





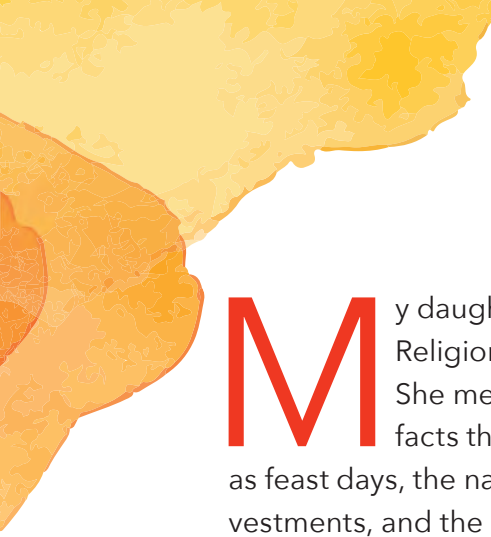
Deepen Devotion to Mary

BY LAURIE ZILIAK

"FACTS AND INFORMATION ARE
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My daughter won the school Religion Bee a few years ago. She memorized about 300 facts that covered items such as feast days, the names of specific liturgical vestments, and the structure of the hierarchy. She studied hard and obviously did well.

As the winner, she had the honor of crowning Mary during the May Crowning. She was also asked to write and share a reflection about her devotion to Mary. This was a challenge for her. In her preparations for the Religion Bee, she had memorized the Holy Days that honor Mary, the images of Mary such as Queen of Heaven, and the mysteries of the Rosary pertaining to the life of Mary. However, nothing in her preparations for the Religion Bee had done anything to foster a connection or devotion to Mary. Through the Religion Bee, my daughter had engaged in a significant experience of catechesis, but it was catechesis without evangelization.

Facts and information are important, but true evangelization engages both hearts and minds. During the month of May, Mary, the mother of Jesus, occupies a special place in the life of the Church. To foster a deeper devotion to Mary in children, consider incorporating multiple approaches to help them make connections between the facts and their own lives.





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Incorporate Marian Prayer

Spend time praying the Hail Mary. Many teachers and catechists successfully invite children to “take apart” the Lord’s Prayer and reflect on the meaning of each phrase, making connections to their own lives. Using the same approach with the Hail Mary over a period of time can be a powerful tool for reflection and personal prayer. Reflection can take the form of creating illustrations, rewriting in modern language, or even developing skits. Prayerfully considering the Hail Mary can help children to develop a special place in their heart for Mary.

Introduce other Marian prayers, such as Hail, Holy Queen or the *Memorare*, to your group. Invite the children to pray aloud with you, or read the prayer in phrases, leaving time between each for silent reflection. Incorporate these prayers frequently until the children become familiar with them.

Illustrate Mary’s Role

Any consideration of Marian prayer should be placed in context, especially for younger children. Though Mary has a special place of honor, Catholic Tradition does not equate Mary with God. Rather, she is the mother of God and, as such, leads us closer to Jesus. As we pray to Mary, we recognize her special relationship with Jesus and ask her to intercede for us.

Spend time exploring the idea of intercession with your group. Ask the children to reflect on times that people have helped them communicate with another person, be it a friend or a relative. Focus on the intercession of Mary by leading the group through an exploration of the Wedding at Cana (John 2:1-12). Point out how Mary facilitated the miracle by coming to Jesus with the problem and then telling the servers to listen to Jesus. Because of Mary’s intercession, Jesus turned water into wine. Help the children appreciate that Mary can intercede for us too.



Introduce Musical Versions of Marian Prayers

The texts of the *Hail Mary* (*Ave Maria*) and the *Magnificat* (*Mary's Song*, Luke 1:46–55) have been favorites of composers throughout the centuries.



Introduce different variations of the same text, ranging from the classical to the modern, such as Franz Biebl's "Ave Maria," Schubert's "Ave Maria," Sarah Hart's "My Soul Rejoices," Matt Maher's "Great Things," or Stronghold's "Let My Soul Proclaim."



Incorporating musical versions of Marian prayers into group prayer allows the children to hear these prayers as more than just words. Music can invite children to pray in ways beyond words. Introducing different musical settings of the same text can also allow the children to hear different emotional expressions and invite them to bring their own emotions to the musical expression of prayer. A link to all suggested music can be found at the end of this article.

Reflect on the Life of Mary

Lead the children through a reflection on the birth of Jesus or the Crucifixion, asking them to think about how Mary might have felt. For an active reflection, consider a specific Gospel account, such as the announcement of the birth of Jesus (Luke 1:26–38). Invite the children to retell or enact these moments from Mary's perspective.

There are many musical ways to engage in contemplation of Mary's life. "Breath of Heaven," by Amy Grant, and "Mary Did You Know?" (recorded by many artists, from Clay Aiken to Pentatonix) offer modern reflections of the life and experience of Mary. Offer these musical reflections, and ask the children to imagine themselves experiencing the events of Mary's life and to consider what their own reactions and emotions might be. For an older group, introduce songs that provide Mary's perspective. Invite the children to act out portions of these songs.



Imagine and Enact the Rosary

The Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary highlight significant events in Mary's life. Take time to explore each mystery with your group. Have the children enact and narrate in their own words each mystery. Consider devoting an entire week to the Joyful Mysteries, addressing one mystery each day. Conclude by praying a decade of the Rosary, or create a Living Rosary by inviting children to act out each of the Joyful Mysteries.



Integrate Art

Bring images of Mary into the classroom through icons, classical art, and statues. A video titled "Pictures of Mary" traces the portrayal of Mary throughout the centuries. Icons of Mary offer different perspectives on her life. Display multiple images of Mary, and ask the children to reflect on which one is most meaningful to them. Be intentional about bringing in images from many cultures, such as Native American Madonnas, Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mother of the Streets, or work by other cultural artists.

During the month of May, be intentional about creating a connection to Mary with your group. Move beyond titles and Feast Days for Mary, and take time to help the children begin to cultivate a true devotion to Mary, mother of God and mother to us all. ■

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