

Weekly Readings:

This week we will begin a new theme: **“All generations will call me blessed” (Luke 1:48)** where we will be given the opportunity to learn from our spiritual mother Mary how to experience being **“blessed”**. Just like Mary we have been blessed because we have also been given Jesus as our Saviour who offers us eternal life through his death and resurrection. However, only those of us who learn from Mary to recognize God’s greatness amidst the darkness or temptations of our world and who willingly accept to belong to Him alone will be able to be filled with hope and the joy of his blessings forever.

Day 1 Revelations 21:1-7 **“...I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride dressed for her husband...”**

The bride in this scripture passage actually is symbolic of us, the Church, and the husband is symbolic of Christ. From the very beginning, God has destined us, his beloved children, to marry him, to become one with him eternally in Paradise. Belonging to God is not just for priests and religious who take public vows but for all Christians who have been baptised. However, from the very beginning, our sin has distanced us from God and from each other. We have preferred to give ourselves to other things rather than to save ourselves for God and his plan for our life.

In prayer, take a moment to imagine what the **“new Jerusalem”** looks like. Allow the Holy Spirit to help you see God’s dream for all his children to become like Christ, filled with love, patience, gentleness, humility, self-sacrifice, mercy, generosity, etc. How is Christ calling you to become **“holy”** and **“new”** in your way of relating with others? Dialogue also with Mary about your personal struggles in imitating Jesus’ quality of love and allow her to encourage you that his mercy will keep renewing you so that you can persevere through all the challenges of today.

Day 2 Jeremiah 31:1-14 **“...Yahweh has appeared to me from afar; I have loved you with an everlasting love and so I still maintain my faithful love for you. I shall build you once more, yes, you will be rebuilt, Virgin of Israel!...”**

In the Old Testament God refers to his chosen people as **“Virgin of Israel”** on several occasions, reminding them that they are exclusively his. Easter reminds us that, although we have not been faithful to our side of the covenant of love with God, he has kept his side. He has sent us Jesus to make the necessary sacrifice of love in order to atone for our sins and reunite us with himself and with each other in heart and mind forever.

Yet, how come the Church is not like a pure bride but instead still full of corrupted sinners? In prayer, allow Jesus to ask you: do you accept that you are the **“Virgin of Israel”** like Mary did? Do you believe that you belong to God and that God is worth waiting for? Dialogue with Jesus about how he wants to help you to be **“rebuilt”** into his image and likeness so that from your life he is able to continue to renew his whole church.

Day 3 Romans 2:11-13 **“There is no favouritism with God. All those who have sinned without the Law will perish without the Law; and those under the Law who have sinned will be judged by the Law. For the ones that God will justify are not those who have heard the Law but those who have kept the Law.”**

Mary experienced being blessed by God not because she was God’s favourite but because she is one of **“those who have kept the Law”**. She really believed that she was the **“Virgin of Israel” (Jeremiah 31:4)**, one of God’s chosen people, called to obey his commandment: **“You must love Yahweh your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6:5).**

In prayer, consider whether or not you have been keeping the **“Law”** of loving God wholeheartedly and also the second part: **“You must love your neighbour as yourself” (Mark 12:31)**. Dialogue with God and Mary about anyone who you might be finding difficult to trust and allow them to remind you that there is no need to be afraid (even of loving your enemies) since their evil plans or harsh judgments or cruel gestures cannot separate you from God.

Day 4 Isaiah 7:14 **“The Lord will give you a sign in any case: It is this: the young woman is with child and will give birth to a son whom she will call Immanuel.”**

Mary is the virgin prophesied about in today’s scripture. The words **“young woman”** in Greek read as **“virgin”** which the Gospel of Matthew interprets as Mary (**Matthew 1:23**). In what way was Mary virginal? She is not only virginal in her body, never having had sexual intercourse with a man (**Luke 1:34**), but she is virginal in her heart and mind. This means her heart and mind belonged to God, not just her body.

In prayer, begin by reflecting on the invitation to give your heart and mind to God rather than to live as the pagans and to keep yourself for whatever you feel or want? How do we know what our heart and mind belong to? By what we proclaim to the world. Mary tells us in **Luke 1:46** **“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord.”** Allow Mary to invite you to fix your thoughts and desires on God’s **“greatness”** rather than on your own **“greatness”** or someone else’s **“greatness”** or the **“greatness”** of some other thing such as the **“greatness”** of evil or **“greatness”** of your past sin so that you can live this day proclaiming God rather than other things.

Day 5 Luke 17:7-10 "Which of you, with a servant ploughing or minding sheep, would say to him when he returned from the fields, "Come and have your meal at once"? Would he not be more likely to say, "Get my supper ready; fasten your belt and wait on me while I eat and drink. You yourself can eat and drink afterwards"? Must he be grateful to the servant for doing what he was told? So with you: when you have done all you have been told to do, say, "We are useless servants: we have done no more than our duty."

In today's scripture we learn that a genuine servant doesn't plan out their life but lives empty of themselves and available only for what their master needs. Furthermore, a servant doesn't ever have the expectation of being served by their master whatever they want but only to serve and to receive from their master what their master considers they need. In fact, a good servant even anticipates what their master needs before their master asks them because the servant's mind and heart are fixed deeply only on what is in the mind and heart of their master.

Did Mary intuit the possibility that God would need her to become the mother of his only beloved son Jesus? When we start to anticipate that God may need us for something, what is our reaction? Do we remain virginal like Mary in our mind and heart and keep fixed on God, ready and available to let him freely ask us what he wants from us? Allow Mary to share with you how she wanted to serve God because she knew him to be great, to be worth living for, to be the best option to surrender her life to since Mary knew that only God could save his people and establish peace and fullness of life for everyone.

Day 6 Ezekiel 16:15-22 "But you became infatuated with your own beauty and used your fame to play the whore, lavishing your debauchery on all comers...And in all your loathsome practices and

your whorings you never called your early days to mind"

Through praying with the scriptures, Mary called to mind how God had acted in the earlier days of the people of Israel, eg. how God had led Abraham to the promised land, how he had then rescued his people from their slavery in Egypt etc.

In prayer, take a moment to see whether you have been calling to mind "**your early days**" (God's love and mercy for you) or instead you have become "**infatuated with your own beauty**"? Dialogue with Mary about how you can ensure that you will no longer take God's goodness for granted but live with gratitude and generosity like Mary did.

Day 7 Isaiah 30:18-26 "But Yahweh is waiting to be gracious to you, the Exalted One, to take pity on you, for Yahweh is a God of fair judgement; blessed are all who hope in him..."

Regardless of whether or not we have lived this week as the "**Virgin of Israel**," (i.e. belonging to God and living his plan), God reminds us in today's scripture passage that we can start afresh and experience being blessed again.

In prayer, allow Mary to once again encourage you to put your "**hope in him**" rather than in all the other attractive options that the world proposes. Let her strengthen your faith that God is the source of all goodness and blessings and that your trust in him alone will enable him to pass on his blessings to many others for generations to come.

School of the Word

Weekly Readings

"All generations will call me blessed"

(Luke 1:48).

Week 1: Virgin of Israel



"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord"

(Luke 1:46)