

ST. ALPHONSUS LIGOURI

THE GLORIES OF MARY

Dedication by St. Alphonsus

To Jesus and Mary

My Lord Jesus Christ, knowing what pleasure you receive from anyone who exalts your holy Mother, I have decided to publish this work and dedicate it to you. Please accept this work and shower the light of confidence and love of the Immaculate Virgin upon all who read it. As a reward, I ask only that you give to me that love for Mary which I want enkindled within the readers.

Prayer

O Mary, God gave me my conversion, my vocation and all my graces through you. I have always tried in public sermons and private conversations to see that all love you. I am near the end of my pilgrimage. Before dying, I want to leave this book to the world so it can continue to preach. Please extend your hand, which has delivered me from the world and from hell. From this labor, I expect one reward – that I may love you more and that everyone who reads this book may be inflamed with love for you so that they will desire to promote and preach your praises.

To the Reader

So that the critic's mind will not condemn this book, I want to explain that I want all of my teachings interpreted according to Catholic Theology. I base all my teachings on what the saints have said. If Christ is the head, then Mary is the neck through which grace flows. She is full of grace so it can be passed on to men. St. Thomas Aquinas says, "In the saints, there is sufficient grace for many, but in Christ and in Mary there is grace in the highest degree for the salvation of all. In all dangers, you can obtain salvation in the Virgin." As Scripture says, "In me is all hope of life and virtue." (Eccl. 24:25)

Introduction

My desire to write and your devotion to read about Mary makes us children of the same mother. Some would say there are too many books on Mary. However, "the praise of Mary is an inexhaustible font" (Abbot Francone). The more she is praised, the more there is to praise.

I have read many books on The Glories of Mary but these are large and voluminous. I have tried to gather together only the choicest passages. In this way, the devout soul can be inflamed with love for Mary and priests can have material to preach.

Although human lovers always speak of their beloved, many who profess to love Mary seldom speak of her. True lovers of Mary want all the world to love her and they use every opportunity (in public or private) to enkindle love for her in others.

Those Who Preach Mary

Theologians are clear on this point. Those who preach Mary are certain of salvation (St. Bonaventure). The Church, on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, says about Mary, “Whoever explains me shall have everlasting life.” (Eccl 24:31). “Rejoice in Mary, my soul, for good things are prepared for those who praise her.” (St. Bonaventure). So, let us praise her so she can lead us into heaven.

Mary appeared to St. Bridget, instructing her to tell Bishop Ermingo (who began his homilies in praise of Mary), that he would die a holy death and that she would bring his soul to God. Because a Dominican priest always spoke of her, Mary appeared to him with similar promises.

St. Anselm says that the Saviour came to save sinners through Mary’s womb. Therefore, their salvation will come from “the remembrance of her praises.” I firmly believe that all graces are dispensed by Mary and all are saved through her. Therefore, the salvation of every soul depends upon our preaching Mary and exciting all to confidence in her. Through Mary, St. Bernadine of Sienna sanctified Italy and St. Dominic converted so many.

I have made it an inviolable rule that every mission preached by a Redemptorist must preach a homily on Mary. In many cases, this homily produces more compunction than any other. “We praise her virginity, admire her humility but, as sinners, we are most attracted by her mercy.” (St. Bernard)

Focus of This Book

To describe her many prerogatives, I have labored many years to collect the sayings of saints. I focus these sayings on mercy and powerful intercession as portrayed in the prayer, “Hail Holy Queen.”

Dear reader, if you like this book, then pray to Mary for me. Bind yourself to the two anchors of Jesus and Mary, and you will not be lost. “Jesus and Mary, for you I suffer and die that I may be yours in all things.” (St. Alphonsus Rodriguez). Until we meet in Paradise, let us stay at the feet of our sweet Mother and her loving Son. Amen.

PART ONE

EXPLAINING THE HAIL HOLY QUEEN

1.1 MARY, OUR QUEEN AND OUR MOTHER

“Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy”

(A) Having Great Confidence in Mary

Because Mary is the mother of the King of Kings, the Church honors her with the title, Queen. “If the son is a king, his mother must be a queen.” (St. Athanasius). “As soon as she

consented to be the mother of the Eternal Word, then she merited to be the Queen of all creatures.” (St. Bernardine)

“As Queen, she possesses by right the whole kingdom of her son” (Abbot Rupert). “All the creatures who serve God, also serve Mary.” (St. Bernadine). “Continue, Mary, to disperse the riches of your Son for to you belongs dominion over all creatures.” (Abbot Guerricus)

The Queen of Mercy

Because Mary is ready to help us in our weakness, the Church calls her, “Mother of Mercy.” She pours out mercy because “Queen signifies compassion towards the needy” (St. Albert the Great). Kings must do works of mercy but, they must also punish the guilty. Mary is not a Queen of Justice, who punishes the guilty. She is a Queen of Mercy, intent on pardoning sinners. “The Kingdom of God was divided into justice and mercy. The Lord reserved justice for himself and yielded the mercy to Mary. He ordered that all mercy would pass through her hands”. (John Gersen). St. Thomas confirms this, “When the Blessed Virgin brought forth the Eternal Word, she obtained half of the Kingdom of God. She is Queen of Mercy. Jesus is King of Justice.”

The Father made Jesus the universal Judge of the world. “Give Justice to the King’s Son” (Ps 122:2) Bonaventure wrote, “Give your judgment to the King, Oh God, and mercy to His mother, the Queen.” We sinners must rejoice because our Queen overflows with mercy. “O Mary, you are full of mercy and compassion. God has anointed you with the oil of gladness.” (St. Bonaventure)

Queen Esther

Queen Esther is a biblical model of Queen Mary. In the Book of Esther, the Jewish people were condemned by the king’s decree and Esther was asked to seek the decree’s revocation. At first, she declined because she feared the King’s anger. Mordicai reproved her, saying that God had made her queen to obtain this salvation. “Do not think that you will save your life just because you are in the King’s house.” We sinners can use the same words, “Mary, God has not made you Queen of the world to provide only for your good. He made you so great, so you can better assist us.”

When the King saw Queen Esther approach him, he asked with love, “What is your request?” She said, “Lord, if I find favor in your sight, save my people.” He revoked his decree of death. Now, if Esther can save the Jewish people, how can God refuse the prayers of Mary? She says to God, “If I find favor (already knowing that she was full of grace), give me my people, for whom I ask.” Can God refuse her? Who is ignorant of the power of Mary’s prayers, “The law of mercy is on her tongue.” (Pr 31:26) God shows mercy to whomever she intercedes for. St. Bernard says she is “Queen of Mercy” because “she opens the depths of God’s mercy to whomever she wills, when she wills, and as she wills. No sinner, however great, is lost if Mary protects him.”

The Gentleness of a Queen

Would Mary refuse to protect someone just because they have many sins? Should we be overawed

by the Queen's holiness? "The higher she is, the greater is her mercy to sinners who desire to amend their lives" (St. Gregory VII).

Kings and queens often inspire terror. However, the Queen of Mercy "shows no severity. She is all gentleness. In her, there is no austerity. She offers wool and milk to all." (St. Bernard) The milk is mercy and the wool is protection against the thunderbolts of God's justice. "God has given a compassionate heart to Mary so that she can send no one away dissatisfied." (Lanspergius) "O Mary, can you refuse to help any who are the subjects of your mercy? Since you are the Queen of Mercy, I am the first of your subjects." (St. Bonaventure) Our sins cannot outweigh Mary's power and compassion. "Nothing resists your power. The Creator answers your petitions as if he were paying a debt." Mary has an infinite obligation to the Father for choosing her to be the mother of His Son. However, her Son is under greater obligation to her for giving Him His humanity. Jesus pays what He owes to Mary by granting all her petitions.

No One is Deprived

How great our confidence in her! We know her power with God to gain us mercy. Our Lady said to St Bridget, "I am the Queen of heaven and the Mother of Mercy. I am the door that leads sinners to God. No sinner is deprived of my mercy. No one (except those already in hell) is so cast off by God that he will not return if he invokes my aid. I am the Mother of Mercy. A soul who could have invoked me and did not, will be miserable for all eternity."

Let us go to Mary to be certain of our salvation. Let us remember that Mary is the Queen of Mercy. She helps even the most abandoned sinners who invoke her. In heaven, these sinners are her crown. "You shall be delivered from the dens of lions" (Song 4:8) These dens are the hearts of sinners, the home of frightful sins. "O Mary, the salvation of sinners will form a crown worthy of the Queen of Mercy." (Abbot Rupert)

An Example

Sister Catherine of St. Augustine told me this story. Margaret began to sin as a young woman and continued all her life. She was driven out of the city and died in a secluded cave without the sacraments. Sister Catherine (who prayed for the dead) thought she was damned and did not even intercede. Four years later, the suffering woman appeared to her and took her to task for not praying for her. "I am poor Margaret who died in the cave. At the hour of my death, I invoked the Mother of God saying, "Lady, you are the refuge of abandoned creatures. Now I am abandoned by all and you are my only hope. Have pity on me." The Virgin gained for me the grace of an act of contrition. I died and am saved. She also shortened my purgatory. I seek now only to have a few Masses said." Catherine had the Masses said and in a few days the soul appeared shining like the sun, "Thank you. I go to heaven to praise God and pray for you."

Prayer

My Lady of Mercy, I present myself as a wounded beggar before a great queen. Cast your eyes upon me. Do not abandon me until you have changed me from a sinner into a saint.

I know you are already my Queen but I dedicate myself even more to your service using St. Bonaventure's words. "Govern me, Oh Queen, and do not allow me to govern myself. Command me. Use me. Punish me when I do not obey. Take charge of my salvation. From this day forward, no one will love and honor you more. This I promise. Amen."

(B) Mary is Our Mother

Mary's clients call her "Mother", seemingly unable to use any other name. She is truly Mother of our souls and of our salvation. Sin deprives our souls of the life of grace which Jesus came to restore by His cross. He said, "I have come that they might have life and have it more abundantly." (Jn 10:10) His redemption far exceeds the injury of Adam's sin. By reconciling us, He became the Father of our souls. "He shall be called the Father of the world to come." (Is. 9:6) If Jesus is the Father of our souls, then Mary is the mother.

Two Occasions

Mary became our spiritual mother on two occasions. First, when she conceived the Son of God in her womb "When the Blessed Virgin gave her consent, she asked for our salvation with intense love and bore us also in her womb." (St. Bernardine) It is of faith, that Mary had no other children by the flesh. She must have had spiritual children and we are those children.

God revealed to St. Gertrude that "Mary brought forth her first born son and that all mankind was her second-born, according to the Spirit." "Mary, by giving birth to life itself, gave life to many." (Abbot St. William)

Mary also became our spiritual mother at Calvary. "By cooperating at the cross in the birth of the faithful to the life of grace, she became mother to all Christ's members." (St. Augustine) The Canticle says "They made me the keeper in the vineyards but my own vineyard I have not kept" (1:5) meaning "to save many souls she exposed her own Son to death." (St. William)

Scriptural Prophecies

Simeon prophesied that a sword would pierce her soul (Lk 2:35). Truly, the lance which pierced Jesus' side also pierced her soul. We are the children of Mary's sorrows. Mary's will was always united to God's will. "Mary saw the Father love sinners so much that He willed the death of His Son. She also saw her Son wanting to die for sinners. Therefore, Mary, in her love for the Father and Son, consented to her Son's death so we might be saved." (St. Bonaventure)

Isaiah prophesied, "I have tread upon the winepress alone" (63:3). However, Jesus saw Mary's ardent desire to aid in salvation. Therefore, he arranged that she would cooperate in our salvation and become the Mother of our souls. When Jesus said to Mary "Behold your son" (Jn 19:26), He actually said, "Behold the human race which is being born to grace by your sacrifice." "By these words, Mary became the mother of all." (St. Bernardine) The gospel says that Jesus "turned to the disciple" (Jn 19:26). This shows that Jesus gave Mary to all who are his disciples.

A Mother's Love

The Church applies to Mary the words "I am the Mother of fair love" (Eccl 24:24). She says that Mary's love makes her a mother who receives us. She is all love to these whom she had adopted. "What mother attends to her children's welfare as you care for us, O sweet Queen? Do you not seek our welfare more than any earthly mother?" (St. Bonaventure)

Blessed are those protected by such a mother! David prayed, “Save the son of your handmaid” (Ps 36:16), placing himself under Mary (although she was not yet born). “Who could ever snatch these children after they took refuge in Mary’s bosom? What power of hell or what temptation can overcome those under her protection? (St. Robert Bellarmine)

Our Refuge

Some say whales swallow their children when they see that they are in danger. This is what Mary does. “When storms rage she protects them in her own bosom until she brings them to the harbor of salvation.” (Novarinus) Blessed be God who has given Mary to us as a secure refuge in all of life’s dangers.

Our Blessed Lady told St. Bridget, “A mother uses every effort to save her son in the midst of his enemies. So, I will do to all sinners who seek my mercy.” In every battle with hell’s powers, we will conquer by having recourse to the Mother of God, saying always, “We fly to your protection.” How many victories this short prayer has won over the powers of hell!

A Brother and a Mother

Oh children of Mary, be of good heart. Remember, she accepts as her children all who choose to be her children. Rejoice! Why do you fear to be lost when Mary defends you? “Rejoice, for whatever judgment there is, will be pronounced by your brother (Jesus) and your mother (Mary)”. (St. Augustine) “Whoever loves this good mother, should always trust, remembering that Jesus is his brother and Mary is his mother.” (St. Bernadine) St. Anselm says the same thing, “O safe refuge! Our judgment depends on our Brother and our Mother.”

Mary says “He that is little, let him turn to me.” (Pr 9:4) In danger, children always cry “Mother, Mother.” Mary desires that we be her children and call on her in every danger. She saves all who have recourse to her.

Example

William Elphinstine was a young Scotch nobleman, born into Protestantism. Enlightened by grace and helped by a Scotch Jesuit, he saw his errors and became a Catholic by Mary’s intercession. He left France for Rome. In a vision, he saw his deceased mother who told him that she was lost because she died outside the Catholic Church. He redoubled his devotion to Mary and thought of being a religious. Delicate in health, he went to Naples, where God wanted him to live and die as a religious.

Shortly after arriving he became seriously ill and was accepted into the Jesuits. He received Viaticum and was professed. After this, he thanked Mary for snatching him from heresy and leading him to die in the true Church, surrounded by his religious brothers.

Told to rest a little, he said, “This is no time to rest. I am close to the end.” He saw his guardian angel who told him he would only spend a short time in purgatory and then go to heaven. A devout religious learned by revelation that he was in heaven.

Prayer

Mary my Mother, I no longer deserve to be your son. It is enough if you accept me as your servant. Yet you must not forbid me to call you "Mother", because this name consoles me and reminds me to love you. When I think of all my sins, I am consoled that you are my mother. Please allow me to call you "Mother." Then, after God, you will be my refuge in this valley of tears. I hope to die with my soul in your hands and saying, "Mother, have pity on me." Amen

(C) The Greatness of A Mother's Love

A mother's love is a necessary impulse of her nature. Children are commanded to love their parents but no similar command is given to parents. Nature itself moves them to love their children. (St. Thomas) "Mothers will expose themselves to danger for their children." (St. Ambrose) Mary makes her own the words of Isaiah, "Can a woman forget her infant so as not to have pity on the child of her womb? If she should forget, still I will not forget." (49:15)

Our Mother By Love

Mary is our mother by love, and not by the flesh. "I am the mother of fair love." (Eccl 24:24) Only her love makes her our mother. "She glories in being a mother of love. She is all love to those whom she had adopted." Who can recount that love? "At the death of Christ, she also desired to die for love of me." (Arnold of Chartres) "While her son was hanging on the cross, Mary offered her life to the executioners for love of us." (St. Ambrose)

Reasons For Her Love

If we see the reason for her love we will better understand it.

She loves us so greatly because she loves God so greatly. Love of God and of neighbor belong to the same commandment. "This commandment we have from God, that he who loves God must also love his brother." (Jn 4:21)

The Saints

Out of love for God, St. Francis Xavier exposed himself to danger and even sought out those living in caves, where wild beasts were.

St. Francis de Sales risked his life every day, crawling on a frozen beam so he could preach on the other side of the river. St. Paulinus became a slave, to gain liberty for a widow's son. St. Fidelis continued to preach to heretics, even knowing that he would lose his life.

Mary's Love

The saints did so much for others because they loved God. Yet, what saint loved God as much as Mary? In the first moment of her existence, she loved God more than all the saints and angels will ever love Him. Mary revealed to a saintly nun that all creation would be instantly consumed if placed in the fire of her love for God.

No one loves us as much as Mary does. If we added together all the love that all mothers have for their children, all the love that spouses have for one another, and all the love of angels

and saints for their charges, it would not equal Mary's love for a single soul. She loves us more than all the angels and saints put together.

When Jesus said, "Woman, behold your son." (Jn 19:26), he placed each soul in her care. This was Jesus' last wish and the last wish of a dying person is always treasured and never forgotten.

Her Suffering

We are important to her because she suffered so much for us. Mothers love those children for whom they suffered to preserve their lives. To gain us the life of grace, Mary endured the bitter agony of offering Jesus. She saw Him die of cruel and indescribable torments. We are obviously very dear to her because we cost her so much.

"God so loved the world that He gave us His only-begotten Son". (Jn 3:16) "We can also say that Mary so loved us that she gave her only-begotten Son". (St. Bonaventure) She granted Him permission to give Himself up to death. She could have pleaded for his life before the judges. Certainly, the words of such a wise woman would have weight, at least with Pilate who wanted to declare Him innocent. However, she said nothing. She did not want to prevent the death which brought forth our salvation.

Mary's Courage

In Jesus' three hours on the cross, Mary gave Him to us a thousand times. "If the executioners were lacking, she would have crucified him to obey the Father who willed his death for our salvation." (St. Anselm and St. Antoninus) If Abraham had the courage to sacrifice Isaac by his own hands, so did Mary have the courage to sacrifice Jesus. What gratitude we owe to Mary for obtaining our eternal salvation. God abundantly rewarded Abraham, but what can we give to Mary for sacrificing Jesus? "Mary's love obliges us to love her because she has surpassed all others in loving us." (St. Bonaventure)

Purchased at a Great Price

Mary has another motive for her love toward us. She sees in us what she purchased at such a great price. If a son was imprisoned to ransom a slave, the son's mother would value that slave. Mary knows that Jesus came into the world to ransom sinners. He did this by "being obedient even unto death." (Phil 2:8) Mary values us as much as she valued the blood of her Son, because she always prayed for her Son to come into the world to save us. Now, she prays even more, now that we have been purchased. Mary loves every soul because all have been redeemed.

To All Souls

Mary is "clothed with the sun" (Rev 12:1). Just as no one can escape the sun, so no one can hide from her love. "Who can form any idea of the tender care this mother has for us?" (St. Antoninus) "It is evident that she was anxious about the whole human race." (St. Bernard). "Many rightly pray, Lord, grant me the graces which Mary seeks for me." This prayer is powerful because our Mother desires better things than we can possibly desire.

Mary loves to give us graces far more than we love to receive them.” (St. Cornelius de Lapide) “She hastens to make herself known in anticipation of man’s desires” (6:14) We find her present even before we seek for her. “As soon as she perceives our need, she comes to our assistance.” (Richard of St. Laurence)

To Those Who Seek Her

If Mary is good even to the ungrateful soul who seldom approaches her, how much more will she be to those who invoke her often? “She is easily found by those who seek her.” (Wis 6:13) “How easy to find Mary” (St. Albert) “She loves all as her children, but loves more tenderly those who love her. (St. Bernard) “Whoever finds Mary, finds everything because she serves those whom she loves.” (Blessed Raymond)

Testimony of the Saints

A Dominican named Leonard called upon Mary two hundred times a day. Mary came in his last illness, “Leonard, come and live with me and my Son.” “Who are you?” he asked. “I am the Mother of Mercy whom you have so often invoked. Let us go together to Paradise.” He died that same day.

“If I love Mary I am sure of persevering to the end.” (St. John Birchmans S.J.) This saint always repeated, “I will love Mary, I will love Mary.” “Mary’s love exceeds ours because she is the most loving of lovers.” (St. Ignatius Martyr).

St. Stanislaus Kostka loved Mary so much that he moved all his hearers to love her. He always gave her new names and new titles. Before doing anything, he would turn to her image. He said the rosary as if he were talking to her face to face. While singing the Salve Regina, his whole face was inflamed with love. One day a Jesuit priest asked him how much he loved Mary. “Father, she is my mother. What more can I say?” The priest said that the words were said with such tenderness that it seemed as if an angel were speaking.

Blessed Hermann called Mary, “the spouse of my love.” Mary gave him the same title. St. Philip Neri was always filled with consolation when thinking of Mary. He called her “My delight.” St. Bonaventure called her, “My Lady, my Mother. My heart and my soul.” St. Bernard called Mary “the ravisher of hearts”. “You have ravished my heart, O Queen.”

St. Bernadette spent time each day before a picture of Mary, telling everyone, “I visited my beloved.” When St. Aloysius Gongaga heard Mary’s name, his heart was always inflamed and his face lighted up like a fire. St. Francis Solano had a “holy madness” for Mary. He sang and played a musical instrument before her picture, explaining that worldly lovers sang to their beloved.

Father John Trexo, S.J. was a slave of Mary. When he visited a Church dedicated to her, he would cry and kiss the ground as the floor of Our Lady’s house. Fr. James Martinez, S.J. would be taken to heaven on her feasts. He said, “I wish I had the hearts of all the angels and saints to love her as they love her.”

An Unequaled Love

Let us do all that a human lover would do to make his affections known. “I know, O Mary, that you love us with an invincible love and a love that can never be surpassed.” (St. Peter Damien)

Blessed Alphonsus Rodriguez, S.J., kneeling before Mary’s image said, “Mary, you love me but not as much as I love you.” Mary responded, “What are you saying, Alphonsus! My love is greater than any love you have for me. There is a greater distance between your love and my love than between heaven and earth.”

“Blessed are the hearts of those who love Mary. Blessed are those devoted to her. Mary never allows her followers to conquer her in love. She always increases her past favors with new ones.” (St. Bonaventure) “May my heart languish and my soul be consumed with your love, Jesus and Mary. But since I cannot love you without your grace, give me the grace to love you as you deserve.” (St. Anselm)

Example

A poor shepherdess left her flocks in the mountain to pray at Our Lady’s shrine. One day, she gathered flowers as a crown and put them on our Lady’s statue, saying “I would put a crown of gold on your head but I am poor.” She fell ill to the point of death.

Two religious, passing by that way, sat down by a tree. One slept and one stayed awake but both had the same thoughts. They saw a multitude of beautiful women, but one surpassed all the rest in beauty. The religious asked, “Who are you and why are you here on this rugged mountain?” “I am the Mother of God and I am going with these virgins to visit a shepherdess who frequently visited me.” The two decided to seek out this shepherdess. When they entered the house and greeted the woman, she said, “Sisters, ask God to let you see who is helping me.” They immediately saw Mary by the woman’s side, holding a crown. The virgins began to sing and the woman’s soul left her body. Mary placed the crown on her head and took her to Paradise. (Told by Fr. Auriemma)

Prayer

O Lady, you loved me when I did not love you. How much more you love me, now that I do love you. I love you but not as I should. You are pure. I am defiled. You are humble, I am proud. O Mary, since you love me, make me like you. You have the power to change hearts. Show the world what you can do. Make me a saint and a worthy child.

(D) Mother of Repentant Sinners

Mary told St. Bridget that she was also the mother of sinners who were willing to repent. “Resolve to sin no more and Mary will love you more quickly than any earthly mother.” (St. Gregory VII).

Need to Repent

To be a child of Mary, the soul must first abandon sin. “Whoever acts differently than Mary shows he is not her son. He surrenders his lineage.” (St. Peter Chrysologus). She is

humble, pure and full of love. The sinner is proud, wicked and hates his neighbor. This is proof that he is not her son. “The sons of Mary imitate her in chastity, generosity, meekness, and mercy.”

If we displease her by a sinful life, why would we want to be her child? A sinner said to Mary, “Show yourself a mother.” She responded “Show yourself a son.” Someone called her a Mother of Mercy. She responded, “You call me a mother of mercy but by your sins you make me a mother of sorrows.” “He is cursed by God who angers his mother.” (Eccls 3:18). God curses those who by obstinacy in sin afflict his tender mother.

“Obstinacy”

I say obstinacy because Mary will certainly help any sinner who tries to give up sin and seeks her help. St. Bridget heard Jesus saying to his mother, “Your consolations are never lacking to those who try to return to God.” If the sinner is obstinate, Mary cannot help him. However, Mary will gladly extend her powerful hand to the sinner who finds himself chained by some passion that makes him a slave of hell. He need only implore her help to withdraw from his state of sin. She will deliver him from his chains and lead him to salvation.

The Merits of Mary

“Prayer said by a sinner is still useful in obtaining grace to abandon sin.” (St. Bernard). “The sinner’s prayer obtains the grace of forgiveness. This grace comes from the merits of Christ.” (St. Thomas) The same is true of Mary. “If the one who prays does not merit to be heard, the merits of Mary will intercede effectively.” (St. Anselm)

Mary’s merits can obtain forgiveness. “You were unworthy of grace. However, through Mary you received God’s help.” (St. Bernard) “A mother would do everything to reconcile a hatred between her two sons. Mary is the mother of Jesus and our mother. She does all she can to reconcile us to Jesus.” “O Mary, you are the mother of both the criminal (the sinner) and the judge (Jesus). Both are your children and you cannot endure any discord.” (St. Bonaventure)

Looks At Intention

Mary wants the sinner to amend. When the sinner is at her feet, she does not consider his crimes but his intention. If his intention is good, she will embrace him, no matter what sins he has committed. “However much a person sins, I am ready to receive him immediately when he repents. I pay no attention to his sins, because I want to heal his wounds. (Our Lady to St. Bridget)

Mary feels her children’s sins, as if they were hers. The Caananite woman, seeking a healing for her daughter said, “Lord, have mercy on me.” (Mt. 15:22) She said “me” because mothers feel their children’s sufferings as if they were their own. When Mary prays to the Lord for sinners, she says, “Have mercy on me.” She pleads, “This poor soul is my daughter so have pity, not so much on her, as on me, her mother.” (Richard of St. Laurence).

All Would Be Pardoned

If all sinners approached her, they would all be pardoned. “Mary, you embrace sinners abandoned by everyone else and you hold on, until each is reconciled.” (St. Bonaventure).

While in sin, the creature is hated. However, if he goes to Mary she will never reject him. She will hold him until he is reconciled with God and put into the state of grace.

In Scripture, a mother cleverly approached King David. “My one son killed my other son. I have already lost one and will lose the second unless you take mercy on me.” (2 Sam 14:5) Seeing her plight, David set the second son free. Mary says the same thing to God concerning a delinquent sinner. “I had two sons, Jesus and this sinner. This sinner killed Jesus on the cross and now Your justice will condemn him. Jesus is already dead. If I have lost one son, do not make me lose the other.”

Mary's Diligence

God will not condemn sinners for whom Mary prays. “Mary is so diligent in her tasks that she allows no soul given to her charge to perish. Who can even describe the compassion, love and clemency of the Virgin Mother toward us? No words can express it.” (Blosius) “Let us embrace the feet of Mary and not leave go until she blesses us.” (St. Bernard). “I would desire to die before her image and be certain of salvation.” (St. Bonaventure)

Each sinner should say, “My Mother, because of my sins you should chastise me. Yet, even if you took my life, I would still trust that you would save my soul. Grant me the grace to die before your image. If that happens, I am convinced that I will not be lost.

Example

Eskil, a noble youth, went to a city in Saxony (Hildesheim) to study. Unfortunately, he fell into a sinful life. He came close to death and received Extreme Unction. While in this state he has a vision. He saw himself in hell. However, he escaped through a hole and found refuge in a great palace where he saw Our Lady. She asked him, “Presumptuous man, why do you dare to appear before me. Go to the fire you deserve.” He sought the Virgin's mercy and asked some bystanders to intercede. When they did, Mary replied, “Do you know the wicked life he leads, never even saying the Hail Mary?” They said, “Yes, but he will change his life.” Eskil added, “I promise to be your good follower.” Mary said, “Be faithful to me. Meanwhile I will free you from death and hell.” Then the vision disappeared.

Eskil told everyone and led a holy life with great devotion to Our Lady. He became an Archbishop in Sweden. In his final years, he became a Cistercian monk at Clairvaux and is numbered by some among their saints.

Prayer

O Sovereign Queen, I should not approach you or call upon you. Yet I will not allow my sins to deprive me of my confidence in you. I have despised God's majesty. However, the evil is done and I now have recourse to you. “Tell me anyone who is more compassionate or in whom I should have greater confidence.” (St. Anselm). I can find no one, in heaven or earth, who is better able to help me. I deserve hell but I come to you with hope that you will not abandon me.

1.2 Mary, Our Life and Our Sweetness

“You are our life and our sweetness.”

(A) Mary Obtains Pardon of Sins

The Church calls Mary, “Our Life”, because grace gives life to the soul just as the soul gives life to the body. Without grace, the soul is dead. “You have the name of being alive but really you are dead.” (Rev 3:1) By obtaining grace for sinners, Mary restores them to life.

Just Find Mary

Commenting on the words, “He that shall find me, shall find life”, St. Bonaventure says, “Honor the Blessed Virgin and you will find eternal salvation.” “God did not destroy the human race after the first sin because he loved the Virgin who was destined to come from the human race. All the mercies of the Old Testament were given in consideration of Our Lady.” (St. Bernardine)

“Seek grace and seek it by Mary.” (St. Bernard) Though we have lost our grace, she has already found it. She is “the finder of grace.” The Angel Gabriel said this clearly, “You have found grace.” (Lk 1:30). If Mary was always full of grace, she must have found it for us sinners. “Let sinners who have lost grace say to Mary, “Lady, what has been found must be restored to the one who lost it.” (Cardinal Hugo) “If we hope to recover grace, we have to go to Mary, who always finds it.” (Richard of St. Laurence)

Our Defense

Mary is our defense. “Go to Mary and show her your wounds. She will ask her Son by the breasts that gave Him milk, to pardon you. He will certainly grant your petition.” (St. Bernard.) The Church prays daily, “Help our weaknesses so that we, who are mindful of the Mother of God, may rise from our sins by her intercession.” She is the “hope of evildoers” (St. Laurence Justinian), “the sinner’s ladder to God.” (St. Bernard). She is “the only hope of sinners” (Ancient writer). Only by her help can we gain forgiveness.

“Sinners receive pardon only by the intercession of Mary” (St. John Chrysostom) “Mary is the throne from which our Lord dispenses all grace. She is the ‘fair daughter’ of our Church. (St. John Chrysostom)

The Dawn of New Birth

“As the dawn is the end of the night, Mary is the end of vices.” (Pope Innocent III). When devotion to Mary begins in the soul, it has the same effect as Mary’s birth. The night of sin is over. “O Mother of God, your help never fails. To pronounce your name is a sign of life in the soul, or at least that that life will soon return.” (St. Germanus)

Mary said, “Behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed.” (Lk 1:48). “Yes, all generations will call you blessed because you have begotten life for all generations.” (St. Bernard) “Even if you have committed all possible sins, go with confidence to Our Lady and you will find her hands filled with mercy”. (Bernardine de Bustis)

The Pledge of Mercy

Mary is the pledge of divine mercy. “When souls have recourse to Mary, God gives them Mary as a pledge of forgiveness. God forgives all who go to her.” (St. Andrew of Crete). “The prophets rejoiced to know that God would be appeased by Mary’s humility.” (St. Bridget)

A sinner who goes to Mary must never have fear of being rejected. “Mary is the new ark. As brute animals were saved in the ark, so great sinners will gain salvation in Mary.” (St. Bernard) St. Gertrude saw a vision of Mary welcoming lions, bears and tigers. She realized that these were abandoned sinners who went to Mary and were saved from eternal death by Mary. Let us enter the ark. She will not reject us.

Example

Ellen, a wicked woman, entered a Church and heard a homily on the rosary. She bought a pair of rosaries but wore them concealed. She repeated the Hail Mary without devotion, but Our Lady gave her such consolation that she kept repeating the Hail Mary. Filled with horror over her sins, she went to confession and amazed the priest with her sorrow. She then said the rosary at Our Lady’s altar.

Our Lady spoke to her, “Ellen, change your life and I will give you a large share in my graces.” She promised to spend her life doing penance. She gave away all her goods, and overcame all temptations. She received extraordinary graces of visions and prophecies. The Virgin told her when she would die. On that day Mary came for her with her Son. (Fr. Bovio)

Prayer

O Mary, you are the “refuge of sinners.” Therefore, you must save me. If I were a saint, I would not seek your mercy. However, I am a sinner. You, Mother of Mercies, assist every heart that is not obstinate. Tell me what to do, because I am resolved to do everything needed to regain grace.

(B) Mary Obtains Perseverance

We can never merit final perseverance. It is totally God’s gift. Yet, all who seek it will receive the gift from God, (St. Augustine) and will infallibly gain it if they ask until the end of their life. (Suarez). “What is required every day must be asked for every day.” (St. Robert Bellarmine) Since all graces come through Mary’s hands, final perseverance, must also come through her. The Church says of Mary the words, “Those that follow me shall not sin. Those who explain me, will have everlasting life.” (Eccl 24:30) and “Strength is mine. By me kings reign.” (Pr 8:14) God gives her strength and Her servants become kings. Sinners rule over their senses and become worthy to reign in heaven. Mary is the “tower of David, which is built with bulwarks” (Song 4:4) Especially in times of war, she defends her followers.

Images of Mary

Mary is like a plane tree. Her leaves are shields against injury and shelter from the heat. She keeps her followers from the fire of passions and temptations. Pity the souls that abandon this defense and do not seek Mary in time of danger.

“Take away the sun and there is no day. Take away Mary and there is only night.” (St. Bernard) Without devotion to Mary, the soul is covered with darkness. “You have appointed darkness and it is night” (Ps.104:20). Without heaven’s light, the soul becomes the place of the devil and of every sin. “If anyone is condemned by Mary, he is necessarily lost. Woe to those who despise her light.” (St. Anselm)

Mary’s Life

St. Francis Borgia, S.J., doubted that anyone could persevere in religious life without devotion to Mary. Realizing that some Jesuit novices had no devotion to Mary, he warned the novice master. All of them later abandoned their religious call.

The Blessed Virgin is the breath of Christians. “The body cannot live without breathing and the soul cannot live without devotion to Mary. Having the name of Mary upon our lips is proof that we are alive.” (St. Germanus). Blessed Alan was greatly tempted and ready to give in, when Our Lady appeared to him and said, “If you had invoked me, you would not have run into this danger.”

Mary’s Light

“Blessed is the man who hears me and watches daily at my gates.” (Prov 8:34) For those followers who watch constantly, Mary obtains light for sinners so that they abandon sin and walk in virtue. She is “the moon at night, the dawn at daybreak and the sun at mid-day.” (Pope Innocent III). She is the moon for those in sin’s darkness, so they see their state of damnation; she is the dawn so they abandon sin and return to God. She is the sun to those in grace, preventing any fall into sin.

“Her bands are healthy bonds.” (Eccl 6:31) St. Laurence says, “These bonds prevent us from straying into vice.” “Mary keeps a constant watch over our virtues, restrains the evil spirits from harming us and keeps back God’s arm of Justice. (St. Bonaventure)

Proverbs say, “All her servants are clothed with double garments.” (31:21) Mary clothes us in Jesus’ merits and her own. St. Philip Neri said to his penitents, “If you want to persevere, be devout to Our Lady.” “Whoever loves Mary will persevere.” (St. John Berchmanns, S.J.) If the Prodigal Son had a mother, he would not have left or, at least, he would have returned sooner. With Mary, a soul never leaves God’s house. If he does, he soon returns.

Help in Temptations

In temptations, Mary walks with us and keeps us from falling. If souls went to her right away, they would never fall. “We must be like little birds who gather under their mother’s wings when they need protection.” (St. Thomas of Villanova) We must not reason with temptation but fly to Mary. “O Mary, after God, we have no other refuge except you, our only hope.” (St. Thomas of Villanova). “O man, you are tossed about on a stormy sea. To avoid being drowned, turn your eyes to the bright star called Mary and keep them fixed there. Let her name never be off your lips. Let your heart never lose confidence in her name. Following her, you will never go astray. Imploring her, you will never despair. If she protects you, you have nothing to fear. If she guides you, you will not grow afraid. Do this and you will live.” (St. Bernard)

Example

The Church Fathers record the life of St. Mary of Egypt. When 12 years old, she went to Alexandria and lived in sin. She went to Jerusalem on the feast of the Holy Cross. She tried to enter a Church, and could not. She realized God was repelling her because of her sins. Fortunately, she saw a picture of Mary and cried out, “You are the refuge of sinners. Help me to enter the Church and I will change my life. The Virgin spoke. “Because you called on me, you can now enter the Church.”

Once she entered, she adored the cross and returned outside to the picture of Mary. “Where should I go to do penance.” Mary replied “Across the Jordan there is a place of rest.” After receiving Confession and Communion, she crossed the Jordan and stayed in the desert. During the first 17 years, the devil tempted her greatly. Each time, she turned to Mary. After 17 years, these combats ceased. She stayed forty more years in the desert. At 87 years old, she met Abbot Zosimus to whom she told the story. He brought her Holy Communion and promised to return later. When he did, he found her dead with a bright light around her body. He buried her in the desert and told everyone the story.

Prayer

O compassionate Mother, look at this traitor who kneels at your feet. My sins increase my confidence because your compassion is even greater to great sinners. I do not fear my sins because you give the remedy. I do not fear the devil because you are more powerful. I do not fear your Son because your words appease Him. O Mary, I hope all things from you because you are all powerful with God.

(C) Mary, Our Sweetness, Especially at Death

“A friend loves us at all times. A true friend is proved in trial.” (Pr 17:17) Only in adversity do friends show their true colors. Worldly friends are faithful in our prosperity, but abandon us at our death. Mary is just the opposite. She is our life who obtains for us a happy death. Since the day that Mary stood at the cross, she has had the privilege to assist at our deaths. Therefore, we say, “Pray for us, now, and at the hour of our death.”

Afflictions of the Dying

The dying suffer great afflictions. They experience remorse for past sins, fear of judgment and uncertainty about salvation. Hell spares no effort to gain a soul about to enter eternity. Otherwise, hell would lose the soul forever. “The devil has come down with great fury for he knows he has but a short time.” (Rev 12:12). The devil brings many other devils with him. At the deathbed, all the devils unite to capture the soul.

St. Andrew Avellino (1521-1608) suffered demonic torments on his deathbed and his religious brothers could see his agony. They redoubled their prayers and were consoled to see the saint look often at a picture of Mary. God gave him the victory. The contortions stopped. Peace filled him. He died looking at Mary’s picture. At the same time, a Capuchin nun, far away, told others, “Recite a Hail Mary. A saint has just died.”

The Devils Flee

These rebellious devils flee from the presence of Mary. With her protection at death, we need fear nothing. David wrote, "If I should walk in the shadow of death, I would fear no evil. Your rod and staff give me courage." (Ps 23:4). The staff is the cross and the rod is Mary's intercession. "This divine Mother is the rod which conquers the violence of the infernal enemies." (St. Peter Damian) "If Mary is for us, who is against us?" (St. Antoninus)

At the death of Fr. Padial, S.J., Mary appeared and said, "The hour has come when the angels congratulate you." As she arrived, an army of demons was seen taking flight saying, "We can do nothing because she who is without sin defends him." Fr. Haywood, assaulted by devils at his death, invoked Mary. Then, people heard him say, "Thank you, Mary, you have come to my aid."

Mary sends St. Michael and all the angels to defend her dying servants. "O Virgin Mother, Michael, the prince of the heavenly army, obeys your commands and defends the souls who have prayed to you, day and night." (St. Bonaventure) Isaiah says, "The netherworld below is all astir preparing for your coming." (14:9) However, when the soul is defended by Mary, the devils do not even accuse it because she herself accompanies each soul to God's judgment seat.

She Receives the Dying

"What a day of joy when Mary will go to meet you." (St. Jerome to Eusochea). Mary told St. Bridget, "I, their mother, will hurry to them so they can have consolation." "Mary receives the souls of the dying." (St. Vincent Ferrer).

Charles, son of St. Bridget, died at war, far from his mother. Mary appeared to St. Bridget and said that she had assisted Charles at death, telling him what prayers to say. Then Bridget saw the devil admitting that she had kept him from tempting Charles. Mary also presented him to Jesus in such a way that the devil had no chance to present his reasons to claim the soul. How fortunate is the soul when it is bound to Mary at death's hour.

Joy At Death

Fr. Benetti wrote in his book about being at the death bed of a soul who loved Mary. The person told others, "If only you could know the joy I experience now because I served Mary." The great theologian, Fr. Suarez, S.J. said that he would sacrifice all his learning for the value of one Hail Mary. While dying he said, "I could not have thought that death was so sweet."

You, devout reader, will experience the same joy at death if you are faithful to this mother. She is always faithful to those who honor her by rosaries, fasts and praise. She will not withhold this consolation. Even if you were a sinner for a long time, live well from this day on. When the devil tempts you to despair, Mary will console you and come for you at the moment of your death.

Past Sins

Such will be your happy death, reader, if you are faithful to Mary. Even if you have sinned before, she will gain you a happy death. Even if you lose confidence, she will claim you. Adolph, Count of Alsace, had a tender love of Mary. At death, he remembered his past sins,

which caused him to fear. Mary came and encouraged him, “Adolphus, you are mine. Why do you fear death so much?” Hearing these words, all the fears left. As long as we serve her the remainder of our lives, we must feel certain that Mary will assist us at our death.

Mary said to St. Matilda (895-968) “I am a faithful mother and am present at the deaths of all who serve me.” Our heavenly Queen promises her assistance at death. What a consolation when our eternal destiny is to be soon decided. This favor was clearly granted to St. Clare, St. Teresa, and St. Peter of Alcantra.

Example

St. John of God (1495-1550) had great devotion to Mary and expected her to assist him at death. However, he was afflicted when she was not there. Mary arrived and read his thoughts, “John, I can never forsake my followers. If I did not come sooner it was because your time had not yet come.”

Prayer

O Mother, how shall I die? Even now the thoughts of my sins make me tremble. I doubt if I have been sorry enough. Also, my actions are sullied. Comfort me. Snatch this sinner from hell and lead him to the Kingdom. I will look for you in my last hour.

1.3 Mary Our Hope

“You are our hope”

(A) Mary The Hope of All

Modern heretics do not want us to greet Mary or say, “Mary, our hope.” They want us to hope in God alone. They quote Jeremiah “Cursed is he who trusts in man.” (17:5) They say that Mary is a creature and how can a creature be our hope. Yet, the Church wants us to say, “Mary, our hope.”

Two Ways to Hope

“We can place our hope in a person in two ways – as a principal cause or as an intermediate cause.” (St. Thomas). Those who hope in a king seek the favor from the principal cause. Those who hope in the messenger, hope for it through an intercessor. In this case, the favor will come from the king but through his favored one.

For Jesus to favor us, we must have confidence. To increase this confidence, he has given us a Mother as our advocate. Those who hope in creatures alone, independent of God’s will, certainly deserve Jeremiah’s curse. But those who trust in Mary honor God because He wants her to be trusted.

We call Mary “our hope” because “through her intercession we gain what we could not gain by our own unaided prayers.” (St. Robert Bellarmine). We pray to her “not because we lack trust in God’s mercy, but because we fear our own unworthiness.” (Suarez)

She is “The Mother of Holy Hope” giving birth to the immense hope of eternal life. St. Ephrem calls her, “O certain salvation of Christians. O Helper of sinners. O Fortress of the faithful.” The saints say “After God, our only hope.”

The Will of God

“God wills that all be saved by means of Mary.” (St. Bernard). “O Mary, after God, we have no hope except in you.” (St. Thomas of Villanova) “This is God’s plan. He has placed all redemption in Mary’s hands so she can dispense it as she wills.”

God commanded Moses to make the mercy seat of pure gold. (Ex 25:17) Mary is this Mercy seat. Through her, God speaks to the whole world.

An Angel

God sent an angel to Mary because he wanted the world to receive His Son through her. “As Eve was seduced by a fallen angel, Mary was led by a good angel. In doing this, she became the advocate of the whole human race.” (St. Irenaeus) “Every help that men have received and will receive from God has come and will come through the hands of Mary.” (Blessed Raymond Jordano)

Our Appointed Consoler

“O Mary, you are so loving. In the middle of our doubts, you enlighten us. In times of danger, you encourage us. You are hope for those in despair and help for those abandoned. You are all-powerful because your Son complies instantly with your requests.” (Blosius)

“O Lady, you are riches in my poverty and healing in my wounds. You are the end of my captivity and my hope of salvation. Have pity on my tears.” (St. Germanus)

Finding All Good

“All good things came to me together with her.” (Wis 7:11) Her faithful servants can say that they have gained everything by devotion to Mary. She is the mother of all good things.” (St. Antoninus) “When we find Mary, we find all” (Abbott of Celles). In the Book of Proverbs, Mary claims “With me are riches that I may enrich those who love me”. (Pr 8:18) “Let us keep our eyes on Mary’s hands. Through them we receive all the graces we deserve.” (St. Bonaventure)

Through Mary, the proud become humble and the passionate become meek. Those in darkness find light. Those who are lost find salvation. Mary prophesied this in Elizabeth’s house, “Henceforth, all generations shall call me blessed.” (Lk 1:48) “She is blessed because she has given life and glory to all nations.” (St. Bernard)

Accepting All

“Our Lord says to the whole world, ‘Children of Adam, I have given Mary to the world. I made her so that all could come to her without fear. I created her with a compassionate disposition, so that she cannot despise anyone who flies to her. Her mantle of mercy is wide open and she consoles all who are at her feet.’ (Lanspergius) May God be praised for giving us so loving a mother!”

“I know that God cannot refuse anyone who seeks Him with his whole heart. If he rejects me because of my sins, I will place myself at the feet of Mary. I will remain prostrate there until she obtains my forgiveness.” (St. Bonaventure)

Example

A young woman named Musa was very devout toward Mary. One day, while with bad companions, she was ready to lose her innocence. Mary appeared with saints. “Musa, do you wish to be one of these saints?” “Yes” she said. “Then withdraw from these companions and in a month you will be with me.” Musa told the vision to others. Thirteen days later the Blessed Virgin appeared again and invited her to come. She said, “O Lady, behold I come” and she died. (St. Gregory)

Prayer

O Mary, I, a sinner, turn my eyes to you. I have such confidence in you that I place my salvation in your hands. Whomever you protect is saved. If you defend me, I shall be saved. I will die saying, “Jesus is my only hope. After Jesus is Mary.”

(B) Mary, The Hope of Sinners

The Sun and Moon

God made two great lights. A greater light to rule the day and a lesser light to rule the night (Gen 1:16) “Christ is the greater light. He rules the just. Mary is the lesser light. She rules the sinners.” (Card. Hugo) The just soul lives in the clear day of grace, (Jesus). Those who live in darkness are enlightened by the moon (Mary). A sinner has fallen into the night of sin. “Whoever is in the night of sin, let him cast his eyes on the moon and look to Mary.” (Pope Innocent III). Having lost the sun of justice, the soul must turn to the moon. Mary will reveal his state of sin and give the strength to repent it. “By Mary’s prayers, innumerable sinners are converted.” (St. Methodius)

Cities of Refuge

The church calls Mary “The refuge of sinners.” In the Old Testament, certain cities were places of refuge. Criminals could avoid punishment by going there. God has established one city – Mary. “Glorious things are said of you, O City of God.” In the Old Testament, not every criminal found refuge and they did not receive the protection. With Mary, all sinners who go to her will find refuge. “Mary is the City of refuge to all who go there.” (St. John Damascene).

Jeremiah says, “Let us enter the fenced city and be silent there.” (8:15) “The Virgin is a city fenced around with grace and glory.” (St. Albert the Great) We are silent because we have offended the Lord. However, we can be silent because Mary will speak. “Fly, all children of Adam, who have outraged God. Fly to the bosom of your Mother. She is our only city of refuge.” (Blessed Fernandez)

Hospital of Sinners

“O Virgin, you are the only advocate of the unprotected. Hail, hospital of sinners.” (St. Ephrem) David speaks of Mary when he says, “He has hidden me in his tabernacle” (Ps 27:5). “She is God’s tabernacle which he entered to accomplish our redemption.” (St. Germanus)

“God granted Peter the power to heal even by his shadow. Will he not grant greater power to his mother?” (St. Basil of Selucia). Mary is a public infirmary which receives all the sick. In hospitals established for the poor, those in greatest need have the greatest claim to be admitted.

A sinner devoid of merit can say, “O Lady, you are the refuge of the sick poor. I am the poorest of all and have the greatest right to be welcomed by you.” “O Mary, you are the only refuge that we know.” (St. Thomas of Villanova)

Star of the Sea

St. Bridget calls Mary, “The star which comes before the sun.” When a sinful soul has devotion to her, the sun of God’s grace will soon arrive.

St. Bonaventure says that sinners have fallen from the ship of grace. They are buffeted by the waves of guilt and fear. They have no light and no guide. They will soon die in despair. At this point, our Lord points out Mary, the Star of the Sea, and says to them, “Do not despair. Cast your eyes on this beautiful star. Breathe again with confidence. The star will guide you to salvation.” St. Bernard says, “If you do not want to be lost in the storm, cast your eyes upon the star.”

“Mary is the hospital for all those oppressed by temptation, calamity or persecution. (Blosius) When Mary sees sinners approaching, she welcomes them and gains pardon. She despises no one, no matter how unworthy. She gives protection to all, consoling them as soon as she is invoked. Her sweetness even awakens sinners who have hatred for God. She excites those plunged into lethargy. God has so created her that no one fears to approach her. No one can perish who cultivates devotion to Mary.” (Blosius)

Restraining God’s Justice

Mary is “like a plane-tree growing beside the water.” (Sir 24:14) She shelters sinners and they escape God’s wrath. Isaiah says, “O God, you are angry. There is none who calls upon your name” (64:4) St. Bonaventure comments, “O God, before Mary, no one could restrain your arm. Now, Mary seizes the sword of your justice so it does not fall on the sinner.” “God complained through Ezekiel that He could find no one to keep Him from punishing sinners. This office was reserved for Our Lady who withholds His arm.” (Richard of St. Laurence)

“Sinners, do not be discouraged. Have recourse to Mary. God wants her to help you in every necessity.” (Basil of Seleucia) She seeks out the most abandoned sinners. If they turn to her, she always finds a way to make them pleasing to God.

Rebecca is a figure of Mary. Her husband, Isaac, promised Esau his blessing if he cooked a meal with two kid goats. However, Rebecca wanted the blessing for the younger son, Jacob. So she asked Jacob to bring two kid goats which she quickly prepared. Now, Mary asks the angels to bring her sinners (the kid goats) so she can make them acceptable to God. “O wise woman, you knew how to make the kid goats taste better than venison.” (Abbot Franco)

Grace for All Sinners

“Every sinner in the world, whatever distance he is from God, will recover grace by asking my assistance.” (Our Lady to St. Bridget) St. Bridget heard Jesus tell Mary that she would gain grace even for Luther if he would only humble himself.

Because it saved all kinds of beasts, Noah’s ark is a true figure of Mary. Sinners, by their vices, are already beasts. There is one difference. The animals on the ark remained animals, but under the mantle of Mary, sinners cease to be beasts. St. Gertrude saw Mary with all kinds of wild animals under her mantle. These represented sinners whom Mary welcomed the moment they turned to her.

“O Lady, you reject no sinner who approaches you. If he asks your help, you free him from the gulf of despair.” (St. Bernard) O Mary, You are kind, even to the worst sinner. How unfortunate the soul who does not love you! Although having the power to gain your help, that soul has no confidence in you because no one is lost who has recourse to you.

God’s Harvest

Boaz allowed Ruth “to gather ears of corn after the reapers.” (Ruth 2:3) “The reapers are all the missionaries and preachers who reap souls for God. However, they leave behind some hardened sinners. Only Mary can save them by her intercession.” (St. Bonaventure) If they refuse to be gathered in by Mary, they will be lost. “No sinner in the world is rejected by Mary. She knows how to reconcile all to Jesus, if they just seek her assistance.” (Blosius)

Mary is the “hope of those who are in despair.” (St. John Damascene) She is “the only hope of sinners.” (St. Lawrence Justinian) She is “the safe harbor for all who sail on the sea of the world” and “the consolation of those who are to be condemned.” (St. Ephrem)

St. Bernard encourages the despairing soul when he says, “O Lady, who can be without confidence when you assist those in despair.”

Example

A sinner had a vision of judgment. The devil was accusing him, but Mary was defending him. His sins were put in a scale and weighed more than his good works. Mary then placed her finger on the scale to turn it in his favor. The sinner understood the vision. Mary would gain his pardon if he converted. And so he did.

Prayer

O Mary, I approach you with a wounded heart. May this sight move you to tenderness because I am lost and merit hell. Do not wait for me to acquire virtues. See only my confidence in you. If you take charge of my salvation, I will have no fear.

CHAPTER FOUR

1.4 MARY, OUR HELP

To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve

(A) Mary's Promptitude

We are poor children of Eve, wandering as exiles in this valley of tears. However, blessed the soul who hears Mary's advice and who watches at her gate of mercy. "Blessed is the man who hears me and waits at my gates." (Pr 8:34)

The Church

The Church teaches us to call on Mary and commands us to have a unique relationship with her. The Church establishes feasts in her honor, devotes Saturday to her devotion, obliges priests to invoke her in the divine office and wants all the faithful to say the Angelus, three times a day. The church always invokes her in public calamities. Mary desires all this so that our confidence in her is increased. "She looks for those who approach her devoutly, so she can adopt them as her children." (St. Bonaventure)

Ruth (whose name in the Bible means "seeing and hurrying") is a figure of Mary "who sees our failings and hastens to help us." (St. Bonaventure) "Because of her great desires, Mary cannot allow delay. She distributes her graces and showers them liberally upon her servants." (Novarino)

Mary's Prompt Succor

How prompt she is to help us. Speaking of the bride, the Canticle says, "Your two breasts are like twin fawns" (4:5) "As the fawns are swift, so Mary's breasts give milk quickly to all who ask. Even by light pressure they give forth large drops." (Richard of St. Laurence) Her compassion is given even to those who only say one Hail Mary.

"Mary can act only as God acts. God has said, 'Ask and you shall receive.' So, whenever a soul invokes Mary, she quickly assists. "She takes wing and flies to our aid." (Novarino) The Book of Revelation says "Two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman so she might fly into the desert." (12:14) These wings are Mary's love for God. She comes to our help with "the speed, greater than any Seraphim." (Amadeus) Luke writes that Mary went "in haste" to Elizabeth's house (1:39).

The Canticle says of Mary "her hands are skillful at the wheel" (5:14) The way she turns the wheel is the easiest and most profitable way of working. Mary helps as soon as we call. She is "the salvation of all those who call on her." (St. Bonaventure) This great lady desires more to give us graces than we desire to receive them.

Mother of Mercy

The multitude of our sins should not diminish our confidence. "A good mother applies the needed remedy to her child no matter how great the illness. So Mary heals our wounds, no matter how grievous our sins." (Richard of St. Laurence) Mary showed to St. Gertrude her

mantle spread out to receive all who invoke her. The saint was told, “Angels constantly guard Mary’s followers from the attacks of hell.”

Acting Beforehand

Her compassion is so great that she does not even wait for our prayers. “She hastens to make herself known in anticipation of man’s desires.” (Wis 6:13) She acts beforehand toward those who seek her protection, gaining us favors even before we ask.

She is called “as beautiful as the moon” (Song 6:10) because her love is so tender and her mercy so prompt. “Her heart is so filled with compassion that she pours out her tenderness as soon as she sees our needs. This kind queen cannot see our needs and not help us.” (Richard of St. Victor)

At Cana, Mary saw the young couple’s embarrassment because the wine had failed. Without being asked by them, she listened to her own compassionate heart and laid her distress before her Son, “They have no wine.” (Jn 2:3) To console Mary, her Son changed the water into wine. “If Mary, without being asked, is so prompt to help, how much more will she help those who invoke her?” (Novarimus)

Heard Quickly

“Who in their night of sin ever called upon her without receiving help?” (Pope Innocent III) “Who ever faithfully implored her and was abandoned?” (Blessed Euthychian) Such a case has never happened. “Anyone who invoked you, O Virgin, and was not helped, should no longer praise your mercy.” (St. Bernard) “Heaven would sooner be destroyed than Mary would fail to help someone who asked with confidence.” (Blosius)

“When we call on Mary, we will often be heard more quickly than if we called on Jesus’ name” (St. Anselm). He gives a reason for this. “Jesus as Judge must punish. Mary as patroness must bring mercy.” Mary is not more powerful than Jesus (His merits gain us salvation). Rather, knowing that Jesus will be our Judge, our confidence fails us. Mary has only one task. She is the Mother of Mercy. “We obtain more promptly by calling on Mary. Our Lord, because He is just, discerns each one’s merits and does not immediately grant pardon. When Mary is invoked, our Mother supplies what is lacking in the person’s merits. (St. Anselm).

Refuses No One

“Many things asked of God are not granted. When they are asked of Mary, they are. How is this? God wants to honor his Mother.” (Nicephorus) St. Bridget heard Jesus say to Mary, “I will grant your every petition, for I can refuse you nothing. I will grant every request made in your name, as long as the sinner will amend his life.” The same truth was revealed to St. Gertrude. “Remember, O Mary, that never was it heard in any age that anyone seeking your protection was left unaided.” (St. Bernard)

Example

St. Francis de Sales, when 17 years old, studied in Paris and devoted himself to prayer. God allowed the devil to persuade him that all was in vain and that he was already condemned

by God's eternal decrees. God left him for quite some time in this spiritual dryness which took away his appetite, caused him to lose sleep, and look pale.

During this terrible storm, the saint had thoughts only of despondency. He cried out, "O virgin Mother, am I never to see you in heaven? If I cannot see you in heaven, at least let me not blaspheme you in hell". The temptation lasted one month.

One evening, he entered a Church and saw a tablet containing the prayer of St. Bernard, "never was it known that anyone who fled to your protection was left unaided." He recited this prayer, promised to say the daily Rosary, and added, "O Mother, if I cannot love the Lord in the next world, help me to love Him as much as possible in this world." In an instant, Mary delivered him from this trial. He regained his peace and always preached her mercy.

Prayer

O Mary, I, a miserable slave of hell, desire to be your servant forever. If you will not accept so unworthy a servant, then change me and make me worthy. The Eternal Word became your Son to save lost sheep. Will you reject such a sheep, who comes to you? Your task, O Virgin, is to apply Jesus' blood. It belongs to you "to save whomever you will". O Queen of salvation to all who call upon you, save me.

(B) Mary's Great Power Over the Devil

Mary is not just Queen of heaven, she is also the Queen of hell. Because she has vanquished all the devils, she is the Queen of all evil spirits. God foretold her victory from the beginning. "I will put an enmity between you and the woman and her seed. She shall crush your head." (Gen 3:15) Notice the future tense, "I will place enmity between you and the woman." Satan's opponent was not Eve (whom he had already conquered) but a future woman. She "would bring to Adam and Eve greater gifts than they had lost by sin." (St. Vincent Ferrer).

Trampling Upon Lucifer

"She shall crush your head" means that she destroys his pride. Two different translations exist, "She shall crush your head", and "He shall crush your head". Whether the mother or the son completes the action, certainly both are the victors. "Lucifer, this proud spirit, was trampled underfoot by the Blessed Virgin. He is like a slave conquered in war who must obey the Queen's commands. Now, he endures a wretched slavery." (St. Bernard) "By allowing the serpent to overcome her, Eve caused death. By conquering the serpent, Mary restores life." (St. Bruno). She binds him so he can do no evil to her followers.

Taking His Spoils

Proverbs says, "The heart of her husband trusts in her and he has no need of spoils." (31:11) "Christ is the spouse who trusts His heart to Mary. She gives to Christ the spoils which she snatches from the devil." (Richard of St. Laurence) "God has given Christ's heart into Mary's hands and He is abundantly supplied with souls." (Cornelius of Lapide)

She promises victory to all under her protection. "My children, when the enemy attacks you, fly to me and your victory will be assured." St. Bernardine says "The Blessed Virgin rules

over the infernal regions, bringing even the devils into subjection.” She is “terrible as an army in battle array.” (Song 6:3) She knows how to array her army of servants so they destroy her enemies.

Two Saints Comment on Biblical Texts

“As the vine, I have brought forth a pleasing odor.” (Sir 24:23) “All poisonous snakes flee from flowering vines. So devils fly away from souls when they smell devotion to Mary.” (St. Bernard) “I was exalted like a Lebanon cedar” (Sir 24:17) “The cedar by its odor, keeps worms off. So Mary’s holiness drives away the devils.” (Cardinal Hugo)

The Ark of the Covenant

In the Old Testament, the Ark of the Covenant gained many victories. “Just as the Ark held the manna, so Mary held Christ in her womb, and brought Him forth as food for the world.” (Cornelius) “When Mary, ark of the covenant, was made Queen of heaven the power of hell over men was dissolved.” (St. Bernardine)

The Devils Fear

How fearful Mary is to the devils. Devils enter the soul in darkness, but “if suddenly the light of Mary enters, her brightness puts them into flight.” (St. Bonaventure) Blessed the soul who invokes Mary in his conflicts with hell. Jesus revealed to St. Bridget that when devils attack Mary’s followers, she terrifies them with a single glance. They flee rather than be subject to her power. “With hope in you, O Mother, I will overcome my enemies with no other protection than your help.” (St. John Damascene) All her servants can say the same thing. “O Lord, in Mary you have given us weapons that no army can overcome.” (St. James the Monk)

God guided the Israelites “by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.” (Ex 13:21) This cloud and fire are symbols of Mary’s two-fold office. As the cloud, she protects us from the fire of God’s wrath. As fire, she protects us from the devils. “As wax melts before the fire, so devils lose their powers over souls who use Mary’s name and imitate her virtues.” (St. Bonaventure) “The devils tremble at the very sound of her name”. (St. Bernard) “At the sound of her name, the devils are prostrated as by thunder.” (Thomas a Kempis)

Invoking Mary’s Name

St. Anthony of Padua, Blessed Henry Suso, and many others have conquered in Mary’s name. “I have seen many who invoke Mary’s name be immediately freed from danger.” (St. Anselm) “Those who pronounce your name, Mary, need not fear the powers of hell”. (St. Bonaventure) “By invoking your name, O Mary, you give security against the enemy.” (St. Germanus) “At the sound of the words, ‘Hail, Mary’, hell trembles.” (Blessed Alan). St. Bridget learned from Mary that the devil leaves even abandoned sinners when her name is invoked. However, the sinner must amend or the devils will return.

Example

A priest, Arnold the Pious, had devotion to Mary. At his deathbed, he began to tremble and said to those around, “Do you not see the devils who are trying to drag me to hell? Please implore Mary and she will give me the victory.” They said the Litany of Our Lady. He said, “Repeat and repeat Mary’s name, for I am coming before God.”

As the devils accused him, he said to God, “It is true that I did those things but I have done penance.” Then, he said to Mary, “If you help me, I will be delivered.” This went on all during the night. In the morning, he announced, “Mary, my refuge, has gained for me pardon and salvation.” Then, looking at Our Lady inviting him to heaven, he said, “O Lady, I come, I come.” Then, his soul left his body.

Prayer

O Mary, I am a poor sinner. I was overcome by the devil because I did not have recourse to you. Through you, I trust that God has already pardoned me. However, I fear that the devils will prepare new attacks and I might forget you. Therefore, I seek the favor of always repeating, “Mary, help me. Mary, help me.” At death’s moment, remind me to call on you. May I die with your name and Jesus’ name on my lips so I will be with you in Paradise.

1.5 MARY, OUR ADVOCATE

“To thee do we cry, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears”

(A) Mary’s Intercession Needed for Salvation

The Church Councils have taught that it is both lawful and useful to pray to the saints and to Mary. The Bible gives two clear examples of saints praying for us after death. Jeremiah was seen praying for Jerusalem after his death. (2 Mc15:14) Peter promised to pray for his disciples after his death. (2 Pt 1:15) Why cannot we ask the saints to pray for us? Paul wrote “Brothers, pray for us” (1 Thes 5:25) James wrote, “Pray for one another.” (5:16)

Mary’s Intercession

Jesus Christ is our only mediator of justice. His merits gained our reconciliation. But God can grant graces through the intercession of others, especially Mary. “We do not obscure the Son’s glory by lavishing praise on the mother. Whatever we praise in her, we praise also in the Son.” (St. Bernard) “The honor given to the Queen redounds to the King.” (St. Ildephonsus) Mary is not a mediatrix of justice (only Jesus is). She is the mediatrix of grace and intercession. “Mary, our most faithful mediatrix” (St. Bonaventure) “She is the ladder to paradise. She is the gate of heaven, a true mediatrix between God and man.” (St. Laurence Justinian)

“We ask Mary to gain a favor for us because we fear our own unworthiness. We ask her dignity to overcome our lowliness. By invoking Mary, we don’t mistrust divine mercy. Rather, we mistrust our own unworthiness.” (Suarez)

Necessary for Salvation

I want to prove more than just the usefulness of recourse to Mary. I want to show that her intercession is necessary for salvation. This necessity comes from God Who wills that all graces pass through her hands. This is now the clear opinion of theologians. “God wills that we gain every grace through Mary’s intercession. We will gain them whenever we invoke her.” (Fr. Alexander) “Such is God’s will, that we gain all through Mary.” (St. Bernard).

The Channel of Mary

When Jesus said, "Behold your Mother" (Jn 19:27), in effect he said, "No one can be saved except by my death and no one will share in my blood except through my Mother's prayer. Fountains of grace flow from my wounds but they reach all only by Mary's channel. In vain do men invoke me if they do not venerate my mother. John, if you loved me, love her. I will love you in proportion as you love her."

Some writers deny that we receive all from Jesus through Mary. Yet so many saints have taught that Mary's intercession is necessary for salvation. Some writers say that this teaching contradicts St. Paul that there "is one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." (2 Tim 2:5)

Mediation of Justice and of Grace

There are two different mediations. Because of His merits, Jesus has the mediation of justice. Because of her prayer, Mary has a mediation of grace. God is the source of all graces. What Mary has is totally a favor from God. However, God wants to exalt Mary whom he chose to be his mother. She loved Him more than all others and He wills that all graces be dispensed by Mary's hands. Jesus is the only mediator of justice but Mary is the mediatrix of grace. She gains all graces through Jesus. They come to us by her intercession.

The Church continually tells us to have recourse to her. She is invoked as "the refuge of sinners and the help of Christians." Of her, the Church says, "In me is all hope of life and of virtue" and "In me is all grace of the way." (Sir 24:25) Scripture says of her, "Whoever finds me finds life." (Prov 8:35) and "They that explain me shall have everlasting life." (Sir 24:30-31)

Mary's Greatness

My own opinion is this. If a teaching honors Our Lady and is not adverse to faith, then to oppose it shows little devotion to Mary. I want the reader to believe firmly all that can be believed about Mary's greatness. St. Augustine says that whatever we say of her is little, compared with what she deserves. The Church says, "O Mary, you are worthy of all praise." (Mass of the Blessed Virgin)

"God has filled Mary with all graces so that men can receive all good things through her. She is a full aqueduct so all can receive a plentitude. Before Mary's birth, graces did not flow constantly because no aqueduct existed." (St. Bernard) King Holofernes ordered the aqueducts of Bethulia to be destroyed so he could capture the city. (Book of Judith) In the same way, the devil tries to destroy devotion to Mary to gain possession of souls.

All Passes Through Her

"Our Lord wants us to honor our Queen so we can acknowledge that all grace comes from the hand of Mary." (St. Bernard) "All graces came through Mary." (St. Antoninus) "The moon transmits light from the sun to the earth. So Mary gives us the heavenly graces which she receives from the Sun of Justice." (St. Bonaventure)

“Every mandate of the King passes through the palace gates. In the same way, every grace from heaven passes through Mary’s hands.” (St. Bernard) “Mary is called the ‘gate of heaven’ because no one can enter without passing through her.” (St. Bonaventure)

Head and Neck

“The fullness of grace in Jesus Christ came to Mary, but in a different way.” (St. Sophronius) Divine fullness resides in Jesus. He is the head. This fullness comes to us through Mary. She is the neck. St. Bernardine gives a reason for this, “Because God was pleased to live in her womb, she acquired a jurisdiction over all graces. When she gave birth to Jesus, all these graces flowed out from her. As soon as Mary conceived, she acquired power over the gifts of the Spirit. Since then, no one has received any grace except through Mary.”

Jesus’ Birth

Jeremiah writes “A woman shall encompass a man.” (31:22) No line can leave a circle’s center without passing through the circumference, so no grace proceeds from Jesus (the center of all graces) without passing through Mary (who encompassed Him in her womb). “All gifts are dispensed by Mary. All must have recourse to this treasury of graces because the whole human race receives blessings through her alone.” (St. Bernardine)

God, Who gave us Jesus Christ, wills that all blessings gained by His merits should be dispensed by Mary. “The prayers of Mary are not just useful. They are necessary for salvation.” (Suarez) This is a moral necessity, not an absolute necessity. God has determined to give grace only through her hands. “O Mary, God has committed all good gifts to your hands and has entrusted all the riches of grace to you.” (St. Ildephonsus) “God became man only with Mary’s consent so we would understand that all is left to her care.” (St. Peter Damien) “If we wish to find Jesus, we must go to Mary.” (St. Bonaventure) “To be a servant of the Son, I must serve the Mother.” (St. Ildephonsus)

Example

A young man on a sea journey was reading an obscene book. A priest asked him if he wanted to make the book a present to Our Lady. He agreed and told the priest to throw it in the ocean. The priest replied, “You yourself must give the present.” He tossed it overboard. When he arrived at Genoa, Mary inflamed his heart and he entered a religious order.

Prayer

O Mary, what have I done for you that you do so much for me? Even to give my life for you would be small in comparison, because you have saved me from eternal death. All I have, I owe to you. All I can return is my love. If my heart is unworthy, please change it.

(B) Mary’s Cooperation Needed in Our Salvation

“Since a man and woman (Adam and Eve) cooperated in our ruin, a man (Jesus) and a woman (Mary) should cooperate in our redemption. Certainly Jesus alone could redeem us. However, “It is more fitting that both sexes cooperate in repairing the evil”. (St. Bernard) Mary is the “helper of redemption” (St. Albert) “God could create the world from nothing but he would not repair the evil without Mary’s cooperation.” (St. Anselm)

God's Decision

"Mary cooperated in our salvation in three ways. She gave birth to the Word. She continually prayed for us. She willingly sacrificed her son". (Suarez) Mary gives so much glory to God by her cooperation that God decreed that all will attain salvation by her intercession.

"All must see Mary as the negotiator of salvation for all ages." (St. Bernard) Jesus said, "No one comes to me unless the Father draws him." (Jn 6:44) "He also says, 'No one comes to me unless my Mother draws him by her prayers.'" (Richard of St. Lawrence) Elizabeth said, "How is it that the Mother of my Lord should visit me?" (Lk 1:42) Elizabeth knew that Mary always brings Jesus.

Proverbs speaks about "The merchant ship which brings bread from afar" (31:14) Mary is that merchant ship bringing the living bread from heaven. "All are lost who are not on the ship of Mary, so whenever we see ourselves in danger, cry out 'O Lady, save me for I am perishing'". (Richard of St. Lawrence)

All in Mary's Hands

One author says foolishly that we cannot pray "Mary, save us", because God alone does that. If a king's friend can intercede to save the life of a condemned criminal, why cannot Mary intercede to obtain us eternal life? Mary is "the solution for those who ask her." (St. Bonaventure)

What do other saints say about our need for Mary's intercession? "We can seek for graces but will never find them without Mary." (St. Cajetan) "Whoever seeks graces without Mary's intercession is trying to fly without wings." (St. Antoninus)

Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Egypt is in your hands." He told people to "go to Joseph" (Gen 41:55) God says to Mary "The world is in your hands." He says to us, "Go to Mary", "God has desired that He will grant no graces without her intercession." (St. Bernard) The Egyptians said to Joseph, "Our salvation is in your hands." So even more we say, "Mary, our salvation is in your hands." "Everyone's salvation depends on their being favored and protected by Mary." (Cassian) Whomever Mary protects will be saved. Whomever she does not protect, will not be saved.

Absolute Need

"As we would fall into an abyss if the ground were taken from our feet, so a soul without Mary will fall into sin and into hell." (Richard of St. Lawrence) "As a child cannot live without its mother's milk, we cannot be saved without Mary's protection. We must never abandon devotion to Mary until we see her in heaven." (St. Bonaventure) "O Mary, who could know God? Who could be saved? Who would receive any graces if not for you?" No one could be free from the powers of the flesh or from sin unless you opened the way." (St. Germanus) "Through you, O Mary, we have access to your Son. We can receive Him Who came to us through you." Mary is the "Mother of grace and of our salvation." (St. Bernard)

The Saints Go Through Mary

“What hope do we have, O Mary, if you abandon us?” (St. Germanus) If we seek grace through the saints, then these saints must ask Mary because God has made her the Queen of all saints. He wants all graces to come through her hands. “It is vain to ask the saints for favors unless Mary helped them to obtain them.” (St. Bernard) “The saints recommend their petitions to Mary who immediately grants them.” We do not ask saints to intercede with each other but we ask them to intercede with Mary, who is their queen.” (Suarez) St. Benedict appeared to St. Frances of Rome and told her that he would be her intercessor with Mary.

Hoping in Mary

“O Mary, by yourself you can gain whatever other saints united with you can obtain. You have such power because you are the universal Queen of heaven and earth. When you begin to pray for us, all the saints do also.” (St. Anselm) “When Mary begins to pray, all the heavenly court does likewise.” (Fr. Segreni) Even more – “When she goes to God to intercede, she commands all the angels and saints to accompany her and to do likewise.” (St. Bonventure)

For these reasons, the Church calls her “our hope.” Luther denied this, saying, “We should not call her “our hope” because only God alone and Jesus Christ, our mediator, are our hope. God curses anyone who places their hope in a creature”. (Luther)

Certainly anyone who places their hope in a creature independent of God is cursed by God. A creature without God can give nothing. But if Our Lord has disposed it that all graces pass through Mary’s hands, we must assert that she is truly “our hope.”

Mediatrice of All Graces

“Mary is the whole foundation of my hope.” (St. Bernard) “O Lady, in you I place all my hope and I expect my salvation.” (St. John Damascene) “Mary is the whole hope of our salvation.” (St. Thomas Aquinas) “O Mary, we have no hope of salvation except through your means.” (St. Ephrem)

“Let us venerate Mary with all our hearts. Such is God’s will. If you are unworthy of a gift, God gives it to Mary so that you can receive it through her.” (St. Bernard) He wants us “to give all our offerings through Mary so God will not reject it.”

(Note – On this topic, “Mediatrice of All Graces”, the book’s editor included the following :) “Mary is a celestial river by which all graces are conveyed to mortals.” (Pope Benedict XIV) “Nothing comes to us except by the will of God through Mary.” (Pope Leo XIII) “She dispenses the graces that Jesus Christ has merited.” (Pope St. Pius X) “It has pleased God to grant all graces through Mary (Pope Benedict XV) These four popes have put their seal of approval on this teaching of St. Alphonsus that Mary is the mediatrice of all graces.

Example

Theophilus, an archdeacon of Adana, Cilicia, was held in high esteem. Although the people wanted him for their bishop, he refused. An evil doer slandered him and he was deposed as archdeacon. He went to a magician to consult satan. He was told to put his renunciation of Jesus and Mary in writing. He complied. The next day, the bishop, aware that the charges were

false, returned him to his office. Now, Theophilus was filled with remorse. He prayed for forty days saying, “Mary, I will not despair as long as I have access to you.”

Then Mary appeared to him, “What have you done. You renounced Jesus and myself to whom?” Theophilus continued to pray with confidence. Mary appeared again, “Theophilus you are pardoned.” He then pleaded, “Mary, please let the enemy surrender the written document.” Three days later, he awoke to find the document on his breast. He went publicly to the bishop and told him everything. The bishop burned the document and all rejoiced. Three days later he died, giving thanks to Jesus and Mary.” (Written by Eutychian, Patriarch of Constantinople and an eye witness).

Prayer

O Mary, I am filled with so many debts to Divine Justice. Leave me not in my poverty. If you protect me, I will not fear evil spirits, or my sins or God’s anger, because you glory in helping sinners who are not obstinate. Although a sinner, I wish to change my life. I am ready to do all with your help.

1.6 MARY OUR ADVOCATE

“Turn to us, Our Advocate”

(A) An Advocate Able to Save All

Mothers have such great authority that even if their son becomes king, he has no authority over his mother. Jesus, even as man (because of his union with the Divine Word) sits at the right hand of the Father. (St. Thomas) He has supreme dominion over all, including Mary.

God is Subject

For thirty years on earth, “He was subject to them.” (Lk 2:51) He was truly obliged to obey her. “Mary is so favored that even God was subject to her will.” (St. Ambrose) All other virgins “follow the Lamb wherever He goes” (Rev 14:4) but, concerning Mary, we can say the Lamb followed her, being subject to her.

“Although in heaven, Mary cannot command her son, but her prayers are a Mother’s prayers. She is the most powerful in obtaining what she wants.” (St. Bonaventure) Why? Because they are the prayers of a mother.

Mary can do whatever she wants in heaven or on earth. “All power in heaven and earth is given you. Nothing is impossible for you.” Why? “Her Son so esteems her prayers that when she asks it is like a command. She is more a queen than a handmaid.” (St. Peter Damien) “You are the Mother of God, all-powerful to save sinners. You need no other recommendation. You are God’s mother.” (St. Germanus) This is how Jesus honors her.

God Obeys

“At Mary’s command, all obey, even God.” (St. Bernardine) i.e. God grants her prayers as if they were commands. “Our Lord has exalted you, Mary. All things that are possible to God, are possible to you.” (St. Anselm)

“Your protection is infinite, O Mary” (Cosmas of Jerusalem) “By every law, the queen enjoys the same privileges as the king. A mother is made omnipotent by an omnipotent son.” (Richard of St. Lawrence) “God has placed the whole Church under the dominion of Mary.” (St. Antoninus)

Jesus made Mary omnipotent. He is omnipotent by nature. She is omnipotent by grace. This is evident. Whatever she asks, her Son grants. Jesus said to Mary, “No petition of yours can be void.” (Revealed to St. Bridget) He loves her so much He can deny her nothing. The reason is that she denied Him nothing when He was on earth. She is omnipotent because her prayers obtain whatever she wants.

The Will of Mary

“You will it and all is done.” (St. Bernard) “Whatever you will must be accomplished.” (St. Anselm) If you choose to raise the lowest sinner to the highest holiness, it will be done. St. Albert has Mary saying, “To will, I must be asked. If I will, it is done.”

“Oh, Mary, let your power move you. The more powerful you are, the greater is your mercy.” (St. Peter Damien) Just the sight of a sinner moves Mary to pity. “O Mary, you have such power with God that you can save all. Please undertake our cause. God has given great power to help us so you can be even more merciful”.

Rich in Mercy

Mary is as rich in mercy as she is in power. “Her powerful charity abounds in compassion and consolation.” (St. Bernard) Mary thinks only of giving God glory and giving men comfort. At Cana, she had compassion on the wedding couple, saying “They have no wine.” Jesus replied, “Woman, what is that to you and Me? My hour has not yet come.” (Jn 2:3) Seemingly, the miracles were to wait until He began preaching. Yet Mary knew her request was already granted. She told the waiters to do what Jesus commanded.

Was this miracle worked contrary to God’s decree? No! It was not the time. Generally speaking, it was too early. Yet, God had already decreed that Mary’s request be always answered. Mary knew her privilege and her request was granted. “Although Jesus answered as if to refuse her, he obeyed her wish.” (St. John Chrysostom) “By His words, ‘My hour has not yet come’, Jesus intended to show that He would have denied the request if it had come from anyone else. However, He could not refuse His mother.” (St. Thomas) Other saints say the same thing. “For Mary, he anticipated the time of working miracles”.

Maternal Authority

“No creature can obtain so many favors for poor sinners. God honors you as Mother, not as handmaid.” (William of Paris) When Mary speaks, her Son executes. The saints are Mary’s friends and they wait for the Queen to ask.

How does Mary gain these favors? She just lets her voice be heard. “O Mary, you dwell in the heavenly gardens and it is impossible for your Son to deny you anything.” (Abbot William) “Mary asks God but she uses her maternal authority. So, we must be confident that she obtains for us all she asks.” (Abbot Godfrey)

When Coriolanus was attacking Rome, his friends could not get him to stop. When his mother, Vetania, asked him, he could not refuse. Mary’s requests are much more powerful. “A single sigh from Mary does much more than the prayers of all the saints”. The devils admitted this to St. Dominic.

“Mary’s prayers are a mother’s prayers. They are like a command. She always obtains what she wants.” (St. Antoninus) “O Mary, with God, you have the authority of a mother. You gain pardon for the greatest sinner because the Lord must acknowledge you as his mother.” (St. Germanus) The saints say to Mary, “You can accomplish everything. Whatever you will, is done.” (St. Bridget) What God does by his power, Mary does by her prayer. “Is Our Lord jealous of Mary’s honor? Do not the commandments tell us to honor our mother?” (St. Augustine)

The Obligations of Jesus

“Jesus satisfies an obligation owed to Mary for giving Him a human nature. He pays His debt by answering her prayers.” (St. George) “O Mary, your Son is a debtor. He has become a debtor by taking flesh from you.” (St. Methodius)

“Since Mary gave flesh to the divine Word, she has more power in gaining eternal life.” (St. Augustine) “The Son delights in Mary’s prayers. He grants her requests to repay her for giving Him a body.” (St. Theophilus) “You can save all by your prayers because they share in your maternal authority.” (St. John Damascene) “God gave this power of mercy to His mother so we would not flee from God.” (St. Bonaventure)

Example

In Germany, a man fell into serious sin but did not want to confess it. One night, he heard a voice, “Go to confession.” He went to Church but not to confession. He heard the voice again. He went to Church but refused to confess. After kneeling before Our Lady’s statue, he was changed and called the confessor. All resulted from Mary.

Prayer

O Mary, God became your debtor, so you could dispense mercy to sinners. If you do good to all, even those who blaspheme you, how much more to those who honor you. We are great sinners but God has given you greater powers. The greater our sins, the greater our hope in you. Can you not gain everything? Just open your lips and Your Son will deny you nothing.

(B) Mary Defends Everyone’s Cause

If every sermon spoke of her and everyone gave their life for her, we would still be in debt for the tender love which she has for those who preserve the slightest spark of devotion to her.

No Fear to Approach

“She only knows to love those who love her and to serve those who serve her. For these she uses all her power to obtain forgiveness. No one should fear to cast themselves at her feet. As the Son intercedes with the Father, so she intercedes with the Son”. (Blessed Raymond Jordano) She is “the refuge of the lost, the hope of the abandoned and the advocate of sinners who have recourse to her.” (Denis the Carthusian)

A sinner might fear that Mary was unwilling to help him. St. Bonaventure answers, “Mary is all powerful with her Son. However, what good would this power be if she did not care for us? Her power exceeds that of the saints and her care for our good also exceeds their love for us.” “O Mary, what saint is so solicitous for our welfare? Who defends us in temptations? Who protects sinners who fight for you? Your care is far greater than any idea we have.” (St. Germanus)

The Queen’s Readiness

“The saints can help their devotees but Mary is everyone’s advocate”. (Blessed Raymond) Mary glories in helping sinners. She revealed to Venerable Mary Villani, “After the title Mother of God, I rejoice most in being called “Advocate of Sinners.”

“The Queen is always before the King, advocating our cause. Knowing our trials, she is always moved to tenderness for us.” (Blessed Amadeus). Every sinner, no matter how evil, must be led to confidence in her. “Mary is always ready to pray for everyone.” (Abbot Godfrey)

Our Defense Attorney

“She always interests herself in our salvation.” (St. Bernard) “O Mary, you are more anxious for our salvation than all the saints” (St. Bonaventure). Who can understand her solicitude? “She never tires of defending us”. This means she prays constantly, never relaxing her efforts. “She has never done enough.” (St. Germanus)

Without her help, how unfortunate we sinners would be. “She is so prudent and wise that the Judge, her Son, can never condemn as guilty anyone whom she defends.” (Richard of St. Lawrence) “Hail, O Mary, for putting an end to our litigation.” The wise lawyer wins all her cases.

She is “the wise Abigail”. King David was angry and ready to kill her husband, Nabal. Abigail went to meet him with presents. (1 Sam 25:33) He thanked her for having prevented the murder. Mary is the heavenly Abigail. By her tender prayers, she appeases God’s justice. God blesses her and thanks her for having withheld His chastisements toward the sinner.

St. Bernard’s Words

St. Bernard writes, “Wishing to show all possible mercy, the Eternal Father gave us Jesus Christ as our principal advocate and Mary as our advocate with Jesus. By His own merits, Jesus is the mediator of justice obtaining pardon and favors. However, men fear Jesus because He is God.

Therefore, God assigned another advocate, whom we fear less. In Mary, we find an advocate who is powerful with God and merciful to ourselves. A mediator was needed with the mediator. One more fitting than Mary could not be found. If anyone should fear to go to the feet of such a kind advocate, he would insult Mary's tender compassion. This person should read all that is written of her in the gospels. If they can find the least trait of severity, then they have a right to fear. Since no such trace can ever be found, they should go with joyful heart and be saved by her intercession."

Refuge of Sinners

William of Paris writes, "O Mother of God, in the miserable state of my sins I come to you full of confidence. If you reject me, I will remind you that you are bound to help me because the Church proclaims you the Mother of Mercy. Your compassion is never lacking because the Church calls you "The refuge of sinners". All of your grace, your glory, and even the dignity of being God's mother, you owe to sinners. Because of us sinners the Word became flesh in you."

This mother gave birth to Jesus, the source of all compassion. She can never deny mercy to a sinner who invokes her. "Mary, you are the peacemaker. Let your tender compassion move you to help me."

"Breathe freely and take courage, all sinners! The Virgin is the advocate for the whole world. She does what she wills with God. She knows all the means of appeasing him. She welcomes all and refuses none. (St. Thomas of Villanova)

Example

A man told this story at a Redemptorist mission. For thirty-five years he has been ashamed to mention a sin and therefore, he made sacrilegious confessions. Many times he had been at the point of death. All during these same years, he was faithful to the devotion to Mary. In her honor, he abstained from milk products on Saturday. She obtained for him the grace of a good confession.

Prayer

Mary, mother of my Lord, I have been ungrateful to God for many years. However, your compassion is greater than my ingratitude. O Mary, either help me yourself or tell me where I can find a more powerful advocate than you. God gave you to me for my salvation. If so, how can I be lost? Happy in heaven, I will kiss forever the hands that saved me from hell.

(C) Mary, the Peacemaker Between Sinner and God

By grace, we became friends of God. Grace is an infinite treasure, desirable for every soul. "She is an infinite treasure, by which we become friends of God." (Wis 7:14) Jesus said to those in grace, "I call you friends." (Jn 15:14) Sins dissolve that friendship. "Your sins have divided you from God." (Is 59:2) By its hatred, the soul becomes God's enemy. "To God, both the wicked and their wickedness are hateful." (Wis 14:9)

Find An Advocate

If the sinner is an enemy of God, what does he have to do? He must find an advocate to gain him pardon. St. Bernard writes, "Take comfort, O soul who has lost God's friendship. He has given you a mediator, Jesus. What can he not obtain from the Father? People imagine him to be rigorous when He is all compassion. Why do you fear? Did He not fasten your sins to the cross? But, if you fear to go to Jesus Christ, then seek another advocate. Go to Mary. She will intercede with her Son. Jesus will hear her and then go to the Father on your behalf. This Mother is the ladder of sinners by which they climb to the height. She is the whole ground of our hope."

The Defender

The Holy Spirit says of Mary, "I am a wall and my breasts are like towers. In his eyes, I have become one who is welcomed." (Song 8:10) This means, "I am a defender of those who call on me, a tower or refuge. I am one who welcomes sinners into God's presence." "Mary finds reconciliation for God's enemies, salvation for the lost and mercy for those in despair." (Cardinal Hugo) This Mother never speaks of war or vengeance against sinners, but only of peace and forgiveness.

The Olive Branch

Prefigured by the dove of peace in Noah's ark, St. Bonaventure describes Mary "You are a dove, a mediator between God and a world that is lost in the deluge, obtaining peace for a lost world." (St. Bonaventure) She gave the world the olive branch of Jesus. "By Mary, heavenly peace was given forever to the world. By her, sinners are reconciled". (St. Epephanus) "She brought the olive branch of unusual peace." (St. Albert)

The Rainbow

John saw a "rainbow around the throne" (Rev 4:3) Mary is the rainbow. She softens God's judgments and lessens the sinner's punishments. God was also speaking of Mary when He placed a rainbow in the sky as a sign of peace to Noah. "I will set my bow in the sky. I shall see it and remember the everlasting covenant". (Gen 9:13) Mary is that rainbow. At her prayers, God forgives sinners and confirms His peace. Mary is also as "fair as the moon". (Song 6:10) "As the moon is between the sun and the earth, Mary is always between God and the sinner, appeasing the Lord and enlightening the sinner to return." (St. Bonaventure)

Feeding the Goats

Mary's main task on earth is to raise up fallen souls and reconcile them to God. "Feed your goats" (Song 1:7), God commanded her. At the last Judgment, sinners are the goats. "O Mother, these goats are given to you to change them into sheep. By their sins, they are driven to the left. By your intercession, they will be placed on the right." (Abbot William) God told St. Catherine of Sienna, "I created Mary to be a sweet bait to catch men." "Mary has 'her own goats'. She does not save all sinners but only those who honor her. Those who live in sin and do not invoke her are not Mary's goats. At the Last Judgment, they will be driven to the left and cast out." (Abbot William)

Stories of Conversion

A nobleman despaired of salvation. A monk encouraged him to visit a church which had a special statue of Mary. As the man prostrated himself, Mary extended her hand on which was written, 'I will deliver you.' The man's love for God and Mary became so strong, that he died at the feet of Mary.

Mary said to St. Bridget, "As a magnet attracts iron, so I attract hearts." I can relate many stories that have happened in Redemptorist missions. Hardened sinners listen to many sermons with no change, but when they hear the mercies of Mary, they return to God. Many sinners fly from God, but they allow the Virgin Mary to bring them back.

For Sinners

"Mary was made Mother of God so that those who would be condemned by divine justice can be saved by her mercy." (St. John Chrysostom) "Mary became the Mother of God for sinners because Jesus said He came for sinners." (St. Anselm) The church proclaims, "You, O Mary, do not reject sinners because, without them, you would never be worthy of such a Son". "O Mary, you owe everything to sinners. Because of sinners you had God as your Son." (William of Paris) "If this is true, how can I ever despair of pardon?" (St. Anselm)

Our Pledge

The Church says that Mary was assumed into heaven so she could intercede with confidence and obtain everything." St. Justin calls Mary an "Arbitrator", meaning one who judges between two parties. Jesus places all His reasons for pronouncing sentence in her hands. She decides the fate of the soul dedicated to her.

"Mary is a pledge of our reconciliation with God." (St. Andrew of Crete) God wants to pardon sinners. So they do not doubt this, He gives Mary as his pledge. "O sinner, if you fear because of your faults, go to Mary because God has imposed on her the duty of helping sinners." (St. Bonaventure) If the Judge gives his mother as an advocate, then the sinner need not fear being lost. "O Mary, you will not reject the sinner because God has made you a mediatrix between the Judge and the culprit." (Abbot Adam)

"O sinner, having grown cold in sin, do not despair. Instead, thank the Lord who has given you Mary as a mediatrix to encourage you to greater confidence." (St. Bernard)

Example

One man, who had been a devotee of Mary, turned to a life of sin. In despair, he went to drown himself. However, before doing so, he prayed, "Mary, I used to serve you. Please help me". Mary appeared and asked "And what are you doing? You will lose both your body and soul. Confess your sins and rejoin my confraternity." He thanked Mary and changed his life.

Prayer

O Mary, fulfill your office of mediatrix. Whatever cause you take up is never lost. Who has ever called on you and been lost? Therefore, to you I entrust my eternal salvation.

I have only one fear – that someday I might lose my confidence in you. O Mary, preserve this confidence and I will certainly regain the divine friendship.

1.7 MARY, OUR GUARDIAN

1.8

“Turn your eyes of Mercy to us”

(A) Mary Helps in All Our Necessities

“Mary constantly keeps vigil over us.” (St. Ephiphanius) She descends with favors from heaven and ascends to heaven to gain results for our prayers. She is the “Heavenly commissioner”, always carrying messages of mercy and grace. The psalm says, “The eyes of the Lord are on the just.” (34:16), but Mary’s eyes are on the just and unjust. “She has the eyes of a mother, watching us so we do not fall and raising us up when we do.” (Richard of St. Lawrence)

Attentive to the Sinner

In a vision, St. Bridget saw our Lord saying to Mary “Ask whatever you wish.” This is how Jesus speaks to her in heaven. Mary replied “I ask mercy for sinners. You made me the Mother of Mercy, what else can I desire or ask for, except mercy?” “Mary, you are so attentive to helping the sinner that it seems you have no other desire.” (St. Bonaventure)

“While living on earth, Mary was filled with tenderness. No one suffered for others as much as Mary. This was obvious at the Cana wedding. “Assuming the task of the tender comfortress, she interceded with Jesus.” (St. Bernardine of Sienna) “Is it possible, O Mary, now that you are high in heaven, that you have forgotten us poor creatures? Let us not think that! The heart of Mary never forgets our sinfulness.” (St. Peter Damien) When a worldly person attains high dignity, they forget their former friends. Not so with Mary. She rejoices in her exultation because she can better help us.

Mary’s Heavenly Compassion

Naomi said to Ruth, “Your latter kindness has surpassed the former.” (Ruth 3:10) If Mary helped sinners while on earth, she does even more so now that she reigns in heaven. She gains more for us because she knows our sins better. As the sun surpasses the moon, so Mary’s compassion in heaven surpasses her tenderness on earth. “Who does not enjoy the sun’s light? On whom does not Mary’s mercy shine?” (St. Bonaventure)

Mary is called “bright as the sun” (Song 6:9) “The sun excludes no one from its warmth.” (St. Bonaventure) “Our Queen shows mercy even to the hardened sinners. As the sun shines on everything, so all who invoke Mary share in divine mercy.” (St. Bridget)

Her Warmth

“Mary opens her merciful heart to all. She brings redemption to the slave and pardon to the sinner. No one can hide from her warmth.” (St. Bernard) “Who can refuse to love this Queen? She is more beautiful than the sun and courteous to all. Forgive me, Mary, if I say I love you for I am not worthy to love you.” (St. Bonaventure)

“When the soul says, ‘Turn your eyes of Mercy toward us’ Mary must yield to the demand.” (St. Gertrude) “The immensity of your mercy fills the earth.” (St. Bernard) “Our Mother so desires to do good that she is offended by those who do not ask for her favors.” (St. Bonaventure) “O Lady, each of us hope for great graces because you give far more than we deserve.” (St. Hildebert)

A Throne of Mercy

Isaiah wrote, “A throne shall be prepared in mercy.” (14:5) “Mary is the throne where all find the consolations of mercy.” (St. Bonaventure) Neither the Son nor his mother know how to refuse mercy to those who ask. Abbot Gueric writes that Jesus says to Mary, “Through you, I will pronounce my judgments. I will give you a power by which you can save all whom you please.”

When St. Gertrude prayed the words, “Turn your eyes of mercy toward us”, she saw Mary holding the Child Jesus and pointing to His eyes, “These are the most compassionate eyes. I want all who call on me to see them.” A sinner weeping before a statue of Mary, saw her ask the Child in her arms, “Son, shall these tears be lost?” The sinner knew he was pardoned.

Mary’s Compassion

How can anyone be lost who calls upon this good Mother? St. Gertrude, in a vision, saw Jesus saying to Mary, “In my omnipotence I have given you the reconciliation of any sinner who calls upon you, in any way that you please.” “O Mother, your compassion is as great as your power. Did a case ever happen when you showed no compassion? When could you, the Mother of the omnipotent God, have no power to help? Your power to help us is as great as your power to see our sins.” (Abbot Adam)

“Satisfy yourself, O Queen, with the glory of your Son and then send us the crumbs that fall from the table.” (Abbot Gueric) “O Mary, your mercy has more power to save me than my sins do to condemn me.” (William of Paris)

Example

A Spanish Catholic resolved to become a Mohammedan and to board a ship to escape justice. Before doing so, he entered a church and heard Fr. Jerome Lopez, S.J. preach on the mercy of Mary. He went to confession. The priest asked if he had any devotion to Mary. “I ask Mary every day not to abandon me”, he said. “That is why she has saved me from boarding the ship.”

That same priest met a person away from the Church for fifty-five years. This man had just one devotion. Whenever passing a picture of Mary, he asked her for a happy death. The man was fighting an enemy when, suddenly his sword broke in half. He cried out, “I shall be killed and eternally lost. Mother of sinners, help me.” Suddenly, he found himself in safety, made a general confession and died full of confidence.

Prayer

O Sacred Virgin, although I deserve chastisements, I do not doubt your compassion. You glory in being kind and in helping us with your riches. Please offer for me the tears that you shed for Jesus, because your mercy would have no purpose if I were condemned.

I ask a special grace from you. In my remaining years let me love God as much as I have offended Him in my previous years.

1.8 MARY, OUR SALVATION

“After our exile, show us Jesus, the Fruit of your Womb”

(A) Mary Delivers us From Hell

It is impossible for a soul faithful to Mary to be lost. This might seem exaggerated but I ask the reader to suspend judgment until he reads all I have to say.

Impossible to be Lost

“It is impossible to be lost” does not refer to those souls who misuse their devotion to Mary so they can sin more freely. Because of this rash confidence, such souls deserve chastisement, not mercy. When I say “impossible to be lost”, I am speaking of souls with a sincere desire to amend their lives and who are faithful in devotion to Mary. It is morally impossible for these to be lost. Many saints and learned men have said the same thing. To show their unanimity, I provide all the quotes (even if many quotations seem the same).

What the Authors Say

“As it is impossible for someone not devoted to Mary to be saved, so it is impossible for those who invoke her to be lost.” (St. Anselm) “As it is impossible for someone to be saved from whom Mary turns her eyes, so those to whom she turns her eyes will necessarily be saved and glorified.” (St. Antoninus)

Pay attention to the first part. Those who have no devotion to her or carelessly abandon it, should tremble. “All those who are not your servants, O Mary, will perish.” (St. Albert) “Whoever neglects to serve the blessed Virgin, will die in their sins. If he does not invoke her, he will never get to heaven. There will be no hope for their salvation. (St. Bonaventure) “It is impossible for any sinner to be saved without the Blessed Virgin” (St. Ignatius, Martyr and St. John Chrysostom).

The Spirit writes of Mary, “All that hate me, love death.” (Pr 13:36) “She is like the merchant’s ship. All who are out of this ship will be lost in the world’s sea” (Richard of St. Lawrence) Even a heretic wrote, “Far be it from me ever to turn away from Mary.”

Don’t Abandon Devotion

Mary says, “He that listens to me shall not be lost.” (Eccles 24:30) “O Lady, whoever honors you will be far from damnation” (St. Bonaventure) “However great a sinner is, if he shows himself to Mary, he will not perish.” (St. Hilary)

After a soul has lost God's grace, the devil does all he can so that he also loses devotion to Mary. Sarah, seeing her Isaac laying with Ismael, demanded of Abraham, "Cast out this woman and her son" (Gen 21:10) She wanted both removed because if the mother stayed, the son would return to the house. So the devil wants Mary and Jesus cast out of the soul. Otherwise, her Son will return. "Whoever is faithful to Mary, will soon receive God himself through Mary."

Hope in Despair

Devotion to Mary is "a charter of liberty" and "our safeguard from hell." Mary is "the only hope of those in despair." (St. Ephrem) "Mary lacks neither the will nor the power to save us. Her requests can never be refused." (St. Bernard) "It is impossible for Mary to pray in vain," (St. Antoninus)

If all this is true, how can a follower of Mary be lost? If a sinner calls upon Mary faithfully with a sincere purpose to amend, Mary will give him light to abandon his sins, persevere in virtue and die in grace. What mother wouldn't save her child when all she had to do was ask the judge for pardon? Will not Mary deliver the soul from hell when she can do it so easily?

God's Gift of Devotion

Reader, thank God if He has given you devotion to Mary. "God only grants this favor to those He is determined to save. If I place my trust in Mary I will be saved. If Mary protects me, I have nothing to fear. God grants this devotion to those He intends to save." (St. John Chrysostom) "Confidence in Mary is a pledge of salvation." (Erasmus)

The devil is enraged by a soul having devotion to Mary. When St. Alphonsus Rodriguez was tempted, the devil said, "Give up your devotion to Mary and I will tempt you no longer." God revealed to St. Catherine of Sienna that "no one who was devoted to Mary would be the prey of hell." David said, "I have loved, O Lord, the beauty of your house." (Ps 26:8) Mary is the house constructed by God where He could live. "Wisdom has built herself a house." (Prov 9:1)

Never Lost

"He who is devout to the Virgin Mother will never be lost" (St. Ignatius, martyr) "Your lovers, O Lady, will never see eternal death". (St. Bonaventure) "The case will never happen that an attentive servant of Mary will be lost." (Blosius)

"How many would have remained obstinate in sin unless Mary intervened?" (Thomas a Kempis) Many theologians, including Thomas Aquinas, believe that Mary has often obtained from God a suspension of hell and allowed souls to return to life to do penance. Many authors have given examples. A deacon who was apparently dead and about to be buried returned to life, saying that he had been condemned to hell but Mary's prayers allowed him to return to earth to do penance. (Flodoardus)

Although there was a similar case of a Roman citizen named Andrew, these examples should not encourage rash persons to hope that Mary will save them if they die in mortal sin.

Should a person throw themselves into a well because Mary had once saved someone? Still greater folly to risk going to hell. These examples are meant to revive our confidence that those who love her and amend their lives can certainly trust in her aid.

“He will not be lost who prays to you, O Virgin.” (St. Anselm) “If you defend me, O Mother, can the judge be unfavorable to me?” (Richard of St. Victor) “I place my soul in Mary. In this way, if I am condemned, she can change my sentence of condemnation.” (Blessed Henry Suso) I always repeat St. Bonaventure’s words, “Having placed my trust in you, O Lady, I trust I shall never be lost.”

Example

Two students in Paris led sinful lives. One, named Richard, left the party to return home. Before sleeping, he remembered he had not said his accustomed number of Hail Marys. During the night, Richard saw his companion deformed and in hell, “This would have happened to you. However, you said your Hail Marys. You are fortunate, if you take this warning.”

The young man thanked Mary. Hearing the bell of the Franciscan monastery, he went for confession and asked to become a member. Later, two priests found his companion strangled on the street. Richard became a missionary to Japan and was martyred there. He is now Blessed Richard of St. Anne.

Prayer

O Mary, if your hand had not delivered me, I would be in an abyss of evils. I would have been in hell. My sins drove me there. God’s justice condemned me and the devils wanted to fulfill the sentence. Then, you saved me without being asked. Please, never allow me the misfortune of cursing you from hell. What return can I make you? Can I forget the love that lifted me up? O most amiable Mother, I hope to love you in time and in eternity.

(B) Mary Helps Her Followers in Purgatory

Mary helps her followers in the prison of purgatory (where they cannot help themselves). “The pains of purgatory are called waves. They are transitory, yet they are bitter.” (St. Bernadine). “In that prison where souls are detained, Mary has a plentitude of power. She relieves pain and delivers from purgatory. “Our Lady never forgets her followers who are suffering in those flames. She relieves all suffering souls, but shows greater favors to her followers.” (Novarimus)

8.11 The Mother of Purgatory

Mary told St. Bridget, “I am the Mother of all the souls in purgatory. Every hour that they are there, I mitigate their pains.” She even goes occasionally into that holy prison. “Mary goes to purgatory to relieve the holy souls by her presence. (St. Bonaventure) “How kind the Blessed Virgin is to those suffering in purgatory. She gives them comfort and refreshment.” (St. Vincent Ferrer)

What other comfort do they have? St. Bridget saw Jesus say to Mary, “You are the Mother of mercy and the Consolation of the souls in purgatory.” Mary told Bridget, “As a sick

person is relieved by words of encouragement, so the souls in purgatory are relieved just by hearing my name.” When these souls invoke Mary, “Her prayers are like heavenly dew immediately refreshing their burning pain.” (Novarimus)

Emptying Purgatory

She also delivers these souls. “When she was assumed into heaven, purgatory was entirely emptied.” (Gersen) Many authors say that Mary, at her Assumption, asked that all the souls in purgatory be with her. “After this, Mary always had the privilege of delivering her followers.” (Gersen) “Mary can deliver souls from purgatory, especially her followers.” (St. Bernardine) “Not only is their pain lessened but their time is shortened.” (Novarimus)

A woman named Marozia appeared after her death to her godmother. She said that, on the feast of the Assumption, Mary set free from purgatory more souls than Rome’s population. “On Christmas and Easter, Mary visits purgatory and sets many souls free.” (Denis the Carthusian) “I believe that on all her solemn feasts, Mary delivers many souls.” (Novarimus)

Brown Scapular

Our Lady appeared to Pope John XXII and told him to make known that she releases all souls who wore the Carmelite scapular on the Saturday after their death. The Pope proclaimed this and five later popes have ratified his teaching. Pope Paul V wrote, “The Christian faithful can piously believe that our Lady will help them after death and that on Saturdays (the day consecrated to her), she helps in a more particular manner the members of our Lady of Mount Carmel Confraternity, if they died in the state of grace, wore the habit and fulfilled the other obligations.”

Why should we not hope for the same graces? If we serve her with a special love, why not hope to go directly to heaven without even going to purgatory? Mary gave Brother Alberto a message, “Tell Brother Godfrey to advance rapidly in virtue so he belongs to my Son and to me. When his soul departs, I will not allow it to go to purgatory. I will offer it to my Son.”

Example

A noble lady was told that her son was killed. She reflected on Mary and how she forgave those who executed Jesus. So, the lady decided to forgive the man who killed her son. She even provided him with what he needed. Her son appeared and told her mother that he was saved. Also, because of his mother’s devotion, Mary had set him free from purgatory.

Prayer

O Mary, in heaven, millions of angels and saints love you continually. Even in this world, many souls burn with love for you. I, too, want to love you and get others to love you. Assist me at death, deliver me from purgatory, and lead me to heaven. All your lovers hope for this.

(C) Mary Leads Her Servants to Heaven

Being a servant of Mary is a sure sign of predestination. Mary says, “I shall abide in the Lord’s inheritance.” (Eccl 29:2) The “Lord’s inheritance” is the soul who offers Mary a place of

repose. How many souls are in heaven only through Mary's intercession. "Mary has caused as many lights to shine in heaven as she has followers. Many saints would never be there without her." (Cardinal Hugo)

Heaven's Gate

"Heaven's gates will open to all who trust in Mary." (St. Bonaventure) "Devotion to Mary unlocks the doors of the heavenly Jerusalem." (St. Ephrem) "To you, O Lady, are given the keys of heaven." (Blosius) "Mary, open to us the gates of paradise because you have the keys." (St. Ambrose) The Church says, "You are heaven's gate." She is "Star of the Sea" because Mary guides Christians to heaven as sailors to a port" (St. Thomas)

She is "the heavenly ladder". "Through Mary, God came down from heaven so that men can ascend to heaven by her". (St. Fulgentius) "You were filled with grace, O Lady, so you can be our means of ascent to the heavenly kingdom." (St. Athanasius) She is "the heavenly chariot" (St. Bernard) "Knowing you is the high road to everlasting life. Preaching your virtues is the way to salvation." (St. Bonaventure)

Reign with Mary

"Who are saved? Certainly those for whom the Queen intercedes." (Denis the Carthusian) Of Mary, the Spirit says, "By me, kings reign" (Pr 8:15) On earth, souls rule over their passions. In heaven, they reign eternally where "all are kings" (St. Augustine). The bible says "And my power was in Jerusalem" (Sir 14:15) Mary is the New Jerusalem, bringing to heaven whomever she wills. "By right, she possesses the whole Kingdom of her Son." (Rupert)

"Mary has already gained heaven for us if we put no obstacle in the way." (St. Antoninus) "Whoever serves Mary is as certain of heaven as if he were already there." (Abbot Gueric) "To serve the Queen of heaven is to already reign there. To live under her commands is to govern. Those who do not serve Mary will not be saved. Those deprived of her help are deprived of her Son's help." (St. John Damascene)

The Bridge to Heaven

In God's infinite goodness, he gave us Mary. "She is the mother of the Judge, so she can bring our eternal salvation to a happy conclusion." (St. Bernard) "Mary is the bridge of salvation. By her, we safely pass from this world to paradise." (St. James) "Listen O nations, serve Mary and you will find eternal life." (St. Bonaventure)

Even those who deserved hell will gain heaven if they serve this Queen. "How many sinners have been saved by you, O Mary!" (St. Germanus) Revelation says "On her head is a crown of twelve stars." The Canticle says, "You will be crowned with lions and leopards." (Song 4:8) The lions and leopards are sinners who have become stars of paradise by Mary's intercession.

The saintly Sister Seraphina asked Our Lady (during a novena for her Assumption) for the conversion of a thousand sinners. Thinking she had asked too much, Mary corrected her "Am I not powerful enough? The favor is already granted." She took Sister Seraphina to heaven in spirit and showed her the thousand souls that were saved from hell.

Certain of Salvation

“Man does not know whether he is worthy of love or hatred” (Eccl 9:1). However, St. Bonaventure says, “Let us sinners follow Mary and stay at her feet until she insures our salvation.” “O Lady, if you will our salvation, it is certain.” (St. Anselm) “Souls protected by Mary are necessarily saved.” (St. Antoninus)

“Mary predicted that all generations would call her blessed, for all the elect gain salvation through her.” (St. Idilephonsus) Mary is the beginning, middle and end of our happiness. She gains pardon for sins (beginning), perseverance in grace (middle), and life in heaven (end). “By you, O Mary, heaven was opened, hell was emptied and eternal life was given to so many miserable sinners.” (St. Bernard)

Sealed With Mary

The bible says of Mary, “Those who work by me shall not sin. Those who explain me shall have everlasting life.” (Sir 29:30) “Whoever bears the stamp of Mary is already enrolled in the book of life.” (St. Bonaventure) “God only grants devotion to Mary to those whom He wants to save.” (St. John Damascene) Scripture says, “I will write upon him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God”. (Rev 3:12) Mary is this city of God.

Paul writes, “Whoever has this seal, the Lord knows is His” (2 Tim 2:19) That is, whoever carries the mark of devotion to Mary. “Devotion to Mary is a mark of certain salvation”. (St. Bernard) “Whoever honors Mary by saying the Hail Mary often has a great mark of predestination.” (Blessed Alan) He says the same of those who say the rosary. “Even in heaven, her followers are more honored. They will be recognized as servants of the Queen.” (Fr. Nierem Berg) Proverbs says, “All her children are clothed in double garments.” (31:21)

St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi saw Mary guiding a ship filled with her followers, to a safe port. Let’s enter her ship to be sure of the Kingdom. “Holy Mother of God, all who live in you will share in heaven.”

Example

Brother Leo saw two ladders, one red with Jesus at the top and one white with Mary at the top. Many tried to climb the red ladder but fell back. Then they tried to climb the white ladder. They succeeded, because Mary helped them to the top. This vision does not make Mary’s power superior to Christ. It is symbolic of even papal teaching. “We can come to the Father only through the Son and to the Son only through the Mother. The Son is all powerful by nature. The mother is all powerful by God’s merciful disposition.”

Prayer

O Queen of heaven, you have saved me from hell. Let me never again become God’s enemy, (as I was for a time.) Then, I loved you little. Now, I desire only to love you. My past sins do not discourage me because I will love you with no fear of losing you. You are my hope of salvation.

1.9 THE CLEMENCY AND COMPASSION OF MARY

“O Clement, O Loving”

(A) Mary’s Great Compassion

“She is the land overflowing with milk and honey promised by God.” (St. Bernard) “The Blessed Virgin has such a merciful heart that she deserves to be called mercy itself.” (St. Leo Great) Looking at Mary, St. Bonaventure no longer saw God’s justice, just His divine mercy. “Your only wish is to show mercy.”

The Oil of Mary

“Her loving heart brings forth tenderness at every moment.” (Abbot Gueric) “What can flow from her except compassion?” (St. Bernard) Mary is “a fair olive tree” (Sir 24:19) who dispenses the oil of mercy. We must be as the wise virgins, who cling to this oil. “Mary is filled with the oil of compassion.” (St. Bonaventure) Mary is called the “most prudent” virgin, able to supply all without losing any oil herself. “The whole world can draw upon your overflowing oil. You replenish the lamps of all.” (Hugh of St. Victor)

“Mary is an olive tree planted in the plain. She is in the plain, so that all can see her and take refuge in her”. (Hugh of St. Victor) “Mary stands exposed in the plain so the just and the sinners can obtain her mercy. How many sentences of condemnation she has revoked in favor of sinners who called on her?” (St. Antoninus) “What safer refuge can we find except Mary’s heart? There the poor find a home and the afflicted find relief.” (Thomas A. Kempis)

Always Attentive

We would be lost if we did not have this Mother of mercy always attentive. “Where there is no woman, the mourner is in want” (Sir 36:27) “Wherever Mary is not present then the sick man suffers.” (St. John Damascene) “Where there is no prayer to Mary, there is no hope of mercy.” (St. Bridget)

Does Mary see and feel our needs? “There is no one among the saints who can feel our bodily and spiritual needs like Mary.” (St. Antoninus) She instantly flies to the needy person. “O Virgin, you dispense your mercies with a generous hand.” (Richard of St. Victor) Mary says she will never cease her work of mercy. “In the world to come I shall not cease to be his dwelling place, I ministered before him.” (Sir 24:14) Until the end of time, she will deliver sinners by her prayer.

Favors Every Day

The Emperor Titus used to say that he was disappointed if a day went by without granting a favor. Probably, he spoke from a desire to be loved. Our Empress, Mary, would truly be disappointed if a day went by without granting some favor. “She is more anxious to grant us favors than we are to receive them. Her hands are always filled with mercy.”

Abraham’s servant asked Rebecca, (who is a symbol of Mary), for some water to drink. She gave water to him and to all his camels. (Gen 24:19) “O Mary, you are much more

compassionate than Rebecca. You are not content with helping the just person (Abraham's servant). You help also sinners (the camels)." (St. Bernard) Mary always gives more than she is asked. "O Lady, you will gain graces far greater than I seek."

A Spirit of Mercy

John and James wanted to call down fire from heaven to devour the Samaritans. Jesus said, "You do not know what spirit you have." Jesus came in a compassionate spirit to save. These two apostles would have condemned.

Mary's spirit is also inclined to mercy. "I am called the mother of mercy. God's mercy made me merciful" (St. Bridget). John writes, "I saw a woman clothed with the sun." (Rev 12:1) "O Lady, you have clothed the sun, the Eternal Word, with flesh. Now, He has clothed you with power and mercy." (St. Bernard)

"The queen is so kind that when a sinner asks for her charity, she does not question whether he is worthy. She just helps him." (St. Bernard) Mary is as "fair as the moon" (Song 6:9) which enlightens even earth's lowest creatures. The moon receives its light from the sun, but does its work quicker. "We obtain what we ask more quickly by calling on Mary." (St. Anselm) "We might fear to approach God because of our sins, but we must never fear to go to Mary." (Hugo of St. Victor) She is immaculate but, like us, she is a child of Adam.

In her charity, Mary has made herself a debtor, opening her heart to all, both the just and unjust. Peter writes that "the devil goes about seeking whom he may devour." (1 Pet 5:8) Mary goes about seeking whom she might save. "Mary's protection is greater than anything we can imagine." (St. Germanus) Why was God so rigorous in the Old Testament, but now is so merciful to far greater sinners? Because of Mary's love and merits. The world would have been destroyed long ago if Mary had not interceded." (St. Fulgentius)

Mary as Mediator

"Now we have full access. The Son is a mediator with the Father, and Mary is a mediator with the Son. The Father must hear a Son who shows Him his wounds. The Son must hear a Mother who shows him the breasts which he sucked." (Arnold of Chartres). "Mary gave God a house in her womb. Her price for this house is salvation for the lost, and life for the dead." (St. Peter Chrysologus)

How many deserved the Son's condemnation but were saved by the Mother's mercy? Let us always petition her for salvation. Mary is the throne of grace of which Paul writes, "Let us go with confidence to the throne of grace to obtain mercy." (Heb 4:16)

"O Mary, you are merciful to those who pray to you, sweet to those who love you. You are clement by giving pardon to the sorrowful, compassionate by giving graces to the just and sweet by giving yourself to the perfect." (St. Bonaventure)

Example

A woman was having sexual relations with two men. One killed the other. She told a priest in confession that the dead man appeared to her dressed in black, bound by chains and

surrounded by flames. The man tried to kill her, blaming her for his state. She invoked the Blessed Virgin. The apparition vanished and she sought forgiveness. (Life of Fr. Anthony de Colleli)

Prayer

O Mary, because you are so merciful, I have recourse to you. Only two things will keep me from receiving mercy, my failure to ask you or little confidence in your intercession. Therefore, help me always to ask and to seek with confidence.

1.10 THE SWEETNESS OF THE NAME OF MARY

“ O Sweet Virgin Mary”

(A) Her Sweetness in Life and in Death

Many saints have said that Mary’s name came from heaven. “The name of Mary came from God’s treasury”. (St. Peter Damien) The Blessed Trinity bestowed on her a name above every other name, except that of Jesus. God willed that all powers in heaven, earth and hell fall down at her name. I want to examine this unique sweetness which Mary’s servants have found in this name.

Like Honey

“This name is filled with every sweetness.” (Honorius) St. Anthony of Padua said, “O Mary, your name is joy in the heart, honey in the mouth and a song in the ear of your followers.” Three times in the Canticle, the angels ask Mary’s name. “Who is this coming up from the desert like a column of smoke.” (Song 3:6) “Who is this who comes forth like the dawn?” (Song 6:9) “Who is this coming up from the desert, leaning upon her lover?” (Song 8:5) “Why do the angels ask her name? “Because her name is so sweet that they want to hear it in reply.” (Richard of St. Lawrence)

The Power of the Name

I do not want to speak of sensible sweetness (which only some experience). I want to speak of the sweetness of consolation, confidence and strength which all receive when they pronounce this name.

“There is no other name after Jesus, from which souls receive such hope and sweetness. There is something so divine in Mary’s name that it breathes a delightful sweetness into friendly hearts. Even if they hear the name a thousand times, they receive the same pleasure.” (Abbot Francone)

When Blessed Henry Suso pronounced the name “Mary”, he was filled with joy and tears. He said her name was like honey in the recess of his soul, “O Mary what must you be like, when just your name alone is so powerful.” “O most holy Virgin, your name is so sweet I cannot pronounce it without being inflamed with God’s love. Just the thought of your name fills our minds with joy.” (St. Bernard) “If riches comfort the poor, how much more Mary’s name

comforts us in the trials of life. Your name, Mary, relieves our poverty.” (Richard of St. Lawrence)

Source of Blessings

“Your name, Mary, is filled with divine blessings.” (St. Methodius) “Your name, Mary, cannot be devoutly pronounced without bringing grace.” (St. Bonaventure) However much a sinner is hardened, the name of Mary will wonderfully soften him. Mary leads sinners to ponder their needs. “By you, Mary, does the sinner recover hope of forgiveness.” (Blessed Raymond)

The name of Mary “is a precious ointment breathing forth divine grace. Let this ointment enter your soul’s innermost recesses.” (St. Ambrose) To remember Mary’s name is a sign of divine grace or, at least, a pledge that grace will soon be recovered. “To remember your name, O Mary, comforts the afflicted, recalls those who have strayed, and encourages sinners so they do not despair.” (Ludolph of Saxony)

Encouraging to Sinners

“Jesus has five wounds which remedied the world’s evils. So, the name Maria has five letters which bring pardon to sinners.” The Office of Our Lady says, “Your name is like oil poured out.” Oil heals the sick and nourishes flames. Mary’s name heals sinners and inflames divine love. Sinners must be encouraged to use Mary’s name “because it alone will cure them of all evils. There is nothing so evil that the power of Mary’s name cannot overcome it.” (Richard of St. Lawrence)

“The devils fear Mary and when they hear her name, they fly away.” (Thomas a Kempis) “Any sinner, no matter how devoid of God’s love, if they invoke my name will overcome the devil.” (Mary to St. Bridget) “All the devils fear my name so much that when they hear it, they immediately let go of the soul they have held captive. When my name is invoked, evil angels flee from sinners and good angels approach the just man.” (Mary to St. Bridget) As breathing is a sign of life, so using Mary’s name frequently is a sign of grace, or at least, a pledge of future grace. This powerful name obtains life for those who use it devoutly.” (St. Germanus)

Source of Purity

“Her name is like a fortified tower. A sinner who takes refuge there will be saved from death. This name saves even the most abandoned and defends the just from hell’s assaults. After the name of Jesus, no other name is so much the source of salvation.” (Richard of St. Lawrence) Her followers know that Mary’s name gives them strength to overcome temptations against purity. “And the Virgin’s name was Mary.” (Lk 1:27) Luke joins these two, virgin and Mary. He shows that her name will always be linked with chastity. “The name of Mary is an indication of chastity.” (St. Peter Chrysologos) Those who invoke her name while tempted by impure thoughts know they have not consented.

“In dangers and in doubt call on Mary. Let her name not leave your lips or your heart.” (St. Bernard) The names of Mary and Jesus go together. Never let these two names be off our lips. By them, we conquer all temptations.

10.7 Special Graces

Jesus revealed to St. Bridget that He would give three special graces to those who devoutly invoke Mary's name:

1. Perfect sorrow for sins
2. Atonement for sins
3. Strength to gain perfection, followed by glory in heaven

"Your words, O Mary, are so sweet to me that I cannot deny whatever you ask." (Jesus' revelation to St. Bridget) "Mary's name is the key to heaven's gate. God puts this key in the hands of those who devoutly use it. (St. Ephrim) "Mary is the salvation of all who call on her. (St. Bonaventure)" Invoking Mary's name devoutly leads to superabundant graces in this life and a high degree of glory in the next." (Richard of St. Lawrence) "To have consolation in every work, honor Mary, walk with Mary and seek Jesus through Mary. By doing this, you will always advance in God's ways. Mary will pray for you and her Son will grant whatever she asks." (Thomas a Kempis)

The Hour of Death

Her name is sweet in this life, but even sweeter in death, because it ensures a holy and peaceful end. Fr. Caputo, S.J. urged all dying souls to pronounce Mary's name. When repeated at death's hour, devils flee and the person is comforted.

"Blessed is the man who loves your name, O Mary, because no one who invokes you has any fear of death." (St. Bonaventure) So many holy people have died with Mary's name on their lips. O reader, may her name be the last word on our lips. "O sweet and safe is the death accompanied by that name. God grants the grace of invoking it to whomever he wishes to save." (St. Germanus)

O Mary, I love your name because I love you. I hope to use it in life and in death. "O Mary, for the glory of your name, come and meet my soul as it departs from this world. Be my ladder to heaven. Obtain for me forgiveness and eternal rest." (St. Bonaventure)

Example

St. Camillus de Lellis (founder of a nursing order) told his members to have the dying person say the names of Jesus and Mary. At his own death, he invoked Jesus and Mary with such devotion that all the bystanders were inflamed with love for these names. When his soul took flight, he gave forth a great expression of heavenly peace. His last words were, "Jesus and Mary."

Prayer

O Mary, in spite of the impurity of my tongue, may I always invoke your name, which is the breath of my life. I will repeat again and again, "Mary, Mary", especially at the hour of death. Let me forget every other name except Jesus and Mary. May I be invoking your names at my last breath.

PART TWO

HOMILIES ON FEAST DAYS

1.1 FEAST OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

(A) The Father Should Preserve Mary From All Sin

How great was the injury from Adam's sin. He lost grace and all his other original prerogatives. An accumulation of evils came upon him and upon all his descendants. God, however, exempted the Blessed Virgin who would be the mother of the Second Adam, Jesus Christ. The Father preserved her from sin because she is His daughter. The Son preserved her because she is His mother. The Spirit preserved her because she is His spouse.

Daughter of the Father

The Father preserved her from original sin because she was his first born daughter. "I came forth from the Most High, the first born of all his creatures." (Sir 24:5. Some teach that she was predestined as the first born from the beginning of creation. Others teach that she was the first born of grace, only after sin happened. All agree that she is God's first born. Mary was never the slave of Lucifer. The Creator always preserved her. "The Lord preserved me from the beginning of His ways." (Pr 8:22) Mary is the "one and only daughter of life. She stands in contrast to all others who, born in sin, are daughters of death." (Denis of Alexandria)

The Father created her in grace because she was to repair the lost world. "O Virgin, you were born to minister salvation to the whole world." (St. John Damascene) "Noah's ark is a type of Mary because Mary saves us from the shipwreck of sin. The ark saved only a few, but Mary rescues the whole human race." (St. Bernard) Mary is the "new Eve and mother of life." (St. Athanasius) She stands in contrast to Eve, the mother of death. "You who have taken away Eve's sorrow". (St. Theophanius) "Hail, reconciler of the whole world." (St. Ephrim)

Cannot be God's Enemy

"An enemy cannot bring peace to an offended person. He would provoke him to greater wrath." (St. Gregory) To mediate peace between man and God, Mary could not appear as an enemy before God. She must appear as friend, free from all sin.

Also, God preserved Mary from original sin because she was to crush the serpent's head. God foretold "I will put an enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed and she shall crush your head." (Gen 3:15) If Mary was to conquer Lucifer, she should never be his slave. Therefore, she was preserved from even a momentary subjection to her demonic opponent. The devil tried to poison her but God pre-endowed her with such grace that she was always able to confound Lucifer's pride. (St. Alphonsus wrote over 100 years before Pope Pius IX infallibly declared this dogma of the Immaculate Conception -1854).

“The devil is the head of original sin. Mary crushed this head because sin never had entry into her soul. She blotted out shame and conquered the devil. She was never be under his dominion.” (St. Bonaventure)

Prepared By Holiness

Mary was created free from sin to honor His Son. “Holiness must be given to whatever is to serve God.” (St. Thomas) David prepared well for the temple, saying, “This house is prepared for God, not for man.” (Chron 29:1) So, the divine architect adorned Mary’s soul to be a worthy dwelling for God. The Church declares that God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, “prepared the body and soul of the Virgin so she would be a worthy dwelling place for the Son.”

A man’s highest honor is to be born of noble parents. The world accepts poverty and ignorance but not a lowly birth. Do we suppose that God would permit His Son to be born of a woman infected with sin? Would he allow Lucifer to claim that Mary was once his slave? No. The Father preserved his Son’s honor by keeping Mary ever immaculate. The Greek Church says, “God caused the Blessed Virgin to be as perfectly pure from the first moment of her existence as was fitting for the Mother of Christ.”

The Highest Degree

Theologians teach that no other creature had any gift which Mary did not also have. “What was given even to a few, will not be denied to the Virgin.” (St. Bernard) “No grace was given to any saint which Mary did not have in a higher degree from the very first moment of her existence.” (St. Thomas of Villanova)

There is an infinite difference between the Mother of God and the servants of God.” (St. John Damascene) “God gave greater privileges to His Mother than to His servants.” (St. Thomas) St. Anselm was the great defender of the Immaculate Conception. “God could preserve the angels in heaven spotless in the midst of Lucifer’s devastation. Was He unable to preserve the Queen of Angels from this devastation?” If God made Eve immaculate, would he not do more for Mary?

“The Virgin, who was to be the Mother of God’s Son, should have a purity that exceeds that of all men and angels.” (St. Anselm) “Because Our Lord is holy and reposes only in holy places, he preserved Mary’s body and soul.” (St. John Damascene) The Father calls Mary a lily amid thorns. All others are stained with sin while she was always immaculate.

(B) The Son Should Preserve Mary From All Sin

Mother of the Son

God also did this because she was His Mother. No human being can choose his mother. If he could, he would certainly choose a queen, not a slave. He would choose a friend of God, not an enemy. God selected a Mother who was like Him.” (St. Bernard) A most pure God should have a spotless mother. “The sanctification of the Mother of God consists in the total freedom from original sin so she would be prepared to give Him birth.” (St. Bernardine of Sienna)

Separated From Sinners

St. Paul writes, “We should have a high priest who is holy and separated from sinners.” (Heb 7:26) St. Thomas says “He who was to take away sins could not be touched by Adam’s fault.” How could Jesus be separated from sinners if His Mother was a sinner? “Christ did not choose this vessel from earth but from heaven.” (St. Ambrose) This is according to Paul’s words, “The first man was of earth, earthly. The second man from heaven, heavenly.” (1 Cor 15:47)

Chosen Vessel

Mary is a “heavenly vessel.” She was superior to the angels in sanctity because she was the woman in whose womb the King of Glory would live. “The King of Glory should repose in a chosen vessel exceeding all men and angels in sanctity. Jesus could have been reproached if He had a mother infected by sin.”

Jesus preserved Mary’s body free of corruption after death, because He would have been dishonored if her virginal flesh had become the food of worms. Corruption is the disgrace of the human race. Mary was exempted because Jesus’ flesh came from the flesh of Mary. Her corrupt body would have been a disgrace for Jesus. How much more if her soul was corrupted by original sin?

The Flesh of Mary

Even after the resurrection, the flesh of Jesus remained the flesh of Mary. “The flesh of Jesus and Mary are one. Therefore, the Son’s glory is one with His Mother’s glory.” If Mary had any sin, Jesus would not have contracted this sin. However, He would be uniting to Himself flesh which had once been infected by sin. This would always be a blot.” (Abbot Arnold of Chartres)

Mary was always a worthy mother of the Savior. “You alone were found to be the virginal womb in which the King of Kings would first abide.” (St. Bernard) “She was prepared, before she conceived, to be God’s mother.” (St. Thomas of Villanova) The Church says, “The Blessed Virgin who merited to carry in her womb Christ the Lord.” (Our Lady’s Birthday)

Merited to Be God’s Mother

“Our Lady did not merit Jesus’ taking flesh. However, by her graces, she merited becoming the Mother of God.” (St. Thomas) “Her unique sanctity merited that she alone should be judged worthy to receive a God.” (St. Augustine)

“If she was worthy to be God’s mother, what perfection exists that did not fit her? When God chooses someone for a dignity, He makes that person worthy. Having chosen Mary to be His mother, He made her worthy of this highest dignity.” (St. Thomas of Villanova) The angel assures us “You have found favor with God. You will conceive.” (Lk 1:50) “The Blessed Virgin never committed a venial sin for this would make her unworthy. How much more unworthy if she had contracted original sin which made her an enemy of God and a slave of the devil?” (St. Thomas) “Through her Son, whom she merited to conceive, she received grace to conquer all sin.” (St. Augustine)

Not Ashamed

“Christ chose a fitting mother, not one of whom He would be ashamed.” (St. Peter Damien) “He lived in a womb free of all dishonor.” (St. Proclus) Jesus was not ashamed when the Jews said, “Is not his mother called Mary?” (Mt 18:55). However, if the devil said, ‘Was not his Mother a sinner? Was she not once my slave?’ It would be a disgrace.” (St. Proclus) It was not fitting that Jesus be born of a deformed woman or one possessed by devils. How much worse if His mother had been deformed by sin and in Lucifer’s power?

God is Wisdom and He knows how to prepare a dwelling. “Wisdom has built herself a house.” (Prov 9:1) David wrote, “God sanctifies this temple in the early morning.” (Ps 14:5) This means at the beginning of life. God has said, “Wisdom will never enter into a malicious soul” (Wis 1:4) How could God’s Son live in Mary’s body and soul unless He had preserved it from every stain of sin? “The Eternal Word lived not just in Mary’s soul but also in her womb.” (St. Thomas)

God would not have taken flesh, even in the wombs of great saints, because they had been stained by original sin. However, He took flesh in Mary because she was free from the least shadow of sin. “God made himself the most worthy dwelling place. This is Mary, who was never possessed by the enemy.” (St. Augustine) “Whoever heard of an architect who built himself a temple and gave possession to his greatest enemy?” (St. Cyril of Alexandria)

Guarding Mary’s Honor

“God said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’. He observed his own words by giving all grace to His Mother.” (St. Methodius) We must certainly believe that Jesus kept the body of Mary preserved from corruption after death. By this, He showed His dutiful respect. He certainly would not have guarded her honor if He did not preserve her from sin.

“A son who could preserve his mother from sin and did not, would certainly sin. If the Word was able to create His Mother immaculate, He had to do so. “Since you choose to have a mother, you owe her this honor. How could she be in the horror of original sin and, at the same time, be the dwelling of all purity?” (Gersen) “The Son came into the world to redeem Mary more than all other creatures.” (St. Bernadine)

A person is redeemed in two ways, by raising them up after having fallen and by preserving them from falling.” (St. Augustine) The latter is the more honorable. We must certainly believe that Mary was redeemed in the more honorable way. “The Holy Spirit, as a special favor, redeemed her from original sin by a new kind of sanctification at the very first moment of her conception.” (St. Bonaventure) “To others, Jesus was a liberator. To Mary, He was a pre-liberator.” (Cardinal Cuservo) Others were delivered after being defiled. She was preserved from being defiled.

1.13 An Immaculate Lamb

If the Lamb was immaculate, the mother must have been immaculate. “O worthy Mother of a worthy Son, O Mother of the Most High God. Suckle your creator. Give milk to him who made you. He made you so that he could be made of you.” (Hugh of St. Victor)

(C) The Holy Spirit Should Preserve Mary From All Sin

The Holy Spirit

The Father preserved Mary from sin because she was His daughter. The Son preserved her because she would be His mother. The Holy Spirit preserved her because she would be his spouse. “Mary alone merited to be both the Mother and the Spouse of God.” (St. Augustine)

“The Holy Spirit entered Mary and enriched her with graces above all creatures, making her Queen of heaven and earth.” (St. Anselm) From her immaculate body, the Spirit formed Jesus’ immaculate body. “Mary is the resting place of the Holy Spirit by whose work she became the Mother of the Incarnate Word.” (St. Thomas)

The All-Beautiful Bride

Why would the Holy Spirit not make his bride as beautiful as she should be? “You are all beautiful, my love. There is no spot on you.” (Song 6:7) Many saints teach that these words refer to Mary’s Immaculate Conception. “In you is no stain of mortal, venial or original sin.” (Blessed Raymond)

The Spirit said, “My sister is a garden enclosed and a fountain sealed up.” (Song 6:12) “In Mary no guile could enter and no deceit of the enemy prevail. She was always holy in mind and body.” (St. Sophrius) “You are an enclosed garden. No sinner’s hand has ever stolen your flowers.” (St. Bernard)

Above All

From the beginning, God loved Mary more than all the saints. He exalted her in sanctity. Scripture says, “The Lord loves the gates of Zion above all the tabernacles of Jacob.” (Ps 134 6:1) “Many daughters gather here, but you surpass them all. (Pr 31:29) If Mary is above every saint and angel, then she must also be above the original justice of the angels and of Adam. “There are young maidens without number but one is my dove, my perfect one, the only one of her mother.” (Song 6:7) Among all the just souls, Mary alone is the perfect one.

Even before she became God’s mother, she was “full of grace.” “The saints receive grace partially. To Mary, all was given” (St. Sophnonus) “Grace even made Mary’s flesh holy so she could clothe God’s word in it.” (St. Thomas) From all this, I conclude that Mary was enriched at the moment of her conception. “At her conception the whole grace of the divinity overflowed into her.” (Peter of Celles) “The Holy Spirit bore her off to himself. He possessed her before Satan could take possession.” (St. Peter Damian)

Conclusion

I have written at length because Mary, in her Immaculate Conception, is the patroness of our Redemptorist congregation. I wish to summarize my reasons. (Editor note: In 1854, Pope Pius IX declared the infallible doctrine of Mary’s Immaculate Conception. When St. Alphonsus wrote, it was not yet defined).

I do not believe that Mary was included in Adam’s sin. I will quote some saints.

(1) “She is an uncorrupted Virgin, free by grace of every stain of sin.” (St. Ambrose)

- (2) "She was remote from all stain of sin." (St. Ephrem)
- (3) "She was altogether excluded from the wrath of God's sentence." (St. Augustine)
- (4) "Her soul was never in darkness." (St. Jerome)
- (5) "She shared in our nature, but not in our sin." (St. Cyprian)
- (6) "God formed the first Eve without sin and the second Eve without sin." (St. Amphilochius)
- (7) "The Virgin is called immaculate because she is corrupt in nothing." (St. Sophronius)
- (8) "The serpent never had access to this paradise of Mary." (St. John Damascene)
- (9) "The flesh of the virgin came from Adam but without the sin of Adam." (St. Peter Damian)
- (10) "Our Lady was full of preventive grace against the corruption of original sin." (St. Bonaventure)
- (11) "The Son of God would not take her flesh if she were stained by original sin." (St. Bernardine)

Examples

A woman wanted her husband to go to confession but whenever she asked him, he would beat her. A priest gave her a picture of Mary Immaculate. When she gave it to her husband, he said, "When will you take me to confession?" He told the priest that as soon as he received the picture, he felt his heart changed. So great was his desire for confession in the morning that the night seemed endless.

In another town, a man had been hurt and wanted to take revenge. He even told the priest that he did not come to Church because of his desire for vengeance. The priest gave him a picture of Mary Immaculate. He immediately wanted to go to confession. However, when he came the next day, he had changed his mind. A second time, the priest gave him yet another picture. As soon as he took it he said, "Let's move quickly on this confession."

Prayer

O Mary, I thank God for preserving you from sin. I want the whole world to acknowledge you as the "Dawn" filled with light and the "sealed garden" in which God delights. You alone are the "white lily", born among the thorns. O Mary, you are beautiful in God's eyes. So much do I want to praise you, that the moment when I finally will see you in heaven seems a thousand years away.

2.2 THE BIRTH OF MARY

(A) Mary's Great Riches From the Beginning

Even though every new-born child is deprived of grace, people celebrate births with joy. With Mary's birth, there was total joy for she was born a great saint. To see the greatness of her holiness, we must study both the first grace she received and her fidelity to it.

Part One – Born a Saint

Except for the human soul of Jesus, Mary's soul was the most beautiful God ever created. Mary was "A work only surpassed by God" (St. Peter Damian). Grace came "like rain on a

fleece.” (Ps 72:6) and Mary’s soul did not lose a single drop. “Mary was full of grace because the Spirit was about to take possession of her.” (St. Basil) “She holds in fullness what other saints have in part.” (St. Bonaventure) “Mary was made holy in her mother’s womb, above all angels and saints.” (St. Vincent Ferrer)

Her first grace exceeded all the graces of all the angels and saints put together. She received this in the first instant of her Immaculate Conception. Two reasons make this clear.

Because Chosen to be God’s Mother

First, she was chosen to be the Mother of God, a role superior to all other creatures. (In a sense her dignity belongs to the realm of Jesus’ Hypostatic Union). When God decreed that his Son would become man He also decreed that He have a mother. “God gives graces proportioned to the dignity He intends.” (St. Thomas) Paul writes “He made us fit ministers of the New Law.” (2 Cor 3:6) The apostles received gifts in proportion to the great office they held.

“A person chosen by God receives all the gifts needed for their exalted state.” (St. Bernardine) and Mary’s graces had to correspond to her immense dignity. “Undoubtedly God gave her the graces needed to be the Mother of God. In the Blessed Virgin there was a preparatory perfection making her able to be Christ’s mother.” (St. Thomas)

St. Thomas says that Mary did not have the highest possible grace, for even Christ’s habitual graces could increase. Jesus had all the grace needed so his humanity could be united with the Eternal Word. Grace could not prepare anything for a higher goal than the personal union with God’s Son. The limit of grace was placed by Divine Wisdom.

Unlimited Divine Power

Divine power can always give more. Although the creature’s capacity to receive is limited, God can always increase this capacity. The soul has an unlimited power to obey God’s will. St. Thomas says the Blessed Virgin was “full of grace.” She received an immense grace which corresponded to her immense dignity of being God’s mother. “We know the measure of her grace according to the greatness of her dignity.”

David said, “The foundations of this city are in the holy mountains.” (Ps 85:1) Mary is the Lord’s holy mountain. At her very beginning, she was more perfect than all the saints put together. “The Lord loves the gates of Jerusalem above all the tabernacles of Jacob” because “a man is born in her.”

Isaiah said, “In the last days, the mountain of the Lord will be the highest mountain.” (Is 2:2) “Mary is a mountain on top of the mountains. She is above all the saints.” (St. Gregory) “As the light of the sun surpasses all the other stars and even overwhelms them, so does Mary surpass all the angels and the saints.” (St. Peter Damian)

Mediatrice for All Mankind

The second proof that Mary was more holy than all the saints is based on her role as mediatrix for all mankind. This task requires that she possess a greater treasure of grace. The Church Fathers gave her the title “Mediatrice” because, by congruity, she gained our salvation by

her intercession and our redemption by her merits. “By congruity” means that Mary offered her merits to God who, as a favor, accepted them along with Jesus’ merits. “She effected our redemption in common with Christ.” (Arnold of Chartres) “Mary sought and effected the salvation of all.” (Richard of St. Victor) Mary obtained whatever gift or goodness the saints received.

Scriptural Description

The Church uses scriptural phrases to describe Mary. “In me, is all grace of the way and the truth.” (Eccl 24:24) “In me, is all hope of life and of virtue.” (24:24) “I am the mother of fair love and of holy hope.” (24:24) “From all these words, we must magnify Mary, the finder of grace and the mediatrix of salvation.” (St. Bernard)

Gabriel called her ‘full of grace’, because other saints had only limited grace. “Grace is given to other saints partially, but to her in fullness.” (St. Sophronius) She receives this fullness because she is “mediatrix between God and man” (St. Basil) ‘If she were not full of grace, she could never become the ladder to heaven and the advocate of the world.’ (St. Lawrence)

Exceeds All Saints

If, from the beginning, Mary received the office of mediatrix of all saints, she must have had graces that exceeded all saints. An intercessor is more important than the ones for whom they are interceding. “Because her pure sanctity surpassed the purity of all others, she merited to be the repairer of the whole world.” (St. Anselm)

How can Mary be the mediatrix of all the angels? Through Jesus, the angels persevered in grace. Mary hastened Jesus’ coming and merited that the thrones, (which the devils vacated), should be filled up. In this way, their accidental glory was repaired. “All things are restored to their original state by this Blessed Virgin.” (St. Anselm) “By her, the ruin of the angels is remedied and human nature is reconciled.” (Richard of St. Victor)

Beautiful in Her Mother’s Womb

Destined to be mediatrix and Mother of the Redeemer, Mary, from the beginning, had grace which exceeded that of all saints and angels together. How beautiful was her soul even when enclosed in her mother’s womb! “When I was a little one, I pleased the Most High.” She was the creature above all others. If she had been born immediately after conception, she would have come into the world richer than all the saints. How much greater were her graces after nine months in the womb?

(B) Mary’s Fidelity to Divine Grace

The second point is Mary’s great fidelity to grace. Many theologians teach that Mary received the use of her reason while still in the womb and was divinely enlightened according to her degree of grace. Enlightened by God’s Wisdom, she understood the eternal truths and God’s infinite goodness. She saw how much God deserved to be loved because he kept her from sin, and called her to be the Queen of the Universe.

Used Immediately

Grateful to God, Mary began immediately using the graces given to her. In the womb, she loved God with all her strength. She did this throughout the nine months. She was free from sin, from all earthly affection, and from every opposition to God. Her beautiful soul was free of all obstacles. She always flowed to God and increased in his love.

Sirach said of Mary, “I was a plane-tree by the waters and I was exalted” (24:19) and “as a vine I brought forth a noble odor” (24:23) Mary was a noble plant growing in divine grace. She was a vine that never ceases to grow. Other trees have a determined height but a vine always grows. The Holy Spirit said, “Who is this, leaning against her beloved?” (Song 7:5) Mary is the vine leaning against the great tree of her Son.

Doubling the Level of Grace

Each soul has a certain level of grace. When it is faithful to God’s leadings, it doubles that level, as did the angels in their time of testing. For Mary, this began during the months when she was in her mother’s womb. She doubled her graces from the first instant of existence. If she had 1,000 degrees of grace, these became 2,000 in the second instant etc. Consider what treasures she had after just one day. What about after nine months! Rejoice with this infant who was born so holy. Rejoice also for ourselves. She was conceived “full of grace” for our sake.

St. Thomas says Mary was “full of grace” in three ways:

1. Her soul belonged to God.
2. Her body merited to receive the Eternal Word.
3. She was full of grace for us, overflowing for our benefit

Thomas says that some saints have so much grace that they save many, but not all. Only Jesus and Mary had this grace of saving all. “What would be enough for all souls was only in Christ and in the Blessed Virgin.” (St. Thomas)

All Share in Her Fullness

Concerning Mary, the saints say “of her fullness, we have all received.” (Jn 1:16) “All share in Mary’s grace. With whom would Mary not share this grace?” (St. Anselm) Jesus is the author of grace. Mary is its mediatrix. Jesus is the source. Mary is the channel. “Mary is a full aqueduct, so that all receive of her” (St. Bernard). The saint tells us to honor this Virgin. “We should honor her in whom God has placed this plenitude. Any hope we have of salvation overflowed from her graces.” (St. Bernard).

The soul that has no devotion to Mary closes the door to this channel. When King Holofernes wished to conquer the Jewish city, “He commanded that their aqueduct be cut off.” (Judith 7:6) When the devil wants to conquer a soul, he first closes down devotion to Mary. First, the soul loses supernatural light, then it loses fear of God and finally, it loses eternal salvation. Read the following example to see the distraction caused by abandoning devotion to Mary.

Example

Two young men led wicked lives. Then, one had a dream of some evil men killing them. He also saw that Jesus was angry with them but that Mary was imploring mercy. He resolved to embrace the religious life.

He told the dream to his friend who ridiculed it but later was stabbed to death. The first young man went to confession and resolved to sell all he had. However, instead of giving the money to the poor, he spent it on evil habits.

He fell ill and had another vision. He saw hell and that God had already condemned him. He again had recourse to Mary and went to confession. He regained his health but lived worse than ever. He went to Lima in Latin America. Again, he fell and confessed his sins, but relapsed into his evil ways. Later, he was ill again. The same priest returned, but the man said, "My vices have brought me to this end and now I go to hell". He died before the priest could help him.

Prayer

O Mary, Mediatrix of all graces, I come before you. Because of my sins, I deserve to be abandoned but I believe in the greatness of your mercy. I know that God denies you nothing and that you delight to help the worse sinners. Give me the grace to change from a sinner to a saint. Do this for the love of God who made you so powerful.

2.3 The Presentation of Mary (November 21)

(A) Mary Offers Herself Promptly

There will never be a greater offering to God than when Mary (at the age of 3) presented herself in the temple as a perpetual victim. She understood God's words, "Arise, make haste my love and come." (Song 2:10) God wanted her to forget her home and think only of Him. "Forget your people and your father's house." (Ps 45:11) Let's consider how acceptable was this prompt and total offering. There are two points.

Part One – Mary's Offering Was Prompt

At the first moment of her Immaculate Conception, she received perfect use of her reason and began to merit. Since God sanctifies us by our meriting, "this is the way the Blessed Virgin was sanctified." (St. Thomas) This gift of being able to merit was given to angels and to Adam. Therefore, it was certainly given to Mary. "Because God received his human nature from Mary, she received more grace from Christ than all others." (St. Thomas) "Being a mother, she has special rights to her Son's gifts" (Suarez). Mary received her fullness from being God's mother. This was a natural debt for God.

Determined to Love God

From the beginning, Mary knew God "as no tongue could express." Enlightened in this way, she instantly offered herself entirely. "She determined to sacrifice her will to God and to give all her love for all her life. No one can grasp how entire was her subjection or how fully determined she was to do God's will." (St. Bridget) Later, she learned that her parents, Joachim

and Anne, had promised to consecrate their child to God. According to many historians, it was a custom for parents to leave daughters at the Temple for their education.

Mary was brought to the temple at three years of age, a time when children most need their parents. Of her own accord, she had asked her parents to take her there so they could fulfill their promise. Her holy mother, “did not delay in leading her to the temple and offering her to God.” (St. Gregory of Nyssa)

Imagine Joachim and Anne making the eighty mile journey from Nazareth to Jerusalem to generously offer their most precious treasure. Few relatives escorted them but many angels accompanied them. “How beautiful are your steps, O daughter of the prince.” (Song 7:1) How acceptable to God was every step of the way!

Mary – Spouse and Dove

God rejoiced to see His spouse come to the temple that day.” (St. Bernardine) He never saw such a beautiful creature offer herself. “Go, queen of the world, to the house of God and await the Spirit who will make you the Mother of God.” (St. Germanus) Upon arriving, Mary kissed her parents and then, without turning back, ascended the fifteen steps to present herself to the priest, St. Zachary. With this, she left the world and consecrated herself to the Creator.

Noah sent forth a raven and a dove from the ark. The raven feasted on the dead bodies. The dove returned. Many are like ravens, feasting on earthly foods. Mary is the dove who knows that God is our only hope. She knew that the world has many dangers. To be free, she left its snares. In the temple, she could better hear God’s voice.

So, in her very first actions, she made herself dear to the Lord. The Church says, “When I was a little one, I pleased the Most High.” She is like the moon which completes its course faster than the other planets. Mary gave herself without delay and without reserve.

(B) Mary Offers Herself Without Reserve

Mary knew that God does not accept a divided heart. She had studied the text, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart.” (Deut 6:5) She had loved God from the first moment of her existence. Yet, she yearned to consecrate herself in a solemn and public way. Consider her fervor as she entered the holy place.

Total Dedication

Thanking God for the favor of being brought to his house, she gave herself completely with all her powers. Many authors say that, at this moment, she offered God her virginity. This was Mary’s first vow and she wanted to dedicate herself to the temple service for the rest of her life. If it was God’s will, she would never leave the temple. She exclaimed, “My beloved to me and I to him.” (Song 2:16) She said, “I come here to please You alone. I will live all yours and die all yours. Accept my sacrifice and help me to be faithful.”

In the temple, Mary made great progress. She was like “the morning rising” (Song 6:9) which quickly became as mid-day brightness. Who can describe the brightness of her charity,

chastity and humility? “She was planted in the house of God, cultivated by the Spirit and bore fruit in all the virtues.” She turned her thoughts from earthly things, made great progress quickly and became a temple worthy of God.” (St. John of Damascus). Mary was docile, spoke little and was always composed. She persevered in prayer, fasting and reading Scripture.” (St. Anselm)

Great Efforts

Mary prayed early in the morning. Worked for six hours and ended the day with prayer. She was perfect in every virtue. No one saw her angry and her words witnessed that God was with her. (St. Jerome and St. Bonaventure)

From her revelations, St. Elizabeth of Hungary (1207-1231) said, “When her parents left her, Mary was determined to have only God as Father and thought only of pleasing him. She determined to consecrate her virginity and to give him her entire will. She especially obeyed the commandment, “You shall love the Lord your God.” Mary said to St. Elizabeth of Hungary, “Do you think I possessed virtue without any effort? I obtained grace only by constant prayer, tears and mortifications.”

The Mother of the Messiah

St. Bridget said, “Mary was full of the Holy Spirit and determined never to offend God. She gave all she had to the poor. She ate only what her body needed. After she read in Scripture that God would be born of a virgin, she desired only God. She wanted to live until the time of the Messiah so she could serve the virgin who would be his mother.”

Although seeing herself as an unworthy servant of the Messiah’s mother, she drew her Son into her virginal womb. Her Spouse said, “The voice of the turtle dove is heard in our land.” (Song 21:12) The turtle dove loves solitude and always sighs for its companions. Mary always sighed for the redemption of the world. The prophet Isaiah recorded these sighs, “Send forth, O Lord, the lamb, the ruler of the earth.” (16:1) “Let the clouds rain down the Just One.” (45:8) “Rend the heavens, and come down.” (56:1)

God’s Delight

“This child was God’s delight, where he found every virtue.” (St. Sophronius) “God chose Mary as his mother because he could find no dwelling as holy as her womb.” (St. John Chrysostom) St. Bernard teaches the same truth. “She surpassed all other creatures in perfection.” (St. Bernard).

Let us imitate Mary and present ourselves fully and without delay. Let us do so through her hands, because God never rejects her gifts. Let us finally have unbounded confidence that we would receive gifts from her hands.

Example

Sister Domenica was born of poor parents near Florence and served Mary from her infancy, fasting every day and feeding the poor. Every Saturday, she gathered flowers for her statue of Mary. One day, she saw a poor lady with a poor child. She went to get food, when suddenly they were in her home without the door being opened. The child was wounded in hands and feet. The mother explained, “It was from love.” She asked the child if the wounds

hurt? He just smiled. The woman asked about the flowers and encouraged her to continue her practices.

When she gave them the food, the child asked her how much she loved Jesus. She said she always thought of him. Then a sweet smell came from the wounds and the appearance of the two changed. She saw the woman clothed like a Queen and the child shining like the sun. Later, Domenica entered the Dominicans.

Prayer

O Mary, you presented yourself in the temple to consecrate your very first years to God. I, however, have forgotten God for so long. But it is better to begin late than never at all. So, this day, O Queen, I present myself to serve you. Since I enter your service late, I must compensate for lost time by doubling my service. Amen.

2.4 THE ANNUNCIATION

(A) Mary's Perfect Humility

When God sought a mother, he wanted the most humble woman on earth. So, he chose Mary. She had exalted virtues but was lowly in her own eyes. "There are many young maidens but only one is my dove, my perfect one." (Song 6:8) So, we will see two points. In the Annunciation, Mary totally humbled herself and God totally exalted her.

Needing Her Consent

"When the King was asleep, my spikenard sent forth its odor." (Song 1:11) "Spikenard, a lowly herb, is a symbol of Mary's humility which awakened the divine Word, asleep in the Father's bosom, and drew him into her womb." (St. Antoninus) Drawn by her odor, he chose her to be his Mother. However, he would become her Son only with her consent. While Mary was sighing that God would send the Redeemer, the angel Gabriel arrived and said, "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women." (Lk 1:28)

What does she say to this? Nothing. In fact, she is troubled, not by the vision but by the words. The praises exceeded her own humble thoughts of herself. If the angel had said, "You are the greatest sinner in the world", she would not have been troubled. The more the angel exalted her, the more she humbled herself. Fearing every praise of herself, she sought only praise for the Creator. Mary said to St. Bridget, "I desired only that the Creator would be glorified."

Praises Cause Fear

From scripture, Mary knew that the time of the Messiah had arrived and that his Mother would be a virgin. She heard the Angel Gabriel praise her with words that would be said only to the Mother of God. Yet being God's Mother never entered her mind. Her humility permitted no such idea. These praises caused only fear. "As Christ was comforted by an angel, so Mary needed to be encouraged by one." (St. Peter Chrysologus) Gabriel had to say "Fear not. You have found favor with God." (Lk 1:30) His words mean, "Do not be surprised, O Mary, that I hail you. You are little in your own eyes, but God has made you worthy to find grace. Therefore, He preserved you from all sin, honoring you from your conception with grace greater

than all the saints. Now, he exalts you to be his Mother.” “You shall conceive and bring forth a Son, and you shall name him Jesus.” (Lk 1:31)

“Do not delay, O Mary. The Angel awaits your reply and so do we because the Lord himself desires your consent.” (St. Bernard) “Answer then, O Virgin. Why delay giving life to the world?” (St. Augustine) Answer quickly because the world’s salvation depends on your consent.

The Perfect Response

She quickly replies, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be done according to your word.” (Lk 1:38) What a humble and prudent reply! Could human wisdom have invented such a reply? After she said these words, the Son of God became the Son of Mary. “O powerful ‘Let it be’ venerated above all others. God’s ‘let it be’ created the universe, but with Mary’s ‘Let it be’, God became man.” (St. Thomas of Villanova)

Let us not wander from Mary’s humility. She understood the dignity of being God’s Mother. She was assured by the angel that God had chosen her. Yet, she does not rise in her own estimation. She sees her own nothingness and God’s greatness. When consent is asked, what does she say? She is totally humbled yet filled with ardent love. She abandons herself to God’s will and says “Behold the slave of the Lord, obliged to do whatever he commands.” She realized that God had chosen her and that He had gifted her. How can a slave be worthy of becoming God’s mother? “Behold the handmaid of the Lord.” God’s goodness is praised, not Mary’s.

The Deep Roots of Humility

“O Mary, you are nothing in your own eyes but great in God’s. You are insufficient for yourself but sufficient for the Almighty” (Abbot Gueric) “How, O Lady, could you unite in one heart such a humble opinion of yourself and the fullness of grace? How could your humility take such deep root, when God so exalted you? (St. Bernard) When Lucifer saw his own great beauty, he wanted to make himself like God. ‘I will be like the Most High’ (Is 14:13) What would Lucifer have said if he had the gifts of Mary? Mary did not act like Lucifer. The more God exalted her, the more she humbled herself. “By this humility, O Lady, you captivated the King and drew the Eternal Son into your womb.” (St. Bernard)

God’s “Great Things”

Mary merited more by her humility than all the saints by their good works. Although Mary’s virginity pleased God, her humility made her worthy to be his mother. “She conceived by her humility” (St. Bernard) “God chose her as his mother because of her humility” (St. Jerome) “Mary became God’s mother because she knew her own nothingness.” (St. Bridget)

Mary said this, “He has looked on my humility and done great things for me.” “She said specifically that God looked on her humility.” (St. Lawrence) “Mary did not praise her own humility but spoke of her nothingness.” (St. Francis de Sales)

The Root of Humility

“Mary’s humility was a ladder that the Lord used to descend into her womb.” (St. Augustine) “Humility prepared her to be God’s mother.” (St. Antoninus). Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would come from the root of Jesse (11:1). “This root means Mary’s humility of heart.” (St. Albert) “Mary’s humility made the Word flee from the Father’s bosom into her womb.” (St. Augustine) “Mary’s humble eyes, always on God’s greatness, held God captive and drew the Word into her womb.” (Fernandez) “How beautiful are the dove’s eyes.” (Song 4:1) With her humble look, she brought God into her womb. “Where could such a virgin be found who could allure the King of heaven?” (Abbot Franco) In the Word becoming flesh, Mary could not have humbled herself more.

(B) God’s Perfect Exaltation of Mary

To describe this exaltation is very simple. God made Mary his mother. “He established her in a rank above all angels and saints.” (Arnold of Chartres) “Her glory is incomparably greater than all saints and angels.” (St. Ephrim) “O Mary, God alone is above you.” (St. Anselm) “God alone can comprehend your greatness.” (St. Bernardine)

Nearest Creature to Christ

The evangelists do not record great praises of her because it is enough to say “Of her, was born Jesus” (Mt 1:16) “Is it not enough that they declare her the Mother of God”. There was no need to go into details.” (St. Thomas of Villanova) “This alone transcends every greatness.” (St. Anselm)

“Because the Virgin Mary was the nearest possible creature to Christ, she received a greater fullness of grace than others.” (St. Thomas Aquinas) “The dignity of being God’s mother surpasses all other created dignity.” (Suarez) This is the highest degree of union. “It is a sort of supreme union with an infinite person.” (St. Thomas) “Being the Mother of God is the highest dignity after that of being God.” (St. Albert)

Rank of Equality

“To be God’s Mother, Mary had to be raised to a sort of equality with the Three Divine Persons, by an almost infinity of graces.” (St. Bernardine) “God loved in Mary in a special way. So, let every creature be silent and tremble. God dwells in the Blessed Virgin.” (St. Peter Damian)

“Just as the humanity of Jesus could not be destined for a greater dignity than union with the Word, so Mary could not have been raised to a higher dignity than the Mother of the Word.” (St. Thomas Aquinas) “There is something infinite in being the Mother of Him who is infinite.” (St. Thomas of Villanova) “This was the highest state that could be given to a pure creature.” (St. Bernardine)

Most Exalted Creature

“God could make a greater world and a greater heaven but he could not exalt any creature more than He exalted Mary.” (St. Bonaventure) Mary expressed it the best. “He that is mighty

has done great things for me.” “Mary did not explain these “great things” because they could not be expressed.” (St. Thomas of Villanova)

“God created the whole world so that he could have Mary as his mother.” (St. Bernard)
“The world that God formed, depended on your will, O Mary.” (St. Bonaventure) “I was with him, forming all things.” (Pr 8:30)

Because of Mary, “God did not destroy man after Adam’s sin.” (St. Bernardine) Mary was a child, but totally innocent. She was Mother but preserved the treasure of virginity.

Mary’s Beauty

St. Denis saw Our Lady and said, “Only by faith, could I believe that she was not God, such was her beauty.” Her beauty was so great that it conferred virginity on all who saw her.” (St. Ambrose) “She was never coveted by others. (St. Thomas) Her active life did not interrupt her contemplative union with God. She died but not with any sorrow of soul or corruption of body.

Superior to All Creatures

Mary is infinitely inferior to God but immensely superior to all creatures. This should increase our confidence. “As Mother of God, she has a unique right to his gifts.” (Suarez) “God must grant her requests to acknowledge her as His mother.” (St. Germanus)

God must grant the petitions of His mother. “Mary, by your maternal authority, you have great power with God and obtain forgiveness for the worst crimes. God complies with all your wishes as His spotless Mother.” (St. Germanus)

She lacks neither the power nor the will to help us. “O Queen, God did not create you just for Himself. He wanted you to restore the angels, to repair man and to vanquish the devils. By you, we recover grace and the enemy is crushed.” (Abbot of Celles) To please her, salute her often with the “Hail Mary”. Mary told St. Mechtilde that she honors this prayer more than any other.

Example

Fr. Paul Segneri recorded the following. A young man addicted to many vices went to confession. The priest assured him that Our Lady could overcome this vice and told him to say one “Hail Mary”, morning and night, until his next confession. He should also offer Mary all his senses and kiss the floor three times a day. He fulfilled this penance but saw only a slight change. The priest told him never to abandon this practice.

Later, the young man left Rome and traveled for many years. Upon returning, he told the priest that he was totally changed, saying, “Our Lady gained this grace by the little devotion you taught me.” The priest told the story from the pulpit. A captain who was in an illicit love affair, decided to begin the same practice, hoping to be delivered from these sins (this intention is necessary for Our Lady to help). He, too, changed his life. Later, he tried to visit the woman to see if she was converted. Some invisible power drove him back and he could not enter the house. He saw that Our Lady had done this. Mary withdraws us from sin and keeps us from relapsing into it.

Prayer

O Mary, you were so lowly in your own eyes, that God exalted you, making you His Mother and Queen. I, too, exalt you. However, because of my pride, I am ashamed to appear before you. So, I greet you in the words of the Hail Mary. Let me say this every day.

2.5 Mary's Visitation to Elizabeth

(A) Must Have Recourse to Mary

Mary is the Treasurer of all graces. We must go to her. If we do, we will surely obtain grace. A family feels privileged if the King comes for a visit. How much more fortunate to have the Queen of heaven and earth visit us. She fills blessed souls with rich graces. How blessed was Obel-edem when the Ark of the Covenant remained in his house (2 Sm6:11) "And the Lord blessed his house." How much more blessed are the souls that receive a visit from the living ark of Mary.

Mary had just entered the house of Elizabeth when heavenly blessings filled everyone. Because this feast of Visitation is also called, "Our Blessed Lady of Graces", I will describe Mary as the treasurer of all graces. There are two parts. First, if you desire any graces, you must go to Mary. Second, whoever goes to Mary, should be confident of receiving.

All Must Go to Mary

After hearing that Elizabeth was six months pregnant, God's Word within Mary enlightened her that he wanted to manifest his riches for the first time. With no delay, "Mary went with haste into the hill country." (Lk 1:39) She left her beloved solitude to go to Elizabeth because "love bears all things." (1Cor 13:7) and knows no delays." "The Holy Spirit does not know slow undertakings." (St. Ambrose) Mary gave no heed to the difficulties of this journey.

The Powerful Greeting

On arriving, "She entered the house and greeted Elizabeth" (Lk 1:40) Mary's visit was not one of ceremony and devoid of sincerity. It brought great graces. By Mary's greeting, Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and John was sanctified. By leaping in the womb, he manifested the grace he received. "At your greeting, the infant in my womb leaped for joy." When Mary's voice entered Elizabeth's ears, the Spirit descended on the child.

Through Mary (as a channel), John received grace, Elizabeth received the Holy Spirit and Zechariah received prophesy, the first graces granted by God's Eternal Word. After this, God made Mary the universal channel by which the Lord dispenses all His graces.

The Treasure Hidden in the Field

For this reason, so many saints have called Mary "the treasurer of divine graces". "Mary is full of grace. In her are hidden all the treasures. In her God has placed all graces." (Richard of St. Lawrence)

“Mary is the field and in her is hidden Jesus, the source of all graces.” (St. Bonaventure)
“Our Lord has placed every grace in Mary. Any grace we have, comes from her.” (St. Bernard)
“In me, are all the graces of the way and the truth.” (Sirach 24:25) “God has decreed that all graces come through your hands.” (St. Idilephonsus) “O Mary, no one is saved without you. No one received God’s gift except through you.” (St. Germanus)

Finder of Grace

“Fear not, O Mary, you did not steal grace like Lucifer, nor did you lose it like Adam, nor did you buy it like Simon the Magician. You have found uncreated grace, God Himself, and have obtained every created good.” (St. Albert) “She found a grace so full that its fullness pours down on every creature.” (St. Peter Chrysologos) “God made the sun so that light could be everywhere. He made Mary so that His mercies could be everywhere.” When Mary conceived, she received a jurisdiction over all the Spirit’s manifestations.” No creature obtains God’s grace unless dispensed by this compassionate mother.” (St. Bernardine)

“Let us go to Mary who gains whatever she asks for her servants. She cannot be frustrated.” (St. Bernard) To gain grace, let us go to the treasurer. “Such is God’s will. He is pleased to dispense all through Mary.” God says “all” and “all” excludes nothing.

(B) Must Be Sure of Obtaining

To receive graces from Mary, we need confidence. Consider this. Why did Jesus place all His riches in Mary unless she was to enrich her followers. “With me are riches that I may enrich those who love me.” (Pr 8:18) Mary has those riches to serve us. “The riches of salvation are in Mary’s keeping for our use. Her womb is the treasury of the poor. She is an aqueduct so others can receive her fullness. Why did the Holy Spirit come upon her with more grace when Mary was already “full of grace”? Mary was full, but the Holy Spirit made her overflow for our good.” (St. Bernard)

The Great Fountain

When there is a great fountain, we can easily draw water. So, we easily find grace and salvation in Mary. “Because Mary was not born in ancient times, we see graces flowing now which were formerly lacking to the world. Mary, the desirable channel, did not yet exist.” (St. Bernard) “From Mary you will gain blessings you cannot possibly imagine.” (St. John Damascene) In a vision, Venerable Mary Villani saw Mary as a great fountain. All who went to her carried off waters in abundance. Those with good jars preserved their graces. Those with broken vessels (those with sin) received the graces but did not preserve them. Even ungrateful sinners receive innumerable graces every day from Mary. “Through you, Mary, sinners receive pardon, the worldly souls receive heavenly things and pilgrims receive their country.” (St. Augustine)

Two Prerogatives

To rouse ourselves to greater devotion, let us remember Mary’s two great prerogatives. She desires to do good and she has power with her Son.

Consider her visit to Elizabeth. Her journey was at least 70 miles. Yet, Mary set out in haste, impelled by her charity to begin immediately her office of dispensing graces. “She believed the angel’s words and was glad to undertake the task to fulfill her office.” (St. Ambrose) She departed quickly, “Rising, she went in haste.” However, she did not hurry her return. “Mary stayed about three months.” (Lk 1:56) “Her charity burning in her heart caused her to hasten.” (St. Bonaventure)

Her charity has certainly not decreased after she went to heaven. There, she knows our wants even better and has still greater compassion. “Mary desires to help us more than we desire to receive.” She feels offended if we do not ask. “They offend you who neglect to ask for your favors.” (St. Bonaventure)

Expects All to Come

“He who finds Mary finds every good. Anyone can find her and no one need fear to approach her. She sends away no one.” (Blessed Raymond) “Mary invites all, expects all and despises not even the worst sinner.” (Thomas a Kempis) Whoever seeks her will find her always ready to help.

Notice the power of her words. As soon as Elizabeth heard the sound of her greeting “the infant leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.” (Lk 1:41) “As soon as she pronounced the words, the Holy Spirit was given.” (St. Bonaventure) “Jesus loves to grant us graces through Mary. When He does, He sees them as given not so much to us as to Mary.” (Theopholus) Jesus is always “forced by the prayers of Mary. He always obeys his true mother.” She obtains graces of pardon for the worst sinners. “It is impossible for God not to listen to His spotless Mother.” (St. Germanus)

Approach With Confidence

Study the wedding feast of Cana. Jesus had said “My hour has not yet come”. (Jn 2:4) “Yet, in spite of this answer, He obeyed His mother and worked the miracle she asked for”. (St. John Chrysostom) “Let us go with confidence to the throne of grace to obtain mercy and find grace in due season.” (Heb 4:16) “The throne of grace is Mary.” (St. Albert) “Let us seek for grace and seek it through Mary”. (St. Bernard) “The Holy Spirit has filled Mary with sweetness and made her so precious to God, that whoever seeks graces through her will gain them”. (Revealed by Mary to St. Mechtilde)

“Salvation is more easily obtained by our invoking Mary than by our own calling on Jesus’ name”. (St. Anselm) Jesus is always the source of all graces. However, Mary’s prayers for us are more powerful than our prayers. Let us never leave her feet.

Brother Reginald O.P. was ill and asked Mary for his health. Mary appeared, together with St. Cecilia and St. Catherine, and asked, “What do you want of me?” Reginald did not know what to say. The other saints gave him this advice “Ask for nothing. Just place yourself in Mary’s hands. She will give you a grace greater than you can ask for.” He did this and she restored his health. To receive her visits, we must visit her churches and go before her images. Read the following example.

Example

Ansald from Dole, France was wounded by an arrow in his jaw which was so deep the doctors could not remove the iron head. After four years, he thought of having the wound re-opened. He prayed to Mary. He promised to visit her image every year and give alms if she would help him. As soon as he made this vow, he felt the iron drop in his mouth. The next day (even though still ill), he fulfilled his vow. When before her image, he was totally healed.

Prayer

O Mary, you quickly visited Elizabeth. Please visit my poor house so my diseases do not lead to eternal death. Visit me, especially, at the hour of my death. I abandon myself into your hands for I do not even know what graces I need. Since your prayers are never rejected, I make an agreement with you. I will always trust in you, if you take charge of my salvation.

2.6 The Purification of Mary (February 2)

(A) Mary's Great Sacrifice in Offering Her Son

The Old Testament had two laws concerning first-born sons. The mother had to be purified for forty days and the son had to be offered to God. Even though she needed no purification (since she was a virgin), Mary obeyed both laws.

"After her days of purification were completed, they took Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord." (Lk 2:22) Mary's offering was different. Other mothers redeemed their sons and had no fear that their son would die. Mary offered Jesus, knowing that her sacrifice would be accomplished on the cross. By offering her Son, Mary sacrificed her entire life to God. Let us consider the greatness of this sacrifice.

Mary's Consent Needed

The Eternal Father had already decided to deliver man from eternal death. He also willed that His divine justice would have full satisfaction. So that the penalty would be paid in all its severity, He did not spare His Son. "He did not spare His Son but gave Him up for all." (Rom 8:32) So, he sent His Son to earth and chose Mary as His mother. Mary had to consent both to Jesus' conception and to His death. In this way, her heart would also be sacrificed. "Since Jesus was innocent and did not deserve punishment, He could not be condemned to the cross without His mother's consent." (St. Thomas)

At the Annunciation, Mary gave this consent, but God wanted a solemn sacrifice in the Temple. She is "a priest" (St. Epiphanius) and we can see what this cost her. She wrote the sentence of death for her Son. So, when Jesus was 40 days old, she goes to Jerusalem, carrying her beloved victim. She enters the Temple, goes to the altar and humbly presents her Son to the Most High. Meanwhile, Simeon (enlightened by the Spirit) announces to her the cost of her sacrifice. She would be sacrificed with her Son.

The Source of Bitter Grief

The holy Simeon grew troubled at having to give this prophecy. St. Thomas of Villanova says, "Mary asked him 'Why are you troubled?' Simeon replies, 'I do not want to announce this

news but God wills it. So, listen. This child who now gives you such joy will one day cause you a bitter grief which no creature in the world has ever experienced. You will see Him persecuted and put to death before your eyes. After him, many martyrs will also suffer and die in their bodies. Thousands will be torn to pieces but in the sorrows of your heart, you will suffer more than all.” Compassion will be the sword “which thy own soul shall pierce.” (Lk 2:35)

Mary’s Knowledge

Mary knew Scripture and knew the sufferings of the Redeemer. She knew he would be betrayed by the one “who ate bread” with him. She knew he would be abandoned. “Strike the shepherd and the sheep will scatter.” (Zach 13:7) She knew he would experience contempt. “I have given my back to those who strike me.” (Is 50:6) She knew he would be insulted. “I am the reproach of men.” (Ps 22:7) She knew his flesh would be torn. “He was wounded for our sins.” (Is 53:5) She knew He would be disfigured. “There is no beauty in him.” (Is 53:5) She knew he would be pierced with nails. “They have pierced my hands and my feet.” (Ps 22:17) She knew He would die for our salvation. “They look upon Me whom they have pierced.” (Zach 12:10)

Mary’s Consent

She knew all of this about the Redeemer. When Simeon said “Your own soul a sword shall pierce”, God revealed to Mary all her sufferings. She consented to do all this with a constancy that amazed the angels, “I sacrifice my Son to you. I agree that he should lose his life for the salvation of the world. I give my own heart to be pierced at the same time as you please.” O victory of Mary which deserves the admiration of heaven and earth.”

Mary’s Silence

At the passion, Mary was silent and said nothing to Pilate (even though he wanted to release Jesus). She was with Jesus, from the first moment he was nailed to the cross, “His Mother stood by the cross of Jesus” (Jn 19:25). She stayed until his death was completed, doing all she could to complete the offering she made before Simeon.

Try to understand Mary’s suffering at the cross. A mother’s love toward her children is so tender that when they are about to die, she forgets all their faults and suffers inexpressible grief. Yet, a mother’s love is divided among all her children. Mary had only one Son, the most beautiful of all creatures. He was innocent and holy. He was God. Mary’s love was not divided. All was concentrated on Him.

Mary’s Sacrifice

How much this cost Mary! What strength she had to have to sacrifice such a loving Son. Mary, as Mother of God, is the most fortunate of mothers, but, at the same time, is the most afflicted. From the day of his birth, she saw he was destined for the cross. What mother would accept a child when she knew she would lose him to such a horrible death at which she would be present? Yet, Mary accepts all this. She offers him with her own hand and sacrifices him to Divine Justice.

“Mary would have more willingly accepted the pains for herself” (St. Bonaventure). In this offering, Mary suffered more than if she herself had been crucified. She surpasses all the

martyrs in generosity. They gave their own lives. She gave her Son's, whom she loved more than her own. Because Mary always had these memories of Jesus' crucifixion, her sufferings did not end at Jesus' death.

She even suffered greater anguish because Jesus was so gracious. O Mary, if you just loved Jesus less or he loved you less, your sufferings would have diminished. No mother and son ever loved each other more than you and Jesus. O God, if we see the beauty of the Christ child, would we have the courage to offer him? Yet, Mary offered her innocent son to the most painful of deaths.

After Simeon's prophecy, your eyes could see the outrages he would endure. You saw him scourged, crowned with thorns and nailed to the cross. O Mother, you will rescue him from King Herod only to keep him for a more sorrowful end.

Always on Her Heart

Mary renewed her temple offering every day of her life. She revealed to St. Bridget, "The sorrow of Simeon's announcement never left my heart until I was assumed into heaven." "O Lady, how could you endure such sorrow for even a moment. Only the Spirit of Life sustained you." (St. Anselm) "She died while she lived, enduring a sorrow more cruel than death." (St. Bernard)

Because of this great sacrifice, Mary is justly called "The repairer of the human race." "The redeemer of Captives", "The Liberator of our calamities", and "the mother of the living." "The will of Christ and of Mary were united. They offered the same sacrifice and produced the same effect, our salvation. Jesus, by satisfying for sins. Mary, by applying this satisfaction to us." (Arnold) She can be called "the Savior of the world" by the pain she endured. She merited that the graces of the Passion be given to men by her prayers.

Greater than Abraham's Sacrifice

Because Mary is the Mother of the Redeemed, the graces to eternal life come through her hands. "When God redeemed the human race, he put the whole price in Mary's hands." (St. Bernard) The Redeemer's merits are applied by the Virgin's intercession. She has charge of the fruits of Jesus.

Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac so pleased God that he "would multiply his seed as the stars of heaven" (Gen 22:16-17). So, by Mary's noble sacrifice, God granted that the number of the elect would be multiplied.

Simeon knew that he would not die until he saw the Messiah (Lk 2:26) This grace came through Mary because, in her arms, he found the Messiah. We find Jesus only in Mary. Let us go to her with great confidence.

Mary appeases any irritation Jesus has with us. Alexander the Great said, "A single tear of my mother cancels all accusation." Lucifer knows that her tears make Jesus forget all the accusations against a sinner. Mary revealed that on every feast of the Presentation, she grants

some sinner a great grace. Perhaps, we may be that soul. “The Son can deny nothing to such a Mother” (St. Bernard).

Example

A young man had committed many shameful acts and despaired of his salvation. He had hated God and had received Communion sacrilegiously, so he could trample on the host.

Later, he entered a Church and experienced sorrow for his sins and a desire to confess. Someone was leading him by force. During this good confession, the priest asked if he had had any devotion to Mary. “Father, I did nothing.” “Think again”, said the priest. The young man remembered that he wore the scapular. The priest said, “This Church is dedicated to Mary”. The young man began to weep, finished his confession and gave permission for the priest to publish his story anywhere.

Prayer

Mary, I entirely trust you, because you gave your Son to death for me. I would offer my heart to Jesus but it is so full of sins, He may refuse it. If you offer it, He cannot refuse. Mary, do not abandon me. Remind Jesus that I am your servant and have placed all my hope in you.

2.7 The Assumption of Mary

(A) Mary’s Precious Death

Since death is a punishment of sin, it would seem that the sinless Mother should have been exempt. But God wanted Mary to resemble Jesus in all things. Since He died, she also should die. Also God wanted to give good souls an example of her own precious death. Let us see how precious was Mary’s death – first by the favors and second by its manner.

Mary’s Threefold Freedom

Three things make death bitter. The person can:

1. be attached to the world
2. be sorry for sins
3. be uncertain of salvation

Mary’s death was free of all three.

1. She had no attachment to earthly things
2. She died in perfect peace
3. She was certain of eternal glory

(1) No Attachment

The saints are detached and their death is sweet. The death of the saints “is worth purchasing at any price.” (St. Bernard) “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.” (Rev 14:13) These happy souls are detached. They say, “My God and my all”. Who was more detached than Mary? She was detached from her parents as she entered the Temple to serve God alone. She was detached from riches, and used her hands to labor. She was detached from honors, even though she was a queen.

In Revelation (12:1), Mary is clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet. The moon signifies the changeable goods of this world. Mary tramples these under her feet, never allowing her desires to center on earthly things. She lived for God alone. She had no bitterness in death, which was peaceful and united her to God.

(2) No need for Sorrow

Sins committed during life torment the hearts of dying sinners. About to come before Jesus, they see themselves surrounded by their sins. These sins cry out, “We are your works and we will not leave you.” (St. Bernard) Mary had no torment because she had no sins. “You are all fair. There is no spot in you.” (Song 4:7)

From the first moment of her conception, she loved God with all her strength and continued advancing all her life. All her thoughts and desires belonged to God. She never left divine love for a single moment. All the virtues that she practiced in life surrounded her at death. Her faith, loving confidence, meekness and compassion, her love for God’s glory and all her virtues consoled her. They were the daughters of her heart and they did not leave her. They accompanied her and reigned with her as queen.

(3) Certain of Eternal Glory

Certainty of salvation makes death a delight. Death is a passage from a short earthly life to eternal life. Those who approach death with uncertainty have a dread. However, holy souls experience a great joy at death. They hope with some security to possess God in heaven.

When a doctor told a holy nun that she was dying, she said, “How do you give me such good news and ask no fee?” When St. Laurence saw his friends weeping, he said, “Away with your tears. This is no time to mourn. Go elsewhere to weep. I rejoice in seeing heaven’s gates open to me”. Many saints broke into joy at the news of their death. Yet they were not as certain or secure in their holiness as was Mary.

Assured by Gabriel

What joy she felt in hearing news of her death. Gabriel had already assured her that she was “full of grace” and “the Lord is with you”. She knew her heart burned with divine love. By a singular privilege, Mary always loved God. “It required a miracle that she did not die every moment from love.” (St. Bernard)

Her fervent prayers were like incense and her love was like a flame. Her beautiful soul was consumed by love. She was like a holocaust burning. She died as she lived. Divine love gave her life and caused her death. Mary died of love, not of sickness.

(B) The Precious Manner of Mary’s Death

How did her death take place? Mary stayed on earth to counsel the apostles, to comfort them in their persecutions and to encourage them to preach the gospel. She willingly remained for the good of the Church. During these final years, she felt the pain of her Son’s absence. “Where your treasure is, there is your heart.” (Lk 12:34) Since Jesus was in heaven, all her desires were there.

Visiting the Holy Places

“She was in heaven through all her affections. Her school was eternity. She was always guided by truth and always rejoiced in the Lord. She admired only God and conformed herself to God’s will. She attended to her own sanctification and sought union with God. He alone was her treasure.” (Tayler)

She sought consolation by visiting the holy places where her Son had been. She visited Bethlehem, Nazareth, and even the Garden of Gethsemane. More frequently, she visited the Mount of Calvary and Jesus’ grave. Even with this, she found no repose. She cried out, “Who will give me wings like a dove so I can fly away and be at rest?” (Ps 55:7) “As the deer thirsts for the water, so I thirst for You, my God.” (Ps 42:1) Her sighs deeply penetrated God’s heart. God could no longer defer her consolation so He called her to His kingdom.

Gabriel’s Final Visit

Some days before Mary’s death, the Lord sent the Angel Gabriel who said, “God has heard your prayers. You are to prepare to leave this earth because he wants you in heaven. I and all the others await your coming.” Mary answered in her same humble words, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord. He chose me to be His Mother. Now He calls me to Paradise. I am ready to go wherever He pleases. Let His will be accomplished.”

When Mary told St. John, he experienced grief and tender feelings. He had helped her like a son and enjoyed her heavenly conversation.

Continued Visitation

The angels continued to visit her, realizing that soon she would be their Queen. Some writers say that many disciples, scattered throughout the world, were miraculously assembled in her room for her death. Mary said to them “To help you, my Son left me on earth. Now the faith is spread everywhere in the world and my assistance is no longer needed. My Son has listened to my desires to see Him in heaven. You remain to carry on the work. My heart remains with you but my love for you I take to Paradise.”

The Disciples and Mary

How tearful the disciples must have become. They said to her, “O Mary, this world is not worthy of you and we are unworthy to enjoy your presence. Remember, you are our Mother. You have enlightened us, consoled us and been our strength. How can you abandon us in the middle of so many conflicts? We have already lost Jesus who ascended. Can you leave us orphans? Either stay with us or take us with you.”

Mary answered, “Do God’s will. Be satisfied with what He has decreed. You must remain to work for His glory. I will not abandon you. I will help you more in heaven than on earth. I commend both the Church and all redeemed souls to you. Labor for their salvation and God’s glory. One day we will meet again, never to be separated.”

Mary's Promises

She begged them to give her burial and told St. John to give her two gowns to the two virgins who had served her. She awaited death with a great joy. The disciples renewed their tears. Mary sought a special blessing. All wept bitterly because of being separated from her for the rest of their lives.

Mary consoled each one. To some, she promised her care, and to others, she gave encouragement. She told Peter to propagate the faith and promised him her special protection. She especially consoled St. John. He was more grieved than anyone because he had served her all these years. Mary said, "John, know that I am grateful for all your assistance. Remain in peace until we meet in heaven. Always think of me. In your wants, call upon me. I leave you my blessing."

Consumed by Love

The vehement flames of Divine love were already consuming her. She was losing her life in this fire. Angels came. They were ready for the great triumph, accompanying her to Paradise. Although consoled by them, she still did not see Jesus. He was her entire love. She kept saying, "Daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my Beloved, tell Him I languish with love." (Song 5:8) "O choirs of angels, you console me but you do not satisfy me, for I do not see my Son. Return to Paradise and tell him I languish for love. Tell him to come quickly for I am dying from the vehemence of love."

Jesus and Mary

One saint said that before her death, Jesus appeared to Mary with his cross in his hands to show the glory he had won. St. John Damascene said that Jesus appeared and gave his mother her final Holy Communion, saying, "Receive from my hands the same body that you gave to me." After receiving, Mary said, "My Son, into your hands I commend my spirit. I commend my soul, which you created rich in grace and free from original sin. I commend my body, from which you took your body. I commend to you your disciples, who are grieved at my departure. You love them more than I do. May they do great things for your glory."

The room was filled with brilliant light. (St. Bridget) This warned the disciples that Mary was going to depart. "O Mary, as you leave us, give us your last blessing." Mary said, "I bless you and I will never forget you." Death then came, clothed in light and gladness. Really, death did not come because Divine love itself cut the last thread. Mary, on hearing her Son's invitation, was wrapped in flames of love, and died. Her soul was loosened. She flew like a dove to enter paradise as its Queen.

In heaven, Mary sees us with compassion. She pities us and will help us if we want. Let us ask for a happy death, and to die on Saturday (a day dedicated to her) or on a feast day (or within the octave). She gained this favor for St. Stanislaus Kostka, who died on the Assumption.

St. Stanislaus, S.J.

On August 1, Peter Canisius exhorted the novices to live each day as if it were their last. Stanislaus told others that those words were for him, because he would die that month. Four

days later, Stanislaus said to a Jesuit priest, "I believe that Mary will take me to Paradise on the feast of the Assumption."

Stanislaus wrote a letter to Mary, asking her to gain the favor of his going to heaven on her feast. On August 10, the feast of St. Laurence, he begged that saint to present his letter to Mary. By evening, he had a slight fever, and considered his prayer answered. He said, "I shall never rise from this bed. Laurence has already gained this favor for me."

On August 14, the fever seemed of no importance. However, he told a brother that he would die that night. That afternoon he lost all his strength. He received all the sacraments. When Holy Communion was brought, he seemed like an angel. Mary then appeared to him. Shortly afterwards, at the dawn of the Assumption, he died with no struggle.

Prayer

O sweet Lady, you have left earth and are now Queen of heaven. Yet, you have never forgotten us in our exile. In fact, your compassion has increased. Turn your eyes to us and see our dangers. Obtain for us holy perseverance so that we might sing your glories forever.

2.8 The Assumption of Mary (Continued)

(A) Mary's Glorious Triumph

Because our Mother left us on this feast, the Church should invite us to mourn. "It seems we should weep rather than rejoice." (St. Bernard) No, we should rejoice in her glory more than in our personal consolation. What son does not rejoice in his Mother gaining a kingdom? Should we not rejoice, if we loved her? To do that, let us consider her glorious triumph and the place to which she was exalted.

Her Triumph

When Jesus died, the angels pleaded, "Arise, O Lord, into your resting place." (Ps 132:8) They said to Jesus, "Come quickly and bring your Mother, whom you have sanctified. Let Mary, sanctified by your conception, also ascend." At last, Our Lord granted their request.

David brought the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem with shouts of joy. With how much greater joy did Jesus bring Mary into heaven. Elijah was carried to heaven in a fiery chariot. "For you, Mary, a fiery chariot was not enough. The whole court of heaven led by its King accompanied you." (Abbot Rupert) "Jesus went forth in his glory to meet you." (St. Bernadine) "The Redeemer ascended to heaven first, so he could prepare a throne for Mary and accompany her with all his angels into heaven." (St. Anselm)

Met by Jesus

"Mary's Assumption was more glorious than Jesus' Ascension. Only angels met him. However, for the Assumption, the Lord himself greeted Mary." (St. Peter Damien) The Divine Word says, "To honor the Father, I descended to earth. To honor my Mother, I ascended to heaven, so I could welcome her." (Abbot Gueric)

Jesus met Mary and said, “Arise, make haste and come. The winter is now over.” (Song 2:10) “Leave the valley of tears where you suffered so much. Come and enjoy the reward of a happy life. Your sufferings have been great. Far greater is your glory. Enter and sit next to me, as Queen of the Universe.” As Mary leaves earth, she looks with affection, remembering all her graces. She has compassion because she leaves her children in dangers.

Who is She?

Jesus offers his hand. Mary ascends. She passes beyond the clouds to the gates of heaven. Mary takes possession of her kingdom. The angels cry, “Lift up your gates that the Queen of glory can come in.” As she enters, the heavenly spirits see her so glorious that they ask “Who is this, leaning upon her Beloved?” (Song 8:5) How can this creature coming from earth be so beautiful? Who is she? “She is the mother of the King, blessed among women and full of grace. She is the Immaculate One.”

Then all sing, “You are the glory of Jerusalem, the joy of Israel and the honor of our people.” (Judith 15:10) Our Queen, you are the glory of Paradise. Be you ever welcome. We are ready to do your commands.

Hailed by All

The virgins welcome her saying, “In this Kingdom we are all queens, but you are our Queen. You were the first to give us the example of virginity.” Then the confessors hail her, because she taught them so many virtues. The martyrs salute her because she taught them constancy in sorrow. St. James, the only apostle already in heaven, thanked her for all the comfort she gave on earth. The prophets said, “You were the one foretold in our prophecies. We waited such a long time to greet you”. Adam and Eve thanked her with special love, “You repaired the injury which we inflicted on the world. You gained the blessing we lost. By you, we are saved.”

Simeon reminded her of the day in the Temple when he held the Child. Zachary and Elizabeth thanked her for her visit. John the Baptist praised her for sanctifying him by her voice. How tender were her parents, Joachim and Anne. “What a privilege to have you as our child. Now, be our Queen because you are God’s mother.”

St. Joseph’s Love

Who can know the love which St. Joseph showed in seeing his spouse enter heaven as its Queen. “How can I thank you, Mother of God, for having me as your husband? Through you, I was able to carry the Saviour in my arms. Let us rejoice that he is no longer poor, as at Bethlehem and Nazareth. He is longer nailed to a cross. Now we shall never be separated from him or from one another.” All the angels greeted her. She thanked them all, especially Gabriel, who announced that she was God’s mother.

Conscious of her nothingness, she adored God, thanking Him for making her the Mother of the Eternal Word. How the Trinity blessed her! How the Eternal Father welcomed her. He crowned her by giving her power. The Son gave her wisdom and the Spirit gave her love. The Trinity declared her Queen of heaven and earth and commanded all creatures to honor her.

(B) Mary's Glorious Throne in Heaven

"If no one can comprehend the glory God has planned for us, who can comprehend the glory which Mary received?" (St. Bernard) The Church says "She has been exalted above them all." She is above all the angels. St. Thomas teaches that the nine orders of angels are divided into three hierarchies. Mary herself, however, is an entirely different hierarchy, the highest and closest to God. "Mary, the Sovereign Lady, is exalted far above the angel hierarchies. "The Queen stood at his right hand." (Ps 45:10)

Her Surpassing Glory

Mary's merits surpassed all the saints. Her reward, then, must also have surpassed theirs. "Since her sufferings were incomprehensible, so were her glories, because God "renders to every man according to his works." (Rom 2:6) Therefore, Mary was exalted above all of heaven's ranks". (St. Thomas) "Let us measure the singular grace she acquired on earth to see the singular glory she gained in heaven." (St. Bernard) The glory of Mary differs from the glory of the saints. They enjoy perfect peace. However, no other saint has loved God perfectly every moment. Each could possess more and each could have done greater good on earth.

Mary is different. She never committed the slightest imperfection. She never lost grace and never let grace be idle. She never had a thought, word or deed not directed to God's glory. Her fervor never grew lukewarm. She never paused on her road to God. She lost nothing by negligence. She loved God as much as she could love him. "I did not love you as you desired but I loved you as much as I could."

Each saint excelled in a particular virtue. One led a life of penance, another the life of prayer. Saints differ in merits and in heavenly glory as "star differs from star." Being full of grace, the Blessed Virgin excels all saints, even in their particular virtue. She is the Queen of martyrs, the virgin of virgins and model of the married. She united all heroic virtues in her heart. "The Queen stands at your right, clothed in gold." (Ps 45:10) All the saints' graces are united in Mary.

All Splendor

She possesses all grace in a splendor that exceeds all, just as the sun exceeds all the stars. "As the sunlight eclipses the stars, so Mary's glory exceeds all the saints' and angels' glory. (St. Thomas) "The saints share only partly in God's glory but Mary is as much immersed in God's glory as is possible for a creature." (St. Bernard) "She contemplates God's glory in greater proximity than all other creatures." (St. Albert)

"As the sun illumines all the other planets, so the saints receive their light from seeing Mary. When she entered heaven, she increased the joy of all who lived there." (St. Bernardine) "After seeing God, the saints' greatest glory is the Queen's presence." (St. Peter Damian)

Even Nearer

Let us rejoice that God has so highly exalted Mary. Also, let us rejoice that she is still with us. Being nearer to God, her mercy to us is even greater. "Is it possible, O Virgin, that you

are exalted and have forgotten us? Your compassionate heart has only pity for our troubles” (St. Peter Damian) “Her compassion for sinners is even greater in heaven.” (St. Bonaventure)

Let us serve Mary. “She does not oppress us with taxes but enriches us with rewards.” (Richard of St. Lawrence) “O Mary, fill yourself with the glory of Jesus and send us the left-over fragments. Enjoy your heavenly banquet. We are the dogs beneath your table, seeking your mercy.” (Abbot Gueric)

Example

St. Peter Damian’s brother sinned against purity. He went before Mary’s altar and prayed, “Dear Lady, mirror of purity, I offer myself in your service. Do not reject me.” He left some money and promised an annual gift of the same amount. On his deathbed, Our Lady appeared to him. When his brother, St. Peter Damian came, he told him of the vision.

Prayer

O exalted Lady, we honor you from this Valley of Tears. We rejoice that you are enthroned as Queen. Cast your eyes upon us, because you are close to God’s throne and can gain great graces for us. On this day of your Assumption, we consecrate ourselves. We ask only to be humble and detached. Change us from sinners to saints. This is a greater miracle than raising thousands from the dead.

Amen.

2.9 Sermon On The Annunciation

(A) Mary’s Humility

St. Thomas calls God becoming flesh, the “miracle of miracles.” There is no greater miracle than a woman becoming God’s mother and God becoming clothed in human flesh. We will consider two prodigies – Mary becoming the Creator’s Mother and the Creator becoming the Son of his creature.

Mother of the Creator

Having determined to become man, God sought a humble Virgin for his mother. Seeing that Mary surpassed all others in humility, He chose her. Mary said, “He has looked upon the humility of his handmaid.” “God chose her for her humility more than any other virtue.” (St. Jerome)

Mary is called a “Spikenard” (Song of Songs). “My spikenard sent forth its odor.” (Song 1:11) This is a lowly plant with a sweet odor. By this sweet smell, Mary attracted the King of heaven to come into her womb. “This lowly herb was a type of Mary who in her lowliness sent forth a sweet smell.” (St. Antoninus) “She was worthy to be looked upon by the Lord because her odor drew Jesus from His Father’s side.” (St. Bernard) Attracted by her humility, God chose her.

Troubled by Praise

“However, God would not take flesh unless she gave consent.” (Abbot William) While she was asking God to send a Redeemer, Gabriel asked Mary to be God’s mother. How does she

answer? She does not reply because she is troubled. What troubled her? The trouble came when she heard the angel's praise. The more she heard herself praised, the deeper she descended into her nothingness. "If the angel had said, 'You are the world's greatest sinner', she would not have been troubled." (St. Bernardine)

Mary knew the Scriptures. She knew the time for the Messiah had arrived and that He would be born of a virgin. The angel's praises could apply on to the Mother of God. Could she have thought that she would be His Mother? No. Her humility would not permit that. Her fear was so great that the angel had to encourage her, "Fear not, Mary. You have found grace before God." (Lk 1:30) "Because you are nothing in your own eyes, God will exalt you."

Awaiting Her Reply

All mankind waited for her reply. The blood of her Son (the price of our salvation) will be formed in her womb. "We shall be instantly delivered if you consent. The Lord desires this." (St. Bernard) "Answer, O Mary! Why delay the salvation of the world." (St. Augustine)

Her words, "Let it be done to me according to your word." (Lk 1:38) drew the Son from the Father's bosom. God's Son became Mary's Son. With her words, heaven came to earth and earth was raised to heaven. Mary felt obliged to do what God commanded. She never saw herself as chosen because of her merits. Let not the servant be praised. Bless God's goodness which looks favorably on his creature.

Exalted But Humble

"Mary's humility is great in God's eyes. Her womb will contain what the heavens cannot. "O Lady, how could you unite in your heart such humility, innocence and a fullness of grace? When Lucifer saw his own beauty, he tried to be God. When exalted, he became proud and went to hell. Oh Mary, when enriched, you did the opposite. You humbled yourself, so God made you above every other creature. "No one is your equal, O Lady. God alone is above you and all others are below you." (St. Andrew of Crete) To what greater dignity could God raise a creature? To be God's mother is the greatest grace." (St. Bonaventure)

(B) God Becomes the Son of His Own Creature

Adam sinned because he was ungrateful to God for all his gifts. God drove him from His sight and condemned mankind to eternal death. Later, God had mercy and became man to satisfy divine justice. "He was made man, suffered, died and was buried."

Accepting the Father's Will

O excess of love! What did it matter to God if man were lost? His happiness would not be diminished. Therefore, he became man only out of his own goodness. "He emptied himself and took the form of a slave." (Phil 2:7) Jesus is omnipotent and equal to the Father, yet he became weak in Mary's womb. Humbled there, he accepted the Father's will that he be executed on the cross.

As a child in Mary's womb, he accepted the Father's will. "He was offered up because he willed it." (Is 53:7) He foresaw the scourging and the crowning of thorns. He foresaw the

cross and offered his life. Why would he do this for us sinners? “He loved us and washed away our sins in his blood.” (Rev 1:5)

We were soiled, so Jesus prepared a bath in his own blood. “He delivered himself for us.” (Eph 5:2) He saw us cursed by God and he accepted our curses. “He was made a curse for us.” We need faith to believe such a great gift. Christ’s love forces us also to love. “The love of Christ presses us”. (2 Cor 5:14) “Knowing that Jesus was truly God and loved us so much to die for us, places our hearts in a wine press which forces love to come forth by the violence of Christ’s love.” (St. Francis de Sales)

John, the Evangelist, writes sorrowfully, “He came into his own and his own received him not.” (Jn 1:11) Did he not become man that we should love him? “Jesus Christ came to earth principally so man might know how much he loved him.” (St. Augustine) Because of this love, God’s justice demands that we love him. “He made his love known so we could experience your love.” (St. Bernard)

2.10 Three Meditations on Mary’s Presentation

(A) Mary Gives Herself Promptly

At three years of age, knowing that her parents had made a vow consecrating her to God, she told them that the time had come. She gained strength for her parents to fulfill their vow and to deprive themselves of the daughter they loved. Joachim and Anne set out from Nazareth accompanied by a few relatives and many angels. They took turns carrying Mary on the 80 mile journey.

Upon arriving at the temple, Mary kissed their hands and received their blessing. She ascended the steps with zeal and did not turn back. Her parents were deeply afflicted, yet filled with wonder at their young daughter’s courage.

Prayer

O Virgin, who served God so early and so faithfully, look at me who have been so tardy. Gain me the grace to serve God for the rest of my life. May my failures excite compassion in you. Please finish the work of salvation which you have begun.

(B) Mary Offers Herself Entirely

The most beautiful aspect is how Mary gave herself totally. From the first moment of her conception, she had the use of reason. Enriched by a great light, she gave herself to God immediately. Yet, she yearned for the day when she would be totally detached from all earthly affections, even the innocent attachment to her parents. Now we can understand the consolation she felt by her act of total consecration in the Temple.

She immediately gave herself to her mistress and asked her to teach her all that she had to do. Then she greeted her companions. After these initial acts, she gave all her thoughts to God. She prostrated on the floor and adored God for his favor in bringing her to his house. At this point, she consecrated all her faculties, her soul and her body.

She also made a new vow of virginity, unknown by the Jews and regarded as a disgrace. She was the first, but soon others would follow. “After her, the virgins shall be led to the King.” (Ps 45:15) How many virgins have followed Mary!

She placed no limit of time for her service. If God so desired, she would serve in the Temple all her life. Mary prayed, ‘I have come into your house to be your servant. Receive me into your service and let me be faithful.’ In the Temple, she thought of God alone.

Prayer

O Virgin, when will I be detached and give myself entirely to God? Led by your example, I, this day, give myself entirely to you and unite my offering with your offering. Gain for me the grace to be faithful.

(C) Mary’s Life in the Temple

“How pleasing was her life! She spoke little but was always affable and obliging.” (St. Anselm) Her chief virtues were humility, love and obedience.

She did her assigned tasks, but gave her greatest part of the day to God. Solitude was her most cherished occupation and sweetest delight. She knew how to further the great work of God’s redemption. She saw the world in which so many were lost. So few know the true God and even fewer loved him. She prayed “Come, Lord, do not delay. Send us your Lamb. Let the heavens rain down the Just One.”

O Virgin, by your love God was attracted to live in your womb. How many lessons you teach us in the Temple.

Prayer

O Mary, you helped me when I did not know you. Now you will not abandon me when I seek you. Do not banish me from your school of sanctity. Teach me. Correct me when you see fit. Do not abandon me until I become your perfect disciple.

PART THREE

THE SORROWS OF MARY

3.1 Discourse on Mary, Queen of Martyrs

(A) Mary’s Martyrdom is Longer Than Other Martyrs’

Should not every heart melt upon hearing the saddest event in the world? A noble mother had an only son, innocent, virtuous and loving his mother deeply. He obeyed her and showed his affection. His mother loved him with all her heart.

His enemies falsely accused her son. Although the judge proclaimed that he was innocent, he condemned him to death. The mother watched as death snatched her son from her. His torments drained all his blood and he died before her eyes in a public execution. Is not this mother worthy of our compassion?

Both in Time and in Intensity

This is the true story of Mary and Jesus. For love of us, she was willing to see him sacrificed. Her great suffering deserves our gratitude. So, let us give a few moments each day to consider Mary as the Queen of martyrs. Her sufferings exceeded all martyrs, both in time and in intensity. As Jesus is the King of martyrs (because he suffered more than all others) so Mary is the Queen of martyrs. She is the “Martyr of Martyrs.”

Isaiah wrote “He will crown you with the crown of tribulation.” (22:18), that is, with a suffering greater than all the martyrs put together.

She is a martyr because she suffered enough to die (even though death did not happen). “To merit martyrdom, it is enough to exercise obedience in the highest degree, i.e. obedient unto death.” (St. Thomas) “Mary was a martyr not by the sword but by the sorrow of her heart.” (St. Bernard). Her body was untouched but a sword pierced her heart with a grief that could have caused a thousand deaths.

A Prolonged Death

Her martyrdom surpassed all others because her whole life was a prolonged death. “Jesus’ passion began at his birth” (St. Bernard) Jeremiah writes “Great as the sea is your destruction”. (Lam 2:13) Mary’s name means “Bitter sea”. Mary’s life was like the sea, (bitter and salty), because Jesus’ passion was always before her mind. Mary knew from the beginning that the Word would suffer and that the innocent Saviour would suffer a cruel death. This began her great martyrdom.

A Life of Sorrow

When she became his mother, her grief increased and she endured a life-long martyrdom. At St. Mary Major Church (Rome) Mary appeared to St. Bridget with a long sword dipped in blood that pierced her heart. Mary did not just suffer the three hours of the cross. Rather, she foresaw Jesus’ death from the moment of his birth. “My life is wasted away in grief.” (Ps 31:11) Her whole life was spent in sorrow, foreseeing all that she would some day suffer. Even after Jesus ascended into heaven, his sufferings were always freshly imprinted in her heart. Her life was continual sorrow.

Time did not relieve Mary. As Jesus grew older and the time of his death drew nearer, her sorrows increased. “A rose grows among thorns. So, as the Rose of Jesus grew, the thorns grew and deeply pierced her heart.” (St. Bridget)

(B) Mary's Martyrdom Is Greater

The Intensity of Mary's Sorrow

Mary has both the longest martyrdom (all her life) and the most intense. "To what shall I compare you, O daughter of Jerusalem. Your destruction is as great as the sea." (Lam 2:13) "The Blessed Virgin is a sea of bitterness. Her grief exceeds all other grief." (Cardinal Hugo) "God had to preserve Mary every moment. Otherwise grief would have caused her death." (St. Anselm) "If Mary's grief were divided among the whole human race, everyone would die immediately." (St. Bernardine) Why was her martyrdom greater? The martyrs experienced sufferings in their bodies. Mary suffered in her soul. "Your own soul a sword shall pierce." (Lk 2:35) Jesus said to St. Catherine of Sienna "There is no comparison between the sufferings of body and soul." "At Calvary there were two great altars. While Jesus sacrificed his body, Mary sacrificed her soul." (Abbot Arnold)

Seeing Her Son Suffer

Martyrs sacrificed their own life. Mary sacrificed her Son's life, which she loved more than her own. Seeing her Son's suffering brought her more torment than suffering the pain herself. How much any mother suffers to see her children in pain. Augustine wrote about the woman in Macabees who saw her seven sons killed. "She endured in her soul what they endured in their bodies." Mary suffered the scourging, the thorns and the nails. All these sufferings entered her heart. "The heart of Mary became a mirror which faithfully reflected all that Jesus suffered." (St. Lawrence Justinian)

"The scattered wounds of Jesus were united in her heart." "O Lady, where did you stand? Was it at the foot of the cross or were you crucified on the cross with you Son?" (St. Bonaventure) "I have trodden the wine press alone." (Is 63:3) "Lord you suffered alone but a woman was with you, your own Mother. She suffered in her heart what you suffered in your body." (Richard of St. Lawrence)

Enduring All Jesus' Suffering

All of this says too little of Mary's sufferings. By witnessing Jesus' sufferings she endured them all. "Parents are tormented more cruelly by their children's sufferings than by their own." (Erasmus) This is especially true of Mary who loved her son more than a thousand of her own lives. "The sorrowful sight of her son caused Mary more suffering than if she herself had endured the Passion." (St. Amadeus) "The soul is where it loves." (St. Bernard) "The heart is where the treasure is". (Lk 12:34) Mary lived more in her Son than in herself and endured greater torments in his death than in her own.

Besides suffering much, she suffered with no alleviation. When the martyrs suffered, their love for Jesus made their pains agreeable. St. Vincent was torn with pincers and burnt with iron plates, but "it seemed the one who suffered was different than the one who spoke." (St. Augustine) He spoke to the tyrant with such power that God was obviously giving him strength in his sufferings. In his sufferings, St. Boniface said, "I give you thanks, O Jesus Christ."

Two other martyrs were told to free themselves of their torments. They responded, "What torments are you talking about? We are suffering joyfully for the love of Christ." Concerning

St. Lawrence, “The interior flame of love was more consoling to his soul than the exterior flame was painful upon his body.” (Pope St. Leo) By love, he was so courageous, that he mocked the tyrant “Turn me on the other side, this side is roasted well enough.” How could the saint rejoice in these torments? “Inebriated with the wine of divine love, he did not feel the torments.” (St. Augustine)

The more they loved Jesus, the less pain they experienced. Seeing the crucified Jesus consoled them. Was Mary consoled by the sight of his torments? No. Seeing Jesus caused her suffering. Her love was her sole executioner. Mary’s martyrdom consisted in seeing her Son suffer so much. The greater her love, the more bitter was her grief.

Who Mitigated Mary’s Wounds?

The Queen of Heaven mitigated the sufferings of the martyrs, but who soothed her wounds? “O Mary, who shall heal you when your Son’s wounds are the cause of your affliction? Your love was your martyrdom. The other martyrs are shown with the instruments of their suffering. Mary is shown holding only Jesus. He, himself, was the cause of her martyrdom. “The greatness of their love consoled the martyrs but the greatness of Mary’s love caused her torments.”

The more we love something, the greater pain we experience when we lose it. The loss of a brother is greater than the loss of an animal. The loss of a son is greater than the loss of a friend. “To understand Mary’s sorrow, we must understand the greatness of her love. But who can measure her love? Mary had two kinds of love for Jesus. By supernatural love, she loved him as God. By natural love, she loved him as her son.” (St. Amadeus) “Because there was no love like hers, there was no sorrow like hers.” (Richard of St. Victor) “Where there is the greatest love, there is the greatest grief.” (St. Albert)

Mary stood by the cross saying, “All you who pass by this way, see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow?” (Lam 1:22) Mary says, “Stop a while. See my son dying before my eyes. Can you find any soul tormented as I?” “No more bitter grief can be found because no one like your Son can be found.” (St. Bonaventure)

Mere Trifles

To preach that Mary’s sorrows were greater than all the martyrs is to say little. “The most cruel tortures inflicted on the martyrs were mere trifles compared to Mary.” (St. Anselm) “As the sun exceeds all the stars, so Mary’s grief exceeded all others.” (St. Basil) Her sorrow was so great that she alone could suffer adequately the death of God made man.

“O Virgin, why did you sacrifice yourself on Calvary? Was not a crucified God enough to redeem us? Why were you crucified with him? (St. Bonaventure) Although Jesus’ death was enough to redeem a thousand worlds, Mary wanted to help our salvation by the merits of her suffering. “We owe Jesus a great debt but we also owe Mary a debt because she voluntarily suffered for us.” (St. Albert) “Our mother was willing to suffer any torment if we could be redeemed.” (St. Bridget) Mary’s only relief in the Passion was to see men reconciled to God. “While grieving she could rejoice to see that the sacrifice was for everyone’s redemption.” (Simon of Cascia) Her love demands that we thank her and meditate on her sorrows. However,

“Mary looks around on earth and finds very few who meditate on her sorrows. She is forgotten by many but I will not forget her.” (St. Bridget)

Jesus’ Four Promises

In 1239, Mary appeared to the seven devout founders of the Servites (The Servants of Mary). She asked them to meditate on her sorrows and that they wear mourning clothes (as she was wearing). “Jesus is more pleased to see compassion to Mary than to himself.” “My daughter, tears shed for my passion are dear to me.” (Mary to Blessed Veronica)

Jesus has promised great graces to those devoted to Mary’s sorrows. It was revealed to a saint that Mary asked Jesus to grant special graces to those dedicated to her sorrows. Jesus granted four graces:

1. Those who invoke Mary in her sorrow will receive true repentance before they die.
2. Jesus will protect them at the hour of death.
3. Jesus will impress the Passion upon their minds and reward them in heaven.
4. Mary can provide for these souls as she wishes. She can give them any favor.

Example

The following example shows this.

A rich man led a sinful life and made a pact with the devil, serving him for sixty years and never approaching the sacraments. When the man was dying, Jesus Christ told St. Bridget to send her confessor. The man refused to confess. The saint told him to go back. On his third visit, he told the man that Jesus Christ was ordering him to visit. The man was touched, but still despairing because of sixty years of service to the devil. Because the priest encouraged him, he did feel sorry and received the sacraments, dying two days later. Jesus told St. Bridget that the man had been saved, despite sixty years of sin, because he had a devotion to the sorrows of Mary.

Prayer

O Mary, may your tears help me to gain true sorrow for my sins. Since Jesus suffered so much, allow me to suffer something for your love. O Mary, wound me. How can I see Jesus wounded and you wounded and myself with no wound? Help me in my combat as I pass into eternity. At death, I might lose my power to invoke your name, so I invoke it now so you help me in my final moments.

3.2 Reflections on Mary’s Seven Sorrows

(A) The Prophecy of Simeon

In this life, everyone suffers. However, suffering is greater if we know what lies ahead. “Knowing the future means we suffer by anticipation.” (Seneca) Our Lord conceals our trials so we suffer them only once. However, wanting Mary to be the Queen of Sorrows, Jesus did not do this for her. She always had before her eyes her future sufferings. Simeon foretold that her Son would be opposed by men. “This child is set for a sign that will be contradicted” and “Your own soul a sword shall pierce.” (Lk 2:34-35)

Slowly Learning the Details

“All my joy was changed into sorrow at that moment.” (Our Lady to St. Matilda) Our Lady revealed to St. Theresa that she knew her Son would be sacrificed for the salvation of the world, but she learned the details of his cruel death slowly. She learned that he would not be believed or esteemed as the Son of God. Rather, people would consider him a blasphemer. “He has blasphemed” said Caiaphas. He would be despised as a peasant. “Is this not the carpenter’s son?” (Mt 13:55) He would be treated as ignorant and as a false prophet. “How did this man get his learning?” (Jn 7:15) He would be considered a madman and a drunkard. “He is mad.” (Jn 10:20) “Behold a drinker of wine and a friend of sinners.” (Lk 7:34) He was seen as possessed. “He has a devil” (Jn 8:48)

The Sanhadrin considered him notoriously wicked and needing no trial. “If he were not an evildoer, we would not have brought him here.” (Jn 18:30) Even the Father contradicted him and refused to hear his prayer, “If it be possible, Father, let this chalice pass from me.” (Mt 26:39) The Father abandoned Him to sadness. “My soul is sorrowful unto death” (Mt 26:38) He was tortured in all his members, drained of his blood and died in torment on an ignominious cross.

Continual Grief

When Nathan told David, “The child born to you will surely die” (2 Kg 12:14), David could find no peace. Although Mary accepted the news peacefully, she had continual grief. Her Son was so gentle and spoke words of eternal life to her. Mary told St. Bridget that she suffered every hour on earth. “Whenever I saw his hands and feet, I was absorbed in fresh grief, thinking of how he would be crucified.” Abraham suffered for three days, knowing he was to sacrifice Isaac. Mary suffered for 33 years, a greater sorrow than Abraham.

When Mary held Jesus, he was a bundle of sorrow to her. “Mary realized that Jesus, who is the strength of the saints, would be weak in his agony and His beauty disfigured. The Lord of Creation would be a criminal. The Judge would be condemned and the King of Kings would be crowned with thorns.” (St. Bernardine)

When Mary nursed him in her arms and he was sleeping in her bosom, she would think of his death. When she put on his garment, she thought of his being stripped. When she saw his hands and feet, she thought of the nails that would pierce them. (St. Bridget)

The Penetrating Sword

Luke writes, “He grew in wisdom and grace before God and man.” (2:52) Since Jesus advanced in the esteem of others, how much more in Mary’s. As her love increased so did her grief in realizing that she would lose him by a cruel death. The closer the Passion came, the deeper the sword penetrated. “That sword of sorrow approached every hour as the Passion drew near.” (St. Bridget) By their love for us, Jesus and Mary suffered cruel pains throughout their lives.

Jesus appeared to a Saint who was suffering much. He asked her to stay on the cross. She replied, "You suffered only three hours and I have suffered all my life." Jesus replied, "Oh, ignorant soul. I suffered all my sufferings from the first moment of my conception."

Example

A young man visited the statue of Our Lady of Sorrows every day. One night he committed a mortal sin. The next day he saw 8, not 7 wounds. An inner voice said that his sin added the eighth. He immediately sought forgiveness in confession.

Prayer

O Mary, I have pierced your heart with many swords. You are innocent and should not suffer. Through your sufferings, gain for me sorrow for sin and patience in my trials.

(B) The Flight Into Egypt

A wounded deer carries the arrow and the pain wherever he goes. Mary, after hearing Simeon's words, always carried this arrow of sorrow. Mary thought continually of Jesus' passion. His blood was always before her eyes. "Your thoughts, O Mary, were always steeped in the flowing blood of your Son." (Gailgrino) Jesus, himself was the arrow in her heart. The more gentle he was, the deeper the wound.

Mary's second sword was the flight into Egypt. Herod was troubled. St. Fulgentius says, "Why are you troubled? Jesus will not conquer kings by his sword but by his death." When deceived by the Magi, Herod slaughtered all the innocents. After hearing from the angel, Joseph told Mary and they set out on the journey. "God who came to save men, must now escape from them." (St. Albert) Mary saw that Jesus was a "sign that will be contradicted." As soon as he was born, he was persecuted. What anguish this flight caused! "Flee from friends to strangers. A newborn child and nursing mother forced to flee!" (St. John Chrysostom)

Difficulties in the Sojourn

It was 300 miles to Egypt, by a rough and unknown road in the snow, rain and winds of winter. What a touching sight, a mother with child, wandering in the world. How did they gain food? Or lodge at night? Was the food brought by Joseph or begged as an alms? Where did they sleep, except on sand or under trees? What about dangers from wild animals? The three greatest persons in the world must live like beggars.

Consider their great poverty during the seven years that they lived in Egypt. They were foreigners, with no money or relatives, and barely able to support themselves. Mary lived in such poverty that she often could not give Jesus any food.

Returning to Israel was painful for Jesus. At seven, he was too big to be carried and too weak to walk without assistance. This teaches us that we must live as pilgrims, detached from the world's good so we are ready to enter eternity. "We have not here a lasting city." (Heb 13:14) "You are a guest. Give a look and move on." (St. Augustine)

Blessed Veronica, an Augustinian nun, had a vision of the Flight into Egypt. Mary said to her, "You can see with what difficulty we have reached this country. Learn that no one receives graces without suffering." Yet, all sufferings become light, even sweet, to the soul which carries Jesus and Mary in his heart.

Example

Mary appeared to Blessed Collette (1381-1447) and said, "Look at my torn Jesus. Sinners constantly renew his sufferings. Pray that they might be converted." Venerable Joanna also had a vision of a beautiful child running to escape some armed men. The Child said, "Joanna, conceal me. I am Jesus of Nazareth. I am fleeing from sinners who wish to kill me, as Herod did."

Prayer

O Mary, even today, ungrateful men continue to persecute Jesus and afflict you. I have been one of these. By your flight into Egypt, help me on my journey so I can join you in loving my persecuted Savior.

(C) The Loss of Jesus in the Temple

James writes that "patience is a perfect work." (1:4) In losing her Son in the Temple, we admire Mary's heroic patience.

A person born blind does not fully realize the deprivation. One who becomes blind suffers much. Souls who are blinded by the world, with little knowledge of God, suffer little in not finding him. However, an illumined soul suffers bitterly when deprived of God's presence. We can see how much Mary suffered by this third sword because she was so accustomed to His presence.

Mary's Anxiety and Tears

Luke writes that the family went each year to the Temple. When Jesus, at twelve, stayed behind, Mary did not at first perceive her loss. However, not finding him, she and Joseph returned to Jerusalem. Imagine Mary's anxiety during these three days. She was like the inquiring spouse, "Have you seen him whom my soul loves?" (Song 3:3) Yet, she received no news. She must have repeated Ruben's words concerning the lost Joseph, "The boy does not appear. Where shall I go?" (Gen 37:30)

She wept continually, "My tears are my bread, day and night." During these nights, Mary did not sleep, constantly weeping and asking God to find her Son. She cried out, "My Son, tell me where you are so I may no longer seek you in vain." (St. Bernard) Some say that this was the greatest of Mary's sorrows. In her other sorrows, she had Jesus with her. Here, she suffered not knowing where he was, "The light of my eyes is not with me." (Ps 38:2)

More than Martyrdom

In this loss, Mary suffered more than any martyr." (Origen) The three days seemed like three centuries. All was bitterness. Who could comfort her, since Jesus was the only one who

could do so? “Therefore, my eyes run down with water.” (Lam 1:16) “What joy can I have when I cannot see heaven’s light?” (Tob 5:120)

In the other sorrows, Mary saw their purpose – the salvation of the world. But why this absence? In her humility, Mary judged herself unworthy to continue to guard so great a treasure. Possibly, she thought herself guilty of some negligence. “Mary and Joseph sought Jesus because he had possibly left them.” (Origen) The greatest sorrow for a soul who loves God is the fear that they have offended him.

Sorrow in Loss

Mary’s words were spoken in sorrow, “Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have sought you in sorrow.” (Lk 2:48) She was not chastising Jesus, but expressing her grief at his absence.

Mary’s sorrow consoles those souls who no longer enjoy the delightful presence of Jesus. Let them weep in peace, just as Mary wept. God told St. Teresa, “No one is lost without knowing it and no one is deceived without wishing to be deceived.” When the Lord withdraws from a soul’s sight, he conceals himself in their heart. In this way, the soul will seek him with greater love. The soul must seek Jesus amid tribulations, not amid the pleasures of the world. “We sought you sorrowing” said Mary. All must learn from her.

Mary sought only Jesus. This is like Job, “He had lost what God gave him, but he still had God himself.” (St. Augustine) If Mary wept because of losing Jesus for three days, how should sinners weep who have lost divine grace. To them God says, “You are not my people” (Osee 1:9) Sin separates us from God “Your sins have divided you from God.” (Is 59:2) St. Augustine describes poor sinners, “If they lose an ox or a sheep or a beast of burden, they are diligent in searching for it. But when they lose God, they eat, drink and sleep.”

Example

St. Bonaventura (died 1289 in Italy) asked Mary to experience the pain of her three day loss. Mary appeared to her, holding the child Jesus. She went into ecstasy. Then the vision disappeared and she felt a terrible loss. After three days, Mary appeared and said, “Your suffering is only a small part of what I have suffered.”

Prayer

O Mary, your Son is not lost. He is in your own heart. You sigh after Jesus whom you love. Leave the sighs to us sinners who have offended him. Mary, if your Son is not in my soul, help me to find him, because He is found by those who seek him.

(D) Mary Meets Jesus on the Way to Calvary

To understand the greatness of her grief, we must understand her love. What mother loved her Son as Mary did? He was an only Son who deeply loved his mother. He was also her God Who came “to cast fire on the earth.” (Lk 12:49) Imagine the love he enkindled in her pure heart. Her love blended the love of both mother and servant, love of her son and love of God.

This created a thousand flames. During the Passion, this ocean of fire became an ocean of grief. “If all the world’s sorrows were united, they would not equal her sorrow.” (St. Bernardine) “As she loved more tenderly, she was wounded more deeply” (Richard of Lawrence). This is especially true when she met him along the way.

Special Sorrows

Mary told St. Bridget that her eyes were always filled with tears, as the time of the Passion drew closer because she thought of her Son whom she would lose. The prospect of his approaching suffering seized her with fear.

The appointed day came. “O Mary, you spent that night without sleep. While others slept, you watched”. (St. Bonaventure) In the morning, the disciples came to tell her what happened. “There was no one to comfort her.” (Lam 1:2) Some told her of Caiaphas’ cruel treatment. Others told her of Herod’s insults. Then John came and told her that Pilate had unjustly condemned him. “The unjust judge condemned him with the same lips that had proclaimed him innocent.” (Leo the Great) John told her that Jesus was already carrying his cross to Calvary and invited her to come to give him a last farewell in a street.

Mary went with John and saw the trail of blood already on the path. “By his footsteps, I knew he had already gone that way.” (Mary to St. Bridget) Then “the most sorrowful mother met her most sorrowful Son.” (St. Bernard) While waiting for him, how many remarks she must have heard said about him.

Recognizing Each Other

Then Jesus recognized her. What a scene of sorrows – the nails, hammers, cords, all the instruments of death. The trumpet that proclaimed the sentence of death was a sword in her heart. All the executioners with death’s instruments had gone ahead. Then she saw this young man covered with blood from head to foot, a crown of thorns and two heavy beams on his shoulders.

She hardly recognized him. “There was no beauty in him.” (Is 53:2) His wounds and blood made him appear as a leper (Is 53:4) “His look was despised that we did not esteem him.” (Is 53:3) When she recognized him, love and fear filled her heart. She desired to see him, but also feared such a heartrending sight. They looked at each other. He removed the blood from his eyes so he could see. The Son looked at the mother and the mother at the Son. All these looks were arrows that pierced their loving souls.

Kept Alive for Grief

When the daughter of St. Thomas More met her father on his way to execution, she fainted. Mary did not. Nor did she die, because God had greater grief in store. Yet her sorrow could have caused a thousand deaths.

The soldiers would not allow Mary to embrace her Son but she followed Him. Where, O Virgin, are you going? To Calvary. Can you trust yourself to see him hang on a cross? Jesus said, “Stop my mother. Where are you going? If you follow me, you will be tortured with my sufferings and I with yours.” Although seeing Jesus would cost so much, Mary would not leave him. The Son advanced. The mother followed, to be crucified with her son. “The Mother took

up her cross to be crucified with him.” (Abbot William) If we saw a lioness watching her cub die, we would be moved to compassion. Should we not have greater compassion to see Mary follow her Immaculate lamb to death?

Example

Jesus appeared to Sister Diomira in Florence and said, “Think of me and love me and I will think of you and love you.” He gave her both flowers and a cross to teach her that all God’s graces are accompanied by the cross.

St. Jerome Emiliano was a soldier and filled with sins. When imprisoned, he had recourse to the Blessed Virgin. With her help, he began to lead the life of a saint. God even showed him his high place in heaven.

Prayer

O Mary, by your grief give me the patience to bear my crosses. How can I, a sinner, not carry my cross when you and Jesus, both innocent, carried your crosses?

(E) The Death of Jesus

A mother sees her innocent son tormented and put to death before her eyes. This is a new martyrdom. “There stood by the cross of Jesus, his mother.” (Jn 19:25) Is there any sorrow like her sorrow? This is the fifth sword in her heart.

On arriving at Calvary, the soldiers stripped him and nailed him to the cross. They used blunt nails, to torment him even more. They planted the cross and then left him to die. Mary, however, drew nearer to the cross. “I did not leave him, I stood nearer.” (to St. Bridget)

Led By Her Heart

“O Mary, what good was it for you to go to Calvary? You only shared in his disgrace. The horror of witnessing the crucifixion of God by men.” (St. Bonaventure) The saints answer, “Your heart did not think of its own sorrows but of your Son’s death. Not even the fear of his death could separate you.”

What a cruel sight! The Son in agony and his Mother at the foot of the cross. “Jesus was breathless, exhausted, and in his last agony. His eyes were sunken. His mouth open. His cheeks hollow. His head had fallen on his breast. His hair was black with blood. His stomach collapsed. His arms and legs stiff. His whole body covered with wounds and blood.” (to St. Bridget) “Every wound on Jesus’ body was a wound in Mary’s heart.” (St. Jerome)

“On Calvary there were two altars. On one, was Jesus’ body. On the other, was Mary’s heart. (St. John Chrysostom) “There was one altar, the cross, on which both the Son and the mother were crucified. O Lady, you are not near the cross. You are on the cross.” (St. Bonaventure) “With Christ, Mary was also crucified.” (St. Augustine) “Love inflicted on Mary’s heart the suffering which the nails inflicted on Jesus’ body.” (St. Bernard)

Bringing No Relief

A mother procures all kinds of relief for a dying son, but Mary could offer no relief. He said, "I thirst" but Mary could not give him water. She had only the water of her tears. She could not give him the relief of her embrace. She saw that her Son "had trodden the winepress alone. There was none to give help." (Is 63:3)

Who would console him? He was surrounded by his enemies. These blasphemed him, saying "Come down from the cross." (Mt 27) Mary's greatest sorrow was to hear Jesus complain that even the heavenly Father had abandoned him. During her whole lifetime, Mary could never forget those words. (St. Bridget)

What grieved her most was to realize that her presence increased His sufferings. "Mary's grief flowed into Jesus' heart. Jesus suffered more from Mary's sorrows than from his own sufferings." (St. Bernard) "He grieved more for me than for himself." (Mary to St. Bridget) "She was dying, without being able to die. Near the cross of Christ his Mother stood half dead." (St. Bernard)

Giving Birth to Us

Jesus revealed to a saint that his affliction at seeing his mother caused him to die without any consolation. This saint cried out "Lord, tell me no more of this sorrow for I can no longer bear it." All who saw Mary suffer everything without any complaint, were astonished. Her lips might have been silent, but her heart was always offering up her Son.

By her sorrows, she gave us birth into grace, for we are the children of her sorrows. "Christ wanted her present at the cross because there she gave birth to us. Leading us to salvation was her only consolation at the cross." (Lansperguis) "By her compassion, my Mother was made the mother of all in heaven and on earth. Jesus' last words gave her to us. "Woman, behold your son." (Jn 19:26)

Mary immediately began her work. The Good Thief was converted by her. She has continued this task ever since. (Authors say that the Good Thief had helped Mary on the flight to Egypt.)

Example

Three times a day, Blessed Joachim visited an image of Mary. He also fasted on Saturdays, and meditated on her sorrows at midnight. As a young man, she appeared to him and told him to enter the Order of Servites. Later, she gave him two crowns. One, made of rubies, symbolized his compassion for her sorrows. The other, made of pearls, was for his virginity.

He asked to die on Good Friday, so, she appeared again and said, "Prepare yourself for you will die tomorrow (Good Friday). You shall die suddenly." The next day as the gospel words were sung, "There stood by the cross, His Mother," he began to grow ill. At the words, "He bowed his head and died", the saint also died. The Church was filled with light and perfume.

Prayer

O Mary, your Son is dead and who can console you? Only the thought that Jesus conquered hell and opened heaven can assuage your sorrow. O Mother, help me to weep with thee so I can gain pardon.

(F) The Piercing of Jesus' Side and His Descent

"See if there is any sorrow like to my sorrow" (Lam 1:12) Mary says to us "Do not console me because, after the death of my Son, my soul can no longer receive consolations in this world. What I want you to do is to look at me and see the greatness of my grief. My loved one was cruelly torn from me." O Lady, even with Jesus' death, the sorrows have not ended. You will be wounded again when the lance pierces your Son's dead body and when he is taken down.

All the Sorrows Together

At the cross, Mary was tortured by these sorrows, one by one. Now, they are all united to assail her. Being told your Son is dead awakened all of her motherly love. This Son never caused her a single displeasure. He always loved, obeyed, and respected.

When Jesus died, Mary's first concern was to accompany her Son's spirit so she could present it to the Father, saying, "I give you the sinless soul of Your Son and my Son. Justice is accomplished. Your will is done. The great sacrifice is consummated." Mary said to the lifeless body, "Oh wounds, I rejoice in you. Through you, the world has salvation. Remain open on his body and become the refuge of sinners. How many will receive pardon through you."

Piercing His Side

Due to the coming Sabbath, the Jews wanted the bodies removed from the cross. However, the crucified had to be dead. Men came to break Our Lord's legs. Mary was weeping as they advanced. At first, she trembled with fear. "My Son is already dead. Torment me no more." She asked that the legs not be broken. (St. Bonaventure) While speaking, she saw a soldier pierce the side of Jesus. "Immediately, there came out blood and water." (Jn 19:34) The cross shook and Jesus' heart was cut in two. The Savior wanted to shed the little blood that he still had left. He had no more to give. "Christ shared this wound with his mother. He received the insult. She endured its agony."

Simeon had prophesied this sword of grief. "The lance which opened his side passed through Mary's soul which was always one with Jesus' heart." (St. Bernard) When the spear was withdrawn, the point was red with blood. "When I saw my Son's heart pierced, mine was also pierced." (Mary to St. Bridget) "Only by God's intervention did Mary not die." (Angel to St. Bridget)

Taking Down the Body

Mary feared further injuries to the body. Therefore, she asked Joseph of Arimathea to get the body from Pilate, so she might protect it from further outrage. Joseph told Pilate of the suffering of Jesus' mother and this softened his heart.

The body was taken down from the cross. Mary had given her Son to the world for its salvation. Now, the world returns to her a dead body, blackened and bruised, with a special wound in His heart. He had been all fair, but now he had no beauty, exciting only horror in those who see him, “How many swords pierced Mary’s soul when she received him.” (St. Bonaventure) Just consider the anguish of any mother holding her dying son.

Three Ladders

The disciples placed three ladders against the cross to remove the body. On the first, the disciples drew out the nails and gave them to Mary. On the second, they supported the upper part of his body. On the third, they held the lower part. Mary embraced the body and then sat at the foot of the cross. She examined his torn flesh, took off his crown of thorns and saw the holes in his hands and feet. “My Son, what has love for men led you to and what evil have they done to you? You were my delight, my glory, my all.” (Bernardine de Bustes) “O Jesus, see my affliction. However, you no longer see. Console me. However, you no longer speak. O cruel thorns, merciless nails and spear, how could you torture your Creator? Why speak of nails, it was sinners who did this.”

Mary’s Words to Sinners

What would Mary say in our present age? What would be her grief that men continue to sin, even though sins crucify her Son? She would say, “Return sinners to Jesus’ heart and he will welcome you. Flee from the Judge and go to the Redeemer. Go from judgment to the cross.”

“I closed Jesus’ eyes but I could not close his arms.” (Mary to St. Bridget) The extended arms showed that Jesus would receive all sinners who returned to him. Mary would say, “Now that my Son has died, it is a time of love, not of fear. It is a time to love him who loved you so much. “The pierced heart showed the invisible wound of love.” (St. Bernard) “If Jesus gave his heart to us, we should return our heart to him.” (Blessed Raymond) “To find a place in Jesus’ heart and not be rejected, go with Mary. She will gain this grace.”

Example

Bartholomew and a friend lived wicked lives, but Bartholomew always sang “Stabat Mater”, a hymn about Mary at the cross. One day he had a vision of himself and his friend in a lake of fire. Mary extended her hand and pulled him out. After the vision, he heard that his friend had been shot. He knew the vision was true and he joined the Capuchins.

Prayer

O Mary, your virtue and your sorrow flowed from a heart inflamed with love. Your sorrows encourage me to hope for pardon. But I want more, I want to love Your Son. Who can gain this better than you?

(G) THE BURIAL OF JESUS

A mother at a child’s death bed feels all his pain. Before he is buried, the mother must bid farewell to him. This grief exceeds all other griefs. We now consider this final sword. Mary had to leave the body in the tomb.

Let us return to Calvary where Mary holds the lifeless body in her arms. All of the virtues, graces and signs of special love that Jesus had shown to her are now changed into arrows that pierce her heart. The more they excited her in life, the more they now cause pain. As if Mary said, “O Son of God, you were Father, Son and Spouse to me. Now I am deprived, a desolate childless spouse and Mother. I have lost all.” (St. Bernard)

Mary was so absorbed in grief, that the disciples worried that she might die, so they gently approached her to get the body and to wrap it in their cloths (still present at Turin because the Lord was pleased to leave it.)

The Funeral Procession

The men lifted up the body to carry it to the tomb. Angels accompanied the procession, followed by the holy women and His mother. When they arrived at the tomb, Mary would have willingly buried herself (told to St. Bridget) she even accompanied the body into the tomb. The disciples had to say to her “We must now roll across the stone, so bid your Son a last farewell.” She said “My Son, shall I see you no more? Receive my last farewell and receive also my heart which I leave with you.” “At the burial, one tomb contained two hearts.” (Mary to St. Bridget)

Mary’s heart was buried with Jesus because he was her whole treasure. “Where your treasure is, your heart will be also.” (Lk 12:34) I would ask, where are our hearts buried? Why not in Jesus? He is in the Blessed Sacrament so we may possess Him.

The Stone

Mary said to the stone “I bless you, for you enclose what I held for nine months. I leave you as the guardian of my Son.” (St. Bonaventure) Then she said, “O Father, I commend to you him who is both Your son and mine.” “This mother was so afflicted, that all who met her wept. The disciples mourned more for her than for their Lord.” (St. Bernard)

The women disciples veiled her like a widow. As they passed by the cross, still wet with his blood, she was the first to kiss it, saying, “I adore you because you are a throne of glory and an altar of mercy, consecrated by the divine Lamb’s blood which has been shed for the world’s salvation.” (St. Bonaventure)

Returning Home

When she returned home, she could remember only his beautiful life and his cruel death. She remembered her many conversations during the years at Nazareth, their mutual love, and the words of eternal life coming from his lips. Then she recalled the sad scene of his death, the lacerated flesh, the deep wounds, the uncovered bones. All came before her eyes. What a night of sorrow this was for Mary. She asked John, “Tell me, where is your Master?” She asked Magdalene, “Where is your beloved? Who has taken him from us?” All wept with her.

Turn to Our Lady and say, “O Mother, let me weep because you are innocent.” She weeps for love. You weep through sorrow. By weeping, we might share in the following example.

Example

A religious suffered from intense scruples but always was consoled by meditating on the sorrows of Mary. At the hour of death, the devil tormented him more than ever. Mary appeared to him saying, "Son, why are you overcome? You have consoled me so often in my sorrows. Now I comfort you. Come with me." This devout religious died with great joy.

Prayer

O Mary, give me a devotion to your sorrows and to Jesus' Passion, so that I may spend all my days weeping for your sufferings. May these sorrows give me confidence at death that even with my sins, I will obtain heaven where I will sing of God's infinite mercies.

PART 4 THE VIRTUES OF MARY

Prologue

"To obtain the favor of the saints, we must imitate them." (St. Augustine) The saints pray for us when they see us practice their virtues. As soon as Mary frees a soul from Satan's grasp. She wants it to imitate her. She cannot enrich anyone who is opposed to her virtues. She says, "Blessed are those who keep my ways." (Pr 8:32)

When I love a person, I try to be like that person. So, the greatest act of love for Mary is to imitate her. "Serve Mary. Then you will love her." (St. Sophranus) Those are true children of Mary who imitate her life. "If a person acts as her child, she will treat them as their mother." (St. Bernard)

Concerning Mary's virtues, the gospels say that she was "full of grace," that is, possessing all virtues in an heroic degree. "Other saints excel in a particular virtue but Mary was a model for all. Let the life of Mary be as a faithful image. From it learn how to live." (St. Ambrose)

4.1 The Humility of Mary

"Humility is the guardian of all the virtues." (St. Bernard) Without humility, all the virtues depart. "God so loves humility that he is always drawn to it." (St. Jane Chantal) This virtue was unknown until the Son of God said, "Learn of me, for I am meek and humble of heart." (Mt 11:29) Mary was Jesus' first disciple. Therefore, she was first in humility and merited to be exalted above all. Mary was so humble that she saw herself enriched more than all, yet she never saw herself greater than anyone. Mary's humility wounded the heart of her spouse. (Song 4:9)

Clothed in Greatness

Because humility is truth, Mary did not see herself as a sinner. She knew she never offended God. She also acknowledged that she received greater graces than any creature. (Humility always acknowledges favors). However, she knew God's greatness and her own lowliness. In this, she humbled herself. "The Virgin always had God's majesty and her own nothingness before her eyes." (St. Bernardine) A beggar clothed in a rich man's garment does not forget his own poverty. When Mary was clothed in God's riches, she humbled herself even

more. “I saw myself as the most unworthy of creatures.” (Mary to St. Elizabeth of Hungary)
“No creature was so exalted, because no creature so humbled herself.” (St. Bernardine)

Concealing Gifts

Humility conceals heavenly gifts. Mary even wanted to conceal from St. Joseph the mystery of how she became the Mother of God. This, however, only added to his perplexity. He could not doubt her chastity but he was ignorant of the mystery. “So, he was thinking of putting her away quietly.” (Mt 1:19) Only the angel’s revelation that she was pregnant by the Holy Spirit stopped this decision.

Also, a humble soul turns all praises to God, not to self. Elizabeth praised Mary saying, “Blessed are you among women. Blessed are you who believed God’s word.” (Lk 1:42) Mary gave all praise to God, “My soul does magnify the Lord” as if “You praise me, Elizabeth, but I praise God who exalted my lowliness.” “I humbled myself because I knew that I possessed nothing. I did not deserve to be praised. I wanted all praise for God.” (Mary to St. Bridget)

Serving Others

Humility serves others. “O Mary, you gave God to men, opened heaven and saved souls from hell.” Mary served Elizabeth for three months. “Mary came to Elizabeth to serve, not to be served.” (St. Bernard)

The humble choose the lowest places. When Jesus was speaking in a house, Mary did not enter. “She remained outside and did not use her maternal authority to interrupt.” (St. Bernard) At Pentecost, she took the lowest place. “They were with the women and with Mary, the mother of Jesus.” (Acts 1:14) Luke knew her dignity, but correctly says that she took the lowest place. “The last has become first and the first, last.” (St. Bernard)

The Disgrace of Calvary

The humble want to be thought of as lowly. Therefore, when Jesus was exalted on Palm Sunday, Mary was not there. However, she appeared at Calvary, even though others knew that she was the mother of the condemned one. “I was called a fool and thought the most unworthy of all. This was my desire because I pleased my Son alone.” (Mary to St. Bridget)

In ecstasy, Venerable Paula saw Mary’s humility. In trying to recount this to her confessor, all she could say was “Oh, the humility of Mary. In the world, there is not even the lowest degree of humility compared with Mary.” Jesus showed two women to St. Bridget. “The one with pomp is pride. The other with head bowed low is humility. Her name is Mary.” Mary was humility herself.

Imitating Her Virtues

No virtue is more difficult for our corrupted nature than humility. However, there is no escape. Without humility, we cannot be Mary’s true children. “If you cannot imitate her virginity, then imitate her humility.” (St. Bernard) She only invites the little ones, “Whoever is little, let them come to me.” (Pr 9:4) Mary protects us under her mantle of humility. “Hide yourself under my mantle, which is humility.” (Mary to St. Bridget) This mantle warms us only if we wear it and we wear it only by imitating it.

“Mary is near to those who call on her and gives herself especially to those who imitate her chastity and humility. So, if you love her, imitate her humility.” (St. Bernard) Martin D’Alberto, S.J. used to sweep the house for love of Mary. Mary appeared and told him, “This humble action done in love is pleasing to me.”

Prayer

O my Queen, I must be humble, but my sins have made me ungrateful and proud. O Mary, supply a remedy. By your humility, make me become your child. Amen

4.2 Mary’s Charity Towards God

“Where there is the greatest purity, there is the greatest charity.” (St. Anselm) A heart empty of self is full of God’s love. Mary had nothing of herself and “her love surpassed that of all angels and men.” She is “The Queen of love” (St. Francis de Sales)

Mary’s Perfect Fulfillment

God told us to love with all our heart. “This will only be accomplished perfectly in heaven because on earth all love is imperfectly fulfilled.” (St. Thomas) Now, can God give a command that will only be imperfectly fulfilled? This would have happened if the Virgin Mother had not lived perfectly. She fulfilled this first great Commandment. No defect had access to her. “Divine love touched every part of her. She loved fully because she was “full of grace.” Mary could say “My Beloved to me and I to Him” (Song 2:16) Even the Seraphim had to descend into Mary’s heart to learn how to love God.

The Fire Bearer

God came to earth to enkindle love, but no heart was more aflame than Mary’s because she had no attachment to earth. She was fully prepared for the divine fire. “Mary was always burning with the divine flame, even inebriated by it.” (St. Sophronius) Mary’s heart became all fire, within her by love and outside of her by good example. When carrying Jesus she was “fire carrying fire”. “The Holy Spirit heated, inflamed and melted Mary with love, as fire does to iron.” (St. Ildephonse) The burning bush seen by Moses was not destroyed by fire. This is a symbol of Mary’s love. That is why John saw her clothed with the sun. “She was so closely united to God by love it was impossible for any creature to have a closer union.” (St. Bernard)

Mary was never tempted by hell. “Evil spirits were driven away by her ardent love, not daring to approach her.” (St. Bernardine) “The Virgin was terrible to the demons. Her fire of love deterred them.” (Richard of St. Victor) “I thought of nothing but God.” (Mary to St. Bridget) Her soul was in constant contemplation. “Her acts of charity were innumerable. She spent her whole life constantly repeating her acts of love.” (Fr. Suarez)

Always Burning

The duties of her life did not prevent her from loving. “The Jewish altar of propitiation had a fire that was never extinguished. This was a symbol of Mary.” (St. Germanus) Even in sleep, Mary made acts of love. While her body rested, her soul watched. “Her lamp shall not be

put out in the night. “(Pr 31:18) “In repose, her soul freely sought God. Even in sleep, she was wrapped in contemplation more than any saint who was awake.” (St. Bernardine) The mind of the Virgin was always plunged into love. “She did only what Divine Wisdom showed her was pleasing to him.” (St. Bernardine)

No creature on earth had such great charity. “By her love, she became so beautiful that God came into her womb. The Blessed Mother wounded God and took captive His heart.” (St. Thomas of Villanova)

Aflame With Love

Since Mary loved God so much, she asks the same of her followers. “Angela, seek to love my Son as much as you can.” (Mary to Blessed Angela) “Daughter, if you want to have me close to you, love my Son.” (Mary to St. Bridget) Mary asked the angels to tell her Lord how much she loved him. Did not God already know? Did he not inflict the wounds of love on her? “She did this so we could also be wounded by divine love.” Because Mary is aflame with love, all who come near to her receive the same fire. She is “the bearer of fire.” (St. Catherine of Sienna) If we want to burn with these flames, let us draw near to her.

“Mary, you are the most beloved and most loving of all creatures. Please confer a spark of divine love on me.” (St. Francis de Sales). Did you not ask for wine when it was lacking at Cana? Will you not ask for love when it is lacking in our hearts? Say to Jesus, “They have no love.”

4.3 Mary’s Charity to Others

We are commanded to love God and neighbor because “he who loves God loves all that God loves.” (St. Thomas Aquinas) Since no one ever loved God as Mary did, there will never be anyone who loves others as much as Mary. The Incarnate Word filled Mary’s womb with charity in its highest degree, so she could aid all who sought her.

So Loved the World

At Cana, she helped the couple even before she was asked. She went quickly to Elizabeth’s house “into the hill country with haste.” (Lk 1:39) Her greatest love for us was in giving her Son to die on the cross. “Mary so loved the world that she gave her only begotten Son.” (St. Bonaventure) “Your purity surpasses the angels’ and your compassion surpasses the saints.” (St. Anselm) “Her love for us in heaven has increased because she sees our miseries. Her mercy to the sinner is even greater now in heaven.” (St. Bonaventure) We need Mary’s prayers. “If there were no prayers of my Mother, there would be no hope of mercy.” (Jesus to St. Bridget)

Mary says, “Blessed is the man who hears me and watches daily at my gates.” (Pr 8:34) We must gain Mary’s love by our love of neighbor. Mary exhorts us, “Be merciful as your Mother is merciful.” Our charity to others will be the measure that God uses for us. “Give to the poor and receive paradise.” (St. Methodius) St. Paul writes that charity makes us happy in this world and the next. “Whoever has mercy on the poor, lends to the Lord.” (Pr 19:17) “Whoever

helps the needy, makes God his debtor.” (St. John Chrysostom) O Mary, help me to imitate you in both your love for God and your love for neighbor.

4.4 Mary’s Faith

Mary is also the mother of faith. “What Eve ruined by her unbelief, Mary restored by her faith.” (St. Irenaeus) Eve did not believe God’s word and brought death. Mary believed the angel and brought salvation. “When Mary consented, she opened heaven to men.” (St. Augustine) “The believing wife sanctifies her unbelieving husband.” (1 Cor 7:14) Mary is the believing wife. Her faith saved the unbelieving Adam. Elizabeth said Mary was blessed because she believed. “Mary was more blessed by receiving Christ’s faith than by conceiving his flesh.” (St. Augustine)

Always Believing

Mary had more faith than all the angels and saints. She saw the baby Jesus and believed he was God. She saw him flee from King Herod and believed he was the King of Kings. She saw him born and yet believed he was eternal. She saw him die and still believed he was God.

“Mary stood at the cross because she was supported by her faith in Christ’s Divinity.” (St. Antoninus) “Her lamp will not be put out.” (Pr 31:18) Even when the disciples doubted, Mary’s light of faith still lived. She merited to become “The light of all the faithful and the Queen of the true faith.” (St. Cyril of Alexandria) The Church says of Mary, “You alone have destroyed all heresies throughout the world.” Scripture says “You have wounded my heart by one of your eyes.” (Song 4:9) This eye is Mary’s faith that so pleased God.

Faith is both a gift (infused by God) and a virtue (something we can practice) We must put God’s gift to use. “If you say, ‘I believe’, then do what you believe.” (St. Augustine) Many are called Christian, but few have the good works of faith. Those without works should change their name (Christian) or change their conduct. “Those who believe that an eternity of suffering is ahead for the wicked, and yet lead wicked lives should be locked up as madmen.” (Fr. Avila) “See all things through the eyes of faith.” (St. Augustine) “All sins come from a lack of faith.” (St. Teresa)

4.5 Mary’s Hope

Hope arises from a faith which sees that God is faithful to His promises. Mary says, “It is good for me to hope in the Lord.” (Ps 73:28) She was the Spirit’s faithful spouse, perfectly detached, never relying on creatures and placing all confidence in God’s help. “She received the world as if it were a desert and leaned upon the Beloved.”

Mary first showed her confidence in God when she saw that Joseph “was ready to put her away privately.” (Mt 1:19) Even then, she did not reveal the mystery of how she became pregnant, but had confidence that God would defend her innocence. “She did not want to boast of her gifts but resigned herself to God’s care.” (Cornelius)

Instances of Faith

She also showed her confidence in God when she was obliged to give birth in a manger, not uttering a single word of complaint. She trusted when Joseph told her they must go to Egypt. She went without money or provisions into a strange country. At Cana, she showed total confidence in the divine goodness, telling the servants to obey Jesus. She knew the favor was already granted.

Mary especially teaches us to have confidence concerning our eternal salvation. Even though we must cooperate, the grace for salvation comes from God alone. "I can do all things in Him who strengthens me." (Phil 4:13) O Mary, you are the "mother of holy hope." (Sir 24:24) After Jesus, "you are the whole ground of my hope." (St. Bernard) "Salvation of all who call on you, save me." (St. Bonaventure)

4.6 Mary's Chastity

Because the senses rebel against reason, chastity is a most difficult virtue. "The battles to preserve chastity are of daily occurrence." (St. Augustine) "Mary is called the 'Virgin of Virgins' for she was the first to offer her virginity to God and brought all virgins to imitate her." (St. Albert) "After her, all the virgins were brought to the Temple." (Ps 45:15) "O Virgin, who taught you to lead an angel's life on earth?" (St. Bernard) "God chose Mary to be the standard-bearer of virginity". (St. Ambrose)

A Beauty that Fosters Virginity

The Spirit calls her "a lily among thorns." (Song 2:2) "All other virgins were thorns, both to themselves or to others. Mary was neither." (St. Denis) "Mary's beauty was an incentive to others to be chaste" (St. Thomas Aquinas) "Joseph preserved his virginity through Mary." (St. Jerome)

Mary so loved virginity that she was willing to renounce being God's mother to preserve it. She consented only because she knew that the Spirit would overshadow her. "Whoever has preserved chastity is an angel. Whoever has lost it, is a devil." (St. Ambrose) Jesus said, "They shall be as the angels of God in heaven." (Mt 22:30) The greater part of adults are lost due to this sin. (St. Remigius)

Three Needed Means

People seldom use the three necessary means.

First, the person must control their senses, especially that of sight. Mary always guarded her eyes. All knew her modestly. The saints also say that Mary fasted all her life. "Grace and gluttony cannot exist together." (St. Bonaventure)

Second, the soul must flee the occasions of sin. "In the war of the senses, those who flee win the victory." (St. Philip Neri) Mary always fled. "She went in haste to the hill country." (Lk 1:56)

Third, the person must pray. "I could only be chaste if God gave it to me, so I went to the Lord and asked." (Wis 8:21) "I only acquired virtue by effort and continual prayer." (Mary to St. Elizabeth of Hungary) Because Mary loves purity, she cannot stand those who are impure.

However, she will free each soul from this vice who invokes her name. “Many have conquered their temptations by devotion to the Immaculate Conception.” (John of Avila)

Prayer

“ Mary, how many are in hell because of this vice. May we always invoke you in our temptations.

4.7 Mary’s Poverty

Our Redeemer taught us to despise worldly things. “Being rich, he became poor for your sake.” (2 Cor 8:9) Jesus would say, “To be perfect, sell all you have. Give to the poor and follow me.” (Mt 19:20)

Mary’s Choices

Mary could have lived in her parent’s property, but she preferred poverty. “I vowed that I would never possess anything on earth.” (Mary to St. Bridget) She even distributed the gifts from the Magi. In the temple, she could offer only two pigeons instead of a lamb. “All I could get, I gave to the poor.” (Mary to St. Bridget) After marrying Joseph, a poor carpenter, she still did work with her hands to support the household. She lived poor and she died poor.

“Whoever loves the things of this world will never become a saint.” (St. Philip Neri) Those who seek perishable goods will themselves perish. “The virtue of poverty contains all the other treasures.” (St. Teresa) The poor in spirit are blessed because they desire only God. In poverty they find their paradise on earth. “My God and my all.” (St. Francis Assisi) “Give me only your love and Your grace, and I am rich enough.” (St. Ignatius) When suffering from poverty, we are consoled that Jesus and Mary were poor.

O Mary, your spirit “rejoiced in God” because you had no desire for this world’s goods. Detach me from this world to love God alone. Amen

4.8 Mary’s Obedience

Mary called herself a “handmaid” because ‘she never contradicted God in thought, word, or deed. She was always obedient.” (St. Thomas of Villanova) God was pleased and “regarded the humility of his handmaid.” Mary’s obedience is greater than in any other human person. All others are touched by sin, prone to evil and find doing good difficult. “Mary found no obstacles in obeying God. She was a wheel easily turned by the Holy Spirit. She always kept her eyes on God to discover his will.” (St. Bernardine) Mary’s soul was a metal, liquefied by fire and ready to fit any mold of God’s will.

Instances of Obedience

She obeyed Caesar Augustus and took the journey to Bethlehem. She undertook the more difficult journey to Egypt. Her greatest obedience was in offering her Son to death. Mary was blessed in becoming God’s mother, but was even more blessed by obeying God’s will.

The obedient are pleasing to Mary. Once, she was appearing to a Franciscan priest who was called out to a sick person. He left and she waited for him to return. In contrast, she blamed a religious who finished some private devotions after the bell rang for supper.

“Obedience brings all saints to glory.” (Jesus to St. Bridget) “God never accuses us of anything done in obedience. He said, ‘He who hears you, hears me.’” (St. Philip Neri) “Because of my obedience, every sinner who comes to me with a purpose of amendment, will receive pardon.” (Mary to St. Bridget)

Prayer

O Mary, by your obedience gain for us a fidelity to God’s will.

4.9 Mary’s Patience

“By your patience, you will possess your souls.” (Lk 21:19) Mary showed her patience at Cana, when Jesus gave her an answer which seemed to reject her request. “Woman, what is this to me and to you?” (Jn 2:4) This reply was given to provide us with an example of Mary’s patience. (St. Francis de Sales)

Mary’s whole life was constant patience in the middle of tribulations. She always knew her Son would be crucified. “A crucified Mother conceived a crucified Son.” (St. Bonaventure) Just what she endured at the cross shows her sublime patience. “There stood at the cross of Jesus, his mother.”

Enriched

“What can enrich us more than the patient endurance of sufferings?” (St. Cyprian) “I will hedge up my way with thorns.” (Hosea 2:6) God surrounds His elect souls with thorns. They are His vineyard and He wants to protect them. Patience delivers us from sin and hell. It makes us saints. “Patience does a perfect work.” (Jas 1:4) It bears peacefully what comes from God (sickness, poverty) and what comes from man (criticism).

“I saw a great multitude carrying palm branches.” (Rev 7:9) This multitude includes both the martyrs and those who patiently endured. “If we practice patience, we can be martyrs without any executioner.” (St. Gregory) Every pain on earth will produce heavenly fruit. “Our present tribulation is light compared to the weight of eternal glory.” (2 Cor 4:17)

“Those who embrace the cross do not feel it. When we resolve to suffer, the pain ceases.” (St. Teresa) In our pain, let us call upon Mary, “The comfortress of the afflicted.”

Prayer

O Mary, although innocent you accepted suffering. Help me, who deserved hell, to accept my crosses.

4.10 Mary's Spirit of Prayer

Mary practiced Our Lord's command "to pray always and not faint." (Lk 18:10) Her prayer was continual, from the first moment that she had the use of reason. She went into the temple where she "rose at midnight to offer her supplications." (St. Elizabeth of Hungary) She prayed with the greatest recollection, free from every distraction. Nothing disturbed her unceasing contemplation.

She loved solitude. The word "Virgin" in Hebrew means "someone withdrawn from the world." Her demeanor outside her house was always composed and modest. "Her love for solitude, led her to avoid the conversations of men." (St. Bernard) She lived in this world like a solitary in the desert.

"God only speaks to souls in solitude." (Philo) God said to Israel, "In the wilderness, I will speak to her heart." (Hosea 2:14) "O happy solitude, where God speaks to his beloved." (St. Jerome) "Silence forces the soul to think of heavenly things." (St. Bernard)

Prayer

O Mary, gain for us an affection for prayer and solitude, so we may seek God alone.

PART 5 PRACTICES OF DEVOTION

Prologue

"The Queen of heaven repays her followers with great generosity." (St. Andrew of Crete) However, there are two conditions. First, when we offer our devotions, our soul must be free from sin. Second, we must persevere in devotion to Mary.

Free of Sin

A soldier each day performed an act of devotion to Mary. One day, when suffering from hunger, Mary brought him food in a dirty container. He said, "I cannot eat from such a dirty container." She replied, "How can I accept your devotions, when your soul is dirty?" He converted, became a religious and Mary appeared to him again at death.

I have written that a follower of Mary cannot be lost. This is true, but there is one condition. They must live without sin or, at least, desire to abandon it. To deliberately sin and to think that Mary will save you, places you outside her protection.

Persevering

Second, the soul must persevere in devotion to Mary. "Only perseverance will merit a crown." (St. Bernard) Thomas A Kempis had devotion but abandoned it. One night, in a dream, he saw Mary embracing his companions but saying to him, "You gave up my devotion. Are you worthy of my embrace?" He resumed his prayer to her. Whoever perseveres will receive his desires.

When St. John Berchmans, S.J. was dying, his companions asked what devotion was most agreeable to Our Lady. “Any devotion that is persevered in”, he answered. I will not list the saint’s various devotions, because you need not use them all. Just persevere in those you have. How many souls would not be in hell if they had only persevered in those devotion to Mary which they practiced at one time.

5.1 The Hail Mary

When Mary hears this prayer, she experiences the same joy that she had when the angel Gabriel came to her. “She always hears these words with pleasure.” (Thomas A Kempis) No one can greet her with better words. (Once a statue of Mary said to St. Bernard, ‘Hail, Bernard.’) “The Hail Mary always gains the grace that we need.” (St. Bonaventure) By saying “Hail Mary” she cannot refuse us grace. “You will receive as many favors at death as you said Hail Mary’s in life.” (St. Gertrude) Even the devils take flight at this prayer. Pope John XXII granted an indulgence to the Hail Mary after hearing about the following incident. A criminal condemned to be burned alive on the vigil of the Assumption said a Hail Mary. He and his clothes remained uninjured.

Formerly, at the Angelus’ bell, all would kneel. Now, some are ashamed to do so. St. Charles Borromeo would kneel, even if it was on the street and in the mud.

Six Suggestions

I suggest the following:

1. On rising and going to bed say three Hail Mary’s adding, “O Mary, by your pure and Immaculate Conception, make my body pure and my soul holy.” Then place yourself under her mantle for the coming day (or night). Try to do this before an image of Our Lady. St. Alphonsus Rodriguez said the Hail Mary at every hour. Angels would wake him at night.
2. Say the Angelus three times, (morning, noon, and evening)
3. On leaving and entering the house, salute Mary with a Hail Mary.
4. Say a “Hail Mary” whenever you pass an image of the Virgin.
5. Begin and end all your actions with a Hail Mary. These include your spiritual actions (Holy Communion, spiritual reading, listening to a homily), and your secular actions (working, eating).
6. In every temptation, say a Hail Mary
If you do this, you will see great benefits. Our Lady promised a happy death to St. Matilda if she said three Hail Marys each day in honor of her power, wisdom and goodness. She told St. Jane Chantel to say the Hail Mary ten times in her honor.

5.2 Novenas

Prepare for each feast of Our Lady by nine days of prayer. On the Assumption, St. Gertrude saw Mary protecting those souls who had prepared for the feast by a novena.

To make a novena, you can do the following:

1. Some mental prayer in the morning or evening
2. Make many acts of love for Mary
3. Read some books each day on her glories

4. Do some bodily mortification
5. During the novena, use interior mortifications (silence, obedience, restraining curiosity). These are the most important.
6. According to the feast you are preparing for, correct your greatest fault and imitate a virtue of Mary.
7. Receive Communion each day of the novena.
8. On the feast, dedicate yourself to Mary's service.
9. Among all her feasts, choose your favorite

5.3 The Rosary

When St. Dominic was battling heretics, Mary revealed the rosary to him. She said, "This land will be sterile until rain falls upon it." This rain was the rosary which Dominic began to preach and which Catholics embraced. Later on, many heretics (like Calvin) spoke against the beads.

How many have been led to salvation by the rosary! We must say the rosary with devotion. "I am more pleased with five decades said slowly than fifteen decades said with little devotion." (Our Lady to St. Eulalia)

It is best to say it on our knees, before a statue. Also, saying it with others is better than reciting it alone.

5.4 Fasting

Many fast on bread and water on Saturday, for that was the day of Mary's constant faith (while Jesus was in the tomb). On account of this devotion, one criminal, who was mortally wounded, was kept alive long enough to make his confession.

By this Saturday fasting, divine mercy flows from Mary. Certainly a sinful life should not be mixed with this devotion, but sinners can begin to fast to begin their conversion. Also, the person should honor Mary on Saturday by hearing Mass or by some devotion.

5.5 Visiting Mary's Images

The Church has always proclaimed the value of images. In Constantinople, a veil covering Our Lady's image parted by itself every Saturday. Mary's followers love to visit Churches dedicated to her and her images. These are "cities of refuge where we find safety from temptations." (St. John Damascene) Emperor St. Henry always visited a Church of Our Lady upon entering a city. Let us visit Mary every day – in a Church or at an image in our home.

On the Vigil of Pentecost in 1611, a great crowd of people gathered in the Church of Mary at Monte Vergine. However, instead of praying, they profaned the feast. A fire broke out and 400 were killed.

5.6 The Scapular

In 1251, Mary appeared to St. Simon Stock, an Englishman, and gave him the brown scapular saying, “Receive this scapular of your Order (Carmelites). Whoever dies clothed in it will not suffer eternal flames.” Mary appeared to Pope John XXII, and commanded him to make known that all who died with this scapular would be freed from purgatory on the Saturday after their death.

The Popes have granted innumerable indulgences. There are many scapulars and I have been careful to receive all of them. (Ed Note – “Stories of the Brown Scapular” by Fr. Howard Rafferty, O. Carm – published by Aylesford, Darien, Il.)

5.7 Confraternities of Our Lady

Many saints, like Francis de Sales and Charles Borromeo established Confraternities (groups of devout people) and wanted all the laity to join them. These groups are like Noah’s ark. They provide lay people with a refuge amid the world’s temptations.

I can see their value from preaching missions. A man who does not attend these meetings, commits more sins than 20 who do attend. A confraternity is a “Tower of David” (Song 4:4), because the members acquire the weapons to overcome Satan and the means to persevere in grace. Non-members do not have these weapons.

Duties of Members of Confraternities

1. “Remember your final end and you shall not sin.” (Sir 7:40) The members must use mental prayer, by which they think about heaven and eternal truths. “My sheep hear my voice.” (Jn 10:27)
2. The Confraternity helps the members to pray constantly. Also, they pray in common and “if two join their voices, the Father hears the prayer.” (Mt 18:19)
3. Members receive Communion more frequently. This is “an antidote against mortal sins.” (Council of Trent)
4. The members do acts of penance and help the sick.
5. The members serve the Mother of God. They are consecrated to her service with their names inscribed in a book. She treats them in a special way. The members say “All good things come to me.” (Wis 7:11)
6. Each member has two goals:
 - a. To serve God and Mary and to save his soul
 - b. To attend the meetings and to draw others to the meetings.

Some Stories

One member abandoned the meetings. When invited to return, he said, “Only when someone cuts off my head.” A few weeks later, an enemy did this.

Those who persevere are blessed. “All her children are clothed with double garments.” (Prov 31:21) In 1586, a young man was dying. He saw a vision of himself before God. The

devils were dragging him to hell. Our Lady intervened. “What business do you have with my servant, who has served me in the Confraternity?” The devils fled.

Another brother, on his deathbed, had a great battle with hell but overcame it. He called out, “What a great blessing to serve our mother.” Then, he died. When dying, the Duke of Popoli told his son “All the good I have done comes from the Confraternity. I value being a member more than I value my title as Duke.”

5.8 Giving Alms

Mary’s followers are generous in giving alms. People have seen visions of her generous devotees. They are in Mary’s arms in heaven. Give an alms every day and increase it on Saturday. If unable to give, then perform a work of mercy.

5.9 Frequent Intercession to Mary

She delights when we seek her help in dangers and in temptations, especially those against purity. Just invoke her name. This has special power over the devil. In temptations, kiss a rosary or scapular, or look at Mary’s image.

5.10 Other Practices

- a. Have a Mass celebrated in thanksgiving to Mary. Mary has revealed how pleasing this is.
- b. Reverence the saints that were closest to her – Joseph, Joachim and Ann. Honor saints devoted to her – John the Beloved, John the Baptist, Elizabeth, Bernard, John Damascene.
- c. Read a book on her glories. Tell others of her. “Take care that your children are also my children.” (Mary to St. Bridget)
- d. Remember the indulgences attached to saying, “Jesus, Mary and Joseph.”

8. Conclusion

With this I conclude. If you persevere to death in honoring Mary and in having others honor her, your salvation is certain. I have much more to say, but what is written is enough to make you desire this great treasure of devotion to Mary. Please accept my desire to lead you to salvation by means of devotion to her. If you have found help in this book, then recommend me to Mary in prayer.

9. Final Prayer

O Mary, I ask you to accept my labors and my desire to see you praised. I wanted to complete this book before I died. Now, I die in peace because I have left this book to continue my preaching. O Mary, lead all who love you to paradise. At the hour of my death, may the passion of Jesus and your intercession enable me to leave this life in God’s grace so I can thank you for all eternity. Amen