

The Blessed Virgin Mary

"She is the flower of the field from whom bloomed the precious lily of the valley. Through her birth the nature inherited from our first parents is changed."

- St. Augustine, when speaking of Mary

"Lord our God, when your Son was dying on the altar of the cross, he gave us as our mother the one he had chosen to be his own mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary; grant that we who call upon the holy name of Mary, our mother, with confidence in her protection may receive strength and comfort in all our needs."

- Mass for the Holy Name of the Blessed Virgin Mary, from the Marian Sacramentary.

"At the cross her station keeping,
Stood the mournful mother weeping,
Close to Jesus to the last.
Through her heart, his sorrow sharing,
All his bitter anguish bearing,
Now at length the sword has passed."

- *Stabat Mater*, a thirteenth-century Latin hymn



The Seven Sorrows of Our Lady

(shown in the picture above, starting from the bottom left corner):

1. at the prophecy of Simeon;
2. at the flight into Egypt;
3. having lost the Holy Child at Jerusalem;
4. meeting Jesus on his way to Calvary;
5. standing at the foot of the Cross;
6. Jesus being taken from the Cross;
7. at the burial of Christ.

While the months of May and October are traditionally devoted to the Blessed Virgin Mary in a special way, the month of September contains several great Marian feasts as well. These feasts include the Birth of Mary on September 8, the Holy Name of Mary on September 12, and Our Lady of Sorrows on September 15. We have feasts to honor Mary in order to study the lessons from her life, to thank God for the blessings He has granted through her, and to ask for her intercession.

The Church only celebrates three birthdays: that of Jesus on Christmas, that of John the Baptist on June 24, and that of Mary on September 8. Tradition has it that Mary's parents Joachim and Ann were of old age and had almost lost hope of having a child until God blessed them with the birth of their daughter. Both Nazareth and Jerusalem claim to be the birthplace of Mary; more important than location, however, is the joy of this feast. By a special grace of God, Mary was the only person conceived without original sin (we celebrate her Immaculate Conception on December 8); her birth was a wonderful step by God to prepare for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ into the world as a man. This joyful feast celebrates the nativity of Mary precisely because she would be the mother of Jesus, who came to bring salvation to humanity.

The feast of the Holy Name of Mary recalls the great victory of Christian forces defending Europe from the onslaught of the Turks. It was on September 12, 1683, that John Sobieski, the King of Poland, and his Christian army defeated a Muslim army that was besieging Vienna; had the Muslim army won, much of Eastern Europe would have been vulnerable to attack. Before the battle, the feast of the Holy Name of Mary had only been celebrated locally in Spain since 1513. When preparing to fight, Sobieski entrusted himself to the Blessed Virgin and sought her intercession. After winning the battle, Pope Innocent XI extended this feast to the entire Church as a way to thank

God for victory and to encourage the faithful to implore the Blessed Virgin for assistance with their needs.

The feast of the Holy Name of Mary is a counterpart to the feast of the Most Holy Name of Jesus, which is celebrated on January 3. It is because Mary is the mother of Jesus, the second Person of the Blessed Trinity, that her name, like His, is holy. As His mother and ours, Mary always intercedes with her son on our behalf.

On September 15 each year the Church remembers Mary under the title of Our Lady of Sorrows. The Servite Order took the devotion to Our Lady's sorrows as their principal devotion in 1239. However, this feast originated in the fifteenth century and was extended to the whole Western Church in 1727 with the title The Seven Sorrows. The number of the sorrows has varied throughout history; at first there were five sorrows to complement a popular devotion to the five joys of Mary. Over time though the number was fixed at seven.

The object or focus of this feast are the seven sorrowful events in Mary's life, each of which participates in the suffering of her son Jesus. Mary loved Jesus not just as her God but also as her son; thus her love for Jesus is the greatest possible love a soul can have for God. She experienced all the sufferings of Jesus in a way no one else could, as the mother of the one afflicted.

Let each of these September feasts inspire in you a desire to more perfectly imitate the Blessed Virgin Mary. We should be joyous on her birthday, we should always show reverence to her and to her name, and we should appreciate how greatly she suffered along with her son.

Goal for the month:

Meditate on the seven sorrows of Mary as revealed in Holy Scripture and on the many victories and the assistance attributed to her intercession. Pray to Our Lady, asking her to help you more fully appreciate that it was out of love for us that our Lord suffered and died.