

# Novena to Our Lady of Unfailing Help



19<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> June 2020

## The Story of Our Lady of Unfailing Help

An 'icon' is a Christian picture that tells a story or teaches a truth. Traditionally, icons have been associated with the Eastern Church, but have played a part in the Western Church also. The icon of our Lady of Unfailing Help tells us of the Passion and death of Jesus, and of the suffering of Mary his mother.

The original picture of Our Lady of Unfailing Help was painted on the island of Crete over five-hundred years ago. The picture was stolen by a merchant in 1498 and brought by him from Crete to Rome the following year. It is recorded in the history of the picture that the merchant fell seriously ill and fearing death he asked a friend to place the picture in a church where it could be once again seen by the faithful. The merchant died, but his friend held on to the picture and it was placed by his wife in their house. After a series of visions of Our Lady, the friend was finally convinced to part with the picture and place it in accordance with Our Lady's request in the Church of St Matthew in Rome. The Church of St Matthew was destroyed in 1798, but the picture was kept safe by the Augustinian friars. Only when a new church was built on the site of the old St Matthew's could Our Lady's request be fulfilled once again. The new church was the Redemptorist church of St Alphonsus, the obvious place for the picture, so near its former home. And so, the Pope requested that the picture should be moved to the Redemptorist church.

On April 26<sup>th</sup> 1866, the picture of Our Lady of Unfailing Help was solemnly installed in this new church of St Alphonsus in Rome. The first copy of the picture to leave Rome came to Bishop Eton, the Redemptorist church in Liverpool. Since then, copies of the picture have been taken to the four corners of the world.

In June 1867, Pope Pius IX approved the coronation of the icon by Vatican chapter, and thus thousands of copies made from the original since this date show Our Lady wearing a crown. However, the icon incorporated in the Shrine in the Cathedral church of St Anne is uncrowned, and must, therefore, have been painted prior to 1867. Our Lady of Unfailing Help was declared the principal patroness of the newly created Diocese of Leeds in 1878.

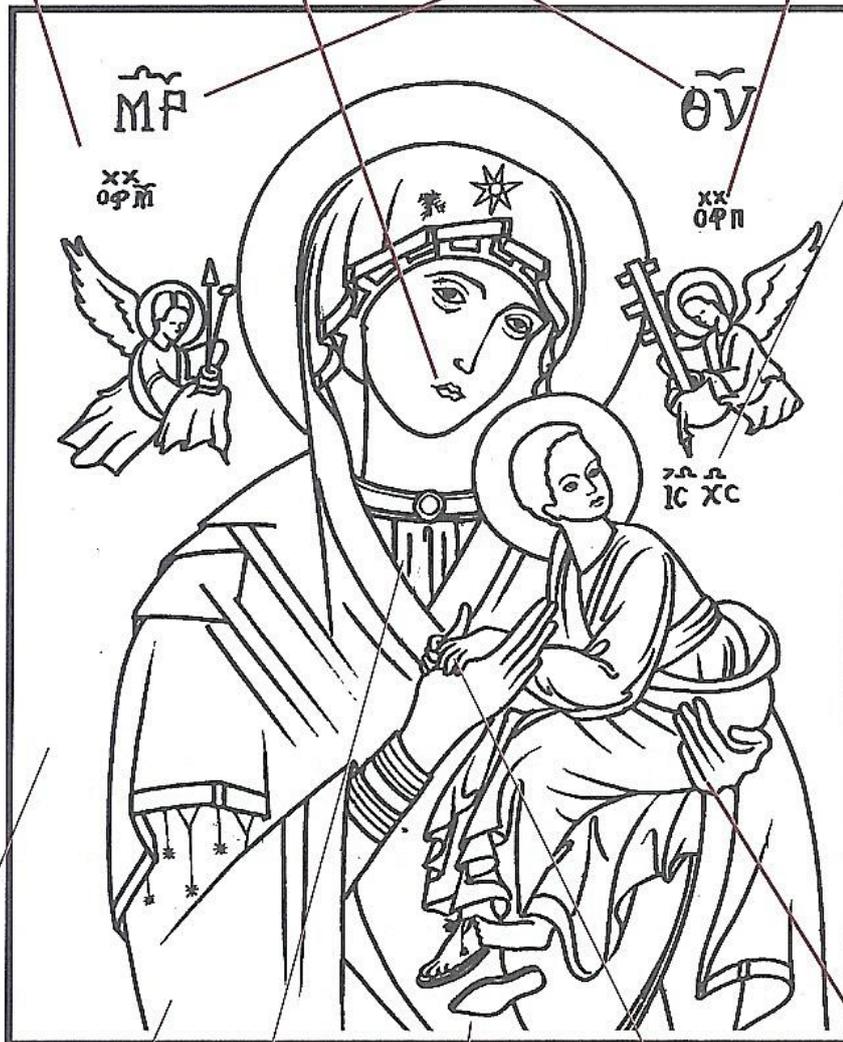
Greek initials for Archangel Michael, who holds the lance and the sponge. 'Michael' means 'who is like God?'

Greek initials for Archangel Gabriel, who holds the cross of Christ. 'Gabriel' means 'God is strong.'

Mary's mouth is small, symbolising her few recorded words and the depth of her contemplation.

Greek initials for Mother of God.

Greek initials for Jesus Christ.



Gold background symbolises heaven.

Red tunic, the colour worn by virgins at the time of Christ.

The Christ-child clings trustingly to his mother.

The mother's supporting hand.

The colour blue, worn by mothers in Palestine.

The falling sandal indicating his alarm at the thought of his Passion and death.

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## OPENING PRAYER

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Sisters and brothers, we have come before the picture of our Mother of Unfailing Help that she will pray for us to God, in praise, in petition, and in thanksgiving.

Dear Mother of Unfailing Help, throughout your life you were open to God's Holy Spirit, faithful in prayer, willing in obedience and generous in love. Pray for us, that we may be open to God's word and filled with the Holy Spirit. You were faithful in prayer; pray that we too may follow Christ your Son with the same spirit of prayer, with a willing heart, and in love for Him, who first loved us.

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## SCRIPTURE READING

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**Each day you are being offered a Scripture Reading with a corresponding reflection.**

**Day One: Friday 19<sup>th</sup>. June**

**A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke**

**1:26-38**



The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, so highly favoured! The Lord is with you.'

She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour. Listen! You are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob forever and his reign will have no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'But how can this come about, since I am a virgin?' 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you' the angel answered 'and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. Know this too: your kinswoman Elizabeth has, in her old age, herself conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God.' 'I am the handmaid of the Lord,' said Mary 'let what you have said be done to me.' And the angel left her.

## **Reflection:**

### ***HUMILITY:***

*St. Teresa of Avila, the great Spanish mystic and Doctor of the Church, got right to the point when she observed that Christ put such emphasis on humility "because humility is truth". Why lie to ourselves and to others? St Teresa also stressed that the first step toward humility is to admit that we are proud.*

*The virtue that St Augustine practised to a heroic degree was humility and it was this profound humility that made him a saint. He always preached that the essential mystery of the faith was the Incarnation, and that the greatest lesson of the Incarnation was humility. "God humbled himself," he once exclaimed from the pulpit, "and yet man stays proud." Christ's whole life is a constant reminder of humility and love and the washing of the Apostles' feet, as a final gesture at the Last Super, could hardly be more significant. And when Mary is told at the Annunciation of her sublime and unique prerogative as Mother of Christ, she is neither crushed nor elated but replies with consummate modesty: "I am the maiden of the Lord."*

*We should be humble before God in the realisation that we are so limited, spiritually, mentally, physically and are totally dependent on divine grace and assistance. "Without me," said Christ, "you can do nothing." He did not say we would not do so well - but bluntly "nothing". And even if we are most gifted in any sphere, St Paul warns us: "What have you that you have not received?"*

*Christ works primarily through the humble and obscure and as St Paul reminds us: "Those whom the world thinks common and contemptible are the ones whom God has chosen." And surely none has described and extolled the mystery of Christ's humility*

*more poignantly and eloquently than St Paul in his letter to the Philippians as follows:*

*'In your minds you must be the same as Christ Jesus: His state was divine, yet he did not cling to his equality with God but emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave, and became as men are, and being as all men are, he was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross. But God raised him high and gave him the name which is above all other names so that all beings in the heavens, on earth and in the underworld, should bend the knee at the name of Jesus and that every tongue should acclaim Jesus Christ as Lord, to the glory of God the Father.'*

**Following this reflection please go to page 20 of this booklet for the Novena Prayer, you are then invited to recite the Rosary, the concluding prayer and the Hail Holy Queen- Marian antiphon.**



**Day Two: Saturday 20<sup>th</sup>. June**

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

John 2:4-5



Jesus said: 'Woman, why turn to me? My hour has not yet come.' His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.'

## Reflection:

*One of Mary's sources of magnetism is indeed her faith. But what about our faith? Is it a cold, impersonal, routine - or is it a strong, interpersonal union with Christ?*

*The great Jesuit liturgist, Fr Jungman, often stressed that the secret of the miraculous growth of the early church was the deep, universal devotion of the early Christians to the person of Christ, not only their saviour but their brother who, as St Paul reminded them: "Christ loved me and died for me." That was their obsession and core of their faith.*

*The late Cardinal Hume in his very popular book "To be a Pilgrim" wrote: "In Britain less than 10% of the whole population go to Church on Sunday. Many of our Catholics have received the sacraments, however infrequently, but have never been brought to the point of making a personal commitment to Christ. They have been 'sacramentalised' but not 'evangelised'" (p. 181).*

*So what can we do? read the Gospels. St Peter could say to Our Lord: "To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." After the resurrection, Peter affirmed his love three times: "Lord, you know all things. You know I love you." St Paul, however, is the most explicit of all: "For me to live is Christ." And again: "Christ loved me and died for me."*

*Love of Christ and others must dominate our lives. Again I quote Cardinal Hume." In the spiritual lives of many persons, fear dominates, not love. A spiritual life built on fear is built on the wrong foundation. Ultimately it is not pleasing to God and can never lead us to Him."*

*Not fear - but optimism and joy must be the dominant themes of our faith, sustained by the knowledge of Christ's infinite love: "Jesus Christ, yesterday, today and the same forever." His universal love and concern as manifested in the gospels is with each of us, now, as St Paul constantly stressed. We must aim to make our faith ever more Christ-centred. Let us therefore ask our Mother of Unfailing Help to help us strengthen our faith but also to ensure that it is centred on Christ.*

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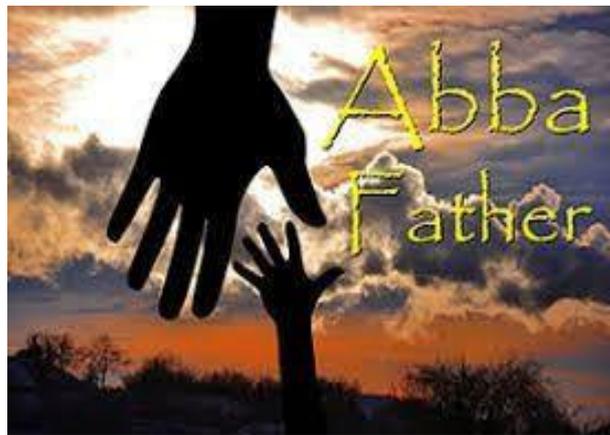


## Day Three: Sunday 21<sup>st</sup>. June

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Galatians

Gal. 4:4-7

When the appointed time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born a subject to the Law, to redeem the subjects of the Law, and to enable us to be adopted as sons. The proof that you are sons is that God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts; the Spirit that cries, 'Abba, Father', and it is this that makes you a son, you are not a slave any more; and if God has made you son, then he has made you heir.



### Reflection:

#### **HOPE AND JOY:**

*People who really believe in the Resurrection and the living Christ, should be constantly full of joy and hope. To the extent that we are grim, morose and cold, we fail - and fail abysmally - as Christians. We do not seem to have grasped the essence of Christ's message. Our Lord wants us to be happy and optimistic, at least within the general limitations of our earthly pilgrimage, without too much emphasis on the "vale of tears" mentality! Few, if any, have suffered more for Christ than St Paul but no writer is more emphatic than he about the need of joy and hope, despite the inevitable failures, misunderstandings, even persecutions. The recurrent theme throughout the Gospels is optimism and hope. Christ assured us that he had come that "we may have life and have it to the full." And also that he had come to save that which was "lost!"*

*St. John Paul II in his first encyclical letter stresses the Incarnation as the source of our hope: "God entered the history of humanity and, as a man, became an actor in that history, one of the thousands of millions of human beings but at the same time Unique! Through the Incarnation God gave human life the dimension that he intended man to have from his beginning..."*

*One of the Church's greatest Popes, Leo XIII, stressed that though the Church has for*

*her own immediate and natural purpose the saving of souls, "yet in regard to things temporal, she is the source of benefits as manifold and great as if the chief end of her existence was to ensure the prospering of our earthly life."*

*We must try, then, constantly to renew our hope and trust in the mysterious but always loving providence of the "Christ among us, our hope of glory" who has for each of us a special destiny. St John Henry Newman expounds this theme most poignantly in one of his meditations:*

*"God has created me to do him some special service... He has not created me for nothing. Therefore I will trust him. Whatever, wherever I am, I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve him...; if in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him. He does nothing in vain. He knows what he is about. He may take away my friends; he may throw me among strangers. He may make me feel desolate, hide my future from me - still he knows what he is about."*

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#### **Day Four: Monday 22<sup>nd</sup>. June**

**A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke**

1:39-45

Mary set out at that time and went as quickly as she could to a town in the hill country of Judah. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. Now as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She gave a loud cry and said, 'Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord? For the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy. Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled.'



### Reflection:

*After the Archangel Gabriel's announcement of the birth of Jesus, St. Luke tells us that Mary "set out and travelled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth." Mary obviously did not dislike climbing hills, navigating the back country, nor tackling roads and paths less travelled. She set out shortly after the beginning of her own pregnancy to visit her cousin Elizabeth. What a tough teenage girl she was! The hills of Judah rise up to 3,000 feet above sea level and its valleys are deep. Whether on the back of a donkey or walking, she would have had to be in pretty good shape, to say nothing of the courage it would take to face the dangers of the road – dust and wind, heat and cold, steep climbs, and perhaps, robbers. But Mary, of course, was highly motivated – overjoyed to share the good news of God's loving mercy and to hear about her cousin's unexpected good fortune of pregnancy in her old age. That would have kept Mary going when things got tough on the road.*

*In December of 1531, Mary travelled to the hill country again, but in Mexico. The trip – this time from her heavenly home – I dare say, was a bit easier! According to the 16th century account of the apparitions of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Juan Diego, a poor Native American, first became aware of Mary's presence when at a Tepayac hill he heard singing like that of beautiful birds. A voice at the top of the hill called him and he climbed up. There she was, a pregnant Aztec mother, more lovely than any human woman with garments shining like the sun. I would like to share with you Our Lady's words to Juan and to us: **"Hear and let it penetrate into your heart, my dear little son: let nothing discourage you, nothing depress you. Let nothing alter your heart or your***

*countenance. Also, do not fear any illness or vexation, anxiety or pain. Am I not here who is your mother? Are you not under my shadow and protection? Am I not your fountain of life? Are you not in the folds of my mantle, in the crossing of my arms? Is there anything else that you need?"* She also asked that a church be built there so that in that hill country she could continue to pour out God's mercy and love, to give protection, good counsel, and perpetual help to all peoples.

*Friends, Mary continues to devote her life to sharing God's love and mercy to everyone. No hill is too steep for that love to climb. No person too poor to receive it. In fact, Mary and her son seem to feel at home in the back country, in the hills with the poor, the oppressed, the sick and the lowly. We need to decorate our lives, our hearts with God's presence, with his word, with love and prayers. That is what Jesus Christ wants from us. We ask for Mary's help to decorate our lives, give generously to others and come closer to God.*

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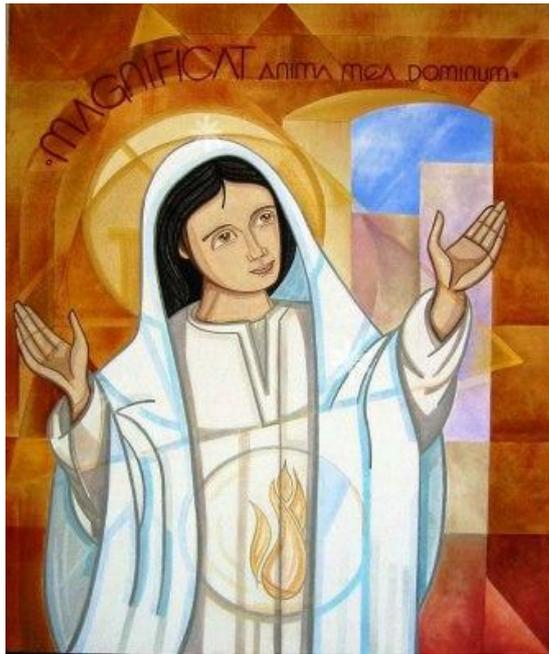
### **Day Five: Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup>. June**

**A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke** 1:46-56

Mary said:

'My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord  
and my spirit exults in God my saviour;  
because he has looked upon his lowly handmaid.  
Yes, from this day forward all generations will call me blessed,  
for the Almighty has done great things for me.  
Holy is his name,  
and his mercy reaches from age to age for those who fear him.  
He has shown the power of his arm,  
he has routed the proud of heart.  
He has pulled down princes from their thrones  
and exalted the lowly.  
The hungry he has filled with good things,  
the rich sent empty away.  
He has come to the help of Israel his servant, mindful of his mercy  
– according to the promise he made to our ancestors –  
of his mercy to Abraham and to his descendants forever.'

Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months and then went back home.



### Reflection:

*In the explanation offered around the painting of Our Lady which is being marked by this novena, our booklet states that Mary's mouth is small, symbolising her few recorded words and the depth of her contemplation. This of course is true but what power do Mary's words have when they were recorded. Today's reading from St. Luke, offers us once again the beautiful story of Mary's visit to her cousin, Elizabeth, who is expecting the birth of John the Baptist. Indeed we will mark his birth tomorrow (24<sup>th</sup>. June). This act of thoughtful concern brings great joy to Elizabeth, sensed even by the child in her womb, but the highlight of the story is the hymn of praise and thanksgiving that Mary offers in her "Magnificat."*

*This splendid hymn transcends time and space as it sings of God's goodness and mercy to Mary and to all of us, in every place and at all times. In spite of the real and tragic presence of evil and sorrow in our world, the dark clouds of violence cannot hide the reality of God's love and concern for all the "lowly" ones. They have not been abandoned and their oppression at the hands of the "mighty and exalted" will not last forever.*

*The high and mighty ones of this world, who rely on power to serve their purposes, are inclined to ridicule those who accept the wisdom of Jesus and do their best to be a loving, caring presence in a much too violent world. Their way seems foolish and unpromising, but God is on their side and their ultimate victory is assured.*

*Unfortunately, in a society where sheer power is too often assumed to be the only means for getting things done, we are tempted to abandon the wisdom of Jesus. Indeed, we feel helpless in dealing with violence in our homes and in our streets. God really does remember his promises to Abraham and therefore to all of us believers, who are spiritual children of that great patriarch, whom Paul calls "the father of all of us" (Romans 4:16). God really does intend to "lift up the lowly" and to "fill the hungry with good things." And if that is so, we should gladly sing with Mary, "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour."*

*So the Magnificat has become an excellent practice in the Church for everyone to sing this hymn daily in the office of evening prayer. As Saint Bede the Venerable reminds us, 'it is fitting that this should take place at this time of the day for at the end of the day our minds are tired and prey to distractions, and it is very useful to have this moment of quiet to recollect ourselves and gather our thoughts'.*

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### **Day Six: Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup>. June**

#### **A reading from the book of Genesis**

12:1-7

The Lord said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your family and your father's house, for the land I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name so famous that it will be used as a blessing.

'I will bless those who bless you:  
I will curse those who slight you.  
All the tribes of the earth  
shall bless themselves by you.'

So Abram went as the Lord told him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. Abram took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had amassed and the people they had acquired in Haran. They set off for the land of Canaan, and arrived there. Abram passed through the land as far as Shechem's holy place, the Oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. The Lord appeared to Abram and said, 'It is to your descendants that I will give this land.' So Abram built there an altar for the Lord who had appeared to him.



## Reflection:

### ***Suffering, Courage, Perseverance:***

*Someone once said "What we call difficult is what we can do at once, the impossible needs a little more time." The courage to suffer and persevere is the hallmark of Christ's life, and the wounds in his hands and feet, reminders and proofs of his love and triumph were on him at the Ascension and are forever in his glorified body.*

*There is a need for Christians at every level to be courageous, to take initiatives and risks, inspired by Christ's example and fortified by the Holy Spirit, as were the Apostles after Pentecost. The realisation that we are working for Christ, that he is with us in every detail of our lives in a most vital way - that should inspire us and give us, no matter how obscure we may be - a sense of destiny and personal worth. The Duke of Wellington admitted that the mere physical presence of Napoleon among his troops was worth another fifty thousand men, so profoundly did he inspire them with his own courage. How much more should we be inspired and motivated by the realisation of the living Christ who infinitely surpasses all earthly leaders and has promised to be with us "all days even to the end of time.". Mediocracy and passivity however would seem to be everywhere and the eminent Jesuit theologian Fr Henri de Lubac, wrote: "in the Church, the mediocre feel especially at home". Cardinal Pie was even more caustic: "Prudence is everywhere and before long courage will be nowhere. We will die of wisdom, you'll see."*

*The courage that a Christian needs is none other than a continual and ever-renewed dependence on the spirit of faith, seeing Christ in the poor old man who has forgotten his prayers, the pleasure-loving teenager, the man drunk with success who has no room for God and may listen to us "some other time". We must believe and believe obstinately - in spite of all appearances - that every hour is the hour of grace, that it is never a waste of time to knock at closed doors. Such courage is not necessarily known or honoured by men, but Christ knows its glory and its worth.*

*True courage is the fruit of prayer, obedience, humility and docility to the Holy Spirit, as testified in the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary in abundance. Genuine concern for souls calls for this spiritual courage. On the day of his Anglican ordination, St John Henry Newman wrote: "I have the responsibility of souls on me to the day of my death." According to him, it is difficult to over-estimate the moral power which a single individual may acquire and thus influence others. The attraction exerted by unconscious holiness and depth of character is irresistible and gradually we become aware of Christ's presence in our midst.*

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**Day Seven: Thursday 25<sup>th</sup>. June**

**A reading from the Holy Gospel According to Luke**

2:41-52.

Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover. And when he was 12 years old they went up according to custom and when the feast was ended as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it but supposing him to be in the company they went a day's journey and they sought him among their kinsfolk, and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem seeking him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions and all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. And when they saw him they were astonished and his mother said to him, 'Son why have you treated us so? Behold your father and I have been looking for you anxiously'. And he said to them 'How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?'. And they did not understand the saying which he spoke to them. And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them, and his mother kept all these things in her heart.



### **Reflection:**

*It is quite common for parents to have unique authority in the lives of their children. Of course that is not always apparent whilst the children are growing up but once they become adults, even a word from a parent can have a significant effect. And the mother-son relationship is no exception to that.*

*Very often, a quiet word from a mother can have a remarkable impact on her child. It can produce a big change in behaviour when all manner of alternatives have failed. And it can turn lukewarm interest or indifference on the part of the child into something approaching enthusiasm.*

*What do we find in the relationship between Christ and his mother Mary. Christ is the perfect son and Mary is his mother. And like any mother we can expect Mary to have a big influence on Christ her son. The Church affords us a good opportunity to think about that relationship and to give thanks to God for it. But here it gets a little more complicated because Christ is not just only human as we are, Christ is divine also, he is God: Christ is divine and human. And that makes a difference in the way Mary influences her son Christ.*

*So how does Christ's being divine and human make a difference in the way Mary influences her son? Well when a mother tries to influence her son it is quite likely that the son does not know how things will work out. Indeed perhaps he does not even care how things will work out. And regardless of whether he cares or not, it is quite likely he can be*

*persuaded to act one way or another. But that does not work in Christ's case. Christ, as we know, is divine and human. Christ is God and as such he cannot lack any knowledge and must know how things will work out.*

*However God does not just possess full knowledge of how things will work out, God also governs creation providentially and there are no gaps in that providence. So we cannot say that God does not care how some things will turn out or is open to persuasion, cajoling or any other such thing that we can think about.*

*But if that is the case, what role is left for Mary to influence Christ her son? Not much it seems. Thankfully that is not the end of the story. In his providence God does bring some things about through our intercessions. It is not that he leaves a gap in his providence for us to have our chance so to speak. Rather we come to desire what God wants in particular situations, we ask for it and God brings it about.*

*However for most of us what God brings about through our intercession is quite small, because we do not play a crucial role in salvation history. Mary on the other hand does play a crucial role in salvation history and consequently God in his providence does bring about many things through Mary's intercession.*

*Hence a prayer offered to God through the intercession of his mother Mary stands a much better chance of being answered than one which is not offered through the intercession of Mary. And that is the way Mary can influence her son, just as we would expect a mother to be able to do.*

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**Day Eight: Friday 26<sup>th</sup>. June**

**A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke:**

**2: 21**

And at the end of eight days when he was circumcised he was called Jesus the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.



## Reflection:

*This short Gospel passage takes us beyond the biological fact that Mary was a mother. It tells us more about her motherhood than that she gave birth. We learn how Mary, together with Joseph, had the baby circumcised, introducing him into the covenant between God and the Jewish people. At the same time they gave the boy his name, Jesus which means Saviour.*

*With these actions, we see Mary undertaking the ongoing work of being a mother. Mary's motherhood is not simply to conceive but together with Joseph, she has the responsibility of nurturing the one who gives life to all. She has the privilege of drawing the Word of God to speak human words in a human language, to oversee the growth in wisdom of the one who is true Wisdom and Teacher of all.*

*Just as Mary's motherhood was a mystery to her from the beginning at the Annunciation so her motherhood is again a mystery she can only ponder on in faith. There is so much that Jesus has- the power to work miracles is but one- that does not come from her. When she asks him to provide wine at the wedding in Cana he replied that his hour had not yet come. Yet he still performed the miracle at her request. This event however does not fully reveal what the relationship is between Mary and Jesus, because his power to work miracles comes not from his mother but from his Father, who is in heaven.*

*But the words 'My hour has not yet come' point us forward to the hour of the cross when Jesus will say to Mary, 'Behold, your son'. It is here that the importance of Mary's motherhood is fully revealed to us. Her motherhood did not give Jesus the power to work miracles, but it did give him a body in which he could suffer and save us from our sins. The full meaning of the Mother of God is that Mary gave to an invulnerable God of miraculous power, the vulnerability of a body which could suffer, die and save. And so we honour Mary because it was she who gave us our Saviour. She is therefore the Mother of the Saviour and Mother of Unfailing Help.*

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Day Nine: Saturday 27<sup>th</sup>. June: **THE FEAST OF OUR LADY OF UNFAILING HELP**

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke

1:26-38



The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, so highly favoured! The Lord is with you.' She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour. Listen! You are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob forever and his reign will have no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'But how can this come about, since I am a virgin?' 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you' the angel answered 'and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. Know this too: your kinswoman Elizabeth has, in her old age, herself conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God.' 'I am the handmaid of the Lord,' said Mary 'let what you have said be done to me.' And the angel left her.

**Reflection:**

*I have used this Gospel reading for the first day of this novena. Whilst then I reflected on **humility** as an important characteristic of Our Lady, I now would like to pick up on another aspect of the account of the Annunciation, that is Mary being **'full of grace'**.*

*In the Old Testament we find various accounts of God having to cajole men such as Abraham, Moses, Jeremiah and Gideon amongst others to listen to His message and mission. With Mary however, it is different. She is naturally troubled and puzzled at the angel's appearing. She has no objections that people will not believe her, as Moses did. She had no objections based on her youth, as Jeremiah did. She has no objection based on lowly status, as Gideon did. She could have asked where all God's mighty and powerful deeds were or pointed out how the Jewish land was occupied by the Romans. But she does not. On being told that she has found favour with God and will conceive and give birth to the Saviour, Mary enquires how this will come about since she is a virgin- a perfectly reasonable question- but not an objection- and on being told presents herself to God: 'I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word'. She does not run away or object to God's plan, but willingly takes her part.*

*So what was the secret of Mary's willing participation? We find an answer in 'full of grace' or 'most highly favoured one'. Gideon had been greeted with a title: mighty man of valour. That was his gift for his mission and Mary's greeting indicates something about the divine favour that fitted her for her mission. 'Most highly favoured' means not just one virtue or another, but a complete gracing of a human life.*

*Mary's immaculate conception means that she was completely freed by Christ's grace from sin, so that there was nothing to hold her back from God's will, no sin to object to God's plan and choice. Grace makes her too free for all that. From the first moment of her existence, she was completely given over from the very root of her being to the God who sets us free. She continues in her freedom today to take her part in God's plan, praying that we too will learn the freedom to respond to her son, and leave our sinful lives behind. May we celebrate through her intercession the freedom her Son gives us and so give ourselves anew to God as His sons and daughters, and as sons and daughters of Mary.*



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## NOVENA PRAYER

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Let us now turn to Our Lady asking her to pray for us.

Dear Mother, the Lord looked on you in your humility, and chose you to be the mother of His Son; and now all ages call you blessed. God has worked marvels for you. You witnessed the death of your Son on the cross, and your

continuing faith has brought you to witness His victory over death, filling your heart with joy and praise.

By the example of your life, you showed that God's mercy is on those who fear Him. You sang of the justice of the one who casts the mighty from their thrones and raises the lowly; you told of the promise made to Abraham, Sarah, and all their descendants forever. You are now with the saints, singing the praises of God, and praying for us, who need your prayers.

Pray with us to the Lord, and as our prayers arise before him like incense, He will hear us and answer us, according to His promise.

## **The Mysteries of the Rosary**

### ***At the end of the rosary***

In a moment of silence, let us commend our personal petitions to Our Lady of Unfailing Help: Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us.

Let us pray: Almighty God, our creator, see us your children gathered in prayer, with Mary, the Mother of your Son. As we ask, let us receive; as we search, may we find; and as we knock, may the door be opened. And may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

### **Close:**

Salve, Regina, Mater misericordiae,  
vita, dulcedo, et spes nostra, salve.  
Ad te clamamus, exsules filii Hevae,  
ad te suspiramus, gementes et flentes  
in hac lacrimarum valle.  
Eia, ergo, advocata nostra, illos tuos  
misericordes oculos ad nos converte;  
et Jesum, benedictum fructum ventris tui,  
nobis post hoc exilium ostende.  
O clemens, O pia, O dulcis Virgo Maria.

Hail, our Queen and Mother Blest  
Joy when all was sadness,  
Life and hope you gave mankind  
Mother of our gladness.

Children of sinful Eve,  
Sinless-Eve, befriend us  
Exiled in this vale of tears  
Strenght and comfort send us

Pray for us O Patrnoness  
Be our consolation  
Lead us home to see your Son  
Jesus, our salvation,  
Gracious are you full of grace  
Loving as none other  
Joy of heavenand joy of earth  
Mary, God's own Mother.