

Fr. Rudy's Reflections
The Fourth Sunday of Advent
December 22, 2024

Hail Mary, Full of Grace

My Brothers and Sisters in the Risen Lord,

In moments of uncertainty, prayer is often where we turn. Consider, for example, the words of the Hail Mary whispered by an anxious mother as she watches her child struggle with illness or murmured by a young person, in the quiet of a church, who is seeking direction in their life. This prayer, rooted in the Gospel of Luke, has offered peace, hope, and comfort to countless Catholics over the centuries. In today's Fourth Week of Advent, we are reminded of the origins of this prayer in the story of Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth. Elizabeth's words, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb," form a central part of what we now know as the Hail Mary.

The Hail Mary as we pray this prayer today is a blend of Scripture and tradition. The first part comes directly from the Gospel of Luke, where the angel Gabriel greets Mary with the words, "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you," followed by Elizabeth's blessing. In these lines, we see the reverence and awe that surround Mary's role in salvation history. The prayer has evolved over centuries, with its final form dating back to around the sixteenth century, becoming a central element of Catholic devotion and a powerful way to connect with God through Mary's intercession.

The Hail Mary is often called one of the most beautiful prayers of the Catholic faith, and for good reason. It speaks to Mary's unique role in our salvation, chosen to be the mother of God. As Catholics, we ask her to intercede for us, to lift our prayers to her Son. Pope John Paul II emphasized that the Hail Mary, especially when prayed in the Rosary, is a pathway to contemplating the life of Jesus through Mary's eyes. Pope Francis has echoed this sentiment, urging the faithful to see the Hail Mary as a simple yet profound way to connect with the mysteries of Christ's life and Mary's "yes" to God's will.

Mary's journey to Elizabeth not only brought these two holy women together but also linked their roles in God's plan. Elizabeth's child, John the Baptist, would prepare the way for Mary's child, Jesus. As we meditate on this encounter, we are reminded of the interconnectedness of God's works and the quiet, humble way in which Mary embraced her mission.

St. Jerome once said, "The truths contained in the Hail Mary are so sublime, so wonderful that no man or Angel could fully understand them." This Advent, as we prepare to welcome Christ into our hearts, may we see in the Hail Mary a source of strength and inspiration, a reminder of the humble faith that leads us closer to God.

Yours in Christ,
Fr. Rudy