

Why Catholics Honor the Blessed Virgin Mary

By Bishop Mark A. Pivarunas, CMRI

Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary
September 8, 1994

Dearly Beloved in Christ,

Among the various characteristics which prove the Catholic Church to be the one, true Church of Christ (the four marks of the Church — one, holy, catholic, apostolic), there is also a particular characteristic which is manifestly based on Holy Scripture and which is unique to Catholicism — the honor and devotion of the Catholic Church to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of Jesus Christ. There is not a single month in the year without several feasts in her honor. Consider the months of August and September, for example, in which there are seven feasts on the ecclesiastical calendar dedicated to her.

This honor and devotion to Mary, the Mother of Jesus Christ, is one of the many things rejected by Protestants. Protestants claim that the Catholic Church's devotion to Mary is not based on Sacred Scripture, that it is an offense to Christ, that no one should pray to Mary because "there is only one Mediator with the Father," that Mary did not always remain a virgin, etc. How important it is for Catholics to know Sacred Scripture and to respond to these attacks on the Mother of Jesus Christ, especially in these times, when there has been such a surge of non-Catholic sects who zealously proselytize their heretical teachings.

Let us begin our defense of the Catholic Church and its devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary by the consideration of the similarities between the Fall of Man and the Redemption of Man.

In the Book of Genesis, we read how our first parents, Adam and Eve, fell into original sin. Satan, in the form of a serpent, first tempted Eve. When Eve had eaten of the forbidden fruit, she then offered it to Adam, who also partook. Adam, as Head of the Human Race, brought about the Fall of Mankind; it was, however, through the cooperation of Eve.

When Adam and Eve had fallen, Almighty God not only punished them and their progeny for this original sin, but He also promised to send a Redeemer.

“And the Lord God said to the serpent... I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel” (Genesis 3:13-15).

Who is the “woman” in the text of Holy Scripture of whom Almighty God set enmities against Satan? Who is “her seed”? What is meant by the words “and she shall crush thy head”?

In the Old Testament, Adam brought about the Fall of Mankind with the cooperation of Eve. In the New Testament, Jesus Christ, the God-Man, brought about our Redemption with the cooperation of the Virgin Mary. Eve, our first parent, was tempted by a fallen angel to disobey the command of God, and she subsequently led Adam into sin. In the New Testament, another angel, the Angel Gabriel, announced the will of God to the Virgin Mary and she, unlike Eve, humbly submitted.

In the Gospel of St. Luke, we read:

“The Angel Gabriel was sent to a Virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the House of David; and the Virgin’s name was Mary” (Luke 1:27).

How did the Angel Gabriel then address her? The Gospel of St. Luke continues:

“Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women!”

“Fear not, Mary, for thou has found grace with God. Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His Name, Jesus... The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee. And therefore also the Holy One which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.”

Who can deny the dignity of the Virgin Mary — chosen to be the Mother of Jesus Christ? The Angel Gabriel, who was sent by God Himself, honored and praised her.

Furthermore, when the Virgin Mary visited her cousin, St. Elizabeth

“was filled with the Holy Ghost, and she cried out with a loud voice and said: ‘Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the Fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?’”

Once again, honor and praise is rendered to the Virgin Mary by St. Elizabeth, “who was filled with the Holy Ghost”

Then during this same visitation, the Virgin Mary responded to her cousin’s praise of her by the prayer so full of humility and of praise to God:

"My soul doth magnify the Lord... because He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid; *for behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.* For He that is mighty hath done great things to me."

As Catholics, members of the one, true Church of Christ, we honor the Virgin Mary, the Mother of Jesus Christ. We call her the Mother of God, because she indeed is the Mother of the one Divine Person, Jesus Christ, Who has both the nature of God and the nature of Man. By this title of "Mother of God," we simply refer to the Virgin Mary as St. Elizabeth did when "filled with the Holy Ghost she cried out... Whence is this to me that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?"

Catholics do not, as Protestants falsely believe, worship the Blessed Virgin Mary. We honor her who was so intimately connected with Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. Yes, there is only one Mediator with the Father — Jesus Christ. Only the God-Man Jesus Christ could have redeemed mankind. Nevertheless, we pray to Mary that she may intercede for us with her Divine Son. How often we request the assistance of prayers from our fellow men — how much more powerful are the prayers and intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary! In the Old Testament, we read how Moses prayed with arms outstretched and interceded with God to procure the victory of the Israelites over their enemies in a crucial battle. As long as he prayed, they were victorious. When he ceased his prayers, the Israelites began to lose. Because of this, it was necessary for two men to hold up Moses' arms in prayer until the battle was won. Also, we read in the Old Testament how Josue prayed to God to have the day prolonged in order to win another crucial battle. If Moses and Josue could have such intercession before God, how much more powerful are the prayers of the Blessed Virgin Mary!

The Gospel of St. John relates two significant accounts which relate to Mary — the wedding feast of Cana and the Crucifixion. Of the first account we read:

"There was a marriage in Cana of Galilee, and the Mother of Jesus was there. And Jesus also was invited, and His disciples, to the marriage. And the wine failing, the Mother of Jesus said to Him, 'They have no wine.' And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what is it to Me and to thee? My hour is not yet come.' His Mother said to the waiters, 'Whatsoever He shall say to you, do ye'" (John 2:1-5).

Jesus Christ then proceeded to work His first public miracle at His Mother's request. Everything related in the Gospels is inspired by God, and there is a reason for it. Does not this narrative of the wedding feast manifest the intercessory power of Mary with Jesus Christ, her Divine Son?

In the second account, also take from the Gospel of St. John, we read:

"There stood by the Cross of Jesus His Mother... When Jesus therefore had seen His Mother and the disciple standing whom He loved, He saith to His Mother: '*Woman, behold thy son...*'" (John 19:25-27).

Just as Eve cooperated with Adam in the Fall of mankind, the Blessed Virgin Mary cooperated with Jesus Christ in our redemption. She "stood by the Cross of Jesus." What anguish, what sorrow did the Mother of Jesus experience at the foot of the Cross as she witnessed the sufferings and death of her Divine Son!

In both accounts, Jesus addressed Mary by the term *woman*. In Hebrew the word used by Jesus was a term which would be addressed to a queen or a woman of high rank. It was a term of great respect.

But why did Jesus Christ address His Mother by the term *woman* at these two significant moments in His life — at His first public miracle, and at His Crucifixion on the Cross?

Our Divine Lord wanted to clearly indicate that His Mother was the Woman spoken of in the Book of Genesis:

"I will put enmities between thee (Satan) and the Woman, between thy seed and her seed, and she shall crush thy head."

Lastly, Catholics firmly believe that Mary, the Mother of Jesus Christ, was "ever Virgin." That Mary was a virgin before and after the miraculous birth of Jesus can be demonstrated from the passage of the Prophet Isaias:

"The Lord Himself shall give you a sign. Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and His Name shall be called Emmanuel."

Note well that the virgin is the subject of the verbs *conceive* and *bear*.

As for after the birth of Jesus, Protestants reject that Mary remained a virgin by their false interpretation of Holy Scripture. To summarize briefly their arguments, they claim that in the Gospel of St. Matthew, we read:

"He (St. Joseph) knew her not till she brought forth her first-born son" (Matthew 1:25).

It is falsely argued on two points — "knew her not till" and "her first-born." In Scriptural usage, *until* expresses what has occurred up to a certain point and leaves the future aside. Thus for example, God says in the book of Isaias, "I am till you grow old" (Is. 46:4). From this are we to infer that God would then cease to be? Of course not! Again in the Book of Psalms, God the Father said to His Divine Son: "Sit Thou at My Right Hand, until I make Thy enemies Thy footstool" (Ps. 109). Will the Messiah, once His enemies are

subdued, relinquish His place of honor? Of course not! So when St. Matthew records, "He knew her not till she brought forth her first-born Son," his principal aim was to tell his readers that Christ's birth was miraculous and that St. Joseph had not part in the conception of Mary's Child. As for the term, "first-born," this was a legal term and did not imply that Mary had other children. The child is called first-born from the fact of its opening the womb and not to contra-distinguish it from subsequent issue.

Protestants also make reference to various passages in the Gospels which refer to "the brethren of the Lord," and from this, they infer that Mary had other children. Once again they falsely interpret the Scriptures. The Hebrew words *ahh*, which is the word for "the brethren," is applicable not only to a brother in the strictest sense, but also to a nephew (see Genesis 14:16); a cousin (see Numbers 16:10); a husband (see Canticles 4:9; Esther 16:12); members of the same race (see Numbers 20:14); an ally (see Amos 1:9); and a friend (see Job 6:15). There are *no* Scriptural references which refer to Mary, the Mother of Jesus, as having other children. Why did Jesus, when dying on the Cross, give the care of His Mother to His Apostle St. John? This would not have been necessary if there were brothers in the strict sense.

The constant tradition of the Church of Christ from the earliest ages of Christianity has always upheld this prerogative of Mary. This is amply proven by the writings of the early Popes, early Councils of the Church, and early Fathers and Doctors of the Church. In conclusion, let us, as members of Christ's one, true Church, fulfill the prophecy made by the Blessed Virgin Mary during her visit to St. Elizabeth — "Behold henceforth all generations shall call me blessed."

In Christo Jesu et Maria Immaculata,
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