Columns



Vietnamese parishioners of Thai Xuan parish, Xuan Loc Diocese, offer flowers to Our Lady in May. (Nguyen Thi Phuong Lan)



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The church has created many prayers of praise and supplication for the intercession of Our Lady. Many poets and musicians have offered our Mother thousands of poems

and musical selections. But talking about our Mother, or writing about her, is hard; she is indescribable, and no words can describe her properly. The church has dedicated many special shrines to Our Lady and established many special feast days celebrating Our Lady's privileges and the events of her life to express thanks and to honor her.

In particular, every year the church dedicates the whole month of May to offering flowers to Our Lady. As Pope Paul IV said in May 1967: "May is an occasion for Catholics all over the world to express the faith and respect to Our Lady Queen of Heaven. Especially, during this month, Christians, both in their churches and in their homes offer Our Lady from their hearts fervent and loving prayers and reverences. In this month, the blessings of the merciful God also pour out on us from the very rich throne of Our Lady."

Every May, many Catholic parishes in Vietnam have a tradition in which parishioners come forward to offer flowers with singing and dancing, to thank and honor the Mother of God. This ethnic tradition goes back to ancient times. It comes from popular affection for Our Lady. We, children of Our Lady, want to show our respect to our Mother, a close and attentive mother to each child, especially her weak, sick, and poor children. Offering flowers to Our Lady is a beautiful and meaningful gesture to honor the Mother of God, the mother of the church and also the mother of each of us.

Vietnamese have countless ways to show respect to the Mother of God through popular piety, such as offering flowers to the Mother; processions; reciting the rosary; and by singing very lovely hymns to honor her as the Queen of Heaven. Most parishes in Vietnam spend the Saturdays of May offering flowers and honoring Our Lady. On these days, members of Vietnam's Catholic families — including children, youth, adults, and elders — attend the flower ceremonies, to thank Our Lady for keeping families in peace and safety during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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The flower offering in Vietnam parishes typically consist of three parts:

First, after a procession with the statue of Our Lady around the parish grounds, the community carries the statue of Our Lady into the church (or, if Mass is celebrated

outdoors, to the altar), places the statue on the throne, then the flower offering begins. The first group offering flowers on behalf of the parish community also offers incense to worship the Holy Trinity, and to honor Our Lady and the angels and saints.

Next, the second group offers flowers to praise the virtues of Our Lady, symbolized with a five-color procession with red, white, yellow, purple, and blue flowers. The flower colors not only represent the virtues of the Mother of God but also express the feelings and wishes that the children want to offer to her.

The final part of the program thanks God and gives thanks and supplication to Our Lady. May Our Lady always bless every Vietnamese Christian, and may we live according to the meaning of the five flower colors that we dedicate to her this month. Red is the rose of love: May Our Lady teach us to love God with all our hearts and to love our brothers and sisters as God has loved us. Yellow is the golden flower of iron faith: May Our Lady teach us to surrender and trust in God's love and providence as she did. Blue is the flower of hope: May our Lady not let us be disappointed by the difficulties and adversities of life. White is the flower of virginity: May Our Lady help us keep our hearts always pure and free of sin. Purple is the flower of pain, illness, mourning, loneliness: May Our Lady teach us to accept the crosses that God sends us so that we faithfully follow Christ for the rest of our lives.

To conclude the flower rituals, we would also like to offer Our Lady flowers of holiness such as good deeds, acts of charity toward others in daily life, and evening prayers in common in the family. May the flowers we offer her bear the fruit of virtue, the perfect virtues that she has practiced all her life in obedience to God's will. From heaven, may Our Lady intercede with God to bless us with devotion toward her in the month of flowers — full of fragrance and full of filial affection.