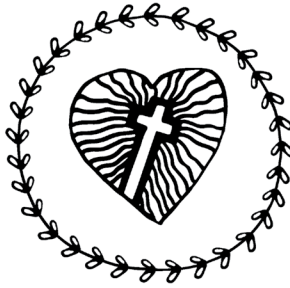


1.

# *Blessed Virgin Mary*

## **A SPIRITUAL MOTHER FOR US ALL**



First Century

**Patronage:** Mothers

**Memorials:** January 1 (Mary, Mother of God),  
March 25 (Annunciation), August 15 (Assumption),  
December 8 (Immaculate Conception)

## **THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY'S STORY**

The ancient tradition of the Church tells us that Mary was the daughter of Anne and Joachim. She first appears in the Bible in the first chapter of Matthew's gospel with the story of the angel's appearance to Joseph, when the angel instructed him not to divorce his betrothed wife as he intended, because the child she bore was from God. In the first chapter of Luke's gospel, we find the more detailed story of Mary's early life. She was living in Nazareth and betrothed to Joseph when the archangel Gabriel announced to her that she was to be the Mother of God. She visited and helped care for her elderly cousin Elizabeth during her

pregnancy and traveled with Joseph to Bethlehem, where she gave birth to Jesus. After the Holy Family took refuge in Egypt to protect Jesus from King Herod, Mary returned to Nazareth with Joseph and raised Jesus according to the customs and beliefs of her Jewish faith. She was present with Jesus as he began his public ministry at the wedding feast of Cana and at his crucifixion, where he gave her to the care of St. John. After Jesus' Ascension, she was among the first members of the Christian community. The Church regards the Blessed Mother so highly that in 1950 Pope Pius XII promulgated the dogma of the assumption, declaring that after Mary's earthly life was complete she was taken to the glory of heaven, body and soul.

## LESSONS FROM MARY

How does one write a book about the saints and not include the Blessed Virgin Mary, the mother of our Savior and the world's first and best Christian? There is so much to say, and yet no words can adequately capture the role of Mary, our "New Eve," Mother to the Church and Mother of the Word Incarnate. I love to look at depictions of Mary in art from around the world—portrayed in every age, skin color, and garb—and realize that she is indeed mother to each of us, regardless of the constraints of time and location. Her goal has always been to lead us into more perfect communion with her son. And yet at the same time, she is for so many of us a spiritual support—a true mom, a spiritual sister, a best friend.

Mary's *fiat*, her yes to what surely must have been a moment of terror and anxiety looking at a future full of the unknown, makes her the perfect disciple. In those moments when following Christ feels too difficult, while I am aiming to open my life fully to God's plan instead of my own and making sacrifices to do the right thing, Mary's simple statement, "May it be done to me according to your word," is the only guidebook I need.

My good friend Martha and I have talked many times about how we'd love to sit down to coffee with Mary and ask her to tell us *her* version of the story—the realities of a life marked by great joys and the most piercing of sorrows. What trust and faith enabled her to face

being pregnant and unwed in a society that clearly would have rejected her? How proud was she at the moment she saw Jesus teaching in the synagogue or performing his first miracle at Cana? Did she feel sad as he grew into his own and left her behind to spread his Gospel of love? How could she bear the grief of seeing her son be put to death?

Martha and I may never get our dreamed-of coffee date, but the good news is that Mary is fully present to me at every moment of every day, waiting to take my hand and carry me to her son. From those painful mothering moments with sick and sleepless babies to my current emotional roller coaster as I watch my sons mature and prepare to leave me for lives of their own, she is at my side as a confidante and friend, a mother. Fearless and yet tenderhearted, human and yet untouched by sin, Mary was, is, and always will be the first and best Catholic mom.

## **TRADITIONS**

The Rosary, one of the Church's greatest devotional prayers, encourages the faithful to meditate upon the mysteries of Christ's life and key moments in the life of his mother, Mary. Around the world, Catholics venerate Mary with prayer, processions, and religious imagery. She is known by hundreds of titles and is the focus of dozens of devotions, great works of art, and numerous hymns. Many miracles have been attributed to her intercession, particularly in places of her apparitions such as Lourdes, Guadalupe, and Fatima.

## **MARY'S WISDOM**

My soul proclaims the greatness of the LORD; my spirit rejoices in God my savior. For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness; behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed.

—Luke 1:46–47

## THIS WEEK WITH SCRIPTURE

SUNDAY: LUKE 1:38

Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.

*I am your handmaid, Father. Help me to hear and to answer your will for my life.*

MONDAY: ACTS 1:14

All these devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

*Mary, help me to follow your perfect example of prayer and lead me to your son, Jesus.*

TUESDAY: LUKE 2:34–35

Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted (and you yourself a sword will pierce) so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

*In my sorrow, Lord, help me to find consolation in your unending love.*

WEDNESDAY: LUKE 2:19

And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.

*My God, you alone know the inner workings of my heart. In your goodness, hear and answer me.*

THURSDAY: LUKE 1:45

Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the LORD would be fulfilled.

*Jesus, equip me to believe more fully the truth of your promises.*

FRIDAY: LUKE 1:46-47

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior.

*My spirit rejoices in you, Lord.*

SATURDAY: JOHN 2:5

Do whatever he tells you.

*Emmanuel, I want to do your Father's will as Mary did. I will follow her and hold her hand as she draws me to you.*

## **SAINT-INSPIRED ACTIVITIES**

FOR MOM

In your prayer corner or other quiet place, create a small altar or sacred space for Mary with a holy card, medal, statue, or other image of her. Speak with the Blessed Mother in prayer, focusing on the Church's Marian traditions including the Rosary, Hail Mary, and Hail Holy Queen.

WITH CHILDREN

Plant a "Mary Garden" with flowers named for Our Lady, or display a rose in your home and pray a decade of the Rosary as a family.

## **A PRAYER FOR OUR FAMILY**

Pray as a family each day this week:

Blessed Mother Mary,  
you said yes to God and in doing so became mother to our Savior Jesus  
Christ.

Help us to follow your example of discipleship by following and loving  
Jesus as you did.

We ask your intercession on behalf of the poor and the suffering, and  
for peace in our world.

Be with us in our celebrations  
and those moments when life is painful and difficult.

Help us to accept God's perfect plan for our lives.

Take our hands and lead us to your son, Jesus.

Amen.

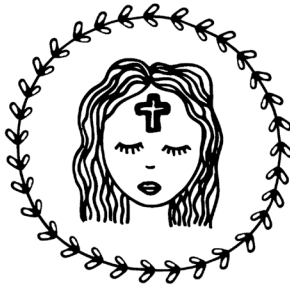
## **SOMETHING TO PONDER**

In what ways is Mary a spiritual mother to you? How does she draw you closer to her son, Jesus Christ, and mentor you in your own life as a mom?

2.

# *St. Zita of Lucca*

## **DILIGENCE IN DOMESTIC TASKS**



1218–April 27, 1272

**Patronage:** Homemakers, Domestic Workers, Servers

**Memorial:** April 27

## **ZITA OF LUCCA'S STORY**

Zita of Lucca was born in 1218 at Monsagrati, a town in Tuscany of central Italy, to a poor but devout Catholic family. Always obedient, Zita left her family home at the age of twelve to begin a lifetime of service in the home of the wealthy Fatinelli family in nearby Lucca. Zita's pious nature, her prayerful habits, her daily Mass attendance, and her cheerful attitude were a constant source of annoyance to the weaver and his family, as well as to her fellow servants. But she persisted in her devotion to her duties and her employer, and she eventually won over the household and was appointed head of the domestic servants. With equal care, she dedicated herself to service of the poor—she was known for her charity, often going without food to give her own portion to the

needy. Zita faithfully served the Fatinelli family and her God until her death, and she was immediately acclaimed a saint by those who knew and loved her.

## LESSONS FROM ZITA

Domestic responsibilities are on every mom's "to do" list, no matter how much time she spends at home. For the most part, I tend to dread seeing items such as "clean boys' toilets" or "go to the market" on my list of chores. I'm not one of those women who is by nature a gifted domestic. My husband has put up for years with a wife who'd rather blog than bake and who's better at coding than cooking.

But learning about the life of Zita of Lucca has given me a new take on my attitude about household duties. The Reverend Alban Butler wrote of Zita that she fully embraced her domestic position as a gift from God. Zita saw all work as a form of penance for sin, and she was therefore happy to be in a position to serve the God she loved so greatly. She saw her constant obedience to her employers as a sign of her obedience to the will of God. For her, work and prayer were interchangeable, and a constant rhythm of devotions accompanied her day. Learning about Zita's attitude hasn't exactly made me joyous to see overflowing mounds of dirty laundry, but it has reminded me that my station in life is a blessing. With my work around the house, I serve not only my husband and sons but also the God who has gifted me with shelter, with comfort, with sustenance, and with the love of my family.

Zita was known in her community for her constant commitment to charity. She took food from her own plate to feed the poor, gave her bed to beggars, and was known for ministering to the sick. One famous legend about Zita tells of her attendance at Mass one cold winter night. Wearing a great fur coat she had borrowed from her master, she spotted a poor man lying near the door to the church in the freezing cold. She took the coat from her back and offered it to him. Of course, by the end of Mass the man and her master's coat were nowhere to be found. When she returned home, she faced the wrath of Mr. Fatinelli. But the next morning, the coat was mysteriously returned to her door, as though by angels. For this reason, and in commemoration of Zita's benevolent soul,



the door to the basilica in Lucca where her remains are kept is referred to as “The Angel Portal.”

This and other stories of Zita’s life remind us that even if we do not have abundant means, there are always people in greater need who rely on our compassionate assistance. When Zita was given oversight of her master’s household, she took it upon herself to run the family’s affairs with even greater economization and attention to detail than they had run them. This enabled the family not only to prosper but also to use their means to support others in their community. As the keeper of my family budgets, I have the same opportunity to run my home with an eye toward efficiency and charity. When I am careful to be a good steward of our family’s income, when I use my time efficiently in carrying out my daily chores, and when I work with a positive and loving attitude, I follow in the footsteps of Zita, who has taught me so much about the dignity of being a domestic engineer.

## **TRADITIONS**

In Lucca, families celebrate St. Zita’s feast day each year with a fresh-flower market and a special blessing of both bread and flowers. She is also celebrated in England, where she is known and loved as St. Sitha.

## **ZITA’S WISDOM**

A servant is not pious if she is not industrious; work-shy piety in people of our position is sham piety.

## **THIS WEEK WITH SCRIPTURE**

SUNDAY: LUKE 21:1-4

When he looked up he saw some wealthy people putting their offerings into the treasury and he noticed a poor widow putting in two small coins. He said, “I tell you truly, this poor widow put in more than all the

rest; for those others have all made offerings from their surplus wealth, but she, from her poverty, has offered her whole livelihood.”

*Jesus, Faithful Witness, help me to always remember that there are those whose needs exceed my own, and let me respond in love and compassion.*

#### MONDAY: PROVERBS 31:27

She watches the conduct of her household, and eats not her food in idleness.

*God, Governor of my days, may I work without idleness to serve my family and to show my love for you.*

#### TUESDAY: TOBIT 4:8

Son, give alms in proportion to what you own. If you have great wealth, give alms out of your abundance; if you have but little, distribute even some of that.

*We are so blessed, Lord. Help us to bless others with our abundance, giving without selfishness and expecting nothing in return.*

#### WEDNESDAY: PSALM 51:9

Cleanse me with hyssop, that I may be pure; wash me, make me whiter than snow.

*Jesus, Living Water, you have cleansed me with your love.*

#### THURSDAY: PROVERBS 31:20

She reaches out her hands to the poor, and extends her arms to the needy.

*Today, Lord, may I extend my arms to all those in need, including my family in need of my love and attention.*

## FRIDAY: TOBIT 12:8

Prayer and fasting are good, but better than either is almsgiving accompanied by righteousness. A little with righteousness is better than abundance with wickedness.

*Father of infinite understanding, you give so much to me. Help me to give in return and to love as you do, with righteousness and abundance.*

## SATURDAY: PROVERBS 31:25

She is clothed with strength and dignity, and she laughs at the days to come.

*Clothe me, Lord, with your strength and your dignity, and help me face whatever waits for our family with no anxiety and with great hope in you.*

## **SAINT-INSPIRED ACTIVITIES**

### FOR MOM

St. Zita once gathered crusts and scraps of uneaten bread in her apron to carry them to the poor. When challenged by her employer who thought she was stealing from him, she opened her apron, and lovely flowers tumbled to the ground. Treat your family to fresh flowers or greenery from your garden on the dinner table, and carry out your domestic work with a positive attitude.

### WITH CHILDREN

St. Zita returned home from Mass late one day, and she hurried in fear that she was late for her job of baking bread for the Fatinelli family. She arrived to find a perfect loaf prepared, as if by angels. Bake two loaves of fresh bread in honor of Zita. Enjoy one together at home, and share one with friends or neighbors.

## **A PRAYER FOR OUR FAMILY**

Pray as a family each day this week:

Charitable St. Zita of Lucca,

you spent your life working for others and serving the poor.

Please help us to carry out our chores with love,

with care, and with a positive attitude.

May we look for opportunities to consume less

and ways to share what we have with those who are in need.

Intercede for our loved ones who are struggling with illness, debt, or anxiety.

Help them, and all in our family, to know the constant love and compassion of God,

our Father in heaven.

Amen.

## **SOMETHING TO PONDER**

Do you have a positive or a negative attitude about cooking, cleaning, yard work, and other household chores? How can you better unite your household work with your prayer life?