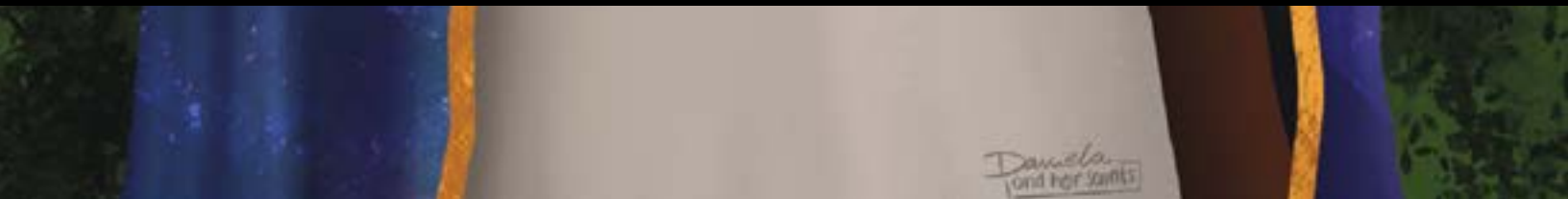


MORE THAN A MOTHER:

6 faces of Mary you haven't met



Mary lived on the periphery of society. She was a young, unmarried woman from a poor village under Roman occupation. She gave birth in a stable, fled to Egypt as a refugee, and watched her son be publicly executed—remaining by his side even as others fled.

Yet Mary was also the first to join Jesus in his mission. At Cana, she prompted his first miracle. At the cross, she stood as a disciple. In the early church, she became a leader in the community of believers.

Around the world, people see Mary as both a companion in suffering and a co-laborer in liberation. During Cesar Chávez's 1960s march for farmworkers' rights, he carried an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe. In Chile and Argentina during the 1970s, when governments kidnapped dissenters, Mary became known as *Madre del Desaparecido*—Mother of the Disappeared—as grieving mothers turned to her for comfort and strength.

Authoritarian regimes have long recognized the power of Mary's message. During British rule in India, the Magnificat was banned for its revolutionary language: *God casts down the mighty, lifts up the lowly, and sends the rich away empty.*

Across centuries and continents, people have envisioned Mary in their own image. These aren't just artistic choices. They are theological claims. They remind us that God shows up not among the powerful, but among the poor and forgotten. When we honor the many faces of Mary, we honor the many ways God draws near to those on the margins.

The stories that follow are just a few of the countless ways people around the world have encountered Mary as one of their own.



MARY THE BODHISATTVA

In Singapore, Michel Chambon, a research fellow at the Initiative for the Study of Asian Catholics, says there's a new Taoist movement that integrates all kinds of deities, including Mary. "We tend to reduce Mary to this universal appeal toward motherhood and femininity," he says. "In the case of this Taoist movement, it's not that. It's Mary's capacity to reach enlightenment, because she was meditating on everything in her heart and therefore she didn't go through death. Which, for them, is proof that she reached enlightenment as Taoist immortals will do."

In Japan, Taiwan, and China, "we see a strong coexistence between Buddhism and Mary, such as using a female bodhisattva to represent Mary," Chambon says. "Catholics in Korea today depict Mary through Buddhist and animist art traditions. Mary is often a bridge between those religious traditions."

Chambon says looking at how Mary is depicted and venerated invites us to consider our own images of Mary: "What are implicit cultural values about women, gender, and motherhood—which kind of mother are we longing for?"

—Cassidy Klein

Read the full version here: https://uscatholic.org/articles/202504/folk-saints-canonized-or-not-champion-liberation-for-all/

STAR OF THE SEA

The ancient mariners called their compass a "star of the sea" because of its shape. Mary became identified with this idea, as she is a guiding light who calls us home again to Christ. She is believed to intercede on behalf of seafarers to guide them home, and many coastal churches bear this name.

Mary's name Star of the Sea seems to have become widespread in early medieval times. There is a plainsong hymn from the eighth century called "Ave Maris Stella." Stella Maris came to be used as a name of Polaris in its role as a guiding star or North Star, as it was always in view. St. Anthony of Padua, perhaps the most well-known of St. Francis of Assisi's disciples, would invoke Mary's name, Star of the Sea, to summon his own strength.

Call upon Mary as Star of the Sea in prayer to support you when life's waves are difficult to navigate and ask for her help in offering direction.

—Christine Valters Paintner

Read the full version here: https://uscatholic.org/articles/201905/8-faces-of-mary-to-call-on-in-prayer/



OUR LADY OF CHARITY



Like most Marian apparitions, the story of Our Lady of Charity, which dates to 1612, began in a nameless place and involved ordinary, undistinguished people. Three boys were gathering salt needed to preserve the meat of the town's slaughterhouse, which supplied food for the copper mine workers and inhabitants near Santiago, Cuba. Two of the boys were native Indian brothers, Rodrigo and Juan de Hoyos, and the third was a 10-year-old Black enslaved person, Juan Moreno.

On their way back to Santiago del Prado (modern El Cobre, meaning "copper") and halfway across the Bay of Nipe, they encountered a fierce storm that threatened their frail vessel. Suddenly the waters calmed. In the distance the boys saw a white bundle floating on a piece of wood. It was a small statue of Mary holding the infant Jesus on her left arm and a gold cross on her raised right hand. Inscribed on the wooden board were the words, "Yo soy la Virgen de la Caridad" ("I am Our Lady of Charity").

"La Virgen de la Caridad is the most profound symbol of the Cuban nation," both exiled and on the island, says Msgr. Felipe de Jesús Estévez, auxiliary bishop of Miami. "The British have their queen, the Cubans have la Caridad. Even before Jamestown, El Cobre kept this gracious statue."

Mary came to our Caribbean island to remind us of her son's eternal love for each of us. As my grandmother Josefa frequently reminded me growing up, "Mary is present to all her children, no matter what language they speak. She comes to her people in their daily need. All you have to do is ask her."

–María Ruiz Scaperlanda

Read the full version here: https://uscatholic.org/articles/201109/our-lady-of-charity-connects-immigrants-with-cuban-tradition/

MADONNA DI MONTEVERGINE



On a brisk winter day in the Kingdom of Sicily, around the year 1250, two young men made a journey to the Shrine of Montevergine. The local villagers, seeing the young men holding hands and kissing as they walked to the shrine, became enraged. They attacked the men, stripped them, and tied them to a tree deep in the forests of Mount Partenio.

Left to die of frostbite or be torn apart by wolves, ice gathering on their shivering bodies, the men prayed to Mary to save them. According to legend, Mary saw their love for one another and had compassion on them. She freed them from their bonds and sent a ray of brilliant sunlight to melt the layers of snow and ice that enclosed them. The pair rushed into the village, testifying to Mary's love and compassion. As writer Lura Filios writes, Mary's act was seen as a "sign of supernatural tolerance."

For many LGBTQ+ Catholics around the world, the story of Mary protecting and saving queer people, claiming them as her own children, is vitally important. The Madonna of Montevergine, as she became known, is also synonymous with a miraculous icon that represents Mary as a mother who welcomes queer Catholics, affirming that they are created in the same image as her son.

–Emma Cieslik

Read the full version here: https://uscatholic.org/articles/202311/the-madonna-di-montevergine-mother-of-lgbtq-catholics/



THE GREENEST BRANCH

The title "Greenest Branch" for Mary comes from the 12th-century Benedictine Abbess St. Hildegard of Bingen. Hildegard lived in the lush Rhine Valley of Germany and saw the greening of the earth around her as a sign of God at work in bringing all creation to life. She coined the *term viriditas*, which refers to the greening power of God at work in all.

Through this concept of greening, Hildegard interweaves all created life—cosmic, human, angelic, and celestial—with God. We might say that viriditas is God's love, energizing the world, making it living and fruitful. St. Hildegard had a great devotion to Mary and saw her as preeminently infused with the life-giving greenness of God.

Call upon Mary as Greenest Branch to support you in welcoming God's life-giving and sustaining grace into your life.

–Christine Valters Paintner

Read the full version here: https://uscatholic.org/articles/201905/8-faces-of-mary-to-call-on-in-prayer/

OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE

On a morning in 1531, a decade after the brutality of the Spanish conquest, a Nahua peasant walked through the hills near present-day Mexico City. The man's name was Juan Diego, and he had recently been baptized into the Catholic faith. As he walked, he heard some unusual birdsong; he looked for the source of the music and found a woman shining with light.

Juan Diego dropped to his knees. The woman addressed him as Juanito, the nickname his intimate friends and family called him, and referred to him as the "smallest of my children." Today, many people of Mexican descent continue to revere this woman—Our Lady of Guadalupe—because she saw their unique value as a people. She affirmed their dignity before God.

The woman told Juan Diego she was the "mother of the true God for whom we live" and that she wanted a house built on that hill. From that home, the woman promised Juan Diego, she would display God's love, compassion, help, and defense to his people.

"The translations you see sometimes online say a temple or a church," says Jeannette Rodriguez, a theologian who has studied the Virgin of Guadalupe. "And that's not what she said. She wanted to build a casita, a house, a home."

Guadalupe offers us a glimpse of who Mary is, says William Calvo-Quirós, a professor and program director of Latino/a Studies at the University of Michigan. "The Virgin of Guadalupe is not just [an object of] devotion but is really this kind of woman who has been accompanying this community," he says.

"Mary is a woman who loves the community. She will adapt to [be] what people need." In Guadalupe, Juan Diego—and Mexico as a whole—met Mary the mother, a woman who seeks out the poor and lowly, the smallest of her children, to bring them a message of compassion and solidarity.

–Annelise Jolley



Read the full version here: https://uscatholic.org/articles/202412/a-liberatory-look-at-marian-apparitions/