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Mary, Mother of God (B) 2021

Juliana Elarde was a healthy young woman living a busy life and one day, like any other day, she stepped into an elevator and suddenly felt a stabbing radiating pain across her lower back and darted down her right leg. She collapsed onto the floor in agony and thus began an 8 ½ year struggle with being nearly completely debilitated. She tried complicated medical treatments, but to no avail. She had been brought up a devout Catholic, praying the family Rosary every night, but had abandoned her Faith at age 19 with the exception of Christmas and Easter. She was given a prayer card with the Divine Mercy Chaplet which she began to pray. Eventually someone suggested that she should ask Mary to intercede for her, but Juliana felt like a hypocrite because she didn't have a devotion to Mary. She decided she had nothing to lose, so humbly started to ask Mary to pray for her.

Eventually she went on a pilgrimage to Lourdes on the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Our Lady's visions to Saint Bernadette. She was nervous about being placed in the baths since she had heard that the water was freezing cold and she feared it would cause spasms and increase her pain. Before being placed into the bath, she gazed at a statue of Mary and requested Her to warm up the water. To her delighted surprise, when the attendants gently lowered her into the water, it was completely warm! When they returned her to her wheelchair, her daughter noticed with excitement that the dark purple skin on her toes was fading. They were turning pinker. She notice her pain was diminishing. The next day she went to the Procession of the Blessed Sacrament and Benediction. When the priest lifted the monstrance in Benediction, she felt a tremendous jolt from her waist down to her toes in both legs. It was intense pain, but she gripped her wheelchair and was able to keep from screaming. She then went to the Grotto to pray the Rosary in the place where Mary had appeared to St. Bernadette. While praying the Rosary, she heard Mary's voice in her heart saying, "Julie don't worry, everything will be all right. Just trust!" Immediately Juliana felt deep, tender, motherly love from Mary, and love for Mary spontaneously burst from Juliana's heart in return.

Well, to make this long story short, she was completely healed, from wiggling toes to circulation in her legs and pink skin again after having been purple for years and pain free in her lower back and legs and she stood up and walked without any pain at all. She had an open wound on her leg that would not heal for several years that healed within days. At Lourdes, Juliana had experienced her Heavenly Mother's love. That was more than 10 years ago, and she has been

praying her Rosary every day! A long story, but I thought it was appropriate as we begin the New Year and celebrate the Feast of Mary, the Mother of God.

This title of Mary is the earliest title and it was defined by the Church Fathers at the council of Ephesus in 431 and it really was a statement about the Divinity of Jesus. If Mary is not the Mother of God, than Jesus is not God, hence that would be a heresy, and I have talked about this many times, so on this first day of the New Year we are invited to gratitude and wonder; i.e. gratitude for the gift of life and another year, wonder at what it will contain. Dedicating this day to the Holy Mother of God means we entrust ourselves and the New Year to Mary. She is our Mother in grace. So, let's put this and that whole story about Juliana in perspective.

When Jesus had given us everything on the cross, He looked down and saw His last gift, His Mom, and He told His beloved disciple, "Behold your mother," and He told His mother, "Behold your son." Jesus gave us His Mother. God didn't just save us as individuals, but as a family. The most highly honored human being in the Church, not including Jesus, Himself, who's God – it's not some super apostle or great prophet or warrior king – it's a Mom – who lived the hidden heroism that Mom's so often live. Saying yes to life at the Annunciation, when she knew it risked her own life and reputation; yes to life, getting up throughout the night to nurse Him, yes to life when She received Him again in the Eucharist. She was mostly unnoticed in life by everybody, but God, but now She's the ark of the covenant, the star of the sea, the help of Christians, the Queen of Heaven and earth, but the most honored title She has is MOTHER! Mother of God, and our Mother. So why do we honor Mary so much? Because She's our Mom and no matter how hard we try, we can't possibly honor Her as much as Her Son did.