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WHATEVER
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JOHN 2:5

*Reflections
on Mary,
Mother of Jesus
and our Mother*

BY SERVANT OF GOD
SISTER IDA PETERFY, SDSH



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Society Devoted to the Sacred Heart

2017



Sister Ida's love and honor for our Blessed Mother was apparent every day of her life, for she knew that the Blessed Mother had no other desire than to lead us to her Son. These words of Sister Ida describe it best:

“If you want to have a window into the heart of Mary, look at her own words and self-revelation right after she was honored and complimented for her special status. What comes to your mind, heart and lips say a lot about you. Her thoughts, words and joy are all about God.”

We offer these reflections and insights to you as a gift from Servant of God Sister Ida Peterfy.

Sisters of the
Society Devoted to the Sacred Heart

In presenting this booklet, we declare our sincere submission to the teachings of the Catholic Church.

*Give yourself to Jesus totally.
Give up all that is your self,
your future,
your worry,
your well-being,
your cross.*

*Be one with Christ
as Mary became one with Him,
so that there will be only
one future,
one worry,
one well-being,
one cross,
one plan - His!*

Servant of God Sister Ida Peterfy, SDSH

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Mary, God's Essay on Holiness

God gives no essay on what a Christian should be, but in His brilliant way, He gives us a woman: one who trusts in God and lives in His guidance.

We are so used to “what I want to be” and to being our own masters. The *call* comes from God who chooses. In Mary’s life, it is clear. Can we say that it is clear in our lives too? Is it true in every Christian’s life? Read Psalm 139. We often question the call because *we* heard, *we* came, *we* chose... Look at the deeper mystery of vocation. We see it in Mary’s life.

UNION WITH JESUS is obvious in Mary. “Whoever does the will of God is my mother” (Mark 3:35) Jesus is not putting Mary down, but rather explaining that physical union is not necessary. *UNION OF SPIRIT* is essential; it is more than just “holding hands.” For example, what is the deepest reason for someone to become

a religious? Read Luke 1:46. We believe. He called us as we are. That is why we are blessed, because *HE HAS DONE GREAT THINGS* with us! God can do anything with a sinner.

MARY WAS THE FIRST DISCIPLE. The Beatitudes describe the ideal Christian (Matthew 5:3-10); in Mary, we see all eight Beatitudes lived. There is nothing spectacular, just *ordinary*: Jesus *enters* our life, instead of lifting us out of the ordinary. When 12 year old Jesus was lost in the temple, that was a sad occasion for Mary, and she handles it completely humanly. She does not expect God to look for Him, *she* looks for Him!

MARY IS GOD'S ESSAY about us. Under the Cross, what did she suffer? Persecuted, in pain, humiliated? Suffering in itself is not worth anything; only if it brings us closer to Him. In suffering, we cannot see or sense or feel that God loves us... we are under the Cross! Things come and go: success, failures... Mary teaches us to always have hope! Even in the darkest moments of life!

With great privileges come great burdens. Mary is a great example for this. The graces and *PRIVILEGES SHE RECEIVED WERE FOR OTHERS* – for us. Is it worth it? At the Cross, Mary was probably not *feeling* happy. She did not want another man for a son!

When someone lovingly speaks to you about their children, can you notice an emotional tone in their voice? When we meet their children, we immediately love them. Why? Who are their children to us? It would be a strange type of love if I loved you, but I would not love anyone that you love! How could I say I love you, but I am not so sure about loving your mom and dad and your family? It is an important reality to remember that we love those who belong to those whom we already know and love. *THANK YOU, MARY, FOR ACCEPTING US AS RELATIVES OF JESUS!*

And we? We have to accept the relatives, too. In the prayer, “the Memorare,” we say “*We* remember, O Blessed Virgin Mary...” Mary is there, whether we recognize her more-or-less, whether we appreciate her

more-or-less. If a child asks his mother something every day, she will do it. We ask Mary, "Pray for us at the hour of our death." Mary has a place in the Church, in our life; we do not have to make a place for her. She will not be richer if we do, but we will be poorer if we do not have her in our life.

Pray the Rosary. Especially when you are in a tight situation, it is calming to pray the Rosary. Or at a bedside, pray the Rosary when the hours become longer and longer, or in heavy traffic where there is annoyance, or in the mountains sitting on a boulder, or when you want to pray for a special intention.

Look at what Mary means to Christians in so many countries. People who question Mary's place in our lives probably do not know her; maybe they want to know her; or perhaps they do not quite understand the humanity of Jesus. Maybe, for them, Jesus may be "someone up there" or someone they think of as entirely different from us. If you accept the humanity of Jesus, if you

accept who He really is, then His Mother means a lot! “*THEOTOKOS*”: She gave birth to Jesus who is totally God and totally man.

WHAT WAS THE SPIRITUAL FORMATION OF MARY? What stands out in her spiritual life? What prepared her to do all that she was called to? How was she prepared to say “*FIAT*,” “*YES, FATHER*”? Look at the story of Mary through the life of Jesus:

- ✦ *ANNUNCIATION* **Luke 1:26-38**
- ✦ *VISITATION–MAGNIFICAT* **Luke 1:39-56**
- ✦ *BIRTH OF JESUS – PROPHECIES – EGYPT* **Luke 2:1-20, Matthew 1:18-2:23**
- ✦ *PRESENTATION* (offering a pair of doves for the firstborn) **Luke 2:21-40**
- ✦ *12 YEAR OLD JESUS IN THE TEMPLE* when He was lost and found **Luke 2:41-52**
- ✦ *CANA* – How daring she was to ask Jesus for a miracle! **John 2:1-12**

- ✦ *AT THE CROSS*, she is mentioned by name again; she is present when Jesus needs her **John 19:25-27**
- ✦ *IN THE UPPER ROOM* where they received the Holy Spirit **Acts 1:13-2:12**

The life of Mary is very strongly connected with the life of Jesus. This is holiness: to *BE WITH CHRIST* in total *FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE*.

Mother of God and our Mother

If we look at the sun, the closer we gaze at the sun, the less we see those things which are closest to the sun. Our blessed Mother is so close to Our Lord that when we look upon Our Lord intently, we might miss her entirely. And she is not offended. She is happy that we do that. But it is good to stare at her once in a while and ask her help to be faithful to Our Lord.

In Mary's vocation, we can see the vocation of the Church, and we can see our own vocation. God chose Mary from all eternity for a very special role. God, in His mercy, in His integrity, does not force us or take away our freedom. He asked Mary if she would accept this role. She had real freedom to say "Yes" or "No" to the will of God.

Why did God choose Mary? This is the mystery of love. Why did God choose you? Look up Deuteronomy 7:7. This is the mystery of love, and God is Love. He wants

to be loved. He chose Mary, and Mary loved Him back. Before Mary became the Mother of God, she was already the Bride of God. Why? Because God chose her from all eternity. Why? Because He loved her. She was the chosen bride of God, chosen to be the Mother of the Second Person of God.

Mary herself did not know the plans God had with her until the angel announced it to her. When the messenger of God came to her, how different she was from Eve. (Genesis 3:1-13) There is no trace of vanity in her. This is why the Holy Spirit speaks words of benediction to her through the angel. Everything is reversed that came upon us through Eve. Eve led us to fall, the Virgin Mary opened for us the way of redemption.

Mary in every way reflects the Church, the "people of God." That bridal love which God expresses towards His people is quite humanly visible and expressed through Mary who became the Mother of the eternal Son of God through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Through her, we have God-made-man, God in a visible form.

In the scene of the Annunciation, we have a most perfect miniature of our whole journey to God, of our whole experience of God. Place yourself in that scene. See all that is happening to Mary. In a way it is paralleling our own lives, our own existence. Mysteriously, even before the Savior, she is the “first Christian” in dignity and efficiency. The “angelus,” the messenger from God comes. Think of the word of God that was spoken to each one of us – God spoke to us the “word” of our vocation. When did it happen? Where did it happen? It did happen! You received a message from God, a “word” of God. Each one of us is very clearly a “word of God.”

The story goes on: God’s messenger explains further to Mary, “Do not be afraid.” Look into your own life. There were fears. Everything unknown is fearful. That step into the unknown for Mary had its fears. The Lord accompanied the grace of our vocation with that spiritual reminder that

we should not fear. And then we heard the vocation, the word of God. Perhaps we had some difficulty with it initially; perhaps there were problems, difficulties we had to take care of. We spoke to the Lord about them. Yet in the end, came those words that continue to bless our lives and hover over us forever: "The Holy Spirit will overshadow you, and what will happen in you is from the power of the Most High." (Luke 1:35)

The Holy Spirit did overshadow us, and has continued to overshadow us. We have nothing to be afraid of. And in the end, against all obstacles, against any difficulties, we have been able to be present to the Lord. The angel can say, "Nothing is impossible with God." (Luke 1:37) Nothing!

Respond as Mary responded: "My soul magnifies the Lord. He has looked down upon the humility of His maidservant. He has done great things in me and holy is His Name." (Luke 1:46-49) Each one of us is signed by that word of God, overshadowed by the Holy Spirit. Each one of us can call

upon that grace of the Holy Spirit to endow us with all that we need to accomplish all that the Lord has called us to do.

The Visitation: see that the events of the Gospel are not merely private, but official actions. The Visitation shows Mary's prominent task in the plan of redemption. She hurried to the house of Elizabeth so that the Savior, without delay, would sanctify John the Baptist. The first sanctifying action of the Redeemer was wrought by means of the Blessed Virgin. She is the instrument of Jesus, giving His countless benefits to people. She is the channel of grace to all of us. Jesus is as yet unborn, and He exhibits His redeeming power through Mary.

Then look further and see Elizabeth's reaction. Mary is not blind to the favors she received from God, or the position to which she was raised. There is no trace of false humility in her. There is a deep gratitude. Gratitude makes it sure that these great benefits, these blessings, are recognized and fully thanked. Can we be like her in this, in giving thanks to God for all the benefits

He gives to us: our vocation, our work, the dignity of being His instruments for salvation, and doing this most important work of teaching about Him and helping others to reach heaven?

Our Blessed Mother tells Elizabeth, “He that is mighty has done great things for me and holy is His Name.” (Luke 1:49) And all generations have confessed her dignity and give her homage as the Mother of the Lord! She says, “His mercy is from generation to generation.” (Luke 1:50) The operation of God in His Church and in every soul is so similar to what happened to our Blessed Mother. In us too, God “shows the might of His arm” and the “abundance” of His mercy. (Luke 1:51)

When Jesus was lost in Jerusalem and Mary and Joseph were looking for Him, people asked them, “What does the boy look like?” Joseph could answer, “He looks like His Mother.” This does not mean that He looked womanly; it simply means that He resembled Mary in His features.

Jesus spent 30 years with Mary and only 3 years with His apostles. Imagine the tremendous amount of communication that went on between Jesus and Mary, both verbal and non-verbal. If we want to be close to Jesus, united to Jesus, ask Mary how to do it.

We can see many reflections of the unity between Mary and Jesus in the Scripture. It shows at Cana. There is not much verbal communication between them. From Mary we only have the words, "Do as He tells you." (John 2:5) She was so sure of what Jesus could do, and at the same time those years are in darkness. She had true unity of heart and soul with Jesus. So much must have happened in those 30 years with Jesus, but Mary does not tell stories. For both of them, that was not important. What was important was "to do the will of the Father."

Cana: the first miracle. Why was it performed? Our Blessed Mother has a watchful and affectionate care; she is ready to intercede and use her influence for us for

no other reason but to help us in our need. So let us confide in her intercession, even in small things. God does not consider them too little. He is ready to act so that people would be moved to faith, and love, and gratitude.

Mary is like her Son, she notices the need of the people, and she is very approachable. Think of Our Lady of Guadalupe: "I am your Mother. Do not be afraid. Come to me and I will dry your tears."

For me, the most striking quality of a mother is her total lack of competitiveness. A good mother would really lay down her life for her children, for us. She wants us to succeed, to be beautiful, to "make it," to be loved. A true mother is totally "for" her children. Mary is truly a mother to us, she is all "for" us, her children and she is so much "for" our relationship with Jesus. She does all she can to promote it, just as a good mother promotes her children in what she considers good. She does not force, she encourages.

We can act as Our Lady did and we can obtain similar favors from Jesus for those around us who are in need: for friends, relatives. Learn from Our Blessed Mother; she addresses Our Lord with complete confidence believing that He will act. She has no doubt that He will help. She believes completely in His goodness of heart, His merciful love. But it is also important to notice that she leaves it up to Jesus to select the moment and the method to help the difficulty. In the same way, we have to have confidence in Our Lord and believe that He will help, and then wait for Him to choose the time and way. He has so many ways to help!

It is normal to appreciate a mother who is as good as Mary. We take away from the humanness of Jesus if we do not believe that certain things will happen because she asked Him. This does not mean that we are “twisting God’s arm” or interfering with divine providence, it simply means that Jesus is human and listens to His Mother.

During His public life Our Lord

avored sinners and He was silent about His Mother. In a sense, Jesus places us sinners even above His Mother. He leaves Mary and goes out to seek the ninety-nine. (Luke 15:1-7) And Mary does not complain.

So many things can be learned from what did not happen. Just think of the time when people were praising Jesus and one woman in the crowd praised Mary by saying, "Blessed are the breasts that fed you." Jesus said, "Even more blessed are those who listen to Me and do the Father's will." (Luke 11:27-28) Mary heard that too. The Scripture could have continued to say, "And since that time, Mary never again visited Jesus," or, "She went home in sorrow."

But that is not in the Scripture. Jesus could easily say what He did because He knew His Mother. He knew that she would take it as a compliment, as an affirmation of who she was. Jesus knew that Mary lived to do the will of the Father. This is why she was "blessed," this is why she had Jesus – because she wanted so much to do the

will of the Father. Mary was not turned away by Jesus saying, "Who is my mother and brother and sister?" She took it as a compliment.

Look at Mary at the foot of the Cross. (John 19:25-27) So many people were there standing around. To some, the crucifixion was just the execution of some disturber of the peace; to others, it was the martyrdom of a good man; some considered it the failure of a noble cause; and for others, it was the triumph of evil. Mary alone recognized that the divine plan for the redemption of mankind was taking place.

Mary gave to her Redeemer the blood which He shed to preserve us from sin. He was more her Son than in ordinary cases of motherhood for she alone gave of her substance to Him. And through Mary, we come to our second birth, our spiritual birth, because when she became the Mother of Christ, she was made the source of our life too, our life in Christ. There, at the Cross, she is declared to be the spiritual Mother of all of us. If we want to know what God the

Father looks like, we look at Jesus. And if we want to know what the “motherliness” of God looks like in human form, look at Mary. God demanded so much of her, and He conferred so much on her.

See Mary’s total unity with the will of God. In this respect she bore the consequences of sin in union with her Son, our Lord. She held her Son, and she is holding the Church. She is our “Mother of Perpetual Help.” She is total, continuous help, always *for* others. She is the “Mother of All Graces.” There is nothing she would not do for us, nothing which she cannot obtain for us from God. She gave us Jesus; she gave us the Source of Grace, so why would she not give us a continual gift of grace! More than any other creature, she is given to us by God to lead us to God.

Mary received Jesus corporally into her home here on earth; it is right and just that God would take her corporally to His eternal home. Devotion to our Blessed Mother is a powerful means of grace for us because of her intercession for us and because of

the great efficacy of her prayers. Is there anything she would not ask from her divine Son? Is there anything He would deny to her if she is asking? We receive so much through Mary's intercession. Jesus is "Lord" and Mary is "our Lady." She takes total care and responsibility for us; she happily exercises this dignity and responsibility.

How does Mary feel towards us? Our Blessed Mother would take us in her arms and tell us that she loves us more than anyone else because we love her Son. This is what she wants most – that everyone would love her Son. During your prayer, go to Mary and have a heart-to-heart talk with her. If we put our life into her hands, if we really and truly ask her help, we can be sure that we will never get into any serious trouble because she will provide before we even know it. Only in heaven will we know how many mistakes we avoided, how many accidents we avoided, how many sins we did not commit because she was with us helping us, imploring for us, giving so much to us out of the goodness of her heart, not because of our merits or goodness or

according to strict justice.

Our Blessed Mother portrays everything we want the Church to be, and everything we need to be. Whatever Jesus said about the Church, Mary had in herself: close union with Jesus, total unity, gentleness, genuineness, humanness, prayerfulness, and the extended care for others which we see in Cana. We also see this caring of Mary in the Acts of the Apostles when they are waiting for the Holy Spirit. (Acts 1:14) Mary was there supporting them in that time of waiting.

Call on Mary with love. There is nothing impossible to her motherly heart. She is not a nagging mother; she does not want to take us away from Jesus. When we do recognize Jesus in our life, when we are moved by the Holy Spirit, perhaps we will also be moved to thank our Blessed Mother. Thank her for helping you to find Jesus. In this she is very much united with us; she too is giving thanks that we found Jesus, that we are united to Him, that we love Him and that we are loved by Him.

When we receive the Word of God, when we open the Scriptures, do we have the same wonder as Mary did? We can accept God's word as a special gift to us, or the words can just pass by our ears. To open the bible, to hear the word of God, is like unsealing a love letter personally addressed to us. Such great love is astonishing! God waits for us to come to Him, He waits for our response. This is awesome!

Ask for the grace to have a warm, loving confidence towards Mary, to be able to ask her help now, not only at the hour of our death. Be with our Blessed Mother. This can be a special time to thank God for giving us His Word, and to tell God our Father what this means to us.

Woman of Prayer

What are some of the titles of our Blessed Mother? We can think of the many different countries and so many titles. We can also look at some of the titles for our Blessed Mother that come from Scripture, particularly from the Psalms. Jesus and Mary are inseparable. Think of Bethlehem, Cana, and especially, the Cross of Calvary.

Mary, although just a young woman, knew scripture and throughout her life lived and prayed it until it was so much a part of her ultimate "Fiat," her total "Yes" to the Father, and Jesus became man.

Now it is our turn to also say "Yes" in our daily lives, to also live these titles of Our Lady and to be/to become: mother/father of "good counsel," mother/father "most pure," mother/father/sister/brother "most chaste."

When I think of Mary, I tend to think of her at isolated times in her life fully grown, full of wisdom: present at the cross,

experiencing the resurrection, Mary of apparitions, Mary of the Rosary.

But what about titles like “Holy Mary,” “Mother of God,” “Virgin of Virgins,” “Queen of Apostles,” “Seat of Wisdom,” “Ark of the Covenant”?

Let us look at some of the titles of Mary from one possible area of Mary’s prayer-life, the Psalms. The Psalms were written by a man, mostly King David, but they were actually prayers for use by either sex. These titles were given to Mary by the Church, and as I said, we also can carry these titles because Mary is “our Mother” and the child always inherits something of his/her Mother.

As a young girl, Mary prayed the Psalms as every young Jewish person learned to do. Many of her prayers were memorized and her favorite lines were prominent in her heart.

Psalm 4: (a prayer for her people) “Answer me when I call you, O my righteous God...” “Give me relief from my distress,

be merciful to me and hear my prayers..."
"Many are asking, 'Who can show us any good?' Let the light of your face shine on us, O Lord."

She prayed in hope of the Messiah; she prayed that the Messiah would be given to her and to her people. She prayed, and her prayers were so seriously answered that she became an instrument of the answer.

Mary's prayers for mercy, for deliverance for her people, were answered in Mary's heart: "You have filled my heart with greater joy than when the grain and new wine abound." (Psalm 4:8)

"I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety."
(Psalm 4:9)

What are our prayers like? Are we so open with Our Lord? Our hearts are burdened, O Lord, by the world situation, for peace... for my family... How do we pray?

We call Mary, "Mother of Divine Grace."

Divine means “of, like, or from God.” Grace is the Love, or favor, of God. Can you think of your spouse as that person of divine grace for you, a “gift” from God? Are you that gift for him/for her?

Mary, “Mother Most Pure, Most Chaste.” It means decent, modest, simple in style. Listen to Mary praying Psalm 139, I think she had to have such a good self image: “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made...Your works are wonderful, I know that full well.” Hear Mary saying “How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.”

Imagine someone speaking to you this way! Such love and awe would move my heart to great tenderness. God the Father must have loved Mary so much!

Through her prayer and daily recognition

of God working in her life, Mary became filled with wonder and awe. What could have been those daily times of recognition: doing the dishes, cleaning, cooking, and going to work? And we? Do we recognize God working in our life each day?

Psalm 37:4 says, "Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart." Psalm 104:33-34 says, "I will sing to the Lord all my life, I will sing praise to my God as long as I live... May my meditation be pleasing to him as I rejoice in the Lord." Our world moves too fast! We have to slow down and see the gifts of God around us!

Mary must have prayed Psalm 16:7-8, "I will praise the Lord who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me... I have set the Lord always before me... Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken." Mary is our "Mother of Good Counsel," she sought truth; she gives good recommendations, good advice.

Mary was raising a little boy – God's

Son, the Messiah, the Redeemer! What a responsibility she carried! She taught him to pray with a human tongue; she taught him in story-form, later to be known as parables. Children often grow up to be “mirrors” of their parents’ words, deeds and actions. Mary had to teach God to be a Man! Mary is the “Mother of the Creator,” “Mother of our Savior!”

Mary is “Mother Most Prudent,” exercising sound judgment in practical matters; she is “Mary Most Renowned” because of her good reputation and fame. She is “Mother Most Powerful,” strong, mighty, and influential; she is “Mirror of Justice,” a reflection of the fairness of God, a reflection of Father, Son and Holy Spirit; she is “Mary Most Faithful.”

Mary could truly sing Psalm 89:2-3, “I will sing of the Lord’s great love forever: with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations; I will declare that your love stands firm forever, that you established your faithfulness in heaven itself!”

Mary is a woman full of faith, full of trust. But remember, she did lose her Son for 3 days! Her life was not all roses, she is the "Woman of Trust" who saw her Son walk to his execution and she stood there by His side!

We can truly say of Mary that she is the "Cause of Our Joy" because the joy of her Son is our strength too! Psalm 89:16-17, "Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you, who walk in the light of your presence, O Lord... They rejoice in your name all day long; they exalt in your righteousness."

Mary is the "Ark of the Covenant." In 1 Chronicles 17:1 we read, "After David had taken up residence in his house, he said to Nathan the prophet, 'See, I am living in a house of cedar, but the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord dwells under a tent cloth.'" And in Revelations 11:19, we hear, "God's temple in heaven opened and in the temple could be seen the Ark of the Covenant." That is Mary, who says with Psalm 126:3, "The Lord has done great things for us, and

we are filled with joy.”

Mary is “Queen of the Angels,” “Queen of the Patriarchs,” “Queen of Prophets,” “Queen of Apostles,” “Queen of Martyrs,” “Queen of Confessors,” “Queen of Virgins,” “Queen of All Saints.” With Mary, pray Psalm 111:9-10, “He provided redemption for His people; He ordained his covenant (promises) forever; holy and awesome is His name. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To Him belongs eternal praise.”

Mary is “Comforter of the Suffering.” Pray with Psalm 46:2-4, “God is my strength and refuge and ever-present help in trouble.”

Mary is “Queen of Apostles” and “Queen of Prophets.” Pray with Psalm 22:23, “I will declare your name to my brothers, in the congregation I will praise you.” and verse 29, “...for dominion belongs to the Lord and He rules over the nations.”

Mary is the “Holy Mother of God.” Read

Isaiah 7:10-14 "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel," for God is with us."

Mary's prayers, and her titles, can teach us so much and call us to a practical kind of holiness, a holiness that asks us to take the Lord by His hand, to trust, to ask, to proclaim. Our true response to God will bring forth just such a response from God to us.

Take these titles of Mary, and prayerfully think of your spouse, or a person whom you care about deeply, and give one of these titles of Mary to that person. Why would you choose that title? Offer it as a true gift of prayer and love.

God's Chosen One

Have you ever thought of what it would be like if you could choose your own parents? What would you like them to be like? (Young? Handsome? Rich? Socially prominent? Gentle? Kind?)

If you could choose your home, where would you want to live? (Big city? Ocean side? In the mountains? A farm? Desert?) Even if you were wealthy and could afford to have a house at every beautiful and exciting place, it would still be very hard to decide. Why? Because you would not have enough time or energy to enjoy them all or to live very long in any one of them! Of course, this is only an imaginary possibility; we cannot choose anything for ourselves before we are born. But what is impossible for us is quite possible for God!

When He became man, He could choose the mother whose child He was going to be. He did not need to choose a father because Jesus is the Son of God the Father from all eternity. He always lived with the Father,

His life had no beginning. He always had the fullness of divine nature and the integrity of a divine Person, but He never had a human nature until He was born as a baby more than 2,000 years ago. He had to have a human mother to be born as we are, body and soul, heart, mind and will, with the thoughts and feelings of a real human being.

Who would God choose to be the Mother? He made her special, beautiful, without stain of sin, the perfect human. And in what type of environment would the Son of God live? God's taste is different; He surprised all those who were thinking in human terms. He chose a simple young girl, Mary, engaged to a young carpenter, Joseph, from the family of King David. Mary and Joseph were far from being important, well-known, rich or influential. They were poor and lived in a small, insignificant town; it was not pretty, not even quiet. People asked, "What good can come from Nazareth?" when they heard that Jesus was from there. (John 1:46)

Why did God choose Mary? When we read the Word of God in the Bible, we find that there is not much written about Mary, but what is written gives us a very good idea of why God chose her from among so many people. It is very important for us to know about this because we are very involved with Mary. Remember what it means to be Christians? It means that we belong to the Person of Jesus Christ. It also means that Christ's family is our family, His Father is our Father, and His Mother is our Mother.

How did Mary find out that she was chosen to be the mother of God's Son? God sent an angel to deliver the message and announce to Mary that she was chosen. Let us listen to His words in Luke 1:26-38: "Rejoice, so highly favored, the Lord is with you. Do not be afraid, Mary, you have won God's favor. Listen, you are to conceive and bear a son, and you must call Him Jesus..."

What did Mary do after she received the message? Did she just sit back feeling very special and very happy? Did she run to the neighbors to share the great news? If

you want to have a window into the heart of Mary, listen to her own words and self-revelation right after she was honored and complimented for her special status. What comes to one's mind, heart and lips says a lot about the person. Mary immediately directed the compliments to God: He is the center of her thoughts and feelings, she proclaims His greatness! HE has done great things to her. HE has shown His power. HE is the one who humbles the proud and raises up the lowly. HE fills the hungry. Help for Israel comes from Him. Mary's thoughts and words and joy are all about God! She simply answered: "I am the servant of the Lord, let it happen as He wills." (Luke 1:38) "Fiat." Let it be. She accepts.

What was it about Mary that captured the Heart of God? Her truthfulness! Her whole attitude was, "I am small, but God is great, with His help nothing is impossible." This truthfulness can also be called humility. She did not ask for signs, she trusted that God would work out the details; that He would not leave her alone if He chose her. What

God wanted was the most important thing for her. This is true love – feeling privileged to do something for the one you love.

Mary was trustful and happy while doing God's will, and she was active, doing everything in the spirit of the message. She also knew that she was in charge. When God chose Mary, He did not send angels to take care of Baby Jesus. It was Mary's responsibility. And even though the circumstances were not the very best, she did not complain or worry.

Mary's love was expressed clearly in her active obedience to God. Emotions come and go, love is forever. We can recall some of the hardships Mary had to face:

✦ Mary and Joseph had to take the five-day journey to go to Bethlehem and register; that was a hard trip for Mary. (Luke 2:1-5)

✦ There was no room for them in the inn (Luke 2:7); all they could find was a stable. There were no relatives or friends around when Jesus was born, no one to share their

joy. Who did God send? The shepherds, the Magi. (Luke 2:15-18, Matthew 2:11) Mary accepted the visitors and listened to their talk about the unusual happenings: the star, the angels... "And Mary kept all these things in her heart." (Luke 2:19) She graciously accepted the simple gifts, and the elegant gifts, too.

✦ In fulfillment of the Law, Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the temple and offered a pair of doves, the offering of the poor, to God for the child. The old man, Simeon, recognized the promised Messiah in the Child and cried out, "Now I can go in peace because my eyes have seen the Lord!" (Luke 2:29-30) And then he told Mary that her heart would be crushed, pierced with sorrows. Did Mary know about the prophecies that foretold that the Messiah would be a man of sorrows, that His own people would reject Him, that He would be spat upon and killed for the sins of His own people? Even if Mary knew the prophecies, as a young mother she probably tried to forget, or at least, not think about it.

✦ Then came the flight to Egypt. You may have seen lovely pictures of Joseph leading

the donkey and Mary sitting on the donkey with the Baby peacefully sleeping in her arms. But it was not that uneventful or easy! They had to run to save the Child's life! In the desert there was heat, dryness, sandstorms, dust-storms, cold nights, shortage of food and drink. And once they reached Egypt, a new language, new customs, needing to find a place to live, finding a job... And when they finally got settled, they received the news through the angel: "Go back, Herod is dead." (Matthew 2:20) They did not hesitate; they made the same hard journey back, this time with the young child, which was probably more difficult than with the baby.

✦ There was the time when 12 year old Jesus was lost in Jerusalem. Perhaps Mary was scared because she thought of those prophecies (Luke 2:34-35) and she did not know how they would be fulfilled. She must have asked herself many times in anguish, "Is this the time?"

✦ The greatness of Mary shone the brightest when Jesus was crucified. She did not have to be there but she wanted to be there. She

was closest to Jesus in unity of heart, and mind and soul. We do not have her words, but “Your will be done” (Luke 22:42) must have echoed in her soul so many times since she became the Mother of Jesus.

✦ Throughout her life Mary gave God a chance to lead her through joys and sorrows, and finally, to witness the Risen Christ.

Mary is our Mother. A mother is the most unselfish “fan” of her child. She is so willing to “bring us up” as she brought up Jesus, our Brother. Our life, too, is constant dying with Christ, and constant resurrection. Mary, Mother of Jesus and our Mother, is with us in our joys and our sorrows. She is eager to encourage us to keep going, to do our best, but not to worry because “God our Father will provide.” (Genesis 22:8, Isaiah 25:6) And if we are confident in the greatest troubles, we will be able to see “what good” can come out of even unhappy events.

We can learn from Mary to look for the will of the Father, to listen to the gentle loving

Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, who lives in us but who will not move us unless we let Him, ask Him, and acknowledge His work and cooperate with Him.

Be friends with Mary. The prayer, “Hail Mary” is composed of the Word of God to Mary through the angel (Luke 1:28), the words of Elizabeth (Luke 1:42), and our own words; it is beautiful in its meaning and depth. Say it with all your heart. And when you pray the Rosary, recall the greatest moments of Mary’s life. We can rejoice in Mary’s triumph as she is rejoicing with us in our success.

Mary, Cause of our Joy

Joy is the fruit of hope, just as peace is also one of the great fruits of hope. Joy is a wonderful trait of Our Lady. We have so little we know about her but in the Scripture we have a complete picture.

One of the earliest pictures of Mary is a picture of joy that somehow never leaves you. It is a joy that is born out of hope. She alone, of all the human beings that surrounded the seeming tragedy of Calvary, she alone was cognizant of the ultimate victory. This is why she could continue standing there, why she could begin her new work so energetically, why she could become the center of support for the nascent Church and begin to build this Mystical Body we are part of today. It was built on the deep hope of Mary conscious of the Resurrection.

St. Ignatius of Loyola thought that Jesus had to have gone first to His mother after the Resurrection. She was the one who could look beyond the sorrow of the shocking

crucifixion to the vision of the Resurrection. She becomes the image of hope for us, in and through the cross.

We look to Mary for inspiration and help in building up God's Kingdom here on earth. She teaches us by her life, that obedience to say "Yes" to God when He calls us. She is our model, our inspiration, she is the "Cause of our Joy" showing us how to be ready for God, how to empty ourselves of selfishness, of self-seeking, so that He might make us instruments of His love.

Like Mother, like Son. Our Lord's and Mary's surrender echo each other. How was Our Lady able to do it, that total "Yes" to God? In Mary, we see what it means to surrender. Surrender has a passive aspect, and an active aspect. Surrender to God's will is actually obedience. Our Lady responded to God "I am your servant." We know what it means to be a servant, it is asking, "*What would you like me to do for you? And I will do it.*" This is the active surrender of the servant. The passive part is, "Let it be done to me according to your will."

It is saying, *“I do not know what is going to happen to me or to those I love, but whatever is Your will, I receive from You, Lord.”*

If we receive good things from God, why are we so reluctant to accept what we consider the not-so-good things? From something that is not so good, a lot of good can come. What seemingly appears very hard and not so easy to receive from the hand of God actually can turn out to be a blessing. We may not see it immediately. Mary did not say, *“Why do I have to go to Egypt?”* Something good came from that difficult experience. Perhaps it helped her to have greater acceptance of foreigners because she experienced how difficult it was to be a foreigner. We know that, if we truly surrender ourselves to God, He will bring good from suffering.

This is the essence of what I call the *“Panic Prayer.”* It is saying, *“Lord, if I accept Your will, then I also accept the possibility that You have more solutions to this problem than what I can see right now.”* We do not know the future; we do not know what God’s grace

can do to a person in a difficult situation. Where there is suffering, misery, sin, so too will His grace be there for us, if we do not block that grace.

When we feel that something threatening is coming, we can block God's grace by saying, "If that happens, I will just die!" Or, "That's it! I can't take it anymore!" Or saying something similar. When we say things like that we are conditioning ourselves, we are putting a block between ourselves and God.

In her total surrender, Mary was totally receptive. She willingly received everything from the hand of God. From her surrender and total receptivity came great strength and unity with God.

Another way to call the Panic Prayer is, "The Prayer of Total Surrender." It is like saying, *"I am without hope; I don't see any way out. But You do, Lord, and I place myself and this situation into Your hands. I believe that You will help. Thank You."* And, truly, Our Lord will miraculously help.

If we have this attitude of total surrender to the will of God, like Mary, we will experience an inner peace and joy in our heart which we may never have experienced before. In this, Our Blessed Mother is our model. She can help us because she is real! She is alive! We need to ask Mary to be with us in our prayer, *“Be with me, Mary, and present me to your Son.”*

If we do things out of love, so much good will come. So, do “servant” things because we are the “servants of the Lord.” We are asked to do so many things in our lives. If we do it with the spirit of “This is me being in conformity to the most beloved person, Our Lady,” then we will not develop a servant complex. Events happen that we do not plan. What will we do about it? Mary’s passive surrender was in accepting. But it did not stop her from being active and doing something, for example, going to her cousin, Elizabeth; or being there at the foot of the cross. The Scripture speaks very eloquently by not saying anything; we never hear even a little complaint from Mary.

What is our relationship with God? Is it really one of Creator-creature? Father-child? Mother-child? As children, we know that we do not have to pay the bills; we are not worried about something that is not "our job." If we are worrying about whether God's will for us is good and whether He wants the very best for us, then we are actually taking over, we are trying to be God. Remember the Prayer of Total Surrender: *"Lord, here is the problem..."*

Turn to God every morning. Ask Mary to help you to have that inner sense of peace and joy in surrendering yourself to God. Be attentive to see through whom God will speak to you during the day. And be actively united with God; trust Him to inspire you in your actions during the day.

Mary drew her strength and courage from God. Her heart still goes out to the needy, the poor, the neglected, the ignorant and the doubtful. Mary has a real part in our spiritual lives. We can love her and turn to her with confidence because she is our Mother. With a mother's tender heart she

will save us from unnecessary sorrows and embarrassment as she did the family in Cana.

Mary guides and protects us in our pilgrimage on earth towards the heavenly Kingdom. We trust that her loving protection will obtain for us the blessings of her Son for all eternity. **“Mary, Cause of our Joy, pray for us.”**

*Here are the basic steps of
Sister Ida's "Panic Prayer"
that you can pray in your own words:*

Prayer of Total Surrender

My five steps in a hurting or panic situation

1. Come into the Presence of God.
I'm here, I love You and believe in
You.
2. Help – I need You, I don't know what
to do. This is my burden...
it is God-sized. I give it to You.
3. You have 1,000,000... ways to solve
it. Please, come, help, enter this
situation. Bring good out of the
situation Your way.
4. I know that You love me and all the
other persons involved
5. Thank You. I know You said You
would always answer and give when
we ask, so I thank You already

Daughter of Israel

Think about our Blessed Mother as the true daughter of Israel, one of the “holy ones” (Deuteronomy 33:3) waiting for the coming of the Savior. She represents that group of people who wrote the Psalms, those who were “poor and needy” (Psalm 74:21) in front of God, regardless of their financial status. They knew that without God they could not do anything; they desperately needed His help. They trusted that He was near and going to help, and therefore, they implored Him with all their hearts.

Our Blessed Mother was a true daughter of Israel, which meant that she kept the covenant. Moses went up the hill. God wrote His will. (Exodus 31:18) “If you keep my will, I will be with you.” (cf. Deuteronomy 7:7-13) “I will be your God and you will be my people.” (Exodus 6:7) God never broke this covenant. Men broke the covenant but God never did. Our Blessed Mother kept the Ten Commandments entirely and faithfully.

So many times people do not tell the truth and do not even think it is going against the Commandments. They say things like, "I forgot. I didn't remember." But that is a lie, because actually they remember very well.

The Beatitudes are based on the Commandments. (Matthew 5:3-10) You can see how the two relate. How could anyone that is truly thirsting and longing for truth tell lies? Our Lord did not come to destroy the Commandments or annul them, but rather, to fulfill them.

Ask our Blessed Mother how she kept the Commandments. She had some very hard times in her life: it was a suffering and anxious time for her when Joseph was doubting her goodness (Matthew 1:18-19); it was hard for her when there was no place for her and the Son of God in the inn; she had to wait for God to act, but she waited with that certainty that God will come and He will help. That anxiousness went deep into her heart when she presented the child to the Father and heard the prophecy of Simeon (Luke 2:22-35); it was not easy

to hear that her heart would be pierced by a sword and her child was destined to be the sign for the rise and fall of many in Israel, a sign which would be contradicted. Mary's soul was in agony at that time, and again when she lost her child in the temple when He was twelve years old. She felt that anxiousness even at Cana, when Our Lord reminded her of the Father's will before He did what she asked him to do. This is how Mary learned obedience.

When people spoke to Jesus about His mother and the bond between Him and her (Luke. 11:27, Matthew 12:46), He made it so clear both times that the tie uniting them was fidelity to the will of the Father. This was the spirit of the *anawim*, the spirit of the poor of the Lord. Without this, Mary would not have been able to stand by Our Lord, especially at the Cross, and "give up" her Son whom she bore and take as a son, John, who was so much less. Hers was a most perfect surrender to the will of God. A mother's natural response would be to say, "I want my son, not someone else offered in place of my son!" How much more could

she give up! This was total surrender to the will of God. In place of Jesus, she is asked to accept John. And she does.

Mary is the “Queen of the Poor.” She said what God was waiting to hear. She said it at the beginning, and she said it at the end – “Yes, fiat, I am the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done according to your word, not mine.” (Luke 1:38) This is how it always was with her.

When Our Lord was talking about “Happy are those who....” (Matthew 5:3ff) He was remembering His mother. Yes, of course He was remembering the prophets, the psalms, the history, but all these were so obviously present in His mother. She inspired Him. It was her spirit put into words, because Our Lord saw in her the lowliest and the loveliest of the *anawim*, the poor and needy of the Lord.

Read the words of God and allow those words to soak in and penetrate your soul, and build up a relationship with Our Blessed Mother, a relationship which is very precious.

The Wedding Feast of Cana

Have you ever been to a wedding? Most of us have. It is a happy occasion to celebrate the man and woman as they are blessed by the Church. At the reception there is good food and drink and happy music for everyone to enjoy.

Would it be a surprise for you to know that Jesus also went to a wedding? He went with His friends and with His mother, Mary. (John 2:1-12) I'm sure they had delicious food to eat and good wine to drink. But at some point during the reception, Mary saw that there was trouble ahead. She noticed that the big container which had been filled with wine was becoming less and less as the servants served the guests, and there was just a small amount of wine at the bottom of the jar.

It would have been very embarrassing for the wedding couple not to have enough wine for all their guests. Mary went to Jesus and whispered in His ear, "They have no wine!" (John 2:3) Then she went to the

servants and told them, “Do whatever Jesus tells you.” (John 2:5)

What did Jesus tell them? There were six big jars off to the side that held water for the guests to wash themselves as they arrived to the wedding feast. Jesus told the servants to fill the jars with water, and then draw some out and take it to the one in charge of the reception. The servants must have thought that was a strange thing to do, but they remembered what Mary had said, “Do whatever he tells you.” So they filled the jars with water and then they took some to the head servant who was in charge of the reception. When he tasted it, he was very surprised. It was the most delicious wine he had ever tasted! He went to the bride and groom and said, “How is it that you left the best wine to be served last? Usually the best wine is served first, and then, when people do not notice any longer, a less good wine is served.” (John 2:10)

Only the servants realized what had happened: Jesus had changed the water into wine. He did this miracle because His

mother, Mary, had asked Him. Jesus never refused anything to His mother.

Mary is the mother of Jesus, but we should never forget that she is our mother too. She is happy to go to Jesus to ask Him to help us, too, when we are in need. When our Blessed Mother asks Jesus for us, we will be saved from many unhappy moments.

Mary teaches us by her life to say “Yes” to God. When we pray the “Hail Mary” we ask Mary, our mother, to help us and be with us “now,” but especially to be with us “at the hour of our death.” We know we need our Mother’s help to get to heaven. Mary can help us to listen to God. We can ask Mary, our mother, to protect us from unnecessary pain and suffering, as she helped those in Cana. With a mother’s tender heart, she is moved by our needs, and we can follow her promptings to “Do whatever He tells you.”

The Wedding at Cana / Cover Art

excerpt taken from Isabel Piczek's Theological and Artistic Description of the stained glass windows in the Heart of Jesus Retreat Center Convent Chapel

The road from Cana to the Cross and to the victory of the Tomb, has a design in its profound depth that only a God could have planned and accomplished.

This road is not the super efficient one for success, not a military road of power or of political gain. Every stone of this road was made of monumental, heroic love. It is the eternal Bridegroom advancing on it toward his total sacrifice of Himself, the royal nuptial Gift to His Bride, the Universal Church.

What an incredible sign Cana is that includes all that was said above. What a beginning! It is not by chance that the Virgin actually caused this first and profoundly significant miracle of Christ to happen: a sign that included the entire character of Christ's mission.

It is a Wedding, that is very strongly a figure of Christ's own wedding with His spotless Bride, the Universal Church - a deep indication of the final future. Since Mary is the Church in its mystical form, here the Virgin represents the Mother of God as well as His spotless Bride.

The Eucharist also is well signified - the water changing into wine, as the wine is changing into the blood of Christ. The plenitude of the wine reminds us of Christ shedding His blood on the Cross. The blood starts to flow out of the stone jars. There is no limit to this love, to this sacrifice.

Sister Ida: a holy friend

Sister Ida first met Isabel Piczek while Isabel was painting the fresco for the altar at St. Ladislaus Church in Courtland, Ontario, Canada in 1952. From their first meeting a great spiritual friendship was born. When Sister Ida decided to respond to the invitation to go to the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, she made arrangements with Isabel and her sister, Edith, as they had already moved to Los Angeles and were good friends with Cardinal McIntyre.

Throughout the years, Isabel and Sister Ida would



(L - R) Isabel and Edith Piczek with Sister Ida
Welcome to Los Angeles 1956

confer on many spiritual topics, especially the topics of Isabel's artwork. Their friendship lasted a lifetime and continues into everlasting life.

Here is an excerpt of a letter Isabel wrote to the Sisters the day after Sister Ida's funeral:

It was only yesterday that we all stood around the open grave of Sister Ida. Was it tragic? I would say, absolutely not. Was it sad? From a very narrow, personal view, yes. But we all deeply felt we were lifted to another plane, to an auxiliary space, where reality was incredibly intense. Looking at the whole event from that plane, Sister Ida's funeral and grave was one of the grandest, most elevating and most victorious events I ever lived through. We lived through a very, very historic moment, but somehow – even if it sounds contradictory, - that historic moment was the first moment of the future.

My sister, Edith, came to the funeral very ill with a serious flu. She could not come to the grave-site. It was too

cold. Sitting in the car, she watched us from a distance, listening to the singing. When I had returned to the car I expected to find her half dead. Instead, her eyes were sparkling and she said; "I don't understand what happened, but this was the happiest, most elevating moment of my life." I just said, we all felt exactly the same way. The reason for that can be known immediately. We have celebrated a living Saint. We buried no one. No one was dead there.

There is no question we had the privilege to share our time packet with a Saint. Immense responsibility rests with all of us. We have to let the world know what we have seen. We have lived through the same uncanny experience as the Apostles. They too have seen a man, who had to wash up, who experienced hunger, sweat, got tired, had to sleep and get even angry at times. Yet through the sweat and hunger they had to see omnipotent God standing in front of them: "You are the Son of the Living God."

We have to have a similar insight. We have seen Sister Ida making cappuccino, cleaning fish, preoccupied about a million earthly problems and racked by illness with all its sometimes disgusting facts. Yet, we have to see in all these and beyond them the great Saint standing in front of us. I give credit to Cardinal Mahony. Due to an apparent inspiration, in his little talk at the end of the funeral Mass he used this expression "the Sacred body of Sister Ida."

...Now, for this age and beyond, Sister Ida was sent. She introduced a "new way"; all things, all the time in chorus sing to God through a natural and constant connection with Him. Instead of sacrifice, there is love. Instead of piety, there is understanding and the joy that derives out of it. Things, all things are reasonable, joyous, well ordered, fitting and easy to explain if we see God through them. Serving God is not a sacrifice, it is a Joyful Apostolate. In the person of Sister Ida we have an extraordinarily universal Saint...

This is precisely the spirit and the gift this world needs. Sister Ida's life does not end here. It starts here on a large scale through you.

Lovingly, Isabel
February 13, 2000



Sister Ida after being elected Superior General at the First Chapter in 1976. She is standing beside an image of the Blessed Mother that was drawn by Isabel Piczek

Servant of God

Sister Ida Peterfy, SDSH

1922-2000

Foundress, Society Devoted to the Sacred Heart

When does a Religious Community begin?
Who are the people God chooses and calls
for such a task of extraordinary faith, zeal
and love?

This is the story of the dynamic action of
God in the life of Sister Ida Peterfy and the
Sisters of the Society Devoted to the Sacred
Heart. There were no extraordinary signs
given to her; only the interior call of God
which she recognized and responded to in
the silence of her heart.

It was the summer of 1939 and the Mayor
of Kassa, Hungary, requested that the
Girl Scouts direct a two week camp for
underprivileged children. Ida, a vivacious
16 year old at the time, was enjoying a
summer vacation in the beautiful northern
region of Hungary. She was asked to take
the leadership role and, unhesitatingly, she



Ida Peterfy (left) with other scouts chosen to represent their countries for the first International Girl Scout World Camp held in 1939

gave up her vacation to fill the need. Her heart went out to the 120 little children who needed to develop a relationship with God and with each other. To teach them, she developed a method with lively dramatizations and imaginative visual aids. In the summer of 1940, Ida once again led the two week camp program. At the close of the camp she made her first three day silent retreat.

It was during this quiet time of prayer and reflection that God spoke to Ida in a way which would penetrate her heart and alter her life. With no external signs nor miraculous gifts, it was simply, yet profoundly, the Word of God finding a home in the heart of a 17 year old girl. The deep realization that *"God knows me by name, and loves me personally"* and *"God cares for the children facing the threat of Nazism and Communism"* brought forth the response in her: *"But who will teach these children about God?"* The stereotypical answer: *"The Church will do it,"* did not sound right to her anymore. In prayer it became obvious to Ida: *"You are the Church, it is up to you; you*

need to work that they would know God." The extraordinary had taken place, the reality of God's personal love had been heard and responded to.

With the support of the Retreat Director and with the approval of Msgr. Nicolas Pfeiffer, her spiritual mentor, Ida was ready to offer her life to God. Upon her 18th birthday she made private vows of chastity, poverty and obedience in the Franciscan Church in Kassa, before the Blessed Sacrament and in the company of one of the first members of the sprouting Community. Thus began the fascinating and inspiring ministry of Sister Ida Peterfy and the Sisters of the Sacred Heart which, in time, became a fully approved Religious Congregation in the Catholic Church, the Society Devoted to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

While Sister Ida was organizing the youth to participate in the Consecration of the city of Kassa to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Hermine Jaschko, Aurelia Majorossy, and Eva Batta were drawn by her zeal and also committed their lives to God in the Community.



(front, left to right)

Sister Hermine, Father Viragh, Sister Aurelia

Sister Ida (to right behind Sister Aurelia)

after their 1st 8-day retreat in 1942

(Sister Ida's mother is in the back behind Sister Aurelia)

The years of World War II, followed by the Communist occupation, seemed to be the bleakest and least stable time in Europe. Yet the innovative teaching methods of Sister Ida and the growing number of companions proved to be the message of hope in God's love to many of Hungary's teachers, youth and children. Undaunted by the threats of the Communist regime and the imprisonment of Sister Aurelia in a Russian labor camp, the Sisters continued their work and apostolic accomplishments. They never considered leaving Hungary. However, after the arrest of Cardinal József Mindszenty, Sister Ida was encouraged by Church leaders to leave the country with the Sisters in order to continue their work in the free world. It became apparent to Sister Ida that God had very different plans for her and for the Community. She continued to trust and follow God's call.

On February 14, 1949 Sister Ida and a companion escaped from Hungary to Austria and prepared the way for the Community to follow. In June 1949, Sister Ida immigrated to Canada and made

preparations for the Sisters' voyage. On August 15, 1950 Sister Hermine Jaschko, Sister Eva Batta, Sister Aurelia Majorossy, Sister Agnes Raday, and Sister Helen Clare Nagy arrived safely in Toronto.

It took insight, courage and determination for Sister Ida and the young Community not to be diverted from their original religious education ministry because of the language barrier. Conducting summer school for the children of Hungarian tobacco farmers led to the Sisters' actual labor in the tobacco harvest. Through this hard work, they acquired enough funds to establish a printing shop. Thus they chose to work with their hands, while gaining fluency in English, rather than compromise their original goal of religious education.

By 1954, the Sisters were ready to share their spiritual knowledge and teaching methods in English. They formed volunteers to be catechists and through their leadership programs the youth of Toronto actively participated in the Marian Year. The Sisters reached out to the newly arrived



"Day of Mary" Banner with children's good deed boxes on the stage

From Sister Ida's letter to a friend
May 24, 1954

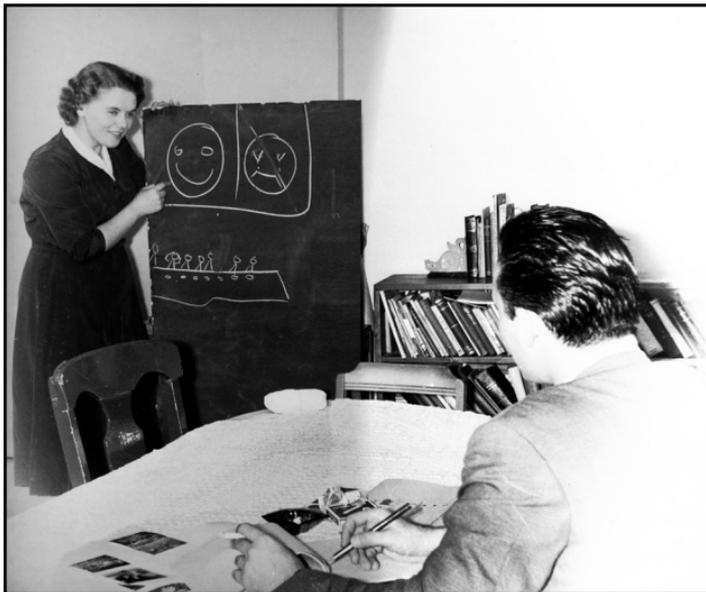
"The Day of Mary was really beautiful. I got a good picture of how seriously the children took the whole idea, and how devout and solemn it is when they give an account in their own words as they bring their good deed boxes onto the stage.

The Sisters were deeply touched to see how sincere, honest and prayerful the whole event was. Everyone paid attention! No disciplining was needed!"

The "Marian Year" in 1954 marked the beginning of the Community's English speaking apostolate. Sister Ida initiated a solemn consecration to the Blessed Virgin Mary and developed a spiritual program to incorporate elementary school children of the Toronto Archdiocese to live out their Catholic Christian faith in a dynamic way. This was accomplished through catechetical lessons, good deed cards and puppet show scripts. Sister Ida and the Sisters organized a large-scale Children's Day of Prayer with the full support and presence of Cardinal James McGuigan, Archbishop of Toronto.

Chinese college students, and with Sister Ida's *Five Step Illustrated Method*, the Sisters were delighted to find that they could communicate and teach well, ethnic and cultural barriers melting away.

With the impact of their teaching and the example of their lives, news of the Sisters' work began to spread. By 1956, the Canadian edition of Time Magazine had published an article on the Community.



Sister Ida presenting lesson to
TIME Magazine interviewer

Recognized by several Bishops during the Religious Education Congress in Buffalo, New York, Sister Ida was asked to bring the Community to work in several dioceses. Accepting Bishop Robert J. Dwyer's invitation in November 1956, a convent was established in Reno, Nevada in 1957. Simultaneously, upon the invitation of Cardinal James Francis McIntyre, the Motherhouse and Novitiate of the Community were opened in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, California.

The Community's steady growth could be seen both in numbers and in accomplishments. Sister Ida, Sister Eva, and Sister Agnes were the first to give Teacher Formation courses in the Archdiocese and the Sisters participated in Religious Education Programs and in Summer Schools of Religion. Young women from Southern California, the Midwest, the East Coast, and from Hong Kong entered this vibrant, joyful and dedicated Community of the Sacred Heart Sisters.

During the 1960's, the Sisters led Youth

Retreats, popular now, but a striking innovation at the time. In their new country they continued their favorite program: summer camps for children. The camps provided an opportunity for the children to hear the Word of God and to rejoice in God's love in the midst of His created beauty. Schools of Prayer for adults and Family Retreat Camps were established to support the family unit.

In 1970, the Sisters' most expansive ministry was to be realized: they reached out through the media to vast numbers of children, producing twenty-seven episodes of *"My Friend, Pookie"* at the request of the



Bishop Connolly and Sister Ida
on the set of *My Friend Pookie*

Los Angeles Archdiocese (for ABC-TV). The Sisters were, unknowingly, honing the skills and talents which would later be used to produce the celebrated Video Catechesis Series, the *Sacred Heart Kids' Club*, bringing joyful help in teaching to catechists worldwide.

Confirmation of their ongoing work took the form of the Society's First General Chapter in 1976. The Chapter reestablished Sister Ida as Superior General and sanctioned the Constitutions re-formulated by her. The Constitutions were approved by Cardinal Timothy Manning in 1980 and received the approval of the Holy See in 1985.

While Sister Ida remained the spiritual inspiration of the community, the 1982 Chapter elected Sister Eva Batta as Superior General. In 1988, Sister Jane Stafford became the first American to hold the position of Superior General.

The end of the seventies was marked by a multitude of blessings, as the Sisters launched the Heart of Jesus Retreat Center

in Santa Ana, California. The generosity of a loving benefactor, combined with the spirited fund raising led by Sister Ida and Sister Jane, produced the necessary resources to acquire a 23 acre property in Big Bear Lake, California. In 1980 the Sisters opened Sacred Heart Retreat Camp. Both of these centers established unique locations for the Sisters' continuing work and steadfast commitment to the spiritual enrichment of children, youth and adults, with a special focus on family apostolate.

In 1985, after prayerful consideration, the



Sister Ida speaking at the dedication of
Sacred Heart Retreat Camp in Big Bear Lake during Family Camp

small Community recognized the need to establish a mission in Taiwan to provide help to the people both within the fields of medicine and religious education.

Sister Ida and her Sisters could be found in a variety of Religious Education ministries from teaching children, youth and adults to directing parish religious education programs, sacramental programs, RCIA, indeed any place where the Word and love of God need to be proclaimed.



(L - R) Sister Catherine Marie, Susan Coppola (*daughter of Francis Ford Coppola*)
Sister Jane, Sister Ida and Sister Yolanda
behind the scenes of *Be a Dynamic and Effective Religion Teacher*

In response to a growing need for catechist formation, Sister Ida produced a video course, *Be a Dynamic and Effective Religion Teacher*. Through it, her unique catechetical method, *The Five Step Illustrated Method*,

brings success to catechists and educators in places previously beyond the Sisters' reach.

The spiritual needs of Hungary and the surrounding countries in Europe are close to the hearts of the Sisters. In 1992 a missionary team of Sisters was sent back to Hungary, the place where Sister Ida initially received the inspiration of the Lord to begin the Community.

Sister Ida's leadership in the Community continued through teaching the novices, giving retreats and monthly seminars to the Sisters, being actively involved in the Community's government and traveling as a religious education speaker both nationally and internationally.

A diagnosis of non-Hodgkins lymphoma in 1995 did not deter Sister Ida from making the Father's love known. During the same time as she was undergoing chemotherapy, Sister Ida gave a 30 day retreat to Sisters who had recently made their perpetual profession.



Sister Ida giving a 30 day retreat in 1995

In the anticipation of the celebration of the Great Jubilee in the year 2000, she spiritually inspired the preparation and, with Bishop Gerald Wilkerson, she was the first to cross through the Holy Door erected for the event on the Novitiate property.

Sister Ida's life on earth ended as it had been lived, focused on the One she had given her life to and surrounded by her Sisters who joined her in this love. She passed on to eternal life on February 8, 2000 in the Motherhouse of the Society Devoted to the Sacred Heart in Northridge, California.



Picture from the *Tidings* of Cardinal Roger Mahony incensing Sister Ida's casket during the Mass of Resurrection at St. John Eudes Church, February 12, 2000

The celebration of the Mass of Resurrection was indeed a celebration. Cardinal Roger Mahony, the main celebrant, mentioned the special and wonderful grace of this moment, "These are moments that we read about in the lives of holy men and women. We were blessed, for whatever reason in God's providence, to have Sister Ida here, to have the opportunity to know her and love her... we also pray that we would be able to capture that spirit of Sister Ida in our own commitment of faith in Christ, and in our lives we would live out the discipleship which she lived out to the full, and shared with us in such a visionary fashion."

"The Joyful Apostolate must go on," said then Archbishop Justin Rigali in his homily at the funeral. "Sister Ida, in her legacy of generous love, still speaks to us." This rite of Christian burial "is a hymn of praise and thanksgiving for the love of God manifested in the Sacred Heart of Jesus and reflected in the gentle life and zealous devotion of our Sister Ida."

Even though Sister Ida's earthly life has ended, the Joyful Apostolate continues in her spirit through her Sisters' catechetical works. It is obvious that it is God who moves the hearts of these dedicated women and that they take Sister Ida's final words to them to heart:

"I think my message was, from day one to day last, that if you don't love God, you don't love Jesus, you don't love each other, and then the people, then somehow you are missing the point of life."

The significance and impact of the Sacred Heart Sisters' accomplishments in the field of Religious Education continues to be globally recognized. To know Sister Ida's Sisters is to know the love, grace, and simplicity of God. They continually follow our Blessed Mother's directive, as Sister Ida encouraged them to do:

*Do whatever He tells
you.*



Sister Ida presenting a gift to Our Blessed Mother on Mother's Day
in the Heart of Jesus Retreat Center, in Santa Ana, CA

Ask Sister Ida's intercession

Most Loving God,
you called Sister Ida to teach and live
Your Truth and Your message of love
in a joyful and inspiring way.

May her example also inspire us
to live in faith and draw others
to Your Sacred Heart

Through the intercession of Your Servant,
grant us the following grace which we ask
from Your loving kindness:

(here make your request).

We ask this through Christ, our Lord.
Amen.

For more information, to request materials,
to share a testimonial of Sister Ida's heroic virtue,
or to report any grace obtained through her intercession, contact:

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sisterida@sacredheartsisters.com
www.sacredheartsisters.com

*From the Opening Day, First General Chapter,
June 21, 1976:*

Our Blessed Mother has a very substantial part in our lives, and God has put her there. I implore her, as I do whenever anything major happens in our life, that she would be with us and help us as she did at Cana, seeing ahead of time what we need and what would cause problems. And through the goodness of her motherly heart, not because she has to, she would step in and provide. So often we don't even know what she has saved us from. We place ourselves into her hands, that she would be the one who foresees the things we do not even dream about, and she would provide. We ask her blessed Son, our Lord Jesus, that He in his goodness, would make our joy complete.

♥ *Your Sister Ida*

Society Devoted to the Sacred Heart



www.sacredheartsisters.com

Cover art by Isabel Piczek

The Wedding Feast of Cana, Stained Glass Window

Heart of Jesus Retreat Center Convent Chapel, Santa Ana, CA

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