Full of Grit
John Kinney, #51 11-8-26

I had a pre-message in which I modified and edited an article by Fr. Michael Marsh. Here is the link to the article in its entirety. It is excellent.
https://interruptingthesilence.com/2026/11/03/living-with-a-tender-heart-a-reflection-on-hope/

The major New Testament person featured in my message today is seldom mentioned in protestant denominations. On the other hand, Catholics are often accused of almost worshipping this figure. It is time to play "Gospel Who?" All of your names were put in a hat and our lucky chosen contestant for today is Bob. Come on down Bob. Jimmy, what is Bob playing for today. Well Johnny, Bob is playing for a fabulous all expenses paid trip to the Marian shrine in Fatima. But wait, that's not all. Included is an olive wood rosary. Back to you Johnny. How about that Bob! Here is how the game works.

I will give you 4 clues then you have 10 seconds to name the gospel personality described. Are you ready to play? Here are your clues. 1. This major biblical personality made an arduous, uncomfortable journey on a donkey to Bethlehem. 2. This biblical figure's cousin's name was Elizabeth. 3. Our personalities name is 4 letters, the first is an M the last a Y. And for your final clue. Her name is the same as your wife's. Who is this personality? Correct, Mary. Wait there seems to be an objection from our Catholic judges. Sorry. The correct answer is Mary Queen of Heaven, Star of the Sea, Mother of Good Counsel, Mother of Sorrows, Queen of Peace, Virgin of Mercy.

Soon we will be celebrating the Incarnation and Mary's is a major player. Duh! As you know, my faith tradition is Catholicism so I hope to shed some light on why Catholics are so enamored with Mary. Let's start with the Hail Mary, the Catholic prayer second only to the Our Father. Yes, the Hail Mary, so much more than a 4th down, long bomb football desperation pass.

1st verse: "Hail Mary full of grace the Lord is with you."
This is Luke 1: 28: Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you." Biblical. So far so good.

2nd verse: "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb Jesus."
This is Luke 1:42: "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb Jesus."

Biblical. Still good. Take that protestant bible thumpers! Who says we cat lickers don't know scripture? I do. Every Sunday there are 4 scripture readings: Hebrew scripture, psalm, a letter from one of the apostle's and the gospel. Most of my Catholic brothers and sisters figure good enough and seldom read the bible on their own.

3rd verse, 1st part. "Holy Mary."

In the bible holy means "set apart" or consecrated by God for a specific, sacred purpose. Still ok.

More of the 3rd verse. “Holy Mary, mother of God.”

Yikes! That is problematic to say the least. No wonder my non-Catholic brothers and sisters think we have gone too far. Mother of God seems to imply that Mary came before God. Mary “birthed” God? It does not imply that God came from Mary but here is the mother of God logic. It is the classic if A=B and B=C then A=C. Jesus is God. Mary is his mother, so Mary is the mother of God. However, it does not imply that Mary proceeded God. You folks would be more comfortable with Mary, Mother of Jesus. That can get problematic if you separate Jesus’s humanity from his divinity. In the Orthodox church Mary is called “Theotokos” God bearer. Very nice.

In many of the artistic depictions of Mary, she is holding the infant Jesus out towards you the viewer. As if she wants you to take Him and hold Him.

Rest of the prayer including all of the third verse. “Holy Mary mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.” Catholics believe that when you die you are still involved with the living folks to the extent that just as you ask people in the meeting house to pray for you, Catholics believe that we can ask the departed to pray for us. I checked and Quakers do not buy into that. I understand. But the concept gives me great comfort. So where is Walter? To me Walter is right here. “Walter, we miss you. Please pray for us.”

At the wedding in Cana, they were running out of wine and Mary tells Jesus. At first Jesus brushes his mother off but later does what Mary asked and fixes the problem. We were raised to be obedient sons and daughters and **do what our mothers ask us to do.** So, who most likely has an “inside track” to influence Jesus? Ta dah. His mother, Mary. Ergo, Catholics often ask Mary to intercede.

There are many jokes in the following vain. Peter and Jesus are walking through Heaven whereupon they come across a group of 'lowlifes'. Jesus remarks 'How did they get in here!?' To which Peter, the keeper of the gate, says 'They snuck in by the back door.' Jesus then asked, 'who is on duty on the back door? 'Your mother', replied Peter.

I bet a fourth of the Catholic churches in the USA have Mary in the name. Just in the Spokane diocese: “Our Lady of Lourdes”, “St. Mary.” “Mary Queen” “St. Mary of the Rosary.”

The church on the Kalispel reservation is “Our Lady Of Sorrows” which I believe is very fitting in light of how the Kalispels were sorrowfully treated by our government. Over 100 Catholic churches, cathedrals, and basilicas in France have "Notre Dame" (Our Lady) in the title.

Notre Dame de Paris, Notre Dame de Chartres, etc. In the USA, home of the fighting Irish, the University of Noter Dame.

I took several years of French and just recently did it hit me that when French people hear us say Noter Dame, they must cringe. Sacre blu, zee Americans zee are idiots.

Why bonkers over Mary? Here is one explanation. Over the years, Christ became more remote, kind of scary. Many art works depict a stern, royal, imperial, risen Christ sitting on a throne of judgement "up there". That is one of the consequences of the Roman Catholic Church becoming aligned with empire.

The church went so far in that direction that the laity gravitated towards Mary because she was so approachable and the patriarchal church was in sore need of a feminine figure to balance out the overly masculine images.

If you enter St. Joseph's Catholic church in Metaline Falls you will see that it is about as big as the meeting house. At the front center is an altar and behind that a mid-size crucifix on the wall. On the left is a large statue of Mary holding Jesus. Just from size alone you might conclude that Mary is as prominent as Jesus. The church was built in the early 50's and at that time St. Francis Xavier in Spokane built a new church. St. Joseph's was poor so St. Francis Xavier gave the old statue and their old pews to St Joseph's. The statues were meant for a larger church. Hence the proportion miss match. Jesus is not a baby in the statue. He looks like a happy wiggling 3-year-old ready to jump from Mary's arms and run around the church.

I want to mention the statue of St. Joseph on the right side. He is wearing a kind of toga thing and has a lily in his hand. There is the Legend of the Blossoming Staff**:** According to ancient tradition, when the Virgin Mary was to be married, several suitors left their staffs in the Temple. Joseph's staff, or a bare branch he held, miraculously burst into white lilies, signaling him as the man chosen by God. This echoes the Old Testament story of Aaron's staff, which blossomed to confirm his priesthood. Hmmm. My beef is that the last thing Joseph looks like is a carpenter. Instead, he looks like a florist. There is one thing I do like about the statue, the look on Joseph's face. He looks like this (deer's eyes caught in a cars headlights). I call him the patron saint of the bewildered as in, "What the heck now. Not another dream." I have always wanted to sneak into church and dress Joseph in Carhart overalls, put a carpenter's belt round his waist and a hammer in his hand. I have also wanted to put an "I Love You" heart shaped helium ballon in the baby Jesus's hand. I think Mary, Joseph and Jesus would get a kick out of it. I would also get a kick out of it. A kick out the door.

Here is an amazing thing about Mary. It is easy to miss. When Moses is called by Yahweh, he tries to weasel out of it, "Can't do it. I have a speech impediment." Isaiah, "Not me. I am a man of unclean lips." Amos, "I am a sheepherder. A tender of sycamores."

Peter, "Leave me. I am a sinful man." Mary asks the angel a very valid question. How is my pregnancy to come about and then Mary says, "**Let it be** done unto me." Hmm. I bet there is a song in this somewhere. Let me see:

When I find myself in times of trouble, Mother Mary comes to me
Speaking words of wisdom, ~~let it be~~ "just be chill"
And in my hour of darkness because we changed the clocks,
Speaking words of wisdom, ~~let it be~~. "just be chill" just be chill.

But I digress. All of the others get hung up on "not being worthy". Mary knows it has nothing to do with being worthy. Raise your hand if you think you are worthy.

You would think that after the Annunciation, Mary would go on a 30-day retreat to spend quiet time alone to ponder the message? What does she do? She immediately sets off to her cousin Elizabeth to provide support and help.

Here is where the image of a mild, meek Mary gets shattered.

Luke 1:51-53

And Mary said, "He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the imagination 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.

Over the past century, at least three countries—India, Argentina, and Guatemala—have banned or restricted the public recitation of Mary's Magnificat because its message of overturning the powerful was deemed politically subversive.

- **Argentina:** The military junta in the 1970s/80s outlawed the text after the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo displayed it on placards.
- **Guatemala:** The government banned its public recitation in the 1980s, viewing its focus on the poor as dangerous.
- **India:** During British rule, its recitation was forbidden in some churches for being "seditious".

Benedictine poet and essayist Kathleen Norris says: *The Magnificat reminds us that what we most value, all that gives us status—power, pride, strength and wealth—can be a barrier to receiving what God has in store for us.*

If we have it all, or think we can buy it all, there will be no Christmas for us. If we are full of ourselves, there will be no room for God to enter our hearts at Christmas. Mary's prayer of praise, like many of the psalms, calls us to consider our true condition:

God is God, and we are the creatures God formed out of earth. The nations are but nations, and even the power of a mighty army cannot save us. We all return to dust. And if we hope to rise in God's new creation, where love and justice will reign triumphant, our responsibility, here and now, is to reject the temptation to employ power and force and oppression against those weaker than ourselves. We honor the Incarnation best by honoring God's image in all people, and seeking to make this world into a place of welcome for the Prince of Peace.

I will conclude with this by Rachel Held Evans, from "Wholehearted Faith."

I am more aware than ever of the startling and profound reality that I am a Christian not because of anything I've done but because a teenage girl living in occupied Palestine at one of the most dangerous moments in history said yes—yes to God, yes to a wholehearted call she could not possibly understand, yes to vulnerability in the face of societal judgment, yes to the considerable risk of pregnancy and childbirth... yes to a vision for herself and her little boy of a mission that would bring down rulers and lift up the humble, that would turn away the rich and fill the hungry with good things, that would scatter the proud and gather the lowly, yes to a life that came with no guarantee of her safety or her son's. By becoming human, God encourages us to honor the vulnerability of our own lives: It is nearly impossible to believe: God shrinking down to the size of a zygote, implanted in the soft lining of a woman's womb…. God inching down the birth canal and entering this world covered in blood, perhaps into the steady, waiting arms of a midwife.

God crying out in hunger. God reaching for his mother's breasts. God totally relaxed, eyes closed, his chubby little arms raised over his head in a posture of complete trust. God resting in his mother's lap…. I cannot entirely make sense of the storyline: God trusted God's very self, totally and completely and in full bodily form, to the care of a woman.

To understand Mary's humanity and her central role in Jesus's story is to remind

ourselves of the true miracle of the Incarnation—and that is the core Christian conviction that God is with us, plain old ordinary us. God is with us in our fears and in our pain, in our morning sickness and in our ear infections, in our refugee crises and in our endurance of Empire, in smelly barns and unimpressive backwater towns, in the labor pains of a new mother and in the cries of a tiny infant. In all these things, God is with us—and God is for us. And through Mary's example, God invites us to take the risk of love—even though it undoubtedly opens us up to the possibility of getting hurt, being scared, and feeling disappointed.

There are several Catholic dogmas concerning Mary that Protestants and the Orthodox have major issues with. There is much disagreement but all of Christianity and Islam agree on this, Mary was special.

Mary could have said no but she didn't. Hail Mary, full of grit.

Thank you.

Query 1: What comes to mind when you think about Mary?

Query 2: What is hope asking of you and how will you respond?