

If we transported ourselves back in time and met Mary on the street or in the marketplace in Nazareth, what would she be like? What would her voice sound like? How tall would she be? Are her hands small and soft or larger and calloused from long hours of work every day? What's her personality like? What would our impressions of her be?

There's no way to know, of course. How we imagine what Mary was like — and how we imagine her to be today — almost certainly says more about us than it does about her, just as it likely says a lot about how we regard her Son, too.

How do we think of Mary?

It's very easy to make Mary into an ethereal, alabaster representation of a fair-haired, light-skinned European woman with whom we know only as an intercessor. But that hardly does her justice. Mary was a real woman with real problems and real sorrows. She intercedes for us precisely because she knows what it is to struggle, what it is to be marginalized, what it is to have one's share of sorrow in life and then some.

She does intercede for us, to be sure. Here's the thing, though: not only does she intercede for us, she calls us to intercede for her by helping to build Her Son's kingdom in the world here and now.

Pope St. Paul VI called our attention to this in his authoritative Apostolic Exhortation, *Marialis Cultis* ("Marian Devotion").

*"The figure of the Blessed Virgin," he wrote, "... offers [us] the perfect model of the disciple of the Lord: the disciple who builds up the earthly and temporal city while being a diligent pilgrim toward the heavenly and eternal city; the disciple who works for that justice which sets free the oppressed and for that charity which assists the needy; but above all, the disciple who is the active witness of that love which builds up Christ in people's hearts."*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Paul VI, *Marialis Cultis* 37. The Holy See, [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19740202_marialis-cultus.html), [http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_exh\\_19740202\\_marialis-cultus.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19740202_marialis-cultus.html).

Cautioning against a “vain credulity, which substitutes reliance on merely external practices for serious commitment” and a “sterile and ephemeral sentimentality,”<sup>2</sup> Paul VI reminds us that Mary “was far from being a timidly submissive woman ...; on the contrary, she was a woman who did not hesitate to proclaim that God vindicates the humble and the oppressed, and removes the powerful people of this world from their privileged positions.”<sup>3</sup>

The import of Mary’s example, Paul VI observes, is a call “to live our lives in accordance with God’s commandments. It is also an echo of [the] words of the Savior: ‘Not every one who says to me ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven’; and again: ‘You are my friends if you do what I command you.’”<sup>4</sup>

Today’s Solemnity reminds us that Mary is not only the Queen of Heaven, but the Queen of Our Lord’s earthly kingdom, too. She is, after all, the Patroness of the United States, the Americas, and scores of countries on every continent — none of which are spared the very sorrows that Mary knew so well during her earthly life.

For in every land, there are swords that pierce the soul of God’s daughters and sons.

There are mothers, fathers and children taking flight to escape poverty, violence and oppression.

There are parents and children lost to war, hunger, illness, trafficking, substance abuse and innumerable other evils.

There are those — including many of us at one time or another — who’re walking their own Via Dolorosa.

There are those — including many of us at one time or another — who’ll see their dreams fade and their sorrows mount.

There are those who suffer the anguish of losing loved ones

There are those who’ll see their hopes for the future entombed by the bitter realities they face.

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<sup>2</sup> *Marialis Cultis*, 38.

<sup>3</sup> *Marialis Cultis*, 37.

<sup>4</sup> *Marialis Cultis*, 39.

Mary experienced her seven sorrows. She's not alone. We experience them, too.

And that, really, is the meaning of today's Solemnity.

Mary accompanies us through all of it, not simply to commiserate with us, but to intercede for the grace we'll need to persevere.

In return, she asks us to intercede for her Son, too, by practicing compassion for the vulnerable and marginalized; by doing what we can to heal the wounds of others, or at least by trying not to add to them; by trying to surmount our own sinfulness by offering the light and hope of Christ rather than striving to perpetuate long nights of despair; by pointing with our lives and our deeds to the reality that the mystery of Christ doesn't end with Good Friday but with Easter.

Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God, that we may follow your example.

Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God, that we may be worthy of the promises of Christ.