

Mary The Good Listener



The Bishop Speaks

Having just celebrated Easter we now move into the month of May – The month of Mary. It's common for parishes to have a daily recitation of the Rosary during May, and often to erect a special May altar with a statue or picture of Mary. It's also a long-standing tradition to crown the statue of Mary during May. Often, the crown is made of beautiful flowers representing Mary's beauty and virtue. It's also a reminder to the faithful to strive to imitate our Blessed Mother's virtue in our own lives. Some individuals and families also make the effort to do these things in the home as well – a practice that I

heartily encourage.

For centuries, the Catholic Church has set aside the entire month of May to honour Mary, Mother of God. As a child I didn't give much thought as to why the month of May, I simply presumed it was because the names of May and Mary are so similar! But there is another reason.

In pre-Christian times the Ancient Greeks dedicated the month of May to Artemis, the virgin goddess of both chastity and childbirth and the patron and protector of young girls. In Ancient Rome, May was



Cover Photo Caption: Damien Locke celebrates his institution to the Ministry of Acolyte in Rome.

dedicated to Flora, the maiden goddess of flowers and spring.

You can probably already see the connections that made it an easy step for Christians to dedicate the month of May to Mary the virgin mother of God in whom also bloomed the fullness of grace and virtue. The custom among Christians became especially widespread during the nineteenth century and remains in practice today.

Just how did Mary become the Virgin Mother of God; the one in whom both the *Word* of God (God the Son) and the *words* of God found a true and fruitful home? I suggest it was because she *listened*.

Have you ever been talking to a friend or a group of people, perhaps telling them a story, only to realise half way through that nobody is listening anymore? Their attention has turned to something or somebody else. You stop, you retreat into yourself, you go quiet and 'dry up'. You might try again later to tell your story but you may very well choose just to give up and remain silent.

But when somebody listens intently to our story we open up and can quite easily go beyond our story and reveal a little more of ourselves than we were originally intending to. There is something remarkable happening when this occurs. The speaker and the listener connect and almost become one for a while. A spark is ignited. Many great friendships and even some marriages have begun this way! Everybody loves a good listener. So does God.

In Mary, God found a good listener! In the Scriptures we first meet Mary at the Annunciation where God had an announcement to make and Mary listened. She didn't just hear – she listened. And she listened so humbly and intently - so *obediently* - to the words of God that “the Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us.” Saint Ephrem in the fourth century is credited to have said of Mary: “Through her ear the Word entered and dwelt secretly in the womb”.

And Mary's listening continued; it never stopped. This attitude is expressed very well in the Scriptures when we are told that “Mary treasured these things and pondered them in her heart.” When something significant occurred or something happened that she didn't fully understand, the Scriptures tell us that Mary kept 'listening' to those events in her heart to find their true and full meaning and to find the will of God in them for her.

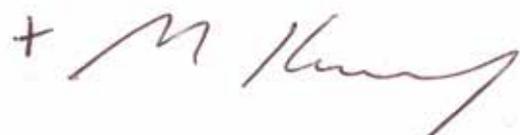
As a good listener, Mary was not only attentive to

God but also to those around her. Good listeners notice things, and it was Mary who noticed that the bride and groom were running out of wine at the wedding feast in Cana. Being a good listener, she was able to do something to help them and save them embarrassment. She told her Son Jesus whom she knew would do something about it.

Mary always remains by her Son's side, listening, pondering, and obeying. We often see this attitude in Mary's physical posture as presented in so much iconography and other Christian art. Artists over the centuries have instinctively depicted Mary leaning forward in a posture of listening.

During the month of May as we venerate Mary the Mother of God, may we too incline unto our Lord, listen to him and obey him. Listening well to God and to others requires a little external silence as well as a little internal silence which I call calm. So let us try to carve out for ourselves a little silence and calm so that we can better listen to God and his Will and to our neighbours and their needs.



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