

U.S. PROVINCE OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE SACRED HEARTS OF JESUS AND MARY

HEARTS ON FIRE

OCTOBER 2026

ISSUE 6



Festa de Nossa Senhora Dos Anjos | The Feast of Our Lady of the Angels

ARTICLES IN THIS NEWSLETTER:

MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

BY VERY REV. FR. LANE AKIONA, SS.CC.
PROVINCIAL

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING

BR. EMMANUELLE DEL
CASTILLO, SS.CC.

MARY, MY NEVER FAILING MOTHER

BY BR. MARK MAKASINI, SS.CC.

CALLED TO BE MARIAN PRIESTS AND BROTHERS

BY FR. JOHN SAWCHENKO, SS.CC.

HISTORY COMPLETING

BY FR. MIKE BARRY, SS.CC.

MOST ATTENTIVE AND LOVING MOTHER

BY FR. BILL GURAL, SS.CC.

THE QUEST FOR RELATIONAL MARY

BY FR. DAVID LUPO, SS.CC.

A MOTHER'S LOVE

BY FR. SEMISI PULOTU, SS.CC.

OUR LOVING MAMA MARY

BY SR. LUCIA BARLA, FS

THE QUIET APPEAL OF MOTHER MARY

BY STEPHANY REH

HUMOR FROM THE HEARTS



FR. BILL GURAL, SS.CC.
EDITOR



OUR LADY OF VLADIMIR (OR THE TENDER VIRGIN) BYZANTINE ART, 1130 AD

MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

BY VERY REV. FR. LANE AKIONA, SS.CC.
PROVINCIAL U.S. PROVINCE OF SACRED HEARTS
OF JESUS AND MARY

"Theotokos" is a title referred to Mary as "God Bearer" from the ancient Greek term. This title does not mean Mary existed before God or created the divine nature since mothers give birth to whole persons, not abstract natures. Mary bore Jesus physically, who is the eternal second person, rightfully she is referred to as the 'God bearer'. In Luke 1:43, Elizabeth calls Mary "mother of my Lord" in the context that signifies God. The Council of Ephesus officially affirmed this title in 431 A.D. to protect the core Christian belief that Jesus's divine and human natures are completely united. During the months of May and October we pray for Mary's intercession as a reminder she is our 'Mother' Mary, Mother of God, pray for us.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING

BY BR. EMMANUELLE DEL
CASTILLO, SS.CC.

When disaster is about to strike, and you have time to grab only a few things, what would you take?

On August 8, 2023, my dad had to fight his way past his coworkers in order to reach my mom at the place they were renting. As my dad drove into the parking space, my mother was already waiting outside. The two of them went inside the house. My mother pointed, and my dad responded. What went into the truck before their landlord screamed at them to escape? A crucifix gifted to them by an important friend, a Sacred Heart statue that had been in the family since before I was born, and a statue of Our Lady of Lourdes that had been entrusted to my mom by a former parishioner of Maria Lanakila.

In all honesty, I did make fun of my parents for what they chose to grab out of all the things they could have taken. In December of that same year, as I visited my brother's house, there those items sat among my brother's family pictures. They caught my eye: remnants of memories that had survived. I stood there for a while and thought about how faith has always been one of the most important parts of my parents' lives. Both of my parents prayed the Rosary. My mother would make me pray it with her when I was a child, while my father would pray it during his breaks at work.

Seeing Our Lady brought back memories from my own past. Growing up, I attended Sacred Hearts Mission Church in Kapalua, Maui. I remember a woman named Henrietta Mahuna, a relative of Lane Akiona, who led the Hawaiian Choir. One of the hymns they would often sing on Sundays was called Hawaiian Madonna. As a child, I may not have completely understood the significance of the words or why devotion to Mary meant so much to the people around me. Yet those memories remained: the music, the Rosary, the statues, and the quiet devotion of people I knew.



Devotion to our Blessed Mother can begin at any time. Now, as a religion teacher, part of my task is to teach about that devotion. One of those lessons involved teaching my students how to make a rosary as their final project. I was overwhelmed by how receptive most of my students were. As one of them commented, "The mornings at church are something I look forward to, especially the Rosary. It helps me focus back on God and the things I need to do." To give them something tangible that they could use in the future was a gift they appreciated. Some even made multiple rosaries for their friends.

It is through her loving presence that our Mother brings us closer to Jesus, closer to God. I know that, for some, it may seem rather rude of me to have made fun of my parents' decision that day. Expressions of devotion come in different ways. For my parents, the devastation of that day would have been even worse if all had been lost. Having their faith at the center of our family life is the most important thing to them, more important than money or material possessions.

MARY, MY NEVER FAILING MOTHER

BY BR. MARK MAKASINI, SS.CC.



Madonna and Child, Sacred Heart Cathedral, Suva Fiji

When I entered the seminary, Mary was mostly a theological figure to me. I knew the doctrines but had not encountered her heart. That changed when I needed her most. During formation, I lost both my parents, first my mother, then my father. I felt orphaned and my prayer life collapsed. I sat in the chapel numb and angry, questioning everything. God felt silent. It was then that Mary became my Mother.

I would sit before her statue and weep, not needing words. She understood. She watched her son suffer and die. She held his lifeless body. She knew loss, but she also knew how to trust God in the darkness, to say yes even when it led to Calvary. I began to speak to her simply. "Mother Mary, I miss my mother and father, please be my Mother now." I believe she heard me. She did not remove the grief; she gave me grace to endure it, strength to continue saying yes to my vocation when I wanted to run.

For a seminarian, Mary is not just a model. She is a blueprint. My journey to priesthood is a series of yeses and now, trusting God even through loss. When Jesus gave Mary to John at the cross, He gave her to all His disciples. I, who have lost my earthly parents, have found in her a Mother who will never leave me. She is my model of faith, my teacher of hope, my icon of love. My yes is a small echo of hers. I place my journey in her hands. She never fails to lead her children to her Son.

CALLED TO BE MARIAN PRIESTS AND BROTHERS

BY FR. JOHN SAWCHENKO, SS.CC.

In 2012 I went on a pilgrimage to Europe with my mom and two friends. One of our stops was Medjugorje, where there have been ongoing reports of apparitions of Our Lady. I didn't know what to expect, and wondered if I would perhaps have an apparition of my own or if perhaps something miraculous would happen. The first night, I woke up from sleep and went out onto the terrace of the hotel to pray. I was struck with a beautiful awareness of the power of saying one Hail Mary, more than ever before; I suddenly believed so strongly in the power of asking Mary to pray for all the souls in this world at the hour of their death.

That has stayed with me until today. The next day we went to Mass and an Irish priest preached on the Eucharist, declaring to us that the Eucharist was itself love. That stayed with me from his homily. Later evening I went to confession, without choosing the priest, I just happened to end up in the confessional of that same Irish priest.

He spoke to me of the love of Mary and I asked him if he was a Marian priest, and he said: 'Sort of, I belong to a Congregation called the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary.' His name was Father John Leahy SS.CC. I told him I had been discerning with the Congregation through Father Mike Barry, whom he delighted in sharing with me was his friend. It was no coincidence I ended up in His confessional. He was one of the only two priests in Medjugorje who spoke English at that time. I told him when I got back to the states I would look into the Congregation more deeply.

Medjugorje is a controversial place but for me it was an essential piece to the puzzle which led to my vocation as an SS.CC., and I have Our Lady of Peace to ultimately thank for that. And Father John, who has since gone to the Lord, God rest his soul. He reminds me that as an SS.CC. we are called also to be Marian priests and brothers. I feel Our Lady calling me to revisit Medjugorje some day soon.

Fr. John Sawchenko, SS.CC.
Asst. Novice Master (Socius)

HISTORY COMPLETING

BY FR. MIKE BARRY, SS.CC.

It is often said that history repeats itself. History completes itself and it is ever true in the foundation of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts. It is best understood and comprehended if one has recourse to the German "*Sitz em leben*" - which means the life setting.

In 1673 at Paray la Monial Jesus appeared to St. Margaret Mary Alogue and said "Behold this Heart which has loved men so much and received nothing but coldness and rejection". Immediately spirituality of the love of the Sacred Heart emerged. There are two saints who lived at that time who promoted spiritualities of Jesus and Mary. St. Louis de Montfort, who went in different directions. St. Louis de Montfort who promoted the Sacred Heart devotion and then changed to Marian devotion, famous for the thirty days consecration. In the 1600's St. John Eudes lived, and he promoted Marian devotion only to change to devotion to the Sacred Heart. Seemingly opposites attract but confusion remained. Which is which and what is what.

Then around the same lapse of time passed and the French Revolution happened and time completed the confusion. Father Marie Joseph Coudrin and Mother Aymer de la Chevalerie, again opposites. One had nobility and the other had peasant birth, that is Pierre Coudrin, who founded the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary; they both were devoted to the love in both hearts, of Jesus and Mary. A miracle waiting to happen in the fullness of time. It had what St. Louis de Montfort had, but more. Likewise, it had what St. John Eudes had, but more.

Time completes. It is not chronological but "Kairos" time and that is God's time. What seemed a holy and sacred foundation in both saints is completed about a hundred years later. Its charism comprises both saints which is "the love in the heart of Jesus as living in the heart of Mary; so history completes."

Fr. Mike Barry, ss.cc.
President, Chairman and Founder of
Mary's Mercy Center
Healing Ministry



Fr. Mike is leading a Rosary Crusade at Damien High School Oct. 17th.

MOST ATTENTIVE AND LOVING MOTHER

BY FR. BILL GURAL, SS.CC.

I am a convert to Catholicism later in life, so I have had much to learn about the faith, and especially about our Blessed Mother Mary.

At a Protestant theological school, discerning about entering into the Catholic Church, I asked one of my classmates, a former Catholic, about the Catholic faith. She told me she missed the BVM. I asked what (who) is the BVM. For me, Mary was a person of the Bible, whom we would focus on only during Advent and Christmas. Yes, the mother of Jesus, but I didn't know her as the Mother of God, the Queen of Heaven, the greatest of the disciples and the most powerful intercessor of the saints, let alone my own mother whom I could trust and share with, and count on to help me.

As a new Catholic, I was on a weeklong discernment visit with the Trappists of St. Joseph's Abbey in Spencer, MA. I remember standing in my prayer stall as Compline (Night prayer) was concluding, and the monks beautifully singing *Salve Regina*. I didn't understand most of the words, but I felt the love and holiness.



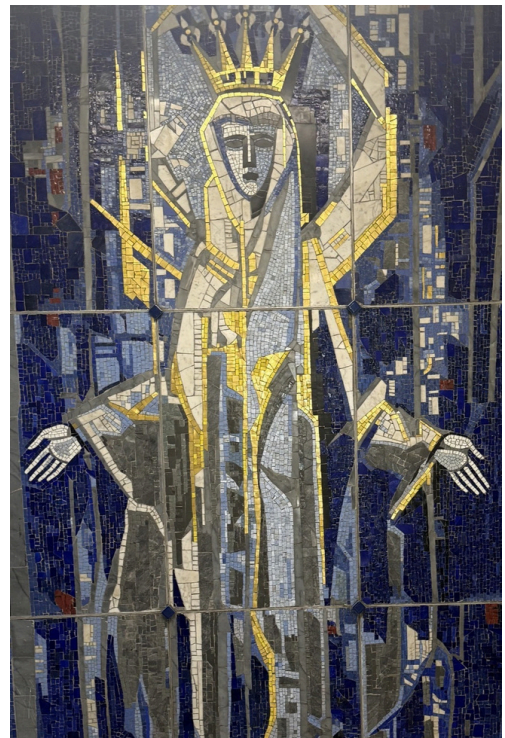
Our Lady and Her Son at St. Joseph Abbey chapel,
Spencer, MA

Learning about our Lady from the Montfort Fathers, the La Salettes, and lay people praying the Rosary, I felt the presence of Our Lady sustaining and helping me as I was adjusting to a new life, and discerning God's call. I felt myself drawn to grottos, their peacefulness, and place of encounter with Mary.

It was touching for me in midst of the newness and challenges of my novitiate a few years later in Hawaii to sing together the Salve Regina, which nurtured my understanding and love the blessed Virgin Mary, and affirmed my vocation.

Serving in Texas and Southern California, I have witnessed the amazing love of Our Lady of Guadalupe. So beautiful to see their smile when they receive a prayer card of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and to witness their trust and joy in her!

I was recently serving at Queen of the Valley hospital in W. Covina, CA, (and also in parishes), I have been touched by people singing Marian hymns after the mass. How beautiful that people at the hospital find solace and peace in the chapel dedicated to Mary. A mosaic of her welcomes people outside chapel and assures them she is watching over the hospital.



Queen of the Valley, W. Covina, CA

How blessed our founders gave us the name of both of the hearts, realizing Mary's heart is entwined with her son's! "Our great devotion to the Queen of Virgins, to whom we owe so many great benefits makes us want to appropriate other feasts ... to her honor." -The Good Father. Fr. Alberto explains that Mother Henriette accepted God's overwhelming love for her after contemplating the pierced heart of Jesus and the obedient heart of Mary. The Good Mother writes about the two hearts: "Calm down and believe asylum cannot be found outside the divine heart of Jesus." and "Take courage, place yourself in hands of the Blessed Virgin and you will find peace again, peace with God, the only true happiness, peace with yourself, peace with your neighbor..."

Especially as my own mother has passed, and hungering for solace, I have been blessed by a more personal relationship with Blessed Mother Mary, to whom I can cry and entrust my trials and sorrows, knowing she understands and that she will bring the pains, petitions, and joys of my heart to her beloved Son Jesus.

By Fr. Bill Gural, ss.cc.
Hospital chaplain, and supply priest

THE QUEST FOR RELATIONAL MARY

BY FR. DAVID LUPO, SS.CC.



Notre Dame et Son Fils, late 19th c. Haiti

When I was a child, my parents did not have the means to send my two brothers and me to Catholic school. As a result, we never obtained a strong Catholic faith formation. We went to public schools from kindergarten to 12th grade. We were released early on Tuesday afternoon to walk down to St. Anthony School for “catechism classes”. Unlike my peers who went to that school daily, I never developed a deep understanding of the Blessed Mother.

We were an average Catholic family. If dad needed the car for work on Sunday, my brothers, my mother, and I would walk to church, about a mile away. On Sunday, we would often visit my maternal grandparents, who had a deep Catholic faith. Every day, they prayed the rosary together on their knees in their bedroom below pictures of the Sacred Heart and the Immaculate Heart.

After college, I joined the Sacred Hearts Community. I decided to be a religious priest rather than do parish work in my home Diocese of Albany. I noticed the Community’s connection between Mary and Jesus, which brought meaning to my grandparents’ pictures.

Despite my Catholic college, pre-novitiate and novitiate in the Community, and theological education at Washington Theological Union, I still had not developed an affective connection to Mary, Mother of God. I seemed more like a Protestant! After WTU, I began to see Mary as a contemplative woman who “pondered all these things in her heart” (Luke 2:19). This understanding stayed with me for a long time.

It was biblical, and I derive deep waters from Sacred Scripture. It was an understanding that motivated me to become more contemplative, a real challenge for someone who has ADD!

Through the years of my life, there have been stories here and there, tales of Marian apparitions, reports about statues of Mary crying. I never believed any of it. I said that if there were ever a news article about a Marian statue breaking into a big smile, I would believe it. Weeping Mary statues are a turn-off.

I have a hard time praying the Rosary alone. I get distracted with this or that. I much prefer praying it in a group setting. During the weeks of Easter, I even pray the Rosary with parishioners in Portuguese (using liturgy aids) at their celebration of the Coroa (Mary’s Crown).

This has raised the question of Mary in popular piety. At my previous ministry placement, St. Mary’s Parish in Fairhaven, we have a large statue of Our Lady of the Angels, brought here in 1936. It was fashioned in Porto, Portugal, and has its basis in a popular devotion to her in the Azores. Every year, there is a festa in her honor near the parish.

A few years ago, I began to see Mary as Mater et Magistra (Mother and Teacher), teaching her son his faith, the Torah, an image still holding that element of being a Contemplative woman. But that rendition was still too passive. What did she do after Jesus and Joseph were no longer around? If she bolted from home to check on Elizabeth when they were both pregnant many years before, I doubt she just stayed at home, even in Ephesus, with the Beloved Disciple.

No. She moved among the people. From her Magnificat came a mission. Mary and popular piety go hand in hand. I have just started reading a book titled Mary: Shadow of Grace by Megan McKenna. The author shares much about Our Lady of Guadalupe, and how the building of the church there was the fulfillment of the Magnificat, revealing the authenticity of this apparition.

Well, the quest continues, and the realization now, like the “Quest for Historical Jesus”, is that the destination is much larger and more of an adventure than I had believed at the outset.

A MOTHER'S LOVE

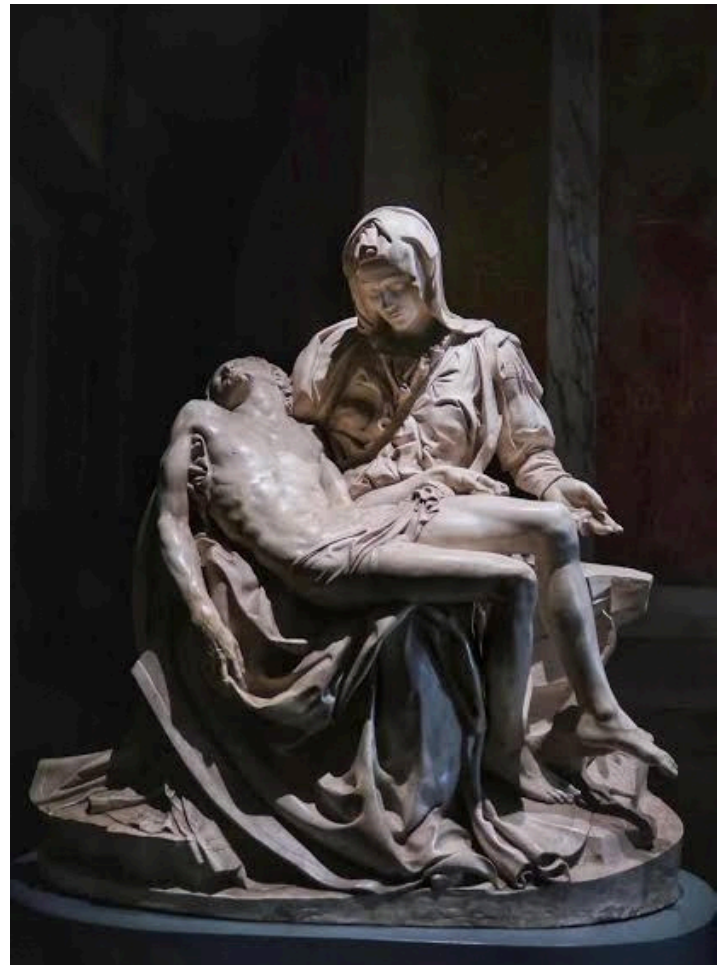
BY FR. SEMISI PULOTU, SS.CC.

"If your desire is to serve, then take the example of Mary and enter the mystery of the Lord's love – penetrate it, live by it. Rooted and grounded in love, ..." (Rule of Life # 80)

Please allow me to share my relationship with Mary through a relationship that I know best. A bond so strong and firm that it has been a foundation of my vocation. From a young age, my relationship with my mother has been one of my sources of motivation and has guided me safely out of paths that would have led me to destruction. While my mother was loving, kind, selfless, and prayerful, she was also fierce and strong; she stood up for what she believed in and, above all, would not hesitate to discipline her children with the help of whatever she could find.

Due to how strong my love and relationship with my mother is, I went down the wrong path of putting a limitation on women that I respect, even believing that my mother was the only one who deserves my respect and love; other women did not deserve that; moreover; the love I receive from my mother was enough and didn't care about how other women viewed me. Thankfully, my mother continues to guide me and does not hesitate to introduce me to people in my life who also became mother figures to me.

For me, the relationship I have with my mother reflects very well my relationship with Mary, especially in how Mary helps and brings me closer to Christ. Because of my relationship with my mother, it was always easier for me to seek the intercession of the Blessed Mother (like most of us). When I was in need of anything, my mother was usually the one I asked first; when I see someone in need, I hear the voice of my mother making sure I lend a helping hand. Therefore, the transition to hearing my mother in Mary's voice was a transition that I did not struggle with. But it was one that helped me so much not only in my vocation but most definitely in my life in general.



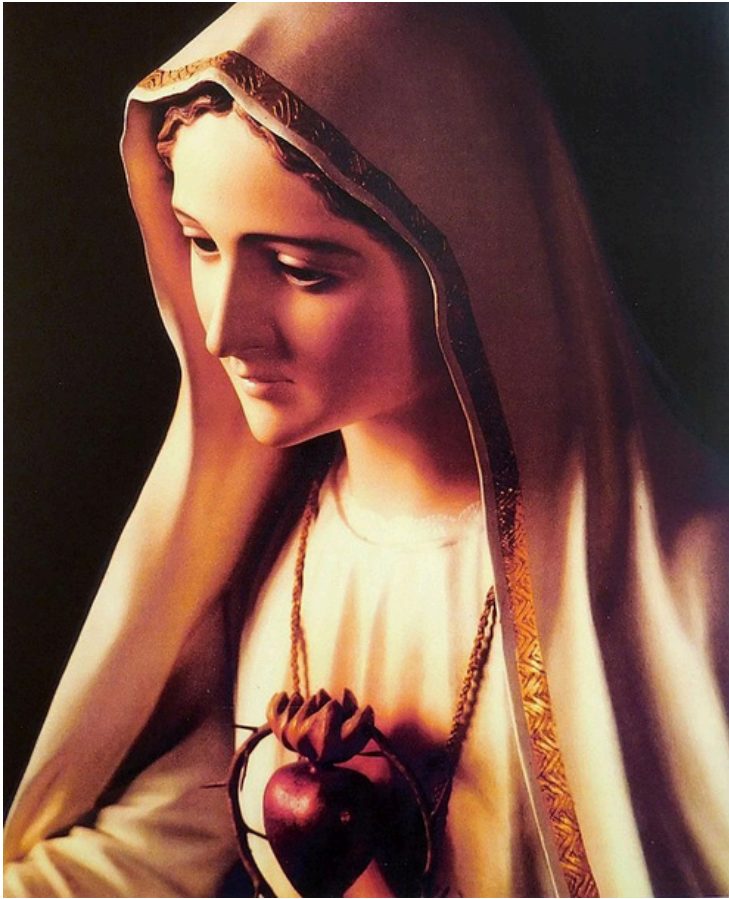
la Pietà by Michelangelo

Mary taught me how to be humble, how to endure the pain for the sake of others. She taught me the importance of being aware of the needs of those who need our help. My mother loved me when I was an obedient son, but even more when I was not. She taught me how to love and how to forgive and even to pray for those who offended me. Like our Blessed Mother, even though she has been taken "up to heaven she did not lay aside this saving office but, by her manifold intercession, continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation ..." CCC #969. Mary, my mother, and all the mother figures in my life showed me that the ultimate expression of love was to be of service to those in need.

May we continue to seek the intercession of the Blessed Mother, who stays to intercede for us; moreover, may all the MOTHERS in our lives continue to be a great reflection of the Sacred Heart of Mary for us as they continue to pray for us.

OUR LOVING MAMA MARY

BY SR. LUCIA BARLA, FS



When we speak about Mother Mary, we are speaking about a Mother who is close to every one of us. For me, Mary is not only the Mother of Jesus; she is our loving Mama Mary, who walks with us, listens to us, comforts us and gently leads us towards her Son, Jesus Christ. Her life is a beautiful example of faith, humility, courage, obedience and unconditional love. Mary was chosen by God to become the Mother of His Son, Jesus. She humbly accepted God's plan with her loving "Yes." She remained faithful to God throughout her life—from the joy of Bethlehem to the sorrow of Calvary. She stood beside Jesus in His suffering and remained faithful even when she did not understand everything. Her life teaches us to trust God's plan with a courageous heart.

My devotion to Mary is expressed especially through the **Holy Rosary, Marian prayers, May devotions and meditation on her life.** The Rosary helps me to remain close to Jesus through Mary. As I pray the mysteries of the Rosary, I learn from her humility, silence, patience and complete trust in God. The Church lovingly calls Mary by many beautiful titles:

Mother of God, Mother of the Church, Queen of Heaven, Queen of Peace, Help of Christians, Our Lady of Fatima, Our Lady of Lourdes, Star of the Sea and Cause of Our Joy. Each title reminds us of a different aspect of her loving presence and her mission of bringing us closer to God.

Mary's love is gentle, compassionate and selfless. She cares for her children on earth, especially those who are suffering, discouraged or searching for hope. Like a loving mother, she invites us to bring our joys, struggles and dreams to God. Her kindness teaches us to become more loving and compassionate towards others. Mary inspires me to say **"Yes" to God every day**, even when His plan is difficult to understand. Her humility teaches me to serve without seeking recognition. Her courage teaches me not to give up in difficult moments. Her faith reminds me that God is always faithful.

For me, Mary is a powerful spiritual help because she teaches us to fight our struggles through faith, prayer and trust in God. The Holy Rosary is a powerful prayer that helps me remain close to Jesus and overcome fear, discouragement and temptation. Mary never keeps us for herself; she always points us towards Jesus. Mary's greatest desire is to bring every person closer to her Son. At Cana, she directed the servants towards Jesus: **"Do whatever He tells you."** These words are also her message to us today. When we follow Mary, we learn to listen to Jesus, trust Him and live according to His teachings. Our Lady of Fatima teaches us to treasure silence and prayer, to listen more attentively to God's voice, and to respond generously to His invitations. Her example inspires us to live our life with deeper faith, greater simplicity and renewed missionary zeal. Her loving presence guides us and helps us to become, wherever we are sent, women of prayer, women of compassion and women who bring Christ's peace to others. She is a precious gift from God. I may not always have the right words to express my love for her, but I know that I can always turn to her as my heavenly Mother. I want to walk with her, learn from her and remain faithful to Jesus.

—Sr. Lucia Barla, FS
Principal of St. Damien School staying in the
Dangadighila community.

THE QUIET APPEAL OF MOTHER MARY

BY STEPHANY REH

A MEMBER OF SECULAR BRANCH
AND PAST COORDINATOR FOR WEST
REGION SECULAR BRANCH OF SS.CC.



I have to confess that as a little girl, I didn't give much thought to the Blessed Virgin Mary—beyond the May crowning in grammar school and other special days like that. When I was about twelve, my mom converted to Catholicism. From then on, we began saying the rosary together as a family every night after dinner.

I didn't realize how deeply the rosary had become part of us until one evening when Mom had to rush Dad to the hospital with a suspected heart attack. One of my older brothers gathered us in the kitchen to pray the rosary. We were all so scared. Thankfully, what we thought was a heart attack turned out to be a gallbladder attack, and Dad recovered. The nightly family rosaries continued.

Years later, when I had my first child, I found myself turning to Mary for help. Becoming a parent for the first time is intimidating—you suddenly realize how unprepared you are for the responsibility. In that moment, it struck me what tremendous faith Mary needed to say "yes" to what the Lord was asking of her. She may have been born without sin, but she was not God. She was being asked to bring the Savior of the world into human history. That realization put my own life in perspective and made her far more relatable to me. I began to appeal to her for help through those joyous yet challenging moments of parenting.

Over the years, that quiet appeal has grown into a steady companionship. In the ordinary struggles and unexpected graces of raising children and now seeing my grandchildren, I keep discovering that Mary understands a mother's heart—its hopes, its fears, and its fierce love. Turning to her does not take away the difficulties, but it anchors me in the same trust she showed at the Annunciation. For that gift, and for the simple family rosaries that first opened the door to her, I remain deeply grateful.

"She (Mary) is his handmaid in the most intimately personal way, since, bringing to man's salvation her free faith and obedience.....

**The heart of the Virgin Mary is totally in accord with Christ's: that is why we view them together, uniting them in the same love and making one consecration of ourselves to both of them. This consecration, 'which is the foundation of our Institute' (Fr. Coudrin)"
Rule of Life, 78.**

HUMOR FROM THE HEARTS

Growth in Prayers

At Our Lady of Fatima parish, José and Debbie Alfama were having a difficult time at the vigil Mass with their little son, Bobby. He ran up and down the aisles, threw his toys at a few members of the congregation, screeched loudly during Fr. Saramago's homily, slapped the heads of the elderly people sitting ahead of him, and made a nuisance of himself. When he tried to take some money from the collection basket, his father, Jose, had it. He growled, and picked up his son and walked briskly towards the main doors. The last noise anyone heard was little Bobby shouting, "Pray for me! Pray for me!"



A Star Wars joke

Darth Vader appears to Luke Skywalker: "Luke, Luke" Darth Vader says to him with his deep raspy voice. "I know what you are getting for Christmas."

Luke responds, "How would you know?"
Darth tells him: "I have felt your presents."

Different Reactions

During a Eucharistic Congress, a number of priests from different orders are gathered in a church for Vespers. While they are praying, a fuse blows and all the lights go out.

The Benedictines continue praying from memory, without missing a beat.

The Jesuits begin to discuss whether the blown fuse means they are dispensed from the obligation to pray Vespers.

The Franciscans compose a song of praise for God's gift of darkness.

The Dominicans revisit their ongoing debate on light as a signification of the transmission of divine knowledge.

The Carmelites fall into silence and slow, steady breathing.

The parish priest, who is hosting the others, goes to the basement and replaces the fuse.



"WE PREACH **LOVE**"

SSCC. Rule of life

2150 DAMIEN AVE., LA VERNE, CA 91750

909-593-5441

INFOSSCCUS@GMAIL.COM