

POPE FRANCIS

Devoted to Mary



PEGGY WEBER

Creative Communications Sample

Pope Francis and Marian Devotions

Pope Francis, the leader of the Catholic Church, is like all of us—he depends on his Heavenly Mother for help. There is such a rich variety of wonderful ways that the world acknowledges Mary, the Mother of God. Representations of Mary and Marian shrines exist all around the globe. And Pope Francis has visited many of these wonderful shrines, displaying his devotion to Mary and asking us to foster a closer relationship with her ourselves.

Pope Francis: Devoted to Mary highlights Marian traditions and devotions that are special to our beloved pope. In this booklet, you'll see why he feels that those devotions are important for all Catholics.

In the following pages, you will learn about some amazing Marian shrines and the miracles associated with them. You'll also read about the great faith of so many people around the world. It is my prayer that this little booklet will help you grow in your love for the rosary and Mary and, of course, Jesus.

So, whether you are devoted to a very familiar representation of Mary or to Our Lady of Zapopan (Our Lady of Expectations) in western Mexico or to Our Lady of the Gate of Dawn in Lithuania, you can draw strength from praying the rosary and connecting with Our Lady. And you will see how one of the most powerful men in the world needs to turn to his mother each day. Pope Francis loves Our Lady, and his relationship with her can inspire all of us to grow in holiness and prayer.

Peggy Weber

Pope Francis, Mary and I

My Catholic faith and devotion to Mary was fostered from an early age. When I was a child, the rosary was a huge part of our family life. Every Friday night the family gathered around a big radio that stood in our dining room. There we all knelt and prayed the rosary together.

Any car trip that lasted more than 15 minutes meant that my mother was taking out her beads and we all began to pray. Each family member took a turn leading a decade—and there just happened to be five of us.

Statues and pictures of Mary were everywhere in our house, reminding us of the importance of the Blessed Mother. I recall skipping off to school with delight when I could bring some lilacs from our backyard to the classroom shrine for Mary.

Pope Francis, too, has delighted in honoring Mary. He has emphasized her importance frequently during his papacy and has always had a fondness for Mary. However, he has admitted that his own devotion to the rosary waned for a while. For some time, I did not have the same ardor for the rosary that I do now. My affection for it has grown back gradually—unlike the experience of Pope Francis who had an epiphany about it in 1985 while praying the rosary with St. Pope St. John Paul II (see page 8).

Both Pope Francis and I have come to love this beautiful prayer. Now, everywhere he goes on his papal visits, Pope Francis honors the Blessed Mother by bringing flowers. He likes to touch her statue and give her a loving pat of affection.

“The Virgin Mary teaches us what it means to live in the Holy Spirit and what it means to accept the news of God in our life,” Pope Francis said in an April 2013 address during the Angelus. “She conceived Jesus by the work of the Holy Spirit, and every Christian, each one of us, is called to welcome the Word of God, to accept Jesus inside of us and then to bring him to everyone.”

Like Pope Francis, I also love images of Mary and visiting various shrines. Our kitchen has a shrine to Mary. I wear a Miraculous Medal around my neck, and my middle name is Marian. In writing and researching

this booklet, I learned about some new and wonderful devotions and shrines to our Blessed Mother—especially those in South America where Pope Francis grew up.

I love the fact that, in Argentina, one million gauchos (cowboys) ride their horses on the last Sunday of September to honor Mary.

And I love Pope Francis and how much he loves Mary. It is reported that when he was given a replica of Our Lady of Aparecida in Brazil, he cradled the statue in his arm and blessed the crowds with it. He only let it go when he wanted to hug the sick and infirm who were waiting to meet him.

Dear Mary, thank you for being our mother and helping us to know your son better. Thank you for your intercession and your example of saying yes to God—even when it is hard. Thank you for standing by the cross and showing what it means to be loyal and faithful and loving during times of great sorrow. Thank you, dearest mother, for being our mother.



Mary, Pope Francis' Dear Friend

The day after Pope Francis was elected pope, he called on a very dear friend.

Well, first he went and paid his bill at the hotel in Rome where he had stayed. That photo went all around the world as it showed a man who takes care of his own business and honors his commitments.

Then, he traveled to a special place near the train station in Rome to visit St. Maria Maggiore, one of the four basilicas in Rome. He brought flowers to an image of the Blessed Mother there. This Byzantine icon is known as the “Salus Populi Romani,” Protectress of the Roman People. The image of the Madonna and Child dates back to the 5th century. Located in the Borghese Chapel of the basilica, the painting measures five feet high by three and a quarter feet wide.

It also is located in a special church, dedicated to Mary, that has a miraculous beginning. Tradition states that the Blessed Mother herself chose the location. History says that she appeared in a dream to both a patrician named John and Pope Liberius and asked that a church be built in her honor. She said a miracle would show the site.

The morning of August 5th, the Esquiline Hill in Rome was covered with a blanket of snow. The pope traced out the perimeter of the basilica in the snow, and John paid for the construction of the new church.

There was no snow on the day Pope Francis visited, but at this very same church, he gave the Blessed Mother a small bouquet and sang the *Salve Regina*. (see page 30). It was a very physical and personal way for Pope Francis to connect with the Blessed Mother and to begin his pontificate. He turned to his mother, his dear friend, in time of need to ask for help and protection.

That is something he does a lot. Immediately after his election, when Pope Francis met with the cardinals, he said, “I entrust my ministry and your ministry to the powerful intercession of Mary, our Mother, Mother of the Church. Under her maternal gaze, may each one of you walk happy and

docile on your path, listening to the advice of her divine son...and bearing witness to the true faith in the constant presence of the Lord.”

Pope Francis works hard at staying connected to his dear friend, Mary. One might say that he is tethered to her with his rosary beads. He was praying the rosary during the time of the second vote in the Sistine Chapel when he was elected pope.

He says that he prays three rosaries a day. When he was asked in an interview what Mary meant to him, he did not give a deep theological answer. The brilliant Jesuit could have spoken at length on the topic and quoted many books and sources. Instead, he said simply, “She is my mama.”

He visits his “mama” regularly through prayer and by traveling to her statues and shrines. “A Christian without the Madonna is an orphan. And a Christian without the Church is an orphan,” Pope Francis said in June 2014.

“A Christian needs these two women...the Church and the Madonna,” he said. “And to make a ‘test’ of a good Christian vocation, you need to ask yourself: ‘How is my relationship with these two mothers going?’”

So, how’s it going?

Dear Mary, thank you for helping us as we face new challenges and even as we face just the tasks of everyday life. You have been a good and loving person. You helped others at the wedding feast in Cana. You brought joy to Elizabeth with your visit. You understood how special your son was when you found him in the temple. And you fled your homeland to protect your son. Your love knows no bounds and is always there for us. We only need to visit with you and ask.

Reflection:

- If you were elected pope, what would be one of the first things you would do?
- How do you honor the Blessed Mother in your home and life?
- What can you do to improve your relationship with your “mama”?

POPE FRANCIS

Devoted to Mary

Celebrate with Pope Francis the rich Catholic tradition of devotion to our Blessed Mother Mary. Marian shrines exist all around the globe and Pope Francis has visited many of them, displaying his devotion to Mary and urging us to foster a closer relationship with her ourselves. In *Pope Francis: Devoted to Mary*, you will learn why Pope Francis has visited so many Marian shrines, why he calls Mary his “Moma,” and why such devotion is important for all Catholics.

This book, along with many other Creative Communications for the Parish products, is available on **amazonkindle** and **nook**.

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