



# According to thy word

Monsignor Keith Barltrop





*Above and overleaf:*

The Wilton Diptych is a tempera and gold leafed painting on Baltic oak dating from the late fourteenth century. The diptych, two panels joined by a hinge, is housed in the National Gallery and depicts the original dedication of England as the Dowry of Mary by King Richard II in 1381.

Here, Richard is presented to the Madonna and Child by his three patron saints; St John the Baptist, St Edward the Confessor and St Edmund the Martyr. On their robes, the angels and king bear Richard's emblem, the white hart (stag) which is also depicted on the exterior panel.

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*According to Thy Word*

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## FOREWORD



One of my favourite 'go to' places is a tiny village in North Norfolk, the village of Walsingham. I first visited the Shrine of Our Lady there in my early 'teens, and it was there that I grew to know and love her. That was in my Anglican days but I have returned there ever since, and especially at the crossroad points in my life. Our Lady has truly been for me – and continues to be – the star of a new evangelisation, guiding me on my way.

In this new faith sharing resource for small communities, specially produced as we journey through this Year of the Word – The God Who Speaks, Mgr Keith Barltrop takes us on a journey through six ancient Titles of Our Lady, helping us to discover the many and marvellous ways in which Mary, as Mother and Sister on our pilgrim way, is our sure guide. Above all he shows us how to echo in our own way her words, "be it done unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38).

I am grateful to Mgr Barltrop for preparing this rich resource, and for inviting us to know and love Our Lady more. To her we now pray:

**Star of the new evangelisation,  
help us to bear radiant witness to communion,  
service, ardent and generous faith,  
justice and love of the poor,  
that the joy of the Gospel  
may reach to the ends of the earth,  
illuminating even the fringes of our world.  
Amen.**

*from Evangelii Gaudium, Pope Francis (2013)*

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Chris Vipers". The script is fluid and cursive.

Fr Chris Vipers  
Director of the Agency for Evangelisation  
Diocese of Westminster



# AUTUMN FAITH SHARING RESOURCE 2020

*According to Thy Word*

Six weekly group sessions based on the titles of Our Lady

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# Faith sharing in a small community

For some of you, these practical points will be well known, but for others, they will be new. To new members of the small community, we offer a big welcome, and to returning members, welcome back. Take time to read these few pages – they will be of great benefit.

**GATHERING** as a small community to share prayer, life and faith is an important part of parish life. This is a sacred time. It is important that you take the time to get to know one another. Always make room for the introductions of anyone new, and to ask one another how you are and what has happened since you last met.

**HOSPITALITY** and environment are very important. You should meet in a reflective atmosphere with as few distractions as possible. It would be helpful to have a central focus, such as an open Bible and a candle.

**TIMING** is important. The suggested time for each session is 90 minutes (see page 7 for the structure of the meeting). Each session will have a balance of prayer, sharing experience, exploring scripture, reflection and talking about how we are living our faith.

**PRAYER** will take different forms; we will make a suggestion for a Psalm or another opening prayer. You can make other suggestions, too, as it is helpful to try varied ways of praying, such as playing some religious music. Ordinarily, it is good to have about 15 minutes of prayer. Silence is an important part of the process, so don't be afraid to pause during your prayer time or, indeed, during the reflection time for some quiet.

**EXPERIENCE** is essential to our spiritual life. During the session, we need to reflect on our real experience. Then we listen to Scripture. As you reflect, ensure each person who wants to talk is given an opportunity to share. No one needs to talk unless they want to, and no one person should dominate the conversation.

**RESPOND** Each week we have the opportunity to respond. It may be a good time to assess our priorities and see how we are living our faith in the totality of our lives: in our families, in our relationships, in our work. We may not need to do more; we may need to do less. This is the time to look at how we are living the values of Jesus and perhaps to identify new behaviours and attitudes.

## WHAT IS THE LEADER OF YOUR GROUP EXPECTED TO DO?

Each community will have its own leader. A leader is not someone with all the answers who is there to put everybody else right. He or she is a fellow participant but with the particular responsibility of facilitating the community by:

- 1 Preparing ahead of the session and creating a warm, accepting and open environment.
- 2 Guiding the group and keeping it on track through the faith sharing process each week.
- 3 Sharing the various tasks among the members of the group.
- 4 Listening and, if necessary, asking questions to keep sharing moving.
- 5 Ensuring that each participant has the opportunity to speak.
- 6 Encouraging members to see the meeting not as a discussion group, but as an opportunity for sharing in which they might grow in faith.

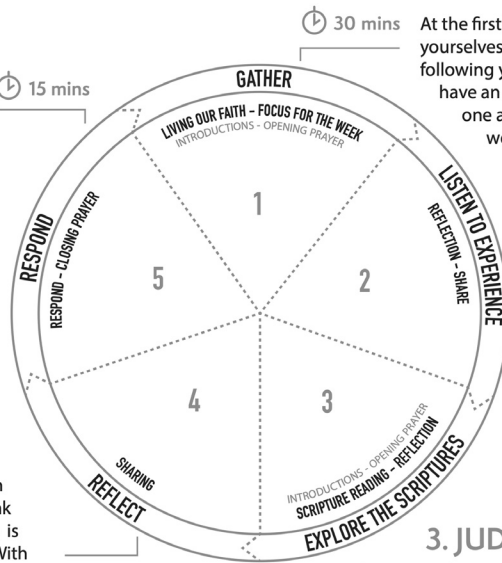
### 5. ACT

Our sharing would not be complete without deciding how to put our faith into practice. With a reflection from Pope Francis, you will be invited to respond to what you have heard in the session.

15 mins

### 4. REFLECT

This is an opportunity to reflect on 'our story' - God's story and your own story - and how to link the two together. What is the meaning for you? With the help of a reflection and questions, you will have the opportunity to share.



### 1. GATHER

At the first meeting, introduce yourselves to each other. Thereafter, following your opening prayer, you will have an opportunity to catch up with one another, and share how last week's session influenced you.

### 2. SEE

This part of the session is about 'your own story' and how it relates to the theme of the session. Having listened to a short reflection, you will be given the opportunity, with the help of questions, to share your own experience.

### 3. JUDGE 45 mins

This part is about exploring 'God's story' in scripture. Having listened to the scripture reading you will be invited to reflect on what you have heard.

# MOTHER OF GOD

## SESSION ONE

### OPENING PRAYER

Father, you chose Mary to be the Mother of your Son and our Mother. As we begin these reflections on her place in your plan to bring us to glory, may we experience the grace of her intercession, for we believe that she remains always close to her Son and close to each one of us, knowing better than we do ourselves what we truly need to understand as we reflect together on her, and we are sure that she will always lead us back to the one in whose name we make this and all our prayers, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### LISTEN TO EXPERIENCE

Apparently until only about 20 or 30 years ago it was not uncommon to find disputes about theological words reported in passionate detail on the front pages of newspapers in Athens and other Greek cities. Should Mary be called Mother of God or Mother of Christ? 'What's the difference?' we might ask?

In the early fifth century after Christ this dispute was taken very seriously indeed. Nestorius, the bishop of Constantinople, argued that Christ's divinity and his humanity must be clearly distinguished, and that calling Mary Mother of God not only muddled the waters but risked elevating Mary to the role of a Mother Goddess.

When the Council of Ephesus in 431 rejected these arguments and upheld the traditional title of Mary as Theotokos, 'God-bearer,' crowds took to the streets in rejoicing. Whether or not they understood all the minute details, they clearly saw the decision as a victory for devotion to Mary. And soon afterwards, Pope Sixtus III built the Basilica of St Mary Major in Rome with the express intention of honouring this decision: one of the first, and still the greatest Church in the world in honour of the Mother of God, and a key pilgrimage destination in Rome.

## QUESTIONS

- 1 Are these just outdated disputes about words, or are the issues still relevant?
- 2 Is there a risk that calling Mary Mother of God could lead to people thinking of her as some kind of goddess?

## EXPLORE THE SCRIPTURES

"When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me?'"

*Luke 1: 41-43*

"During the Council of Ephesus, to the great joy of Christians, the truth of the divine motherhood of Mary was solemnly confirmed as a truth of the Church's faith. Mary is the Mother of God, since by the power of the Holy Spirit she conceived in her virginal womb and brought into the world Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who is of one being with the Father. The dogma of the divine motherhood of Mary was for the Council of Ephesus and is for the Church like a seal upon the dogma of the Incarnation, in which the Word truly assumes human nature into the unity of his person."

*Pope St John Paul II, Redemptoris Mater 4*



## REFLECTION

Sometimes Protestant friends ask why we Catholics 'worship Mary' or 'add things about her which are not found in Scripture.' In this Year of the Word that is an important question. But as Pope John Paul makes clear in this passage, in the Church's history, Mary only comes into focus in order to clarify who Jesus is: this is the great mystery of our faith which gives us such joy yet is hard for our minds to comprehend, how it is that someone who lived among us as a man can also be the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, how someone who suffered death and was buried can at the same time be a divine Person who has enjoyed from all eternity the embrace of the Father in the Holy Spirit. Calling Mary the 'Mother of God' brings this truth home to us in a very concrete way, even if our heads cannot get around it and maybe never will.

We sometimes talk about the 'hierarchy of the truths of faith.' What this means is that Catholic truth is a marvellous organism, in which the different truths are all related to each other. Some are more fundamental than others, some flow as a consequence of more fundamental beliefs. It is like a human body in which every part is important but some are more important because the activity of the others flows from them: the heart and the brain are the obvious examples.

Applying this to Catholic faith doesn't mean that some truths are negotiable while others aren't, any more than you would seriously think about having your arm or leg cut off even though you could live without them. Rather it means that some truths are based on others. And it helps us to explain how Catholic beliefs, such as those about Our Lady, flow from the more fundamental beliefs about Christ and the Church, so it is useful when we are trying to dialogue with other Christians.

And, of course, this marvellous organism of Catholic truth grows and expands over time, as St John Henry Newman explained in his famous *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*. Parts of a tree that were not visible in the sapling can be seen when the tree is grown, though they were present in embryo in the sapling. So we are not worried by the absence of an explicit Scripture text saying that Mary is the Mother of God.

As we meditate together on the Scripture text given above, where Mary is called "the mother of my Lord," we are not trying to prove anything from it. Rather, like Mary herself, we are "pondering these things in our hearts" (Luke 2:19), which is exactly how the Church's faith grows over time under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1 How would you personally respond to the accusation that Catholics 'worship Mary?'
- 2 Cardinal Newman in his earlier years was sometimes put off Catholic faith by what he felt was an exaggerated devotion to Mary. Can you explain from your own experience how devotion to her actually leads us closer to Jesus?
- 3 What for you is the very essence of the Gospel message, and how does Mary figure in it?

## POINTS FOR ACTION

- 1 Spend a few moments in personal prayer before a favourite icon or statue of Our Lady, perhaps repeating slowly a simple phrase such as, "Mother of God, be my mother too."
- 2 Suggest to your local ecumenical group that they discuss some of the points raised in the reflection above.

## CLOSING PRAYER

Mary, like the crowds at Ephesus so long ago, we are full of rejoicing that you are rightly called 'Mother of God.' We know that you pass on to your divine Son all honour paid to you. Help us to bring Jesus into the world ourselves by our joyful and loving way of living, and please show us how to do that not just in good times but when, like you, our souls are full of sorrows. Amen.

## SESSION TWO

### OPENING PRAYER

Father, you have given us Mary to be our Mother and the Mother of all your people. Her love for us is a wonderful reflection of your tender care for all your creatures. We thank you, too, for our earthly mothers, who also reflected to us something of your care. May we allow Mary to take us into her motherly arms, teaching us, consoling us, warning us and always guiding us to the one in whom we will find our true fulfilment, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

### LISTEN TO EXPERIENCE

Fr Bernard Michon, a French priest of the Foyer de Charité, tells a fascinating story of how he discovered the motherhood of Mary. He decided to consecrate himself to Mary using a prayer written by St Louis de Montfort which was much loved by Pope St John Paul II (see the Closing Prayer of this session). Following de Montfort's advice, he chose one particular aspect of his life to consecrate to Mary over a two week period, and as he had just found himself, for the first time in his life, forced to do all his own cooking, housework and cleaning, he selected that as the 'problem area' he would ask her help with.

He had almost forgotten about it when one day, to his astonishment, he found himself on his hands and knees cleaning, not the inside but the underside of his bathroom sink! “How did I get here, where no male normally goes?” he asked himself. Then he remembered that this was what he had asked Mary to help him with.

That homely example is a long way from the splendour of St Peter’s in Rome where Pope Paul VI solemnly proclaimed Mary as Mother of the Church at the end of the Second Vatican Council. No doubt Mary was overjoyed by that proclamation, but I wonder if as a true mother she is not just as happy helping her poor children clean sinks...

## QUESTIONS

- 1 Does your experience of your own mother, or of being a mother, help or hinder you in seeing Mary as your Mother?
- 2 What areas of your life could Mary help you with in a very practical way?

## EXPLORE THE SCRIPTURES

“When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, behold your son.’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Behold your mother.’ And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.”

*John 19:26-27*

“We believe that the Most Holy Mother of God, the new Eve, the Mother of the Church, carries on in heaven her maternal role with regard to the members of Christ, cooperating in the birth and development of divine life in the souls of the redeemed.”

*Pope St Paul VI, Credo of the People of God, 1968*

## REFLECTION

We just read that, when Jesus gave Mary into John's care at the foot of the cross, that "from that hour the disciple took her to his own home." The Greek doesn't actually mention a home, and it's not clear if the apostle actually had a permanent home. The Greek is difficult to translate well: literally it is "into his own things," into his own world, to himself, which no doubt included physically caring for her, but much more: he made a place for her in his life.

Jesus gives Mary to John and John to Mary. In giving Mary to John, the Catholic Church has always seen John as representing the Church, so Mary has been given to the Church as its protector, model, intercessor, and above all, mother. Pope Paul brings out beautifully what that means in the quotation we read: she cooperates in the birth and development of divine life in us, just as our earthly mothers gave birth to us physically and were vital in the growth of our human life.

So let us each reflect on the part that Mary has played in our lives. What are your earliest memories of asking her help or being taught about her? Have there been any significant moments in your life when you discovered her in a new way? Has a pilgrimage to a Marian Shrine such as Walsingham, Lourdes or Fatima played an important part in your life? Or if, when you are honest, you have to admit that Mary is not so important to you, or you even have some resistance to honouring her, can you see why that might be?

Of course, calling Mary Mother of the Church is not just about her relationship to us as individuals but to the Church as a whole. It might remind us of the times Mary has been invoked by the Church to avert warfare or plague, which is not just a historical memory, as we found during the coronavirus scare. We may think of Mary's concern for the sick in her apparitions at Lourdes, or her motherly warnings to the human race at Fatima.

Although in no sense divine, through God's grace, Mary shares in the infinite resourcefulness of God, so we can rightly speak of the 'Mystery of Mary,' that is our never-ending discovery of the ways in which God gives her to us. Her fruitfulness, being of the Holy Spirit and bringing forth the eternal Word, can never be exhausted: that fruitfulness seems to be being exercised in a particular way in our times through numerous apparitions and interventions in our world, though of course we always submit to the judgment of the Church as to their authenticity.



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1 Do you see Marian apparitions as an expression of Mary's motherhood of the Church, and how important are they to you, if at all?
- 2 Given that the official hierarchy of the Church is masculine, could reflecting on Mary's motherhood help introduce a more feminine note into the way the Church is run?
- 3 What has been the single most important experience in your own life in shaping your present attitude to Mary as your mother?

## POINTS FOR ACTION

- 1 Write a brief autobiographical statement of how you have experienced Mary's presence in your life since your earliest memory.
- 2 Look up on the internet a document of Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, and read no. 47. See if any phrase strikes you and take it as a starting place for prayer during these weeks.

## CLOSING PRAYER

I choose you this day, O Mary, in the presence of the whole heavenly court, for my Mother and my Queen. I abandon and consecrate to you in total submission and love my body and soul, my goods both interior and exterior, and the very value of my good actions, past present and future, leaving to you the full and entire right of disposing of me and all that belongs to me, according to your good pleasure, for the greater glory of God in time and in eternity. Amen.

*A prayer of St Louis de Montfort*

## SESSION THREE

### OPENING PRAYER

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your love. Teach us to see how you come to us in a special way through Mary. Through her motherly prayers, take away our fear of opening our hearts fully to all that you want to give us. Make us, like her, entirely docile to your inspirations and eager to put them into practice. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

### LISTEN TO EXPERIENCE

Fr Cantalamessa, who for many years was preacher to the papal household, tells an amusing story from his childhood, when after Sunday Mass people from the village would walk home with each other, and on reaching someone's home it was customary to invite others in to have lunch, a tasty bowl of pasta followed by roast lamb or something similar. But it was a purely formal invitation: you were expected politely to decline and say your wife was expecting you with some home-made lasagna and tiramisu. If you had actually said, "Yes, I'd be delighted," the person who invited you would be horrified.

It's often like that with us and the Holy Spirit, Fr Cantalamessa says: we invite him to speak to us, but if he actually did...!

Calling on the Holy Spirit through Mary can help us to overcome our fears of what the Holy Spirit might say to us or do for us. No doubt we are afraid he would tell us off or ask us to do something we really don't want to do. The Curé of Ars says of Mary: "Our Lady is so good that she always treats us with love and never punishes us... In the heart of the Most Holy Virgin, there is nothing but mercy." If that is true of her, how much more is it true of the Holy Spirit, her Spouse.

## QUESTIONS

- 1 What does the phrase, 'Spouse of the Spirit,' applied to Mary mean for you? Do you find it helpful or not?
- 2 What are you afraid God might say to you or ask you to do? Could Mary help you overcome these fears?

## EXPLORE THE SCRIPTURES

"Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called the Son of God.'"

*Luke 1: 34-35*

"What came about in bodily form in Mary, the fullness of the Godhead shining through Christ in the Blessed Virgin, takes place in a similar way in every soul that has been made pure. The Lord does not come in bodily form, for we 'no longer know Christ according to the flesh', but he dwells in us spiritually and the Father takes up his abode with him, the Gospel tells us. In this way the child Jesus is born in each one of us."

*St Gregory of Nyssa, On Virginity*

## REFLECTION

I suppose each of us gravitates naturally towards one of the members of the Blessed Trinity when we pray: to Jesus or the Father or the Holy Spirit. Mary has a unique relationship with the Holy Trinity, but she invites us all to enter into the life of the Trinity, to be taken up into it, so to speak. In the last session we considered Mary as the Mother of the Church, and the life of the Church is really nothing other than human beings sharing in the communion that exists for all eternity between the persons of the Blessed Trinity.

It's easy for us to consider Mary in relation to the Father, who chose her to be the Mother of his Son; easy to contemplate her relationship with her Son – as a baby, a growing man, and as her Saviour and ours; but how do we picture Mary in relation to the Holy Spirit? Calling her the Spouse of the Holy Spirit enables us to see how joyful it was for her to say yes to God's invitation, the kind of joy we all feel at a wedding.

Strikingly, it was at a wedding, according to St John's Gospel, that Jesus performed his first miracle, of changing water into wine, and significantly, it was at his mother's prompting that he did this. Scripture often speaks of God's relationship with his people as being like that of a lover with his bride, most notably in the Song of Songs, and of heaven as being like a wedding banquet. Mary is, as it were, the distillation of all that is good and holy in God's people, and Catholic writers often speak of her humility and purity as attracting God's loving gaze from heaven.

In an age like ours when virginity is not exactly highly prized, speaking of Mary as the Spouse of the Holy Spirit can help us to see that her virginity is not something negative, but a beautiful quality that makes her ready to respond joyfully with the whole of her being to God's loving gaze on her, and in that she points to what kind of relationship God desires to have with each one of us in a way unique to us personally.

The first thing the Holy Spirit did in the soul of Mary, of course, was to bring about her Immaculate Conception, so that she could be a fitting vessel for God to bring into the world his Son and hers. If we are to be like Mary in becoming a dwelling place for God and a means of his Son coming into the world, we too must desire that the Holy Spirit make us holy, and since he is nothing other than the love between the Father and the Son, that means simply that he fill us with his divine love for God and all people. And that holiness will fill us with joy, as it did Mary.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1 What kind of relationship do you have with the Holy Spirit? How would you like it to grow?
- 2 What kind of picture do you have of Mary? Someone gentle, shy, or a powerful, strong woman?
- 3 Mary was present in the Upper Room at Pentecost. Was she filled with the Holy Spirit in the same way as the apostles?

## POINTS FOR ACTION

- 1 Identify from a book, from the internet, or from your own belongings some paintings of Mary, whether classic or more contemporary. Which of them expresses most powerfully her relationship with the Holy Spirit?
- 2 Make a Novena to the Holy Spirit through the intercession of Mary for some particular issue that is bothering you.

## CLOSING PRAYER

**Mary, please ask your Spouse the Holy Spirit to come upon me, to protect me from harm, to strengthen me to do what is right, to lead me into all truth. Ask him to come to me, and remain with me, and be within me a fountain springing up to eternal life. Pray that he will come upon the whole world to preserve us from the degeneration and despair that threatens us. May he renew the face of the earth and inspire us to live and work always for God's glory. Amen.**



# QUEEN OF PEACE

## SESSION FOUR

### OPENING PRAYER

Father, at the birth of your Son, the Prince of Peace, the angels sang of peace to people of goodwill. After his resurrection, his first words to his apostles were “Peace be with you.” Teach us how to ask Mary, his mother and ours, to bring us and the whole world to the peace he won for us on the Cross when he overcame our hostility to you and to each other. May Mary, Queen of Peace, flood our hearts with her peace so that we may in turn bring it to all those who need it most and so fulfil your Son’s words, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” We ask this through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### LISTEN TO EXPERIENCE

“How many divisions does the Pope have?” Stalin famously asked the French Foreign Minister in 1935. Yet the Popes do indeed have a secret weapon far more powerful than any army: prayer to Mary, Queen of Peace.

During World War I Pope Benedict XV added the title, ‘Mary Queen of Peace’ to the Litany of Loreto. On 31 October 1942, at a critical moment of World War II, when German troops were making significant advances in North Africa and the Japanese occupying more and more of south-east Asia, Pope Pius XII called for a Crusade

of Prayer to Mary Queen of Peace. In the same radio address he fulfilled the instructions of Our Lady in Fatima 25 years previously to consecrate the whole world to her Immaculate Heart, with special mention of Russia. In 1966 Pope Paul VI called for families to invoke the Queen of Peace in response to the Vietnam War and the dangers of nuclear proliferation (see quotation above).

In all this, the Popes were simply putting into practice what Our Lady had asked of the little shepherd children in Fatima in 1917: "Pray the Rosary every day for peace in the world and for the end of the war."

## QUESTIONS

- 1 Why do you think it is appropriate to call Mary the Queen of Peace?
- 2 What experiences do you have of finding inner peace after a time of turmoil? Did the Rosary or other prayers to Our Lady help you find this peace?

## EXPLORE THE SCRIPTURES

"For thus says the Lord: I will extend peace to her like a river; and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing stream; and you shall nurse and be carried on her arm, and dandled on her knees. As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem."

*Isaiah 66:12-13*

"Nothing seems more appropriate and valuable than to have the prayers of the whole Christian family rise to the Mother of God, who is invoked as the Queen of Peace, begging her to pour forth abundant gifts of her maternal goodness in midst of so many great trials and hardships. We want constant and devout prayers to be offered to her whom We declared Mother of the Church, its spiritual parent, during the celebration of the Second Vatican Council."

*Pope St Paul VI, Christi Matri, 1966*

## REFLECTION

"Mankind will not find peace till it turns with trust to my Mercy," Jesus told St Faustina in 1934. Approaching the great Shrine of Divine Mercy just outside Krakow, Poland, you may find yourself crossing a tram line, and if a tram is approaching, the destination shown on the front may well be – Oświęcim, that is, Auschwitz. How striking that many of the revelations of Divine Mercy were given to St Faustina at a place so near the great symbol of evil of the twentieth century. And how striking that Mary's call in Fatima to peace through conversion was given at the height of the 'war to end all wars' in 1917.

After two world wars and many local conflicts since, what hope does mankind have for peace now? What hope do we even have to achieve a modicum of inner peace in our own hearts or peace in our families and communities? Whether on a world scale or in the 'little world' of our own hearts, we seem able to achieve a temporary compromise in one area only for conflict to break out somewhere else. What is the source of lasting peace and how do we access it?

In the teaching of the Church, peace is above all the fruit of justice, and justice means giving each person, each community, each element within our own soul what is its due. Whether in Israel / Palestine, Northern Ireland, or anywhere else, every group or community that is not valued and given its due rights will constantly be a threat to peace. And the same is true in my own soul: if I ignore my physical health, my spiritual life, my need for relationship, my need for solitude and creativity, they will turn into a weapon against my inner peace.

In so many ways, Mary can help us find peace. She values each person as a mother values every child; she values each community as an important part of her human family; and she is thoroughly practical and wise. She is tough and will not accept compromise as a substitute for true peace; but she is also tender, and is just as likely to tell me to take more rest as to urge me to action. She is an unending source of wisdom about human relationships, which so often baffle us, but are the building blocks of peace on a bigger scale.

Above all Mary knows that peace in my heart and peace in the world both demand conversion, reparation and prayer. She utters these warnings out of the goodness of her motherly heart. She always points us to Jesus, who made our peace with God, and to the Church, where we find the seeds of a new humanity growing afresh every day under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to renew the face of the earth.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1 What contributions can we as 'ordinary' Catholics make to promoting world peace?
- 2 Can you give an example of where, even in a modest way, you have been able to be a peacemaker? What helped you in this?
- 3 At Fatima, Mary showed the children a vision of hell, and spoke of the dangers of a new war breaking out if we do not repent. Do you think we are too afraid today to speak of the effects of evil and the possibility of hell?

## POINTS FOR ACTION

- 1 Pray a decade of the Rosary (or more!) every day for world peace, either on your own or in a group.
- 2 Look up [catholicsocialteaching.org.uk](http://catholicsocialteaching.org.uk) on the internet, follow the link to 'take action' and consider how the suggestions there could be a help to you as a peacemaker.

## CLOSING PRAYER

**Mary, Queen of Peace, save us all, who have so much trust in you, from wars, hatred, and oppression. Make us all learn to live in peace, educate ourselves for peace, do what is demanded by justice and respect the rights of every person, so that peace may be firmly established. Amen.**

*A prayer of Pope St John Paul II*

## SESSION FIVE

### OPENING PRAYER

**Pour forth, we beseech you, O Lord, your grace into our hearts, that we, to whom the Incarnation of Christ your Son was made known by the message of an Angel, may, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, by his Passion and Cross be brought to the glory of his Resurrection, through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.**

### LISTEN TO EXPERIENCE

A few years ago a remarkable bishop from Maiduguri, Nigeria spoke in Westminster Cathedral about his experience of the power of the Rosary. In April 2014 the notorious terrorist group, Boko Haram, kidnapped 200 girls from a school in his diocese. While praying in front of the Blessed Sacrament a few months later, Bishop Oliver Dashe Doeme told how he experienced Jesus appearing in front of him holding a sword. He held the sword out for the bishop to take, and when he did it was transformed into a Rosary. Jesus then said to him three times: "Boko Haram is gone!"

The bishop began promoting the Rosary in his diocese, and in October 2016 and again in May 2017 many of the girls were suddenly released. In July 2017, 700 members of Boko Haram surrendered their weapons and turned themselves in, though it appears they may have experienced a resurgence more recently.



Most of us may not have such dramatic experiences, or indeed seek them, but hearing about them reminds us of the power of the Rosary and encourages us to use it as a 'holy weapon' on behalf of our friends and family who are in any kind of need, and for our whole world in its need of God.

## QUESTIONS

- 1 What is the most pressing need of the world of today for which we could turn to the Rosary?
- 2 What is the most pressing need among your own friends, family and community for which the Rosary could help?
- 3 What is the most pressing need in your own life which the Rosary could help you with?

## EXPLORE THE SCRIPTURES

“The Lord God said to the serpent, ‘I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.’”

*Genesis 3: 14-15*

“The Rosary of the Virgin Mary, which gradually took form in the second millennium under the guidance of the Spirit of God, is a prayer loved by countless saints and encouraged by the Magisterium. Simple yet profound, it still remains, at the dawn of this third millennium, a prayer of great significance, destined to bring forth a harvest of holiness.”

*Pope St John Paul II, Rosarium Virginis Mariae I*

## REFLECTION

The largest naval battle in the world since classical times took place in 1571, when ships of the Holy League, an alliance of the Republic of Venice and the Spanish Empire, defeated those of the Turkish Ottoman Empire, putting an effective end to Turkish expansion towards the West. Under their great ruler, Suleiman the Magnificent, who had died five years earlier, the Turks had gained the reputation of being unstoppable, so this victory put new heart into Christian Europe.

Victory was attributed by the Holy League to their recourse to the Rosary, and an important consequence of the battle was the institution by Pope St Pius V of a new feast day, at first called Our Lady of Victory, later changed to Our Lady of the Rosary, on 7 October.

It's a different image of Our Lady from those we often have in our minds: a warrior rather than a young girl peacefully contemplating in her heart all that had been said about her newborn Son. These are two apparently contradictory aspects of Mary, and of the Rosary, both of which we need to keep constantly in mind. Perhaps the way to do that is to remind ourselves that we all face a spiritual battle every day in our lives, and that Mary is always at hand to help us with it.

Even saying the Rosary can be a battle sometimes. Repeating the Hail Mary and other prayers while focusing on whatever Mystery we are saying, and at the same time perhaps offering it for someone or some cause can tie us up in knots. We can get distracted and then discouraged about our distractions. At that point, when we are tempted to give up, we should remember that the thing Satan hates most is to see us praying, and he will use every trick he has to stop us.

And of course, Satan hates Mary wholeheartedly. To be defeated, not by Almighty God directly, but through a humble, obscure girl from a hopeless town like Nazareth! So the Rosary is an incredible gift of God to the Church. Its origins are shrouded in mystery, but it has become both a way of contemplating quietly the mysteries of Jesus' life and ours, and a powerful weapon against enemies both outside us and within our own soul. And if you don't know how to use it in a way that suits you best, the answer is simple: ask her!

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1 What are your experiences of saying the Rosary? Do you find it a help to contemplation?
- 2 What would you say to someone who finds saying the Rosary difficult and has given up?
- 3 How comfortable do you feel hearing stories about the power of the Rosary to defeat terrorists or Turkish invaders?

## POINTS FOR ACTION

- 1 Look up *Rosarium Virginis Mariæ* on the internet, Pope John Paul's letter on the Rosary, and read a few paragraphs till you find something that strikes you. Don't worry – you won't have to read it in Latin!
- 2 Take some issue in the world that troubles you and which you feel powerless about – climate change, terrorism, social deprivation, or whatever – and see if praying the Rosary for it over a few days gives you a sense that you can do something. Pray for guidance as to what you could do but stay grounded in prayer.

## CLOSING PRAYER

**O Blessed Rosary of Mary, sweet chain which unites us to God, bond of love which unites us to the angels, tower of salvation against the assaults of Hell, safe port in our universal shipwreck, we will never abandon you. You will be our comfort in the hour of death: yours our final kiss as life ebbs away. And the last word from our lips will be your sweet name, O Queen of the Rosary, O dearest Mother, O Refuge of Sinners, O Sovereign Consoler of the Afflicted. May you be everywhere blessed, today and always, on earth and in heaven. Amen.**

*A prayer of Blessed Bartolo Longo, the Apostle of the Rosary*

## SESSION SIX

### OPENING PRAYER

Father, we thank you that for a long time we have been the Dowry of Mary, and we rejoice that our bishops, priests and faithful have recently entrusted England once again to your Son through Mary's Immaculate Heart, and so re-owned the ancient title and spiritual heritage. We thank you for all that this title means to us: in these uncertain times we can be certain of her protection and blessing. May her prayers lead our nation back to you, who are the source of all that is good in our land and our character. May the unity of heart and soul among Christ's followers that she inspires in us be a powerful sign to all of the beauty of our faith and its abiding truth. We ask this through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

### LISTEN TO EXPERIENCE

For us in England, Our Lady has a quite particular resonance. We are her Dowry, and we ask her intercession for the Conversion of England. We have our Marian shrines, especially Walsingham, and in shrines abroad, such as Lourdes, Fatima, or Medjugorje, there will always be a considerable English contingent.

On the other side, we are aware that our love for Mary is an obstacle for some in our land, who may associate it, as Newman did in his Anglican years, with excessive, 'un-English' devotion.

It's been said that while most English people do not think much about theology, we do have a specifically English heresy: Pelagianism, a 'do it yourself' religion. Pelagius was a British theologian of the late fourth century, who became so concerned about the moral laxity of society, which he blamed on St Augustine's teaching about divine grace, that he developed a strict, rigid moralism which stressed a natural human ability to attain salvation.

In these times of both moral laxity and rigid fundamentalism, may Mary, "full of grace," help us overcome our natural English tendency to think we have to do it all ourselves, and to realise instead that at the end of the day, all is grace, all depends on God's grace, especially the Conversion of England that we so long for.

## QUESTIONS

- 1 What does the 'Conversion of England' mean to you? Is it possible to pray for it and still be involved in ecumenical and interfaith work?
- 2 Do you recognize Pelagianism as a danger in yourself and in the general attitude of our times?

## EXPLORE THE SCRIPTURES

"Mary said, 'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant. Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me.'"

*Luke 1:46-48*

"We want to win back the world to Christ and we want to do it God's way and not our own. Our divine Lord came to the world through a human Mother and it is through that same Mother that the world will return to Him."

*Cardinal Griffin's words as he consecrated England and Wales to Mary in the presence of the bishops of England and Wales in 1948.*

## REFLECTION

Strictly speaking, a dowry is money or property given by the bride's parents to the bridegroom at the marriage, as a contribution to her upkeep. On the other hand, a dower is property settled on the bride herself by the groom, property which remains her own to do with as she wishes. Clearly it is in this second sense that we speak of England as the dowry of Mary: we are considered to have been given to her as a special possession which she can do what she likes with.

But who has the power to make such a gift? Who is the groom? In older times the answer would have been: the king. The famous Wilton Diptych (front cover), which dates from the end of the fourteenth century and can be seen in the National Gallery in London, shows King Richard II kneeling before Our Lady, who is carrying the baby Jesus surrounded by angels, one of whom is carrying the Cross of St George, on top of which is an orb with a tiny map of England. The Diptych is a travelling altarpiece depicting King Richard presenting England to Our Lady with the words "*Dos tua Virgo pia hæc est, quare rege, Maria.*" "This is your dowry, O Holy Virgin, wherefore rule over it."

But in a democratic age, the only valid answer to the same question – who can make this gift – would be simply, ourselves – we the people. And this is exactly what we were invited to do on 29 March 2020, the Sunday after the Solemnity of the Annunciation. It was to be the culmination of a tour of every diocese in England by the statue of Our Lady of Walsingham, England's national shrine of Our Lady, leading to a national Act of Entrustment or Re-dedication of England to Mary.

As it turned out, by this stage our churches were closed for public worship by this stage because of the coronavirus, which meant that grand liturgies led by bishops and attended by hundreds were not possible. It was up to each of us to make this re-dedication ourselves in the privacy of our own homes, perhaps while watching online an empty cathedral or the Shrine of Walsingham itself, where similar acts were being carried out.

It's hard not to feel this was strangely appropriate and pleasing to Our Lady. After all, the very message of Walsingham is about rediscovering her presence and power in the very humdrum events of daily life, like the washing of a sink mentioned in our second session! She had asked for a replica of her house of Nazareth to be built in Walsingham so that people could come there in pilgrimage with their everyday joys and sorrows.

We hope that this Act of Entrustment will have profound effects on our whole nation in God's good time, but we can experience those effects in our own lives every day as we offer ourselves, and all our activities and sufferings, to her, leaving to her the right of disposing of us as she wishes, for we are each one of us her Dowry too if we choose to be.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1 Have you been on pilgrimage to Walsingham? What did you take away from it?
- 2 Share among yourselves in the group the different ethnic backgrounds you come from, and how far each of you identifies with England as a nation specially belonging to Our Lady.
- 3 What difference do you hope the Act of Entrustment to Our Lady will make to England as a whole in the coming months and years?

## POINTS FOR ACTION

- 1 Find out if there is a pilgrimage to Walsingham planned by your parish in the near future, or consider making your own personal pilgrimage there.
- 2 Decide whom you are going to share the fruits of these sessions with!

## CLOSING PRAYER

**O Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and our most gentle Queen and Mother, look down with mercy upon England thy Dowry, and upon us all who greatly hope and trust in thee. By thee it was that Jesus our Saviour and our hope was given unto the world; and he has given thee to us that we might hope still more. Plead for us thy children, whom thou didst receive and accept at the foot of the Cross, O sorrowful Mother!**

**Intercede for our separated brethren that with us in the one true fold they may be united to the Chief Shepherd, the Vicar of thy Son. Pray for us all, dear Mother, that by faith fruitful in good works we may all deserve to see and praise God, together with thee, in our heavenly home. Amen.**



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Monsignor Keith Barltrop is currently the Parish Priest of St Mary of the Angels, Bayswater. His Ministry has included being Rector of Allen Hall Seminary, Episcopal Vicar in East London, Director of the Catholic Missionary Society, Chair of the China Forum of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, Chaplain to two groups supporting LGBT/Same-Sex attracted Catholics in London, and overseeing the visit in 2009 of the Relics of St Therese of Lisieux to England and Wales. He is a Trustee of the Basilica and Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham.

### USEFUL LINKS

*The Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham*

**[www.walsingham.org.uk](http://www.walsingham.org.uk)**

*The Shrine of Our Lady of Willesden*

**[parish.rcdow.org.uk/willesden](http://parish.rcdow.org.uk/willesden)**

*The Diocesan Shrine of the Most Holy Rosary (Haverstock Hill)*

**[www.rosaryshrine.co.uk](http://www.rosaryshrine.co.uk)**

*The Diocesan Pilgrimages to Lourdes and Walsingham*

**[www.rcdow.org.uk/pilgrimages](http://www.rcdow.org.uk/pilgrimages)**





DIOCESE OF WESTMINSTER AGENCY FOR EVANGELISATION