



Formative Parenting

Cultivating Character in Children

A Ministry of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Immaculata, Pennsylvania

MARY and the SAINTS

Mary is mother and model for us all! Whenever she heard the will of God she responded “Your will be done.” She was the **first evangelist** because she was the first to bring the Good News into the world. Through her the Word became flesh and she presented Jesus to shepherds, kings, Simeon, Anna, and others. Mary was the **first disciple**, one who can hear the Word of God, understand God’s meaning, and put God’s Word into action. A disciple brings others to Jesus and brings Jesus to the world. Discipleship or evangelization, the vocation of Mary, the saints, and every Christian, is the mission of the Church. Evangelization begins at home and parents are the primary evangelizer of their family when they create a sense of the sacred and communicate knowledge of God and formation in faith and morals. Mary-like qualities and spiritual heritage develop in children when their experience of home includes sacred space, sacred time, and sacred practices that open their hearts to Jesus and the service of his gospel.

This newsletter is not limited to a particular liturgical season because its focus is the call to personal holiness through the guidance of Mary and the Saints. Days to honor canonized saints are sprinkled throughout the liturgical cycle and all holy men and women are celebrated on the feast of **All Saints, November 1**. Through Baptism we were called to holiness, to “put on the mind of Christ” (Philippians 2: 5). Holy folks who have gone before us can light our way. For instance, as an adolescent, St. Patrick was captured by pirates, taken to Ireland, sold as a slave to work as a shepherd, escaped, returned home, became a priest, and chose to return to Ireland to bring Christ to the people. He was creative in teaching about the Trinity and he fostered awareness of Christ in everything. Characteristics that you could emulate might include: not holding grudges, choosing to become better rather than bitter, forgiving those who hurt you, being creative in spreading the Gospel, or inviting Jesus’ presence in every circumstance. Christening with saintly names places the baptized under the patronage of such guides.

WHY HONOR AND PRAY TO ANYONE OTHER THAN GOD?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church supplied a response to this question: *By keeping the memorials of the saints—first of all the holy Mother of God, then the apostles, the martyrs, and other saints—on fixed days of the liturgical year, the Church on earth shows that she is united with the liturgy of heaven. She [the Church] gives glory to Christ for having accomplished his salvation in his glorified members (Mary and Saints); their example encourages her [the Church] on her way to the Father (#1195).*

Mary and the Saints, including saints known only to us and who are without worldwide recognition like grandpop or a particular aunt, modeled virtues like total dependence on God (Mary), integrity (Thomas More), unshakable devotion to Christ in the poor (Teresa of Calcutta), zeal for souls (Patrick), and unconditional forgiveness (Maria Goretti). Reflecting on their lives can lead us to develop Christ-like qualities and can assure us that “we are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses” whose lives encourage us to “persevere in running the race which lies ahead ... keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, who inspires and perfects our faith” (Heb. 12: 1-2). The Gospel is our road map and the

lives of Mary and the Saints are human guideposts whose lives inspire devotion within us as they teach us about God’s sustaining grace. From whom do you draw strength, advice, and direction? What qualities do you connect with your Baptismal namesake? What do your children know of their patron saints? Which heroes and heroines inspire the lives of your children? How familiar is your family with its spiritual genealogy? The following kinds of practices may be helpful:

- Celebrate “name day” on each family member’s baptismal anniversary or birthday, the saint’s feast day, or the feast of All Saints.
- Give gifts of name derivation, medals, saint books, or statues.
- Make a tradition of presenting a family-created collage of patron saint characteristics to each child on a designated birthday, like age eight. Involve the whole family in research and discussion. Collage the results and frame it. Religious book stores carry a variety of saint books and www.catholic.org/saints offers abbreviated biographies.

MARY, QUEEN OF ALL SAINTS

Born free from the original sin of Adam and Eve, Mary continued to live free from sin. Her entire life was a “Yes!” to God. As an adolescent she responded fully and freely to the vocation-invitation of the angel Gabriel. Though she wondered how his message could translate into reality she said, “I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be done to me as you say” (Lk. 1: 34,38). Mary lived her commitment in every circumstance: the annunciation, visitation, birth of Jesus, presentation in the temple, exile in Egypt, resettlement in Nazareth, feeling the loss of her child and then finding Jesus after three days’ separation, the wedding feast of Cana, widowhood, throughout Jesus’ public ministry, on the road to Calvary, at the foot of the cross, holding her dead son in her arms and burying him, and serving as Mother to the Apostle John and to the young church. Her life was far from easy. But we hear no word of complaint. Instead she demonstrated so many virtues—graciousness, non-defensiveness, readiness, acceptance, listening ability, courage, humility, outreach, perspective, ability to prioritize needs vs. wants, obedience, trust in Divine Providence, contemplation, self-control, patient endurance—to name but a few.

Introduce your children to Mary as mentor and model: a wise and trusted teacher, guide, counselor, and friend who is a standard or example for imitation. Seek her advice in decision-making and identify behavior based on hers. For instance, taking soup to a sick neighbor is like Mary caring for Elizabeth. Initiate family rituals that become second nature, expected, annual events so that Mary-ways penetrate your family environment and memories. Some Marian practices follow. May they lead to a year of grace for you and your loved ones.

- Learn and live the words of Mary:

“I am the servant of the Lord.” (Lk. 1:38)

“Let it (God’s will) be done to me.” (Lk.1:38)

“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord.” (Lk.1: 46)

“God who is mighty has done great things for me, holy is his name.” (Lk.1:49)

“Do whatever he tells you.” (Jn. 2:5)

- Observe Mary seasons throughout the liturgical year, i.e., October (Month of the Rosary), May (Mary’s Month), the First Saturday of each month, and the feast of the Immaculate Heart on the Saturday following the Second Sunday after Pentecost.

- Punctuate the year by observing the major feast days of Mary: Solemnity of Mary (1/1), Presentation of Jesus (2/2), Our Lady of Lourdes (2/11), Annunciation (3/25), Visitation (3/31), Our Lady of Mount Carmel (7/16), Assumption (8/15), Queenship of Mary (8/22), Birth of Mary (9/8), Our Lady of Sorrows (9/15), Our Lady of the Rosary (10/7), Presentation of Mary (11/21), Immaculate Conception (12/8), and Our Lady of Guadalupe (12/12).

- Establish a prominent, permanent place of honor for a statue or image of Mary.

- Use a symbol or icon of Mary for the family meal table centerpiece on Mary days.

- Develop your own worship practices and celebratory events on Mary feast days. For example, celebrate the birthday of Mary (Sept. 8) with Mass in the morning and cake with ice cream in the evening. Contribute infant items to a baby layette program.

- During October review the mysteries of the rosary. Explore the meaning of each mystery (joyful, sorrowful, glorious, luminous) and the lessons it contains.

- Pray the rosary together on the feast of the Holy Rosary, October 7.

- Pray a decade of the rosary on Rosary Mystery Feast Days, i.e., Presentation (2/2), Annunciation (3/25), Visitation (3/31), Assumption (8/15), and Queenship (8/22).

- Use rosary guides to foster contemplation, for example, McCormack, P. (2003). *Mary’s Beads of Transformation*. Liguori Publications.

- Pray the Angelus prayer on the feast of the Annunciation (3/25).

- Read the scripture story and involve the children in naming Mary qualities and characteristics on scriptural feasts, like the Visitation (3/31).

- View a video or read the story of the event on apparition feasts, like Lourdes, Fatima, or Guadalupe.

- Establish during the month of May a Mary Marathon Day or a Weekly Mary Day to (1) review prayers like the Angelus, Memorare, the Magnificat, “My Queen, my mother. . .”, Mother of Good Counsel, the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary; (2) read stories or view videos of the Miraculous Medal, Lourdes, Fatima, Guadalupe, etc.; and (3) sing favorite Mary hymns.

- Observe through Mass participation and family ritual the Marian holy days of obligation: January 1 (Solemnity), August 15 (Assumption), December 8 (Immaculate Conception).

- Use Mary feasts to teach faith concepts. For example, on the feast of Sorrows (9/15) discuss the seven sorrows of Mary (prophecy of Simeon, escape to Egypt, losing Jesus in Jerusalem, meeting Jesus carrying his cross, standing at the crucifixion, holding the dead body of Jesus, burying Jesus).

Dr. Patricia McCormack, IHM, a former Catholic schoolteacher and catechist, is a formation education consultant, an author of several books as well as the PARENT PARTNERSHIP HANDBOOK feature of *Today's Catholic Teacher*, and director of **IHM Formative Support for Parents and Teachers**, Arlington, VA. She speaks and writes frequently on topics of child formation. *Reach her at DrPatMcCormack@aol.com.*

This article originally appeared in the (**April 2004**) issue of *Today's Catholic Teacher*, © Peter Li, Inc. Reproduced with permission. All rights reserved. This article is protected by United States copyright and other intellectual property laws and may not be reproduced, rewritten, distributed, disseminated, transmitted, displayed, published or broadcast, directly or indirectly, in any medium without the prior written permission of Peter Li, Inc.