

Words of praise for *Listen to Your Blessed Mother*

Biblical, personal, engaging, and thought-provoking are just a few words that come to mind when reading this wonderful book! The Virgin Mary truly is our BLESSED Mother, and listening to her words in Scripture can help us to become blessed, too. Gary Zimak has done a great service for both Catholics and non-Catholics in offering *Listen to Your Blessed Mother: Mary's Words in Scripture*, a book that unpacks the biblical words of Mary in a very conversational and easy-to-follow style. The message summary and reflection questions at the end of each chapter will be of great benefit to the reader, too! I highly recommend this book!

Donald Calloway, MIC, STL, author of *Under the Mantle: Marian Thoughts From a 21st Century Priest*

“Listen to your Mother.” How many times did we hear those words growing up? How many times did we roll our eyes and ignore the sage advice only to find out later on that Mom indeed did and does know best, especially our Blessed Mother. Now, straight from Scripture, Gary Zimak has given us even more reason to pay close attention to what our Mother, as in Mary, has to say about living a grace-filled life in this world so we can be with her and her Son in the next. This book will definitely bring you closer to the heart of Christ through the Immaculate Heart of the Mother of God.”

Teresa Tomeo, syndicated Catholic talk-show host
and best-selling Catholic author

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Listen
TO YOUR BLESSED
MOTHER

Mary's Words in Scripture

GARY E. ZIMAK

Foreword by Matt Swaim



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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my Blessed Mother, Mary.
Thank you, Mom, for taking me by the hand
and leading me to your Son.

Ad Jesum Per Mariam!

Acknowledgments

To my beautiful wife, Eileen: Thank you for your constant love and for your support of my work. You are an absolute blessing and the best friend I've ever had. I love you!

To my wonderful daughters, Elizabeth and Mary: Thanks for being such great kids. I'm so proud of both of you, and I really appreciate how you share in my work for the Lord. Mom and I are truly blessed to have such wonderful daughters, and we love you very much!

To all of my friends in Catholic radio: There are too many of you to mention here, but know that I very much appreciate your support, as you allow me to bring the "Good News" to the airwaves.

To my friends at Liguori Publications: Thank you for allowing me to become a part of your family. Together, we have been able to reach many people, and I greatly appreciate you for letting me proclaim the Lord's message through my books.

To everyone who prayed for me as I worked on this book: All I can say is that there were many days when I felt totally dry, but the words suddenly flowed. I attribute that to your prayers, and I am very grateful for your support.

Above all, words cannot express my gratitude to Almighty God for his willingness to work through an imperfect vessel like me. May your will always be done in my life, Lord!

Foreword

Prior to becoming Catholic, I had a distorted view of Mary, mostly because I thought Catholics had a distorted view of Mary. It seemed as though Catholics treated her as a goddess (bad), or like one of those giant inflatable mascots you see in used car lots (worse). I thought they were participating in some kind of grand cultish mob misdirection, focusing on some obscure figure in salvation history, and completely blowing her out of proportion. To me, figures like St. Paul, St. James, and others deserved far more attention.

I still maintain that those men who wrote some of the key doctrinal texts of the New Testament should be read and studied by every Christian. These are people who set things down for us that are necessary to know for salvation. It's interesting, however, to note that while Mary never wrote any canonical texts herself (we don't even know if she was literate), the things she had to say were so important at crucial times in the life and ministry of Jesus that the Gospel writers (Luke, especially) saw a need to share them with us. And because of Luke's pinpoint precision gleaned through his classic medical and scientific training, none of those recorded words are accidental afterthoughts.

I mentioned that I used to think that from outside the Church, Mary seemed to loom larger than Jesus. However, from inside the Church, I've found that she shrinks down to her normal size. Her name comes up only a couple of times in the Liturgy of the Mass, and it's certainly not her I'm receiving in the Eucharist.

For me, she has stopped being some pagan demigoddess and instead has come to be what she was always meant to be: a fellow human being, preserved by the grace of God, chosen to become the model for every Christian.

When she said “yes” to God’s will, she was the first to accept Christ into her heart, as even non-Catholic Christians deem to be important. However, with that “yes” she also showed her willingness to have his flesh and blood inside of her, as we who receive the Eucharist do at each Mass. When I pray the rosary in adoration, I am never tempted to visualize myself praying to Mary as though she were on the altar, but instead I envision her kneeling next to me, teaching me to see my Savior through the eyes of the one who knew him best, because she knew him before anyone else did.

As you read these reflections on Mary’s words in Scripture, it is my hope that you can put yourself in Mary’s sandals. Ponder what was in her heart as she spoke these words, for Luke tells us that she deeply pondered the meaning of mothering the second person of the Blessed Trinity. Her words in Scripture are few but hold powerful meaning for those willing to reflect upon them and internalize them. And if at any point you feel like she’s reading over your shoulder, don’t freak out: That’s actually a good thing.

MATT SWAIM

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Introduction

Why does Mary matter and why should we care about what she has to say? After all, if she's so important, why does she only speak on four occasions in sacred Scripture? I have a great relationship with Jesus, why do I need Mary? If you've asked these questions, you are not alone. Even among Catholics, who (for the most part) accept Mary as part of their spiritual lives, there is a lot of confusion about our Lady's role. I should know. Even though I've been Catholic all of my life, for many years I didn't understand Mary or care about what she had to say. I've since learned that I was wrong... *very* wrong. Accepting Mary as my spiritual Mother, studying her life, and listening to her words have brought me closer to Jesus than all of my previous studies and prayers. Not only is she the model Christian, but as a spiritual Mother, Mary has a profound message that she wants to share with her children. By listening to her words, we can learn to become holier and more devout Catholics. Why? Because Mary knows what she's talking about.

This book is the visible sign of a love story, one that has taken more than fifty years to develop. It is the story of how I have grown to love my Blessed Mother and how that love increases each day. Unfortunately, for most of my life it was a lopsided relationship: She loved me unconditionally, and I ignored her. Even though I knew of her, I can't say I really knew her. Over

the years, I gradually began to appreciate her and learned to ask for her help. It wasn't until very recently, however, that I started treating her as a son should treat his mother: with great love and confidence. Now that I've accepted Mary as my heavenly Mother, I want to share our relationship with as many people as possible.

I was baptized into the Catholic faith as an infant and was always comfortable with the idea that Mary was an important part of being Catholic. My mother had a great devotion to her. Statues and pictures of our Lady were spread throughout the Zimak household. In fact, whenever we needed good weather for an outdoor event, it was a given that the statue of Mary was placed on the windowsill (always looking out, as if she wouldn't be able to help if she couldn't see out the window). My sister and I definitely knew about the Blessed Mother from an early age. This may sound funny, but I was very surprised when I attended my first day of classes at Maternity BVM School in Philadelphia and discovered that the Blessed Mother actually had a first name. The only name I knew for her was "Blessed Mother," and I was stunned when Sister Maria Melita referred to her by another name. Thinking I discovered a great secret, I rushed home and told my mother, "Did you know the Blessed Mother's name is Mary?" As you can imagine, my mom smiled. She did her job by planting the initial seeds in me that Mary was indeed my Mother. Although it would take many years, that seed would eventually grow and bear great fruit in my life.

All of my grandparents came from Poland, a country that had a great devotion to Mary. This probably accounts for my mother's love of the Blessed Mother. We often visited the Marian shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa, located in Doylestown,

Pennsylvania, and I look back fondly on those trips. I especially remember the Labor Day festivals, where we ate pierogi and kielbasi and listened to plenty of polka music. More importantly, my parents always made sure we'd go inside the church and say a prayer. Surrounded by numerous images of Mary and Jesus, we prayed as a family, and peace descended upon us. With all of this exposure to Mary, it only follows that I would automatically develop a great love for her, right? In reality, nothing could be further from the truth. While I eventually grew to love Mary dearly, there was nothing automatic about that process.

Even though I had seen images of Mary all of my life and accepted her as part of being Catholic, I didn't understand her role. I barely spoke to Jesus, so why should I speak to Mary? When I did pray, I thought I'd go right to the top and speak directly to the Lord. So, what eventually led me to a healthy Marian understanding? Surprisingly it was my self-centeredness and the dissatisfaction with my life that started me on the journey. I had some real needs, and I was willing to try anything.

In 1982, I graduated from college and took a job working for the federal government. Although the salary was very low, I was happy to be employed as the economic conditions during those years were not good. For the next six years, I lived with my parents and was dissatisfied with my life. Even though my spirituality left a lot to be desired, I never stopped going to Mass, and that was a good thing. One Sunday in the fall of 1988, it was announced that our parish would be hosting a miraculous medal novena. In order to better explain what would take place at that novena, a Vincentian priest spoke at all of the Masses and gave us more information. While I would usually daydream during such talks, the priest said something that got my attention. During this novena, we would be able to ask Mary for

help with our intentions, including finding a new job. Now, I was *very* interested as my two biggest intentions were finding a better-paying job and getting a girlfriend. What's there to lose, I thought—I had to give this novena thing a try.

For the next nine days, I attended the miraculous medal novena and asked Mary to help me with my intentions. My hopefulness grew stronger as the priest would read letters from people whose prayers were answered. More importantly, something he said resonated with me: “Be assured that the minute you ask Mary for something in prayer, she is immediately bringing the request to her Son, Jesus.” I was completely bowled over by that statement, as I never heard anyone say that before. Suddenly, after years of praying in vain, I started to believe it was possible for my “impossible” intentions to be granted. During the novena, I sent out my first résumé and prepared to settle in for a long and painful job search, as I needed to find a higher-paying job so I could move out on my own. Although I believed the Blessed Mother could help me to find a new job, I didn't expect she would do so immediately. Within two weeks, however, I not only received an interview from that résumé but was offered a job and a fifty percent salary increase. At this point, I started to see the importance of the Blessed Mother. I viewed her as someone who could put in a good word for me with Jesus. Hardly a perfect relationship, but it was a start.

The new job enabled me to move out of my parents' house and buy a condominium. Although I still didn't have a deep relationship with Mary, I at least understood that she had a place in my life. I told my mother I'd like a statue of the Blessed Mother, and she bought me a nice one from a local religious store. I found a table and displayed Mary prominently in my condo. When I looked at her statue, I felt a sense of peace and even motherly

protection. Although my new parish didn't offer a miraculous medal novena, I was very interested when they announced they were starting a young-adult group known as Twenty Something or Thereabouts. The group was devoted to praying the rosary, eucharistic adoration, and learning more about the Catholic faith, and it was geared toward younger Catholics. I'd like to say I attended these meetings because of my deep love for Jesus and Mary, but my real motivation was to meet a nice Catholic girl. What I didn't realize at the time was that the Lord was calling me to a deeper relationship with him and with his Mother. Because he knew I was spiritually immature, however, he found a way to meet me where I was at. As I attended these meetings and prayed the rosary with people my own age, I grew closer to our Lady and felt that same peace that I initially experienced at the miraculous medal novena. Although my motivation was less than perfect, I was growing spiritually.

In 1993, I met Eileen Moynahan at Twenty Something. She was beautiful, funny, and a devout Catholic. Unfortunately, she also happened to be engaged. As we got to know one another, I was extremely frustrated to find out just how much we had in common. I asked the Lord in prayer why he would make me suffer like this. After years of praying, I finally met the perfect girl for me, and she was unavailable (or so I thought). Over the weeks, Eileen and I became friends and discussed many things. I was astonished to discover she was having second thoughts about her engagement and was thinking of breaking it off. So I decided to take the bold step—and for me it *was* a *bold* step—of asking her out on a date. After an initially positive response, Eileen had some reservations and I was forced to wait. As “luck” would have it, I discovered that my former parish was having its annual miraculous medal novena. Guess where I went for

the next nine days? As soon as I started to pray those familiar prayers, I felt a deep peace and accepted the fact that with our Lady's intercession, all things are possible. Although it took another month, Eileen did break off the engagement and we started dating. Then I realized more than ever that there really *is* something to the Blessed Mother's intercession.

Eventually, Eileen and I got married and, in 1997, we were thrilled to learn we were pregnant. Several weeks into the pregnancy, we were even more excited to find out (during an ultrasound) we were having twin girls. Our initial joy turned into anxiety when the doctor called an hour later to say there was a serious problem with the twins. The next day, we had a follow-up appointment and were told the girls had Twin-to-Twin Transfusion Syndrome, a very rare and often fatal condition that put their lives in jeopardy. To make matters worse, because it was discovered so early in the pregnancy, their chance for survival was very small. Without thinking twice, Eileen and I immediately started praying. Every night we would bring our statue of the Blessed Mother (the one from my condo) into the living room, light a candle, and pray the rosary. In spite of the danger, we felt incredible peace while we prayed. Twice a week we went to Our Lady of Lourdes hospital (how appropriate!) in Camden, New Jersey, for an ultrasound to see if the girls were still alive. The doctors would also measure Eileen's amniotic fluid, which would provide an indication of whether or not the problem was worsening. After an especially bad visit one day, we knew we had to name the girls. We wanted to make sure they would never be forgotten if they died. The names we chose? Mary and Elizabeth. It was our way of calling on our Blessed Mother and asking her (and her cousin) to protect our children. After riding an emotional roller coaster for several weeks, Mary and

Elizabeth Zimak were born on October 27, 1997. Despite being three months premature, the doctors could now treat their medical condition, and their chance for survival improved. We were told by several medical professionals it was a miracle they survived. Grateful beyond belief, we attributed the girls' survival to Mary's intercession. She came through once again.

Although Mary and Elizabeth are healthy teenagers today, their early years were challenging. Developmental issues and immunity concerns really knocked us for a loop. As a result, I neglected my faith. Although I continued to go to Mass, I didn't pray regularly, using the excuse that I was too tired. And, despite having been the beneficiary of the Blessed Mother's help so many times in the past, my relationship with her was still lacking. She was still just someone to turn to when I was in trouble. In no way did I view Mary as my Mother.

As the years passed, I grew to love my Catholic faith like never before. As I started to listen to Catholic radio and read more about the teachings of the Church, I heard more and more people refer to Mary as their Mother. I desired that type of motherly relationship with our Lady in my life and started to pray about it. Taking the advice of someone I heard on the radio, I asked Jesus to help me love his Mother more. In August of 2011, something happened that would put me on the right track. I was attending a Catholic Marketing Network trade show in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, and I met Ray Mooney, who was there to promote Total Consecration to Jesus Through Mary, as popularized by St. Louis de Montfort. Ray asked me if I was interested in making the Total Consecration, and I took an information packet and said I'd think about it. I knew this devotion was very important to Blessed Pope John Paul II, and something about it was attractive to me. Deep in my heart, I

wanted a better relationship with Mary, and this could be just what I needed.

On October 7, 2011, I accepted Mary as my spiritual Mother. On that day, the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, I formally consecrated my life to Jesus through Mary. From that day on, my life has never been the same. I have grown to love Mary and turn to her constantly. She is my Mom and I am her son. Just as my own mother used to take me shopping and on various errands, Mary now takes me by the hand and leads me on the path chosen for me by her Son. And I follow with confidence, knowing that wherever Mary is...Jesus is right there, too.

Now here's the best part: Not only is Mary my Mother, but she's your Mother, too. When Jesus was dying on the cross, he looked at his Mother, standing with the Apostle John, and proclaimed to her, "Woman, behold your son" (John 19:26). Jesus then said to the beloved disciple, "Behold, your mother" (John 19:27). It has always been the Church's understanding that John represented each one of us. According to the Bible, from that hour onward, John accepted Jesus' gift and took Mary into his care. How about you? Have you accepted the gift? Are you ready to allow Mary to become your spiritual Mother?

As our Mother, Mary wants to speak to us. She longs to advise and teach us what it means to have faith and follow God's will. By listening to her words, we can learn to imitate her and grow closer to Jesus. In the pages that follow, we'll look at Mary's words and study her actions. Her greatest desire is to bring us closer to her Son. Together, let's explore our Mother's words and put them into practice in our own lives. Some have questioned Mary's importance, given that she spoke so little in the pages of the Bible. I would counter with the argument that, in those few words, she said all that needed to be said. Let's look

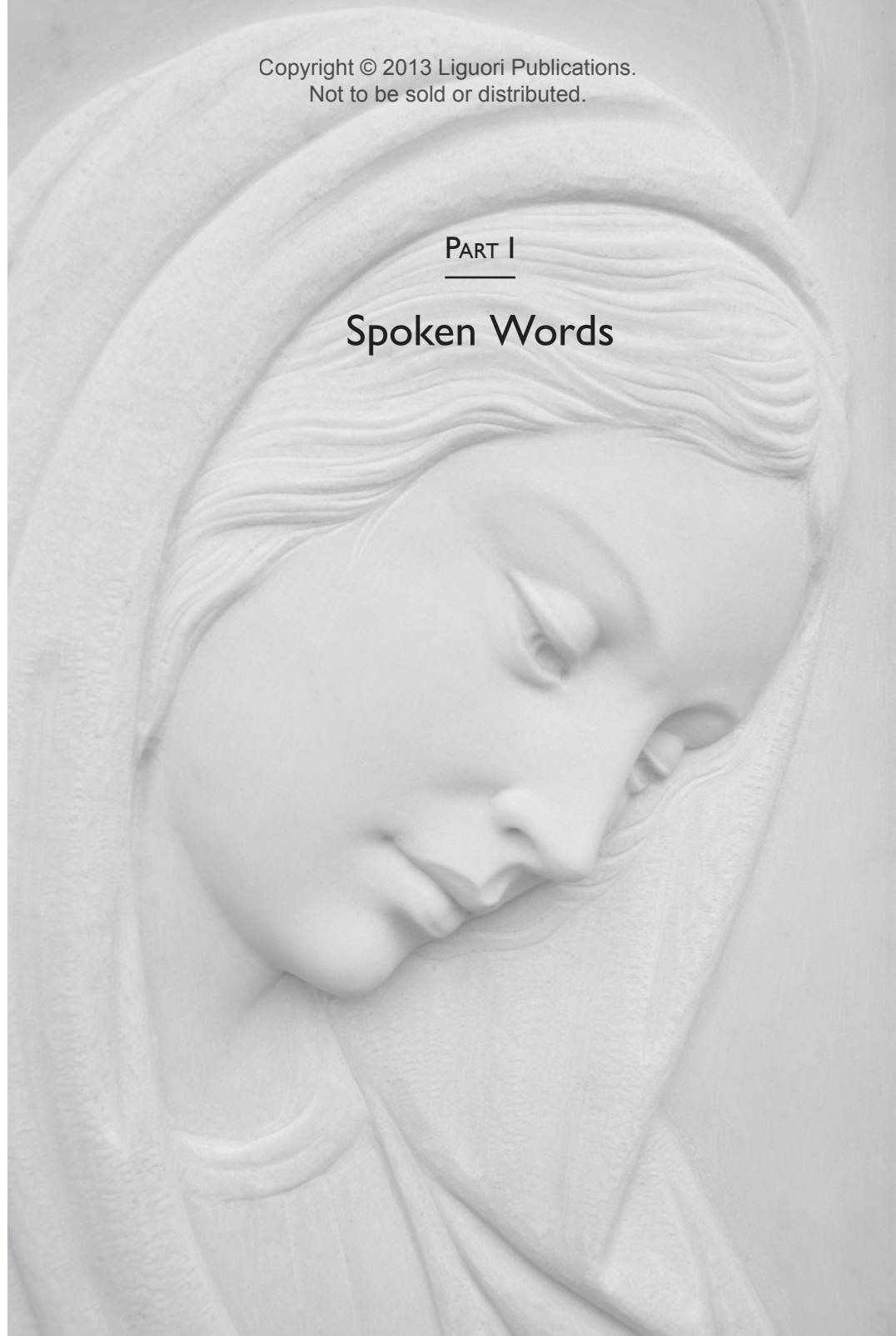
at her words and her actions, seeing where they lead us. I have a hunch that Mary's words are going to lead you where they led me: directly to Jesus.

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PART I

Spoken Words



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CHAPTER 1

Seeking God's Will

“How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?”

LUKE 1:34

Have you ever been visited by an angel? Although the Church teaches that each of us has a guardian angel, most of us have never experienced what it's like to be able to see and hear an angel. In the Bible, we see several examples of angelic visits. Each of these visits has a significant purpose. In the Old Testament, Moses was given an angel to go before him and was instructed by God to “be attentive to him and obey him” (Exodus 23:21). After conceiving a child with Abram and running away, Hagar (the maid of Abram's wife, Sarai) was visited by the angel of the Lord and instructed to submit to her mistress (Genesis 16:7–9). In the Book of Judges, the angel of the Lord also appeared to the barren wife of Manoah (Judges 13:3–5) and told her she would conceive and bear a son, Samson. In the New Testament, we see numerous examples of the appearance of angels: Gabriel appearing to Zechariah (Luke 1:11–20) to announce that Elizabeth would conceive a son (John the Baptist), the angel of the Lord speaking to St. Joseph (in a dream) and urging him to take Mary as his wife, despite the fact that she was pregnant with Jesus (Matthew 1:20). The angel comforted the confused Joseph, explained that the pregnancy occurred by the Holy Spirit, and informed him that Jesus would save the people from their sins. Even our Lord

himself was ministered to by angels, after he was tempted in the desert (Matthew 4:11) and while he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night before his death (Luke 22:43). By looking at these examples, we can clearly see that angels just don't show up for the heck of it. There is always an important purpose attached to their appearance.

One day, God dispatched an angel named Gabriel to a city of Galilee named Nazareth. He was sent to deliver an important message to a young virgin (Mary), who was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph. As usual, the angel arrived without warning. The Bible is silent as to where this meeting took place and what Mary was doing at the time. Was she praying? Was she performing her household chores? Was she inside the house? Was she outside?

While we have no way of knowing with certainty what she was doing when the angel appeared, we can be sure of two things. First, that the Lord reached out to Mary and sent his angel to meet her where she was. As he often does with us, God called to Mary in the midst of her ordinary duties. She didn't need to seek him out. Instead, he found her. We often forget that we can encounter God's presence while carrying out the mundane tasks of our daily lives, and this encounter reminds us it is possible. Secondly, this is the only biblical instance where an angel addresses a person by a title and not his or her proper name. While some translations say "favored one" and others "full of grace," the point remains that Mary was indeed special, and that fact was acknowledged by Gabriel in his salutation. She was chosen for a one-of-a-kind role and was about to be asked to become the Mother of the long-awaited Messiah. A role of this nature called for a special greeting that is evidenced in the angel's words.

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"With Scripture and personal stories, Gary Zimak leads us to a greater appreciation of our Mother in heaven, so that we might strive to imitate her virtues as she takes us by the hand to her Son, Jesus. Highly recommended!"

Donna-Marie Cooper O'Boyle,

EWTN television host and author of sixteen Catholic books, including *The Miraculous Medal: Stories, Prayers, and Devotions*

Our Lady is a woman of few words, but when pondering with our hearts, we begin to understand that wisdom often begins in silence. In *Listen to Your Blessed Mother*, Gary Zimak explores both the spoken and unspoken words that Mary is recorded to have said and acted upon within the New Testament.

Zimak illustrates how Mary is, in fact, Jesus' model disciple. She listened and obeyed God's word. God invites us to do likewise.

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Mary/Spirituality

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