

Gabriel called Mary "favored one" (Luke 1:28), and Mary's cousin, Elizabeth, upon seeing her, cried out, "Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb" (Luke 1:42). Catholics throughout the ages have continued this tradition of honoring Mary. While Jesus Christ is the center of our faith, Catholics often look to Mary as the perfect example of Christian humility and trust in God.

It is important to understand the difference between worshiping God and honoring Mary. Even many Catholics confuse this point. To **honor** someone means to hold him or her in great respect or high regard. To **worship** means to show reverence for a god. Catholics worship only God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Similarly, when Catholics pray the Hail Mary, we do not pray to Mary. We are honoring her with words taken directly from Scripture (Luke 1:28, 42) and then asking her to pray for us because of her unique closeness to our Lord.

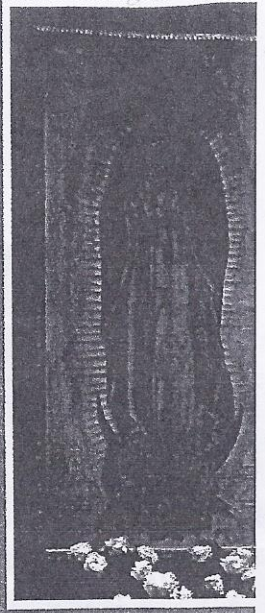
God the Father honors Mary. In Luke's Gospel, the angel Gabriel tells Mary that she has found favor with God (Luke 1:28, 30). God chooses Mary from among all women to be the Mother of Jesus, "the Word made flesh." God entrusts this holy young woman with the Light of the World. Because of her "yes," we would have a Savior.

Jesus honors Mary. Jesus shows special respect for his Mother by granting her requests as in the marriage feast at Cana (John 2:1–11) and by holding her up as an example of one who hears the word of God and lives it (Luke 8:21). At the time of his death, Jesus makes sure Mary will be cared for by his "beloved disciple" (John 19:26–27).

Even the friends and disciples of Jesus sometimes brought their problems to Mary, trusting in her closeness to her Son. At the wedding feast at Cana, Mary steps in to help when the wine begins to run low. Still, Mary reminds the disciples that they must rely only on Jesus with the words, "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5). Mary also prayed with the disciples while they waited for the coming of the Spirit (Acts 1:14). These events take on an even greater significance when we understand that, at the time of Jesus, women had very little social standing.



Our Mother of Perpetual Help



Our Lady of Guadalupe

The early Christian Church honored Mary. Written within the century following the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Gospels reflect the thinking of the early Church. As early as the year 150, Christian artists began painting pictures of Mary holding the Infant Jesus. The Catholic Church's devotion to Mary is deeply rooted in tradition.

- What role does Mary play in your faith?
- How do you understand Mary's role in the Church?



How do Catholics honor Mary?

The Hail Mary

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Just as we erect buildings, ballparks, and other special places in the name of respected public figures, so Catholics often name churches in Mary's honor. And just as we fashion statues of great men and women, Catholics often use images of Mary to help them reflect on her holiness and pure, humble life. In doing this, we aren't worshiping Mary, rather we're holding her up as inspiration. Mary reminds us that when we simply say "yes," we bring Christ to our world.