

The Place of Mary in the Mass

Mary has an important place in the life of Catholic people. She is the Woman of Faith, Mother of the Lord, and Mother of the Church. She is the Woman of Faith and Mother of the Lord at the Annunciation/Incarnation; she stood at the foot of the cross; she joined the disciples in prayer as they awaited the coming of the Holy Spirit and assumed into heaven, as she supports the church on its pilgrim journey (cf preface for *Votive Mass, Mary Mother of the Church*).

MARIAN HYMNS

For the most part, songs about Mary are only appropriate on feasts and solemnities of our Blessed Mother, such as the Assumption of Blessed Virgin Mary (15th August) and the Immaculate Conception (8th December). While in cases such as the month of May is dedicated to Mary, elements of these devotions which include Marian hymns, the Rosary, or prayers to the Blessed Virgin should be refrained in being incorporated into the Mass. Being mindful of this avoids the risk of opening the door for other inappropriate liturgical choices.

The document on '**Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines**' covers three points to consider when choosing to sing a Marian Hymn or pray the Hail Mary on a Marian feast day...

1. *The Eucharist is preeminent:*

The Sacred Liturgy, in virtue of its very nature, is by far superior to pious exercises....Liturgy and pious exercises must co-exist in accordance with the hierarchy of values and the nature specific to both of these cultic expressions. (3)

2. *Marian rituals & songs, though focused on Mary, must always find their source in, and point us toward Christ:*

Such pious exercises...should be derivative from the "one worship which is rightly called Christian, because it efficaciously originates in Christ, finds full expression in Christ, and through him, in the Holy Spirit leads to the Father" (Marialis cultus 24). (186)

3. *Marian songs or rituals, if they will be used in the Mass, should:*

give expression to the Trinitarian note which characterizes worship of the God revealed in the New Testament, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit... and have constant recourse to Sacred Scripture, as understood in Sacred Tradition; not overlook the demands of the ecumenical movement in the Church's profession of faith; consider the anthropological aspects of cultic expressions so as to reflect a true concept of man and a valid response to his needs; highlight the eschatological tension which is essential to the Gospel message; make clear missionary responsibility and the duty of bearing witness, which are incumbent on the Lord's disciples. (186)

Given all of that, it is better to reserve hymns like "Ave Maria," "Immaculate Mary," or "Hail, Holy Queen" or devotions that are expressly directed towards Mary for occasions other than Mass. Alternatively, use them before or after Mass. Instead, concentrate on songs that give thanks to God and point us to Christ via Mary throughout the Mass itself (including any song after Communion). A song that praises and directs us towards the mission of Christ via the life of Mary would be any setting of the *Magnificat* (the Canticle of Mary from Luke's Gospel), which is most appropriate perhaps for Gathering or Sending Forth, rather than the Preparation of the Gifts.

STATUES OF MARY

Placement of statues can be found in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal: “Thus, in sacred buildings images of the Lord, of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and of the saints, in accordance with most ancient tradition of the church, should be displayed for veneration by the faithful and should be so arranged so as to lead the faithful toward the mysteries of faith celebrated there. Care should, therefore, be taken that their number is not increased indiscriminately and, moreover, that they be arranged in proper order so as **not to draw the attention of the faithful to themselves and away from the celebration itself**” (GIRM 318). It’s important to take note of the following: (Extract from *Principles & Guidelines for Marian Devotions, Catholic Diocese of Sandhurst*)

- That all Marian devotions reflect on Mary in relationship to Christ.
- That all Marian devotions be Scripture based
- That the shrine decorated to the Blessed Virgin Mary on the Marian Festival (or indeed any other time of the year) not out do in ostentation, flowers, candles the main altar so as not to remove the focus from the fruit of Mary’s womb to Mary herself.
- That the Icon/Statue to Mary have one vase of flowers before it or one on each side AND that there are more or a bigger display of flowers in front of or near the main altar so as not to overshadow the central focal point and that any icon/statue to Jesus is suitable venerated with flowers.
- That if candles are to be used in front of the Marian statue/icon then they are not to be greater than the number used at Mass and preferably less.

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

The Roman Rite does not, in fact, envisage the inclusion of devotional prayers in the Prayer of the Faithful. According to the General Instruction to the Roman Missal, in the Prayer of the Faithful, “the people respond in some sense to the Word of God which they have received in faith and, exercising the office of their baptismal Priesthood, offer prayers to God for the salvation of all” (GIRM #69). We participate in the Prayer of the Faithful as a priestly people. After hearing God’s Word and being moved by God’s vision for our wider community, for everyone, for the Church, and for the world, we now bring these people’s needs before God in a spirit of compassion, praying once again with, though, and in Christ. The Hail Mary, which is occasionally prayed at this time, is a prayer of worship rather than intercession, and does not fit here.

The series of intentions is always: (1) for the needs of the universal church, (2) for the public authorities and the salvation of the world, (3) for those burdened by any kind of difficulty, (4) for the local community, and (5) the other necessity. (Extract from the *Prayer of the Faithful Guidelines, Catholic Diocese of Forth Worth*)

1. **The needs of the universal church.** This category includes petitions for the pope, bishops and pastors of the Church, missions, Christian unity, and vocations to the priesthood and religious life.
2. **Public authorities and the salvation of the world.** This category includes petitions for peace, leaders of government, elections, respect for the freedom of the Church, good weather, the safety of crops, and the resolution of economic crises.
3. **People burdened by any kind of difficulty.** This category includes those burdened by poverty or any other tribulation, the unborn, the persecuted, the unemployed, the sick and infirm, the dying, prisoners, and exiles, to name a few.
4. **Local community.** People to pray for may include those in the church preparing for baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, holy orders, or marriage; it also includes prayers for the repose of the souls of the deceased. Specific parish needs should be communicated: for the upcoming Youth Mission Trip, etc.
5. **Silent prayers.** At times offer the opportunity for the congregation to silently offer their private prayer. This final petition need only be offered every few weeks or months.

THE HAIL MARY

The Mass or Eucharist is **the** perfect prayer of praise and thanksgiving. It is, in the true sense, because it is the prayer of Christ prayed to God, in and through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, this prayer – the liturgy, Mass, or Eucharist, considerably outweighs all other forms of prayer and devotion as **“by its very nature far surpasses any of them.” SC 13**

Christ guides us in prayer during the liturgy; he does not abandon us as orphans but rather takes us and forms this prayer of his within us so that we may also offer it to God. The question of "does Christ pray to Mary?" must be

posed when the **Hail Mary** is incorporated into the liturgy, typically either following the homily or at the conclusion of the Prayer of the Faithful. It is critical to comprehend who in the liturgy it is being prayed to.

The Hail Mary should not be incorporated into the Mass because it would disrupt its rhythm. The liturgy is not made up of various discrete parts. Instead, it is a whole that, when properly appreciated, flows, carrying and forming those of us who have joined. When the Hail Mary is prayed during Mass, our gaze is diverted away from the Trinity, who is the subject of our worship, and instead is focused on

Mary, who, despite being beautiful, is not the subject of our worship. She has joined us in this prayer that her son is leading, and she is one of us. In the liturgy, the object of our praise is God – the Holy Trinity. When the Hail Mary is prayed in the liturgy, either after the homily or after the Prayer of the Faithful or whenever the priest decides to put it, it may seem to people that Mary is the object of our praise. This is confusing.

Mary's place in the liturgy is to pray with us, with and through and in Christ, to the Father. Because she has a pivotal place in salvation history, sometimes she is featured in the readings or in Masses dedicated to her. On these Sunday's it may be appropriate to include a hymn about Mary at the beginning of Mass, one of the purposes of the entrance or gathering hymn being to introduce peoples' thoughts **to the mystery of the liturgical time or festivity** GIRM 47. On these Sundays, she is likely to be referred to, (though not prayed to), in the prayers of the Mass.

“But these devotions should be so drawn up that they harmonize with the liturgical seasons, accord with the sacred liturgy, are in some fashion derived from it, and lead the people to it, since, in fact, the liturgy by its very nature far surpasses any of them.” SC 13

“These adaptations consist, for the most part, in the choice of certain rites or texts, that is, of the chants, readings, prayers, explanatory interventions, and gestures capable of responding better to the needs, the preparation, and the culture of the participants and which are entrusted to the Priest Celebrant. However, the Priest will remember that he is the servant of the Sacred Liturgy and that he himself is not permitted, on his own initiative, to add, to remove, or to change anything in the celebration of Mass.” GIRM #34

