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Our Lady of the Lakes - PO Box 399 - Balsam Lake, WI 54810
Queen of the May
by Charles Eldredge MTS

“What ever happened to May crowning?” Andy asked as we left church. “May is the month of Mary. Heck. When I was a kid, we always had a procession around the first of May. Its conclusion was placing a wreath, a crown, of the head of her statue. Do people do that anymore?”

I’m sure they do. And I remember it as well. When I was in grade school it was a big deal to be chosen to place the “crown” on Mary’s head. I don’t recall that I was even that person, though. I also seem to remember the crown being woven from flowers, mostly dandelions. And why not? They’re pretty reliably blooming then. Every kid in every class could pick one on the way to school, so everyone had a role to play. Their flowers are very beautiful, despite their weediness. But most of all, their stems are long and flexible, so they can be braided into very nice crowns.

I also remember the song, which I suppose I haven’t sung since grade school.: “O Mary we crown thee with blossoms today, Queen of the Angels, Queen of the May.” I also recall, “Bring flowers of the fairest, bring flowers of the rarest, from garden and woodland and hillside and vale”

We don’t have these songs in our hymnals these days. They’re probably too simple and beautiful and singable. Or maybe not so simple. I never figured out what “the May” meant – that Mary is Queen of. “Queen of May” would make sense – that she’s Queen of that month. Now, I’ve come to suspect it’s just an abbreviated form of “Queen of the month of May.” It was also quite a few years before I came to understand that “vale” is just a short form of valley. That’s what is nice about children: they can pray and sing with great devotion and enthusiasm even though they don’t really understand what all the words mean.

I don’t believe there’s any formal title for Mary regarding May, but the universal church has always been supportive of this devotion as it has developed in many countries.

“And May is good because of the flowers,” Andy suggested.

Yes, and flowers are symbols of new life after the apparent lifelessness of winter. All nature is renewed each spring. The human spirit should be renewed as well. I did some research and found that Mary has been honored during the month of May since the 16th century, so this relationship between springtime and Mary runs deep in our religious veins. Because of Mary’s “Fiat” millennia of humanity began its emergence from spiritual death. For many centuries, Mary has been depicted holding a lily. One source observes, “For many, the beautiful trumpet-shaped white flowers symbolize purity, virtue, innocence, hope and life—the spiritual essence of Easter.”

“Purity, virtue, innocence, hope and life.” That would pretty well sum up our view of Mary, wouldn’t it,” Andy observed.

So, spring and Mary go very well together. Nature and grace. She is Queen of the May.

About the author: Charles L. Eldredge, a member of Our Lady of the Lakes Catholic Church from 2001 until his death in February of 2014, was a graduate of The University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota. He received his Masters of Theological Studies from the University of Dallas. Charles was active in lay ecclesial ministry and adult faith formation in the parish.

The Blue Mass will again be held in our church on the 21st of May at 6pm. If you have never attended one try to make it a point to do so as it is a beautiful service. The Knights of Columbus are in charge of this service. This is a Mass to honor all those people who do service work in time of need. They include the firemen, policemen, EMT’s, and others. The Blue Mass was actually organized in the 1900’s and only recognized the law enforcement people. However, after 9-11 the Knights of Columbus became involved and opened it up to all the service people in our country. The service is very colorful with the KC’s in their honor guard uniforms with the plumes on their hats and the swords in their hands. Our honored guests from this area process into the sanctuary as the knights stand guard by the pews. The service is a regular mass but we have had guest speakers do the homily and have heard some wonderful stories in the past. Following mass everyone goes outside for the blessing of all the vehicles that are clean and sparkling and lined up in our parking lot. After the blessing all are invited to return to the church social hall for a picnic supper and a time of socializing. There also usually are drawings and each of our guests have in the past received a gift. If you have not been to a Blue Mass consider coming this year at 6 pm on the 21st of May.