

WOMEN OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

**Their Lives,
Our Hope**

Copyright 2012
Liguori Publications
All rights reserved.



Liguori
LIGUORI, MISSOURI

Imprimi Potest:
Harry Grile, CSsR, Provincial
Denver Province, The Redemptorists

Published by Liguori Publications
Liguori, MO 63057-9999

To order, call 800-325-9521, or visit liguori.org.

Copyright © 2012 Pía Septién

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior written permission of Liguori Publications.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Septién, Pía.

[Mujeres del Nuevo Testamento. English]

Women of the New Testament : their lives, our hope / Pía Septién.—1st ed.
p. cm.

ISBN 978-0-7648-2216-2

1. Women in the Bible--Meditations. 2. Bible. N.T.—Meditations. 3. Catholic Church—Prayers and devotions. I. Title.

BS2445.S3913 2012

225.9'22082—dc23

2012014677

Scripture texts in this work are taken from the *New American Bible*, revised edition © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C., and are used by permission of the copyright owner. All Rights Reserved. No part of the *New American Bible* may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

Excerpts from *Vatican Council II, The Basic Edition: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*, edited by Reverend Austin Flannery, OP, copyright © 2007, Costello Publishing Company, Inc., Northport, NY, are used by permission of the publisher, all rights reserved. No part of these excerpts may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise—without express permission of Costello Publishing Company, Inc.

Quotations of other Vatican documents are used with permission. Copyright Libreria Editrice Vaticana (© Libreria Editrice Vaticana 2012).

Excerpts from English translation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* for the United States of America © 1994, United States Catholic Conference, Inc.—Libreria Editrice Vaticana; English translation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Modifications from the Editio Typica* © 1997, United States Catholic Conference, Inc.—Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

Compliant with *The Roman Missal*, third edition.

Liguori Publications, a nonprofit corporation, is an apostolate of The Redemptorists. To learn more about The Redemptorists, visit Redemptorists.com.

Printed in the United States of America.

16 15 14 13 12 / 5 4 3 2 1

First edition

CONTENTS



Introduction ► 7

I. Women Who Recognized God in a Little Child

Chapter 1: Mary, Mother of Jesus and all people ► 10

Chapter 2: Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist and relative of the Virgin Mary ► 21

Chapter 3: Anna the prophetess, a woman who was able to recognize God in a newborn baby ► 31

II. Women Who Recognized the Greatness of God

Chapter 4: The Widow's Offering: the woman who placed two coins—all she had to live on—in the Temple treasury ► 44

Chapter 5: Martha and Mary, friends of Jesus ► 54

Chapter 6: Lydia, a woman who opened her heart and her home to Jesus ► 68

Chapter 7: Mary Magdalene, first witness of the resurrection ► 77

III. Women Who Experienced the Love and Salvation of Jesus

Chapter 8: A woman who suffered from a hemorrhage for twelve years, and her personal encounter with Jesus ► 92

Chapter 9: The Samaritan woman, a woman whose heart was converted and who became a follower of Jesus ► 104

Chapter 10: The faith and perseverance of a non-Jewish woman ► 116

Copyright 2012
Liguori Publications
All rights reserved.

DEDICATION



The psalm says, children
“are a gift from the LORD” (Psalm 127:3),
and my experience confirms it.

I dedicate this book with all my love
to our four children. I pray every day
that God will grant them the grace
of loving him with all their souls
until the last instant of their lives.

And I thank God for our fifth son, Juan Bosco,
who brought so many lessons of love
to our family during his short life.

Copyright 2012
Liguori Publications
All rights reserved.

Copyright 2012
Liguori Publications
All rights reserved.

INTRODUCTION



This is a continuation of my first book, *Women of the Old Testament*, also published by Liguori Publications. With immense joy, I write this book and hope to help readers encounter the living God.

It is written in the style of an informal heart-to-heart chat. It is not intended to be an academic book, but rather it aims to help us reflect, either individually or as a group, on the lives of some of the women who appear in the New Testament—women who lived in Jesus' time, like Mary Magdalene, or a little while later, like Lydia. Some perhaps knew him personally and spoke with him, like Martha and Mary. Others, like Elizabeth, recognized him as God even before he was born.

As we read along, we will discover what it was that those women saw in Jesus and what led them to follow him. We will also get a glimpse of what he saw in them; for just like us, they were in need of God's love.

This book begins with a chapter dedicated to Mary, the Mother of God and of all humanity, our blessed mother in heaven, so that we will take her example with us as we read the rest of the book.

Copyright 2012
Liguori Publications
All rights reserved.

**I.
WOMEN WHO
RECOGNIZED GOD
IN A LITTLE CHILD**

Copyright 2012
Liguori Publications
All rights reserved.

CHAPTER 1



MARY

Mother of Jesus and all people

“We greet you and call upon you with the Angel’s words: ‘full of grace’ (Luke 1:28), the most beautiful name that God himself has called you from eternity. ‘Full of grace’ are you, Mary, full of divine love [...], providentially predestined to be Mother of the Redeemer and intimately connected to him in the mystery of salvation.

“‘Full of grace’ are you, Mary, who, welcoming with your ‘yes’ the Creator’s plan, opened to us the path of salvation. Teach us also at your school to say our ‘yes’ to the Lord’s will. Let it be a ‘yes’ that joins with your own ‘yes’ without reservations or shadows, a ‘yes’ that the Heavenly Father willed to have need of in order to beget the new Man, Christ, the one Savior of the world and of history.”

POPE BENEDICT XVI TO IMMACULATE MARY
ON THE SPANISH STEPS,
ROME, DECEMBER 8, 2006

Objective

Mary, our blessed mother in heaven, can be studied from very different perspectives since she is the best example of total openness to God's will. In this chapter we will focus on Mary as the Mother of God and as our mother.

Scripture text

- ▶ Mary, the Mother of Jesus, in the childhood narratives
Luke 1:26–56; Luke 2:1–52
- ▶ Mary, the Mother of Jesus, at the wedding in Cana.
John 2:1–12
- ▶ Mary, the Mother of Jesus, at the foot of the cross
John 19:25–30

Introduction to the character

Many books and countless chapters have been written about the Blessed Virgin Mary. God willing, many more are yet to be written!

This book begins with a chapter dedicated to Mary, Mother of Jesus and mother of all people. A beautiful task awaits us! We will read and reflect on Mary's behavior as Jesus' Mother so we can understand how she acts as our mother.

With her example as a loving mother who was always present in the important moments of Jesus' life, she shows us how it is possible to love God above all things and still be present in the lives of the people God has entrusted to us. In Mary's case, that entrusted person was her son, Jesus. In our case, it may be our spouse, children, parents, siblings, friends, colleagues, or acquaintances in the community.

Development of the Bible story

Since the objective of this chapter is to study Mary as the Mother of God and our mother, we will focus on three transcendent moments in her life:

- ▶ The annunciation
- ▶ The wedding feast in Cana
- ▶ Her presence at the foot of the cross

Mary at the annunciation

This exceptionally beautiful Bible story begins with the annunciation of the angel Gabriel to Mary, whose “yes” changed the course of human history. From then on, Mary’s life becomes intimately united to Jesus’—and Jesus’ life to Mary’s.

Three characters in particular comprise this story. A young virgin named Mary; a man named Joseph, of David’s lineage and to whom Mary was engaged; and the angel Gabriel, who had been sent by God.

The angel presents himself to Mary and greets her, paying her the most beautiful compliment that a person could ever be given: “Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you” (Luke 1:28). No less than God, Jesus, the Lord of lords and the king of kings, is with you. And besides that, you are the favored one, full of his grace!

Mary was “greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be” (Luke 1:29). Troubled at hearing what the angel said and not at the messenger’s presence? This tells us a great deal about Mary’s relationship with God. She was probably so close to God that the angel’s presence did not worry her, just the message.

The angel answers, “Do not be afraid, Mary” (Luke 1:30). The angel’s words continue to be just as fitting today as they were then. “Do not be afraid,” God has a plan. Thus, the angel

declares, “And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God” (Luke 1:36–37).

Nothing is impossible for God!

Mary at the wedding in Cana

This passage from Jesus’ life is very famous and has been depicted in countless paintings for posterity. Considered the miracle with which Christ began his public life, this passage is frequently read during the rite of Catholic matrimony.

We are told that a wedding was being celebrated in Cana of Galilee and that Mary was there, as well as Jesus and his disciples.

Before continuing with the story, it is necessary to explain that the celebration of a wedding in Jesus’ time was an occasion for great rejoicing, not just for the couple, but for all of the community. A wedding at that time and in that region of the world was a big event, since it not only broke the routine of heavy labor that the people did to survive, but it was also a celebration that strengthened the community. And a very important part of the celebration was the wine that was served at the feast.

Let us continue with the story of this wedding, in which something happened that no one would ever want to happen at his or her own wedding: The wine ran out! That was when Mary, who had realized what was happening, went into action. There are authors who suggest that Mary probably was helping in the kitchen or serving the food when she saw what had happened and immediately turned to her Son, telling him, “They have no wine” (John 2:3b), as if saying, “Do something for this newlywed couple so they can keep celebrating with their guests on this special day.”

Jesus answered, “Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come” (John 2:4). Jesus thinks that the moment has not yet come to reveal himself to all humanity as the one sent by God. But this response does not prevent Mary’s objective from being fulfilled: avoiding letting the newlyweds suffer embarrassment. Firm in her purpose, she tells the servants, “Do whatever he tells you” (John 2:5).

The next verse tells us how Jesus gives instructions to the servants, telling them to fill six jars with water and bring them to the headwaiter, who says in surprise, “Everyone serves good wine first, and then when people have drunk freely, an inferior one; but you have kept the good wine until now” (John 2:10).

On that day, something begins that will henceforth be a constant reality: Mary’s intercession to Jesus for the needs of human beings.

To Jesus through Mary!

Mary at the foot of the cross

The Gospel of John tells us how, at the end of his life, at the moment of the crucifixion, Jesus was accompanied by four women and John the Apostle. All the rest fled.

It tells us, “Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala” (John 19:25). The Virgin’s presence at the foot of the cross allows us to see her great love for Jesus. There can be no other coherent explanation for the fact that someone would dare to accompany a crucified man in his final moments—no other explanation than love, since only love is capable of being stronger than fear.

Mary stands at her son’s side once more as a companion and witness. With her presence, she supports him and encourages him to fulfill his mission.

But Jesus does not let himself be outdone in generosity, and even in the midst of his great suffering, as he saw his mother and the beloved disciple with her, “he said to his mother, ‘Woman, behold, your son.’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother.’ And from that hour the disciple took her into his home” (John 19:26–27).

What does Mary’s story teach us?

- ▶ It shows us the greatness of her faith, which led her to say the “yes” that changed human history.
- ▶ It teaches us that Mary’s response springs from her great faith in God and her intention to be faithful to him always.
- ▶ It encourages us to take seriously the angel who declared, “Do not be afraid” (Luke 1:30). This is an important lesson for us as twenty-first-century men and women who are constantly worrying: We worry about what happened, what is happening, and what could happen.
- ▶ It reminds us that what happened belongs to the past and we cannot change it, but we can learn from it, and we can do something about what is happening now. As for what will happen in the future, we can do everything possible so that things turn out well.
- ▶ It teaches us to get busy and not to fret.
- ▶ It helps us value the role Mary played during Jesus’ life as she stood by his side.
- ▶ It reveals how Mary is in touch with people’s needs, and that just as she was attentive to that newlywed couple, she is constantly attentive to us.
- ▶ It shows Mary’s tenacity as she gently but firmly asks Jesus to act in favor of the newlyweds.
- ▶ It shows us that Jesus listens to his mother.

- ▶ It helps us see how Mary was present in the joyful and pleasant times of her Son's life, like his birth or the wedding at Cana, and in the hard times like the crucifixion.
- ▶ It shows us Mary's fidelity as she stood by her Son to the end.
- ▶ It teaches us that love is capable of being stronger than fear. Mary was there, at the foot of the cross.
- ▶ It also teaches us how she is our adoptive mother. One of the last things Jesus said before dying was, "Behold your mother" (John 19:26). And the Gospel tells us that from that day on, the disciple took her into his home.
- ▶ It teaches us to value Mary as the Mother of God and our mother.

What does the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tell us?

- §148: "The Virgin Mary most perfectly embodies the obedience of faith. By faith Mary welcomes the tidings and promise brought by the angel Gabriel, believing that 'with God nothing will be impossible' (Luke 1:37; see Genesis 18:14)."
- §149: "Throughout her life and until her last ordeal (see Luke 2:35), when Jesus her son died on the cross, Mary's faith never wavered. She never ceased to believe in the fulfillment of God's word. And so the Church venerates in Mary the purest realization of faith."
- §144: Mary is the perfect model of obedience of faith.
- §165: Mary and the saints provide an example of faith.
- §437: Jesus Christ was born of Mary.
- §456: The Creed says Jesus' incarnation was by the work of the Holy Spirit.
- §484: The annunciation to Mary begins "the fullness of time."
- §485: Mary conceives the "eternal Son of the Father."

- §724: “In Mary, the Holy Spirit manifests the Son of the Father....She is the burning bush of the definitive theophany.”
- §726: Mary, Mother of the “whole Christ.”
- §964: She models unity with Jesus.
- §2030: She is an example of holiness.
- §2617: Mary’s prayer as found in Scripture and her radical “yes” to God’s plan.
- §2619: Mary’s canticle, the *Magnificat* and its significance.

Questions and ideas for personal reflection

- ▶ Now that I have read about Mary, what have I learned about her way of working? Note well: The question is not about Mary’s personal history, which is already familiar to me, but about the love she put into her actions.
- ▶ If an angel were to appear to me, what would I do? What would I think? What would surprise me? The appearance of the messenger or the words?
- ▶ How much time do I spend worried, fearful, overwhelmed?
- ▶ I will take a pen and paper and draw a line down the middle of the page. On one side, I will write down the things that worry me, but which I cannot control, such as whether or not it will rain. And on the other side, I will write down the things I *can* control, such as finishing a job. The point is to realize that I worry about things about which I can do absolutely nothing, so worrying about them gets me nowhere. On the other hand, with the list of things I do have control over, I will see what I can do to take care of them. So instead of worrying, I will work on taking care of things as best I can.
- ▶ How is my relationship with Mary? Do I treat her like a mother? Does it make me happy to know that she is looking out for me, just as she did for Jesus?

- ▶ What did I learn from each of the three moments of Mary's life that were covered in this chapter? From the annunciation? From the wedding at Cana? From Mary at the foot of the cross?
- ▶ What can I do to draw closer to Mary and trust more in her help as my intercessor with Jesus?

Group questions and activities

- ▶ What have you learned from Mary?
- ▶ What would you think if an angel were to appear to you and say, "Hail, favored one, the Lord is with you" (Luke 1:28)?
- ▶ Saint Marcellin Champagnat (1789–1840), a French priest and founder of the Marist Brothers, adopted the motto: "All to Jesus through Mary; all to Mary for Jesus." What does this motto say to you?
- ▶ As a group, discuss the following:
 - ▷ The past is in the past, and there is nothing we can do to change it. What we *can* do is learn from it, and so we live it with faith.
 - ▷ We *can* do something in the present. And so we live it with charity.
 - ▷ In the future, we *can* do our part so that things turn out well. And so we live it with hope.
 - ▷ How many times have we thought that things are going to happen, and when the time comes they end up not happening...and we realize we had been wearing ourselves out imagining what they were going to say to us, what we were going to answer, etc.?
- ▶ In the Mass, immediately after praying the Our Father, the priest says, "Deliver us, Lord, we pray, from every evil, graciously grant peace in our days, that, by the help of your mercy, we may always be free from sin and safe from all distress, as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Savior,

Jesus Christ.” What does this prayer tell us? Do we realize that we are asking Jesus for peace in our life so that we can live free from anxiety, worry, and unrest?

- ▶ What do you think about the statement made in this chapter that “love can be stronger than fear”?
- ▶ Discuss the following Loreto litanies:
 - ▷ Virgin most powerful, pray for us.
 - ▷ Virgin most faithful, pray for us.
 - ▷ Cause of our joy, pray for us.
 - ▷ Gate of heaven, pray for us.
 - ▷ Health of the sick, pray for us.
 - ▷ Refuge of sinners, pray for us.
 - ▷ Comfort of the afflicted, pray for us.
 - ▷ Help of Christians, pray for us.

Practical resolutions

- ▶ Turn to Mary to ask her to protect us. She went through many problems and difficulties, and she understands us.
- ▶ Imitate Mary in her willingness to do what God asks of her.
- ▶ Like Mary, be attentive to others’ needs.
- ▶ Whenever you can, accompany your children in the important moments and decisions of their lives.
- ▶ Be at peace knowing that Mary is always present in our lives, just as she was in Jesus’ life, both in the happy and enjoyable times like Jesus’ birth or the wedding at Cana, and in the hard times such as the crucifixion.
- ▶ Pray the rosary with great devotion as a totally Marian pray-er.
- ▶ Memorize the Litany of Loreto in honor of the Virgin Mary so that you can recite it at any time or place, and so bring the Blessed Virgin to mind.
- ▶ Talk to others about Mary, the Mother of God and our mother, and seek out and read Catholic books about Mary.

Prayer

Prayer of Pope Benedict XVI to Our Lady of Loreto September 1, 2007

Mary, Mother of the “yes,” you listened to Jesus
and know the tone of his voice and the beating of his heart.
Morning Star, speak to us of him,
and tell us about your journey of following him
on the path of faith.

Mary, who dwelt with Jesus in Nazareth,
impress on our lives your sentiments,
your docility, your attentive silence,
and make the Word flourish in genuinely free choices.
Mary, speak to us of Jesus, so that the freshness of our faith
shines in our eyes and warms the hearts of those we meet,
as you did when visiting Elizabeth,
who in her old age rejoiced with you for the gift of life.

Mary, Virgin of the *Magnificat*
help us to bring joy to the world and, as at Cana,
lead every young person involved in service of others
to do only what Jesus will tell them.

Mary, [...] pray that Jesus, dead and risen,
is reborn in us,

and transforms us in a night
full of light, full of him.

Mary, Our Lady of Loreto, Gate of Heaven,
help us to lift our eyes on high.

We want to see Jesus, to speak with him
to proclaim his love to all.

Amen.