

# KAIROS

GLOBAL

ALSO ↓

Pray, Hope  
and Don't  
Worry

■ FR JOSEMARIA GUZMAN-  
DOMÍNGUEZ, O.P.

Lights, Camera,  
Holiness!

■ VINCY STEPHENSON

# Motherhood

VARIOUS AUTHORS



Jesus Youth

A Missionary Movement At The Service Of The Church







## MARY, MY MOTHER



Hail, Mary, White Lily of the Glorious and always-serene Trinity. Hail brilliant Rose of the Garden of heavenly delights; O you, by whom God wanted to be born and by whose milk the King of Heaven wanted to be nourished! Nourish our souls with effusions of divine grace. Amen!

# EDITOR'S ROOM

DR CHACKOCHAN J NJAVALLIL

X @readkairos



HOWEVER, THE DEEPER ISSUE MAY LIE IN THE INCREASING SECULARISM OF MODERN LIFE. IN MANY PARTS OF THE WORLD, THE ABSENCE OF GOD AND THE DOMINANCE OF WORLDLY CONCERNS HAVE SHAPED ATTITUDES TOWARD FAMILY LIFE, WITH MANY PRIORITISING PERSONAL FULFILMENT...

## Missing Mothers

**T**he days of concern over an exploding population have passed, giving way to a new global issue: the steady decline in birth rates. Across the world, countries are grappling with shrinking populations, raising alarm about the future of societies. China, which once promoted its stringent 'one child per family' policy, has now reversed course due to its negative consequences. However, despite the government's push for larger families, many Chinese citizens remain reluctant even to marry. Japan faces a similarly grim situation, with an aging population and diminishing births. Many Western countries, too, are encouraging families to have more children, but the results have been underwhelming.

Even in India, now the most populous country, early signs of this global trend are emerging. While the population has grown significantly, recent trends point to a decreasing birth rate, falling below the replacement rate of 2.1 children per woman. Increasing late marriages and the growing reluctance to marry are contributing to this shift.

What is driving this decline in childbirth? One major factor seems to be the improvement in the standard of living. As living conditions improve, families tend to have fewer children. Career aspirations, financial pressures, and a desire to avoid the challenges of parenting, including the physical pain of childbirth and the emotional toll of child-rearing, are also significant reasons. However, the deeper issue may lie in the increasing secularism of modern life. In many parts of the world, the absence of God and the dominance of worldly concerns have shaped attitudes toward family life, with many prioritising personal fulfilment and comfort over the responsibilities of parenthood.

This trend calls for serious reflection, especially from us Christians. In a world increasingly driven by materialism and individualism, the spiritual and communal importance of family life needs to be reasserted. Proactive steps must be taken to reawaken a sense of purpose and responsibility toward the future. Faith communities, in particular, should lead the conversation, encouraging a deeper understanding of family as a divine calling and an essential part of human flourishing. A cultural shift towards valuing children and family life as blessings rather than burdens is crucial in addressing this growing concern.



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*Chackochan J*

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Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold your mother!'  
*John 19:27*



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WHAT MY MOTHER  
TAUGHT ME

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# ASK



FR. BITAJU

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## What is the Catholic Church teaching on the use of alcohol?

The Catholic Church acknowledges the use of alcohol as a part of human culture and recognises that it can be enjoyed in moderation. However, it also emphasises the importance of temperance and warns against the dangers of excessive consumption and abuse of alcohol.

*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* speaks about alcohol in the context of the virtue of temperance and moderation. 'The virtue of temperance moderates the attraction of pleasures and provides balance in the use of created goods. It ensures the will's mastery over instincts and keeps desires within the limits of what is honourable' (CCC 2290). This teaching highlights that while the enjoyment of alcohol is permissible, it should be done in a way that is balanced and respectful of one's dignity and the dignity of others.

Moreover, the teaching of the Church underscores the dangers associated with excessive drinking. 'The virtue of temperance disposes us to avoid every kind of excess, the abuse of food, alcohol, tobacco, or medicine' (CCC 2291). This would mean that while moderate consumption is acceptable, the Church strongly condemns drunkenness and the behaviours that can arise from it, which can lead to harm to self and others.

Furthermore, the Church teaches that individuals must be mindful of their own limits and the potential impact of their actions on others. 'The use of alcohol, tobacco, and drugs is morally acceptable as long as it does not harm others' (CCC 2287). This principle emphasises the responsibility that individuals have to ensure that their consumption does not lead to scandal or harm to others.

It is noteworthy that some cultures look down on even moderate consumption of alcohol, of which one needs to be sensitive and respectful. Remember that often people who have the wrong idea of what moderation is can end up in alcoholism although they may begin with moderate consumption of alcohol. St Paul cautions us that *All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful, but not all things build up* (1 Corinthians 10:23).

To summarise, the Catholic Church's teaching on the use of alcohol emphasises moderation and temperance. While it recognises the cultural significance of alcohol and allows for its responsible enjoyment, it warns against excess and drunkenness, advocating for a balanced approach that respects both personal and the well-being of others.



YUCCAT 5

## WHY DO PEOPLE DENY THAT GOD EXISTS, IF THEY CAN KNOW HIM BY REASON?

To know the invisible God is a great challenge for the human mind. Many are scared off by it. Another reason why some do not want to know God is because they would then have to change their life. Anyone who says that the question about God is meaningless because it cannot be answered is making things too easy for himself. [CCC 37-38]



DR. KOCHURANI JOSEPH

## Prayer Intentions February

### For vocations to the priesthood and religious life

Let us pray that the ecclesial community might welcome the desires and doubts of those young people who feel a call to serve Christ's mission in priesthood and religious life.



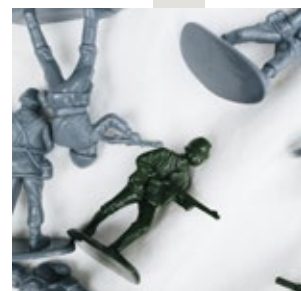
# Pope talk



*Authentic spirituality implies that we leave 'vinegar faces' behind, embrace joy, constant commitment to one's own sanctification, a serious theological and professional preparation, and a lifestyle that is friendly and loving toward everyone.*

*The Jubilee year invites us to rediscover the joy of the encounter with the Lord. It calls us to spiritual renewal, and commits us to the transformation of the world, so that this may truly become a jubilee time.*

***Wars, social injustices, and the many forms of violence we are exposed to every day should not dishearten us nor draw us toward scepticisms and discouragement.***



*The goal of a Holy Door is to allow us to enter into new life, free from the slavery of sin, free to love and serve God. So welcome men and women from all over the world, Catholics and Christians of other denominations, believers of every religion, seekers of truth, freedom, justice and peace, all pilgrims of hope and fraternity.*

*Family dialogue defeats digital distraction and mealtimes offer a special moment for dialogue in the family while specifically cautioning against digital distractions. Never, never use mobile phones at the family table. Talk, listen to each other; this is the dialogue that is good for you and what makes you grow.*



# JESUS YOUTH



**Dr Edward Edezhath**, one of the pioneers of Jesus Youth, gives us a glimpse of the growth of the movement.

## Witnesses amidst a Whirlwind of Confusion

→ We started our New Year prayer meetings by studying the first part of St Matthew's Gospel. Our discussion reached St Joseph's life. He knew about God's great plans and believed in them, but everything around him was chaotic. What could have been his inner response to that constant change and confusion?

Later, someone brought up the topic of young people today: 'It was with much prayer and preparation that we had planned a good youth weekend. But the youth response was very poor. The team was so upset.' Another person spoke of a very active youth leader in the parish who had been well accompanied but who abruptly ended her life, driving many who heard about it to despair. More and more stories came, painting a murky picture of today's youth.

### WE ARE EAGER FOR A WELL-ORDERED, SAFE WORLD

During a storm when the sky becomes dark, and wind and rain begin to lash, most of us rush to shelter and want to feel safe. Or, when we live in a foreign land where everything is strange and confusing, we look for some little friendship, a little group to belong to. And if we find such a group, the intimacy there would be intense. Young

people do the same when they reach a new school or workplace.

Interestingly, spirituality and religion often become just this: a safe place to feel secure in a confusing world. But we may have to go beyond that – what will we do in that protected place? We will engage in many activities to keep ourselves busy. Then, we will look at the wider confused world with derision and contempt. Is that our spirituality?

Jesus wanted to challenge this spirituality, safe within the boundaries of laws and customs. He went out to a chaotic world, to the lost sheep and sent his followers there too. Chapter 9 of St Matthew's Gospel narrates this well. Jesus wandered through the cities and villages. He saw and interacted with the crowds and felt pity for them. He felt their confusion and helplessness. But he also saw this as a great opportunity and a harvest. Jesus wanted his disciples to pray for people, not to escape from this confused situation, but to work in that chaotic world.

### CAN WE GO INTO THAT CHAOTIC WORLD?

I remember a meeting of leaders and animators discussing ideas for a series of youth programmes. The big question

was how to carry out those plans. 'Our young leaders are not up to the mark. They are so confused and irregular. Most of them don't show up on time for anything.'

I could see, in that discussion, a significant disconnect between the big ideas and plans and the confused life of the crowds of youth. As Pope Francis repeats, 'Realities are more important than ideas.' I tried to tell them that some ideas and plans that had worked well in the past or worked in other places were not entirely relevant here. They were focused on big and beautiful programmes and how to implement these, but the confused and disordered youth were nowhere near them. What a pity!

For most of us, doing God's work or mission means following the safe path and using familiar plans and approaches. But yesterday's world is gone; today, here and now, is entirely different and new. When people want to do something for the youth, they think of helpful retreats or seminars they have seen. They also consider familiar topics and programme styles. But somehow, for the new generation, these seem increasingly ineffective.

Interestingly, here comes the effectiveness of the less organised Jesus Youth. Some of them, even when





**Jesus wanted to challenge this spirituality, safe within the boundaries of laws and customs. He went out to a chaotic world, to the lost sheep and sent his followers there too. He felt their confusion and helplessness. But he also saw this as a great opportunity and a harvest.**

they plan a small gathering of young people, first sit together and ask, 'Who will be there?' 'What does the Lord want?' and 'How should we go about it?' If possible, they try some never-tried topics and approaches. Often, the Spirit works there better.

#### **CONNECT, BE JOYFUL, BELONG, AND BE COMMITTED**

The night is darkest just before dawn. When confusions increase, we know God's action is not far away. For a believer, chaos is a God-given

opportunity or a harvest. The journey of the Jesus Youth movement has many such examples. Young leaders found that working among students was difficult and ineffective many years ago, and the Campus Ministry was born. Rex Band was born out of confusion when a famous music group failed to arrive at one of our large conferences. Canonical approval by the bishops came when there was considerable confusion about the movement's status. Any good ministry is born when old ways don't work, and there is much confusion about solving big problems.

During prolonged student unrest and chaos, the principal of a Catholic college considered depending on Jesus Youth to initiate some change. Young people prayed and sought new ways, and a miracle happened. How do these simple changes work when many experienced people get stuck? A notable strength of the Jesus Youth movement is its capacity to be comfortable with confusion and lack of order. There, they work in newer and more creative ways. But how do we go about this?

1. Connect to Reality. Like Jesus in Matthew 9, a missionary looks at things

and offers them to the Lord.

2. Have a Joyful Christian Spirit.

Only with Jesus can you be genuinely joyful in confusion, and God can work.

3. Community is Vital. A missionary works in a community; the antidote to chaos is love and community.

4. Deep Sense of Commitment is the quality you need to build on God's foundation when all kinds of change and confusion come.

I shared with that leaders' group how today's situation is often described using the acronym VUCA: volatile (fast changing), uncertain (difficult to predict), complex with many levels, and ambiguous with no clarity. What is VUCA to human planners can be a joy-filled opportunity for one moved by the Spirit. The world of today's youth is confusing and troublesome, but the solution is not to worry or plan much but to engage and be present so God can do wonders in that confusing situation. ■

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One of the pioneers of the Jesus Youth movement, an international preacher and author, **Dr Edward Edezhath** is a retired professor from St Albert's College, Ernakulam. He is presently a researcher at Amoris Christi in Florida, USA.

ENGAGE

# Pray, Hope, & Don't Worry

**Fr Josemaria Guzman-Domínguez, O.P.** reminds us of our Christian hope and that 'if I pray I am never totally alone.'





**S**aints Philip and James Church, the parish where I serve in Baltimore, USA, lifts up people's hearts to God by its great beauty. In the middle of the church, by one of the side doors, we have a small, lovely statue of Saint Padre Pio. He is represented there, with his kind face, one hand extended in blessing. I love seeing him there, and pray to him often, especially when I go hear confessions. This wonderful Capuchin priest is well known for many reasons. One of my favourites is perhaps his most famous phrase: 'Pray, hope, and don't worry. Worrying is useless. God is merciful and will hear your prayer.' What wise advice! How hard to follow!

Why shouldn't we worry? Why should we hope instead? So many crises and sufferings around us, in our families, and in our hearts seem to warrant at least worry if not despair. Wars rage in some parts and famines ravage others and prosperity blinds the wealthy nations. All kinds of false doctrines and personal wounds threaten the unity of families. And even the communion of the Church feels under attack by our leaders' and our own weaknesses and sins. In all this, it can be tempting for us Christians to throw our arms up despondently or to fret and cling tenaciously to narrow plans to control and fix a situation. But we don't have to live this way, we can listen to Padre Pio and just pray, hope, and surrender our worries!

We can do so because we are given a firm hope in Christ Jesus. And, like I said last time, Christian hope does not promise solutions to global politics, or temporal healing to families, or even the overcoming of differences among Christians. All those are good and worth pursuing. Supernatural hope, however, assures us of salvation. Through hope, we can desire our eternal promised Good – the beatific vision, eternal life in the Trinity. Hope enables us to depend with great confidence and abandon on our merciful and all-powerful Helper, who is Almighty God Himself.

So, yes, we are pilgrims and not yet at home. And, yes, there are many dangers on the road ahead. We might be wounded and experience fatigue. But we walk by faith and hope, certain of our promised destination. And we do not walk alone.

## A first essential setting for learning hope is prayer. When no one listens to me anymore, God still listens to me.

We are invited to trust that the One who makes this promise to us is true. And we know that, in the person of the Word-made-flesh, the One who promised has even completed the journey and traced a path for us. So, if we place our hope in Him and follow in His footsteps, we need not worry.

Sacred Scripture gives us a wonderful image for Christian hope: the anchor. We encounter it in the sixth chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews. There we read:

*When God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he interposed with an oath, so that through two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible that God should prove false, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to seize the hope set before us. We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 6:17-20).*

Christian hope is to the Christian what an anchor is to a ship. The anchor does not shield a ship from waves or storms or pirates. But if a ship remains anchored, these dangers can't move it or change its course (of course, the analogy limps, as they all do!). Christian hope is much sturdier. If we live in the grace of Christ and receive the gift of supernatural hope, no matter what the circumstances of our life, we remain steadfast and full of peace. And the reason for our hope is Jesus, who has taken our humanity to the Father. So while we are yet on the way, in a certain sense, we are home already in Christ. In this confidence we can face any trials, knowing that the love of Christ will see us through (Romans 8).

So, what does this all have to do with prayer? Everything! Prayer is traditionally defined as raising our minds to God. So, in the act of prayer, which is always a gift of grace, we are united with our

eternal happiness already. In confident, filial prayer, we receive from the Father the seed for the great promised life He is preparing for us. In prayer, our hearts are united to Jesus' Sacred Heart, that human heart who already shares in the fullness of heaven. In prayer, we let ourselves be guided by the Consoling Spirit who lights and shows us the way and comforts our weary pilgrim souls.

As Pope Benedict XVI reflects in his beautiful encyclical *Spe Salvi*: 'A first essential setting for learning hope is prayer. When no one listens to me anymore, God still listens to me. When I can no longer talk to anyone or call upon anyone, I can always talk to God. When there is no longer anyone to help me deal with a need or expectation that goes beyond the human capacity for hope, he can help me. When I have been plunged into complete solitude ...; if I pray I am never totally alone' (*Spe Salvi*, 32). Through prayer, we experience the nearness of the God who longs to bring us home. When we really give ourselves over to the mystery of prayer, little by little, we see that the ship of our soul is unmovable, anchored in the reality of Christ's salvific action.

We hope in God with one another in the community of the Church as we walk together as God's pilgrim people. In the meantime, let us heed good Padre Pio. Let us pray, hope, and stop worrying. Our God is good and true to His word. He will walk with us and see us through to the happy end of our pilgrimage. ■■

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Fr Josemaría Guzmán-Domínguez, O.P. is a Dominican friar of the Province of St Joseph. He and his family hail from Caracas, Venezuela and moved to the United States twenty years ago. After studying Italian Literature at the University of Notre Dame he entered the Order of Preachers. He was ordained a priest of Jesus Christ in 2021 and now serves as Chaplain for the Catholic Community at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore.



## ENCOUNTER



# Lights, Camera, Holiness!

When she said that 'yes,' she was holding a beer bottle in one hand and a cigar in the other. But her subsequent transformation was swift. **Vincy Stephenson** takes us into the exciting, remarkable life-transforming journey of Sr Clare Crockett, who left a worldly life to embrace one of religious service.

**K**nown for her deep faith and vibrant personality, Sr Clare Crockett was born in Derry, Northern Ireland, on 14 November 1982.

## Chasing Stardom and Fame

Though born into a Catholic family, Clare's spiritual life was anything but stable. At the age of 14, she harboured a strong desire to become a Hollywood actress and achieve fame. Driven by this ambition, she began working as a presenter on various TV channels, including Nickelodeon, where she hosted a children's programme. Throughout her school years, Clare was always the centre of attention, with her outstanding talent for acting. Just as desired, she started appearing in movies. Wealth and fame were her prime goals. Outside of her career ambitions, she was known for her love of partying and often found herself caught up in reckless behaviour, frequently drinking to excess with friends!

## The God-Incidence

It was on a day in the year 2000 – when she was 17 – a friend asked if Clare would be interested in making a trip to Spain with a group of people. With visions of parties, clubs and beaches, Clare readily and joyfully agreed. The group were asked to gather at a house to plan the trip – and it was there that her 'hopes' were dashed. The group were going to Spain not for pleasure but on a pilgrimage – a Holy Week retreat organised by the Servant Sisters of the Home of the Mother. At the house where the group had gathered, Clare, who had been expecting a group of youngsters, encountered a group of people aged between 40 and 60, sitting and praying the Rosary. She immediately knew she had made a wrong choice. To make matters worse, the friend who suggested the trip, fell sick at the last moment and was unable to go.

It was a reluctant Clare that went with the group for the pilgrimage. She showed her displeasure by being contrary to the rest – while the others prayed, she would

be smoking cigars or basking in the sun, even when it wasn't hot. And finally, that day came! One of her group members requested her to join them in church and asked her to kiss the crucifix as the others did, since it was Good Friday. She agreed to do so, and it turned out to be life-changing!

As she stood in the line, kneeled and kissed the crucifix, tears started flowing from her eyes. She didn't know why she was crying but deep in her heart she realised that it was her sins which had nailed Him to the cross. She recognised His deep love for her that made Him choose to be crucified. Clare experienced God's forgiving love in that simple gesture. Experiencing God's love for her, she decided to walk away from her old life. 'He loves me. And He died for me,' she kept repeating over and over again.

She said, 'Lord, you leave me speechless. If you have died for me. How can I not die to myself?'

## Famous, A Nun, or a Famous Nun?

She heard the Lord speaking to her, 'Clare, I want you to become like one of those sisters. I want you to live in poverty, chastity and obedience.' Initially, she couldn't accept what He had asked as she still held on to 'her plans'. Then the Lord said, 'If I ask you to do this, I'll give you the strength and the grace to be able to do it.'

With that Clare decided to give her life to the Lord. She expressed her interest in becoming a nun to Fr Rafael Alonso, the founder of Servant Sisters of the Home of the Mother. She told him that she would return. She said, 'I am going to become a nun. And I am going to be a famous nun.' She said this to Fr Alfonso, a cigarette in her hand, smoking. Fr Alfonso said, 'I think you have to become a famous nun. But to become a famous nun, you have to be the most humble. To be the most humble, you have to obey.' Taking a puff of her cigarette, she said, 'Well then, I'll obey.'

But Clare had to first battle an inner struggle. Deep down she still desired fame and fortune, and to become a nun, she would have to give up those dreams.

## Either God or the World

She returned home from the pilgrimage



She said, 'I am going to become a nun. And I am going to be a famous nun.' She said this to Fr Alfonso, a cigar in her hand, smoking. Fr Alfonso said, 'I think you have to become a famous nun. But to become a famous nun, you have to be the most humble. To be the most humble, you have to obey.' Taking a puff of her cigarette, she said, 'Well then, I'll obey.'

with hopes of becoming a changed person. But that year turned out to be her worst. She was found drunk most of the time, and hospitalised. It was as though she was battling with God to live life on her terms. But the Lord kept telling her, 'I don't want you there. I want you for me.' She did all that she wanted and thought she was happy, but deep inside, she wasn't.

Clare's life was now moving in the direction she had initially planned for. She had just received the opportunity to act in a movie – she had everything she ever wanted: fame, money, living in the best hotels and getting the best of everything. One day, she strongly heard these words in her heart, 'Why do you keep hurting me?' She experienced the Lord's presence and felt His gaze upon her.

Sitting in her hotel room, looking at the schedule for the next day, she began to cry. She knew she had everything, but nothing within. If she went ahead with the movie, heights of success would surely be hers. But, she decided to give up everything that took her away from God. Clare's life took a pivotal turn from there. Although it was a difficult decision, she felt a deep inner peace.

### All or Nothing!

On the day of her perpetual vows, Clare told her family that she would not cry. But after taking her vows, they saw her crying. At first they mistook it for regret, but she said, 'I cried, because I am happy that I am finally doing it.'

When someone asked, 'Aren't you worried about your family when you are here?' Clare responded with what the Lord had said to St Catherine of Siena, *If you take care of my things, I'll take care of your things.*

Sr Clare's life as a member of the Home of the Mother was marked by an intense commitment to prayer, personal sanctification, and service. The Servant Sisters of the Home of the Mother focus on serving young people, by promoting vocations and leading others to deeper spiritual lives. Sr Clare took this mission to heart and became known for her joyful witness, her zeal for evangelisation, and her ability to connect with young people. When youngsters came to know about her past life – smoking, drinking, and going out with boys, etc., they too were moved to transform their lives for good, just as Clare did.

She worked with the Home of the Mother's youth apostolates, conducting summer camps, retreats, and spiritual formation programmes. She also took part in their music ministry, playing the guitar and singing, and helped organise events that encouraged young people to deepen their faith.

One important thing that caught everyone's attention was her joyfulness. It was contagious. She brought a smile to whomever she came across. Not just the people outside but even to those within her religious community, Sr Clare's presence brought joy and happiness. And whatever she did, she did it to her best! Her friends and co-members testified that

whenever she wanted to do something for the Lord, she gave it all or nothing!

### Tragic Death and Legacy

Sr Clare's life came to a tragic and untimely end on 16 April 2016, when a sudden earthquake hit Ecuador. She was only 33 years-old, just as our Lord. Sr Clare had been serving as part of a missionary team in the town of Pedernales, where she had been helping run a youth centre and working with local children and families. When the earthquake struck, she was in the building with several other people, including a group of youth who were attending a retreat. Sr Clare was killed instantly when the building collapsed.

Her death deeply impacted many people around the world. Her life became a powerful testimony of the possibility of living a deep Christian vocation even at such a young age.

### A God Who Celebrates Comebacks

Her legacy continues even after her death. Sr Clare's life stands as a shining testament to the ever-merciful, ever-loving God. Once she chose to leave her past behind and follow Him, her past no longer mattered to God. He became the centre of her life. Since her passing, Sr Clare has become an inspiration to many, and she is remembered for her witness of radical love for God and for others.

Today, Sr Clare's story is widely shared through books, videos, and social media. Her example continues to inspire many to live their faith with great zeal and generosity. She desired to become a famous actress but became a world-renowned saintly figure. Her vocation continues to resonate with people around the world, particularly among young people seeking to live a life of purpose and meaning. ■■

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A CATHOLIC MAGAZINE FOR CHILDREN

VOLUME 5 ISSUE 50

KAIROS

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EXPERIENCE

# WHAT MY MOTHER TAUGHT ME



**Fr Maximilian Maria Jaskowak, O.P.** shares about how his mother was instrumental in shaping his faith life, particularly his Marian devotion.

**E**ven the most devout of parents could not possibly teach their children everything the Church has to offer, for such are the riches of the Catholic faith! They focus, rather, on what riches they *know best*, and what riches they *love most*. My parents were no different. From my father, I learned the life of virtue, and from my mother, the reality of heaven. As an impressionable young child, I enjoyed nothing more than observing my father at work around home, exhibiting by his deeds the same life of virtue he taught by his words, or reading the *Lives of the Saints* with my pious mother in tow. It was during this privileged season of my life, in the midst of an ordinary and yet discernibly Catholic household, that I first recognised sanctity as something attractive and indeed possible – not merely for the saints, but for myself and for all.

Drawn as I was to the witness of my parents (as much as I was drawn to the witness of the saints), I modelled my life after the goodness I observed in each. With regard to my father, I marvelled at his untiring devotion and constancy at home. I never saw him shrink from spousal affection. He always adorned my mother with an embrace of love. In fact, I've never had reason to doubt his love for her, nor his love for me. With regard to my mother, words fail to describe her goodness. To date, I have never met anyone comparable to her natural beauty and grace. It is not without reason, then, that I have referred to my mother, in both private and public forums alike, as a living saint. Happily, God entrusted this holy woman with the herculean task of teaching me how to pray.

All these years later, I still remember when my mother taught me to pray the Rosary and how needlessly long five decades seemed at the time! Even now, I am struck by the gravitas with which my mother spoke about Our Lady and the

mysteries of the Rosary. I recall how my mother commended the praying of the Rosary, and how she advised *that I make this prayer my own*. In no uncertain terms, my mother assured me of its power and the many graces that would come as a result of its telling. She then gifted me a five-decade rosary and exhorted me to pray with its cord, so that I might learn from the 'school of Mary' (as she called it) first-hand and become a saint thereby. And so, I did. I enrolled myself in the school of Mary and have since learned everything that I now know from her instruction ... everything that my mother and father were unable to teach me about the Faith. Suffice it to say, as a child, I entrusted my mind and my heart to Our Lady, and I am eternally grateful for the divine tutelage received through her hands.

Unfamiliar though I was with the venerable and longstanding tradition of Marian Consecration, my mother instilled within me such a strong desire to know and to love Our Lady that I found myself soon offering everything to her – offering all that I was and all that I could be. On the eve of my First Holy Communion, I finally made good on this desire. When everyone had fallen asleep in the house (including my younger brother, who slept in the bed next to mine), I knelt before a modest and unceremonious image of Our Lady (a gift from my maternal grandmother) and professed my love to her, offering my life to her as any soldier would his queen. Even today, I remember the magnitude of that moment, the trepidation in my voice, and the surrender of my soul.

Now, dearest reader, why would anyone, let alone a child, offer his life at the service of Our Lady, given that such an act and its underlying significance surely exceeds our best and most pious imaginings? Fair question, indeed. I suspect that a lifetime of reflection might yield a greater appreciation for this act

and its place within divine providence; but at the present moment, absent an answer from the future, I trust that the impetus for my self-oblation was none other than God. And though I could never have understood it then, I believe that whatever good has come of my life thus far – the innumerable graces received in preparation for my profession as a consecrated religious, as well as my ordination to the diaconate and the priesthood – has derived from this singular act of love.

In no uncertain terms, I believe that Our Lady accepted my voluntary sacrifice, however imperfect it may have been, and has since purified its content (through her intercessory and mediatory role), both as a child and now a priest.

### ***The place of Marian devotion in the Christian life***

Admittedly, not everyone has need to consecrate their lives to Our Lady as I did. The circumstances of my offering and the beginnings of my Marian devotion are, insofar as I can tell, uncommon and perhaps singular in kind. I say this openly and honestly, because it is important to recognise that the essence of Marian devotion – its underlying reason or purpose within the Christian life – is not found in the praying of the Rosary or even offering one's life in an act of solemn consecration, but in the relationship that Mary, as mother and queen of the communion of saints, expatiates for little souls like you and me. The essence of Marian devotion is found principally in its instrumental character, by which I mean, its capacity for leading us upward and onward to Jesus, swiftly and sweetly. Our Lady is entrusted with the work of leading you and me to Jesus, nothing more and nothing less. The closer we stand in proximity to Mary, the more vivid our vision of Jesus becomes.

At least, that is what my mother taught me. ■

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Fr Maximilian Maria Jaskowak, O.P. is a solemnly professed friar and Catholic priest of the Order of Preachers (Eastern Province, USA). He is an instructor of moral theology at St Mary's Seminary & University in Baltimore, MD.



# FROM 365 DAYS TO 800

How the *Bible in a Year* Podcast Transformed my Faith Journey



**Arun George Joseph shares his experience of reading the Bible with Fr Mike Schmitz' Bible in a Year podcast.**

When my college mate, Joe Mathai first told me about *The Bible in a Year* podcast by Fr Mike Schmitz, I wasn't sure if I could commit. Reading the entire Bible in a year? That sounded intense – like running a marathon, but for my faith. Yet something inside me said, 'Why not?' Little did I know this journey wouldn't just change how I read the Bible but would transform my relationship with God and my purpose in life.

Here's the truth: it didn't take me 365 days. It took me close to 800. And you know what? That's okay. Joe with his wife and four kids, now settled in Germany, took even more days to complete it.

At first, I worried I was failing because I wasn't on schedule. But I realised this wasn't about deadlines or ticking off a checklist. It was about meeting God where I was. Fr Mike's warm, authentic voice helped me see that faith isn't about being perfect – it's about showing up.

Every episode felt like a conversation with God. Some passages challenged me, pushing me to grow.

Others gave me peace on tough days. And Fr Mike? He made it feel real – his humour, clarity, and genuine passion brought the stories of the Bible alive. It didn't feel like a lecture; it felt like hanging out with a friend who wants you to succeed in life and faith.

Here's what I learned:

1. It's okay to take your time. God isn't watching the clock. Whether it's 365 days or 800, what matters is moving forward.
2. The Bible is alive. It's not just stories from the past – it speaks to our struggles, dreams, and questions right now.
3. God wants a relationship, not perfection. You don't have to 'get it right' every time. Every step you take matters.

What's incredible is how the Bible connects every piece to Jesus, who is at the centre of it all. Fr Mike's guidance helped me see how God's Word is more than a book – it's a roadmap for living with purpose, courage, and love.

For anyone thinking, 'This sounds

too much for me,' let me say this: just start. Don't worry about being perfect or finishing on time. Your pace doesn't matter; your heart does. Whether you're in high school, college, or just figuring out life, this podcast can change your perspective. And here's some great news: *The Bible in a Year* is now available in different languages, including Malayalam. If you've ever thought about diving into Scripture but felt unsure, this is your chance.

So press play. Start small. Give God a little time every day, and watch how He transforms your life. Trust me, it's worth it.

*The Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to the dividing of soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart (Hebrews 4:12).*

Arun George Joseph is part of the faculty at Marian College Kuttikkanam. He lives in Kanjirapally, India with his family.



# A EUCHARISTIC CENTRED LIFE

**Silvy Santhosh** introduces us to **Leon Thomas**, a fellow parishioner, who encourages the youth to make daily Holy Mass a regular practice and mentors the young for altar service.

Leon was just 10 or 11 years-old when I first noticed his deep reverence for the Holy Mass and his willingness to serve. I remember the day he stepped onto the altar as a server – humble, respectful, and ready to embrace his new role.

From the start, Leon led simple yet heartfelt prayers like *Samadhanam Nammodu Koode* (Peace be with us), using a small Malayalam-English transliteration prayer book. Coming from a devout family, his parents and grandmother steadfast pillars of our parish, it was no surprise that Leon followed their example. He attended daily Mass from a young age, especially on Saturdays and

during school vacations. Even in high school, he prioritised his faith, arranging his schedule to attend morning *Holy Qurbana* while balancing academics and extracurricular activities.

Over the years, Leon grew into a dedicated altar server and a leader. He mentored younger servers, coordinated altar service, and even developed a scheduling app to streamline CCD student involvement. His faith and initiative have strengthened our parish community.

Recently, with the introduction of a weekday evening English *Qurbana* by Fr Mathews Munjanattu Kurian and Fr Jimmy Edakalathur Kurian, Leon's consistent attendance and patient





mentoring of new altar servers have been pivotal. His dedication to the faith and enthusiasm for serving the Lord have been a true blessing to our parish.

Let's listen to Leon in his own words.

### **Leon, what motivates you to attend daily Mass?**

Leon: From a very young age, I began to attend Holy Mass every day. As I grew, my motivation deepened when I began as an altar server. Over time, I also reflected on the stories of once-devout parishioners who had drifted away from their faith. These cautionary tales have reminded me of how easy it is to lose one's way in the face of peer pressure, worldly distractions, and temptations.

Then it was very rewarding and encouraging to serve others, particularly the younger altar servers in our parish.

I wanted to help them navigate the responsibility of serving at the altar, ensuring they felt confident and supported. Seeing their growth in faith inspired me to stay present and engaged.

I want to stay rooted in my faith and values. I hope my example shows that staying close to God brings true joy, not from worldly success but from the peace that comes from following Him.

### **What special graces have you received by attending daily Holy Mass?**

Leon: The graces I've received are countless, but these stand out:

**Strength to Resist Temptation:** The Eucharist has been my shield against temptations. The grace from frequent reception of the Eucharist has kept me on track during challenging times.

**Resilience in Disappointment:** The Eucharist has given me the grace to

handle struggles – whether failed exams and assignments from school or personal setbacks – with trust and resilience.

**The Gift of Forgiveness:** Inspired by Christ's teaching to forgive *seventy times seven* (Matthew 18:22), I've learned to let go of grudges, finding peace and freedom in forgiveness.

Looking ahead, I know I'll need even more grace for the big moments in life – finding the right spouse, raising a family, and supporting loved ones during difficult times. Spending extra time with the Eucharist now is my way of preparing for those future challenges.

### **How do you find time for daily Holy Mass despite a busy schedule?**

Leon: Time is never the issue; it's about priorities. If I can make time for leisure – socialising, watching YouTube, or driving for fun – then I can prioritise



the Eucharist. Daily Mass is my spiritual investment. It prepares me for life's challenges and strengthens my trust in God's providence.

For example, getting a job right after college, recovering from illnesses, and even simple daily blessings like returning home safely, all feel like answers to prayers and rewards for my commitment.

### How has daily Mass influenced your professional life?

Leon: My mother often says, 'God stays close to those who stay close to Him.' I've seen this truth in my life. Daily Mass has instilled:

**Discipline and Commitment:** Regular Mass attendance has taught me discipline, a trait essential for success in any field.

**Humility and Grace:** The Eucharist reminds me to stay humble, even when praised for my work.

**Resilience:** Daily Mass has given me the strength to face rejection and setbacks with faith and perseverance, trusting in God's plan.

### Who inspired your Eucharistic journey?

Leon: Many people have influenced my journey:

I was fortunate to have guidance and inspiration from Fr Johnsty Thachara during the initial days of my altar serving.

**Elder Altar Servers:** Their example of striving for excellence inspired me to serve wholeheartedly.

**My parents and grandmother:** Their devotion to daily Mass laid the foundation for my faith.

**Younger Altar Servers:** As a mentor, their enthusiasm inspires me to continue serving with joy

### Can you please share about the app you are currently developing to help inspire altar servers?

I also developed an innovative website to support altar servers, functioning as a modified calendar to display assignments. The site includes a leaderboard where servers earn points for tasks like reading the Bible, using incense, and serving at the altar in general. Top performers are recognised quarterly, with their names featured on the site, and the leaderboard resets at the start of each new quarter. With the support of our parish priests, Fr Mathews and Fr Jimmy, this project

has become a valuable tool for our community.

### How would you summarise your Eucharistic-centred life?

Leon: Daily Mass has been the cornerstone of my life. It has shaped my faith, character, and career. If my example inspires even one person to deepen their relationship with Christ, every effort will have been worth it.

### What do others say about Leon?

**His parents:** We did not do anything extraordinary while raising him other than making it a family routine to go to daily Mass on Saturdays and school vacation days. His mother shared that she learned that from her mother while she was growing up in India.

**His sisters:** I think that Leon has really shown us the benefits of going to daily Mass. He's been so consistent, showing up whenever he can, even if he's not feeling it. I used to think it was a bit much and a tough commitment, but seeing the blessings he's received has made me realise it's definitely worth it. Being witness to this, I think both of us have found more motivation to go to daily Mass and focus on building a stronger relationship with God.

**His grandmother:** His grandmother says: 'I had a great desire for Leon to serve the Lord in the altar. I used to sit with him and teach Malayalam Holy *Qurbana* using a transliteration Holy *Qurbana* book.' His grandmother lives with them and influences him significantly to lead a Eucharistic centred life.

**Fr Mathews Munjanattu Kurian (Vicar, St Alphonsa Syro-Malabar Catholic Church)** says: 'Leon is deeply devoted and lives a Christ-centred life, with his love for the Holy Eucharist radiating in all he does. His profound dedication to the Eucharist is truly inspiring. He places the Holy *Qurbana* above all other church activities or meetings, recognising it as the source and summit of our faith. Leon works tirelessly to be a role model for children and young people, encouraging them to serve at the altar with reverence and love. He motivates his fellow altar servers to cherish the Holy *Qurbana* and approach it with their whole hearts. For Leon, the Holy *Qurbana* is not just a devotion but

the essence of his life!'

**Fr Jimmy Edakaluthur Kurian (Asst Vicar, St Alphonsa Syro-Malabar Catholic Church)** says: 'I am so glad to see Leon coming to Holy *Qurbana* every day and help with the altar serving, but more than that I am amazed at how Leon researches the things he can do to bring more people to Holy *Qurbana* and sacraments. I have had young people come to me for confession because Leon guided them towards the sacrament of reconciliation. Leon is a role model for other youth and children to look up to!'

**Fr Johnsty Thachara (Former Vicar, St Alphonsa Syro-Malabar Catholic Church, Coppell)** says: 'While with a passionate heart he served the Lord in the altar, he also advanced in age and wisdom!'

### Conclusion

Leon's journey is a testament to how God works through young hearts to strengthen His Church. His faith, dedication, and leadership have not only enriched our parish but also serve as a powerful example for his peers and the younger generation.

As St John Bosco said, 'The best way to serve God is to do what is right and just and good.' Leon's life reflects this call to holiness. May his story inspire us all to lead Eucharistic-centred lives, offering ourselves wholly to God's service.

Jesus surely whispers to him daily, *Well done, good and faithful servant* (Matthew 25:21).




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**Leon Thomas** is a parishioner of St Alphonsa Syro-Malabar Catholic parish in Coppell. He is the lead for English Altar Servers, a graduate of the University of Texas at Dallas with a Bachelor's degree in Computer Science, and works as a software engineer at DTCC. He lives with his parents, sisters, and his grandmother in Coppell, USA.

**Silvy Santhosh** The author is a parish member of St Alphonsa Syro-Malabar church in Coppell, Texas, where she prepares children and adults for their First Holy Communion and Confirmation. She works as a Paediatric Nurse Practitioner, sharing the love of Christ with children and their families through her healing ministry. She lives in Dallas, USA with her husband Santhosh Kurian and their children Sophia, Sonia and Solomon.

# ROME DIARIES:

## THE JUBILEE OF HOPE



It was during the first week of September 2024 that I set foot in Rome and within the first week I could witness the strain and frenzy the city was going through, all in preparation for the Jubilee year. By the end of October, Rome was like a construction site, traffic blocks and roadworks, public transports being adjusted and detoured, tourist sites being renovated, public sites being refurbished including the Vatican; to add to all that, a huge barrage of tourists. Such was the excitement as well as groaning that was felt in the air.

The Jubilee which is celebrated every 25 years has always been a time of excitement for the whole church. Rome, as the city that hosts it, has to prepare well in advance for all that are expected. Even my university (Santa Croce) has been assigning projects based on the Jubilee. In the light of these works, I found that this Jubilee could be the one that receives the most promotion thanks to huge advancements in technology and media. Various materials (audio visual as well as documents) were made available and accessible across the globe. The dedicated website and programme calendar in addition to the upcoming canonisation of Carlo Acutis are all creating a special aura. Considering the huge migration that happened over the last decade to Europe, Italy is bracing for a huge number of tourists both as faithful and otherwise, to visit the country during this year.



The theme, Pilgrims of Hope, a much-needed call of the time, made its way into every nook and corner. From the Christmas crib made in Vatican to all the textiles and merchandise, to ads and decorations, to topics being discussed in various halls, everything bears this theme. More than ever, people have that desire to come and receive graces and indulgences that are added to this pilgrimage. There was a huge increase in people who attended online the opening ceremonies of various basilicas, especially that of St Peter's on Christmas Eve.

The Jubilee of Hope has begun. There

is excitement everywhere, at the same time the city is already reeling a bit under pressure. The local residents are bracing for all the dangers and difficulties that would accompany such a huge event. The whole world is in a mood of hope.

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Fr Justin Panachickal MSFS is currently doing his licentiate in social communications at the Pontifical University of Santa Croce, and will share with us throughout the Jubilee year ground reports from Rome.



## PRAYER OF HIS HOLINESS POPE JOHN PAUL II FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE GREAT JUBILEE OF THE YEAR 2000

*1. Blessed are you, Father,  
who, in your infinite love,  
gave us your only-begotten Son.  
By the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate  
in the spotless womb of the Virgin Mary  
and was born in Bethlehem  
two thousand years ago.*

*He became our companion on life's path  
and gave new meaning to our history,  
the journey we make together  
in toil and suffering,  
in faithfulness and love,  
towards the new heaven and the new earth  
where You, once death has been vanquished, will be all in all.*

Praise and glory to You, Most Holy Trinity, you alone are God most high!

*2. By your grace, O Father, may the Jubilee Year  
be a time of deep conversion  
and of joyful return to you.  
May it be a time of reconciliation between people,  
and of peace restored among nations,  
a time when swords are beaten into ploughshares  
and the clash of arms gives way to songs of peace.*

*Father, grant that we may live this Jubilee Year  
docile to the voice of the Spirit,  
faithful to the way of Christ,  
diligent in listening to your Word  
and in approaching the wellsprings of grace.*

Praise and glory to You, Most Holy Trinity, you alone are God most high!

*3. Father, by the power of the Spirit,  
strengthen the Church's commitment to the new evangelization*

*and guide our steps along the pathways of the world,  
to proclaim Christ by our lives,  
and to direct our earthly pilgrimage  
towards the City of heavenly light.*

*May Christ's followers show forth their love  
for the poor and the oppressed;  
may they be one with those in need  
and abound in works of mercy;  
may they be compassionate towards all,  
that they themselves may obtain indulgence and  
forgiveness from you.*

Praise and glory to You, Most Holy Trinity, you alone are God most high!

*4. Father, grant that your Son's disciples,  
purified in memory  
and acknowledging their failings,  
may be one that the world may believe.  
May dialogue between the followers of the great religions prosper,  
and may all people discover the joy of being your children.*

*May the intercession of Mary, Mother of your faithful people,  
in union with the prayers of the Apostles, the Christian martyrs,  
and the righteous of all nations in every age,  
make the Holy Year a time of renewed hope and of joy in the Spirit  
for each of us and for the whole Church.*

Praise and glory to You, Most Holy Trinity, you alone are God most high!

*5. To you, Almighty Father, Creator of the universe and of mankind,  
through Christ, the Living One, Lord of time and history,  
in the Spirit who makes all things holy,  
be praise and honour and glory  
now and for ever. Amen!*



## IN FOCUS

# THE SACRED GIFT OF MOTHERHOOD

How the Catholic Church Honours Mothers and the Role of Project Little Flower Ministry

Marian Thomas writes about the importance the Church gives to motherhood, and Project Little Flower.

**M**otherhood holds a revered and pivotal place within the Catholic Church. Motherhood is a sacred vocation, a unique calling that the Catholic Church holds in the highest regard. Rooted in Scripture, tradition, and the lives of the saints, the Church sees motherhood as a profound reflection of God's creative and nurturing love. In the words of Pope Pius XII, 'Motherhood is the highest dignity that a woman can attain. In motherhood, the mother participates in the divine plan of creation and offers to God the fruits of her labour' (*Address to Catholic Women's Organisations, 1942*).

Motherhood also mirrors the Church – herself, a mother. The Church's mission to nurture and form souls reflects the maternal role of bringing spiritual life to her children. All women – biological or spiritual mothers – are called to give spiritual birth and form Christ in others. As St Paul expressed in Galatians 4:19, *My little children, for whom I am again in*

*the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.*

From the earliest days of Christianity, motherhood has been revered as a vital part of God's plan for humanity. The Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, stands as the ultimate example of maternal love and self-gift.

## Encountering God in the Joys and Struggles of Motherhood

As Mother Mary herself experienced, motherhood is a journey marked by both immense joy and profound difficulty where both joys and struggles intertwine to reveal His love and grace. In the joys of nurturing a child, from the first smile to the warmth of a loving embrace, mothers experience a taste of divine joy and fulfilment, reflecting God's unconditional love for His creation. At the same time, the struggles – whether physical, emotional, or spiritual – become moments where God's presence is often most deeply felt, as mothers are called to surrender, to trust, and to rely on His grace.

## Higher Calling

Motherhood profoundly reflects John 15:13: *Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.* A mother lays down her life not just in the daily sacrifices of time, energy, and care but also in the physical, emotional, and spiritual challenges she endures.

For some, this means navigating difficult or high-risk pregnancies filled with fear or uncertainty. Others face the trauma and pain of childbirth, their bodies pushed to the brink to bring new life into the world. Postpartum struggles – physical recovery, emotional exhaustion, or even depression – add yet another layer of sacrifice. Yet, through these challenges, a mother embodies Christ's sacrificial love. She gives of herself, often in silence and suffering, so her child can thrive. Each moment of pain and perseverance is an offering of love, making motherhood a living, breathing reflection of the greatest love Jesus speaks of: laying down one's life so that another may live.



### **A Personal Encounter with God's Love through Motherhood**

In my own experience, I have felt Mother Mary's maternal guidance in moments of struggle. When I faced challenges with breastfeeding, it was through the intercession of Our Lady of La Leche that I was able to nurse my son successfully at five months. Similarly, after my third delivery, when my mother could not be with me, God promised that Mother Mary would take over my kitchen. Amazingly, my mother-in-law stepped in and cared for my household with such great sincerity that it was clear her actions were a manifestation of Mary's maternal care.

In my children's frailty and reliance on me for everything, I saw a model for my own reliance on God – turning to Him with dependency and heroic surrender. Through this, I experienced an abundance of fatherly love, care, and providence. Each of my pregnancies was high-risk, requiring significant limitations on my mobility. Each one was an exercise in trusting God with my life and surrendering control.

The joy and delight I felt in seeing my children helped me to get a glimpse of the way God delights in me. One of the happiest moments of my life was the moment my oldest son came into the world and it's such an honour to be able to have a child to love and nurture.

During one hospitalisation, I experienced God's providence in small but miraculous ways. When I craved something, it often arrived at the hospital without my even mentioning it to anyone. Through these moments, God's care became tangible, reinforcing the truth that He sees and provides for every need.

One of the most memorable experiences of divine intervention occurred during a novena to St Thérèse of Lisieux. We were in a difficult situation, struggling to find help in a new place. On the ninth day of the novena, God sent us a kind and capable helper named Theresa, miraculously answering our prayers. Similarly, during my third pregnancy, I desired a somewhat normal experience after two high-risk pregnancies and preterm deliveries. I prayed for a full-term baby and was blessed to deliver at exactly 37 weeks without complications. God's

provision extended to every logistical detail, fulfilling the desires of my heart.

These profound experiences not only deepened my faith but also planted a calling in my heart. Having endured trials, isolation, and pain through fertility struggles, difficult pregnancies, losses, NICU stays, and traumatic births, I felt called to support and minister to others facing similar challenges.

Ministry is sharing the light and warmth from the fire that refined you. It is about offering hope and strength from the well that was dug in your own season of thirst.

The Holy Spirit moved powerfully and inspired many others to join and support this mission. Project Little Flower was thus born, co-founded by a group of Jesus Youth mothers to support mothers. The ministry is currently run by a core team led by Sheena Andrews.

### **Project Little Flower Ministry: A Beacon of Hope for Mothers**

Project Little Flower Ministry exemplifies the Church's mission to honour and support mothers. Inspired by a shared connection to St Thérèse of Lisieux, the 'Little Flower,' this ministry offers a lifeline to mothers, guiding them through the blessings and challenges of their vocation. It creates a community where mothers can find healing, encouragement, and spiritual renewal.

### **The Mission of Project Little Flower**

The ministry was founded to address the multifaceted needs of mothers, particularly those navigating difficult circumstances such as infertility, miscarriage, traumatic births, and neonatal challenges. Recognising that these experiences can be isolating and emotionally devastating, Project Little Flower seeks to create a space of healing, empowerment, and faith formation. At its core, the ministry embraces a threefold mission of healing, support and faith building in Christ.

### **Programmes and Services**

Project Little Flower Ministry offers



a range of programmes to support mothers facing life challenges. Inner healing retreats such as 'At the Well' and the 'Made Well' virtual healing journey provides opportunities for faith-sharing, practical workshops, and sacraments like confession and Eucharistic adoration, helping mothers experience God's transformative love. The ministry also provides personalised one-on-one accompaniment, offering compassionate support and guidance during difficult seasons. Through daily intercessory prayer, the team lifts up intentions for individuals and families, while thoughtfully curated care packages bring comfort to those grieving the loss of a child. Online resources on topics like infertility, grief counselling, and spiritual growth empower mothers with tools to face their struggles with faith and resilience. A monthly virtual adoration event, 'Come as You Are', further fosters a sacred space for healing and renewal in God's presence.

Learn more about Project Little Flower Ministry at [www.projectlittleflower.org](http://www.projectlittleflower.org). us or follow us on Instagram: @projectlittleflower18.

### **Empowering Mothers to Thrive**

The impact of Project Little Flower Ministry extends far beyond its programmes. By fostering an environment of love and support, the ministry empowers mothers to see their vocation not only as a challenge but as a profound calling. The testimonies of mothers

who have participated in the ministry's programmes highlight the transformation that occurs when faith, community, and healing converge.

One ministry member shared, 'Through this beautiful ministry, I experienced deep healing from past wounds, freedom from anxiety, and a renewed hope for the future, all while feeling the Lord's protection and the love of a supportive community.'

A mother who attended 'At the Well' in Houston shared her transformative experience: 'With all the challenges in my life, I could have easily been crushed and overwhelmed if I were still in the mental and spiritual state

I was in just last week. But the Lord's providence has been truly miraculous. Through "At the Well," He has brought healing, lifted the weight of worry and sorrow from my heart, and filled me with renewed strength and unwavering positivity. I now face these challenges with an extraordinary sense of peace and calm.'

### **Looking Ahead**

As the world continues to grapple with challenges that often undermine the family and the role of mothers, ministries like Project Little Flower stand as a testament to the Church's unwavering commitment to life, love, and the dignity of women. By honouring and supporting mothers, the Church not only upholds its teachings but also reflects the compassionate heart of Christ.

Through prayer, community, and practical support, Project Little Flower Ministry embodies the Church's mission to walk alongside mothers, reminding them that their vocation is sacred, their struggles are seen, and their sacrifices bear eternal fruit. As we celebrate the gift of motherhood, let us also commit to ensuring that every mother experiences the love and support they so richly deserve.



Marian is the Co-founder of Project Little Flower Ministry, supporting families and women in need of healing. She lives in Dallas, USA with her husband Vineeth and their three children. Marian is passionate about parenting topics and family.



# When Motherhood was Once Snatched Away

**Jesly James** shares her heartbreaking story of a brief motherhood and her walk through the 'valley of darkness'.

In the year 2020, towards the end of March I became pregnant. During my third month I was rushed to the hospital after experiencing severe bleeding and was advised bed rest for a month, with scans to be done each month. During the seventh month of my pregnancy, there was a leak in my amniotic fluid and I was immediately admitted to the hospital. During a scan that was taken, we realised that my baby's heartbeat had reduced. An immediate

C-section was decided and I gave birth to a beautiful baby boy. As soon as the baby was born they rushed him to the NICU. No one, myself included, had seen the baby. The NICU was on the ground floor and as I was healing from the stitches and couldn't climb the stairs, I couldn't see or visit my baby.

As soon as I was able to walk, I started visiting him in the NICU. It was there that I first saw him. I would nurse him and as the doctor advised, I would keep him on my chest, and sing him the song, *Kunje neeyen kayyil chanchadumbol*. We noticed a boost in his health. But his fingers had a sort of deformation, so the doctor suggested doing a genetic test. He suspected chromosome disorder. After the results came in we had an appointment with the doctor, who told us that our sweet boy had a genetic disease called Trisomy 18 (a disorder in which babies are born with three copies of chromosome 18 instead of two).

I was heartbroken and began questioning God why all this was happening to us, and I fell into a spiritual crisis. My mother remained my pillar of strength during that time. She supported me and made sure that I prayed and did not give up on my faith.

The doctors said that they doubted if our baby would survive. We called a priest and baptised him. We named him 'Job'... *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord*. He was also given the sacrament, Anointing of the Sick. A few days later my baby passed away. The nurses called my husband to the NICU. At that moment, I had a dream in which the doctor delivered the news of my baby's death. When my husband came up, I told him about the dream I had. And he broke the news of our baby's passing.

It was after his death that our family got to hold him in their hands for the first time. We buried him in our church cemetery. As the saying goes, small coffins are the heaviest to hold.

After this, I was in a spiritual mess. It took me a very long time to recover. The spiritual support that my parents gave me made a positive impact in my life. However my husband and I decided that we didn't want another child soon. But

after a year we began longing for a baby. However we couldn't conceive as easily as before. We visited many doctors and did a plethora of tests. All the results came back normal. Yet we weren't able to conceive. That was a very difficult period in my life.

A year of treatment passed. At that time a kind neighbour told us to go and pray at the Shrine Basilica of Our Lady of Health at Vailankanni (TN, India). I offered up my sorrows with the sorrows of Mother Mary. She who watched her innocent son crucified and blamed as a sinner would know the pain and sorrow of a mother who had lost her infant son. During our pilgrimage there, we tied a cradle and offered our prayer in God's hands. With faith that God would hear our prayer, we told Him that we wished for a baby girl. A nun whom we knew had also asked me to pray the prayer meant for pregnant women. I would say that prayer daily, even though I wasn't expecting at the time.

After the pilgrimage I took a test and was extremely surprised to find out that I was indeed pregnant. God had put an end to the three years of waiting that I had gone through. On 18 October 2023, I delivered a beautiful baby girl. The good Lord has not stopped blessing us abundantly. At present I am expecting my third child.

God takes us through rough and turbulent paths but all of the pain and longing that you undergo during that waiting period is meant for your spiritual cleansing. The story of Lazarus shows us how Jesus wasn't actually late to resurrect Lazarus, He was merely waiting for the correct time. The three days Lazarus remained dead served as a preparatory phase for the miracle that God was to bring to him.



Passionate about music and a gifted vocalist, **Jesly James** is a business owner based in Kerala, India.

# A Mother's Guide to Navigating Teen Years

**Dr Annilyn Sebastian** shares a few tips to mothers with teenage children.







**T**eenage years are the bridge between early childhood and adulthood during which children undergo a lot of change, including emotional, social, and physical, as they prepare to transition to adulthood.

Being a mother of nine children, having launched two into adulthood and currently having two teenagers and a preteen, I am still learning along the way. But overall, I want to share some broad tips that have helped us, and continue to help us navigate these precious years.

*(1) Relationship with God and prayer.* A strong relationship with God is crucial for navigating the teenage years. Deepening our own prayer lives and encouraging our teens to develop their own personal relationship with God, helps align priorities. Personal prayer, reading the Bible, and regularly participating in sacraments like Holy Mass and confession provide a good spiritual foundation. Once the relationship with God is right, for both us and our kids, everything else falls in place!

*(2) Relationship with family.* It is also important to keep relationships with family members right. For this, forgiveness and patience are instrumental. Through promoting a culture of love, mutual respect, togetherness and family support, we can strengthen family bonds.

In our family, when there is a significant event for a child, we have the whole family pray for that child, laying hands on them. When conflicts arise, we try to model humility by asking for forgiveness, and encouraging our kids to do the same, early years on.

*(3) Setting their moral compass.* The world has changed so much that there are so many dark possibilities that our children can get lost in. We need to educate them about potential pitfalls. We also need to educate them on Catholic social teachings, moral values and consequences of making poor choices. We need to empower them to make the right

decisions, by allowing them to use the free will that God has given them.

Even with a right moral conscience there are so many ways our kids can easily be dragged into dark areas, especially with the rise of technology, social media and apps with hidden dangers. Technology is great if used in the right way, but can have very serious spiritual and physical pitfalls if used improperly, from pornography to health issues to even suicide. The solution is not necessarily shielding them completely from technology, but again, empowering them to use it in a responsible way. We cannot just assume they will do the right things when given a screen, especially when so many adults fail in this area very vastly. As parents, it is our responsibility to make sure to provide a safe environment for them online.

As we homeschool, we do provide devices early on, but only with highly restricted access. We give them personal phones only around high school age. We implement parental controls for all devices, install filters and monitoring apps, check devices periodically after letting them know, and restrict social media until adulthood. These measures provide a potentially safer environment while teaching accountability and self-regulation.

*(4) Boosting self confidence, and giving space to grow.* Teenage phase is a period when they seek acceptance. Each child is unique, gifted in different ways, equipped with different temperaments, and have specific weaknesses and things they struggle with. It is very important to tap into their unique passions and strengths, and encourage them in that direction. Understanding our kids and their aspirations, dreams and personality is also of vital importance, and to be able to connect with them in a unique way. For this, the only way is to spend time talking to them. No two kids are exactly the same, and we can see that very easily in our own family of nine kids.

It is very important to let teens



have the freedom to make their own decisions, within a certain boundary, and avoid helicopter parenting at all costs. It is also important to give them more privileges, as long as they show increased responsibility. We give all our kids chores around the house, with no exception for teens. We require them to do household work in spite of their heavy school schedule; both our home-schooled adults graduated with whole college degrees while in high school, with great GPAs. We pay our kids for extra chores they do outside the norm. We teach them financial stewardship with saving and tithing as well. If they want something fancy or something we would not normally buy, we have them use the money towards that, again encouraging thoughtful spending. We also teach them the standards we set for our family, and that every person and family has the right to set their own standards differently, so that they don't give in easily to peer pressure.

*(5) Spending time with them, and understanding what they are going through.* We live in a corrupt and immoral world, which is not easy to live in. We as parents have a responsibility to give them moral support by listening to them and being there for them when they need us. In addition, teenagers go through a roller coaster of emotions. They can be lively and happy one minute and dull few minutes later. Understanding that this is a biological process with hormones causing such mood swings, will help us to empathise with them, and be more supportive, instead of taking it personally.

One of the ways we are able to spend time and connect with our teens is by teaching them driving ourselves. Though we are easily able to send them to driving school, we prefer to teach them ourselves, so that we can spend time with them one-on-one, for the 40 plus hours they need to practise, before the driving test.

Wrapping up, God specifically chose us parents to be the mother and father of our teens and equipped us with all the grace we need to parent them. It is our duty to understand them, nurture them, support them and bring out the best in them so they can be the unique person God created



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them to be, for the purpose He has created them for. Let us ask God for His heavenly wisdom to take this parenting mission seriously and do it the best we can for the few formative years He has placed them in our hands! God Bless!

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**Dr Annilyn Sebastian**, an MD Pathologist by profession, and wife of Dr Anup Skaria, is currently a stay-at-home home-schooling mother of their nine children. They reside in Houston, USA.







# MARY

## ICON OF PERFECT MOTHERHOOD

**Dr Sunnichan V George** writes about the profound mystery and living reality of the motherhood of Mary.

**T**he motherhood of the Blessed Virgin Mary is a profound and timeless mystery that continues to inspire faith, devotion, and reflection. Mary's role as the Mother of Jesus is central not only to the truth of salvation but also to the spiritual journey of every believer. When the angel Gabriel greeted Mary with the words, *Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you* (Luke 1:28), he revealed her unique place in God's plan. Mary's fiat – her 'Let it be done to me

according to your word' – was a moment of unparalleled faith and courage. In her willingness to embrace God's will, Mary became the *Theotokos*, the God-bearer, entrusted with carrying the Saviour of the world.

Mary's motherhood, however, was not limited to the physical act of giving birth to Jesus. It was a lifelong journey of faith, love, and sacrifice. At the nativity, she experienced the joy of holding her child, while also pondering the mystery of His



divine mission. Simeon's prophecy in the temple that *a sword will pierce your own soul too* (Luke 2:35) foreshadowed the suffering she would endure as she shared in the redemptive mission of her Son.

The Gospels offer glimpses of Mary's quiet yet steadfast presence in Jesus' life. At the wedding at Cana, she interceded for the hosts, demonstrating her attentiveness and trust in Jesus' divine power. Her words, *Do whatever he tells you* (John 2:5), are a timeless call to obedience and faith. At the foot of the Cross, Mary's heart was united with the suffering of her Son. Her silent strength in the face of unimaginable sorrow exemplifies her unwavering faith and love. Jesus' words to John from the Cross, *Behold, your mother* (John 19:27), reveal Mary's universal motherhood. In that moment, Mary became the mother of all believers, embracing the entire Church as her children. This spiritual motherhood reflects her ongoing role in guiding, nurturing, and interceding for us. It is through Mary's Holy Love she crushes the works of the devil.

Mary's motherhood invites us to reflect on the depth of God's love and the beauty of a life fully surrendered to His will. Her humility, obedience, and trust are qualities we can strive to emulate in our own lives. In times of doubt or difficulty, Mary's example reminds us to trust in God's plan, even when it is not fully clear.

Personally, I've often found comfort in turning to Mary during challenging moments. Praying the Rosary has been a source of peace and strength, reminding me of her maternal care and constant intercession. Whether it's seeking guidance, finding solace, or expressing gratitude, Mary's presence is a tangible reminder of God's love.

The motherhood of the Blessed Virgin Mary is not just a doctrine or a historical event; it is a living reality that continues to touch hearts and transform lives. As we honour Mary, we are drawn closer to Jesus, the source of all grace and salvation. May her example inspire us to live with faith, courage, and love, always saying 'yes' to God's call in our own lives.

Mary's example as a mother offers profound lessons for mothers today, especially in a world where the role of

Mary's motherhood also challenges societal norms by emphasising the dignity and sanctity of every life. Her acceptance of God's will, despite the uncertainties of being an unwed mother in her time, underscores the value of trusting in God's providence. Modern mothers can draw strength from her example to navigate the complexities of parenting with faith and grace.





motherhood is often undervalued or misunderstood. Her life demonstrates the importance of selflessness, faith, and nurturing love. Mary's fiat to God's plan is a challenge to modern mothers to embrace their own vocations with courage and trust, even amidst difficulties.

In a society that frequently prioritises personal achievement over family life, Mary reminds us of the irreplaceable value of a mother's presence. Her unwavering support of Jesus, from His childhood in Nazareth to His public ministry and crucifixion, highlights the vital role mothers play in shaping their children's faith and character. Her

example calls mothers to prioritise their children's spiritual and moral formation, even when the world offers competing distractions.

Mary's motherhood also challenges societal norms by emphasising the dignity and sanctity of every life. Her acceptance of God's will, despite the uncertainties of being an unwed mother in her time, underscores the value of trusting in God's providence. Modern mothers can draw strength from her example to navigate the complexities of parenting with faith and grace.

#### **Mary's Motherhood links her characteristic as the 'Purest Vessel of Grace'**

Mary's title as the 'Purest Vessel of Grace' reflects her immaculate nature and her unique role in bearing the Saviour of the world. From her conception, Mary was preserved from original sin through the grace of God, a privilege that prepared her to be a worthy dwelling place for the Incarnate Word. Her

Immaculate Conception is a testament to the abundance of grace that God poured upon her, enabling her to live a life of perfect holiness.

Grace is the life of God within us, and Mary, as the purest vessel, was filled with it to an extraordinary degree. Her openness to God's will and her unwavering faith allowed her to receive and reflect this grace in every aspect of her life. Unlike any other human, Mary's soul was completely aligned with God's will, making her a model of holiness and virtue for all believers.

Her purity and grace are not only foundational to her role as the Mother of God but also to her ongoing mission as our spiritual mother. Mary's intercession is powerful precisely because of her closeness to God and her complete surrender to His plan. She stands as a beacon of hope and a reminder of the transformative power of God's grace in our lives.

In reflecting on Mary as the purest vessel of grace, we are invited to consider our own openness to God's grace. Are we, like Mary, willing to say 'yes' to God's call, even when it is difficult or uncertain? Mary's example challenges us to trust in God's providence and to strive for holiness in our daily lives.

#### **Proclamation of the 'Fifth Marian Dogma'**

Mary's spiritual motherhood is evident in her apparitions throughout history, where she calls humanity to conversion, prayer, and a deeper relationship with Christ. From Guadalupe to Lourdes to Fatima, Mary's messages are consistent with her maternal care and her mission to lead us closer to God.

The proposed Fifth Marian Dogma seeks to formally recognise three key aspects of Mary's role in salvation:

**Co-Redemptrix:** This title emphasises Mary's unique cooperation in Christ's redemptive work. While Christ alone is the Redeemer, Mary's participation as the New Eve complements the obedience of the New Adam. By her fiat, she gave Christ His human nature, enabling the incarnation. At Calvary, her suffering united with her Son's sacrifice, exemplifying her deep collaboration in God's plan of salvation.

**Mediatrix:** Mary's role as mediatrix highlights her intercession in distributing the graces of redemption. As the Mother of Christ and the Church, she is seen as a channel through which God's grace flows to humanity. Her role does not diminish Christ's mediatory role but rather demonstrates how God chooses to involve His creation in His work.

**Advocate:** As our advocate, Mary continually intercedes for us before her Son. Her maternal care ensures that our prayers are heard, and her example inspires us to live lives of holiness and trust in God.

Mary's motherhood and her proposed titles as Co-Redemptrix, Mediatrix, and Advocate offer profound insights into her relationship with Christ and the Church. In my own life, I've experienced the transformative power of her intercession. When faced with trials, turning to Mary has brought peace and clarity. Her example of unwavering faith and love serves as a constant reminder to trust in God's plan, even in moments of uncertainty.

The Fifth Marian Dogma, if proclaimed, would not introduce new beliefs but would deepen our understanding of Mary's unique role in salvation history. It would affirm her as a model of faith and a source of inspiration for all believers, encouraging us to live lives of grace and surrender.

Devotion to the Blessed Mother and her intercession also poses questions from other non-denominational groups where they have a problem when Catholics go to Jesus through Mary. They do claim we should go directly to Him. We can and we do not negate that. What they do not realise is that God did not come directly to us! He chose to come to us through Mary. His ways are better than ours.

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**Dr Sunnichan V George** is a distinguished professor of food technology at Amal Jyothi College of Engineering, Kanjirapally, India. A devout Marian pilgrim, he regularly leads spiritual journeys to revered sites such as Medjugorje and Guadalupe. Dr George is married to Dr Mini Mathew, and they have four children.

# My Mother, the Blessed Mother and My Faith



## My Mother Drew Me to HER

*She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children arise and call her blessed (Proverbs 31:27-28).*

Although I was named Maria, I never truly felt a connection with Mother Mary especially in my younger years. As a teenager, I was quite a rebel and had slowly started drifting away from faith. I've watched my mother wake up at 4am to start the day with prayer and Rosary, prepare food, tend to household chores and manage to hurry for Mass. I remember how she would go to our neighbouring parish on the days there was no Mass at our parish. At that age nothing made sense to me. I would go for Mass and confession just because she insisted. At that point of time my faith was largely outward.

My mother knew I was drifting away from God and she consistently kept praying for me. Through her devotion to Mother Mary I was able to find my way back to God. Seeking the intercession of Mamma Mary gave me the courage to say yes to the Lord for my full-timership. Now when I go to places as part of my ministry I feel the presence of the Blessed Virgin around me. My ministry partner and I have made it a daily practice to pray the Rosary together.

It was my earthly mother, her prayers and Rosaries that led me closer to my spiritual Mother Mary. Today, even though I am in a far off land for my mission, I never felt lonely because I know that Mother Mary is with me. I cannot help but thank God for the gift of my mother who brought me closer to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

→ Maria Deepti Issac Baby, AP, India

## Just Like Mary

*But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart (Luke 2:19).*

When I was asked to share an experience about my mother, I realised that even though I was deeply attached to her I hadn't really thought about this before.

As I sat back in my chair and closed my eyes, I remembered the woman who bore me and how she kept aside her life to take care of us while our father worked abroad. Despite being a very learned woman of her time, she chose to stay and look after us. A very devoted woman who never missed Holy Mass or family prayers, she was a calm woman who practised the virtue of forgiveness.

During the construction of our home she would pack lunch, go to the site and work alongside the labourers. I remember her serenity and how she kept calm even when my father disapproved of my joining the seminary. She once told me that deep down in my heart she knew that my vocation was priesthood even before I was aware of my calling. Just like Mother Mary had known that her son was the Saviour, my mother had known that I would be a priest one day, she kept this divine knowledge in her heart.

I will forever cherish the morals that she taught me.

During my time at the seminary, my mother has been far in terms of distance but she always knew about my wellbeing. Through all my struggles, I knew and felt her on the other side, praying for me and spiritually walking along with me. How blessed am I to have a mother like Mother Mary who walked alongside Jesus during His passion on the cross.

→ Dn. Jones Pallippuram, Sagar Diocese, MP, India



## A Special Gift from Mother Mary

*When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine' (John 3:3).*

In the year 2016, I was quite apprehensive about joining the seminary. After my mother departed us, I was

broken. During this period, I had an experience through which I felt the providence of God in a deep way.

There was a pious woman named Rani John in our locality who experienced Jesus turn into flesh and blood during Holy Communion. I was present during that Eucharistic miracle. Since she was a friend of my family, I would regularly go to the chapel at her home and pray. I remember the fragrance in the chapel during the prayers to Mother Mary. In the year 2003, she had received a spiritual message that from then on there would be no fragrance during prayers.

As time passed my wish to become a priest strengthened

and so did my prayers. Still, I waited for a spiritual intervention that would serve as a confirmation for me to join the seminary. It was during that time that I went for a prayer service (to Mother Mary) at Rani Aunty's house. On that day I experienced the fragrance of jasmine flowers – after 13 years. I was elated knowing that Mother Mary was guiding me to priesthood. Later I met the priest who led the prayer. After having a conversation with him, he told me that this prayer was planned by God for me and that my vocation was discerned with the help of Mother Mary.

→ **Fr Melvin Chiramel**, Assistant Vicar, Holy Trinity Forane Church, Palakkad, India



## My Brave and Selfless Mother

*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations (Jeremiah 1:5).*

As soon as I heard of the topic motherhood, I remembered my mother who in my eyes was the epitome of love and sacrifice. Be it the mothers of saints or even Mother Mary, my mother's love was the root that connected me to other mothers.

Whenever I remember my mother or share this experience, I find myself filled with tears at the suffering she went through for me. Being the firstborn in my family, naturally everyone had high expectations of me. While she was pregnant with me, my mother contracted chickenpox. She was taken to a hospital with good facilities and expert doctors where she was told that the baby would be born deformed. A very able team of five doctors asked her to abort the baby as it would be a struggle to raise a deformed baby. Even friends and family pressured her to get rid of the baby. But she stood strong and bravely fought to protect her child. My mother firmly said that she was ready to look after her baby even if it was deformed from birth to



death; she was ready to care for the baby every single day. She firmly refused to accept what everyone told her and valued her God-given motherhood.

The sacrifice that she made is one of the reasons I stand on the altar today. I remember her abstinence from meat for a whole year in preparation for my ordination. Like Mother Mary, my mother was willing to offer her son into the hands of the Lord, keeping aside her pain and firmly believing in His plan.

→ **Fr Prijov Vadakkethala**, Assistant Vicar, St Joseph's Shrine, Velupadam, India





## Rosaries that Inspired My Mother

*I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions (Joel 2:28).*

It was into a family of 'Sunday Christians' that I was born, where family prayers were completely absent. Looking back, I can call my family, a spiritually broken one.

I was drawn closer to Jesus after being a part of the Jesus Youth movement and started attending Holy Mass regularly. Every morning, on the way to church, I would be surrounded by pitch darkness. To boost my confidence, I started saying the Rosary – one on my way to church and a second while returning. It felt like I was holding Mamma Mary's hand as I went. The more Rosaries I said, I noticed that my familial bond grew stronger and stronger.

Previously, whenever any problem came up my mother would say that it was fated for her to face it. But now when faced with a problem, I began to see her run towards the image of Jesus in my house and cast her worries on Him. I would also narrate the joy I felt while receiving Holy Communion to my mother. Hearing my experience, my mother too started attending Holy Mass regularly.

Now when I see her pray, I am confident that she does not simply pray rather she has felt a strong connection with Jesus. I am sure that she has felt the same Jesus that I have so deeply felt in my heart. I feel blessed to think that Jesus used me as His instrument to inspire my mother in her spiritual life.

→ Anna Maria, Arunachal Pradesh, India

# How Motherhood Changed Me



## MIRACLES AMIDST TIGHTROPE

As a mother, I envisioned a normal delivery or, worst-case, a C-section, followed by a joyful return home with my twins. But my world was turned upside down when I discovered the challenges ahead, even before the due date.

My preterm babies arrived at just 27 weeks and 4 days. 45 days in neonatal NIC was like walking on precautions' tightrope. Yet, each day brought miracles and messages from the Lord through others. Though my expectations and reality clashed, God transformed me into a resilient woman, rooted deeply in faith, able to withstand life's storms. Even 12 years later, those memories remain profound.

Jeena Kuruvilla, Bangalore, India



## GRACE IN THE CHAOS

**A**s a young mom, motherhood meant making sure there was food at the table three times a day, taking them out in the evenings and bathing them before bed! As we added another baby to the family, I felt a strong nudge and inner voice wanting more for my children apart from the set standards of the world. Yes, being a good person, being well mannered and respectful were all the great qualities that I would want to instil in them but there was more that my ‘mom-heart’ desired – which led to the beginning of my journey towards where God wanted me to be.

Like most mothers would say, motherhood is one of the most fulfilling and joyous roles that women are blessed with but for me personally, it has been an extremely humbling path. I was someone who took ‘pride’ in the belief that I was without pride or ego. But the Lord so very lovingly revealed to me through my children, how little I knew about myself!

One of my biggest convictions is that motherhood is not something I get to choose, it is a gift from Him. It may sound cliché but this conviction comes from my personal testimony. I have a son and daughter and both my pregnancies were so grace filled and smooth, during and after.

Somewhere along the way I took this for granted until the year 2021 when I had my first

miscarriage. The first few days were hard on me physically and I thought the worst was over. The grief of losing a child hit me hard and that was when it dawned on me that nothing is mine to keep, everything is a gift from Him! That was when I began to allow God to stretch my heart. This journey has brought a lot of healing to me especially in those areas where I had begun to believe the lies that were being whispered to me very subtly but regularly. The voices that told me, I wasn’t doing enough for my children, that they deserved better than what I was giving. It was hard to ignore these negative thoughts and voices and in that moment of fear and anxiety, God sent to me a great community of moms who are on a similar journey of finding their calling and trying to lead their children to where God wants them to be.

The truths that I received in exchange for all the lies were, God chose me to be a mother to my children and I am enough for them, that through this journey God wants to draw me closer to Him and cling to Him for grace and patience, that He will be with me every step of the way and that no matter how many times I fall, I will always be held and strengthened by Him.

► Sneha Thomas, McKinney, Texas, USA





## MOMMY LIFE

It was only after my first delivery that I pondered about birthdays. When somebody's birthday was mentioned, I would think about their mother. I started wishing their mothers the anniversary of their pregnancy and delivery.

Being a mother is like joining a lifelong course, researching each day, plenty of trial and error, practising skills that gain perfection only with time, the list continues. When I turn back to the three years of my motherhood journey, I realise that His grace is sufficient for me (2 Corinthians 12:9). Even in the midst of chaos or uncertainty it was easy for me to go through with a smile when I realise that His grace is with me and His hands are supporting me. But on the flipside, when I forget, it feels like I am plunging down a black hole – no one and nothing to hold on to.

John 15:16 says, *It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you.* This Word of God is a great strength when I

doubt myself as a mother. Looking into my weaknesses always fills me with fear: I'm not yet a good person, still trying to figure it out myself. How will I bring up my little ones? How can I mould them when I'm not a perfect mould? There is still a lot I have to learn – handling situations, organising tasks and applying it to my daily life. When I look around, I see only disorder and no one to help, all of which only increases the stress and struggle. But the most beautiful part is that the Lord planned all this before I was even born. He made me realise how wonderfully I was made and taught me to live this Word of God: *I am grateful to him who has strengthened me, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he considered me trustworthy in appointing me to the ministry* (1 Timothy 1:12).

The Lord also reminded me that I am just a custodian of my kids and that their real provider is Our Father in heaven. He will provide everything for His kids, born through me. Therefore, I had to stop worrying about my parenting skills.

Some spiritual exercises that have

helped me on this journey of motherhood are: calling and seeking help from my guardian angel and the guardian angels of my husband and kids. Asking the helper, the Holy Spirit is another way which reduced my stress and increased my capacity. *Send her forth from your holy heavens and from your glorious throne dispatch her, that she may be with me and work with me, that I may know what is pleasing to you. For she knows and understands all things, and will guide me prudently in my affairs and safeguard me by her glory* (Wisdom 9:10-11).

Mother Mary, who endured the hardships of motherhood, is a great helper and role model. She knows exactly what and how to do, so offering my kids to her Immaculate Heart was a relief from the stress I was going through. She was the best mother in the world for the best son in the world. She takes care of my kids as her own and she is there with me as my own mother, always.

► Sonia T Sunny, Watford, UK



## 'THIS IS MY BODY, BROKEN FOR YOU'

**M**uch of my first trimester was spent in Kozhikode, India. Most days were uncomfortably hot, and this, coupled with the nausea and sickness that accompanied this part of my pregnancy, made it very difficult for me to focus during Holy Mass. On one such occasion, I remember looking up at the Host, and for the first time, with a new meaning, the words echoed in my heart, 'This is my body, broken for you.' The words Christ spoke to me each day as I received Him in the Eucharist, here He was calling me to live. To the little one in my womb, whom I didn't yet know, 'This is my body, broken for you.'

What a gift it is to share in the suffering of Christ. When breathing through the pains of contractions, when my body is torn and in the healing that follows, through each sleepless night, my heart echoes the words of my Saviour: 'This is my body, broken for you.'

I can see that, in every moment of my journey as a mother, Christ is teaching me to be a little more like Him. He is teaching me that true love costs and hurts. He is teaching me that life is most beautiful when lived in the service of others. Though it is painful, and even when I feel frustrated, helpless, weary, or tired, I am reminded of Christ's words: *Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit* (John 12:24). Becoming a mother has taught me that motherhood is part of my personal call, in which Christ is pruning me and forming me more into His likeness and into a saint.

■ Della John, West Midlands, UK



## BEING THE GRAIN OF WHEAT

*Unless the grain of wheat falls down and dies, it just remains a grain of wheat* (John 12:24).

**T**his Word of God has been the core of my journey as a mother. God has taken me on this beautiful journey slowly but steadily, through good times and hard times, nourishing me with His Fatherly love. Through the years, He has gently pried my self-reliance off my hands and given me a father's hand to hold on to for strength, as I mother my children. Over time I have experienced a strength in me to count everything (that the world runs after) as nothing for the surpassing value of knowing Christ and trying to live His will in my motherhood.

One of the greatest gifts I received in this journey is the 'gift of courage,' to decide to be at home to stay with my children – to be with them at every step, to be there to wipe every tear, to kiss every bump, to read with them every book as they learn their letters, to be with them on their home-schooling journey, and to live with a little less in the eyes of the world, but with an abundance of joy that cannot be put into words. Along the way I have found that even on the verge of breaking, God always provides a little more strength to go another step, a strength I would never have experienced otherwise.

There is no greater gift than the absolute devotion in my children's eyes as they look at me, and the love of my dear husband – to them I'm their whole world, and so often I ask my Heavenly Father, 'How is it possible Lord? To be loved so much in return, for so little I do.' And He often reminds me of that single grain of wheat, which fell down and died, and of a loving Father who can bring forth abundance of life out of it.

■ Mahima Anthraper, Southampton, UK



# Chandeliers

## ✧ *St Gianna Beretta Molla: Saint of Motherhood*



**D**uring this year's Bible Fest in the Sultanpet Diocese, Palakkad, India, my daughter Eza unusually dressed up as St Gianna Beretta Molla instead of a biblical character. This unexpected choice became a turning point for me. Intrigued, I started reading about this remarkable woman, the saint of motherhood. Saint Gianna, a devoted wife, mother, and paediatrician, lived her life with profound faith and selfless love. Her ultimate sacrifice – choosing her child's life over her own – deeply inspired me.

St Gianna Beretta Molla, often celebrated as the 'saint of motherhood,' is a modern-day example of selfless

love, and dedication to both family and vocation. Her life, though brief, remains a testament to the sanctity of life and the profound role of motherhood in God's divine plan.

Gianna was born on 4 October 1922, in Magenta, Italy, to a deeply Catholic family. She was the tenth of thirteen children, and her parents instilled in her a strong faith and love for service. From an early age, Gianna had a deep devotion to God and the Church, attending daily Mass and dedicating herself to prayer. She was particularly inspired by the lives of the saints, who influenced her to lead a life of holiness.

Gianna pursued her education with vigour, eventually enrolling in medical school at the University of Milan. She saw her medical vocation as a way to serve others and live out her Christian principles. Her specialisation in paediatrics reflected her deep compassion for children and families.

Gianna faced significant challenges during her medical training and early career. Italy was still recovering from the devastation of World War II, and resources were scarce. However, her determination and faith never wavered. She established a medical practice in Mesero, near her hometown, where she became known for her kindness, professionalism, and commitment to her patients.

In addition to her medical work, Gianna was actively involved in her parish and various Catholic organisations. She believed deeply in the importance of balancing professional life with personal faith and family. Her life's motto was clear: 'Whatever God wants.' This attitude of surrender to God's will became a defining feature of her life.

In 1955, Gianna married Pietro Molla, an engineer, after discerning a clear calling to marriage and family life. Their union was a partnership rooted in mutual love and respect, with God at the

centre. Together, they had three children: Pierluigi, Mariolina, and Laura. Gianna embraced motherhood with joy, viewing it as a divine mission. She often spoke of the sacredness of family life and the privilege of raising children in faith.

Balancing roles as a wife, mother, and doctor was not easy, but Gianna managed with grace and determination. Her patients admired her not only for her medical expertise but also for her warmth and compassion.

In 1961, Gianna became pregnant with her fourth child. During the early stages of her pregnancy, she was diagnosed with a large fibroma in her uterus. This condition posed a serious risk to both her and the life of her unborn child. Gianna's doctors presented her with three options: a complete hysterectomy, which would save her life but end the pregnancy; a procedure to remove the fibroma, which carried risks for both mother and child; or terminating the pregnancy. Gianna chose her child's life, insisting on the removal of the fibroma while preserving the pregnancy. She told her husband and doctors, 'If you must decide between me and the child, do not hesitate: choose the child. I insist on it. Save the baby.' Her decision reflected her unwavering faith and her belief in the sanctity of life.

On 21 April 1962, Gianna gave birth to a healthy baby girl, Gianna Emanuela. However, complications arose shortly after delivery, and Gianna developed septic peritonitis. Despite the best medical efforts, she passed away on 28 April 1962 at the age of 39. Her final moments were marked by prayer and a serene acceptance of God's will.

Gianna's life and death left a profound impact on her family, community, and the world. Over time, her reputation for holiness spread, and many began seeking her intercession, especially mothers and families facing difficult pregnancies.

The Church recognised her heroic

*Gianna chose her child's life, insisting on the removal of the fibroma while preserving the pregnancy. She told her husband and doctors, 'If you must decide between me and the child, do not hesitate: choose the child. I insist on it. Save the baby.'*

virtue, and Pope John Paul II beatified her on 24 April 1994, during the International Year of the Family. In his homily, the Pope highlighted Gianna's life as a shining example of love and self-giving, calling her a 'proclaimer, defender, and servant of life.' He canonised Gianna on 16 May 2004. She became the first married woman and mother of modern times to be declared a saint. Her canonisation was attended by her husband Pietro and her youngest daughter, Gianna Emanuela, who had become a doctor herself. This rare and poignant moment underscored the enduring legacy of Gianna's sacrifice.

St Gianna Beretta Molla is widely venerated as the patron saint of mothers, unborn children, and physicians. Her life continues to inspire countless people around the world, particularly those who face difficult decisions regarding life and family. Gianna's story emphasises the sacredness of motherhood and the profound dignity of every human life, even in the face of immense personal sacrifice. Her example reminds us that motherhood is not merely a biological role but a divine vocation that calls for love, courage, and trust in God.

St Gianna Beretta Molla's life was a symphony of faith, love, and sacrifice. From her early years of devotion to her final act of courage, she exemplified the Christian call to live for others. Her legacy reminds us that true holiness lies in embracing God's will and loving others without measure.

O glorious Saint Gianna, model of faith, love, and sacrifice, you embraced God's will with courage and joy in every aspect of your life. As a wife, mother, and physician, you showed compassion, selflessness, and unwavering trust in the sanctity of life. Intercede for us, that we may cherish and protect the gift of life in all its stages. Inspire mothers to fulfil their divine vocation with grace and strength. Help us to place our trust in God's plan and to love without measure. Through your prayers, may we grow in holiness and serve God faithfully. ■

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Aji Thomas lives in Palakkad, India, with his wife Lizi Das and their three children.





# Awesome Wonder

**Anil Israel** reflects on the role of mothers in our lives, including our mother the Church, the Blessed Virgin Mary and the numerous saints who were mothers.

**W**e all owe our lives to our mothers for they chose to lovingly welcome us into their lives so we could have life. They carried us in their womb for nine long months and endured agonising labour pains, so we could have the privilege of being born, as a child of God – created in His image and likeness.

We all have very fond childhood memories of our mothers. Her tender loving care, her gentle warm embrace, her affectionate nurturing love, her indispensable presence to raise us up when we were down. She's the one we run to for rescue from pain or fear. She's the one in whose maternal solace every child finds rest and heavenly peace.

My mother was a homemaker. She fed us with not only delicious food for the body, but also instilled in us virtues of truth, love and humility. Her recourse to prayer and Scripture, provided the protective shield in spiritual battles. Her

weekly fasting, though it never made sense as a child, has won incredible graces in the well-being of our small family.

Every mother has an enormous share of sacrifice and silent suffering. *Suffering produces endurance* (Romans 5:3). Mothers are endurance personified. We have a lot to learn from their *patient endurance* (Hebrews 10:36). Mothers have an innate gift of recognising when their little ones have woken up in the middle of the night. They nurse and put them back to sleep, sacrificing their own rest. Undoubtedly, they are for us an epitome of selflessness.

A mother at times may go hungry just to ensure everyone else in the family is adequately fed. The image of a mother pelican feeding its young ones with her own blood portrays the self-emptying love of a mother. Her personal preferences, her hobbies, her wants and desires, tend to take a back seat, in the attempt of letting everyone else have theirs fulfilled.

Mothers stand tall as pillars of supreme strength. She is the heart of the family – weaving everyone together in a web of love. She is the super glue that provides the quick fix solution to the breaks and aches of anguish and anxiety. Her kiss of love can heal a wounded heart.

When Don Bosco was two-years-old, his father passed away. His mother, Venerable Margaret Occhiena raised him up with unwavering faith and encouraged him to be a saintly priest. Later, she even supported his Oratory becoming *Mamma* to numerous homeless boys.

Dominic Savio's mother told him stories of St Louis, whose mother taught him that she would rather see him dead than commit a mortal sin. This inspired Dominic Savio to embrace a resolution *Death rather than sin*. Surely saintly stories heard during childhood have raised many young saints like Maria Goretti and Laura Vicuna. Mothers play a vital role in forming pure hearts.

A Jewish mother of seven sons,



encouraged them to embrace martyrdom *than abandon the traditions of our ancestors* (2 Maccabees 7:2) *Give up your life willingly and prove yourself worthy of your brothers, so that by God's mercy I may receive you back with them at the resurrection* (v29). St Monica is said to have prayed for seventeen long years for her son Augustine. Innumerable are the fruits of praying mothers.

Motherhood is not only about giving physical birth and raising one's own children. It's also being a motherly figure to other souls. In a convent, the superior is often called Mother. I fondly recall going for spiritual guidance to the Mother of a Carmelite convent. Her ever-radiating face spoke volumes to all those who approached her for spiritual counselling.

Many spiritually mature lay women

OF THE LORD. LET IT BE DONE TO ME ACCORDING TO YOUR WORD › LUKE 1:38



Third century Church Father and theologian Cyprian once wrote: *You cannot have God as your Father unless you have the Church for your Mother. The Church is considered to be a mother to her members because she is the Bride of Christ.*

also offer a listening ear to the anguish of distressed souls. In their non-judgemental listening, in their loving guidance, in their gentle consolation and persistent accompaniment, they become spiritual mentors to desperate youngsters. My wife and I are blessed to approach a spiritual elder with our prayer requests for personal and ministry intentions. Her invaluable suggestions as to how to improve prayer life have played a vital role in moulding us on our pilgrimage of faith.

An Albanian nun, Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu, stirred by a divine inspiration, embraced the call to be a mother to the destitute. She went on to become Mother Teresa, the founder of the Missionaries of Charity. Mother welcomed abandoned new-born children and gave shelter to

those who were left on the streets to die. She chose to quench the thirst of Christ in the lonely and the suffering. She recognised Jesus in the poorest of the poor.

Third century Church Father and theologian Cyprian once wrote: *You cannot have God as your Father unless you have the Church for your Mother.* The Church is considered to be a mother to her members because she is the Bride of Christ.

We all are in need of spiritual guidance from those spiritually more mature than us. We can learn from the teaching authority of the Church. We can also learn a lot from our spiritual mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary. When at the cross Jesus referred to the disciple John, *Behold your mother!* (John 19:27), He entrusted His own mother to be our spiritual mother.

May we heed to her request to pray the Rosary for the conversion of sinners and give an obedient ear to Jesus, for she requests each one of us: *Do whatever he tells you* (John 2:5). We have a lot to learn from her for she lived in full submission to the Father's will: *Behold, I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be done to me according to your word* (Luke 1:38).

Motherhood is every woman's vocation. May motherly saints like St Zelig Martin and St Gianna Beretta Molla, continue to inspire the women of today's generation to embrace the call to holy motherhood. May our hearts be ever filled with immense gratitude for all the mothers, for their infinite contribution to humanity. May we praise God for His marvellous creation – our mother – truly an awesome wonder. ■■

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Anil Israel lives in Mannheim, Germany, with his wife Sunitha and their 6 children.



# NewsWatch

## SEEK conference held for the first time in Europe

A vibrant gathering of over 17,000 Catholics filled the Salt Palace Convention Centre in Salt Lake City from 1 to 5 January for SEEK25, an annual conference hosted by the Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS). For the first time, the event expanded to three locations, with satellite conferences attracting more than 3,000 attendees in Washington, D.C., from 2 – 5 January, and nearly 500 participants in Cologne, Germany, from 31 December to 2 January, marking SEEK's inaugural presence in Europe.

Bishop Oscar A Solis of Salt Lake City celebrated the opening Mass, joined by 489 concelebrating priests. In his homily, he reflected on the historic journey of seekers in Utah, from indigenous people to Catholic pioneers, emphasising the spirit of exploration and faith. Participants engaged in a rich spiritual experience through daily liturgies, Eucharistic adoration, and the sacrament of reconciliation. Notable speakers inspired audiences, including Father Mike Schmitz, host of *The Bible in a Year* podcast. He addressed original sin as humanity's inherent brokenness, stating that sin arises when people choose personal desires over God's will. True happiness, he emphasised, is only possible through a relationship with God.

The conference featured the 'Making Missionary Disciples' track, which drew influential speakers like Bishop Andrew H Cozzens and Trent Horn. Together, they explored the event's theme, 'Follow Me,' across 42 impact sessions. Topics ranged from gender identity, social narcissism, and artificial intelligence to the sanctity of life, marriage, and healing broken relationships. Practical workshops provided strategies for lay leaders to foster missionary discipleship, prayer, leadership, and evangelisation in their parishes.



In Mission Way, hundreds of vendors offered connections to religious orders, educational services, and Catholic organisations. Many attendees, such as Nicholls State University freshman Mallory Griffin, were inspired by the vibrancy of campus ministries and the broader SEEK experience. Griffin expressed optimism about young people's growing engagement with the Church through events like SEEK. For many Utah Catholics, the vastness of their faith community was a revelation. Rigo Tellez from Weber State University noted that witnessing so many faithful believers expanded his understanding of Catholicism beyond routine Sunday worship. The conference's personal encounters were transformative for some. Father Steve Mateja of Detroit led a group that included non-Catholics, four Protestants, and two atheists. A student's spontaneous desire to become Catholic after a small group discussion reaffirmed the event's evangelising purpose:

fostering lasting relationships with Christ.

FOCUS founder Curtis Martin shared his reflections on SEEK's international impact, likening evangelisation in spiritually dark regions to the profound difference a single candle can make in a cave. He stressed the power of discipleship – following Christ by following faithful leaders. As SEEK25 concluded in Washington, Archbishop Nelson J Perez of Philadelphia celebrated the closing Mass. He reminded attendees that Christian discipleship centres on the resurrection of Jesus, which embodies the source of hope. Drawing from the Epiphany story, he encouraged participants to return home changed, trusting in God's enduring presence despite life's hardships. FOCUS announced that SEEK26 would expand to Columbus, Ohio; Denver; and Fort Worth, Texas, from 1 – 5 January 2026. Columbus Bishop Earl K. Fernandez expressed his enthusiasm, anticipating the spiritual energy SEEK would bring to his diocese.



By Sam Biju

## Embracing the role of Pilgrims of Hope during the Jubilee Year

In a recent BBC podcast, Pope Francis urged Catholics to embrace the role of ‘pilgrims of hope,’ emphasising that hope and kindness are central to the message of the Gospel. Speaking on 27 December, shortly after the opening of the 2025 Jubilee Year, the Pope reflected on kindness, calling it more than a social tool or strategy. Instead, he described it as ‘a form of love that opens hearts to acceptance’ and nurtures humility. The pontiff addressed the challenges of modern times, acknowledging the prevalence of war, social injustice, and daily violence, but urged listeners not to succumb to discouragement or scepticism. He highlighted the enduring power of kindness and hope even in the face of adversity. Drawing inspiration from GK Chesterton, Pope Francis cited the British author’s encouragement to approach life with gratitude rather than entitlement. He noted that Chesterton was also admired by Argentine poet Jorge Luis Borges, emphasising the global resonance of such reflections on life and faith. As part of his message for the Jubilee, Pope Francis expressed a wish for the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity to shape the new year, praying that it would bring peace, unity, and gratitude.

The 2025 Jubilee Year began on Christmas Eve when Pope Francis opened the Holy Door of St Peter’s Basilica. Pilgrims from around the world are now passing through this symbolic doorway, a tradition representing spiritual renewal and a return to God’s grace. In his Christmas Day address, the Pope reminded the faithful that ‘the door of God’s heart is always open,’ inviting everyone to return to divine love and forgiveness. In addition to St Peter’s, other Holy Doors are opening across Rome, including one at Rebibbia prison, marking the start of a yearlong celebration.

Jubilees, or holy years, are moments of special grace in the Catholic Church, offering opportunities for deepening faith and spiritual renewal. A key element of the jubilee is the chance to obtain a plenary indulgence, which removes temporal punishment for sin through the merits of Christ. Among the significant events planned for the Jubilee of Hope are two major canonisations. Blessed Carlo Acutis, known for his dedication to the Eucharist and use of technology to share the faith, will be canonised during the Jubilee of Teenagers on 27 April. Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati, celebrated for his devotion to charity and the poor, will be canonised during the Jubilee of Young People on 3 August. Through these celebrations and acts of devotion, Pope Francis hopes that the Jubilee will inspire Catholics to draw closer to God, embrace kindness, and live with renewed hope and gratitude in their hearts.

## Sister Brambilla to be the Prefect of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life



Pope Francis has made history by appointing Sister Simona Brambilla as the first woman to head a dicastery within the Roman Curia, reflecting his commitment to enhancing

women’s leadership roles in the Vatican. The 59-year-old Italian, a former superior general of the Consolata Missionary Sisters, has served as secretary of the Vatican’s department for religious and consecrated life since October 2023. In her new role as prefect of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Sister Brambilla will share leadership with Cardinal Ángel Fernández Artime, appointed pro-prefect on 6 January. A Spanish national and former rector major of the Salesians, Fernández’s ordination fulfils the requirement of canon law for certain governing functions. Brambilla’s background is distinguished by a blend of healthcare, mission work, and academia. She began her professional life as a nurse before joining religious life, then spent time as a missionary in Mozambique in the late 1990s. Returning to Italy, she earned an advanced psychology degree and taught at the Pontifical Gregorian University. She led the Consolata Missionary Sisters from 2011 until May 2023. This appointment adds to a growing number of influential women elevated to leadership roles by Pope Francis. Among these are Sister Raffaella Petrini, the first woman to hold the second-ranking position in the Vatican City State government; Sister Alessandra Smerilli, secretary of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development; Sister Nathalie Becquart, undersecretary of the Synod of Bishops; and laywomen Gabriella Gambino and Linda Ghisoni, undersecretaries of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family, and Life.

Women have also been entrusted with secretary roles within various Vatican commissions and councils. Notably, last month, Brambilla was appointed to the 16th Ordinary Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod, joining Argentinian laywoman María Lia Zervino as the only women and non-bishops among the 17-member body. In her leadership of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Brambilla will collaborate with undersecretaries Father Aitor Jiménez Echave and Sister Carmen Ros Nortes. Pope Francis’ continued appointment of women to prominent positions underscores his vision of greater inclusion within the Church’s governance, affirming that women’s perspectives and talents are vital to its mission.

# time out



Take a picture of the solved image and send it to  
[quiztime@jykaivosmedia.org](mailto:quiztime@jykaivosmedia.org) before 25th February 2025.  
 The winner will be rewarded with 1 year subscription of Kairos Global

## Q FIND 10 HIDDEN ANIMALS

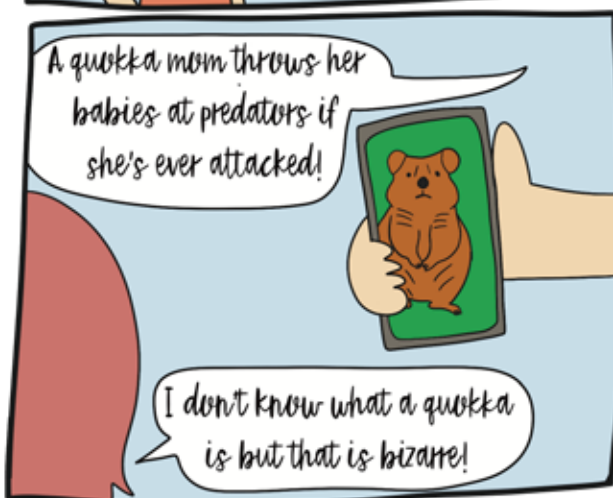
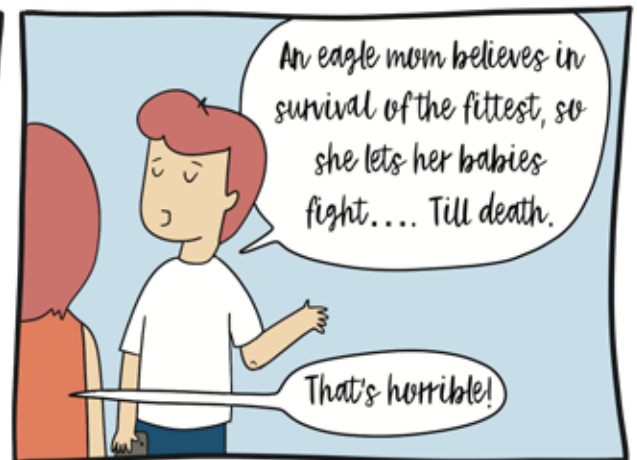
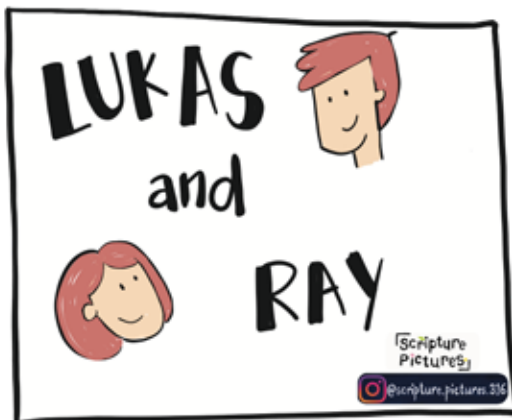
HIDDEN  
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ALSO







Inspired by "There are moms way worse than you" by Glenn Boozan



# Today's Youth Need Hearts that Listen!

*The Art of Listening to Young People*, written by the Florida-based JY affiliate Amoris Christi, is a valuable resource for parents, teachers, mentors, spiritual directors and counsellors – anyone working closely with the youth of today.

Combining pastoral wisdom and scientific research, this book helps the reader connect with today's youth, be an empathetic and understanding listener able to support them in the challenges they currently face.

*The Art of Listening to Young People* is your guide to building relationships that inspire and transform.

