

Sermon for the Solemnity of the BVM  
Sunday, August 14, 2022  
“Why Mary Matters”

Text: Luke 1:46-55

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

*Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.*

This is the beloved prayer, known as the *Hail Mary* or *Ave Maria*. Today we are celebrating the Feast or Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which actually occurs tomorrow, on August 15. It is a feast, because it is one of the holy days when any abstinence is dispensed, particularly in fasting seasons. In past times when meat was scarce and livestock was an important part of agricultural livelihood, a feast day meant that farmers could kill a cow or a pig, a chicken, and such for eating, which was one less animal to provide milk, eggs, or strength to pull a plow. This holy day is also a solemnity, because it recalls and glorifies an important event in the life of Jesus and the most significant mysteries of catholic Christian faith. Every year on this solemnity, I feel it necessary to say pretty much the same things about it, but as I thought of what new thing I could say, I thought I would also point out why the Hail Mary helps us understand why the Blessed Virgin Mary is so important in our lives.

First, Mary is the most blessed among women for all time; second, Mary is the Mother of God; and, third, Mary humbly accepted God’s invitation and call. The *Hail Mary* prayer summarizes the saintly characteristics of Mary herself and what she does for us. When the Archangel Gabriel appeared to Mary to inform her that she had been chosen by God to bring him into the world in human form, he gave her the great news that began with the words, “Hail, thou full of grace.” St. Luke utilized a verb form in Greek (κεχαριτωμένη), which meant that God made her full of grace from her beginning and throughout all time, and his grace infused her very being. “Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.” A short time later, when she went to meet with her relative, Elizabeth, mother of St. John the Baptist, upon her arrival, John leaped in Elizabeth’s womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, exclaimed “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.” Once again, Luke utilized the Greek verbal form that meant she had been blessed, or spoken highly of, by God from the beginning and continued to be for all time. That’s when Mary offered the words of the *Magnificat*, which we heard in the Gospel lesson, in response to God’s call to her—a prayer of praise to God for allowing her to bring into the world his very incarnation, who was himself blessed from the beginning and for all time.

The second part of the *Hail Mary* prayer reminds us that she is the mother of God and intercedes for us on our behalf to God. “Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.” The Church has venerated Mary for at least 1,900 years and placed special prominence upon the Blessed Virgin since its

beginning. From the days the early church Mary was considered the first among all the saints. In the year 431, the Third Ecumenical Council at Ephesus (a city in modern-day Turkey) declared Mary as the *theotokos*, or ‘God-bearer.’ Because she bore him in her womb, that makes her the mother of him whom she bore. She provided the womb and supplied the genetic material for God to become human in the person of Jesus. We know that Jesus is God-incarnate, the Word made flesh, and one of the persons of the one, holy and undivided Trinity. We also know that Jesus is fully divine and fully human. Therefore, Mary is the Mother of God, because it is through Mary that Jesus received his humanity. That does not mean that she is older than God; that does not mean that she is the source of his divinity or was at the Creation. Rather, Mary gave birth to a person, and that person also happened also to be God. Because of that, we believe she has a special place in the heart of God, and so we ask her to intercede for us—to pray for us—to God who hears her petitions directly.

On this holy day, we also celebrate her Dormition and Assumption. The details around her death and what happened to her afterward are a mystery and not specifically recorded in scripture. From the earliest days of the Church, it was understood that Mary’s mortal fate was like that of the rest of humanity. According to Paul in his First Letter to the Thessalonians, those “who sleep in death” and have “fallen asleep” before the second coming and await the resurrection of the dead (1 Thessalonians 4:13); that would suggest her dormition, or falling asleep. The Church has also taught since ancient times that at the moment of her conception, she was granted by God the grace to be free of original sin (that is the sin of the Fall of Adam and Eve), the result of which is corruption of the body. There are apocryphal writings by early Church Fathers that claim that the apostles were present when Mary died and that when St. Thomas asked to have her tomb opened, she was not there. Since, according to the words of Jesus in the Gospel of John only he who descended from the Father would ascend back to the Father, it was presumed that she did not ascend into Heaven, but was assumed. These two events can be seen in the image on the cover of the bulletin, which shows both Mary’s dormition and assumption beautifully depicted by the Eastern-European contemporary painter, Svitozar Nenyuk. Wherever, you might fall regarding this specific mystery, we still know that Mary had a special place in the heart of God.



We believe this because Mary humbly accepted God’s invitation and call to be the bearer of Jesus the Christ, the Anointed One, the Messiah. She showed incredible faith in the Almighty and faithfulness to him when she said, “Yes,” to God. She was an

unmarried teenage girl who risked shame and rejection by her family and community in order to fulfill God's purpose for her. What a risk! That kind of faithfulness takes incredible strength and courage, but she accepted the challenge. God knew she would and he knew she was courageous enough to do it and do it well. Mary should have been married to have a child, but she trusted God, and by her visitation to Elizabeth, she trusted Elizabeth, who accepted her and welcomed her with the same inclusive love that Jesus would eventually show to many who didn't fit society's mold. So often in Scripture God used the most unexpected people to work out his purpose in the world. Think about Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Ruth, David, Elizabeth, Peter, Paul, and Mary...and many others. And God can use unexpected people like you and me, to do his work.

It is this aspect of Mary's story that resonates the most for us. Mary is the highest example of how God can do the most extraordinary things with the most ordinary people. God can use any one of us for his purpose, no matter where we've come from, what we've done, who we've been, God can interrupt our lives to allow his plan to unfold. God can interrupt our lives in his call to us to be his agents to bring about his kingdom. The most important thing that we can do is humbly accept God's invitation and pray for his assistance to help us carry it out.

God saw in Mary such overwhelming potential to accept his invitation with humility, that he entrusted her and conferred his grace upon her to be the vessel by which the divine would become human. In so doing, she became the Mother of God-incarnate. As you think about the story of Mary, ask yourself, "How and where is God using me today?" Pray and listen to how God might be calling you to help work out his purpose in the world. There are so many ways in which we can all participate in furthering God's desire for a better world: there is much work to be done here among us as the community of God's people—the Church—and there is much work to be done for God's people and his creation. Put away all anxiety, anger, and confusion. God is calling you to say, "Yes."

Mary matters because she *is* the most blessed among women for all time, she is the Mother of God, and she humbly accepted God's call to her. In our own lives, she is an example to us that ordinary folk like us can participate in the work of God to make an impact in the world, and that if we remain faithful to him, we will, like Mary, some day enjoy eternal happiness with him. Say, "Yes," to God today. Thank God for Mary and her example to us. Ask Mary to pray to God on your behalf, so that you can know and do the work he has given you to do.

*Hail Mary, full of grace. Blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.*

## Resources

“Commentary on Luke 1:39-45, (46-55)” in *The Working Preacher*, [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=2723](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2723)

“Mary, Mother of God,” <http://www.catholic.com/tracts/mary-mother-of-god>

“The Dormition of Mary,” <http://www.catholiceducation.org/en/culture/catholic-contributions/the-dormition-of-mary.html>

“The Assumption of Mary: A Belief since Apostolic Times,” <https://www.ewtn.com/library/ANSWERS/AOFMARY.HTM>