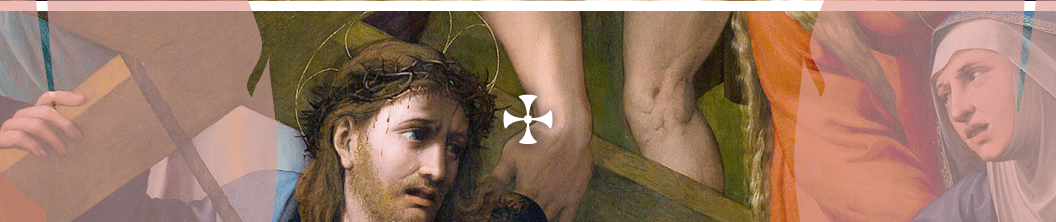
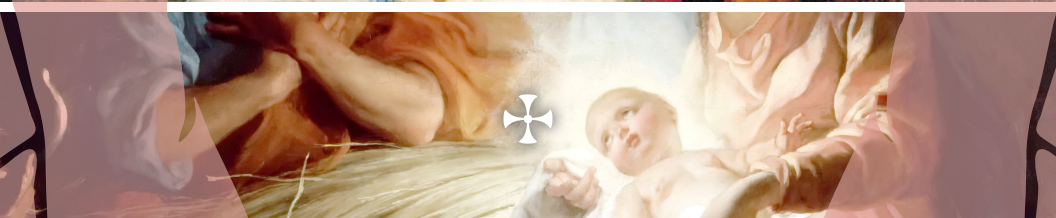
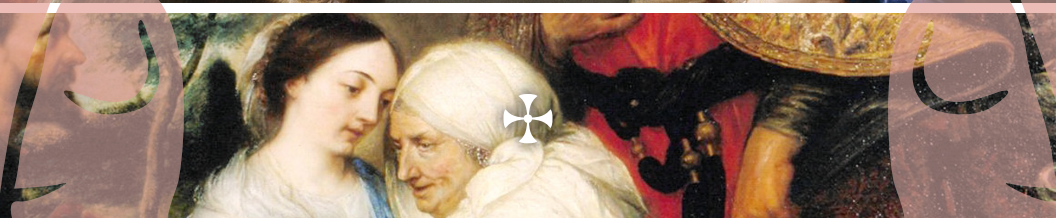
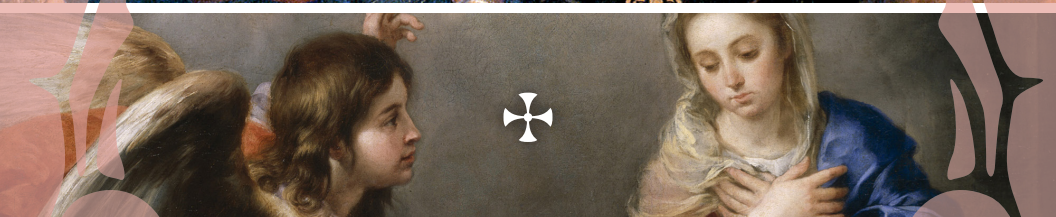
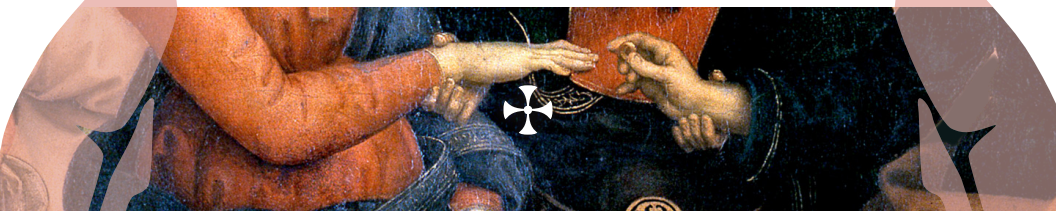


GRATIA
REFLECTIONS

Precious Life

R O S A R Y



"See that you do not despise one of these little ones." —MATTHEW 18:10

MARRIAGE



“That is why a man clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body.”

GENESIS 2:24

✝ Reflection ✝

“From the beginning he created them male and female” and God himself said to them, *“be fertile and multiply.”* (Genesis 1:27–28). Creation itself is the foundation of God’s saving plan; wishing to associate us with his creative work, God designed men and women in his image to share in the spiritual development of one another in cooperation with his eternal love. By its very nature the vocation of marriage is one with God’s creative intentions; the birth of Jesus Christ instantly transformed Mary and Joseph from a married couple into the Holy Family, reflecting the centrality of family in God’s saving plan. And it was at a wedding, of all places, that Christ revealed his glory and began his public ministry (John 2:11).

Married love is ordered to the procreation and education of children, and it is in children that marriage finds its crowning glory (Catechism 1652). By contrast, we recognize that Satan, acting out of hatred for God, despises marriage and aims to annihilate the family; its destruction remains the top priority of the Evil One. As Our Lady prophesied to the Fatima visionary Lucia dos Santos, *“The decisive battle between the kingdom of Christ and Satan will be over marriage and the family.”* Likewise, we are urged by Saint John Paul II, *“The future of humanity passes by way of the family.”* The future of God’s plan rests with mothers and fathers joined in holy matrimony, open to the gift of life, committed to the formation of children, and dedicated to the preservation of humanity by way of the family.

Blessed
is the vocation of
marriage, and with it
the openness to the
gift of children from
the life-giving God.

✠ Inspiration ✠

**SAINTS LOUIS AND
ZÉLIE MARTIN** were

a married Catholic couple in

France, successful artisans—he a watchmaker, she a lacemaker—who fell in love and were married on July 13, 1858 in the Basilica of Notre Dame in Alençon, France only three months after they met. They were the parents of nine children, from which the five surviving daughters entered religious life. Their youngest child, Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, is one of the most well-known and beloved saints in the world. Louis and Zélie were a devout couple who believed in the providence of God and practiced Christian service in the family. They created a home-life of faith and love that nurtured the vocations of their daughters, and they were the first husband and wife in the history of the Church to be canonized as a couple in the same ceremony. Through Saints Louis and Zélie Martin we are inspired to celebrate the vocation of marriage and the blessing of children, all dedicated to the family's role in fulfilling God's divine plan. Saints Louis and Zélie Martin are the patron saints of marriage and parents. Their feast day is July 12.

*“When we had our children, our ideas changed somewhat.
We lived only for them. They were all our happiness, and we
never found any except in them.”*

—A CALL TO DEEPER LOVE, THE FAMILY CORRESPONDENCE
OF THE PARENTS OF SAINT THÉRÈSE OF THE
CHILD JESUS 1863–1885, LETTER 192



The Marriage of the Virgin, Raphael, 1504

2 CONCEPTION



“Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you.”

JEREMIAH 1:5

✝ Reflection ✝

The divine plan for the universe has been formed completely in the mind of God. And God, the divine author, writes history the way you or I write with words. All of creation, all of time, all of humankind, is God’s story of salvation. And in this story, the central character is Jesus Christ, for the life of Christ both validates the history that came before, and foreshadows the story yet to unfold. Seven hundred years before the birth of Christ, the prophet Isaiah predicted, *“The Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14).”* In God’s story, everything before Christ leads to him, while everything after Christ emanates from him. And resting upon God’s divine timeline, situated exactly between the before and the after of the coming of Christ, is the moment—the precise instant—when God’s incarnate life begins.

In his infinite power and wisdom God could have introduced Jesus Christ to our world at any time, in any place, and in any shape, fashion, or form. He chose 1st-century Galilee in a town called Nazareth, and he chose to be formed in the womb of a young Jewish woman named Mary. The angel Gabriel announced, *“You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus”* (Luke 1:31). In Hebrew, Jesus means “God saves”, and Mary’s humble *fiat* fulfilled Isaiah’s ancient promise of hope and salvation. Conception represents the pivotal moment precious life begins. It is the spark of life for one of God’s creatures so that his perfect story may further unfold upon the pages of salvation history.

Blessed
is the **conception** of
a child, the miraculous
moment life begins.

✝ Inspiration ✝

**SAINT GIANNA
BERETTA MOLLA**

was a pediatrician born in 1922 in Magenta, Italy. She was raised Catholic by her loving parents, and ardently embraced her faith as a young girl. At the age of 20, Gianna began her medical studies at the University of Milan, and a decade later was a pediatric specialist with a heartfelt devotion toward mothers, babies, the elderly, and the poor. She was married in 1955 to Pietro Molla, and gave birth to her first child a year later. In 1961, Gianna became pregnant with her fourth child. When doctors spotted a tumor developing in her uterus, they recommended an abortion. Despite the risks to her own life, Gianna opted for surgery to remove the tumor and pleaded with her surgeons to preserve the life of her child. The baby's life was saved, and was eventually delivered by Caesarean section, for which Gianna was eternally grateful. Yet the complications that persisted throughout her pregnancy foretold tragedy; one week after giving birth, Gianna died from septic peritonitis. The life of Saint Gianna Beretta Molla is a testament to the selfless and sanctified defense of innocent life. Saint Gianna Beretta Molla is the patron saint of mothers and the unborn. Her feast day is April 28.

"If you must decide between me and the child, do not hesitate: choose the child, I insist on it. Save the baby."

— SAINT GIANNA BERETTA MOLLA



The Annunciation, Murillo, 1660

DESIGN



“He has made everything beautiful in His time.”

ECCLESIASTES 3:11

✝ Reflection ✝

Common among different societies is the respect for artistic talent. Surely, works such as Michelangelo’s *David* or Leonardo da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa* continue to shape our concept of beauty. We revere the ability of an artist to convert a raw block of marble or a flat palette of paint into a spellbinding creation. Critics gaze at an effigy resting motionless upon a pillar or marvel at a lifeless image spattered upon a canvas, and breathlessly effuse, “*It is a masterpiece. Priceless.*” But deep down, despite the critical acclaim, we acknowledge Michelangelo’s confession that “*The true work of art is but a shadow of the divine perfection.*” Logic insists, therefore, that if we place such high regard on the inanimate *art*, so must we confess the immeasurable value of the human *artist*, a divinely inspired precious life. “*We are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand*” (Isaiah 64:8).

In the mother’s womb the divine artist, all knowing and ever-present, shapes and forms human life according to his perfect designs. “*You formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother’s womb; my days were shaped before one came to be*” (Psalm 139:13, 16). And it was in this way that Our Savior, Jesus Christ, was formed, designed by the hand of God and growing in the womb of Mary as she traveled to visit Elizabeth who was likewise pregnant and carrying a precious life of her own, that of John the Baptist. “*When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the infant leaped in her womb*” (Luke 1:41). In this moment of beauty and eternal consequence, these two expectant mothers embrace, awaiting the fullness of God’s time when their babies will come—one to announce the other who will change the world.

Blessed
is the **design** of
precious life, formed
by God in the
mother's womb.



The Visitation, Lievens, 1638–1640

✠ Inspiration ✠

SAINT GERARD

MAJELLA was born in

1726 in Muro, Italy to a family

of seven. His father died when Gerard was only 12 years old, and he left home to become a tailor's apprentice where he earned a reputation for flawless craftsmanship. At the age of 23 he joined the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer and became a professed lay brother. During the last year of his life, Gerard suffered from tuberculosis and was extremely frail. One day, Gerard forgot his handkerchief while visiting at the home of friends. When one of the family's daughters attempted to return it to him, Gerard said, *"Keep it. It will be useful to you someday."* Soon after, Gerard passed away at the young age of 29. Years later, the girl to whom he had given the handkerchief was in danger of dying during childbirth. She remembered the words of Gerard, and called for the handkerchief that she had treasured as a souvenir. The pain and danger immediately passed, and both her life and the life of her child were saved. Saint Gerard is the patron saint of expectant mothers and unborn children as a result of the many miracles attributed to prayers to him. He is known popularly as "The Mother's Saint", and Italian women call him *il santo del parto felice*, "the Saint of happy childbirth." His feast day is October 16.

*"I would give my life a thousand times that God might not
be offended."*

— SAINT GERARD MAJELLA

4 POSTERITY

“The time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son.”

LUKE 2:7

✝ Reflection ✝

The third chapter of the Gospel of Luke, and the first chapter of the Gospel of Matthew provide the genealogy of Jesus, tracing his lineage over the many generations that came before him. The purpose of this meticulous documentation is to validate, consistent with the Hebrew requirement that a prophecy be completely accurate, that Jesus was in fact a direct descendant of King David, and as such, fulfilled the messianic prophecies of the Hebrew Scriptures. Stated simply, the birth of Jesus proved God kept His promise to Israel. *“For a child will be born, a son will be given”* (Isaiah 9:6). In God’s divine plan, the birth of a child signifies promise; the yet-to-be fulfilled promise of a new life dawning at birth, and the satisfied promises of prior generations, which, like the setting sun, make possible the awakening of a new day.

Every person has two parents, four grandparents, eight great-grandparents, and so on; the number doubles with each generation. Continue back in time, generation upon generation, and the numbers become great. Over millennia, countless individuals through their own lives—and the challenges, sacrifices, hopes, and dreams therein—make possible the dawning of a child’s life today. Therefore, concealed in our suffering today is the promise we make to future generations; that through our faith we, like all those who have come before us, will persevere, that the long line of promises from our distant relatives will continue unbroken. And with great joy and thanksgiving we enable, and thus fulfill, our promise to our posterity whose time according to God’s plan will one day arrive.

Blessed
is the **posterity** of a
newborn child, the latent
promise of one new life,
and the fulfilled promises
of many lives of old.

✠ Inspiration ✠

SAINTS JOACHIM

AND ANNE were the

parents of the Blessed Virgin

Mary, and the grandparents of Jesus. Although Saints Joachim and Anne are not mentioned in the Bible, tradition holds that they were an older couple when Anne gave birth to Mary. The name Anne derives from the Hebrew *Hannah*, meaning “grace”, and Leonard da Vinci painted a remarkable depiction of Saint Anne in 1510, titled “*The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne*.” In it, the Christ-child is shown tussling with a lamb while his mother, Mary, seated on Saint Anne’s lap, attempts to restrain him. This “double Madonna” theme emphasizes the crucial role of Saint Anne in salvation history as the bearer of the Immaculate Conception. We are reminded of the promise of a new life, the happiness a new baby brings to grandparents, and the essential role grandparents play in a child’s upbringing. “*Children’s children are a crown to the aged*” (Proverbs 17:6). Saints Joachim and Anne are the patron saints of grandparents, and Saint Anne is the patron saint of women in labor. Their feast day is July 26.



The Nativity, Coypel, 1728

“O God, you bestowed on Saint Anne such grace that she was found worthy to become the mother of Mary, who brought forth your only begotten son. Grant that we may be helped by her intercession.”

—PRAYER TO SAINT ANNE

SALVATION



*“For it is God who works in you, both to will
and to work for His good pleasure.”*

PHILIPPIANS 2:13

✝ Reflection ✝

As Catholics, we are taught that God made us to know him, to love him, and to serve him in this world, and to be happy with him forever in the next. God loves each of us so desperately, in fact, that he will do anything to help us come home to him, back to his loving embrace, going so far as to sacrifice himself to unimaginable suffering when he was beaten, scourged, and nailed through his hands and feet to a cross. *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish, but have eternal life”* (John 3:16). God is unconditionally committed to each precious life. Simply put, *“God is love”* (1 John 4:8).

Our calling then, is to spend what little time we have on this earth committing our lives to God’s work, so as to spend eternity with him in paradise. Mother Angelica, the founder of the Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN), put it directly when she said, *“We are all called to be great saints; don’t miss the opportunity.”* Jesus Christ reveals the direct path to sainthood when he commands us to love God and love each other (Matthew 22:37–39). Like Jesus Christ, we are called to embrace our earthly suffering with faith, humility, and resignation to God’s divine will, so as to induce good for our neighbor. And Saint Ignatius of Loyola contends, *“If God causes you to suffer much, it is a sign that He has great designs for you, and that He certainly intends to make you a saint.”* Jackie Robinson, whose courage, suffering, and restraint led to the end of racial segregation in professional baseball, provides a beautiful, contemporary model of love: *“A life is not important except in the impact it has on other lives.”*

Blessed
is the **salvation** of each
divinely inspired life,
called by grace to a
covenant with God.

✠ Inspiration ✠

**SAINT TERESA OF
CALCUTTA** was born

Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu in 1910

in Skopje (now the capital of North Macedonia). As a child, Agnes was fascinated by stories of the lives of missionaries, and at age 18 she left home to join the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, known as the Sisters of Loreto, in Ireland. She received the name Sister Mary Teresa after Saint Thérèse of Lisieux. In 1950 Teresa received Vatican permission to found the Missionaries of Charity, a religious congregation devoted to “wholehearted and free service to the poorest of the poor,” starting with the homeless, crippled, blind, disabled, aged, and orphans of Calcutta. Throughout her life, Teresa displayed a deep and steadfast belief in the sanctity of each and every life. At the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, D.C. in 1994, surrounded by worldly and powerful politicians, she bravely spoke in defense of innocent life. She told them: *“The greatest destroyer of peace today is abortion, because it is a war against the child, a direct killing of the innocent child, murder by the mother herself. And if we accept that a mother can kill even her own child, how can we tell other people not to kill one another?”* Saint Teresa of Calcutta is the patron saint of World Youth Day. Her feast day is September 5.

“It is a poverty to decide that a child must die so that you may live as you wish.”

—SAINT TERESA OF CALCUTTA



Christ Falling on the Way to Calvary, Raphael, 1515

God creates

each and every precious life from all eternity,
to ordain His divine plan to unfold.



✠ **Life is Intended** ✠ Innate in each of us is a mysterious sense that we are created not of our own volition but by another who intended us, with deliberation and purpose. As written in the book of Psalms, *"It is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves"* (Psalm 100:3), and in the words of Saint John Paul II, *"In the designs of Providence, there are no mere coincidences."* The creator of the universe, he who designed all the stars in the sky, and the sun and the moon; he who formed the highest mountains, and filled the deepest seas; it was he, the Lord God, who, with foresight and resolve, *"breathed into our nostrils the breath of life."* (Genesis 2:7).

✠ **Life is Divine** ✠ The Lord God is the divine source of every heartbeat, the font of every breath. The thought that the very God who formed the infinite universe likewise *"created us in His image"* (Genesis 1:27) is at once humbling and unfathomable. That the divine plan for the eternal universe, having been formed in the mind of God, was finally made complete through the lives of you and me is, simply, miraculous. And what greater miracle, what greater revelation of the creative power, the infinite wisdom, and the tender love of God, than that of a child, divinely formed from the spark of conception in a mother's womb.

✠ **Life is Precious** ✠ Jesus Christ, eternal Son of God the Father, was conceived in his incarnate existence the moment Mary of Nazareth expressed her humble *fiat* and offered herself as a living shrine to become the Ark of the New Covenant. *"Let it be done to me according to your word"* (Luke 1:38). Conceived in Mary's womb, Jesus was born into poverty among the animals of a stable in Bethlehem, and at last fulfilled God's plan for the salvation of all humankind. As Catholic faithful, we profess that each and every life is precious, and like the life of Jesus Christ, is designed from conception to fulfill the flawless intentions of the creator of heaven and earth. May the **Precious Life Rosary** allow us to devote our lives, through our Blessed Mother Mary, to the protection of all life and the fulfillment of God's perfect plan for all humanity.