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Who Is Our Mother of Perpetual Help?



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Our Mother of Perpetual Help

A devotional, historical approach to one of the most beloved icons in the Catholic Church

Br. John Matthys, CSsR



ary the Blessed Mother has many titles that inspire and uplift the faithful who are eager to seek her assistance and consolation during their spiritual journey. She is known as Mother of God, Blessed Virgin, Holy Virgin Mary, Mother of Divine Grace, Our Mother, and Our Lady, just to list some of the most well-known.

Mary is the woman of many names, all faces, and all nations. She is the woman given to us by God, through the miracle of the Holy Spirit, to be the Mother of Jesus, our Redeemer. Jesus, from the cross of salvation, gave us his Mother Mary to be our heavenly Mother here on earth.

Scripture says, “Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, behold, your son.’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother’” (John 19:26–27). We believe that Jesus gave Mary the mission to be not only our Mother but the Mother of the Church.

All generations and races acknowledge and respect this exceptional woman of faith. We can turn to her in both good and difficult moments of our lives. She is ready and willing at every moment to be our perpetual help. For Catholics, this happens to be one of her most beloved titles: Our Mother of Perpetual Help, *Madre del Perpetuo Soccorso*, also known as Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

The icon of this special and unique Virgin can be found in the most ornate cathedrals and churches around the world, small and simple chapels, workplaces, and millions of homes as well.

History of the Icon

It is traditional for us to “read” an icon as we do the sacred Scripture in order to more deeply appreciate the timeless message and begin to comprehend the richness of the symbolism they contain. Icons were painted for veneration and as a means for the faithful to express their religious beliefs in a special way to Jesus, Mary, saints, and angels.

In the middle of the fifteenth century, this rare icon created in the Byzantine style was highly honored in a church on the island of Crete. The author of the icon is unknown, and it may well have been modeled after an older icon. The icon stayed there until the sixteenth century when, according to tradition, a merchant from the isle of Crete removed the miraculous icon from one of its churches and took it to Rome, where he became ill and died. The merchant himself

was a sort of “good Samaritan” because he saved the image of Mary from possible obliteration. He told a friend what he had done and asked that Mary’s image be placed in a suitable church for public veneration. His friend promised to fulfill his wish. However, the man’s wife persuaded her husband to keep the icon for himself, and so it hung in their home for a long time.

The original miraculous image of Our Mother of Perpetual Help did eventually make it out into the public. It is enshrined and venerated in the church of the Most Holy Redeemer dedicated to Sant’ Alfonso di Liguori in the Esquiline Hill in Rome. It has a long history and took many detours before this distinctive icon was placed in the care of the Redemptorists.