

Meditations on The Holy Rosary

**By Robert T. Harrell
Solemnity of the Annunciation
March 25, 2006
Jacksonville, Florida**

Dedicated to The Blessed Virgin Mary, whose prayers have made all the difference.

To those who will use these meditations:

I have written these with a sense of conviction that this needed to be done. The first version of these appeared in January 1998 in the form of a booklet produced on a photocopier at my parish. A few copies were distributed and are possibly still in the hands of those who were there. Some of that earlier material appears in these meditations, although these are considerably revised and, I think, more helpful. If someone who finds this revision has a copy of the earlier version, I hope you will enjoy this series. The original version did not include the Luminous Mysteries; this new series does.

I hope that you will be drawn closer to the heart of Jesus Christ through these meditations. The Rosary, while it is a "Marian" devotion, is all about Jesus Christ because Mary herself is all about Jesus Christ. This should become more and more evident as you work through the meditations. If you do not know how to use a rosary, you will find easy to follow instructions [here](#). You can read a very helpful discussion of the rosary in John Paul II's Apostolic Letter [Rosarium Virginis Mariae](#).

I shall never forget the words spoken in 1975 by a friend at the Dominican House of Studies in Washington, D.C. I was at that time an Episcopal seminarian in Alexandria, Virginia, and we were having dinner at Dominican House after a class we had in common there. I asked him how he, who had grown up a Baptist in an African American congregation in South Carolina, had ended up as a Catholic priest. After he narrated the story of his conversion to the Catholic Faith, I asked him, "What about all that Mary stuff?" He smiled, looked me square in the eye and said softly but emphatically, "She's there!"

Now it is just over 31 years later that I am writing this. What Reg said to me that day at Dominican House is true, absolutely. As I review the story that has unfolded in my life in Jesus Christ, with its strange twists and turns and unexpected pitfalls and changes, the presence of the most holy Mother of God has become clearer with each passing year. I am persuaded that she is not only the

first member of Christ's Body by virtue of being his Mother, indeed the first human being in history to have a personal relationship with Jesus, she is the preeminent member of the Church who always seeks to "magnify the Lord" as she points to him and tells us to "do whatever he tells you." She has been given to us as our Mother by the Lord himself as he spoke from the Cross in the last moments of his life. Today I do not know how one can speak of Jesus Christ as Son of God unless one in the same breath speaks of him as Son of Mary, for as the Incarnate Lord who has the fullness of both divine and human natures, we do not know him as one without full knowledge of the other. God's Son is Mary's child. She is the Mother of God who gives birth to the Church by virtue of giving birth to him who is its head.

Finally, I must say that it has become deeply personal. It is in the deeply personal that we finally realize the universal truths; universal never turns out to be "general" because I cannot really know anyone or anything "generally." I know humanity in the particulars of the people I learn to love personally. I know God in the particular person of Jesus Christ. I know Jesus Christ because he was conceived in and born of Mary; and for her, that was deeply personal. Her love for him, for his Church and for each one of us is deeply personal. I have come to love her deeply because Jesus loves her and has told me that his Mother is my Mother.

So I close by repeating myself: I hope that you will be drawn closer to the heart of Jesus Christ through these meditations. Take it personally!

--Bert Harrell

The Joyful Mysteries

The Annunciation

Mary's ability to interact with the Archangel Gabriel is remarkable. She responds as any human being with fear, uncertainty and confusion; yet these do not prevent her from receiving the messenger or the message. By her fiat, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38), love drives out fear, faith displaces uncertainty, and hope dispels confusion. She who is "full of grace" confronts all hindrances to obedience with the theological virtues of faith, hope and love through the exercise of her free will. Our Lady acted decisively, consenting to the will of the Father, by offering her body, soul and spirit to the action of the Holy Spirit in her so that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). She expressed her serious concerns and lack of understanding in her conversation with the Archangel, and then she chose to participate in the divine plan. Here is

the model of our response to God; here is the clearest picture of what happens when we say “Yes!” to God. Joy comes to us unexpectedly, reaching past our fear, uncertainty and confusion to draw us toward the action of the Holy Spirit who will make Jesus Christ present in us. In offering our “Yes!” to God, we become “participants in the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). The Blessed Mother is the first person in history to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Her “Yes!” was the human race’s ultimate response to God’s initiative. May the prayers of the most holy Mother of God ignite my desire for God’s will and open my heart to the Holy Spirit’s unquenchable joy.

The Visitation

The elderly woman receives the younger woman. Both carry children conceived in extraordinary circumstances: the elderly Elizabeth conceived in her womb John the Baptist at a stage of her life when she was too old to have done so; and the Virgin Mary conceived in her womb the Son of God by the direct action of the Holy Spirit. Elizabeth signifies the old Israel giving presence and voice to God’s word through the prophets, the greatest of whom will be her son John. Mary signifies the final hearing and complete receiving of God the Son who enters human history through her whole person, body, soul and spirit. As Mary approaches, John the Baptist leaps in Elizabeth’s womb, the prophet motioning toward his Lord and God who lies hidden within Mary. Mary and Elizabeth stand at the center of God’s activity in these moments; they and they alone are “in on it.” This marvelous visit between two women on the fringes of the Roman Empire goes unnoticed by those who wield power in the world. It is hidden, but it is actual; the irony is that in our day we do not know anything of the main news of that day, but we instead recollect this visit, this moment of recognition and grace between an old woman and a young woman. In this small moment of our own recollection, let us join with Elizabeth and call on Mary as “the mother of my Lord” (Luke 1:43). Let us turn our eyes away from the seduction of the world around us with its power, wealth and emptiness, and instead receive the fullness that comes to us in Jesus Christ. When we do this, we step into the very center of God’s activity, however hidden and secret it may seem. May the prayers of the most holy Mother of God help me to be still and embrace this divine visitation into my heart.

The Birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ

Exposed to the elements and hidden from view amidst the livestock, Jesus Christ was born. It seems to us such a contradiction that Christ the King should be born in such unseemly circumstances. This contradiction, however, pales in contrast to the dark and dangerous contradictions that infect the human hearts for which he came to offer

himself as a sacrifice. Jesus came to conquer our hearts by assuming our humanity so that he could infuse us with his divinity. Such is love. The nativity scene invokes stillness and silence, replacing the tumult and chaos of my heart with holy serenity and light. The self will that drives me mad collapses into adoration at the sight of Emmanuel, “God with us” (Matthew 1: 23). Behold the first moments of the visible real presence of God in this world, the same presence that continues to this moment in the Blessed Sacrament of the altar. The infant’s outstretched arms meet the enfolding warmth of the holy Mother’s embrace; as a member of Christ’s Body I know that I am enfolded in that same embrace. As Jesus draws in the earthly air into his newborn humanity, so he also breathes the Holy Spirit into our souls as we seek him. From the day of his birth to the present moment, divine worship means beholding the human face of Jesus. May the prayers of the most holy Mother of God draw me to him in humble adoration.

The Presentation of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Temple

Within this magnificent Jerusalem Temple, the site of sacrifice and the center of Judaism’s lofty worship, the old prophet Simeon receives into his arms the very God to whom the Temple belongs. His joy at seeing and holding this child, illuminated by the Holy Spirit guiding him, must have deeply changed the way the Temple looked to him after that. This Temple of stone, that will fall into ruins under the heavy hand of the Roman army in 70 A.D., for a brief moment contains within it Christ the true high priest who will, 33 years later, become the final sacrificial victim “once for all” (Hebrews 10:10) outside the walls of Jerusalem. Simeon’s words over the baby identify Jesus as a light to the whole world, as a source of controversy, and as the revealer of hearts. Simeon’s words to Our Lady, “and a sword will pierce through your own soul also” tell us that in Jesus’ sacrifice she will be closer to him than any other human being, and it will be her steadfastness in that terrible moment that embraces us in our time of greatest pain. The joy of this presentation in the Temple is infused with the language of sacrifice, as seems fitting for the occasion of the Lord’s first entrance into his Temple. This is a joy of utmost and abiding sobriety, not the transient narcotic joy that first masks and then gives way to pain. The joy of fulfillment for Simeon points to the road of pain and loss for our Lord’s Mother and the road to final sacrifice for Jesus. For us to know the permanent joy that conquers pain and death, we will have to follow Jesus to Calvary and stand alongside his Mother there. May the prayers of the most holy Mother of God encourage me to receive the wounds of divine love that lead to enduring joy.

The Finding of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Temple

Such a strange scene! A twelve year old boy astounding those whose whole lives have been devoted to the study of the Hebrew Scriptures and the long tradition of teachings that had accumulated around them. God the Son, standing before them as a human child to offer them divine wisdom. “He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:17). These scholars receive questions from their God, not knowing who he is. His conversation, indeed his very presence, imparts divine teaching to them. At his Mother’s admonition, he departs in obedience to his earthly family, having been about his “Father’s business” amongst the scholars in the Temple. They had experienced a divine visitation, but they did not know it. Does the Lord sometimes teach us in the unexpected encounters with unlikely teachers? Do we listen when such voices instruct us? Perhaps we see ourselves as too well educated and experienced to receive God’s word in such unusual ways. The scholars in the Temple were “astounded,” which suggests they at least listened, despite their failure to recognize who was speaking. Do we listen? May the prayers of the most holy Mother of God give me ears to hear and a heart to receive the Lord’s instruction from whomever the Lord may choose to deliver it.

The Luminous Mysteries

The Baptism of Our Lord Jesus Christ

John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Lord, speaks in the tradition of the Old Testament prophets whose words anticipate God’s Messiah. John is the end of that line, a man of the Old Testament whose words and actions initiate the New Testament (see Mark 1:1) that comes to us through Jesus. St. Matthew tells us that John thought it should be the other way around, that Jesus should baptize him, but Jesus insists that John proceed “to fulfill all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15). Jesus has come to where the sinners are. John’s baptism anticipates Christian baptism, but it is not the same thing. John baptizes as a sign of repentance in preparation for Christ; Christian baptism, which will come after Jesus’ death and resurrection, will be the Church’s Sacrament of new birth by which one is united to the Lord’s death and resurrection (see Romans 6: 3-14). John cannot foresee this. Why does Jesus have John baptize him? The Lord wills to engage fallen human beings in their place of need; he meets us in the place of repentance; he joins himself to my repentance to flood it with grace. He through whom “all things were made” (John 1: 1-5) has become man and entered the waters of the Jordan River to stand alongside the sinners who need him, imparting his divine life to the waters that will one day be used in the Sacrament of

Baptism. Here he further reveals just how fully he is “Emmanuel, God with us” (Matthew 1:23). May the prayers of the most holy Mother of God direct the Holy Spirit to make my repentance genuine and my heart yearn to embrace Jesus who has found me where the sinners are.

The Wedding and First Miracle at Cana

The wedding party has run out of wine! What could be more disastrous at a Jewish wedding celebration in the first century? It would mean a premature end to the festivities for which many had traveled some distance. Mary intercedes. Her Son’s response seems strange to us, as if he is dismissing her and brushing off her concern. Not so! In the idiom of Aramaic, the language of daily discourse in first century Palestine, it would paraphrase into something like this: *Hey, mom! What’s the big deal? Is this what you think I’m all about? When my time really comes, it will be much more serious than this!* (see John 2: 4). It has all the hallmarks of a personal interaction between a mother and her son who have a familiarity that only family members can share. She tells the servants: “Do whatever he tells you” (John 2: 5). She speaks with authority; having spoken to Jesus as only his mother can, she orders the servants to obey. This wonderful scene with its familial tone and domestic concerns reveals to us the relationship that the Mother of God has to the whole household of the Church. When we find ourselves in need, she intercedes for us to the Lord and calls us to obedience. In so doing, she continues to live out the first words of the *Magnificat*, “My soul proclaims (magnifies) the greatness of the Lord” (Luke 1: 46). Her presence at the wedding feast calls our attention to Jesus; as his servants, she calls us to hear and obey him. We first hear her, but she quickly becomes transparent and turns our attention to him. This is always Our Lady’s role; her whole life and love are for her Son, to make him seen and heard, and she loves us as members of his Body the Church. Jesus changes water into wine, a sign that points to that wine of his precious Blood that will be shed in his “hour” and which we drink in the Mass. The water of Jewish ritual cleansing, able to clean only the outward body, must yield to the wine of Christ’s Blood that cleanses the soul. May the prayers of the most holy Mother of God turn my eyes to behold Jesus’ sacrifice and direct my will to obey his every word.

Jesus’ Public Ministry: Proclamation of the Kingdom of God

Jesus called the 12 disciples to him and took them with him for three years as he preached, taught, and healed those whom he encountered. He called people to repentance and genuine faith, exhorting them to denounce the false practice of religion as it had been distorted by legalistic and greedy leaders more interested in their own power and privilege than in the real encounter with the living God. Because this

entrenched Jewish establishment did not reflect the true faith of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and because Jesus spoke with authority to identify false religion and called his hearers to true faith, tension built to an intolerable level. All four of the Gospels record the escalation of this basic difference between Jesus and the Jewish authorities of his day that led finally to his arrest, trial and crucifixion. Despite this, Jesus never ceased to pour out divine life on those who were willing to receive it from him. The Kingdom of God is in essence the presence and activity of Jesus Christ. Through his humanity he gives us his divinity, casting out darkness by his light, casting out lies by the truth, and healing human brokenness, spiritual and physical, in every form. In the public ministry of Jesus the kingdom of darkness and death is invaded and exposed for the terrible shrunken terror that it is. St. Paul writes that Christ has “delivered us from the power of darkness, and has translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love, in whom we have redemption through his blood, the remission of sins” (Colossians 1: 13-14). May the prayers of the most holy Mother of God guide me to seek Christ’s Kingdom, work for the spread of his Kingdom and never rest until all darkness is overcome.

The Transfiguration of Our Lord Jesus Christ

On Mount Tabor Peter, James and John see Jesus radiant with divine light as he converses with Moses and Elijah. Eastern Orthodox icons of this scene often picture Peter, James and John falling down headlong with their sandals flying off their feet, the blue-white rays of light penetrating their eyes as the glory of the Son of God is manifested through his humanity. The stunning radiance of Christ’s divinity had been veiled from their sight until this moment; it overwhelms them. We remember Moses in Exodus chapter 33 who, after seeing the back of God’s glory as he passes by, must veil his face when he approaches the Israelites to protect them from the divine light that radiates from him after his encounter with God (ch. 34). In the Transfiguration, Moses stands with Jesus whose light is that same light he encountered on Mt. Sinai almost 1500 years earlier. Elijah also stands with Jesus, conversing with him in this splendid light. We remember Elijah’s departure from his earthly life in a chariot and whirlwind of divine fire (II Kings chapter 2). Moses, who received the divine Torah, and Elijah, the great prophet, bear witness to Jesus’ divinity and sovereignty. But the three disciples did not yet understand, and only in retrospect after Christ’s death and resurrection and the sending of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost will St. Peter write: “For we have not by following artificial fables, made known to you the power, and presence of our Lord Jesus Christ; be we were eyewitness of his greatness. For he received from God the Father, honour and glory: this voice coming down to him from the excellent glory: ‘This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.’ And this voice we heard brought from heaven, when we were

with him in the holy mount” (2 Peter 1: 16-18). The Transfiguration is a turning point. Jesus sets a course for Jerusalem, where his public ministry will come to an end as he faces arrest, trial and crucifixion. May the prayers of the most holy Mother of God turn my eyes to behold the glory of the Lord in the midst of trial and suffering.

The Holy Eucharist

Jesus own words: “This is my Body; . . . This is my Blood of the new testament. . .” (see Matthew 26) say it all. At the Passover meal Jesus gave himself to his disciples so that they and all Christians since that night may have direct access to him. As they called the great events of the Exodus from Egypt into full force in their Passover that night, Jesus instituted the Mass, that sacrifice whereby the full force of his passion and death passes through our lips to make our lives one with his. Anamnesis (remembrance) means to bring the full weight of a completed action in the past into full force in the present. The Mass is direct access to Jesus opened to us in a solemn act of anamnesis. Jesus the risen Lord feeds us by his own hand with the Body and Blood of his sacrifice to heal and renew us. In the face of this mystery, we must bow the knee. By Jesus’ words spoken bread truly becomes his Body; wine truly becomes his Blood. St. Thomas Aquinas gave us a word for what happens in the Mass: Transubstantiation—the essence or substance (inner reality) of the bread and wine are changed by the action of the Holy Spirit to become Christ’s Body and Blood. When the priest consecrates the elements, they are no longer bread and wine, although the accidents (outward physical properties) remain to our senses as bread and wine. St. Augustine wrote that, if we could actually see what is truly present under the veils of bread and wine, we would be unable to approach because of the glory. St. John Chrysostom, in his instructions to the newly baptized, wrote that Satan must flee from us when he sees our lips and tongue red with Christ’s Blood after we receive Holy Communion. On the night before he died, Jesus gave us this; he knew we would need him in this direct and concrete way, and in his mercy he has provided for us. May the prayers of the most holy Mother of God deepen my hunger for Christ’s Body and Blood in the Eucharist and strengthen my fellowship with the whole of Christ’s Body both in earth and in heaven.

The Sorrowful Mysteries

The Agony in the Garden

After the last Passover meal with his disciples, Jesus anticipates his arrest, trial and crucifixion. As a human being, all the terror of these events weighs upon him, the most dreadful element of this being the

poison cup full of our sins that he must consume in his self-offering. His answer to the fear and anxiety: “My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me. Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matthew 26: 39). I must face the truth that my sins were in that cup, adding to it all those thoughts, words and actions that separate me from God. Multiply that by every person who ever has lived, is living and will live, and see the sheer magnitude of Jesus’ suffering as he anticipates what he is about to endure. Thinking of Jesus in the garden in prayer calls me to account for myself. Have I, like Peter, James and John, been found sleeping at the moment of crisis? At the moment when Jesus bids me give myself to him, will I be listening? The terrible mistake is to put off the decision. Jesus has willingly entered into the most profound suffering in his will to take my sins onto himself. In this meditation, I must turn my will to unite with his. Just as Jesus has turned his human will toward full cooperation with his divine will, so by his grace my human will can answer his invitation to cooperate with the grace that flows to me from his sacred humanity. Obedience is within my grasp because of Jesus’ obedience. He received the cup of my sins; and I now choose to receive the cup of his saving Blood that cleanses my sins. May the prayers of the most holy Mother of God awaken me from the deadly spiritual sleep of my sins and help me raise to my lips the cup of salvation.

The Scourging

It is beyond comprehension to imagine the helplessness, the sheer physical pain and terror of being tied by the wrists to a pillar for the purpose of being systematically lacerated by the metal tips of the whip’s cords. Even the best theatrical presentations of this action cannot convey the combination of physical pain, the vulnerability and the emotional destructive force of being tortured. Jesus suffers, loving the one who bears the whip, loving those who have unjustly handed him over to such horror, and loving those close friends who abandoned him. He meets this human cruelty and hatred with divine love, in each lash of the whip receiving into his own body the effects of our sins. Our sins subject him the Roman scourge; his blood shed there offers us healing. Do I draw back in the self-delusion that my sins are not as bad as all that? Do I see that he suffers for me, or am I blaming this suffering on others the same way I blame my sins on others? “But he was wounded for our iniquities, he was bruised for our sins: the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his bruises we are healed” (Isaiah 53: 5). Has my indifference to the suffering that others endure added to the lacerations laid on him? When any human being suffers because of my indifference or hatred, the hand of the Roman torturer joins with my hand to inflict pain on Jesus. When I cause injury through my own sinful words and actions, I bear the whip against those whom Jesus Christ loves, and in

so doing I injure myself. But Jesus does not hate or condemn; he loves and forgives. Will I now repent and receive from Jesus that blood which can heal the pain I have caused, or will I continue to administer the lash? May the prayers of the most holy Mother of God make me surrender the whip that I carry to receive instead the healing Jesus offers me from the pillar of his scourging.

The Crowning with Thorns

Twisted thoughts so often torture our minds. Sometimes we will to think such thoughts; at other times they come to us from outside ourselves and invade us because we let them in. However such thoughts get into us, they are evidence of our fallen condition and the loss of our powers of reason. St. Paul diagnoses the fallen human condition: "Because that, when they knew God, they have not glorified him as God, or given thanks; but became vain in their thoughts, and their foolish heart was darkened. For professing themselves to be wise, they became fools" (Romans 1: 21-22). Our most unreasonable act is the rejection of Jesus Christ. The only truly reasonable action that any human being can make is to receive the renewing grace of Jesus. To my corrupted mind and heart, debilitated by my sins, Jesus brings his head crowned with thorns. He knows me. To all those things that clutter my mind and torment my thoughts, to all my memories of failure and frustration and to my loss of hope for the future, Jesus brings cleansing and healing to restore my mind to reason and to break the chains of darkness and depression that often overwhelm me. By the blood from Jesus' brow, my countenance is cleansed and my true vision restored. May the prayers of the most holy Mother of God melt the hardness of my heart and clear the fog from my thoughts to free my will to receive healing of my mind from Jesus' pierced brow.

The Bearing of the Cross

Jesus bore the cross that he might lift the crushing burden of sin. Jesus calls true disciples to join him: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For he that will save his life, shall lose it: and he that shall lose his life for my sake, shall find it" (Matthew 16: 24-25). Jesus takes up that burden which is too heavy for me to carry. The cross he calls me to carry is my willing entrance onto the path of self-denial—the surrender of my own agenda for myself in exchange for his agenda: the salvation of my soul. The self that I have constructed is a distortion of the true person that God wills me to be. Of all the things that distort the image and likeness of God in me, my failure to forgive wields the most destructive power. Jesus forgives; he offers me the grace to forgive. When I say, "Yes!" to his invitation to take up my cross, I am consenting to the forgiveness that flows from his cross, the

forgiveness that cannot stop with me but must extend to all who need my forgiveness. Just as my sins did not hinder his loving self-sacrifice, so the sins of others must not hinder my love in forgiving them. The refusal to forgive someone else is the same motion of my will that rejects Jesus' forgiveness offered to me. Receiving forgiveness from Jesus and extending it to another are the same action; to do one is to do the other, just as the refusal to do one is to refuse the other. Jesus bears his cross to make my cross bearable! Forgiveness changes everything. May the prayers of the most holy Mother of God open my heart to love as I have been loved and to forgive as I have been forgiven.

The Crucifixion

Death is final. Spiritual warfare boils down to a battle of life and death, not only the death of the body, but also the death of the soul. There is nothing pleasant about any of it: the body fails; the organs reach their limit and stop working; everything about life as I know it grinds to a halt. All that I know about myself ends. Sin drives me irreversibly to death. Jesus entered, confronted and conquered this finality, this degrading darkness that looms over every human being. In his death, death itself is killed. "Death is swallowed up in victory" (I Corinthians 15: 54). He even entered hell to break the ancient chains that held fallen humanity captive since the fall (see I Peter 3: 18-20). Baptism joins me to the death of Jesus; this is the doorway to the resurrection. "For we are buried together with him by baptism into death; that as Christ is risen from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life" (Romans 6: 4). As I stand before the crucified Jesus and embrace him there, life on his terms begins. Everything about me must be made new: "And they that are Christ's, have crucified their flesh, with the vices and concupiscences" (Galatians 5: 24). Spiritual warfare demands of me that I daily embrace Jesus crucified so that the reality of baptism becomes the life I am actually living. Jesus has fought and won this for me; he now bids me participate in his victory through the daily submission of my will to his. As she stands beside me at his crucifixion, may the prayers of the most holy Mother of God lead me to embrace him there as my Savior and obey him as my Lord.

The Glorious Mysteries

The Resurrection

The shocking reversal! No one expected this! It is a problem! Faced with the empty tomb, the first reaction of the disciples is disbelief; they think the women are mistaken, perhaps hysterical in their grief as they report what they found (See Mark 16). Mary Magdalene is the first person to

meet the Lord Jesus in his risen life: St. John records her first conversation in which she mistakes him for the gardener and inquires about the whereabouts of his body. Only when Jesus calls her by name (see John 20: 16) does she recognize him. Everything that followed the resurrection: the encounters with Jesus, his instructions to the disciples, his mysterious coming and going through locked doors, his corporeal reality—all of these things, completely changed their idea of what he was all about, overthrew whatever they thought was supposed to happen next and launched them on a different life than any of them could have imagined. This is the problem with the resurrection. Jesus calls me by name as I behold his empty tomb in my confusion. If I begin a new life empowered and directed by the risen Lord, what happens to my plans? Where will he lead me? What will my life look like if I put it into his hands to remake it according to this stunning and unforeseen reality? When I let this risen Lord into my heart, he calls me out of the tomb I have been constructing for myself. He breaks down the doors of the prison in which I have been slowly dying and calls me out into the fresh air of grace and into the light of truth. The problem is my response! May the prayers of the most holy Mother of God give me the courage to ask Jesus to break open my heart as he has broken the gates of hell and to let him do with me as he wills.

The Ascension

“And if I shall go, and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and will take you to myself; that where I am, you also may be” (John 14: 3). Jesus spoke of his future glory and plans to include us as he spoke to his disciples the night before he died. In his Ascension Jesus has raised our human nature up to share in the very life of God. In his person we are already there in his eternal Kingdom, even though for a while we must still live in anticipation of full participation. Yet even now the ascended life is available to us through prayer and sharing in the Holy Eucharist. Life in the present is made holy by receiving the grace that the ascended Lord Jesus pours out to us through the Sacraments, enlarging our capacity to receive and share divine love. “And of his fullness we have all received, and grace for grace” (John 1: 16). The Ascension of Jesus points forward to the future of God’s plan: “And while they were beholding him going up to heaven, behold two men stood by them in white garments. Who also said, ‘Ye men of Galilee, why stand you looking up to heaven? This Jesus who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come, as you have seen him going into heaven’” (Acts 1: 10-11). This present year, month, day, moment in which I live is a season of grace. In relation to Jesus Christ, ascended and enthroned in glory, every moment of my passing life is charged with his active presence and ordered according to his divine purpose. I have been offered participation in the divine life right now, and the Lord’s Ascension has shown me where it will lead.

What is my answer? May the prayers of the most holy Mother of God move me to receive this day and all it brings as one more step of preparation for my full participation in the eternal Kingdom.

The Descent of the Holy Spirit

“And I will ask the Father, and he shall give you another Paraclete, that he may abide with you forever. The Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, nor knoweth him: because he shall abide with you, and shall be in you” (John 14: 16-17). On the day of Pentecost this promise of Jesus was fulfilled, and it has been ongoing in its fulfillment ever since. It is being fulfilled right now! The same Holy Spirit who moved at the beginning of creation, inspired the prophets, conceived the Word in Mary’s womb, anointed Jesus at his baptism and rushed on the disciples at Pentecost, continues to work in the life of the Church and in each individual Christian. The life of the grace is generated and sustained by the Holy Spirit through the Body of Christ, Holy Mother Church, as she proclaims and teaches the true Faith and touches the human race through the Sacraments. The Holy Spirit calls us to holiness. What impurities can I offer for the Holy Spirit’s purging fire? To what new cleansing (long overdue) can I open my heart today? The confessional stands open as an opportunity for renewal. Come Holy Spirit, right now, and enkindle in my heart the warmth of divine love and purify my soul for Jesus Christ. Through the prayers of her who knew no sin and from whom the Holy Spirit received unhindered cooperation, the most holy Mother of God, may the same Holy Spirit become in me a radiant fire of love.

The Assumption of The Blessed Virgin Mary

Moses buried by God himself, is alive on the mount of Transfiguration. Elijah, swept up into heaven by a fiery chariot, also stands alive with Jesus in the Transfiguration. These two great figures from the Old Testament foreshadow the great mystery and grace of our Lord’s Mother, who at her death was met by her Son and raised up bodily as a sign that we, too, will one day be bodily raised up (See Romans 8: 11) to share in the life of the Incarnate Word in eternity. How fitting, indeed, that she who received into herself the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets should also be raised up like Moses and Elijah! She who carried God in her womb now lives in glory in the same heaven which she as his Mother carried in her womb by his incarnate presence. The Eastern Orthodox icon of the Virgin, entitled “More Spacious than the Heavens,” conveys to us the idea that, where Jesus Christ dwells, all of heaven is present. Such was her womb as she bore him. She who held heaven within her body is now held body and soul within that heaven. The grave was no place for this holy Mother from whom the risen Savior took his human

nature. In her Assumption, God's faithfulness toward us is manifest and our hope is enlarged. From her place in the heavenly realm she, who gave the Lord a body, prays for his Body the Church, loving us as she loves him, caring for us as she cares for him, holding us in her arms as she once held him in his infancy and in his death. May the prayerful embrace of the most holy Mother of God call me to share in the fullness of the heavenly assembly to which she has preceded us as the Holy Spirit within my heart cries out "Abba, Father!" (Romans 8:15).

The Coronation of Our Lady, Queen of Heaven

A young skeptic once asked why Mary would pray for him, or for that matter why anyone in heaven would pray for any of us still in this earthly life. The response: "Because everyone in heaven loves you!" That young skeptic was struck silent at the thought. Heaven is full of love, a real place, certainly not limited by time and geographical constraints as we know them now, but most assuredly a place that feels more like home than any place we have ever known in this life. As member of Christ's Body, the Church, we are named as his brothers and sisters, and his Mother is our Mother (See John 19: 26-27), the Queen of Heaven. Her royal queenship is a sign of our royalty as heirs of his eternal Kingdom. Just as the Archangel Gabriel greeted her with "Hail, full of grace" (Luke 1: 28), a formal greeting by which one of lesser rank greets one's sovereign, so do we greet her as a royal Queen who has brought to us the Savior of the world through her faithful response to God: "Hail holy Queen, mother of mercy, our life, our sweetness and our hope." Mary's whole life can be summed up in her words of praise to God when she visited Elizabeth: "My soul doth magnify the Lord" (Luke 1:46). As she continues to magnify him to us from her place in heaven, so may we by her prayers magnify Jesus Christ to those around us who share with us "this vale of tears." Our Queen prays for us as we make our way to her Son, and she never ceases to magnify him to us to help us stay our course. Truly she is the "Star of the Sea" by which we navigate on our journey from this life to the next. St. John presents us with an image of "A woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars" (Revelation 12: 1). What follows in Revelation 12 gathers up of all time as the movement of history is recapitulated around the image of this woman. Our Lady stands at the threshold of time and eternity, a human person whose cooperation with God has made her to be the greatest of all participants in divine grace. The first stanzas of a beautiful Marian hymn makes this so clear: "When creation was begun / God had chosen you to be / Mother of his blessed Son / Holy Mary, full of grace. / Ave, Ave, Ave Maria! / When creation was restored / you were there beside the Lord / whom you cherished and adored / Holy Mary full of grace. / Ave, Ave, Ave Maria!" May the prayers of the Queen of Heaven, the most holy Mother of God, make me

know this day that I am surrounded by mercy and love beyond my greatest imaginings.