

MARY – OUR MOTHER

Have on hand: O.F.S. Rule

Our Opening Prayer:

A Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

“Hail, O Lady, Holy Queen, Mary, holy Mother of God, Who are the Virgin made Church, chosen by the most Holy Father in heaven whom he consecrated with His most holy beloved Son and with the Holy Spirit the Paraclete, in whom there was and is all fullness of grace and every good. Hail His Palace! Hail His Tabernacle! Hail His Dwelling! Hail His Robe! Hail His Servant! Hail His Mother! And hail all You holy virtues which are poured into the hearts of the faithful through the grace and enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, that from being unbelievers, You may make them faithful to God.”¹

Thomas of Celano writes about St. Francis: “He embraced the Mother of Jesus with inexpressible love, since she made the Lord of Majesty a brother to us. He honored her with his own Praises, poured out prayers to her, and offered her his love in a way that no human tongue can express. But what

gives us greatest joy is that he appointed her the Advocate of the Order, and placed under her wings the sons to be left behind, that she might protect and cherish them to the end. Oh Advocate of the Poor! Fulfill towards us your duty as protectress until the time set by the Father!”²

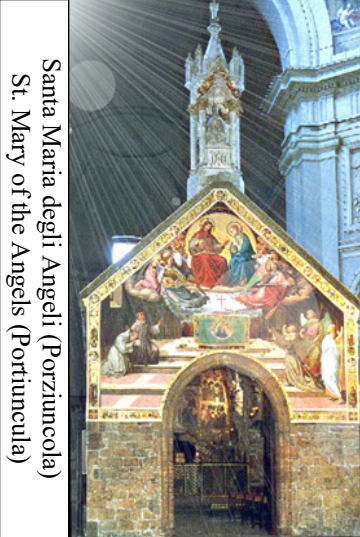
Someone should read from our *Rule*, Article #9.

In our *General Constitutions*, Article #16, we read: “1. *Rule 9*. Mary, Mother of Jesus, is the model of listening to the Word and of faithfulness to vocation; we, like Francis, see all the gospel virtues realized in her. The brothers and sisters should cultivate intense love for the Most Holy Virgin, imitation, prayer, and childlike surrender. They should manifest their own devotion with expressions of genuine faith, in forms accepted by the Church. 2. Mary is the model of fruitful and faithful love for the entire ecclesial community. Secular Franciscans and their fraternities should seek to live the experience of Francis, who made the Virgin the guide of his activity. With her, like the disciples at Pentecost, they should welcome the Spirit to create a community of love.”

Bonaventure writes of St. Francis’ love for Mary: “When he finally completed this church [San Pietro della Spina], he came to a place called the Portiuncula where there stood a church of the most Blessed Virgin Mother of God, built in ancient times but now deserted and no one was taking care of it. When the man of God saw it so abandoned, he began to stay there regularly in order to repair it, moved by the warm devotion he had toward the Lady of the world. Sensing that angels often visited there, according to the name of that church, which from ancient times was called Saint Mary of the Angels, he stayed there out of his reverence for the angels and his special love for the mother of Christ.”³

From studying and praying with the Gospels, which is our Franciscan way of life (that which we are to “live”), Francis learned everything he could. In this way, he learned much from and about Mary, namely her total surrender to the Father (the handmaid of the Lord), her style, her humility, her patience in trial, her long-suffering (Our Lady of Sorrows), her openness to the Holy Spirit, her trust, her being the woman of virtues.

St. Francis was always searching to partake of the richness of God’s love manifested in the Scriptures. He meditated on Mary’s many messages: e.g., (Luke 1:46-55) *The Canticle of Mary* (the Magnificat). How well he recalled her last recorded words to us at Cana (John 2:5): “His mother said to the servers, ‘Do whatever he tells you.’” He learned, as she did, that obedience leads to blessings.



Santa Maria degli Angeli (Portiuncola)
St. Mary of the Angels (Portiuncula)

Honoring Mary was not difficult to do – for if it were appropriate for God to honor Mary in so many ways, and it was, surely it is proper for us today – her brothers and sisters – to honor her as well. St. Francis deeply appreciated having such a Mother as model and guardian and advocate. He treasured those dedicatory words of Jesus on the cross to her and to us all. As John (19:25-27) stated: “Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, behold, your son.’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother.’ And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.”

We are encouraged that in the fullness of his prayers, St. Francis not only spoke to Mary, but also with Mary. When Francis contemplated Jesus, there was Mary with Him. In his three loves, with Jesus as the center of all three – Crib, Cross, Eucharist. [See Topics 1, 2, and 3: St. Francis’ Three Loves – the Crib – the Cross – the Eucharist.] Francis also saw Mary there – at the Crib, at the Cross, and in the Eucharist (God given flesh in her womb, her Son, now alive in His Church). Reflecting on Mary’s critical and essential role in the development of salvation history helps us see her awesome dignity, worthy of our honor and tribute.



There are two paintings over the altar in the very small Portiuncula chapel down in the valley outside of Assisi [now overpowered by the dimensions of the basilica built around it]. The lower picture shows the Annunciation, with the angel waiting pensively for Mary’s response. Above this is another painting, of Mary sitting next to and facing her Son, as the two sit in the realms of heaven. (Both become great meditation themes for anyone who loves Mary.)

We pause now to join with St. Francis and the early Franciscans in praying *The Office of the Passion Antiphon*: “Holy Virgin Mary, among the women born into the world, there is no one like you. Daughter and servant of the most high and supreme King and of the Father in heaven, Mother of our most holy Lord Jesus Christ, Spouse of the Holy Spirit, pray for us with Saint Michael the Archangel, all the powers of heaven and all the saints, at the side of your most holy beloved Son, our Lord and Teacher. Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.”⁴

- Q1. What would St. Francis have meant by “Who are the Virgin made Church” from *Our Opening Prayer*?
- Q2. Reflect upon *Luke 2:19* “And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart” and *Luke 2:51* “... and his mother kept all these things in her heart.” What kind of prayer is expressed about Mary by these Scripture passages?
- Q3. How well do we follow St. Francis in listening to our Mother Mary when she tells us: “Do whatever he tells you”?
- Q4. How much time do we spend with trying to enter into the heart of Mary by reflecting and meditating on her prayerful messages in her Magnificat? Do I take time to make these sentiments my own?

If there is time, we can personally benefit greatly from the instructions the Church gives us in her *Catechism*: §973-§975; §2617-§2622; and §2679. What struck you in your reading of §2679?

¹ FA:ED, *The Undated Writings, A Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, Vol. I, p. 163

² FA:ED, *The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul, Second Book*, 1245-1247, Vol. II, p. 374, Chapter CL: His devotion to Our Lady to whom he especially entrusted the Order

³ FA:ED, *The Major Legend of Saint Francis*, 1260-1263, Vol. II, p. 540, Chapter Two, v. 8

⁴ FA:ED, *The Undated Writings, The Office of the Passion Antiphon*, Vol. I, p. 141