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Mary's Life And Reflections
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Mary's Life and Reflections

As Seen In

The Mystical City of God

by

Mary Joan Wallace

**MARY'S LIFE AND REFLECTIONS
AS SEEN IN**

THE MYSTICAL CITY OF GOD



By: Mary Joan Wallace

The author prays that you will receive inspiration and blessing in reviewing this summary
from a 794-page abridgement, called *City of God*,
a translation from Spanish of *The Mystical City of God*
about Mary's life, as revealed to a seventeenth-century nun,
Ven. Mary of Agreda.

DEDICATION

The author wishes to dedicate this book to Karen and Mark, her children,
to her two step-children, Deanne and Brent,
and to all their family members, including her granddaughter Chelsea.
She also wishes to dedicate this to her sister Barbara and her family,
and to their Wachter relatives.

May all those reading this book, in God's timing and ways,
be blessed and guided by the Holy Spirit,
especially as they review the reflections entitled
Thoughts from Mary.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

After reading the inspirational 794-page abridgement of Ven. Mary of Agreda's *Mystical City of God* from the 1600s, the author spent close to a year in the late 1980s reflecting upon and typing approximately 50 single-spaced pages of what she considered to be its highlights. Her main purpose then was to become able to review more easily and more often this book's helpful suggestions for daily living. The author included encouraging recommendations from Mary under headings entitled *Thoughts from Mary*.

In following years the author provided copies of her summarized manuscript for others who might not otherwise tend to read and study the lengthy original writings. After receiving her gift copy in 2009, a church friend by the name of Anne Schroeder who is also an author and creative writing instructor enthusiastically emphasized that this manuscript had changed her life for the better. The author is especially grateful for Anne's encouragement towards preparation for its possible publication and for Anne's related helpful advice.

Many additional hands and hearts have touched this work through its journey towards publication. The author is indebted to all who have offered encouragement and practical support, especially:

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INTRODUCTION

The Mystical City of God is a 2,676-page history in four volumes about the life of Mary, the mother of Jesus, as revealed to a Spanish nun called Venerable Mother Mary of Jesus of Agreda (1602-1665). Originally published in 1670, this book has been translated into numerous languages and widely distributed since the early 1700s.

In a series of mystical ecstasies between 1627 and 1637, Ven. Mary of Agreda, a title to be used throughout this presentation, vividly observed many episodes of the Blessed Mother's life. Our Lady asked this nun to write a book about what she had experienced and learned from Mary in these visions. For this book the Blessed Mother especially desired that emphasis would be placed on her own expressed reflections, thoughts, and encouragement related to her life experiences, presented here as *Thoughts from Mary*. Also summarized here is information not only about Mary's life and family, but also about Jesus and His early apostles and followers.

Despite initial criticisms and challenges by religious leaders, for well over 300 years popes, cardinals, theologians, and representatives from many religious orders and renowned universities have acclaimed *The Mystical City of God*. Published in at least 60 editions in a variety of languages, these writings have inspired both laity and clergy not only towards greater understanding and appreciation of Mary, Jesus, and His early followers, but also towards the desire to become much more like them in love, prayerfulness, and holy lives.

For original translations in the early 1900s from Spanish into English in the United States, and for copies in other languages, Catholic imprimaturs have provided official declarations that these books contain no doctrinal or moral errors. They are considered to be in harmony with scriptures, the holy fathers, and Church councils.

Reasons for Writing This Summarized Version

To help a wider audience become exposed to and appreciate the profound beauty of revelations to Ven. Mary of Agreda, the author has summarized here what she considers to be special highlights. She also has shortened and modernized some long sentences from their original 1912 translations from Spanish into English.

Careful translations for both the original four volumes and also for the 794-page abridgment were provided by Rev. George J. Blatter, a priest from Chicago who used the pen name of Fiscar Marison. These translations have been made available by AMI Press, referred to here in the concluding Bibliography. In writing this present book, the author used the abridged version, listed by AMI Press as *City of God*. St. Augustine used the same title for a different and widely read major work written in defense of the Catholic faith between the years of 413 and 426.

The author prays that readers will give close and thoughtful attention here—more than once—to Our Lady’s reflections, thoughts, and encouragement related to her experiences and to those of Jesus and His early followers, as listed in this book presentation under subheadings entitled *Thoughts from Mary*.

Information about Venerable Mary of Agreda

Starting from the age of 16, Ven. Mary of Agreda served as a sister of the Immaculate Conception in a convent established by her devout, middle-class family in her home town area. Her mother and two sisters also became members there, and her father and two brothers joined a religious order of St. Francis. Eleven times she was elected abbess of her order, a position she held for 35 of the last 38 years of her life. In recognition for her having practiced virtue to a heroic degree, the Catholic Church bestowed the title of Venerable on her shortly after her death.

As in the recent life of an Italian priest called Padre Pio in the 1900s, Ven. Mary of Agreda may also have received from God the gift of bilocation. For 11 years, from 1620 to 1631 and while she was still in her convent in Spain, someone appearing to be her frequently came to American Indians in Western Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico. Innumerable times this person instructed these Indians about Jesus and about the Catholic faith and then sent them out to be baptized by Franciscan priests approaching from Mexico and the south. Such reported cases of bilocation, then thought to be of Mother Mary of Jesus of Agreda, were carefully explored and documented in the 1630s.

When Our Lady first asked Ven. Mary of Agreda to write a book about her visions and revelations, she was overwhelmed by such a momentous assignment, and especially at a time when few women were spiritual writers. Initially she resisted, but after being

encouraged by superiors from her religious order she eventually produced lengthy writings. Unfortunately, she destroyed these writings after criticism from a visiting confessor. Finally in 1655 and after insistent persuasion from her religious superiors, she brought to completion *The Mystical City of God*.

Other Recognized Mystics with Revelations about Jesus and Mary

Professor Courtenay Bartholomew, M.D., has written a number of extremely well-researched books about Our Lady and about visions, apparitions, and messages reported to be from her. In his book entitled *The Passion of the Christ and His Mother*, he encouraged devoting particular attention to the writings of three mystics: (1) Ven. Mary of Agreda, (2) Sister Anne Catherine Emmerich (1774-1824), and (3) Maria Valtorta (1897-1961).

Professor Bartholomew wrote that what each of these three women experienced and shared has led to numerous conversions, religious vocations, and greater love for Jesus and for the Christian faith. He was able to view the incorrupt body of Ven. Mary of Agreda in 1988 at the Carmelite Convent of the Immaculate Conception in Sorce, Spain.

In another well-researched book called *The Life of Mary as Seen by the Mystics* and published in 1951, Raphael Brown compiled a story that was similar to a novel and in harmony with biblical gospels. Material for this book came primarily from mystical experiences and revelations received by (1) Ven. Mary of Agreda and (2) by Sister Anne Catherine Emmerich. He also included brief references to visions from (3) St. Elizabeth of Schoenau who lived in Germany in the twelfth century and (4) St. Bridget of Sweden from the fourteenth century.

Professor Bartholomew wrote that he considers the four extensive volumes about visions of Sister Anne Catherine Emmerich, an Augustinian nun from West Germany, to be among the most extraordinary writings ever published. From 1812 until her death about 12 years later at the age of 49, Sister Anne Catherine bore the stigmata of Our Lord, including a cross over her heart and wounds from a crown of thorns. During most of these later years she subsisted for long periods almost entirely on water and the Holy Eucharist.

Clemens Brentano's descriptive writings about visions of Sister Anne Catherine Emmerich greatly impacted the background for Mel Gibson's recent and powerful film called *The Passion of the Christ*. Some early concerns about possible historical and theological

errors in books by Clemens Brentano initially resulted in suspension of beatification consideration for Sister Anne Catherine Emmerich. The process was reopened in 1973 and, as in other beatification cases, the question of her visions was set aside. On October 3, 2004, Pope John Paul II beatified her and declared her Blessed, a higher title than being called Venerable and a preparatory step toward canonization as a saint. Her beatification cause was based on her own personal sanctity and heroic virtues. The Pope declared, “Anne Catherine Emmerich told of the sorrowful passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ and lived it in her body.”

Regarding Maria Valtorta, the third mystic whose visions Professor Bartholomew recommended reading, he reported that she had spent most of her life in bed due to a severe back injury. There she wrote five volumes of *The Poem of the Man-God*. As in the case of Ven. Mary of Agreda’s writings, initially a number of religious leaders discouraged the reading of Maria’s books. In 1948 Pope Pius XII ordered that her works be published. In 2001 Bishop Roman Danylak, the Titular Bishop of Nyssa in Rome, wrote that Maria Valtorta’s works are in perfect consonance, or agreement, with canonical gospels, Church traditions, and the Magisterium of the Catholic Church.

Benefits from Reviewing Experiences from Recognized Mystics

In his Introduction to *The Life of Mary as Seen by the Mystics*, in 24 pages Raphael Brown quoted insights and evaluations from numerous theologians and scholars. They recognized that even though revelations from the four mystics written about in his book generally did agree, in some situations they did not agree. Usually this had to do with minor details. There were also some errors relating to historical, geographical, and chronological explanations. Despite such facts, after careful review these scholars and theologians strongly encouraged reading and reflecting on their mystical revelations—considered edifying for spiritual growth.

In the conclusion to his Introduction, Raphael Brown emphasized that Mary is and can be a model for our interior lives. Imitation of her prayer and charity of heart can be pleasing to God—helping us in becoming more united to Him, doing His will, and assisting in leading others to Him.

The biblical conclusion for the Gospel of John (*The Navarre Bible, RSV and Catholic edition*) states, “There are many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be

written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.” While revelations from Church-recognized mystics do not replace scriptures and their accuracy, this author believes that our reflecting upon what they have experienced can help us to better mentally visualize, understand, and appreciate with our hearts biblical stories related to Jesus, His mother, and His early followers. Resulting insights can be helpful for rosary meditations, too, as well as for our appreciating more fully Mary’s roles as intercessor, mother, and heavenly queen.

When the author’s beloved husband, Jack Wallace, was baptized as a Catholic in his mid-thirties, at first, like some others, he had little interest in learning about Our Blessed Mother. For many years Jack was not even interested in hearing about miracles related to Our Lady’s 1858 apparitions in Lourdes, France, and important messages received from her in 1917 in Fatima, Portugal. While very enthusiastic about developing and sharing a close and loving relationship with Jesus and the Holy Spirit, Jack continued to be fairly disinterested in learning more about Mary. However, this changed when he became aware of Our Lady’s apparitions in Medjugorje.

In the mid 1980s when Jack was in his sixties, both he and the author learned that Our Blessed Mother had been appearing to six young people with messages for the world in Medjugorje, Bosnia Herzegovina, a part of Yugoslavia at that time. Witnesses reported that she had been coming since June of 1981 as Our Lady Queen of Peace. Her daily apparitions have continued through the time of this writing. Millions of pilgrims have visited Medjugorje, including the author, with many resulting conversions to Jesus and dramatically changed lives.

After learning about the Medjugorje apparitions, Jack began praying the rosary with his wife, the author, and sharing with her in several group presentations about Our Lady’s increasing appearances and messages throughout the world. In the late 1980s he encouraged her initial writings about Mary’s messages (1) from revelations to Ven. Mary of Agreda, and (2) in her book entitled *Medjugorje, Its Background and Messages*, first published in 1989. A second revised, updated, and completely rewritten edition came out in 1991 and is listed in the Bibliography.

Before Jack’s death in 1996 from cancer-related problems, he insisted that his wife’s book on Ven. Mary of Agreda’s revelations include his own carefully written paragraph

about the importance of reflecting on Mary's life and relationship to God. Jack's beautiful and thoughtful presentation is as follows:

Throughout Mary's life she said "Yes" to God. In saying "Yes" she surrendered her total being to the Word of God. Like Mary, we can become new creations as we frequently say "Yes" to Him. Each day we can surrender to God, asking for His life and will within us. This process does not result in our imprisonment, but in personal liberation, as we willingly reinstate God at the center of our hearts and existence. As we say "Yes" to God, as for Mary, He will speak to us within our hearts, guide us, and free us to receive the blessings of His great love—in this life and for eternity. Just as God can speak to us during times of prayer, so He also can speak powerfully to us when we reflect on Mary's life and relationship with Him.

I. MARY'S CHILDHOOD

Mary's Parents

In her seventeenth-century book entitled *The Mystical City of God*, Venerable Mary of Agreda described Anne, the mother of Mary and the grandmother of Jesus, as a beautiful, humble, and holy person who had deep understanding of scriptures. A contemplative, Anne was fervent in prayer. Like others of her time, she often prayed for the coming of the Messiah.

Anne came from a home in Bethlehem, and God guided her and Joachim to one another for marriage. Joachim also was very spiritual. Their marriage was close and loving. They lived comfortably in their home in Nazareth, and from income from rentals and from their estate they were able to give one-third of their money to the temple in Jerusalem and one-third to the poor.

Although Anne and Joachim desired children, they remained childless for about 20 years of marriage. Finally, in prayer they vowed that if God would bless them with a child they would consecrate that child to serve Him in the temple in Jerusalem. God revealed to each of them in prayer that they would have a very special daughter, Mary. She would be full of the Holy Spirit and would serve God in the temple.

Mary's Early Life

By God's special providence, writes Ven. Mary of Agreda, Mary was formed free and exempt from fault, and full of grace. Her birthday is celebrated on the eighth of September. Early in her life Mary showed much faith and hope in God. He was the center of her happiness and her ultimate end. She revered and adored God in deep humility. She was a loving child and enjoyed praying for others and giving away food to the needy. God had assigned a number of angels to guard and assist Mary, and before she was four years old she was blessed by having visions of her angels and of God. Often she would ask her angels to join her in prayer and praise to God.

Mary's Life in the Temple

A few days before Mary's third birthday, God revealed to her parents that the time had come for her to be taken to live in the temple at Jerusalem. Mary's parents felt much grief over this parting, but the Lord promised His comforting grace and assistance in their loneliness. While sad about leaving her parents, Mary was very excited about going to live in the house of the Lord.

Upon reaching the temple, Mary and her parents, Anne and Joachim, offered prayer together before proceeding to the base of 15 steps that led to the living quarters for many first-born daughters from the tribes of Judah and Levi. Girls staying there received training until the age of marriage for growing in holiness. Mary was welcomed there by some priests and received their blessings. Then she kissed her parents goodbye and received their blessings, too. Seemingly unafraid, little Mary quickly ran up the 15 steps, in joyfulness for what lay before her. At the top of the stairs she was greeted by a priest named Simeon and a prophetess called Anna, who was to be Mary's special teacher.

Daily in the temple Mary and the other girls participated in prayers from dawn to the third hour, nine o'clock in the morning our time. They prayed for temple necessities, for God's people, and for the coming of the Messiah. Divine praises and songs were used from Isaiah, Jeremiah, Psalms and other prophetic scriptures.

During Mary's first year in the temple and until she was about four years old, she continued to have angelic and heavenly visions. Her father died when she was 3½, and her heavenly visitations were of comfort to her. However, for the next ten years of her life she had few visions.

Mary continued to frequently express her love of God and to adore Him often with the singing of canticles. At times she was led to prostrate herself before God in the form of a cross. Observing Mary's devotion, holiness, and obedience, the other girls in the temple became jealous. They invented lies about her and called her a hypocrite. Mary offered her prayers and blessings to make up for their offenses, humbly returning good for evil. At first Simeon believed the negative reports from

the other girls about Mary, but God revealed to him that she was innocent of their false charges. The trouble finally subsided.

When Mary was 12 years old, her mother died. Angels transported her to her mother Anne's deathbed to receive her mother's final blessing. Mary's visions of angels and of God's essence then resumed, helping her to be comforted over the loss of her mother.

Mary's Betrothal to Joseph

When Mary was 13½ years old, God informed Simeon and her that she was to be married. Because she had taken a vow of chastity, Mary wished to keep her vow and remain a virgin. After she had prayed for nine days about a possible marriage, God let her know that He had selected her spouse, one who would respect her vow of chastity.

Temple priests issued a call for eligible men from the house of David and tribe of Judah in Jerusalem to assemble. Among them was 33-year-old Joseph from Nazareth, who was then living in Jerusalem. Joseph was a handsome, modest, and holy man. The priests asked the assembled men to pray that God would reveal His plans. Joseph had taken a vow of chastity at the age of 12, and he begged God to reveal His will about this vow and about marriage with Mary.

Upon inspiration, a high priest gave each eligible man a thin, dry piece of wood, similar to a staff. A blossom appeared on Joseph's staff, and a resplendent dove of light descended and rested upon Joseph's head. God then revealed to him that Mary was to be his spouse. He was to accept this most pure person, with attentive reverence to her requests.

They set out for Nazareth, where the home of Anne and Joachim was available. Mary told Joseph of her earlier consecration to God and her vow of chastity. Joseph shared with Mary that he had made the same vow at the age of 12. Joseph promised Mary that he would agree to a relationship with her as brother, companion, and faithful servant, in an expression of chaste love. God helped Joseph by giving him command over his natural inclinations and by giving him increased purity.

A carpenter, Joseph started working in his trade around Nazareth. Just as Anne and Joachim had done, Mary and Joseph donated one-third of their income to the temple and one-third to the poor.

II. MARY'S EARLY LIFE WITH JESUS

The Annunciation

Ven. Mary of Agreda understood that when Mary was 14½ years old God sent the angel Gabriel to inform her that she had been chosen to be the mother of Jesus, the Son of God and the Messiah. God had prepared Mary for this tremendous announcement in nine preceding days, when He provided her with revelations about the creation of the world and the fire of His love. After saying yes to the angel Gabriel and to God, Mary was led by the Holy Spirit to prostrate herself in the form of a cross. The Annunciation, celebrated on the twenty-fifth of March, was reported to have taken place approximately six months after the espousal of Mary to Joseph.

Thoughts from Mary:

Happy is the soul to whom God manifests His holy and perfect will. More happy and blessed, however, is the one who puts into execution God's will. Humbly obey God. Devote yourself entirely to what God shows you to do for the welfare of souls, and especially for their eternal salvation. Remember that, in God's divine love, these souls are bought at the price of the blood of Jesus.

Do not allow yourself to be hindered by feelings of lowliness and bashfulness in responding to God and helping others towards eternal salvation. Overcome your restraining fears. Although you may feel you are of small usefulness, your great and powerful God will see to it that the tasks He gives you are successfully completed. Your promptness and affection will be rewarded. Let your actions be motivated by the desire to please God.

The Visitation

Four days after the Annunciation, Mary departed with Joseph on a four-day trip to the home of Zechariah and Elizabeth, near Jerusalem. Angels who were visible only to Mary accompanied them on their journey. Shortly after their arrival Elizabeth welcomed Mary in a private room. Elizabeth and the child within her were filled with the Holy Spirit and worshiped the eight-day-old Messiah within Mary (Luke 1:40-45).

A few days later Joseph returned to his work in Nazareth. During Mary's stay in Elizabeth and Zechariah's home until after the birth of their son John, Mary spent much time in prayer, especially around midnight. Following guidance from the Holy Spirit, Mary prayed that Zechariah would be able to answer when townspeople would ask what name he wished to call his son. Then Zechariah became filled with the Holy Spirit and finally was able to speak.

Zechariah received prophecy about the divinity and humanity of the coming Messiah, who would bring about redemption. In using his priest Zechariah for this public prophecy, God showed reverence and honor for the dignity of the priesthood. Elizabeth concealed from public knowledge the private prophecy she had received earlier, because not all hearts were as well-prepared as hers and because it was not yet time for this mystery to be known.

Life in Nazareth during Mary's Pregnancy

Joseph came to take Mary home after John was born to Elizabeth and Zechariah. Joseph did not notice that Mary was pregnant until she was in her fifth month. Mary waited for God to manifest how He wished Joseph to learn of her pregnancy, and she did not tell Joseph about it. When Joseph realized that Mary was pregnant, he became extremely distraught. Although he recognized that Mary appeared to be a virtuous woman, he felt he must leave her and move away to the desert.

Joseph made plans to permanently leave Mary during the night. He would travel first to the temple in Jerusalem to pray and donate money for Mary's protection. While he was sleeping before his planned departure, an angel visited him. Joseph was filled with the Holy Spirit, and when he awoke he knew that Mary was to be the mother of the Messiah, the Son of God. Now Joseph could not do enough to please and help Mary. They both had a wonderful time rejoicing and praising God together.

In Nazareth Mary and Joseph lived simply within their home. It had been partitioned into three living areas. One section was for Joseph's carpentry, one was where Joseph slept, and the third area was used for their living quarters,

which Mary usually occupied. Joseph would often find her in prayer there, sometimes worshipping on the floor in the form of a cross. At times when coming upon Mary in prayer, Joseph heard celestial music and smelled a wonderful fragrance.

The Nativity

After traveling for five days, Mary and Joseph reached Bethlehem at sunset, around four o'clock in the afternoon our time. Before finding lodging in a cave at about nine o'clock in the evening, they were turned down at more than 50 places. Joseph built a fire to warm the cave and then, with assistance from angels visible to him, he cleaned the cave.

After supper and a time of prayer, Mary encouraged Joseph to rest near the cave entrance. God brought him into a peaceful sleep and at midnight, while he was sleeping, Mary brought forth Jesus into the world. The angels Michael and Gabriel, appearing in human form, gently placed Jesus into Mary's arms.

When Joseph awakened he could hear music from a multitude of angels singing and adoring Jesus. Humbly and with tears of joy, Joseph joined Mary in adoring Jesus. He handed Mary swaddling clothes, which she wrapped round and round Jesus to keep Him warm. She lovingly held and rocked Jesus in her arms before placing Him on straw within a manger in the cave. Their breath from their donkey and from an ox helped to keep Him warm. These animals were a part of giving Jesus honor in this mystery of poverty, humility, and divine love.

When the shepherds arrived at dawn, they prostrated themselves upon the ground to adore the Word made flesh. No longer appearing to be ignorant rustics, but now anointed with wisdom and prudence, they joined with Joseph and Mary in adoring Jesus. The shepherds acknowledged and magnified Jesus as true God and true man and as Redeemer and restorer for the human race. They remained in the cave until close to noon.

Later when the Magi came to worship, Mary greeted them with words similar to a canticle: "My spirit rejoices in the Lord. My soul blesses and extols Him, because from among all the nations He has called and selected you to look

upon and behold that which many kings and prophets have in vain desired to see, the eternal Word made flesh. Let us together worship and praise our Lord in this place made holy by His real presence.”

The wise men expressed wonder and compassion over all the poverty there, in which was hidden the greatest of mysteries of heaven and earth. They spent several hours joyfully worshiping and sharing before going on to their lodging place in Bethlehem.

The next day the wise men returned with their gifts for Jesus: gold representing love, incense symbolic of prayer, and myrrh for acceptance of labor and mortification. Mary in turn gave the wise men some garments in which Jesus had been wrapped. Later a sweet fragrance spread from these valued garments to those believing in the coming of the Son of God. In response to a request from the wise men, Mary and Joseph promised not to forget them in prayer.

Thoughts from Mary:

From the reverence, awe, and respect shown Jesus at His Nativity, learn how you are to treat Him. Remember how I lovingly held Jesus in my arms. Follow my examples of love whenever you receive Jesus as host in the Eucharist, in which you receive the same God-Man born to me.

In this holy sacrament, you receive and possess Him and He remains in you, just as when I welcomed Him at the Nativity. Even go to extremes in your holy reverence and awe. Understand and be thankful for the goodness of Jesus, as if He has come from heaven to redeem you alone, and as if He has instituted all His wonders and Church for you alone.

The Presentation in the Temple

Shortly after Jesus was born a priest visited Him for His circumcision and naming. Then in keeping with Jewish tradition, when Jesus was close to one month old Mary and Joseph carried Him to the temple in Jerusalem for the Presentation. This was a time for purification of a mother and newborn child, according to the laws of Moses. Angels accompanied the holy family in a solemn procession during their journey of about six miles from Bethlehem to Jerusalem. When the holy family

entered the temple, Simeon and Anna beheld them in shining light. Guided by the Holy Spirit and greatly rejoicing, they knew that at last their Messiah had come.

Mary and Joseph began a novena within the Jerusalem temple between nine o'clock in the morning and nightfall in memory of the nine months Mary had carried Jesus within herself before His birth. These nine days of prayer also were in memory of the nine days of God's special revelations to Mary before the Angel Gabriel came to her at the Annunciation. The holy family found an obscure part of the temple in which to pray. Their intercession in particular was for the greatest of sinners. During several of these days, they had opportunity to share with Simeon and Anna. They spoke together about biblical prophecies and about God's plans for redemption.

The Trip to Egypt

On the fifth day of their temple prayer, God informed Mary that they should not complete their novena. They were to flee from danger immediately to Egypt. Mary waited to reveal this message to Joseph until God would also inform him, as she expected. That evening when sending an angel to Joseph while he was sleeping, Joseph was given the same message that Mary had received.

Immediately Mary and Joseph left for Gaza. On their way Mary's cousin Elizabeth provided them with supplies for the journey. However, they gave away most of these supplies to the needy during their first few days in Gaza. Through Mary's ministry then, God healed a crippled woman and two other sick people were freed from the danger of death. Mary and Joseph also shared with them life-saving knowledge about God.

The holy family had a difficult desert journey of close to 200 miles before reaching Heliopolis in Egypt, about six miles northeast of Cairo. It was early February and cold. They had no place to lodge and no tent, other than a makeshift one provided with a cloak and some sticks. Food ran out and their hunger increased. A wind and rain storm harassed them. Not yet 50 days old, Jesus shivered in the cold. In her concern as she tried to shelter Jesus, Mary in prayer commanded the elements not to afflict their creator. She prayed that any vengeance related to the storm would afflict her rather than

Jesus and that He would be allowed shelter and refreshment. Immediately the wind died down and the storm abated. Then angels came and ministered to their needs.

When they reached the first town in Egypt, Mary and Joseph prayed for the salvation of its occupants. Idols crashed, altars fell, and temples crumbled. Coming out to meet them, the local people shared what was happening within their temples. This gave the holy family the opportunity to tell about the one true God who alone was to be adored. Hearts were changed. Demons were driven not only from temples, but also from many human beings, who then were healed.

For about seven years Mary and Joseph stayed in Egypt in a small home on the outskirts of Heliopolis. Mary helped supplement their income by doing needlework. With Joseph she taught others about God and ministered with the power of healing, especially during a pestilence. She ministered to the women and Joseph to the men, and they helped to bring about changes in many lives.

In their family life in homes in both Egypt and in Nazareth, Mary and Joseph sought to do what God ordained. They let the will of the Lord be their delight and joy, and they gave thanks to Him for the least of favors. Returning to Nazareth when Jesus was seven, they moved back into their former home, which had been cared for by a cousin to whom they had written.

The Finding in the Temple

Thoughts from Mary:

I believe that God allowed this happening, so that after seeking Jesus in sorrow and tears I might experience the joy of finding Him. I desire that you imitate me in having a continual longing for Jesus. Do not come to rest until you hold Him and are unable to lose Him anymore. Be filled with humble and heartfelt gratitude for the companionship of Jesus.

The height of evil, as opposed to the goodness of God's plan, is that, in this transitory and short life, people rejoice in visible things as if these things were their last end. Instead, use what is visible as an aid in gaining full possession of God and of eternal life. In God's wisdom, He allowed for you anxiety and fear of sin. He gave you baptismal virtues, such as faith and hope. He provides you with His inspirations. These are all to help you overcome listless ignorance of God's plans for your

justification. These gifts are to help bring you to the happiness of eternal life with Him.

Effects of Thirty Years of Private Life with Jesus

Jesus spent only three years in public life, teaching and preaching. However, he spent ten times three years with Mary, helping to stamp upon her the image of His holiness. Their time together has helped enable early Christians and us to receive His example and assistance through Mary. She heard and experienced Jesus' communion with God the Father, in suffering, joy, and humility. She witnessed Jesus in prayer, at times prostrate in the form of a cross and even sweating blood. All of this was His expression of burning love for mankind and His desire to welcome, caress, relieve, and refresh all sinners. Jesus longed for them to imitate and associate with Him, "the way, the truth, and the life."

Thoughts from Mary:

I was aware of the angels adoring, praising, and giving thanks to Jesus, the only begotten of the Father. I joined with them. Many times I heard Jesus conferring with the Father and petitioning for mankind. I accompanied Him in His prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings, with reverence and adoration. I call upon you to join with me in these respects, in imitation of Jesus and union with Him. Seek out God's perfect will for your lives. With pure motives, honor the Lord and love your neighbors.

Joseph

Joseph had grown up loving and honoring God and seeking to lead a good and holy life. He had a very well-balanced mind. From about the age of three he had known God through faith, reason, and the highest kinds of prayer. With Mary and Jesus, Joseph continued to grow in wisdom and holiness.

Joseph's nature was kind, loving, even-tempered, and sincere. He lived until his early 60s, spending twenty-seven of those years as Mary's husband. For eight years before Joseph's death his health continued to fail and his strength decreased. During the last nine days of Joseph's life Jesus and Mary were almost constantly with him. Joseph then experienced ecstasy and heard celestial music and revelations from God about many divine mysteries.

Thoughts from Mary:

Joseph is one of the more greatly favored saints in God's presence. His intercession is powerful. Love him, and worthily seek the extraordinary favors which his intercession can help provide. The intercession of Joseph is particularly powerful for: (1) the overcoming of sensuality, and the attainment of purity; (2) escape from sin, and a return to God's love; (3) love, and devotion to me, Mary; (4) protection, and help for a happy death; (5) terror on the part of demons at the mention of Joseph's name; (6) health and assistance in difficulty; and (7) desires for children. If you properly and with good disposition seek Joseph's intercession, these and many other favors from God will become available to you.

Mary's Offering Up of Her Son Jesus as a Sacrifice

Before Jesus left home for His public ministry, God asked Mary to agree to offer up her beloved son Jesus in sacrifice. In obedience to the will of the Father, Mary offered up Jesus to God the Father to pay for the debts of mankind that were not Jesus' fault. By His life and death Jesus would fulfill all that the prophets had written about Him.

Inspired by God, Mary promised to be Jesus' companion, helper, and partaker during His sorrows and sufferings. God accepted Mary's loving and heartfelt offer to suffer with Jesus.

III. LIFE WITH JESUS IN PUBLIC MINISTRY

Beginning of Jesus' Ministry with Baptism and Desert Fasting

Mary was not present at the baptism of Jesus at the River Jordan by John the Baptist. However, she was aware of what was happening because of what her angels revealed to her. On this special occasion she created and sang new canticles and hymns of praise and thanksgiving to God. As she reflected upon the baptism of her son, Mary prayed that in the future large numbers of people would also be blessed by baptism and that it would be ministered throughout the world.

Mary was bothered by Jesus receiving baptism for the remission of sins when He Himself was sinless, and she desired that others recognize that He was sinless. However, Mary then realized that at Jesus' baptism both the voice of God the Father heard speaking about Jesus as His beloved Son and the visible descent of the Holy Spirit upon Him in the form of a dove gave proof for what she desired. These signs from God the Father and from the Holy Spirit showed that Jesus as the Son of God was like them in substance and perfection and was free from sin.

During Jesus' forty-day fast in the desert at the beginning of His public ministry, Mary also fasted. She remained in her oratory room in Nazareth without leaving it throughout these forty days. Townspeople thought she was away. Mary went without eating in the same course of rigorous fasting that Jesus was following. She knew what Jesus was experiencing because of what her angels told her. From examples provided by Jesus she learned even more about how to resist the devil. Mary was then an intercessor to the fullest extent possible.

Between their thirtieth and fortieth days of fasting, Jesus' temptations ended. Jesus humbled the pride and malice of Satan and crushed his power. Mary then became strengthened and encouraged. In thanksgiving she created more hymns of praise. Her angels set these hymns to music and delivered them to her son Jesus.

Humility and Loving Gentleness Better than Pride

As He reached out towards His apostles, Jesus showed tender kindness. He encouraged them not to be dismayed at their own imperfections but humbly depend on Him and trust Him and God the Father. Jesus took His apostles home to meet Mary, and she traveled with them throughout much of Jesus' public ministry. At times she remained briefly at home, sharing with Jesus' followers. Then she would proceed on foot through all types of weather and on arduous journeys, just as Jesus.

Sensitive to the needs of those around her, Mary cared for their bodily needs and was a fervent intercessor. She served as an example of true attentiveness and devotion to Jesus and His teachings. The apostles became very close to her. She was a humble and pleasing example of a wise and loving mother and teacher.

Mary was close to the apostle John, especially because of his humility and gentleness. She looked upon the humble and peaceful as the most faithful imitators of Jesus. Mary also went out of her way to be gentle and caring towards Judas. With good intentions, Judas had first asked to become an apostle. Later, dwelling largely on his own accomplishments and becoming full of pride, Judas began to judge and criticize others more and more. He became self-complacent, and his charity and devotion towards others diminished. Becoming a hypocrite, he sought to deny his own sins.

Mary encouraged Judas to humble himself and ask pardon and make amends. She emphasized to him that a greater evil than falling into sin was persevering in that sin and not seeking to arise from it. However, because of his pride Judas rejected her merciful counsel. With a lying and hypocritical tongue, he denied his guilt.

In considering relationships just described, we are helped to understand the tremendous importance of humility and love. The humility and loving gentleness of both Mary and John as opposed to the pride that led to the downfall of Judas serve as a stimulus and warning. Rather than promote our own merits, we are encouraged to give thanks to God, who continues to assist and sustain us with great love.

Mary's Responses and Examples in Following Jesus

More and more miracles from Jesus were witnessed by Mary as the time of His crucifixion approached. Increasingly she was led to compose canticles and songs of

praise and thanksgiving to God. When Jesus was revealed in glory to a few of His apostles at the time of His Transfiguration, through the help of her angels Mary was able to witness His Transfiguration. Her canticles of praise were especially joyful then.

As the handmaid of the Lord, in her prayers Mary asked God for both opportunities and strength to cooperate with Jesus in His work of bringing about salvation for many. She sought to participate in His passion at the cross. In His love for Mary God permitted her to undergo sufferings, sorrows, and detachment from worldly things and herself, so that through these experiences she and followers of Jesus could be drawn even closer to Him. Mary asks us to meditate on Jesus' actions, sufferings, and sorrows that led to His crucifixion for our salvation. She also asks us to think about and learn from her own accompanying sufferings and examples, realizing that detachment from self and things of the world truly can help us draw closer to God.

Tremendous Importance of Communion

At the Last Supper when preparing for their first Communion service, Jesus told His apostles that those loving Him and one another would be greatly loved by both their eternal Father and by Himself—with the same love with which the Father loves Jesus. Our Lord went on to explain that when we receive Him in Communion the loving presence and peace of the Father and the Holy Spirit also flow into us and fill us. Since hearing this, Mary has considered receiving Communion a superabundant reward and favor, of which she is not worthy. If for her, the greatest of saints, one Holy Communion is so special, how much more should we reverently value and worthily receive Jesus in this sacrament.

Throughout her writings, Ven. Mary of Agreda emphasized many times the tremendous importance of Communion. In describing to this nun the real presence of Jesus in this Eucharist, Our Lady told her that in Communion Jesus has become invisibly there in a form of existence that does not change within the bread and wine. Although Jesus is present in each part of the bread and wine, any changes to these do not alter His sacred presence there. Because the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are inseparable in the Godhead, when one receives Jesus in His humanity and deity in Communion one receives all the members of the Trinity.

Ven. Mary of Agreda understood that at the Last Supper on Holy Thursday angels and saints were present but not visible to the apostles for the first Communion service. Angels then conveyed the consecrated bread to such saints as Enoch and Elias, who was also known as Elijah, as well as to Mary in a nearby private area. Prostrate on the floor, Mary then adored Jesus present within herself in the Eucharist. In response, God then blessed her by promising the tremendous miracle of her having Jesus as just received in His Eucharistic form and presence remain within herself and close to her heart until long after His death and Resurrection.

Thoughts from Mary:

Nothing can be wanting if you worthily esteem and taste the sweetness of Jesus in Communion. Through Communion, you share not only in God's love, but also in His hidden power, which can bring strength and health. With frequent reception of Communion and other sacraments, you will be enabled to overcome gloriously. When the Eucharist is carried in procession, demons usually disperse in haste. Sometimes within churches demons try to cause the faithful to forget the reverence due to the Lord present in Communion.

Special strength will be there for those who prepare to receive Communion worthily and devoutly and strive to retain this holy presence until the next Communion. Prepare for the tremendous favor of Communion with prayers and acts of love, humility, and gratitude. When receiving Communion have fervent devotion to Our Lord Jesus Christ. Receive Him in Holy Communion frequently.

Agony in the Garden and Passion of Jesus

Our Lady experienced Jesus' agony in the garden when she was then praying in a room with three other women called Mary. God had granted her earlier request to experience Jesus' tortures, wounds, and pains. She suffered a bloody sweat then similar to that of Jesus. God divinely strengthened Mary to enable her to continue in her agony, and the angel Gabriel ministered to her. As the soldiers approached to arrest Jesus, He ordered His disciples to join together with Him as the head to meet their enemies. This direction from Jesus was to help them learn the power of mutual and perfect unity with one another and with Him for overcoming.

During Jesus' passion after His arrest, God enabled Mary to become aware of what was happening to Jesus, as if she were right there with Him. She personally felt

Jesus' pains from ropes and body blows. She begged the three other women named Mary with her and her angels to come against injuries and affronts to Jesus by means of praise and adoration for Him. Mary saw Jesus pray for those who struck his face, and she also prayed for them. She saw Jesus ready to forgive and turn His other cheek to be struck. She recognized that Peter's denials of Jesus caused Him even greater pain than the buffets. Jesus prayed for Peter, and so did Mary.

Thoughts from Mary:

By contemplating and feeling the sacred passion, you can attain the summit of perfect love for Jesus. My heart cries out because of so many hypocrites who pose as Jesus' followers. Judas has many more followers than Christ does. I am disturbed by so much forgetfulness of Jesus' passion, and by such ingratitude and hardness of heart. So few try to console Jesus and me. People are inhumane and cruel to us, and to themselves.

Imitate and follow me in solitude. Reflect on how much it cost Jesus to reconcile mankind to the eternal Father. Weep and grieve for the forgetful and those losing and destroying what was bought with the blood of Jesus. Grieve and intercede for those with false piety and pride, who are hypocritical and sacrilegious. Through personal ambition and inactivity, they hinder the spread of faith.

Do as I did during the passion. Practice virtues opposite to their related vices. Come against blasphemy, and bless God; against oaths, praise God; for unbelief, perform acts of faith. Weep over faults. Don't hesitate to seek my intercession. Be patient in adversity, accepting it without disturbance and with joy. Remember that illness, problems from people, and suffering can lead to God's light. They raise the heart from visible things to the Lord. And during suffering, remember that the Lord is with the afflicted, and He sends them His protection and help.

Sufferings during Jesus' Passion

From Jesus' scourging with hardened leather thongs, great welts and tumors resulted. Additional scourging broke these open and blood ran down in streams. Previous wounds were cut into. Especially painful were the sensitive and delicate nerves of His face, hands, and feet. Ven. Mary of Agreda understood that the number of blows Jesus received reached 5,115 and that He was blinded by blood and swellings. One of Jesus' greatest tortures came from the penetration into His skull of thorns from His cap-like crown of thorns. When soldiers stripped Him of His

garments, the crown was torn off and wounds were reopened. New wounds resulted when this crown was again thrust upon His head.

Although Mary shed no blood nor was lacerated in her experiencing the agony of Jesus, her bodily pain so changed her that she did not resemble herself. Her sorrows and anguish were those of a most loving mother in agony over the mistreatment of the innocence and dignity of her son Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God, and a member of the Blessed Trinity. During the remainder of Mary's life this image of her wounded, defiled, and bound son remained firmly in her mind, as if she were continually beholding His suffering.

Thoughts from Mary:

As members of the Mystical Body of Christ, we are to respond as follows: Be persecuted and do not persecute. Be oppressed and do not oppress. Bear crosses and do not give them. Suffer and do not cause others to suffer. On the contrary, God calls us to exert ourselves for the conversion and salvation of those who hurt us. God expects this of us, as His children and His friends. In sorrow and affliction, I cooperated in this work.

Do not forget these teachings. Greatness is not in what is visible, and happiness should not be limited to earthly goods. Continually aspire, with divine grace, towards what is spiritual and eternal. Many falsely think they are following Jesus as teacher and redeemer as they strive after earthly pleasures. With hollow self-love and desires for honors and riches, they try to fly from mortification, injury, and poverty. Jesus did not call us to a life of ease and softness. He did call us to recognize that victory is gained by the cross, labor, penances, mortification, and acceptance of contempt. All of these are trademarks and evidences of true love. They are for those destined for eternal life, in the glory of God.

The Crucifixion

At the crucifixion, Mary yielded to God her rights as a mother. She offered up her son to God as a sacrifice for the redemption of mankind. Mary joined with Jesus in His prayer, "Forgive them, they know not what they do!" Such intense intercessory prayer enlightened Dismas being crucified at the same time as Jesus. As Dismas expressed sorrow for his sins, Jesus promised that Dismas would be with Him that day in Paradise.

When Jesus cried out, “I thirst!” He also was expressing His great thirst for the captive children of Adam to return to God and become close to Him. He longed for their making better use in their lives of the liberty that they were abusing and which He merited and was offering up. Jesus thirsted for their faith, friendship, love, and eternal happiness. When He proclaimed His final words, “It is consummated,” He referred to His fulfillment of scriptural prophecy by coming from heaven to suffer and die for the salvation of all mankind. Ven. Mary of Agreda was told that what Mary also suffered during the passion and death of Jesus was more intense than what all martyrs and those sentenced to death have ever suffered.

Thoughts from Mary:

I ask that you seek, with all the power of your mind, to recall these mysteries related to Jesus’ passion. Never forget Jesus crucified, and His sufferings. You will gain interior spiritual beauty as you imitate Jesus, in accordance to the life to which you are called by God.

Jesus’ Last Will and Testament

Ven. Mary of Agreda learned that before Jesus died on the cross He had prayed interiorly about His last will and testament. For His mother, Jesus left the position and responsibility of her becoming queen of angels and mankind. She was to dispense heavenly blessings and serve through loving intercession. In return people were to honor her.

For those imitating Him by following His will and obeying holy laws, Jesus promised the following: protection, defense, faith, hope, love, holy inspiration, assistance, humility and joy in trials, favors, blessings, and justification. For His chosen and beloved He promised the relationship of father, brother, and friend.

For proud people who in vanity and injustice would pursue transitory material goods rather than turning to Christ, they would not gain eternity with Him in heaven, despite their temporarily acquiring possessions. For those choosing to follow Him, however, Jesus promised that angels would defend, protect, guide, and help them. For His followers Jesus would communicate secrets, converse intimately, and live with them in community. He would help lead them to the enjoyment of heaven with Him.

Reactions of the Enemy

In Jesus' passion and death the humility, poverty, patience, and prayer of both Jesus and his mother Mary were important aspects for the overcoming of Satan. He angrily questioned how a mere creature such as Mary could be used against him so mightily. Satan then recognized in Mary a heavenly and prophetic sign that she had and would have much to do with his being overcome by the power of God. Mary was to remain a strong intercessor and advocate for God's intervention against him. She also was to be an instructor and example for others to follow in prayerful intercession.

Satan responded by instigating new warfare. He furthered attractions to excite people to follow their own passions, spread idolatry, and become forgetful of divine truth. Some of Satan's followers would pervert good inclinations, beginning at conception and at birth. Parents would become negligent in loving their children and in providing them with necessary education. Some devils would create hatred between husbands and wives, causing them to think little of faithfulness.

Satan and all his followers agreed to sow seeds of discord, hatred, ignorance, pride, sensuality, and desires for riches and honors. They would suggest "sophisticated reasons" against virtues taught by Jesus. They would cause forgetfulness of the passion and death of Jesus as the means of salvation, and they would cause forgetfulness of the pains of hell. Satan and his followers hoped that mankind would become so burdened with material pleasures that they would devote little time to spiritual thoughts and to salvation.

Thoughts from Mary:

The enemy is astute, cruel, and watchful. Mankind tends to be sleepy, lukewarm, and careless. So many people listen to, accept, and follow Satan's entrenched deceptions. They forget eternal life. Recognize the dangers and devastation of wickedness that causes eternal death. Seek Jesus' powerful remedies and help. Accept the way of the cross and work in it with God's guidance and grace, and with love, zeal, and devotion.

Souls in Limbo Freed by Jesus

After Jesus died, according to Ven. Mary of Agreda, His soul entered into limbo in His wounded, lacerated, and disfigured state. She understood that Jesus remained there from about half past three on Good Friday afternoon when he suffered and died for our sins until very early the following Easter Sunday morning. When Jesus arrived in limbo, in one instant occupants there passed from comparative darkness into God's light previously inaccessible to them. They went from long-deferred hope to the possession of God's glory.

These souls praised God in words similar to those in scriptures in the Book of Revelations (5:9-12), "The lamb that was slain is worthy to receive power and divinity, wisdom and strength, and honor, glory, and benediction. You have redeemed us, Lord, in your blood, out of every tribe, tongue, people, and nation. You have made us for our God a kingdom and priests, and we shall reign on the earth." Souls that had remained there were brought to Jesus. He absolved them from sin and enabled them to fully enter into and stay in His divine presence with each member of the Blessed Trinity.

Patriarchs, prophets, and saints adored the disfigured Jesus and confessed Him as the Word made flesh. They recognized that He truly had taken upon Himself our infirmities and sorrows. In His innocence and guiltlessness, Jesus had paid abundantly for all our debts. In the justice of our eternal Father, Jesus had paid for what we ourselves have owed (Isaiah 53:4-5).

Resurrection for Jesus

At the time of His resurrection shortly after midnight on Easter Sunday morning, Jesus' body and soul were reunited. Shining with a most brilliant light and with body and soul together, Jesus penetrated right through the sepulcher rocks without removing or displacing them. Bright light glowed from the wounds of His hands, feet, and side, adding an enchanting beauty and charm to His entire being.

As a promise of universal resurrection for all mankind, Jesus then commanded that some souls of deceased saints be reunited with their bodies and rise up to immortal life. Among those so blessed were Joseph, Anne, Joachim, and ancient

patriarchs of faith, hope, and prayer. Their glorified bodies became similar to the body of Jesus in the following ways: (1) *clearness*, exceeding many times the sun; (2) *impassibility*, in which they receded from earthly corruption and infirmity, (3) *agility*, in which they were able to move tremendously quickly from one location to another; and (4) *subtlety*, in which they had new power of penetration through matter and could advance beyond all that could offer resistance.

For those in the state of grace and who would perform even the least of works for the love of God, as in giving a cup of water in His name, each gift received from God has been and will be correspondingly increased. For them, Our Lord has promised clear wisdom and insight equal to that of the most enlightened doctors and other leaders of the Church. They will receive tremendous security and tranquility, and they will enjoy being in the possession of the Divinity. Delights of heavenly love and blessings to be felt within this state can never compare to all the joys of this mortal life.

The Appearance of the Risen Jesus to His Mother Mary

After Jesus' death the Blessed Mother retired with a few women at the Cenacle house where the Last Supper had occurred. According to Ven. Mary of Agreda's revelations, while she was in prayer there Mary became aware of the beauty of Jesus' presence in limbo. Instantly her sorrow turned to joy, her pain to delight, and her grief to jubilation and rest. Praising God, she experienced a new kind of joy.

Then, suddenly Jesus appeared to Mary, risen and glorious. As she prostrated herself before Him, Jesus raised her up and drew her to Himself a heavenly embrace. Mary now began to understand many hidden mysteries of God and to experience Jesus more as part of the Divine Trinity. She also was given rest. For hours she enjoyed the essence of God with her divine son. Together Jesus and she shared about mysteries related to His passion and His present glory.

Mary's Heavenly Vision about New Gifts and Responsibilities

While praying in the Cenacle a few days before Jesus' Ascension into heaven, Mary received another heavenly experience with Jesus. Ven. Mary of Agreda

understood that Our Lady then was transported to God's throne, where she was able to see Jesus join the Father and the Holy Spirit. There the Holy Spirit presented to Mary gifts of wisdom and grace that would remain within her, along with awareness of mysteries, teachings, and works of Jesus throughout the world.

Jesus spoke about Mary from the heavenly throne to assembled angels and saints. He proclaimed that, because she had consecrated herself perfectly to what pleased the Trinity, she would be honored as: (1) queen of heaven and earth, (2) a protector for the Church, (3) an intercessor for the faithful, (4) an advocate for sinners, and (5) the mother of beautiful love and holy hope and piety.

Jesus promised that the Blessed Trinity would carefully listen to and honor Mary's requests. Those asking for her intercession from their hearts and those for whom she would intercede would be led towards eternal life. Mary responded with humility, love, and adoration. Since that time she has taken upon herself even more the evangelical needs of the Church. As a caring mother she incessantly and fervently prays for us all as her children.

Promises of Help from the Holy Spirit, the Church, and Mary

On the same day that Mary received her heavenly vision about new roles and responsibilities, Jesus and His apostles gathered together at a table in the Cenacle house where the Last Supper had taken place. Through divine inspiration, about 120 other disciples and pious women joined them there later that same day. All felt united in peace and charity. Jesus told them that in a few days He would ascend to His heavenly Father, from whom He had come to earth to rescue and save mankind. He asked those gathered there be present with Him for His Ascension into heaven.

Jesus instructed these faithful in what each was to know before He would leave them at the time of His Ascension. He declared that He was appointing Peter to be leader of His Church to serve as its supreme high priest, and He encouraged them to obey Peter. Jesus reminded them and reaffirmed that from the cross He had appointed John to be like a son in providing care for His beloved mother.

Jesus told those assembled that He also was leaving for each of them his mother Mary as their protector, advocate and mother. Earlier Jesus had proclaimed

that all who saw and knew Him saw and knew the Father. According to Ven. Mary of Agreda, now Jesus declared to His apostles and the 120 others present, “The one who knows My mother knows Me. The one who hears her hears Me, and the one who honors her honors Me.”

Jesus explained that those seeking Him could find Him within Mary. He said this because of His continually abiding Eucharistic presence within her, as received at the Last Supper. He declared that when His mother would receive Communion in the future He would remain within her in added and miraculous ways ordained by the Trinity.

Jesus requested that those assembled honor Mary and persevere with her in Jerusalem in prayer for the coming of the Holy Spirit, as foretold by the Father and promised by Him at the Last Supper. From the Holy Spirit they would receive God’s power and assistance for preaching and sharing—within Jerusalem, Samaria, and throughout the world about mysteries of His redemption for all of mankind. His Ascension to heaven to be at the right hand of God the Father would hasten the fulfillment of His promise at the Last Supper to send the Holy Spirit as guide and helper (John 16:7-16).

Forty days after His Resurrection, the Ascension of Jesus was witnessed by Mary, the apostles, and approximately 120 followers of Jesus at Mt. Olivet, which is near Jerusalem and in the direction of Bethany. They saw Him rising up through the sky above them in His own power, and in peace and majesty. To sounds of celestial music, Jesus entered into heaven and was accompanied by a procession of angels and glorified saints, some with body and soul together and others with only their souls present. Then two angels in resplendent white garments suddenly appeared and declared, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven will return in the same way as you saw Him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:11)

Thoughts from Mary:

God’s holy and perfect desires are to bless and not to inflict. God wishes to console rather than to cause sorrow, to reward rather than to chastise, and to help us to rejoice rather than to grieve. Mortals desire from God earthly and dangerous blessings, in preference to true and more secure blessings. Mortals are not adequately aware of God’s desires and the reasons for difficulties that He allows.

In his love, God allows for correction of mortal faults through lessons learned in tribulation and in adversity. Human nature is slow. If not cultivated and softened, it gives no fruit in season. It does not become fit for divine gifts and favors. Learn from my example and imitate me in times of difficulty. Rather than concentrate on earthly matters, be led to a sweet relationship with God. Labor strenuously. Be willing to give your lives to God in communication with Him in prayer. Offer supplication from the depths of your hearts, for the honor and glory of God.

IV. THE EARLY SPIRIT-LED CHURCH IN JERUSALEM

The Coming of the Holy Spirit to Those United and Yielded

The Holy Spirit seeks repose in hearts united to one another and yielded to Him. After the Ascension when waiting for the promised Holy Spirit, the apostles fervently prayed and fasted in the Cenacle house. They were joined by Mathias—whom they selected as the twelfth apostle—and by many other disciples and a few pious women, including Mary. Like the other apostles, Mathias had been with Jesus throughout his public life and was considered a reliable witness. These early followers praying together remained in one accord. Their union in charity then was so powerful that it not only prepared them to receive the Holy Spirit, but it led to the overcoming and dispersing of evil spirits.

Ten days after the Ascension of Jesus into heaven and on Pentecost morning, the Blessed Mother exhorted approximately 120 men and women gathered in the Cenacle Upper Room to pray more fervently, as the hour was soon approaching when the Holy Spirit would come from on high. At the third hour, nine o'clock in the morning our time, and as all were gathered around Mary in fervent prayer, the air around them suddenly resounded with tremendous thunder and the blowing of a violent wind. Centered upon the Cenacle house, the thunder and wind were mixed with the brightness of fire and lightening. Then suddenly over the head of each of them there appeared a tongue of that same fire of the Holy Spirit.

Everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and with His divine and diverse gifts—according to what each would need for future ministry. The 12 apostles were confirmed by the Holy Spirit with special sanctifying gifts of grace that they would not lose. These gifts were to help them serve God as fit ministers of the teachings of Jesus and become founders of His evangelical Church, to be spread throughout the world. The Holy Spirit provided each of these 12 with divine strength, heroic virtues, and the highest sanctity, so that they could perform quickly, well, and with great joy their difficult tasks for God.

Peter and John were especially favored, Peter to lead the Church as its head and John to look after, protect, and serve Mary. As the daughter, mother, and spouse of members of the Blessed Trinity, Mary already had received very special gifts from the Holy Spirit, but at Pentecost the gifts given to her and released for her use were greatly multiplied.

The Holy Spirit filled the Cenacle house and those within it with wonderful light and splendor (Acts 2). This overflowed to multitudes outside the Cenacle and throughout Jerusalem and its vicinity. Crowds of curious and astonished people quickly gathered near the Cenacle house. Among them were foreigners and strangers from many parts of the world who had come to the temple in Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost.

According to extensive footnotes in *The Navarre Bible* and for its Book of Acts, as listed in the Bibliography, Pentecost was one of the three great Jewish feasts. Celebrated each year seven weeks after Passover and on the fiftieth day following Passover, Pentecost originated as a day of thanksgiving on which first fruits were offered to God. Later it also became a special day for recalling the Commandments God gave to Moses.

Through God's providence, wrote Ven. Mary of Agreda, when the Holy Spirit came in power and love on Pentecost, the annual feast day for giving thanks for material harvest, it now also became a special day for commemorating and giving thanks for a new, bountiful, and widespread spiritual harvest. In Old Testament days the Holy Spirit had visited His people off and on and from time to time. However, starting with this Pentecost—to be remembered as the birthday of the Christian Church—the Holy Spirit came to stay with and dwell within His people throughout the world. He guided, directed, and enlivened the apostles and disciples in their reaping of a mighty spiritual harvest; and He blessed their outreaches affecting the growth, life, and work of early communities following Jesus.

Among gifts received from the Holy Spirit for followers of Jesus on Pentecost was the ability to speak in other languages. Shy and in seclusion earlier, His apostles and disciples now quickly came forth from the Cenacle house to share with unhesitating boldness about Jesus. They spoke about His divinity and about the redemption that Jesus had provided. They spoke with words that burned and penetrated into the souls of those listening, and they became able to understand and respond enthusiastically in other languages to questions from the gathering crowd.

During Peter's preaching on Pentecost, although he then spoke only in the language of the Jewish people, all heard and understood him in their own languages. The other apostles had the same experience. The Holy Spirit provided this great miracle so that there would not be confusion and difficulty resulting from having to repeat over and over again like messages in different languages.

Infused with light from the Holy Spirit, those hearing Peter and the other apostles were eager to learn divine truths. They cried out asking what they could do to gain eternal life. In his important talk that day, Peter encouraged them to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus. As a result they would receive forgiveness from their sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit, a promise for them, for their children, and for those far off (Acts 2:38-39). After Peter's bold and eloquent speech, approximately 3,000 people quickly became ardent followers of Jesus. They expressed sorrow for their sins and deep longing for divine mercy and forgiveness, asking to be baptized soon. Multitudes more became converted to Jesus within the following weeks.

Fully aware of what was happening, on Pentecost Mary remained in deep intercessory prayer in the Cenacle house. On following days she and other disciples went outside to share the good news about Jesus individually and in small groups. As they prayed and laid hand on the ill, many healings resulted. Full of appreciation, those healed and the newly converted thanked and praised God with all their hearts for extended periods of time. Encouraged by Mary, they eagerly paid careful attention to teachings and instructions from the apostles for receiving baptism and their first Communion.

In this golden beginning of the Christian Church, faith was alive and firm, charity ardent, sincerity pure, and humility true. Followers of Jesus were freed from the pride and ambition that came to many Christians in later ages of the Church. The eyes and ears of these early followers of Jesus were increasingly open to considering truth. They were eager to lead worthy lives for our God, who is so merciful to those who seek Him.

Thoughts from Mary:

Gifts from the Holy Spirit are not held in enough recognition, esteem, and thankfulness in our times. The blessings of Pentecost were a pledge and testimony for the rest of God's children, letting them know that God is ready to communicate His gifts to all if they will dispose themselves to receive them. The Holy Spirit came in a powerful way to assist the 120 at Pentecost because they were faithful, sincere, pure, and ready.

In our times, the Holy Spirit comes to many just souls with similar gifts and effects as received at Pentecost. The Holy Spirit gives in accordance to the disposition and state of each one receiving. Blessed are you who yearn for, aspire after, and seek to participate with the Holy Spirit and His gifts. With divine fire, the Holy Spirit enkindles, enlightens, and consumes what is

worldly minded. He does this while purifying and raising us up to a new existence, union, and participation with God Himself.

Baptism of 5,000 Eight Days after Pentecost

After 3,000 people committed their lives to Jesus on Pentecost, according to Ven. Mary of Agreda a huge baptismal service for approximately 5,000 people took place in the Cenacle house eight days later. Throughout the week prior to their baptism, Peter and the apostles taught about Jesus and salvation, while Mary and the disciples continued to counsel individuals and prayerfully share in smaller groups.

As on Pentecost, Peter proclaimed the need for repentance and baptism. He described the nature and excellence of baptism and its divine effects as follows: Through baptism one can become a member of Christ's mystical body, receive a beautiful interior spiritual character, and be regenerated into a new existence as a child of God. As a result, one can receive the remission of sins and sanctifying grace, a great help for leading a more holy life and eventually gaining the inheritance of eternal glory with God.

Before both the baptismal and Communion services that day, Mary and the other disciples prepared the Cenacle house to be similar to how it was at the Last Supper with Jesus. Disciples of Jesus served as ushers for this first baptismal service as about 5,000 people reverently and orderly entered one door of the Cenacle, were baptized inside by the apostles, and then filed out through another door. Our Blessed Mother remained to one side within the Cenacle house throughout this time, offering prayers of thanksgiving and motherly intercession.

First Communion for 1,000

Ven. Mary of Agreda reported that approximately 1,000 people received Jesus in Holy Communion after the baptismal service for 5,000. Although the others had not yet been able to receive adequate preparation and insight for this added blessing, they were able to receive Communion later.

While the newly baptized were offering prayers and thanksgiving to God, prayerful preparation was being made by the apostles, disciples, and other faithful for

the Communion service to follow. Leading this service, Peter recited Psalms and prayers that Jesus had offered at the Last Supper and pronounced the same words of consecration over the bread and wine that Jesus had said.

Before Mary received Jesus in Holy Communion, she bowed low three times. After receiving Him in this form, she remained in a place shielded from the view of most of those present, transformed by the great love of Jesus. Then God granted Mary a very special added favor: He promised that the most sacred body of Jesus that she had just received would now abide within her permanently.

God granted this important blessing so that (1) we may know and bless the Lord in and through Mary, and (2) we can receive powerful intercessory help from Our Lady as a recipient of His abiding and loving presence. In this way, Jesus also can satisfy both His own love of Mary and her love for Him.

Mary's Contributions to the "Foundation Stones"

With continual prayer and thanksgiving, Mary contributed in special ways to the apostles and early disciples, the "foundation stones" of the Church. She attended to their needs, counseled, and guided them with reverence, affection, and zeal. Regularly disciples returned to her to share their experiences about going out to minister. As if in a watchtower, she became increasingly aware of their needs through her spiritual gifts of knowledge, from what God revealed to her in prayer, and with the help of her angels.

Our Lady tried to reach out in many directions. She encouraged, warned, consoled, and inspired, assisted by her angels in visible and invisible ways. As a mother, she provided nourishment for both body and soul. She fed the hungry and cared for the sick, and there were numerous miraculously cures through her ministry.

Mary assisted a number of people facing death, staying with them until she received reassurance of their eternal salvation. For souls not yet fully arriving into heaven, Mary offered and has continued to offer fervent prayers. At times she has prayed for them while lying prostrate in the form of a cross. In God's timing, these souls have been and are being led by angels to God's heavenly throne. There, as fruit of Jesus' blood and redemption they are warmly received and welcomed.

Thoughts from Mary:

In your actions, first take counsel from the interior light and knowledge communicated to you by God. Next, seek advice from superiors and teachers; and if they are not available, seek advice from others. This is better than following your own will. Such rules should be followed with thoughtfulness and love, and according to the demands of the circumstances. Above all, do not lose sight of the “north star of interior light” from God.

**Mary’s Help and Guidance for Freeing Souls
from the Enemy**

With discernment and interior vision, Mary recognized needs of individuals that demons have deceived, oppressed, and obsessed. Mary and John visited one young girl in this condition who was dying. When they arrived the demons began to disappear. Our Lady commanded the demons to all descend into hell and remain there, and they departed. The girl then became relaxed and was able to share how someone had persuaded her to separate herself from Jesus and His followers.

Our Blessed Mother explained to this girl that she had been influenced by Satan, and said to her, “I come in the name of God to give you eternal life. Return to the faith that is truly of God. Confess with all your heart to Jesus, your Redeemer and your God. Jesus died upon the cross for your salvation and for the salvation of the whole world. Adore Him, call upon Him, and ask Him to pardon your sins!”

After helping this girl to openly profess faith in Jesus Christ and tell God that she was sorry for her sins, Our Lady sent for some apostles. They ministered to this girl, encouraging her to continue with additional prayers of sorrow for her sins and love for God. Then she peacefully died in Mary’s arms.

Thoughts from Mary:

Imitate me in such ministry, for the salvation of many souls. I would not refuse any torment to save any of the damned. Persevere in labor and prayer to prevent any sins from hurting others. God is always attracted by such reaching out in love. God wishes to save souls. Pray for His will. In His justice, God allows free will. However, His longing is for salvation. When you are inclined to sin or are around sin, no matter how small it might be, recall my sorrows and tears over the effects of sin. Like me, desire to please Jesus and accomplish His will. His will is to liberally apply the fruit of His blood to draw us to close

union with Him. Much is expected of those receiving the infused light of this knowledge. There will be dangers and temptations.

Stephen, the First Martyr

Mary felt especially close to Stephen, who resembled Jesus in his peaceful and humble nature. Wise and full of the Holy Spirit, Stephen was tremendously thankful for God's benefits. Frequently Stephen had come to Mary to discuss spiritual matters. God led Mary to understand that Stephen might very well be the first follower of Jesus to become a martyr. She encouraged his following Jesus' example in facing persecution and death with faith, knowing that God's strength would be with him.

With his heart inflamed with love for Jesus, Stephen had refuted the Jews more often and more courageously than others when preaching about Jesus. Incited by the devil against Stephen's powerful witnessing, a number of those who had heard Stephen gave false testimony against him. They accused him of blasphemy against God and being against the laws of Moses and the temple. He responded by insisting that Jesus was the promised Messiah. Stephen strongly reprimanded his accusers for their unbelief and hardness of heart, but their ears were closed. From her separate place of prayer, Mary was interceding for him.

Stephen saw the heavens open and Jesus at the right hand of the Father. When he proclaimed what he had just seen, those present thought he had blasphemed. They stoned him to death. "Forgive them!" Stephen prayed, as Jesus had done. That day marked the beginning of severe persecution against the early followers of Jesus. A multitude of them were mistreated and arrested. Participating in and helped to direct such persecution was Saul, later to be called Paul, in zealous defense of the laws of Moses.

Preparation of the Apostles' Creed, and Christian Beliefs Expressed Later

Knowing that the apostles and disciples would soon be going forth to other parts of the world to share about Jesus and His teachings, Mary and followers of Jesus felt the need for a written creed to guide them in sharing their united beliefs. Mary

prayed and fasted for 40 days for the apostles' guidance from the Holy Spirit before their formation of this creed. For the last ten of these 40 days, the apostles joined in like prayers and sought the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In the Cenacle following their receiving Holy Communion on the tenth and last day of such prayers, the Holy Spirit manifested Himself to them with thunder, light, splendor, and individual enlightenment.

Mary encouraged each of the 12 apostles to come together to share a portion of his understanding of their beliefs about Jesus and salvation, as inspired by the Holy Spirit. Their gathering and shared writings took place close to the end of the first year after Jesus' death. What each one expressed represents the basis for our Christian faith—now called the Apostles' Creed.

Peter: I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven, and earth; (2) Andrew: And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, Our Lord; (3) James the Greater: Who was conceived through operation of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary; (4) John: Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; (5) Thomas: Descended into hell and arose from the dead on the third day; (6) James the Less: Ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God, the Father almighty; (7) Philip: From thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead; (8) Bartholomew: I believe in the Holy Spirit; (9) Matthew: In the holy catholic (meaning universal) Church and the communion of saints; (10) Simon: Forgiveness of sins; (11) Thaddeus: The resurrection of the flesh; and (12) Mathias: Life everlasting. Amen.

To help refute heresies, in later years additional words of explanation were provided in the Nicene Creed. This was prepared at ecumenical councils of Nicaea and of Constantinople in 325 and 381 A.D., according to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* listed in the Bibliography. Similar to the Apostles' Creed, The Nicene Creed has longer descriptions about each member of the Blessed Trinity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Used by Catholics in both Eastern and Western traditions, the Nicene Creed is prayed during Mass. Although both creeds represent and provide examples of basic Christian beliefs, many additional Christian beliefs exist. Especially important for Catholics is their belief in the real presence of Jesus in Holy Communion—body, blood, soul, and divinity.

Additional helpful resources for learning about Christian beliefs, as presented in the Bibliography, include (1) *The Navarre Bible*, with its extensive footnotes from a variety of scholars, and (2) well-researched biblical teachings by Fr. John H. Hampsch, C.M.F. The author has summarized some of his writings here within the Appendix, which contains information about Church-recognized Marian dogmas.

Preparations for the Apostles Being Sent Forth to Evangelize

Encouraged by Mary, the apostles each prayed and fasted for ten days for guidance from the Holy Spirit before going forth to share about Jesus in other parts of the world. Such periods of prayer were similar to their ten days in prayer after the Ascension of Jesus when they were seeking to become better prepared by receiving ministering gifts from the Holy Spirit.

Before additional important undertakings, the apostles also fasted and prayed in similar ways. In answer to their prayers, the Holy Spirit revealed that Peter was to decide where the apostles and disciples were to be sent. New strength and abilities were granted to each of those going forth. With assistance from God and from His angels, the early apostles and disciples were able to do far more than most humans normally could do.

The Blessed Mother continued to receive words of knowledge and guidance from God as the apostles and disciples proceeded on their journeys, enabling her to know how each of them was to minister and how she could best pray for them. As she learned of their labors, dangers, and attacks, sometimes from her vivid mental imagery received from God, she prayed with great maternal compassion.

Before leaving on their evangelistic trips, each apostle visited and revered holy places in Jesus' life, such as the Garden of Gethsemane, Calvary, the sepulcher where Jesus had been buried, the place of His Ascension, Bethany, and the house of the Cenacle.

To help remind them of her son Jesus, the Blessed Mother provided the apostles with garments similar to what Jesus had worn—garments between brown and ash gray in color. For their witnessing she arranged for the construction of 12 crosses that would be an appropriate height and size for each of them to carry. The apostles

preserved these crosses and often carried them on their journeys. Because the apostles were bold in their sharing about Jesus with these crosses, some tyrants later made use of them for the apostles' deaths.

Our Lady gave each apostle a small metal container with relics of thorns from Jesus' crown at crucifixion and small pieces of material stained by His blood during His circumcision and at the time of His death. She treasured these vivid reminders of the love of Jesus and of the most-high God for all of God's children, and especially for His ministering apostles.

Thoughts from Mary:

Consider the great eagerness with which God seeks to send his powerful and overflowing river of goodness upon mankind. Only man's free will can dam up this river. This river can inundate, fill, enrich, and raise the fallen to be seated with God in His glory. God is very pleased by those showing zeal to remove obstacles for all in this river. That is why God particularly exalts priests and preachers.

Ponder the greatness and abundance of gifts and favors God gives to those who do not hinder the flow of His bounty. This truth was manifested in the Church's early beginning, when God showed great wonders. The Holy Spirit was visibly manifested then, many miracles occurred, and numerous favors flowed upon the faithful and those accepting the creed.

Paul's Persecution of Early Followers of Jesus

Paul, who used his own Jewish name of Saul prior to his conversion to Jesus, was generous and kind by nature. However, zeal to uphold his own opinions initially interfered with his kindness. Although well-educated from Jewish studies of God's law, Paul at first did not have much divine insight from the Holy Spirit. Motivated by his own reasoning and determined to uphold Jewish law, with cruel actions he attempted to destroy those promoting the teachings of Jesus. Satan tried to incite Paul and other Jews to persecute and destroy those following Jesus and their use of the name of Jesus.

Paul's desire to bring about death for followers of Jesus disturbed him in his early contacts with them. From what he had heard about Mary, he admired her and respected her composure in particular. In compassion for Mary, he did not wish to

harm her. However, Paul was strongly influenced by Satan in his insistence on protecting the Jewish law of his ancestors. He sought permission from the chief priests to bring the followers of Jesus as prisoners to Jerusalem from outlying areas, such as Damascus. Paul offered to do so at his own cost and without salary.

Because of Paul's persecution, the apostles and disciples of Jesus became increasingly fearful and discouraged. Mary intensified her intercession even more at this time. She was guided by the Holy Spirit to pray not only for protection for those being persecuted, but that Paul would be led to become a follower of Jesus, too, and a defender and preacher for Him and for His Church then being formed.

V. EARLY CHURCH GROWTH IN NEW AREAS

Paul's Conversion

Jesus revealed Himself in a cloud of glory to Paul on his way to Damascus, where He flooded Paul with divine light within and without. Prostrate, blinded, and bereft of strength, Paul was changed instantly. Just as Satan in his pride had been instantly removed from heaven by God to the deepest abyss, God quickly drew Paul from earth to high heaven. For us sinners the Lord is no less powerful in providing justification instantly.

Ven. Mary of Agreda was told that Paul became able to see the Divinity of God in a series of visions that resulted in his being drawn into the third heaven. In these experiences Paul intuitively recognized the following mysteries: (1) the Incarnation, (2) the Redemption, (3) the peerless blessings of justification through Christ, (4) results from the forgiveness prayer by Stephen as one of the first of many followers of Jesus to become a martyr, and (5) the powerful intercessory prayers of Mary and others committed to Jesus. Paul accepted God's call immediately and promised to serve, labor, and suffer for Jesus until death.

When God told Ananias to go to Paul in Damascus, Ananias fearfully questioned why God would want to send him as a sheep to a wolf desiring to devour. "Go!" the Lord commanded. "Through Paul my name will be carried to all nations and kingdoms and to the children of Israel."

When meeting with Paul, Ananias shared that God had sent him so that Paul could regain his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Ananias also provided Paul with Communion, with which Paul was greatly strengthened. Because of what he had been experiencing and because of not having eaten beforehand for several days, he was extremely weak. With much praise and thanksgiving, Paul was led to worship the Trinity. He sincerely begged for pardon from the followers of Jesus and was eager to talk about Jesus with them. Ven. Mary of Agreda understood that Paul's conversion that began on his way to Damascus took place in late January of 36 A.D., about one year and one month after Stephen's martyrdom.

Thoughts from Mary:

How very much God wants all of us, as Paul, to be pardoned and raised to His close friendship. How important it is to respond like Paul did, with full cooperation to the utmost. Paul placed himself entirely at the disposal of God, asking, “Lord, what do You wish with me? What shall I do for You?” Paul renounced his own will and delivered himself completely over to the services of God’s divine will.

Many people respond to God and begin a life in His Spirit. Then, however, they relax and finish in the flesh. Such people stumble on occasions of sin because of too much self-love and desires for possessions, honors, and sensual pleasures. After your initial response to God, follow up, persevere, and strive after perfection. Execute the commands that God repeats to you over and over. Frequently ask God what He wishes of you. Seek only God’s will. When you follow just your own will you are not going in the true direction desired for you by God. Be instruments for God. An instrument has no action except that provided by the artisan using it. Seek only the pleasure and will of God.

Mary’s Trip to Ephesus

Four years after Paul’s conversion and in January of the year 40 AD, Mary and the apostle John left Jerusalem and sailed together to Ephesus. They departed about a month before Paul’s visit to Jerusalem to share with the apostles. Before leaving Mary visited holy places related to redemption by Jesus. As she prayed and worshiped along the way of the cross that commemorated Jesus’ route to his place of crucifixion at Calvary, Mary asked God to send His angels there to guard and help keep sacred these places for honoring the memory of Jesus.

In experiencing difficulties on her first sea voyage and in her new role of motherhood for many, Mary was compassionately led to beg God to protect from the fury of the sea all those who would call upon her name and seek her intercession. God granted this petition by promising to favor all seeking her help with sincere faith and devotion. In remembrance of this promise, frequently voyagers have carried with them reminders of Mary, whom they have called “the Star of the Sea.” On their journey and during her stay in Ephesus, Mary ministered especially to the ill and needy. Helped by her prayers and assistance, many were cured and possessed people were set free.

After arriving in Ephesus Mary and John each found private rooms with a few poor and retired women who were followers of Jesus. There Mary spent much time in intercessory prayer. She prayed especially for Paul. The wrath and fury of hell then was falling more against him than towards other apostles. Mary began her prayers for Paul and the followers of Jesus in a way similar to this, “All powerful God who fills the heavens and the earth, I your handmaid wish to fulfill entirely your holy will in any way and everywhere you decide to place me. You are my only good, and my life. I desire that my thoughts, words, and actions will be for your pleasure.” As she begged God to guard and protect the apostles and disciples, she pleaded especially for Paul during this period of intense persecution.

Paul’s First Visit with Apostles in Jerusalem

Four years after his conversion and early in the year 40 A.D., Paul arrived in Jerusalem for his first visit with the apostles. Ven. Mary of Agreda understood that much of Paul’s first year following conversion had been spent in Arabia. He went there after secretly being lowered in a basket from a Damascus city wall to escape from those wishing to do him harm. Later he returned to Damascus for several years of ministry.

After Paul’s eventual arrival in Jerusalem, he met with Peter and James the Less, the only apostles there at that time. The title of James the Less was because of his being younger than the other apostle named James, who was the brother of John and called James the Greater, meaning older. The disciples of Jesus in the Jerusalem area and Peter and James the Less were fearful of Paul at first. However, Peter soon recognized Paul’s dependability in his zeal to preach about Jesus. Paul’s preaching penetrated hearts like burning arrows.

As Mary interceded from Ephesus with God-given understanding of Paul’s needs and those of the early Church, she became increasingly aware of how important Paul’s ministry could become for spreading the gospel and exalting God and the name of Jesus. Mary was well aware of satanic-led hatred against Paul by Herod and by many Jews.

Helped by her intercessory prayers, Paul was raised to ecstatic rapture when praying in the temple one day while in Jerusalem. During this ecstasy God filled him with exalted enlightenment and understanding. God then commanded Paul to quickly leave Jerusalem, for his own protection. He was led to go to Caesarea about 25 miles northwest of Samaria and then to Tarsus. Paul had been able to spend only about 15 days with the apostles and disciples on this trip to Jerusalem.

Mary's Prayer and Ministry for James, Brother of John

Reassured about Paul's safety, Mary directed her prayers towards the welfare of the apostle James, the brother of John. James had left Jerusalem to minister in Spain around the year 36 A.D. While he was there and with help from Mary's angels, they exchanged messages and prayer petitions. Ven. Mary of Agreda reported that Our Lady appeared to James by means of an apparition while he was in Saragossa, Spain. As evidence of her appearance, she left a small column of jasper with a beautiful, carved statue of herself. James helped construct a church of "Our Lady of the Pillar." This later became an important place of pilgrimage for those from throughout Europe.

Desiring added personal sharing with both Mary and his brother John, James then traveled and preached in much of Spain and continued on via Italy to be with them in Ephesus. While with them there, James gained increased knowledge and wisdom about God's mysteries. Publicly he then preached even more about the redemption that Jesus has provided. Often he referred to related prophetic and supportive scriptures. Audiences were moved to tears of repentance.

Enemies of James feigned a quarrel and had him arrested and imprisoned in Jerusalem. Ven. Mary of Agreda wrote that angels transported Our Lady from Ephesus to Jerusalem to minister to James there before his death. An angel appearing to be Mary remained briefly in Ephesus while Mary was gone. Mary's reported bilocations and angelic help were similar to bilocations many years later in the 1900s in the ministry of a well-known Italian priest called Padre Pio. Ven. Mary of Agreda wrote that James was the first apostle to be martyred. He was beheaded in Jerusalem, and his body later was taken to Spain for burial.

Peter Freed from Imprisonment

Next Peter was arrested and placed in chains, where he awaited death. With deep anguish, Mary increased her intercessory prayers. Jesus then appeared to her, begging her to moderate such extreme sorrow and promising to provide help for Peter. “Use the power I have granted you,” urged Jesus, “but know that all the fury of the demons will be towards you.”

Offering to continue to undertake needed intercessory battles for Peter and all the faithful, Mary responded, “I am but useless dust, but with the assistance of Your infinite divine power and wisdom, I command Lucifer and all his followers of wickedness who disturb the Church to descend into the abyss and be silenced until permitted by God to return.” Without resistance all the evil spirits immediately descended to hell. Knowing that this command had come with God’s power from Mary as queen, they fearfully did not even dare to say her name.

On the night before Peter was to be executed, an angel briefly appeared to him. This angel told Peter that he had been greatly helped by intercessory prayers and that God was about to free him from prison. Then Peter’s prison chains suddenly fell away. Joyfully he rushed to the house of another Mary, the mother of John Mark who was called Mark. In this house Peter consulted with the apostle James the Less about what to do next. Quickly Peter was led to flee from Jerusalem to safety.

The End of Persecution by Herod

Mary continued to frequently travail in tearful prayers for the persecuted followers of her son Jesus. She also told God that she would be willing to suffer much in intercession to help bring Herod to salvation, so that his soul would not be lost. When God revealed to Mary that Herod was not going to change, Mary then prayed that he would not cause greater torment for the followers of Jesus. Herod was struck down and died. This resulted because of Herod’s many crimes against God’s children and his pride and vanity, in which he had assumed a divine role.

Mary wept over the loss of Herod’s soul. However, she also rejoiced and thanked God that the Church would now be in much less danger and could grow. We are reminded that just as Mary assisted members of the early Church with her

intercession, this mother of mercy now wishes to pray for us. Jesus as the Son of God has given to Mary as his human mother very special helping power. In return, He wishes us to honor her and request her intercession often.

Growth of the Early Church in Ephesus

After Herod's death the Church grew rapidly in many places. In Ephesus God performed great signs and miracles as a result of John's preaching there. Philosophers and educated scholars living in Ephesus were drawn to hear John and to learn from him about Jesus. John sent some of them to Mary for instructions. Aware of their interior inclinations, she spoke to the heart of each one. They were filled with the heavenly light of understanding. Mary also continued to assist the sick and the poor in Ephesus. Where she lived she had a supply of clothing for the needy. As she ministered, numerous cures and miracles took place. Also assisting those approaching death, Mary helped to bring them to their Creator.

Thoughts from Mary on Service:

All are obliged to care for their brothers and sisters. This is especially true for Christians. Through prayers, Christians are able to receive special help from God for giving service. Particularly obligated to help in service are those of you who have received benefits and those of you who have opportunities for leadership within the Church. If you seek only lives of ease, you will be held accountable for the harm and ruin of God's flock.

Thoughts from Mary on Our Responsibilities for Saving Souls:

We have a common cause, the souls of others. So many souls are lost from eternal salvation. The Lord goes around like a gleaner after the vintage, seeking a grape or olive not dried up or carried away by a demon. By cowardliness, you are overcome in efforts to lead souls to salvation. You become content in concentrating on working for yourselves, and as a result you neglect God's desire that you work for the salvation of souls. Truth is obscured, and the number of souls saved does not increase as it should. Too many of you are not willing to risk your comforts or interests to save what cost Jesus His blood and His life.

Thoughts from Mary on How We Are to Minister:

What are you to do? Ponder over my following question: How can you find consolation or rest in your hearts when witnessing the loss of so many souls? For them Jesus shed His blood, and I have wept. Follow me in tearfully praying with all your hearts for these souls. Pray without ceasing.

Do not let labors and tribulations intimidate you from helping brothers and sisters, and in acquiring for them the possession of Jesus. Fight the Lord's battles in the name of Jesus, and also using my name, Mary. Join me in casting the satanic enemy into hell. Counsel one another to use, in lively faith, the Lord's power given you. With this divine power, you shall repress and vanquish the enemy, for the honor and glory of God.

VI. EARLY CHURCH LEADERSHIP

Peter's Call for the Jerusalem Council

The death of Herod ended his persecution against followers of Jesus, and the early Church enjoyed relative tranquility for some time. Paul and Barnabas then were preaching in Asia Minor. From other parts of Asia, Peter was ministering and reaching out to the faithful there and in Palestine.

Because of questions raised by the Jewish people about Paul's teachings, Peter scheduled the important Jerusalem Council with the apostles. They were wondering about how to respond to questions about circumcision and about Paul's teachings that appeared to differ from the laws of Moses (as described in Acts: 15). Both Mary and John were invited to attend this council. Mary asked John as the one responsible for her to arrange for what would be considered proper for her to do regarding attendance. John responded that it was right and proper that she accompany him to Jerusalem, obeying Peter as head of the Church.

Spiritual Warfare in Storm at Sea

Mary and John left for Jerusalem by ship. They had been in Ephesus 2 ½ years. Before leaving Mary became aware that they were about to engage in spiritual warfare at sea. She was able to see a huge number of angels assigned to her in visible and human form and dressed in battle garb. She also witnessed multitudes of infernal legions and dreadful shapes and a dragon with seven horns in their midst. Fortifying herself for battle with firm faith in God's love and forthcoming help, Mary began to boldly proclaim words from the Psalms and words that Jesus had spoken. She also begged for assistance from her angels. Mary did not yet tell John about the severe spiritual warfare about to happen.

Shortly after they had set sail a terrible storm came up that lasted for 14 days. Rather than the usual 6 days, the voyage took 15 days. In this storm their ship was thrown back and forth. At times the mast and sails were buried in foaming waters as their ship was hurled up and down, from dark clouds to sands at the bottom of the sea. Calls to abandon ship were heard coming from demonic forces, and some sailors gave up their responsibilities. Had it not been for angelic forces steadying and steering the ship, all would have been lost.

Although Mary suffered bodily in this storm, she was able to maintain calmness and strength. Very concerned for fellow passengers, she also felt increased and deep compassion for voyagers everywhere. She made an added commitment to pray in particular for those traveling by sea.

The fury of the storm led Mary to consider even more the wrath of divine justice against sinners refusing to repent. As she continued to offer to God difficulties being experienced in this violent storm, Mary ardently prayed for the repentance of sinners and for their conversions then and in the future.

During this storm at sea and its spiritual warfare, John pleaded with Mary to beg Jesus for help. The Blessed Mother assured John that in her prayers she already had asked God that passengers would not perish and that angels would assist and defend them. Because Jesus already had let her know that the enemy would be defeated and they would be saved, she encouraged John to become less disturbed. She recommended to him that they help overcome the enemy by means of their sufferings, fortitude, and patience. In participating in this spiritual warfare, Mary did not listen to, look at, or speak to demons involved. They in turn could not bear to look upon her, greatly because of God's virtue shining from her face. Finally the storm abated.

Preparations for the Jerusalem Council

Arriving in Jerusalem, Mary was especially happy to meet Paul for the first time since his conversion. She admired Paul's zeal in his having worked so hard to spread the faith. She felt great love for him, for Barnabas, and for all the apostles. To prepare hearts to receive divine guidance at this important council, their first ten days were spent in intercessory prayer, the custom for the apostles before their important undertakings. Peter presided at Communion services on both the first and last of these ten days of prayer. Mary helped to prepare the Cenacle hall for each Communion service, and God's light and a sweet fragrance were then experienced. During her ten days of intercession before the Jerusalem Council, Mary spent most of her time alone and in prayer. The apostles and other disciples spent their time in both prayer and ministry.

Mary's Experiences in Prayer before the First Council

On the first of Mary's ten days of prayer and fasting for the success of the Jerusalem Council, God allowed demons into her presence. He bound them to remain there temporarily so that they would experience the superiority He had given her for dealing with them. Demons present recoiled in terror, especially from their exposure to the Eucharistic presence of Jesus within Mary. Then they heard God declare, "With this shield I will always defend My Church, crushing the head of the ancient serpent and triumphing over his haughty pride, for My glory."

The demons recognized that with Mary's assistance humans in despair and those in the process of losing eternal life in this world could still be led to the rewards of eternal life. Although such rewards have been made possible because of Jesus' redemptive dying for the sins of mankind, Mary's intercession to Jesus also can be of much added help for everyone. As the demons became more aware of the hopelessness of their plight, their being in Mary's presence caused them even more torment. Demons bound to remain there pleaded with Mary to let them depart from her presence. God then gave her the ability and permission to release them. When she did so, with terrible howls they swiftly cast themselves to their abyss.

Mary's brief experience with demons was followed by her wonderful and ecstatic vision of each member of the Trinity. This also happened on the first of her ten days of intercessory prayers before the beginning of the Jerusalem Council. Mary heard them offer to help the Church in the following ways: (1) The Father agreed to direct the Church by His omnipotence, (2) As head of the Church Jesus promised to assist it with His wisdom, and (3) As spouse of the Church the Holy Spirit agreed to provide the Church and God's people with His enlightening gifts and great love.

In her beatific vision, Mary saw Jesus in his humanity presenting to the Father her prayers for the Church. In positive response from the Father, immediately the form of a sparkling church or temple appeared. Clear, resplendent, and extremely beautiful, as if made of sparkling crystal and diamonds, it was adorned with many enhancing enamels and reliefs. As Mary received this gift from God in her vision, she became enabled to see the Divinity intuitively and more clearly. Feeling great love and new fervor for the Church, Mary remained in ecstasy for many hours.

While Mary held the mystical church in her hands, angels carried her back to her room at the Cenacle house. Hardly moving, she remained there in prayer for the next nine days. During this time she responded positively and with deep appreciation to God's expressed desire that she help Him distribute to the Church and its members, through the ages, abundant treasures and graces that had been merited by Jesus.

Results from the First Jerusalem Council of Apostles

At the opening of the Jerusalem Council, Peter spoke first and was then followed by Paul, Barnabas, and James the Less. Major decisions reached included a statement declaring that, because eternal salvation could result from baptism and faith in Jesus Christ, ancient laws of Moses regarding circumcision would not be imposed on newly baptized Gentiles.

Disciples also attended later meetings with the apostles, where decisions were made about Church administration, religious ceremonies, and ways to help members in spiritual growth. Even though Lucifer and his followers prowled about in the distance during this Jerusalem Council and its subsequent meetings, God prevented them from coming near the Cenacle meeting place. The presence and approval of the Holy Spirit then was very much experienced within the Cenacle, and this was confirmed by manifested signs of fire.

Letters about council results were sent to Christians elsewhere. When these letters were later read before the faithful in Antioch, the Holy Spirit again manifested His confirmation with signs of fire. As they were departing from Jerusalem, Mary presented Paul and Barnabas with treasured gifts, including some parts of Jesus' clothing and remembrances from His passion.

God's Help to Weak Humans Persevering Against Spiritual Forces

Our Lady spoke with Ven. Mary of Agreda about differences in natures of human and spiritual forces. Humans are weak and prone to fatigue. They soon tire, succumb in labor, and turn back discouraged. Human fervor tends to be inconsistent, going up and down—at times fervent and at times lukewarm. One day humans find it

agreeable to serve God, and the next day they turn back. On the other hand, demons are not fatigued or weakened in their efforts as they tempt souls. However, Almighty God does limit and restrain the power of demons. In helping persevering humans to resist the enemy, God provides support and overcoming grace.

Weak Humans Becoming Tardy and Imbecilic

Ven Mary of Agreda was told that the evil one seeks to exaggerate unpleasant difficulties and hardships, emphasizing that these are dangerous to health and life. Resulting emphasis on worldly mindedness rather than on a God-centered life is repulsive to God. People who are weak and wavering in doing good and in following God end up with strength to do evil. Rather than following God's commands for practicing virtue, they remain ready to persist in sinning. Following the deception of Satan, these humans hinder themselves from advancing towards perfection and thus give the devil victories. Those weak in following the Lord become tardy and imbecilic about saving their souls, and they load upon themselves eternal damnation.

Means Such as the Eucharist for Overcoming the Enemy

Thoughts from Mary:

Consider the ways I resisted Lucifer and all of hell. With fortitude and constancy I despised his illusions and temptations. I did not permit myself to be disturbed by him or pay attention to him. These are good ways to overcome his haughty pride. In temptations, do not be lax in labor and in the exercise of prayer. In time of battle, offer heartfelt and at times tearful prayers, as needed. It is important to be very watchful, for the temptations you face are not ordinary, but directed by the highest astuteness and malice of the enemy.

In conclusion, I remind you of two forms of help that should receive special attention for frightening and overthrowing the enemy: (1) all Church sacraments, and (2) the Eucharist, which is the most powerful means of help. If the power of the Eucharist is not felt by you or by others, it is because, in the frequency of receiving Communion, the recipient has lost the esteem and veneration one should feel. If you receive the Eucharist frequently, with devotion and with piety, you will then be helped by God to exercise great power and dominion over the enemy. The divine fire of the Eucharist, in pure souls, acts in a most powerful way, as if it were in its own element. In myself this divine fire

has been active to the limit of possibility for a human, thus inspiring terror to the demons.

Mary's Honoring the Apostles

After this council Mary stayed on in Jerusalem with John and James the Less. She remained in contact with the progress and needs of other apostles elsewhere through correspondence, visits, and various supernatural means. Our Blessed Mother offered much encouragement to the apostles in her correspondence with them. She also sent them clothing.

Frequently Mary's angels visited the apostles, assisting them in both interior and visible ways. Her angels conversed, encouraged, warned of dangers, and informed them about what God wished them to do. These angels also accompanied them and even helped to free them from prison. Throughout this period Mary prayed that with help from angels the apostles and disciples would be guided by God's divine light.

Our Lady shared about Jesus and about her own life with a medical doctor by the name of Luke, who later wrote both the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. With the apostles and others Our Lady spoke mainly about Jesus. She discouraged their saying and writing much about herself.

Thoughts from Mary:

Church members, and especially women in current times, do not adequately treat priests with the reverence, esteem, and respect which is due to them. This has been an increasing problem within the Church. While it is true that some priests unduly subject themselves to serving specific Church members, to gain their help financially and in other ways, the fault lies even more with too much self-pride on the part of those helping.

Give more honor to priests, who have been anointed and sanctified for the purpose of consecrating and offering up the body and blood of Jesus Christ in the Mass. Make up for inadequate and disrespectful treatment of priests. Regard them with reverence, similar to that which would be shown if these priests were standing at the altar or near the Blessed Sacrament or holding Jesus. As you recall how I desired to provide garments for the apostles, also show reverence for the garments and articles used by priests for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

VII. MARY'S SPIRITUAL RECOLLECTIONS

Mary's Reliving of Jesus' Passion

According to what Ven. Mary of Agreda was led to understand, Mary received the privilege that also had been given to angels of not forgetting what she once knew or understood. As a result mental images and impressions of the passion of Jesus remained and were deeply felt within her. In Mary's memory she frequently remembered Jesus mistreated, afflicted, and disfigured. Again and again Mary recalled the blasphemies against Jesus as she relived His whole passion.

For each type of suffering that Jesus had received, Mary offered a specific type of prayer. To come against blasphemies towards Jesus, she sang her own canticles and hymns to venerate Him. In doing so she confessed Jesus' divinity, humanity, holiness, miracles, works, and teachings. Recalling afflictions against Jesus' body, Mary prayerfully provided her own bodily gestures of worship with genuflections and prostrations. At times the Blessed Mother's grief became so extreme that she even shed tears of blood. Then Jesus would come to her to sooth her sorrows and to help her to overcome these physical manifestations caused by such intense love.

Jesus provided Our Lady with new strength after each of her periods of remembrance of His passion and death. Jesus especially encouraged her to try to put aside such sorrows on the days in which she commemorated His Resurrection. Then such sorrow seemed incompatible with the overflowing favors and joys that He had provided. Nevertheless, Mary never lost sight of Jesus' sufferings. In the sweetness of the Lord's favors there remained a mixture of sorrow and joy.

From about five o'clock in the evening each Thursday until noon on Sundays Mary would retire to her room of prayer in the Cenacle. Starting with her memories of Jesus' washing of feet at the Last Supper, each hour she relived an aspect of Jesus' suffering, passion, and death. Repeating prayers that she remembered Jesus had offered from the cross, she felt within herself His pain. Week after week Mary relived her memories and experiences of the horrific passion of her son Jesus Christ. Because of her intercession during such sufferings, she helped obtain a multitude of favors for others from God. In similar situations in later years devout Christians, including some

bearing stigmata wounds like those of Jesus, also have been led to sorrowfully relive the passion of Jesus and offer up such sufferings for the salvation of souls.

Mary's Preparation and Devotion for Receiving Communion

Except for when she confined herself weekly in her Cenacle room of prayer to relive the passion of Jesus, Mary received Communion almost daily. The most sacred and wonderful effects of the actual presence of Jesus within each Eucharistic host she received remained within her from one Communion to the next. Even though she was worthy of having Jesus in the Eucharist remain dwelling within her, as in a tabernacle, she nevertheless fervently prepared herself each time before receiving Communion.

In her preparations for Communion Mary often presented her prayers prostrate and in the form of a cross. To God the Father Mary offered up Jesus' passion and death, His humanity and divinity, and His works and worthiness. As she humbly adored God, she acknowledged her nothingness in comparison to Him. She sought help from her angels as she prepared to even more worthily receive Jesus in the Eucharist. Her angels were happy to accompany her in prayer and to offer assistance.

For Mary's reception of Communion, the apostle John usually celebrated his services for her and for others with Psalms, spiritual sharing, and a consecration of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus. With great love when receiving Communion, Mary frequently genuflected three times. Unless there were urgent needs to be met, then she usually retired to spend several hours in prayer. During her hours of prayer, writes Ven. Mary of Agreda, the apostle John frequently was privileged to see rays of light darting forth from Mary, as if from the sun.

Mary's Ministry from the Cenacle

When not in prayer and meditation, Mary usually was busy serving others. She tended to the poor and ill, distributed alms, and assisted the sick in their last hours. From gifts of linen and silk, she prepared vestments and altar cloths. She seemed to need little food and sleep. However, at John's insistence she was obedient and humble in response to his requests to eat and rest more often.

Mary was concerned about how to assist those who might seek her help during her periods of prayer and rest in her Cenacle oratory room. John agreed to then be available to offer assistance, and Ven. Mary of Agreda understood that at other times an angel appearing as Our Lady was present to briefly attend to important details needing immediate attention.

Mary's Celebration of Special Commemorative Days

After Jesus' Ascension and particularly in the final years of Mary's life in the Cenacle, she celebrated days commemorating special happenings for Jesus and herself. Such celebrations renewed her memory of benefits for which she and all mankind should be indebted. The Blessed Mother especially commemorated the Nativity of Jesus and her own Immaculate Conception. Each year the Catholic Church celebrates the feast of her Immaculate Conception on the eighth of December.

Before such special times of commemoration, Mary spent whole nights in prayer and praise. Such occasions were celebrated at the same times in heaven. Then Mary was raised up to experience beatific visions of the essence of the Trinity and to enjoy the presence of each member of the Trinity for several hours. Following these experiences angels helped to bring her back to her room in the Cenacle house.

On days that Mary recalled and gave thanks for the gift of her own Immaculate Conception, angels joined her in singing and thanking God that He had preserved her from the weight and guilt of original sin when she was first conceived, even though she had been formed as a descendant of Adam. This singular grace and privilege had come from almighty God in heaven, where time is different than on earth, by virtue of the forthcoming redemptive merits from the death and resurrection of her son Jesus. Mary had been created by God to be "full of grace," unmerited favor, primarily for her becoming the mother of Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God, and the Savior for all of mankind.

Added Thoughts on the Immaculate Conception

The author wishes to add some related thoughts about the Immaculate Conception from Fr. Ray Tintle, O.F.M., of the San Miguel Mission in California. When the Blessed

Mother visited her cousin Elizabeth, in her beautiful response to Elizabeth (in Luke 1:46-55, now called The Magnificat), Mary declared: “My soul rejoices in God my Savior.” In this proclamation she recognized that already she had received salvation from God.

Fr. Ray then referred to Hebrews 4:15, where it states: “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin.” The theological principle at work here, declared Fr. Ray, is that Jesus could not have received His sinless human nature from His own mother if she were not already preserved from original sin. As the mother of Jesus, Mary was able to pass on to Him her own human qualities, including her own gift from God of being sinless, and then to carry Jesus within herself in a sinless body during her pregnancy.

The Catholic Church officially proclaimed the Immaculate Conception as an important Church dogma to be believed by its members on December 8, 1854, about 200 years after Ven. Mary of Agreda received revelations about Our Lady’s Immaculate Conception. This dogma is stated in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 490-495.

About 24 years before the Immaculate Conception became a recognized Church dogma, in 1830 in Paris Our Lady appeared to a young French nun now known as St. Catherine Laboure. Then Mary requested the making of *the Medal of the Immaculate Conception*, now known as *the Miraculous Medal*, to be engraved with the following prayer, “O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee.” On its reverse side she desired a large M surmounted by a cross and with two hearts beneath it representing Jesus and herself—all surrounded by 12 stars.

After many delays, by 1836 millions of medals finally were circulated. Remarkable cures resulted, including an instant healing of someone with cholera. Such cures led to the official 1854 declaration of the Catholic dogma on the Immaculate Conception. Before St. Catherine Laboure’s death in 1876, few knew that she had received apparitions and messages from the Blessed Mother encouraging devotion to her Immaculate Conception.

In 1858 in Lourdes, France, Mary also appeared to a 14-year-old girl by the name of Bernadette Soubirous and referred to herself to as the Immaculate Conception. Since then millions of people and especially the sick have made pilgrimages to Lourdes to receive Jesus in Holy Communion there at Mass, to pray the rosary, and to bathe in waters from a spring that first appeared during Our Lady’s 19 apparitions to St. Bernadette. Many healings have

resulted. A popular movie called *The Song of Bernadette* tells about experiences of St. Bernadette and others at Lourdes and about Mary's revealing that she wished to be known as the Immaculate Conception.

Thoughts from Mary on Preparing to Receive Communion:

. In preparing for Communion, purify yourselves, as I have done. Examine yourselves to receive God. Adorn your interior temples with virtues, so as to receive Him worthily. I serve as the special advocate and protectress for those wishing to arrive at greater purity for Holy Communion. Ask God for my help, and for help from the angels. The angels also are very anxious to see you approach the Holy Eucharist with great devotion.

Thoughts from Mary Encouraging Meditation on Jesus' Passion:

Notice and be attentive to my continual exercises to renew remembrances of Jesus, and particularly the recollections of Jesus' sufferings and passion. Such remembrances will lead to personal sorrow for one's forgetfulness of the redemption and its incomprehensible benefits.

Forgetfulness can be considered proof of contempt. One does not forget what one holds dear. Humans tend to become upset when other humans are not grateful. Yet towards Jesus, their Redeemer who suffered to rescue them from eternal damnation, humans are forgetful. They ungratefully complain when God does not assist them as they wish. Why? Those forgetful of Jesus' death seldom talk about or share Jesus, and in this they show contempt.

Encouraged by our forgetfulness, Satan works on us all, figuring that in our lack of awareness we will not easily detect his evil ways. On the other hand, Satan is very wary and fearful of power from those of you who are not forgetful. Prayerfully meditate often on the life and death of Jesus.

VIII. THE END OF MARY'S LIFE ON EARTH

Preparation for Mary's Passing into Eternal Life

Although the angels, saints, and members of the Trinity longed for Mary's coming to live with them in heaven, they recognized that those remaining in the world still desired and needed her motherly assistance. Ven. Mary of Agreda understood that Mary passed over into eternal and immortal life shortly before the age of 70. Beforehand God sent the angel Gabriel and other angels to inform her that in three years she would be joining them in heaven at the right hand of Jesus. These angels found Mary in her Cenacle oratory room praying for mercy for sinners. As she had answered the angel Gabriel earlier at the Annunciation, Mary responded, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done to me according to thy word." She then requested that these angels join with her in alternating verses of a canticle of praise to God.

In her preparations for passing on to eternal life, Mary again visited memorable places related to Jesus. She remained the longest at Calvary. There she worshiped God and fervently prayed for His Church, the body of Christ. She prayed especially that within the Church many souls would come to know and worship the Lord and would become profoundly affected by Jesus' redeeming death. She also requested that from heaven she could continue to look upon the Church and offer loving prayers for its increase, well-being, and progress.

Later God sent Mary a vision in which she received assurance that these supplications would be honored. Praising God, Mary expressed appreciation for her life within the Church as a pilgrim en route to her real and true home. She thanked God especially for the blessing within the Church of the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.

Mary's Last Will and Testament

According to Ven. Mary of Agreda, in Mary's wisdom she was led to prepare a last will and testament. In this, Mary declared that her only real possession was God, to whom all else belonged and whom she loved as her everything. In her will, Mary offered the following blessings and forms of help for four groups:

(1) To the Church, Mary left blessings of achievements and examples she had provided through her own efforts and with help and grace received from God. Mary prayed that by her examples the Church and its people would be assisted in fulfilling God's will on earth. She prayed that her actions would help members of the growing Church to better know, love, and venerate God.

(2) To apostles and priests of existing and future ages, Mary also offered blessings based on her achievements and examples. She desired that these examples would assist them in their becoming wise, able, virtuous, and holy. Such qualities would help in their building up and sanctifying souls redeemed by the blood of Jesus.

(3) For those who would call upon her for prayers and assistance, Mary offered both her prayers and her accomplishments as examples for their spirituality, protection, grace, and eternal life.

(4) For all God's children when they would sin, Mary promised that in God's presence she would continue to pray for them throughout their lives. Almighty God expressed full and grateful approval for each part of Mary's heartfelt last will and testament.

Thoughts from Mary:

Forgetfulness about when we are to die and be judged is an absurd evil, introduced by the enemy. Satan sought to convince the first woman that she would not die and need not think of this matter. Realize that you must die. In this life, God expects you to operate the best you can with His guidance and help. Talk with God regularly, without intermissions in prayer. And try not to be forgetful or careless in matters pertaining to God, and in what he expects of you.

Gathering of Those Close to Mary before Her Death

God brought his apostles and disciples together in Jerusalem three days before Mary's death. Some had been led there because of God's interior inspiration, not understanding why. Others understood why they had come and were brought there in different and special ways. God desired each of them to be present at the time of Mary's happy and glorious transition into her heavenly home. While they would feel sorrow about her no longer being with them, they would be encouraged by the hope of following her into heaven in due time.

Gathered around Mary in the Cenacle room, the apostles and others beheld her full of beauty and celestial light. Mary appeared quite youthful, a privilege resulting from her immunity to original sin inherited from Adam. She asked for blessings from Peter and the others and told them she wished that she could have served them more. Mary offered as gifts some of her own tunics to two women who had provided care for her with much kindness and helpfulness. She then spoke individually to each of those assembled and gave thanks in particular to John.

As she was about to depart for God's eternal mansions, Mary asked those present to remember with love and prayer especially the following: (1) the lifting up of the name of the most high God (2) her mother the Church, (3) the evangelical spread of the word of God, (4) honor and veneration for the words of Jesus, (5) memory of Jesus' passion and death, and (6) the practice of Jesus' teachings. Our Blessed Mother encouraged them to love the Church and one another in the same ways of love that Jesus had taught. Finally, she commended John and the followers of Jesus into Peter's care.

Mary's Death

Shortly before her death, Mary requested that those present pray with and for her in silence. As they were doing so, Jesus was seen by her descending on a throne of glory with angels and with saints. The Cenacle house was filled with a glorious and divine presence. While only John and a few others were aware that Jesus had come in this special way, everyone felt the powerful effects of His presence.

Jesus offered Mary a choice of entering into heaven either with or without her passing through the portals of death. Mary responded that she wished to enter into eternal life with a natural death, like other children of Adam. She referred to how Jesus had suffered death without being obliged to do so, despite His being the Son of God and a member of the Divine Trinity. Just as she had followed Jesus in life, Mary desired to follow Him in death. Jesus agreed to her wishes.

Mary was reclining on a couch, with hands joined and eyes fixed upon Jesus. Her eyes were enflamed with the fire of divine love. The house was filled with a lovely fragrance that spread even to the street, and many heard angelic music. This

music included a portion from the canticle of Solomon in the second chapter of the Song of Songs: “Arise, haste, my beloved, my dove, my beautiful one; and come, the winter has passed.” Mary pronounced words Jesus had said from the cross, “Into Thy hands, Oh Lord, I commend my spirit.” Then she closed her eyes and expired. Her death was not related to any sickness, accident, or weakness, but to love of her son Jesus.

When Mary passed on to be placed in glory on a throne at the right hand of Jesus, music heard within the Cenacle seemed to withdraw to the upper air, where angels and saints accompanied her soul in solemn procession into heaven. A multitude of angels also remained to guard her body. The room became filled even more with a wonderful and unknown fragrance, and Mary’s physical body on the couch shone with light. All bystanders were filled with a sense of interior sweetness.

With tears of joy about what they had just experienced, the apostles and disciples remained absorbed in wonder and admiration for some time. Then they sang Psalms and hymns in honor of Mary. Ven. Mary of Agreda wrote that the death of the Blessed Mother took place about three o’clock in the afternoon on a Friday in August, close to her birthday for becoming 70 years of age. Jesus was born when Mary was 15 years old. His redemptive death and resurrection took place when He was 33 and Mary was 48. Ven. Mary of Agreda wrote that Our Lady had lived for about 21½ years after the death and resurrection of her son Jesus.

Happenings in Jerusalem at the Time of Mary’s Death

Following the death of Mary the sun became eclipsed and its light hidden. Many birds gathered around the Cenacle and made sorrowful sounds. Jerusalem was in a commotion. People came together in crowds, wondering what was happening and proclaiming loudly the power of God. Sick people at that time were cured and souls in purgatory released.

Ven. Mary of Agreda understood that three people who had died in the Jerusalem area close to the time of Mary’s death became restored to life as a result of Mary’s intercession. Not yet in grace when each one had died, they were given the

opportunity to amend their lives. Later each one passed over into heaven in a state of grace.

Mary Given Role of Helping the Dying

Death has been considered a punishment for sin. Because sin had no part in Mary's life, Ven. Mary of Agreda reported that God could have granted her the favor of not dying had this been her wish. Although Jesus had an even greater right than Mary to not taste death, He took upon Himself divine justice when He provided redemption through His passion and death. In His humanity Jesus desired much likeness between Himself and Mary. In her deep love for Jesus, Mary also wanted to be like Him in every way possible. She even chose to suffer much during Jesus' passion and later willingly chose death.

Because of Mary's choosing to be like Jesus in suffering and even death, God granted her the desires of her heart. With Him she would continue helping His children from heaven. All devoted to Mary and calling upon her at the hour of death would be under her special protection. She would represent them before the tribunal of God's mercy, would be their defense against demons, and would intercede for them for God's help and protection. For those calling upon her intercession and help, Mary would not only assist God's children at the time of death, but also beforehand in leading holier lives. We are encouraged, wrote Ven. Mary of Agreda, to thankfully remember Mary's intercessory assistance and God's responsive help during our lives, and especially at the hour of death.

Thoughts from Mary:

The surest pledge of a good death is a good life, in which your heart is free and detached from earthly loves. In one's last hour, earthly love afflicts and oppresses the soul like a heavy chain. It restricts liberty and prevents rising above things loved in this world. In your lives it is desired by the Lord that you become free from effects of original sin and be unhampered by such effects of original sin at death. Ignorant and unhappy children of Adam become captives of their passions and spend their lives loading upon themselves new burdens and fetters.

Those living in detachment of earthly things experience resulting freedom at death. Free your hearts more and more each day, so that with advancing years you may find yourselves more detached and free from

visible things. Then, when God calls you to Himself, you will be more ready and not have to seek this required freedom.

Preparations for Mary's Burial

In accordance with Jewish tradition, the apostles decided to anoint Mary with precious ointments and wrap her in the winding cloths used for burial. They asked the two women to whom Mary had given her tunics to prepare her body for burial. However, when these two women entered Mary's Cenacle room they experienced extremely brilliant light and were unable to see or touch her body.

After being informed of this, Peter and John entered Mary's room, where again they heard angelic music. One group of angels was singing, "Hail Mary, full of grace," and another group of angels was responding, "A virgin before childbirth, in childbirth, and after childbirth."

The apostles knelt down. Seeking God's will about what to do next, they were led to understand that they should not touch or uncover Mary's body. The apostles made arrangements for the obtaining of a bier on which to place her. With Peter and John each taking one end of the tunic on which Mary had been reclining on the couch, they transferred her to the bier without touching her. The light around Mary was still brilliant, but less so. They could now witness the tremendous beauty of her face and hands. They lit many candles and placed them around her during the three days before her scheduled burial.

Wonders Related to Mary's Funeral

Because of so many unusual happenings around the time of Mary's death, a large percentage of the inhabitants of Jerusalem was attracted to the funeral procession as it slowly progressed through winding streets from the Cenacle house towards her burial site. As Mary's body was carried by, the sick were cured and evil spirits fled, thus enabling such cures to take place.

Numerous conversions to Jesus occurred along the procession route as those present became more enlightened about Mary, her son Jesus, and His mercy. They began to loudly proclaim Jesus as Redeemer, Lord, and true God, and to call out for

baptism. The apostles became increasingly busy—teaching more about Jesus for days after the funeral and baptizing.

Those carrying Mary on the bier felt wonderful effects from divine light and experienced consolation in different and varying degrees. Those in the crowd were astonished by the fragrance diffused about and by hearing such sweet and angelic music. Many proclaimed the power and greatness of God and sorrow for their own sins.

Peter and John placed the bier on which Mary was lying in a new sepulcher that had been prepared for her and covered her with a linen cloth. Then, according to Jewish custom, the apostles closed the sepulcher with a large stone. As celestial couriers returned to heaven, a multitude of angels assigned to Mary remained nearby guarding the sepulcher. Additional heavenly music was heard by many.

The beautiful fragrance that had been close to Mary's body remained. This fragrance was noticeable in the area near the sepulcher for about a year. It also was noticeable in Mary's Cenacle oratory room for a number of additional years. The oratory continued to serve as a sanctuary and place of refuge for people with all kinds of difficulties. Those coming there often found miraculous assistance. After several years the fragrance and number of miracles did subside, greatly affected by an atmosphere of sin surrounding the area of Jerusalem.

The apostles gathered together again at the Cenacle house after the ceremony near the sepulcher. They agreed that some of them should return immediately to the sepulcher to watch and pray there for as long as they would hear the celestial music. All were wondering how long this music would last. They agreed that some apostles should remain at the Cenacle to be available for those desiring instruction, ministry, and baptism. The apostles decided to take turns in ministering there at the Cenacle, so that some of them could have frequent visits at the sepulcher and remain there for a number of days. Peter and John then spent much time near the sepulcher, where lay the treasure of their hearts.

IX. THE BEGINNING OF MARY'S LIFE IN HEAVEN

Mary's Entrance into Heaven

Ushering Mary into heaven and presenting her to the Father and the Holy Spirit, Jesus expressed His desire for her to be seated close to Him at His right hand as companion and helper. He recalled how rays of God's light had resulted in Mary's appearing resplendent from the first moment of her conception, even above the brightness of angels. God had continued to preserve her from impure temptations and had exempted her from common sin and guilt.

Jesus declared that throughout her life with Him she had remained illuminated by God's light. In response to having received God-given grace and perfection beyond measure, Mary faithfully had used and preserved such gifts and talents. Carefully and lovingly she had followed and adhered to God's will. Chosen and distinguished above all other creatures, she was like a rose among thorns.

Jesus then made a proclamation similar to this: "It is right that My mother—this pure, beautiful, and worthy woman who is as much like Me as is possible for a human being—it is right that she be given a place of honor here in heaven at My right hand."

God the Father and the Holy Spirit enthusiastically agreed. Immediately they gave Mary a position of eminence and majesty above that of all other creatures. In her position of closeness to God, Mary was to have the privilege of enjoying and understanding deeply the attributes, glories, mysteries, and hidden secrets of God in the Blessed Trinity.

Mary's Bodily Assumption into Heaven

On the third day after Mary's soul entered into heaven, according to Ven. Mary of Agreda, God the Father officially proclaimed that he also desired that Mary reign at Jesus' right hand with both body and soul together. She was not to wait until the time that most other souls would be reunited with their bodies.

Accompanied by angels and saints on the third day after Mary's death, Jesus descended to earth with the soul of Mary. At His command her soul entered into her body and she was raised to a new life of immortality and glory. In her body Mary was then provided with four gifts that corresponded to gifts she had received earlier for her soul: (1) *bright clearness*; (2) *impassibility*, with freedom from earthly corruption and infirmity; (3) *agility*, with the ability of speedy movement from one place to another; and (4) *subtlety*, with new powers of penetration.

With body and soul now united and endowed with these gifts just mentioned, Mary emerged from the tomb—penetrating through material that had enfolded her and through the sepulcher stones without disturbing them. Now clothed in gold and resplendent for her new reign, Mary appeared in a beauty and glory similar to that of Jesus insofar as was possible for a human being.

To celestial music in a solemn procession through the air, they rose towards heaven, with angels and saints going first and followed by Jesus and Mary. It was the hour after midnight. Some of the apostles were at the tomb and were able to witness what was happening. They heard new songs of praise as the heavenly court looked towards Jesus and Mary. Mary then was joyfully welcomed by God in the Trinity in an eternal embrace.

Thoughts from Mary:

Lamentable and inexcusable is man's ignorance in which he knowingly forgets the eternal glory to which he is called by God. Whoever willfully forgets eternal glory is in danger of losing it. No one is free from this danger, as it is human nature to labor for things that cause one to forget the end for which one was created. Mankind does not provide the time, attention, and care needed for preparation for eternity.

Humans are hindered by pride, covetousness, and fleshly desires for transitory pleasures, possessions, and honors. Human beings become overly lax in seeking and remembering the goal for which they were created. This is a misfortune without equal and for which I have sorrow beyond all sorrows!

How I long for mankind to accept the salvation provided by the blood of Jesus! In my great love for mankind, I long to cry out as follows: Deceived human beings, what are you doing? For what purpose are you living? Do you not realize what it is to see God face to face,

share His company, and participate in His eternal glory? Of what are you thinking? What will you seek once you have lost this true blessing and happiness, for which there is no other happiness? The labor is short, the reward is infinite glory, and the punishment is eternal.

Crowning of Mary as Queen of Heaven

Because Mary had humbled herself so much in serving others during her earthly pilgrimage, members of the Trinity proclaimed their desire to crown this beautiful woman so full of grace as glorious queen. She was to reign over the seraphim, ministering spirits, angels, and the entire universe of all creatures. Just as Mary had humbled herself in obedience to the apostles and saints, all in heaven were commanded to humbly recognize and obey Mary as their queen. As a human being who had showed such loving dedication as the mother and follower of Jesus, she was to be given power, majesty, and sovereignty.

God the Father asked Mary to serve as His treasurer, assisting Him in distributing different forms of help and grace. In her queenship and reign He desired that she serve all people as mother, advocate, protectress, and teacher. She was to be a special patroness for certain countries that God desired to be more His own. Mary was to help make available God's special relief for those calling upon her, showing devotion to her, and serving His desires. In her different roles as queen she would also serve His children as friend, defender, and comforter.

The heavenly coronation day for Mary was full of festivity and joy. Participating in a special way were Mary's family members, including Joseph, Anne, and Joachim. Visible on this day was what appeared to be a circular monstrance for holding Jesus in His Eucharistic presence close to her heart. This monstrance served as a testimonial and reward related to Mary's having received Communion so worthily and with such devotion.

Mary's Longing to Fulfill Heavenly Responsibilities

In the heavenly realm Mary abides close to where God serves the entire universe as king, judge, and master. In her God-given roles as mother, advocate, protectress, and teacher, she remains especially eager to help lead mortals towards

eternal life with God. She is sorrowful that more do not ask for her intercession, and especially for achieving salvation for themselves and for others. Because so many people do not ask for the assistance that Mary longs to provide, she has been limited and held back in her ministry of helping lead souls towards eternity with her son Jesus and all in heaven.

Throughout the centuries frequently people have observed and shared about blessings resulting from prayers for Mary's intercession. Although God does desire that we pray directly to Him and to each member of the Blessed Trinity, He also has enabled Our Blessed Mother to be our heavenly helper.

Our Lady remains ready and waiting to assist individuals, families, and nations needing to be brought to the grace and friendship of God. May many more people ask for her intercession. May we follow her examples of love, and especially as a result of reviewing in this book and meditating upon *Thoughts from Mary*. Thank you, God, for giving us Mother Mary, not only as a mother for Jesus, but also as a dear and caring mother for each one of us.

+ + +

APPENDIX, INCLUDING REFLECTIONS RELATED TO MARIAN DOGMAS

Pertinent to *Mary's Life and Reflections, as Seen in the Mystical City of God* are four Marian Catholic dogmas, or doctrines, as follows:

(1) In 431 at the Council of Ephesus that defined the Church's first Marian dogma, Mary was declared to be *Mother of God (Theotokos)* and truly the Mother of God the Son made man. "The Holy Virgin is the *Mother of God* since according to the flesh she brought forth the Word, God made flesh." Titles for Mary and wording related to the four Catholic dogmas about her are found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and in well-researched publications by Professor Courtenay Bartholomew, M.D., listed in the Bibliography.

(2) The Lateran Council in 649 officially referred to *the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*: "She conceived without seed, of the Holy Spirit...and without injury brought Him forth...and after His birth preserved her virginity inviolate."

(3) Approximately 1,200 years later and in 1854, *the Immaculate Conception of Mary* was recognized by Pope Pius IX as follows: "The Most Holy Virgin Mary was in the first moment of her conception by the unique gift of grace and privilege of Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of mankind, preserved free from all stain of original sin." For further information, see Chapter VII here, beginning with its section called *Mary's Celebration of Special Commemorative Days*.

(4) The most current Marian dogma officially presented by the Catholic Church is *the Assumption of Mary*, proclaimed in 1950 by Pope Pius XII who stated: "Mary, the immaculate perpetually Virgin Mother of God, after the completion of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into the glory of heaven."

Particularly fascinating are words in agreement with these four Church dogmas that are from Our Lady of Guadalupe in December of 1531, when she appeared to a fifty-seven-year-old Christian Indian by the name of Juan Diego near Mexico City. He was canonized by Pope John Paul II on July 31, 2002. Within the Nican Mopohua, St. Juan Diego's word-for-word report in the Nahuatl Indian language that was then

translated into Spanish and later into English, Our Lady was quoted as saying, “Know, know for sure, my dearest and youngest son, that I am the perfect, ever virgin, holy Mary, mother of the one great God of truth, who gives us life, the inventor and creator of people, the owner and Lord of what is around us and what is touching us or very close to us, the owner and Lord of the sky, the owner of the earth.”

In Mary’s final and loving motherly message to St. Juan Diego, she reassured him by saying, “Listen. Put it into your heart, my youngest and dearest son, that the thing that frightened you, the thing that afflicted you, is nothing. Do not let it disturb you. Do not fear this sickness, nor any other sickness, nor any sharp and hurtful thing. Am I not here, I who am your mother? Are you not under my shadow and protection? Am I not the source of your joy? Are you not in the hollow of my mantle, in the crossing of my arms? Do you need something more? Let nothing else worry you, disturb you.” Some of these words just quoted now appear over the entrance to a huge Mexico City cathedral honoring her: **“Am I not here, I who am your mother?”**

The author received her copy of the Nican Mopohua from Dr. Jose Aste Tonsmann and his wife Cucha at a San Francisco International Marian Conference. Starting in the early 1980’s and for well over 20 years, Dr. Aste Tonsmann had slowly and meticulously magnified over 2,500 times both eyes of the Image of Our Lady of Guadalupe that suddenly and miraculously appeared on the long tilma or cloak of St. Juan Diego as he gave his bishop Our Lady’s gift of Castilian roses carried within his tilma. Dr. Aste Tonsmann’s magnification of her eyes was done, with permission, with IBM equipment used for studies related to outer space where he was employed as a computer systems analyst and computer photography enhancement expert.

Thirteen people from 1531 now can be seen reflected from the magnified eyes of the Guadalupe Image. Included are St. Juan Diego, a second Indian, their bishop, the bishop’s interpreter, another visiting bishop, a family of seven—including three young children—and a black woman. Historical records have confirmed that a black woman then worked for the bishop.

These recent findings provide added confirmation of the validity and importance of the apparitions and Image of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Especially significant in a seemingly prophetic way was Our Lady’s telling St. Juan Diego, **“For**

the fulfillment of the intentions of my merciful compassionate gaze, go to the residence of the bishop of Mexico...Tell him that I want him to build me a house here, to erect my temple.” For our generation Mary may well have been predicting that we would see the reflections of St. Juan Diego and others from 1531 in the eyes of her miraculous Image. The temple or church requested by Our Lady has become the most-visited Catholic shrine in the world.

In our times, when stability and love within families seem especially needed, the recent discovery of a family group with three children among the thirteen people reflected from the eyes of the Image indicates a continued call from God and from Our Lady for more awareness of their deep concerns for the well-being of families. Dr. Aste Tonsmann and his wife have been sharing such messages in a variety of countries. Over and over they have been emphasizing present-day serious needs to work and pray for encouraging closer and better family life throughout the world.

* * *

The author is grateful to Fr. John H. Hampsch, C.M.F., for his wise and caring review of this book while it was being written. He also kindly provided her via email with copies of several of his helpful publications, including: (1) *Glad You Asked That*, (2) *Common Questions about Mary*, and (3) *Mary, “Our Tainted Nature’s Solitary Boast.”* The author recommends obtaining and studying these and Fr. Hampsch’s other biblically-sound and well-researched materials. For further information, please see the Bibliography.

Following are summarizations related to Catholic dogmas and teachings about Our Blessed Mother that the author has prepared from three of Fr. Hampsch’s very informative publications mentioned above. He has reviewed summarizations here and has given approval for their use:

Because of some biblical references in the New Testament to Jesus’ brothers and sisters, and for those who might question Catholic dogma about the perpetual virginity of Mary, Fr. Hampsch points out in his publications that Hebrew and Aramaic spoken by Jesus had no words for *cousin*, *uncle*, and *aunt*. In scriptures James and Joseph (Joses) are referred to as brothers of Jesus, yet both are listed as

sons of another Mary at the foot of the cross (Mt. 27:56 and Mk. 15:40). Early Church tradition consistently considered both of them to be Jesus' "brethren" but not his brothers. Otherwise, why would Jesus have consigned the care of Mary at the foot of the cross to His "disciple" John who was not Jesus' brother? In addition, St. Polycarp who was John's own disciple has written that Mary was perpetually a virgin.

In Genesis 13:8, Abram addressed his nephew Lot by the name of brother. Paul in his epistles written in Greek referred to James the son of Zebedee as Jesus' brother (Gal. 1:19), which meant that this James was either a close follower and/or possibly a relative of Jesus. Such information helps to prove that those referred to as brothers and sisters of Jesus were not His siblings but actually followers and/or kinsfolk of Jesus.

Fr. Hampsch writes that we are to venerate (honor) but never worship or adore Mary and other saints. Our devotion to them, and especially towards the Blessed Virgin Mary, is to be based on (1) **intercession**, (2) **fellowship**, and (3) **imitation**.

- (1) Regarding **intercession**, the Bible clearly states that Jesus is the only mediator between God and mankind. However, these passages in context refer to Jesus as the only redemptive mediator. Nowhere in scripture is He ever referred to as the only prayer mediator. Certainly Jesus is the greatest mediator and the one through whom all prayer must pass to reach our Heavenly Father. (See John 14:6.) Just as Paul wrote in his epistles that he himself acted as a mediator for others in prayer and encouraged them to do the same, (Eph. 6:19, Col. 1:9-10), and just as we ask one another to pray to God for each of us, we can ask Our Blessed Mother Mary to intercede for us.
- (2) In **fellowship** with Mary and the saints and with Jesus Christ as parts of His Mystical Body, we can effectively join together with them in adoration, praise, and petition to our Heavenly Father through Jesus (Eph. 2:19-20), thus enhancing our prayer power (Eph. 3:15).
- (3) **Imitation** of Jesus Christ and the realization of His life in us is an important aspect of Christianity (Eph. 5:1-2). Chosen and sanctified to bring forth the Messiah into the world as His mother, the Blessed Virgin

Mary became more like Christ and more deserving of our imitation and honor than anyone else. Especially worthy of our imitation, writes Fr. Hampsch, is her obedience to God's will. We are reminded of what is written in First John: 3:24: "Those who obey His commands live in Him, and He in them." (To grasp the role of imitation in spiritual growth, review 1 Cor. 4:16, Heb. 6:12, and the Third Epistle of John, verse 11.)

Mary is the best Christ-imitator, writes Fr. Hampsch. Her virtuous God-imitation has been most perfectly realized because of her Immaculate Conception. Because of this she was not only saved from sin, but saved from sinning—to better cooperate with God in presenting this sinful world with a sin-free Redeemer. By venerating or honoring her and the saints for their holiness, we are honoring the source of that holiness, the Lord Himself. By honoring Mary as Christ's mother, we also are honoring God, the Divine Artist who fashioned her.

In Mary's Canticle of praise that begins in Luke 1:46, Our Blessed Mother whom the angel Gabriel declared to be "full of grace" exclaimed, "My being proclaims the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit finds joy in God my Savior." She appreciated her salvation more than any other human creature because: (1) it was "preventative" rather than "curative" of sin and (2) it was divinely engineered as a pre-application of Jesus' redemptive act at Calvary. Since Mary's Immaculate Conception occurred some years before Calvary, it was something like merchandise received before the bill for it was paid.

Some have questioned the Immaculate Conception because of Paul's statement in Romans 3:23-24, as presented in *The New King James Bible*: "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Taken in context with verses 22 and 29 (expressed with the words of unto and upon), redemption is offered **for all humans**, and salvation **to every human**, without exception and without distinction between Jew and Gentile. The important verses of 22 and 29 indicate that all races or nations (not all individuals) are contaminated with personal sin and need to be saved.

This understanding is clear not only when taken in context with verses before and after Romans 3:23-24, but from on sense. Taken literally, would "all have sinned"

include Jesus, or sinless infants or fetuses, or those unconscious from infancy or early childhood? And what about those who are comatose from infancy or so severely mentally or psychologically affected that they are incapable of sinning?

So it appears that Mary would not be the only one exempt from the universal statement of “All have sinned.” However, she also was saved from sinning because of the later redemptive act by her son Jesus that was pre-applied to her soul at the moment of her conception in the womb of her mother Anne. In her Immaculate Conception, according to Catholic Church dogma presented December 8, 1854, Mary became exempt from both original sin and also personal sin (the kind of sin referred to in the controversial passages of Romans 3:23-24). The pre-application of Jesus’ redemptive power to redeem Mary’s soul was no problem for God, since in God there is no time and no temporal sequence as we know it.

In concluding this summary, the author wishes to refer to Fr. Hampsch’s sharing about the motherhood of Mary—motherhood for Jesus and for us. The incarnation involved her agreement to the enfleshment of the divinity of God Himself within herself in human form. We all are members of His body (Eph. 5:30). By God’s design, her maternal relationship to her Savior-Son in His physical body has been paralleled in a maternal relationship for all of us in His redeemed, Mystical Body. While not causing redemption, Mary has been called by God to co-act with her son Jesus in mankind’s restoration (salvation), without her causing it. Her co-activity with her son was demonstrated at the birth of His Mystical Body at Pentecost by reason of her noteworthy place of honor then. She has been called to be our mother, too.

* * *

Quotations at the beginning of this Appendix about four Marian Church dogmas have been summarized from a scholarly and well-illustrated book by Professor Courtenay Bartholomew, M.D., *A Scientist Researches Mary, Mother and Coredemptrix*, which is listed in the Bibliography. The prefix “co” comes from the Latin word “cum” that means “with.” Coredemptrix means “with the Redeemer.” Dr. Bartholomew writes that Mary’s role was secondary, subordinate and not co-equal, but cooperating with—just as a co-pilot is subordinate to a pilot. “I am the handmaid

of the Lord. Let it be done to me according to your word,” Our Lady declared in Luke 1:38. It was her Immaculate Conception, he explains, that properly prepared her for and made her worthy of the intimate and unique cooperation she was to have with the Redeemer in the work of salvation.

In the book just mentioned Dr. Bartholomew writes about a possible final fifth dogma that would refer to Our Blessed Mother as *Lady of All Nations and Coredemptrix*. He states that between 1945 and 1984 a Dutch woman from Amsterdam by the name of Ida Peerdeman received heavenly visions, prophetic messages (many of which have come to pass), and Eucharistic experiences. She understood that once the new title of *Lady of All Nations* would be proclaimed as an official Church dogma true peace would come to the world.

At her bishop’s instigation, Ida was subjected to thorough psychological investigations and found to be “perfectly normal.” After fifty years of investigations about Ida and assurance that there were no scriptural errors in the messages she had received, approval of devotions to the *Lady of All Nations* was given by Bishop Hendrik Bomers of Haariem, Amsterdam, on May 31, 1996. No official Vatican proclamation had been declared at the time this present book was written.

Particularly important was Ida’s twenty-seventh message on February 11, 1951. Then Our Blessed Mother presented the following prayer to be said in unity by individuals, nations, and the Church. Because of so many increasing needs presently being experienced throughout our world, may we frequently offer to God this prayer and share it with others:

“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Father, send down your Spirit over the earth. Let the Holy Spirit live in the hearts of all nations, so that they may be preserved from degeneration, disasters, and war. May the Lady of All Nations, who once was Mary, be our Advocate. Amen.”

Providential Experiences While Writing about Mary

While writing about Our Lady's messages for each of us, I have experienced a number of unusual and memorable experiences and blessings that I believe have been providentially guided by the Holy Spirit. I wish to share with you some of these experiences, which for me are extremely special. I hope that such sharing will result in readers becoming increasingly aware within their own lives of heaven-sent guidance, experiences, and help from God and from Our Blessed Mother.

In the spring of 1986 my husband Jack and I attended Mass in our former home town of Huntington Beach, California and then enjoyed lunch with a close friend, Charlie Mansur, and with Scotty and Joi Bourne from an organization called Follow Me Communications. While we were at lunch an inner voice kept urging me to talk about recent and ongoing apparitions of Mary, the mother of Jesus, in the village of Medjugorje in Yugoslavia. I had just learned from a magazine article about her reported apparitions there as Queen of Peace. Not realizing at first that this inner voice might be coming from the Holy Spirit, I internally argued with it, saying that such a discussion could result in our becoming late for a previously scheduled and important get-together with our son Mark and his wife. However, when the Bournes began sharing about Medjugorje towards the end of our visit, I knew without a doubt that my earlier promptings were from the Holy Spirit.

When the Bournes spoke of their own plans to go to Medjugorje in the near future, I realized with delight that Jack and I could afford to make a pilgrimage to Medjugorje, too, because we would soon receive some added payment from the sale of our previous home. Although Jack later decided that it would be best for him to not travel so far away, because of his own health needs, he strongly encouraged me to make such a pilgrimage. As a result, in December of 1986 I was able to enjoy a beautiful and life-changing spiritual journey to Medjugorje, led by Sr. Margaret Catherine Sims of the Center for Peace in Boston.

During my pilgrimage and while I was climbing over numerous large rocks on Apparition Hill, my camera accidentally was dropped and became broken. Related disappointments eventually led to blessings. To make up for my photo losses, fellow pilgrims kindly sent copies of their own pictures and videos. Included was a video showing in

apparition two of the young visionaries, Marija and Jakov. I happened to be among about 20 pilgrims with them during the recording of this video in a rectory room at the Franciscan parish of St. James in Medjugorje.

I also received video pictures of the pulsating sun that several of us had witnessed from the top of Mt. Krizevac, Cross Mountain, a few miles behind the church. There we were able to look at the pulsating sun for numerous and prolonged periods of time, three to ten minutes each time and from before noon until after three in the afternoon. This phenomenon is one of many unusual happenings witnessed in and near Medjugorje since the apparitions began in 1981. The pulsating sun also has sometimes been seen by those attending Marian conferences elsewhere. When I was able to gaze directly at the sun in Medjugorje, it appeared to me that a thin shield of light similar to a Eucharistic host and perhaps representing Jesus covered the sun and protected us from its direct rays.

After I returned home to Atascadero, California, my husband Jack and I spent hours with a professional person trying to create another video for public showing that would include pictures of the pulsating sun at Medjugorje and scenes of the two visionaries witnessing our Lady's apparition, where I had been blessed to be. Unfortunately, this video was never adequately completed. However, what I researched and wrote about for our video eventually developed into a manuscript and later a book.

* * *

In the late 1980s John and Faith Wightman kindly offered at their own expense to provide with attractive covers 100 bound copies of my Medjugorje manuscript, to be sold at cost. They also provided 100 bound copies of *Mary's Life as Seen in the Mystical City of God*, my initial summarization of highlights here from the writings of Ven. Mary of Agreda. Both of these manuscripts were made available at Cross of Peace gatherings in Santa Maria, California and at Medjugorje presentations that my husband, I, and others gave at several different Catholic churches in California. Providentially, what began with a broken camera in Medjugorje and receipt of photo replacements from caring pilgrims eventually materialized into publication by Follow Me Communications for two editions of *Medjugorje, Its Background and Messages*.

After my hours and hours of book preparation, sometimes all night, a Notre Dame priest approved its being offered for sale at the first Medjugorje conference in the United States. This conference took place at the University of Notre Dame in 1989 on the weekend of Mother's Day and Pentecost. A week before last-moment scheduled printing for my book, printing presses broke down. Members of the Dick Anesi family, so helpful in its preparation for publication by Follow Me Communications, immediately went to a prayer meeting to ask for intercession. Someone "just happened to be there" from another printing business. This person offered to cancel all their own printing projects for one week so that our book could be completed in time to be sold at the Notre Dame conference.

When printing for our book finally was completed, the Anesi's son Dan, who patiently and diligently had spent numerous long hours providing computer preparation, quickly transported completed copies by driving with a friend half-way across the United States to Notre Dame. They arrived the evening before the conference began. En route, beads on Dan's all-silver rosary that he had owned for years and which was hanging near the front window of his vehicle turned into a golden color—a seemingly miraculous happening that others involved with Medjugorje apparitions also have experienced.

To help with book promotions and sales, members of Follow Me Communications paid for my plane flight and attendance for that first Medjugorje Conference at Notre Dame. Beforehand they also encouraged my attending another Medjugorje conference scheduled for shortly afterwards in Eugene, Oregon. While at Notre Dame I prayed asking God and Our Lady to guide me to those with whom they wished me to share at a noon meal. Providentially, even though about 3,000 people were attending, at lunch I ended up sitting next to one of the leaders for the Eugene conference! During lunch she invited me to stay at her home during their conference. Later, while attending the Oregon conference I again became able to look directly at the pulsating sun.

Over and over I experienced such unusual happenings. They seemed to indicate heavenly confirmation of the importance of Our Lady's messages for drawing us closer to the Lord. Especially when at Medjugorje on two different pilgrimages, I experienced feeling tremendous closeness to Mary and to Jesus. When looking out windows when in Medjugorje, I strongly felt that I was lovingly heard by each of them when simply saying, "Hi, there!" In Medjugorje I also felt especially close to them during Eucharistic adoration within St. James

Church, at Mass surrounded by such fervent local people and pilgrims, and when climbing and meditating on nearby Apparition Hill and Mt. Krizevac, where apparitions continued to take place.

My second trip to Medjugorje in 1990 was made possible by a free gift from Ted Elisee, who was then editor of the *Observer*, a newspaper for our Catholic Diocese of Monterey in California. Not able to use tickets given to him for a pilgrimage to Medjugorje, he kindly encouraged me to go in his place for further research for a revised and updated second edition of my Medjugorje book. I remain tremendously grateful. Especially meaningful to me on both my 1986 and 1990 pilgrimages were personal experiences shared by other pilgrims.

Near one of the Stations of the Cross on Mt. Krizevac behind the church a young woman with my 1990 pilgrimage group named Yami and I had a most unusual and memorable encounter with a priest from the Boston area and a young man accompanying him. This priest was eager to relate that on his previous Medjugorje pilgrimage about two years beforehand the visionary Ivan through an interpreter had asked what he would like to request from the Gospa, the Croatian name by which Mary is called there. Writing in English on a piece of paper, this priest had asked what ministry the Gospa desired for him. His message was translated on the same piece of paper into Croatian for Ivan, who later returned with her response that someone had written in both Croatian and in English. The priest then showed us his treasured paper containing the following message: The Gospa desires that this priest dedicate his efforts to working with youth.

During our extensive sharing on Mt. Krizevac, the priest said that after this encouragement from the Gospa he organized various youth retreats at home in the United States. For about six months and after much difficulty in gaining permission to do so, he also was able to visit regularly a young man in prison accused of being a serial killer. There they shared about Jesus and about Our Lady of Medjugorje and prayed together. Only two weeks beforehand the young man—the person standing there with us on Mt. Krizevac—suddenly was released from prison! Authorities had discovered that someone else was the serial killer! This priest and the young man then decided to leave immediately for Medjugorje, to extend grateful thanks to Our Blessed Mother and to her son Jesus.

No wonder that before our special meeting on Mt. Krizevac during my week in Medjugorje more than once I had seen that young man crying—sometimes prone on the floor within the church in times of adoration before the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. While with us on Cross Mountain, this young man shared so beautifully about his spiritual reflections and meditations at various Stations of the Cross. There he vividly pictured himself in different roles within scenes from Jesus’ passion. We encouraged him to share such reflections when returning home, and especially with youth groups.

I continued to have special experiences related to my writings about Mary’s apparitions and messages. One highlight happened at a Medjugorje conference in Irvine, California, when a close acquaintance that I had not seen for over 30 years, Eleanor Guilford, came up while I was signing Medjugorje books and asked me to write a message for her. She had been my social work supervisor in foster care employment at Catholic Social Services in San Francisco way back in the in the 1950s. A friend gave her a gift copy of my book when she was leaving by plane on her Medjugorje pilgrimage, and when later reading it on Apparition Hill she excitedly had discovered that I was its author.

Ten pages of Mary’s messages that I prepared under different categorical titles for *Medjugorje, Its Background and Messages* have been included in *The Thunder of Justice* by Ted and Maureen Flynn, a book listed in the Bibliography. In addition portions have appeared in various other Medjugorje newsletters.

* * *

An editor from one Medjugorje newsletter requested that I also write an article about Our Lady of Guadalupe. A well-known, framed image of Our Lady of Guadalupe is on display behind the main altar of a large Mexico City cathedral, where millions of pilgrims come each year to gaze at it and pray. This still-well-preserved, life-sized image with vivid colors suddenly had appeared on the tilma of St. Juan Diego when he opened it to present to his bishop a gift from Mary of Castilian roses. As a heavenly sign for his bishop, earlier on that cold morning of December 12, 1531, she had asked St. Juan Diego to gather these roses from a nearby high, rocky, and arid hilltop where such flowers normally could not grow.

Starting in the early 1980’s, Dr. Aste Tonsmann has greatly magnified both eyes of the miraculous Guadalupe Image, in which thirteen people can be seen reflected from 1531.

Included are members of what appears to be a family group of seven, with three young children, the parents, and an older couple standing behind them, perhaps grandparents.

After researching and working on my Guadalupe article for about six months, I gave a copy to Teresita Villasenor, a close church friend in Atascadero. I was totally amazed when she revealed that she was related to Dr. Aste Tonsmann! After receiving his address from Teresita, I mailed him my twelve-page article for his review. I was so pleased when he telephoned me from the Mexico City area more than once with added helpful information.

I was able to arrange for Dr. Aste Tonsmann and his wife Cucha to be speakers and show pictures at an international Marian conference sponsored by St. Raphael Ministries in the San Francisco area. There they provided for attendees eight pages of a word-for-word translation into English of the *Nican Mopohua*. This contains St. Juan Diego's actual descriptive words regarding apparitions and messages that he received from Our Lady of Guadalupe. It has been a great blessing for me to be able to use Our Lady's words from this within the Appendix here!

I have continued to enjoy emails from Dr. Aste Tonsmann's wife Cucha about their sharing in many countries regarding the Guadalupe Image and about the related importance of encouraging close family life. They strongly believe that the Guadalupe Image with its reflection of a family seen in both eyes represents a concerned heavenly call for our times to give much more attention towards helping families.

* * *

While writing about Our Blessed Mother and her encouraging messages for this book that you are reading, frequently and sometimes unexpectedly I have received helpful assistance from a number of friends. For example, after praying aloud at a weekday Mass within my parish about needing to find an additional person for helping with editing, right after Mass a friend by the name of Elaine Wolfe offered her free assistance. Unbeknown to me, previously Elaine had been employed as an editor for technical publications! I remain especially thankful for Elaine's many hours of dedicated, attentive, and wise suggestions.

Often I have felt that the Holy Spirit and Our Lady were helping to orchestrate and improve this book by sending just the right people to offer suggestions and encouragement, in God's perfect timing. After I had given out some gift copies of this work in progress, one

person by the name of Jim Leonard provided especially helpful suggestions. I had written that the Blessed Mother and the apostle John sailed from Jerusalem to Ephesus. When Jim informed me that Jerusalem did not then have a seaport, I was able to improve accuracy by writing that they left Jerusalem and sailed to Ephesus.

After having knee surgery while still preparing this book, I gave copies as thank you gifts for many of those who had then been so kind and helpful. When some recipients shared that they were keeping these manuscripts by their beds and in their bathrooms for times of daily spiritual reflection and prayer, I became even more motivated in trying to do well in preparing *Mary's Life and Reflections – As Seen in The Mystical City of God*. May God richly bless all those who have helped in any way as I prepared this book. Thank you kind helpers, thank you Mother Mary, and thank you Holy Spirit.

In conclusion, I would like to share one of my more-meaningful experiences related to Our Blessed Mother. While on a Medjugorje pilgrimage in 1990 I began to cry when hearing at Mass there in Croatian the familiar song of *Holy God We Praise Thy Name*. This beautiful hymn reminded me of my own mother, Stella Wachter Tascher, who frequently enjoyed singing it very loudly and enthusiastically at the end of Mass. She passed away unexpectedly when I was only 20, and I have missed her greatly. Then in Medjugorje I strongly heard another unexpected voice within me that said: ***“I’m your mother too, and I’m here for you!”*** As a result I cried even more—but this time for joy.

Now I believe that Mary would like to give each of you readers a similar message: ***“I wish to be your mother, too. I’m here for you, and so is my son, Jesus.”***

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About the Author

After majoring in journalism and social work in her home town of Missoula at Montana State University (now called the University of Montana), Mary Joan Wallace (known as Mary Jo) earned her master's degree in social work from Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania. After working in foster care and adoptions, she lived in Adaban in southern Iran from 1960 to 1967, where her husband Jack was an economic analyst at a large Iranian oil refinery. Then they were able to travel within 35 countries, enjoying studying different cultural and religious beliefs and practices.

Between 1974 and 1979 they were part of a small team in southern California that planned and presented 240 weekly Catholic TV programs--*It's a Brand New Day*--for Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN). Programs featured personal testimonies of guests. Mary Jo participated in weekly meetings to plan programs, obtained background information for those doing interviews, handled publicity, and answered letters from viewers.

She is the author of *Medjugorje, Its Background and Messages*, published by Follow Me Communications. Its second edition, with 87 illustrations, has been available for purchase for those phoning (818) 830-0724 or contacting Spirit Enterprises at www.spiritenterprises.com.

On this site viewers have been able to read several of her writings, including: (1) her Medjugorje book, (2) *Mary's Life and Reflections - As Seen in the Mystical City of God* (a summarization of highlights from a 17th Century classic by Ven. Mary of Agreda), and (3) *The Miraculous Image of Our Lady of Guadalupe - God's Gift for Us All*. This web site also has shown pictures of 13 people from 1531--reflected from enlargements up to 2,500 times of both eyes of the original Image of Our Lady of Guadalupe. These pictures were made available by Dr. Jose Aste Tonsmann, after his extensive use of special IBM equipment for over 20 years of preparing the enlargements, starting in 1979.

After moving to Atascadero in the central coast area of California, Mary Jo and her husband became Benedictine oblates of the Monastery of the Risen Christ. Later, in 2013 she became a secular Franciscan ((OFS). She is the mother of four children (including two step children whom she partly raised), and she is a grandmother and great grandmother. Her husband Jack passed away in 1996.

