



Journey to Our Lady

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My Dear Friends,

Now is the time of cleansing and renewal! "A clean heart create for me, God; renew within me a steadfast spirit." [Psalm 51:12]

Perhaps, we do not get excited during the season of Lent as we deny ourselves a favorite food or drink or habit for 40 days. However, there is cause for excitement. This period of cleansing helps us to grow spiritually and to conform our ways to Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life. We are clearing out our internal clutter that distracts us and creates obstacles on our path to holiness.

The Lenten season reminds us to take the time to make progress on our spiritual journey by strengthening our unity with God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Through our prayers, sacrifices, penance, and good works, we learn what it means to live more for God and less for ourselves; we learn to decrease so that our Lord can increase in our lives.

Of course, during this season we need to be honest with ourselves about what we do—is it merely fulfilling an obligation (somewhat begrudgingly) or are we truly trying to express our love for God by the way we live our lives? These 40 days give us the opportunity to exercise our spirit and perhaps remind ourselves that we have the will to follow God's will.

Will we continue to build on what we do when the 40 days are over or will we go back to our old habits? Will God remain in the forefront of our lives or fade into the background? Will we allow our faith in the Almighty, our hope in eternal salvation, our love for God, and God's love for us guide us through life? With help from Mary, our Blessed Mother, let us continue our journey.

The Lord is With Us!

When the Archangel appeared before Mary, our Blessed Mother, and said "The Lord is with you," Mary was greatly troubled and pondered what sort of greeting that might be [Luke 1:28-29]. Do we ponder what it means to have our Lord with each of us every day of our lives? Do doubts creep into our psyche, compelling us to shy away from God?

Mary did not doubt. Mary believed, saying "I am the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done to me according to thy word." [Luke 1:38] Always close at hand, God was Mary's refuge and strength; faith, hope, and love were her constant companions.

Mary shows us, along with all the saints in Heaven, what it means when we open ourselves to God and welcome His love and mercy into our lives. We can become beacons that help light the way toward the Kingdom of Heaven. Even in our pain and sorrow, we can inspire with God's merciful love emanating from our hearts and souls, but perhaps that is too much to consider. Perhaps we just want to know we are not alone, especially in our most trying moments.

Life is not always what we expect or plan. Events out of our control can hit us very hard. Those days can be rife with anger, resentment, fear, frustration, and despair; we do not feel God's presence in our lives. We are tempted to give up and to close ourselves off from God. However, without God, what do (See story, pg. 2)

(God is With Us, cont'd from pg. 1)

we have to protect ourselves against evil from within? “Evils come from within and they defile” [Mark 7:23].

Mary was never defiled. Yes, Mary was born without original sin and remained pure throughout her life. We are born with original sin, yet our sin is washed away at Baptism and through Penance and Reconciliation. Truly, God is with us to guide us and to guard us with His infinite love and mercy.

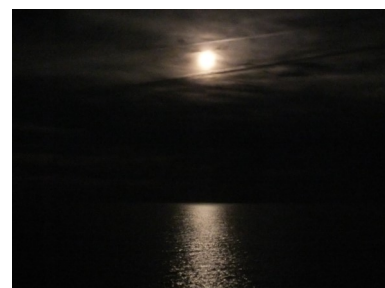
Even with God’s merciful love, Mary had to endure pain and sorrow when she saw her Son crucified on the cross. Instead of pulling away, Mary was united with Jesus Christ in His suffering to take away the sins of the world. At her Son’s behest, Mary became mother to us all, assuring us that we are not alone.

In unity with the Holy Spirit, Mary embraces us with her faith, hope, and love, and guides us to her Son Jesus Christ who leads us to God the Father Almighty. Our choice is: do we give up and turn away in our weakest moments, or do we pray for strength to hold on tight? And if we do not have the strength to pray, do we ask others to pray for us?

Let us use this season of Lent to tighten our bonds with the Holy Trinity and through Mary’s intercession, let us ask to be filled with God’s grace, so that on those lonely days when we find we cannot pray, just believing our Lord is with us will carry us and keep us from getting lost in the darkness.

In all of their journeys, Jesus and Mary never got lost in the darkness. Certainly, their roads were not paved with convenience. However, they knew what to do and where to turn. They knew because they were in God’s hands.

Rejoice! Our Lord is with us! #

***Little Changes***

Little changes can certainly go a long way. Little changes in our diet can help us stay healthy. Little changes in our physical activities can give us more energy. Little changes in our heart can help us to sin no more.

I have to admit the season of Lent used to be rather annoying to me. What’s the big deal? So what if I give up chocolate for 40 days; I’m just going to eat it again on Easter Sunday. Then I began to realize that Lent is more than just a season of giving up something temporarily; it is a frame of mind—a time to ask myself what little changes can I make in my life to draw me closer to God?

For example, instead of using time and energy to complain about a situation, use that time and energy to pray for strength to better deal with that situation. Instead of getting angry or impatient with someone, think about how Jesus would respond. Instead of getting into a funk over something I do not understand, ponder as Mary did in her heart.

These little changes have gone a long way in keeping my heart from hardening over life’s travails. While I do not always understand why events happen as they do, I do not blame God for any misfortune. Instead I offer up my day in hopes of helping a soul that is worse off than myself. True, I stumble at times and fall back into old habits, but I also catch myself quicker which keeps me from pulling away from God and abandoning my journey.

In the past, there have been many times when I stopped praying to God because I did not think my prayers did any good or made any difference. I still have days when I wonder if God is listening to my pleas. On those days I remind myself that God answers prayers in His own time, not my time, and my heart remains open to whatever answer He gives.

Yes, these little changes have helped me to progress on my journey. Although I have a very long way to go, with each little step forward I draw closer to God and farther away from sin. #

Prayer

*Dearest Mother,
Our Lord was with you
every day of your
life on earth.
I do not always feel
our Lord’s presence
in my life.
On those days,
I feel very much
alone.
In those darkest
moments
I ask for your
intercession
before our Lord
to strengthen
my faith
and my resolve
to hold onto
God’s loving mercy
even when I do not
feel it in my heart.
Amen.*

Salvation's "Might"

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him." [John 3:16-17] A key word from the Gospel according to John is "might," indicating that we have certain choices and decisions to make.

To love God and to reject sin are certainly the right choices. However, do we find it hard to stop those little infractions like gossip, name-calling, irreverence, negligence, and overindulgence that lead to greater sin? Perhaps we consider these acts as minor and not worth addressing. Do we think that way when we see a little mold growing in our homes or do we clean it out immediately before it spreads and causes greater damage?

When we sin, no matter how small that sin is, we stain the love we offer to God and we weaken our resolve to be saved. If not caught early, like mold in a home, sin can cause great damage to the soul making it uninhabitable for God's grace that we need to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Because of our human frailties, God gives us the sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation to cleanse us and to strengthen us to sin no more, otherwise how can we expect to be immersed in God's love for all eternity?

When we love God, we make a commitment to Him to do our best to live free of sin. If we think that commitment is too hard, let us think of what God did for us. "Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many." [Matthew 20:28] Isn't that worth our commitment?

Let us not waste our time and energy committing sin. Instead let us strive to "be perfect, just as [our] heavenly Father is perfect." [Matthew 5:48] That alone is a lifelong endeavor. To consider it in another way, when we make our souls a better place for our Lord's loving graces to dwell, we are given the strength — the might—to make the decisions in our lives that will lead us to the gates of Heaven. #

Foundation of Faith, Hope, and Love

God calls to us—to build our life on the foundation of faith, hope, and love. Whether or not we answer His call is our choice. The Blessed Virgin Mary can help us with our decision because our Lady knows the full responsibilities we must bear.

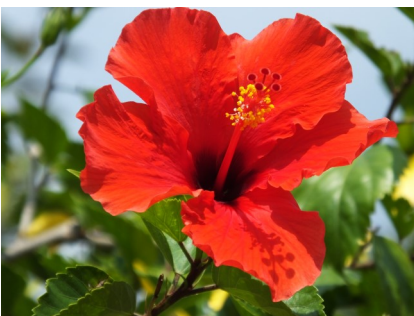
Simply stated: Mary is our heavenly Mother and gives us her maternal love to sustain our spiritual life and to encourage us to have faith and hope even in our tears and sorrows. Mary teaches us by her example, by her life on earth. Through the mysteries of the Rosary, we can see that Mary is perfectly centered in the foundation that God has laid out for each of us.

Mary's life shows us her unshakeable faith in God as her body and soul were prepared, by the power of the Holy Spirit, for the coming of her Son Jesus Christ. Mary held onto her faith throughout her entire lifetime and on her most difficult journey to her Son's crucifixion. Forever united with God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Mary's faith—at the foot of her Son's cross—gave her the hope of the resurrection and the love to be Mother to us all.

The thoughts of many hearts have been revealed to Mary. As our loving Advocate and Mediatrix, Mary shares those thoughts, pleas, and prayers with her Son Jesus Christ "in Whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of

sins." [Colossians 1:14] With that redemption and forgiveness, we can faithfully follow our Lord's path to Heaven where the hope of our salvation is realized for all eternity.

If we model ourselves after Mary, we can truly build our lives on the unshakeable foundation of faith, hope, and love, and be firmly united with the Holy Trinity. Like Mary, our lives can be a source of inspiration and encouragement for others who are building lives on their own. #



Prayer

*Mother of Good Counsel,
Help me to be
humble of heart.*

*Help me
to remain steady
in my faith, hope, and love
so that*

*what I do in this world
is according to
God's will,*

and not my own.

*God chooses
His instruments
in this world
to accomplish*

His Divine purpose.

*Although I am not worthy
to be a vessel for His use,
give me the courage*

*to say yes
to all that God wants me
to do*

in my lifetime.

*May I be ready for
all good works of God.*

Amen

Dear Angel,

I have so many distractions in my life. Try as I do to remain focused on God, I find myself being pulled away. Certainly, my time away from God is not meant to commit harm. My work, my chores, my errands, my relationships, my health all require my time. What can I do?

Help me to embrace God in all that I do so that I follow His will in all that I do. Help me to rely on His grace and not on myself. May my faith in God be stronger than any temptation or trial I may face in my lifetime. Guide me to Mary, the Mother of Mercy, for the protection I seek on my journey. Amen



Our Time is Now

The days and weeks go by so quickly—perhaps as a reminder that our time in this world is short, particularly when compared to our eternity. Let us ask ourselves: How do we spend our time? The fact is what we do with our time in this world will determine our ultimate destination for our eternity.

“Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we shall go into such and such a town, spend a year there doing business, and make a profit’—you have no idea what your life will be like tomorrow...Instead you should say, ‘If the Lord wills it, we shall live to do this or that.’” [James 4:13-15]

During this season of Lent, we have an opportunity to reorganize our priorities so that we can spend more time with God. We may think we spend a sufficient amount of time with God by saying a few extra prayers, attending Mass more often, and giving to charity—certainly all very worthy activities. The truth is our time always should be centered on God. How tough is that?

The difficulty comes when we separate our relationship with God from all that we do in our lives. Sometimes we make that separation because we think what we do in our ordinary living, such as work, chores, errands, has nothing to do with our faith in God. Other times we may make that separation purposely particularly when we think our relationship with God, and all the responsibilities that go with it, get in the way of what we want in life. Getting ahead in our careers, our romances, and in our everyday responsibilities may seem easier if we compromise our values and core beliefs. Our soul may be pulling us in one direction, but society and peer pressure may be pushing us in another direction. Isn't it easier just to go with the flow?

On those days when we just do not know which way to turn, let us turn to Mary, our Blessed Mother, who can help us use our time wisely. The Kingdom of Heaven and all its righteousness were first and foremost in Mary's heart, and therefore the life she led gave the world faith, hope, and love. Every act, every decision Mary made in this world solidified her unity with God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Sometimes we need to remind ourselves that our purpose in life is to do the same.

“So teach us to count our days aright, that we may gain wisdom of heart” [Ps 90:12]. Mary, the Seat of Wisdom and Mother of Good Counsel, shows us that seeking the Kingdom of Heaven first and all its righteousness protects us from sin and helps us to be better people. There was no room for petty jealousy, resentment, envy, or anger in Mary's heart—indeed Mary was full of grace. Therefore, our time is now to open our hearts to God's loving graces so that there can be no room for sin in our lives. May God's grace, and not the pressures of the day, guide us in all that we do so that whatever we do, we do everything for the glory of God.

Journey to Our Lady

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