

All Saints' Sunday  
November 2, 2014  
The Rev. Robert H. Malm

## The Mystery of Invocation

Since at least the 6<sup>th</sup> century, these words have formed a prayer that has strengthened and supported the Church universal and generations of individual Christians.

*Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death.*

The opening two verses are direct quotes from St. Luke's Gospel – the first verse is from The Annunciation; when the Angel, Gabriel, tells Mary that she will bear the Son of God, Jesus (1:28); and the second verse is Elizabeth's greeting to Mary when Mary visits Elizabeth some months after finding out that she too is pregnant and will soon give birth to John the Baptist (1:42). The last verse, the invocation to Mary to "pray for us..." was added later during the medieval period as devotion to Mary increased.

The "Hail Mary" is said in the prayers of the Rosary in both Roman and Anglican practice. Normally the Rosary is an individual or small group devotion focusing upon the "mysteries" of Christ's life and using beads as prayers and verses are recited. Last spring we had a group here at Grace praying the Rosary after the 11:15 Holy Eucharist. The Angelus is a prayer often recited before or after the Eucharist that focuses upon the Incarnation of Christ and Mary's role in the plan of salvation.

The "Hail Mary" for some refers to a last-minute desperation pass for a touch down to win a football game. This was made famous by the Dallas Cowboy quarterback, Roger Staubach, who in an NFL play-off game against Minnesota in 1975 completed a long last second touchdown pass to win the game. After the game reporters asked Staubach about the play. He replied, "Before I was about to be tackled, I just threw the ball as far as I could, closed my eyes and said a Hail Mary."

Mary is sometimes called the "Queen" of Saints since she is the God-bearer, Theotokos, Mother of Our Lord. So this prayer reminds us of the communion we share with all the Saints, a communion of prayer, of invocation, asking for help. Perhaps you have a favorite Saint. Francis, who we just celebrated a few weeks ago, is said to be the most admired Saint and the least followed. Mother Julian of Norwich is a very popular English Saint. We have 22 different Saints here in our Church windows and statues.

Each year, on the Sunday closest to November 1<sup>st</sup>, we celebrate the Communion of all the Saints. Our celebrations turn our attention to the Saints with a capital "S" that show us in their own lives the self-giving love of God in Christ. Mary shows us his self-giving love. She said, "Yes" to God. "Behold, I am the hand maiden of the Lord...be it unto me according to thy word..." We see this same self-giving love in all those we know as Saints, especially those who are remembered for giving up their lives – the martyrs. Self denial, self sacrifice, love of God are marks of the Saints in history.

They inspire us as we learn about their lives. They embodied the words of Jesus at the start of the Sermon on the Mount.

*Blessed are the poor in Spirit... Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness... Blessed are the merciful... Blessed are the pure in heart... Blessed are the peace makers... Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake...*

We also celebrate the lives of the saints with a little "s", those known only to us; those who are not recognized through the Church or in history. They are recognized and remembered by those who know and loved them. This second group of saints led the Church to celebrate All Souls' Day on November 2<sup>nd</sup>. We celebrate All Souls – all the faithful departed – each month on the first Tuesday when we remember and pray for those whose anniversaries of death occur in that month. It is extremely powerful to read the long list of names at the Lady Altar each first Tuesday at the 6:30 pm Holy Eucharist.

We don't just pray with and to the Saints with the capital "S". We also pray with and to the saints with a small "s". The Communion of Saints is not just our memory of famous people and of those we have loved who have died. The Communion of Saints is a fellowship of active love and prayer. As one of our concluding collects states,

*"Almighty God, by your Holy Spirit you have made us one with your Saints in heaven and on earth. Grant that in our earthly pilgrimage we may always be supported by this fellowship of love and prayer, and know ourselves to be surrounded by their witness to your power and mercy..."*  
(BCP, p. 395)

We need this connection to heaven while we live on earth. This is the mystery of our invocation to the Saints, and asking for their help, for their guidance; this is the mystery of the fellowship of the living with the dead.

The psychologist, James Hillman, called this "bridging" the realm between the invisible world and the visible world. Hillman sees Christ as a bridge "because the Incarnation means the presence of the invisible in the common matter of walking-around human life... God-man: visible and invisible become one..."<sup>1</sup>

We stay connected to all the Saints through prayer and celebration to keep the invisible connected to the visible; to know the unity between the Church Triumphant in heaven and the Church Militant on earth; to know that the mortal becomes immortal; to know we are "dust bound for glory."

My mother died seven months ago. I miss her dearly. Sometimes I find myself talking with her, praying with her, asking for strength, for guidance. I wonder what she might do or think or say in any given situation. She is invisible to me now, but I believe the bridge connecting us is strong and the distance across it is short – the bridge of love and prayer and invocation.

Ecclesiasticus 44:1-10, 13-14

Psalm 150

Revelation 7:9-17

Matthew 5:1-12

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<sup>1</sup> James Hillman, *The Soul's Code*, Warner Books/Random House, New York, 1996, p.110.