



## Faith Formation Session on Mary, Our Blessed Mother: LEADER'S GUIDE

# 5 on the Archdiocese of Dubuque's Top Ten Reasons to be Catholic!

*Faith Formation Leaders: Please review all materials and select those most effective for your presentation. You may copy and distribute any of the materials.*

### **Introduction:**

Catholics believe that when Jesus said to the apostle John from the cross, "Behold your mother," Mary became the spiritual mother of all Christ's followers. Catholics have a great affection for Mary, and honor her as the Mother of God, the first disciple, and one who intercedes for us. Jesus answered Mary's request at the wedding feast at Cana, therefore we trust Jesus to answer her requests on our behalf.

### **Opening Prayer:**

Loving God, send your Spirit to open our hearts to Jesus.

Guide us to a deeper conversion.

Grant us a greater appreciation of the beauty and truth of our Catholic faith.

Give us the courage and confidence to joyfully share our faith with others.

May your Church be a beacon of light for all who seek your loving presence.

Be with us now as we explore our relationship with Mary, Our Blessed Mother.

Mary, faithful Mother of God, intercede for us.

We make this prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,

who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

One God, forever and ever. Amen.

### **Scripture:**

Luke 1: 26-38

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke:

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" And the angel said to her in reply, "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 called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God." Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

The Gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ.**

**Opening Song:** (or choose your own)

*Perfect Love (Mary's Song)* by Darlene Zschech: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=glrQXII\\_YNs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=glrQXII_YNs)

Or

*Mary Did You Know? (The Bible)* by CeeLo Green: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C1DZA\\_TdBBI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C1DZA_TdBBI)

## **Section I:** Mary, Undoer of Knots and Our Lady of Sorrows

**Video # 1:** Faithful of the Archdiocese of Dubuque

<http://youtu.be/oQBgQ-V4r28>

From her first “fiat” to her final embrace of her crucified Son, to her continual intercession for us, her children, Mary’s unceasing “yes” has earned her a singular place of honor among Catholics. She is hailed as “Blessed among women,” the “new Eve,” the first disciple, the first Church, and the first of all mothers. We understand that grace flows through Mary and her mission is to draw all people to her Son.

In a recent homily, Pope Francis has invited all people to embrace the spirit of Mary, a spirit of consummate faith, hope and love, a spirit of openness and trust. He asks: “What was Mary’s faith like?” He identifies three aspects of her life for imitation. First is Mary’s role in “untying the knot of sin” (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 56). What does that mean? The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council took up a phrase of Saint Irenaeus who states that: “The knot of Eve’s disobedience was untied by the obedience of Mary; what the virgin Eve bound by her unbelief, the Virgin Mary loosened by her faith” (*Adversus Haereses*, III, 22, 4).

Pope Francis continues: “The ‘knot’ of disobedience, the ‘knot’ of unbelief occurs when children disobey their parents; a little ‘knot’ is created. This happens if the child acts with an awareness of what he or she is doing, especially if there is a lie involved. At that moment, they break trust with their parents. You know how frequently this happens! Then the relationship with their parents needs to be purified of this fault; the child has to ask forgiveness so that harmony and trust can be restored.

“Something similar happens in our relationship with God. When we do not listen to God, when we do not follow God’s will and do concrete things that demonstrate our lack of trust - for that is what sin is - a kind of knot is created deep within us. These knots take away our peace and serenity. They are dangerous, since many knots can form a tangle that gets more and more painful and difficult to undo. Yet, when we fall short, we know one thing: nothing is impossible for God’s mercy! Even the most tangled knots are loosened by his grace.

“And Mary, whose ‘yes’ opened the door for God to undo the knot of the ancient disobedience, is the Mother who patiently and lovingly brings us to God, so that God’s mercy can untangle the knots of our soul. We all have some of these knots and we can ask in our heart of hearts: ‘my knots cannot be undone!’ It is a mistake to say anything of the sort! All the knots of our heart, every knot of our conscience, can be undone. Do I ask Mary to help me trust in God’s mercy, to undo those knots, to change?”

Sometimes, the knots in our lives are simply the result of living in a fallen world. We experience knots in our stomachs out of sorrow and concern for our loved ones—especially those who suffer from sickness or addiction. As these mothers gave witness to the knots in their lives, they also spoke of Mary’s gentle tenderness, comfort, and care. Through their experiences and over time, they grew in their devotion to Mary, Our Lady of Sorrows, who taught them to trust in God, especially in the midst of deep sorrow for their children.

Our Lady of Sorrows, a beloved devotion since the early church, became a popular tradition by the early 13th century. Meditating on Mary’s seven sorrows allows us to enter into her suffering while she accompanied Jesus through life—to the cross. Mary’s seven sorrows include: Simeon’s prophecy; the flight into Egypt; the loss of Jesus in the temple; the meeting of Jesus on the way to Calvary; the crucifixion and death of Jesus; the piercing of the side of Jesus and his descent from the cross; the burial of Jesus. Perhaps Michelangelo’s sculpture of the Pieta best depicts our Lady’s sorrow as she embraces the lifeless body of her Son.

Mary understands all our concerns and sorrows because she has walked the path of human suffering as the Blessed Mother of our Lord. Mary willingly watches over our loved ones—unties their knots, if we but trust and release them into her loving care. As one witness said: “When I knew I was out of control, that there was nothing else I could do to help my child, then I surrendered him to Mary. I knew she could work it out—she would take him to her Son.”

**Discussion Questions:**

- a. What are some of the knots in your life? When has God’s mercy unraveled a knot in your life?
- b. What struck you about Liz’s witness on the sorrows in her life? With which of the Seven Sorrows of Mary can you most identify? Why?
- c. What situation can you surrender over to God’s care?

**Section II: Mary leads us to Jesus.**

**Video #2:** Witness of the faithful of the Archdiocese of Dubuque

<http://youtu.be/axbuYsn5hI0>

Pope Francis identifies a second aspect of Mary’s faith; it gives human flesh to Jesus. “Through her faith and obedience, she gave birth on earth to the very Son of God, without knowing man but by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit” (Lumen Gentium, 63). Mary first conceived Jesus in faith, by her fiat, – “thy will be done” – and then in the flesh. Through her free ascent, God chose to rescue the world from sin. This openness to God’s will that Mary exemplifies is available to each of us as we discern God’s will for our lives.

Mary’s nudge leads us closer to Jesus and compels us to actively take Christ’s presence into the world, as witnessed by God’s people. Mother Teresa wrote of her order’s foundation: “Our Society was born at our Lady’s pleading and through her intercession it grew up.” Mary’s prodding has led the faithful to open soup kitchens, maternity homes, homeless shelters, and hospices.

This reality is the Incarnation in our midst. It proclaims a depth of believing that literally means “giving him our hands, to caress the little ones and the poor; our feet, to go forth and meet our brothers and sisters; our arms, to hold up the weak and to work in the Lord’s vineyard; our minds, to think and act in the light of the Gospel; and especially to offer our hearts to love and to make choices in accordance with God’s will. This is the grace of the Holy Spirit operative in us for the life of the world” (Pope Francis’ homily).

The third aspect of Mary’s faith is that of journey. In this respect she models what it means to faithfully follow Jesus. Hers was a spiritual pilgrimage, a walk of trust and confidence in the grace of God. In the journey of faith, Mary knows the way to Jesus, who is “The Way.” She welcomes everyone and gently guides each to her Son. She accepts people’s hearts with all their questions and doubts, with all their misunderstandings, and with any opposition or resistance. As a true mother, she awaits patiently for her children to surrender to her love. As one young man put it, “Mary brought me home.”

When we arrive home with Mary, she often leads us closer to Jesus through the Rosary. “The Rosary is not a prayer of vain repetitions, but very scriptural, and a beautiful meditation on the mysteries of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus through the eyes of His mother. The Rosary is not Mary-centered but Christ-centered. Each bead you touch is like holding the gentle hand of His mother and walking through the Gospels, as she leads you closer to her son. Each bead you say a prayer on is like giving our Blessed Mother a rose. (And praying a whole rosary is like giving her a crown of roses.) Mary’s soul always magnifies the Lord. If you want to grow closer to Christ, and develop a deep personal relationship with Him, pray the rosary.” (Love Being Catholic Facebook Page)

Please break into small groups after watching this video presentation to discuss the following questions.

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**Discussion Questions:**

- a. Several witnesses expressed their struggle with their relationship with Mary. What has been your journey toward Mary?
- b. Msgr. Bleich spoke of Mary allowing God to overshadow her and to use her body for the kingdom of God. In what ways have you given over your body to Christ? In what areas do you struggle to give over completely your body, mind, and spirit (human sexuality, material desires, attitudes, service, ascent of faith) to God?
- c. Many spoke of the power of the Rosary as a way of reflecting on the life of Christ—as well as our own. What has been your experience of praying the Rosary? Katherine spoke of praying with the Crowning of Thorns; with which mystery have you had a powerful connection?

### Section III: Honoring Mary Today

**Video #3:** The Faithful of the Archdiocese of Dubuque

<http://youtu.be/pS8PrbZvOMw>

Who is Mary for believers today, for contemporary cultures and for the people of our archdiocese? Mary holds a singular place of honor. She is one with us and can relate: as mother, she comforts all; as first disciple, she guides our vision; as indigent, she sustains hopefulness in the poor; as pilgrim, she journeys with refugees and immigrants, as one who trod the *via dolorosa*, she embraces all who face rejection, loneliness, and sorrow; as lover of Jesus, she is the gateway to union with God.

Mary secures our way. Leaving our homeland – whether as immigrants or as imprisoned, the jobless or divorced – and setting out upon unknown waters connects our pilgrimage with Mary’s centuries ago. Knowing our fears, she protects us and promises motherly love every step of the way. Mary has an on-going presence in the life of the church as she continues to say “yes to God” and “go in haste” on mission to God’s children around the world.

Mary makes her presence known in remarkable, and strikingly visible ways through apparitions but also in quiet, hidden way in the lives of humble believers. (Catholicism: Robert Barron) Reports of apparitions have been recorded throughout Catholic history: Bernadette at Lourdes, the Children at Fatima, Portugal, and others, some confirmed by the Church and others, such as Medjugorje, still being discerned by the Vatican. Nonetheless, these miraculous breakthrough moments have brought believers to a deeper faith as they hear her message and follow in her footsteps.

No sighting has been more popular in recent years than the encounter between the Queen of Heaven and Juan Diego, a simple Indian in Mexico. As he walked to Mass he heard a burst of birdsong and, turning to see where it was coming from, he was taken aback at the beautiful sight before him, a woman clothed in light. She announced herself as the “Mother of the Most High” and asked Juan Diego to go to the local bishop and request that he construct a temple in her honor.

Obedying her request, Juan met with Bishop Juan Zumarraga, a good and holy man who was a valiant protector of the local population. After hearing Juan Diego’s report, the bishop asked for a sign, a confirmation of his sighting. Returning to Tepeyac, Juan Diego found the Virgin there and told her of the bishop’s request. She asked Juan Diego to gather roses in his *tilma* – his poncho like garment – and take them to the bishop. When he returned, he opened his garment and the roses spilled out, but to the surprise of everyone in that room, embossed on the inside of his garment, was the image of the Virgin clothed in light.

The bishop promised on that day, (December 12, 1531) to build a beautiful temple for our Lady. Within ten years of

this breakthrough event, the entire Mexican nation – some nine million people – converted to Christianity. That same faith in the Virgin mother, that Juan Diego and his bishop possessed, is carried in the hearts of the Mexican people even today. At the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Juan Diego's tilma is displayed. Mysteriously, the tilma, which usually lasts about twenty years, has not faded or lost its vibrancy in over five hundred years.

Today, millions of pilgrims approach the Virgin at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Guadalupe, often on their knees, beseeching her to intercede for them. For the Mexican and Spanish people, this Madonna is a protect-tress, more powerful than all their Indian gods. Mary is beloved for appearing to a poor, native Mexican, who had no political power. Our Lady of Guadalupe cares for and champions the lowly and the poor.

In recent years, believers have been powerfully impacted by Mary's intercession at additional sites in Medjugorje and in the Americas and have become courageous witnesses to proclaiming her message that we must pray for peace and strive for reconciliation with everyone. While the Church is cautious to declare individual sites and their messages as officially worthy of belief, we can assert, with Scripture that: "So by their fruits we will know them" (Matt 7:20).

Please break into small groups after watching this video presentation to discuss the following questions.

### **Discussion Questions:**

- Mary has appeared in Mexico, Fatima, and Lourdes. Have you visited any Marian sites or shrines? What are your beliefs or experiences regarding Mary's appearances?
- What struck you about the depth of devotion of our witnesses to Our Lady of Guadalupe, such as the remark, "She is everything to me!" Why do you think Hispanic men and women are so devoted to her?
- Most of those interviewed had a very real sense of "Mary as Mother." How is your mother similar to the Blessed Mother?

### **Conclusion:**

Please be sure to make time for large group discussion:

What difference does it make in one's life to have a devotion to Mary, Our Blessed Mother?

### **Concluding Questions:**

- What did you learn about Mary, Our Blessed Mother?
- What did you like best about the session?
- What is one thing you will share with someone at home or in your sphere of influence?

### **Closing Song (Choose one or choose your own):**

*The Angelus:* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g7BbncHyw9E>

Or

*Great Things* by Matt Maher: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o7KlmzZ\\_f9k](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o7KlmzZ_f9k)

**Finish the session by saying the following prayer together:**

### **Prayer in Thanksgiving for the Gift of Mary, Our Blessed Mother:**

Loving God, we thank you for the gift of your Mother, Mary.  
Grant us a deep desire to remain close to Mary, our Blessed Mother.  
May our devotion to Mary bring us ever closer to you.  
Give us the strength and courage to live as Mary's children.  
Make us into a people who journey to you through Mary.  
Mary, Blessed Mother of the Word Incarnate, intercede for us.  
We make this prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit.  
one God, forever and ever. Amen.

OR

Recite The Magnificat (below):

*The Magnificat*

My soul magnifies the Lord

And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior;

Because He has regarded the lowliness of His handmaid;

For behold, henceforth all generations shall call me blessed;

Because He who is mighty has done great things for me,  
and holy is His name;

And His mercy is from generation to generation  
on those who fear Him.

He has shown might with His arm,

He has scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart.

He has put down the mighty from their thrones,  
and has exalted the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things,  
and the rich He has sent away empty.

He has given help to Israel, his servant, mindful of His mercy

Even as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity forever.

**Additional Resources:**

To find additional resources (including books, DVDs, online resources, and more) on Our Blessed Mother, Mary, please contact the Education Resource Center (ERC) of the Archdiocese of Dubuque at 563-556-2580, ext. 214, or [dbqcm1@dbqarch.org](mailto:dbqcm1@dbqarch.org).