



Mary and the Saints

In the Catholic Church, May has traditionally been recognized as the month of Mary.

While Mary and the saints are an integral part of Catholic faith, it is important to keep them in perspective. Devotion to Mary and the saints must never become superstition, or replace Christ as the centre of the Christian life, or supplant the Eucharist as the focus of Catholic worship. This principle was restated firmly in the Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy issued by the Congregation for divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments in 2002.

Catholics **venerate**, **imitate** and **invoke** the saints. Veneration recognizes saints as human beings transformed by the grace of God. In celebrating the feast of a saint, recognition is given to the marvellous things God who has done in the everyday life of the saint.

One on the journey of faith imitates the saints because they offer examples of how to be disciples of Christ. When the calendar was pruned after Vatican II, it was not to downplay the role of the saints but to ensure that those who remained offered models of discipleship which are relevant for the Church in all ages and places.

By invoking the intercession of the saints the person of faith asks for prayer through Christ the one mediator.

The liturgy highlights devotion to the saints as part of the Church's tradition and integrates them into the life of the Church. In a typical month the liturgical calendar lists solemnities, feasts, memorials and optional memorials of Mary or the saints.

Solemnities must be celebrated and even take precedence over the Sunday celebration. Feasts too are days of special celebration with their own readings. Memorials are celebrated normally without disturbing the continuous reading of the word of God for the week in question. All three have the potential to draw one into the mystery of the communion of the Church and the communion of saints in its fullest sense. They offer examples of God's grace at work in many different ages and places and inspires one to discipleship in one's own time and place.

For instance, the feast of the Visitation on May 31, the first of two feasts of Mary in the liturgical calendar, invites one to ponder Mary as the woman who believed and obediently accepted the will of God. This enabled her to play a most significant role in the saving work of Christ.

In *Marialis Cultus*, the 1974 apostolic exhortation on devotion to Mary, Pope Paul VI said: "far from being a timidly submissive woman, Mary 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 positions of privilege".

The feast of the Visitation demonstrates how celebrating feasts of Mary and the saints can help reposition them as models for the present age.