

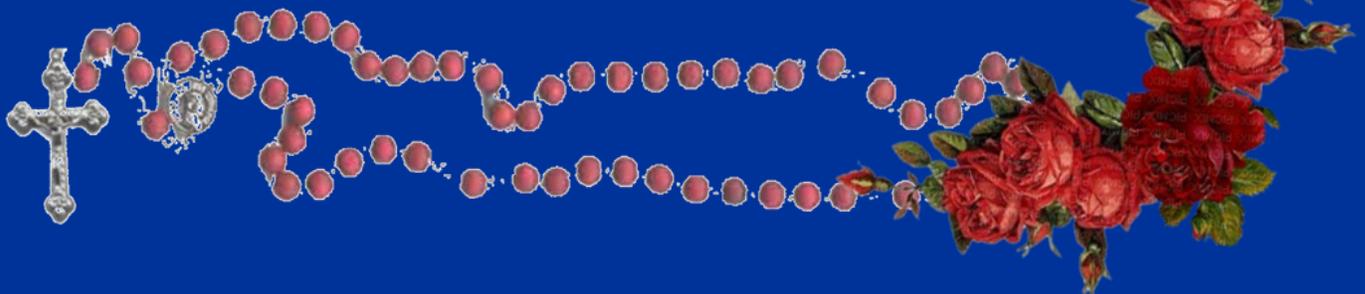


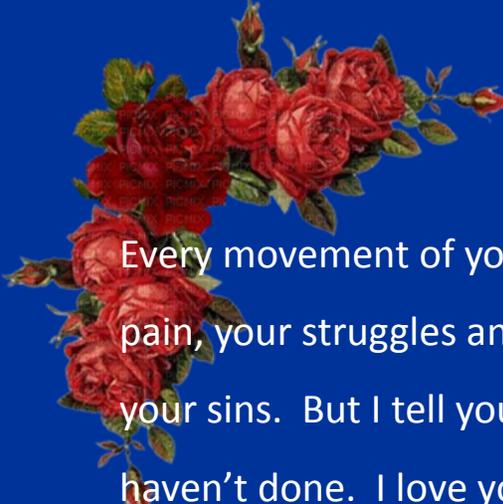
*Mary, Mother of the Moral Life*

This talk entitled *Mary Mother of the Moral Life* asks the question “How do you, how do I live the moral life?” I intend it to be both a reflection and a practical application on how Mary lived her life.

In order for us to live the moral life we must be convinced as was Our Blessed Mother that we are really and truly loved, as we are, by God. We cannot love as we are meant to love unless the knowledge of being unconditionally loved, warts and all, is deeply rooted in our soul. We need to make time every day to sit, to be and just soak in His love if we intend to live an authentic Christian life which requires our surrender to His will. That being said, we will begin with part of a meditation entitled “I Thirst for You” taken from the book *Mother Teresa’s SECRET FIRE*. Listen now as Jesus speaks His love to you.

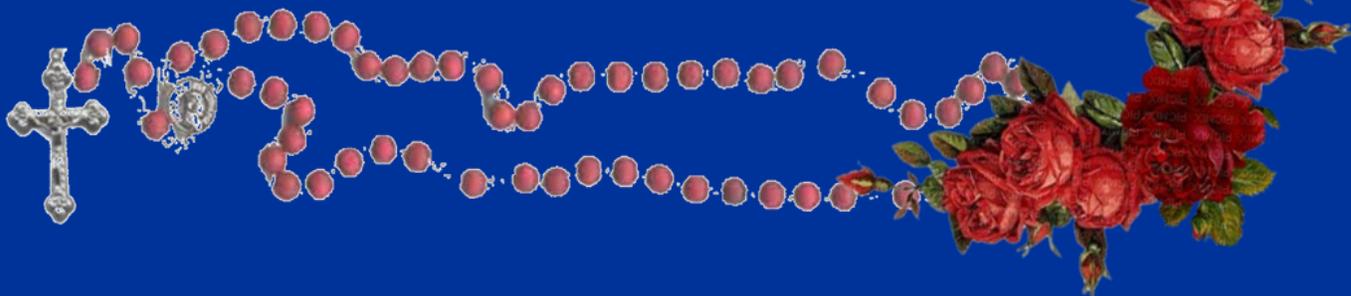
“I know you through and through. I know everything about you. The very hairs of your head I have numbered. Nothing in your life is unimportant to me. I have followed you through the years, and I have always loved you, even in your wanderings. I know every one of your problems; I know your needs, your fears, and your worries. I hear your every whispered prayer, always. Even when it seems I am silent, I am ever at work in your life to bless you and protect you.”

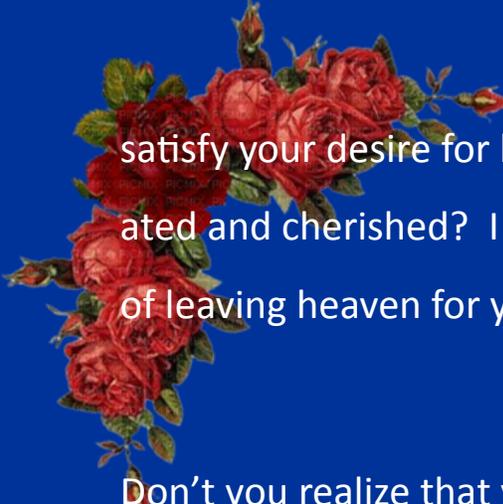




Every movement of your heart I follow, and your every thought. I know all your pain, your struggles and trials, your failures and heartaches. And yes, I know all your sins. But I tell you again that I love you, and not for what you have or haven't done. I love you for you; I love you because you are. I love you for the beauty and dignity my Father gave you, creating you in His own image. It is a dignity you have forgotten, a beauty tarnished by ego and sin. But I love you as you are, infinitely, completely, without reserve; and I shed my blood to win you back. If you only ask me with faith, my grace will touch all the needs changing in your life, and I will give you the strength to free yourself from sin and from all that binds and burdens you, and from all that takes you away from me.

I know what is in your heart. I know your loneliness and all your hurts: the rejections, the judgments, the humiliations. I carried it all before you. And I carried it all *for* you so that you might share my strength and my victory. I know especially your need for love, how you thirst to be accepted and appreciated, loved and cherished. But how often have you thirsted in vain, seeking that love outside of me – I who am its Source – striving to fill the emptiness inside you with passing pleasures, and often with the even greater emptiness of sin. Do you thirst for love? *“If any one thirst, let him come to me...”* (Jn 7:37). I will





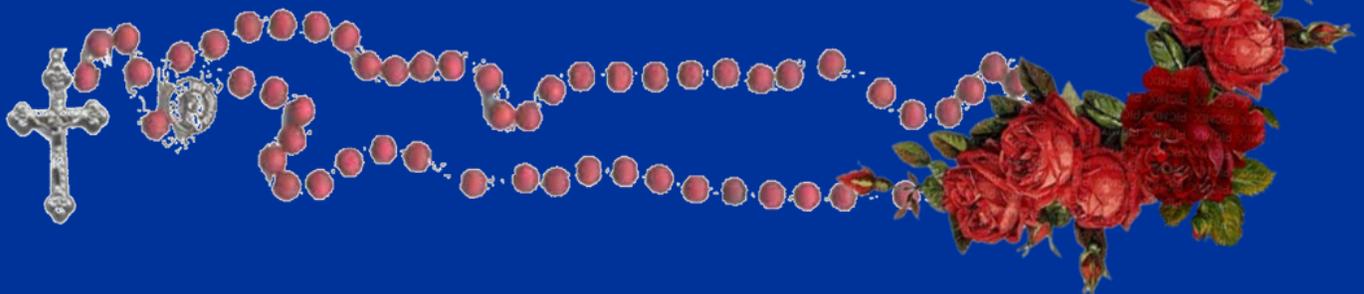
satisfy your desire for love beyond your dreams. Do you thirst to be appreciated and cherished? I cherish you more than you can imagine, to the point of leaving heaven for you, and of dying on a cross to make you one with me.

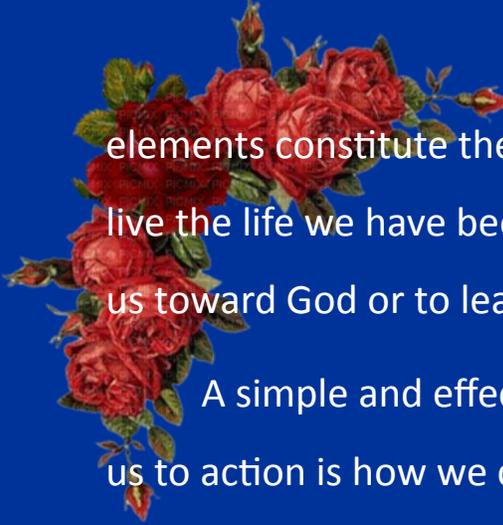
Don't you realize that your thirst for love is a thirst for me, I who *am* Love? I am myself the answer to your deepest desires.

*I THIRST FOR YOU* ... Yes, that is the only way to describe my love for you: I thirst to love you and to be loved by you – that is how precious you are to me” (Joseph Langford, M.C., Mother Teresa’s SECRET FIRE, 297).

Love and Love alone filling us, convicting us, compelling us to love in return. Our motivation in all we think, say, and do must be LOVE! Every singular virtue of Our Blessed Mother as well as the loving disposition she possessed rose forth from this fire of love burning in her. She realized this love, which brought the experience of God and divine things so close to her that she could sense the supernatural, in her Heart.

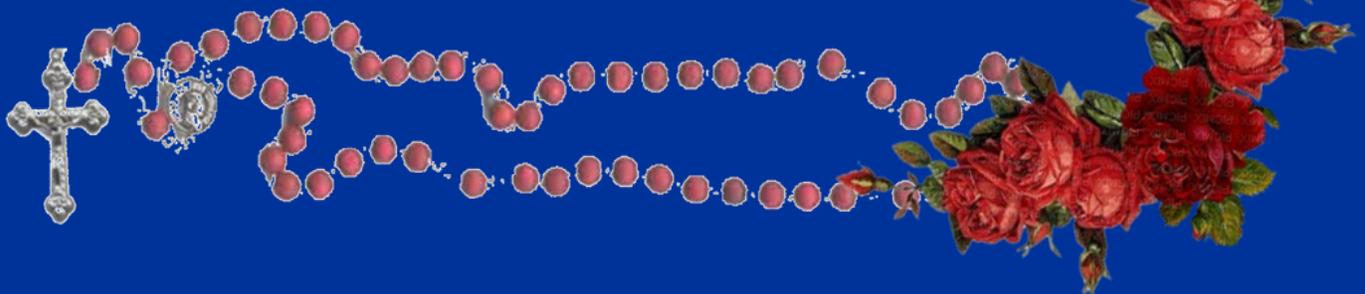
In the life of Our Blessed Mother, we see the authentic expression of how we ought to go about in our thoughts, words, and actions. These three

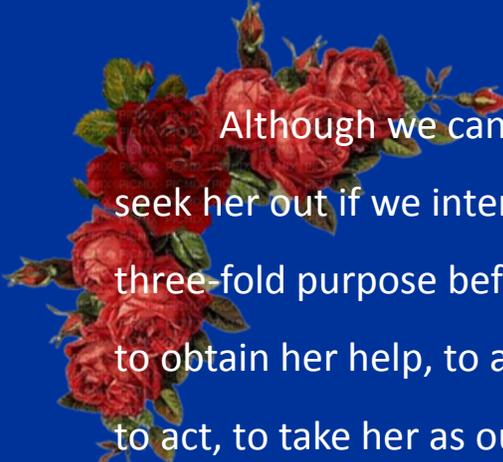




elements constitute the substance of the moral life. In other words, how we live the life we have been given, using our thoughts, words, and actions to lead us toward God or to lead us away from Him.

A simple and effective way to help us understand the dynamics that lead us to action is how we come to virtue. Virtue can be defined as a good habit. Or as the Catechism of the Catholic Church explains it: a habitual and firm disposition to do good (CCC 1833). Picture a set of stairs rising up to heaven. We name this stair steps to virtue. For every stair step we assign a label. The first step is “senses” which refers to our five senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. The second step is “images” because as we encounter an object with the use of our senses our mind stores it as an image or a picture. The more this image is impressed upon our mind, the more we think of it so we label this third step “thoughts”. As we continue thinking, we are led to desires, step four, and these drive us to act. The last step, then, we call “actions”. Since these stair steps are a means of describing a process, we must remember that each step in the process is not in isolation of the other. They work together simultaneously and often in a short, sometimes a very short span of time. What, better said, who we desire is paramount to what compels us to act in one way or another. If our desire is for God, for the good, then we will incline ourselves to do His will as we see in the life of Our Blessed Mother.

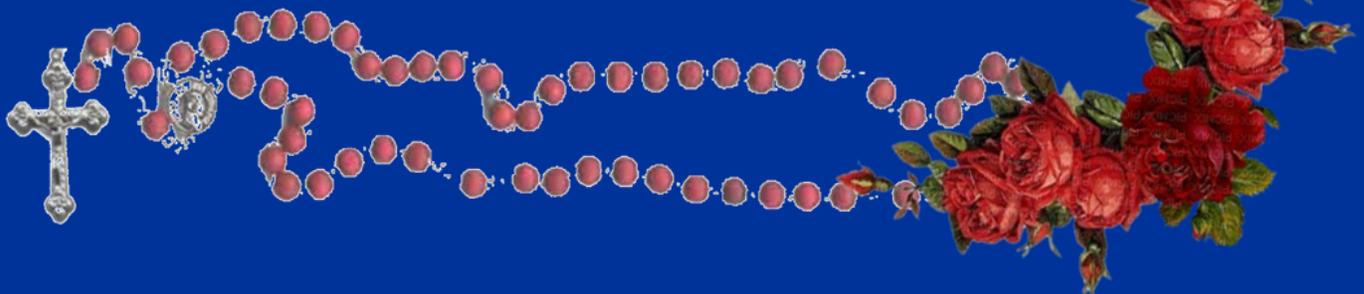


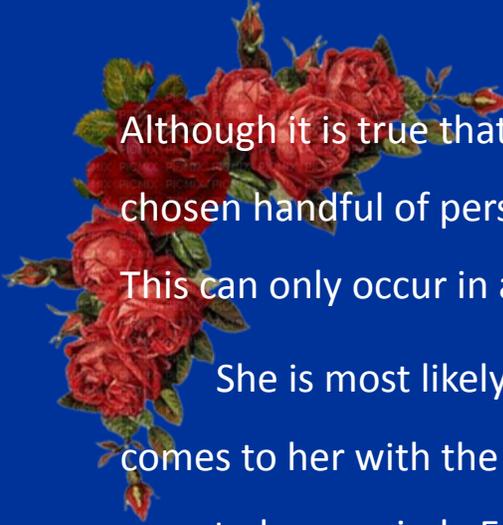


Although we can never attain her level of sanctity, we can, no we must, seek her out if we intend to acquire any amount of holiness at all. Let us keep a three-fold purpose before us: one is to watch her, to see how she acts; two is to obtain her help, to ask her to be our advocate and protectress; and three is to act, to take her as our model and guide. As we consider, as we reflect on her unique vocation and her 'yes' to God, we want to incorporate the stair steps to virtue in order to gain a knowledge of how she lives the moral life. When we see how this works in her life, then we can apply this process in our own. And as one of my Sisters said: "This is a life changer."

While Our Blessed Mother was still quite young, probably anywhere from as young as 12 to as old as 16, the Heavenly Father smiling upon her invited her to become the Mother of His Son, to be that person who would give flesh to the divine thus making the fullness of the Godhead visible to man, to you and to me. He did not speak directly to her but through a messenger, an angel sent by God to make known His desire to bring all mankind into the communion of His Trinitarian life. Here we recall the account in the first chapter of Luke of the announcement of the birth of Jesus: "...the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary" (Luke 1: 26-27).

Here we notice several things. Our Blessed Mother is in a particular circumstance. God is not given to generalities which are vague and unspecified.



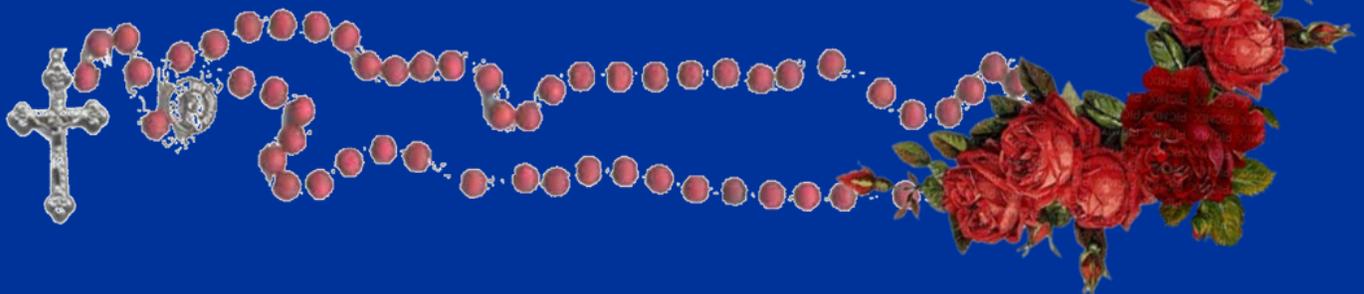


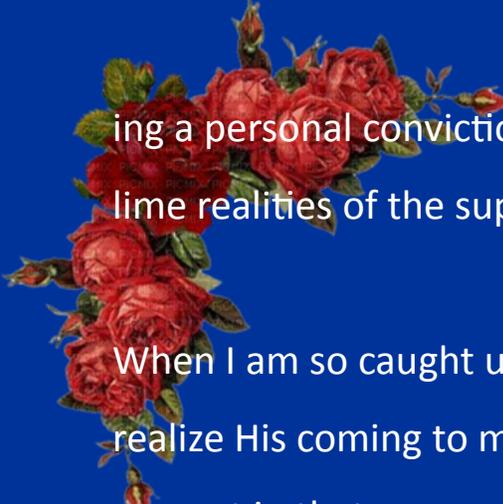
Although it is true that His salvation is for all of humanity and not merely a chosen handful of persons, it must be appropriated to each individual soul. This can only occur in a place in a given situation as we see with Mary.

She is most likely at home in the little town of Nazareth when the angel comes to her with the divine plan. She is a virgin, betrothed to Joseph and soon to be married. Exactly what she was doing at the time of the angel's visit we cannot know since her activity has not been recorded. Speculations abound. Was she at prayer? Was she doing the housework? Was she indoors or outside? We really do not know. Nevertheless, we can imagine from her response that the message, the request being made of her, came as quite a surprise.

God comes to us too. Like Our Blessed Mother, we may be surprised yet unlike she, who recognized the presence of God in the messenger we often do not see that God is coming to us in disguise. He hides Himself from us in a variety of ways: a person, a letter, an email, a phone call, etc. and we do not recognize His presence! In his book [And the Light Shines in the Darkness](#), Father J. V. Bainvel, S. J. writes:

“We, too, live on the plane of the divine; but for a variety of reasons (our immersion in the world of material things, the cares of life, trials, tepidity, etc.), we seem to live very little on that plane, and we have greatest difficulty in hav-

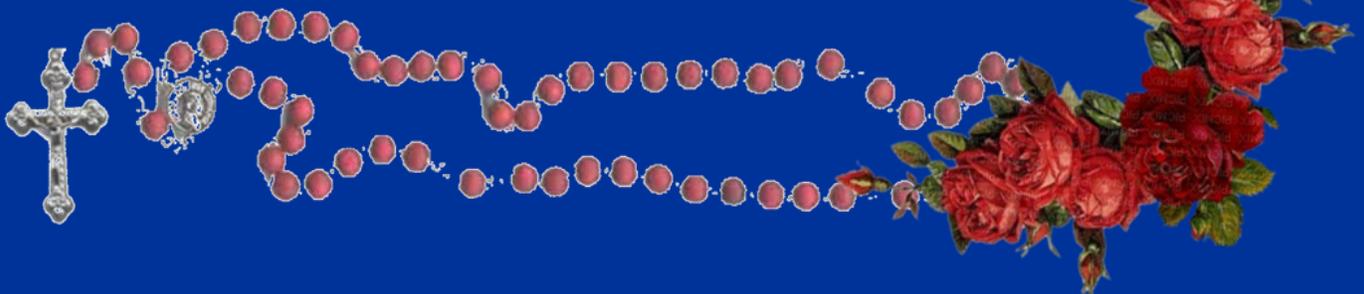


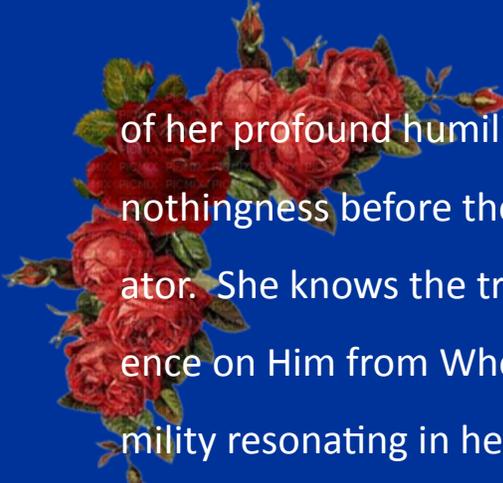


ing a personal conviction and relish, through faith and through love, of the sublime realities of the supernatural life” (228).

When I am so caught up in my circumstances, in my activity, in myself, I fail to realize His coming to me, His time of visitation. He is making Himself sensibly present in that person, that letter, that email, that phone call, etc. I can see Him. I can hear Him. I can touch Him. Saint John in his First Letter in chapter four reminds us that if we do not love the brother we see, then we cannot love God whom we have not seen. Recognizing the messenger as one bringing the presence of God creates a better receptiveness to the message. I tend to be more attentive, making the needed effort not merely to hear but to listen to the message and receive it clearly.

Our Blessed Mother, who was no stranger to heavenly visits, did not find Gabriel’s coming shocking. She sees the angel. She hears the angel. He comes to her because He has a message for her, something of importance that she needs to know. He conveys this to her by his greeting. It is his greeting “Rejoice, full of grace. The Lord is with you” (Lk. 1: 28) which she finds disturbing. This is an invitation to joy which deeply strikes her. (See stair steps: “Senses”). Yet Our Blessed Mother is “greatly troubled.” Why? Certainly, it is not due to the angel’s presence and the presence of God he brings with him since Mary lived in the company of Heaven. No. Her being troubled is a result



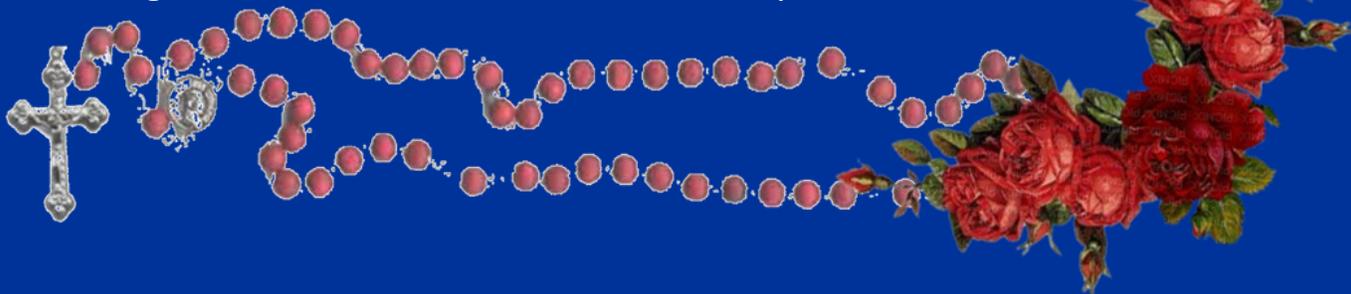


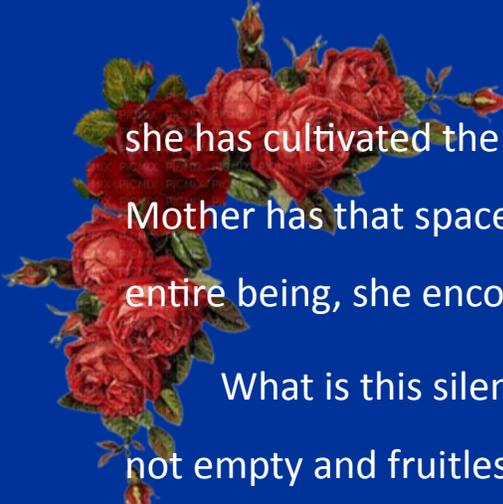
of her profound humility in the eyes of God. She knows her littleness, her nothingness before the Almighty One, she being His creature, He being her Creator. She knows the truth of her being, her complete, total, absolute dependence on Him from Whom she receives everything. Her authentic beautiful humility resonating in her soul helps her to know and see herself as she truly is before God's messenger. (See stair steps "Images"). How far removed we are from this authentic and beautiful humility!

A messenger comes to us with a message and yes, we too may be troubled. However, what troubled Our Lady is in all likelihood not what troubles you or me. Is it not more likely that we are annoyed that our precious activity, that our coveted time has been interrupted? When we are no longer in control of the situation we become anxious and distressed and the peace we think we have, dissipates in thin air. Blinded to the reality of God's presence in the messenger, we so often fail to receive the message as well.

After her initial "being troubled", Our Blessed Mother "pondered what sort of greeting this might be." What is this pondering? Pondering, as defined in Webster's is "to weigh mentally; think deeply about; consider carefully." The Blessed Virgin ponders consciously and conscientiously within herself. She reflects in her Heart. (See stair steps "Thoughts").

The word ponder implies need for a space, a created space in which this deep thinking, this careful consideration, this deep reflection, can occur. Since



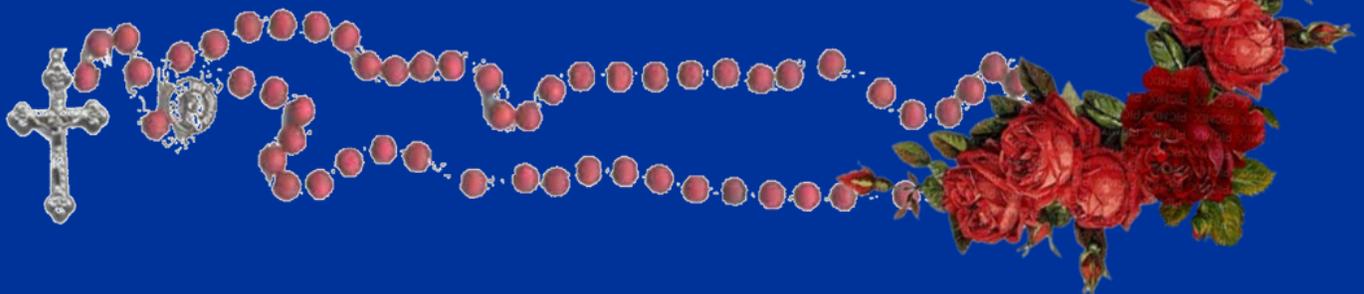


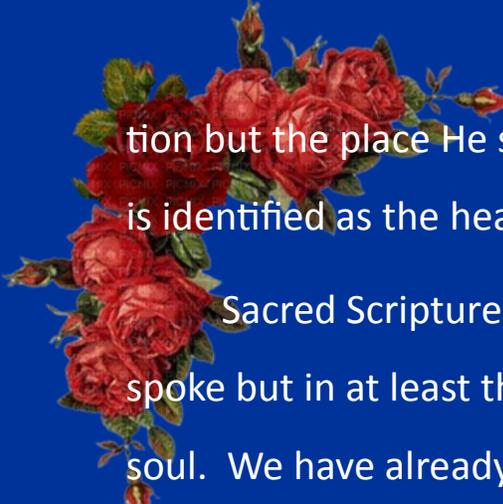
she has cultivated the practice of silence in the depths of her soul, Our Blessed Mother has that space within her heart. There in that silence permeating her entire being, she encounters God.

What is this silence of which we seem to have so little in our lives? It is not empty and fruitless resulting from self-introspection and self-absorption. The silence that fills Blessed Mary is rich and abundant with the Holy Spirit Himself. Fr. Joseph Langford, co-founder of the Missionaries of Charity Fathers, writes:

“As we come to this deeper place of the heart, we open ourselves to the activity of the Holy Spirit. If we allow him to do his work in silence, we will perceive that something is happening at a deep level of our being. We begin to realize that only God can love us this way. No mere human can give us this much love, nor place that love so deeply in our being” (Joseph Langford, Mother Teresa: In the Shadow of Our Lady, 57-58).

If we desire to live at the level of depth as did Our Lady, then we should take the advice of Blessed Mother Teresa: “In the silence of the heart God speaks” (Langford, 57). Let us make note that it is in the heart not the head where He speaks. Of course this does not mean that the use of the intellect is in some manner disengaged. No. The head participates according to its func-



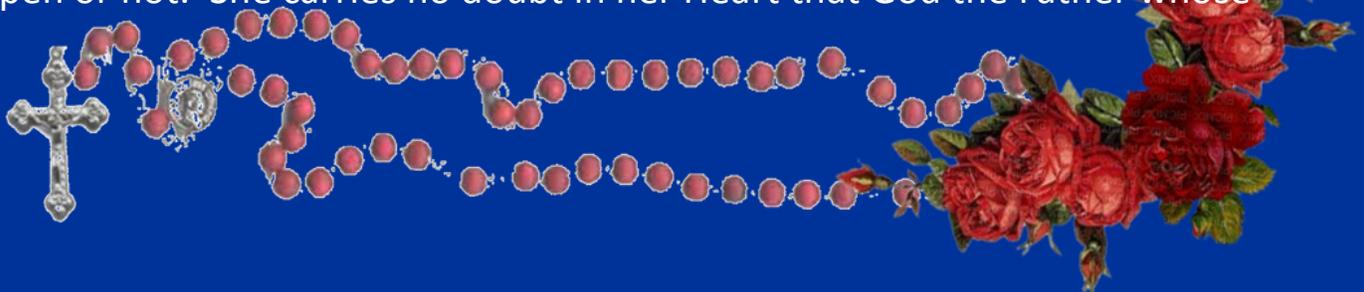


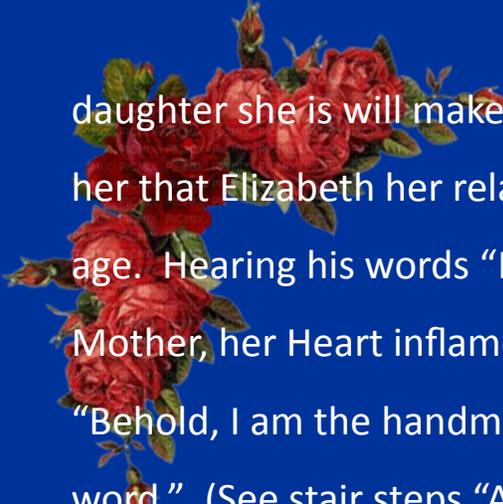
tion but the place He speaks is at the core of our being. In Scripture, this core is identified as the heart.

Sacred Scripture reveals very little to us about what Our Blessed Mother spoke but in at least three different passages, we discover her disposition of soul. We have already seen in the beginning of the Annunciation in Luke 1:29 how she “pondered”. After the visit of the shepherds in Luke 2:19, we read she “kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.” Upon their return to Nazareth, after finding Him in the Temple in Luke 2:51: “...and his mother kept all these things in her heart.” This is the key to knowing and imitating Our Blessed Mother.

Having thought deeply and considered carefully, Our Blessed Mother then receives the message from the angel with complete assurance that he brings the message of God Himself. As Gabriel delivers the message, Our Blessed Mother continues to ponder. The more she reflects on this encounter, the greater her desire to give her “yes” to what the angel of God is asking of her. (See stair steps “Desires”).

Because she desires only to do God’s will, she asks the angel how His will is to come to fruition. “How can this be...?” (See Lk. 1: 34-38) Since she has given her virginity to God, she seeks to understand the manner in which the conception of the Son of God is to occur. Her question is not whether it will happen or not. She carries no doubt in her Heart that God the Father whose





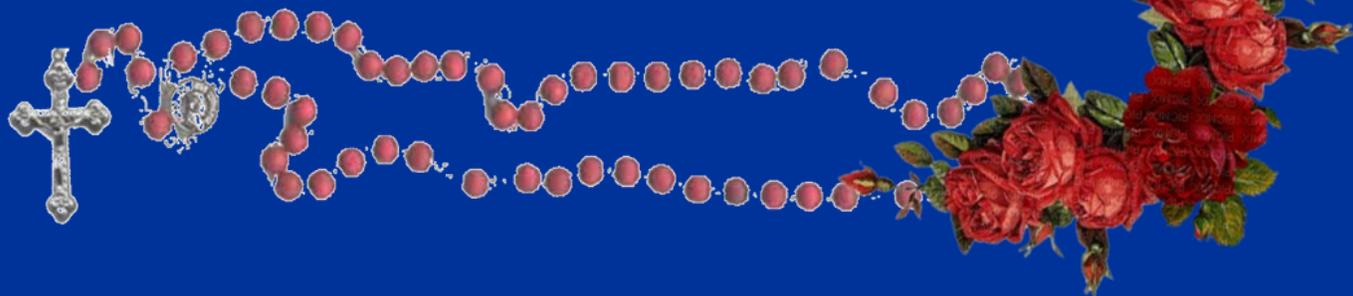
daughter she is will make it happen. The angel gives her confidence as he tells her that Elizabeth her relative who cannot have children has conceived in her old age. Hearing his words “For nothing will be impossible for God”, Our Blessed Mother, her Heart inflamed with love and desire for God, gives her “yes”.

“Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” (See stair steps “Actions”). The message given and received, the messenger departs from her leaving behind the presence of God.

Do I, do you, receive the presence of God from my, from your encounters as did Our Blessed Mother? Or do I, do you, become irritated, annoyed, impatient when someone comes to me, to you, often unexpected and maybe even uninvited? Can I, can you, sense in such encounters God visiting me, God visiting you?

The Incarnation, God becoming man, now accomplished, Our Blessed Mother sets out “in haste” to go to Elizabeth. Why does she go “in haste”? Compelled by Love whom she carries in her Heart and her body, she seeks to be a source of comfort and support for her aging relative. We can imagine that having been informed by the angel of Elizabeth’s pregnancy (“Senses”), Our Blessed Mother realizing the condition of her aging relative (“Images” and “Thoughts”), is driven (“Desires”) to be of help in any possible way. She thinks not of herself but goes without hesitation to be with Elizabeth (“Actions”).

Upon arriving at the house of Zechariah, Our Blessed Mother greets Elizabeth and here is played out a similar scene as we observed at the Annunciation.

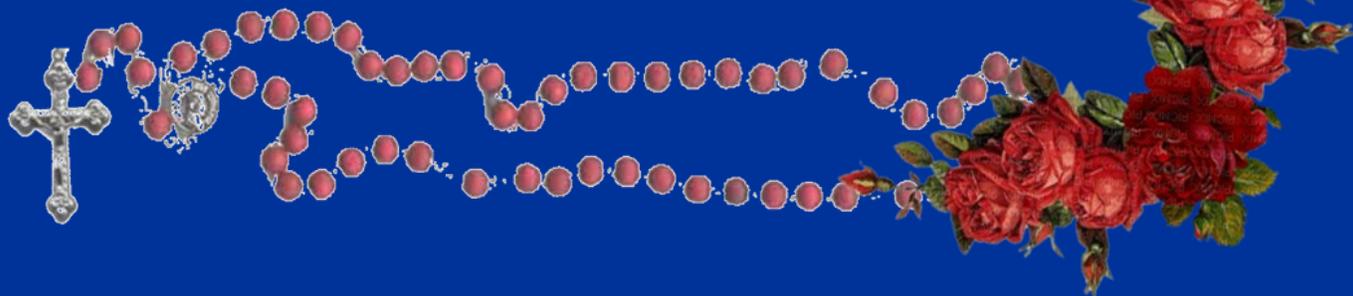


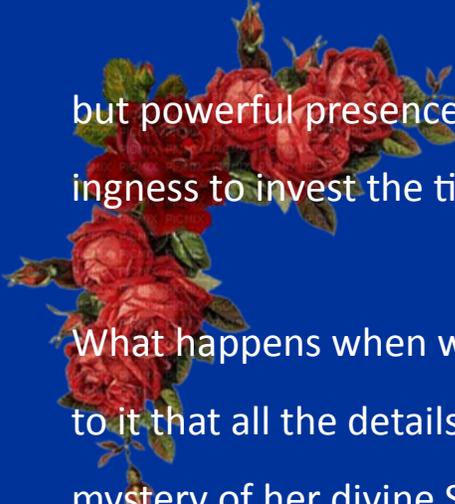


Our Blessed Mother filled to overflowing with the presence of God dwelling within her brings Him to her relative. As Elizabeth receives Him, she in turn is filled with the Holy Spirit and proclaims: “Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb...” Our Blessed Mother turns this proclamation back to God in her Magnificat, her song of praise to God: “My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior” (Lk. 1: 46-47). From her response, it is evident that Our Blessed Mother’s way is to ponder, to reflect, to keep all in her Heart. Here we see the weight, the force, the power our thoughts have on our actions. We recognize how crucial it is for us to take in our experiences and dwell on them in the light of the Holy Spirit to see and know the good we must do. When we are thus enlightened, our wills are inflamed by desire for possessing the good and we become strengthened by love to act on and accomplish the good.

How then should we proceed if we want to imitate her life? We must ask her to obtain the graces we desperately need. To live a life of Love, to be loved and to give love, requires us to draw close to her with utter confidence and trust. Fr. Joseph Langford, from whom I have already quoted, writes:

“Our Lady is a concrete, daily presence to be met with, welcomed, known, cherished, and learned from. We must not only pray to her but to live in company with her. Living with her implies an ongoing, daily encounter with her unseen





but powerful presence. This requires not only faith on our part, but also the willingness to invest the time to draw near to her” (Langford, 31).

What happens when we draw near to her? She, like the best of mothers, will see to it that all the details and events of our life are increasingly integrated into the mystery of her divine Son our Lord and Savior.

So in conclusion, now is the time for you, for me, for us to give ourselves to her as did John at the foot of the Cross, when Jesus hanging from the wood gasped: “Woman, behold your son. Son, behold your Mother” (John 19: 26-27). He who is the Son of God gives His dearest treasure to us and He implores us to take her as our Mother. As is written of John who by taking her “into his home” enjoyed a communion with her that has no end, may it be so for you and for me.

