

Holy Trinity Catholic Church
RCIA Class Transcript
Mary and the Saints
Lecturer: Father Francis Peffley
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Tonight's class is one of the very important ones, on the Blessed Mother, on Mary, the Mother of the Lord. We'll also talk a little bit about the saints, so you understand what the Catholic understanding of saints is. We're going to cover quite a few topics. We'll talk about Mary in God's plan for our salvation. We'll talk about many of the Catholic teachings about the Blessed Mother, such as the Immaculate Conception, and the Assumption of Our Lady, and of course, many other topics as well.

This is a very important topic, because up until now, we've dealt with a lot of issues that all Christians have accepted, mainly the Trinity, the Old Testament, the New Testament, the Divinity of Christ, miracles, the Scriptures. But now, we're moving into topics where there are some differences, where maybe many of you had been born and raised in other denominations, and you might have some misconceptions about what Catholics actually believe about Mary and the saints.

Mary is the Mother of the Lord. First, let me talk in general a little bit about saints, and why we have saints in the Church. We honor saints. We respect saints. We try to follow their example. But we do not worship Mary or the saints. That's the most important thing to remember. We only worship God alone: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We respect, we honor, we show reverence towards these holy people. Just as the Bible says, "Honor your father and mother," so we also show honor to the saints. That's different than worship and adoration. Worship and adoration is given only to God alone. But respect, and love, and honor is shown to the saints.

In Latin, two different words are used in how we worship God, and how we honor saints. It's very important, I think, to write these words down on the board, so you know exactly what the Church teaches. There's a word called *latria*, and there's a word called *dulia*, and these are in the official teachings of the Church. The word *latria* means "adoration," or "worship," and *dulia* means "honor" or "respect." Now, the word *latria* is only used in regard to God. We only worship and adore God alone, and that is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. What's interesting, in a few classes, we'll be talking about the Eucharist, the Real Presence of Jesus in Holy Communion, and actually we give Jesus *latria* in the Eucharist, because it is the Lord. Since Jesus is truly present in Holy Communion (Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity); the Church uses this word in our worship of Christ, truly present in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the altar. The word *dulia* is a Latin word meaning "honor" or "respect," and this is given to Mary and the saints. In fact, for the Blessed Mother, we give her what's called *hyper-dulia*,

which is “special honor,” or “special respect,” because she’s the only one ever to give birth to the Son of God. So, as the Mother of the Lord, she’s the most special of all the saints.

I like to call the saints the “Christian Hall of Fame.” Now, if you go to Cooperstown, New York, you can visit the Baseball Hall of Fame. There you see statues of Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig. If you go to Canton, Ohio, you can see the Football Hall of Fame. You see the statues of the great football players. So really, the saints are our Christian Hall of Fame, because they’ve done such exceptional things in following Christ. We honor saints; we respect them. The saints for us are role models. We imitate their virtues, their good qualities: their generosity to the poor, their humility, their kindness, their charity, such as people like Mother Teresa, who’s on her way to becoming declared a saint. We also ask them to pray for us, so they have intercession. These are what the saints do for us; they give us example. We try to imitate their virtues, and then we ask for their prayers. See, we believe that if somebody dies and goes to Heaven, they can pray for us. We believe, even in this world, we can pray for each other. Have you ever asked somebody to pray for you? We do that all the time. If you’re sick, if your loved one is over fighting in Iraq, we pray for their safety and protection. We can pray for each other in this world.

Just because we die and go to the next world, does not mean that we can’t pray for one another anymore. We call that the *Communion of Saints*. We even say that in the Apostle’s Creed. The Communion of Saints means that we’re not separated by death, that those in Heaven can and do pray for us. We’ll find out later, that the souls in Purgatory can pray for us as well. The souls in Hell are lost for all eternity. Of course, they don’t pray at all. They hate God, and they curse God, so they don’t pray at all. But the souls in Heaven, and the souls in Purgatory do pray for us. So, just as you can pray for me, and I can pray for you, so the souls that have gone before us, like St. Peter and St. Paul, St. Anthony and St. Teresa, and the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph, they’re enjoying the Beatific Vision. They’re in Heaven right now, which means they can intercede for you, and they can pray for you.

Many of the saints were people, just like ourselves. Many of them were husbands and fathers, wives and mothers, priests, nuns. There were saints from every walk of life – carpenters, and doctors, and lawyers, and moms, and nurses. The saints can give us example. We can follow their example, imitate their virtues, and ask them to pray for us. This does not get in the way of praying directly to Jesus – we pray directly to Jesus all day long, all the time. But remember, the Church is a family. The Church is the family of God. Jesus is our Lord, and Brother, and Savior. Mary is our Spiritual Mother, and the saints and the Angels are like our big brothers and sisters, our cousins, that have already made it to their final destination.

If you had to take a trip, let's say, to drive down to Georgia, and you've never been there before, if your relative lived there you could call them and ask for directions, because they made the trip before, and they can give you the best way to get to that destination. It's the same thing with the saints in Heaven. See, they made it to Heaven, and we can ask them to pray for us. If we do ask them, they will pray for us. We can read about their lives. By following their good advice, and their example, we can make it to that final destination as well. We can make it to Heaven by following the example of these holy men and women, these great Christians who have gone before us, who have left us, in a sense, an example to follow. The Church is a family. Always remember that, that God is our Heavenly Father; Jesus our Brother and Savior; Mary our Spiritual Mother; and the saints and Angels our big brothers and sisters. So, that's one idea you'll get in the Catholic Church, this idea that we're one big family, and we're all in this together, all trying to get to Heaven and to be with God for all eternity.

There are many different definitions of a saint. One definition is "a saint is anybody who makes it to Heaven." That's one definition. If your grandma's there, then she's a saint. If your father or mother have passed away and made it to Heaven, they're a saint as well. Another definition of a saint is "a saint is a sinner who kept on trying." Isn't that good? A saint is a sinner who never gave up. Other definitions are: Once a little girl was asked, "What's your definition of a saint?" She looked up at the stained-glass windows. She saw the beautiful sunlight shining through, and she said, "A saint is someone through whom God's light shines through." And isn't that the case? That we see the holiness of Jesus shining through the example of the saints. They really are our examples and our role models. We do not worship saints. We do not adore saints. We respect and we honor them. We just have to keep repeating that, because sometimes you'll get people that might be confused, or misunderstand that. Remember, saints do not take away from Christ. In fact, they glorify Christ, because the saints really are the Scriptures lived out. St. Francis de Sales once said that, "The Gospel is like sheet music, music on the page. But the saints are music sung, music in action."

What are the saints? Saints are people who lived the Gospel. They followed Christ in poverty, chastity, obedience, and generosity. We have saints that are martyrs for the Faith, that were beheaded, or thrown to the lions, or killed in the Coliseum. Some of the saints died very young, like the Holy Innocent children that were killed by King Herod, when he was trying to destroy the Christ Child. We've had saints that were very young, like Maria Goretti, and St. Cecilia, and St. Agnes, and St. Agatha. We've had saints that have lived to be over a hundred years or age, like St. Patrick, and St. Anthony of the Desert. The teachings of the saints are wonderful, and I hope that all of you will get a chance to start reading The Lives of the Saints. Next to the Gospel, next to the Bible, the best thing you can read is The Lives of the Saints, because you'll see the Gospel being lived out in real life, by people just like ourselves.

Really, the saints were no different than us. They had their struggles. Some of them had very difficult husbands. Some of them had nagging wives. Some of them struggled with alcohol. One was even a former Satanist. He came out of Satanism, and actually became beatified, and his name is Bartholomew Longo of Italy. When he was in college, he had become a Satanist, and had been ordained in the Church of Satan. His friends never stopped praying the Rosary for him, and eventually he came out of Satanism, gave his life back to God, and built a beautiful shrine over in Pompeii, Italy, which is now the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Rosary. If you go to Pompeii, you can visit this shrine. So we've had saints from all walks of life as well.

Let's take a look at, really, the most important saint, which is Mary, the Queen of all the Angels, the Queen of all the Saints. Mary's dignity is incredible, because Mary had a special relationship with each of the Persons of the Blessed Trinity. Mary is Mother of God the Son. She's called the Daughter of God the Father. And, she's called the Spouse of the Holy Spirit. No other person on Earth has that relationship to God. Again, Mary remains a human being. She's a human creature, a human person. She's not a goddess. She's not divine. She's a human being. Because God's Son became Incarnate within her, she's called the Mother of God, the Mother of Jesus; and we'll go through in a few moments why we can call her the Mother of God. She's the Chosen Daughter of God the Father. And then, she is the Virginal Spouse of the Holy Spirit. What a unique person she is, to have this relationship to the Most Blessed Trinity!

In God's plan for our salvation, Mary became the "New Eve." That's one of her special titles – the "New Eve." See, the first Eve was the mother of all the living. But, of course, the first Eve sinned. Adam and Eve turned against God. They said no to God. They committed a sin of disobedience, saying no to God. In the redemption, God had to send somebody to make up for what the first Eve had done. We know that St. Paul says, "Christ is the Second Adam," or the "New Adam," and you can't have a "New Adam" without having a "New Eve." In the Old Testament, we had Adam; we had Eve. Adam was the head of the human race. But, who did the devil go to first? The devil went to Eve first, tempted Eve, and then Eve tempted Adam, and Adam sinned. When Adam sinned, the human race fell, since Adam was the head of the human race. We call Eve the "co-mess-upper" of the human race, which means that Mary did the reverse of what Eve did.

Mary did not save the world from sin; Christ did. Christ is the Redeemer. The human race sinned in Adam. The human race was restored by Christ. Just as Eve played a part in the downfall of the human race, so Mary played a part in the restoration of the human race. Mary's role was so important, that God chose to need her. He did not absolutely have to use her, but He chose to use her, just like I choose to use this microphone or this pulpit. It's my decision. It was God's decision to redeem us, by sending His Son, but through the Blessed Mother. What's also interesting, when you look at the parallel, that in the Old Testament,

you had the fallen angel, Lucifer – came first to Eve. Eve sinned, and then Adam sinned. In the New Testament, when God reversed the fall, He sent the Angel Gabriel, Gabriel was sent by God, and who did He go to first? He went to Mary first, and said, “Hail full of grace, the Lord is with you.” Now Mary said “yes” to God; Eve said “no” to God. Eve was known for her pride and disobedience; Mary for her humility and obedience. She’s just the opposite. Eve became the mother of all the dead and dying. She was the mother of all the living, but because of her sin, she became the mother of all the dead and dying. Mary now becomes the mother of all the living, because in her womb was born the Christ.

What’s also interesting is that in the Old Testament, there was a garden, the Garden of Eden. In the New Testament, there was the Garden of Gethsemane. In the first garden, paradise was lost. In the second Garden of Gethsemane, paradise was restored. If you saw the movie The Passion, you saw how Jesus took upon Himself the sins of the world, and sweated blood for our salvation. He then steps on the snake and crushes the snake. Again, that’s a parallel to the Garden of Eden, how the serpent appeared and tempted our first parents, and led them into sin.

In the Old Testament, there is the Tree, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. In the New Testament, there is the Tree of the Cross. You see how perfectly God redeemed the world, after the fall of the human race. God could have left the human race in sin. He loved the world so much that He sent His Son, born of the Virgin, to redeem us, by taking our sins in the Garden of Gethsemane, and taking them and nailing them to the Cross. That’s the parallel between the Old and New Testament. Mary is the New Eve. She said yes to God, and made up for the disobedience of Eve.

One of the other neat topics regarding the Blessed Mother is “Mary as the Ark of the Covenant.” The Covenant is the agreement that God made with His people. In the Old Testament, the Ark of the Covenant contained the Ten Commandments, Moses’ staff, and some manna from the Old Testament. Now, the Ark was not adored. You did not worship the Ark. The presence of God dwelt in the Ark, and that was worshiped, but nobody worshiped the wood and the gold of the Ark of the Covenant. Christ is the New Covenant between us and the Father. At the Last Supper, He said, “I give you this New Covenant in My Blood.” It says He took bread, and said the blessing, and said, “This is My Body, which will be given up for you.” He took the wine and said, “This is the cup of My Blood, the Blood of the New and Everlasting Covenant.” Jesus is the Covenant, the agreement between us and the Father. Therefore, that makes Mary the Ark of the New Covenant. She’s the Ark of the New Covenant, because she contained within herself Jesus, who is the Covenant between us and the Father. It’s very important to remember that.

In the Old Testament, they respected the Ark of the Covenant. In fact, there’s a story of Uzzah. I don’t know if you got this one handout on the Virgin Mary, where

Uzzah had reached out and tried to touch the Ark, and he was struck down by God, because he was not supposed to touch the Ark of the Covenant. Mary is much more holy, much more sacred. She's the living, walking, breathing Ark of the New Covenant. Mary has to be respected as well, and woe to those who criticize or downgrade the Blessed Mother. You see, nobody likes to have their mother criticized. Even big football players! The worst thing you can say to a big football player or boxer is something derogatory about their mother. It's the same thing with Jesus. If you want to get on Jesus' good side, honor His Mother. Pay her proper respect and reverence. Don't downgrade or criticize or denigrate His Mother. That always baffles me how sometimes people, they think they can, let's say, talk negatively about Mary. What does that do to their relationship with Jesus? What if somebody spoke negatively about my mother or your mother? How would that help the relationship? It doesn't. But if you want to enter into a deeper relationship with the Lord, show proper respect and honor to Mary, the Ark of the New Covenant. That's a beautiful title of Our Lady. And, there's rich symbolism in that.

A couple of other analogies I like to use in explaining the Blessed Mother is that Christ is like the Sun, and Mary is like the Moon. Christ is God; He generates holiness. Mary is like the Moon; she reflects the holiness of Jesus. In fact, all the saints reflect the holiness of Jesus. But Mary especially does that. Christ is like the Sun; Mary is like the Moon. Christ is the source, and Mary is a reflection of His holiness.

I also like to use the example of a picture and a frame. Imagine if you had a photograph, and you framed it very beautifully. The frame is supposed to lead you. It enhances the picture, the painting, or the photograph. It doesn't take away from the photograph. The same thing with Mary – Mary is the frame, and Christ is the picture. She's supposed to lead us to a deeper relationship with her Son.

I like to call Mary the bridge, because remember, Jesus came to us through Mary, as a bridge, when He came to this world. We could go back to Jesus and to God, in a different way, but how could we improve on the way that Jesus came to us? God was up in Heaven, and He had to become man. He didn't get beamed down like Scottie on the Starship Enterprise, you know, "Beam me down, Captain." Jesus could have beamed down, but He didn't. He chose to be born into this world through a mother. That mother really became the channel through which Jesus entered the world. In a sense, she's like the bridge, and then Jesus came to us that way. Yes, we can go back to Jesus in other ways, but how can we improve on the way that He set up? That's why it's good to go to Jesus with Mary, and through Mary, because she is our Spiritual Mother as well. Nobody builds a house on a bridge. A bridge is never somebody's ultimate destiny. It's a transition. It's not your destination. Mary is not an end in herself; she's always a means to an end, which is Jesus, or God. You go over a bridge to get to your destination. We go through Mary to get to Jesus; it's always to Jesus, but through and with Mary.

I also like to call Mary the magnifying glass. In the Bible, she says, "My soul magnifies the Lord." A magnifying glass comes between you and what you're trying to see, but does not hinder what you want to see. It magnifies it. Mary is like that. Some people say, "Well, I don't want anything to get between me and Jesus." Well, does this microphone get between me and you? It doesn't. Do your glasses get between me and you? In fact, your glasses help you to see things better. Or your contact lenses help you to see the writing, or to see what you're looking at better. Yes, they do stand between you and your eyeballs and me, but that's their purpose. Mary, even though she can come between us and Jesus, is there to magnify the Lord, not to get in the way of your relationship with Jesus. She's not there to obstruct your relationship; she's there to exemplify and magnify the Lord in your life. Just like a magnifying glass, or binoculars, or a telescope, she helps us. The telescope, yes, it does come between you and the stars, but so you can see the stars all the better.

Another analogy I like to use for Mary is what the Bible says: "A tree and its fruits." Jesus says, "You shall know a tree by its fruits." A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. If you want oranges, you go to an orange tree. If you want poison ivy, you go to a poison ivy plant. The Bible says, "Blessed are you among women," referring to Mary, and, "Blessed is the Fruit of your womb." Therefore, according to Jesus' own teaching, "You shall know a tree by its fruit," Mary must be very special and very holy, because she bore Jesus into this world. Again, I think it's a nice analogy, and it's right from Scripture, when Elizabeth says, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the Fruit of your womb." Look how good and holy Jesus is. Well, the tree through which Jesus came must also be very special, and very good, and very holy.

If you were to come to the Rectory for dinner, or if I came to your house for dinner, you never serve dinner to somebody on a dirty plate, or give them water in a dirty glass. You want to give them a presentable vessel, or plate, upon which to give the food. Mary is like the vessel, and so that's why we call Mary the *Immaculate Conception*, because she was the vessel through which Jesus came into this world. Just as you wouldn't serve your neighbor good food on a dirty plate, or a good glass of wine in a dirty glass, nor would God give us His Mother through an unclean vessel.

We should first look at the fact that Mary was called the Immaculate Conception. There's a lot of misconceptions about the Immaculate Conception. Some people think that the Immaculate Conception is when Jesus was conceived in Mary's womb by the power of the Holy Spirit. Yes, it's true, that was an Immaculate Conception. We also refer to that as the *Virgin Birth*, that Jesus was conceived in Mary's womb by the power of the Holy Spirit, without a human father. Yes, that did happen to Jesus, so yes, Jesus was Immaculately Conceived. But when we talk about *the* Immaculate Conception, we're really referring to Mary's conception in the womb of her mother, St. Anne; it was immaculate. The word *macula* in

Latin means “evil,” or “sin,” and so immaculate means “without sin.” What we’re saying is that Mary was conceived in the womb of her mother, St. Anne, without being tainted by Original Sin. That’s the definition of the Immaculate Conception. We celebrate this on December 8th. Nine months later, we celebrate Mary’s birthday on September 8th. We recall the day of the Immaculate Conception, December 8th; Mary’s birthday, September 8th. Now with Christ, we celebrate his birthday December 25th. Nine months before that, the Annunciation, March 25th. Nine months for Christ, from March 25th to December 25th. Nine months for Mary, December 8th to September 8th.

The Immaculate Conception took place in the womb of St. Anne. We know that that is the name of Mary’s mother, and Jesus’ grandmother. Some people then get confused, they think, well does that mean that Anne was immaculately conceived? Is that how it happened? No. Anne had sin. She had Original Sin. Anne’s husband name was Joachim. Joachim and Anne were the parents of Mary. We know these were the names. They were written in many of the ancient writings that were written in the first and second centuries, referring to the parents of Mary. They conceived Mary in the normal way, through normal marital relations. But God worked a special miracle, that the moment of Mary’s conception in the womb of St. Anne, God preserved her from being tainted by Original Sin, because she was going to be the one that God would choose to be the mother of the Messiah. To clarify this, the exact definition of the Immaculate Conception is “due to the foreseen merits of Christ”; Mary was preserved from being tainted by Original Sin at the moment of her conception, in the womb of her mother. In other words, Mary was the recipient of God’s salvific work in Christ. Mary is not outside of God’s redemption; she’s not outside of receiving the blessings of God. See, you and I are redeemed by Christ in our Baptism, and when God’s grace touches our souls.

Let’s say we have the year 2004, and we have Christ, and we have Mary’s conception way back here, and let’s say this is 1 AD. Let’s say Mary was about 16 years old when Christ was conceived in her womb. Let’s call this 16 BC, and let’s say this is 33 AD when Jesus died on the Cross. Jesus, and His work of dying on the Cross, His grace can come into our life, even though what Jesus did was in the past. We all believe that, when we get baptized and accept Jesus. What Jesus did back then affects and changes our life right now. In other words, God’s grace can work over time. In our case, it’s 2,000 years ago. What Jesus did 2,000 years ago touches our life right now, when we get baptized, and go to Confession, and have our sins forgiven. If God can work outside of time, even though we live 2,000 years after Christ, Jesus’ grace, His death on the Cross, can affect Mary, who lived before Him.

Let’s see how that works. Mary is saved through the anticipated merits of Christ; the foreseen merits of Christ are applied to her. Mary is not outside of God’s salvation. That’s why Mary could say in the Magnificat in Luke, Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, “My soul magnifies the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” Lots

of times Protestants will point and say “Oh, Mary called God her Savior; therefore she must have sinned.” Mary was saved from sin due to the merits of Christ applied to her at her conception. A good analogy is if you were walking through the jungles, and you fell into quicksand, and you’re going down. Somebody pulls you out of the quicksand. Well, you could say that person saved your life. Well, that’s what Jesus did for us. He pulled us out of the quicksand after we were already contaminated by sin, Original Sin, and our own personal sin. If you were walking through the jungle, and were about to fall into the quicksand, and somebody caught you before you fell in, you can still say “that person saved me from falling into the quicksand.” Either way, that person is your savior. One is saved after you get pulled out of the muck by the person, but if you’re caught before you fall in, you’re still saved by Christ. And that’s what happened to Mary – she was saved by Jesus even before she was allowed to be contaminated by Original Sin. That’s how we believe that Mary was conceived without Original Sin.

The other reason is: remember the first Adam and Eve? They did not have Original Sin. They were created without sin. They had free will, and they sinned. If the first Eve was created without Original Sin, then the New Eve, Mary, must also be created without Original Sin. Remember, the New Testament figures are greater than the Old Testament figures. Certainly Christ is far greater than Adam. Gabriel is certainly far greater than Lucifer as far as holiness; therefore, Mary must be far greater than Eve. But if Mary were conceived in sin, Eve would be greater than her. So it can’t be the case. Mary, the New Eve, must be created without Original Sin; otherwise, the first Eve would be greater than her.

(A question). The names Anne and Joachim are found in some of the early writings. They’re not in the Bible. They’re found in the writings of the Gospel of Thomas, for example, or the Gospel of James – some of what we call the *Apocryphal Writings*, that were written in the early days of the Church, but they’re not inspired by the Holy Spirit. Even though they do give us some historical truths, like a few names here and there, but they are not part of the Bible, because they’re not the inspired word of God. They do contain some errors, but that’s where we do get the names Anne and Joachim.

(A question). There’s a number of places in Scripture that we can show that Mary would be Immaculately Conceived, from the Bible. So when you go to DC, and you see the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception up near Catholic University, that’s named after the Blessed Mother, because she’s the Patroness of the Americas. Her title, the Immaculate Conception, is the title of that Shrine. A couple of places to look: Genesis, Chapter 3, Verse 15. This is at the fall of the human race. You can look this up. After Adam and Eve sinned, God told the Devil, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed, and they shall crush thy head.” That’s the first sort of prediction of the Immaculate Conception, that God predicted that the seed of the woman would crush the serpent, and of course, the seed (nobody argues with) is Christ,

because He's the only one that crushes the Devil. But then this woman, according to the Bible, would have total enmity. *Enmity* means "total separation," "completely distinct," "not touching." Total enmity is a total separation. This woman, who we know would be Mary, because her seed crushes the head of the serpent, would have total enmity between the Devil, completely at odds, completely separated. That's a little glimpse of the Immaculate Conception, because if Mary had Original Sin, she would not have total enmity with the Devil, because Original Sin means the Devil has some power over us. That's one little glimpse from the Old Testament.

I think one of the greatest passages, though, is Luke, Chapter 1. In Luke 1, we have the Annunciation, and there the Angel Gabriel says to Mary, "Hail, full of grace." I think this is the clearest teaching about the Immaculate Conception in Scripture. The New Testament was written in Greek. And the word in Greek, that only appears one time in the whole Bible, is *kecharitomene*. This word means "charity," or "so full of love," "full of God's grace." This word, I think, is so important, because again, it's the only time it's used, and it's the perfect passive participle of that verb, which means "one who has been perfected in grace." That word, which the Angel Gabriel used for the Blessed Mother, implies that she's Immaculately Conceived. He said to her, "Hail, you who have been perfected in grace," or "by grace." And therefore, it would seem to indicate Mary's Immaculate Conception, that she was never tainted by Original Sin. Now of course, in the common sense, there are things too about the "pure vessel," through which Jesus would come to us. So, obviously, it makes sense, I think logically, because of the fact that God would choose a pure vessel in which to enter this world. But I think this word here helps out a lot, *kecharitomene* – one who has been perfected by God's grace.

The other one I think is helpful has to do with John the Baptist. It says, "When Mary went to visit her cousin Elizabeth, John the Baptist leapt in his mother's womb, and was filled with the Holy Spirit." And so, he was *sanctified* (cleansed of Original Sin), at six months. John the Baptist was conceived in sin. He had Original Sin, but he was cleansed of Original Sin when he was a six-month old baby. If Mary had Original Sin, then John the Baptist would be greater than the Mother of the Lord. Logically, it would make sense that Jesus' own Mother would not even be tainted by Original Sin. If John was cleansed at six months, it's not unreasonable to hold that Mary, who's far greater than John, because John was only the precursor of the Lord (he's like the best man at the wedding – he prepared the way), but the Mother of the Lord would be far holier.

Plus, I think another neat thing is Jesus is the only person who ever pre-existed his mother. Did you know that? See, in our case, our mothers were born first, and then we're born after them. If we could do what Jesus did, how would we create our mother? Wouldn't we want to make her the most beautiful, the most perfect, the most loving, the most pure, the most holy person imaginable? Jesus is the only one who ever got a chance to create his own mother. Since the Bible says,

“Honor your father and mother,” how could Jesus not make her perfect without sin? If He made her sinful, then in a sense, He really didn’t honor her as much as He could, because He is God. And there’s a good saying; “If she’s good enough for Jesus, she’s good enough for us.” That’s a great saying, because if she was good enough for the Lord, good enough for Jesus to be born in her womb, to be carried for nine months, then she’s certainly good enough to be our Mother as well.

How do we know that Mary is our Spiritual Mother? Very easily, because Jesus lives within us. Jesus is in you. Jesus is in me. If Jesus is in us, then Mary is our Spiritual Mother as well. See, we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior – we also have to accept Mary as our personal Mother. Mary is our Spiritual Mother. Isn’t that wonderful? Your own mom might have died and gone to Heaven already, but you still have a Heavenly Mother. Mary actually loves you more than even your own earthly mother could, because love, when it’s from a holier person (and Mary, of course, is perfect), her love is even greater. St. Alphonsus Ligouri says that, “If you combined the love of all mothers for their children, from the beginning of the human race until the end of the human race, and put them all together, they would not equal the love that Mary has for each one of you.” Isn’t that amazing? Why is that? Because she sees Jesus in each one of us. Jesus is within us. We’re baptized. We have Jesus in us. Therefore, Mary is our Mother as well. Eve became the Mother of all the dead and dying. Mary is the Mother of all the Redeemed. And a good place to look for this is John, Chapter 20. Jesus was dying on the Cross, and His mother Mary was standing at the foot of the Cross, and John was there, John the beloved disciple. Jesus turned to Mary and said, “Woman, behold your son. Son, behold your mother.” That beloved disciple represents all of us. Jesus gave Mary, His mother, to us as His last, and dying, gift.

The last thing Jesus did before He died was to entrust His mother to John, and John to Mary. The Bible says, “Behold your son. And from that hour on, the disciple took her into his home.” We do the same. We take Mary into our heart and soul as well, so she becomes our Mother.

Remember, the Church is the Body of Christ. The Body of Christ has a head, and it has members, the hands and feet, the arms and legs. A mother is not just the mother of a head; she’s the mother of the whole body. The Body of Christ is the head, which is Christ, and the members, which is us. Therefore, if Mary is the Mother of Christ, she also must be the Mother of the whole Church, namely all of us.

Of course, Mary is not just the Mother of all Christians, of all Catholics; she’s also the Mother of all people. Because remember, Christ redeemed everyone. He died for everyone. He redeemed everyone, and Mary is the Mother of all the Redeemed. She’s also the Spiritual Mother of all the Hindus, and Jews, and Muslims, and everyone, because Jesus died for everybody. Therefore, Mary

became the Spiritual Mother of all Mankind. So again, that's something to really think about - Mary's great love for each one of us.

I want to finish up tonight. We still have a little bit to cover, regarding the Blessed Mother. We call her the Blessed Mother because Scripture says, "All generations will call her blessed." So, when we call Mary the Blessed Virgin, or the Blessed Mother, then we're fulfilling Scripture's prophecy.

One of the other titles of Mary that we should talk about for a few minutes is called "The Mother of God." This does not mean that she's the Mother of the Trinity, or that she somehow existed before God, or is greater than God. It means simply, that Mary gave birth to Jesus Christ, and Jesus is God. We talked about that before (in the talk on Christ), that Jesus is God; Mary gave birth to Jesus, so we can call her the Mother of God. In Greek, it's *Theotokos*. "Theo" is "God," "tokos", the "God bearer." Mary bore God in her womb.

This title was officially given to Our Lady at some of the early Church Councils. At the Council of Ephesus in the year 431, this title was officially declared, but it wasn't a Marian Council; it was a Council of Christology, which is having to do with Christ. They were debating "Was Jesus Christ truly God?" And they said yes. Therefore, we can call Mary the Mother of God. Remember, when the mother gives birth to a child, she doesn't give birth to a nature, she gives birth to a person. Christ is one Person. He is a Divine Person, who has a Human and Divine nature. Christ is one Person. He is God - the Son of God. Therefore, Mary didn't just give birth to His human nature; she gives birth to a Person. Therefore, since Jesus is God, true God and true Man, and since Christ is One Person, we call that the Hypostatic Union, the fact that the two natures of Christ are united in the One Person of Christ, a Divine Person. The mother just doesn't give birth to the body, she gives birth to the whole child; and the child is Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ is God.

This title (Mother of God) was found in the ancient Catacombs. We have an early prayer dating back to about the year 125. It says, "We fly to your patronage, O holy Mother of God. Despise not our prayers and our necessities, but ever deliver us from all dangers, O glorious and Blessed Virgin." So keep that in mind, that this is an ancient title for Mary. In fact, it's in the Scriptures too, because Elizabeth says, "Who am I, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?" The "Mother of my Lord," which means "The Mother of God." St. Thomas the Apostle knelt down at Jesus' feet and said, "My Lord and my God." Jesus did not say, "No, I'm not Lord and God," He said, "Blessed are you Thomas, but more blessed are those who do not see and yet believe." Another good passage is the Gospel of John, Chapter 1, Verse 1: "In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God, and the Word was God." And then Verse 14: "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us." Therefore, we can call Mary the Mother of God.

Now the other topic that we should talk about is *Mary's Perpetual Virginity*, the fact that she had no other children. This is one of the topics that some of our friends of other denominations don't see eye-to-eye with us on this. A couple of passages we should point out: one is Isaiah Chapter 7 of the prophet Isaiah. It says, "A Virgin shall be with Child and give birth to a Son." That was a great miracle, the fact that a Virgin who would conceive and bear a child, and remain a virgin. This teaching, of the fact that Mary had no other children, sometimes can be confusing, because the Bible says things like, "Jesus' brothers and sisters showed up," and Jesus says, "Who is my Mother? Who are my brothers?" Now, nowhere are these brothers of Jesus called children of Mary. They're called His brethren, or His sisters, and that word also means "cousins." It doesn't necessarily mean that it's from the same mother, from the same womb. The word "brother" also included cousins, uncles, nephews, etc. There are passages in Scripture that support this. For example, in the Old Testament, it says that, "Lot was Abraham's brother." That's what the Bible says. But if you look closely in other passages, Lot was Abraham's nephew, and yet it uses the word "brother."

Sometimes, people say, "Well, the Bible says that Jesus is the first-born of Mary. Well, that must mean there must be a second-born, or a third-born." Remember, the title "first-born" was given to the child that opened the womb. It didn't matter if any other children were born after that. The first one was always called the "first-born," even if no other children were born later. There's an inscription on an ancient tomb about a woman who died giving birth to her first-born, and obviously she did not have any children after that.

Some people say, "Well, then it says in the Bible 'Joseph knew not Mary until she bore a Son,'" which seems to think well maybe he knew her physically after she bore a Son. Again, the word "until" does not necessitate that the activity happened after the fact. There's a passage in Second Samuel that says, "Michal had no children until the day of her death." Does that mean she had children after the day of her death? Of course not. The word "until" does not necessitate that the opposite happened after the fact.

Regarding the "brothers and sisters" of Christ mentioned in Scripture, again none of them are ever mentioned as Mary's children. They're all mentioned as the brethren of the Lord. Christ is always called "The Son of the Carpenter." "The Son" and the word "the" means singular. He's not called "One of the Children of the Carpenter." He's always called "The Son" of Mary, or "The Son of the Carpenter." That indicates that there were no other children born of Mary, that Mary remained a Virgin before, during, and after the birth of Christ. This is an official teaching of the Church. It's been a teaching of the Church for 2,000 years. "Before, During, and After," and not just sort of an emotional virginity, or a spiritual virginity, but physically remained a virgin before, during, and after the birth of Christ, her only Son. So, Mary had no other children.

There are many passages that can support this, as well as common sense, and the teaching of the Church. St. Augustine, who wrote in the 400's, said that, "Just as light can pass through a window pane without breaking the window pane, so Jesus, the Light of the World, came through Mary without hurting her physical integrity, her physical virginity." So she remained a virgin before, during, and after the birth of Christ. We know it was before, because the Virgin Mary, Christ was conceived in her womb by the power of the Holy Spirit. As you know, Joseph was not the father of Jesus. They lived a virginal, chaste, celibate marriage their entire life. Mary conceived Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. The overshadowing, the presence, the cloud of the Holy Spirit overshadowed her, and Christ was conceived in her womb, without disrupting her physical integrity. During the birth of Christ, He passed through the Blessed Mother without damaging her physical integrity, and she never had any marital relations with Joseph after the fact. That's why we call her the Blessed Virgin Mary. This is an official teaching of the Church, for 2,000 years. The Church has never taught error on issues of Faith and Morals. The Church is guided by the Holy Spirit, and so we know that the Church is accurate on this passage as well.

When you hear the passages about the Brethren of the Lord, realize it's referring to other relatives and cousins. A couple of things that can support that is that, at the foot of the Cross, when Jesus was dying, Jesus did not entrust His Mother to any other brothers, because He didn't have any. He had to choose an Apostle, namely John, who was one of the youngest Apostles. What's interesting is that Jewish law said that if the eldest son died, the next son would take care of the mother. There was no "next" son; there were no other children, and so Jesus had to entrust Mary to somebody that He wasn't even related to. I think that's a good support as well.

In the finding of Jesus in the Temple when He was twelve years of age, there's no indication of any other children as well. In the Scriptures, it refers to James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas as Jesus' brethren. But we know that in other places in the New Testament, we know that they're actually cousins of the Lord. Most of them are the children of Mary's sister. And, if you want to get into more details about that, I'd recommend reading the passage in the book by Carl Keating called Catholicism and Fundamentalism. He goes through and traces all these men that are mentioned as the brethren of the Lord, and shows that they're children of other relatives, like mostly Mary's sister's sons.

The other topic that we should talk about is Mary as an intercessor. The Bible talks about how we should pray for one another. Just as we can pray for each other, we believe that Mary can pray for us as well. The Bible says that, "The prayer of the just man is very powerful." Certainly Mary is very holy and very powerful, so her prayers are important too. I would especially recommend reading John Chapter 2, the Wedding Feast of Cana. What's interesting is that the wine ran out, and Mary knew it before anybody else did. Mary's a good mother, a good Jewish mother; so she knew that the wine ran out, and she made

sure that this young couple was not embarrassed on their wedding day. Mary goes to Jesus and says, "They have no more wine." Mary is interceding. She's praying to Jesus, asking Jesus to do something. And even though Jesus said, "What does your concern have to do with Me at this time?", He went ahead and worked His first miracle, even though He wasn't planning on beginning His public ministry, He obeyed His mother. That's interesting to remember, that Jesus is still a son, so He still listens to His mother. Keep that in mind, that if Mary asks Jesus to do something, it'll be pretty hard not to do it. Just as if your mother called you, and said, "Would you please do something for me?", it's pretty hard to refuse your mother, so Mary is such a good intercessor.

In these last few minutes, we should also see Mary as our model of Faith, because she had tremendous faith in the Lord. She was Jesus' first disciple. What's interesting is that Mary was a wife. She was a mother. She remained a virgin. She was a widow (because St. Joseph died sometime when Jesus was between the age of 12 and 33). Mary can relate to us in many different ways.

What I'd like to do is just to explain this medal. This medal is called the *Medal of the Immaculate Conception*, but the nickname is the "*Miraculous Medal*," because so many cures, and healings, and miracles have taken place because of those who have worn this medal. This medal truly is miraculous. There have been many examples, even in recent years, of people that were cured by God. When they wore this medal, they were protected by the Lord in many, many ways. If you look on the medal, and hopefully all of you have the medal in your hand, you can see that underneath Mary's feet, are the numbers 1830. That's the year that Mary appeared to St. Catherine Labouré, who was a nun in Paris, France. Mary appeared to this nun, and said, "Have medals made. Those who wear the medal, especially if they wear it around their neck, would receive great graces from God." Underneath Mary's foot as well is the serpent, which represents the Devil. So, this medal shows Mary as the New Eve, crushing the head of the serpent. Mary's arms are like this, open, with rays of light coming out, showing that Jesus, the Light of the World, came to us through Mary.

Without Mary, we wouldn't have Jesus. Isn't that amazing to think about? What if Mary had said no? What if the Angel Gabriel came to her, and she says, "Well, I'm not interested." How would Jesus have come into this world? Mary, for that reason, was vital to our salvation, because she said yes, and God came to us. We wouldn't be saved without Mary saying yes. We wouldn't have Jesus without Mary giving her "yes" to God. Her arms are open, showing that she is our Spiritual Mother, that she loves us, and that she sees Jesus in us, and the rays of light represent Jesus coming into this world.

The words, if you have really good eyesight to read these words, say, "O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee." We're asking Mary, who is without sin, to pray for us. So, just by wearing the medal, you're wearing a prayer around your neck. Day and night, when you wear this medal,

it's like you're sending out little SOS signals, asking Mary to pray for you. It's like beaming up to Jesus, "pray for this person," because we say, "O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee." That's called the joyful side of the medal.

The back is called the sorrowful side, because the back has the Cross, and it's in the center, showing that Jesus is the center of our life, the center of our Faith. The "M" means that Mary stood at the foot of the Cross. The two Hearts, the Heart on the left, if you look closely, is the Heart with the Crown of Thorns – that's Jesus' Heart. The Heart on the right is Mary's Heart, because it has a sword going through it, because Mary suffered so much that Simeon predicted a sword of sorrow would one day pierce her heart. And it happened at the Crucifixion, when she stood there at the foot of the Cross, and saw the sword go through Jesus' heart. Jesus was already dead; He did not feel that, but Mary felt that. The twelve stars represent the twelve Apostles, also the twelve Tribes of Israel.

On November 27, 1830, Mary appeared to this nun, and this nun saw the vision of this. The nun wrote down what she saw, and they had medals made. The one thing that appears on our medal that did not appear in the original apparition was the words "Made in Italy." The nice thing about the medal is that when you wear it, your heart is right next to the Heart of Jesus and Mary.

This medal, in fact, you can read the article about the woman who was shot in Baltimore, on August 30, 1989. She was waiting for a bus. This guy came up and tried to steal her pocketbook. He took out a gun and shot her, right in the chest. The bullet hit one of these medals of Mary. It broke the medal in two, but stopped it from killing her. The doctors at John's Hopkins say she probably would have not survived, had not she been wearing her Miraculous Medal. It saved her life. The moral of the story is if you ever go to Baltimore, I want you to wear these medals!

Wear the medals! I'll bless them, and we will say a special prayer. I'd recommend that you pray this prayer, "O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee." Remember, it's not a good luck charm. It's not an idol. It's not anything bad. It's a holy sacramental, like a cross, or crucifix. It's just like wearing a locket with a picture of your mother in it. It's like having your mother around your neck. When you wear this, it means you're asking Mary to pray for you, to watch over you, to keep you safe from all physical and spiritual harm, to keep you on the right track, to keep you close to Jesus. Make sure you wear the medal. I encourage you to take it home, to wear it every day.

(A question). We know that at the moment of the Crucifixion, it says, "From that hour on the disciple took her into his home." The historians tell us that John eventually moved to Ephesus, over in modern-day Turkey, and Mary lived there as well, and spent the rest of her life there. As far as we know, she lived a very

quiet life. People probably came to visit her, and ask her questions. John and Luke probably interviewed her about the Gospels, and that's where they got some of their stories from. We don't have any record of her doing any public preaching, or any miracles.

(A question). Yes, there are records of Mary Magdalene going to France, and there's a church built over the spot where Mary Magdalene had lived as well.

Realize that it's not just Catholics that have special love for Mary, but many Protestants do as well. The most beautiful book written about the Rosary was by a Methodist minister, J. Neville Ward. It's called Five for Sorrow, Ten for Joy. Also, John Wesley, who founded the Methodist religion, on his deathbed was praying the Rosary. One of the other Protestants, named Zwingli, honored Mary. Martin Luther had devotion to our Blessed Mother, and wrote beautifully about her Magnificat. He also said that if Our Lady were to enter Jerusalem today, in a golden chariot, drawn by 4,000 horses, it would not be honor enough to honor "she who bore the Son of God in her womb." Isn't that a beautiful thing? That was from Martin Luther. Even Calvin called Mary his "Spiritual Mother." Something also to remember is that when Mary was looking for a place to give birth to Jesus, when people turned away Mary, at the inn, they also turned away from Christ. We don't want to turn away from our Blessed Mother. We want to accept her as our own Spiritual Mother. We know that she is the infallible way to getting closer to Jesus.