



The Fleur de Lis Symbol: Mary and the Trinity

Fleur de lis is French for 'the lily flower' or 'flower of the lily'. In Catholic symbology, the lily represents the Virgin Mary. The three petals in the fleur de lis symbol (above) point to Mary's *radiance*, *royalty* and *purity*.

The symbol also refers to the Holy Trinity, *God the Father*, *the Son* and *the Holy Spirit*. So in one symbol, the relationship between the Virgin Mary and the Holy Trinity emerges. Some interpret the cross bar or bracket that holds the three leaves or petals together at the base of the symbol as representing Mary. Those three bars or three gems reflect Mary's different relationships with each Person of the Trinity. Mary's has a unique relationship with the triune God. Mary is the *daughter* of the Father, *mother* of the Son and *spouse* of the Holy Spirit.

These titles are not some medieval invention or add-on, they have been a part of Catholic Faith from the beginning and were reiterated by Vatican II, Mary "is endowed with the high office and dignity of the Mother of the Son of God, and therefore she is also the beloved daughter of the Father and the temple of the Holy Spirit" (Lumen Gentium, 53).

The Roman Catholic Church adopted the Fleur de lis symbol to represent Virgin Mary and her relationship with the Trinity. When Pope Leo III in 800 crowned Charlemagne as emperor, he is reported to have presented him with a blue banner covered with a golden fleurs-de-lis symbol. The symbol was later adopted by many European noble families, most notably the French monarchy, to establish an association with the Church.

1st Petal: God the Father and Mary's Radiance

The first petal signifies Our Lady's radiance as Daughter of God and the first Christian. She was created without sin and enjoyed the spiritual effects of Baptism before she was even born. Tradition tells us that she was presented to the Father at a young age at the Temple. Her obedience and her desire to please God in everything makes her a model of virtuous daughterhood. She is our life, our sweetness and our hope because she was the first to be given the benefits and graces of the cross both at her conception and later at her assumption and coronation in heaven. Mary is designed in the mind of God as the perfect radiant vessel, gold inside and out, untouchable to men. Her faith in God the Father is a model of radiant light shining like a star.

Middle Petal: God the Son and Mary's Royalty

The middle petal signifies Mary as Mother of Jesus and Queen of heaven and earth. The obvious association between Mary and God is found in her relationship with Jesus. The two are more closely related than any other mother and son. Only Jesus received all of his human DNA from one person. Because they are so united in the mission of love and redemption, the two hearts of Jesus and Mary beat as one. Her motherhood developed through the stages of Jesus' life. The mother of God, the Theotokos, learned to let go and allow him to become the sacrificial victim as she stood by and lifted up her heart to be pierced as an offering of maternal love for Jesus and all of us. Mary is the Queen mother of Christ the King. Like Jesus her royal status was humble, one of self-sacrifice and service.

Third Petal: God the Holy Spirit and Mary's Purity

The third petal represents the spousal relationship that the Virgin Mary has with the Holy Spirit. Like the ark of the old covenant, the Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary at the conception of the Lord -Lk 1:35. She became impregnated with the Word of God. As a faithful spouse, the Holy Spirit remained in her and she became a permanent dwelling place, a temple of His glory. When scripture says she kept everything in her heart it was there under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that she later pondered the meaning of salvation and humbly embraced her role in it. She conceived Jesus in her womb by the power of the Holy Spirit and therefore remained ever-virgin. Her virginal purity was protected by Joseph, her earthly spouse. This is why Joseph is depicted in Catholic art and iconography as carrying lilies.

Today the Fluer de lis symbol continues to remind us of Christendom, a time when the Church and Europe were synonymous. It is still featured on the traditional flags of Albania, Bosnia, Brazil, Canada, France, England, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Serbia, United States (Louisiana Creole people and New Orleans) as well as many other cities and territories influenced by France. It is even a symbol used by an NFL team (New Orleans Saints).

Through heraldry, flags, insignia, statues and even football helmets we see the residual effects of the impact that our historical Catholic faith has on all of us even if most people are oblivious to the religious meaning of this very Catholic, Marian and Trinitarian symbol.

Gary Sullivan | 05/26/2024 | www.catholic365.com

