



Catechetical Corner

PRAYER IN COMMUNION WITH MARY

“Because of Mary’s singular cooperation with the action of the Holy Spirit, the Church loves to pray in communion with the Virgin Mary, to magnify with her the great things the Lord has done for her, and to entrust supplications and praises to her” (CCC, no. 2682). This twofold movement of joining Mary in praising God for his gifts to her and seeking her intercession has found a privileged expression in the Hail Mary.

The Hail Mary

Along with the Lord’s Prayer, the Hail Mary is one of the most widely used prayers in the Catholic Church. The first half of the Hail Mary comes from Luke’s Gospel accounts of the Angel Gabriel’s annunciation to Mary that she was called to be the Mother of God’s Son (Lk 1:26-56). The second half is an intercessory prayer developed in the Church’s tradition.

- “Hail Mary, full of grace.” This is the greeting the Angel Gabriel spoke to Mary of Nazareth. Gabriel proclaims that Mary is full of grace, meaning that she is a sinless woman, blessed with a deep union with God, who had come to dwell in her.
- “The Lord is with thee.” Mary has been chosen by God for this great privilege. He is with her, having already preserved her from sin and filled her with grace. This does not mean that Mary is deprived of her freedom. She lives in graced friendship with God and freely offers him her undivided heart.



- “Blessed art thou among women.” This was the greeting given Mary by her cousin Elizabeth when Mary came to visit and help Elizabeth with the birth of her forthcoming child (Lk 1:42). As Scripture points out, Mary holds a singular place among all God’s chosen ones in the history of salvation. Mary is the world’s most honored woman.
- “Blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.” This is another beatitude or blessing uttered by Elizabeth, who spoke these words after her child, John the Baptist, leaped in her womb at the moment she hears the greeting of Mary. Elizabeth is inspired by the Holy Spirit to bless Mary

for believing the message of Gabriel. Elizabeth acknowledges the presence of God in Mary’s womb: “How does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” (Lk 1:43). This is the first time in Scripture that Mary’s faith is praised.

- “Holy Mary, Mother of God.” Sometime in the Middle Ages, the second half of the Hail Mary, which begins by invoking her title of Mother of God, was composed. This title comes from the earliest days of Christian faith. Mary is the Mother of God, because she is the mother of Jesus who is true God and true man, as defined by the Council of Ephesus in AD 431.



The Eastern Churches call Mary *Theotokos*, or “Birth-giver of God” (sometimes translated as “God-bearer”). Mary’s response to God engages her in the plan of human salvation through motherhood of Jesus.

- “Pray for us sinners.” We have noted that intercessory prayer concerns the needs and hopes of others. Jesus Christ, our High Priest, always intercedes for us before the Father, and he calls us to intercede for others as well. The saints and the Blessed Virgin Mary continue this prayer of intercession in heaven. As Mother of the Church, Mary continues to pray with a mother’s care for the Body of her Son on earth. At Cana, Mary interceded with Jesus on behalf of the couple who had run out of wine. Jesus heard her prayer and turned water into wine. Mary’s last words in Scripture are spoken to us: “Do

“Our holy mother always brings us to Jesus.”

whatever he [Jesus] tells you” (Jn 2:5). Our holy Mother always brings us to Jesus.

- “Now and at the hour of our death. Amen.” In her life, Mary walked a pilgrimage of faith. Even with all the grace she received from God, she encountered the mysterious ways of God and profound suffering, especially at the death of her Son. She knows what a journey of faith entails, and she accompanies us with prayer

as we make our journey to God throughout our lives and at death.

Other Prayers to the Blessed Virgin

In the Latin Church, the Rosary, a venerable and powerful form of prayer, developed out of popular piety. Praying the Rosary involves the recitation of vocal prayers, including the Our Father, the Hail Mary, and the Glory Be, while meditating on mysteries in the life of Jesus. In the Eastern Churches, litanies and hymns to the Mother of God are more commonly prayed.

We do not pray to Mary in the same way we pray to God. In praying to Mary, we invoke her intercession on behalf of our needs, whereas when we pray to God we ask him directly for gifts and favors.