus Liguori, *The Glories of Mary*

IN GOD'S PRESENCE, CONSIDER . . .

Has anyone ever tried to convince me not to ask Mary or the other saints to pray for me? How might St. Alphonsus' insights help me respond convincingly?

CLOSING PRAYER

From the “Litany of the Saints”: *All you holy, righteous, and chosen ones of God, pray for us!*

Mary's hymn of praise to God

The longest quote from Jesus' mother was recorded in St. Luke's Gospel: a hymn of praise to God, inspired by her encounter with her kinswoman St. Elizabeth.



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.
 And his mercy is on those who fear him
 from generation to generation.
 He has shown strength with his arm,
 he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts,
 he has put down the mighty from their thrones,
 and exalted those of low degree;
 he has filled the hungry with good things,
 and the rich he has sent empty away.
 He has helped his servant Israel,
 in remembrance of his mercy,
 as he spoke to our fathers,
 to Abraham and to his posterity for ever.

—The Blessed Virgin Mary, *Luke 1:46–55*

IN GOD'S PRESENCE, CONSIDER . . .

When I consider myself honestly, which category in Our Lady's hymn am I more likely to fit: those who are proud, mighty, rich? Or those who fear God, those who are lowly, those who are hungry?

CLOSING PRAYER

Blessed Mother of my Lord, help me to humble myself before God so that he can lift me up again in mercy. Teach me by your example to hunger for righteousness, so that I can be filled.

“All generations will call me blessed!”

St. Alphonsus invites us to be among those whom Mary prophesied would call her blessed down through the generations.



How many who were once proud have become humble by devotion to Mary! How many who were ruled by passion have become restrained! How many in the midst of darkness have found light! How many who were in despair have found confidence! How many who were lost have found salvation by the same powerful means! All this, Mary clearly foretold in the house of Elizabeth, in her own sublime canticle: “Behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed!” (Lk 1:48). And St. Bernard, interpreting her words, says, “All generations call you blessed, because you have given life and glory to all nations; for in you sinners find pardon, and the righteous find perseverance in the grace of God.”

For this reason, the devout monk Lanspergius has our Lord address the world in this way: “Men, poor children of Adam, who live surrounded by so many enemies and in the midst of so many trials! Endeavor to honor my Mother and yours in a special way. For I’ve given Mary to the world, so that she may be your model, and so that from her you may learn to lead good lives. I’ve given her also to be a refuge to which you can flee in all your afflictions and trials. I’ve made this daughter of mine in such a way that no one need fear or have the least reluctance to turn to her. For this purpose I’ve created her of such a kind and compassionate disposition that she doesn’t know how to despise anyone who takes refuge with her, nor can she deny her favor to anyone who seeks it. The mantle of her mercy is open to all, and she allows no one to leave her feet without consoling him.”

May the immense goodness of our God be ever praised and blessed for having given us such a great, such a tender, such a loving mother and advocate!

—St. Alphonsus Liguori, *The Glories of Mary*

IN GOD’S PRESENCE, CONSIDER . . .

Am I among those who call Mary blessed? Is it my frequent habit to take time to praise her for her role in my salvation, and to ask for her assistance in living a holy life?

CLOSING PRAYER

With St. Elizabeth, I greet you, my Lady: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!” (Lk 1:42).

Mary foreshadowed by Noah's dove and the rainbow

The Fathers of the Church began a long tradition of discovering in the Old Testament figures and events that foreshadow Mary. Here, St. Alphonsus tells how earlier theologians saw Noah's dove as her symbol.



Mary was foreshadowed by the dove that returned to Noah in the ark with an olive branch in its beak as a pledge of the peace that God granted to men (see Gn 8:11). With this in mind, St. Bonaventure addresses our Blessed Lady this way: “You are that most faithful dove.” “Mary,” he adds, “was the heavenly dove that brought to a lost world the olive branch, the sign of mercy, since she in the first place gave us Jesus Christ, who is the Source of mercy, and then, by his merits, obtained all graces for us.”

Again, the rainbow described by St. John in the Book of Revelation, which encircled the throne of God, was an express figure of Mary: “And round the throne was a rainbow” (Rv 4:3). St. Bernardine of Siena says that “it was of this rainbow that God spoke when he promised Noah that he would place it in the clouds as a sign of peace, so that upon looking at it, he might remember the eternal peace that he had promised in his covenant with man: ‘I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth . . . I will look upon it, and remember the everlasting covenant’” (Gn 9:13, 16).

“Mary,” says the saint, “is this bow of eternal peace. For just as God, when he sees it, remembers the peace promised to the earth, so does he, at the prayers of Mary, forgive the crimes of sinners, and confirm his peace with them.”

—St. Alphonsus Liguori, *The Glories of Mary*

IN GOD'S PRESENCE, CONSIDER . . .

How do the parallels between the figures and events of the Old Testament and those of the New Testament help to enrich our understanding of the faith? What other Old Testament figures and events foreshadowed Mary?

CLOSING PRAYER

From a prayer of St. Tarasius: *Mary, in you is the curse of Adam done away, and the debt of Eve is paid. You are the ark of Noah, and rainbow of reconciliation with God in a new generation.*

Mary is more spacious than Noah's ark

Though Noah's ark foreshadowed Mary, St. Alphonsus notes, she's even more accommodating than that huge ship!



Mary has been called an ark more spacious than that of Noah. For only two animals of every kind were brought into the ark of Noah. But under the mantle of Mary, the righteous and sinners all find their place.

This was one day revealed to St. Gertrude in a vision. She saw a multitude of wild beasts, such as lions and leopards, who took refuge under the mantle of Mary. Not only did she not drive them away, but with her gentle hands she caressed them, so that they might not flee away.

The animals that entered Noah's ark remained animals. But sinners who are received under the mantle of Mary don't remain sinners. She is certain to change their hearts and to render them dear to God.

The Blessed Virgin herself said to St. Bridget: "However much a man may have sinned, if he returns to me with a genuine intention of repentance, I'm ready at once to receive him. I don't pay attention to the sins with which he's burdened, but only to the good disposition in which he comes. And then I don't refuse to anoint and heal his wounds, for I am called, and truly am, the Mother of Mercy."

Mother of Mercy, I will then say to you, in the words of St. Bernard, "Remember that it has never been heard of in any age, that any sinner who turned to you was rejected by you." I am a miserable sinner, but I turn to you and trust in you.

—St. Alphonsus Liguori, *The Glories of Mary*

IN GOD'S PRESENCE, CONSIDER . . .

Given the pattern of sins in my life, which beast entering the ark might best represent me? Am I asking Mary to help me be transformed more fully into God's image instead?

CLOSING PRAYER

From a prayer of St. Alphonsus: *In you, O Mother of God, I have unbounded confidence. From you I hope for grace to be sorry for my sins as I should, and from you I hope for strength never again to fall into them.*

The Old Testament foreshadowed Mary

St. John of Damascus provides multiple examples of the Old Testament foreshadowing of Mary.



Inexhaustible goodness of God! Boundless goodness! He who called what did not exist into existence, and filled heaven and earth, whose throne is heaven, and whose footstool is the earth—he has made the womb of his own servant a spacious dwelling place, and in it the mystery of mysteries is accomplished. Being God, he becomes Man, and is marvelously brought forth without injury to his mother’s virginity. He is lifted up as a baby in earthly arms—the One who is the brightness of eternal glory, the form of the Father’s substance, by the word of whose mouth all created things exist. Truly divine wonder!

Holy mother and Virgin, what is this great mystery accomplished in you? Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. You are blessed from generation to generation, you who alone are worthy of being blessed. Behold, all generations will call you blessed, just as you have said. You are the royal throne that angels surround, seeing upon it their true King and Lord. You are a spiritual Eden, holier and more divine than the Eden of old. For that Eden was the dwelling of the mortal Adam, while the Lord himself came from heaven to dwell in you.

Noah’s ark foreshadowed you, for you held the seed of the new world. You brought forth Christ, the salvation of the world, who destroyed sin and its angry waves. The burning bush foreshadowed you, and the tablets of the Law, and the Ark of the Covenant. Just as Jacob saw the ladder bringing together heaven and earth, so you are placed between us, and have become the ladder of God’s communion with us, of him who took upon himself our weakness, uniting us to himself, and enabling us to see God.

—St. John of Damascus, *First Homily on the Dormition*

IN GOD’S PRESENCE, CONSIDER . . .

How might Mary be foreshadowed by Eden, Noah’s ark, Moses’ burning bush, the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments, and Jacob’s ladder? What is it about each of these that offers a parallel to her role in our salvation?

CLOSING PRAYER

From a prayer of St. Tarasius: *O purest one! You are the book of Moses, the law-giver, on which the New Covenant is written with the finger of God. You are Aaron’s rod that budded. You are like David’s daughter, all glorious within, wrought about with diverse colors.*

Rebecca is an image of Mary

In her preparation of food for her husband Isaac, St. Alphonsus notes, Rebecca foreshadowed Mary's desire to render sinners dear to her Lord.



The Old Testament patriarch Isaac desired to eat some wild game. So he promised his blessing to his son Esau if he would procure this food for him. However, Rebecca was anxious for her other son, Jacob, to receive the blessing. So she called him and said, “Go to the flock, and fetch me two good kids, that I may prepare from them savory food for your father, such as he loves” (Gn 27:9).

St. Antoninus says: “Rebecca was a figure of Mary, who commands the angels to bring her sinners (symbolized by the kids), so that she may prepare them in such a way (by obtaining for them sorrow and intention to repent) that she can render them dear and acceptable to her Lord.” Here we may well apply to our Blessed Lady the words of the Abbot Franco: “O truly wise woman, who knew how to dress these kids so well that they are not only equal to real venison in flavor, but often superior to it!”

The Blessed Virgin herself revealed to St. Bridget that “there is no sinner in the world, however much he may be at enmity with God, who doesn’t return to him and recover his grace, if he turns to her and asks her assistance.” The same saint one day heard Jesus Christ address his mother, saying that “she would be ready to obtain the grace of God for Lucifer himself, if only he humbled himself so far as to seek her aid.” We know that proud spirit will of course never humble himself so far as to implore the protection of Mary. But if such a thing were possible, Mary would be sufficiently compassionate, and her prayers would have sufficient power to obtain both forgiveness and salvation for him from God. But what can never happen with regard to the Devil has been proved in the case of sinners who turn to this compassionate mother.

—St. Alphonsus Liguori, *The Glories of Mary*

IN GOD’S PRESENCE, CONSIDER . . .

How might Mary “dress” me so that I can become more “palatable” to the Lord? What “spices” (virtues) do I need that I’m now lacking?

CLOSING PRAYER

Blessed Lady, beloved of God, fragrant with “all chief spices” of the holy virtues (Sg 4:14), draw me close after you, and let us run together (see Sg 1:4), so that I may imitate your holiness, and the fragrance of your virtues may become mine as well.

Mary: the vine, the cedar, the Ark

St. Alphonsus notes several additional images of Mary from the Old Testament.



Mary is said to be “terrible” to the powers of hell, “as an army in battle array” (Sg 6:10). She is called terrifying because she knows well how to array her power, her mercy, and her prayers, to the defeat of her enemies, and for the benefit of her servants, who in their temptations turn to her most powerful aid.

“As the vine, I have brought forth a pleasant odor” (Ecclus 24:23). These words the Holy Spirit has Mary speak in the book of Ecclesiasticus. “We are told,” says St. Bernard in commenting on this passage, that “all venomous reptiles fly from flowering vines”: for as poisonous reptiles fly from flowering vines, so do demons fly from those fortunate souls in whom they perceive the perfume of devotion to Mary.

She also calls herself, in the same book, a cedar: “I was exalted like a cedar” (Ecclus 24:17). Cardinal Hugo of St. Cher remarks on this text that this comparison is made for two reasons. First, Mary was untainted by sin, just as the cedar is incorruptible. Second, “like the cedar, which by its fragrance keeps away moths, so also does Mary by her sanctity drive away the demons.”

Among the ancient Hebrews, victories were gained by means of the Ark of the Covenant. In this way Moses conquered his enemies, as we learn from the Book of Numbers. “And when the Ark was lifted up, Moses said: “Arise, O LORD, and let your enemies be scattered” (Num 10:35).

It is well known that this Ark was a foreshadowing of Mary. For as manna was in the Ark, so is Jesus (of whom manna was a foreshadowing) in Mary; and by means of this Ark we gain the victory over our enemies on earth and in hell. “In this way,” St. Bernardine of Siena well observes, “when Mary, the Ark of the New Covenant, was raised to the dignity of Queen of Heaven, the power of hell over men was weakened and dissolved.”

—St. Alphonsus Liguori, *The Glories of Mary*

IN GOD'S PRESENCE, CONSIDER . . .

What other images, drawn from my own experience, would be fitting symbols of Our Lady?

CLOSING PRAYER

Blessed Mother, you are the great highway to heaven, stretching out across the hills and valleys to make the way straight and smooth on our journey home to your Son.



DOMINICAN SISTERS OF SAINT CECILIA CONGREGATION

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

A Short Guide to

PRAYING AS A FAMILY

GROWING TOGETHER IN FAITH AND LOVE EACH DAY

TO OUR BLESSED MOTHER MARY,
QUEEN OF FAMILIES,



HELP OF THE WEAK,
AND STAR OF THE NEW EVANGELIZATION



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LET HIM ENTER, THE KING OF GLORY!

FOREWORD

Archimedes, the ancient Greek scientist, once said that if he had a fulcrum and a long enough lever, one small man could move the world. Children and families are not levers. They're human beings. They're persons, not objects. But Archimedes' words are still useful. The formation that spouses give to each other and to their children—if it's done with love, courage, tenderness, and persistence—can move the world and change society.

This is why the greatest gift a father can give his children is to love their mother. And of course the same applies to mothers loving their husbands. Personal example is the most powerful teacher in the world. Children see everything, and they understand far more than adults often think. If parents love each other, children see and learn love. They learn *fidelity* instead of broken promises; *patience* instead of restlessness; *simplicity* in place of confusion; *humility* instead of pride; *courage* in place of cowardice; *honesty* instead of excuses; *forgiveness* in place of revenge; a *hunger for justice* in place of apathy.

And if parents love God, children see and learn faith. Parents who pray together teach by the way they live that God is real; that He

is present, listening, and eager to be part of our lives. Helping children learn the habit of prayer thus becomes one of the most important lessons a family can share. A life of prayer makes us fully human because it makes us real; it brings us out of ourselves, again and again, into conversation with the Author of life Himself—the God who made and loves us, and created everything we know.

It's no secret that I've admired the Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia for many years. The reason is simple. In the larger family of God we call the Church, the Sisters embody by their daily example every virtue that makes a family beautiful and filled with life. But they also teach by what they speak and write, edit and publish—and this volume, *A Short Guide to Praying as a Family*, is wonderful and very practical proof.

Archimedes never found the lever he needed. The Sisters remind us that Christian families already have one. Family prayer can move the world.

**The Most Reverend Charles J. Chaput,
Archbishop of Philadelphia**



TO THE GLORY OF GOD

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She saith unto

him, Rabboni, which is

to say, Master

INTRODUCTION: HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Prayer is as simple and natural as friendship. It is loving conversation with the Lord, with Him whom we know loves us.¹ It is raising our hearts and our minds to Him. Prayer is our relationship with the living and present God.²

Beginning to pray as a family can genuinely transform your life, enriching not only your relationship with the Lord but also your relationships with one another. Prayer can change the way you see the ordinary circumstances of your daily life. You begin to see disappointments as perhaps God's way of leading you to new and better opportunities, joys as a share in the life of heaven, and sufferings as a way to enter into the mystery of Jesus' own suffering for us on the Cross. The closer we are to the Lord in prayer, the more we realize that He is present with us, walks with us, in our daily lives. We begin to see as He sees and to love as He loves. Thank you for your faith. Thank you for picking up this book, for desiring to draw your whole family closer to God. "[T]he Lord takes pleasure in those . . . who put their hope in his mercy" (cf. Ps 147:11), and "[t]he

Lord is good . . . to the one that seeks him" (cf. Lam 3:25).

Through prayer we nourish our personal relationship with God, much as fertilizer and weeding, water and sunshine, nourish a garden. Thus, it is not surprising that Christian writers have often compared the soul to a garden. Beautiful gardens are a delight. The brilliance of the palette of colors, the sweet scents, the restful shade, the tranquil silence, all make a garden the perfect place to rest, to be still. Your hearts (the hearts of the members of your family) are that garden in which you can rest with the Lord and He can rest with you. However, gardens require a great deal of constant care: planning, tilling, planting, weeding, watering, pruning, and fertilizing. That's where this book comes in. The types of prayer in this book contain each of these components. Some are like flowering or fruit-bearing plants; others are like bushes or groundcover; still others are the water, the pruning, or the fertilizing. For instance, *Going to Confession as a Family* (page 103) is the equivalent of weeding your garden. You don't want weeds to take over, so you won't want to neglect that crucial component of family prayer! Confession also brings

¹ cf. St. Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*.

² cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2558.



marvelous new graces and gifts to your family. God is the Master Gardener; we simply need to cooperate with His grace, and allow Him to prune and water the garden of our souls. He will give us new growth.

As you'll notice from the Table of Contents, this book is organized according to phases. Phase One contains the Basic Vocal Prayers: the Sign of the Cross, the Our Father, the Hail Mary, and the Glory Be. These are the staples, the plants you want to have all over your garden. Phase Two guides you in Making Your Home a Sacred Place, unifying your family in the desire to have the Lord as the center and goal of your family.

The remaining phases allow you to continue your growth in prayer. Take a moment to look at the progression of the phases in the Table of Contents. Remember, as you do so, that your family does not need to do everything that is listed. You can customize the phases according to your family's needs and preferences. If you do begin to try one type of prayer (for instance, Preparing for Mass as a Family), try it several times before deciding whether or not that prayer is a "fit" for your family. Prayer takes practice, so give yourselves a chance to become comfortable with a particular form of prayer before you give up on it.

Please remember that merely *saying* the prayers is not the goal. The goal is *praying*: personally encountering the Lord, listening to Him, and giving Him your heart. Formal prayers and methods of prayer are intended as a *means* to help us in our own personal conversation with the Lord: to come to know Him and to speak to Him in our own words, as one speaks with a friend. By praying, we learn how to listen to Him—how to be docile to His promptings and attentive to His way of seeing reality. He is always with us. Through prayer we learn more and more how to be with Him. The words of the prayers help to form our hearts and minds, so when we pray them as a family, they express our shared life with one another and with the Lord—a unity and a desire for greater unity with and in Him.

Many of the prayers in this book are handed down to us through tradition; Christians have been praying them for hundreds of years. Just as these formal prayers have helped them to begin praying, showing them how to speak to the Lord, they do the same for us, drawing us into a deeper and deeper relationship with the Lord. Thus, when we come together for communal prayer (such as the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass), the prayers in our tradition give us the words to pray as a community and as a Church. If we have a deep relationship with

the Lord, these prayers are more than mere words—they become communal conversations with the Lord, who is the center of our community, our families, and our Church. Ultimately, what is important is that we talk with the Lord, listen to Him, and allow Him to speak to us through the Scriptures and to pour out His graces upon us through the sacraments.

Each prayer in this book is followed by pages that explain the prayer (how it forms our minds and hearts) and suggest appropriate times or other ideas for that particular prayer. You can use the explanations to help your children understand the meaning and purpose of each prayer. Each phase builds on the phases that go before it. Hopefully, your family will look forward to entering each new phase as your prayer life develops and you grow closer to the Lord.

May the garden of your family's hearts remain always in bloom, inviting and pleasing to Our Lord. May your family be the garden where Christ Himself is always welcome, where He always delights, and where He always rests. May He, the Master-Gardener, be the One who applies His gentle artistry to water (to bless), to prune (to purify), and to give new growth to your whole family. He longs for you. He longs to be welcome in your family, to rest

in the garden of your souls, a place of peace and beauty within. As this begins to happen in your own family, may you bring the precious gift of praying as a family to other families.

A FEW PRACTICAL NOTES

Family life is so busy these days, and many demands are made on our time, yet this is precisely what makes praying together so important. When God is at the center of our family life, all our other priorities fall into place. We put God first, and our spouse and children next. Extended family and work follow after these. Children learn to put their brothers and sisters before their friends, and to put attending Mass before other activities. When your family prays together, you are not only putting God at the center of your family, but also showing your children how to enter into a personal relationship with Him so that He becomes a companion and friend throughout life.

The most effective way to begin implementing family prayer is to build it into your schedule, that is, to pray in the course of things you already do. For example, you already get in the car to go somewhere, so you can easily add saying the Angel of God prayer (page 81) shortly after you get in the car. You also already eat meals together, so you can easily add praying

Grace Before and After Meals (page 47). Filling your day with prayer fills your day with awareness of the Lord's presence, goodness, and love.

In the course of implementing the prayers you choose, we encourage you to be careful and gentle, because you don't want your children or your spouse to develop a distaste for prayer. You want family prayer to be a positive experience. Also remember that everything doesn't have to be perfect. Little ones are going to squirm. Teens may act as if they don't care. Others may be experiencing withdrawal from hyper-connectivity (to the television, computer games, electronic devices, cell phones, etc.). Be at peace yourself and keep peace in the family. Don't be discouraged. Be forgiving of yourself and your family if you get off track. Life can also seem to take you off track. So, when there is a change in the routine, simply adjust your prayer. Ask the Lord how to do it. For instance, if you are traveling in the car, and it is time for Family Bedtime Prayers, you may want to pray them in the car and shorten them for the sake of the exhausted members of your family. A simple movement of the heart toward the Lord in gratitude and love is a thousand times better than many words spoken only from a sense of duty.

Try your best to pray together, "[f]or where two or three are gathered together in my name,

there am I in the midst of them” (Mt 18:20). Discuss the prayers you are choosing to pray together. Get your children involved, especially the older ones, asking their advice and their ideas. Everyone likes to be included. If you believe you may experience resistance from your teens, speak to them privately first and ask them what they think about beginning to pray together as a family. Listen to them. You might even want to ask them to lead some of the prayers. Or, in other cases, you may want to give them the option to come or not to come, but let them know you would like for them to come since they are important members of the family. When your family makes the time and the effort to pray, you will be blessed by the Lord. He meets our weakness with His mercy and love. He will reward your generosity with His infinite generosity.

Finally, remember the power of community. You are not alone. There are over one billion Catholics in the world! There is another family in your neighborhood or in your parish that would also like to start praying together. Why not find two or more friends who have this same desire, and support one another in working together to implement praying with your families? You might even start a small parish group for this purpose. You can be a

source of encouragement for one another, and you can share your experiences and concerns, receiving advice and reassurance from one another.

We hope these pages will help your family to grow in love for God and one another, for your faith and for your life of prayer. We hope they will help you to teach your children about the beauty and meaning of life, about how to love and be loved, by God and by each other. As you journey along and deepen your relationship with the Lord, may the treasured Catholic prayers in this book accompany you, so that your family—a domestic church—will always be united to God in love.



PHASE ONE



BASIC VOCAL PRAYERS

THE SIGN OF THE CROSS

THE OUR FATHER

THE HAIL MARY

THE GLORY BE





THE SIGN OF THE CROSS

In the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Making the Sign of the Cross is a prayer. The Cross is the symbol of Christianity, for it is on the Cross that Christ shows His love for us by dying for us, saving us from sin and death. Moreover, through the Sign of the Cross, we invoke the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Thus, two of the greatest mysteries of our faith—the Holy Trinity and our redemption by Christ on the Cross—are encompassed by this one prayer. Even as early as the 5th Century, Christians began making a large Sign of the Cross over themselves¹ in a way very similar to the way we Christians do today. Because of its intense store of meaning, the Sign of the Cross has traditionally been used to begin and end every prayer, including the greatest prayer, the Holy Mass.

Traditionally, the Sign of the Cross is made in this manner: at the words, “In the name of the Father,” the Christian touches the fingers of the right hand to the forehead; at the words, “and of the Son,” the hand is moved downwards (drawing, in effect, the vertical crossbeam); at the words, “and of the Holy” the fingers touch the left shoulder; at the word, “Spirit,” the right shoulder (drawing the horizontal crossbeam).

¹ *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Sign of the Cross.”

Finally, the hands are joined together with the word “Amen” (which means, “truly it is so” or “so be it”).

Children can easily be taught to understand the meaning of these gestures as saying to God: “Take my mind” (when we put our fingers to our foreheads); “Take my heart” (when we move our fingers over our hearts); and, “Take my whole self” (when we touch our fingers to each shoulder).

Teach your children to make the Sign of the Cross with reverence, attention, and love, for this prayer is a beautiful proclamation of our faith in Jesus Christ and all He has done for us. Sometimes we feel rushed or do not want to hold others up by taking the time to wait for our children, particularly small children, to make the Sign of the Cross, and we can assume that eventually they’ll catch on. However, waiting and modeling the Sign of the Cross, even with toddlers, is worth all the time in the world. Allowing the smallest children to participate in our family prayers by sharing in this gesture of faith is a powerful way to include them in the family prayer. It is perhaps easiest to show young children how to make the Sign of the Cross by standing or kneeling behind them and moving the child’s hand slowly through the steps of the Sign of



the Cross as you recite the words aloud. Or, one parent can demonstrate in mirror-image fashion (that is using the opposite hand and doing the opposite gesture that the child mirrors in making the Sign of the Cross) in front of the child while the other parent helps the child from behind. Older children can also help the younger ones to make the Sign of the Cross.

A valuable practice is making the Sign of the Cross right after you wake up in the morning. With this simple prayer, you give your entire day to the Lord and ask Him to be your shield, your protector. Children very easily understand this concept: the Sign of the Cross is like putting on your holy armor for the day.

My Catholic Children's BIBLE



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THE OLD TESTAMENT



THE CREATION OF THE WORLD

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. All was dark, and deep water covered the land. God's Spirit hovered over the water. Then God said, "Let there be Light!"

At once bright rays of light shone down gently on the earth. God saw that this was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. He called the light 'day', and the darkness 'night'. This was the first day.

Then God said, "Let there be a sky to separate the waters, so that water is above the sky and below the sky." And it was so. Night fell, and a new morning dawned. This was the second day.

(Genesis 1:1-8)





On the third day God said, “Let the waters below the sky gather together and let dry ground appear.”

God called this dry ground ‘land’ and the waters ‘sea’. And at God’s command grass and plants grew across the earth. Flowers blossomed and trees bearing rich fruit burst toward the sky.

On the fourth day God placed the sun in the sky to bring warmth and light to the earth. Night fell and God created the stars and the moon to fill the darkness above the earth.

On the fifth day God said, “All kinds of fish shall fill the oceans, and birds shall fill the sky.” And so the birds and the fish were the first creatures to live on the earth.

(Genesis 1:9–23)









On the sixth day God said, “Now the earth shall be filled with life.” From the greatest animal to the smallest insect, God made each creature and sent them to live in all four corners of the earth. “Now I will create a being in My own image,” He said.

Then God created man in His image. He created both male and female. “You have power over all living things in the sky, on the earth, and in the sea,” God told them.

God stopped and looked at all He had created. He said it was very good.

On the seventh day God finished His work. He made this day holy, for this was the day He rested from His work.

(Genesis 1:24-31; 2:1-3)



ADAM AND EVE

God had planted on earth a beautiful garden, a place called Eden. He had created the garden for Adam, and here He placed the most wonderful plants and creatures.

Looking at the man He had created, God thought, “It is not right that Adam should be alone.” So while Adam slept, God took one of his ribs. From this rib He made the first woman, Eve.

God set Adam and Eve in the garden and said: “Everything in this garden is yours. Enjoy it and be happy. Only one thing is forbidden to you. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil grows in this garden. You must never eat any of the fruit from this tree. If you do, you will die.”

Adam and Eve were naked, but they were not ashamed, for this is how God had created them.

(Genesis 2:4–25)





Of all the animals that lived in the garden of Eden, the serpent was the most crafty.

“Wouldn’t you like to know the secret of this fruit?” he whispered to Eve. “It will give you the knowledge of good and evil, which only God knows. That is why He does not want you to eat it, for then you could be as powerful as He!”

Adam and Eve knew that God had forbidden them to eat the fruit. But Eve thought about the wisdom that could be theirs if they ate the fruit, and she was tempted.


Finally Eve picked one of the forbidden fruits and tasted it. Then she took some to Adam, who also ate the forbidden fruit.

(Genesis 3:1–6)









At once their eyes were opened. They saw that they were naked, and for the first time they felt ashamed. They sewed fig leaves together to cover their bodies. When God saw them, He asked them, “Who told you that you were naked?”

“Eve gave me the fruit, and I ate it!” said Adam, and Eve cried, “The serpent tricked me!”

God placed a curse on the serpent. “From now on you will crawl on the ground,” He said. Then God turned to Adam and Eve. “From now on your life will be full of suffering,” He said. “You have disobeyed me, and from this moment the garden of Eden is forbidden to you.”

God sent Adam and Eve out of the garden. God placed an angel with a flaming sword at the entrance to the garden to stop them from ever returning.

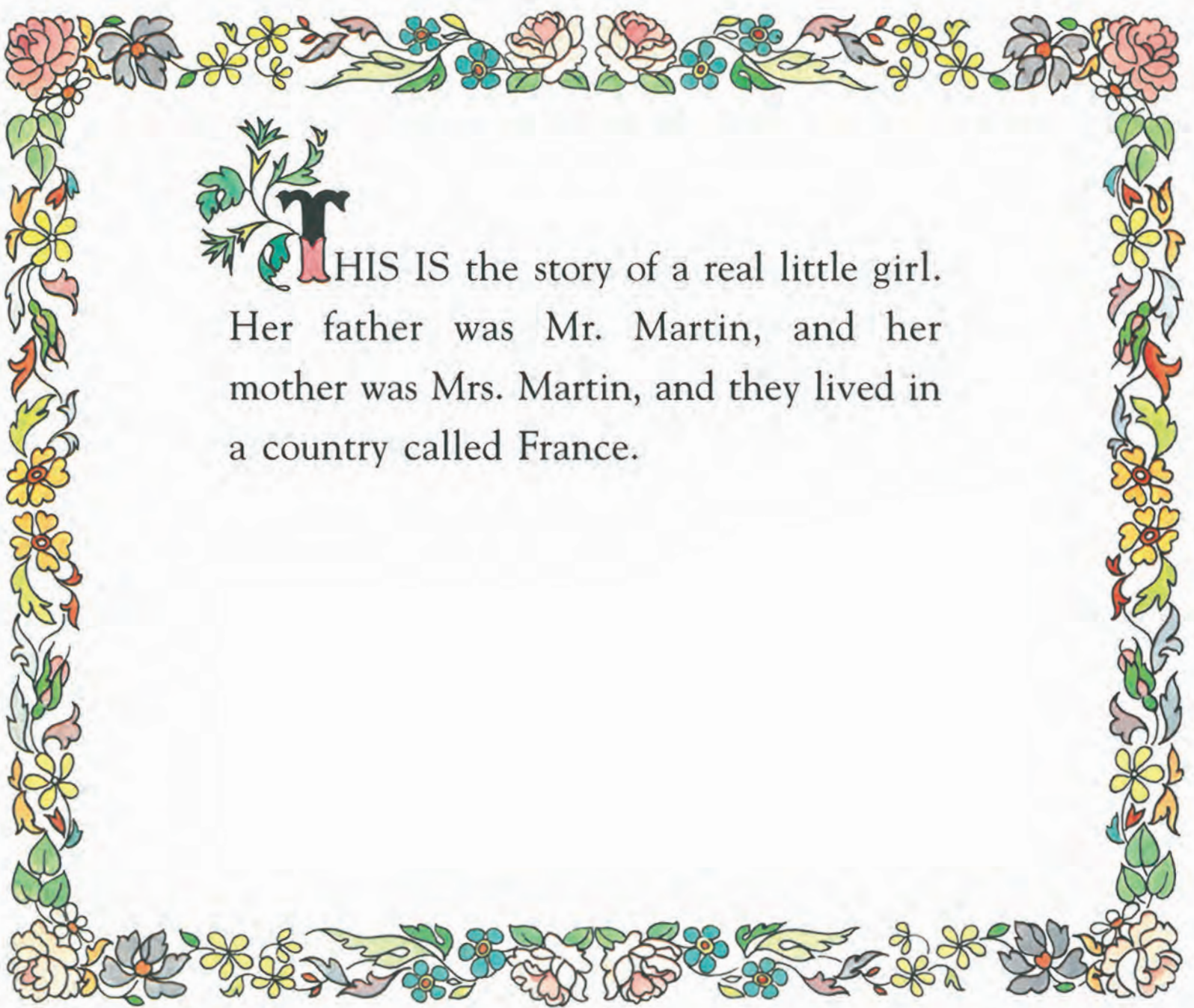
(Genesis 3:7-24)



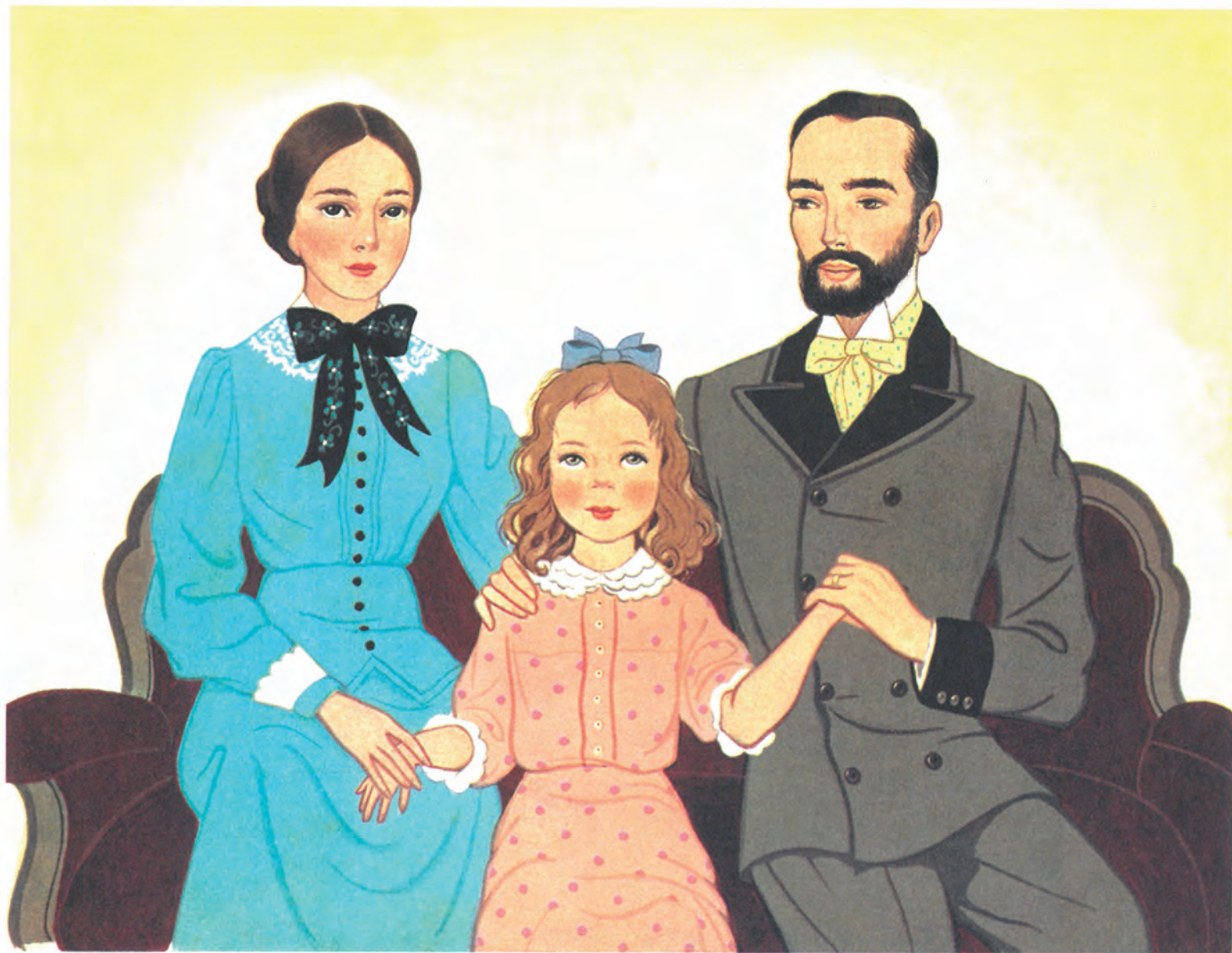
A LITTLE GIRL NAMED THERESE



Therese was a very special little girl. She loved God best. She can show you how to know God, how to love God, how to do things for God, and how to get to Heaven. She did. She is a saint—Saint Therese of the Child Jesus.




THIS IS the story of a real little girl.
Her father was Mr. Martin, and her
mother was Mrs. Martin, and they lived in
a country called France.





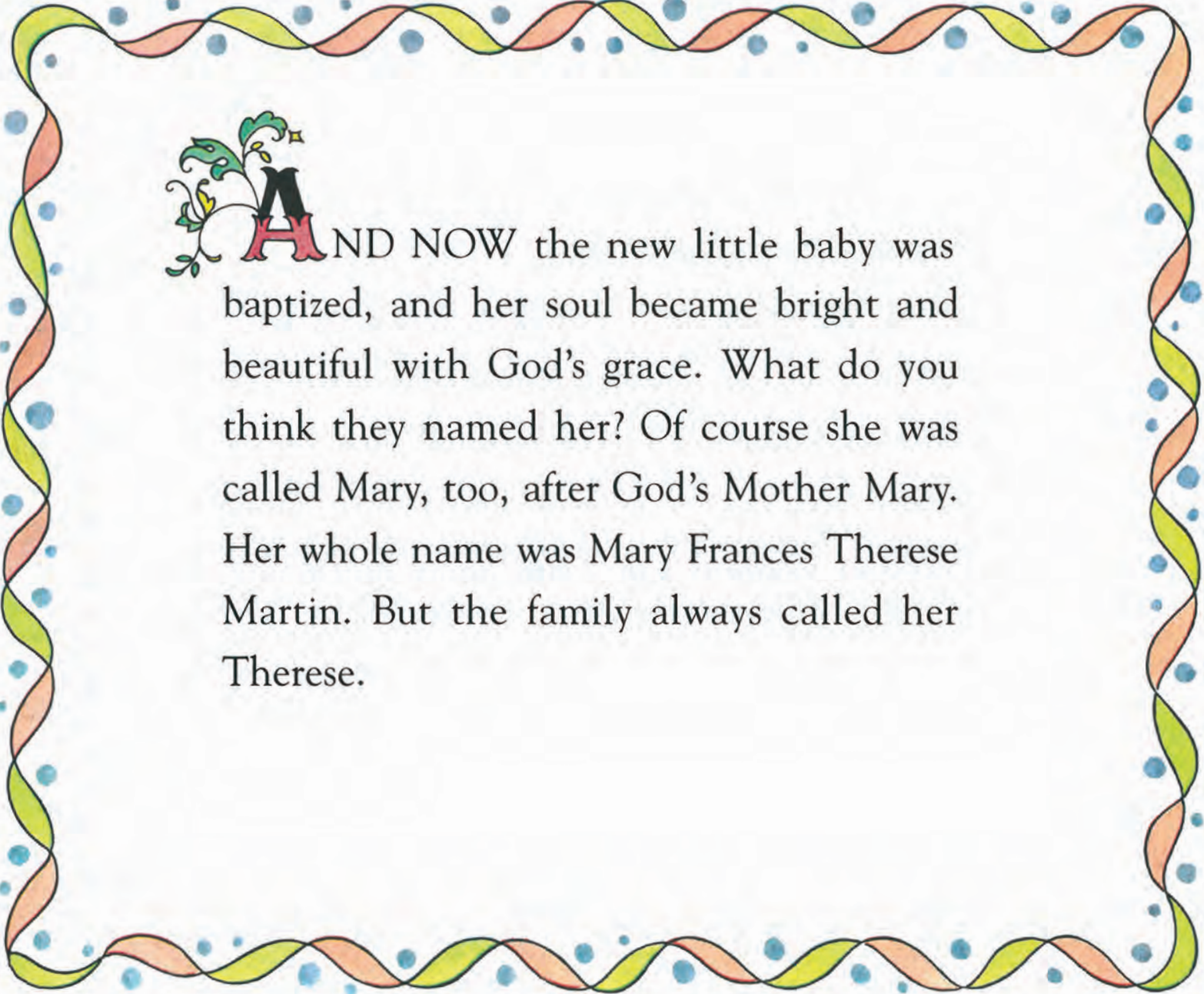
HERE SHE is when she was just a new
little baby.





THE NEW little baby had four beautiful sisters who were all called Mary, after God's Mother Mary. Of course, each of the girls had another name too, so they would not get mixed up. There was Mary Louise, and there was Mary Pauline, and there was Mary Leonie, and there was Mary Celine.





AND NOW the new little baby was baptized, and her soul became bright and beautiful with God's grace. What do you think they named her? Of course she was called Mary, too, after God's Mother Mary. Her whole name was Mary Frances Therese Martin. But the family always called her Therese.





MRS. MARTIN loved her darling
Therese as much as she could. Mr. Martin
loved his sweet little girl as much as *he*
could. He called her his Little Queen.
And Baby Therese loved her mother and
her father as much as ever she could.

