

Blessed Mother, Pray for Us

The Catholic faith came to our parish of Saint Thomas the Apostle at Ivy Mills almost 300 years ago (1729). By that time, Mary's role in Catholicism was firmly fixed and well understood. In 1729, all Roman Catholics used the same basic prayers that we know and rely on: *The Our Father* and the *Credo*s, of course, but also *The Hail Mary*, the *Hail, Holy Queen*, the *Angelus* and the *Memorare*. By then, the rosary and the litany of the Blessed Virgin were also long since in place as common prayers among the faithful. Even greater awareness was to come in subsequent centuries, though, and it is interesting to follow that growth into the 21st century.

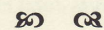
The Hail Mary is the oldest and probably the most beloved Marian prayer. Its gradual expansion from its first century start to its final wording reflects the Church's and all believers' growing understanding of Mary's role in God's plan. The first part of the prayer began informally. Exactly when is unknown, but by the mid-11th century it appears in monastic orders' daily prayers as a way to greet the Blessed Virgin. The words (with the addition of Mary's name) were taken directly from the Angel Gabriel's announcement to Mary in Nazareth, as recorded by Luke: "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women." The following phrase, added in the 12th century, repeats Mary's cousin Elizabeth's greeting upon Mary's arrival at her home: "and blessed is the fruit of thy womb." The name "Jesus" was added much later.

The second part of the prayer ("Holy Mary, Mother of God ...") began to be used informally by the 13th century, with no standard wording until 1514. The wording as we know it was made official by the Council of Trent and printed in the Roman *Breviary* of 1568. The prayer was then recommended to all believers by popes and bishops.

By the 18th century, besides the four Marian prayers noted above, the Church had recognized Mary's essential role in many other ways, most importantly by the proclamation of two dogmas: the Motherhood of God (431 A.D.) and her "Ever Virgin" status (649 A.D.). The Church's gradually increasing realization of Mary's central role in human history was reflected in the dedication of cathedrals and churches (beg. 220 A.D.), titles, such as

Mother of Christ and *Seat of Wisdom* (beg. c. 328 A.D.), feast days (beg. 400 A.D.), shrines (beg. 975 A.D.), the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary, including about 50 titles (1531), and innumerable hymns, paintings and sculptures. Two additional dogmas were proclaimed: the Immaculate Conception (1854) and the Assumption (1950). Marian apparitions and messages, such as at Lourdes and Fatima, began in 40 A.D. and began happening much more frequently beginning in the 16th century. They have continued ever since, including into the 21st century.

In his 1987 encyclical *Mother of the Redeemer*, Pope Saint John Paul II explained and summed up the Church's full understanding of Mary. Her faith is key. The first to believe, to experience God's gift of His Son, Mary is "deeply rooted in humanity's history", and is still our model, our advocate, our mentor, our protectress and our Mother. She is "at the center of the pilgrim church the Church's beloved Mother [is] maternally present and helping the Christian people in the constant struggle between good and evil." In 2012, Pope Benedict XVI added that as a "fearless woman of faith", Mary "becomes an image of the Church as she considers the word of God, tries to understand it in its entirety and guards in her memory the things that have been given to her."

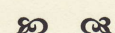


Maintenance Update

Painting

The painting project for the 1852 church is complete. All the sacristy window and door frames were carefully refinished, as well as the exterior red doors. A pane of nineteenth-century glass now replaces the original pane that was cracked (installed in 1898). The original chestnut doors at the entrance were carefully sanded and coated with three coats of spar varnish.

Necessary masonry repairs were made to the vestibule and the cement apron around the church. The exterior of the vestibule was coated with a much needed moisture protection sealer. The exterior stucco on the chimney and sacristy was also painted. Finally, wall repairs were made to the vestibule interior and it was completely repainted.



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