



Mary in the month of May

A new way of using your rosary



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The Month of May

The month of May is traditionally dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary. May is a month of growth when nature is reborn: in the northern hemisphere, May is certainly known for its springtime beauty. It is associated with flowers and blossoms, with trees which spring back to life, and grass which sprouts; it brings to mind the idea of promise and hope, of new life. This month normally belongs to the Easter season, between Easter and Pentecost. The tradition of dedicating the month of May to Our Lady is centuries old, dating back at least 700 years. Saint Pope Paul VI wrote an encyclical on the month of May, focusing on the Virgin Mary. He wrote that the faithful have long dedicated the month of May to the Mother of God:

We are delighted and consoled by this pious custom associated with the month of May, which pays honour to the Blessed Virgin and brings such rich benefits to the Christian people. Since Mary is rightly to be regarded as the way by which we are led to Christ, the person who encounters Mary cannot help but encounter Christ likewise. (Mense Maio).

During the Easter season, Mary's presence in the beginnings of the Church is emphasised—this community needed the women. Mary of Magdala was the first to witness the Resurrection and brought the good news to the apostles in lockdown. Mary of Nazareth was present in the first community of disciples and was with the Apostles in the upper room as they prayerfully waited for the descent of the Holy Spirit with hopeful expectation (Acts 1:14). As Saint Pope John Paul II stated in 'Redemptoris Mater', **'Mary was in the Upper Room, where the Apostles were preparing to take up this mission with the coming of the Spirit of Truth: she was present with them. In their midst Mary was "devoted to prayer" as the "mother of Jesus", of the Crucified and Risen Christ.'** Her maternal presence was humble and discreet but fundamental. Among them, she acted as a guide, an exceptional witness of the mystery of Christ, a role she had since His conception and birth, as well as a model of true faith.



Rosaries left at Holywell. Image: Clare Lewis

Reflection: Week 1—Rosary of the World

In the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth, on the walls inside and outside, there are icons of Mary from the various countries – showing their national portrayal of Mary.

For this first week in May you are invited to reflect on and pray for the countries of our world asking Mary's intercession for them—you may need an atlas.



*Our Lady of Knock at the Basilica of the Annunciation, Nazareth.
Image: Susan Richert PVBM*

On the “Our Father” bead: pray the ‘Our Father’

On each of the next 10 beads pray:

- Mary of Walsingham, intercede for England
- Mary of Scotland, intercede for Scotland
- Mary of Wales, intercede for Wales
- Mary of Ireland, intercede for Ireland
- Mary of France, intercede for France
- Mary of Nigeria, pray for Nigeria
- Mary of Myanmar, intercede for Myanmar
- Mary of the United States, intercede for the United States
- Mary of Poland, intercede for Poland
- Mary of Vietnam, pray for Vietnam

Then say – Glory Be and Our Father and move onto the next 10 countries that you want to pray for

The rosary is an ancient meditative type of prayer that is central to Catholic popular devotion. We can use our rosary beads to help us focus on a particular event in the story of

salvation from the birth of Christ through to his resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Traditionally we pray the 'Hail Mary' ten times as we consider each event in the life of Christ and his loved ones. This simple repetition of a prayer we know by heart, becomes a background to our meditation.

As we grow and mature in our faith, we can be creative in our prayer; in these times of pandemic and our desire to move forward, we should not fear experimentation in our use of this ancient and beautiful prayer. The Church was founded in a time of crisis—for Peter, James, Thomas and the majority of the male disciples, their world had crumbled with the death of Jesus. It was left to the female leaders like Mary of Nazareth and Mary of Magdala to help them through the crisis; they brought the message of the Risen Jesus; they offered the peace of Christ to a troubled band of apostles who deemed themselves failures. That gentle, unjudging presence of Mary in the Upper Room, the Church of Lockdown, brought comfort, wisdom and light to these first timid proclaimers of the Word of God.

We can look to Mary to give us leadership in the crisis we are facing today: we really need to take to heart the documents of Vatican II that called for a Church of inclusion and peace—an inclusion all too obvious in that early Christian community in Jerusalem. The pandemic has brought so much hardship, not least in the way we live and express our faith, but we need to move forward from an experience of just 'hearing' mass in person or online to a full participation in the liturgy. Vatican II and our Catechism remind us that the Eucharist is not an event for spectators; Christian life demands a response and a living of our baptismal vows:

The Eucharist is "the source and summit of the Christian life." "The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch.

Catechism of the Catholic Church #1324

In this month of May, I urge you to pray with Mary that we can emerge from this pandemic a stronger and more reflective community of faith.



Reflection: Week 2—Mary, untier of knots



*Mary, Untier of Knots by Johann Georg Melchior Schmidtner
Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons*

This was a popular devotion in Catholic Germany and Schmidtner's seventeenth century Baroque style painting shows Mary untying the knots and problems of life. It is a devotion that has grown especially under Pope Francis; studying in Germany, he brought this image of Mary back to his native Argentina and referred to it, especially during stressful times. It is a beautiful devotion, one that places our knotted lives in the hands of our Mother, trusting that she has the ability to untie what we thought was lost.

Tradition has it that a German nobleman, Wolfgang Langenmantel, and his wife, Sophie, had marital problems and were on the brink of a divorce. Wolfgang was very distraught and went to Jesuit priest Fr Jakob Rem for counselling. The two prayed together to the Blessed Virgin Mary for Wolfgang's marriage each time they met. While meeting for the last time on Sept. 28th, 1615, Wolfgang provide Fr Rem with his wedding ribbon, which was used during his wedding ceremony to tie the couple together as a symbol of unity. Fr Rem then took the ribbon, lifted it up next to an image of 'Our Lady of the Snows', and asked Mary if she would "untie the knots" of Wolfgang's marriage. The ribbon then loosened, completely untied, and became extremely white. Even though precise details were not given, Wolfgang and Sophie reconciled after this happened. Wolfgang and Sophie's grandson, Hieronymus Langenmantel, became a priest and asked for a painting to be done in memory of the story.

In the painting, Mary unties the knots of marriage: one angel gives her the knotted ribbon, while the other holds the unknotted side and presents it to us. Mary walks with us through those 'knots' and problems of life.

We all experience difficulties and serious issues in life, and often they can be sorted out by a good chat and talking things through—a cheeky cuppa or something stronger might help too!. When we are distant and silent, all kinds of knots can be created in our lives; relationships break down and we suffer. We need to work together and help to undo those knots that life will throw at us; if we are guilty of causing the problems, then we must be big enough to admit our mistakes. As a community, we need to work together to guide the Church through the fallout caused by the pandemic—the knots can be undone if we have the will and trust.

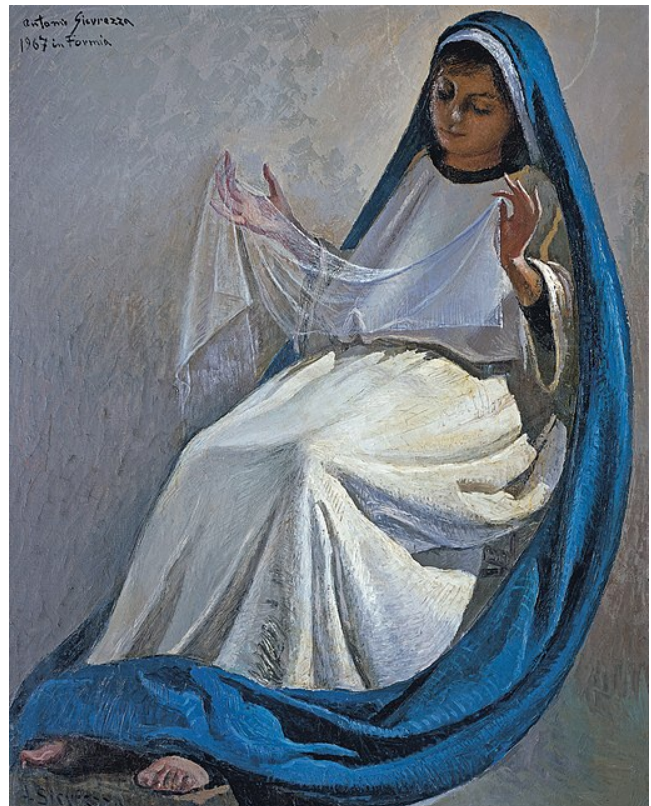
Take a piece of string; make a big knot; then a space. Create 10 smaller knots; then a space; make a larger knot.

Instead of your usual Rosary beads – use this string.

Start with the Our Father on the big knot

On the next 10 knots pray, for example (you may well have issues of a personal or family nature).

- Mary undoer of knots--intercede for Yemen
- Mary undoer of knots-- intercede for those suffering with depression
- Mary, undoer of knots--intercede for those suffering abuse
- Mary, undoer of knots—intercede with those who marriages are failing
- Mary, undoer of knots—intercede with those facing problems with exams.
- Mary, undoer of knots—intercede with those facing surgery.
- Mary, undoer of knots—intercede for Myanmar
- Mary, undoer of knots—intercede with those who are angry
- Mary, undoer of knots—intercede with those who are selfish
- Mary, undoer of knots—intercede with those who will never listen.



*'Announced' Antonio Sicurezza,
Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons*

Prayer of Pope Francis:

Holy Mary, full of God's presence during the day of your life, you accepted with full humility the Father's will, and the devil was never capable of tying you up with his confusion. Once with your Son you interceded for our difficulties, and full of kindness and patience, you gave us example of how to untie the knots in our life. By remaining forever Our Mother, you put in order and make clearer the ties that link us to the Lord.

Holy Mother, Mother of God and our Mother, to you who untie with a motherly heart the knots of our life, we pray for you to receive in your hands (the name the person you are praying for), and to free him/her of the knots and confusion with which our enemy attacks.

Through your grace, your intercession and your example deliver us from all evil, Our Lady, and untie the knots that prevent us from being united with God, so that we, free from sin and error, may find Him in all things, may have our hearts placed in Him, and may serve Him always in our brothers and sisters. AMEN.

Reflection: Week 3—Mary brings comfort

In that early Church of lockdown, the Acts of the Apostles tells us that Mary was a comforting and helpful presence. Her motherly care and wisdom were an obvious and needed gift to that early Church. It was natural that they turned to Mary in times of need—it is natural that the Church, down through history, would also turn to Mary in crisis. There are great and varied stories of Mary being with her people in their need. Here in the UK, we are blessed to have a national Marian shrine that is shared by the Anglican, Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions—Mary brings us together.

In the eleventh century, just before the Norman invasion, Richeldis de Faverches, a noblewoman from Walsingham in Norfolk claimed that the Blessed Mother appeared to her showing the house of the Holy Family in Nazareth. Lady Richeldis was asked to build a replica in Walsingham, which has become a centre of pilgrimage in England. Today we are invited into the HOME of Jesus, as we journey to this remote village, well off the beaten track.

Walsingham allows us to feel at home and comfortable in our faith; it stands as a place of unity and shared values.



Contemporary icon of Our Lady of Walsingham, Olga Shalamova, [CC BY 4.0](#) via Wikimedia Commons

At the height of the Irish famine, villagers claimed that Mary appeared to them one dark night in Knock—a remote village in Mayo, miles from any sizeable centre of population, suffering the worst of the famine. In this apparition, Mary simply stood with these people in their pain and hunger; unlike other Marian apparitions, Mary said absolutely nothing. Once again her presence was one of comfort and understanding to a people destroyed by famine and emigration. The Shrine today stands as a symbol of a modern Ireland, boasting an international airport that allows local to take their holiday in the sun or make a weekly commute to work, while allowing their families to remain at home. While famine and emigration are consigned to the pages of history, 'Our Lady of Knock' stands as that quiet comforter and friend to the Irish people and the diaspora spread throughout the world.

Watch and pray: <https://youtu.be/Fm6ss1PBC1Q>



Image: Fr Lawrence Lew OP [CC BY-NC 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/2.0/) via Flickr

In the nineteenth century, the Soubirous family lived in Lourdes, yet another insignificant town on the French border with Spain. Poor and living in the disused town prison, Bernadette was collecting firewood for the family at the grotto or cave by the river when she saw a beautiful lady who befriended her over a series of meetings. Bernadette, a simple, sickly and uneducated girl, was chosen above the parish priest, town mayor or Reverend Mother to receive the messages from the Immaculate Conception. From the beginning, this obscure town has been associated with healing, central to the ministry of Jesus. Today, millions of pilgrims descend on Lourdes looking for miracles and a sense of hope that Jesus offers through the gift of his mum. While most return home with no major miracles in their

lives, I suspect that all enjoy the peace of mind that time at the grotto can bring—miracles come in the most surprising ways.

You may well have your own favourite place of Marian pilgrimage, so you are invited to use the beads of your rosary to make up your own Litany of the Blessed Virgin.

Pray the 'Our Father' and on each bead spend some time remembering a place of pilgrimage; remember these places that traditionally gather people together for prayer and to celebrate the Eucharist. Remember those pilgrims and their prayers, remember those who are sick and in need of miracles in their lives.



JESUS MAFA. *Virgin and Child*, from *Art in the Christian Tradition*,
[a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN](http://www.librairie-emmanuel/) Original source: <http://www.librairie-emmanuel/>.

- Our Lady of Walsingham, pray for us
- Our Lady of Fatima, pray for us
- Our Lady of Knock, pray for us
- Our Lady of Banneux, pray for us
- Our Lady of Marija Bistrica, pray for us
- Our Lady of Lourdes, pray for us
- Our Lady of Kibeho, Rwanda, pray for us
- Notre Dame d’Afrique, pray for us
- Our Lady of Guadalupe, pray for us
- Our Lady of Częstochowa, pray for us

Reflection: Week 4—Mary who listens

First, read John 2:1-12.



*Marriage at Cana, Hieronymus Francken III
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In the gospel of John, the evangelist records Jesus' first miracle at the wedding feast at Cana. Jesus, his family and friends are invited guests; as is tradition, all are having a wonderful time. Then disaster strikes—the wine runs out. In the face of what we are facing globally at the moment, it is really no big deal. However, for this newly-wed couple and their families, this situation was serious: they would be named and shamed forever. In years to come, people would point at them and scoff, “there’s the ones who ran out of wine—at their own wedding!” However, the only one who really is aware of the couple’s impending shame is Mary; she is ever-sensitive to their predicament; as a mother and wife herself, Mary feels the need to do something to help.

Instinctively she turns to her own son Jesus—she argues to herself that he is the only one to do something about it, as she does not have the resources to go down to the Cana equivalent of ‘Tesco’ and buy hundreds of bottles of wine! We read that Jesus does not seem all that enthusiastic, as ‘his hour has not yet come’. But Mary knows her son: she has taught him well and she knows that he will listen. This incident always reminds me of the Parable of the Two Sons (**Matt 21:28-32**): I think of the son who says ‘no’ to his father’s request of help, but later thinks better of it and does the job. To prepare for the miracle, Mary simply instructs the servants, “**do whatever he TELLS you**”; she is asking them to LISTEN to the WORD that Jesus has for them, and to watch for the results. All this is happening quietly in the background with the wedding guests totally oblivious to all that is going on—the party continues in full swing. Mary goes to the ones who can make the difference—the ones in the background, working silently for the good of all.

The rest, as we say, is history, as gallons of top quality vintage wine is produced, so that the Wedding of Cana is still remembered two thousand years later. For me, this miracle shows the intense fun and joy that is associated with Christianity; our paintings and statues can make Jesus, Mary and the saints all too serious, lacking any humour. This, in turn, can reinforce the idea that religion and faith have to be endured and suffered, rather than enjoyed and lived to the full. Mary is central to this Christian living; she urges us to LISTEN to Jesus and 'to do what he tells you!'. That pearl of wisdom to the servants at Cana is something that we need to remind ourselves of every day. As followers of Jesus, we need to listen to the Word and, more importantly, act on it.

Pray the 'Our Father' and on each bead, spend some time remembering an incident in the life of Jesus that made a difference: when he listened to the cry of the leper or heard the grief of Martha, or when he heard his Father's voice on top of a mountain or in a garden. In this new praying of the rosary, bring to mind the influence of Jesus' own family, especially his mother, Mary: on her lap, he learnt the gift of listening—perhaps when she told night-time stories and prayed with him at bedtime.

- Jesus who turned water into wine, help us to listen to your word
- Jesus who told the story of the Prodigal Son, help us to listen to your word
- Jesus who was the baby in the stable at Bethlehem, help us to listen to your word
- Jesus the refugee, help us to listen to your word
- Jesus who played with his friends in the hills around Nazareth, help us to listen to your word
- Jesus who laughed with his friends, help us to listen to your word
- Jesus who reached out to the leper, help us to listen to your word
- Jesus who told wonderful stories to children, help us to listen to your word
- Jesus who accepted the kindness and love of Simon of Cyrene and Veronica, help us to listen to your word
- Jesus who showed the totality of his love, nailed to the cross on Golgotha, help us to listen to your word



Patxi Velasco Fano via Qumran2.net

Hear O Israel

The Lord our God is one God.

You must love the Lord with all your heart

With all your soul and with all your strength

And you must love your neighbour as yourself.

Do this and you will find happiness.

Amen!

Reflection: Week 5—Mary, Mother of the Church

Although Mary was not given the official title of ‘Mother of the Church’ until the closing session of Vatican II when St Pope Paul VI proclaimed, **‘we declare Mary Most Holy Mother of the Church, that is, of all the Christian people’** (21/11/1964). He was only echoing a tradition that goes back to the foundation of the Church when Mary was central to the care and support of this infant Church, living locked down in fear in the Upper Room. In the fourth century, St Ambrose of Milan recognised the unique place that Mary has in the life of the Church and saw that she was indeed the ‘Mother’.



*Mary and Jesus, in the old Church of St. Mary of Zion, Axum, Ethiopia
A Davey from Where I Live Now: Pacific Northwest,
[CC BY 2.0](#), via Wikimedia Commons*

I am blessed with wonderful memories of my own mother and I invite you to reflect on those mother figures in your own life. I remember, in my late teenage years, no matter how late I returned home, my mum was always in the kitchen ‘just making a cup of tea!’ I remember those early morning chats with her, and it was only years later that I realised that this is what good parenting is all about: you will wait up, you will listen to the stories of crazy parties or of broken relationships—above everything else, she was there for me. That gift and relationship can never be broken, and I still pray with her every day, even though the Lord took her home in 1999.

When Jesus was accidentally left behind in Jerusalem, Mary and Joseph searched high and low for him. While he was content to be ‘in his Father’s house’, his parents were frantic with worry; on finding him, he is content to go back to Nazareth with them and continue his growth and maturity. On pilgrimage to Nazareth, you will experience something of family life in first century Palestine, especially if you visit the YMCA ‘Nazareth Village’. You get a

real feel for the village that Jesus grew up in, and the work of his parents. As a mother, Mary shared her love, wisdom, discipline and care with Jesus; in turn, he shared it with all he met as he carried out the will of his Father in heaven. His life and ministry reflected that single-minded dedication to mission: parables, miracles and community together form a life, death and resurrection that we are invited to share in. We are in excellent company in this community of faith and Mary will guide us as a friend, companion, shoulder to cry on and be a loving mother to us all.

Pray the 'Our Father' and on each bead spend some time remembering the Motherhood of Mary.

- Mary, who listened at the Annunciation, pray for us
- Mary who helped at the Visitation, pray for us
- Mary who journeyed to Bethlehem, pray for us
- Mary who bore the Light of the World, pray for us
- Mary who was forced into exile as a refugee, pray for us
- Mary who searched for her lost son in Jerusalem, pray for us
- Mary who listened to her Son preach in the synagogue of Nazareth, pray for us
- Mary who watched the water turned in excellent wine, pray for us
- Mary who walked the Way of the Cross with her Son, pray for us
- Mary who cradled the body of her Son in the pain of Calvary, pray for us

Virgin Mary, turn your merciful eyes towards us amid this coronavirus pandemic. Comfort those who are distraught and mourn their loved ones who have died, and at times had to be buried in a way that grieves them deeply. Be close to those who are concerned for their loved ones who are sick and who, in order to prevent the spread of the disease, cannot be close to them. Fill with hope those who are troubled by the uncertainty of the future and the consequences for the economy and employment.

Mother of God and our Mother, pray for us to God, the Father of mercies, that this great suffering may end and that hope, and peace may dawn anew. Plead with your divine Son, as you did at Cana, so that the families of the sick and the victims will be comforted, and their hearts be opened to confidence and trust.



*Francesco Albani,
Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons*

Protect those doctors, nurses, health workers and volunteers who are on the frontline of this emergency and are risking their lives to save others. Support their heroic effort and grant them strength, generosity and continued health.

Be close to those who assist the sick night and day, and to priests who, in their pastoral concern and fidelity to the Gospel, are trying to help and support everyone.

Blessed Virgin, illumine the minds of men and women engaged in scientific research, that they may find effective solutions to overcome this virus.

Support national leaders, that with wisdom, solicitude and generosity, they may come to the aid of those lacking the basic necessities of life, and that they may devise social and economic solutions inspired by farsightedness and solidarity.

Mary Most Holy, stir our consciences, so that the enormous funds invested in developing and stockpiling arms will instead be spent on promoting effective research on how to prevent similar tragedies from occurring in the future.

Beloved Mother help us realise that we are all members of one great family and to recognize the bond that unites us, so that, in a spirit of fraternity and solidarity, we can help to alleviate countless situations of poverty and need. Make us strong in faith, persevering in service, constant in prayer.

Prayer of Pope Francis written in a time of international pandemic, 25/04/2020

Cover image:

Our Lady of the Miracles of Caacupé. Cargale-Vittorio Giardini [CC BY 3.0](#) via Wikimedia Commons