



Volume 12 Issue 13
Winter Edition

Greetings!

The Lord has done great things for us and we are filled with joy! May Our Blessed Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who came to us as a baby, fill your heart with much love, peace, and wonder during this holy Christmas season. I pray that He will bless you and your family abundantly for your generosity to our ministry.



Kathy MacInnis

Central Service Team

Kathy MacInnis, Coordinator



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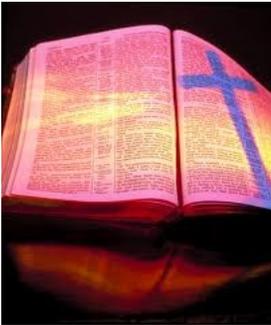
Jesus is Reason for Season



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1629 Metairie Road, Suite 3, Metairie, LA 70005

Liturgy of the Hours



Liturgy of the Hours

Office of Readings
Second Reading

From a spiritual Canticle by
Saint John of the Cross, priest

The knowledge of the mystery

Though holy doctors have uncovered many mysteries and wonders, and devout souls have understood them in this earthly condition of ours, yet the greater part still remains to be unfolded by them, and even to be understood by them.

We must then dig deeply in Christ. He is like a rich mine with many pockets containing treasures: however deep we dig we will never find their end or their limit. Indeed, in every pocket new seams of fresh riches are discovered on all sides.

For this reason the apostle Paul said of Christ: *In him are hidden all the treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of God.* The soul cannot enter into these treasures, nor attain them, unless it first crosses into and enters the thicket of suffering, enduring interior and exterior labors, and unless it first receives from God very many blessings in the intellect and in the senses, and has undergone long spiritual training. All these lesser things, disposing the soul for the lofty sanctuary of the knowledge of the mysteries of Christ: this is the highest wisdom attainable in this life.

Would that men might come at last to see that it is quite impossible to reach the thicket of the riches and wisdom of God except by first entering the thicket of much suffering, in such a way that the soul finds there is consolation and desire. The soul that longs for divine wisdom chooses first, and in truth, to enter the thicket of the cross.

St. Paul therefore urges the Ephesians *not to grow weary in the midst of tribulations, but to be rooted and grounded in love, so that they may know with all the saints the breadth, the length, the height and the depth-to know what is beyond knowledge, the love of Christ, so as to be filled with all the fullness of God.*

The gate that gives entry into these riches of his wisdom is the cross; because it is a narrow gate, while many seek the joys that can be gained through it, it is given to few to desire to pass through it.



Lois Mader,
Good and
Faithful Servant!

In order to care full-time for her beloved husband, Gerry, who has had recent and numerous medical challenges, Lois feels it is time to relinquish her Regional Representative duties. Lois and Gerry have both been very active, and devoted servants in the Charismatic Renewal at the National level for many years.

In addition to being the founding coordinator of the Fort Myers, Florida Chapter, our gratitude goes out to Lois for being instrumental in the forming of the new Tallahassee Chapter. She spent much time with them as a spiritual mother. She has stayed very close to the Chapters in her Southeast Region #5 and graciously shared her best practices with us at the WebEx Regional Rep and Advisory Team Meetings.

We are most grateful for Lois' dedication and commitment to the ministry. We pray that God's love will sustain her through this difficult time and that she will be protected in the folds of the Blessed Mother's maternal mantle.

Magnificat is my spiritual oasis; my Mary and Jesus time! My first Magnificat was indeed "my Magnificat" as I was 9 months pregnant with my fourth child. I was just like Elizabeth meeting Mary and sharing a woman's moment with the mother of Jesus. The breakfast, has become for me a morning of renewal, where wonderful women and priests gather to give praise and thanksgiving to our awesome God who never ceases to love us and call us to be with



Praise the Lord

Fr. Kevin's Korner
Magnificat's CST Spiritual Advisor
Father Kevin Scallon C.M.



Say A Prayer for Me

When I worked in England as a young priest after my ordination, I met a lot of lapsed Catholics who would invariably say to me, "I don't go to church no more. I think Catholics are just a lot of hypocrites. They go to Mass on Sunday and then go straight to the pub." My answer which always disarmed them was, "And what's wrong with going to the pub?" I should explain that whereas in the U.S. people go to bars to drink, in England and Ireland they go to pubs to talk. For my Yorkshire friends, however, pubs and religion shouldn't be mixed; which of course is ridiculous.

Some people can always find their own excuses for leaving the Church. The truth is never as simple as what people try to make it out. You can blame Father Jack or Sister Jill, or whoever you want, or you can disagree with Church teaching and discipline, etcetera, etcetera. The fact is that to leave the Church is to turn your back on Jesus Christ. Jesus is the sole reason why we go to Church on Sundays. We go to Mass, "Do this in memory of Me," to worship God the Father through His Son Jesus in the Holy Spirit.

Apart from this, there is a great deal of dishonesty, perversity and hypocrisy in the hearts of many who "leave the Church." It seems now that any old excuse will do. For them, Jesus has become a real inconvenience in their chosen life of egoism and self-will. And this is why Jesus, through the Church, is right to call us to repent. Repentance is always the key that lets us back into the Church. There are two kinds of people who leave the Church: those who do not know any better and who we need to evangelize, and those who simply "will not serve." Many and are infected with the modern viruses of disobedience and arrogance. People like these need to "humble themselves before the mighty hand of God (1 Peter 5:6)." They need to put their pride in their pocket and repent. Such repentance is best expressed in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. I once heard an English Bishop who had a lot of pastoral experience say, "You know, death bed conversions are few. Most people die the way they live. If they live in the awareness of God, they will die in the awareness of God. Otherwise, they may meet God as a stranger." Thank God that His mercy will always far exceed our repentance. of them have been well instructed in the faith.

Our Lady of Medjugorje asked the visionaries to pray one Hail Mary for the conversion of sinners. She once took Jakov to China and showed him an old man who lay dying and she said, "This man has lived a very evil life, but because of your Hail Mary, Jesus is taking him to heaven this day.

Some years ago one of my Vincentian Confreres, a well-known charismatic priest in Ireland, announced one morning in the month of June that Charlie Chaplin would die on Christmas day. He said, "I must pray for him." And sure enough, six months later on Christmas day the little man died and I am sure went to his reward.

For months before Sammy Davis Jr. died, the Lord put him in my heart to pray for him every day, which I did. I learned afterwards that he needed a lot of prayers, and I am looking forward to meeting him in heaven and having a chat.

And finally, on a lighter note, during my second year in England, I visited the house of a good practicing English Catholic and his family. I asked him, "Are there any other Catholics living on your street." The man said, "There is an Irishman living six doors from here, but you will only be wasting your time asking

him to go back to Church." I said, "Well, we'll have to see about that." The man said, "Father, I will bet you ten pounds that you will not get him to go back to Mass." I went to see the Irishman, and introduced myself and said, "There is an Englishman who bet me ten pounds that I will not persuade you to return to Sunday Mass." He replied, "Did he say that now?" Next Sunday, he was at Mass and he came to see me afterwards and said, "You know Father, I think maybe I should go to confession. Have you a moment?" Weeks later, he asked me, "Tell me Father, did you ever get the ten pounds?" I said, "I did indeed." "I am glad," he replied. Then he said, "You know Father, that man did me a very great favor. God bless him."

God is constantly putting people into our minds and onto our hearts. People we had not thought of for years, and people we pass on the street or see at the checkout, or remember during Mass. We should always pray for them, that they will be saved. No prayer is too short. And as we all know, prayer reaches to the ends of the earth.

We of Magnificat should never lose an opportunity to pray for our country, for our friends, and for the many strangers in our midst, that the Lord will pour out His Mercy on us all. God bless you.



Holy Father's Monthly Intentions



December 2013

Victimized Children. That children who are victims of abandonment or violence may find the love and protection they need.

Prepare the Savior's Coming. That Christians, enlightened by the Word Incarnate, may prepare humanity for the Savior's coming.

January 2014

Economic Development. That all may promote authentic economic development that respects the dignity of all peoples.

Christian Unity. That Christians of diverse denominations may walk toward the unity desired by Christ.

February 2014

Elders. That the Church and society may respect the wisdom and experience of older people.

Collaboration in Evangelization. That priests, religious, and lay people may work together with generosity.

State of The World by Marilyn Heap

It is no secret that we live in troubled and confusing times. At the heart of some of this confusion is the issue of government versus religion. As Christians we must be aware of what is happening in our country that appears to have only political implications. Yes, the dismantling of our system of government is being done very successfully. But ... this has only been able to be accomplished because our Judeo-Christian morality has been systematically dismantled paving the way for destroying our government as we know it.



The moral criteria by which we as Christians live is no longer the standard upon which our laws are based. We are no longer a Christian society, but an amoral, secular one that says what is good is bad, and what is bad is good. Our laws are now interpreted from this amoral point of view, not from a framework of Judeo-Christian morality. We must now learn how to live in this corrupt climate without betraying our moral code that is TRUTH and not some foggy, outmoded way of approaching life. This will be very difficult and we must be prepared to meet the challenge.

It is important that we recognize how our Judeo-Christian morality has been gradually dismantled. The Ten Commandments and what Jesus taught us regarding His fulfilling of them has no relevance to our American society today. We have been gradually convinced that there is no obligation to attend church on Sundays, that male & female living together out of wedlock is acceptable (the Scripture calls this fornication), as are artificial contraception and abortion (both of which have placed our race at the brink of annihilation with a birthrate of 1.9 % children per couple when it takes 2.1 % to continue the race), that sexual freedom is a right even for children so chastity must not be taught in our schools, and that homosexual relationships are an alternate lifestyle with legal rights (not an abnormality). We have been playing God, deciding for ourselves what is right and what is wrong, i.e. *eaten of the fruit of the tree of good and evil (Cf. Gn. 3:1-7)*. *If we believe that Jesus is God; that He said, I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life, AND... that He did not leave us orphans but established a church to guide us in the ways to follow Him with a man called Peter in the lead (Cf. Mt. 16: 18-19), we must accept what He and His Church teaches as TRUTH. Jesus, who lived under the Judeo law, is the same yesterday, today & tomorrow. His teachings, through Scripture and the Church He founded and promised to be with until the end of time, have guided humankind for over 2000 years and they cannot change because He is God who does not vacillate, one minute going one way and the next minute going another way.*

This article is not meant to pass judgment on anyone's salvation, for it is God who reads hearts, forgives, especially through the Sacrament of Reconciliation and judges salvation. The purpose in sharing it is to serve as a reminder of what we profess to believe as followers of Jesus and to help us evaluate our personal belief system in light of these teachings and the problems we are facing today. It is hoped we will become aware that the root cause of our political dilemma is moral, and either we will stand now and in the future on our Judeo-Christian principles based on TRUTH, or go with the tide and build our families on sand. (Cf. Mt. 7:21-29.)

To see what Sacred Scripture says and the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) teaches on some of the subjects mentioned in paragraph 2 above, refer to the following:

Matthew 19:3-9, 1 Corinthians 6:10, 1 Timothy 1:10
CCC #'s 1852, 2257, 2259, 2270, 2271, 2348, 2350, 2353, 2366, 2370, 2378, 2384 and 2385

Advent Reflections

by Elyse O'Kane



Each year it becomes spiritually frustrating to discover I am still tempted by the secular world, telling me I need to have a Martha Stewart home and that my food should look like what the Barefoot Contessa made on the Food Network. It's definitely a battle against what society attempts to drum into my brain. It begins sometime in October when Christmas trees suddenly appear in craft stores and Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire starts playing over the intercom. Remember our outrage when this used to happen before Thanksgiving? Now it has crept in much earlier as the stores fret about meeting their bottom line. But the good news is that we know the truth. We know deep in our hearts the "reason for the season". We don't have to give into the lure of materialism. We may be tempted to become anxious about many things but Our Lady wants to gently show us how to peacefully prepare for her Son.

Recently, as I began to think about getting the house ready to decorate, I sensed that I needed to invite my Mother Mary to be my interior decorator. And I'm talking about true interior decorating, the preparation and decorating of my heart. What would that look like? With those thoughts turning about in my head, I fell into an unexpected time of reflection. I wondered, what would Mary discover there, in my heart?

I imagined her entering and finding it cluttered and a bit dusty. I could see her in my mind's eye as she began making a pile of things that needed to be thrown away; selfishness, pride, impatience, anger and unforgiveness. But I knew that I was the one that needed to carry them out. She noticed a dark corner and said it needed the light of God's Word there. The sweeping she left to me. And as I swept away worry and anxiety, she smiled and seemed pleased with the progress. Things were beginning to take shape. Next she brought in a large bowl filled with the fruits of the Spirit; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control, and told me to partake of them frequently. She stirred the dying embers until they formed a blazing fire and I could feel the warmth of a Mother's love. In my hands she placed a rosary, telling me to pray it fervently. She left briefly but came back with her Baby. "You're ready", she said, as she then placed this precious Child in my arms. His eyes opened and He gazed deep into my soul. This tiny Child knew everything about me. Then a smile appeared on His cherub-like face. I pressed him close and whispered, "Thank You, dear Jesus, for coming into this poor heart of mine."

This time of meditation ended as suddenly as it had come but leaving me with great peace. It left me with a resolve to be aware of the lion of consumerism prowling about waiting to devour my joy. It made me want to protect my heart from acting on any temptations that would knock on its door. And it made me want to sing out praises!

Being a mother and now a new grandmother, I want my home to be a place of warmth and welcome, of love, of peace and of joy when everyone comes to celebrate this most beautiful season. I want the Christmas lights outside our home to represent the light that shines inside our hearts. When my grandchildren place Jesus in the manger on Christmas morning and we sing "O Come let us Adore Him", I pray for that sound and memory to remain and echo into the coming year.

Blessed Advent, dear sisters, may this Christmas bring you ever closer to the Christ Child, the Prince of Peace.

Conway, AR Has First Meal

By Debbie Eckert
Coordinator of Conway,
Arkansas Chapter

"We are women, women of faith. United in God's love, sisters in grace. Looking to Jesus to lead us each day. We are women, women of faith! The words of this song rang true to the hearts of the newly-formed, "Jesus, Bread of Life" Chapter in Conway, Arkansas.



Debbie Eckert, Coordinator

September 28, was our birthday and we were covered in the love of Jesus and Mary. We served 215 women, representing 21 communities and even some from other faith traditions. This was truly a work of the Holy Spirit since we are only 5% Catholic in our state.

The journey seemed long to us getting to that first meal, but the wisdom of those who have gone before us was a key element in the success of our first Breakfast. A funny story that was a gift and word of the Holy Spirit was a trip that our service team took to our Mother Chapter's Meal.



Left to right: Doris Williams, Treasurer, Lib Harrison, Historian,
Sarah Thornton, Secretary, Aggie Neck, Speaker

As we traveled in the car 3 hours to Cherokee Village, we were laughing, sharing and meeting as we drove. The more we talked, the faster I drove...unaware of the speed limit. I was pulled over for speeding! The best part was I did not get a ticket. The officer was merciful and told us to SLOW DOWN! This was a word from the Holy Spirit...Slow Down... you will get established,

just take your time. I include this to encourage those in formation ...take your time, it will happen.

Thanks to you who intercede regularly for Magnificat. Your prayers are jewels in the treasure chest of each chapter. One last question?? Do we really have to wait until September of 2015 to attend the next Int'l Leaders' Conference? We can't wait to connect with our sisters again. The conference is awesome!! If you have never been, save your money. It is well worth it!

SAVE THE DATE!

**2015 Magnificat
International Leaders' Conference
"Proclamation of the Kingdom"
September 24-27, 2015
Washington, D.C.**

MAGNIFICAT PRAYER BOOKLET

Christmas 2013 Special

Magnificat has been a daily companion to thousands on their spiritual journey, enriching their prayer life and helping them grow in love and knowledge of Christ and the Church.



The Magnificat Prayer Book would be a great idea to consider as a Christmas gift for family and friends. Every subscription to this lovely Mass and prayer guide directly benefits our Ministry services domestically and worldwide.

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Regular Edition: first subscription \$44.95; second subscription \$35; and subsequent subscriptions \$29; **Large Print Edition:** first subscription \$64.95; second subscription \$55; and subsequent subscriptions \$49.

These US prices are a considerable discount and only available in the USA until March 31, 2014. This offer is available by mail (see address below) - but **not** on the website.

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The Magnificat Garden is growing!



Conway, Arkansas



Tallahassee, FL



Brasil, Aruba



Dublin, Ireland



Denver, CO



Czyzowice,
Poland

Welcome to our New Chapters
May you bloom where you are planted!





Thanks Be To God:

Developing A Grateful MAGNIFICAT Heart

By Marilyn Quirk

Mary said, "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. For He has looked with favor on his lowly servant; From this day all generations will call me blessed. The Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name." (Luke 1: 46-49)

Mary's magnificent hymn of praise, the Magnificat, gives us a view into her heart and soul. We see her obedience, her faith, and her total love for the living God. As she sings her canticle, she looks back through the ages at God's faithfulness to his people; she looks at all the wondrous things he has done and then sees how she is part of his plan; she realizes in a new way his overwhelming love for her as he chooses her to receive his greatest gift - to bring God's promised Messiah into the world. And the only thing she can offer him in return is a heart overflowing with thankfulness and praise. Mary, our Mother, wants to teach us to love and praise God as she does: with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength. Let us

learn from her as we look back and reflect upon the time just prior to her singing her beautiful song of praise.

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee named Nazareth to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. (Lk 1: 26-27)

The beautiful narrative of the Annunciation as told in the first chapter of Luke's Gospel tells of the angel Gabriel sent from God to invite his highly favored daughter, Mary, to become the mother of the Redeemer. This ordinary woman, extraordinarily graced by God from the moment of her conception, was told she would conceive and bear a son and name him Jesus. "How can this be...?" she asked. The angel told her in reply, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God." Mary placed her life at the disposal of his plan and said, "I am the servant of the Lord, let it be done according to your word. [As a side note - I love the title with which Mary identified herself - servant. In Greek this word is δούλη (doulē), which means a female slave, a servant of servants, the lowest level of servitude.] Her surrender to the Lord was total.

This overshadowing of the Holy Spirit must have been the most incredible experience of union with God ever. I imagine she would have wanted to savor this moment for a good period of time. Yet Luke tells us "in those days" Mary set out in haste to visit her kinswoman, Elizabeth, whom the angel said was with child in her old age "for nothing is impossible with God." In faith, Mary began this arduous journey of nearly one hundred miles, which must have taken several days, to the hill country to a town of Judah. She went on the wings of the Holy Spirit to love and serve her aged cousin. Pope Benedict said this was the first Eucharistic procession. One may also say that she was the first bearer of the good news of our salvation. When Mary entered Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth, the child within Elizabeth's womb leapt; "Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and cried out in a loud voice, 'Blest are you among women and blest is the fruit of your womb. But who am I that the mother of my Lord should come to me?'"

Because there were no easy forms of communication over distances at that period of time, the sight of Elizabeth, great with child, must have filled Mary's heart with joy. This was indeed confirmation of what the angel had told her about her cousin. How good it is for all of us to have a confirmation of what God has spoken quietly to our heart. It was not possible for Elizabeth to know through human eyes that Mary was pregnant. It was only by the revelation of the Holy Spirit that she knew Mary was bearing the Son of God. The exuberant joy of these two women must have filled that little home. I can only describe this moment as an explosion of grace. Mary, filled to overflowing with love and gratitude and joy, sang her Magnificat with great exultation. When she said, "my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior," the Greek word "rejoice" translates to jubilee joy - to jump or leap in great jubilation. She marvels at the faithfulness and mercy of God in redeeming the human race and with all humility acknowledges that the Almighty has done great things for her. She gives him the glory, taking none for herself.

The town where this event took place is called Ein Karim, which means "Garden Fountain" or "Vineyard Fountain." In visiting that little home in the Holy Land, one can see a well inside with the water flowing down into a fountain in the little village just below the shrine. It is called Mary's Spring. When Mary visited Elizabeth, a little spring burst forth, as often happens in places of her visitations. Water is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. Wherever she goes, the Holy Spirit is there as well. The following passage describes Ein Karim to me.

"You are an enclosed garden, my sister, my bride, an enclosed garden, a fountain sealed.



**You are a park that puts forth pomegranates, with all choice fruits;
Nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all kinds of incense;
Myrrh and aloes, with all the finest spices.**

You are a garden fountain, a well of water flowing fresh from Lebanon.

Arise, north wind! Come, south wind!

blow upon my garden that its perfumes may spread abroad. (Song 4: 12-16)

Magnificat, A Ministry to Catholic Women, is a work of which I have been privileged to be a part since its beginning on the Feast of the Holy Rosary, October 7, 1981.

Magnificat takes its inspiration from the Visitation, and before we had ever heard of Ein Karim, the Lord inspired us with this passage from Scripture. We are women whose lives have been transformed through God's mercy by "the love God poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Rom 5: 5). We have experienced a taste of the joy these two women, Mary and Elizabeth, shared as they came together. Through the grace and mercy of God, the Holy Spirit, given to us in baptism and confirmation, has been stirred and fanned into a flame (2 Tm 1: 6), making us new creations in Christ. This personal encounter with the risen Christ has impelled us to go and tell the good news to our sisters in Christ, to evangelize and foster spiritual growth in women all over the world.

Our Holy Father, Pope Benedict, in speaking to the Curia at the end of 2007 identified a crucial need in the Church: to evangelize. He also stated that the Gospel cannot be implemented without a personal encounter with Christ. He said further, "Whoever has recognized a great truth, whoever has found a great joy should transmit it. He cannot keep it to himself."

John Paul II told us (Rimini, Italy, April 2001) that Mary is the privileged and sure means for encountering the Lord: "It is she who prepares us to welcome His Word and makes us persevering in prayer, in the expectation of the Spirit who inflames our hearts and leads us to put out into the deep with courage, toward the goals that the Lord is indicating."

As a mother, I care deeply about the spiritual well-being of my children. I have learned that Mary, my heavenly Mother, cares much more about my spiritual growth. Time and again I have asked Mary to help me pray, to prepare my heart to receive the Eucharist, to assist me in my ordinary duties, etc., and she has more than answered my prayer. In the Apostles' Creed, we say Jesus "was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary." This is also true in our lives. Mary was there at Cana interceding with Jesus: "They have no more wine." One interpretation is the "wine" of the Holy Spirit. She was present at Pentecost, praying with the apostles and disciples for the coming of the Spirit. (When the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them, the joy of those receiving the Spirit was so profound that some bystanders scoffed, "They have had too much new wine.")

Father Cantalamessa, preacher to the papal household and a regular contributor to the Magnificat publication, said in one of his Advent homilies in 2007 that "all prayers and hymns to the Holy Spirit begin with "Come!" This means that the Spirit is something that we have received and that we must receive again and again." The "Spirit who interiorly transforms us, gives us a taste of the praise of God, opens our mind to the understanding of the Scriptures, teaches us to proclaim Jesus 'Lord' and gives us the courage to assume new and difficult tasks in the service of God and neighbor." Mary, spouse of the Holy Spirit, teaches us openness and docility to the Holy Spirit in our everyday lives.

Mary's life was filled with unexpected twists and turns, joys and sorrows. She embraced each day and situation with total submission to the will of God. "I am the servant of the Lord, let it be done according to your word." Father Romanus Cessario says it best in his exquisite meditations in the 2008 Holy Week edition of Magnificat, "The Via Matris: The Way of Our Sorrowful Mother." Father Cessario writes that "although Mary was conceived immaculately she did not refuse to embrace the sorrows that she endured for the Lord's sake... Her 'Fiat,' her prayer of submission to the divine plan, commits Mary to cooperating with her Son as he wins the world's salvation. The sorrows of Mary are meant to provide a source of encouragement for Christian believers. What the Mother of God experienced in faith becomes both a model and a support for us." She truly is the Woman of the Way and the Help of Christians. So often I have turned to her and meditated on her trials in life and been strengthened. How many of us, as parents, have had concerns for our children and grandchildren, and have entrusted them to her to watch over them. Mary is the first and foremost disciple, with virtues for all to emulate!

Saint Augustine tells us that we cannot be exempt from trials but that we progress through means of them. In the ministry of Magnificat we have received strength and inspiration from hearing the testimonies of so many women who have endured great obstacles and difficulties, have overcome them, and have grown spiritually through the power of the Holy Spirit and Mary's help. As Mary endured the depths of sorrow, she received the heights of joy and praise. Reflecting on her many trials gives us strength to endure and to grow in our own gratitude to God.

This year marks the twentieth anniversary of John Paul II's Apostolic Letter On the Dignity and Vocation of Women. The introduction opens with an excerpt from a prophetic message to women given at the close of the Second Vatican Council, December 8, 1965.

"The hour is coming, in fact has already come, when the vocation of women is being acknowledged in its fullness, the hour in which women acquire in the world an influence, effect, and a power never hitherto achieved. That is why, at this moment when the human race is undergoing so deep a transformation, women imbued with the Spirit of the Gospel can do much to aid mankind in not falling...." The word "imbued" means to soak, to saturate as if one were dyeing a garment. God's plan for us is to be saturated with his Holy Spirit - as Mary is.

Women have been given by God great power to influence for good or for evil. We see this in the Scriptures and in our society and culture today. The late Archbishop Sheen said that "woman is the measure of the level of our civilization." As go women, morally, so goes the culture. She is a standard bearer. As we see the moral decline in our culture today, we also see that godly women can make a difference in influencing our culture for good. I have witnessed that when a woman surrenders her heart to the Lord and his purposes for her life, dramatic changes often happen within her family and sphere of activities.

In John Paul II's Apostolic Letter on women he wrote, "in order to intervene in the history of his people, God addresses himself to women..." And also, "In the Spirit of Christ... women can discover the entire meaning of their femininity and thus be disposed to making a 'sincere gift of self' to others thereby finding themselves."

I believe God is speaking this message to the hearts of women all over this world. Let us pray that we respond in this critical hour. I believe it is only through the grace of God in the power of his Spirit that we as women can pull down the strongholds that allure us to seek ourselves in following the ways of the world. Jesus said, "Whoever finds his life will lose it and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Mt 10: 39). I like to think of this passage in this way: in seeking ourselves we lose our selves, but in losing ourselves in Christ we discover who we are. It is only in Christ that we can find our true identity and fulfillment. "Self-help" programs apart from Christ, striving to have the perfect body or to rise on the corporate ladder, will never gain for us true peace. Our position or beauty, etc., is not our worth; it is only Christ and his plans

Again, John Paul II said, "Only by the power of the Holy Spirit who 'overshadowed' her was Mary able to accept what is impossible with men, but not with God" (cf. Mk 10: 27). God, the Almighty, is calling all of us, men and women, to unite with him in a life of holiness - to walk with him as Enoch and all the holy men and women in the Scriptures walked - to imitate the lives of the saints of the past and the saints who are living among us today. This is the universal call to holiness the Church proclaims. As Mary teaches us, however, holiness cannot be accomplished by our efforts alone. We must cooperate with God's grace. He initiates and we respond. How do we cooperate and respond to his grace?

I believe it is by living a life of prayer. "There is no holiness without prayer. In fact, as we see in the lives of the saints, Christians are worth as much as they pray" (John Paul II, Rimini, Italy, April 2001). Prayer must become an essential part of our day. Making it so begins with a decision on our part that time alone with God must be a priority. In all of our busy lives we need to carve out a portion of our day to God - to seek his kingdom first and his righteousness, and all things will be given to us besides (Mt 6: 33). This will mean finding a time and place to meet with God alone: "When you pray, go to your room, close the door and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you" (Mt 6: 6). These are the words of Jesus, who by his words and example teaches us to pray. Seeking God in personal prayer will always be rewarded - if we are faithful to a little, he will give us more. Prayer will be the joy and strength of our lives.

In 2001, John Paul II exhorted us to "'put out into the deep' of prayer in order to 'put out into the deep' of mission. Mission that does not spring from contemplation is doomed to frustration and failure... Contemplation which does not give birth to mission will eventually wither" (John Paul II, Vatican, June 22, 2001). In other words, we must "Be" before we "Do." Prayer must always precede apostolic activity. What happens to us as we pray? Why is it so important? I have tried to identify, from my personal experience, six gifts God gives us as we pray. You may want to add to this list.

1.) Fellowship with God

It is inconceivable to us how much God desires to commune with us. Saint Augustine said that God thirsts that we may thirst for him. It is in prayer that we come to know him and his personal love for us and to love him in return. Once we have experienced the joy of fellowship with him, nothing will be the same. We will only thirst for more. We have an open invitation to have each day a divine appointment with the Almighty. He desires for us "fullness of joy in his presence" (Ps 16: 11).

2.) He Changes Us

In the presence of the living God, we are changed and transformed. "All of us, gazing on the Lord with unveiled faces are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another" (2 Cor 3:18). The word "transform" in Greek is (metamorphein), which is metamorphosis - the process through which a caterpillar is changed into a butterfly. God changes us in his presence. Bad habits are gradually softened and erased. More love for others comes into our hearts. Even our appearance can be altered as the Lord's light shines through us (see 2 Cor 4: 6). I have realized that, through prayer, God changes the desires of my heart. Looking back, I have seen how the direction of my life has changed. The things that I held important no longer attract me. It is amazing that we have only to say "yes" to him and dispose ourselves and he does the rest - he transforms us. This is the good news of salvation.

3.) He Teaches Us

He renews our mind. "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom 12: 2). Once again the word "transform" is metamorphosis. God's word is alive and active with power to enlighten and conform our minds to God's will as we read and meditate upon the Scriptures.

"The revelation of your words sheds light, giving understanding to the simple" (Ps 119: 130). As we read God's word and reflect upon it, it is amazing how often a word or a passage will come "alive" to us with understanding and be a source of meditation for the day. The Magnificat missal is a great tool for us to read and meditate upon the Scriptures for each day. It is a perfect companion to carry with us in our purse or pocket. I look forward to the spiritual reflection that follows each day's reading, as well as the many hymns and beautiful images that accompany each issue. Father Peter Cameron's articles and meditations are both inspiring and spiritually nourishing.

4.) He Guides Us

In prayer we come to recognize the Shepherd's voice that wants to lead and "guide us along right paths for his name's sake" (cf. Ps 23: 3). So often in prayer God will inspire us and direct us to do or not do certain things. We may be prompted to call or visit someone in need. Or we may have a decision to make that we want to take to prayer. I remember after Hurricane Katrina when we were in "exile" - not knowing if our home was destroyed or where we were to live. I was praying in an adoration chapel and the clear words came to me, "My home is by your altars" (cf. Ps 84: 4). I was filled with peace and joy, knowing it did not matter as long as I was with him.

5. He Strengthens Us against Temptations

Jesus, as he prayed in the garden prior to his passion, told his companions to "watch and pray that you may not undergo the test." He was preparing them for what was to come, but they did not understand. All of us are tempted, but prayer strengthens us to overcome temptations. In my own life, areas I have struggled with, through prayer, have somewhat been lessened and handling them has been a bit easier. One example is the proper use of my tongue: to respond with kindness when spoken to unkindly, not speaking too much (or too little), speaking the right words at the right time and in the right way. God is about the work of purification, and so we will never be free of temptation, but he will always give the grace to grow and overcome.

6. He Uses Us

The work of intercession on behalf of others is powerful. Battles can be won, wars can be stopped, lives can be changed through conversion, vocations to the priesthood and religious life can increase, family life strengthened, and life can be made sacred - all through prayer. God will inspire us to pray in a certain way for a particular situation, but we must be disposed by prayer to follow his directives.

Developing a grateful, Magnificat heart like Mary's will require us to decide to make God first in our lives. This will mean daily prayer, but also frequent participation in the sacraments. Most of us are blessed with the opportunity to attend daily Mass. This is such a gift to be able to receive the Lord - body and blood, soul and divinity - into our very being. Jesus said, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me" (Jn 6: 56-57). What powerful words to meditate upon. Every one of us who wants to grow in Christ should make every effort to receive the Eucharist as often as possible. "The Eucharist in a priceless treasure ... The worship of the Eucharist outside of the Mass is of inestimable value for the life of the Church" (Ecclesia de Eucharistia, John Paul II's encyclical on the Eucharist, section 25). Eucharistic adoration chapels, which are springing up all over with the encouragement that has come from Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict, are great gifts. I live in the Archdiocese of New Orleans, where Archbishop Alfred Hughes, a native of Boston, has set up an office to promote Eucharistic adoration. I am blessed to live in a place where there are three adoration chapels within a ten-minute drive from my home. It is a taste of heaven to have this opportunity. Eucharistic

adoration has become a great joy in my life and has expanded my participation in the Holy Mass. These chapels are fountains of grace for the Church. They seem to build community as well.

We are blessed in the Church to have the great sacrament of reconciliation. The discipline of monthly confession (more frequent if needed) is a great means of spiritual growth and grace. Nothing gives us greater gratitude and love in our hearts for God than receiving his forgiveness and mercy. I love the words of Jesus regarding the sinful woman who anointed his feet: "I tell you, her sins which are many are forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little" (Lk 7: 47).

All of us need some kind of faith community in order to grow and be strengthened spiritually. In a culture increasingly secular, it is important to have holy bonds of friendship and prayer so that we can grow in holiness and bring the Gospel into the marketplace. The presence of a joy-filled, loving Christian provides a powerful witness. My involvement in various growth and prayer groups within the Church has helped to deepen my faith and inspire me by the lives of those trying to live a godly life. Participation in conferences and events like the "Pilgrimage of Hope" bless the faithful with renewed spiritual strength to press on to live and proclaim the kingdom of God in our midst.

We are living in difficult times - some say these are times of darkness but of great light. "The light shines in the darkness and darkness has not overcome it" (Jn 1: 5). We are those who are to be the lights in the midst of the darkness.

At the opening of the one hundred and fifty-year jubilee celebration in Lourdes, France, as papal envoy Ivan Cardinal Dias stated: "The Virgin Mary invites us once again today to be part of her combat legion against the forces of evil. The struggle between God and his enemy still takes place more so today than at the time of Bernadette, one hundred and fifty years ago." He quoted Cardinal Karol Wojtyła's words on November 9, 1976 (six months before he became pope): "We are today before the final struggle between the Church and the Antichurch, between the Gospel and the Anti-Gospel." Cardinal Dias continued, "One thing that remains certain: the final victory belongs to God and that will happen thanks to Mary the Woman of Genesis and of the Apocalypse who will fight at the head of the army of her sons and daughters against the enemy forces of Satan and will crush the head of the serpent" (Inside the Vatican, February 2008).

Let us ask Mary to pray for us and to walk with us along the way of her Son. Let us ask her to help us be a people of hope, a people of joy and gratitude in the knowledge of our God "who is able to accomplish far more than all we ask or imagine, by the power at work within us, to him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen" (Eph 3: 20-21).

I close with words from Saint Ambrose: "Let Mary's soul be in each of you to proclaim the greatness of the Lord. Let her spirit be in each to rejoice in the Lord."

**Just a Reminder ... Printer
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Please make copies available for those you know without email and for your Chapter Meals. Your parish priest might appreciate one also. This is a great way to share the Magnificat ministry with others and to keep in touch.

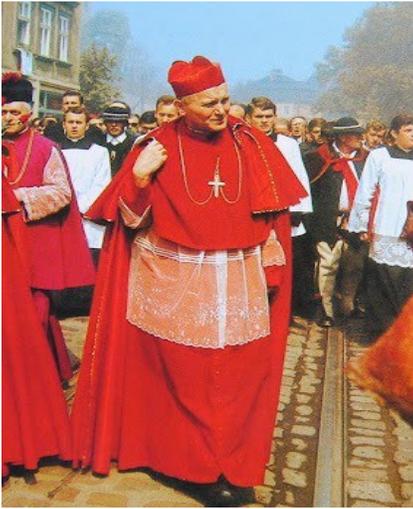


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Before He Became Pope; Cardinal Karol Wojtyla Prophesied to America And Said...

We must be prepared to undergo great trials in the not too distant future, trials that will require us to be ready to give up our lives... "1

Pope John Paul II, as Karol Cardinal Wojtyla, elaborated this theme during a visit to the United States in 1976:

"We are now standing in the face of the greatest historical confrontation humanity has gone through. I do not think that wide circles of the **American Society** or wide circles of the **Christian Community** realize this fully. We are now facing the **'final confrontation'** between the **Church** and the **anti-Church**, of the **Gospel** versus the **Anti-Gospel**. It is a trial which the Church must take up!!!

Cardinal Karol Wojtyla (JOHN PAUL II), reprinted from the November 9, 1978, issue of The Wall Street Journal from a 1976 speech to the American **Bishops**.

Jesus is the Reason for the Season



There has been no greater gift than a precious baby that has been born in a manger in Bethlehem. In this season of Giving, please consider supporting Magnificat's Mission to proclaim the greatness of the Lord across the globe. [Click here](#) to give the gift that will truly keep on giving!

Welcome Susan Shaw, Regional Rep Region #5



The Magnificat Ministry welcomes Susan Shaw as the new Regional Representative for the Southeastern Region #5. Many of you already know Susan as the chairwoman of our Magnificat Internet Prayer Ministry since 2006. She has been diligently sending your prayer requests up to the heavens. Many prayers have been powerfully answered through our Internet Prayer Ministry.

Susan's favorite Scripture is from Psalm 51 "A pure heart create for me, O God, put a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, nor deprive me of your Holy Spirit." Susan is a devoted mother of three daughters and six grandchildren. She retired this March after working for 30 years for the Federal Government as a Senior Public Health Advisor for the Center of Disease Control and Prevention. She now works as a Public Health Consultant.

Susan is very active in her parish and her Archdiocese of Atlanta. She also serves her city in the area of Public Health and Emergency Preparedness Training. Susan joined the Joyful Visitation Chapter of Atlanta, GA in 2000 as Secretary and has served the last three years as Treasurer. Susan has also been a leader in the Charismatic Renewal since the early '70's. Susan embodies the characteristics of a faithful handmaid of Our Lady. We thank her for her YES! and we welcome her to our Regional Rep Team!

The Newsletter is brought to you by the Magnificat Central Service Team

Paulette Renaudin - Editor
Donna Ross
Elise Botch
Jeanne Greenfield



*Wishing you and
your loved ones
a grace-filled Christmas
and a Happy New Year!*

*Love and prayers,
Your Central Service Team
Kathy, Diane, Donna,
Nancy and Paulette*

Merry Christmas!