

# May the Month of Mary

May is the month when Catholics traditionally focus on Mary, the Mother of Jesus. The practice dates back at least 700 years and is still observed around the world today. May is seen as the beginning of new life and the start of summer, which makes this a logical time for the celebrations of Mary, who brought life into the world.

## May Devotions

This month of devotions in the church calendar is characterised by special hymns and the use of flowers, which bring nature into the church. There are several Marian feast days in May, including Our Lady of Fatima, Our Lady of the Most Blessed Sacrament and Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The celebration of May as a holy month for Mary has been ratified by several popes through the ages. Pope Benedict XV ordered a prayer for peace in 1915 during World War I and Pope Pius XII called for May devotions in 1939, at the start of World War II.

## The May Crowning

Perhaps the most well-known of the May Marian devotions is the crowning of a statue of Mary with flowers. This became particularly popular in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with a procession of school-age boys and girls dressed in their finery, following the statue in a procession.

In this ceremony, the statue is decorated at its base with flowers and one of the girls would be chosen to crown Mary with flowers. The nineteenth century hymn 'Bring Flowers of the Rarest' is a traditional accompaniment to this ceremony. Its lyrics, 'O Mary, we crown thee with blossoms today, Queen of the Angels and Queen of the May,' sum up what the celebrations are all about.

This practise is echoed on a smaller scale throughout the Catholic world with families decorating a statue or picture of the Virgin Mary in their own homes.

## Marian Shrines

Marian shrines also receive particular attention during this special month and, again, are decorated with flowers. Pilgrims sometimes undertake a journey to reach a particular shrine, praying the rosary along the way. The lady chapel of a church or cathedral is often also decorated with flowers during May.

Marian devotions have sometimes been criticised by people who misunderstand Catholic devotion to Mary the Mother of God. Mary is not worshipped in the way that Catholics worship God. She is honored as the mother of Jesus and as a woman free from sin. Devotions to Mary are an integral part of Catholic life.

1. Make the Sign of the Cross and say the **Apostles' Creed**

**The Apostles' Creed:** I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell; the third day He arose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. Amen.

2. Say the **Our Father**.

**Our Father**, who art in heaven  
hallowed be thy Name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those  
who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.

3. Say three **Hail Marys**

Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with thee.  
Blessed art thou amongst women,  
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.  
Holy Mary, Mother of God,  
pray for us sinners,  
now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

4. Say the **Glory be to the Father**

**Glory be to the Father**,  
and to the Son,  
and to the Holy Spirit,  
as it was in the beginning,  
is now, and ever shall be,  
world without end. Amen.