

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

Queen of Martyrs, Pillar of Faith

When I was growing up in Maryland, my father once took me out to an empty field on a cold December morning to show me our new parish church. It was still under construction. The only things standing were several massive pillars, with arches. You could see the bare outlines of what would one day be St. Patrick's Church. But you would have to use your imagination. For months, those pillars were all that stood in that field. It would be another year or so before the structure was completed and dedicated.

That image of those pillars came to my mind as I was putting together some thoughts to mark our parish feast day. I remembered a book we have in the sacristy. It's a slender blue volume of special Masses devoted to Mary, honoring her by various titles. One of those titles is: "Pillar of Faith."

When I look out at you I'm looking out at the pillars of this parish—in every sense. I'm looking out at the people who support this parish with their prayers, their sacrifice and their love. But I'm also looking at the pillars that support, in a very literal way, this very building. And in that, I see reflected back everything that Mary is to the life of the Church, and to the life of this parish. She is our Pillar of Faith. There are 12 pillars in the nave of the church—in and around the pews—just like the 12 apostles. Those pillars hold up the roof and the walls. They offer to all who come here shelter and protection and security.

So does Mary.

Those pillars enable the walls to hold up the stunning stained glass windows that not only flood this space with color, but that also radiate light. Drive past this church on an evening when there's a Mass going on inside, and the windows send forth the unmistakable message: There is life here. Something is happening—something joyous, and beautiful, and sacred. The pillars help the windows proclaim our faith and put forth light.

So does Mary.

Finally, those pillars connect the floor with the roof—the earth to heaven.

And so does Mary.

She is the bridge between heaven and earth, between God and man—the humble woman "full of grace" who made possible the Incarnation and our salvation. She is our intercessor, our patroness, our help and, so often, our hope. At St. Patrick's in Maryland, long before there was an altar or pews or even walls, there were those pillars. They were necessary to support everything that followed. And while some things in that church have changed over the years, those pillars haven't. They can't. Everything that stands depends on them.

So it is with Mary.

Two millennia ago a peasant woman in a forgotten town dared to believe that nothing is impossible with God. We live our faith because she said, "Yes." And today, when we receive communion we will echo Mary's yes, when we answer "Amen" to the elevated host. But before you do that, as you line up for communion, you'll walk past these pillars. They don't call much attention to themselves. They aren't ornate. But like Mary, they offer a quiet assurance: Here is the support that makes everything possible. Here is stability in an unstable world . . . strength in the face of weakness . . . steadiness that keeps the world from caving in around us.

In a way, they are prayers in concrete—unbending reminders of that great Pillar of Faith, Mary. As you walk past those pillars for communion, think of that. Remember the woman we honor here in this parish. And remember that the short journey past those pillars leads ultimately to Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. Or as an age-old saying puts it: "To Jesus through Mary."

Whether we realize it or not, we live that very idea every time we come here to church. Let us seek to live it, as well, in the world. Let us pray to our Blessed Mother—the Queen of Martyrs, Our Lady of Sorrows—to uplift us, support us, shelter us and give us, by her grace, strength.

Our Lady Queen of Martyrs—and Pillar of Faith—pray for us.

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