

Mary, the Knot Undoer



R: Sisters and brothers, can you imagine, I found a Mary that not even Christine had known about. Her picture came to me in the post. It was on an invitation to an event for hospital chaplains. Catholic hospital chaplains, for whom the month of May is the Mary month.

Mary, the Knot Undoer, she is called. There are not many images of her in the whole world. A very famous one can be seen in the church of St Peter am Perlach in Augsburg. It was painted by the Baroque church painter Johann Georg Schmittner around 1700. You can find the painting on the cover of today's bulletin.

C: Mary, the Untier of Knots, was a fairly unknown religious painting which received worldwide attention through the current pope, Pope Francis. Before he was elected pope, Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, Archbishop of Buenos Aires, had visited Augsburg and seen the painting of Mary. He was so impressed with it that he took a copy of the painting to Argentina. His interest was awakened. He used the image in his pastoral work with the poorest of the poor and was touched by the way the faithful responded to Mary as a knot and problem solver. Mary, the Untier of Knots, attracts people with big and small problems.

Since Pope Francis had drawn so much attention to this Mary figure, a worldwide movement began. More Marys undoing knots were painted and spread all over the place.

The Catholic Church in Austria and Northern Italy has a tradition of meditating and honoring Mary, the Undoer of Knots, in the month of May.

The painting had been donated to St Peter in Augsburg by a monk. This monk shared the story of his grandfather Wolfgang who was about to leave his wife Sophia, and sought advice of a priest. The priest prayed for him, addressed Mary and asked her to undo the knots in Wolfgang and Sophia's bond of marriage. Almost immediately peace was restored between husband and wife, and the separation did not happen.

In memory of this joyful outcome the picture of Mary, the Undoer of Knots was painted.

R: Mary, the helper, the supporter and sustainer – Mary, the Untier of Knots had caught my attention. She is there when people are in trouble and have to do the hard things. She solves problems, straightens conflicts, and gives people courage and new hope.

I had never heard of her, but entered in a kind of conversation with her, learned about her, was very impressed with her and couldn't let her go again.

There she stands undoing knots.

I read and searched a bit and discovered that, at least in the past, it was primarily about marriage, partnership and the crises in these relationships that people connected Mary with.

Relationship knots.

Something has contracted and is no longer loose.

Something is tied up and blocked.

Injuries, bad words, bad thoughts, silence, separate worlds in one house...

Knots.

But not only those.

Illnesses, starting new friendships to replace old and broken ones, the wrong job in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Knots.

Being misunderstood.

Not heard, not really recognized for who I am.

Walls I run into because they keep standing in my way.

Knots.

Over and over again.

The simple ones at the beginning could probably be solved. Provided you don't wait too long.

If more are added, it will be really difficult.

The knots become thicker and tighter. And at a certain stage they can no longer be unraveled by the people alone.

The un-doing seems impossible.

Mary is needed – the Knot Undoer.

C: Mary was and is, so to speak, the therapist, supervisor, mediator summoned into people's messes.

She is the saint and patron of those whose lives are in many ways bound up and can no longer be untied.

She comes in and unties... carefully, tenderly – not with a pair of scissors or the sword to break and hurt, but with her patience, her love and her sensitivity.

No violence goes out from her, no military forces, no fights or wars – just her tender touch.

If we solved problems in the world as Mary, the Knot Undoer does, we'd live at peace with each other...

R: Strictly speaking, all wars, all violence, small and large with their innumerable injuries, are resignation and failure in the face of the many knots in the lives of individuals, groups, nations.

The refusal to become Mary makes our world a place of hurt and pain.

The refusal to take the time, to have patience, to save the thread so that it can be picked up again, destroys people's lives and leaves only shards.

Mary, who undoes the knots gently, bears in her action new beginnings.

People can reconnect, provide support, find peace, save lives.

To undo crises with force has always and will always only destroy.

Mary with her tenderness and sensitivity plays the total counterpart.

Patiently, highly focused, with intuition, and empathy... she solves the messes and problems.

She loosens and relaxes – makes things flow again.

Besides Mary I see two angels. Mary has the angels to help her hold the thread and undo the knots. They bear the weight of the cord, lift the knots up

a bit, make them lighter, let the rope flow through their angelic hands and support Mary do her patient and tender job.

Mary and the angles bring about release, peace and quiet, so that people can breathe out and discover new resources and new strength.

Even though I'm not Catholic and the devotion to Mary that I encounter around here is often strange to me: I'm happy to let the knot-looser be my companion. My inner conversation partner. My supervisor, my mediator, my pastor.

C: Every now and then I need a knot undoer who treats me carefully, has patience with me and time for me. Who shares with me her humour, and embraces me with a gentle smile. Only then will the hard things in my life be solved, and all that was stuck can flow again.

R: Let us pray:

Gracious God, thank you for Mary,
sister in faith,
knot breaker.

You know them,
the painful situations
when rejection and disappointment paralyze,
when set goals move far away,
when listening becomes impossible,
when misunderstanding hurts
when power claims become unexpected traps,
when nothing works anymore,
when energy cannot flow.

God of Mary of the Knot,
give me courage,
wake up hope,
and show me ways of healing,
good ways, to unravel the entangled,
to smoothen out the harsh things,
to loosen knots,
to heal injuries,
with patience and perseverance,
with courage and openness,

with sensitivity,
with tenderness and energy,
with faith and creativity,
and with great trust,
that everything is going well.
Amen.

C: Activity:

Sometimes we need someone to help us untie our knots because we can't do it on our own. Today we want to entrust to God, all our worries, problems, our "knots" that cripple and oppress us, asking him to let them slip through hands like Mary's and, in time, to untie our entanglements and let things flow again.

As a symbol of this and as a reminder of this service, everyone gets a small cord in which you can tie one or more knots.

Music is played as we make our knots...