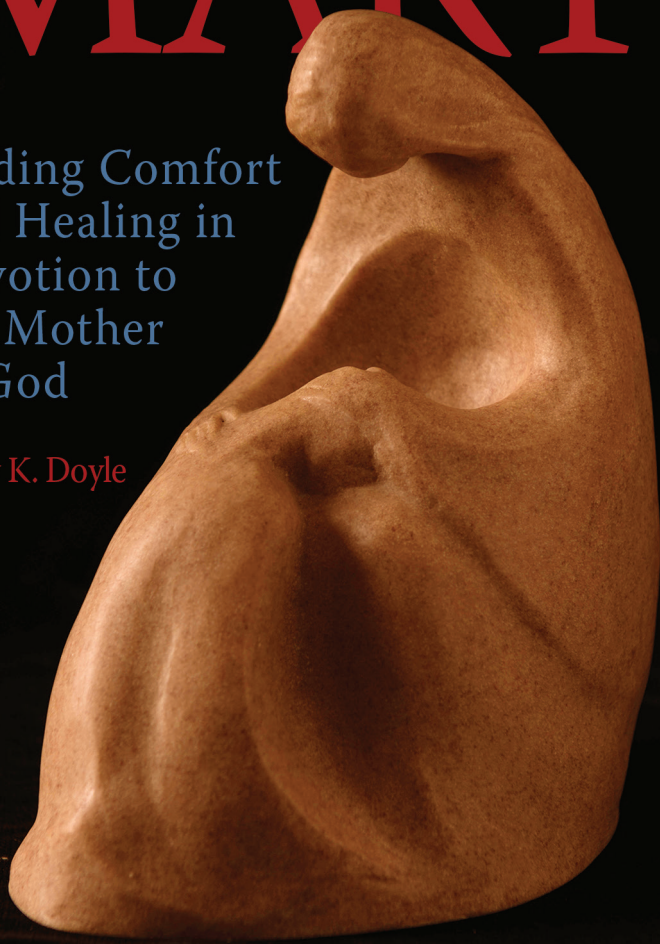


GRIEVING WITH MARY

Finding Comfort
and Healing in
Devotion to
the Mother
of God

Mary K. Doyle



REVISED EDITION

Grieving with Mary

FINDING COMFORT AND HEALING
IN DEVOTION TO THE MOTHER OF GOD

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INTRODUCTION

Say Three Hail Marys and Call Her in the Morning

The memory of the day my father died is as clear as if it happened only yesterday. I was enjoying the lovely July sunshine and fresh morning breeze streaming through the windows when Dad's nurse called to tell me he had passed away. The news shouldn't have surprised me. Dad had small-cell carcinoma of the lungs that metastasized to the brain and likely spread throughout his body. I knew the prognosis was not good, and yet the announcement of his death left me stunned.

Immediately after talking with the nurse, I prayed three Hail Marys and began calling family members. There was little time to sort through my thoughts and feelings. The business of death consumed my time. I needed to meet with my brothers and sisters and plan a wake. There were people to notify, bills to pay, and household items to sort.

In the following months, my family did its best to help one another through the grieving process. We told stories about our dad and hugged one another often. We prayed together and individually. I've always had a devotion to

Mary, so many of my prayers went to her. In my sorrow, I needed to remain close to my heavenly mother.



THREE HAIL MARYS

Sick, frightened, or sad? Say three Hail Marys and ask the mother of Jesus for help. Both my parents and my first teachers, the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (BVM), prescribed this remedy to me when I was a child. I have carried on the practice of praying these prayers as one of my first responses to a crisis ever since.

Throughout the many trials, heartaches, and anxieties of my life, I prayed, and continue to pray, those three Hail Marys. The practice gives me comfort and a brief period of calm like the eye of a storm. I literally feel the relief, and also the tenderness, of our holy mother. I then am able to think and evaluate the situation more clearly. Most reassuringly, I am reminded that I am never alone—a devoted friend is at my side. Mary will watch over and help me.

The Hail Mary is the prayer of choice because it is the most common and the most loved Marian prayer. People have prayed it in its present form since at least the sixteenth century, and they read segments of it for centuries prior to that. Today the Hail Mary is prayed by itself; repeated three times, often for the intentions of faith, hope, and love; or grouped with other prayers, such as when praying the rosary or a novena.

Praying the Hail Mary is an effective method of calling on Mary for several reasons. For one, it is a prayer that honors her. More importantly, it focuses on the Incarnation of

God in the human person of Jesus. Mary is *full of grace* and *blessed among women* because of her relation to Jesus. We go to Mary ultimately to use her as a pathway to Christ. She always leads us to her son.

The Hail Mary begins with two events in Mary's life that are found in Scripture. *Hail Mary full of grace, the Lord is with you*, is the greeting from Angel Gabriel to Mary at the Annunciation. Gabriel told Mary that she would conceive Jesus, the Messiah. This event is found in the Gospel of Luke, Chapter One.

Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus, is the greeting from Mary's cousin Elizabeth at the Visitation. Also in the Gospel of Luke, we learn that Elizabeth conceived far beyond the age anyone was thought to be capable of bearing a child. Both Mary's and Elizabeth's pregnancies illustrate that nothing is impossible with God.

The second half of the Hail Mary, *Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death, Amen*, is a petition. It is a request for Mary to help us at this very moment and in anticipation of our eternity with Christ. We ask for her assistance and guidance in this life and into the next.



WHY PRAY TO MARY?

Mary has maintained a significant level of popularity since her earthly life. More art, literature, and music are dedicated to her than any other woman in history. Her name is affectionately called on every continent of the planet. Her

image is displayed on everything from lighters and bumper stickers to rosaries and priceless works of art.

She is honored on her feast days and remembered in the liturgy. Public and private shrines are erected in her honor worldwide. And pilgrims travel hundreds, sometimes thousands, of miles to places where she appeared so they may feel closer to her.

If you are not yet a devotee of Mary you may wonder why so many people go to such an extent for her. What is it about her that prompts followers to be so very fond of her ever since she first walked this earth? You also may ask why we go to her rather than directly to God the Father, her son Jesus, or the Holy Spirit.

Once you are aware of Mary's presence in your life and feel the warmth of her love, you will understand. No doubt you too will fall in love with this incredible saint and discover for yourself why for nearly two thousand years people have known that not only does God care for us, our heavenly mother cares deeply for us as well. When we are hurting, we can go to her for love and support as well as answers. Mary will assist us in our time of need. All it takes is a simple request.



GRIEVING WITH MARY

While we are often blessed with joy, the human condition is sometimes one of conflict and tribulation. Grief is unavoidable. Everyone encounters heartache at one point or another. We battle our addictions and abuses. We disagree and argue with family, friends, and coworkers. We suffer from

illness and the loss of loved ones. We stress over finances and employment issues.

During such times, much comfort is found from our faith. We gain hope that our prayers are answered in the goodness and mercy of the Lord. We also attain peace in the support of saints and angels with whom God surrounds us. For many of us, Mary, who is the greatest of all the saints, is particularly comforting.

This form of relief is more likely found if we have a pre-existing belief system prior to a crisis. Once we're in the heat of things, our heads buzz with a mixture of thoughts, making prayer more difficult for even the strongest believers. It then is more challenging to realize God's loving hand in all aspects of our life—even those that are troubling.

Grieving triggers a range of spiritual questions. We ask why "this" happened to us. Why did it happen now? We want to know why we must endure such anguish and how long must we suffer.

When our security is threatened, it's not unusual to begin a dance with God. We bargain that we will do something if God does something for us. If we don't get what we want, emotions may turn to anger. We blame God for the evil done by human beings or for not preventing bad things from touching us. We think God did not answer our prayer, when in reality our answer came but differed from our expectations.

Leaning on Mary shouldn't result in such feelings. Mary doesn't possess the authority to grant miracles, so we really can't hold her responsible. God is the only one who answers prayers. When we pray to Mary, or any other saints, we simply are asking for their intercession. Prayer is

a plea for help. It is a request for the one to whom we pray to take our prayers to God, to support us in our quest for answers.

Scripture instructs us to petition prayers from, and pray for, one another (see Thessalonians 2, 3:1-2). We solicit prayers from Mary the same way we ask for prayers from our friends and family. Everyone belongs to God's family of humans. We all are united in Christ, "so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another" (Romans 12:5).

God is the ultimate healer and the only one we worship. Praying to Mary does not replace our adoration of God but rather promotes a greater devotion to God. The Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Church affirms this by stating that the maternal role of Mary in no way obscures or diminishes the unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power (#60).

However, Mary does reign in an influential position. As Jesus is King, and Mary is his mother, she is queen of heaven and earth and the one person by whom he most likely is influenced. When we bring our troubles to Mary, we ask that she then ask the Lord, along with us, to solve our problems as we hope. And we can confidently trust that is exactly what she will do because of her great unconditional mother's love for all of us.

A journey to Mary is a circle of joy and love that flows to her and from her. She is a fine example of humility, hope, and faith. Mary was "highly favored" by God and recognized for her goodness (see Luke 1:28, 1:42, 1:48). She is our role model, teacher, protector, and advocate. We strive to serve, trust, and respond to God as she did. Therefore, praying to

her leads us closer to God.

We love Mary in the way that Jesus does. We may assume that, while on earth as a devout Jew, Jesus followed the commandments and honored Mary because she was his mother. We are to do the same, given that she is our mother as well. Recognizing Mary as the mother of the world is an ancient tradition dating back to the first centuries. This stems from the knowledge that Jesus shared her with us from the cross when he instructed Mary and his disciple, John: “Woman, here is your Son,” and told John, “Here is your Mother” (John 19:27).

We can depend on Mary to help us in our need. She stays closest to us, her children, when we are in crisis, as all good mothers do. She knows our pain, because she, like us, lived a human life and experienced struggles as great as any of us. She patiently listens to all of our deepest desires and concerns. We may rest assured that if we place our troubles in her hands, she will take them to her son.

Mary’s concern is for our health, well-being, and most of all, our relationship with her son. She prays for our continuous conversion, always taking us to Jesus, who takes us to the Father. Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord and my Spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior” (Luke 1:46-55). Mary encourages us to give glory to the Father, follow her son, and let the Spirit transform us.



OUR PRAYER INTENTIONS

Prayer is an opportunity for communication with the divine and the holy. When we pray to Mary, we are talking with her. We may pray to ask something of her, honor her, or simply be close to our friend and mother. She listens to us, and hopefully, we listen to her. We trust that, after praying, we will be guided and inspired by her. Our choices and any action we take should be influenced by her.

There are many reasons for us to pray. Most often, we do so because we are in need. We go running to God or to Mary when we are frightened, sick, worried, or tired. We seek peace while journeying through the turbulent waters of our lives. We also give thanks to God and Mary for their assistance.

By the example of how she lived her life, and when appearing to people through the centuries, Mary taught us how to pray and gave us suggestions for what to pray for. When Our Lady appeared to the children of Fatima, Portugal, she asked us to pray for the conversion of sinners. Few of us consider praying for conversion, but if we all work to move closer to God, we will progress to a more peaceful world. We won't hurt ourselves or others if God is first in our lives and we see God's reflection in every human being.

We also can pray for an increase in faith. That trust and assurance in God's mercy and generosity is tested when we suffer. Those strong in their faith may encounter doubts from time to time but do find peace in their belief that God remains with them always. On the other hand, those who have no faith struggle to find it when they need it most. They may feel guilty or incompetent in their ability to connect with God when they hadn't previously done so on happier occasions.

Probably the most common reason we run to our heavenly mother is for physical healing. When we, or someone we love, are sick, we turn to Mary in prayer. We ask her to pray for us, to pray our prayer. This is exactly what Scripture tells us to do. We are instructed to ask people to pray in this way: “Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them” (James 5:14). And when we are hurting from the loss of someone or something, Mary fills the empty spaces in our hearts with her love. Our prayers are answered with her tenderness.

We know from Scripture that nothing is impossible with God. There is no limit to the miraculous gifts God bestows on us. Miracles happen every day in every way, and Mary’s intercession is extremely powerful. People who pray to her emphatically declare that she assists with their prayers being answered.

However, it is important to remember that, although countless physical healings and other answered prayers are attributed to Mary’s intercession, not all prayers are answered in the way we anticipate. The healings resulting from faith and prayer to her are most often of a spiritual nature. Prayer typically is an additional remedy in the healing process. Modern physical and psychological medicine should still be sought along with the presence, touch, and supportive words of a live human being. In fact, these elements of healing may well be part of the answer to our prayers.



YOUR DEVOTION TO MARY

There are many ways to show devotion, many ways to pray. Your journey to Mary is as individual as you are. There are no rules when praying to her. No one way is better than another. Mary listens to all prayers, whether they are crude or refined, simple or elaborate, silent or aloud.

You can pray alone or with friends. Some gather strength by praying traditional prayers the way they have been said for centuries. Others speak to her in their own words. There are admirers of Mary who dedicate their entire lives to caring for the hungry and needy in her name or promise to pray her intentions daily. Other followers show their devotion musically or by sculpturing and painting. And pilgrims trek thousands of miles at great financial expense to honor her at shrines around the world.

Whichever way you choose to honor Mary, one thing is very likely: You will become more aware of her presence. Whether you feel it or not, you will know that she is with you, watching over you, protecting you, and ready to help. When sad or hurt, her tenderness will warm your heart. You will feel God's gift of Mary's sweet love. More significantly, your love for Jesus also will grow in ways you could not have imagined.

WHY PRAY TO MARY?

Prayer is often a plea for help. Yet, when we are grieving, it is sometimes difficult to ask our generous and merciful God for what we need. Calling on Mary to pray with us in our sadness can be very reassuring. We can ask her to join us in our prayer, to intercede for us.

Mary understands our grief. While holding us in her loving embrace, she takes our pleas before her Son. She is our role model, protector, teacher, advocate, and mother.

In *Grieving with Mary*, Mary K. Doyle finds comfort and healing in traditional Catholic devotion to the Blessed Mother. By detailing the many ways Catholics approach Mary, she encourages readers to use one or more of the following to nurture their own personal relationship with the Mother of God:

- Hymns
- Prayers
- Devotional Art
- Icons
- Shrines
- Rosary Beads
- Labyrinths
- Feasts and Processions

Grieving with Mary includes an Appendix with feast dates, Marian hymns and prayers, a glossary, and a list of Marian religious and lay organizations. Also included are photographs from Marian shrines around the world.



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Spirituality/Mary



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