

Honoring Mary in a special way seems to go back to at least the sixteenth century in Italy, when St. Philip Neri decorated a statute to the Blessed Virgin Mary with flowers at the beginning of the month of May. This little devotion of St. Philip Neri really caught on, and eventually the church decided to devote this entire month to honoring the Mother of God, and we've been doing this now for about 450 years. Nowadays, at least since 1955, we've also been honoring St. Joseph in May, or at least on the first day of May, the Feast of St. Joseph the Worker. So, in May we celebrate the role of Mary in the life of Jesus and in our lives and we celebrate the holiness of work.

These are things that remind us that we are not just Christians. We are Catholic Christians. We belong to a church whose bishops are the successors to the apostles, that celebrates all seven of the sacraments, has the help of the Holy Spirit when it comes to the really, really hard things it has to decide, and prays to and with the saints, all the saints, the greatest of whom of course is the Mother of God.

When I think of devotions to Mary and feasts like St. Joseph the Worker, I think of identity markers - they're things we do because we're Catholics and remind us that we're Catholics and that there's something special about being Catholics.

That doesn't mean we're better than other Christians or even non-Christians, but it does mean that God has chosen to bless us in a way that's very special by calling us to be members of the Catholic church, and one of the ways we celebrate that blessing is to honor Mary the Mother of God, especially during the month of May.

And there are good reasons for honoring Mary during this month of May. One, she is the Mother of Jesus. Because she said yes to the archangel Gabriel, the Son of God was able to take on human form, become one of us and bring about our redemption, and open for us the gates of heaven. Two, she is the first and the most perfect of all the followers of Jesus. She was the first to hear the good news and follow Jesus. From the moment of conception she was one hundred per cent about Jesus, assisting him and doing anything she could to help him carry out the mission the Father had given him. Three, she is our mother. We're all members of the Body of Christ, the communion of saints, and she's the one whose decision allowed that body to be born and grow. Four, she is more than just our Mother. She's also our advocate, Helper and Mediatrix - feminine for mediator - someone who helps to mediate in our lives the grace of God. She is completely devoted to accompanying Jesus and praying for us and with us so that we may one day share life with her and her son in heaven. And she's on the job 24/7/365/forever. When we need help she's there - all the time.

So, as the old hymn says, "Tis the month of our Mother, the blessed and beautiful May." Thank Mary for always being there for us and, more importantly, thank God for the wonderful gift of his Mother.