Columns
Horizons
Spirituality



Mother Mary remains a steadfast figure of hope for Catholics worldwide. (Tessy Jacob)



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There is a legend about the statue of Mother Mary installed in my parish church, St. Mary's, in Edoor, Kerala, India.

The church is nearly 100 years old and was built by the first generation of migrants from Kottayam, in South Kerala to Edoor in Malabar in North Kerala. Over 50% of the migrants were Catholics with a strong traditional faith, and their primary goal was to construct a church and a school adjacent to it. According to oral tradition, while the idea of a church was still in its inception, a miracle happened in the region.

It is said that a bullock cart carrying a life-size statue of Our Lady was passing through Edoor. When it reached the spot where the church now stands, the cart wouldn't move forward. Was it divine intervention or just a technical glitch? Either way, the statue was installed in the church, and over the years, it has become a Marian pilgrim center. My parents, who are in their 80s, vaguely remember this event.

Years later, I heard about a similar incident in a retreat center where a statue refused to move, even an inch, when workers tried to tilt it slightly. I've also witnessed other vivid experiences of Mother Mary in my life that influenced my devotion to her.

The life-size statue of Mother Mary in my parish was a special attraction for me. As children, we would race each other to stand beneath the statue to exchange smiles with her. Decades later, when I look back on those innocent moves, I realize that a "mother–daughter' bond developed and remained a strong connection.

Anyone with a special devotion to Mother Mary will agree that she is a mother who is alive and quick to intercede for us. She is always busy getting our jars full and making them extraordinary.

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When we celebrate the feast of Assumption of Our Lady on Aug. 15, we remember that Mother Mary was the beloved daughter of the triune God, and through her,

salvation history became possible. How immaculate and precious she was! An honor remembered generation after generation.

I often think Mother Mary had the best of everything, but I seldom remember that everything she had came at a cost!

Mary's life was not without suffering. Her near-death experiences from the time her son was born, made her always alert and watchful of the situations around her. Only a girl born in a highly conservative society can truly understand that scenario. She was both oppressed and empowered at the same time.

Just as Mary faced immense challenges, so too do many women today continue to embody her strength. One day, I encountered one of our staff members sitting on the floor, visibly distressed. When I asked if everything was OK she began to talk — our conversation lasting an hour.

Married and widowed at a very young age, this woman works hard to make ends meet. She single-handedly raises her daughters and supports her in-laws. Although sometimes her body gives in, she never skips a day of work because her entire family depends on her.

I felt as though a "Mother Mary" was sitting in front of me — someone who endures struggle for the welfare of others, just like Mary, who rushed to meet her cousin Elizabeth! We witness many scenes of the Pietà in our lives, but the miracle is that amid the sadness, these suffering women remain hopeful!

I admire those who remain genuinely happy and composed amid the roller coaster rides of life. Like Mary, they have a Magnificat to sing and thank God. It's a song of hope that God will bring justice, uproot pride, be gracious to the lowly and humble of heart, and never forget those who stand close to him.



Newlyweds seek blessings from the statue of Mother Mary at St. Mary's Shrine in Edoor, Kerala, India. The legend surrounding the statue has drawn many pilgrims to the area. (Albin Tom)

We feel drawn to Mary as the liberator of the oppressed and as a woman who withstands all the adversities of life with her humble and divinely favored disposition. She was specially chosen by God and, as tradition holds, assumed into heaven, where she lives as a divine mediator.

This makes me believe in the miracles associated with Mother Mary. She is a living mother who feels the joys, pain, struggles and hardships of her children.

It is easy to stand before the beautifully crafted statues of Mother Mary; they give the illusion that reaching heaven is easy. These statues often depict a woman who had all earthly happiness. We seldom remember a mother who, according to tradition, was orphaned in childhood, pregnant out of wedlock, widowed at an early age, raised a son who was scorned by society, witnessed his brutal death, and, in the end, had to take shelter in someone else's home.

How much more did she endure to become the most favored daughter of the heavenly Father? How hard is it to imitate Mary?

One of my friends, a great Marian devotee, was preparing for a competitive exam with her friends. When the results were declared, three of them passed, and one failed. The one who failed had to invest more money to prepare and pass the exam. My friend decided to mortgage her gold, which she had saved to develop her future career, to give to her friend. She reminded me of the scene of the visitation between Mary and Elizabeth and said: "When you receive happy news, help others also to find their happiness."

This was a profound revelation for me. In this competitive world, to be fully human, we indeed need Mary's blessings.

In contemplating Mary's life, we find a model of faith and perseverance that calls us to live with the same trust in God and dedication to others. In a world where we fear that values are diminishing, we can look to Mary and seek the grace to live like her—always reaching out to others, making our presence alive with the Holy Spirit, walking through adverse times with utmost trust in God, and pondering the instances of life rather than fretting over them. Instead of keeping a list of favors to be granted, our only prayer should be, "Teach us to be like you."

I pray I can be generous, other-centered, sensitive to others' needs, tolerant, and humble. May the feast of Assumption remind us that we have a heavenly Mother who is still alive among us.