

# “Am I Not Here, Who Am Your Mother?”

BY JEM SULLIVAN

*Coronation of the Virgin with the Trinity and Saints*  
Miniature from a Psalter (series) c. 1440, Olivetan Master.  
National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC  
<https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.39233.html>

A full color image of this painting is available on the back cover of this issue and with the digital version of this article located on the website of the Catechetical Review.



“HOPE FINDS ITS SUPREME WITNESS in the *Mother of God*.  
In the Blessed Virgin, we see that hope is not naive optimism but a gift of grace amid the realities of life.”  
— Pope Francis<sup>1</sup>

As the Church venerates Mary, Mother of God on the first day of this Jubilee Year of 2025, our gaze turns to the mother of Jesus, the mother of the Church, our spiritual mother who

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, *Spes non Confundit* (Bull of Indiction for the Ordinary Jubilee of the Year 2025), no. 24.

accompanies each of us on our jubilee journey of hope. *Coronation of the Virgin with the Trinity and Saints*, an illuminated miniature in a 15th-century psalter, offers a beautiful visual homily for our contemplation on our pilgrim way.

The scene reflects the creative gift of an anonymous illustrator, known simply as the Olivetan Master. We see the Trinity—Father,



Son, and Holy Spirit—in the company of the Blessed Virgin Mary amidst a host of angels and saints neatly arranged in rows. The saints, the angels, and indeed Mary and the Trinity in the center, invite the viewer into their holy company.

In the upper right, St. Peter holds the keys of the Church, symbolic of the leadership that Jesus entrusted to him. Beside

him stands St. Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles. Below them is a group of bishop saints, including the great doctor of the Church St. Augustine. Beneath them is St. Benedict, holding his well-known Rule for monastic life, and St. Bernard of Clairvaux, the great monastic reformer. Close to them stands St. Anthony with bell in hand and St. Francis, who reveals his stigmata wounds.

On the left side, beneath a group of soldiers, is St. John the Baptist pointing to Jesus, the Lamb of God. Below him, St. Agnes holds a small lamb in the company of women martyrs. And finally, in the lower left corner we see a host of women saints, featuring St. Mary Magdalene holding a perfume jar, her artistic attribute.

The saints direct our eyes to the center of the work. The Trinity and Mary are covered in brilliant, blue robes and enclosed in a mandorla. Traditionally associated with iconography, the mandorla is an almond-shaped halo that surrounds the entire body, not just

the head, of the divine figures. We see God the Father—shown as a bearded, wise figure—tenderly enfold his divine Son, Jesus, and Mary, the woman he chose to bear his Son into the world. Jesus stretches out his right hand to gently place a crown on Mary’s haloed head. The scepter and book of Scripture in his left hand point to his divine identity and mission. Between the three divine figures is the dove of the Holy Spirit, who is the love of the Father and the Son. Mary leans her head toward the Trinity as she folds her hands across her chest in a gesture of humble praise to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

As we contemplate our identity and mission as pilgrims of hope in this jubilee year, this beautiful image offers a glimpse into the personal mystery of God. The God we worship is a communion of three divine persons. This mystery is the foundation of Christian hope. We are reminded that, by virtue of baptism, we join the communion of saints to share in and witness to the love of the divine family of God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Christian faith begins and ends in the mystery of the Trinity. A Christian is baptized “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” following Jesus’ command to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Mt 28:19–20). The Eucharist, the “source and summit of the Christian life,” begins and ends in the name of the Holy Trinity.<sup>2</sup> And God’s Word presents faith as the human response to the divine invitation to live in communion with the triune God and with our neighbor (see Jn 1:12; Heb 10:22–25). The Trinity and Mary, depicted so beautifully in this image, are not distant sacred figures. Rather, the Triune God invites our sharing in the divine life with Mary, Mother of God, as our spiritual guide and exemplar of faith and discipleship.

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<sup>2</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 11.

In words of encouragement to the faithful, Pope Francis observes that,

In the many Marian shrines throughout the world . . . countless pilgrims commend to the holy Mother of God their cares, their sorrows and their hopes. During the Jubilee Year, may these shrines be sacred places of welcome and privileged spaces for the rebirth of hope. I encourage all pilgrims to . . . venerate the Blessed Mother and to implore her protection. I am confident that everyone, especially the suffering and those most in need, will come to know the closeness of Mary, the most affectionate of mothers, who never abandons her children and who, for the holy people of God, is “a sign of certain hope and comfort.”<sup>3</sup>

As we take the first steps on our spiritual journey in this Jubilee Year of 2025, we draw close to the Mother of God as pilgrims of hope. May Mary, the beloved of the Trinity and of the saints, be our maternal guide, especially in the comforting words spoken by Our Lady of Guadalupe to St. Juan Diego: “Am I not here, who am your mother?” Let us follow her eagerly as she leads us to encounter her divine Son, the ever-new source and sure foundation of Christian hope.

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<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, *Spes non Confundit*, no. 24, quoting Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 68.