

Meditations for Caregivers

by Maggie Hume

Caregivers of Alzheimer's patients need to find some way to become spiritually energized, renewed, and connected with their God. These meditations on the Mysteries of the Rosary written by Maggie Hume come from her many years of caring for her mother who suffered with Alzheimer's. Each relates some piece of everyday life to one of the twenty Mysteries. Alzheimer's patients often revert back to their childhood when in crisis, dealing with each other, or relating to God, bringing profound challenges to those who love and care for them. May these meditations and prayers bring consolation and comfort to all you who are caregivers.

As you say the prayer at the end of each meditation, simply add your own loved one's name in the blank space.

THE JOYFUL MYSTERIES

The First Joyful Mystery: The Annunciation

When the doctor phoned to tell me that she thought Mom had "some type of senile dementia," I was devastated. A battery of tests had found no other cause for my mother's increasingly odd behavior and speech

problems. I had been so sure that her problems stemmed from a visit to a new doctor and an increase in her thyroid medication, but I was wrong.

Almost four years ago Mom and Dad moved in with my husband, children, and me so that I could help Dad, whose health is frail, take care of Mom. For years she took care of everyone, now it was our turn. It is now seven years since that initial diagnosis and Mom is in the last weeks of her battle with Alzheimer's disease. Dad and I are in our final weeks as caregivers. It has been quite a journey.

Prayer

I don't know about you Mary, but many times I've questioned my "Yes." So many times it just seems too hard. But then there's a look, or a smile, or an entire good day with _____ and I know my "Yes" was the right decision. Lord, please help me live my "Yes" on the bad days.

The Second Joyful Mystery: The Visitation

The first month that Mom and Dad were living with us was a nightmare. They had barely moved in when Dad had a heart attack and needed open-heart surgery. Dad's hospitalization made Mom's Alzheimer's worse. Or, at least it made my coping skills worse. Dad spent about three weeks in the hospital and then another two weeks in rehab. Then there were months of slow recovery at home.

Mom was completely confused by Dad's absence. She didn't know where he was or why he was gone. Everyday we would visit him in the hospital. She

appeared completely unaware of how sick he was. She would ask me the same questions hundreds of times a day: “When is he coming home?” and “Is he coming home now?”

I thought I was going to go nuts, but then a small miracle happened. I ran into a neighbor who told me about a local adult day care program that her mother attended and enjoyed. I took down the number and gave them a call.

Prayer

Mary, you understood what Elizabeth was going through and reached out to her. Help me be aware of the needs of others. Help me appreciate all the many friends I have who have reached out to me.

The Third Joyful Mystery: The Birth of Our Lord

One night soon after Mom had come to live with us I was in the kitchen fixing dinner. When the food was almost ready, my four-year-old son Peter came into the kitchen and started to race his matchbox trucks across the floor.

“Come on Peter, put down the trucks and help me set the table for dinner.”

“Okay, Mom,” he said and we got out the silverware and napkins.

As we were setting the table, Mom came into the room.

“Maggie, why does HE get to help you set the table? I wanted to do that.”

Peter and I looked at each other in mutual disbelief at what we were hearing. I couldn’t believe that my

mother was whining at me like a petulant child. Peter very reasonably let Grandma set the table and went back to his trucks.

After dinner Peter and I had the first of many talks about Grandma and Alzheimer's disease. I realized that just as I had prepared the older children when a new baby was coming home, I should have prepared Peter for Grandma's arrival. The only problem was that I didn't know what to expect myself.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, my world is fairly chaotic right now. Please bring me your peace. Be born in my heart every day and let your love fill me with joy.

*The Fourth Joyful Mystery:
The Presentation in the Temple*

The people at our church are just wonderful. No one has ever said not to bring Mom or that her presence at church made anyone uncomfortable. And that's a good thing because Mom loved going to church. Sunday Mass has been an important part of Mom's life since childhood. Whenever she could, she would go during the week too. When she moved in with us, I took her to daily Mass.

We live near the church and pass it in the car many times a day on our way to the supermarket, library, or school. Even when Mom couldn't read very well anymore, she could make out the word "church" and order me to "turn in here now!" Even on days when Mom was very restless and agitated, she was calm in

church. She loved the singing and loved the people. She was happy.

Mom is confined to bed now. She can't walk and most of the time she is completely silent. But every day I take her hand in mine and we pray. They are my words, but our prayers.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, your parents presented you to the Father when you were a tiny baby. They recognized your holiness. Help me to recognize the holiness that is within us all.

*The Fifth Joyful Mystery:
The Finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple*

We were lucky. There never was a problem with Mom wandering out of the house. Maybe our daily walks helped. However, she was very, very restless in the house. This was particularly true at mealtimes.

Every day Mom would wake up very early and want breakfast. Dad would pretend he was asleep until about 5:30 a.m. and then they would eat. On most days we would go to 9:00 a.m. Mass, but, if not, Mom would be ready for lunch about 9:00 a.m. She would fuss and try to "fix lunch" until she actually had lunch at 11:00 a.m. After a brief nap, she would have her walk and then want to "fix dinner" at 1:00 p.m. She would take out knives, forks, plates, glasses, and anything else she found in the cupboard. It wasn't that she was hungry. We gave her plenty of snacks. She just wanted her old job back.