

## A PICTURE OF MARY

One day during World War II, a group of marines was on patrol on the island of Guam in the South Pacific. Suddenly they came upon three Japanese soldiers fleeing on foot. A volley of gunfire followed, and the three Japanese were killed. One of the marines, Cyril O'Brien, routinely checked the dead soldiers for grenades and possible intelligence material. As O'Brien put his hand into the blood-soaked pocket of one of the soldiers, he felt a piece of thin cardboard. Pulling it out, he was surprised to find that it was a picture of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The pocket in which the Japanese kept it was over his heart. O'Brien kept that picture. Later he put it in his prayer book to remind him always to pray for the soldier to whom it belonged.

That story is moving for two reasons. First, it tells us something deeply personal about the Japanese soldier. The one picture he chose to take into battle with him was not a picture of God the Father, or of Jesus, or of the Holy Spirit. It was a picture of Mary. And the pocket in which he chose to keep the picture was the one over his heart.

The second reason that story is moving is that it tells us something deeply personal about the marine who found the picture. He didn't throw it away. He kept it. He put it in his prayer book and prayed daily for the Japanese soldier who used to keep it over his heart. The reason the marine did this is that the picture helped him see that the Japanese was not his enemy but his brother.

They both had the same spiritual mother, Mary. On this feast we do more than celebrate that Mary was untouched by sin from the moment of her conception and remained that way the rest of her life. We also celebrate the fact that she is the spiritual mother of the entire human race. As such, she gives us hope that someday we will begin to see each other as the American marine saw the Japanese soldier, not as enemies but as brothers and sisters.

We American Catholics have always been devoted to Mary under the title of the Immaculate Conception. We dedicated ourselves to her, under this title, in the early days of our nation's history. And so on Monday, we celebrate the feast of the Immaculate Conception with special joy and gratitude. It is, in a very special way, "our" feast. Let us close with a prayer to Mary.

It is the same prayer that Christopher Columbus and his crew prayed daily on their voyage to the new world. Each night they gathered on deck for evening prayers. These prayers always ended with the singing of the Salve Regina. Many of us are familiar with the English translation of that hymn. Please take a moment to pray these words in silence as you conclude the reading of this article adapted Fr. Mark Link's series.

Hail Holy Queen, mother of mercy,  
Our life, our sweetness, our hope.  
To you we cry, poor banished children of Eve.  
To you we direct our sighs,  
Mourning and weeping in this valley of tears.  
Be merciful to us, loving advocate, Virgin Mary,  
And after this our exile, show us your son, Jesus.

When you do this, you will sense in your heart, that.....

YOU ARE LOVED

DEACON DAN