

SUNDAY *to* SUNDAY

Motherhood and the Gift of the Rite for the Blessing of a Child in the Womb

by Norma Montenegro Flynn

The month of May, dedicated to Mary, Mother of Jesus, also celebrates the joy of motherhood. Mother's Day is a special day when we cherish the precious gift of life, the life we receive from our mothers and the life we give to our children. Last year's was particularly special to me as an expectant mother.

Feeling my baby kicking in my womb brought me a feeling of joy like I had never felt before. Feeling my baby so full of life made me appreciate even more the precious gift of human life as a gift from God, a life that begins in the womb and that must be protected and respected in society. My husband and I found in the *Rite for the Blessing of a Child in the Womb* an abundance of prayers and blessings to accompany our baby during gestation and before Baptism. It was a way to lead him into our Catholic faith from his early weeks of life, or "an opportunity of first evangelization."

The *Rite for the Blessing of a Child in the Womb* can be done by a priest or deacon and is available in English and Spanish. The rite opens with readings of the Visitation, the Annunciation, the prophecy of Sarah's conception of Isaac, or other similar readings. It includes a blessing for the mother to "grant her comfort in all anxiety and make her determined to lead her child along the ways of salvation," the text reads. And there is a blessing for the father to "grant him courage in this new responsibility, and make him an example of justice and truth for this child." An excerpt of the blessing reads:

God, author of all life,
 bless, we pray, this unborn child;
 give constant protection
 and grant a healthy birth
 that is the sign of our rebirth one day
 into the eternal rejoicing of heaven.

This blessing represents a wonderful opportunity, through prayer, to connect with the unborn child, not only if one is close or distant from God, but also for those who seek blessings for their unborn child or for those who may face health challenges during their pregnancies. After my child was blessed, a feeling of peace and serenity came into my heart for the weeks that followed. It was a reminder that God was watching over us. Our baby was born less than three weeks later and has been the greatest blessing in our lives.

Norma Montenegro Flynn is assistant director of Media Relations at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. This article first appeared on the USCCBlog.



CNS photo/Bob Roller

"God's parental tenderness can also be expressed by the image of motherhood, which emphasizes God's immanence, the intimacy between Creator and creature" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 239).

SUNDAY *to* SUNDAY

Mater Admirabilis

by Rev. Larry Rice, CSP

A few years ago, I went with my parents on a tour of Rome. My mother, a student of history, was fascinated by the ancient ruins and historic churches. But one little-known site on her list of things to see made the trip a true pilgrimage. My mother was intent on finding the Mater Admirabilis.

In the year 1844, a young French novice of the Religious of the Sacred Heart began a painting of the Virgin Mary in a niche in the order's Trinità dei Monti convent, at the top of the Spanish Steps in Rome. After laboring over the fresco for many months, Sr. Pauline Perdrau concluded that her artistic efforts were disappointing. Her mother superior hid the fresco behind a curtain.

The legend says that in October, two years later, Pope Pius IX visited Trinità dei Monti. During a tour, the curious pope looked behind the curtain, and exclaimed, "Mater admirabilis!" at the fresco, which had been miraculously transformed into a beautiful work of art.

The fresco depicts Our Lady seated on a simple wooden chair, with a lily in a vase on her right and a distaff on her left. She has a spindle in her lap and a basket of books at her feet. The serene icon shows Mary as one balancing work and contemplation, learning and reflection. Like many such icons, favors and miraculous healings have been reported by those who have venerated the image and prayed for Mary's intercession. Although not on the Church's universal calendar, the Feast of the Mother Most Admirable is often observed on October 20.

My pilgrimage to the Mater Admirabilis was brought about by my own mother, who was educated by the



Religious of the Sacred Heart in St. Louis, Missouri. It has been the custom of that order to place a representation of the Mater Admirabilis in all their classrooms and convents, to inspire their charges to seek that same admirable balance of work and prayer.

Fr. Rice is the vocations director for the Paulist Fathers. Copyright © 2015, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. All rights reserved.

St. Isidore the Farmer, 1070-1130

May 15

A humble peasant born near Madrid, Spain, Isidore married and worked the same fields all his life. The couple was said to have lived celibately after their young son died. Always devout, Isidore visited church on his way to work, prayed while plowing, and made local pilgrimages. Legends associate him with miraculous feedings of birds and a crowd of poor men. He was canonized in the august company of Ignatius Loyola, Francis Xavier, Teresa of Avila, and Philip Neri.

Frequently Asked Questions About The Blessed Virgin Mary

Why does Mary have a special role in helping us?

As the Mother of God, the Virgin Mary has a unique position among the saints, indeed, among all creatures. She is exalted, yet still one of us.

Redeemed by reason of the merits of her Son and united to Him by a close and indissoluble tie, she is endowed with the high office and dignity of being the Mother of the Son of God, by which account she is also the beloved daughter of the Father and the temple of the Holy Spirit. Because of this gift of sublime grace she far surpasses all creatures, both in heaven and on earth. At the same time, however, because she belongs to the offspring of Adam she is one with all those who are to be saved.

Mary embraces God's will and freely chooses to cooperate with God's grace, thereby fulfilling a crucial role in God's plan of salvation. Throughout the centuries, the Church has turned to the Blessed Virgin in order to come closer to Christ. Many forms of piety toward the Mother of God developed that help bring us closer to her Son. In these devotions to Mary, "while the Mother is honored, the Son, through whom all things have their being and in whom it has pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell, is rightly known, loved and glorified and . . . all His commands are observed."³³ The Church honors her as the Mother of God, looks to her as a model of perfect discipleship, and asks for her prayers to God on our behalf.

How does our veneration of Mary and the saints relate to our worship of God?

The honor we give to God alone is properly called adoration, the highest honor we can give. The honor we give to Mary and the saints is called veneration. Proper veneration of the saints does not interfere with the worship due to God, but rather fosters it. "Our communion with those in heaven, provided that it is understood in the fuller light of faith according to its



genuine nature, in no way weakens, but conversely, more thoroughly enriches the laudatory worship we give to God the Father, through Christ, in the Spirit."

With this understanding, we see that proper veneration of Mary does not detract from worship of God. Even as the Mother of the Savior, Mary has a place that is in every way subordinate to and dependent upon that of her Son, who is the one mediator between God and humanity. The maternal role that Mary fulfills toward us as Mother of the Church "in no way obscures or diminishes this unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows His power."

Continued on page 9