

# Gifts of Grace Newsletter

## May / June, 2014



### Table of Contents

Page 1: Greeting

Page 2: Mother's Day

Page 3: Events & Quotes

Page 4: Thanks & Father's Day

Page 5: Featured Saint

Page 6: Secret Garden Story

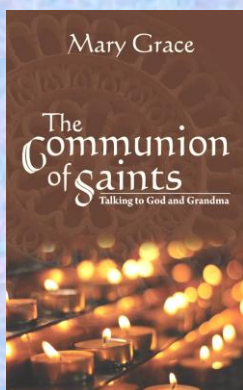
### Greetings Friends & Saints:

Although most of us in the northern states are fed up with the weather, it truly makes us appreciate the sunny days when they do arrive; and they will! I am also constantly reminded of how blessed we are whenever I turn on the news. My husband and I live in an area where we don't have to worry too much about tornados, mudslides, avalanches, floods, forest fires, hurricanes, or earthquakes (although we live on a major fault line in Western, NY). Seeing images on TV of entire towns wiped off the map is a truly humbling opportunity for counting our blessings. My thoughts and prayers go out to the victims of these disasters, as well as their family and friends.

On another note, the torrential downpours and April showers are certain to bring May flowers. I have already noticed in my back yard that trout lilies, coltsfoot, bloodroot, tulips and hyacinths are blooming. The lilac bushes are budding and soon one of my favorite scents will be emanating from the purple, white and yellow blooms. Many people are unfamiliar with the yellow lilac. It is only grown in Rochester, NY which is host to the International Lilac Festival. About ten years ago I purchased a sapling of the rare species and planted it in front of my house. It's a special time, each year, when all the lilacs are blooming.

Another sign of spring is the deer herding up for the mating season. The other day I had a group of about twenty deer in my backyard; it was quite an incredible sight and, yet another, gift from nature. In addition, bluebirds, robins, starlings, geese, rose-breasted grosbeaks and redwing blackbirds have recently arrived. Be sure to take time to enjoy the unfolding of spring, stop and smell the lilacs, listen to the peepers, watch some sunsets, and "just be" with it all. This is God's magic show and his way of reminding us that all of life is a miracle.

**Happy Spring! Love, Mary Grace**



## Mother's Day – May 11

May marks a holiday that is difficult and sad for anyone who has lost their mom; it's called "Mother's Day." The first year without my mom created an entire shift on how I viewed this morbid marker. While many people were out purchasing flowers, chocolates, Hallmark cards, and making special plans for a family brunch or dinner, I was purchasing flowers for Mom's gravesite.

I noticed in the local Penny Saver, many restaurant advertisements for Mother's Day dinners and all you can eat buffets. I thought, "Wouldn't it would be great for restaurants to have a special dinner for all those who were grieving the loss of their mother and call it "Motherless Day." Wouldn't it be nice if there were someplace to go to gather with others to celebrate your deceased mother's life? You could reminisce about all the great adventures and fun times you had with her and about all the things that made her special. A cake could be made in your mom's honor and a place set at the table for her to join in spirit.

To add more salt to the wounds, I tried to get together with my sisters that first year to celebrate Motherless Day (my three brothers were living out of the area). To my surprise, they were too busy with their own children, who were fixing brunch and celebrating their mom. That's when the knife went into my heart as I realized for the first time in my life, not only do I not have a mom, but I am not a mom either; it was a double whammy.

However, something special happened on that first Mother's Day that reminded me that we never lose our mothers and they continue to be part of our life from their home in heaven. I wrote a story in my book, called *Secret Garden*, that describes my experience of an after death communication from my mom. In honor of Mother's Day, I wanted to share this story to help those who find themselves spending the holiday with a trip to the cemetery (see page 6).

So be sure to purchase some flowers for your mom, whether she is on earth or in heaven, and celebrate her eternal love and everlasting life. Whether you're commemorating Mother's Day or Motherless Day, it's just one more way to practice the communion of saints.

## Upcoming Events

### Book Signing and Presentation

Saturday, May 3

Wellness Fair

12:00 – 6:00pm

2pm: Book Talk

Healthy Alternatives

Stone Road, Rochester, NY

Free Admission

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### Spiritual Sign Language Workshop

Friday, June 13

6:00 – 9:00pm

Healthy Alternatives

Stone Road Rochester, NY

\$25.00 donation

Please RSVP Carol to confirm seat:

585-787-6954 or angelhd1@hotmail.com

For more info on workshops or book talks go to:  
[www.giftsofgraceministry.org](http://www.giftsofgraceministry.org) or call me @ 585-766-9318

### Patron Saint of Mothers

Saint Mary, the Blessed Mother is the patron saint of mothers. Her feast day is celebrated on January 1. We pray to Mary when we say the rosary; “Hail Mary full of grace...” If you are a mother, God bless you and take all the help you can get. Pray to Mary for strength in your most holy mission of raising children of God.

### Spiritual Quote

**I am but a fleeting thought in the cosmic consciousness, but as integral a part of the universe, as each molecule is to a drop of water.**

Mary Grace

(Page 371 of *The Communion of Saints*)

## A Big Thank You

Thanks to the following people for hosting workshops / book presentations:

Karen & Judy of Lightways Journey Barn in Brockport, NY

Their metaphysical store is simply beautiful and amazing. The workshop space in the barn is a homey, unique setting and one of my favorite locations so far.

Kathy Farrak of Avon, NY invited me to her spiritual book club, “Women of Spirit,” in her beautiful country home. This is the second book club I attended that is reading *The Communion of Saints*. I believe it makes an excellent selection as there is so much material to discuss. We had a wonderful meeting, not only about the book, but many other spiritual topics as well. I truly enjoyed myself as we drank tea, snacked, and talked well into the evening.

Mary Lamb, a fellow parishioner at Spiritus Christi Church, hosted a book presentation at Plant Paradise Café in Fairport, NY. Mary, along with the café owner, Susan Daly, organized an incredible luncheon for the event. It was a fantastic afternoon and I highly recommend eating at the quaint café with a marvelous location along the Erie Canal.

The greatest part of this journey for me is the opportunity to meet so many wonderful, extraordinary people. The paranormal stories that many share with me are phenomenal too. I never cease to be amazed at all the ways that our loved ones find to keep in touch with us. The communion of saints is alive and well!

## Happy Father’s Day – June 15

Father’s Day was founded in Spokane, Washington at the YMCA in 1910 by Sonora Smart Dodd, of Arkansas. Dodd was one of six kids in a single parent home run by her dad, who was a widower and civil war veteran. The holiday was not successful for the first fifty years due to controversy that it was too commercialized and was only a ploy to profit businesses selling men’s products, such as apparel, cologne and tools. It was not formerly recognized until 1966. At that time President Lyndon B. Johnson issued the first presidential proclamation honoring fathers on the third Sunday in June. It was finally made a national holiday in 1972 by Richard Nixon.



## Featured Saint: Saint Anthony of Padua

**Feast Day: June 13**

**Patron Saint of Lost Articles**



**“Tony, Tony look around; what was lost must be found.”** Although I often pray to St. Anthony, I never heard this particular prayer growing up. I learned it from one of my students who went to Catholic School. I love it and say it whenever I’m looking for something, which seems to be often in my older age.

St. Anthony was born in Portugal, baptized and named "Ferdinand." He joined the Augustine order at the age of 15. When he was twenty-five he joined the newly formed Franciscans where he took the name “Anthony.” He was chosen by St. Francis himself, to teach theology to friars at Padua in Northern Italy. He was assigned to a quiet friary in Italy where he washed pots and pans without complaint.

One day, at an important ordination of Franciscan Monks, when the speaker failed to arrive, Anthony was asked to give a sermon. He preached such a marvelous sermon that everyone who heard him was most impressed. From then on, until he died nine years later, St. Anthony preached all over Italy and France. He was so popular that people even closed their stores to hear him. He is famous for the time he got fed up trying to teach heretics so he went to the river to preach to the fishes instead. When a multitude of fish showed up, others started listening.

At thirty-two, a young novice stole a valuable psalter (book of psalms) from St. Anthony. The Franciscan prayed for the book’s recovery and the thief was suddenly compelled by a frightening apparition to return the book immediately. After the incident, people looked to Saint Anthony to help them recover things that they have lost. For over 800 years now, he has been doing just that. This is why he is called the “finder of lost articles” and became its patron saint.

St. Anthony died, on June 13, 1231 when he was just thirty-six. After his death, many miracles were attributed through the intercession of the saint, which made him known as the "wonder-worker." He was given the title "Doctor of the Church." by Pope Pius the XII in 1946. Pictures of St. Anthony often show him with Baby Jesus because the infant appeared to him in a vision. Apparently, he was clairvoyant!

An Excerpt from *The Communion of Saints, Talking to God and Grandma*, by Mary Grace:

## Secret Garden

My mother's favorite story was the children's classic, *The Secret Garden*. She not only read it to me and my sisters, but to her trio of grandchildren as well. All three generations also enjoyed watching the movie together over and over. One year, I bought Mom a stepping stone that read "The secret of my garden is but one word, Love." Although she did not have her own garden, the stone reminded me of Mom's favorite story, so I presented it to her as a gift on Mother's Day. She proudly displayed the stone by the front porch step for all to see when they entered her home. That was 1996, the year Mom was diagnosed with cancer.

In February of 2000, Mom's health was failing fast so I moved in with her to assist my brother and Dad in caretaking. During this time, a male cardinal started coming to the window every day. He would fly right into the glass, batting his wings and feet against the panes. He did this repeatedly, day after day. Afraid he would hurt himself, we tried everything to discourage him; we put pictures in the window and hung up signs. When that didn't work, we tried taking them down all together. This went on for weeks.

A month later, on March 12, Mom lost her four year battle with multiple myeloma; she passed away shortly after midnight. The cardinal did not come that morning and never returned. I always felt that the bird had taken Mom's soul to heaven. Several weeks later, a friend told me that whenever a bird flies into the window it means someone in the house is going to die; I guess it's true.

Of course we were all devastated by Mom's death, but I don't think any of us knew to what extent she touched our lives. With each passing day I felt my mother's loss more and more; I kept finding new ways that it affected my life. There were no more five minute messages on my answering machine (Momograms, we called them). When a show she liked would come on TV I would put a tape in to record it for her, and then remember that she was gone. I would think of something I needed to tell Mom and pick up the phone to call her, only to realize that she was not there. Each day seemed to be more difficult than the one before; my grief was getting worse, not better. There was a great void in my life and I began to realize how traumatized I was by my mother's death; I felt lost.

In the weeks that followed, I was battling severe depression. During this time, my dear friend, Kim suggested I plant a tree or garden in memory of Mom; I thought that was a great idea. There was already an ideal place in the corner of my backyard; it was the pet cemetery. The small graveyard was a triangular shaped plot, which was bordered by a creek on one side, woods on the other side and the lawn in front. It is where we buried many of our beloved dogs and cats over the years. Since Mom loved animals, it seemed the perfect spot.

Knowing that my own mental health was becoming an issue, I felt that building a memorial garden would be therapeutic. It gave me a reason to go on and kept me busy both mentally and physically. I spent the next several cold and dreary weeks planning the flowerbed. It was still too early to plant so I researched what I would need by reading gardening books, magazines, and websites. The cemetery required shade loving plants that grew low so they would not obstruct the headstones and crosses, which marked the myriad of pet graves. (Continue to next page)

In mid-April, the weather finally broke and I could actually start working in my new garden. The first thing I needed was an exceptionally nice centerpiece to serve as the focal point. In a nearby nature store I found the perfect item, a statue of St. Francis of Assisi standing in a birdbath that was atop an old tree trunk. Not only would it attract wildlife, it was also a natural looking addition to my woodland garden.

A spot was established for St. Francis and the flower arrangements were planned around the birdbath. I found an old bench, which was placed in front of the garden, and in a nearby tree I hung a bird feeder. All my spare time was spent working on Mom's flowerbed, fertilizing, mulching, weeding, planting, watering and reflecting. At the same time, I felt Mom was watching over me while I labored. It was a place I loved to be, as I enjoyed the birds and squirrels that found a neat new place to hang out. The pet cemetery became our sanctuary, it became our secret garden.

Each week I added a little more, trying to fill the area with plants that would bloom from spring to fall. As the garden started taking shape I got more and more excited and looked forward to the next day off from my job so I could work in it. I put in primrose, grape hyacinth, lilies of the valley, columbine, stonecrop, creeping phlox, and lungwort. Alongside the creek, and behind the headstones, daylilies, lupines and honeysuckle were planted. I was becoming proud of my creation knowing that Mom would be pleased.

It was a sunny, spring day on May 14, 2000. Two months had passed since Mom died; it was also Mother's Day. Despite the brightness of the morning, there was darkness in my soul as I walked out to the pet cemetery to be near Mom. As I sat on the park bench, I was struck with the realization that this holiday was a cruel reminder of my loss and pain; I began to cry. It was my first Mother's Day without Mom; I never felt so alone in my life. As my tears began to subside, I managed to present Mom with the gift I had worked so hard on; I sadly proclaimed aloud "Happy Mother's Day Mom; I hope you like your secret garden."

Just at that moment, a bright red cardinal landed on a tree branch just above my head. It was the first cardinal I had seen since Mom passed away. My heart leapt as sudden elation took over; I "just knew" it was mom. The bird was quite vocal and appeared to speak directly to me, "Cheer, cheer, cheer, cheerup, cheerup, cheerup"; he seemed to be laughing. In a holy instant my grief was replaced with joy. Mom really had been watching over me and she was telling me she was delighted with my gift to her. As I listened to the comforting cardinal song, I knew that at this moment in time Mom was actually here with me, and she found a way to let me know that she was alive and well! I was filled with a great sense of gratification; not only was Mom at peace, but for the first time in months, so was I.

That afternoon I took the stepping stone I had given to Mom years earlier and placed it in its new home. Mom had her own secret garden now, one she could enjoy from a bird's eye view. It's been over ten long years since that Mother's Day, and every spring I look forward to spending time with Mom in our special place. I also look forward to seeing the red velvet feathers of the cardinal and reading the words on the stone that are planted in my soul, "The secret of my garden is but one word, Love."

**Happy Mother's Day!**