

## September's Marian Feasts and Our Lady of America®

### The Holy Name of Mary – Mother of Sorrows – Our Lady of Ransom (Mercy)

We celebrate Mary's holy name on September 12 and her sorrows on September 15, followed by the feast of Our Lady of Ransom, Our Lady of Mercy, on September 24.

The name Mary has somewhat different meanings in the varied languages of origin. The most widely accepted origin of the name is from the Hebrew "miryam" but that raises the question why the name, if of Hebrew origin, is found nowhere in the Hebrew Scriptures except for the name of Moses' sister, Miriam. Was it more Egyptian than Hebrew, since Moses and Miriam grew up in Egypt; hence the Jews would not have used that name? One translation is "rebellion," which might fit Miriam who did indeed rebel against God with her brother Aaron when building the golden calf in Moses' absence, but it would not fit Mary. A common view is that it comes from the Hebrew word "mar" meaning "sea" and "yam" meaning "bitter", a meaning that fits the bitter sea of sorrow that would be Mary's as Co-redeemer with Christ in His Passion and Death, and also alludes to her refuge for us in the valley of our tears. St. Jerome in the Latin associated the name with the Latin phrase Stella Maris, "Star of the Sea" or "drop of the sea." Mary is indeed a light to us in the sea of life's storms. Others suggest a Hebrew meaning of "wished for child." As the people awaited the birth of the mother of the Savior, that meaning might well apply to Mary. Still others trace the name Maria to the Egyptian "mer" or "mar" to "love," and the Hebrew "Yam" or "Yahweh," meaning "one loving Yahweh" or "one loved by Yahweh." That would most certainly fit Our Lady.

The most important question with respect to Mary's name, however, is why did Anna and Joachim give Mary that name? Edward Healy Thompson in **The Life and Glories of St. Joseph**, pg. 105, says:

**Her name, we cannot doubt, came from heaven, and was revealed to Joachim, who gave it to her on the eighth day after her birth.**

Since salvation history shows that God Himself gave the names of those chosen for some special mission, does it not make sense, then, that Mary's name should have come directly from God, for her mission as Theotokos was greater than any other creature's mission on earth? In the New Testament the name of the Virgin Mary is generally always Mariam, the archaic form, possibly used by the evangelists to distinguish Mary from others who bore the same name.

As seen in the meaning of Mary's name, the idea of sorrow and bitterness is significant. It was in 1244 A.D. that the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows was first celebrated by the founders of the Servite Order to focus attention on the deep anguish of Mary's life. While seven sorrows are picked for emphasis, Mary endured sorrows too numerous to mention. These seven are Simeon's prophecy that a sword would pierce Mary's own soul so that the thoughts of many might be revealed, words spoken when Jesus was presented in the temple; the flight into Egypt to escape the hatred of Herod who had ordered the death of all Hebrew boy babies under age two; the loss of Jesus in the temple; the meeting with Jesus on the Way of the Cross; that horrendous crucifixion of her dearly beloved Son; holding that battered, bloody body of Jesus on her lap after He was taken down from the cross, a sorrow memorialized with Michelangelo's great work of the Pieta; and having to bury her Son hastily without the desired preparation and time to grieve over Him because it was the Sabbath.

In Mexico the custom arose to build Altars of Compassion and Grief in homes and churches, altars that would be carried in the streets as people prayed in honor of Mary's sorrows. Her statue would always be accompanied by a cross as people sought to remember the deep pain and sacrifice she shared so deeply with Jesus in His Passion and Death for our salvation. She is the greatest of all martyrs. It is fitting that the Church honors Our Lady of Sorrows the day after she celebrates the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. As family and friends gathered around their altars in veneration, the traditional hymn we know so well, "Stabat Mater," written by Giacopone da Todi in 1306, would be sung.

*At the Cross her station keeping,  
Stood the mournful Mother weeping,  
Close to Jesus to the last. ...  
Is there one who would not weep  
"Whelmed in miseries so deep  
Christ's dear Mother to behold?"*

In the book "Las Glorias de Maria" St. Alfonso Maria of Liguori says Jesus revealed to Monica of Binasco these words, **"I am very grateful for the tears shed for my passion, but since I love my mother intensely, the meditation on her sorrows at my death are extremely pleasing to me."** It is said St. John, the Beloved Disciple, so longed to see Mary after her Assumption that Jesus and Mary appeared to him and gave these promises to him – 1. Whoever invokes the Holy Mother of God remembering her sorrows, will have the grace of true penance of all sins. 2. She will console them through all their difficulties, especially at the time of death. 3. That the memory of His Passion will always be in their souls, and they will be rewarded in heaven. 4. That these devotees will be entrusted to Mary, so that she decides as she pleases with them, granting them the graces She wishes to bestow on them.

The Mother of God once said to her faithful servant St. Bridget, with whose devotion to Our Lady's sorrows most of us are familiar and who enumerates even more promise for veneration of Mary's sorrows:

**No matter how numerous a person's sins may be, if he turns to me with a sincere purpose of amendment, I am prepared forthwith to receive him graciously, for I do not regard the number of sins he has committed, but look only upon the dispositions with which he comes to me; for I feel no aversion in healing his wounds, because I am called and am in truth the Mother of Mercy.**

How can we not, when meditating on Our Lady's sorrows and these words, not hear ringing in our hearts those sad cries of Our Lady of America® to Sister Mildred (Mary Ephrem) Neuzil:

**Behold, O my children, the tears of your Mother! Shall I weep in vain? Assuage the sorrow of my Heart over the ingratitude of sinful men by the love and chasteness of your lives. Will you do this for me, beloved children, or will you allow your Mother to weep in vain? (Diary, pg. 12)**

**O my sweet child, when will my desires be realized? My Immaculate Heart desires with great desire to see the kingdom of Jesus my Son established in all hearts. How I have pleaded with my children to open their hearts to Him, but most are cold and indifferent. Has ever a mother shown more love and interest in her children's welfare than I have done? (Diary, Pg. 17.)**

**What am I to do, child of my heart, when my children turn from me? (Diary, Pg. 18.) Will you do as I wish at last, my children? (Diary, Pg. 21.)**

**Beloved daughter, you wonder at the sword and the deep wound it has made in my Heart. It is the sword of grief plunged therein by my children who refuse to let me teach them the true way. (Diary, Pg. 23.)**

**See, I weep, but my children show me no compassion. They behold the sword in my heart but will make no move to withdraw it. I give them love; they give me only ingratitude. Weep then, dear child, weep with your Mother over the sins of men. (Diary, Pg. 34.)**

**Will we give our dear Lady compassion and gratitude, or will we allow her to go on weeping in vain?**

In accord with the Latin meaning of her name, Maris Stella, Star of the sea, Our Lady becomes the Star of hope and rescue on the seas of Islamic piracy when many of her children were kidnapped and forced into slavery. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century these Barbary pirates from North Africa raided the coasts of Spain and Italy and went on into England and Ireland, going ashore to take many of the local people captive. Often the villages

were burned to the ground. Being captured by the Saracens became the fear of every coastal land.

Religious orders sprang up to help these imprisoned Christians in Islamic countries. Members would beg for funds to buy the release, the ransom of prisoners from their captors. The Mercedarians, established in 1218 and dedicated to Our Lady of Mercy, known as Our Lady of Ransom in England, was founded by St. Peter Nolasco who devoted his life to ransoming Christians from the Muslims, a society that depended on slaves. The money paid for the release of the slaves was called *ransom money*. Here again we see Our Lady as that merciful Mother, always weeping for her children and finding new ways to give hope and rescue to them on the high seas of their journey home to God. Maris Stella. Star of the sea! It is this same Mary who becomes our own ransom in every need when she pledges to Sister Mildred:

**Have confidence, dear one, I am your Mother and will never leave you. (Diary, Pg. 46. )**

It is this same Mother of Mercy who begs us to offer prayer and sacrifice in atonement for our sins and as a ransom for the sins of others. She begs us:

**Help me save those who will not save themselves. Help me bring once again the sunshine of God's peace upon the world. (Diary, Pg. 15.)**

In May of 1957 Sister Mildred wrote that Our Lady showed herself to her as the Mother of Mercy. With her arms extended and her blue mantle affording a safe refuge for the sinner, she said:

**I am the Mother of Mercy. Under my mantle I will hide my children. The justice of God will not reach them if they seek refuge beneath the protection of my mercy. My Son gives to me all those souls who come to me with confidence, calling upon my aid. Their salvation is in my hands. I will obtain for them the necessary graces to save their souls.**

**Come to me, poor, suffering and frightened ones. I am your Mother. Never will I forsake you. Only come to me with a wholehearted and loving trust. Place your souls into my keeping. I am that faithful Mother who never forsakes her children. Honor me by your confidence and love. This I desire and ask of you my poor children. Do not deny the wishes of your Mother.**

**I am the Mother of Mercy!**

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