



Artwork by Anne Darwin sdv

MARY, MOST HOLY

by Eileen M. Ponder, MDiv

The day our three-year-old lifted up his little arms and chanted with reverent certitude “I am God!” I was tickled and then startled—maybe even frightened—by the notion that my husband and I had bearers, bringing the presence given birth to God. Yet that is indeed what we are all called to in baptism, to be Christ-of God to our weary and aching world. That day I knew that I wanted somehow to reclaim Mary, mother of Jesus, as icon and holy role model. I wanted her example to guide me not only in motherhood but also in my still infant discipleship. Mary, after all, was strong enough to bear the Christ child and the cross. And yet she is tender enough to cradle in her heart over one billion other Catholics and me.

Mary represents all of us who claim to be disciples of her son, Jesus and her story of faith is our story of faith. We, like her, are called to make room in our lives so that God might create wonderful things out of our emptiness, whatever that that emptiness might be. Like Mary, we are called to serve the world tenderly as handmaids of the Lord, to give birth to the eternal Word, to boldly proclaim the Good News, and to live forever with God in glory.

In our scriptures and in the church’s tradition, Mary represents the church and is lauded as *the* model of Christian discipleship. We are invited to honor her in the liturgy and in both public and private devotions. We honor her in fifteen liturgical feasts and memorials, in the Liturgy of the Hours, and in countless hymns and prayers. Mary bears hundreds of titles and her image graces poetry and paintings, sculptures and cathedrals the world over. Devotion to her has endured throughout the history of the church and continues to sustain the spiritual life of many Catholics.

Marian devotions, though many and varied, are all to be harmonized with the church’s liturgy. Like all devotions, they serve the liturgy. They never compete with it, but instead flow from it and lead devotees back to it. In other words, when we pray to Mary as a powerful intercessor and reflect on her story as a holy icon of our own discipleship, her example will draw us to fuller participation in the liturgy.

Mary Most Holy came to me in the spiraling winds of my own early motherhood. She comes to all of us in our sorrow and in our joy, in our agonies and in our triumphs. She is mother to us—showing us how to let God create out of our virgin nothingness all that we need to redeem our often shattered lives and our aching, desperate world. Mother Mary waits for each of us, showing us how to give birth to the Word. Her witness in this world and her continuing presence in the life of the church teach us how to tenderly cradle the awesome presence of God, alive in us, until it takes root in our world, bringing life eternal and joy unceasing.

