

Reading Group Questions for
Mary and Me: Catholic Women Reflect on the Mother of God
by Ginny Kubitz Moyer

INTRODUCTION

- What are your early experiences of Mary? Was she part of your faith tradition as a child? Are there certain visual images of Mary that you remember from childhood or later in life?
- Moyer discusses the various attitudes towards Mary, both within and outside of Catholicism. Have you ever had a conversation about Mary with someone who had a different viewpoint on her than you did? What did you learn?

ANNUNCIATION: SAYING "YES"

- Alice talks about how Mary is an amazing example of courage. Is courage a trait that you instinctively associate with Mary? If not, what are the qualities that come to mind when you think of her?
- What are decisions or choices in your own life that have required courage? Did you realize that you were being courageous at the time, or only with hindsight? How do these experiences relate to Mary's own "yes"?
- Beth explains that Mary is "a beautiful way to get to her son, maybe especially for women." What are some ways that Mary might function as a "bridge" to bring people to Christ? Has she ever played that role in your life?

VISITATION: THE JOURNEY INTO COMMUNITY

- When Karen went to the Holy Land and saw the difficult terrain that Mary traveled over to visit Elizabeth, it made her realize that Mary must have been “very brave, active, and even a little gritty.” Have you ever come to understand someone in a new light by seeing the environment in which he/she lived? How has your own environment shaped you?
- Mary went out of her way (quite literally!) to support her cousin and celebrate with her. Is there someone in your life right now who could use your support, or who would love to celebrate with you?
- Sister Kristin’s work with drug addicts and prostitutes has helped her connect with the Visitation. As she says, “I think there’s a magic in women coming together, in which they can really touch one another at a deeply meaningful core, and bring out the best in one another.” Think of a time when a woman in your life brought out the best in you. Did you realize it at the time, or only with hindsight? Does she know the impact she had on you?

NATIVITY: HAVING A MOTHER, BEING A MOTHER

- At a difficult moment in her life as a mom, Trish found comfort by looking at the statue of Mary and remembering that she too was a real person. Do you struggle to imagine Mary as a real person? If so, what might help you recognize her humanity?
- Mary Jo talks about the way that children are often a source of unintentional worry for their parents. Think of ways that Mary might have worried about Jesus, both during his childhood and his adult life.
- Think of your mother, or of a motherly figure in your life. In which way(s) is she like Mary?
- Maria talks about “spiritual maternity,” a way that women who are not mothers themselves can encourage and nurture others. When have you nurtured someone who was not your own child? How might Mary offer support and inspiration in the process?

OUR LADY OF SORROWS: GRIEVING LOSSES

- Sandra shares the experience of turning to Mary during the aftermath of a painful romantic breakup. Are there losses in your own life that can help you relate to the Mary who grieves? Is it easy for you to imagine Mary sharing your sorrow?
- When Alberta became a widow, she began to connect with Mary in a new way. Have you ever contemplated Mary as a widow? What do you think her relationship with Joseph must have been like?
- Moyer talks about how she used to feel that images of the sorrowful Mary holding her dead son were medieval and excessive. Have you ever felt the same way? Why do you think those images have survived over the years?
- Think of women in the world today who suffer the loss of their children (to war, to exploitation, to illness or to addiction, among other things). Consider saying a prayer for all mothers who mourn.

OUR HEAVENLY INTERCESSOR: PRAYING WITH MARY

- Do you pray to Mary as an intercessor? If so, how does it change your experience of prayer? If not, what might Mary be able to add to your prayer life?
- Which woman's story from this chapter most intrigues you? Which seems closest to the way that you pray yourself?
- Following her terrifying experience on 9/11, Marcia developed a deeper relationship with the rosary. She even started a "mother-daughter rosary," inviting friends and family members to pray together. Have you ever prayed with others? How does it feel different from praying alone?

MARY OF THE APPARITIONS: A MOTHER WHO REACHES OUT

- What is your level of knowledge about Marian apparitions? Did you learn about them as a child, or later in life? Are they something you are interested in learning more about?
- Andrea talks about how visiting the shrine at Lourdes helped her in her long battle with anorexia. Have you ever visited a religious shrine or holy site? What was the experience like? Are you still processing it?
- Mary, the teacher and cancer survivor, describes the experience of visiting a Jewish woman who had images of Our Lady of Guadalupe all over the house. Have you ever seen images of Mary being “adopted” by people of different faiths? Why might she have this appeal outside of Christianity?
- Moyer explains that Marian apparitions are considered “private revelation,” and are thus not a required part of a Catholic faith. All the same, many Catholics find great comfort and inspiration in them. Why do you think this is the case? How might the apparition stories enrich your own experience of faith?

IMMACULATE MARY: PERFECTION AND VIRGINITY

- Karen explains that she used to find Mary’s sinlessness to be distancing: “She just seemed so perfect that I felt intimidated by that.” Do you find Mary’s sinlessness to be a barrier to connecting with her? If so, what might help you bridge the gap?
- Lucia talks about resisting the common temptation to see Mary as a “passive, colorless” figure. Do you find it hard to believe that Mary had real human emotions? Think about the Gospel accounts of Mary and imagine the emotional reactions she must have had at key moments in her life.
- Church teaching says that Mary was a virgin her entire life. Is this something that you struggle to understand? Why or why not?
- Several women talk about how they developed a more expansive view of what it means to be a virgin. Beth says, “I like the idea of virginity as innocence, as openness, a womb that has not yet been filled and is open to possibility.” Reflect on this definition and how it might help you understand Mary in a new way.

BRING FLOWERS OF THE FAIREST: CELEBRATING MARY

- Have you ever participated in a May Crowning? If so, what are your memories of them? If not, which aspects of the tradition are most appealing to you?
- Maria, who grew up in Guatemala, describes the solemn Holy Week processions and the way that they honor Mary. Imagine yourself participating in such a procession. How might it enhance your experience of Holy Week? Your experience of Mary?
- Linda, the Catholic school teacher, talks about the May Procession at her school: "It sends nice memories to people who are Catholic, and people who aren't Catholic can't help but be struck by the solemnity of it all." Have you ever been impressed by the reverence or ritual of another faith tradition? What did you learn from that reaction?
- Dolores talks about the cherished Mary statues that she displays with pride. What are some ways that you could celebrate Mary in your own home?

EPILOGUE

- Having read the entire book, which women's stories are most memorable to you? Which ones mirror your own experience of Mary?
- How has your understanding of Mary been enriched by these women's stories?