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A YEAR  
WITH  
MARY









# A YEAR WITH MARY

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DAILY MEDITATIONS  
ON THE  
MOTHER OF GOD

PAUL THIGPEN



CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA



## AUTHOR'S DEDICATION

For Leisa  
*Wife, mother, grandmother,  
and Proverbs 31 woman par excellence*

## PUBLISHER'S DEDICATION

For Jackie Gallagher  
*A true daughter of Mary, without whose exemplary devotion  
to faith and family Saint Benedict Press simply would not exist*

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In some cases the writer's argument depends on a significantly different translation, such as the Septuagint or Vulgate. In these cases, that translation has been retained.

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# Introduction



Books about the Blessed Virgin abound. Yet after nine centuries, the words of St. Bernard of Clairvaux still ring true: “Of Mary, there is never enough!” She’s a mystery that faithful Christians seek to understand more fully, an ocean “full of grace” still awaiting deeper exploration.

In fact, as an adult convert to the Catholic faith, I found the mother of Jesus to be more than a mystery; she was a perplexity—or perhaps I should say that traditional Catholic devotion to her puzzled me. Coming from a Christian tradition that was rightly zealous, and jealous, for the honor of her Son, and suspicious of anything that seemed to eclipse his glory, I entered the Church with questions about how best to understand her and, more importantly, how to relate to her.

Even before my conversion, I had felt the irresistible attraction of her moral and spiritual beauty. She was, as the saints of old described her, the mirror of her Son’s righteousness. Hers was the soft radiance of a moon that modestly reflected the blazing brilliance of the Sun, who had himself conquered my heart long before.

Yet even then, she held out to me the promise of a relationship much more proximate, more affectionate, more intimate. After all, she had carried in her womb the incarnate God, my Brother. No wonder the achingly sweet strains of Schubert’s *Ave Maria* always moved me so deeply: Somewhere in my depths, I knew it was the lullaby of a loving mother I had never known, yet longed to meet.

Who was this woman on whom the Son of God himself had laid the incomparable burden, the inexpressible dignity, of becoming his human mother? Had we somehow made her his rival? If she was so important, why did the Scripture seem to say so little about her? (As it turned out, the Scripture had much more to say about her than I had ever dreamed.)

To answer these and many other questions, I set out to explore that ocean of grace. My map was provided, not only by Scripture, but by the profound insights of numerous saints and other spiritual writers from across the centuries. My compass was the exquisite poetry of their Marian devotion.

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That high adventure began before my conversion, contributed significantly to it, and has lasted more than twenty-five years, as I have grown in the faith of the Church. I now know that my exploration will last a lifetime, and beyond. In many ways, this book is one of the fruits of that journey.

In this volume you'll hear from saints and theologians, popes and poets, lay and religious, monks and mystics, Fathers and Doctors of the Church. They hail from lands all around the globe, speaking to us in a hundred tongues from every age of the Church's long story. Perhaps modesty should have forbidden it, but I've even dared to offer a few prayers of my own—so intense was my desire to join the chorus of praise to the Queen now enthroned at the King's right hand in glory.

Through this collection of meditations, I invite you to discover more fully “the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints” (Eph 1:18)—and most especially in the saint of saints, the Mother of God. You'll find excerpts from biblical passages, theological essays, papal documents, liturgical sources, historical anecdotes, popular devotions, stories, prayers, poems, and hymns. The intent here is not to be comprehensive—that would be impossible—but rather eclectic, and representative of the fabulous treasury of Marian literature.

For truly, of Mary, there is never enough.

Paul Thigpen

March 25, 2015

*The Feast of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary*



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## How to Use this Book



If this book is to achieve its purpose, you must read through the texts slowly, attentively, and prayerfully, with an open mind and heart. It's best, if you can, to set aside a regular time daily for this and other spiritual reading, and the volume is designed so you can take up one meditation each day for an entire year.

The reflections aren't tied to particular days of the year, so you can start anywhere, and skip around if you like. There are, however, some topical clusters of readings regarding, for example, Mary in Scripture, Mary's virtues, her titles, her sorrows, the other events of her life, and the Rosary. So you might find some advantage in reading them in the order presented.

Before you read each day, I urge you to offer a quick prayer to the Holy Spirit to enlighten you by his grace. Then ask Our Lady to help you, too, so you can understand and apply what you're reading.

Each meditation has a brief introduction. After the reading, you're asked to consider in God's presence what the author is saying. These questions are intended to spur you to ponder, not just what the text means, but *what it means for you personally*.

Finally, each day has a brief closing prayer related to the reading. Most of these prayers are from saints and other spiritual writers, but some are original, and some are simply traditional Catholic prayers. You may of course choose to pray in your own words instead.

An entire year of profound and powerful thoughts about Our Lady is in your hands. If you read and reflect on them carefully, I guarantee that you will have a whole new relationship with her, and with her Son, when the year is done. Prayerfully reading these meditations has certainly transformed me.

As you begin reading, make your own this prayer of St. John Eudes:

*You angels of Jesus and his saints, pray for me, that our loving Savior may give me new grace and new love for him, to devote this year and my whole life, purely and solely, to the service of his glory and love. Amen.*



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## A Note on the Texts



With a few exceptions noted in the Acknowledgements, these readings are gathered and adapted from public domain sources, mostly in older English translations. If this book were intended as a scholarly tome, the texts would be strictly translated—and as a result, they would require extensive, and intrusive, explanatory notes. Many words in the original translations are unfamiliar to most readers today (“lictors,” “abnegation,” “disordinate,” “turpitude”). Others have changed their meanings. (A hundred years ago, for example, “confusion” typically meant “ruin” or “shame,” not “misunderstanding” or “perplexity.”)

My goal, however, was instead to provide short and simple readings about Mary, profound in their insights yet easily accessible to contemporary readers. So I’ve adapted the texts rather freely to achieve that goal. I’ve modernized the language, and where earlier standards of style called for long, complex sentences and interminable paragraphs, I’ve broken them up into shorter, more manageable pieces.

In some places I’ve added clarifying words, such as a brief identifier for a biblical or historical character mentioned. In other places, I’ve condensed the text to fit the space available. In every case, nevertheless, I trust the original meaning has been illuminated rather than obscured.

Quotations from Scripture are from the Revised Standard Version (2nd Catholic Edition) unless the writer’s argument depends on a significantly different translation, such as the Septuagint or the Vulgate. Scriptural references (such as “see Jn 3:16”) are indirect quotations and may not reflect the exact wording of any particular biblical translation.

A note on the authors chosen for inclusion here: My intention was to feature as many writers as possible. But any compilation of this sort, with 365 substantial readings rather than brief quotes, must depend heavily on several teachers whose Marian writings are extensive and widely recognized as classic texts on the subject. Among these are St. Louis de Montfort, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, St. John of Damascus, Blessed John Henry Newman and, most especially, St. Alphonsus Liguori.

St. Alphonsus’ work *The Glories of Mary* is uniquely comprehensive, not just in the scope and detail of its Marian subject matter, but also in its citations of numerous saints, theologians, and other spiritual writers. So the preponderance



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of quotes selected from that particular text was perhaps inevitable. On the one hand, the author offers a number of provocative original insights. On the other, when his insights are drawn from the common spiritual tradition, he makes them all the more convincing by showing how many of the Church's spiritual giants concur on a matter. In quoting St. Alphonsus, then, we necessarily quote many other saints and spiritual writers.

After some deliberation, and for several reasons, I decided not to include selections taken directly from alleged private revelations. Such texts can prove extremely problematic, both in historical provenance and in proper interpretation. I should note, however, that St. Alphonsus in particular is fond of citing the visions of St. Bridget of Sweden, St. Gertude the Great, and a few others.

A final note about the way many of our selected writers have approached their meditations on Mary. Only a little is said about the events of her life in the Gospels; we have no biography of Jesus' mother. So we shouldn't be surprised to find that much of what has been written about her involves either "theological deduction," as we might call it, or a kind of "sanctified speculation."

What I mean to say is this: A great deal of what we know about Our Lady (such as her status as "Mother of God") has been logically deduced from the data, so to speak, of Divine Revelation. (Our understanding of the Blessed Trinity would be another such deduction.) Meanwhile, the imaginative recreation of scenes from her life, based in part on common human experience, has often yielded profound insights by speculating about what could, or should, or almost certainly *must*, have happened.

I trust you will discover in these pages that both approaches to Marian reflection have proven fertile ground for a deeper, richer understanding of Our Lady that leads us to love and serve her more eagerly.