

National Council of Catholic Women

Rosary Meditation on the Dignity of Women



Plaque in Mary's Garden at the Basilica National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C. acknowledging the donation of the garden by the NCCW in 2000. Photo courtesy of Sharon O'Brien.

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NCCW Board members in Mary's Garden, Basilica National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, Washington, D.C. in 2016. Photo courtesy of NCCW.

Introduction:

This Rosary Meditation is presented for your prayerful use by a committee of the 2017 Spirituality Commission of the National Council of Catholic Women. The committee drew its inspiration from scripture and three papal documents:

1. "Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* of the Holy Father Francis to Bishops, Priests and Deacons, Consecrated Persons, Christian Married Couples and All the Lay Faithful on Love in the Family, March 19, 2016"
https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf
2. "Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* of the Supreme Pontiff, John Paul II on the Dignity and Vocation of Women on the occasion of the Marian Year, August 15, 1988"
http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1988/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19880815_mulieris-dignitatem.html
3. "Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* of the Supreme Pontiff, John Paul II to the Bishops, Clergy and Faithful on the Most Holy Rosary, October 16, 2002"
https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/2002/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20021016_rosarium-virginis-mariae.html

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The Rosary Meditation for each of the four mysteries: Joyful, Sorrowful, Luminous and Glorious begins with a selection of Catholic teaching on the dignity of women, then each of the five mysteries within cite Scripture, contain a reflection by the committee and include a prayer related to a specific role(s) women have in building God’s kingdom.

For your information, when citing papal documents, the entire paragraph must be cited. Numbers at the beginning of the paragraphs refer to the paragraphs as presented in the documents, numbers in parentheses refer to foot notes included at the end of each papal document entry and are presented here with approval of © *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*.

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The committee prays that the recitation and reflection on the mysteries will be the source of information and inspiration on the dignity of women.

Additionally, the Committee provides the following selections from the papal documents. These selections so inspired our work that we offer them to you for your prayerful consideration.

Selections from Papal Documents:

RESOURCE: AMORIS LAETITIA, Pope Francis, Chapter Two, The Experiences and Challenges of Families

54. In this brief overview, I would like to stress the fact that, even though significant advances have been made in the recognition of women’s rights and their participation in public life, in some countries much remains to be done to promote these rights. Unacceptable customs still need to be eliminated. I think particularly of the shameful ill-treatment to which women are sometimes subjected, domestic violence and various forms of enslavement which, rather than a show of masculine power, are craven acts of cowardice. The verbal, physical, and sexual violence that women endure in some marriages contradicts the very nature of the conjugal union. I think of the reprehensible genital mutilation of women practiced in some cultures, but also of their lack of equal access to dignified work and roles of decision-making. History is burdened by the excesses of patriarchal cultures that considered women inferior, yet in our own day, we cannot overlook the use of surrogate mothers and “the exploitation and commercialization of the female body in the current media culture”.⁴² There are those who believe that many of today’s problems have arisen because of feminine emancipation. This argument, however, is not valid, “it is false, untrue, a form of male chauvinism”.⁴³ The equal dignity of men and women makes us rejoice to see old forms of discrimination disappear, and within families there is a growing reciprocity. If certain forms of feminism have arisen which we

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must consider inadequate, we must nonetheless see in the women's movement the working of the Spirit for a clearer recognition of the dignity and rights of women.

42 *Catechesis* (22 April 2015): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 23 April 2015, p. 7.

43 *Catechesis* (29 April 2015): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 30 April 2015, p. 8.

RESOURCE: *Mulieris Dignitatem*, St. Pope John Paul II, Chapter I Introduction, A Sign of the Times,

1. THE DIGNITY AND THE VOCATION OF WOMEN - a subject of constant human and Christian reflection - have gained exceptional prominence in recent years. This can be seen, for example, in the statements of the Church's Magisterium present in various documents of the Second Vatican Council, which declares in its Closing Message: "The hour is coming, in fact has come, when the vocation of women is being acknowledged in its fullness, the hour in which women acquire in the world an influence, an effect and a power never hitherto achieved. That is why, at this moment when the human race is undergoing so deep a transformation, women imbued with a spirit of the Gospel can do so much to aid humanity in not falling".^[1] This Message sums up what had already been expressed in the Council's teaching, specifically in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*^[2] and in the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam actuositatem*.^[3]

Similar thinking had already been put forth in the period before the Council, as can be seen in a number of Pope Pius XII's Discourses ^[4] and in the Encyclical *Pacem in Terris* of Pope John XXIII.^[5] After the Second Vatican Council, my predecessor Paul VI showed the relevance of this "sign of the times", when he conferred the title "Doctor of the Church" upon Saint Teresa of Jesus and Saint Catherine of Siena,^[6] and likewise when, at the request of the 1971 Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, he set up a special Commission for the study of contemporary problems concerning the "effective promotion of the dignity and the responsibility of women".^[7] In one of his Discourses Paul VI said: "Within Christianity, more than in any other religion, and since its very beginning, women have had a special dignity, of which the New Testament shows us many important aspects...; it is evident that women are meant to form part of the living and working structure of Christianity in so prominent a manner that perhaps not all their potentialities have yet been made clear".^[8]

[1] The Council's Message to Women (December 8, 1965); *AAS* 58 (1966), 13-14.

[2] Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World "*Gaudium et spes*," 8; 9; 60.

[3] Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity "*Apostolicam actuositatem*," 9.

[4] Cf. Pius XII, *Address to Italian Women* (October 21, 1945): *AAS* 37 (1945) 284-295; *Address to the World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations* (April 24, 1952), *AAS* 44 (1952), 420-424; *Address to the participants in the XIV*

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International Meeting of the World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations (September 29, 1957): AAS 49 (1957), 906-922.

[5] Cf. John XXIII, Encyclical Letter "Pacem in Terris" (April 11, 1963); AAS 55 (1963), 267-268.

[6] Proclamation of St. Teresa of Jesus as a "Doctor of the Universal Church" (September 27, 1970): AAS 62 (1970), 590-596; Proclamation of St. Catherine of Siena as a "Doctor of the Universal Church" (October 4, 1970): AAS 62 (1970), 673-678.

[7] Cf. MS 65 (1973), 284f.

[8] Paul VI, *Address to participants at the National Meeting of the Centro Italiano Femminile* (December 6, 1976): "*Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*," XIV (1976), 1017.

Chapter V, Jesus, *Women in the Gospel*

13. As we scan the pages of the Gospel, *many women, of different ages and conditions*, pass before our eyes. We meet women with illnesses or physical sufferings, such as the one who had "a spirit of infirmity for eighteen years; she was bent over and could not fully straighten herself" (Lk 13:11); or Simon's mother-in-law, who "lay sick with a fever" (Mk 1:30); or the woman "who had a flow of blood" (cf. Mk 5:25-34), who could not touch anyone because it was believed that her touch would make a person "impure". Each of them was healed, and the last-mentioned - the one with a flow of blood, who touched Jesus' garment "in the crowd" (Mk 5:27) - was praised by him for her great faith: "Your faith has made you well" (Mk 5:34). Then there is *the daughter of Jairus*, whom Jesus brings back to life, saying to her tenderly: "Little girl, I say to you, arise" (Mk 5:41). There also is *the widow of Nain*, whose only son Jesus brings back to life, accompanying his action by an expression of affectionate mercy: "He had compassion on her and said to her, 'Do not weep!'" (Lk 7:13). And finally there is the *Canaanite woman*, whom Christ extols for her faith, her humility and for that greatness of spirit of which only a mother's heart is capable. "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire" (Mt 15:28). The Canaanite woman was asking for the healing of her daughter.

Sometimes the women whom Jesus met and who received so many graces from him, also accompanied him as he journeyed with the Apostles through the towns and villages, proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom of God; and they "provided for them out of their means". The Gospel names Joanna, who was the wife of Herod's steward, Susanna and "many others" (cf. Lk 8:1-3).

Sometimes *women appear in the parables* which Jesus of Nazareth used to illustrate for his listeners the truth about the Kingdom of God. This is the case in the parables of the lost coin (cf. Lk 15: 8-10), the leaven (cf. Mt 13:33), and the wise and foolish virgins (cf. Mt 25:1-13). Particularly eloquent is the story of the widow's mite. While "the rich were putting their gifts into the treasury... a poor widow put in two copper coins". Then Jesus said: "This poor widow *has put in more than all of them...* she out of her poverty put in all the living that she had" (Lk 21:1-4). In this way Jesus presents her as a model for everyone and defends her, for in the socio-juridical system of the time widows were totally defenceless people (cf. also Lk 18:1-7).

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In all of Jesus' teaching, as well as in his behaviour, one can find nothing which reflects the discrimination against women prevalent in his day. On the contrary, *his words and works always express the respect and honour due to women*. The woman with a stoop is called a "daughter of Abraham" (Lk 13:16), while in the whole Bible the title "son of Abraham" is used only of men. Walking the *Via Dolorosa* to Golgotha, Jesus will say to the women: "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me" (Lk 23:28). This way of speaking to and about women, as well as his manner of treating them, clearly constitutes an "innovation" with respect to the prevailing custom at that time.

This becomes even more explicit in regard to women whom popular opinion contemptuously labelled sinners, public sinners and adulteresses. There is the Samaritan woman, to whom Jesus himself says: "For you have had five husbands, and he whom you now have is not your husband". And she, realizing that he knows the secrets of her life, recognizes him as the Messiah and runs to tell her neighbours. The conversation leading up to this realization is one of the most beautiful in the Gospel (cf. Jn 4:7-27).

Then there is the public sinner who, in spite of her condemnation by common opinion, enters into the house of the Pharisee to anoint the feet of Jesus with perfumed oil. To his host, who is scandalized by this, he will say: "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much" (cf. Lk 7:37-47).

Finally, there is a situation which is perhaps the most eloquent: *a woman caught in adultery* is brought to Jesus. To the leading question "In the law Moses commanded us to stone such. What do you say about her?" Jesus replies: "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her". The power of truth contained in this answer is so great that "they went away, one by one, beginning with the eldest". Only Jesus and the woman remain. "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, Lord". "Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again" (cf. Jn 8:3-11).

These episodes provide a very clear picture. Christ is the one who "knows what is in man" (cf. Jn 2:25) - in man and woman. He knows *the dignity of man, his worth in God's eyes*. He himself, the Christ, is the definitive confirmation of this worth. Everything he says and does is definitively fulfilled in the Paschal Mystery of the Redemption. Jesus' attitude to the women whom he meets in the course of his Messianic service reflects the eternal plan of God, who, in creating each one of them, chooses her and loves her in Christ (cf. Eph 1:1-5). Each woman therefore is "the only creature on earth which God willed for its own sake". *Each of them from the "beginning" inherits as a woman the dignity of personhood*. Jesus of Nazareth confirms this dignity, recalls it, renews it, and makes it a part of the Gospel and of the Redemption for which he is sent into the world. Every word and gesture of Christ about women must therefore be brought into the dimension of the Paschal Mystery. In this way everything is completely explained.

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Chapter IX, Conclusion, *If you knew the gift of God*

31. "If you knew the gift of God" (*Jn 4:10*), Jesus says to the Samaritan woman during one of those remarkable conversations which show his great esteem for the dignity of women and for the vocation which enables them to share in his messianic mission.

The present reflections, now at an end, have sought to recognize, within the "gift of God", what he, as Creator and Redeemer, entrusts to women, to every woman. In the Spirit of Christ, in fact, women can discover the entire meaning of their femininity and thus be disposed to making a "sincere gift of self" to others, thereby finding themselves.

During the Marian Year *the Church desires to give thanks to the Most Holy Trinity* for the "mystery of woman" and for every woman - for that which constitutes the eternal measure of her feminine dignity, for the "great works of God", which throughout human history have been accomplished in and through her. After all, was it not in and through her that the greatest event in human history - the incarnation of God himself - was accomplished?

Therefore *the Church gives thanks for each and every woman*: for mothers, for sisters, for wives; for women consecrated to God in virginity; for women dedicated to the many human beings who await the gratuitous love of another person; for women who watch over the human persons in the family, which is the fundamental sign of the human community; for women who work professionally, and who at times are burdened by a great social responsibility; for "perfect" women and for "weak" women - for all women as they have come forth from the heart of God in all the beauty and richness of their femininity; as they have been embraced by his eternal love; as, together with men, they are pilgrims on this earth, which is the temporal "homeland" of all people and is transformed sometimes into a "valley of tears"; as they assume, together with men, *a common responsibility for the destiny of humanity* according to daily necessities and according to that definitive destiny which the human family has in God himself, in the bosom of the ineffable Trinity.

The Church gives thanks *for all the manifestations of the feminine "genius"* which have appeared in the course of history, in the midst of all peoples and nations; she gives thanks for all the charisms which the Holy Spirit distributes to women in the history of the People of God, for all the victories which she owes to their faith, hope and charity: she gives thanks for all *the fruits of feminine holiness*.

The Church asks at the same time that these invaluable "manifestations of the Spirit" (cf. *1 Cor 12:4ff.*), which with great generosity are poured forth upon the "daughters" of the eternal Jerusalem, may be attentively recognized and appreciated so that they may return for the common good of the Church and of humanity, especially in our times. Meditating on the biblical mystery of the "woman", the Church prays that in this mystery all women may discover themselves and their "supreme vocation".

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May *Mary*, who "is a model of the Church in the matter of faith, charity, and perfect union with Christ",^[63] obtain for all of us *this same "grace"*, in the Year which we have dedicated to her as we approach the third millennium from the coming of Christ.

With these sentiments, I impart the Apostolic Blessing to all the faithful, and in a special way to women, my sisters in Christ.

[63] Cf. *ibid.*, ([62] Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church "*Lumen gentium*,") 63.

RESOURCE: *ROSARIUM VIRGINIS MARIAE*, Introduction

1. The Rosary of the Virgin Mary, which gradually took form in the second millennium under the guidance of the Spirit of God, is a prayer loved by countless Saints and encouraged by the Magisterium. Simple yet profound, it still remains, at the dawn of this third millennium, a prayer of great significance, destined to bring forth a harvest of holiness. It blends easily into the spiritual journey of the Christian life, which, after two thousand years, has lost none of the freshness of its beginnings and feels drawn by the Spirit of God to "set out into the deep" (*duc in altum!*) in order once more to proclaim, and even cry out, before the world that Jesus Christ is Lord and Saviour, "the way, and the truth and the life" (*Jn 14:6*), "the goal of human history and the point on which the desires of history and civilization turn".⁽¹⁾

The Rosary, though clearly Marian in character, is at heart a Christocentric prayer. In the sobriety of its elements, it has all the *depth of the Gospel message in its entirety*, of which it can be said to be a compendium.⁽²⁾ It is an echo of the prayer of Mary, her perennial *Magnificat* for the work of the redemptive Incarnation which began in her virginal womb. With the Rosary, the Christian people *sits at the school of Mary* and is led to contemplate the beauty on the face of Christ and to experience the depths of his love. Through the Rosary the faithful receive abundant grace, as though from the very hands of the Mother of the Redeemer.

(1) Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 45.

(2) Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus* (2 February 1974), 42: AAS 66 (1974), 153.

THE JOYFUL MYSTERIES



Nancy Poll, then Service Commission Chair with Ana Esmeralda on a Cross Catholic Outreach mission trip to Guatemala in 2014. Photo courtesy of NCCW.

THE JOYFUL MYSTERIES (Monday and Saturday)

CATHOLIC TEACHING ON THE DIGNITY OF WOMEN

RESOURCE: *Rosarium Virginis Mariae on the Most Holy Rosary (October 16, 2002) John Paul II, CHAPTER II MYSTERIES OF CHRIST – MYSTERIES OF HIS MOTHER*

The Joyful Mysteries 20. The first five decades, the “joyful mysteries”, are marked by *the joy radiating from the event of the Incarnation*. This is clear from the very first mystery, the Annunciation, where Gabriel's greeting to the Virgin of Nazareth is linked to an invitation to messianic joy: “Rejoice, Mary”. The whole of salvation history, in some sense the entire history of the world, has led up to this greeting. If it is the Father's plan to unite all things in Christ (cf. *Eph 1:10*), then the whole of the universe is in some way touched by the divine favour with which the Father looks upon Mary and makes her the Mother of his Son. The whole of humanity, in turn, is embraced by the *fiat* with which she readily agrees to the will of God.

Exultation is the keynote of the encounter with Elizabeth, where the sound of Mary's voice and the presence of Christ in her womb cause John to “leap for joy” (cf. *Lk 1:44*). Gladness also fills

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the scene in Bethlehem, when the birth of the divine Child, the Saviour of the world, is announced by the song of the angels and proclaimed to the shepherds as “news of great joy” (Lk 2:10).

The final two mysteries, while preserving this climate of joy, already point to the drama yet to come. The Presentation in the Temple not only expresses the joy of the Child's consecration and the ecstasy of the aged Simeon; it also records the prophecy that Christ will be a “sign of contradiction” for Israel and that a sword will pierce his mother's heart (cf Lk 2:34-35). Joy mixed with drama marks the fifth mystery, the finding of the twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple. Here he appears in his divine wisdom as he listens and raises questions, already in effect one who “teaches”. The revelation of his mystery as the Son wholly dedicated to his Father's affairs proclaims the radical nature of the Gospel, in which even the closest of human relationships are challenged by the absolute demands of the Kingdom. Mary and Joseph, fearful and anxious, “did not understand” his words (Lk 2:50).

To meditate upon the “joyful” mysteries, then, is to enter into the ultimate causes and the deepest meaning of Christian joy. It is to focus on the realism of the mystery of the Incarnation and on the obscure foreshadowing of the mystery of the saving Passion. Mary leads us to discover the secret of Christian joy, reminding us that Christianity is, first and foremost, *euangelion*, “good news”, which has as its heart and its whole content the person of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, the one Saviour of the world.

Mulieris Dignitatem (August 15, 1988) John Paul II, CHAPTER II WOMAN-MOTHER OF GOD (THEOTÓKOS) Theotokos

4. Thus the “fullness of time” manifests the extraordinary dignity of the “woman”. On the one hand, this dignity consists *in the supernatural elevation to union with God* in Jesus Christ, which determines the ultimate finality of the existence of every person both on earth and in eternity. From this point of view, the “woman” is the representative and the archetype of the whole human race: she *represents the humanity* which belongs to all human beings, both men and women. On the other hand, however, the event at Nazareth highlights a form of union with the living God which can *only belong to the “woman”, Mary: the union between mother and son*. The Virgin of Nazareth truly becomes the Mother of God.

5. This event is clearly *interpersonal in character*: it is a dialogue. We only understand it fully if we place the whole conversation between the Angel and Mary in the context of the words: “full of grace”.^[19] The whole Annunciation dialogue reveals the essential dimension of the event, namely, its *supernatural* dimension (***). Grace never casts nature aside or cancels it out, but rather perfects it and ennobles it. Therefore the “*fullness of grace*” that was granted to the Virgin of Nazareth, with a view to the fact that she would become “*Theotókos*”, *also signifies the fullness of the perfection of “what is characteristic of woman”, of “what is feminine”*. Here we find ourselves, in a sense, at the culminating point, the archetype, of the personal dignity of women.

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When Mary responds to the words of the heavenly messenger with her "fiat", she who is "full of grace" feels the need to express her personal relationship to the gift that has been revealed to her, saying: "*Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord*" (Lk 1:38). This statement should not be deprived of its profound meaning, nor should it be diminished by artificially removing it from the overall context of the event and from the full content of the truth revealed about God and man. In the expression "handmaid of the Lord", one senses Mary's complete awareness of being a creature of God. The word "handmaid", near the end of the Annunciation dialogue, is inscribed throughout the whole history of the Mother and the Son. In fact, this *Son*, who is the true and consubstantial "Son of the Most High", will often say of himself, especially at the culminating moment of his mission: "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve" (Mk 10:45).

At all times Christ is aware of being "the servant of the Lord" according to the prophecy of *Isaiah* (cf. *Is* 42:1; 49:3, 6; 52:13) which includes the essential content of his messianic mission, namely, his awareness of being the Redeemer of the world. From the first moment of her divine motherhood, of her union with the Son whom "the Father sent into the world, that the world might be saved through him" (cf. *Jn* 3:17), *Mary takes her place within Christ's messianic service*.^[20] It is precisely this service which constitutes the very foundation of that Kingdom in which "to serve ... means to reign".^[21] Christ, the "Servant of the Lord", will show all people the royal dignity of service, the dignity which is joined in the closest possible way to the vocation of every person.

Thus, by considering the reality "Woman - Mother of God", we enter in a very appropriate way into this Marian Year meditation. *This reality also determines the essential horizon of reflection on the dignity and the vocation of women*. In anything we think, say or do concerning the dignity and the vocation of women, our thoughts, hearts and actions must not become detached from this horizon. The dignity of every human being and the vocation corresponding to that dignity find their definitive measure in *union with God*. Mary, the woman of the Bible, is the most complete expression of this dignity and vocation. For no human being, male or female, created in the image and likeness of God, can *in any way* attain fulfilment apart from this image and likeness.

[19] Cf. Encyclical Letter "*Redemptoris Mater*," 7-11 and the texts of the Fathers cited in Note 21: loc. cit., 367-373.

[20] Cf. *ibid.*, 39-41: loc. cit., 412-418.

[21] Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church "*Lumen gentium*," 36.

First Joyful Mystery

SCRIPTURE: Announcement of the Birth of Jesus. (Luke 1:26-38) In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" And the angel said to her in reply, "The holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God." Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

REFLECTION: In this first joyful mystery, we think of every young girl experiencing puberty - the flower of womanhood and deeply pondering its meaning; we consider how they are taught – whether this is a “curse” to be endured – an ancient scourge to be purified or as should be - a privilege to be cherished. It is the first of many surrenderings – entrance into the mystery of oneness with God – of who they are in God. It is a spiritual preparation for their physical reality – to be treated with the dignity and respect of divinity in humanity. “Full of grace,” Mary was full of the gifts of the Holy Spirit – modesty and chastity among them – manifest in her virginal conception of Christ.

PRAYER: We pray that every young girl, teen, young adult single woman, every woman of whatever age and state in life recognize her profound dignity in the role and gift God has bestowed upon her – that she manifest the gifts of modesty and chastity in thought, word, action – a woman of grace.

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The Second Joyful Mystery

SCRIPTURE: Mary Visits Elizabeth. (Luke 1: 39 – 56) During those days Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, “Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.”

The Canticle of Mary. And Mary said:

“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;
 my spirit rejoices in God my savior.
 For he has looked upon his handmaid’s lowliness;
 behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed.
 The Mighty One has done great things for me,
 and holy is his name.
 His mercy is from age to age
 to those who fear him.
 He has shown might with his arm,
 dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart.
 He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones
 but lifted up the lowly.
 The hungry he has filled with good things;
 the rich he has sent away empty.
 He has helped Israel his servant,
 remembering his mercy,
 according to his promise to our fathers,
 to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

REFLECTION: In this mystery, we see Mary, called to serve depart immediately to serve her cousin Elizabeth – also miraculously pregnant - in old age. And it is in responding to that call that Elizabeth affirms just who Mary is – “the Mother of my Lord.” In the very action of responding to the call to serve, Mary’s vocation and dignity are expressed. And so we consider all of the many roles in which a woman serves –daughter, wife, mother – birth, stepmother, foster mother, adoptive mother - aunt and niece, as cousins and friends – women go to women with understanding and compassion in their common call. And one must also reflect on the call of both women to serve the child conceived within – giving their lives, their very selves that the child should live.

PRAYER: We pray that every woman sees her intrinsic dignity in service and responds to the call to serve with immediacy and generosity.

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The Third Joyful Mystery

SCRIPTURE: The Birth of Jesus.(Luke 2: 1- 14) In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. So all went to be enrolled, each to his own town. And Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields and keeping the night watch over their flock. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were struck with great fear. The angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying:

“Glory to God in the highest
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

REFLECTION: The birth of Our Lord calls us to meditate upon all births, upon the anguish a woman experiences as she labors, at her joy when the child is born. Just as the womb cannot hold back the birth, the tomb could not contain the resurrection. So too, spiritual motherhood nourishes, cares for and gives birth to the Christ within each and all.

PRAYER: We pray for all women who as mothers, mentors, friends have given of themselves that we might become. We pray for each and all of us that in our daily relationships and activities, we too may graciously bring Christ into our world.

The Fourth Joyful Mystery

SCRIPTURE: The Presentation in the Temple. (Luke 2: 22 – 38) When the days were completed for their purification according to the law of Moses, they took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, just as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every male that opens the womb shall be consecrated to the Lord,” and to offer the sacrifice of “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons,” in accordance with the dictate in the law of the Lord.

THE JOYFUL MYSTERIES

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, awaiting the consolation of Israel, and the holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Messiah of the Lord. He came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform the custom of the law in regard to him, he took him into his arms and blessed God, saying:

“Now, Master, you may let your servant go
in peace, according to your word,
for my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you prepared in sight of all the peoples,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and glory for your people Israel.”

The child’s father and mother were amazed at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted (and you yourself a sword will pierce) so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.” There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived seven years with her husband after her marriage, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple, but worshiped night and day with fasting and prayer. And coming forward at that very time, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem.

REFLECTION: The mystery of the presentation includes the purification of both Joseph and Mary after the birth of Jesus – reaffirming their spousal relationship - especially for the good of the child. We consider the dignity the Church bestows upon spouses in their marriage and upon their children – the fruit of their union. As wife and mother Mary is dignified. In Simeon’s prophesy to Mary, “and a sword will pierce your heart,” we also recall the lance that pierced Our Lord’s side on the cross. Mary suffered as her son suffered. There can be no greater dignity.

PRAYER: We pray for all women who as wives sanctify their marriages in Christ-given dignity for the good of their spouses, their children and all the world. We pray for mothers who in their very call as mothers – suffer the sorrows of their children. We pray for all women who suffer in compassion for all.

The Fifth Joyful Mystery

SCRIPTURE: The Boy Jesus in the Temple. (Luke 2: 41-52) Each year his parents went to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, and when he was twelve years old, they went up according to festival custom. After they had completed its days, as they were returning, the boy Jesus remained behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Thinking that he was in the caravan, they journeyed for a day and looked for him among their relatives and acquaintances, but not finding

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him, they returned to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions, and all who heard him were astounded at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished, and his mother said to him, “Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety.” And he said to them, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” But they did not understand what he said to them. He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus advanced [in] wisdom and age and favor before God and man.

REFLECTION: Once again, Mary’s anguish – the loss of and seeking for Jesus for three days – prefigures the passion, death and resurrection of her son. Every mother experiences in some way the loss of the child she carried as she gives birth; of the child borne of body or child adopted in heart as he/she grows into maturity, into becoming who God created him/her to be. There are the positive separations of temporarily entrusting the child to another’s care, of sending the child off to school, teaching the child courage and self-confidence in exploring an ever-widening circle of the world. Jesus was clearly pursuing his call, but inherent in this mystery are the losses of a mother whose child - no matter what the age - makes bad or destructive choices; the anguish of a woman who can only watch and wait patiently as someone she has nurtured and cared for – endures the suffering of those bad decisions – but then comes through to the resurrection which always awaits.

PRAYER: We pray for all women who in their patient abiding through suffering – who with dignity ponder and pray and wait - teach us the power of grace to transform.

THE SORROWFUL MYSTERIES



On June 13, 2014, Youth DREAMer, Evelyn Rivera was reunited with her mother who had been deported to Columbia six years before after a traffic stop revealed they were undocumented. Mother and daughter were allowed to embrace through the border fence dividing Nogales - a town on the Mexican - Arizona border. Rivera graduated from college and was married, fulfilling her mother's dreams for her - without her mother's presence. Photo courtesy of Evelyn Rivera.

THE SORROWFUL MYSTERIES (Tuesday and Friday)

RESOURCE: *Rosarium Virginis Mariae on the Most Holy Rosary (October 16, 2002) John Paul II The Sorrowful Mysteries*

22. The Gospels give great prominence to the sorrowful mysteries of Christ. From the beginning Christian piety, especially during the Lenten devotion of the *Way of the Cross*, has focused on the individual moments of the Passion, realizing that here is found *the culmination of the revelation of God's love* and the source of our salvation. The Rosary selects certain moments from the Passion, inviting the faithful to contemplate them in their hearts and to relive them. The sequence of meditations begins with Gethsemane, where Christ experiences a moment of great anguish before the will of the Father, against which the weakness of the flesh would be tempted to rebel. There Jesus encounters all the temptations and confronts all the sins of humanity, in order to say to the Father: "Not my will but yours be done" (*Lk 22:42* and parallels). This "Yes" of Christ reverses the "No" of our first parents in the Garden of Eden. And the cost of this faithfulness to the Father's will is made clear in the following mysteries; by his scourging, his crowning with thorns, his carrying the Cross and his death on the Cross, the Lord is cast into the most abject suffering: *Ecce homo!*

This abject suffering reveals not only the love of God but also the meaning of man himself.

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Ecce homo: the meaning, origin and fulfilment of man is to be found in Christ, the God who humbles himself out of love "even unto death, death on a cross" (*Phil 2:8*). The sorrowful mysteries help the believer to relive the death of Jesus, to stand at the foot of the Cross beside Mary, to enter with her into the depths of God's love for man and to experience all its life-giving power.

Mulieris Dignitatem (August 15, 1988) John Paul II ***Guardians of the Gospel message***

15. *Christ's way of acting, the Gospel of his words and deeds, is a consistent protest against whatever offends the dignity of women. Consequently, the women who are close to Christ discover themselves in the truth which he "teaches" and "does", even when this truth concerns their "sinfulness". They feel "liberated" by this truth, restored to themselves: they feel loved with "eternal love", with a love which finds direct expression in Christ himself.*

In Christ's sphere of action their position is transformed. They feel that Jesus is speaking to them about matters which in those times one did not discuss with a woman. Perhaps the most significant example of this is the *Samaritan woman* at the well of Sychar. *Jesus - who knows that she is a sinner and speaks to her about this - discusses the most profound mysteries of God with her.* He speaks to her of God's infinite gift of love, which is like a "spring of water welling up to eternal life" (*Jn 4:14*). He speaks to her about God who is Spirit, and about the true adoration which the Father has a right to receive in spirit and truth (cf. *Jn 4:24*). Finally he reveals to her that he is the Messiah promised to Israel (cf. *Jn 4:26*).

This is an event without precedent: that a *woman*, and what is more a "sinful woman", becomes a "disciple" of Christ. Indeed, once taught, she proclaims Christ to the inhabitants of Samaria, so that they too receive him with faith (cf. *Jn 4: 39-42*). This is an unprecedented event, if one remembers the usual way women were treated by those who were teachers in Israel; whereas in Jesus of Nazareth's way of acting such an event becomes normal. In this regard, the sisters of Lazarus also deserve special mention: "Jesus loved Martha and her sister (Mary) and Lazarus" (cf. *Jn 11:5*). Mary "listened to the teaching" of Jesus: when he pays them a visit, he calls Mary's behaviour "the good portion" in contrast to Martha's preoccupation with domestic matters (cf. *Lk 10: 38-42*). On another occasion - *after the death of Lazarus* - Martha is the one who talks to Christ, and the conversation concerns the most profound truths of revelation and faith: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died". "Your brother will rise again". "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day". Jesus said to her: "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world" (*Jn 11:21-27*). After this profession of faith Jesus raises Lazarus. *This conversation with Martha is one of the most important in the Gospel.*

Christ speaks to women about the things of God, and they understand them; there is a true resonance of mind and heart, a response of faith. Jesus expresses appreciation and admiration for this distinctly "feminine" response, as in the case of the Canaanite woman (cf. *Mt 15:28*).

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Sometimes he presents this lively faith, filled with love, as an example. *He teaches*, therefore, taking as his starting-point this feminine response of mind and heart. This is the case with the "sinful" woman in the Pharisee's house, whose way of acting is taken by Jesus as the starting-point for explaining the truth about the forgiveness of sins: "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little" (Lk 7:47). On the occasion of another anointing, Jesus defends the woman and her action before the disciples, Judas in particular: "Why do you trouble this woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me... In pouring this ointment on my body she has done it to prepare me for burial. Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her" (Mt 26: 6-13).

Indeed, the Gospels not only describe what that woman did at Bethany in the house of Simon the Leper; they also highlight the fact that *women were in the forefront at the foot of the Cross*, at the decisive moment in Jesus of Nazareth's whole messianic mission. John was the only Apostle who remained faithful, but there were many faithful women. Not only the Mother of Christ and "his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas and Mary Magdalene" (Jn 19:25) were present, but "there were also many women there, looking on from afar, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him" (Mt 27: 55). As we see, in this most arduous test of faith and fidelity the women proved stronger than the Apostles. In this moment of danger, those who love much succeed in overcoming their fear. Before this there were the *women on the Via Dolorosa*, "who bewailed and lamented him" (Lk 23:27). Earlier still, there was *Pilate's wife*, who had warned her husband: "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much over him today in a dream" (Mt 27:19).

The First Sorrowful Mystery

SCRIPTURE: The Agony in the Garden (Mark 14: 32- 38) Then they came to a place named Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took with him Peter, James, and John, and began to be troubled and distressed. Then he said to them, "My soul is sorrowful even to death. Remain here and keep watch." He advanced a little and fell to the ground and prayed that if it were possible the hour might pass by him; he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible to you. Take this cup away from me, but not what I will but what you will." When he returned he found them asleep. He said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray that you may not undergo the test. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak."

REFLECTION: Every woman who has kept watch knows the despair of powerlessness when prayer is all that she can give – at the side of a dying, sick or handicapped person of whatever age; at the side of a person caught in the grips of mental illness, addiction; in awareness of someone enduring bullying, abuse, domestic violence; visiting those in prison, waiting with the unemployed, waiting for inclement weather to abate – or for needed rain and good weather to come. There is infinite dignity in surrendering to human powerlessness.

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PRAYER: May we surrender with grace to our powerlessness simultaneously acknowledging and comforted by the power of God to transform all to good.

The Second Sorrowful Mystery

SCRIPTURE: The Scourging at the Pillar (Mark 15: 15) So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas to them and, after he had Jesus scourged, handed him over to be crucified.

REFLECTION: Images of women being scourged proliferate: starving mothers in third world countries desperately trying to feed their starving children; young girls, teens, women rescued from human trafficking; refugees fleeing persecution; the caregiver, house cleaner, field worker stooped in exhaustion but persevering in labor – all images of dignity despite the circumstances of their victimization.

PRAYER: May we, like St. Josephine Bakhita who was scourged and brutalized and enslaved – in justice work to eradicate all forms of scourging; in charity assist those who are scourged and with grace and dignity like Christ, like St. Bakhita pray for and forgive those who torture.

The Third Sorrowful Mystery

SCRIPTURE: The Crowning with Thorns (Mark 15: 16-19) The soldiers led him away inside the palace, that is, the praetorium, and assembled the whole cohort. They clothed him in purple and, weaving a crown of thorns, placed it on him. They began to salute him with, “Hail, King of the Jews!” and kept striking his head with a reed and spitting upon him. They knelt before him in homage.

REFLECTION: There are many crowns – of social status, of success, of worldly power, of money, of privilege, of fame, of beauty – all of them earned or won or achieved through sacrifice – and yet each one worthless unless coupled with humility and a response in service – only then do they convey God-given dignity. One thinks of St. Gianna Beretta Molla, a physician who gave her life for her unborn child; of Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta who despite success and fame continued to live with and love the poorest of the poor; of St. Theresa Benedicta of the Cross, who relinquished academic honors and success to devote her gifts to the Church; of St. Katherine Drexel who committed her inherited fortune to the welfare and education of blacks and Native Americans.

PRAYER: May we always recognize and utilize our God-given gifts to seek the crowns of heaven.

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The Fourth Sorrowful Mystery

SCRIPTURE: The Way of the Cross. (Luke 23: 26-28) As they led him away they took hold of a certain Simon, a Cyrenian, who was coming in from the country; and after laying the cross on him, they made him carry it behind Jesus. A large crowd of people followed Jesus, including many women who mourned and lamented him. Jesus turned to them and said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep instead for yourselves and for your children,”

REFLECTION: Women carry immense and heavy crosses with a courage and dignity modeled in Christ and his Blessed Mother. This mystery calls to mind those women who carry the cross of wanting but not being able to conceive a child and weep; those who have lost a child of any age through illness or accident or tragedy; those who silently watch and mourn as husbands, sons and daughters in military or first responders are injured and die – or give of themselves in disaster relief, in ministry to the poor and disadvantaged - in countless sacrificial ways.

There are women who have made the tragic decision to abort a child or who may have participated in another’s decision to abort and repent of that irreversible decision; others may have chosen to give a child life by giving them up for adoption and may be mourning that loss; still others may have inadvertently hurt a child or another through abusive words and/or actions. In God’s mercy, Christ suffered and died to forgive all sin - it is in the humble acceptance of that pure unmerited gift of mercy that women can find consolation and dignity. Women wear their dignity in wrinkled faces, stooped shoulders, silent tears coursing their cheeks and in the privacy of broken hearts.

PRAYER: May we always acknowledge the dignity of those who mourn and comfort them in humility and love and may we gracefully mourn our own losses – comforted in prayer, the love of others and God’s mercy.

The Fifth Sorrowful Mystery

SCRIPTURE: The Crucifixion (Mark 15: 22-25) They brought him to the place of Golgotha (which is translated Place of the Skull). They gave him wine drugged with myrrh, but he did not take it. Then they crucified him and divided his garments by casting lots for them to see what each should take. It was nine o’clock in the morning when they crucified him.

REFLECTION: Women know in their minds and bodies and hearts – the foolishness – the poverty of those who would wreak violence. Women stand with courage and ultimate dignity in the face of fear; with commitment in the face of doubt and with veracity in the face of evil untruth.

PRAYER: In unity with the Holy Spirit, may we always recognize and gracefully accept that the very vulnerability of women is the power of their dignity.



March for Life 2017, Washington, D.C. Photo courtesy of Laraine Bennett.

The Luminous Mysteries (Thursday)

RESOURCE: ROSARIUM VIRGINIS MARIAE, October 16, 2002, John Paul II

The Mysteries of Light

21. Moving on from the infancy and the hidden life in Nazareth to the public life of Jesus, our contemplation brings us to those mysteries which may be called in a special way “mysteries of light”. Certainly the whole mystery of Christ is a mystery of light. He is the “light of the world” (*Jn 8:12*). Yet this truth emerges in a special way during the years of his public life, when he proclaims the Gospel of the Kingdom. In proposing to the Christian community five significant moments – “luminous” mysteries – during this phase of Christ's life, I think that the following can be fittingly singled out: (1) his Baptism in the Jordan, (2) his self-manifestation at the wedding of Cana, (3) his proclamation of the Kingdom of God, with his call to conversion, (4) his Transfiguration, and finally, (5) his institution of the Eucharist, as the sacramental expression of the Paschal Mystery.

Each of these mysteries is *a revelation of the Kingdom now present in the very person of Jesus*. The Baptism in the Jordan is first of all a mystery of light. Here, as Christ descends into the waters, the innocent one who became “sin” for our sake (cf. *2Cor 5:21*), the heavens open wide and the voice of the Father declares him the beloved Son (cf. *Mt 3:17* and parallels), while the Spirit descends on him to invest him with the mission which he is to carry out. Another mystery of light is the first of the signs, given at Cana (cf. *Jn 2:1-12*), when Christ changes water into wine and opens the hearts of the disciples to faith, thanks to the intervention of Mary, the first among believers. Another mystery of light is the preaching by which Jesus proclaims the coming

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of the Kingdom of God, calls to conversion (cf. *Mk* 1:15) and forgives the sins of all who draw near to him in humble trust (cf. *Mk* 2:3-13; *Lk* 7:47- 48): the inauguration of that ministry of mercy which he continues to exercise until the end of the world, particularly through the Sacrament of Reconciliation which he has entrusted to his Church (cf. *Jn* 20:22-23). The mystery of light *par excellence* is the Transfiguration, traditionally believed to have taken place on Mount Tabor. The glory of the Godhead shines forth from the face of Christ as the Father commands the astonished Apostles to “listen to him” (cf. *Lk* 9:35 and parallels) and to prepare to experience with him the agony of the Passion, so as to come with him to the joy of the Resurrection and a life transfigured by the Holy Spirit. A final mystery of light is the institution of the Eucharist, in which Christ offers his body and blood as food under the signs of bread and wine, and testifies “to the end” his love for humanity (*Jn* 13:1), for whose salvation he will offer himself in sacrifice.

In these mysteries, apart from the miracle at Cana, *the presence of Mary remains in the background*. The Gospels make only the briefest reference to her occasional presence at one moment or other during the preaching of Jesus (cf. *Mk* 3:31-5; *Jn* 2:12), and they give no indication that she was present at the Last Supper and the institution of the Eucharist. Yet the role she assumed at Cana in some way accompanies Christ throughout his ministry. The revelation made directly by the Father at the Baptism in the Jordan and echoed by John the Baptist is placed upon Mary's lips at Cana, and it becomes the great maternal counsel which Mary addresses to the Church of every age: “Do whatever he tells you” (*Jn* 2:5). This counsel is a fitting introduction to the words and signs of Christ's public ministry and it forms the Marian foundation of all the “mysteries of light”.

The First Luminous Mystery

SCRIPTURE: The Baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3: 13-17) Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. John tried to prevent him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and yet you are coming to me?” Jesus said to him in reply, “Allow it now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he allowed him. After Jesus was baptized, he came up from the water and behold, the heavens were opened [for him], and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove [and] coming upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, saying, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

REFLECTION: This mystery of Jesus and John recalls the first proclamation of John when at the sound of Mary's voice, he leapt in his mother's womb – there too they were immersed in water, there too their very presence proclaimed God's affirmation that these were beloved children of God. There is no greater dignity than that which God chooses to conceive in a woman – both physically and spiritually. The light of Christ enters the world through us – whether by our nurturing in the womb or by our nurturing of others as they grow and become the persons God created them to be. It was through the motherhood of Mary and Elizabeth that Jesus and John were able to assume the roles God chose for them.

PRAYER: We pray that all women – individually and collectively realize, cherish and fulfill their unique nurturing role – the sacred trust God has given to woman – her ultimate dignity.

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The Second Luminous Mystery

SCRIPTURE: The Wedding at Cana. (John 2: 1-11) On the third day there was a wedding in Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding. When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” [And] Jesus said to her, “Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come.” His mother said to the servers, “Do whatever he tells you.” Now there were six stone water jars there for Jewish ceremonial washings, each holding twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus told them, “Fill the jars with water.” So they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, “Draw some out now and take it to the headwaiter.” So they took it. And when the headwaiter tasted the water that had become wine, without knowing where it came from (although the servers who had drawn the water knew), the headwaiter called the bridegroom and said to him, “Everyone serves good wine first, and then when people have drunk freely, an inferior one; but you have kept the good wine until now.” Jesus did this as the beginning of his signs in Cana in Galilee and so revealed his glory, and his disciples began to believe in him.

REFLECTION: How fitting that it is Mary who becomes aware of the need in this momentous social event – the wine has run-out at the wedding reception. It is Mary who assumes responsibility to rectify the problem and she calls upon her son. With complete trust in his fulfillment, she tells the servants to “do whatever He tells you.”

PRAYER: We pray that all women recognize their dignity in their unique God-given gift to perceive need and resolve it – first petitioning God and then trusting Him to provide.

Third Luminous Mystery

SCRIPTURE: The Beginning of the Galilean Ministry. (Mark 1:14-15) After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God: “This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.”

REFLECTION: What greater honor is given to a woman than when the child/children/people she has nurtured step-up and assume the role and responsibility God has given them. And she does so hidden - in the depths of her heart pondering and rejoicing in the good which God had begun in her and is now come to fruition. A woman’s countless yeses affirm her dignity and become her crown in the Kingdom.

PRAYER: We pray that every woman finds dignity in the tedium of household chores, in the patience of others’ baby-steps – whether a child or employee or spouse or friend – that every woman holds onto the hope of what is to come and when it does indeed arrive - that God’s grace suffice to bask silently in God’s glory.

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The Fourth Luminous Mystery

SCRIPTURE: The Transfiguration of Jesus. (Matthew 17: 1 – 8) After six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, conversing with him. Then Peter said to Jesus in reply, “Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud cast a shadow over them, then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” When the disciples heard this, they fell prostrate and were very much afraid. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and do not be afraid.” And when the disciples raised their eyes, they saw no one else but Jesus alone.

REFLECTION: Although Mary is not present at the Transfiguration of Jesus from his humanity to divinity, this mystery mirrors the transfiguration of Mary who full of grace conceived and brought to birth the Son of God - within her, the Word became flesh - her humanity was transformed with divine dignity.

PRAYER: We pray that each and every woman recognizes her God-given grace to transform the world – that through her – Christ becomes and the world becomes a better place.

The Fifth Luminous Mystery

SCRIPTURE: The Lord’s Supper. (Matthew 26: 26-30) While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said, “Take and eat; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, from now on I shall not drink this fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it with you new in the kingdom of my Father.” Then, after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

REFLECTION: There is no greater mystery than Jesus transcending bread and wine to become His body and blood that He may become one with us physically - so that we might manifest Him spiritually. And once again this echoes Mary’s surrender of her body that Christ might become. How often we as women surrender ourselves for the life – for the good of others. There is no greater dignity.

PRAYER: We pray that each and every woman recognizes her God-given dignity and manifests that dignity in all that she thinks, says and does; that Christ might be her beginning, her end, her all.

THE GLORIOUS MYSTERIES



Saint Ann's CCW and Jr. CCW, DeBary, Florida celebrate NCCW Sunday January 15, 2017 with their pastor, Father Peter Henry. Photo courtesy of Kathy Dempsey.

THE GLORIOUS MYSTERIES (Wednesday and Sunday)

**RESOURCE: *Mulieris Dignitatem*, Chapter V Jesus Christ,
First Witnesses of the Resurrection**

16. From the beginning of Christ's mission, women show to him and to his mystery a special *sensitivity which is characteristic of their femininity*. It must also be said that this is especially confirmed in the Paschal Mystery, not only at the Cross but also at the dawn of the Resurrection. The women *are the first at the tomb*. They are the first to find it empty. They are the first to hear: "He is not here. *He has risen*, as he said" (*Mt 28:6*). They are the first to embrace his feet (cf. *Mt 28:9*). They are also the first to be called to announce this truth to the Apostles (cf. *Mt 28:1-10; Lk 24:8-11*). The Gospel of John (cf. also *Mk 16: 9*) emphasizes *the special role of Mary Magdalene*. She is the first to meet the Risen Christ. At first she thinks he is the gardener; she recognizes him only when he calls her by name: "Jesus said to her, 'Mary'. She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbuni' (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father, but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and to your Father, to my God and your God'. Mary Magdalene went and said to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her" (*Jn 20:16-18*).

Hence she came to be called "the apostle of the Apostles".^[38] Mary Magdalene was the first eyewitness of the Risen Christ, and for this reason she was also *the first to bear witness to him*

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before the Apostles. This event, in a sense, crowns all that has been said previously about Christ entrusting divine truths to women as well as men. One can say that this fulfilled the words of the Prophet: "I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy" (Jl 3:1). On the fiftieth day after Christ's Resurrection, these words are confirmed once more in the Upper Room in Jerusalem, at the descent of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete (cf. Act 2:17). Everything that has been said so far about Christ's attitude to women confirms and clarifies, in the Holy Spirit, the truth about the equality of man and woman. One must speak of an essential "equality", since both of them - the woman as much as the man - are created in the image and likeness of God. Both of them are equally capable of receiving the outpouring of divine truth and love in the Holy Spirit. Both receive his salvific and sanctifying "visits".

[38] Cf. Rabanus Maurus, "De vita beatae Mariae Magdalene," XXVII: "Salvator...ascensionis suae eam (=Mariam Magdalenam) ad apostolos instituit apostolam" (PL 112, 1474). "Facta est Apostolorum Apostola per hoc quod ei committitur ut resurrectionem dominicam discipulis annuntiet": St. Thomas Aquinas, "In Ioannem Evangelistam Expositio," c. XX, L. III 6 ("Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Comment. in Matthaum et Ioannem Evangelistas"), Ed. Parmen. X, 629.

Rosarium Virginis Mariae, Chapter II Mysteries of Christ – Mysteries of His Mother The Glorious Mysteries

23. "The contemplation of Christ's face cannot stop at the image of the Crucified One. He is the Risen One!"⁽²⁹⁾ The Rosary has always expressed this knowledge born of faith and invited the believer to pass beyond the darkness of the Passion in order to gaze upon Christ's glory in the Resurrection and Ascension. Contemplating the Risen One, Christians *rediscover the reasons for their own faith* (cf. 1Cor 15:14) and relive the joy not only of those to whom Christ appeared – the Apostles, Mary Magdalene and the disciples on the road to Emmaus – but also *the joy of Mary*, who must have had an equally intense experience of the new life of her glorified Son. In the Ascension, Christ was raised in glory to the right hand of the Father, while Mary herself would be raised to that same glory in the Assumption, enjoying beforehand, by a unique privilege, the destiny reserved for all the just at the resurrection of the dead. Crowned in glory – as she appears in the last glorious mystery – Mary shines forth as Queen of the Angels and Saints, the anticipation and the supreme realization of the eschatological state of the Church.

At the centre of this unfolding sequence of the glory of the Son and the Mother, the Rosary sets before us the third glorious mystery, Pentecost, which reveals the face of the Church as a family gathered together with Mary, enlivened by the powerful outpouring of the Spirit and ready for the mission of evangelization. The contemplation of this scene, like that of the other glorious mysteries, ought to lead the faithful to an ever greater appreciation of their new life in Christ, lived in the heart of the Church, a life of which the scene of Pentecost itself is the great "icon". The glorious mysteries thus lead the faithful to *greater hope for the eschatological goal* towards which they journey as members of the pilgrim People of God in history. This can only impel them to bear courageous witness to that "good news" which gives meaning to their entire existence.

⁽²⁹⁾ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 January 2001), 28: AAS 93 (2001), 284.

THE GLORIOUS MYSTERIES

The First Glorious Mystery

SCRIPTURE: The Resurrection (Mark 16:6-7) He said to them, "Do not be amazed! You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Behold, the place where they laid him. But go and tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you.'"

REFLECTION: It is because of the resurrection that women especially mothers always can trust in the Lord for all their needs during good and bad times. Jesus honored Mary Magdalene by appearing to her first after his resurrection bestowing upon all women the dignity of proclaiming the gospel to all. This Easter Sequence rejoices in God's unconditional love and mercy. A woman's dignity is intrinsic to God's love of her.

PRAYER:

Sequence

Christians, to the Paschal Victim

Offer your thankful praises!

A Lamb the sheep redeems;

Christ, who only is sinless,

Reconciles sinners to the Father.

Death and life have contended

in that combat stupendous:

The Prince of life, who died,

reigns immortal.

Speak, Mary, declaring

What you saw, wayfaring.

"The tomb of Christ, who is living,

The glory of Jesus' resurrection;

Bright angels attesting,

The shroud and napkin resting.

Yes, Christ my hope is arisen;

to Galilee he goes before you."

Christ indeed from death is risen, our new

life obtaining.

Have mercy, victor King,

ever reigning!

Amen. Alleluia.

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THE GLORIOUS MYSTERIES

The Second Glorious Mystery

SCRIPTURE: The Ascension of Jesus. (Mark 16:19) So then the Lord Jesus, after he spoke to them, was taken up into heaven and took his seat at the right hand of God.

REFLECTION: Upon his Ascension, Christ – the bridegroom completed the covenant made with the Church – his bride - and in doing so validates the equality of women as well as their dignity.

RESOURCE: *Mulieris Dignitatem*, VII THE CHURCH - THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

The "great mystery"

23. Of fundamental importance here are the words of the Letter to the Ephesians: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the Church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the Church, because we are members of his body. 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'. *This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the Church*" (5:25-32).

In this Letter the author expresses the truth about the Church as the bride of Christ, and also indicates how this truth is *rooted in the biblical reality of the creation of the human being as male and female*. Created in the image and likeness of God as a "unity of the two", both have been called to a spousal love. Following the description of creation in the Book of Genesis (2:18-25), one can also say that this fundamental call appears in the creation of woman, and is inscribed by the Creator in the institution of marriage, which, according to Genesis 2:24, has the character of a union of persons ("*communio personarum*") from the very beginning. Although not directly, the very description of the "beginning" (cf. *Gen* 1:27; 2:24) shows that the whole "ethos" of mutual relations between men and women has to correspond to the personal truth of their being.

All this has already been considered. The Letter to the Ephesians once again confirms this truth, while at the same time comparing the spousal character of the love between man and woman to the mystery of Christ and of the Church. *Christ is the Bridegroom of the Church - the Church is the Bride of Christ*. This analogy is not without precedent; it transfers to the New Testament what was already contained *in the Old Testament*, especially in the prophets Hosea, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Isaiah.^[48] The respective passages deserve a separate analysis. Here we will cite only one text. This is how God speaks to his Chosen People through the Prophet: "Fear not, for you will not be ashamed; be not confounded, for you will not be put to shame; for you will forget the shame of your youth, and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more. *For your Maker is your husband*, the Lord of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is *your Redeemer*, the God of the whole earth he is called. For the Lord has called you like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, like a wife of youth when she is cast off, says your God. For a brief moment I forsook you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says the Lord, your

THE GLORIOUS MYSTERIES

Redeemer. ... For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, *but my steadfast love shall not depart from you*, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the Lord, who has compassion on you" (Is 54:4-8, 10).

Since the human being - man and woman - has been created in God's image and likeness, God can speak about himself through the lips of the Prophet using language which is essentially human. In the text of Isaiah quoted above, the expression of God's love is "*human*", but the *love* itself is *divine*. Since it is God's love, its spousal character is properly divine, even though it is expressed by the analogy of a man's love for a woman. The woman-bride is Israel, God's Chosen People, and this choice originates exclusively in God's gratuitous love. It is precisely this love which explains the Covenant, a Covenant often presented as a marriage covenant which God always renews with his Chosen People. On the part of God the Covenant is a lasting "commitment"; he remains faithful to his spousal love even if the bride often shows herself to be unfaithful.

This *image of spousal love*, together with the figure of the divine Bridegroom - a very clear image in the texts of the Prophets - finds crowning confirmation in the Letter to the Ephesians (5:23-32). *Christ* is greeted as the bridegroom by John the Baptist (cf. *Jn* 3:27-29). Indeed Christ applies to himself this comparison drawn from the Prophets (cf. *Mk* 2:19-20). The Apostle Paul, who is a bearer of the Old Testament heritage, writes to the Corinthians: "I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband" (2 *Cor* 11:2). But the fullest expression of the truth about Christ the Redeemer's love, according to the analogy of spousal love in marriage, is found in the Letter to the Ephesians: "*Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her*" (5:25), thereby fully confirming the fact that the Church is the bride of Christ: "The Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer" (*Is* 54:5). In Saint Paul's text the analogy of the spousal relationship moves simultaneously in two directions which make up the whole of the "great mystery" ("*sacramentum magnum*").

The covenant proper to spouses "explains" the spousal character of the union of Christ with the Church, and in its turn this union, as a "great sacrament", determines the sacramentality of marriage as a holy covenant between the two spouses, man and woman. Reading this rich and complex passage, which *taken as a whole is a great analogy*, we must *distinguish* that element which expresses the human reality of interpersonal relations from that which expresses in symbolic language the "great mystery" which is divine.

[48] Cf. for example, *Hos* 1:2; 2:16-18; *Jer* 2:2; *Ezek* 16:8; *Is* 50:1; 54:5-8.

PRAYER: We especially pray for women who are striving to keep their faith during troubling times in their relationships with others – especially their spouse – and in the many issues of their lives, may they always remember their dignity as a bride of Christ.

THE GLORIOUS MYSTERIES

The Third Glorious Mystery

SCRIPTURE: The Descent of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4) And they were all filled with the holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim.

REFLECTION: Working women especially deal daily with difficult people and need help to keep calm. They need the gifts (wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear – wonder - of the Lord) of the Holy Spirit to let the fruits (charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, chastity) of the Holy Spirit shine forth. It is the grace of the Holy Spirit which infuses within and overflows without that gives women their dignity.

PRAYER: We pray for all women that the gifts of the Spirit overshadow them and the fruits of the Spirit are expressed in all that they think, say and do.

The Fourth Glorious Mystery

SCRIPTURE: The Assumption (Revelation 12:1) A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.

REFLECTION: When we think of heaven and Mary's Assumption, we think of all those who have gone before and now with Mary intercede for us. We think of our grandmothers and mothers who are keeping and sharing the faith to all generations – a continuum from heaven to earth.

PRAYER: We pray for every woman on the continuum and ourselves that we assume our God-given responsibility to pass on our faith.

The Fifth Glorious Mystery

SCRIPTURE: The Coronation (Judith 15:9-10)

When they came to her, all with one accord blessed her, saying:

“You are the glory of Jerusalem!
You are the great pride of Israel!
You are the great boast of our nation!
By your own hand you have done all this.
You have done good things for Israel,
and God is pleased with them.
May the Almighty Lord bless you forever!”
And all the people said, “Amen!”

THE GLORIOUS MYSTERIES

REFLECTION: This reading from the Book of Judith is an apt description of Mary, Queen of Heaven and Earth. Each woman should internalize it as addressed to her. An example of the “good things” that God is “pleased with” are women who share their faith by helping others - volunteering wherever needed and who use their God given gifts to the fullest. Just as Mary is crowned with glory – so too all women are crowned with dignity.

PRAYER: We pray that all women will look to Mary to emulate her as their model of dignity and vocation. We pray that all women know in the depths of their being that “God is pleased with them.”



Prayer to Our Lady of Good Counsel

*God of heavenly wisdom,
you have given us Mary, Mother of Jesus,
to be our guide and counselor.
Grant that we may always seek her motherly help in this life
and so enjoy her blessed presence in the life to come.
O Mother of Good Counsel,
Patroness of the National Council of Catholic Women,
intercede for us,
that we may be wise, courageous, and loving leaders of the Church.
Help us, dear mother, to know the mind of Jesus, your son.
May the Holy Spirit fill us with reverence for God's creation,
and compassion for all God's children.
May our labors of love on earth enhance the reign of God
and may God's gifts of faith and living hope
prepare us for the fullness of
the world to come.
Amen.*