and across the world who come to seek the
Blessed Mother’s intercession for
them and their families in times of need
and who come to express gratitude for
prayers answered and graces received.
The presence of many people praying at
the Grotto and of so many candles lit,
representing prayers offered, are signs
now of faith in her and love for her.

Many years after I left Sister Regina
Maria for second grade, I still want to
love the Blessed Mother like my beloved
teacher, like Mrs. Sepe, like the pilgrims
in Mexico City and at the Grotto. I
somehow always feel like I fall short in
this, but how could I not want to love
her? When I think of how much Jesus
suffered for us in his passion and death
on the cross, I can’t help but think how
much more Mary suffered. I’ve seen
countless times how mothers suffer far
more the sufferings of their children
than their children do. Mary is truly, as
Blessed Basil Moreau, C.S.C., named her
the patroness of the Congregation of
Holy Cross, “Our Lady of Sorrows.” How
could I not want to love her when I know
that Jesus gave her to us and us to her
right before he died on Calvary? “Woman
behold your son … behold your mother.”
(John 19:26) What a great gift Jesus gave
us as he was about to die - the Blessed
Mother as our own Mother!

So how are we to love the Blessed
Mother? In many ways that’s a question
that each of us has to answer for
ourselves. The month of May beckons
each of us to honor Mary, for it is
her month. This year 2017, the one
hundredth anniversary of the apparition
of the Blessed Mother to the three
children in Fatima, Portugal, invites us
to pray the Rosary for the conversion of
sinners, for souls in purgatory and for
peace in our world, meditating on her
life and Jesus’. Perhaps the best way for
us to love her is to live what she told the
servants at the Wedding at Cana (John
2:1-12) when the wine had run out, “Do
whatever he tells you.” Do whatever
Jesus tells us, what the Word of God
and the Church tells us. Clearly history
shows that the Blessed Mother above all
else wants to lead us to Jesus and thus to
the Kingdom of Heaven. By yielding and
opening our hearts to Jesus, we’re loving
the Blessed Mother.

May we honor and truly love the Blessed
Mother - our Mother - this May and
always with our lilacs and our lives!

Fr. John Herman, C.S.C., earned a bachelor’s degree in
civil engineering from the University of Detroit in 1988.
He professed final vows and was ordained a deacon in
1994, and a priest in 1995. He was assigned to serve at
St. John Vianney Parish from 1995-98, at Notre Dame
in campus ministry and the rector of O’Neill Hall from
1998-2002, as the pastor of St. John Vianney Parish
from 2002-11, as the pastor of Nuestra Madre Santisima
de la Luz in Guadaloupe, Nuevo Leon, Mexico from 2011-
16. Since the summer of 2016 he has been serving as
the rector of Moreau Seminary. He is also a suffering
Detroit Tigers fan!
I was walking recently in front of the Basilica of the Sacred Heart on the campus of the University of Notre Dame. My nose told me before my eyes did that there were lilacs in the vicinity. I turned and saw a lilac bush in full bloom. Immediately, these lilacs took me back more than forty-years to Mrs. Sepe’s lilacs.

Mary Sepe was a very dear elderly woman who lived with her husband next door to my family. Throughout my childhood, she was ringing our doorbell and coming to visit us almost daily to share the latest news from the neighborhood or a picture and a story of her family from the Depression era in Pennsylvania. Mrs. Sepe was dependable. She could be counted upon for certain things, for example, keeping an eye on our house when we were away, bringing her famous Italian “pizzelle” cookies to our First Communion parties or other big family celebrations, reminding us constantly of the importance of completing our education, etc. When the month of May rolled around, she could always be counted upon, as well, to give my sister, my brothers and me the most beautiful bouquet of purple flowers from the lilac bush in her yard to take to the Blessed Mother for our “May crowning” each year at St. Joseph Catholic School in my hometown of Trenton, Michigan. A simple gift from her yard and her heart for the Blessed Mother whom she loved.

The annual May Crowning was for us a culmination of our continual honoring of the Blessed Mother. From my first days in first grade, Sister Regina Marie taught my classmates and me to love Jesus and Mary, the Blessed Mother. It was especially important for us to honor Mary during the month of May because May was her month. Sister Regina Marie clearly loved Jesus and Mary and looked forward to this May crowning, and, following her good example, we did too. Unfortunately, I was not given the honor of crowning Mary!

"Blessed be the great Mother of God, Mary most holy."  

After all of these years, it has stayed with me that May is the Blessed Mother’s month. My relationship with the Blessed Mother has evolved since my days with Sister Regina Maria. As sons and daughters can drift away from their own mothers emotionally, I too drifted away from the Blessed Mother, despite always wanting to love her like my first grade teacher did.

I was blessed to come to a new and deeper appreciation of Mary when I served as a transitional deacon at St. John Vianney Parish in Goodyear, Arizona. I was left speechless by the love that I saw for the Blessed Mother in the parishioners from Mexico at our celebration of Our Lady of Guadalupe. A church packed to overflowing with people on a dark, cold, December Arizona morning - at 5:00 a.m. - to sing songs of praise and thanks to Our Lady of Guadalupe! This kid from the suburbs of Detroit couldn’t imagine such a thing! It was clear for these parishioners that Our Lady of Guadalupe was as real for them then as she was when she appeared to St. Juan Diego in 1531 in what is now present day Mexico City. Maybe even as real as their own mothers. I was also blessed to be able to witness the faith and devotion of the countless pilgrims who traveled from far and wide to the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, not just to see her image but, truly, to visit her there. Pilgrims coming to offer their gratitude to her for prayers answered and graces received and coming to seek her intercession for needs in their families and their lives. I wanted what those pilgrims had, many of them so poor materially, a love for the Blessed Mother both deep and real.

I am blessed now to be serving at Moreau Seminary where I’m able to encounter the Blessed Mother in a different way. A short walk from our seminary, the Blessed Mother is surely present as well at the Grotto, the most beautiful place on the Notre Dame campus. The Grotto is a replica of the grotto at Lourdes, France where the Blessed Mother appeared to Saint Bernadette in 1858. It is a place of prayer and of great peace. There, too, I see pilgrims from across the campus