

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners... How often do we say these words without ever thinking about what they mean and the resulting implications for us in our own lives and in our personal relationship with God?

Holy Mary. Mary conceived without the stain of original sin. Mary who lived a life without sin; Mary, the virgin who gave birth to the Son of God, and still remained a virgin after the birth, even though she was married to Joseph. Mary who practiced her faith throughout her life, saying her daily prayers, worshiping in the Temple, and making pilgrimages to Jerusalem as required by the law. Mary, who did all of those ordinary, yet essential tasks of daily living; cooking, cleaning, caring for the house and her family to the best of her ability because holiness is found in the ordinary events of daily life.

Mother of God. She is the first Christian, the first tabernacle, the one who taught Jesus how to love as a human through the example of the love she had for Joseph and Joseph had for her. The Mother of God who named her child Yeshua, Jesus in English, which means 'God is salvation' in order to fulfill what the Prophet Isaiah foretold and the Angel Gabriel commanded to name him Emmanuel, a title which means 'God with us'.

The Mother of God who nursed Jesus, changed and washed his diapers, held his hand as he learned to walk. Mary, Mother of God, who along with Joseph and Jesus were refugees fleeing the terror unleashed by Herod as he slaughtered the Holy Innocents in order to maintain his grip on earthly power. The Mother of God, whom God made our Mother from his throne on the Cross. The Mother of God who stood at the foot of the Cross on Calvary and held her Son's broken and dead body in her arms.

Pray for us sinners. Pray for us, your broken children, pray for us, our Mother who's love for us is so great, so wonderful that it can only be exceeded by her Son's love for us.

Pray for us, your children who run hither and yon throughout our lives searching... Searching for happiness, searching for fulfillment, searching for contentment in our hearts, and thinking that we can do it on our own. In that search we may try frenetic parties, illicit sexual

liaisons, drugs, and drunkenness. We may think money, power, and success will fill our hearts. But all of these false gods that we end up worshiping disappoint. Some of us continue to separate ourselves from God, become more driven down the wrong path and self-destruct without ever finding what we are looking for.

Others, through her intercession, her prayers for us, figure it out. I remember struggling through St. Augustine's Confession and as I read a particular passage thinking, 'I was at that party!' St. Augustine, the one who prayed, "Our hearts are restless until they rest in you, O Lord." All the searching for happiness, searching for fulfillment, searching for contentment in our hearts, is a search for God in our lives. It is a universal human experience. Even the most hard-core atheists in our society are always asking for proof that they can accept within their world view that God exists.

We are sons and daughters of God. We are sons and daughters of Mary, the Mother of God. Just as there can only be one God, he can only have one mother. God formed us in our mother's womb, our souls; our existence is a gift from God. In giving us Mary as our mother, Jesus acknowledged and made known to us the fact that just as God is our Father, Brother, the Son and Mentor, the Holy Spirit, Mary is our mother because he is her child.

Archbishop Fulton Sheen expressed this point much better than I. He said; "If we have a box in which we keep our money, we know the one thing we must always give attention to is the key; we never think that the key is the money, but we know that without the key we cannot get into our money. The Mother of the Babe is like that key; without her we cannot get to Our Lord because He came through her.

She is not to be compared to Our Lord, for she is a creature and He is the Creator. But without her we could not understand how the Bridge was built between heaven and earth. As she formed Jesus in her body, so she forms Jesus in our souls. In this one Woman, virginity and motherhood are united, as if God willed to show that both are necessary for the world. Those things which are separated in other creatures are united in her. The Mother is the protector of the Virgin and the Virgin is also the inspiration of Motherhood."

The shepherds on that first Christmas night heard the message from the Angels, and saw the new born babe. Although it isn't recorded it is inconceivable that they did not speak with the Mary, the mother of the child. They had been told by the Angel that God now walked the earth as man, They saw the babe in the manger, wrapped in swaddling cloths, but to connect the dots, to truly believe, they required their hearts opened to the grace of conversion. A grace that can only come from the first person to follow Christ, Mary the Mother of God.