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THE Blessed Virgin



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MARY, THE MOTHER OF GOD

When early in the fifth century the ugly heresy of Nestorius lifted its head, attacking the Divinity of Christ and declaring that Mary was not "the Mother of God," thus seeking to rob the world of its two most precious and consoling truths, the Third Ecumenical Council met at Ephesus, in the year 431, and solemnly defined:

If any one does not profess Emmanuel to be true God, and therefore *the Holy Virgin to be the Mother of God*—for she gave birth to the Word of God made flesh, as it is written: "The Word was made flesh"—let him be anathema!

Nothing could have made plainer the universal belief of Christendom than the rejoicing with which this definition of the Divine Motherhood of Mary was greeted.

The place of meeting had been the Cathedral of Ephesus. There, with all his eloquence, the great St. Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria, had defended Mary's right to her sublime title of Mother of God before the vast and splendid Council of Bishops gathered beneath its roof. Outside of the sacred edifice the people thronged about, waiting for the decision.

At last the doors were thrown open and the assembled Hierarchy of the Church appeared, announcing the condemnation of Nestorius and declaring that henceforth no one could belong to the one true Church of Christ who denied Mary's true title of Mother of God.

At those words a mighty shout went up from the uplifted faces of the multitude, like the roar of ocean waves. Men and women surged forward in their zeal and enthusiasm to kiss the hands of the illustrious Prelates, and the masses poured along the streets chanting in triumphal strains: "Holy Mary, Mother of God!" The word spoken by Mary in the silence of her Judean hills was indeed fully verified: "Behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed."

But the Council of Ephesus merely defined what all the previous Christian centuries had firmly believed without

hesitation; what the Nicene Fathers had already taught, more than a hundred years before; and what the Scriptures themselves clearly contained, though not in set and formal terms. The challenge of Nestorius only served to lend to the truth of Mary's Divine Motherhood, which all the Faithful had hitherto unquestioningly accepted the new additional splendor of a dogma, an article of Faith.

A mere creature like ourselves, and remaining such, Mary had yet been chosen by the Most High for a dignity so overwhelming in its magnitude that St. Bernardine might justly say of it: God alone could comprehend all that it implied. Was not she to bear in her womb and nurse at her breast the Incomprehensible made flesh for us?

At the very cradle of the human race we meet with the promise of the Woman and her Child, Mary and her Christ. He alone, it is true, was to be the Saviour of mankind, the Mediator with the Father, yet Mary was ever to be most closely associated with Him. At Bethlehem it was she who wrapped Him in His swaddling clothes, and on Calvary, where she stood beneath the outstretched arms of Christ, two altars had been erected; one the Altar of the Cross, but the other, the Altar of Mary's Mother-Heart, on which the Immaculate Lamb, born and reared by her for the Supreme Sacrifice, was freely offered up by her for the world's redemption.

In the long course of type and prophecy we find the Mother is ever united with her Child. Two striking instances will here suffice. Mary, with the Word Incarnate in her bosom, is most beautifully prefigured in that burning bush which Moses saw in vision, aflame with the fire of God yet unconsumed by it. The very dust whereon he trod was holy ground. What then is the sanctity of Mary's Divine Motherhood? Turning to the Prophecies we see her foretold, in plainest terms, by that most wonderful of all signs which Isaias prophesied should come to pass. A virgin should conceive and bear and yet remain a virgin—and her child should be very God: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and his name shall be called *Emmanuel*." *Emmanuel*, in the Prophet's language, meant "God with us."

Finally, the fulfilment of this same prediction, to take place in her own person, was announced to Mary by the Archangel Gabriel when he appeared to her, and in almost the very words of the Isaian prophecy solemnly assured her:

"Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name Jesus.

"He shall be great and shall be called the Son of the most High; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of David his father; and he shall reign in the house of Jacob for ever.

"And of his kingdom there shall be no end."

And Mary said to the angel: "How shall this be done, because I know not man?"

And the angel answering, said to her: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the most High shall overshadow thee. And therefore also *the Holy which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.*"—Luke i. 31-35.

Here, then, was announced Mary's Divine Motherhood. She who was to conceive in her womb and give birth to the Son of God must evidently be the Mother of God. St. Joseph, as the Scriptures makes clear, was not the father according to the flesh, but the foster-father of Jesus: "being, as it was supposed, the son of Joseph" (Luke iii, 23). Mary, on the other hand, is in the strictest sense called by St. John, "the mother of Jesus," and by St. Luke "the mother of the Lord," while St. Paul tells us that: "When the fulness of time was come, God sent his Son, *made of a woman*" (Gal. iv. 4).

It would indeed be impossible more clearly and explicitly to reveal to us the great truth that Mary is the Mother of God. For the Son of God, we are told, is "conceived in" Mary, "made of" Mary, "born of" Mary, "brought forth" by Mary. He must, therefore, be truly and really the Son of Mary, if words have any meaning, and Mary must be the Mother of God.

It is the *person*, whose sonship in every instance is attributed as due to the mother, and that Person here is the Divine Person of the Eternal Word made man in whom two natures, the Divine and human, are inseparably united.

The Eternal Word became incarnate in Mary precisely

that there might be the one God-Man, Jesus, who could make expiation for our sins. He was God so that His slightest action might have infinite value; and He was man, so that He might truly suffer and die for us. He, then, whom Mary gave to the world was one indivisible Person, who in His eternal generation from the Father was the Son of God, and in His temporal birth was the Son of Mary. Mary is the Mother of God.

In the same single instant in which Mary spoke her great words of acceptance, assuming all the mighty responsibilities of that Divine Motherhood, three things came to pass; the human body of Christ was by the infinite power of God miraculously formed out of her most pure and virgin substance; simultaneously with this act the spiritual soul of Christ was created and infused by God into that body; and body and soul together, in the self-same moment, were united with the Divine Person of the Word in what theologians call the *Hypostatic Union*.

So the great mystery was accomplished, the Incarnation had come to pass. Mary was Mother and yet Maiden. It was God she bore incarnate in her womb.

In this mystery all the three Persons of the Most Blessed Trinity had co-operated, although it is in a special way attributed to the Holy Ghost. From Joseph, Mary's faithful spouse, it was still to be kept a secret that by his sacred questionings of soul the possibility of all future doubting might forever be removed. Only when the angel appeared to him was Joseph to learn the mystery that had taken place. Such was the Divine Providence. Out of his devotion and anguish of heart was our Faith to be made impregnable.

But when he thought on these things, behold the angel of the Lord appeared to him in sleep, saying: "Joseph, son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary, thy wife, for that which is conceived in her, is of the Holy Ghost.

"And she shall bring forth a son: and thou shalt call his name Jesus. For he shall save his people from their sins."

Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which the Lord spoke by the prophet saying:

Behold a virgin shall be with child, and bring forth a son, and

Protestant Tributes to MaryLeccky

"The world is governed by ideals, and seldom or never has there been one which has exercised a more salutary influence than the medieval conception of the virgin. . . . All that was best in Europe clustered round it, and it is the origin of many of the purest of civilization." From "Rationalism in Europe," ch. III. p. 234

Ruskin

"I am persuaded that the worship (veneration) of the Madonna has been one of the noblest and most vital graces of Catholicism, and has never been otherwise than productive of true holiness of life and purity of character. . . . There has probably not been an innocent cottage house throughout the length and breadth of Europe in which the imagined presence of the Madonna has not given sanctity to the humblest duties, and comfort to the sorest trials of the lives of women."

From "Flora Flavivara," 41st letter

Hawthorne

"I have always envied the Catholics their faith in that sweet, sacred Virgin Mother, who stands between them and the Deity, intercepting somewhat of His awful splendor, but permitting His love to stream upon the worshipper more intelligibly to human comprehension through the medium of a woman's tenderness"

From "Old Manse" vol. 11. p. 173.

Oliver W. Holmes

"Is thy name Mary, maiden fair?
Such should, methinks, its music be
The sweetest name that mortals bear
Here best befitting thee
And she to whom it once was given
Has half of earth and half of heaven"

Scott

"Mother beautiful and mild
In folding in one dear embrace
Thy savior and thy Child"
Canto III. "Lady of the Lake"

they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, "God with us."

Could anything then be plainer than that Mary's son is "God with us," who alone could "save his people from their sins?" So the whole Christian world understood it, and all united in proclaiming Mary the Mother of God. Not only was Nestorius condemned in the Third Ecumenical Council, but still more fully, in 553, the same truth was repeated, by the Fifth Council of Constantinople:

If any do not confess that the Word of God has two births, the one before the world from the Father, out of time and incorporeally; and the other . . . *from the holy and glorious Mother of God and ever Virgin Mary . . .* let him be anathema!

What the Councils defined so long ago we daily repeat in each "Hail Mary," adding to the angelic salutation and the greeting of Elizabeth from the Holy Scriptures, those sweet words of impetration: "Holy Mary, *Mother of God*, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death, Amen." But this invocation, too, is based upon the Scriptures, where Mary's intercessory power, as Mother of God, is immediately made plain in the sanctification of John the Baptist, even at the very salutation of Mary.

He who does not acknowledge Mary as the Mother of God must at the same time deny that the Christ born of her is the Son of God, and thus, in this one denial, he sweeps away all Christian Faith. The dogma that Mary is the Mother of God is, therefore, a foundation stone which cannot be withdrawn from the edifice of Christianity without instantly causing its total and inevitable collapse. Where this dogma is not accepted Christianity may exist, but in name only. As Mary enclosed in her breast the Son of God, so the dogma of Mary's Divine Motherhood enshrines within it that other dogma of the Divinity of Christ. Dante but voiced the faith of all the Christian centuries when he sang:

O Virgin Mother! Daughter of thy Son!

Higher than aught besides; more humbly low!

End by the Eternal Counsel fixed upon!

Thou'rt she, who human kind enoblest so

That its Creator thought it not unfit

His own creation in Thy womb to grow.

II.

THREEFOLD DIGNITY OF MARY

What, in itself, does the Divine Motherhood imply for Mary? It does not, we well know, change her human nature. Neither does it cause her to exalt herself, but to God alone she ascribes all her greatness: "My soul doth magnify the Lord."

Mary, too, as she best understands, owes every grace to her Redeemer, and therefore she sings: "And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour." As the reason for her supreme dignity she can find nothing in herself except her littleness and nothingness: "Because he hath regarded the humility [*i.e.* the lowliness] of his handmaid." But neither does she belittle the sublime favors that God has actually bestowed on her:

For behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. Because he that is mighty, hath done *great things* in me; and holy is his name.

What, then, are some of these "great things" that God has done in Mary?

First of all let us consider the dignity of her Divine Motherhood. Perhaps it may appear startling to be told that the great Doctors of the Church actually describe it as infinite. Only God can be infinite in Himself. But infinity, as applied to the dignity of being truly the Mother of God, is not a *quality* in Mary herself. It is not ascribed to her person as to the Person of her Divine Son. It is purely a *relation*. The last word on this great subject was spoken by St. Thomas Aquinas when he thus described that dignity of Mary's Divine Motherhood:

Three things there are than which God Himself can create nothing better; the humanity of Christ, which is united with God; created beatitude, which is the fruition of God; and *the Blessed Virgin, in that she is the Mother of God*. For these have a certain *infinite* dignity from the infinite Good, which is God. In this regard nothing better than these can be created, as there can be nothing better than God.

In regard to Mary St. Bonaventure pointedly says :

She is it than whom God Himself could make no greater. A greater world God could create; a greater heaven God could create; *but a greater mother than the Mother of God, God Himself cannot create.*

Summarizing this entire truth Bl. Albert the Great was obliged, it appears, to invent a new word to do justice to his thought, for he writes: "The Son *infinitizes* the goodness of the Mother. Infinite goodness in the fruit shows there is also a certain infinite goodness in the tree." The fruit, namely, is Christ, infinite Goodness in Himself; the tree is Mary, whose dignity is infinite as Mother of God.

These, as we see, are no exaggerations, but calm, considerate statements by the Church's great Doctors and theologians. Verily, then, He that is mighty hath done great things to Mary! But let us ponder still more in detail the threefold relation with God which this infinite dignity of Mary's Divine Motherhood implies.

Mary, in the first place, is the Daughter by predilection of the Eternal Father. That is the title given to Mary in her relation towards the First Person of the Most Blessed Trinity. She, too, could say with Him to the Eternal Word: "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee!" In the phrasing of the Council of Constantinople, already quoted: "the Word of God has two births." He was begotten by the Father incorporeally before the world was, coequal and coeternal with Him, and was born in time of Mary.

The intimate relationship which these two distinct births of the Word of God, from the Eternal Father and from Mary, establish in her regard cannot be exactly described in any word that human language supplies. The term assigned to it by common usage is that of "Daughterhood." Hence we have the consecrated expression, that Mary is "the Daughter of God the Father." We all are meant to be His adopted children, but Mary is His Daughter by special excellence and predilection. She thus holds antecedence over all other creatures, and is truly Queen of Angels and of Men. By every right we lovingly call her "Our Lady." It is the favorite term St. Ignatius so constantly uses.

“By becoming the Mother of the Creator,” St. John Damascene says, “Mary became also the mistress over all His creatures.” Naturally, these dignities are due to her also because of her relationship with the other Persons of the Most Holy Trinity.

But the Daughterhood of Mary furthermore implies a particular closeness of resemblance to God the Father which no other creature can attain. Christ alone, as the Only-Begotten of the Father, may in the fullest sense of the words be called the Brightness of Eternal Light, the unspotted Mirror of God’s Majesty and the Image of His Goodness. But these words are rightly applied to Mary also, implying in her then the nearest, purely human likeness to Christ, who alone is the infinitely perfect Image of the Father. So, in a creature way, Mary too represents for us the Father’s own untarnished image, the bright and spotless mirror of His beauty, the winsome likeness of His Goodness, His Tenderness and Mercy—qualities that in Him are infinite, but in her are a finite reflection derived from Him.

Mary, in the second place, is the Mother of the Divine Word. This truth has already been fully set forth here. The relationship with God contracted by her, in her Divine Motherhood, is in the first and closest degree. The substance of the body of the God-Man was formed from the substance of Mary, so that we have the famous expression ascribed to St. Augustine: “The flesh of Jesus is the flesh of Mary.” *Caro Jesu, caro Mariae.*

The fact that Mary alone has contributed her substance to form the Incarnate Word makes this tie of parenthood all the closer. St. Joseph, too, is truly called in Scripture the “parent” of Jesus, but not according to the flesh. He was the true moral and legal father, with full parental authority, but not the physical father of Christ. His is the most glorious paternity that earth has ever known, yet Mary alone was of one flesh with the God-Man.

“Here,” exclaims St. Peter Damian, “let every creature be silent and tremble; nor let any one dare gaze on the limitless height of this dignity.” Yet Mary is our Mother, too, and so we need not fear to look up to her and even

hasten to the very bosom of her tenderness where Christ reposed and drew His nourishment.

God, as an absolutely independent being, can, of course, stand in a logical relation only to His creatures. But just as His dominion over these creatures, though not technically a *real relation*, leaves Him none-the-less *the real Lord* of all creation, since all belongs to Him, so, as St. Thomas explains: "Christ is said to be *really the Son of the Virgin* because of His real nativity." That conclusion suffices, for Mary is really the Mother of God.

We can now, therefore, better understand what St. Bernardine meant when he said: "So great is the dignity of the Blessed Virgin that it is reserved to God alone to know it." An infinite dignity can be comprehended by the Infinite alone. Where the Fathers and Doctors seem most excessive in their praise of Mary they may be found most strictly theological. Once you have come to the Mother of God you can go no further without reaching God.

Mary, in the third place, is the Bride of the Holy Ghost. "He hath created her in the Holy Ghost," is a Scripture text applied to her. Christ was supernaturally conceived, by the Holy Ghost, within her chaste womb, without any violation of her virginity. Daily we allude to this fact in the Apostles' Creed as we avow our faith in Our Divine Lord: "Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary."

With what a plentitude of grace, then, must not the Holy Ghost have endowed her to make her worthy of such an alliance! When a king steps down from his throne and makes a lowly maid his queen, he at once robes her in a manner becoming her queenly dignity. Around her shoulders he throws the jewelled mantle of state, on her head he places the golden coronet. In bestowing upon her these signs of distinction he merely provides what is demanded by his royal dignity. And so it was becoming to God that all the high favors, the lofty prerogatives, the unparalleled graces which we shall behold in Mary were to be conferred on her as Daughter elect of the Eternal Father, as Mother of the Divine Word, and as Bride of the Holy Spirit.

“Never enough can be said of Mary,” is the watchword of the great Fathers of the Church. It is impossible ever adequately to laud the dignity and grandeur of Mary. Poets in vain essay to sing her praises, saints to proclaim her honors, for the wings of Seraphim themselves must falter in seeking to rise to her heights. These are sober truths expressed in sober language. We need but hold fast to the one great principle: that all this glory God owes—not to Mary—but to His own Infinite Dignity. No one, as I have said, better understood this truth than Mary. It is the keynote of her *Magnificat*.

Directly connected with Mary’s high dignity of Divine Motherhood is the dogma of her “Fulness of Grace.” This the Angel declared when he addressed her; “Hail, full of grace.”

Fulness of grace has a different significance as applied to the God-Man, to Mary, or to the angels and saints in Heaven, just as three vases of different size may each be filled to its capacity, yet the amount contained in them singly may differ vastly. The fulness of grace in Our Blessed Lady is described by theologians as a “plenitude of the utmost abundance,” far indeed beneath the created sanctity of Christ, but transcending, as is often stated, the combined sanctity of all the angels and saints. In the same way must we measure all the various virtues of Mary.

The supreme principle to guide us safely is that the measure of grace bestowed upon any person is fully commensurate with the function that person is called to assume. What then is the grace required to be worthily the Mother of God!

Since the dignity, position and excellence of a person measure the respect and veneration due to that person, it is plain that no merely ordinary homage and respect are due from us to Mary. The devotion wherewith we honor her is therefore known under the specific name of *hyperdulia* or “super-cult” in distinction to our devotion shown to angels and saints. It is infinitely inferior to the worship due to God but vastly superior to every other devotion. For Mary, as the poet so justly says, is indeed: “Fashioned like us, yet more than we.”

III.

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

The first of Mary's special prerogatives to be considered here is her Immaculate Conception. It signifies her preservation from original sin. This exemption took place in the instant of her conception. God then applied to her the forseen merits of her Divine Son, at the very moment namely when her newly created soul was united to her body, since then only did she begin to be a human person. The words of Pope Pius IX thus define that great privilege of Mary, granted her by Almighty God in view of her sublime function of Divine Motherhood:

We define that the doctrine which declares that the most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instant of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted her by Almighty God, through the merits of Jesus Christ, Saviour of mankind, was preserved from all stain of original sin, is a doctrine revealed by God and therefore must be held firmly and constantly by all faithful Christians. (Dec. 8, 1854.)

Mary's Immaculate Conception thus stands forth as the greatest and most signal fruit of the Redemption wrought by her Divine Son. While others are cleansed from original sin, the stain inherited by us from Adam's fall, Mary is never even touched by it. She is "preserved" from it, but only "through the merits of Jesus Christ," so that she too could call Jesus by that sweet name, "Saviour!"

Mary indeed was "full of grace," as the Angel saluted her, and her fulness of grace began with the instant of her conception. If for a period difficulties and perplexities arose in certain minds regarding Mary's Immaculate Conception, it yet is true that it was always included in the Tradition of the Church, and from the very earliest Christian times Fathers and ecclesiastical writers drew the contrast between the sinful Eve and the sinless Eve, in a manner similar to that in which they contrasted with each other the sinning Adam and the sinless Christ. If Mary's life had been contaminated with sin at its very source, such a comparison would have been most meaningless and unjustified.

But more than this, Christ and Mary are constantly mentioned together to express the antithesis to Adam and Eve, who, also taken together in the same manner, denote the beginning of sin for the human race.

I need not enter here into a discussion of that great text known as the Protoevangelium, where are given the words of God to the Serpent:

I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel.

It suffices for our purpose to show that from this text the Fathers virtually arrive at the conclusion of Mary's Immaculate Conception.

All agree in their interpretation that here—typically at least—God promises to place enmities between Satan and Mary, and these enmities are to be complete and absolute, that is they will begin with the very first moment of her existence, and reach onward through all eternity. They are, further, to be the same enmities that exist between the seed of the woman on one hand and the Devil and his seed on the other, the same namely as between Christ and Satan.

In the one camp we have Mary and Christ; in the other the Devil and his seed. The enmity and separation between them is total, admitting of not a single point of contact. Yet the existence of original sin in Mary would have vitiated the entire argument, and made null and void the constant and consistent traditional interpretation of that text in the Church. There can be no doubt, therefore, of the constant traditional belief in Mary's Immaculate Conception.

But aside from the Scriptures and the Fathers, the argument that appeals irresistibly to our heart and reason is the famous: *potuit, deuit, ergo fecit*. God *could* preserve His Mother from original sin that she might not first fall into the slavery of Satan before becoming the Mother of God; it was only *fitting* that He should do so; therefore He *did* preserve her. Nothing could be more satisfying. The mere mention of the argument would seem to suffice. But again, God owed it not to Mary, but to His own Divine Majesty to preserve her immaculate. The disgrace of the mother reflects upon the child.

Mary is the temple built for Himself by the Word of God.

Can we imagine that He would first have given it into the possession of His arch-enemy? As St. Thomas of Villanova so convincingly wrote: "It becomes not the Sanctuary of God, the House of Wisdom, the Shrine of the Spirit, the Urn of the celestial Manna, to have in it any stain or spot."

We rightly shrink with horror from the thought, Pope Pius X comments in his Encyclical on the Jubilee of the Immaculate Conception, that the flesh which Christ took from Mary, the flesh of the Eternal Word, should be a flesh that had been sullied by even one brief moment of contact with sin. Unthinkable to the Christian intelligence is the very idea, as Denis the Carthusian expresses it, "that this woman who was to crush the head of the serpent should already have been crushed by him; that the Mother of God should have been a daughter of the evil one."

To continue this argument would be superfluous. Joyously, in the familiar words of the great English poet, the Christian world hails Mary, "Purer than foam in central ocean tost," and lifts up its voice acclaiming her:

Mother! whose virgin bosom was uncrust
By the least shade of thought to sin allied,
Woman above all women glorified,
Our tainted nature's solitary boast.

So all the Christian ages have caught at a glance the truth and the beauty of Mary Immaculate. The writings of the Fathers indeed are filled with references to her as "immaculate in every regard," "innocent and most innocent," "all pure, all unsoiled," "than beauty itself more beautiful and than holiness more holy," "more beautiful by nature than Cherubim and Seraphim and all the angelic host." To a long list of such expressions Pope Pius IX himself refers in proof of the Church's tradition.

No later than the middle of the *second* century St. Justin Martyr drew that contrast between Eve and Mary, which runs through the writings of the Fathers with its clear implications of the truth of the Immaculate Conception. Immediately at the opening of the *third* century we meet with Origen writing of Mary: "Neither was she infected by the

breath of the poisonous serpent," while Hyppolytus described her as the sacred tabernacle of the Son of God, which was at all times inaccessible to sin.

"Thou and Thy Mother," St. Ephrem exclaimed in the *fourth* century, addressing Our Divine Lord Himself, "must alone be accounted all-beautiful in every regard, for in Thee, O Lord, there is no spot, and no stain upon Thy Mother!" Could the Immaculate Conception be expressed more clearly? The same Syrian writer calls her: "Immaculate and unsullied, incorrupt and wholly chaste, and most remote from all scum and stain of sin."

In the *fifth* century Theodotus of Ancyra refers to Mary as "a Virgin innocent, without taint, holy in soul and body, as a lily budding in the midst of thorns, unlearned in the evils of Eve, a daughter of Adam, but unlike him."

It were, indeed, an endless task to continue these quotations, giving text and page, as can easily be done, for the countless patristic and early ecclesiastical writings that imply the Immaculate Conception. Enough has here been said for our purpose.

But the Immaculate Conception meant more to Mary than coming into being with the purity of our first parents at their creation, or even the purity of the angels themselves. It meant that God had privileged her by such an exceptional love, as to preserve her alone, from among all the children of Adam, from the curse that else would by all right have rested upon her also. She was to be *the first as well as the most glorious fruit of the Redemption*, exempt from original sin in prevision of Christ's merits. Had Mary lived for but that one first instant of her Immaculate Conception she would still have been the greatest wonder of Divine grace.

Need we then marvel that the Church delights in applying to her many of the beautiful passages of Holy Writ that strictly and directly are descriptive of the Divine Wisdom only. As Pope Pius IX says in his great dogmatic Bull: "These very words with which the Holy Scripture speaks of Uncreated Wisdom and declares its origin in eternity, the Church is accustomed to use in her ecclesiastical offices and in the sacred liturgy, transferring them to the Virgin

whose creation was determined by one and the same decree with the Incarnation of Divine Wisdom."

From all eternity the thought of Mary was a pure and radiant delight in the Heart of Almighty God. In His eternal Present He beheld her, with Him in his creative work, rejoicing Him by "playing," as it were, before His Throne, and distributing His graces to the children of men. It is therefore, on the Feast of Mary's Immaculate Conception, that the Church puts upon Mary's lips that mighty poetry of the Holy Spirit:

The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his ways, before he made anything from the beginning.

I was set up from eternity, and of old before the earth was made.

The depths were not as yet, and I was already conceived, neither had the fountains of waters as yet sprung out;

The mountains with their huge bulk had not yet been established; before the hills I was brought forth;

He had not yet made the earth, nor the rivers, nor the poles of the world.

When he prepared the heavens I was present, when with a certain law and compass he enclosed the depths;

When he established the sky above, and poised the fountains of water;

When he compassed the sea with its bounds, and set a law to the waters that they should not pass their limits; when he balanced the foundations of the earth:

I was with him forming all things, and was delighted every day, playing before him at all times,

Playing in the world; and my delights were to be with the children of men.

Now, therefore, ye children, hear me: Blessed are they that keep my ways.

Hear instruction and be wise, and refuse it not.

Blessed is the man that heareth me, and that watcheth daily at my gates, and waiteth at the posts of my doors.

He that shall find me shall find life, and shall have salvation from the Lord.—Prov. viii. 22-35.

EVER SINLESS, EVER VIRGIN

Closely connected with the Immaculate Conception of Mary is her perpetual sinlessness. Both these truths alike are defined as articles of Faith. We therefore know with certainty that Mary, "by a special Divine privilege," was exempt throughout her entire life from the stain of all venial as well as mortal sin. Never was the mirror of her pure soul clouded by even the suspicion of any offense against the Divine Majesty. This, too, was no more than becoming her dignity as Mother of God.

Christians, of course, could have no difficulty in accepting this obvious doctrine even though the Church had never spoken upon the subject. It had always been the favorite theme of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church.

"Thou art all fair, O my love, and there is not a spot in thee," is the love-song of the Holy Ghost, applied to her.

"When there is question of sin I will not suffer Mary to be named," was the decisive statement of St. Augustine. "For the honor of her Son she cannot here be brought into question, and for the same reason more grace was given her that she might overcome all sin in every respect. She was to be rendered worthy to conceive and bear Him in whom there could be no trace of any sin." That is the plain theology upon the subject. "Even if such was not the right of Mary," St. Augustine concludes, "it was the right of the Divine Son whom she bore."

St. Thomas but repeats the same thought when he says that since Mary is the Mother of God, the greatest purity was necessary to render her worthy of her Divine Son. "And therefore we must assume that she was absolutely free from every stain of personal sin, not only from mortal but from venial sin." Well then does the Christian world accept as entirely unchallenged the great conclusion which has been drawn from Mary's Divine Motherhood: "It is fitting that the Blessed Virgin should shine with such purity that under God no greater can be conceived."

But of Mary's sinlessness still more remains to be said. In her there was no stimulus of sin, no inclination towards evil, no possibility even of committing any sin. Hence it is perfectly true, as the Fathers insist, that she was not only pure as the angels, but far purer than they. Yet again, it was not due to Mary in herself, but to the God she bore, that she was rendered incapable of ever committing sin.

And here be it clearly understood that while we assert the impeccability of Mary, *by grace*, as Christ possessed it *by nature*, it is not set forth by the Church as even the basis for her dogma of Mary's perpetual sinlessness. Faith does not oblige us to hold more than the actual sinlessness of the Mother of God. But aside from questions of Faith we assume, without hesitation, that Mary was no more capable of committing sin while here upon earth than are now the angels and saints who look on the Beatific Vision.

Christ was incapable of sin in virtue of the Hypostatic Union, but Mary's impeccability was bestowed by God as a free gift; a gift of perfect perseverance as against mortal sin, a gift of confirmation in grace as against venial sin. With these two great graces was united her perfect freedom from all concupiscence. A single thought must again tell us that God owed it to Himself to render sin entirely *impossible* in her who was to be His own inner sanctuary and whose immaculate flesh was to become the very flesh of the Word Incarnate.

Yet this impeccability of Mary implied no mere passivity in her, but rather the highest and sublimest activity of any creature. To every slightest Divine inspiration her soul corresponded with the most minute fidelity. God, indeed, constantly sustained and upheld her every moment by the fulness and superabundance of His graces, but Mary's own loving response as constantly drew down to her an ever-increasing plenitude of graces.

What then must have been her "ascensions" in grace during the entire course of her lifetime, especially if we remember, as Suarez holds, that the very first of the graces granted to Mary was in all likelihood greater than the very final and summital grace of the most seraphic of angels or

saints? "The foundations thereof are in the holy mountains," the Psalmist says, and these words Suarez applies to denote the very first of Mary's graces as topping all the mountains of sanctity attained by any other creature at the climax of its holiness. Here, too, we are dealing with no idle deductions, but with the serious conclusions of one of the greatest of human minds. What he so magnificently says is yet, surely, no more than befitting her who was to be the Mother of our God.

How simple and how beautiful it all is, and how sublime! How every praise of Mary always redounds to the praise of God. How infinitely removed all is from the perversion which men, unacquainted with Catholic belief, have at times ascribed to us! And Mary herself is the first to turn all her honor to the glory of her Maker. Well was it remarked that whenever we say, "Mary!" Mary herself says, "God!"

Mary, no more than we, could merit God's first actual grace which always and essentially is a gratuitous gift. But, like us, too, she could correspond with God, in the instant that His graces came to her. Like a flower, unfolding its petals and lifting up its head to the rising sun, was the soul of Mary. With every faculty of all her being she answered to the glow and effulgence of every ray of that Divine grace which streamed down upon her from the Sun of all Beauty, Goodness and Love. Sweetly, gently, without violence, God's grace could operate all its wonders in her who was the world's fairest flower, shaped into perfect loveliness for the eternal joy of angels and of men, and the delight of the Most Blessed Trinity.

Whither, then, shall we turn to find words worthy to praise her, except to the Holy Spirit Himself?

I was exalted like a cedar in Libanus, and as a cypress tree on Mount Sion.

I was exalted like a palm tree in Cades, and as a rose plant in Jericho;

As a fair olive tree in the plains, and as a plane tree by the water in the streets was I exalted.

I gave a sweet smell like cinnamon and aromatic balm; I yielded a sweet odor like the best myrrh;

And I perfumed my dwelling as storax, and galbanum, and onyx and aloes, and as the frankincense not cut, and my odor is as the purest balm.

I have stretched out my branches as the turpentine tree, and my branches are of honor and grace.

As the vine I have brought forth a pleasant odor, and my flowers are the fruit of honor and riches.

I am the mother of fair love, and of fear, and of knowledge, and of holy hope.

In me is all grace of the way and of the truth, in me is all hope of life and of virtue.

Come over to me, all ye that desire me, and be filled with my fruits.

For my spirit is sweet above honey, and my inheritance above honey and the honeycomb.

My memory is unto everlasting generations.

They that eat me, shall yet hunger; and they that drink me shall yet thirst.

He that hearkeneth to me shall not be confounded; and they that work by me shall not sin.

They that explain me shall have life everlasting.—Eccli., xxiv : 17-31.

Herself "full of grace," Mary will obtain for us too a fulness of graces, for she bore in her womb the God of all grace, and He can deny her nothing. Heed her invitation and hasten to her. The more you partake, the more you will hunger for those graces of God, and the more you drink, the more you will thirst for her wine of salvation. Well, therefore, are those words, spoken of Divine Wisdom, also applied to Mary.

But not the soul of Mary only, her body, too, shared in that purity I have here described. To her alone among all mothers belongs the title which the Christian world has given her, "Ever-Virgin." *Before, during, and after* the birth of Christ Mary always remained a most pure and inviolate Virgin. Such are the three distinct facts, set forth by the Church—always so jealous of Mary's honors because they implicate the glory of God—as three distinct dogmas, or articles of Faith. What Christian does not rejoice in this just tribute paid to Mary, in these three jewels added to her crown, and placed there to the special glory of the Holy Spirit, her infinitely chaste Spouse!

To spend time in arguing these points, so evident to anyone who has grasped the significance of the Divine Motherhood, seems almost wasteful. Even in the very first centuries of the Church St. Epiphanius, who died in the year 403, could exclaim: "Who has ever dared, or in what age has anyone ever attempted, to utter the name of Holy Mary, without adding at once, if questioned, 'the Virgin'!"

Only a few years later, when Helvidius impiously denied the virginity of Mary, St. Jerome could hurl back at him the words: "Can I not adduce against you a long line of ancient writers: an Ignatius, a Polycarp, an Irenaeus, a Justin Martyr, with many other eloquent and apostolic men!" Those he enumerates are the very first of the great Christian writers, who stood in almost immediate contact with the Age of the Apostles and could rightly speak for it. So from the very origin of the Church is Mary proclaimed "Ever-Virgin." In the words of St. Augustine, summing up the entire subject: "The Virgin believed, as a Virgin she conceived, as a Virgin she bore, and a Virgin she remained."

Here, if anywhere, the honor of Christ is at stake. In consequence there is hardly a Christian truth which was defended with such united zeal, even by the most ancient Fathers and the first Christians, as the Perpetual Virginity of Mary. As a Virgin Isaias had beheld her: "Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son"; as a Virgin the Apostolic Creed proclaims her: "Born of the Virgin Mary"; and as a Virgin the Scripture sets her before us in the very first chapter of the New Testament. In the beginning of his Gospel St. Luke, with great minuteness, tells us how the Angel Gabriel was sent: "To a virgin, espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, and the virgin's name was Mary." (i.27.)

It is that same Virgin in whom the mystery of the Incarnation takes place, in the presence of that messenger from the Most High, in the very instant in which Mary humbly answers him: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word."

But these words were not spoken before Mary had made plain her vow of perpetual virginity: "How shall this be

done, because I know not man?" It was then for the Angel to reveal how she might keep inviolate that perpetual virginity to which she was dedicated, and yet conceive and bring forth the Son of God who was to be born of her: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the most High shall overshadow thee." In that most pure and inviolate way was to take place the immaculate, virginal conception of Christ.

That Mary remained an inviolate Virgin during the birth of Christ is plainly stated in the Prophecy of Isaias: "Behold a virgin shall conceive, and *bear* a son." Isaias uses the wonted Hebrew term for "virgin" and the stupendous sign he proposes to give in this Prophecy would have no significance except for the fact that it is a *virgin* who conceives and bears a son. So the Holy Ghost Himself interprets this Prophecy. For we find the virginal conception of Jesus explained in the first chapter of St. Matthew by quoting that very Prophecy: "Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which the Lord spoke by the prophet saying: 'Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and bring forth a son.'" The virgin, be it noted, is not merely to conceive but also bear her son, still remaining a Virgin, for that is the complete sign promised.

So Mary remained a Virgin both in the conception and the birth of Christ. There is not one single Father who is doubtful on this fact.

To her are applied the words of Ezechiel: "And the Lord said to me: This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall pass through it, because the Lord God of Israel hath entered there." On which St. Ambrose writes: "Who is this gate, if not Mary, shut because she is a Virgin? O, a safe gate was Mary, which was sealed and was not opened, through which, without opening it, Christ entered into this world." And to explain this miraculous birth St. Augustine points out how the same Power that brought forth the sacred body of Christ from His inviolate Mother, afterwards made it possible for the same body to pass through the closed doors and the sealed tomb.

The same virginity which Mary retained *before*, and

during the birth of Christ, she continued to possess throughout life. That is plain from her vow of perpetual virginity expressed to the Angel. "Impiety," "blasphemy," and "sacrilege" the Fathers of the Church call the denial of the fact of Mary's continued virginity after the birth of Christ. It is heresy, of course, to deny that Mary perpetually remained a virgin after the birth of Christ. The earliest liturgies of the Church, like the earliest patristic writings safeguard for Mary the glorious title we now give her as "Ever-Virgin."

The difficulties sometimes mentioned are easily answered. The Scripture text, "When his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together she was found with child of the Holy Ghost," most probably simply refers to the Jewish custom of the husband taking the wife to his home only some months after all the full rights of husband and wife had already existed. So Joseph now took Mary to his home after the will of Heaven was made clear to him. In any case, it would not follow from the phrase "before they came together," that afterwards Mary's virginity had no longer remained inviolate. "If I say Helvidius died before he did penance for his sins," St. Jerome argued, "does it follow that he did penance after his death?"

So also the expression "first-born" is used according to Hebrew custom of the first child, whether followed by other children or not. In a similar way the words "brothers and sisters" of Jesus are used to signify "cousins" in the Hebrew language, which simply is without any other term for the relationship between cousins. In certain cases we know that those so referred to were in fact cousins of Jesus. That He certainly had no brothers and sisters in our own strict sense of the word is perfectly clear from the fact that on the Cross Christ committed His Mother to St. John.

It was to the virginal Joseph that the Virgin Mary was espoused, and to his most chaste guardianship was safely entrusted her Perpetual Virginity. The virginal fruit of that virginal marriage was the virginal Christ, conceived of the Holy Ghost, without human intervention, and born miraculously of the Ever-Virgin Mary.

OUR MOTHER AND MEDIATRESS

1. *Our Spiritual Mother*

Mary is not only the Mother of God; she is our Mother also, Mother of grace and Mediatrix of all the graces that come to us from God. "Death through Eve and life through Mary," is the summary expression of St. Jerome, which indicates the part that all the Fathers of the Church assign to Our Blessed Lady.

Eve gave physical life, but Mary is the Mother of all in the life of grace. Combined with her Divine Motherhood, and inseparable from it, is her Spiritual Motherhood. To her, with Christ her first-born, belong all the children of God.

Mary is the Mother of Divine Grace. The entire work of Redemption waited upon her *Fiat*: "Be it done to me according to thy word." These words of the Virgin are the turning point of the supernatural history of the human race. On that *Fiat* God conditioned the whole Divine plan of the Redemption of the world. Mary understood all this, and she accepted her part, whatever it might be, in the work for which Christ came to earth: the salvation and sanctification of souls. Is it difficult to see, then, the sublime meaning of Mary's Spiritual Motherhood?

Art and poetry have inseparably united the Crib with the Cross. No thought could be more true, since even in the very Incarnation Mary offered up her Child to the Will of God, and in that Divine Will was included the entire work of Redemption, even to the final Sacrifice. That oblation by Mary was continued throughout every moment of her life. Christ was begotten by her, nourished by her, protected by her for the one purpose, that He might be the Victim of Calvary. Towards this great and supreme consummation of the Divine Sacrifice and of the Redemption of mankind Mary cooperated even to the very moment when she at last came to stand beneath the Cross itself and the sword which Simeon had predicted pierced her soul. United

in her agonies of heart with the torments of Christ the Saviour, she became truly the Queen of Martyrs. If through all her life she bore us in her heart, she now begot us in the anguish of her soul, as she there consummated her own sacrifice and offered up her Divine Son to the Eternal Father for our Redemption. So, most truly, is she our Mother.

"The pain suffered by the Blessed Virgin was so intense that if it were divided among her fellow creatures," says St. Bernardine of Sienna, "they would all die on the spot. The Blessed Virgin Mary, standing beneath the Cross, suffered all this for us, and thus became our Mother and was declared to be such by her crucified Son Himself."

The words "Woman behold thy son," "Son behold thy mother," may be variously interpreted, but the common sense in which they are taken by the Faithful throughout the world is, that beneath the Cross John received Mary, not merely as his own Mother, but as the Mother of us all, since he stood there as the mystic representative of the entire human race, that so in him we all were committed to Mary's mothering protection. We, in turn, are devoutly and lovingly to acknowledge her as our own true, spiritual Mother.

"Woman" is the great word used by Christ in referring to His Mother. For Mary is *the* Woman. "She shall be called woman," Adam said to Eve. And Mary is the New Eve. Eve, the woman, was to be the mother of all the living *by nature*; but Mary, the Woman, was to be the mother of all the living *by grace*. In Paradise Mary is already pointed out as "the Woman." All the Sanctified were there strikingly represented as the seed of Mary, her spiritual children, while Almighty God promised to put enmities between Satan and the Woman, his seed and her seed.

The same idea of Mary as the great Woman, the Second Eve, is again brought before us in the Apocalypse, where Mary is typified by the Woman as Mother. In vain does the dragon seek to destroy her and the children she begets as the Mother of all the living by grace. All are safe who stand under Mary's protection. Of course, there can be no difficulty in seeing here a twofold mystic motherhood,

that of the Church and that of Mary. Mary, in fact, is intimately compared with the Church from the first centuries.

The word "Woman," therefore, applied to Mary, contains the highest mystic meaning. In the language of the Scriptures it is applied as a word of respect, and in the use of it at the marriage feast of Cana Christ taught us that His favors come to us through "the Woman," His Mother, who was also to be our Mother. Again her intercessory power as the Mother of God is there made manifest. A great word, then, of profoundest significance is that word "Woman," recalling Mary's function as the Second Eve, the Mother of all the children of grace.

The more we study Mary, the more her greatness stands out before us and the more wonderful she becomes in our eyes. Yet we cannot begin to comprehend all that the Divine Motherhood of Mary implied and brought in its train.

But there is still another and most important way in which Mary is our Mother.

Christ is to be regarded not merely as the only Son of the Eternal Father and the Son of Mary, but He is also the Head of regenerated humanity. All its members form with Him one body. His whole reason for coming to us is to draw all men to Himself, and so, united with Him as their head, to present them to the Eternal Father. He is the first-born of many brethren, who are all to be incorporated into one body under Him, of which He is the life-giving source.

Now Mary, as Mother of Christ, is Mother also of Christ as Head of this mystic body. Hence it follows that she must also be Mother of all regenerated humanity whose members possess their spiritual life only in union with Christ their Head. As Mary, therefore, is the Mother of God, so she is also the Mother of men. As she is Mother of the First-born among many brethren, so she is Mother of all His brethren who are her spiritual children. In consenting to be the Mother of God she consented no less to be our Mother, the Mother of all who form part of Christ's mystic body. How close then should be our union with Mary; how sweet and intimate our converse with her; how filled with love for her all our devotion!

2. *Mother of Divine Grace*

But more even than all this remains to be said. Mary is not merely our Mother, in the various ways we have explained, but she is also the Mother of Divine Grace, and so intimately connected with all the graces that come to us.

The Redemption was conditioned on the consent of Mary; she cooperated with the Atonement by begetting, and preparing the Divine Victim for the Sacrifice. She herself offered Him to the Eternal Father for the salvation of the world; she, too, partook in all His sufferings by her maternal compassion and she finally endured a true mystic martyrdom beneath the Cross. It is befitting, therefore, that as she had so great a participation in gaining for us all the graces we receive from Christ, she should also have an equally important part in their distribution. That is the sublime prerogative which has given Mary the title of "Mediatress of All Graces."

Mary, as we know, has not merited for us these graces, but Jesus only; yet Mary was intimately associated with Jesus in the gaining of them. Mary, as again we know, is not the Mediator with God, but Jesus only; yet Mary, too, in a similar, secondary and dependent manner, is our Mediatress under Him and through Him. As in the work of Redemption, so in the work of Mediation, Mary is inseparable from Jesus. This does not lessen the position of Our Divine Lord as sole Redeemer and sole Mediator, but greatly heightens it. He is the supreme cause, Mary cooperates with Him and is the instrument of His Divine Goodness.

How then does Mary exercise her spiritual maternity in the distribution of the graces won by the Divine Blood that Jesus once drew from her maternal heart? The answer is plain and brief: *No single grace comes to us except through Mary's hand, i.e. unless it has first been obtained for us through her special and actual intervention.*

This belief has received the fullest support and authorization from the Holy See. It has clearly been enunciated by successive Pontiffs, and may in fact at any time be defined

as a dogma of the Church. By God's Divine dispensation all the graces merited by Christ are therefore distributed by Mary and come to us only through her intercession at the side of Jesus.

Mary's part in our salvation, although entirely secondary and subordinate to that of Jesus, is in fact made no less *extensive* and *universal* than His own. It applies to every grace and sanctification in the spiritual world, and the reason for this is plain from all that has already been said: Mary's cooperation in the Redemption is the fitting measure of her cooperation in the distribution of its fruits.

While still on earth Mary had cooperated in our sanctification by her actions and her prayers, and now in Heaven she continues that work by her prayers and intercession. She never ceases to labor for us as our Mother, and her intercession is coextensive with the intercession of Christ, though always dependent upon Him, our Only Mediator with the Father.

We understand therefore why, through all the ages, Christians have placed such trust in Mary, and why they have found in her the hope of their salvation through Christ, why Christian art has everywhere outdone itself in honoring Mary, churches have been erected to glorify God through her and the liturgy itself is filled with Mary. "Through Mary to Christ!" is the cry of the ages. She is called our life, our light, our joy, our hope, our salvation, always understanding that these terms apply to her in a manner entirely subordinate to her Divine Son and terminate entirely in His glory and that of the Most Blessed Trinity only.

No false cult of Mary existed or can exist on the part of the Church. It can be ascribed to the Church by those only who fail to understand her doctrines, or whose hearts are filled with bitterness against her. In the latter case it is the work of the dragon described in the Apocalypse, bent upon destroying both the Woman and her Child. Yet all in vain is his spleen against her, whom St. John so gloriously beheld:

A woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars . . . And the dragon was angry against the woman, and went to make war against the rest of her seed, who kept the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ. (xii. 1, 17.)

It is even imagined by some that Christ spoke disparagingly of His Mother, as if He could have violated His own Fourth Commandment. The word "Woman," we have seen, is a Hebraic title of respect, and in Mary's regard a most glorious term, full of mystic and spiritual significance. Christ's answer to the woman who cried out: "Blessed is the womb that bore thee and the paps that gave thee suck," does not contradict her praise of Mary, but completes it: "Yea rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God, and keep it." For this very reason we have insisted so much upon Mary's Immaculate Conception and Perpetual Sinlessness, without which the Divine Motherhood of Mary is inconceivable.

Above all other creatures Mary heard the word of God and kept it. Christ seems to have had Mary's own answer to the Angel particularly in mind: "Be it done to me according to thy word." We cannot imitate Mary in her sublime dignity, surpassing the united glory of angels and of saints, but we can imitate her in striving like her faithfully to hear the word of God and keep it, that so we also may be accounted "blessed" with her. In this same way St. Joseph, too, stood nearest to Mary, being likeliest to her in obedience as he was closest to her in his exalted rank.

Here, then, is our one way to beatitude. But the means that must help us to attain it can all come to us through Mary's hand, only, since she is the Dispenser of all God's graces to us.

The doctrine which I have here explained is no modern innovation, nor does it begin with the days of St. Bernard, who so forcibly expressed it, describing Mary as the channel through which all graces flow to us from Christ. For St. Bernard himself was no more than a voice repeating the

earliest traditions of the Christian world, which Dante so nobly set forth in his great poem:

Lady! thou art so great, thou art so high,
 That he who seeketh grace and seeks not thee,
 Is like to one who, wingless, yet would fly.
 And not alone does thy benignity
 Lend help to him who asks it, but the prayer
 Oftimes exceeds spontaneously.
 In thee all grace, in thee all loving care
 United with all of noble, all of high,
 And all of good created beings share.

“Such is the will of Him,” says St. Bernard, “who would have us all through Mary. It is His will, but in our behalf.” And St. Bernardine of Sienna, describing more in detail that Divine dispensation, writes: “Every grace which is communicated to this world has a threefold origin: it flows from God to Christ, from Christ to the Virgin, and from the Virgin to us.”

Such statements must not, of course, be taken in too literal a manner. They simply imply—once more to restate this great belief—that Christ is our Only Mediator with the Father, while Mary’s intervention, at the side of Christ, disposes the Sacred Heart to bestow the graces she asks for us. And it is the Divine will that no grace should come to us except through her maternal intercession for our sake.

About four centuries before the day of St. Bernard, St. Germanus had already thus perfectly expressed the Christian belief in Mary as the Dispenser of all God’s graces to us:

No one is saved unless through thee, O all-holy; no one is delivered from his ills save through thee, O immaculate; no one obtains any gift unless through thee, O all-pure; no one receives mercy and grace unless through thee, O all-venerable.

Even in Shakespeare we still catch the echo of this Christian tradition when in “All’s Well That Ends Well” the countess, referring to her son’s wickedness, says:

He cannot thrive
 Unless her prayers, whom Heaven delights to hear
 And loves to grant, relieve him from the wrath
 Of greatest justice.

3. *Our Mother Glorified*

Naturally the thought of Mary's intercessory power with God brings us to the tradition of her glorious bodily Assumption into Heaven. Of the time, place or circumstances of her death we know nothing. The ancient legends, however beautiful, must not be confused with historic facts. Following these legends, art has given us the presentation of the Apostles gathered miraculously around the tomb of Our Lady, which is filled with heavenly flowers, while we behold her taken up into the splendors of God with her risen body. These are details that poetically express the great central truth of Mary's Assumption, for we know that the flesh which bore the Light of the World could not have known corruption, even though, like Christ Himself, it was to pass through the portals of death.

"Thou wilt not give thy holy one to see corruption" are the words of the Psalm applied to Mary as to Our Lord, since the flesh of Christ was the flesh of Mary. Her Immaculate Conception, Perpetual Virginity and freedom from concupiscence, together with her Divine Maternity are sufficient reasons for this further prerogative of Mary, which, though not a dogma of the Church, may at any time be made one.

We cannot even imagine that Christ would leave His Mother to wait for the day of the final resurrection of the dead before she might join Him, body as well as soul, in Heaven. That is a truth which simply requires no argument, although arguments there are in abundance, if we wish here to trace back to its source the tradition of the Church, which has all the characteristics of Apostolicity.

Already in the sixth century we find a developed liturgy in reference to this prerogative of Mary, showing how the belief went back to the earliest times. Regular feasts of the "Falling Asleep" or Assumption of Our Lady are celebrated, and it is worthy of note how even then August 15 is in various places set aside for this feast. East and West the same doctrine is established. In 596 St. Gregory of Tours reverently tells how Our Lord ordered the body of Mary "to be taken up in a cloud and borne to Paradise,

where, after its reunion with the soul, it rejoices with its Elect and enjoys the bliss of eternity, to last without end."

In fine, Mary's intimate association with Christ, as opposed to the devil and his seed, includes her also in the victory with Christ over death and the grave—for else, in a way, Satan would not have been completely conquered by the Woman. It is clear that she had part with Christ in all His threefold triumph over Satan. His triumph, namely, over sin, concupiscence and death. Over death Christ triumphed in His glorious Resurrection and Ascension, accomplished through His own Divine power, while Mary triumphed in her Assumption through the power of Christ. Associated with Him in all His trials she was also to share with Him in His final victory.

There, then, at the right hand of the Risen Christ we behold her in glory, *Our Mother!* ever ready to intercede for us by the side of Christ. Rightly has the conclusion been drawn from this that devotion to Mary is a sure pledge of salvation, provided we do not fail to perform our own part, for the prayer, "Show thyself a Mother," must have its counterpart in our efforts to show ourselves her children.

The true Catholic is filled with an instinctive, constant, child-like love of Mary. Her greatness does not inspire fear, because he knows her arms are ever ready to enfold him. Let him but remain little in spirit and trusting in heart. As Mary is truly the Mother of God, so no less truly is she our Mother.

Her heart has been divinely made for this great purpose: that it might mother, not the Christ only, but us also, who are her other children, begotten of her agony, members of Christ her Divine Son. Each of us she loves with a great and individual love for his own single soul, and for each one, like Christ, would she gladly have endured all her agonies to win him unto God.

No mother's love on earth, however great, can be like that mother-love of Mary for each individual soul. Let us not fear, then, to nestle close to her heart, to ask a place upon her breast with the Divine Child that she bears, and to beg of her that Christ, too, may live in us. For sweeter

than honey and the honeycomb are the kisses of her lips to the children of her love.

For sinner and saint alike is Mary's Mother-Heart ever open, to bring them back to the grace of God or to make them grow ever more fervent in that Divine love wherewith her own heart overflowed. She, too, tradition says, died a Victim of Love.

And if we would find the special secret of the way to Mary's heart, let us go to Joseph. Mary cannot but love those who faithfully love her chaste spouse. Let us remember that on Joseph's consent depended the virginity of Mary, and so even the Divine Motherhood itself, which he preserved ever-virginal. How, then, can she better show her gratitude than by loving with a special love all those who are devoted to her spouse, St. Joseph, the virginal guardian who preserved from harm both her and the Christ at her virginal breast?

Each day, in fine, let the rosary glide without fail through our fingers, and let our prayers be said to Mary with all a child's most sweet affection. Through the hours of the day may tender thoughts and looks of love revert to her, and with Mary at our side let us go to Christ her Son. So when life's night comes, and our work is done, and we have sought in every moment to do our Mother's wish, that so most perfectly we might accomplish the great and holy Will of God, may we, too, be able to repeat at last that prayer which ends the final poem written by the Little Flower and addressed by her to Mary:

O thou who camest to smile on me at dawn of life's beginning,

Come once again to smile on me . . . Mother! the night is nigh.

I fear no more thy majesty, so far, so far above me,

For I have suffered sore with thee, now hear my heart's deep cry:

O, let me tell thee face to face, dear Virgin! how I love thee,

And say to these forevermore: "Thy little child am I."

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