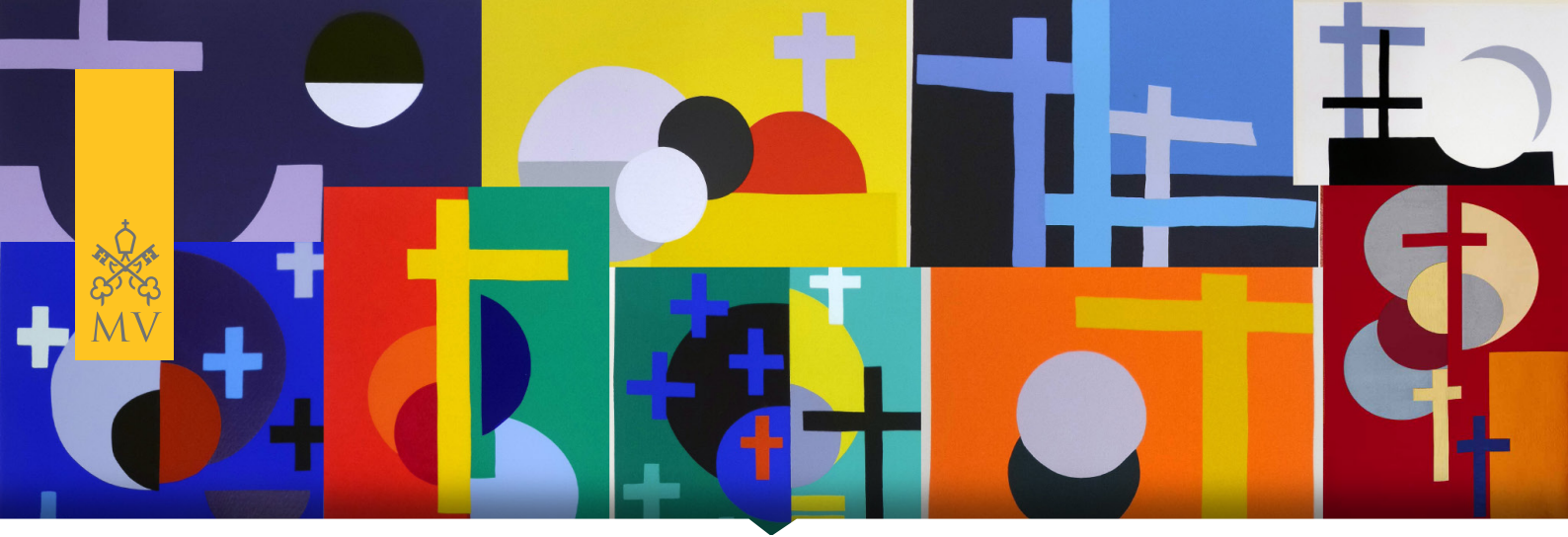




THE LITANY OF LORETO, OR LITANY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

The litany of Loreto is a Catholic *litany*, a prayer in which an assembly responds to a series of invocations addressed to Mary with the words, “pray for us.” It takes its name from Loreto, in the Marche region of Italy, home to the shrine dedicated to the Holy House of Nazareth, where the litany’s present form became established beginning in the 16th century.

Its precise origins are unknown, but its structure follows that of the ancient Litany of the Saints, which originated as early as late antiquity. The current form essentially adopts the text used at Loreto, which developed from earlier Marian litanies and was subsequently approved by Pope Sixtus V in 1587. The Litany of Loreto spread widely throughout Europe from the late 16th through the 19th century, promoted by the Catholic Church as a form of devotion and communal prayer, often recited following the Holy Rosary.

The number of titles attributed to the Virgin Mary has not always been the same: over time, slightly different forms and local traditions developed. The titles present Mary through a series of conceptual categories: as Mother (*Mater*); as Virgin (*Virgo*); as Queen (*Regina*); or through biblical and poetic images, such as “Seat of Wisdom” (*Sedes Sapientiae*), “Ark of the Covenant” (*Foederis arca*), “Mystical Rose” (*Rosa mystica*), and “Morning Star” (*Stella matutina*). Finally, Mary is invoked as a source of help and intercession, as in “*Auxilium Christianorum*,” “Help of Christians”, from which derives the title “Mary, Help of Christians.”

The litany of Loreto remains a living tradition, to which many Popes throughout history have added new titles. These additions reflect different moments in the history of Christianity and in Christian devotion, preserving their memory within the prayer. In 2020, Pope Francis ordered the addition of “Mother of Mercy,” “Mother of Hope,” and “Comfort of Migrants” (*Mater misericordiae*, *Mater spei*, and *Solacium migrantium*), bringing the total number of invocations to 54.

Mario Deluigi’s *Litanie della Vergine (omaggio a Mondrian)*, created in 1949–1950, represents a unique and highly original case within the history of the iconography of the Litany of Loreto. The classical iconography of the Litany is characterised by a predominantly illustrative and catechetical figurative approach, which marked numerous printed volumes from the seventeenth to the twentieth century, with a particular flourishing during the Art Nouveau period.