



PRESENTED TO

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Personal Note



A YEAR
WITH
MARY





A YEAR WITH MARY

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.

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

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.

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

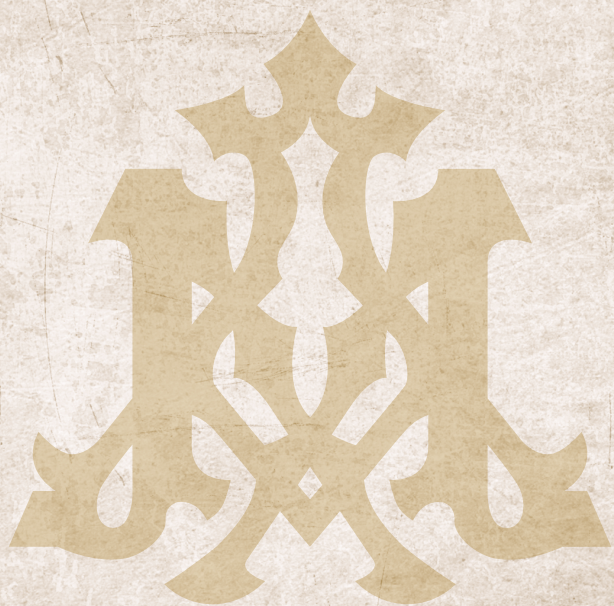
of quotes selected from that particular text was perhaps inevitable. On the one hand, the author offers a number of provocative original insights. On the other, when his insights are drawn from the common spiritual tradition, he makes them all the more convincing by showing how many of the Church's spiritual 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.



A YEAR WITH MARY

The Daily Readings

Of Mary, there is never enough!

St. Louis-Marie Grignion 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.”

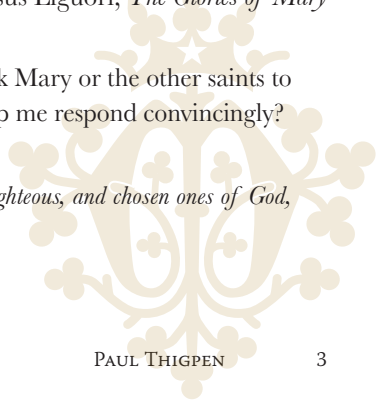
—St. Alphonsus Liguori, *The Glories of Mary*

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.