

What Would Mary Do?

by Kara Douglass Thom

I was on my knees. The floor was covered with applesauce and I was under the kitchen table wiping it up. The twins had run away from their half eaten lunch. I was certain I'd find peanut butter streaked along the walls and smeared on light switches. The girls were on the verge of waking up their baby sister by chasing each other around the house and screaming at the sight of one another. I could hardly face wiping down the kitchen counter another mind-numbing time. I remained huddled under the table.

It wasn't this incident that had me on edge. It was the culmination of these pesky mishaps that were making me crazy. Half the time the final straw was a result of my own stupid move, like forgetting the coffee filter before brewing a much-needed-but-now-ruined pot of coffee or getting all three kids packed in the car with their necessary accoutrements and not knowing where the hell I put my keys.

I just wanted to leave it all there—sometimes I do, even though I know it's me who's responsible for cleaning it up. The proposition of doing it later is a small indulgence or a coping mechanism. There have been times when my husband comes home to a glob of jelly on the counter. "That's disgusting," he'll say as he reaches for the sponge. *It's not disgusting*, I think. *It's jelly*. But I don't care what he thinks so long as I don't have to wipe it up.

Kneeling under the table cleaning applesauce, about to face a dirty kitchen for the second time before noon, and not sure how I could control (and care, and nurture, and love) three children under three, I felt momentarily paralyzed. All of these minor infractions on my day were munching away at my self-confidence. I felt like a child losing at a new game who doesn't want to play anymore. Could I stomp away with my arms crossed and my face pinched up in a pout? I wanted to play something else. Something I could be good at.

"Uh oh!" I heard McKenna say, followed by Kendall's belly laugh. The faucet in the bathroom was running. The door to the



bathroom was closed. I snapped out of my stupor, but I was afraid to investigate.

I couldn't possibly yell at my kids again. This was the way of two-year-olds. I was the adult. I was the *mother*. How was I supposed to act?

What would Mary do?

Yes, that Mary. Mother of Jesus. Talk about a woman blindsided by motherhood.

I have to wonder, did she ever lose it when Jesus was an out-of-control toddler? Odd that we don't hear stories of Jesus as a two-year-old, don't you think? Probably because he was a self-centered, mess-making, patience-nabbing kid just like any other toddler. Did Mary ever yell at him? "Get back in bed this minute!" Did she squeeze his arm just a little bit too hard? Did she say to him, or God, or no one in particular, "That's it! I've had it!" Did she yell at him as he was running away from her, "Jesus Christ! Get back here right now!" and not feel like she was taking His name in vain?

I thought about Mary, really working hard to hold it together, with God watching over His only Son, scrutinizing her every maternal weakness. Now *that* would be stressful.

I'll bet Mary had an inordinately high patience level. Then again, Jesus did not have a twin brother.

With new-found inspiration, I calmly walked into the bathroom.

"Kendall did it," McKenna said, using both hands to hold a plastic cup overflowing with water.

"Our babies is thirsty," Kendall said, standing in a puddle.

I turned off the faucet. "Girls," I said calmly, lovingly, like I was being videotaped for *Super Nanny*, "the water isn't for the babies."

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Your babies need their bottles. Go find your baby bottles and come back to the kitchen, we'll do something fun."

They were as surprised as I was that I didn't toss them in time out. I used a dirty bath towel to sop up the water and realized that the bathroom floor was as good as mopped. That would count as forward motion, as an accomplishment.

Then, as if possessed by a preschool teacher—or the Blessed Mother herself—I broke out the Play Doh and cookie cutters and assisted them in making shapes and sculptures between washing lunch dishes and picking up shoes.

That's what I was after, more Play Doh moments in my life—the ones that make me feel like I'm pretty good at this game.

To have them, I needed to replace the pressure (say, from an applesauce-painted kitchen) with inner peace. I started by asking: *What would Mary do?* I'm not even Catholic, so this is new to me. I seem to be coming up with the same answer every time I ask the



question: parent with humility.

Being a good mom—one who is humble, patient and awed by the wonder of discovery—is good for my girls, yes, but it's also what's best for me. Each hellishly frazzled instance in which I threaten to become unglued is an opportunity to improve myself, grow stronger, and become a better human being.

I don't suspect I'll ever reach sainthood, but I'm comforted in the thought that Mary didn't either. I continue to turn to her in weak moments—usually just before or immediately after I scream, "Jesus Christ! Get back over here right *now!*"

Kara Douglass Thom is the author of Becoming an Ironman: First Encounters with the Ultimate Endurance Event, and a children's book, See Mom Run. Her work also has appeared in Experience Life and Women's Adventure magazines. She and her family live in Savage, MN.

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