

Reflecting On One of the Most Important Catholic Prayers – The Hail Mary

Each line of the popular Catholic prayer recited countless times since our childhood—the Hail Mary—is rich in meaning and is meant to lead us to reflect deeply on our faith. Although the prayer is addressed to Our Lady, the connecting thread throughout the prayer is the one at the center of our faith: Jesus. If we read it closely, we see that it's a Christ-centered prayer that gives Jesus great praise.



The Hail Mary prayer is separated into two main parts:

1. Recognizing Mary as the sinless mother of Jesus, the one who gave birth to our Savior, and played a role in our salvation.
2. Asking Blessed Mary to pray for us "*now and at the hour of our death,*" and to be our intercessor before her son.

Pope John Paul II, who was devoted to Blessed Mary, wrote of the importance and meaning of this prayer in his apostolic letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*. Let's take a closer look at this prayer to understand why it's one of the top three prayers (along with the Our Father and Glory Be) of our faith.

"Hail Mary, full of Grace, the Lord is with you."



The opening line of the prayer is taken directly from the Bible when the angel Gabriel appears to Mary during the Annunciation of the Lord (Luke 1:28) informing her that she will become pregnant by the Holy Spirit. When he greets her he says "Hail Mary, full of Grace, the Lord is with you." Here the angel is declaring his admiration to Mary for being born full of God's grace, (or without original sin) and for being the

woman worthy of praise for being chosen by God to carry our all-holy, all-powerful Savior in her womb—"the Lord is with you."

"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus."



After learning she was pregnant, Mary visited her relative, Elizabeth. As soon as Elizabeth laid eyes on Mary, she said with great awe the words, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus." (Luke 1:41). Like a star-struck fan a million times over, she is in awe of young Mary for being the most "blessed" of all women and being the only one worthy of carrying Jesus, the most "blessed" baby in her womb.

In these first two lines, it's important to recognize as Pope John Paul II explains that "although the Hail Mary is addressed to Our Lady, it is to Jesus that the act of love is ultimately directed." Through their words, the angel Gabriel and Elizabeth are giving praise to God for the Incarnation and the mysteries of our faith: that God was born among us, walked the earth, and ultimately died on the cross for us and rose from the dead.

“Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now, and at the hour of death.”



The second part of the prayer is where we declare that we are sinners and in need of lots of help. We all know that one day we will meet our maker and have been warned that living a life of sin can stand in the way of our salvation. We're asking Blessed Mary to pray for us on our behalf to her son, our Lord, now, and most importantly, at the hour of our death. Again, here we are pointing out that Mary is the "Mother of God," the God whom we

acknowledge as being the Holy One and the Most High. He is the only one who can forgive us our sins.

How can I get the most out of saying the Hail Mary?

When we say prayers over and over, they can sometimes lose their impact unless we stop and let the meaning of the words sink in. When you say the Hail Mary, stop after each line and reflect on what you've just said. Think about where we'd be if Jesus didn't die for our sins? Or if Blessed Mary didn't say yes to God's plan to give birth to Jesus. When you think about it this way, you can't help but join Elizabeth and the angel Gabriel in praising Blessed Mary for her willingness to play a pivotal role in God's plan for our salvation, and adoring God for coming up with the plan.