



# Boston Catholic Journal

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## Mary Our Advent Hope

**S**ALVE REGINA, *Mater misericordiae. Vita, dulcedo, et spes nostra, salve.*"

**O**n the threshold of Advent many of us begin to experience a sense of anticipation and excitement as we look forward in expectation to the happiness and joy that we hope Christmas and its festivities will bring to us and our families.

The reality, however, is that for many of us — and for reasons that seem to multiply with our years — it may well come to us not as a road to the fulfillment of our dreams (and so often our illusions), but as an avenue through a Vale of Tears. Even our joy, however brief, whispers somehow that it is the harbinger of sorrow. We find this echoed in the beautifully composed Catholic hymn, *Salve Regina*, in which our voices are raised to the Queen of Heaven to whom, "we cry, poor banished children of Eve, mourning and weeping in this vale of tears" — or more literally, "to thee we breathe out (*suspiramus*) our sighs...!"

*"Ad te Suspiramus, gementes et flentes ..."*

Sometimes the pain within us swells up like a bitter-sweet anthem, as painful in its beauty as it is sorrowful in its sound ... and the last note uttered is ever a protracted sigh. At such times, we can do only this ... breathe out our sighs to God and to His Holy Mother. And in the quiet of that shallow breath, how often we empty our souls of all hope ...

*"in hac lacrimarum vale. "*

But *Mary* is our Advent hope ... whose heel, even now, is on that serpentine sorrow that wends its way through the often dark and empty corridors of our lives! She is our Mother in our

motherlessness, our Queen in our broken servitude to sin, and she is our hope in the looming despair which would crush us under both: our sin and our sorrow.

Yes, even the joy of anticipation in Advent so often comes to us commingled with sorrow. The festooned lights of our frail hope span the gulf of our grief and we are led to a passing; a passing within ourselves through a passing of all things. We are sojourners only, pilgrims withal, and exiles in longing. It is the fabric of our being — as long as it is a *being-apart-from-God*. In Advent, then, we come to a twilight, and know not whether it precedes the dawn or the dark. How obscure is this valley, as fraught with hope as it is with impending despair!

But there is one who dwelt in this twilight before us.

How little she, too, understood, comprehended, perceived! How anxious her heart upon the threshold of the impossible; how obscure the way through which God would become man, and how meekly she questioned, even as she did not doubt, what was proffered by God! ... "How can this be?"

She knows our twilight, our consternation, our fear. "How can this be?", we ask of the promises of God — "how can this be?" ... that this valley of tears will lead us to the summit of Paradise? That our sins without number will be numbered no more? Will the salt of our tears become the salt of the earth? And will this dust of the earth be raised up unto God? "*Quomodo fiet istud?*" "How can this be?"

"*Et Verbum caro factum est!*", we affirm with our lips, embrace with our hearts each Sunday at Mass: "*And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us!*" The Light came into this world, not in the day, but in the darkness!

It is Mary, then, whom we first find in this valley, "The Woman" who preceded not God, but "The Man" Whom God assumed in His Son.

Mary ... the paradigm of the possible, in all that is impossible to man, but is possible to God.

Yes, Mary is the Mother of hope!

***"Et Iesum, benedictum fructum ventris tui, nobis post hoc exilium ostende.  
O clemens, O pia, O dulcis, Virgo Maria. "***

"And after this our exile, show unto us the Blessed fruit of thy womb Jesus, O Compassionate, O Holy, O sweet Virgin Mary "

Pray with Mary this Advent; not simply to her ... but with her, for her heart's desire is precisely what you ask of God: to lead you through this vale of tears that, at Christmas, she herself may show you, in the manger of your own poverty, the fruit of all hope, "the blessed fruit of her womb, Jesus."

*A Poor Clare Nun*



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