

Paulist Father.
Devotion ---
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Devotion to Mary

RIGHT AND USEFUL



By
A PAULIST FATHER

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of the nature and advantages of a warm devotion to the Mother of God, the Blessed Virgin Mary.

In the first place let us understand what is meant by the expression, "Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary." By devotion in general, we understand a warm and ardent love and affection. This manifests itself in outward acts when opportunity offers, and in a constant attention to find opportunity to show itself in such actions.

A son, for example, who is devoted to his mother, is constantly on the lookout to contribute to her comfort and happiness. His devotion shows itself in a certain tender tone of voice and affectionate expressions; in his self-denial and the pains he takes to render her some service; in his respect and reverence for her on all occasions; in short, in a variety of ways, which we feel better than we can describe.

Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary means nothing different from this. It is a love of her expressing itself in appropriate ways. It is to think of her with pleasure, and of what relates to her. It is to love to consider the beauty of her character and all her virtues, or to reflect upon those principal events of her life which gave joy or sorrow to her heart. It is to raise the soul to a holy interchange and communion of thought with her. It is to rely on her love for us, to count upon her good will, and to expect great help and comfort from her prayers and intercession with God.

It is to behave toward her very much as though we saw her, and were filled with respect, admiration, and love for her, and realized that she is all graciousness and benignity on her part, and able to do wonders for us in all our wants and needs.

This expresses itself, the Blessed Virgin not being here, but in heaven, in various acts of prayer directed to her; for example, in reciting the "Salve Regina," the "Ave Maria," the "Rosary," the "Little Office of the Blessed Virgin," or what is sometimes quite as good or better, loving and fervent little prayers and ejaculations out of the heart. For what are any prayers, unless they do come from the heart, but empty words, a breath of wind, the talk of a parrot, which can have no value in the eyes of God Who looks at the heart, and only values the actions of men according to the intentions which prompt them.

This is devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. But why is it a good thing? Is it not rather evil? Is it not putting love and affection and prayer to a creature, in place of that love and affection and prayer which is due to God alone? Is it not giving that glory and honor which belong alone to the Almighty, to one of His creatures?

The Love of Christ for His Mother

In order to answer these objections, we must form a true idea, as near may be, of the state of things in heaven at this moment, and of the relations

which exist now between the members of that happy home. Our Lord Jesus Christ, Who has redeemed us by His death on the Cross, is, as we all know, both God and man. He was God from all eternity, but at a certain period of time became a man "for us and our salvation." As a man He is a creature with a perfect, entire human nature, in all respects like ours, sin only excepted. This human nature once joined to the divine nature, can never be again separated from it, not for all eternity. Our Lord as man, with His entire body, eyes, ears, hands, feet, and with His human soul, sits at the right hand of His Father, and shall come again as man to judge the living and the dead.

We ought to bear this perpetual Humanity in mind, and never lose sight of it, if we would have a true idea of the real position of the Blessed Virgin Mary to our Lord Jesus Christ. He is really a son, and she is really His mother. It is as a real man that He takes an interest in all that relates to man—to us. It is as a man that He makes intercession for us. It is as a man that He loves and pities us. It is in the same way as true man that He loves His own Mother. He had but one Mother, and He has that Mother yet. Every good son loves his mother, and loves her as he loves no one else; for God has planted that instinct to love her in his heart, and if he did not love and prize her far beyond others, he would not be a man, but a monster.

If our Lord Jesus Christ did not love His Mother beyond any other human being, He would not be a true man. He would be a pretended man, as one who had put on the appearance of a man; but His assumption of manhood would not be true and real; it would be an unworthy deceit.

If we believe that He really was a man, and is a man, why not believe all those things which grow out of a real human nature? It seems to me that those persons who deny the real relation which subsists between Jesus Christ as a Son to His Mother in heaven at this moment, cannot really and sincerely believe that He is a man. They must be Nestorians. The Nestorians held that the Second Person of the Trinity, the Divine Word, came down in the form of a dove and inhabited a human body for a time, and then deserting it went back to heaven, the same that He was before He came.

The Blessed Virgin Mary is, then, nearer to Jesus Christ than any other creature. She has the position of Mother in heaven, with the dignity and pre-eminence and privileges belonging to this position.

To Honor His Mother Is to Please Christ

In order to comprehend this better, let us take an example. When the first Napoleon became Emperor of France, one of his first duties was to place his mother in a position suitable to her relationship with him. She had a peculiar title to signify that

she was the mother of the emperor. She had a palace assigned her, and the first ladies of the court to attend upon her.

Will our Lord Jesus Christ, the great King and Emperor of the universe, the head of the human race in His human nature, fail in any of those sacred duties and obligations which devolve upon Him as a Son to His Mother? Will He be less careful to observe that propriety which He as God, Himself, planted in that human nature which He afterwards so humbly took upon Himself?

Since, then, the Blessed Virgin enjoys the dignity and pre-eminence of Mother in heaven, conferred upon her through the exceeding love and respect of her Divine Son, what harm can there be in loving her? What harm in expressing that love in suitable ways, in meditating on her virtues and life, or in asking her prayers?

Can we believe that to love His Mother can be displeasing to Jesus Christ? Can we suppose that a great and tender love for her can be anything but most pleasing to Him?

Would you not be highly gratified to hear anyone who was acquainted with your mother, express a great esteem for her? If your mother were a very virtuous and good woman, would you not be glad to have her virtue appreciated and made much of? Is it likely that you would be much offended, if any-

one who wanted a favor from you, should enlist that deeply-loved mother to urge his claim before you?

Why should human nature follow a different law in the heart of our Lord Jesus Christ? Oh! but He is God, and God is jealous of His own' worship and honor. I know that He is a jealous God, and that worship and honor which is due to Him alone, He will not suffer to be given to any creature. But He is not unwilling that our love and adoration of Him should lead us to show esteem and devotion to His dearest friends, remembering always that they are creatures and not God.

Why should we try to divorce the human and divine natures which are inseparably united? Jesus was not only God, but also man, and as man He was worshiped on earth and is now worshiped in heaven. His divinity is not jealous of His humanity. The Godhead and manhood united in His Person are not at variance with one another, but inseparably and forever united in the one Person of the Divine Word.

Jesus, as man, makes intercession for us with the Father. As man He is not so far separated from His fellowmen as some suppose, and does not wish to be. He intercedes with the Father for us, and we do not hesitate to intercede with Him, and make known to Him our desires for the benefit of our friends, who are His brethren.

The Holy Family in Heaven

There is a family in heaven. God is the Father of it. Jesus is the elder brother. The Blessed Vir-

gin Mary is the Mother in that family, the saints from the least to the greatest are members of it. All have a mutual love and interest and interchange of thought in it.

We, on the earth, are absent members of it, on our way home, and exposed to the danger of losing our way and never reaching it.

We are all, then, in heaven and on earth, from our Lord Jesus down, one great family each and all knit together in a common interest and a common love: bound, all of us, to love one another and help one another if we can.

The Father loves to see His family united, not strangers to one another, not selfishly looking out each one for himself, but ever mindful of one another, ever keeping up an interchange of affection.

Hence it must be in the designs of God, that the inhabitants of heaven should continually supplicate Him in our behalf. And that we should continually ask their help with Him and constantly love them, meditate on their example, and congratulate them on their happiness.

And especially proper is it that we should love the Blessed Virgin Mary, and dwell upon her in our thoughts, since she is the principal figure, after our Lord Jesus Christ, in that blissful family in heaven. She is the venerable matron of the household. She is the benignant and most gracious mistress of the heavenly palace, who is at her Son's side to receive

His guests, and help to make them feel at home in His house.

This is certainly a truer idea of heaven and of our Lord, than the one which pictures Him all alone in heaven, sitting on a throne of majesty, with all the blessed spirits at a distance and awe-struck. He alone knowing anything of our condition on earth, because He is God, and all the saints ignorant of it, thinking only of themselves and taking no interest in us. This is what may be called forgetting and diminishing the human nature of Jesus Christ, and absorbing it all in His divinity.

There can be no question in a reasonable mind, which realizes the Incarnation of our Lord, that the Communion of the Saints in heaven and on earth flows directly out of it.

A Great Help to Loving Our Lord

Why should our Lord be jealous of the love and devotion we pay to His Mother? Does it hinder us from loving Him? Not at all. It is a great help to loving Him. Why do we meditate upon His life and all His actions, unless it be to realize "that for us men and for our salvation He became Incarnate," that is, took our nature upon Himself, to redeem us, and to raise us to a share of His own glory and happiness. When we endeavor to excite our love for Him, we do not think of Him so much as God before He came into the world, but as He moved

about here, doing good as He talked and ate and drank and suffered—in short, as a man.

Now, the devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary helps us very much to realize this. The thought that He had a real Mother of flesh and blood like our own, brings home very forcibly to us the reality that He was a true man. The thought of the message of the Archangel Gabriel brings home the same idea. "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus." They are associated in one blessedness, and that the greatest the human race has ever received.

We cannot conceive of Jesus as a babe without beholding the Mother holding Him in her arms and nursing Him. We cannot picture to ourselves the household of Nazareth, where Joseph, Mary, and Jesus lived together so many years, without vividly realizing all that the Saviour has done and suffered for us.

And the thought of Mary in heaven, now at Jesus' right hand, reminds us, most forcibly, not to forget, in any fear of the majesty of God, that He is also a man, with the true heart of a man beating in His bosom.

The Mother brings home to us this fact as no other can. We certainly find it easier to love Jesus Christ, when we reflect on this infancy, childhood, and manhood, and similar mysteries which call His Mother to mind, than apart from her, and all these

relations with her. We cannot reflect on His Mother without being stirred up to love Him.

Besides: To reflect on her virtues and loveliness of character assists us much to comprehend His loveliness and goodness. We all know that the feminine character has its own peculiar lovable traits. Women, as a general thing, are more affectionate and tender than men; they are more inclined to gentleness and pity; they possess a grace and sweetness of manner peculiar to themselves.

Take any woman of high station, who joins in her character some of the best and noblest traits of woman, and what do we see? Everybody is filled with admiration of her; she wins at once the dominion of all hearts. The same thing is true in humble life. A truly good mother or sister or friend is held in everlasting and tender remembrance by all who have come to an acquaintance with her virtues.

All That Is Lovely in Woman

The Blessed Virgin Mary unites in herself all that is lovely in woman. We imagine her most beautiful, most noble, most benignant, and loving: in short, it is hard to say to what height our idea of her does not reach.

But it matters not how great our idea may be, we know and understand that we must at once say: All this loveliness, all this graciousness in the Blessed Virgin is as inferior to the same qualities in our

Lord Jesus Christ as her dignity is inferior to His: all these qualities in her are only a reflection of the same in Him. We rise, then, through her, to a most sublime and charming idea of the extreme loveliness and benignity of the Son of God made man for us.

It is sometimes said that Jesus is the King of Justice and Mary the Mother of Mercy. We perhaps gather from this that Jesus is hard to forgive, stern, and unrelenting, and Mary is all benignity. This would be an erroneous and very wrong conception. It arises from our feebleness of mind and inability to grasp the whole truth at once.

The benignity of the Blessed Virgin Mary is not in contrast with any quality of our Lord Jesus Christ, but simply a means of rising to the thought of His benignity. If we are so much afraid of the justice of God as to lose sight of His infinite mercy, the thought of the mildness of the Mother brings back our souls to repose once more in His benignity. The Mother is the chain which binds us to Him in a union the very closest—that of a common nature and common sympathies.

Sin drives us away from God, and makes us lose sight of His goodness. We get afraid, though that does not make Him in the least less good or compassionate than He was before. We think of the Blessed Virgin, and ask her prayers, and our confidence comes back. The Blessed Virgin takes us as little infants in her arms, and hands us over to Jesus

Christ. And when we get in His arms, and are taken up by His love, we can, from time to time, cast a grateful look at that sweet Mother, who has been so good to us, and who is so dear to Him. And thus in our devotion we live over again those blessed days at Bethlehem, when Mary held Jesus in her arms, and gave Him up for an embrace and kiss of love, to the humble and simple shepherds, who recognized in Him, a little child, their Lord and their God, and in her the Mother of the Word made flesh.

As this devotion to the Mother of God has, so to speak, a natural effect most beautiful and most profitable to the soul of everyone who practices it, so also has it a supernatural effect in drawing down a powerful grace and the divine aid.

Let Us, Then, Go to Mary

God wills us to pray for one another. Abstractly speaking and apart from His holy will, we might reason that there is no need of it; that God hears all and can attend to all; that we can go to Him directly and not employ the intervention of any creature: but such is not His will. He means us all to be knit together in one great family, and that an interchange of prayer and intercession shall take place among all grades of His redeemed creatures, from the highest to the lowest.

Every saint in heaven, even the lowest, can intercede for us. But the higher his sanctity and the

nearer he is to God, the more powerful his prayers. The Blessed Virgin is, beyond all comparison, the holiest of the saints. She is nearer to God than any of them, for she is the very Mother of the Son of God. Blessed is she in that she has borne the Saviour, and more blessed still in that she has heard the Word of God, and kept it more faithfully and truly than any other.

Let us, then, go to her with great confidence, and beg her to procure for us the greatest and best of all gifts—a great love for her Son, Jesus Christ, and a complete and heartfelt conformity to His holy will, that being united to God, heart and soul, here, we may be united to the blessed company of heaven hereafter.

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