

This last Labor Day weekend an eighty-six year old Maryknoll missionary priest came and spoke at our parish. He came to St. Peter's to raise money for the missions. That night, over dinner, he and I had a two hour plus conversation about the state of the Church, the future of the Church and prayer. Despite being from different eras and having somewhat different perspectives, I thoroughly enjoyed our conversation. I vaguely remember, at some point, talking to him about Mary and the Rosary.



That said, about a month later he sent me a book by Sister Elizabeth Johnson with a note stating that this sister's work had helped deepen his relationship with Mary. The book is called, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints*. I was at first slightly amused because Sister Johnson is a bit of a provocateur. It wouldn't normally be a book I'd read. Nor do I recommend the book as I think most of you would find it boring. However, I like to read books from various viewpoints. Also, if a priest ordained sixty years bothers to send me a book, I'm going to read it.

This is the main point I took from the book. According to Sister Johnson, during most of the first thousand years of Christianity, Mary was viewed as a member of the Communion of Saints, although granted, a particularly privileged member. During the next thousand years of Christianity, legitimate theological developments including the Rosary and Marian apparitions placed Mary on a high pedestal, above the rest of the Communion of Saints. While not denying Mary should be venerated, Sister Johnson feels that by doing so, one can forget that Mary was most likely a simple, poor and possibly uneducated woman. During Mary's earthly life, she was probably a destitute, unimpressive woman that we may intentionally or unintentionally ignore, instead of the beautiful Marian statue at our local church. Not to be aware of this can affect how we view political and economic issues and how we live out the Gospel daily. I think it's a fair point.

Today we celebrate the Annunciation. Through Mary's "Yes", Jesus was conceived in the womb of Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. For those mathematically challenged, it's exactly nine months until Christmas. At least we now have something to look forward to while living under lockdown. I suggest we all pray the Rosary everyday, but particularly today. Mary should be venerated. Her perfect obedience to the will of God and her virginity are qualities undervalued in the world. She is the gold standard of discipleship. However, in raising Mary up, don't forget to look down. There are a lot of people who feel invisible. They need to be acknowledged, heard and helped. That's true Marian spirituality.

