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Flowers from the Holy Land

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Flowers from the Holy Land

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Friday May 27, 2022

By Melanie Fields

Pressed flowers were once popular souvenirs pilgrims brought home from their travels in the Holy Land. During the 19th and 20th centuries, these mementos often made their way onto holy cards, bookmarks and other small items. The Marian Library has a collection of floral-themed holy cards from sacred sites in Bethlehem, Galilee and Jerusalem, including the Mount of Olives, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, Calvary, Gethsemane and Mount Carmel, among others.

A rare book in the Marian Library's collection, *Wild Flowers from Palestine*, catalogs a variety of plants that grow naturally in and around many of these sacred sites. Featuring 17 flowers gathered and pressed by the author, Harvey Greene, the book sold for \$1 at the time of its publication in 1899. The introduction states, "These flowers are sent out in the hope that they may make the truths of the Bible which they illustrate more real, and serve to increase the study of Nature and Nature's God." [Browse the digitized version of this special book](#) or see some sample images below.

Organized into a mandala pattern for the recent *Journeys of Faith* exhibit (see image above), many of the pressed-flower holy cards featured are also from the turn of the 20th century. They are arranged around a poem by Ralph H. Shaw, which was hand-copied by John S. Stokes Jr., founder of the *Mary's Gardens* movement. It reads:

O sacred flowers from hill and plain!
What visions come to me,
That I may look on Olivet
And over Galilee

No better gift hath Palestine
Than you, O Flowers fair!
Endeared to Him whose tender eyes
Looked upon your beauty rare.

The pathos of His life is yours;
You move us, as if we
Did in you, all His smiles of love
And tears of pity see.

You tell of Him, as nothing else
Of Holy Land can tell;
The beauty in the Gospel found
Is in your page as well.

As we wrap up May, a month which symbolically honors Mary and flowers, discover more Mary Garden connections on our [website](#) and browse more pressed flower holy cards on our [Pinterest board](#).

— *Melanie Fields is a library specialist in the Marian Library, working with artwork and special collections, writing informative articles and communicating about the Marian Library through a variety of media.*