

# Say it to Mary

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**I**T DOESN'T HELP that the name of the prayer has two words always spoken as if they were one, with the emphasis on the second: "Hail Mary". That's never been the way "Hail" has been said. It's a greeting that goes back to Anglo-Saxon *hal* – pronounced "hahl" – like *hello*, but with a tone of respect: a vocal bow upon meeting. It was always said with emphasis. And when followed by the name of someone we know, the name wouldn't be stressed. To say "Hello **Mary**" would suggest we're surprised to see Mary. "Hail Mary" makes no sense, especially when repeated 10 times as in the Rosary. It should be "HAIL, Mary."

"Full of grace": It's usually said with "grace" the only prominent word, as if it were "fulla grace". But the fullness is critical. Imagine telling someone they're "full of the joys of spring", and note how you say "full". Both words need to be stressed: **full of grace**.

"The Lord is with thee." The newsworthy part is the opening. It's the **Lord** who is with thee. Again, imagine the contrast in meaning. "Coming to the show? Yes, and John will be **with** us." We all know who John is. But if it's new information that John is coming, then it has to be "**John** will be with us." And when the angel spoke to Mary, surely this was new information. So: **Lord** needs to be stressed.

"Blessed art thou among women." It's normally said with the last word stressed.



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But the accolade is in the first word. "**Blessed** are thou ..." And it needs an intonation of delight – the tone of bringing special news.

"And blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus." This is the biggest fail in the way the prayer is said. It's always "... **thy** womb **Jesus**", with the rhythm of "**your** old **coat**". But it's not a throwaway name, as in: "Here I am, Jim." This is the name at which every knee should bow. So there surely has to be a beat after "womb", and "Jesus" spoken with due reverence.

Then comes the second half of the prayer, which demands a different tone, for we have a switch from praising to appealing. We're asking for something

now, so it should be slower, and not with the same rhythm and intonation as the first half. "Holy Mary" needs to be heartfelt, as we might say "Dearest Mary, listen to me ...".

"Mother of God." This is usually run on without a break: "Holy-Mary-mother-of-God." But this is surely the most remarkable phrase in the prayer, and it needs to be said with a sense of awe.

And then the plea, "pray for us sinners". Most of us won't have any difficulty saying this humbly. The tricky bit is what follows. It's another phrase which is said mechanically: "now-and-at-the-hour-of-our-death". But this part of the prayer is asking her to pray for us **NOW** – and (of course, but that's not so important just at this moment – we hope) at the hour of our death. It needs its own emphasis.

I've little to say about Amen, other than "Amen." "Truly it is so." In Old English, the "Our Father" ended in that way: *Sothlice* (pronounced *sothh-lee-chuh*): "Truly." "Amen" in its prayer-ending use only become routine in the Middle Ages.

It'll take longer, mind, to pray it this way, and I don't suppose saying it in such a meditative manner is practicable when spoken in unison. However, if you're alone? Try it. It may take you up to 25 seconds instead of the usual 15. But what a great way to use 10 seconds.

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