

Bring flowers of the Rarest

Create a May Altar in your Home

Many people create a small altar in their home and many schools made them in their classrooms during the month of May. The altar is traditionally dedicated to Mary, the mother of God as May is the Marian month when Catholics give special praise and honour to Jesus' mother Mary, gifted to us as our mother too. May is also the first month of summer, so it comes to pass that altars which are created during this time are adorned with flowers that bloom at this time of year and with particular prayers, or items of devotion such as rosary beads to decorate this special space and to express our love and honour to Mary.



History of the May Altar

Our Lady had been proclaimed officially Mother of God at the Council of Ephesus in 431A.D. two years before St. Patrick crossed over to Ireland again from France as a Catholic Bishop to establish the Catholic Church in Ireland. Saint Patrick carried with him his devotion to Our Lady. So right from its inception the Catholic Church in Ireland has displayed a profound devotion to Our Lady. In fact Our Lady had such a special place in the Irish Church she had her own special name: Muire, all other Marys were called Maire.

St. Fiacre, an Irish Saint, who is the Patron Saint of Gardeners (*and Taxi drivers*), is recorded in the 7th Century as having immigrated to France, where he established a garden of healing herbs and flowers around an Oratory of the Blessed Virgin, near Meaux - showing forth both his love for gardening, and also his Marian devotion.

In later Medieval times, Mary Gardens, as they came to be called, became popular, especially in Medieval England. England came to be known as Our Lady's dowry! The Medieval gardeners gave the flowers in their gardens names to associate them with Mary. (*e.g. Marigold – Mary's Gold*). The earliest record of a garden explicitly called a "Mary Garden" involves a fifteenth century monastic accounting record of the purchase of plants "for Saint Mary's garden" by the sacristan of Norwich Priory, in England. Post reformation and enlightenment devotions to Our Lady with flowers and thirty day prayers date from Italy in the 17th and 18th Centuries (*for example: Ferrara, 1784*).

May altar devotion was influenced and furthered, by Louis de Montfort, a famous French Marian Saint, in his Treatise on True Devotion to Mary, who, among other things, counted the decoration of Marian altars a chief exercise of Marian devotion.

Here are a couple of steps that you and your family can follow when preparing to have a May Altar in your home...



1: Plan a nature walk

Decide upon a place to go for a walk together (a local park or even just around your local area as limitations allow). On your nature walk, try to locate some of the following traditional flowers that have been used for May altars over the generations. It was the custom for young children to pick posies of fresh flowers which were placed at the foot of a Mary's statue in the Church or in the May altar. It is good to choose wildflowers, if you can, which are far better for the environment. Cut commercial flowers can sometimes come with a big carbon footprint, which Pope Francis encourages us to try to reduce. Some flowers in bloom during May (*Bláthanna Bealtaine*) that you might like to look for on your nature walk might include....

Primrose – Sabhaircín
Gorse - Aiteann
Cowslip - Bó Bleachtán
Marsh Marigold - Riaschbláth
Meadow buttercup – Fearbán féir



As well as buttercups, daisies, ground violets, dandelions, sprigs of pussy-willow and pansies.

All of nature awakened to new life in springtime is presented to honour Mary, who is herself 'a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys' (Song of Songs 2,1)

2: Pick the location for the May Altar in your home

Try and involve all members of the household in the decision-making about where your family May Altar will be placed. Ensure that this is a space which is clearly accessible to all members (*and ages*) in your home (*or classroom*) and of course is also visible to all visitors to your home (*or classroom*).

3: Pick your symbols

Decide upon which religious items or symbols you would like to include in your new sacred space.

Ensure you also have the following

- Statue of The Blessed Virgin Mary
- Candle
- Cloth or colourful material
- Flowers (*That you have picked on your nature walk*)
- Pictures of mothers and grandmothers and people in your family called Mary, Marian, Miriam, Muireann, Máire (*or other Marian names*)
- Other items that remind you of Mary the Mother of God
- Symbols of meaning to your family

5: Involve all the Family in the decorating the Altar

Gather the family together to set the May Altar. Let all who have gathered plan a part in the decision making of where each item is placed.

6: Pray

During this holy month dedicated to Mary the Mother of God, make an effort to set some time aside as family to say a prayer to Mary. This is also a great opportunity to try out and learn some new prayers to Mary that you might not know. Prayers like...

Praying the Rosary
The Memorare
The Magnificat

The Angelus at 12pm & 6pm
Alma Redemptoris Mater
Finish each day with the Corona Prayer



Don't forget!!

TO

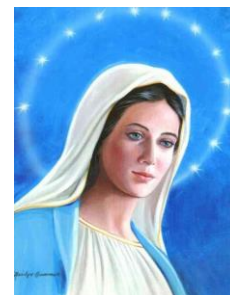
- Spend time at your altar each day to reflect and pray (*both individually and as family*)
- Share your altar with others by bringing it to the attention of those who gather in or visit your home, even if it is only through social media!
- Remember to water (*and replace!!*) the flowers if needed throughout the month.
- As you journey through the month of May, you might also pick up meaningful prayers, symbols, intentions and objects that speak to you or have a special message or significance for your family. Make sure to add these items to your [May Altar to Mary](#).

A few of the Prayers

THE MAGNIFICAT

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for He has looked with favour on the lowliness of His servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is His name. His mercy is for those who fear Him from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, according to the promise He made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to His descendants forever."



THE MEMORARE

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to your protection, implored your help or sought your intercession, was left unaided.

Inspired with this confidence, I fly unto you, O Virgin of virgins my Mother; to you do I come, before you I stand, sinful and sorrowful;

O Mother of your Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in your clemency hear and answer me.

ALMA REDEMPTORIS MATER

Loving mother of the Redeemer, gate of heaven, star of the sea, assist your people who have fallen yet strive to rise again. To the wonderment of nature you bore your Creator, yet remained a virgin after as before. You who received Gabriel's joyful greeting, have pity on us poor sinners.

O Mary, You are my Mother and my hope. Keep us safe beneath your cloak, Amen.

A Mhuire, is tú mo mháthair is mo dhóchas. Tabhair dúinn foscadh faoi do chlócadh.

Sé do bheatha, a Mhuire

Sé do bheatha, a Mhuire, atá lán de ghrásta, Tá an Tiarna leat. Is beannaithe thú idir mná, Agus is beannaithe toradh do bhroinne; Íosa. A Naomh-Mhuire, a Mháthair Dé, guigh orainn na peacaigh, anois, agus ar uair ár mbáis. Amen.

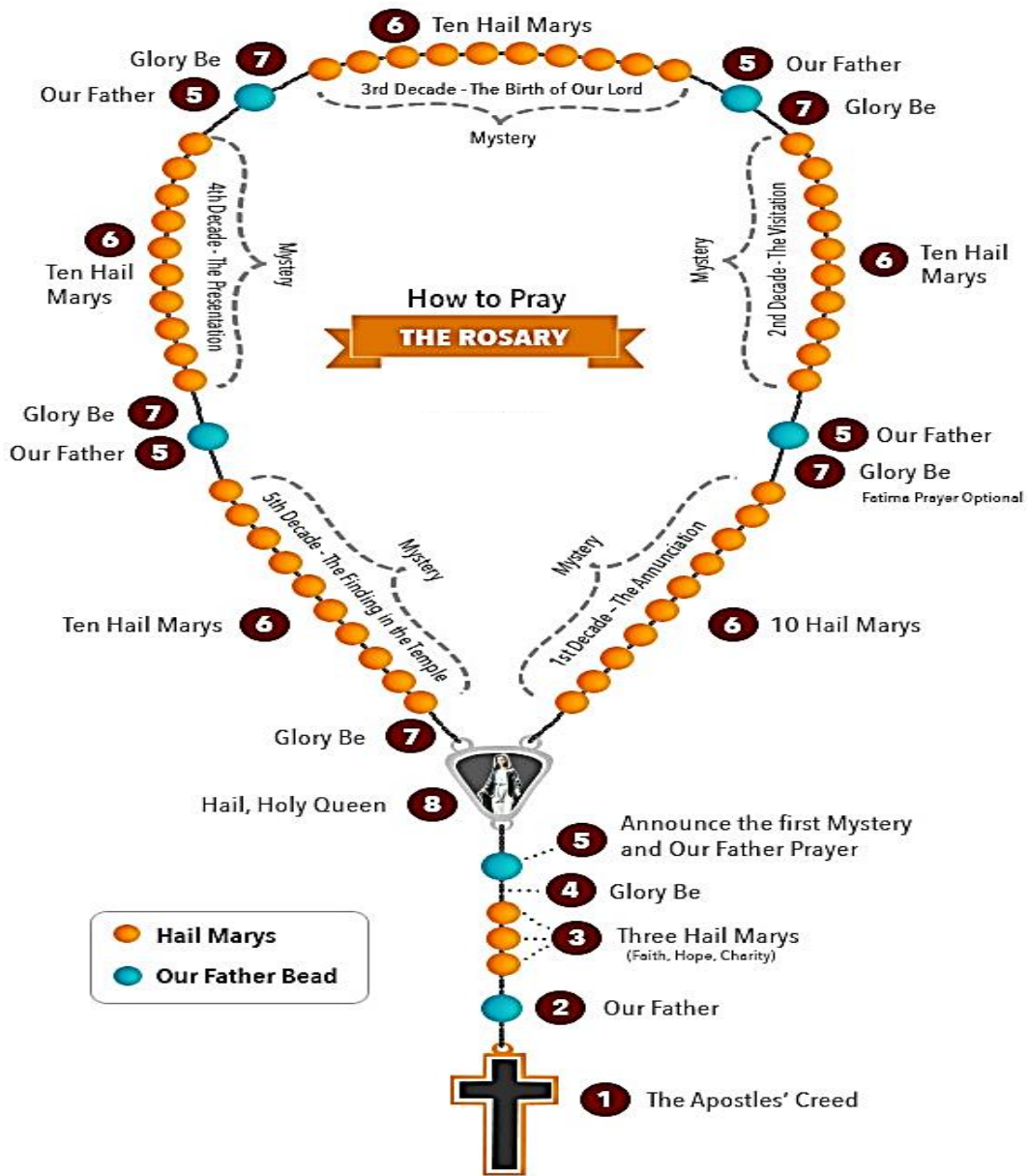
O Mary of Graces, oh answer my plea. Under crosses in trials, to thee do I flee.

O teach me Sweet Mother to follow His will. To journey with courage up Calvary hill.

O Mary my Mother and Mother of all. Be my guide and protectress that I may not fall.

And may you lead me to Heaven above with care. Where with Saints and Angels I'll share.

We pray for all those in our country and throughout the world suffering from the Corona Virus. May its victims and their families be strengthened by the support of our community of faith and restored soon to full health. We also pray for our leaders and medical personnel who deal with the virus. May we keep calm and may we join together in solidarity with care and compassion to tackle this emergency. This we ask in confidence through Christ Our Lord. Amen



Joyful Mystery	Sorrowful Mystery	Glorious Mystery	Light Mystery
Monday-Saturday	Tuesday-Friday	Wednesday-Sunday	Thursday
1. The Annunciation	1. The Agony in the Garden	1. The Resurrection	1. The Baptism in the Jordan
2. The Visitation	2. The Scouring at the Pillar	2. The Ascension of Our Lord	2. The Wedding at Cana
3. The Birth of Our Lord	3. The Crowning with Thorns	3. The Descent of the Holy Spirit	3. The Proclamation of the Kingdom of God
4. The Presentation in the Temple	4. The Carrying of the Cross	4. The Assumption of Our Lady into Heaven	4. The Transfiguration
5. The Finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple	5. The Crucifixion	5. The Coronation of the Blessed Virgin Mary	5. The Institution of the Eucharist