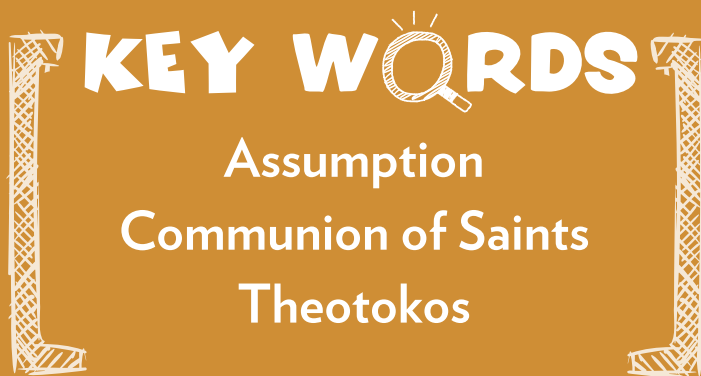


Chapter 6

Mary and the Saints



Imagine the scene: An invitation is about to be delivered to a girl who is about the age you are now. This girl has no idea this invitation is coming. She is simply going about her daily chores. She is also a bit distracted because she has been thinking about her cousin, who is believed to be too old to be pregnant but is pregnant anyhow (see Luke 1:5–25). Her mind is also wandering to thoughts of the man she is engaged to, a man named Joseph. (Yes, this girl lives in a time and culture where girls are engaged very young.)

Suddenly, an angel appears from nowhere and says: “Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you” (Luke 1:28). These

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CONNECT with GOD

Holy Mary, God chose you to be the Mother of Jesus and so the Mother of God. God also chose you to be the Mother of the Church and my spiritual mother. Be with me today. Protect me and guide me with your love. Show me how to follow your Son, Jesus, in everything I do and say. Amen.



are powerful words. The angel is telling this girl, whose name is Mary, that she is full of God's grace. She is full of God's life. Scripture gives us insight into what Mary must have been thinking and feeling after being told that God has greatly blessed her: "But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be" (Luke 1:29).

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 of his kingdom there will be no end." (1:30-33)

This event is called the Annunciation.

Mary's Yes

How did Mary react to the announcement that she would give birth to the "Son of the Most High"? Remember that Mary was not yet married, and she had never been with a man. She was a virgin. Because of this, she asked the angel, "How can this be?" He told her she would conceive by the power of the Holy Spirit. God would take care of everything.

At this point, Mary could have chosen not to believe anything the angel was telling her. Or she could have run off in fear of what might lie ahead for her. But Mary had a deep love for God and knew nothing was impossible for him. Therefore, she proclaimed her yes to God. She said to the angel, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). Mary consented to God's becoming man through her. By saying yes to the Incarnation, Mary cooperated in all the work that her Son, Jesus, was to accomplish.

Mary, Mother of God

Sometimes mothers are identified through their children. For example, people might say, "She's Tom's mother" or "She's Ashley's mom." We read in the Gospels that Mary was the "mother of Jesus." Yet, early in

LIVING the GOSPEL

Do as Jesus Tells You

At the Wedding Feast of Cana, where people had gathered for a wedding celebration, the wine had run out (see John 2:1–12). The servants were scrambling about, trying to decide how to solve this embarrassing dilemma. Imagine Mary, the mother of Jesus, who is at the wedding, nudging Jesus and whispering in his ear, “They have no wine” (John 2:3). She wanted Jesus to do something about the problem. He replied, “How does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come” (John 2:4). What happens next is the only time in the Gospels that Mary gives directions. “His mother then said to the servers, ‘Do whatever he tells you’” (John 2:5).

The Blessed Mother points us straight to Jesus. She tells us, “Do whatever he tells you.” Spend some quiet time reflecting on Mary’s words. What is Jesus telling you to do today?

the Gospel of Luke, Mary’s cousin, Elizabeth, knew something no one else did about Mary’s identity as a mother. Soon after the angel appeared to Mary, Mary went to visit Elizabeth, who was pregnant with John the Baptist. Elizabeth greeted Mary with the following words: “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?” (Luke 1:42–43). Elizabeth exclaimed, at the prompting of the Spirit, that Mary was the mother of the Lord. Mary is truly the Mother of God because she is the mother of the eternal Son of God made man, Jesus, who is God himself. We call Mary **Theotokos**, which means “God-bearer,” or the one who gives birth to God.



Theotokos ➔ A Greek term that means “God-bearer.” The Church uses this name for Mary because she is the Mother of Jesus Christ, the Second Divine Person of the Trinity.

Mary, Mother of the Church

With a mother's love, Mary supported Jesus throughout his life. The Gospels do not tell us much about Jesus' childhood. We can imagine that Mary provided all the guidance and nurturing of the most loving of mothers. Her support and love for Jesus continued throughout his ministry and to his cross, where she stood as he died. In the final moments of Jesus' earthly life, he gave the Church the gift of his mother. The Gospel of John recounts how Jesus spoke to his mother, and to John, the beloved disciple: "Jesus saw his mother and the disciple he loved standing there; so he said to his mother, 'Woman, behold, your son'" (19:26). This simple statement shows us that the beloved disciple and all believers are Mary's children. "Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother'" (19:27). This means Mary is the mother of all

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This icon of the Theotokos shows Mary's arms open to all the world. The circle represents her womb with Jesus inside, his arms open wide in blessing.

PRAYING TOGETHER

The Feast of the Assumption

Because of Mary's holiness and faithfulness, God took her into Heaven, both body and soul, at the end of her life on Earth. This event is called the **Assumption**. (In the Eastern Churches, this event is called the Dormition of the Theotokos, or the "falling asleep" of the Mother of God.) Mary shared in Jesus' Resurrection from the dead as soon as her life on Earth ended. She is in Heaven waiting for us and for all the faithful to join her. The Church celebrates the Feast of the Assumption on August 15.

Christians; she is our mother. Mary is the Church's model of faithfulness and love. Mary points us straight to Jesus. For this reason, the Church's devotion to the Blessed Mother is an important part of Christian worship. She is our model of holiness.

The Communion of Saints

When we recite the Apostles' Creed, we profess our belief in the **Communion of Saints**. This refers to the Church. The Church is a communion of holy people, living and dead (but alive with God). There is a second, closely related, meaning as well. In English, the word *saint* can translate the Latin *sancti* ("holy people") and the Latin *sancta* ("holy things"). The holy things are primarily the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. When we profess belief in the Communion of Saints, we say something about our relationships with all faithful people living now



Assumption → The belief that God took Mary directly into Heaven at the end of her life on Earth.

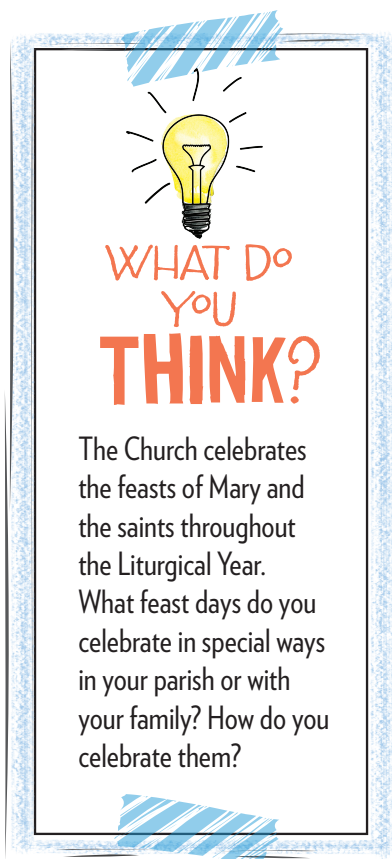
Communion of Saints → The whole community of now-living faithful people united with all those who have died but are alive with God.

and in the past, but that is not all. We are also saying that “holy things”—especially the Eucharist—bind us to one another and unite us to God. When we participate in the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist, we are nourished with the Body and Blood of Christ, and we become the Body of Christ for the world.

Our Friends in Heaven

We’ve all had the experience of leaning on our friends in time of need. Not only that, but we count on our friends to help us celebrate life’s moments. We have a whole other group of friends too—our friends in Heaven. Mary is one of these—she is our spiritual mother, and she is joined by the saints, all those who have died and are with God in Heaven.

As Catholics, we have a special connection to those who have died. The Holy Spirit unites all believers, those who have died and are being purified before entering Heaven, and the saints already in Heaven. All these people are our heavenly friends. Our heavenly friends help us grow close to Jesus and be his faithful followers. And just as we ask our friends here on Earth to help us or pray for us, we can ask our heavenly friends to put in a good word for us with God. We can ask them to bring our needs to God. We can also ask them to pray for us when we have difficult decisions to make. We believe that they hear our prayers and are with God in Heaven. It is an especially meaningful prayer to ask our own loved ones who have died to bring our needs before God.



The Saints

What do you think being a saint means? Saints embody what it is to be holy. To be holy is to seek God and to be filled with God. Mary is the first saint, the queen of all the saints. She was totally filled with God’s life. The many saints who have come after her are also examples of what it means to live Christian lives, trying to do what God wants. You’ll notice that a number of saints are highlighted in “People of Faith” throughout this book. This is because reading and studying the lives of the saints can inspire us to follow their example.

We witness the Holy Spirit’s activity in the Church through her saints. They are our companions in prayer. They, with Mary in Heaven, contemplate God, praise him, and perhaps best of all, care for

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good to KNOW

Have you ever wondered how many official saints there are? It is difficult to arrive at a definitive number. We do know that the names of more than ten thousand saints have been recorded in various historical records during the Church’s history.



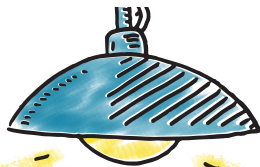
people like us who are still living on Earth. That's good news for us. The saints are our holy friends, looking out for us always. When we celebrate their feasts and memorials at liturgies throughout the year, we show that as the Church on Earth, we are united with the liturgy of Heaven. All the official saints of the Church are a part of our Catholic family. These are the saints whom the Church has canonized. We can also use the term *unofficial saints* to refer to all the people in the Church who are living and dead. This term describes the whole Communion of Saints.

CHECK this OUT

Birthdays of the Saints

Have you ever wondered how the Church determines on what day a saint's feast will be celebrated? The vast majority of saints are remembered on the anniversary of the day they died. This is a sort of birthday because it is the first day of their new life in Heaven with God. The saints participate in Christ's passage from life on Earth, through death, to a new life. Christ's passage is called the Paschal Mystery, and it includes his Ascension into Heaven after his Resurrection. When we celebrate the life of a saint, we affirm our belief in this mystery.

By making a special point of remembering the saints on the anniversaries of their deaths, we commemorate all that Jesus Christ accomplished through them during their lives on Earth. This practice also reminds us that they remain alive and offer us their friendship. Death was not the end for them, and it isn't for us either.



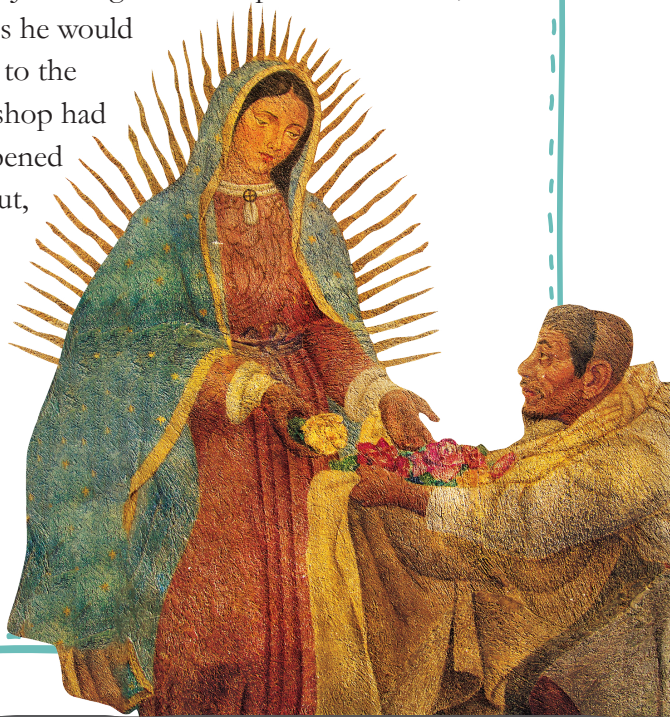
PEOPLE of FAITH

Saint JUAN DIEGO

On December 9, 1531, a fifty-seven-year-old peasant named Juan Diego (1474–1548), who lived near Mexico City, was on his way to Mass. Suddenly he heard beautiful music and a woman’s voice calling to him from Tepeyac Hill. At the top of the hill, he saw a beautiful woman, who revealed that she was the Virgin Mary. She told Juan to tell the bishop that a church should be built in her honor at the bottom of the hill.

Juan went to the bishop and told him about his vision, but the bishop wasn’t ready to believe Juan’s story. He said he needed a sign to prove the story true.

The Virgin Mary told Juan to go to the top of the hill and, in his cloak, gather the roses he would find there and take them to the bishop as the sign the bishop had requested. When Juan opened his cloak, the roses fell out, and a beautiful portrait of the Virgin suddenly appeared on his cloak. Soon after, a church was built in Mary’s honor. Saint Juan Diego’s feast day is celebrated on December 9.



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