

THE Glories of Mary

A LIGUORI CLASSIC

SAINT ALPHONSUS LIGUORI

THE GLORIES OF M ✦ A ✦ R ✦ Y

Saint Alphonsus Maria de Liguori

✦

A NEW TRANSLATION
FROM THE ITALIAN

TWO VOLUMES IN ONE

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EDITOR'S PREFACE



It is more than a century and a half since the first American edition of *The Glories of Mary* appeared. Since that time, the *Glories* has gone through several editions and many printings. When Saint Alphonsus first published *The Glories of Mary* in 1750, the work appeared in two volumes. The first contained the explanation of the *Hail, Holy Queen;* the second, various sermons, meditations, devotions, and prayers. Since the first edition, the *Glories* has often appeared in a single volume. This is the plan we have followed in this edition.

The present volume, therefore, contains substantially the material that appears in Volume VI (1935) and Volume VII (1937) of the *Opere Ascetiche di Sant' Alfonso*, entitled *Le Glorie di Maria*. The last section of Volume VII contained material which was composed by Saint Alphonsus at a later date and which was incorporated into some editions merely for convenience. Thus, the last section has been omitted in this volume.

This present edition is based on an English-language text, published in two volumes in 1962 and 1963, and made as a new translation by John Chapin from the critical Italian edition of *The Glories of Mary (Le Glorie di Maria)*. This volume is not a synopsis or compendium of the *Glories*. It is a new translation of the work as it left the hand of Saint Alphonsus. The content is his; the affections are his; the examples are his.

Kind suggestions from many sources recommending an abbreviation of the work, or at least the elimination of some of the more controversial examples, were set aside in favor of a plan to edit a faithful and unabridged translation of the Alphonsian original. Some of the stories and legends the saint narrates pertain, it is true, to an age and a culture quite different from ours. But the lesson behind the stories is still practical and valid, and for that reason the original examples have been retained.

Several features of the new translation should be noted. An attempt has been made to render many involved grammatical constructions of the original in readable vernacular idiom. Sentences have been dissected and participial expressions, so cumbersome in previous versions, appear in a more felicitous clause form. Matter which is obviously repetitious, as when Saint Alphonsus refers to an authority in his own words and then gives the quotation verbatim, has been synthesized. This translation gives either the paraphrase or the quotation, seldom both. Where Saint Alphonsus refers to holy persons who have since been beatified or canonized, we have referred to them as Saint Thomas More, Saint Robert Bellarmine, rather than merely Sir Thomas More, Cardinal Bellarmine, and so on.

Footnotes have been reduced to a minimum. Where they have been employed, the references are explanatory rather than mere citations. Sources can be verified quickly and easily by referring to the critical Italian edition, which is superbly annotated.

The Confraternity Edition of the sacred Scriptures has been used wherever feasible. In certain instances, however, it was deemed expedient to give the Douay-Rheims translation. Saint Alphonsus used the Latin Vulgate exclusively and there are instances where his doctrine or implications would be lost, or at least obscured, by the use of any English text other than one based on the Vulgate. Particularly is this true in the many citations from the Book of Ecclesiasticus (Sirach).

Perhaps the most significant differentiating feature of the present translation is the consistent use of “you” and “your” in place of “thou” and its forms.

Saint Alphonsus wrote *The Glories of Mary* as a defense of Our Lady at a time when Jansenistic writers were ridiculing devotion to Mary, singling out the “Hail, Holy Queen” for particular criticism. This explains the saint’s approach to the subject—his numerous citations from the Fathers, Doctors, and theologians of the Church. It explains, too, the unction and the fervor that characterize these pages. His was a Latin temperament, strong in its loves, violent in its antagonisms. Some have suggested toning down his exuberances of expression, streamlining the text and prayers. This suggestion, too, has been set aside. To eliminate the unction, especially of the affections, would be to dissipate the

distinctive flavor that makes these writings his. And it is the distinctive Alphonsian flavor that is the secret of the appeal that *The Glories of Mary* has always exerted in the field of Marian literature.

The Glories of Mary is, beyond all doubt, Saint Alphonsus's masterpiece. The saint's own deep, personal love of Our Lady would have enabled him to write originally, enthusiastically, almost inexhaustibly, in honor of his Queen. But he chose to give the world a summary of Christian tradition in praise of Mary. In the *Glories*, he allows the Church, as it were, to speak for herself by the voice of the prophets, patriarchs, apostles, pontiffs, the Doctors and Fathers and saints of all ages and climes. His work is no mere compilation, however. A writer named Candido Romano has said: "It is a mosaic executed by a clever artist … or better, a work done in enamel, adorned with jewels … a beautiful harmony of light and shade and color … all revealing the genius of the master who planned the work and executed it with consummate skill."

Quoted in the *Acts of Conferring the Doctorate* are these words: "Saint Alphonsus has given us an excellent work—perfect from every point of view. It is worthy of a man of his great intellectual gifts and profound knowledge. It not only promotes piety among the faithful; it provides ample material for theologians and preachers of the Word of God. A cursory reading may convey the impression that it is just an ordinary book. But an attentive study of the contents will reveal a veritable mine of ecclesiastical lore and Marian theology.… The manna of sacred Scripture seemed to have the property of adapting itself to the taste of everyone who ate it. The same seems to be true of *The Glories of Mary*. It satisfies the needs and the taste of the most diverse readers."

It is easy to understand why Pope Pius VII said what he did when the grave of Saint Alphonsus was opened at Pagani. "Let the three fingers of his right hand, those fingers that have written so well for the honor of God, of the Blessed Virgin, and of our holy faith, be carefully preserved and sent to Rome."

Cardinal Deschamps of Belgium (1810–1883) called Saint Alphonsus's *Glories of Mary* his spiritual thermometer. "When I am faithful to grace," he wrote, "this book enlightens me and sustains my confidence. When I grow negligent and become lukewarm, it hardly suits

my taste. It is, in a way, too much for me. When this happens, I enter into myself and I recognize without difficulty that it is not the light that has diminished its brightness, but my interior eye that is no longer able to bear its brilliance. Then I try to restore to the eye of my soul its purity and power, and soon the thermometer rises."

May this little work be, for all lovers of Mary, our spiritual thermometer. Even more. May it serve immeasurably to increase our fervor, our devotion, our love for this great Queen. Saint Alphonsus laid his sword at Mary's altar and dedicated his life to her. May we, his readers, be inspired to consecrate our lives to Mary in every detail as he did. May our lives, like his, reverberate incessantly, interminably, in praise of the glories of Mary!

Charles G. Fehrenbach, C.Ss.R.
Editor of the 1962/1963 Edition

READING
THE GLORIES OF MARY



Saint Alphonsus is well known for his deep and affectionate devotion to the Blessed Mother. He wrote *The Glories of Mary* in 1750 at the mature age of fifty-four as a testament to his unfailing love for the mother of his Lord. His aim in doing so was to deepen his readers' love for Mary. To achieve this end, Alphonsus gathered from all the sources available to him at the time all that would serve to draw his readers closer to the woman hailed by saints and angels alike as God's closest and most highly favored daughter.

Alphonsus put his heart and soul into this work. His highly complex mosaic of teachings, anecdotes, prayers, and practices places Mary at the very heart of the Church and depicts her as having an intimate role in the redemptive action of her son.

An Open Book

One way of approaching this great classic of Catholic Marian devotion is to examine its structure. Alphonsus opens *The Glories* with a prayer to Jesus and Mary (page xxi). This opening supplication is followed by an introduction where he explains his reasons for writing the book and points out the common bond he shares with his readers by virtue of Mary's spiritual motherhood (pages xxiii–xxvi). This, in turn, is followed by a brief explanatory note to his readers of the theological correctness of some of his terms; for example, Mary's mediation of grace and her cooperation in the work of redemption (page xxvii).

The body of the book is divided into parts, the first of which consists of a phrase-by-phrase exposition of the *Salve Regina* (pages 1–158), followed by prayers to Our Lady (pages 159–176), a series of shorter tracts on various Marian feasts (pages 177–280), dolors (pages 281–

326), virtues (pages 327–358), and devotional practices (pages 359–384). At the end of the work, Alphonsus offers a brief conclusion where he expresses his hope that his work will deepen his readers' devotion to Mary. He also turns to Mary herself and expresses his joy that he has left on earth a book that will continue to praise and extol her long after her death.

The greatest strength of this structure is its open-ended character. Each part falling between the introduction and the conclusion—be it his polished exposition of the *Salve Regina* or one of the smaller treatises and practices—is self-contained and could easily have been published on its own. By placing them together in a single work dedicated to the Blessed Mother, Alphonsus gives the reader the impression that no single literary form or style could ever exhaust the glories of this humble maiden from Nazareth. This open-ended structure corresponds directly to the praise of Mary which, as Alphonsus states in his introduction, "is an inexhaustible fount; the more it is enlarged, the fuller it gets."

Alphonsus's approach displays a clearly thought-out method of presentation that provides a strong measure of internal unity. Most of the parts that make up *The Glories* follow a fourfold method of (1) theme; (2) exposition; (3) example; and (4) prayer. Alphonsus begins with a brief statement of the topic he will be treating. He then develops his topic at length, usually with numerous sayings from the Fathers, Doctors, and saints of the Church. After this exposition, he provides a concrete story from the lives of the saints that embodies the particular point he is trying to make. He concludes each section with a prayer to Mary, asking her for the grace to make that value a concrete reality in the reader's life.

This method immerses his readers in the tradition of the Church and encourages them to think the great thoughts the saints have thought about Mary, to read how others have tried to express their love for her, to pray as they have prayed, and, in doing so, to develop a lasting devotion to the spiritual Mother of all believers. Because it is used nearly throughout the entire work, the method also serves to bind the various parts together and gives the reader a clear idea of what to expect as he or she moves from one part to the next.

In addition to this fourfold method, Alphonsus uses the arrangement

of his material as a way of leading his readers into a deep devotional practice. He does this by placing the more abstract considerations at the beginning and those of a more practical nature at the end. The exposition of the *Salve Regina* is a far cry from the simple descriptions of practices of devotion in honor of Mary found at the end. This movement from teaching to practice marks the general flow of the entire work. Teaching, in Alphonsus's mind, must be reinforced by practice, and vice versa. One must practice devotion to Mary if one wishes to foster a deep and lasting love for her. Otherwise, one runs the risk of deceiving oneself with empty words and promises.

What He Says

A brief examination of the principal parts of *The Glories* reveals Alphonsus's mastery of spiritual and pastoral theology.

Salve Regina

In Part I, Alphonsus provides a phrase-by-phrase exposition of the *Salve Regina*. Each phrase of this popular Marian prayer is examined according to the fourfold method outlined previously. In doing so, Alphonsus reveals the depth of meaning present in this simple prayer in praise of God's Mother. By gathering the sayings of the Fathers, Doctors, and saints of the Church, he steeps his readers in the tradition of the Church and gives them a sense of being in the midst of the communion of saints. This literary device naturally carries over into the prayer itself. After reading *The Glories*, one's recitation of the prayer cannot help but take on deeper and fresher dimensions.

The examples Alphonsus uses to concretize the themes under consideration, moreover, usually focus on a particular attribute with which the reader can easily identify: lack of confidence in God, fear of judgment, shame of confessing one's sins, and so forth. Alphonsus chooses examples that will help the reader to overcome whatever may be keeping him or her from turning to Mary. In these examples also the reader finds a reflection of who he or she is or would like one day to become.

After Alphonsus's exhaustive exposition of the *Salve Regina*, he offers a series of shorter treatises on various Marian themes. Except for the treatment of Mary's virtues and his sampling of Marian prayers and devotions, Alphonsus follows roughly the same method he used in his treatment of the *Salve Regina*. These treatises are shorter and generally more practical in that they provide concrete tools for preaching and instruction on Mary.

What follows are some brief commentaries on the themes of the remaining parts of *The Glories of Mary*.

Principal Feasts of Mary

This part focuses on the seven major Marian feasts: Mary's Immaculate Conception, her birth, her presentation, the Annunciation, the visitation, her purification, and her Assumption. Using the same method found in Part I, Alphonsus tries to bridge whatever gaps might exist between the reader's personal devotion to Mary and the Church's liturgical celebrations. By introducing a treatise dedicated to the major Marian feasts, Alphonsus emphasizes the intimate relation between personal and communal devotion to Mary.

Dolors of Mary

This part focuses on the sorrows of Mary. It emphasizes her participation in the sufferings of her son, showing that she collaborated in the work of redemption not just at Jesus' birth but also during the Way of the Cross. It begins with a discourse on Mary under the title of "Queen of martyrs," then offers a sermon on the dolors of Mary before entering into an extended reflection on each of her seven sorrows: Simeon's prophecy, the flight into Egypt, her meeting with Jesus on the way to Calvary, the death of Jesus, the piercing of his side and descent from the cross, and his burial.

The thrust of this section is to demonstrate Mary's total unity with the suffering of her son. Mary's sorrows, moreover, make her approachable. In them, readers see someone human like themselves, who will listen to them, understand what they themselves are going through, and lend a helping hand.

Virtues of Mary

This part of *The Glories* focuses on the ten virtues most closely associated with Mary: humility, charity towards God, charity towards neighbor, faith, hope, chastity, poverty, obedience, patience, and a spirit of prayer. In Alphonsus's day, these virtues were those most closely associated with the life of perfection and especially (although not exclusively) with religious life. Today, he most likely would emphasize these virtues as expressions of discipleship, a concept which spans the various "states of life" in the Church and which would appeal to all members of Christ's Body, regardless of their state in life. In this part Alphonsus omits the examples found at the end of most of the other sections. The reasons should be obvious. Mary herself is the example par excellence of the virtues he is extolling. There is no need to point to anyone or anything else.

Practices of Devotion in Honor of Mary

In this part, Alphonsus outlines the various popular devotions close to the heart of Mary—the Hail Mary, novenas in her honor, the rosary, her Office, fasting, visiting her images, wearing her scapular, confraternities dedicated to her, giving alms in her honor, having recourse to her—to name but a few. In this practical section, Alphonsus takes great pains not only to describe the makeup of each devotion, but also to delineate the various ways of putting it into practice. His aim in all of this is to provide his readers with as many choices as possible so that they will be able to make appropriate selections that fit into the exigencies of their own lives.

Observations

This brief exposition of the structure, method, and content of *The Glories* invites a number of observations.

First, the most fundamental impression the reader should receive from this book is that of Alphonsus's great love for Mary and his desire to kindle in as many hearts as possible a deep and lasting devotion to her.

Second, it must be remembered that in expressing his love for the

Madonna and in the suggestions he made to his audience, Alphonsus was strongly influenced by the culture of his day. Born and raised in the atmosphere of eighteenth-century Bourbon Naples, a culture that placed great emphasis on strong familiar ties, patrician and feudal loyalties, and deep emotional expressions of fealty, love, and devotion, it makes perfect sense that Alphonsus would transfer his understanding of the nature of "right relationships" to the divine plane and, in the case of Mary, to the saintly.

In the third place, *The Glories* not only stands as a monument to Catholic practice and devotion as it was understood in Alphonsus's day and in many parts of the world down to the dawn of the Second Vatican Council, but also encourages us to examine our own culture and understanding of "right relationships," so that we can develop expressions of love and devotion to Mary appropriate to our own time and place.

Fourth, when reading *The Glories*, it must be remembered that Alphonsus wrote during a time when Christ's divinity was emphasized over his humanity and Mary had a correspondingly exalted place in Catholic thought and piety. Since the end of the Second Vatican Council, the emphasis has been more on Christ's humanity, working up to his divinity, and an emphasis of Mary's role as servant of the Lord, working up to her more exalted titles. Whenever such shifts in Catholic thought and piety occur, they need to be taken into account when reading and interpreting devotional works of another time and place.

Fifth, Alphonsus wrote *The Glories* for a predominantly Catholic audience during a time when Christians from other denominations were looked upon with great suspicion. Although it has a long way to go, ecumenism since that time has made great strides in promoting an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding. In the midst of these developments, Mary has gradually emerged from being a source of great contention among believers to become a symbol of servanthood and the meaning of discipleship. In reading *The Glories*, today's readers face the twofold challenge of remaining thoroughly Catholic and true to its tradition, yet opening themselves up in appropriate and respectful ways to this wider ecumenical audience.

Sixth, Alphonsus's presentation of Mary's active cooperation in

Christ's redemptive action has special significance for all of her spiritual sons and daughters. As the Mother of the Church, she demonstrates in her humble *fiat* the openness and willingness to respond to God's grace that all Christ's disciples should aspire to. Looking at Mary as the model disciple in no way takes away from her unique role in God's salvific plan. On the contrary, it actually reinforces it. Mary could not be the model of discipleship if she had not been specially chosen by God to follow Jesus on every step of his redemptive journey. She was chosen to do this when she was asked to be God's mother, and she responded full to that call from the depths of her soul and with every aspect of her being. Her spiritual children are called to imitate her in this regard in their own lives. It is for this reason they invoke her under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix (see Vatican II, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, #24).

Finally, devotion to Mary rests at the very heart of the Church. All authentic private devotion to Mary must orient the believer to the Church's liturgical life and the reception of the sacraments. These same celebrations, in turn, call each and every believer to deepen his or her relationship to Mary. This circular relationship exists in all mature Marian devotion. Private devotion leads to the celebration of the liturgy, the sacraments, and to an ever deeper personal relationship to Mary.

Dennis Billy, C.Ss.R.
March 20, 2000

THE AUTHOR'S PRAYER TO JESUS AND MARY



My most loving Redeemer and Lord Jesus Christ, I, your unworthy servant, know how much pleasure anyone gives you who strives to praise and glorify your most holy Mother. You love her so tenderly. I know how much you desire to see her known and loved by everybody. And so I have resolved to publish this book which treats of her glories.

I do not know to whom I could better dedicate it than to you, who have her glory so much at heart. And so to you I dedicate and commend it. Accept this trifling tribute of the love I bear to you and your dear Mother. Bless it, and grant that all who read these pages may burn with love for this Immaculate Virgin in whom you have placed our hope and the assurance of our salvation. And as a reward for my poor labor, give me, I beg of you, that great love of Mary which I desire to see enkindled in the hearts of all my readers.

I fly to you, my most sweet Lady and Mother Mary. You are well aware that, after Jesus, I place all my hope of salvation in you. I acknowledge that everything good—my conversion, my vocation to renounce the world, and all the other graces I have received from God—all comes from you. You know that in order to see you loved by everybody, and as a token of gratitude for all you have done for me, I have tried in all my preaching, both public and private, to promote a deep devotion to you.

I hope to continue doing this till my last breath, but my advanced years and feeble health warn me that I am near the end of my pilgrimage and that my entry into eternity is imminent. And so I wish, before I die, to leave this book to the world, so that, in my place, it may continue to preach your glories and encourage others to praise you and glorify the tender mercy you show to those who are devoted to you.

I trust, most beloved Queen, that your gracious heart will accept this little gift. Though lacking in merit, it is a gift of love. Stretch out then,

that same tender hand that snatched me from the world and delivered me from hell and receive this little book and consider it as your own. But know at the same time, O Mary, that I do expect a reward for my offering. And it is this, that I may love you more and more from this day forth, and that all who read this book may be inflamed with the same love for you, and that their desire of loving you and seeing you loved by others may go on every day always increasing and that they may labor with affection to spread and promote your glories and confidence in your most powerful intercession. Amen. So I hope, so may it be.

Your most loving, though unworthy, servant
Alphonsus de Liguori of the Most Holy Redeemer

INTRODUCTION BY SAINT ALPHONSUS



Beloved Reader and Brother in Mary: The devotion that led me to write this book, and moves you to read it, makes us happy children of the same good Mother. Should you hear it said that I might have spared myself the labor, since there are already so many learned works on the same subject, I hope that you will reply in the words of the Abbot Francone: “The praise of Mary is an inexhaustible fountain. The more it is enlarged, the fuller it gets; and the more you fill it, so much the more is it enlarged.” In short, the Blessed Virgin is so great and so exalted that the more we say in praise of her, the more there remains to be said. So much so that Saint Augustine declares: “If all the tongues of men were put together, and even if each of their members were changed into a tongue, they would not suffice to praise Mary as much as she deserves.”

I have seen innumerable works, large and small, which treat of the glories of Mary. But they were either rare, or bulky, or did not answer the object I have in view. And so I endeavored to collect, from as many authors as I could lay my hands on, choice passages, especially quotations from the Fathers and theologians, which suit my purpose. These I have gathered together in this book, so that devout souls may, with little trouble and little expense, read of the glories of Mary and be inflamed with love for Mary. More particularly have I endeavored to provide priests with material for sermons, so that they may spread devotion to the Mother of God

Worldly lovers often speak of those they love, and praise them so that these individuals will be esteemed and praised by others. There are people who claim to be lovers of Mary. Yet they seldom speak of her or endeavor to inspire others to love her. Their love cannot be very great. Those who really love Our Lady do not act that way. They endeavor to praise her always and everywhere and to make the whole world love her. They never lose an opportunity, either in public or in private, of enkindling in the hearts of others the flame of love towards Our Lady

with which they themselves burn.

So that everyone may be convinced, both for his own good and for the good of others, how important it is to promote devotion to Mary, let me recall for you what theologians say on the subject.

Saint Bonaventure maintains that those who make the glories of Mary known to others are certain of salvation. This opinion is confirmed by Richard of Saint Lawrence who declares that to honor Mary is to gain eternal life. He says: “Our Lady will honor in the next world those who honor her in this.” Is there anyone not aware of the promise made by Mary herself in the words of Ecclesiasticus: *They that explain me shall have life everlasting* (Ecclus 24:31)? The Church applies this passage to Mary in the Office of the Immaculate Conception.

“Rejoice then,” exclaims Saint Bonaventure (who did so much to make the glories of Mary known), “rejoice and be glad in her; for many good things are prepared for those who praise her.” He tells us that the whole of the Scriptures is full of the praises of Mary and he adds: “Let us therefore always honor with our hearts and tongues this Blessed Lady so that she may conduct us into the kingdom of the blessed.”

We learn from the revelations of Saint Bridget that the Blessed Bishop Emingo was in the habit of always beginning his sermons with the praises of Mary. One day the Blessed Virgin appeared to the saint and told her to tell the bishop that she (Mary) would be his mother, that he would die a holy death and that she herself would present his soul to God. Shortly afterwards, the bishop died a peaceful and saintly death.

Mary also appeared to a Dominican friar who always concluded his sermons by speaking of her. When he lay dying, Mary defended him from the devil, consoled him, and then herself carried his devout soul off to heaven. The pious Thomas à Kempis pictures Mary recommending to her Son a soul who had honored her in life, and saying: “My Son, have mercy on the soul of this servant of yours who loved and honored me.”

As to the advantage of this devotion for everybody, Saint Anselm has this to say: “How can it be otherwise than that the salvation of sinners should come from singing the praises of her whose womb was made the way through which the Savior came to save sinners?” And if the opinion is true (and I consider it indisputably true, as I shall point out in the fifth

chapter) that all graces are dispensed by Mary, and that all who are saved obtain salvation through Mary, it follows naturally that everything depends on the preaching of Mary's glories and confidence in her intercession. We know that this was the way Saint Bernardine of Siena sanctified a great portion of Italy and the way Saint Dominic converted so many provinces. Saint Louis Bertrand never failed in his sermons to exhort his hearers to devotion to Mary. Many other preachers have followed the same practice.

I find that Father Paul Segneri the younger, who was a very renowned missionary, used to preach a sermon on devotion to Mary in every mission. He called that his favorite sermon. In our own missions we have an inviolable rule to do the same. And we can attest, in all truth, that no sermon is more profitable and none arouses more compunction in the hearts of people than the sermon on the mercy of Mary. I say "on the mercy of Mary," for, in the words of Saint Bernard, "we praise her virginity, we admire her humility, but, being sinners, we are attracted more by her mercy. We recall it oftener and invoke it more earnestly."

For this reason, I leave it to other authors to praise the other prerogatives of Mary and I confine myself, for the most part, to her mercy and the power of her intercession. I have gathered, as far as I was able (and it was the work of many years), all that the Fathers of the Church and the most celebrated authors have to say on the subject. I find that the mercy and power of Our Lady are admirably portrayed in the prayer *Salve Regina* (Hail, Holy Queen). Since all priests, secular as well as religious, are obliged to recite this prayer daily for the greater part of the year, I propose to divide and explain this beautiful prayer in separate chapters of this book. Over and above this, I thought Mary's clients would be pleased if I added some discourses pertaining to her principal feasts and her special virtues and if I incorporated devotions and pious practices which many of her servants have used and which have been approved by the Church.

Beloved Reader, if this book should find favor with you, I beg that you will recommend me to the Blessed Virgin so that she will give me great confidence in her protection. Beg this grace for me, and I promise that no matter who you may be, I will ask the same for you. Happy are

they who bind themselves with love and confidence to these two anchors of salvation, Jesus and Mary! Certainly they will not be lost. Let us both then say, with the devout Alphonsus Rodriguez: “Jesus and Mary, my two best loves, for you may I suffer; for you may I die. Let me belong entirely to you and not to myself.”

Let us love Jesus and Mary and become saints. We cannot hope or pray for anything better. Farewell then, until we meet in paradise, at the feet of this most sweet Mother and of this most loving son. May we praise them there and love them face to face for all eternity. Amen.

DECLARATION OF THE AUTHOR



Lest anyone think that any propositions expounded in this book are too advanced, I declare that I mean them in the sense in which they are conformable to the teachings of Holy Church and of sound theology. For example, in calling Mary our *mediatress*, I mean that she is a mediatrix of *grace*, and that her office differs from that of Jesus Christ, who is our principal and sole mediator of *justice*. In calling Mary *omnipotent* (as Saint John Damascene, Saint Peter Damian, Saint Bonaventure, Saint Cosmas of Jerusalem, and others have done), I intend to signify that, as Mother of God, she obtains from him by her prayers all that she asks for the benefit of her clients. Taken absolutely, neither mediation nor omnipotence is attributable to Mary, since she is only a creature. In calling her our *hope*, I mean that all graces (as Saint Bernard teaches) pass through her hands.

PART I



COMMENTARY ON THE HAIL, HOLY QUEEN OR SALVE REGINA

Hail, holy queen, Mother of mercy, our life, our sweetness and our hope! To you do we cry, poor banished children of Eve. To you do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears. Turn then, most gracious advocate, your eyes of mercy toward us. And after this, our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of your womb, Jesus. O clement! O loving! O sweet Virgin Mary!

1

HAIL, HOLY QUEEN, MOTHER OF MERCY



Our Confidence in Mary Should Be Great Because She Is the Queen of Mercy

The Blessed Virgin Mary was chosen to be the Mother of the King of Kings. Accordingly, holy Church honors her, and wants everyone to honor her, with the glorious title of "Queen."

Saint Athanasius mentions how proper this is in his sermon on the Annunciation: "If he who was born of the virgin is a king, then the one who bore him is rightly called a lady and a queen." Ever since the moment that Mary gave her consent to be the Mother of the Eternal Word, adds Saint Bernardine of Siena, she deserved to be called the queen of the whole world and of every creature in it. If Jesus took his flesh from Mary, how can Mary be disjoined from the royal dignity of her son? So asks Arnold the Abbot. We must conclude, he infers, that not only the kingdom's glory, but the very kingdom itself, belongs to both the Son and the Mother.

The Abbot Rupert also says that if Jesus is the king of the universe, then Mary is its queen. And Saint Bernardine of Siena assures us that all creatures who serve God must also serve Mary. All angels, all men, all things in heaven and on earth, inasmuch as they are subject to God's dominion, are also subject to Mary. That is why the Abbot Guerric turns to Mary and says: "Continue, O Mary, to feel that all that your Son possesses is yours. Have no hesitation in acting as a queen, as Mother of the King, and as his spouse, for both the kingdom and the power over it belong to you."

There is no doubt, then, that Mary is a queen. But let everyone know, for his own consolation, that she is a most sweet, a most merciful queen, completely dedicated to the well-being of sinners. That is why the

Church wants us to greet her in this prayer as the “queen of mercy.”

The very name of queen, observes Saint Albert the Great, implies kindness to the poor and solicitude for them. It is different from the title of empress, which usually denotes severity and rigor. According to Seneca, the greatness of kings and queens consists in helping the unfortunate. Tyrants have their own good in view; kings should look to the good of their subjects. That is why kings, when they are consecrated, have their heads anointed with oil. Oil is a symbol of mercy, and it signifies that when a king governs, he should, before all else, be kind and compassionate to his subjects.

It is obvious, therefore, that kings should first and foremost spend themselves in acts of mercy. At the same time, of course, they must not neglect to exercise justice towards the guilty when this is necessary. Mary, however, is different. Though she is queen, she is not a queen of justice. That is to say, she is not concerned with punishing. She is a queen of mercy, committed to pity and pardon. Holy Church expressly wants us to call her a “queen of mercy.”

The Grand Chancellor of Paris, John Gerson, meditating on these words of David: *These two things have I heard, that power belongs to God, and mercy to you, O Lord* (Ps 61:12, 13), reasoned this way—since God’s kingdom consists of two elements, justice and mercy, God decided to divide his kingdom. Justice he reserved to himself; mercy he transmitted to Mary, ordaining that all mercies which come to human beings should come through Mary’s hands, and that these mercies should be distributed according to her choice. Saint Thomas, in the preface to his commentary on the Canonical Epistles holds the same opinion. He says that when the Blessed Virgin conceived the Eternal Word in her womb, she obtained half of his kingdom. Mary became the queen of mercy, he says, while the distribution of justice remained in the hands of her son.[1]

The Eternal Father appointed Jesus Christ the King of justice and made him the judge of the whole world. For this reason, the prophet says: *O God, with your judgment endow the king, and with your justice the king’s son* (Ps 71:2). Commenting on this, a learned interpreter says: “Lord, you have given justice to your Son, because you have given mercy to the King’s Mother.”

Saint Bonaventure paraphrases this passage of David by saying: "O God, give judgment to the King and mercy to his Mother." Ernest, the Archbishop of Prague, also says that the Eternal Father gave to his Son the office of judging and punishing and to his Mother the office of pitying and comforting." Hence we can say that the prophet David foretold that God himself, as it were, consecrated Mary as the queen of mercy, anointing her with the oil of gladness: *God has anointed you with the oil of gladness* (Ps 44:8). God did this, according to Saint Bonaventure, so that all the children of Adam might be happy in the thought of having in heaven so great a queen, a queen anointed with the balm of mercy, a queen all full of kindness.

Saint Albert the Great appropriately applies to Mary the history of Queen Esther who was a figure of our heavenly queen. In the fourth chapter of the book of Esther, we read that during the reign of Ahasuerus a decree was issued ordering all Jews to be killed. At that time Mordecai, one of their number, sought help from Esther, begging her to use her influence with the king and have the decree revoked. At first Esther refused because she was afraid that Ahasuerus would become even more angry. But Mordecai chided her and told her she should not think of saving merely herself: the Lord had put her on the throne to insure the safety of all the Jews: *Think not that you may save your life only, because you are in the king's house more than all Jews* (Est 4:13). Just as Mordecai spoke to Esther, so we poor sinners can speak to Mary, our queen, should she ever refuse to plead with God and save us from the punishment we deserve. "Do not think, dear lady," we can say, "that the Lord has made you queen of the universe merely for your own sake. He gave you the power you have so that you could feel all the more pity for us and help us all the more."

When Esther appeared before King Ahasuerus, he said lovingly: *What do you ask of me, Esther?* The queen answered: *If I have found favor in your sight, O king … give me … my people for whom I pray* (Est 7:2–3). Ahasuerus's heart was touched and he immediately ordered the decree to be revoked.

Now, if Ahasuerus spared the Jews because he loved Esther, how can God, who loves Mary immensely, fail to hear her when she prays for the sinners who recommend themselves to her? *If I have found favor in your*

sight, O king … Mary knows very well that she has found favor in God's sight. She knows very well that she alone of all creatures has found the grace lost by men, that she is the favorite of the Lord, loved by him more than all the angels and saints together. Therefore she can well say: "Give me my people, for whom I pray." Is it possible for God not to hear her? Is there anyone who has never heard of the power of Mary's prayers with God? *On her tongue is kindly counsel* (Prov 31:26). Her every prayer is like a law established by God—a decision, we might say, on God's part to show mercy toward all for whom Mary intercedes.

Saint Bernard asks why the Church calls Mary the "queen of mercy." And he answers that it is because we believe that Mary opens up the vaults of God's mercy to anyone she likes, when she likes, and as she likes. There is not a sinner, he adds, no matter how wicked, who is lost as long as Mary protects him.

Perhaps there are some who fear that Mary would refuse to pray for this or that sinner, because she sees him hopelessly involved in sin. Or some may feel that we ought to be frightened by the majesty and holiness of this great queen. Saint Gregory puts us at ease. The higher Mary's position, he says, and the greater her holiness, the more gentle and compassionate she is with sinners who want to amend and who have recourse to her. Kings and queens, by the very display of their majesty, inspire awe and their subjects are afraid to come into their presence. But how can sinners, says Saint Bernard, be afraid of this queen of mercy? Mary is not stern or forbidding. "Why should weak humanity fear to approach Mary? There is nothing severe about her, nothing frightening. She is unspeakably sweet, and offers milk and wool to all." Mary not only gives, but she goes out of her way to offer to all, no matter who they are, the milk of mercy to quicken their confidence, and the wool of protection to shelter them from the storms of divine justice.

Suetonius tells us that the Emperor Titus was so tender-hearted that he could never refuse a favor. At times, in fact, he promised more than he was asked. When this was brought to his attention, he replied that a prince should never send anyone away discontented.[2] But once in a while Titus must have lied or at least was unable to keep his promise. But Mary cannot lie and certainly she has sufficient power to obtain for

her clients every single favor that they ask. Her heart is so kind and compassionate that, if anyone prays to her, she cannot bear to send him away unsatisfied. “She is so kind,” says Louis Blosius, “that she never lets anyone go away disappointed.”

How could you, O Mother of Mercy, asked Saint Bernard, refuse to help the miserable, since you are the queen of mercy? And who are the most likely candidates for mercy, if not unfortunate sinners? “And that is why I,” he adds, “the most wretched of all sinners, am the first of your subjects. You have to take more care of me than of the rest. Have pity on all of us, therefore, O queen of mercy, and do all in your power to save us.”

O most holy virgin, prays Saint Gregory of Nicomedia,[3] please do not claim that you are unable to help us because of the number of our sins. Your power and mercy are so great that they can outweigh any number of sins. Nothing can resist your power, for the Creator himself considers your glory as his own. And your son, exulting in this glory, fulfills all your petitions as if he were paying back a debt. Saint Gregory is saying, in effect, that even though Mary has an infinite obligation towards her son because he chose her to be his mother, at the same time we cannot deny that the son is indebted to his mother for giving him his human nature. And that is why, in recompense to Mary who now enjoys his glory, Jesus especially honors her by always hearing her prayers.

How great, then, should be our confidence in this queen, when we know on the one hand how powerful she is with God, and on the other how tremendously rich in mercy she is—so much so that there is not a person on earth who does not share in Mary’s kindness. The Blessed Virgin herself revealed this to Saint Bridget. “I am the queen of the world and the Mother of Mercy. I am the joy of the just and the gate that opens up to sinners the way to God. There is no sinner on earth so abandoned that, while he lives, he will be deprived of my mercy. If he receives no other grace, he will receive at least the grace to be less frequently tempted by the devils than he would otherwise be.”

“Nobody,” adds Our Lady, “provided he has not been already definitely damned (and this refers to the final irrevocable sentence of damnation), is so cut off from God that he will not return to God and find mercy if he calls on me. Everybody calls me the Mother of Mercy,

and indeed it is God's mercy that has made me merciful." She concludes with these words: "He will be very miserable who does not approach me, merciful as I am, when he can do so." There is no doubt then that that man will be miserable forever in the life to come who in this life can have recourse to Mary (who is so compassionate and so eager to help everyone), but who refuses to do so and thus damns himself.

Come, then, you and I—if we want to be saved, let us hasten to the feet of this sweetest of queens. If we are frightened and discouraged at the sight of our sins, we must realize that it was precisely for this that Mary was made the queen of mercy, to protect and save the greatest and most abandoned sinners who beg her for help. These sinners are to be her crown in heaven, according to the words of her divine spouse: *Come from Libanus, my spouse, come from Libanus, come; you shall be crowned … from the dens of the lions, from the mountains of the leopards* (Cant 4:8). What else are these dens of wild beasts and monsters but wretched sinners? Their souls have become dens of sin and they are the most hideous monsters that can be found. It is these same miserable sinners, comments the Abbot Rupert, the sinners you have saved, O Mary, who will crown you in heaven. Their salvation will be your crown, a worthy and becoming crown for a queen of mercy.

The following example illustrates this point.

Example

It is related in the life of Sister Catherine of Saint Augustine, that in the city where this servant of God lived, there was a woman called Mary, who had been a sinner in her youth and even in her advanced age had continued in her evil ways. She was so wicked that the people of the place drove her away. Reduced to living in a cave, she practically rotted to death, neglected by everybody and without the sacraments. Like an animal, she was buried in a field.

Sister Catherine, who used to pray much for the dying, learned of this unfortunate woman's death. However, she never thought of praying for her because she, like everybody else, considered her already damned.

After four years, a soul from purgatory appeared to Sister Catherine

and said: “Sister Catherine, how miserable I am! You recommend all the dying to the mercy of God, yet my soul is the only one you did not pray for.” “And who are you?” asked the servant of God. “I am that poor Mary who died in the cave, was the reply.” “But how were you saved?” asked Catherine. “I was saved by the mercy of the Blessed Virgin Mary. When I realized that I was dying and saw myself so abandoned and so loaded with sins, I turned to the Mother of God and said to her: ‘O Lady, you are the refuge of the abandoned. Right now everybody has abandoned me. You are my only hope. Only you can save me. Have pity on me.’ The Blessed Virgin obtained the grace of contrition for me. I died and I was saved. More than this. Our Lady has obtained for me the grace to have my time of punishment shortened. She is allowing me to suffer intensely what I would have suffered through many long years. Now I need only a few Masses to free me entirely. I beg you to have them offered for me and I shall promise to pray to God and to Mary for you.”

Sister Catherine had the Masses said at once and a few days later this soul appeared again. Radiantly happy, she said to the nun: “Thank you, Sister Catherine. See, I am now on my way to paradise to sing God’s mercies and to pray for you.”[4]

Prayer

O Mary, my Lady and Mother of my God, as a poor, wounded beggar before a great queen, I present myself to you, the queen of heaven and earth. From your lofty throne, do not disdain, I beg of you, to turn your eyes upon me, a poor sinner. God has made you rich so that you can help everyone in need. He has made you queen of mercy so that you can bring comfort to the disconsolate. Look upon me and have pity on me. Protect me and do not abandon me until I have changed from a sinner into a saint.

I understand very well that I deserve nothing. I know that for my ingratitude I should be stripped of every grace I have ever received from God through you. But you are the queen of mercy. And you do not go about looking for deserving souls, but rather for unworthy ones, so that you can help them. Who is poorer, more needy than I?

O sublime virgin, I know that as queen of the universe you are also my

queen. In a very special manner, I want to dedicate myself to your service, so that you can do with me whatever you please. And so I say to you with Saint Bonaventure, "O Lady, I want to subject myself to your reign, so that you rule over me and govern me in everything. Do not abandon me to myself." Command me; use me as you please; yes, even punish me if I disobey you. Any chastisement coming from you will be helpful to me. Being your servant means more to me than being the ruler of the whole world. I am yours; save me (Ps 118:94). O Mary, accept me as your own, and procure my salvation. I have no longer any desire to belong to myself. I give myself to you entirely.

If in the past I have been remiss in your service, if I have lost so many opportunities to honor you, I now want you to number me among your most loyal and devoted servants. I do not want anyone to surpass me in loving you, my amiable queen. This I promise and this I hope with your help to accomplish. Amen.

Our Confidence in Mary Should Be Even Greater Because She Is Our Mother

Mary's clients are not using empty words, or just speaking at random, when they call her "Mother." It is because they know no other name for her and never tire of calling her "Mother." Yes, she really is our mother. Not according to the flesh, of course, but spiritually. She is the mother of our souls and of our salvation.

When sin deprived our souls of grace, it also deprived them of life. Jesus, our Redeemer, with an excess of mercy and love, came to restore this life by his own death on the cross. He himself declared, *I came that they may have life and may have it more abundantly* (Jn 10:10). Jesus said "more abundantly" because, as the theologians teach, Jesus Christ brought us more benefits through the Redemption than we had lost through Adam's sin. By reconciling us with God, he made himself the Father of our souls in the new law of grace, as the prophet Isaiah foretold: *He shall be called … the Father of the world to come, the prince of peace* (Isa 9:6). Now, if Jesus was the Father of our souls then Mary was the Mother, because in giving us Jesus she gave us true life. And by offering her son's life on Mount Calvary for our salvation, she brought us forth to the life of grace.

The Fathers tell us that Mary became our spiritual mother on two occasions. The first, according to Saint Albert the Great, was when she merited to conceive in her virginal womb the Son of God. Even more clearly does Saint Bernardine of Siena tell us this: "The Blessed Virgin, by her consent to the Son's Incarnation, with the most intense ardor sought and obtained the salvation of all. By this consent she dedicated herself to the salvation of all. So much so that ever since, she has carried us in her womb as a true mother carries the children of her flesh."

Speaking of our Redeemer's birth, Saint Luke says that Mary *brought forth her firstborn son* (Lk 2:7). A certain author remarks that since the evangelist speaks of Mary's "firstborn," are we to suppose that later she had other children? But then he replies to his own question, asserting that if it is of faith that according to the flesh Mary had no other children but Jesus, then she must have had other children who were spiritual. We are those spiritual children. Our Lord revealed this to Saint Gertrude, who was puzzled on reading this text from the Gospel. She could not understand how, if Mary had no other children but Jesus, he could be called the firstborn. God explained it to her, saying that Jesus was Mary's firstborn according to the flesh, but that all men are her second-born according to the spirit.

In view of this we can understand why the Canticle of Canticles says in reference to Mary: *Your body is a heap of wheat encircled with lilies* (Cant 7:2). Saint Ambrose explains this verse by saying: "One grain of wheat was in the Virgin's womb, Christ Jesus. But we say 'heap of wheat' because this single grain contained virtually all the elect, so that he was the firstborn of many brethren." And the Abbot Saint William writes that Mary, in bringing forth Jesus, our Savior and our life, brought forth many unto salvation. "By giving birth to life itself, she gave life to many."

The second occasion on which Mary became our spiritual mother was on Mount Calvary, when she so sorrowfully offered the life of her beloved son to the Eternal Father for our salvation. "As she cooperated by her love in the birth of the faithful to the life of her beloved Son to the Eternal Father for our salvation. Mother of all who are members of the one Head, Jesus Christ." This is the meaning of the words of the sacred Canticle as applied to Mary: … *they charged me with the care of the*

vineyards: my own vineyard I have not cared for (Cant 1:5). In order to save our souls, Mary was content to sacrifice her son's life, as Saint William the Abbot comments: "That she might save many souls, she exposed her own soul to death." And who but Jesus was the soul of Mary? He was her whole life and all her love. And that is what Simeon meant when he announced that one day a sword would pierce her soul (Lk 2:35). This sword was the lance that pierced the side of Jesus, her very soul. It was then that, through her sorrows, she brought us forth to eternal life. And that is why we can call ourselves "children of Mary's sorrows." Our most loving mother was always completely united to the will of God. And therefore, says Saint Bonaventure, when she saw that the love of the Father toward humankind was so great that in order to save men he willed the death of his son; and on the other hand, that the son, out of love, wished to die for us, in order to conform herself to what Saint Bonaventure reverently calls the excessive love of both the Father and the Son, Mary also, for the salvation of men, offered and consented to the death of her son.

It is true that Jesus wanted to be alone in dying for the human race. *I have trodden the winepress alone* (Isa 63:3). But when he saw Mary's eagerness to share in man's salvation, he so arranged it that she, by offering the life of her Jesus, should cooperate in our salvation and in that way become the mother of our souls. Our Savior manifested this when he looked down from the cross upon his mother and upon Saint John, who stood at its foot, and said to Mary: *Behold your son* (Jn 19:26). By that he meant to say: Behold the whole human race, which is even now being born to the life of grace as a result of the sacrifice you have made of my life for the salvation of all. Turning to the disciple, he said: *Behold your Mother* (Jn 19:26). By these words, says Saint Bernardine of Siena, Mary became mother not only to Saint John, but also to all men, because of the love she bore them. Sylveira makes the reflection that Saint John himself gives us this idea by the wording he uses in his Gospel: *Then he said to the disciple, "Behold your Mother."* Take notice, Christ did not say these words specifically to John, but to the "disciple." This was to show that the Savior assigned Mary as the common mother to all who, because they are Christians, bear the name of "disciple." "John is a particular name, but 'disciple' is a general name and it shows

that Mary is being given as a mother to *all*."

Blessed are they who live under the protection of a mother so loving and so powerful! The prophet David, before Mary was even born, sought salvation from God by dedicating himself to her as a son. He prayed: *Save the son of your handmaid* (Ps 85:16). "Of what handmaid?" asks Saint Augustine. He answers, "Of her who said, 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord.'" And who, asks Cardinal Bellarmine, will dare to snatch these children from the bosom of Mary once they have turned to her to be saved from their enemies? What power of hell, what temptation can overcome them, once they have placed their confidence in the protection of this great mother?

It is said that when a whale sees her little ones in danger, from storms or from hunters, she opens her mouth and swallows them.[5] Novarinus applies this to Mary, and says that when Mary sees her children in danger she receives them into her bosom and protects them there until she brings them to the harbor of salvation. O most loving Mother, most compassionate Mother, praise be to you forever, and praise be to God forever, for having given you to us as our mother and as a refuge from all the dangers of life.

The Blessed Virgin revealed to Saint Bridget that she is like a mother who sees her child surrounded by the enemy's swords. She wants to do everything in her power to save him. "… And this I shall do for my children, sinners though they be, as long as they turn to me for help." There is no doubt, then, that in every battle with hell we shall surely win if we fly to Mary and repeat over and over again: "We fly to thy patronage, O holy Mother of God." O how many victories have the faithful won over the forces of hell because they had recourse to Mary with this short but powerful prayer! It was with this prayer that that great servant of God, Sister Mary Crucified, the Benedictine nun, always conquered the demons.[6]

Rejoice, therefore, you who are Mary's children. And know that Mary receives and accepts everyone who wants to be her child. Why should you fear to be lost when this mother defends and protects you? Saint Bonaventure says: "Say it, my soul, and say it most confidently: I rejoice and exult because, whatever my judgment will be, it depends on what

my Brother and my Mother say." The same thought makes Saint Anselm cry out with joy: "O blessed hope! O safe refuge! The Mother of God is my mother! How firm should be our confidence, since our salvation depends on the judgment of so good a Brother and so tender a Mother." It is then our mother who calls out to us: *Whosoever is a little one, let him come to me* (Prov 9:4). Little children always have the word "mother" on their lips. And every time they are frightened, they immediately raise their voice and cry out: "Mother! Mother!"—O sweetest Mary, O most loving Mother, this is precisely what you want us to do. You want us to cry out to you like children in every danger. You want us to run to you always, because you want to help and save us, as you have in the past helped and saved all your children who ran to you for help.

Example

In the history of the Society of Jesus in the Kingdom of Naples, we read of a young Scotch nobleman named William Elphinstone.[7] He was related to King James of Scotland[8] and lived for some years in the heresy in which he was born. Enlightened by divine grace, he gradually saw his errors. He went to France, and with the help of a good Jesuit Father, who was also a Scotsman, and more especially, through the intercession of Mary, he abjured his heresy and became a Catholic.

Later he went to Rome. Here a friend one day noticed him sad and on the verge of tears. The friend asked the reason. William replied that during the night his mother had appeared to him from hell and said: "My son, it is good that you entered the true Church. I am damned because I died in heresy." From that moment, he redoubled his devotion to Mary. She inspired him with the thought of entering religion and he bound himself by vow to do this.

But the young man became ill and went to Naples, hoping to be cured by a change of air. There it was the will of God that he should die, and as a religious. Shortly after his arrival, his illness became much worse. By his prayers and tears he moved the superiors to accept him. It was while he was receiving Viaticum that he pronounced his vows and was declared a member of the Society of Jesus.

After pronouncing his vows, he edified everyone by the fervor with which he thanked the Blessed Virgin for having snatched him from heresy, for leading him to die in the true Church and surrounded by his religious brethren in the house of God. He exclaimed: “O how glorious it is to die in the midst of so many angels!” When exhorted to rest a bit, he answered: “Now is no time for rest, when I am at the end of my life.” Before he died, he said to those at his bedside: “Brothers, don’t you see the angels of heaven who have come to help me?” One of the religious heard him murmuring some words and asked what he was saying. He answered that his Guardian Angel had just revealed to him that he was to spend only a short time in purgatory and soon go to heaven. He then began to converse with the Blessed Virgin. “Mother, Mother!” he repeated, and then quietly breathed his last like a little child falling asleep in its mother’s arms.

Shortly afterwards, it was revealed to a devout religious that he was already in heaven.

Prayer

O most holy Mother, how is it possible that I, who am so wicked, should have so holy a mother? How is it that I should still love creatures when I have a mother all aflame with the love of God? How is it that I have a mother so rich in virtues and I am so spiritually poor? It is true, most loving Mother, that I do not deserve to be your child, because my sinful life has made me unworthy. I will be quite content if you accept me merely as your servant. Just to be numbered among your lowliest servants, I would give up all the treasures of the world. Yes, I would be satisfied with this if only I could continue to call you “Mother.”

This name consoles me, softens my heart, and reminds me of my obligation to love you. It encourages me to put my confidence in you. When the memory of my sins and the thought of God’s justice terrify me, I am soothed by the conviction that you are my mother. Allow me then to call you “mother.” I do call you “mother” and will always call you “mother.”

In this valley of tears, you must be, after God, my refuge, my hope, and my love. I hope to die entrusting my soul to you and saying: “My Mother,

help me, have pity on me!" Amen.

Our Mother's Great Love for Us

Precisely because Mary is our mother, let us see how much she loves us. Love for one's children is a natural instinct. That is why Saint Thomas points out that God's law commands children to love their parents, but gives no express command to parents to love their children. Saint Ambrose goes further and says that love for one's offspring is so strong a force and one so deeply implanted by nature itself that even the wild beasts have to love their young. Explorers tell us that when tigers hear the cries of their cubs when they have been captured by hunters, they will even plunge into the sea to reach the ships on which they are.[9]

Since the very tigers, says our loving Mother Mary, cannot forget their young ones, how can I forget to love you, my children? And should the impossible happen, that a woman should forget her child, it is impossible that I forget a soul that is my child. *Can a woman forget her infant, so as not to have pity on the son of her womb? And if she should forget, yet will I not forget you* (Isa 49:15).

As we have said, Mary is our mother, not according to the flesh, but through love, *I am the mother of fair love* (Prov 24:24). It is her love for us that makes her our mother and, as a certain author observes, she glories in being the mother of love. All her love is for us, her adopted children.

It is absolutely impossible to analyze the love Mary has for us creatures. Arnold of Chartres tells us that at the death of the Savior, Mary desired, with intense ardor, to die along with him for love of us. And Saint Ambrose adds that while her son was hanging on the cross, Mary offered herself to the executioners.

Consider now the reason for such love, and you will come to some understanding of how much Mary loves us.

The first reason behind the great love Mary bears to men is the great love she bears to God. According to Saint John, love of God and love of our neighbor belong to one and the same commandment: *And this command we have from God, that he who loves God, love also his brother* (1

Jn 4:21). As the one love increases, so does the other. See what the saints have done out of love for their neighbor, because they loved God so much. They gave up everything, even their lives. Read what Saint Francis Xavier did in India. To help the souls of those people and to bring them to God, he went climbing mountains and submitted to all kinds of dangers in his quest for these poor wretches who, like animals, lived in caves.[10]

Saint Francis de Sales, to convert the heretics in the province of Chablais, risked his life for a full year as he daily crossed the streams on an ice-covered beam to reach the other side and preach to those obstinate people. Saint Paulinus gave himself up as a slave to free the son of a poor widow.[11] Saint Fidelis persisted in going to a certain place to preach to the heretics, even though he knew it would cost him his life. It was because the saints loved God so much that they succeeded in doing so much for their neighbor.

But who ever loved God more than Mary did? At the very first moment of her life, she loved God more than all the angels and saints did in the whole course of their existence—as we shall consider at length when we treat of Mary's virtues. Our Blessed Lady herself revealed to Sister Mary Crucified that the fire of love with which she was inflamed toward God was so great that if the heavens and the earth were put in it, they would be instantly consumed. Compared to it, the ardor of the seraphim is like a fresh, gentle breeze. Therefore, since neither angels nor saints surpass Mary in loving God, so no one, after God, loves us or can love us as much as Mary. And if we were to combine all the love that mothers bear their children, all the love of husbands for their wives, all the love of the angels and saints for their devoted clients, all this would not equal Mary's love for a single soul.

Father Nieremberg says that the love that all mothers have ever had for their children is but a shadow in comparison with the love which Mary bears to each one of us; and he adds that she loves us more than all the angels and saints put together.

Furthermore, Mary loves us so much because Jesus himself gave us to her when he said, just before dying: *Woman, behold your son* (Jn 19:26). He intended Saint John to represent all men, as we observed above.

These were the last words her son said to her. The last mementoes our loved ones leave us at the point of death are always cherished and can never be forgotten.

Again, we are so dear to Mary because we caused her so much sorrow. Mothers generally love those children most who cause them the most labor and pain to be kept alive. We belong to this class of children. To obtain for us the life of grace, Mary had to suffer the pain of offering her own dear son to the executioners. She was content to see him die in torment before her very eyes. Through this grand sacrifice of Mary, we were born to the life of grace. Analogously, we may apply to Mary what was written of God's love for men in delivering his own Son to death: *God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son* (Jn 3:16). Saint Bonaventure writes that it can be said of Mary: "Mary so loved us that she gave her only-begotten son."

When did she give him? She gave him first, says Father Nieremberg, when she gave him permission to go and die. Second, when she declined to defend her son's life before his judges when others, out of fear or hatred, failed to defend him. We can well believe that the words of so wonderful a mother would have influenced Pilate and stopped him from condemning to death a man whom he himself had recognized and declared as innocent. But no; Mary declined to say one word in favor of her son to hinder the death on which our salvation depended. Finally, she gave him to us a thousand times at the foot of the cross during the three hours she watched him die. Every moment of these three hours, as her heart overflowed with sorrow and with love for us, she constantly offered the sacrifice of her son's life for us. So much so that Saint Anselm and Saint Antoninus maintain that, if there had been no executioners, she herself would have crucified him to obey the will of the Father who wished his Son to die for our salvation. If Abraham showed a similar courage in his willingness to sacrifice his son with his own hand, we must believe that Mary would have fulfilled God's will with even greater courage, since she is more holy and more obedient than Abraham.

Returning to our theme, how grateful we ought to be to Mary for so great an act of love! She sacrificed her son's life amid so much sorrow to obtain salvation for us all. God rewarded Abraham generously for his willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac. But how can we thank Mary

enough for the life of her son, so much more holy and beloved than Abraham's son? The only gift we can give Mary is the gift of our own love, especially since Mary loved us more than anyone else ever loved us. Saint Bonaventure says: "No one besides Mary has loved us so much as to give an only-begotten and well-beloved Son for us."

This last reason supplies another motive why Mary loved us so dearly. She realizes the great price of the ransom her Son paid for our souls. Suppose a mother saw her beloved son ransom one of her servants at the cost of twenty years' hard labor and imprisonment. How highly she would esteem that servant! Mary knows very well that Christ came to earth for the sole purpose of saving us poor creatures. He himself protested: *The son of Man came to save what was lost* (Lk 19:10). And to save us, he was content even to lay down his life: … *becoming obedient to death* (Phil 2:8). Were Mary not to love us, she would show very little appreciation of her son's blood, the price of our salvation. It was revealed to Saint Elizabeth of Hungary that from the time Mary entered the temple, she prayed continually that God would soon send his Son for the world's salvation. How much more does she love us now that he has come and purchased us at so heavy a cost!

Mary loves and favors all of us because all men were redeemed by Jesus. Saint John saw Our Lady clothed with the sun (Apoc 12:1). She is clothed "with the sun" because there is nothing on earth that can be hidden from the heat of the sun: *There is no one that can hide himself from his heat* (Ps 18:7). So too there is no living being on earth without Mary's love. The Blessed Raymond Jordano, who called himself the Unlearned, says: "From her heat, that is, from her love, no one can escape."

Who can form any idea, asks Saint Antoninus, of the great concern that Mary has for each one of us? That is why she offers and dispenses her mercy to everyone. As our mother, she longed for the salvation of all and cooperated in the salvation of all. It is evident, says Saint Bernard, that she was solicitous for the whole human race. According to Cornelius à Lapide, some clients of Mary have adopted the very beneficial practice of begging God to grant them the graces that Mary implores for them, saying, "Lord, give me whatever the Most Blessed Virgin asks for me." Cornelius à Lapide says this is very reasonable, since Mary desires greater favors for us than we ourselves could desire.[12] Bernardine de

Bustis says the same thing: “She is more eager to do you good and to be generous with her graces than you yourself could desire her to be.”

Saint Albert the Great applies to Mary a text from the Book of Wisdom and says that Mary forestalls those who have recourse to her by making them find her before they even look for her. Richard of Saint Victor says that the love which this good mother has for us is so great that, as soon as she is aware that we need something, she runs to help us. “She comes before she is asked.”

Now, if Mary is so good to all, even to the ungrateful and the negligent who do not love her and do not invoke her, how much more devoted will she be toward those who really love her and frequently call upon her? *She is easily found by them that seek her* (Wis 6:13). O how easy it is, says Saint Albert the Great, for those who love Mary to find her, and to find her filled with compassion and love! Our Blessed Mother protests: *Those who love me, I also love* (Prov 8:17). Though this most loving lady loves all people as her children, yet, says Saint Bernard, she knows and loves more tenderly those who love her. And these happy lovers of Mary, asserts Raymond Jordano, are not only loved by her, but are even served by her.

The Chronicles of the Order of Saint Dominic relate that one of the friars named Leonard used to recommend himself two hundred times a day to Mary, and that when he was dying he saw a most beautiful queen by his bedside. She said to him, “Leonard, do you want to die and come to my Son and me?” “Who are you?” he asked. And the queen replied, “I am the Mother of Mercy. You have prayed to me very often. Now I am coming for you. Let us go to paradise.” The Chronicle says, “And Leonard died that very day, and, we hope, followed her to the kingdom of the blessed.”

“Ah, my most sweet Mary,” exclaimed Saint John Berchmans, S.J., “happy the man that loves you. If I love Mary, I am certain of final perseverance and I shall obtain whatever I ask from God.” Therefore, this holy youth never tired of renewing his resolution and of repeating often to himself: “I will love Mary! I will love Mary!”

It is a truism that the Blessed Mother makes all her children advance in love. “She is especially amiable towards those who love her,” says

Saint Ignatius the Martyr. Let them love her as did Saint Stanislaus Kostka. He loved Mary so much that when he spoke of her he made everyone who heard him love her. He coined new words and invented new titles to honor her. He never did anything without first turning to Mary and asking her blessing. When he recited the Office, said his rosary, and recited other prayers, he did so with such affection and devotion that he seemed to be speaking with Mary face to face. When the *Salve Regina* was sung, his whole soul and his countenance were aglow with love. On one occasion, while he and a Jesuit companion were on their way to visit a certain shrine of Our Lady, his companion asked him how much he loved Mary. He replied, "What more can I say than that she is my mother?" The Father afterwards said that when the youth spoke these words, he uttered them with such tenderness and devotion that he seemed no longer a man, but rather an angel speaking of love for Mary.[13]

Let them love her as Blessed Herman loved her. He called her the spouse of his love, because Mary herself had honored him with that title.[14] Let them love her as Saint Philip Neri did. He was filled with consolation when he merely thought of Mary, and for that reason he called her his delight. Let them love her like Saint Bonaventure, who called Mary not only his lady and mother but even his heart and his soul.

Let them love her like that great lover of Mary, Saint Bernard, who called her the "ravisher of hearts." To express his ardent love he would often say: "Have you not stolen my heart?"

Let them even call her "sweetheart," as did Saint Bernardine of Siena. Every day, he made a visit to a shrine of Mary and protested his love for her. When someone asked him where he went each day, he replied that he went to call on his sweetheart.

Let them love her as Saint Aloysius Gonzaga loved her. He loved her so much that whenever he heard her name mentioned his heart was inflamed and even his countenance reddened with a glow that everybody could see.[15]

Let them love her as Saint Francis Solano did, who was considered mad (but with a holy madness) for love of Mary. He would sing before

her picture and play a musical instrument, and claim, like worldly troubadours, that he was serenading his queen.

Finally, let them love her as did so many of her servants who could never do enough to show their love. Father John Trexo, S.J., used to call himself the slave of Mary. He often visited her in one or the other of her churches. Then, to prove his servitude, he would drench the floor with his tears. Next, he would wipe away those tears with kisses—all because this was the house of his lady.

Another Jesuit, Father James Martinez, was honored in a special way for his devotion to Mary. On great feasts he was taken by angels to heaven to see how the feasts were observed there. He would often say: "I wish I had the hearts of all the angels and saints to love Mary as they love her! I wish I could control the lives of all men, so that I could direct them all to the love of Mary."[16]

Let still others love her as did Saint Bridget's son, Charles, who claimed he had no greater consolation on earth than knowing that God loved Mary so dearly. He also maintained that he would gladly accept any suffering rather than have Mary lose even one iota of her greatness, if indeed if were possible for her to lose any. Furthermore, he said that if her glory were his, he would renounce it in her favor since she is ever so much more worthy of it.

Let them desire even to lay down their lives as proof of their love for Mary, as Saint Alphonsus Rodriguez did. Let them love Mary as did those who carved the sweet name of Mary on their breasts with sharp knives, as did Francis Binanzio, a holy religious, and Queen Radigunde, the wife of King Clothaire. Let them love her as did those who took red hot irons and imprinted her name upon their flesh, so that it would remain there clear and long, as did John Baptist Achinto and Augustine d'Espinoso of the Society of Jesus, both driven to this by the vehemence of their love.

Even though these lovers of Mary exert their best efforts to prove their affection for her, they will never succeed in loving her as much as she loves them. "I know, O Mary," says Saint Peter Damian, "that you are most lovable and that you love us with an invincible love." I know, my Lady, he said in effect, that you love us with a love that is unsurpassable, that cannot be topped by any other love.

On one occasion, Saint Alphonsus Rodriguez, S.J., was praying before an image of Mary. His heart became inflamed with love for her and he cried out: “My dearest Mother, I know that you love me, but you do not love me as much as I love you.” Mary, offended, as it were, on a point of love, immediately answered: “What are you saying, Alphonsus? My love for you is greater than any love you could have for me. The distance between heaven and earth is not so great as the distance between your love and mine.”

Saint Bonaventure then was right in exclaiming: “Blessed are the hearts that love Mary! Blessed are those who serve her!” Yes, for Mary will never allow herself to be surpassed in love by her clients. “In this contest, she will never be worsted by us. She returns our love and always adds some new favors to past ones.” In this respect Mary imitates our most loving Redeemer. She returns to those who love her their love doubled and redoubled in favors and benefits.

With Saint Anselm, so enamored of Mary, I also exclaim: “May the love of you, O Mary, make my heart languish and my soul melt!” May my heart always burn and my soul be consumed with love for you, my dear Savior, and for you, my dear Mother Mary. Through your merits, therefore, and not because I deserve it, grant my suppliant soul a love that is worthy of you. Therefore, through your merits and not my own, O Jesus and Mary, grant my soul the grace to love you as much as you deserve. O lover of souls, you were able to love guilty men unto death. Will you then refuse love for yourself and for your mother to one who prays for it?

Example

Father Auriemma tells this story about a poor shepherd girl who was guarding her flocks. She loved Our Blessed Lady so much that, while her sheep were grazing, she would go to a tiny chapel of Our Lady situated on a lonely mountain and there would pray and converse with Mary. Seeing that the small statue of Our Lady was unadorned, she set to work herself to provide some decorations for it. One day she gathered a few flowers in the field and wove them into a wreath. She placed the wreath on the head of the statue and said: “My Mother, I wish I could place a

crown of gold and precious gems on your brow. But since I am so poor, I want you to accept this poor crown of flowers in token of my great love for you." With this and other small signs of devotion, the pious little girl often endeavored to honor Mary. See now how the Mother of God returned the visits and the devotion of the little shepherdess.

The youngster became ill and was lying at death's door. Two religious happened to be passing that way and stopped to rest in the shade of the trees. One of them fell asleep and the other remained awake. But both of them had the same remarkable vision. They saw a group of most beautiful maidens, one of whom was even more lovely than the others. One of the religious asked her: "Who are you?" She answered: "I am the Mother of God. I am on my way with these holy virgins to visit a dying little shepherd girl who has often visited me." After these words the vision disappeared. The religious said to each other: "We will also go to visit her."

They soon found the house where the girl lay dying. They entered the little hut and found her lying on a straw pallet. They greeted her and she said to them: "Dear friends, ask God to let you see the company that surrounds me." The two religious knelt down and immediately saw Our Lady standing at the girl's side, consoling her, and holding a crown in her hand. The group of virgins began to sing, and at that moment the child's soul left her body. Mary placed the crown on her head, and, taking her soul, led it to paradise.[17]

Prayer

"O Lady! O ravisher of hearts!" I will exclaim with Saint Bonaventure, "O Lady, ravish also my heart which desires so much to love you. You have enamored a God with your beauty and have drawn him down from heaven into your chaste womb. How shall I live without loving you?" Let me say with your beloved son, Saint John Berchmans, "I will never rest until I am certain of having obtained your love." You loved me so much even when I was ungrateful to you. Where should I be now, O Mary, if you had not obtained so many graces for me? Since you loved me so much when I did not love you at all, how much more may I now not hope from you since I now love you so fondly. I love you, O Mother, and I wish I had a heart to love you in place of

all those unfortunate creatures who do not love you. I wish I had a thousand tongues, so that I could cry out to all the world and make the whole world know your greatness, your holiness, your mercy, and especially the love you have for all who love you. Were I rich, I would use my riches to honor you. Had I subjects under me, I would make them all love you. Were I able to lay down my life, I would do so for your glory.

I love you then, O Mother, but I fear that perhaps I do not love you as much as I should. It is said that love makes the lover and the loved one alike. "Love either finds lovers alike or makes them so," said Aristotle.[18] *Therefore, when I see myself so different from you, it means that I do not really love you. You are so pure and I am so defiled. You are so humble and I am so proud. You are so holy and I, so sinful. Here is what you must do for me, O Mary. Since you love me, you must make me resemble you. You have the power to change hearts. Take mine, then, and change it. Make the whole world see what you can do for those who love you. Make me a saint. Make me a worthy child of yours. This is what I hope for; may it be so.*

Mary Is the Mother of Penitent Sinners

Our Blessed Lady told Saint Bridget that she was the mother not only of the just and innocent, but also of sinners, provided they were willing to repent. Every sinner who wishes to mend his ways finds this good mother ever so willing to embrace and help him; far more so than any earthly mother. Saint Gregory VII had this thought in mind when he wrote to the Countess Matilda, saying: "Resolve to give up sin, and I promise you that you will find Mary more ready to love you than any earthly mother."

But whoever hopes to be a child of this great mother must first abandon sin. Only then can he hope to be accepted as Mary's son. Richard of Saint Lawrence, commenting on the words of Proverbs: *Her children rise up and praise her* (Prov 31:28), remarks that these words indicate that no one can be a child of Mary without first endeavoring to rise from the depths into which he has fallen. He who is in mortal sin is not worthy to be called the son of such a mother. And Saint Peter Chrysologus says, "He who acts differently from Mary plainly proves that he does not want to be her son." Mary is humble, and he is proud;

Mary is pure, and he is evil; Mary is full of love, and he hates his neighbor.

"The sons of Mary," says Richard of Saint Lawrence, "imitate her, and they follow her chiefly in four things: in chastity, meekness, humility, and mercy." How can he who repudiates Mary by living a wicked life even dare to wish to be a child of Mary? A certain sinner once said to Mary, "Prove that you are my mother." But the Blessed Virgin answered: "Prove that you are my son."

Another sinner invoked Mary, calling her the "Mother of Mercy." And she replied: "You sinners, when you want my help, call me Mother of Mercy. But at the same time, you do not cease by your sins to make me a mother of sorrows and anguish."

We read in Ecclesiasticus, *He is cursed of God that angers his mother* (Ecclus 3:18). That mother, says Richard of Saint Lawrence, is Mary. God curses those who by their wicked life and by their obstinacy in sin afflict so good a Mother.

I say, by their obstinacy, for if a sinner, though he may not have given up his sin, endeavors to mend his ways and, for this purpose, seeks the help of Mary, this good mother will not fail to help him and make him recover the grace of God. One day, Saint Bridget heard Jesus say to his Mother: "You help everyone who tries to rise to God, and you leave nobody deprived of your consolation." But when the sinner is obstinate, Mary cannot love him. However, if he finds himself chained by some passion which makes him a slave of hell and still recommends himself to the Blessed Virgin and implores her with confidence to draw him out of that state of sin, there can be no doubt that Mary will reach forth her powerful hand, will deliver him from his chains, and will bring him to salvation.

The doctrine that all prayers and works performed in the state of sin are themselves sins was condemned as heretical by the Council of Trent. Saint Bernard says that, although prayer in the mouth of a sinner is devoid of all merit because it is not accompanied by charity, nevertheless it is useful and wins the grace to abandon sin. Saint Thomas teaches that the prayer of a sinner, though without merit, is an act which obtains the grace of forgiveness, since the power of impetration is

based not on the merit of him who asks, but on the divine goodness and the merits of Jesus Christ, who said: *Everyone who asks receives* (Lk 11:10).

We must say the same of prayers offered to the Blessed Mother. “If the person who prays,” says Saint Anselm, “does not merit to be heard, the merits of Mary, to whom he recommends himself, will effectually intercede for him.” Saint Bernard exhorts every sinner to invoke Mary and to have the greatest confidence in praying to her, because, although the sinner does not deserve what he asks, it will be granted to Mary on account of her merits. And those graces will be given to the sinner which she begs of God for him.

Adam, the Abbot of Perseigne, uses this comparison. Suppose a mother knew that her two sons were deadly enemies and plotting each other’s murder. What else would she do than try in every way to pacify them? “Mary,” says the abbot, “is man’s mother and Jesus’ mother.” When she sees a sinner become the enemy of Jesus Christ, she cannot bear it, and consequently does everything in her power to establish peace between them. “O happy Mary,” he said, “you are the mother of the criminal and the mother of the Judge. You are the mother of both and you cannot suffer to see discord between your sons.”[19]

The only thing that Mary demands is that the sinner have recourse to her and intend to change his ways. When Mary sees a sinner at her feet begging for mercy, she does not concentrate on the sins with which he is burdened, but rather on the intention with which he comes. If he comes with the proper good intention, even though his soul be black with sin, she welcomes him, and like a loving mother, does not hesitate to heal all the wounds of his soul. For Mary is not merely called, but actually is, the Mother of Mercy. She makes herself known as such by the spontaneous love and tenderness with which she helps all who turn to her. This is precisely what she said to Saint Bridget; “No matter how much a man sins, I am instantly ready to welcome him back. I do not fix my attention on the number of his sins, but rather on the intention with which he returns. I will not refuse to anoint and heal his wounds, for I am called and really am the Mother of Mercy.”

Mary is the mother of all sinners who wish to repent. And as such, she cannot help but pity them. In fact, she feels the misfortunes of her

children as though they were her own. When the Canaanite woman begged Our Lord to free her daughter from the devil that troubled her, she said: *Have pity on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is sorely beset by a devil* (Mt 15:22). Now, since it was the daughter, and not the mother who was tormented by the devil, we would think she should have said: "Lord, have pity on my daughter," and not "have pity on me." Nevertheless she said: "Have pity on me." And rightly, because mothers feel the miseries of their children as if they were their own. Richard of Saint Lawrence says that is the way that Mary prays for sinners who have recourse to her: "Mary cries out with a loud voice for a sinful soul and says, 'Have pity on me.'" "Yes," she seems to say, "this poor soul is in sin. This soul is my child, and therefore have pity not only on her but also on me, her mother."

God grant that all sinners have recourse to Mary. Because then he will pardon them all. In rapture, Saint Bonaventure exclaims: "O Mary, you affectionately embrace the sinner who is despised by the whole world. And you do not leave him go till you reconcile him with his Judge." What the saint wants to say is, that a sinner is hated and despised by everybody. Inanimate creatures—fire, air, and earth—would like to punish him and take revenge on him for dishonoring their Lord whom the sinner has despised. But when the wretch turns to Mary, does she turn away? On the contrary. If he goes to her for help and is ready to mend his ways, she embraces him like an affectionate mother. And she will not rest till by her powerful intercession she has reconciled him to God and restored him to grace.

We read in the Second Book of Kings how that wise woman of Thecua said to David: I had two sons. *Unfortunately, the one killed the other, and so I have lost a son. Now in justice, they want to take the other, the only one left to me. Have pity on me, their poor mother, and do not let me be deprived of both my sons* (2 Kings 14). David wisely declared that the delinquent should be set free and restored to her. Mary seems to say the same thing when God is indignant against a sinner who has recourse to her: "My God, I had two sons, Jesus and man. Man has slain my Jesus on the cross and now your mercy wants to condemn man. O Lord, my Jesus is already dead. Have pity on me. Now that I have lost the one son, do not make me lose the other also."

Surely God does not condemn those sinners who have recourse to Mary and for whom she intercedes. God himself has recommended these sinners as sons to Mary. The devout Lanspergius makes God speak in this vein: “I have commended sinners to Mary as her sons. No one committed to her care shall perish, particularly if he goes to her for help. In as far as it lies in her power, she will bring him back to me.”

Who, says Blosius, can ever describe the mercy, the fidelity, and the charity with which this good mother seeks to save us whenever we beg her for help? Let us prostrate ourselves before her, says Saint Bernard, let us embrace her feet, let us not leave her until she has blessed us and received us as her children.

Who could ever mistrust the compassion of Mary? Saint Bonaventure used to say, “Even though she should ask for my life, I would still hope in her. Full of confidence, I hope to die before her image. And I know I shall be saved.” Every sinner who has recourse to her should feel the same and should say: “O Lady, O my Mother! On account of my sins I deserve to be abandoned by you and punished according to my just desserts. But even though you would banish me and take my life, I will still trust in you and hope with a firm hope that you will save me. My entire confidence is in you. Give me the grace to die before your image, recommending myself to your mercy. That will convince me that I will not be lost and that I will go to praise you in heaven, in the company of so many of your servants who, when dying, called on you for help, and who were all saved by your powerful intercession.”

Read the following story and see how no sinner who has recourse to Mary can possibly mistrust the love and mercy of this good mother.

Example

The Jesuit Father, Carlo Bovio, relates that in the year 1430 a young nobleman named Ernest gave all his patrimony to the poor and entered a monastery at Châteauroux in France. There he led such a holy life that his superiors came to think a great deal of him. They admired particularly his devotion to the Blessed Virgin. About that time, a violent plague swept the city and the citizens came to the monastery for help.

The abbot ordered Ernest to go and pray before Mary's altar and to stay there until the Madonna answered him. After three days he received an answer from Mary to the effect that certain prayers should be said. This was done and the plague ceased.

After a time Ernest cooled in his devotion to Mary. The devil attacked him with many temptations. He was tempted particularly to impurity and to flee from the monastery. Since he had stopped praying to Mary, he yielded to the temptation and made plans to run away by climbing over the monastery wall. On his way out through the corridor, he passed in front of a statue of the Madonna. Mary called out to him and said: "My son, why are you leaving me?" Ernest was stunned at this, threw himself on the ground, and replied: "But, Mother, don't you see that I can't resist any longer? Why don't you help me?" Our Lady answered: "Why didn't you come to me for help? Had you come to me, I would not have let you fall so low. From now on, call on me for help and don't be afraid of anything."

Ernest returned to his cell. His temptations returned, and again he failed to pray to Mary. Finally he fled from the monastery and gave himself over to a life of sin. Eventually he turned to murder. He took over the ownership of an inn where at night he would rob and kill poor travelers. One night he killed the cousin of the local magistrate. He was caught and sentenced to death.

Before he was taken into custody, however, another young guest arrived at the inn. Ernest made his usual plans to murder and rob the victim. But that night, when he entered the guest's room, he did not find the young man. In his place lay our crucified Savior, bleeding and covered with wounds. Jesus looked at him and said reproachfully: "My son, are you not satisfied that I died for you once? Do you want to kill me again? Very well! Raise your hand and strike!" Filled with remorse, the poor wretch began to cry and promised immediately to return to the monastery.

On his way he was overtaken by the police and freely admitted all his crimes. He was condemned to be hanged immediately, with no opportunity for confession. It was then that he once more thought of Mary and prayed to her for help. Mary heard his prayer. She personally loosened the noose around his neck and sent him back to the monastery.

"Go back to the monastery," she said, "and do penance. And when you see a paper in my hands announcing your pardon, prepare to die."

He returned to the monastery, told the abbot the whole story, and accepted a most severe penance. Many years later he saw a paper in Mary's hands announcing his pardon. He prepared immediately for death and passed away most edifyingly a short time later.

Prayer

O my Queen, my Mother, most holy Mary! When I consider my misery and the burden of my sins, I should not dare to come and call you mother. But I do not want my sins to deprive me of the consolation of calling you mother. I know that I deserve to be abandoned by you. But first of all, I beg you to consider all that Jesus has done and suffered for me. Then banish me if you can. I am really only a poor sinner who more than anyone else has despised God's goodness. But the evil is done. I come to you. You are able to help me. Do help me. Do not tell me that you are unable to help me, because I know you are all-powerful and can obtain from God whatever you ask him. And if you say you cannot help me, then tell me to whom I can go for help. With Saint Anselm I say to Jesus and you: "Have mercy on me—one of you sparing me, the other interceding for me. Or else, at least tell me to whom I can go who is more compassionate than you and in whom I can have greater trust." Neither in heaven nor on earth can I find anyone who is more willing to help a miserable wretch or who is better able to help.

You, O Jesus, are my father, and you, O Mary, are my mother. Both of you have a great love for sinners and actually seek them out in order to save them. I am worse than all the rest and deserve nothing but hell. But you do not have to search for me. I come rushing to you with the certain hope that you will not abandon me. Here I stand at your feet, O my Jesus. Pardon me! Mary, my mother, help me!

2

OUR LIFE, OUR SWEETNESS



Mary Is Our Life Because She Obtains the Pardon of Our Sins

To understand clearly why Holy Church bids us call Mary our life, we must realize that, as the soul is the life of the body, so divine grace is the life of the soul. The Apocalypse says that a soul without grace is really dead, even though it appears to be alive: *You have the name of being alive, and you are dead* (Apoc 3:1). Therefore, when Mary, by her intercession, obtains grace for sinners, she obtains life for them.

The Church applies to Mary these words of Proverbs, and has Mary say: *They that in the early morning watch for me, shall find me* (Prov 8:17). In the Septuagint the words *shall find me* are translated *shall find grace*, implying, of course, that to find Mary and to find grace are one and the same thing.

Later, in the same book of Proverbs, these words are applied to Mary: *He that shall find me, shall find life, and shall have salvation from the Lord* (Prov 8:35). "Pay attention to these words," exclaims Saint Bonaventure, "you that desire the kingdom of God. Honor Mary and you shall find life and eternal salvation."

Saint Bernardine of Siena gives it as his opinion that, if God did not destroy man after his first sin, it was because of his great love for the Blessed Virgin, who was to be born of this race. He adds that he does not doubt that all the mercy and pardon received by sinners in the Old Testament were granted in consideration of Mary.

Therefore, Saint Bernard does well to exhort us in these words: "Let us seek grace, and let us seek it through Mary." Even though we may have lost grace, it is she who has recovered it. He calls her "the finder of grace." The idea was earlier expressed by the Archangel Gabriel, who

said to Mary: *Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found grace…* (Lk 1:30). How can the Archangel say Mary *found* grace when she had never been without it? When anybody gets something he did not previously have, he is said to have found it. Yet the Archangel himself said that Mary was always with God and always possessed grace: *Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you* (Lk 1:28). Since, then, Mary did not find grace for herself, and was always full of grace, for whom did she find it? Cardinal Hugo, in commenting on these words of Saint Luke, says: "She found it for sinners who had lost it." Therefore, says the same writer, let sinners who have lost grace run to Mary and they will find grace with her. Let them say to her confidently: "Give us back what we have lost and what you have found. Whatever is lost must be restored to its owner. This grace which you have found is not really yours, because you never lost it. Therefore, you must return it to us." In keeping with this thought, Richard of Saint Lawrence concludes: "Since we desire to find grace, let us go to the *finder* of grace. Mary always finds what she seeks, and cannot possibly fail us."

In the eighth chapter of Canticles, Mary says that God has placed her in this world to be our defense. *I am a wall; and my breasts are like towers* (Cant 8:10). And so Mary is truly a mediatrix of peace between God and sinners. *I am become in his presence as one finding peace* (Cant 8:10). Inspired by these words, Saint Bernard encourages the sinner and says: "Go to the Mother of Mercy and show her the wounds inflicted by your sins. She will show you mercy, because the son always hears his mother."[20] This is the sentiment we find in the prayer recited after the *Ave Regina Coelorum:* "Grant, O merciful God, protection for our weakness, so that we who are ever mindful of the holy Mother of God may, by the help of her intercession, rise again from our sins."

With good reason, then, does Saint Lawrence Giustiniani call Mary "the hope of evildoers," since she alone is the one who obtains God's pardon for them. With good reason, too, does Saint Bernard style her "the ladder of sinners," because she extends her merciful hand to rescue sinners from the abyss into which they have fallen and raises them up to God. Saint Augustine calls her "the only hope of sinners," because through Mary alone do they hope for forgiveness of their sins. Saint John Chrysostom speaks in the same vein when he says that only through

Mary's intercession do sinners receive pardon. Therefore does he greet Mary in this fashion in the name of all sinners: "Hail, Mother of God and of us all—the *heaven* where God dwells, the *throne* from which Our Lord dispenses all graces, the *glory of our Church!* Pray unceasingly to Jesus so that we may find mercy on the day of judgment, and that through you we may come into possession of the wonderful things he has prepared for those who love him."

Finally, Mary is fittingly called "the dawn." *Who is she that comes forth like the dawn…* (Cant 6:9). "Yes," says Pope Innocent III, "as the dawn marks the end of night and the beginning of day, so is Mary truly styled the dawn, because she marks the end of vice and the beginning of virtue." When devotion toward Mary begins in a soul, it produces the same effect as the birth of Mary produced in the world. It puts an end to the night of sin and makes the soul walk in the path of virtue. That is why Saint Germanus says: "O Mother of God, your protection never ceases; your intercession is life." He goes on to say that the affectionate mention of Mary's name is a proof of life in the soul or a sign that life will soon return there.

We read in the Gospel of Saint Luke that Mary said: *Behold, henceforth all generations shall call me blessed* (Lk 1:48). "Yes, my Lady," exclaims Saint Bernard, "henceforth all generations shall call you blessed, because you have brought forth glory and life for all generations. In you do sinners find their pardon, and the just perseverance and eternal life."

Listen to the devout Bernardine de Bustis: "Do not be afraid, O sinner, even if you have committed every kind of sin. Run to this lady and you will find her hands filled with mercy. She desires more to do you good than you can desire to receive favors from her."

Saint Andrew of Crete calls Mary the guarantee of divine pardon. Here is his meaning. When sinners call upon Mary in order to be reconciled to God, God promises them pardon and moreover gives a pledge of it. That pledge is Mary, whom he has given them as a champion or advocate. Through her intercession and by virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, God pardons all sinners who go to Mary. Saint Bridget tells us that she heard from her Guardian Angel that the early prophets were happy in knowing that God was to be reconciled with

sinners through the humility and purity of Mary.

No sinner need ever fear that Mary will spurn him when he calls on her for mercy. Never! Because Mary is the Mother of Mercy and she burns with the desire to help unfortunate sinners. Mary is that blessed ark, says Saint Bernard, where anyone who takes refuge will escape the shipwreck of eternal damnation. At the time of the deluge, even the brute animals were saved in Noah's ark. And so, under Mary's protection, even sinners are saved.

One day in a vision, Saint Gertrude saw Mary with her cloak spread wide open. Under its folds were many wild animals: lions, bears, tigers—all of whom had taken refuge there. The saint noticed that Mary did not chase the beasts away. She welcomed them kindly and caressed them. From this, Saint Gertrude concluded that even the most sordid sinners are not only not rejected by Mary, but are even welcomed and saved by her from eternal death. Let us then enter this ark, let us take refuge under the cloak of Mary and she will most certainly not spurn us, but will secure our eternal salvation.

Example

Father Bovio relates that there once was a very wicked woman named Helen, who entered a church and chanced to hear a sermon on the rosary. After she left the church, she bought a rosary, but carried it concealed, as she did not want people to know that she had it. She began to recite the beads and, though she sometimes did so without devotion, Our Lady filled her with such consolation and fervor that after a time she could not stop repeating the Hail Mary. Finally, she was filled with such horror for her wicked life that she could find no rest and felt obliged to go to confession.

She told her sins so remorsefully that the confessor was amazed. After confession, she walked up to Mary's altar to thank her. Here she again recited the rosary. Then Mary, speaking from the image on the altar, said to Helen: "That is enough, Helen. You have offended God and me enough. From now on, change your life, because I am going to give you many graces." Overwhelmed, the poor sinner replied: "O most holy

Virgin, it is true that till this moment I have been a criminal, but you, who are so powerful, must help me. I give myself to you and I want to spend the rest of my life doing penance for my sins."

Helped by Mary, she gave away all her possessions and began a life of rigorous penance. She was tormented by terrible temptations, but she constantly recommended herself to Our Blessed Lady and was ultimately victorious. She received many favors, even such unusual ones as visions, revelations, and prophecy. Finally, when she came to die, the Blessed Virgin together with her Divine Son, visited her, as Mary had promised several days earlier. When Helen expired, her soul, in the form of a beautiful dove, was seen winging its way to heaven.

Prayer

Behold, O Mother of God, Mary, my hope, behold me at your feet, a poor sinner begging for mercy. All the faithful all over the world proclaim you the "refuge of sinners." You are then my refuge, and you must save me.

You know, O sweet Mother—as William of Paris says—how much your Son desires our salvation. You know what Jesus Christ suffered to save me. I present these sufferings of Jesus to you, my Mother: the cold he suffered in the stable of Bethlehem, the steps he took in his journey to Egypt, the toil and perspiration of his working hours, the blood he shed, the sorrows that killed him before your very eyes as he was hanging on the cross. Prove that you love this son of yours, and by this love I beg you to help me.

Stretch out your hand to a fallen sinner who asks mercy of you. If I were a saint, I would not be looking for mercy. But since I am a sinner, I hasten to you, the Mother of Mercy. I know full well that as long as a sinner does not remain obstinate in his sin, you are happy to help him whenever you are able. Therefore today, O Mother, bring consolation to your heart by bringing consolation to mine. I am giving you now the opportunity of saving a poor sinner condemned to hell. You can help me, precisely because I do not want to remain obdurate in my sin.

I hereby place myself in your hands. Tell me what to do and give me the strength to do it. I determine to do all I can to get back into God's grace. I fly to your protection. Jesus wants me to turn to you, so that, to his glory and

yours, both his blood and your prayers may help me to be saved. It is Jesus who sends me to you for help.

O Mary, see how I run to you to confide in you. You pray for so many others; pray for me too. Say only a word in my behalf. Tell God you want me to be saved and he will surely save me. Tell him I belong to you. This is all I ask of you.

Mary Is Also Our Life Because She Obtains Perseverance for Us

Final perseverance is so great a gift of God that, as the Council of Trent has declared, it is entirely gratuitous on his part, and we cannot merit it. According to Saint Augustine, those who ask for perseverance will obtain it. And according to Suarez, they will infallibly obtain it if they ask for it diligently till the end of their lives. Saint Robert Bellarmine writes: "You must ask for perseverance every day, in order to obtain it every day."

Now, if it is true—and I hold that it is true, according to the common opinion, and as I shall show later in Chapter V—if it is true that all graces given us by God come through Mary's hands, then it is also true that only through the help of Mary are we able to hope for and obtain the greatest grace of all, the grace of final perseverance. We will certainly obtain it if we constantly and confidently ask it of Mary. She herself promises this grace to all who in this life serve her faithfully, according to the words which the Church puts on her lips for the feast of the Immaculate Conception: *They that work by me shall not sin; they that explain me shall have life everlasting* (Ecclus 24:30–31).[21]

To be preserved in the life of grace we must have the spiritual strength to resist all the enemies of our salvation. This strength, however, we will obtain only through Mary. In the liturgy of the feast of Our Lady of the Snows we read this quotation from Proverbs: *Mine is strength; by me kings reign* (Prov 8:14–15). This strength *is mine*, says Mary. God has put this gift in my hands, so that I can dispense it to my devoted ones. By my help, kings reign. By my help, my children reign over and have control over all their senses and passions, and in that way make themselves worthy to reign eternally in heaven.

How tremendous is this power which Mary's servants have to

conquer all the temptations of hell! Mary is that tower of which the sacred Canticle says: *Your neck is like David's tower, girt with battlements; a thousand bucklers hang upon it, all the shields of valiant men* (Cant 4:4). To all who love her and look to her for help in battle, Mary is like a strong tower surrounded by defenses. She contains all the shields and weapons they need to battle against the forces of evil.

That is why Mary is also called a plane tree: *As a plane tree by the water in the streets was I exalted* (Ecclus 24:19). Cardinal Hugo explains this by pointing out that the leaves of the plane tree resemble shields. Blessed Amadeus gives another explanation. He says Mary resembles the plane tree because the shade of its leaves offers the traveler shelter from the sun's heat and from rain. Under the shade of Mary's protection, human beings find refuge from the heat of their passions and from the fury of temptation.

Unfortunate indeed are those souls who get away from this protection, who give up their devotion to Mary, who no longer recommend themselves to her in occasions of sin. Saint Bernard says that if the sun did not rise upon the world, the world would be nothing but a chaos of darkness and horror. "Take away the sun," says the saint, "and where is the daylight? Take away Mary, and what is left but darkness?"

Once a soul loses devotion to Mary, there is nothing left but the darkness of which the Holy Spirit speaks: *You bring darkness and it is night; then all the beasts of the forest roam about* (Ps 103:20). Divine light no longer shines in the soul. It is night, and the soul becomes the haunt of devils and of every sin. Woe to those, says Saint Anselm, who despise the light of this sun, who despise devotion to Mary! Saint Francis Borgia used to fear for the perseverance of those in whom he found no devotion to Mary. He warned the Novice Master to keep an eye on such unfortunate novices. It happened that every one of those eventually lost his vocation and left the Order.

So it was perfectly natural for Saint Germanus to call Mary the "breath of Christians." Just as the body cannot live without breathing, so the soul cannot live without having recourse to Mary, through whom the life of grace is acquired and preserved in us. Here are the saint's own words: "As breathing is not only a sign of life, but also its very cause, so Mary's name, ever on the lips of God's servants, not only is a sign that

they really live, but actually causes that life and gives them every help they need to sustain it."

Blessed Alan was once assailed by a strong temptation and was on the point of yielding, because he had neglected to recommend himself to Mary. The Blessed Virgin appeared to him. To warn him once and for all, she struck him on the face, saying, "If you had recommended yourself to me before, you would not be in this danger."

Happy the man, says Mary, *watching daily at my gates, waiting at my doorposts* (Prov 8:34). Happy the man that hears my voice and is always ready to come to the doors of my mercy for light and help. Mary will take care of such a man. Mary will get for him the light and strength to abandon sin and walk the way of virtue. That is why Pope Innocent III beautifully calls her "the moon in the night, the dawn in the morning, and the sun in the day." She is a *moon*, because she enlightens those steeped in the night of sin so that they will recognize their wretched state; she is the *dawn*, that is, the herald of the sun, to those whom she has already enlightened, to help them abandon sin and return to divine grace; she is the *sun* to those who are already in the state of grace, lest they fall back into sin again.

Learned writers apply these words of Ecclesiasticus to Mary: *Her bands are a healthful binding* (Ecclus 6:31). "Why bands," asks Saint Lawrence Giustiniani, "unless it be to bind her children lest they run about freely on the fields of vice?" Saint Bonaventure gives a similar explanation of these words in Our Lady's Office, *My abode is in the full assembly of the saints* (Ecclus 24:16). He says that Mary is not only placed in the midst of the assembly of the saints, but also preserves the saints from falling out of that assembly. She preserves their virtue and keeps the demons from harming them.

Our Lady's servants are said to be clothed very warmly. *All her charges are doubly clothed* (Prov 31:21). Cornelius à Lapide explains what this double clothing is. He says that Mary adorns her servants with the virtues of her son and with her own. Clothed in this way, they persevere in virtue.

That is why Saint Philip Neri always admonished his penitents with these words: "If you want to persevere, be devoted to Mary." Saint John

Berchmans, S.J., often used to say: “Whoever loves Mary will persevere.”

The Abbot Rupert makes a beautiful comment on the parable of the Prodigal Son. He says that if this wayward son had had a mother alive, either he would never have left his father’s house or he would have returned sooner that he did. It is obvious that the abbot meant to say that whoever is a child of Mary either will not leave God, or, if he has unfortunately done so, will soon return through Mary.

Who would ever fall into sin if all men loved this most kind Mother and immediately ran to her in temptations? Who would ever be lost? Not to have recourse to Mary is one of the surest ways of falling into sin. Saint Lawrence Giustiniani applies to Mary these words of Ecclesiasticus: *I … have walked in the waves of the sea* (Ecclus 24:8). And he makes her say: “I have walked with my servants in the waves of the sea, so that I might rescue them from shipwreck.”

Father Bernardine de Bustis tells of a little bird that was taught to say: *“Ave, Maria!”* A sparrow-hawk was on the point of seizing it when the bird cried out, *“Ave, Maria!”* In an instant, the hawk fell dead. By this, God wanted to show that, if an irrational little bird was saved by invoking Mary, how much more surely will one who is tempted be saved from the clutches of Satan who at the moment of the attack calls upon Mary.

All we have to do when we are tempted, says Saint Thomas of Villanova, is to imitate little chicks. As soon as they see the chicken hawk flying about, they run under the wings of their mother for protection. That is exactly what we should do in moments of temptation. There should be no stopping to reason or to argue with the temptation. We should fly under the wings of Mary’s protection immediately. “We know no other refuge than you,” says the saint. “You are our only hope; you are the only one to whom we can look for help.”

Let us conclude then in the words of Saint Bernard: “O man, whoever you are, know that in this world you are tossed around on a stormy sea, rather than walking on solid ground. Remember that, if you want to escape shipwreck, you must never turn your eyes from this bright star which is Mary. Keep your eyes fixed on her and call on her. In dangers, in troubles, in doubts, remember Mary, call on Mary.” Yes, in danger of

sinning, and when beset by temptations, when in doubt how to act, remember that Mary can help you. Call on her and she will help you immediately. Never let her name be absent from your heart and lips. Follow her, and you cannot go astray. Pray to her and you will never despair. If she sustains you, you will not fall. If she protects you, you need never fear. If she guides you, you will never become exhausted. With her help, you will reach your goal. In short, with Mary on your side, you will surely reach heaven. Do this, and live!

Example

The history of Saint Mary of Egypt, as told in the *Lives of the Fathers*, is very well known. At the age of twelve, she ran away from home and went to Alexandria, where she led an infamous life and became a scandal to the whole city. After living sixteen years in sin, she was seized with the desire of going to Jerusalem. She was roaming around the city on the feast of the Holy Cross. More through curiosity than devotion, she determined to enter a church. At the very door, she felt herself repulsed by an invisible force. She tried again and again to enter, and the same thing was repeated a third and a fourth time. Then the poor soul retired to a corner of the vestibule where, enlightened by God, she understood that it was on account of her sinful life that she was driven away. In a fortunate moment, she raised her eyes and noticed a picture of Mary painted on the vestibule wall. With tears in her eyes, she turned to the picture and said: “O Mother of God, have pity on a poor sinner. I know that because of my sins I do not even deserve that you look at me. But you are the refuge of sinners. For the love of your son, Jesus, help me and bring me into the church. I promise to change my life and to do penance in whatever place you appoint for me.”

She immediately heard an interior voice, which she took to be that of Mary, saying: “Very well; since you come to me and promise to amend, enter the church. It is no longer closed to you.” The sinner entered, adored the Holy Cross, and wept unceasingly. Then, returning to the picture, she said: “My Lady, I am ready. Where do you want me to go and do penance?” “Go,” said Mary, “across the Jordan. There you will find your place of rest.” The penitent went to confession and

Communion, then crossed over the river into a lonely desert and began to do penance for her sinful life.

During the first seventeen years of her seclusion, she suffered the most violent temptations of the devil. What did she do? She recommended herself to Mary, and Mary procured for her the grace to resist heroically during the whole seventeen years. Then the struggle ceased.

When she had spent fifty-seven long years in the desert and had reached the age of eighty-seven, she was found by the Abbot Zosimus. She told him her life's story and begged him to return after a year and bring her Holy Communion. This the abbot did.

Then she requested that he come again to see her. He returned but found her dead. Her body was surrounded by a dazzling light and at her head he found this note: "Here bury the body of a wretched sinner, and pray to God for me." A lion came and with his claws dug the grave in which the abbot laid the body. On his return to the monastery, Zosimus related the marvels of God's surprising mercy towards this happy penitent.[22]

Prayer

O compassionate mother, most sacred virgin, look down upon this traitor who, by repaying with ingratitude the many graces he has received from God, has betrayed both him and you. But yet, O most blessed Lady, my misery, far from taking away my confidence in you, increases it, because I know that your mercy is as great as my grief is great. It is enough if you will only look on me and pity me. For if your heart pities me, it will not cease protecting me. And if you protect me, what shall I fear? I fear nothing. Not from my sins, because you can repair the damage I have done. Not from the devils, because you are more powerful than all hell together. Not even from your son, who is so justly angry with me, because at one word from you he will be appeased. The only thing I fear is this: that through my own fault I shall fail to recommend myself to you in the time of temptation and so lose my soul. But today I promise always to have recourse to you. Help me to keep this promise. Do not lose this opportunity of fulfilling your desire to help and comfort a

senseless sinner.

In you, O Mother of my God, I have the greatest confidence. From you I expect the grace to grieve for my sins as I ought. From you I hope for the strength never to fall again. If I ever become ill again, you, O heavenly physician, can heal me. If my sins have weakened me, your help can make me strong. O Mary, I hope for everything from you, because you are all-powerful with God. Amen.

Mary, Our Sweetness—She Makes Death Sweet to Her Clients

He who is a friend is always a friend, and a brother is born for the time of stress (Prov 17:17). It is in times of distress and misery that we recognize true friends, not in times of prosperity. People of the world never abandon a friend as long as he is wealthy and successful. But, if he should have some misfortune, and particularly when death comes along, his friends are quick to abandon him. That is not the way Mary acts. When those who love her are in distress, particularly when they are at the point of death, which is the greatest trial they can have on earth, this good mother simply cannot abandon her faithful servants. As during our earthly exile Mary is our *life*, so too at the moment of death she becomes our *sweetness* by obtaining for us a sweet and peaceful death. From the very day when Mary sorrowfully stood at the cross of her son, Jesus, who is the head of the Mystical Body, she received the grace to assist the members of that Mystical Body at the moment of their death. That is why Holy Church begs us to admonish Mary to assist us, particularly at the moment of death: "Pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death."

The moment of death brings to a departing soul many anxieties. It is apt to suffer from remorse for past sins, fear of the approaching judgment, and uncertainty of eternal salvation. It is at that moment that all hell arms itself to snatch the soul on the point of entering eternity. Satan knows there is little time left to win that soul and that, if this attempt fails, he has lost that soul forever. *The devil has gone down to you in great wrath, knowing that he has but a short time* (Apoc 12:12).

That is why too, as Isaiah says, the devil, who has been tempting the

soul during life, is not content to act alone in tempting the soul at death. He calls on his companions to help: *Their houses shall be filled with serpents* (Isa 13:21). When a person is at the point of death, the whole place is filled with devils who all combine in the attempt to make him lose his soul.

The story is told that when Saint Andrew Avellino lay dying, ten thousand demons came to tempt him. The conflict that he had with the powers of hell at his last agony was so severe that the good religious at his bedside trembled with fear. They saw the saint's face swell and turn black with agitation. They saw his limbs quiver and become frightfully contorted. Tears coursed down his cheeks and his head shook violently. All this was an evidence of the frightful battle hell was waging against him. Trembling with fear to see a saint dying this way, the brethren in the room wept with pity and redoubled their prayers. They were consoled, however, in seeing that very often, as if begging for help, the saint turned his eyes to a picture of Mary. They remembered how he had assured them that at the hour of his death Mary would have to be his refuge. Finally, God put an end to the conflict and gave the saint a glorious victory. The contortions ceased; his face resumed its original shape and color, his eyes remained peacefully fixed on the image of Mary. Then, as if to thank Our Lady, the saint bowed to her and devoutly expired. It is piously believed that Our Blessed Lady had appeared to him at that moment. A Capuchin nun, who was also in her agony at the same time, turned to the Sisters around her and said: "Say an *Ave Maria*, for a saint has just died."

Imagine how the evil spirits must flee from the presence of Mary! If we have Mary on our side at the hour of death, there is no reason to fear the enemies from hell. When David grew frightened at the thought of death, he comforted himself by placing his reliance in the death of the coming Redeemer and in the intercession of the Blessed Mother. *Even though I walk in the dark valley, I fear no evil; for you are at my side with your rod and your staff that give me courage* (Ps 22:4). Cardinal Hugo beautifully explains these words by saying that the staff is the wood of the cross and the rod is the intercession of Mary, who was the rod foretold by Isaiah; *There shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise out of his root* (Isa 11:1).

Saint Peter Damian affirms that Mary is that powerful rod by which the violence of hell is overcome. Saint Antoninus encourages us by saying: “If Mary is for us, who is against us?” When Father Manuel Padial was at the point of death, Mary appeared to him and spoke these consoling words: “At length the hour has come when angels rejoice with you and exclaim: O happy labors! O well-rewarded mortifications!” At the same moment, an army of demons was seen taking flight and howling in hideous despair: “We are helpless now, because she who is spotless is defending him.” Father Jasper Hayewood was similarly attacked by devils with a strong temptation against faith. He turned immediately to Mary for help and those around him heard him exclaim: “Thank you, Mary, for coming to my aid.”

Saint Bonaventure claims that, to defend her dying clients, Mary sends the Archangel Saint Michael, together with his host of angels. Moreover, she commands Saint Michael to receive the souls of all who had constantly recommended themselves to her. Addressing Our Blessed Lady, the saint says: “Michael, the leader and prince of the heavenly army, with all his ministering angels, obeys your commands, O Virgin, and defends and receives the souls of the faithful departed who day and night have particularly recommended themselves to you.”

The prophet Isaiah tells us that when a man is about to die, hell is opened and sends out its worst devils, both to tempt the soul before it leaves the body and to accuse it when it is presented before the tribunal of Jesus Christ for judgment. The prophet says: *Hell below was in an uproar to meet you at thy coming; it stirred up the giants for you* (Isa 14:9). But Richard of Saint Lawrence says that when Mary defends a soul, the devils dare not even accuse it. They know the supreme judge never has condemned, nor ever will condemn, such a soul.

Saint Jerome wrote to Eustochius that Mary not only helps her servants at the hour of death; she even comes to meet them on their way to eternity, so that she can encourage them and accompany them to the divine tribunal. This is in line with what Saint Bridget heard from the Blessed Virgin. Speaking of the death of those who are devoted to her, Mary said: “Then will I, their lady and mother, fly swiftly to them to console and refresh them.”

Saint Vincent Ferrer writes: “This loving queen takes the souls of the

dying under her protection and presents them to the judge, her son, and most certainly obtains their salvation." This was verified in the case of Charles, the son of Saint Bridget, who died on the field of battle, far from his mother. The Blessed Virgin revealed to Saint Bridget that Charles was saved because of his love for Mary, and that she herself had aided him at death and suggested to him the acts of faith, hope, love, and contrition that should be made at that hour. In the same vision, the saint saw Jesus seated on his throne as the devil lodged two accusations against the Blessed Mother. The first was that Mary had prevented the devil from tempting Charles at the moment of death; the second, that without giving any reason for claiming him as her son, she herself presented Charles to be judged and thus saved him. Saint Bridget saw the judge drive the devil away in confusion and Charles's soul carried away to heaven.

In her there is beauty of life, says Ecclesiasticus, *and her bands are a healthful binding* (Ecclus 6:31). He indeed is blessed who finds himself at death bound by the sweet chains of love for Mary. These chains are chains of salvation that assure us of eternal happiness. Father Binetti, in his book *The Perfections of Our Blessed Lord*, tells how he was present at the deathbed of a great client of Mary. Just before breathing his last, the dying man said: "O Father, I wish I could let you know how happy I feel that I have served the most Blessed Mother of God. I cannot possibly describe the joy I feel at this moment."

Father Suarez was so devoted to Mary that he claimed he would be willing to exchange all of his knowledge for the merit of a single Hail Mary. As a result of his devotion, he died so cheerfully and so happily that he was able to say: "I never thought it was so sweet to die." You, too, will have the same satisfaction at the moment of death if you remember having loved this good mother. Mary simply cannot help being loyal to those who have been faithful to her—faithful by their visits, rosaries, fasts, and other acts of devotion.

In spite of your sins, as long as you are determined from now on to lead a good life and to be devoted to her, Mary will give you this consolation. In your trials, in your temptations (which the devil will surely bring before you to make you despair), Mary will comfort you and will come to assist you at the moment of death. Saint Peter Damian

relates that his brother, Marinus, had seriously offended God and had one day gone to an altar of Mary to dedicate himself to her as her slave. He took the cord which he wore about his waist and put it around his neck as a sign of slavery, and then said to the Blessed Mother: “My Lady, mirror of purity, I have offended God and you by a sin against chastity. There is nothing left for me but to offer myself to you as your slave. This I do. Receive me, a rebel, and do not abandon me.” He left a sum of money on the altar step and promised to leave the same amount there annually as a tribute of his slavery to Mary.

Eventually Marinus came to die. One morning before he passed away, he was heard saying these words: “Arise, and honor the presence of my lady.” Then he added: “What favor is this, O Queen of Heaven, that you come to visit your poor slave? Bless me, O Lady, and do not let me be lost after you have honored me with your presence.” At that moment his brother Peter entered the room. Marinus told him all that had happened, how the Blessed Mother had appeared to him and blessed him. Then he complained that the persons present in the room at the time had not risen from their seats while Mary was present. A few moments later, Marinus died peacefully.

You, too, dear reader, will taste the same joy in death, if you are faithful to Mary. Even though you have offended God seriously in the past, she will see to it that you die a sweet and happy death.

And if at that moment you are still frightened and lose confidence at the thought of your past sins, she will come and encourage you just as she did Adolph, the Count of Alsace. Adolph had left the world and became a Franciscan and was very devoted to the Mother of God. His days were coming to an end, and as he reviewed his past life—the government of his property and the treatment of his vassals—the rigors of God’s justice rose up before his mind and he began to tremble for his salvation. Suddenly Mary appeared to him, accompanied by many saints. Reproving the dying religious, she said to him: “Adolph, you are mine. You have given yourself to me and belong to me. Why are you so afraid to die?” At these words of Our Lady, Adolph felt immensely consoled. Every fear disappeared and he died peacefully and contentedly.

Even though we are sinners, as long as we have this confidence in Mary, we may rest assured that Mary will come to assist us at the hour

of our death. She said as much to Saint Matilda. What a consolation it will be at the last moment of our lives, when in a few moments the issue of our salvation must be settled, to see the queen of heaven near us, assisting and consoling us with the assurance of her protection!

In various books there are countless examples besides those I have just cited, of how Mary comes to the assistance of her devotees at the moment of death. Saint Clare, Saint Felix the Capuchin, Saint Clare of Montefalco, Saint Teresa, Saint Peter of Alcántara—all were remarkably assisted by Mary on their deathbed. But for your encouragement and extraordinary consolation, let me relate the following incidents.

Father Crasset relates that Blessed Mary of Oignies saw the Blessed Virgin standing near the deathbed of a devout widow of Willambronx. The widow was burning with fever, and Mary stood near her consoling her and cooling her with a fan.

They tell of Saint John of God that he was tenderly devoted to Mary and that he expected a visit from her when he was dying. He was disappointed when she did not appear immediately and even complained a little. First, Mary reproved him for his lack of confidence. Then she spoke to him these tender words that should console all who are devoted to Mary: "John, it is not my practice to abandon my clients at this hour." As much as to say: "My dear John, what is the matter with you? Did you think I had forsaken you? Do you not know that I cannot abandon my clients at the point of death? I did not come sooner because the appointed hour had not yet struck. Now, however, the hour has come and I have come to take you. Let us go to paradise." Shortly after, the saint breathed his last and his soul took flight to heaven, there to thank his most loving queen forever.

Example

Let me close this discourse with another example, in which we see how far the tenderness of this good mother goes for her children at the time of death.

The pastor of a certain country village was called to assist at the deathbed of a very rich parishioner. The house was beautifully

furnished. Servants, relatives, and many friends stood at the bedside, but the good priest also saw devils, in the form of black dogs, waiting to snatch the man's soul. Snatch it they did, for the man died in sin.

While this was happening, the pastor was also called by a poor woman who lay dying and wanted to receive the sacraments. Since he could not leave the rich man who was in so much need of spiritual help, the pastor sent another priest, who took the pyx with the Blessed Sacrament and went to the home of the poor woman.

What a contrast! No servants here; no troupe of relatives; no costly furniture. Just a few scattered articles, and the dying woman lying on a pallet of straw. But as he entered the door, a great light filled the room. Near the poor dying patient the priest saw the Mother of God consoling her and wiping the perspiration of death from the woman's brow. At first the priest was loathe to enter, but Mary made a sign and bade him come and hear the woman's confession. Mary herself placed a chair for him at the woman's bedside. The poor woman made her confession, received Communion most devoutly, and happily breathed her soul into Mary's arms.

Prayer

O my sweetest Mother, what kind of death will be mine, poor sinner that I am? As I think of that critical moment when I shall have to appear before the divine tribunal, and as I remember how often I wrote my own condemnation by perversely consenting to sin, I tremble, I am confounded, and I fear for my eternal salvation.

O Mary, I place all my hope in the blood of Jesus and in your intercession. You are the Queen of Heaven. You reign over the universe. It is enough to say that you are the Mother of God. But your greatness does not make you distant. In fact, it inclines you to pity our miseries. Worldly friends, when they are raised to some dignity, become distant and disdain to associate with their old friends. Your noble and loving heart, O Mary, allows nothing of this kind. The greater the miseries that come to your notice, the more you try to help. As soon as we call to you, you come to our aid. Actually, your favors anticipate our prayers. You are on hand to console us in our afflictions, to

disperse the storm clouds that gather, to conquer our enemies. You never ignore a single opportunity to do us good.

Forever blessed be the divine hand which so well combines majesty with tenderness, and unites such greatness with so much love. I thank God for this constantly and I rejoice to make your happiness my happiness. O consoler of the afflicted, comfort one who is afflicted and who turns to you. I am burdened with remorse for the many sins that stain my conscience. I am uncertain whether I have bewailed them enough. All that I do is so imperfect and full of defects. Hell awaits my death in order to accuse me. God's offended justice waits to be satisfied. Dear Mother, what will become of me? If you will not help me, I am lost. What do you say? Will you help me?

O compassionate Virgin, console me. Obtain for me true sorrow for my sins and the strength to amend and be faithful to God for the rest of my life. And when finally I find myself face to face with death, do not abandon me, Mary, my hope! At that hour help and console me more than ever, so that I will not despair at the sight of the sins I am sure the devil will confront me with.

If this seems like pious audacity, O Lady, forgive me. Do come then to console me with your presence. You have done this for so many and I want you to do it for me. If my desire is great, your goodness is even greater, because it is your custom to seek out the most miserable to console them. This is the basis of my confidence. Let this be to your eternal glory, that you have saved a wretch already condemned to hell and have led him to your kingdom where, at your feet, I hope ever to love, to bless, to thank you eternally. O Mary, I shall be waiting for you. Do not leave me without your consolation at the moment of death. So be it. Amen. Amen.

3

OUR HOPE



Mary Is Everybody's Hope

People outside the Church cannot bear to hear us call Mary "our hope." They say that God is our only hope and that he curses anyone who puts his trust in creatures: *Cursed be the man that trusts in man* (Jer 17:5). Mary is a creature, they argue, and how can a creature be "our hope"? That is what many non-Catholics say. Nevertheless, Holy Church obliges all priests and religious to raise their voices every day in the name of the faithful and invoke Mary by the sweet name of "our hope," the hope of all: *Hail, our hope!*

The Angelic Doctor, Saint Thomas, says that we can place our hope in a person in two ways: as a principal cause and as a mediate cause. Those who expect something from a king put their trust in him as their sovereign. They put their trust in his ministers or courtiers as intercessors. When the favor is granted, it comes really from the king, though the minister or courtier is the intermediary. In this case, the one who seeks the favor is right in calling the intercessor or intermediary his hope.

Because his goodness is infinite, the king of heaven is most eager to enrich us with his graces. On our part, we must have confidence. To increase this confidence, God has given us his own mother as our mother and advocate and has supplied her with the power to help us. Therefore he wants us to place our hope of salvation and of every blessing in her. To fix one's hope on creatures alone, independently of God, as sinners are wont to do, and to outrage God in seeking the friendship and favor of men, is to bring down the curse of heaven, says the prophet Jeremiah. But to hope in Mary, the Mother of God, who can really obtain grace and eternal life for men, is to do something very pleasing to the heart of God.

For God desires to see Mary honored in this way, that same Mary whom in this world he loved and who loved and honored him more than all angels and all people together.

That is why we justly and reasonably call Mary our hope, trusting, as Saint Robert Bellarmine says, to obtain through her intercession what we cannot obtain by our prayers alone. Saint Anselm says that we pray to her so that her dignity as intercessor may supply for our unworthiness. And he adds that when we invoke the Blessed Virgin with this kind of hope, it does not mean that we lack hope in God's mercy, but rather that we fear our own lack of the proper dispositions.

Consequently, the Church is right when she applies these words of Ecclesiasticus to Mary: *I am the mother … of holy hope* (Ecclus 24:24). She is the mother who gives birth to holy hope in our hearts. Not the hope of the transitory goods of this life, but the hope of boundless joys and the eternal goods of heaven. Saint Ephrem greets Mary by saying: "Hail, hope of my soul! Hail, sure salvation of Christians! Hail, helper of sinners! Hail, defense of the faithful and salvation of the world." Saint Basil, too, is right in reminding us that after God we have no other hope than Mary.

Reflecting on the present arrangement of Providence by which, as Saint Bernard says (and as we shall discuss at length later), God has disposed that all who are to be saved must be saved through Mary, Saint Ephrem says to her: "Lady, never stop guarding and protecting us, because, next to God, we have no other hope but you." Saint Thomas of Villanova says the same thing: "You are our only refuge, our only hope." Saint Bernard gives the reason for this when he says: "Behold, O man, God's merciful plan. About to redeem the human race, he places the price in Mary's hands." He places the price in Mary's hands so that she can dispense it at will.

We read in the Book of Exodus that God commanded Moses to make a mercy-seat of purest gold, because it was from there he would speak to him (Exod 25:17–22). Saint Andrew of Crete says that the whole world considers Mary as this mercy-seat. A certain author, commenting on this, says: "You, O Mary, are the propitiatory of the whole world. From you, our most compassionate Lord speaks to our hearts. From you, he speaks words of pardon and mercy. From you, he bestows his gifts. From you,

all good flows to us." And, therefore, according to Saint Irenaeus, before the Divine Word took flesh in Mary's womb, he sent an archangel to ask her consent: because he willed that the world should receive the Incarnate Word through Mary and that she should be the source of every blessing.

Blessed Raymond Jordano, who styles himself the Unlearned, says: "Through her the world has, and shall have, every good." Every good, every help, every grace that men are to receive from God till the very end of time, and every grace that men have received must have come to them and shall come to them through Mary and her intercession. The devout Blosius did well to exclaim: "O Mary, who would not love you? You are a light in doubts, a comfort in sadness, a refuge in danger. After your only begotten Son, you are the sure salvation of the faithful. Hail, hope of the despairing! Hail, helper of the needy! So much does your Son honor you that he immediately does what you ask him."

Saint Germanus recognizes Mary as the channel of all our blessings and of our liberation from evil, and addresses her in this fashion: "O my Lady, you alone are my consolation from God, the guide for my path, the strength for my weakness, the wealth for my poverty, the medicine for my wounds, the assuagement of my sorrows, the severing of my fetters, the hope of my salvation. Hear my prayers, have pity on my sighs, O my Lady, my refuge, my life, my help, my hope, and my strength."

We should not be surprised then that Saint Antoninus applies these words from the Book of Wisdom to Mary: *All good things together came to me in her company* (Wis 7:11). Since Mary is the mother and dispenser of every good, the whole world, and more particularly each individual who is devoted to Mary, may say with truth that, with devotion to Mary, there came to both him and the world everything good and perfect. And the Abbot of Celles does not hesitate to say absolutely: "To find Mary means to find every good." Whoever finds Mary, finds all graces and every virtue, because by her intercession he obtains everything he needs to become rich in divine grace. In the Book of Proverbs Mary herself tells us that she possesses all the riches of God, that is, his mercies, so that she may disperse them to her lovers: *With me are riches and honor, enduring wealth and prosperity … On the way of duty I walk … granting wealth to those who love me, and filling their treasuries* (Prov 8:18–21).

That is why Saint Bonaventure says that all of us should keep our eyes fixed on Mary's hands, so as to receive from her whatever favor we want.

Oh, how many people who were once proud have become humble through Mary! How many ill-tempered people have become meek, and how many blind have been enlightened! How many in despair have found confidence, how many lost have been saved! Our Blessed Lady foretold all this in the sublime canticle she sang when visiting Elizabeth: *For behold, henceforth all generations shall call me blessed* (Lk 1:48). Saint Bernard paraphrases these words and says: "Henceforth all generations shall call you blessed, because you have brought all generations forth to life and glory. In you, sinners find forgiveness, and the just find perseverance in divine grace."

We find the devout Lanspergius picturing Our Lord as saying to the world: "Men, poor children of Adam, who live surrounded by so many enemies and in the midst of so many trials, endeavor to honor my Mother and yours with special veneration. For I have given Mary to the world so that she may be your model, and that you may learn from her to lead a good life. Also so that she may be a refuge to which you can fly in all your afflictions and trials. I have so created this daughter of mine that nobody should fear her or hesitate to turn to her. I have given her so kind and compassionate a nature that it is impossible for her to despise anyone having recourse to her, nor can she deny her favor to anyone who seeks it. Her mercy is open to all and she does not allow anyone to leave her without being consoled." May the immense goodness of God be forever praised and blessed for having given us so great, so tender, so loving a mother and advocate!

How touching and full of confidence are the sentiments of the enamored Saint Bonaventure toward Jesus our loving Redeemer and Mary our most loving advocate. He says: "No matter how much the Lord may know about me, I am confident that he cannot deny himself to one who loves him and seeks him with all his heart. I will embrace him, and if he does not bless me, I will never let him go, for without me he will never be able to leave me. If I can do nothing else, I can at least hide myself in the depth of his wounds and it will be in himself alone that he will find me. And if, finally, on account of my sins, my Redeemer does

drive me from his feet, I will throw myself at the feet of Mary and there I will remain prostrate until she has obtained forgiveness for me. This Mother of Mercy does not know, and has never known, how to do otherwise than pity the miseries and satisfy the wishes of troubled creatures who run to her for help. And so, if not out of duty, at least out of love and compassion, she will influence her Son to pardon me."

"Look down upon us then," let us exclaim in the words of Saint Euthymius, "look down upon us, O compassionate Mother, for we are your slaves and we have placed all our trust in you."

Example

In the fourth part of *The Treasury of the Rosary* we read a story about a gentleman who was greatly devoted to the Blessed Virgin. He built a special oratory in her honor in his home and he went there to pray frequently, not only during the day but even at night. His wife, a very devout woman, could not help noticing that frequently, in the dead of night, her husband rose from bed, left the room, and stayed away for a considerable time. She naturally became jealous and suspected that something was wrong. In order to settle the matter once and for all, she one day asked her husband if he loved another woman. "Yes," he replied, "I happen to be in love with the most beautiful woman in the world. I've given my heart to her and I'd rather die than stop loving her. If you knew her, you would tell me to love her even more than I do." Of course, he was referring to the Blessed Mother. But the poor wife, not knowing this, became more and more uneasy and kept questioning whether it was to visit this lady that he rose every night and left the room. Unaware how greatly disturbed his wife was, the man answered, "Yes." Misled by this answer, she fell into a fit of despair. That evening, after he had left the room, she took a knife, cut her throat, and died.

The man finished his devotions and returned to the room and found the corpse of his wife. He realized immediately that she had killed herself in a fit of jealousy. He locked the door of the room, went back to the chapel, and fell on his knees before the statue of Mary. "Mother," he said in the midst of his sobs, "see what I have done. You must help me. Think of it! Because I came to honor you, I find my wife dead and

condemned to hell for all eternity. Mother, you can set matters straight! Please do so!"

No sooner had he finished this prayer than he heard one of the maids calling him. "Go to your room, sir," the servant was saying; "your wife is calling for you." The gentleman could hardly believe his ears. "Go back and see if she really wants me," he said to the maid. When she returned with the same message, the man went up to the room, unlocked the door and found his wife alive. The poor woman was greatly disturbed and, in the midst of tears, begged her husband's pardon. "Forgive me for my suspicions," she said. "Because of your prayers to the Blessed Mother, she has rescued me from hell." Weeping now for joy, both of them went back to the chapel to give thanks to Mary. The following day, the gentleman gave a banquet for all his relatives and at the banquet requested his wife to tell the whole story. She did so and even showed them the scar on her neck as proof. All who heard her were inflamed with love for the merciful Mother of God.[23]

Prayer

O Mother of holy love, our life, our refuge, and our hope! You know that your son, Jesus Christ, was not content himself with being our perpetual advocate with the Eternal Father. He also wanted you to act as our advocate to obtain divine mercy for us. He has decreed that your prayers should aid vastly in securing our salvation and he has made them so powerful that they obtain whatever they ask. That is why I, a miserable sinner, turn to you, O hope of the miserable. I hope through the merits of Jesus Christ and your intercession to be saved. I have such confidence in you that, even if my salvation were in my own hands, I would entrust it to you, for I rely more on your mercy and your protection than on all my good deeds. My Mother and my hope, do not abandon me as I deserve. Look upon my miseries; pity me; help me and save me. I admit that by my sins I have often closed the door to the lights and help you have obtained from God for me. At the same time, your pity for miserable sinners and your power to help them surpass all the evil of my sins. Both in heaven and on earth it is known that those whom you protect will most certainly be saved. Let everyone else forget me, O Mother of Almighty God, provided you remember me. Tell God that I am his servant and

that you are my protector, and I shall surely be saved. O Mary, I trust in you. In this trust I live, and in it I desire and hope to die, saying always: "My only hope is Jesus, and after Jesus, the Blessed Virgin Mary!"

Mary Is the Hope of Sinners

In the first chapter of Genesis we read: *God made two great lights; a greater light to rule the day; and a lesser light to rule the night* (Gen 1:16). Cardinal Hugo says that the sun is a figure of Jesus Christ, whose light illumines the just who live in the day of divine grace; the moon is a figure of Mary who enlightens those who dwell in the night of sin. Since Mary is the moon, so propitious to sinners, Innocent III asks what a man should do who finds himself in the night of sin, and answers: "Let him who wanders despairingly in this night of sin look at the moon. That is, let him pray to Mary." Since he has lost the light of the sun by losing divine grace, let him turn to the moon, let him pray to Mary that she obtain for him light to know his miserable state and the power to escape from it. Saint Methodius says that an innumerable multitude of sinners are constantly being converted through Mary's prayers: "By the power and prayers of Mary an almost uncountable number of conversions takes place."

One of the most encouraging titles under which the Church bids us have recourse to Mary is the title "refuge of sinners." In ancient Judea, there were cities of refuge to which criminals fled to escape punishment for their crimes. There are very few, if any, such cities today; but we still have one in Mary, of whom it is said: *Glorious things are said of you, O city of God* (Ps 86:3). However, there is this difference: not all criminals were sheltered by the ancient cities of refuge, nor were these cities for every kind of crime. But, under Mary's mantle, all sinners find refuge; it is enough that a sinner turn to her for protection. Saint John Damascene puts these words on Mary's lips: "I am the city of refuge for all who come to me."

It is enough simply to take refuge there. Those who already have the good fortune to have entered this city need say no more in order to be saved. Quickly *let us enter into the fenced city, and let us be silent there* (Jer 8:14). Saint Albert the Great explains that this walled city is the Blessed

Virgin, who is fortified with grace and glory. The Commentary says: “And let us be silent there, because we dare not implore the Lord whom we offended. Let her pray and plead for us.” Because we do not dare beg the Lord’s pardon, it is enough to enter this city and remain silent, because then Mary will speak for us and pray for us. That is why a pious author, Benedict Fernandez, exhorts all sinners to take shelter under Mary’s mantle when he says: “Flee, O Adam and Eve—and you, their children—flee to Mary’s bosom. She is the city of refuge, the only hope of sinners.”[24] Years before Saint Augustine had already styled her “the only hope of sinners.”[25]

Saint Ephrem says to Mary: “You are the only advocate of sinners and the helpless.” And he greets her with these words: “Hail, refuge of sinners; hail, haven to which sinners can safely fly for refuge.” A certain author thinks that this is what David meant when he said: *For he has hidden me in his tabernacle* (Ps 26:5). What other tabernacle can this be but Mary? So Saint Germanus says, in reference to her: “O tabernacle made by God, which God alone has entered, to work in you his sacred mysteries for the salvation of all men!” Yes, a God-made tabernacle where God alone entered to effect the mysteries of man’s redemption. And Saint Basil says that God gave us Mary as a “public hospital,” where all the sick who are poor and without any help may be received. I ask: in hospitals established for the poor, who but the sickest and the poorest have the greatest right to be accepted?

The greatest sinners, therefore, being short on merits and most oppressed by ailments of the soul, can say to Mary: “O Lady, you are the refuge of the poor and the sick. Do not send me away; since I am sicker and poorer than the rest, I have a greater claim to your pity.” Let us say then with Saint Thomas of Villanova: “We do not know of any refuge but you. You are the only one in whom we trust. You are the only one to whom we look for aid.” O Mary, we poor sinners cannot find any other refuge but you. You, to whom we all have turned, are our only hope and we confide our salvation to you. You are our only advocate with Jesus Christ.

In the revelations of Saint Bridget, Mary is called “the star preceding the sun.” She is so named, because when we notice devotion to Mary appearing in a soul, we may recognize it as a sure sign that God will

soon enrich this soul with his grace. In order to inspire sinners with devotion to Mary, Saint Bonaventure pictures a stormy sea into which sinners have fallen from the ship of divine grace, and where they are buffeted to and fro by remorse of conscience and by a fear of divine justice. They are without light and without a guide; they are about to lose the breath of hope and are on the point of despair. With these thoughts in mind, the saint recommends Mary to sinners, Mary who is commonly called "star of the sea." Raising his voice, he says to them: "Look to her, you sinners who are lost, and she will lead you to port." Poor sinners, you who are lost, do not despair; raise your eyes to this beautiful star and regain the breath of hope, because she will bring you out of the storm and lead you to the port of salvation.

Saint Bernard says the same: "If you do not want to be overwhelmed by the waves, look at this star and call on Mary." And the devout Blosius says, she is the only shelter for those who have offended God. She is the refuge of all the tempted and afflicted. She is all kindness and sweetness not only to the just but also to the despairing and to sinners. Whenever she sees that unfortunate creatures with all their heart seek her help, she aids them at once, welcomes them, and obtains pardon from her son. She cannot despise anybody, no matter how unworthy he is, and does not deny her protection to anyone. She consoles everybody. Merely to have invoked her means that immediately she helps the one who has called upon her. And in her gentle way she knows how to attract to her devotion those sinners who are most at enmity with God and most deeply plunged in sin: "Often through her kindness she sweetly draws to her devotion sinners who are least attached to God. She influences them powerfully and prepares them for the reception of grace, and finally makes them fit for the kingdom of heaven." That is how God made her, so that nobody need fear to approach her. It is impossible for anyone to perish who has been diligently and humbly devoted to Mary.

She is called in sacred Scripture a plane tree: *As a plane tree … was I exalted* (Ecclus 24:19). As the plane tree offers relief to travelers resting under its shade to escape the sun's heat, so Mary, on seeing the anger of divine justice raised against sinners, invites them to rest in the shade of her protection. Saint Bonaventure reminds us that the prophet Isaiah made this complaint to God: *Behold you are angry, and we have sinned …*

there is none … that rises up and takes hold of you (Isa 64:5, 7). There was no one then to appease God because Mary had not yet been born. "Before Mary," says the saint, "there was nobody who dared stay God's hand. But now, whenever God is angry with a sinner, and Mary takes him under her protection, she restrains her son's hand and withholds him from punishing. In fact, continues Saint Bonaventure, there is nobody so capable as Mary of putting a detaining hand on the sword of divine justice, lest it fall to punish the sinner.

Following the same line of thought, Richard of Saint Lawrence says that before Mary came into the world, God complained that there was not anybody to keep him from punishing the sinner; but once Mary was born she appeased him and stayed the hand of his justice.

Saint Basil encourages sinners with these words: "Do not lose hope, O sinner, but in all things follow and invoke Mary, whom God desired to be our aid in all things." You will find her ever ready to help you, because it is God's will that she help everybody in all necessities. This Mother of Mercy so greatly desires to help the most abandoned sinners that she goes out in search of them. And if they have recourse to her, she has no difficulty in making them acceptable to God.

Because the Patriarch Isaac was eager to eat a dish of game, he promised to bless Esau. But Rebecca wanted her other son, Jacob, to receive the blessing; so she told Jacob to bring in a pair of goats which she would season according to Isaac's taste: *Go your way to the flock, bring me two kids of the best, that I may make of them meat for your father, such as he gladly eats* (Gen 27:9). Saint Antoninus says Rebecca is a figure of Mary saying to the angels: "Bring me sinners"—prefigured by the kids —"because by obtaining for them sorrow and amendment, I shall season them in such a manner that they become dear and acceptable to my Lord." The Abbot Francone, following the same idea, says that Mary knows how to season these goats in a manner that they not only equal but even surpass the flavor of venison.

The Blessed Virgin herself revealed to Saint Bridget that there is no sinner on earth so far removed from God that he will not return to him and recover his grace, if he has recourse to Mary and begs her assistance.

One day, the same Saint Bridget heard Jesus say to his mother: "You

would obtain mercy even for Lucifer if he humbly asked for it." That proud spirit, however, would never humble himself so much as to beg for Mary's protection. Nevertheless, were it possible for Lucifer to humiliate himself enough to ask Mary for her protection, she would have the power and mercy to obtain his pardon and salvation from God. What will never come true with regard to the devil, will come true in the case of every sinner who seeks the protection of this Mother of Mercy.

The ark of Noah was a figure of Mary, because every species of animal found refuge there. Similarly, all sinners who have become brutes by their vices and sins of sensuality find refuge under Mary's protection—with this difference, however, that the ark received them as animals and kept them as animals. The wolf remained a wolf, the tiger a tiger. But under Mary's protection the wolf becomes a lamb, and the tiger a dove. One day Saint Gertrude saw Mary with her cloak spread wide open and under it many different wild beasts, such as leopards, lions, tigers, and bears. She noticed that the Blessed Virgin not only did not chase them away, but with her own kind hand welcomed and caressed them. The saint understood that these wild animals represented sinners who have recourse to Mary and are welcomed by her kindness and love.

Therefore Saint Bernard had good reason to say to Mary: "Lady, you do not turn your back on any sinner, no matter how despicable, as long as he approaches you. If he begs your help, you do not refuse to extend a hand to rescue him from the depths of despair." May God be ever blessed and thanked, O loving Mother, for having made you so kind and gentle towards sinners! Doomed indeed is the man who does not love you, who does not hope in you. Whoever does not turn to Mary will be lost. But, on the other hand, who has ever been lost who has turned to Mary for help?

There is a scriptural story that tells how Boaz allowed Ruth to gather the ears of corn which at the harvest fell from the reapers' hands: *She went therefore and gleaned the ears of corn after the reapers* (Ruth 2:3). Saint Bonaventure's comment on this passage is this: "As Ruth found favor in the eyes of Boaz, so Mary found favor in the Lord's eyes and was allowed to glean the ears of corn, that is, the souls left by the reapers, and bring them to pardon." These reapers of souls are the missionaries,

preachers, and confessors who daily acquire souls for God by their labors. But there are certain rebellious and hardened souls who are left behind by the reapers. Only Mary has the privilege of saving these by her intercession. There is no doubt that the souls that will not let themselves be garnered by Mary are in a sad way. Hell is of their own choosing. On the other hand, how fortunate the souls that let themselves be gathered up by Mary. The devout Blosius says there is no sinner on earth so depraved, so abandoned, and so filled with misery as to be rejected and despised by Mary. Mary can and will reconcile him to her beloved son, if only he begs for her help.

With excellent reason then, O sweetest queen, Saint John Damascene calls you the "hope of the despairing." And with equal right, Saint Lawrence Giustiniani calls you the "hope of evildoers," and Saint Augustine the "only hope of sinners." Saint Ephrem likes to call you the "safe port of the shipwrecked." He even goes so far as to call you the "protectress of the damned."[26] Finally, Saint Bernard is right when he tells even the despairing not to despair: "Let him who is without hope, hope in you."

Saint Antoninus tells of a sinner who was under God's displeasure and who saw himself in a vision standing before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ. The devil was accusing him and Mary was defending him. In the prosecution, the devil presented the entire list of sins the defendant had committed. When these were put on the scales of divine justice, they outweighed all the sinner's good works. But what did Mary do? She gently placed her hand on the side of the good works and the balance went down in favor of her client. In this way, she gave him to understand that she would obtain his pardon if he would but amend his life. After the vision, the sinner was converted and led a devout life.

Example

Blessed John Herolt, the Dominican scholar who out of humility called himself merely the "Disciple," tells the story of a married man who lived at enmity with God. His wife was unable to get him away from sin, but she begged him at least to practice some devotion to Mary, even though he continued to live in sin. She suggested that every time he passed

before a picture or statue of Mary he would greet her with a Hail Mary. The man began to practice this devotion.

One night, as he was on his way to commit sin, he saw a light and noticed that it was burning before a statue of Mary holding the Infant Jesus in her arms. He said his usual *Ave* and then, to his amazement, he saw the Infant covered with wounds that oozed fresh blood. Frightened by this, the sinner began to realize that it was his own sins that had wounded his Redeemer. He broke into tears but noticed that the Infant turned his back on him. He became alarmed. He turned his glance to Mary and said to her: "O Mother of Mercy, your son rejects me. Where can I find a more compassionate and powerful advocate than you? O my queen, help me and pray for me!" Mary answered him and said: "You sinners call me the Mother of Mercy, but at the same time you insist upon making me a mother of sorrows by renewing my afflictions and the sufferings of my son."

Nevertheless, she now turned to her son and begged him to pardon the sinner. Jesus continued to show himself, as it were, reluctant to forgive. The Blessed Virgin then placed the Infant in the altar niche and knelt down before him. "My son," she said, "I will not leave here until you pardon this sinner." Then Jesus said to his mother: "Mother, I cannot refuse you anything. Do you really want him pardoned? If you do, for the love of you I will pardon him. Make him come and kiss my wounds."

The sinner approached and kissed the Infant's feet. At once those wounds were healed. Finally, Jesus embraced him as a sign that he had forgiven him. The sinner, from then on, changed his life completely and dedicated himself to a life of virtue, characterized by a special love for the Blessed Virgin, who had obtained so great a grace for him.

Prayer

O most pure Virgin Mary, I venerate your most holy heart, the repose and delight of God. Your heart is filled with humility, purity, and love for God. I, unhappy sinner, come to you with a heart full of filth and wounds. O Mother of Mercy, do not despise me for this, but be compassionate and help me. Do

not look for any virtue or merit on my part. I am lost and deserve nothing but hell. Look only at the confidence I have in you and my will to do better. Look at all that Jesus has done and suffered for me, and, only then, if you have the heart to do so, abandon me. I offer you all the sufferings of his life: the cold he bore in the stable, the journey he made into Egypt, the blood he shed, his poverty, his toil in the sweat of his brow, the sadness and death he endured for love of me in your very presence. For love of Jesus, save me!

Now that I turn to you and ask for help, I am not afraid that you will reject me. If I were afraid, I would be insulting your mercy which seeks out those in misery to help them. O Lady, do not refuse that mercy for which Jesus did not refuse his blood. Unless you recommend me to God, these merits will not be applied to me. I hope for salvation through you.

I do not ask for riches, or honors, or any other worldly goods. I am looking only for God's grace, love of your son, the fulfillment of his will, and Paradise, there to love him eternally. Is it possible that you will not hear me? No, you have already heard me. You have already prayed for me, already obtained the graces I want, already received me under your protection.

O my Mother, do not leave me! Continue, continue to pray for me, until you see me safe in heaven, blessing you and thanking you forever.

4

TO YOU DO WE CRY, POOR BAMSHED CHILDREN OF EVE



Mary Is Prompt to Help Those Who Invoke Her

We are poor unfortunate children of Eve. As guilty before God as she, and condemned to the same penalty, we are doomed to wander in this valley of tears as exiles, weeping over our many afflictions of body and soul. But happy is he who can turn in the midst of these sorrows to the comforter of the world, to the great Mother of God, and who can devoutly and humbly pray to her: *Blessed is the man that hears me, and that watches daily at my gates* (Prov 8:34). Blessed, says Mary, is he who listens to my counsels and who watches at the gates of my mercy and invokes my intercession and aid.

Holy Church indicates quite clearly how attentively and confidently we are to have recourse constantly to this loving protectress. As a matter of fact, she commands us to have a special devotion to Mary. During the year, a certain number of feasts are to be celebrated in her honor. One day a week is to be specially dedicated to her. In the daily Office, all priests and religious are to invoke her in the name of all Christendom, and three times a day all the faithful are to greet her at the sound of the Angelus bell.

A deeper insight into the mind of the Church is gotten from the fact that in all public calamities the Church wants us to turn to Mary through novenas, special prayers, processions, and visits to her shrines. This is the way Mary wants it. She wants us constantly to seek and invoke her help. Not that she is begging for it, because all the homage we can show her falls far short of what she deserves. But as Saint Bonaventure says, she wants us to increase our confidence and in that way receive greater consolation and help.

Saint Bonaventure also says that Ruth is a figure of Mary because the

very name *Ruth* means *seeing and hastening*. When Mary sees our miseries, she hastens to help us with her mercy. Novarinus adds that, because of her great desire to do us good, Mary does not delay. She is not a greedy guardian of her graces but the Mother of Mercy, and so she cannot help distributing the treasure of her graces as soon as she can.

Oh, how prompt this good mother is to help those who invoke her: *Your breasts are like twin fawns* (Cant 4:5). In explaining this passage Richard of Saint Lawrence says that, just as fawns are known for the speed with which they run, so also are the breasts of Mary quick to give the milk of mercy to any who ask for it. Richard assures us that Mary dispenses her mercy to everyone who asks for it, even though his prayer be only a simple Hail Mary.

Novarinus claims that the Blessed Virgin not only runs, but actually flies to help whoever calls on her. And he assures us that whenever Mary dispenses mercy she imitates God. Just as Our Lord immediately flies to the rescue of those who ask his help, mindful of his promise, *Ask and you shall receive* (Jn 16:24), so too, whenever Mary is invoked she actually hurries to help the one who prays. "God uses wings and immediately flies to help his servants; and the Blessed Virgin also dons wings to fly to our aid."

From this, we can readily understand how Mary is the woman mentioned in the Apocalypse, of whom it is said: *And there were given to the woman the two wings of the great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness* (Apoc 12:14). Father Ribera, S.J., explains this passage by saying that the two wings are the love wherewith Mary is ever flying toward God. "She has the wings of an eagle, because she flies out of love for God." But Blessed Amadeus has another explanation, one more in accord with our own opinion, and says that the two wings indicate the speed with which Mary always flies to the aid of her children, a speed that surpasses even that of the Seraphim: "At a most rapid speed, surpassing even the Seraphim, Mary, as a mother, flies everywhere to aid her own."

In Luke's Gospel, we read that when Mary went to visit Elizabeth and shower that entire family with grace, she did not tarry but made the whole journey rapidly: *Now in those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country…* (Lk 1:39). Nothing is said in the Gospel about her

also returning with haste.

From the fifth chapter of the Canticle of Canticles, we get the impression that Mary's hands are used to the lathe. Richard of Saint Lawrence explains that the use of the lathe makes difficult work easy and also enables the artisan to work swiftly. He explains the passage in Canticles (5:14) thus: "As the art of working a lathe is the quickest of all, so is Mary quicker than all the saints in doing good."

Mary has the greatest desire to console everybody. No sooner is she invoked, says Blosius, than she immediately hears the prayers and graciously helps the petitioner. That is why Saint Bonaventure rightly calls her "the salvation of all who call on her." He means to say that in order to be saved it is enough merely to call on Mary. According to Richard of Saint Lawrence, Mary is always found ready to help everyone who prays. And Bernardine de Bustis tells us she is more eager to do us favors than we are to receive them. "Mary is more anxious to do us good than we are to receive her benefits."

The fact that we have committed many sins should not lessen our confidence that Mary will hear us when we fly to her. Mary is the Mother of Mercy and there is no place for mercy where there is no misery to be relieved. Just as a good mother does not hesitate to apply remedies to the ulcerous wounds of her son, even though the treatment is annoying and nauseating, so too Mary cannot abandon us when we have recourse to her, even though the wounds of our sins be nauseating and revolting. This thought is the sentiment of Richard of Saint Lawrence who says: "For this good mother does not despise sinners any more than any good mother would despise her child who is afflicted with a horrible disease, for this reminds her why she became the Mother of Mercy. Where there is no misery, there is no demand for mercy." This is the very point that Mary wished to bring home to Saint Gertrude when Mary opened her cloak to receive all who turned to her. At the same time, the saint was told that all the angels of heaven constantly protect Mary's clients from the assaults of hell.

The Blessed Virgin's compassion and love are so great that she does not wait for our prayers before helping us. The Book of Wisdom expresses this beautifully: *She hastens to make herself known in anticipation of men's desires* (6:13). Saint Anselm applies these words to

Mary and says she forestalls those who desire her protection.[27] By this we are to understand that she implores many favors for us from God before we even pray to her!

Precisely for this reason, says Richard of Saint Victor, is Mary called *beautiful as the moon* (Cant 6:9), because in flying to the aid of those who call on her, Mary is as swift as the moon in its course. Swifter, in fact, because she is so concerned about our welfare that she even anticipates our prayers. And, adds Richard, it is not possible for this benign queen to behold the want of any soul without immediately assisting it.

Mary, even when living in this world, showed at the marriage feast of Cana the extraordinary compassion she would exercise for us later in heaven—that compassion which would make her come to our aid even before we ask her. In the second chapter of Saint John, we read that Mary noticed the distress and embarrassment of the bride and groom because the supply of wine was running low. Without being asked, and listening only to the dictates of her compassionate heart (which can never notice the distress of others without feeling for them), Mary prevailed upon Jesus to relieve the situation. She merely mentioned to him: *They have no wine* (Jn 2:3). To spare the couple embarrassment, but even more to content the tender heart of his mother, Jesus ordered the water pots to be filled. Then he miraculously transformed the water into wine. Arguing from this fact, Novarinus remarks: “If Mary comes to the rescue so quickly, without being asked, what more will she do if she is asked?”

If anyone still doubts that Mary will hasten to his help when asked, let him feel rebuked by the words of Innocent III who says: “Who has ever called upon her from the dark night of sin, and was not relieved?” Blessed Eutychian asks the same question: “Who has ever faithfully implored your all-powerful aid and was abandoned by you?” Such a thing has never happened and never will happen. “I would be perfectly satisfied,” says Saint Bernard, “if anyone who ever called on you and was not helped by you would never even speak about you and praise your mercy.” But such a case has never occurred.

“Sooner,” says the devout Blosius, “would heaven and earth be destroyed than Mary would fail to help anyone who asked for help, provided he did so with a good intention and with confidence in her.”

Saint Anselm, to increase our confidence, says this: “When we have recourse to Mary, not only may we be sure of her protection, but often we will be heard by Mary more speedily than if we had recourse to Jesus, our Savior.” The reason he gives is that it is the office of Jesus as judge to punish, but it is Mary’s role, as mother, to be merciful. He says this, not because Mary’s power to save us is more powerful than her son’s, for we know that Jesus is our only Savior, the only one who through his merits has brought about our salvation. But when we remember that Jesus is our judge, and that it is his province as judge to punish ungrateful sinners, we may become apprehensive and lack the confidence we need to be heard. Surely our confidence is greater when we go to Mary, whose only office as Mother of Mercy is to help us and defend us as our advocate. To substantiate this, we have the beautiful words of Nicephorus: “Many things are asked of God and not obtained. Many things are asked of Mary and obtained—not because she is more powerful, but because God has arranged this to honor her.”

Saint Bridget heard Our Lord make a most sweet and consoling promise. In the fiftieth chapter of the first book of her *Revelations* we read how the saint one day heard Jesus say to his mother: “There is no prayer of yours that will not be heard. My dear Mother, ask for whatever you wish. I will refuse you nothing. And I also promise to hear the prayers of all who for love of you ask me for grace, even though they be sinners, provided they want to amend.” Saint Gertrude heard our Divine Redeemer make the same promise to his mother, namely, that through his omnipotence he had granted Mary the power to reconcile all sinners who called on her for help in whatever way it should suit Mary to help them.

Let everyone, then, with the fullest and completest confidence, make this well-known prayer of Saint Bernard his own: “Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to your protection was left unaided.”[28] Therefore, forgive me, O Mary, if I say that I will not be the first unfortunate creature who has ever had recourse to you and was not abandoned.

Example

Saint Francis de Sales experienced the power of this prayer very forcibly. He was about seventeen and studying in Paris. He not only applied himself diligently to his studies, but was also very devout, and God allowed him to experience many spiritual delights. But in order to try him and to strengthen his love, God allowed Satan to tempt him and to persuade him that all he did for love of God was of no avail since he had already been damned. Darkness and dryness of soul accompanied the temptation, and his bitterness of soul became almost unbearable. He lost his appetite, was unable to sleep, and became so sick and despondent that people looked on him with pity.

As long as this storm lasted, the saint could conceive only bitter thoughts and utter only words of despondency. We read in his life that he said to himself: "Am I now to be without the grace of God who formerly was so sweet and amiable to me? Shall I never again enjoy any divine consolation? O Virgin Mother of God, most beautiful of all the daughters of Jerusalem, am I never to see you in paradise? If I am never to see you in heaven, at least do not let me blaspheme and curse you in hell."

One whole month the temptation lasted. Finally, the Lord was pleased to relieve him through Mary's intercession. (Previously the saint had consecrated his virginity to Mary and had often said that in her he placed all his hope.) One evening, as he was returning home, he entered a church in which he found a plaque with Saint Bernard's famous prayer to our Blessed Lady: "Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to your protection was left unaided." He knelt before the altar of Mary, affectionately recited the prayer, renewed his vow of virginity, and promised to recite the rosary daily. Then he added this prayer of his own: "O my Queen, be my intercessor with your son, whom I dare not approach. My Mother, if I am to be lost in the next world and unable to love your son, who is all worthy of my love, at least secure for me the grace to love him as much as possible in this world. This is the grace I ask of you and hope for from you."

Finishing his prayer, he resigned himself completely to God's will and abandoned himself to the divine mercy. Instantly, he was freed from the temptation. Mary regained for him interior peace as well as physical

restoration, and for the rest of his life Francis continued to be most devoted to her and to write many books and preach many sermons in her honor.

Prayer

O Mother of God, O queen of angels, O hope of mankind, hear him who now calls on you and has recourse to you. Behold me at your feet, I who am a miserable slave of hell. I dedicate myself to your service forever. I offer to serve you as much as I can for all my life. I see quite clearly that you are not honored by the service of a slave as vile as I am, who have so often offended you and your son. But if you accept me as your servant, unworthy as I am, and by your intercession change me and make me worthy, then your mercy will give you such honor as I, a miserable wretch, cannot give. Accept me then, O my Mother, and do not reject me. The Eternal Word came down from heaven to seek the lost sheep, and became your son in order to save them. You certainly will not despise a lost sheep who has recourse to you in order to find Jesus. The price of my salvation has already been paid. My Savior has shed his blood, which is sufficient to save an infinite number of worlds. The only thing yet to be done is to apply this blood to me. This, O Blessed Mother, is your task. Saint Bonaventure tells me it is your duty to save whomever you wish. "He whom you desire to save will be saved." Therefore, O my queen, help me, save me! Today I surrender my soul to you. See to it that I am saved. With Saint Bonaventure, I end my prayer by saying: "O salvation of those who invoke you, save me!"

Mary's Power Is Great in Time of Temptation

Not only is Mary the queen of heaven and of all the saints, but she is also the queen of hell and of all evil spirits. The reason is that she has gloriously routed them by her virtues. At the very beginning of the world, when God announced that a woman would come into the world to conquer the devil, he notified the infernal serpent how our queen would conquer him and rule over him: *I will put enmities between you and the woman … she shall crush your head* (Gen 3:15).

Who else is this woman, this enemy of Satan, but Mary who, by her gentle humility and holy life, completely routed and conquered him? According to Saint Cyprian, "the Mother of the Lord Jesus Christ was promised in that woman." And that is why, reflects the saint, God did not say *I put enmities* but rather *I will put enmities*, lest he seem to be referring to Eve. God said *I will put enmities between you and the woman* to show that Satan's opponent was not to be Eve, who was still living, but another woman descending from her, who, as Saint Vincent Ferrer observes, "would bring our first parents far greater blessings that they had lost by sin."

Mary then is this great and valiant woman who has conquered the devil and has crushed his head by bringing down his pride, as God himself foretold: *She shall crush your head*. Because the Septuagint version has *He shall crush your head*, some doubt whether the words refer to Mary or to Jesus. But our Vulgate edition, the only one approved by the Council of Trent, has *She* instead of *He*. And that this is correct is the opinion of Saint Ambrose, Saint Jerome, Saint Augustine, Saint John Chrysostom, and many others. Be that as it may, it is nevertheless certain that either the Son through his Mother, or the Mother, by the Son's power, has overcome Lucifer. And this prompts Saint Bernard to remark that this proud spirit, in spite of himself, has been beaten down and trampled underfoot by the most Blessed Virgin. Like a slave conquered in war, he is forced always to obey the orders of his queen.

Saint Bruno says that Eve was the cause of death, because she allowed herself to be overcome by the serpent, but Mary restored life to us by conquering the devil. "In Eve are darkness and death; in Mary, life and light. Eve was conquered by the devil. Mary conquered and bound the devil." Yes, Mary bound him in such a way that he cannot stir himself to do the least injury to any of her clients.

What a beautiful explanation Richard of Saint Lawrence gives of these words from the Book of Proverbs: *The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he shall have no need of spoils* (Prov 31:11). He says: "The heart of her husband, that is, the heart of Christ, trusts in her and he will have no need of spoils, because she, as it were, enriches him with spoils taken from the devil." Cornelius à Lapide says: "God has entrusted the heart of Jesus to the hands of Mary that she may win for the Sacred Heart the

love of man." In that way he will not need spoils; that is, he will be abundantly supplied with souls; for she enriches him with those whom she has snatched from hell and saved from the devil by her powerful aid.

We know that the palm is a symbol of victory. Therefore our queen is placed on a lofty throne in view of all the mighty ones of the world, like a palm that symbolizes certain victory for all who put themselves under her patronage. *I was exalted like a palm tree in Cades…* (Ecclus 24:18). That is, "for defense," adds Saint Albert the Great. Mary therefore seems to address us, saying: "My children, when the enemy attacks you, turn to me, look upon me and take courage; because when you look to me to defend you, you are sure of victory."

Recourse to Mary, then, is the surest way of overcoming all the attacks of hell. In the words of Saint Bernardine of Siena, Mary is also queen over hell and the devils. She is the one who overcomes and subdues them. And for this reason she is called an enemy that is terrible to the powers of hell. *Terrible as an army set in array* (Cant 6:3). Mary knows how to deploy her forces, that is, her mercy and her prayers, to the confusion of the enemy and for the benefit of those who call on her for defense in temptation.

In the words of the Holy Spirit, Mary says: *As the vine I have brought forth a pleasant odor* (Ecclus 24:23). "We are told," says Saint Bernard on this passage, "that all venomous reptiles stay away from flowering vines." Similarly, the demons of hell stay away from those happy souls who breathe forth the fragrance of devotion to Mary. In the same chapter, we read that Mary was *exalted like a cedar in Libanus* (Ecclus 24:17). This is not only because Mary was free from sin, as the cedar is free from corruption, but also, as Cardinal Hugo remarks on the same passage, because Mary by her holiness disperses the demons, just as the cedar, by its fragrance, repels reptiles.

In Judea, victories were won by means of the Ark. This is how Moses conquered his enemies, as we learn from the Book of Numbers. *Whenever the ark set out, Moses would say, "Arise, O Lord, that your enemies may be scattered, and those who hate you may flee before you"* (Num 10:35). Jericho and the Philistines were conquered in the same way, *for the ark of God was there that day with the children of Israel* (1 Kings 14:18). We know that the ark is a figure of Mary. As Cornelius à Lapide puts it: "The

ark containing the manna, namely Christ, is the Blessed Virgin who gives victory over men and devils." And Saint Bernardine of Siena says that when Mary, the ark of the New Testament, was raised on high and made queen of heaven, the power of hell over humankind was weakened and dissipated.

Oh, how the demons of hell tremble at the thought of Mary and quake at the mention of her name, says Saint Bonaventure. The saint compares these enemies to those of whom Job speaks: *In the dark he breaks into houses. By day they shut themselves in; none of them know the light* (Job 24:16). It is in the dark that thieves go to rob a house. And when day begins to dawn they hurry away as if an image of death had appeared to them. "Precisely thus," says Saint Bonaventure, "do the devils enter a soul when it is darkened by ignorance. And if the dawn suddenly comes, namely the grace and mercy of Mary, they flee as everybody flees from death." Blessed is the man who invokes the name of Mary in his battles with the demons of hell!

In proof of this, there is the revelation made to Saint Bridget which discloses that God made Mary so powerful against the devils that, whenever they attack someone who has called upon Mary for help, they are immediately terrified and leave off molesting that soul. They prefer to flee and to take a double dose of their torments, rather than see themselves subjected to Mary's power.

Cornelius à Lapide reflects on the words with which the divine bridegroom praises his spouse, calling her a lily: *As a lily among thorns, so is my beloved among women* (Cant 2:2). He says: "As experience teaches, calling upon the Blessed Virgin is a singular remedy in all temptations, especially against lust, just as the lily is a remedy against snakes and poisons."

Saint John Damascene used to say: "I shall be saved, O Mother of God, if I keep alive my hope in you. I will fight and overcome my enemies with no other weapon than your protection and your invincible aid." And everyone who has the good fortune to be devoted to this great queen can say the same thing. O Mother of God, if I put my hope in you, I shall certainly not be conquered. Defended by you, I shall rout my enemies. I shall oppose them with the shield of your all-powerful protection. And I shall conquer them. The monk James, one of the Greek

Doctors, speaking to Our Lord about Mary, says: “You have given us in Mary, O Lord, a weapon that the forces of the enemy cannot overcome and a sign of victory that cannot be taken away from us.”

In the Old Testament we read that God guided his people from Egypt to the land of promise *by day in a pillar of a cloud, and by night in a pillar of fire* (Exod 13:21). This stupendous pillar, at times as a cloud, at times as fire, says Richard of Saint Lawrence, was a type of Mary as she fulfills the double office she constantly exercises for our good. As a cloud, she protects us from the heat of divine justice. As fire, she protects us from the demons. Saint Bonaventure adds that as wax melts in the presence of a flame, so do the devils lose their power against souls who often invoke Mary’s name—particularly if they try to imitate her.

The devils tremble at the mere mention of Mary’s name. Saint Bernard declares that at the name of Mary every knee bows, and the devils not only fear but actually tremble at the mention of that name. Thomas à Kempis agrees. He says that as men often fall to the ground when a bolt of lightning strikes near them, so do the devils quake with fear when they hear Mary’s name. Countless are the victories that the clients of Mary have won by merely pronouncing her name. That is how Saint Anthony of Padua dispelled temptation—also the Blessed Henry Suso and many others devoted to this great queen.

We read in the history of the missions in Japan that there was a certain Christian to whom many devils appeared in the form of ferocious animals. But he spoke to them boldly and said, “Personally, I have no weapons that you are afraid of. If God permits it, you can do whatever you want with me. But, meanwhile, I am going to defend myself with the most powerful names of Jesus and Mary.” He had hardly pronounced these names when the earth opened up and the evil spirits, howling horribly, cast themselves headlong into it.

Saint Anselm affirms that he personally knew and had seen and heard of many who had invoked the name of Mary in temptation and were immediately delivered. Saint Bonaventure exclaims: “Glorious and admirable is your name, O Mary! Those who hold to this name have no fear at the hour of death, for when the demons hear the name of Mary they immediately let that soul alone.” He adds, “No enemy on earth fears a powerful hostile army as much as the demons of hell fear the

name and protection of Mary." Saint Germanus says: "At the mere invocation of your name, you secure your servants against all the attacks of hell."

What a great thing if, during temptation, all Christians thought of confidently invoking Mary's name! They would certainly never fall. As Blessed Alan says: "At the very sound of the words Hail Mary, Satan flees and hell trembles." To Saint Bridget, Our Lady revealed that even from the most abandoned sinners, from those farthest from God, from those most under Satan's power, the enemy will flee as soon as he hears Mary's name pronounced, and when the sinner has a true desire to mend his ways. But at the same time Our Lady added: "If the sinner is not contrite and will not amend, the devil will immediately return and possess him."

Example

In Reichersperg in Bavaria there was a Canon Regular by the name of Arnold, who was greatly devoted to the Blessed Virgin. When he was at the point of death, he received the sacraments, called his brethren in religion, and begged them not to abandon him in his last hour. Hardly had he said this when he began to tremble all over. His eyes became distorted and he was covered with a cold sweat. Trembling, he said to them: "Don't you see those devils who want to drag me into hell?" Then with a loud cry: "Brothers, ask Mary to help me! I am sure she will help me win this struggle."

The religious recited the Litany of the Blessed Virgin. At the words "Holy Mary, pray for him," the dying man said: "Repeat Mary's name! I am already being judged!" After a brief pause, he added: "It's true that I did it. But I did penance for it." Then, turning to the Blessed Virgin, he prayed: "O Mary, I shall be freed if you help me."

The devils began a fresh attack, but he defended himself with the Sign of the Cross and by invoking Mary. All night long this struggle continued. When morning dawned, Arnold had become entirely calm. Joyfully he exclaimed: "Mary, my refuge, has obtained pardon for me!" Turning to the vision of Mary who asked him to follow her, he said: "I

am coming, my Lady, I am coming!”

He tried to rise, but his body was too weak to obey him and he expired sweetly in the attempt. And his soul, we devoutly hope, followed the Blessed Virgin to the heavenly kingdom.

Prayer

Behold at your feet, O Mary, my hope, a poor sinner who has been so many times, by his own fault, a slave of hell. I know that by neglecting to have recourse to you I allowed myself to be overcome by the devil. If I had always remembered you and invoked you, I would never have fallen. O most loving Mother, I trust that, with your help, I have already escaped the clutches of the devil and that God has pardoned me. But I tremble for the future, lest I again become enchained. I know that my enemies have not given up the hope of returning and conquering me again. My queen and my refuge, help me! Take me under your protection. Do not let me become enslaved again.

I know that you will help me every time I call on you and that ultimately you will make me victorious. But there is one thought that frightens me: that in the hour of temptation I shall forget you and fail to call on you. And that is why today I seek and beg the grace of ever remembering to call on you, especially in times of temptation. Make me invoke you often with these words: “Mary, help me! Mary, help me!”

Finally, when the day of my last combat dawns, when I am about to die, then, O Mary, help me more than ever. Make me call upon you frequently, so that I may die with your most sweet name, and that of your Son Jesus, on my lips, and that I may come to bless and praise you and never leave you for all eternity in heaven. Amen.

5

TO YOU DO WE SEND UP OUR SIGHS, MOURNING, AND WEEPING IN THIS VALLEY OF TEARS



Mary's Intercession Is Necessary for Our Salvation

That it is not only lawful, but also useful, to invoke and pray to the saints, and especially to the queen of saints, so that they may obtain divine grace for us, is an article of faith. This has been defined by General Councils against heretics who condemned it as injurious to Jesus Christ, who is our only mediator. But if Jeremiah, after his death, prays for Jerusalem (2 Macc 15:14); if the ancients of the Apocalypse present the prayers of the saints to God (Apoc 5:8); if Saint Peter promises to remember his disciples after his death (2 Pet 1:15); if Saint Stephen prays for his persecutors (Acts 7:59) and Saint Paul prays for his companions (Acts 27:24); if, in fact, the saints *can* pray for us, why can we not implore them to do so? Saint Paul recommends himself to the prayers of his disciples: *Brethren, pray for us* (1 Thess 5:25). Saint James exhorts us to pray for one another: … *Pray for one another, that you may be saved* (Jas 5:16). Then we can do the same.

No one denies that Jesus Christ is the only mediator of justice, that through his merits he obtained our reconciliation with God. But, on the other hand, it is sinful to assert that God is not pleased to grant graces through the intercession of his saints, especially of Mary, his mother, whom Jesus so much desired to be honored and loved. Who can pretend that the honor a mother receives does not redound to the honor of her son? *The glory of children is their parentage* (Prov 17:6).

Therefore Saint Bernard says that we should not imagine that we obscure the prestige of a son by the praise we lavish on his mother. The more we honor a mother, the greater is the renown of her son. And Saint Ildephonsus adds quite logically: "The more honor that is given to the

queen, the more is the king exalted and honored." There can be no doubt that, by the merits of Jesus, Mary was made the mediatrix of our salvation. True, she is not a mediatrix of justice, but of grace and intercession. As Saint Bonaventure puts it: "Faithless Eve was the mediatrix of perdition; the most faithful Mary is the mediatrix of our salvation." And Saint Lawrence Giustiniani asks: "How can she be otherwise than full of grace—she who has been made the ladder to paradise, the gate of heaven, and the most true mediatrix between God and man?"

Saint Anselm makes the very pertinent remark that when we pray to Mary for graces, it is not because we lack confidence in God's mercy, but rather because we mistrust our own unworthiness. We commend ourselves to Mary so that her worthiness may supply for our insufficiency.

Only those who lack faith can doubt that recourse to Mary's intercession is a holy and profitable thing. To speak plainly, the point we wish to prove here is that Mary's intercession is necessary for salvation. Not absolutely necessary, but morally necessary. Moreover, we say that this necessity arises from the very will of God, who wills that all the graces he dispenses should pass through Mary's hands. This is Saint Bernard's opinion, which today can certainly be called the common opinion of theologians and scholars.

The author of *The Reign of Mary*, the Carmelite Father Emmanuel of Jesus Mary, says that this is so. And he is followed by Vega, Mendoza, Paciucchelli, Segneri, Poire, Crasset, and innumerable other scholars. Even Father Noël Alexandre holds this, and he is usually very conservative in his opinions. These are his own words: "God wills that we hope for all graces from him, and that we obtain them through the most powerful intercession of the Blessed Virgin, when, as is fitting, we invoke her." In proof of his contention, Father Noël quotes the celebrated passage of Saint Bernard: "Such is his will, that he wants us to have everything through Mary." Father Contenson agrees with this when he explains the words of Our Lord on the cross to Saint John: "Behold thy mother!" It is almost as if he had said: "No one shall share in my blood, except through my mother's intercession. My wounds are fountains of grace; but their waters will not be brought to anyone except

through Mary, their channel. You, John, my disciple, shall be loved by me in proportion as you love her."

This proposition, that all the graces we receive from the Lord come to us through Mary, does not please a certain modern author. Although he speaks with great learning and piety about other aspects of true and false devotion, nevertheless, in discussing devotion to Mary, he seems to grudge her that glory which was given her without scruple by Saint Germanus, Saint Anselm, Saint John Damascene, Saint Antoninus, Saint Bernardine of Siena, the Venerable Abbot of Celles, and so many other learned men who found no difficulty in maintaining, by force of the reasons just mentioned, that Mary's intercession is not only useful but necessary. The modern author claims that this opinion is merely a figure of speech, an exaggeration that fell from the lips of the saints in the heat of their fervor. Actually, he claims, the sentence is to be understood merely as meaning that through Mary we have received Jesus Christ, by whose merits we receive all graces. He says that, except in this restricted sense, we would be in error to believe that God cannot grant graces without Mary's intercession, for Saint Paul tells us that we recognize but one God and only one mediator between God and men, namely, Christ Jesus (1 Tim 2:5). So much for his argument.

But with his leave, and going on his own admission in his books, mediation of justice by way of merit is one thing, and mediation of grace by way of prayer is another. And again, it is one thing to say God cannot and another to say he will not grant any graces without Mary's intercession. We admit freely that God is the source of every good and the absolute master of all graces. Also, that Mary is only a creature, who receives whatever she obtains as a pure favor from God. But who can deny that it is most reasonable and proper to assert that God wants every grace destined for redeemed souls to pass through Mary's hands and be dispensed by her, since she, more than all others, loved and honored him during his life and had been chosen by him to be the mother of his son and our common Redeemer? We most readily admit that Jesus Christ is the only mediator of *justice*, according to the distinction just made, because through his merits he obtained grace and salvation for us. But we say that Mary is the mediatrix of *grace*. Whatever she obtains, of course, is gotten through the merits of Christ,

and that is why she asks and prays in his name. Nevertheless, every grace we seek is obtained through her prayer and intercession.

There is certainly nothing contrary to faith in this. Actually, it is quite in accord with the mind of Holy Church. She has approved many prayers in which we are taught continually to have recourse to Mary—many prayers in which Mary is called the health of the sick, the refuge of sinners, the help of Christians, our life and our hope. In the Divine Office for the feasts of Mary, the Church applies to her the words of Ecclesiasticus, giving us to understand that in Mary we shall all find hope: *In me is all hope of life and of virtue* (Ecclus 24:25). In Mary we find every grace: *In me is all grace of the way and of the truth.* In Mary we find life and eternal salvation: *He that shall find me, shall find life, and shall have salvation from the Lord* (Prov 8:35). In still another place in Scripture we read: *They that work by me shall not sin. They that explain me shall have life everlasting* (Ecclus 24:30–31). All this points out how much we need Mary's intercession.

This, then, is the point of which I am convinced by so many theologians and Fathers of the Church. It is definitely incorrect in speaking of them to say, as this modern author does, that, in exalting Mary, they spoke exaggeratingly and that these words dropped from their lips in an excess of fervor. It ill becomes us to say that the saints exaggerated, spoke in hyperboles, and overstepped the limits of truth. The saints were animated by the Holy Spirit, who is Truth itself, and it was through him they spoke.

If I may be permitted to make a short digression and to express my own sentiment, it is this: When an opinion tends in any way to honor the Most Blessed Virgin, when it has some foundation, when it is not contrary to faith or the canons of the Church or to truth, the refusal to hold that opinion or to oppose it, because its opposite might possibly be true, would show little devotion to the Mother of God. I do not want to be numbered among those who have so little devotion to Mary. Nor do I want my readers to belong to such a group. I prefer to be one of those who fully and firmly believe everything that can be believed without error about Mary's greatness. The Abbot Rupert, listing the various ways of giving honor to Mary, places this most prominently: "To believe firmly everything that redounds to her honor."[29] If there were nothing

else to take away our fear of excess in honoring Mary, the words of Saint Augustine should suffice. He maintains that whatever we say in praise of Mary is slight in comparison to what she deserves by reason of her dignity as Mother of God. And Holy Church has us say in the Mass of the Blessed Virgin: "You are fortunate indeed, O holy Virgin Mary, and *most worthy of all praise*."

But let us return to the point and see what the saints say about the subject. Saint Bernard says that God filled Mary with all graces so that through Mary, as through a channel, all people may receive whatever they need. He remarks significantly: "Before Mary's birth there was no such flow of graces into the world for everybody because this much-desired aqueduct did not yet exist." Precisely for this was Mary given to the world, he adds, that, through her, graces would descend from God upon all men.

Just as Holofernes ordered the aqueducts to be destroyed so that he could capture the city of Bethulia, so also does the devil do his utmost to make men lose their devotion to the Mother of God. If this channel of grace is closed to them, the devil will have no trouble in winning them. And so, Saint Bernard continues: "See with what tender devotion God wants us to honor Mary. He placed the fullness of every grace in her. So much so that every expectation of salvation comes to us through her." Saint Antoninus says the same thing: "Every grace that has ever been given to man has come to him through Mary."

Mary has been compared to the moon. The reason, says Saint Bonaventure, is that just as the moon is a kind of intermediary between the sun and the earth and reflects upon the earth what it receives from the sun, so also does Mary act as an intermediary between God and ourselves. She pours out upon the world the heavenly graces she receives from the sun of justice.

One of Mary's titles is "gate of heaven." As every rescript of grace or pardon ordered by a king passes through the palace gates, so, according to Saint Bernard, does every grace from heaven pass through Mary's hands. In another place, Saint Bernard says that nobody can enter heaven unless he passes through Mary as a gate.

An ancient author, in a sermon on the Assumption published with the

works of Saint Jerome, says that the fullness of grace was in Christ Jesus as the Head. From this Head flow upon the members all the life-giving graces they need to attain eternal salvation. But the same fullness of grace is in Mary, as in the neck through which these vital graces are channeled to the members. The same opinion is confirmed by Saint Bernardine of Siena who says: “Life-giving grace is poured into the Mystical Body of Christ the Head through the Blessed Virgin.”

Saint Bonaventure tries to give us the reason for this when he argues that, since God chose to dwell in Mary’s womb, Mary acquired, so to speak, a jurisdiction over all graces. And when Jesus issued forth from her virginal womb, streams of divine grace issued forth from her as from a heavenly ocean. Saint Bernardine of Siena says the same, but in clearer terms, when he asserts that from the moment the Virgin Mother conceived the Divine Word in her womb, she acquired, as it were, a special claim over the gifts we receive from the Holy Spirit, so much so that no one has ever received any grace except through the hands of Mary.

Another author, commenting on the passage from Jeremiah in which the prophet says that *a woman shall compass a man* (Jer 31:22), gives this explanation of the text: As no line can be drawn from the center of a circle without passing through the circumference, so no grace proceeds from Jesus, who is the center of every good thing, without passing through Mary, who compassed him when she received him into her womb.

From this truth, Saint Bernardine concludes that all gifts, all virtues, all graces are dispensed by Mary’s hands to whomever she wishes, whenever she wishes, and in whatever way she wishes. Richard of Saint Lawrence also says that whatever good God wishes to give to creatures he gives through the hands of Mary. That is why the venerable Abbot of Celles exhorts everyone to have recourse to this treasury of graces, as he calls her. “Go to the Virgin,” he says, “because through her the world shall get possession of every blessing.”

It must be evident to all now that, when the saints and authors tell us in such terms that all graces come to us through Mary, they do not simply mean, as the abovementioned author maintains, that through Mary we have received Jesus Christ, the source of every grace. They

very clearly assure us that after God gave us Jesus Christ, he willed that from then till the world's end all the graces to be bestowed on men through the merits of Jesus Christ would be dispensed through Mary's hands and through Mary's intercession.

Father Suarez concludes from all this that it is the universal mind of the Church today that Mary's intercession is not only useful for us, but necessary. Not absolutely necessary, as we have already said, because only the mediation of Christ is absolutely necessary. But morally necessary, because the Church feels, with Saint Bernard, that God has determined that no grace be given except through Mary's hands. Even before Saint Bernard, Saint Ildephonsus said the same thing in addressing Mary: "O Mary, the Lord has decreed that all the favors he has determined to bestow on man shall be entrusted to your hands. He has entrusted to you all the treasures and riches of grace." And Saint Peter Damian remarks that God would not become man without the consent of Mary for two reasons: first, that all of us might feel ourselves highly obligated to Mary; secondly, that we might all understand that our salvation is left to the care and judgment of this Blessed Virgin.

In Isaiah we read: *And there shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of this root; and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him* (Isa 11:1–2). By these words, Isaiah prophesies that a virgin, Mary, would be born from the offspring of Jesse and from her would rise a flower, the Incarnate Word. Meditating on this prophecy, Saint Bonaventure utters these beautiful words: "Whoever wishes to obtain the grace of the Holy Spirit should seek the flower on the stem. For through the stem we come to the flower and through the flower to the Spirit." In other words, let everyone seek Jesus through Mary. Having found Jesus through Mary, we will come to the Spirit of God through Jesus.

In the tenth chapter of the same work he adds: "And if you wish to possess the flower, bend down by your prayers the stem which bears this flower." That is the way you will get possession of the blossom. In his sermon on the Epiphany, the Seraphic Doctor comments on the words of Saint Matthew: *They found the child with Mary, his mother* (2:11), and indicates that if we wish to find Jesus, we must go to Mary. "Christ is never found except with and through Mary."[30] Whoever does not try to

find Jesus with Mary seeks in vain. That, most likely, is why Saint Ildephonsus said: “I want to be the slave of Jesus. But since no one can ever serve the son without serving the mother, for this reason, I make myself a slave of Mary.”

Example

Both Vincent of Beauvais and Caesarius tell the following story. A certain noble youth, as a result of his vices, had been reduced to extreme poverty, so much so that he had to go begging. Confused and ashamed, the lad left his home town and took off for a distant city. On the way he met one of his father’s former servants. Observing the young man’s pitiable condition, he promised to lead him to a wealthy benefactor who would give him all the help he needed.

The servant happened to be a sorcerer. He took the youth to a lake in the middle of a forest and began to speak to some invisible person. When the lad inquired to whom he was speaking, the servant replied: “I am speaking to the devil.” The boy was frightened but the servant continued his colloquy with the demon. “This young man,” he said, “has lost everything and would like to be restored to his former position.” The devil answered: “If he is ready to obey me, I shall make him even richer than before. But first, he must deny God.”

The youth was horrified. But the servant continued to argue and cajole and finally the poor lad agreed and denied his Creator. The devil, however, was not satisfied. “You must also deny Mary,” he said, “because Mary is our greatest enemy. See how many souls she snatches from our hands and leads back to God.” “Absolutely not,” answered the young man. “Mary I will never deny. She is my mother, my life, and my hope. I would rather spend the rest of my life as a beggar.” With these words he left the place.

As he continued on his way, he passed a church dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. Tormented and troubled, he went in and knelt down before a statue of Mary. He begged Mary to intercede for him.

Suddenly, Mary appeared and began to pray for him. At first her divine Son said: “But Mother, this ingrate has denied me.” Mary

continued to pray, and finally Jesus said: “Mother, I have never refused you anything. Let the boy be pardoned, since that is what you ask of me.”

The man who had come into possession of the lad’s fortune happened to be a witness of this entire scene. Touched by Mary’s mercy, the man offered him his daughter in marriage and made him his heir. In this way Mary became the cause of his spiritual as well as his material rehabilitation.

Prayer

O my soul, see what a sure pledge of salvation and eternal life Our Lord has given you by inspiring you with confidence in his holy mother. By your falls in the past, you have often merited his displeasure and made yourself worthy of hell. Therefore, be thankful both to God and to Mary who has become your protectress.

Yes, my Mother, I thank you for everything you have done for me. I know I am worthy of hell. From how many dangers you have freed me! How many lights and graces you obtained from God for me! And what honor have I given you in return?

It is your goodness alone which has brought me this far. Even if I were to shed my blood and lose my life for you, I would be paying but a little of what I owe you for saving me from eternal death. You have enabled me to recover divine grace. Everything that I am and have I owe to you.

My most sweet Mother, poor ingrate that I am, I cannot do anything for you except to continue to love and praise you. Do not turn down the affection of a soul that is bursting with gratitude because of your goodness. And if my heart is not able to love you as much as you deserve because it is impure and filled with earthly affections, cleanse and change that heart. Unite me to your divine Son and bind me to him in such a way that I may never be able to separate myself from him. You ask me to love God, and it is you who must obtain for me the grace to love him. Let me love him alone and always. Amen.

Mary Intercedes for All Sinners

Saint Bernard says that as a man and woman cooperated in our ruin, so also was it proper that another man and woman, Jesus and his Mother Mary, cooperate in our redemption. "There is no doubt," says the saint, "that Jesus Christ alone was more than able to redeem us. But it was indeed fitting that both sexes should work together in repairing the ruin which both sexes has caused." Hence Saint Albert the Great beautifully calls Mary the "cooperatrix of the redemption." The Blessed Virgin herself revealed to Saint Bridget that, as Adam and Eve had sold the whole world for one apple, so Mary, together with her son, ransomed the world with one heart. And Saint Anselm affirms that God was well able to create the world out of nothing, but, when the world was lost through sin, he did not wish to rescue it without Mary's cooperation: "He who could make all things out of nothing, did not wish to repair the shattered world without Mary."

Father Suarez explains that the Blessed Mother cooperated in our redemption in three ways: first, by having merited with a merit of congruity or fitness the Incarnation of the Word; second, by having prayed for us continually while she lived on earth; third, by having voluntarily offered her son's life to God for our salvation. For this reason, God justly decreed that, since Mary cooperated with so much love in the salvation of man and at the same time gave so much glory to God, all men are to obtain their salvation through Mary's intercession.

Mary is called the cooperatrix of our justification because God has committed into her hands all the graces intended for us. Therefore, Saint Bernard affirms that all men, past, present, and future, must look upon Mary as "the means and negotiator of their salvation."

Jesus Christ says that no one can find him unless the Eternal Father first draw him by means of divine grace: *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him…* (Jn 6:44). According to Richard of Saint Lawrence, Jesus says of his mother: "No one comes to me unless my mother draws him by her prayers." Jesus was the fruit of Mary's womb, as Saint Elizabeth told her: *Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb* (Lk 1:42). Whoever wants the fruit must go to the tree. Whoever wants Jesus must go to Mary. Whoever finds Mary will

certainly find Jesus.

When Saint Elizabeth saw the Blessed Virgin coming to visit her, she was at a loss how to thank her. So she exclaimed in all humility: *And how have I deserved that the mother of my Lord should come to me?* (Lk 1:43). Why did Elizabeth word it that way? Surely she knew that it was not Mary alone coming to visit her. Surely she knew that Jesus had also come into her home. Why did she then deem herself unworthy of welcoming Mary, instead of considering herself unworthy of having Mary's son come to visit her? It was because Elizabeth knew very well that when Mary comes, she invariably brings Jesus. That is why she felt confident that it was enough to thank the mother without also naming the son.

She is like the merchant's ship, she brings her bread from afar (Prov 31:14). Mary is this happy ship that brought from heaven Jesus Christ, the living bread that came down from heaven to give us eternal life. *I am the living bread that has come down from heaven. If anyone eat of this bread he shall live forever…* (Jn 6:51–52). Richard of Saint Lawrence says that in the sea of this world everyone shall perish who is not taken aboard this ship. That is, all will perish who are not protected by Mary. Therefore, he adds, when we see the waves of the sea rising high, we must cry out to Mary: "O Lady, save us, we perish!" Whenever we find ourselves in danger from the temptations or passions of life, we must run to Mary and cry: "Come quickly, O Lady, and help us! Save us if you do not want us to be lost!"

Take notice how the author says: "Mary, save us, we perish!" He does not mention the objection of that certain author, already mentioned, who forbids us to ask Mary to save us. That author forbids this because, as he says, it is proper to God alone to save us. Now, suppose a man is condemned to death. Can he not beg for his life through a friend of the king, who can put in a good word for him? Why cannot we ask Our Lady to put in a good word for us and obtain for us the favor of eternal life from God? Saint John Damascene did not scruple to say to Mary: "O pure and immaculate queen, save me from eternal damnation!" Holy Church approves of calling her "health of the sick." Shall we then scruple to ask her to save us when a certain author (Paciucchelli) says: "Only through her is the entrance to salvation open." Long before this

author, Saint Germanus addressed Mary with the same words: “No one is saved, except through you.”

But let us see now what else the saints say about the necessity of Mary’s intercession. The glorious Saint Cajetan used to say that we may seek and seek for graces, but we shall never find them without the intercession of Mary. Saint Antoninus confirms this beautifully when he says: “Whoever expects to obtain graces without Mary is attempting to fly without wings.” King Pharaoh said to Joseph: *The land of Egypt is at your disposal* (Gen 47:6), and then sent to him everyone that came for help, saying: *Go to Joseph* (Gen 41:55). So, too, when we ask God for graces, he says: “Go to Mary,” because, as Saint Bernard says, God determined he would grant no graces except through the hands of Mary. That is why Richard of Saint Lawrence says: “Our salvation is in Mary’s hands. And we can better say to Mary than did the Egyptians to Joseph: ‘You have kept us alive.’” Blessed Raymond Jordano says exactly the same thing, and Cassian speaks in even stronger terms. He declares absolutely that everybody’s salvation consists in being favored and protected by Mary. Whoever is protected by Mary will be saved; whoever is not protected by her will be lost. Saint Bernardine of Siena says to Our Lady: “You are the dispensatrix of all graces; our salvation is in your hands.”

Therefore Richard of Saint Lawrence was right in saying that as a stone falls when the earth that holds it is removed, so also does a soul without Mary’s aid fall, first into sin and then into hell. Saint Bonaventure says that God will not save us without Mary’s intercession: “Just as the infant cannot live without the nurse that cares for it, so also can no one be saved without Mary’s aid.” Therefore he exhorts us to hunger and thirst after devotion to her, to preserve it with care and never to abandon it until we have received her maternal blessing in heaven.

“And who would ever know God,” exclaims Saint Germanus, “if it were not for you, O most holy Mary? Who would be saved? Who would be free from sin? Who would receive any grace at all, if it were not for you, O Mother of God, who are so full of grace?” Listen to his beautiful words: “Nobody, O most holy Virgin, learns to know God except through you. No one will ever be saved but through you, O Mother of God. No

one will ever be free from dangers except through you. No one will ever receive any gift from God except through you, O full of grace!" Elsewhere, too, Saint Germanus says to Our Lady: "Nobody would ever be free from the stings of the flesh and from sin unless you made it possible."

Saint Bernard tells us that, as we have no access to the Eternal Father but through Jesus, so also we have no access to Jesus but through Mary. This is the reason he gives why God determined that we should be saved by Mary's intercession: "Through you we have access to the Son, O blessed finder of grace, O bearer of life, that by you we may receive him who was given to us through you." Therefore he calls Mary the Mother of Grace and of our salvation. "What will become of us," asks Saint Germanus, "what hope of salvation will remain to us, O Mary, if you, who are the life of Christians, abandon us?"

The modern author already quoted uses this absurd argument: If all graces come through Mary, do not the other saints then have to approach Mary to obtain graces when we invoke their intercession? He says no one ever dreamed of such a thing and certainly no one would believe it. As to believing it, I reply that there is no difficulty at all. Since God established Mary as the queen of all saints, and since God wants all graces to be dispensed by her hands, where would be the impropriety in saying that, to honor Mary, God wants the other saints to turn to her for the graces they wish to obtain for their clients? And as for saying that no one would ever dream of such a thing, I rejoin that I find Saint Bernard, Saint Anselm, Saint Bonaventure, together with Father Suarez and many others expressly teaching this. Saint Bernard says: "He who prays to the other saints would pray in vain if Mary did not help."[31] It is in this sense also that a certain author explains these words of David: … *The rich among the people seek your favor* (Ps 44:13). The rich among God's people are the saints, and when they wish to obtain a favor for a client, they turn to Mary and she obtains it for them. Father Suarez says wisely: "Among the saints we do not usually ask one to intercede with the other, because all are of equal rank. But we do ask them to intercede with Mary, because she is their sovereign and their queen." This is exactly what Saint Benedict promised to Saint Frances of Rome, as we read in Father Marchese's book. The saint one day appeared to Saint Frances

and promised to protect her and to be her advocate with the Blessed Virgin.

I can quote Saint Anselm in support of the same opinion. “What all the saints can do united with you,” he says, “you can do alone without them.” “Why is this?” he asks. “Why do you alone have such tremendous power? Because you are the Mother of our Redeemer, you are the spouse of God, you are the queen of heaven and earth. If you do not speak for us, none of the saints will pray for us or help us. But if you pray for us, then all the saints will do the same.”

Father Segneri says the same thing in his book *The Devout Client of Mary*. Together with the Church he applies these words of Holy Writ to Mary: *The vault of heaven I compassed alone…* (Ecclus 24:8). He says that as the movement of the first sphere causes all the rest to move, so, when Mary is moved to pray for a soul, she causes the whole court of heaven to join in her prayers. In fact, says Saint Bonaventure, whenever the Blessed Virgin goes to God to intercede for us, she, as queen, actually commands all the angels and saints to join her in her prayers.

And so now we finally understand why Holy Church commands us to greet Mary with the grand title of “our hope.” Martin Luther could not endure the thought that the Catholic Church insists upon calling Mary our hope, even though she is only a creature. He said that only God, and our mediator Jesus Christ, are our hope. He added that God curses everyone who places his hope in creatures and quotes as his authority the prophet Jeremiah, who said: *Cursed be the man that trusts in man* (Jer 17:5).

Holy Church, however, teaches us to invoke Mary on all occasions and not to hesitate to call her “our hope.” Whoever places his hope in creatures independently of God will certainly meet with God’s displeasure. God is the only source and dispenser of every good, and any creature without God has nothing and can give nothing. But yet, if God so arranged matters—and we have proved that he did—that all graces should pass through Mary, as through a channel of mercy, then we not only can, but indeed must, affirm that Mary is our hope, because through her we receive divine grace.

That is why Saint Bernard called Mary the whole foundation of his

hope. And Saint John Damascene said: “O Lady, I have placed all my hope in you. With my eyes fixed on you, I expect eternal salvation.” In his eighth *Opusculum*, Saint Thomas claims that Mary is the whole hope of his salvation. And Saint Ephrem protests: “If you want us to be saved, O Mary, protect us, because we have no other hope of salvation but through you.”

Let us conclude with Saint Bernard, who says: “With all our heart let us honor Mary, because this is the will of him who wants us to have everything through Mary.” He exhorts us to recommend ourselves to her with the hope of obtaining anything we desire: “Let us seek grace, and let us seek it through Mary.” Saint Bernard says that even if you do not deserve the grace you ask for, Mary, who will ask for it for you, is deserving of it. And by the same token, he adds, whatever you offer to God by way of good works or prayers, be sure to offer through Mary if you want the Lord to accept it.

Example

Very well known is the story of Theophilus, Patriarch of Constantinople, as written by Eutychian, an eyewitness to the event. According to Father Crasset, this story is confirmed by Saint Peter Damian, Saint Bernard, Saint Bonaventure, Saint Antoninus, and others.

Theophilus was archdeacon of a church in Adana, a city of Cilicia. He was held in such high esteem that the people wanted him for their bishop, but out of humility he refused the office. Later some malicious people accused him of a crime, and as a result he was relieved of his charge. He was so bitter at this, that, blinded by passion, he sought a Jewish magician who put him in touch with the devil. The devil said that if Theophilus wanted help, he would have to renounce Jesus and his Mother Mary, put his renunciation in writing, sign it with his own hand, and then turn the document over to the devil. Theophilus wrote and signed the dreadful document.

On the following day, the bishop, realizing the wrong done to Theophilus, begged his pardon and restored him to his former position. Torn by remorse for the enormous sin he had committed, Theophilus

almost fell into despair. He went to one of the churches and cast himself at the feet of Mary's image, where, mingling tears with his prayers, he said to her: "O Mother of God, I do not want to despair as long as I have you who are so merciful and can help me." For forty days he continued weeping and praying to the Blessed Virgin.

One night Mary appeared to him and said: "Theophilus, what have you done? You have renounced my friendship and that of my son—and to whom? To my enemy and yours." "O Lady," replied Theophilus, "you must pardon me and obtain pardon for me from your son." Mary saw his great confidence and said to him: "Have courage! I shall pray to God for you." Encouraged by this, Theophilus increased his tears, penances, and prayers, and stayed before that image.

After a time, Mary appeared to him again and with a cheerful countenance said to him: "Theophilus, I have presented your tears and prayers to God. He has accepted them and has pardoned you. From now on, be grateful and loyal." "But, my Lady," answered Theophilus, "that is not enough to comfort me completely; the devil still has that miserable document on which I renounced you and your son; you are able to restore it to me." One morning, Theophilus awoke to find the document lying on his breast.

The next day, when the bishop and a great throng of people were in church, Theophilus threw himself at the bishop's feet. He told the bishop all that had happened and turned the diabolical document over to him. The bishop immediately had it burned in the presence of the throng of people. The people praised God's goodness, and praised the mercy which Mary had exercised toward this sinner. Then Theophilus returned to Our Lady's church, where after three days he died a consoling death, thanking Jesus and his holy Mother.

Prayer

O Queen, O Mother of Mercy, who with so much liberality, because you are our queen, and so much love because you are our mother, gives graces to everyone who asks for them, I come to you today. I am poor in merits and so much in debt to God's justice. But you, O Mary, hold the key to divine mercy.

Do not overlook my pitiful condition. Do not leave me in such dire straits. You are so generous with everybody. You usually give more than is asked for. Be as generous towards me.

Protect me, O Mary; that is all I ask of you. If you protect me, I shall fear nothing. Not from the devils, because you are more powerful than all hell together. Not from my sins, because one word to God from you can obtain for me complete pardon. Nor will I fear God's anger, because a single prayer from you will appease him at once. If you protect me, I hope for everything because you can obtain everything.

O Mother of Mercy, I know you glory in helping the most unfortunate and that you will help them as long as they are not obstinate. I am indeed a sinner, but an obstinate one. I want to change my way of life. You can help me. Help me and save me. Today I place myself entirely in your hands. Tell me what I have to do to please God. I want to do it. I hope to do it with your help, O Mary, my Mother, my light, my consolation, my refuge, my hope. Amen.

6

MOST GRACIOUS ADVOCATE



Mary Is an Advocate Who Is Able to Save Everybody

So great is the authority which a mother has over her son, that even though he is a monarch and has absolute power over everybody in the kingdom, still she can never become her son's subject.

It is true that Jesus who is now in heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father has, as Saint Thomas explains it, even as man, supreme power over all creatures, even over Mary, because of the hypostatic union with the Person of the Divine Word. At the same time, it will always be true that there was a time, while he was living on this earth, when he was pleased to humble himself and be subject to Mary, as we are told by Saint Luke: *And he was subject to them* (Lk 2:51). We can go even further, according to Saint Ambrose, and say that, having deigned to make Mary his mother, Jesus Christ obligated himself to obey her, since he was her son. For this reason, says Richard of Saint Lawrence, while we may say of the other saints that they are "with God," of Mary alone can it be said that since she was not only favored to be subject to the will of God, but that God himself was subject to her will, the Lord could well be said to be "with Mary": *The Lord is with you* (Lk 1:28). And whereas it can be said of all other virgins, the same author remarks, that *they follow the Lamb wherever he goes* (Apoc 14:4), of the Blessed Virgin alone can it be said that the Lamb followed her, having become subject to her.

Mary is now in heaven. Although she can now no longer command her son, nevertheless her prayers are always the prayers of a mother, and, as such, are so powerful that they can obtain whatever she asks. "Mary," says Saint Bonaventure, "has this great privilege compared with other saints, that she is most powerful in obtaining whatever she

requests from her son." Why is this? Precisely for the reason which we have just mentioned and which we will examine later on, at greater length, because her prayers are those of a mother.

Therefore, as Saint Peter Damian remarks, the Blessed Virgin can do whatever she pleases both in heaven and on earth. She can cause even those who are in despair to hope; and so he addresses the following words to her: "All power is given to you in heaven and on earth, and nothing is impossible to you because you can raise those who are in despair to the hope of salvation." And then he adds: "When the mother goes to seek a favor for us from Jesus Christ [whom the saint calls the golden altar of mercy, at which sinners obtain pardon] her son regards her prayers so highly and is so eager to satisfy her, that when she prays it seems as if she were commanding rather than praying, and as if she were a lady rather than a servant." Mary honored Jesus so much during her life that Jesus is now pleased to honor his beloved mother in this way, by granting at once whatever she asks or desires. This is beautifully confirmed by Saint Germanus, who addresses the Blessed Virgin and says: "You are the Mother of God and are all-powerful to save sinners; with God you need no other recommendation, for you are the mother of true life."

"At the command of Mary, everybody obeys, even God." Saint Bernardine of Siena is not afraid to utter this sentence, meaning thereby, of course, that God grants the prayers of Mary as if they were commands. And so Saint Anselm addresses her, saying: "Our Lord, O holy Mary, has exalted you to such an extent that by his favor all things that are possible to him should be possible to you!" "For your protection is omnipotent, O Mary," says Cosmas of Jerusalem. Yes, Mary is omnipotent, remarks Richard of Saint Lawrence, for by every law the queen enjoys the same privileges as the king. And since the power of a son and that of a mother are the same, a mother is made omnipotent by an omnipotent son. "And thus," says Saint Antoninus, "God has placed the whole Church not only under the patronage, but also under the dominion of Mary."

Since the mother, then, should have the same power as the son, Jesus, who is omnipotent, has also made Mary omnipotent; though, of course, it is always true that, while Jesus is omnipotent by nature, Mary

is omnipotent only by grace. But that she is so appears from the fact that, whatever the mother asks for, the son never denies her. This was revealed to Saint Bridget. One day she heard Jesus talking to Mary and saying: “Ask me for whatever you wish, for whatever you desire will not be denied you.” As if he had said: “My Mother, you know how much I love you, so you may ask me for anything you wish. It is not possible for me to refuse you.” And he gave this beautiful reason: “Because you never denied me anything on earth, I will not deny you anything in heaven.” Mary, then, is called omnipotent in the sense in which such a term can be applied to a creature who is incapable of a divine attribute; that is, she is omnipotent because she obtains by her prayers whatever she wishes.

It is very much to the point, therefore, for Saint Bernard to address Mary thus: “You will it, and all things are done.”[32] And for Saint Anselm to say: “Whatever you will, O Blessed Virgin, cannot but be done.” If you should choose to raise one of the most abandoned sinners to the highest pinnacle of holiness, you would be able to do this. Saint Albert the Great has Mary say: “I must be asked to will it; but once I do will it, it must necessarily be done.”

Saint Peter Damian, reflecting on this great power of Mary and begging her to have pity on us, says this to her: “May your nature move you, may your power move you. For the more powerful you are, the greater your mercy should be.” O Mary, our beloved advocate, since you have such a compassionate heart that you cannot even see the wretched without being moved to pity, and since, at the same time, you have such great power with God that you can save all whom you protect, do not refuse to take up the cause of us forlorn creatures who place all our hope in you. If our prayers cannot move you, at least let your own gracious heart move you. For God has enriched you with such great power that, the richer you are in power to help us, the more willing you will be to help us. Saint Bernard reassures us on this point. He says that Mary is equally rich in power and in mercy. Precisely because she is so powerful, for that very reason is she so merciful and compassionate.

From the time Mary came into the world, her only thought, after seeking the glory of God, was to help the unfortunate. We know that even then she enjoyed the privilege of obtaining whatever she asked. We

know this from what happened at the marriage feast of Cana in Galilee. When the wine failed, Mary was touched with pity at the embarrassment of the bride and groom. She asked her son to relieve them by performing a miracle. She simply said to him: *They have no wine* (Jn 2:3). Jesus replied: *Woman, what is that to you and to me? My hour is not yet come* (Jn 2:3). Note that Our Lord seemed to refuse his mother the favor she asked, saying in effect: "What is it to you and to me if the wine has failed? This is not the time for me to perform a miracle; the time will come when I will begin to preach and when miracles will be required to confirm my doctrines." Nevertheless, Mary, as if the favor had already been granted, ordered the waiters to fill the jars with water, so that the guests would immediately be satisfied. And this is precisely what happened. Jesus, in order to content his mother, changed the water into the best wine.

Why did he do it? If the time for working miracles was to be that of his public life, how could he perform this miracle, contrary to the divine decrees? According to Saint Augustine, there was nothing contrary to the divine decrees in this.[33] Although, generally speaking, the time for miracles had not yet arrived, from all eternity God had determined by another decree that nothing Mary asked for should ever be refused her. And therefore Mary, who was well aware of this privilege, told them to fill the jars with water as if her request had already been granted, although her son seemed to have refused her. This is the way Saint John Chrysostom understood the passage. Explaining these words of Our Lord: *Woman, what is it to you and me?* he says, that "though Jesus answered in this way, nevertheless, in order to honor his mother, he obeyed her." This is confirmed by Saint Thomas, who says that by the words: *My hour is not yet come*, Jesus intended to show that if the request had come from any other person, he would not have complied with it; but because it was addressed to him by his mother, he could not refuse it.[34] Saint Cyril and Saint Jerome both say the same thing, according to Barrada. And so does Jansenius in his commentary on this passage: "To honor his mother, Our Lord anticipated the time for working miracles."

In short, it is quite certain that no creature can obtain so many favors for us as this gentle advocate, who is so highly honored by God, not only as his beloved handmaid, but also as his true mother. As William of Paris

says: “No creature can obtain so many important favors for us as you obtain for poor sinners; it is evident, therefore, that God honors you not only as a servant, but also as his very own mother.” Mary has only to speak, and her son complies with her wishes.

Our Lord conversing with the spouse of the Canticle of Canticles—this is, Mary—says: *O garden-dweller, my friends are listening for your voice, let me hear it!* (Cant 8:13). The friends are the saints, who, when they desire to have some favor for their servants, wait for their queen to ask and obtain it for them. For, as we said in the preceding chapter, no grace is granted except at the prayer of Mary.

How does Mary obtain these favors? She has only to speak—*my friends are listening for your voice*—and her son immediately grants her prayer. Listen to what Abbot William says, commenting on the above text. Jesus addresses Mary as follows: “You who dwell in the heavenly gardens, intercede with confidence for whomever you wish; for it is not possible that I should so far forget that I am your son as to deny you anything, O my Mother. Your voice has only to be heard, for to be heard by your son is to be obeyed.” Abbot Godfrey adds: “Although Mary obtains favors by asking, she nevertheless asks with a certain maternal authority, and therefore we have every reason to feel confident that she obtains whatever she desires and asks for us.”

Valerius Maximus relates that when Coriolanus was besieging Rome, the pleas of his friends and all the citizens could not make him stop. But as soon as his mother, Veturia, appeared on the scene, he could refuse no longer; he immediately raised the siege. Now, the prayers of Mary are far more powerful with Jesus than those of Veturia were with Coriolanus, just as the love and gratitude of this son for his dear mother are much greater than the love and gratitude of Coriolanus. Father Justin of Miechowice says that “a single sigh of the most Blessed Virgin can do more than all the prayers of the saints together.” The devil admitted as much to Saint Dominic. According to Father Paciucchelli, the saint forced the evil one to speak from the mouth of a possessed person and he was obliged to admit that “a single sigh from Mary was worth more in God’s sight than all the combined prayers of the saints.”

Saint Antoninus maintains that since the prayers of the Blessed Virgin are those of a mother, they necessarily have, to a certain extent, the

nature of a command. It is impossible, in other words, that she should not obtain what she asks for. Saint Germanus encourages sinners who appeal to her and thus addresses her: “Since you have the authority of a Mother of God, O Mary, you can obtain pardon for the worst sinners. Because the Lord acknowledges you in all things as his true and spotless mother, he cannot do otherwise than grant what you ask.” This explains why Saint Bridget heard the saints in heaven addressing the Blessed Virgin: “O most blessed Queen, what is there that you cannot do? You have only to will it and it is done.” There is a famous saying which corresponds to this thought: “What God can do by his power, you can do by your prayers, O Blessed Virgin.” Saint Augustine says: “Is it not consistent with the kindness of the Lord to wish to honor his mother, especially when he came on earth not to break the law but to fulfil it, and one of the commandments of the law is that we honor our parents?”

Saint George, Archbishop of Nicomedia, says Jesus Christ grants all that his mother asks, as if he were satisfying an obligation he had placed upon himself when she consented to give him his human nature: “The Son, as if paying a debt, grants all your petitions.” With this thought in mind, the holy martyr Saint Methodius exclaims: “Rejoice, O Mary, for you have as your debtor that son who gives to everyone and receives from no one. We are all indebted to God for all that we possess, for everything is his gift; but God has been pleased to be indebted to you by taking flesh from you and becoming man.”

This truth enabled Saint Augustine to say: “Since Mary was found worthy to give flesh to the Divine Word and thus supply the price of our redemption, that we might be delivered from eternal death, she is obviously more powerful than all others in helping us to gain eternal life.” Saint Theophilus, Bishop of Alexandria, a contemporary of Saint Jerome, wrote: “The prayers of his mother are a pleasure to the son, because he desires to grant all that is granted on her account. In this way, he repays her for the favor she did him in giving him his body.” Saint John Damascene addresses the Blessed Virgin and says: “Being Mother of the Most High, O Mary, you can save everybody by your prayers. Your prayers have increased value because they are the prayers of a mother.”

Let us conclude with Saint Bonaventure, who, bearing in mind the

great benefit conferred on us by Our Lord in giving us Mary for our advocate, says: “O truly admirable goodness of God, which has been pleased to grant you, O sovereign Mother, to us miserable sinners as our advocate, so that, by your powerful intercession, you may obtain all that you please for us!” “O wonderful mercy of God,” continues the same saint, “whereby he has given us his own mother and the patroness of grace to be our advocate, so that we may not be unduly frightened by the sentence that might be pronounced upon us!”

Example

Father Razzi, of the Camaldolese Order, tells a story about a young man who, after the death of his father, was sent by his mother to the court of a prince. Before he left, however, the mother made him promise to remain faithful to the Blessed Virgin. Every day he was to recite a Hail Mary and add at the end the words: “Blessed Virgin, help me at the hour of my death.”

The young man reached the court, but in time became so dissolute that the prince was obliged to send him away. In despair as to how to earn a living, he joined a band of robbers who made a practice of assassinating people on the highways. All this time, however, he never ceased to recommend himself to the Madonna, as his mother had told him to. Finally, he was captured by the police and condemned to death.

While he was in prison awaiting execution on the following day, he thought of his disgrace, the grief that it was causing his mother, and the death that was in store for him, and he began to weep and feel sorry for himself. Seeing him so depressed and melancholy, the devil appeared to him in the form of a handsome young man and told him that he would free him from death and imprisonment, if he would do what he indicated.

The condemned wretch agreed to do anything. Then the young man revealed that he was in reality the devil, who had come to help him. First of all, he wished him to deny Jesus Christ and his sacred sacraments. The poor man agreed. Then he told him that he must deny the Blessed Virgin and renounce her protection. But this he swore that

he would never do. Turning to Mary, he repeated the prayer which is mother had taught him: “Blessed Virgin, help me at the hour of my death.” As soon as he had uttered these words, the devil vanished. But the unfortunate youth remained downcast because of his great crime in denying Jesus Christ. He appealed again to the Blessed Virgin and obtained, with her help, true sorrow for all of his sins and was able to make a good confession.

On his way to the place of execution, he passed by a statue of Mary and instinctively offered up his usual prayer: “Blessed Virgin, help me at the hour of my death.” Whereupon the statue, in the full sight of all, bowed its head and acknowledged his greeting. With that, he expressed the desire to kiss the feet of the statue. At first the guards would not allow it, but they finally gave in when the people began to raise a clamor. As the youth was bending down to kiss the feet, Mary reached down and took him by the hand, holding him so tight that it was not possible to pry him loose. On seeing this miracle, everybody began to shout, “Mercy! Mercy!” And mercy was granted him. He returned to his home and led a model life, always very devoted to the Blessed Virgin, because she had freed him from both temporal and eternal death.

Prayer

O great Mother of God, I address you with the words of Saint Bernard: “Speak, O Lady, for your Son hears, and whatever you ask you will obtain.” Speak, speak, then, O Mary, our advocate, in favor of us miserable creatures. Remember that it was also for our good that you received such great power and such great dignity. A God was pleased to become your debtor by taking his humanity from you, so that you might be able, at your will, to dispense the riches of divine mercy to sinners.

We are your servants, devoted in a special way to you. And I trust that I am one of these too. We are thrilled to live under your protection. Since you are kind to everybody, even to those who do not know or honor you, and even to those who outrage and blaspheme you, how much more should we not hope from your kindness, we who honor, love, and trust in you?

We are great sinners, but God has enriched you with mercy and power far

greater than our iniquities. You are both able and willing to save us; and the more unworthy we are, the more we shall hope in you in order to reach heaven ourselves and to glorify you there.

O Mother of Mercy, we present to you our souls once cleansed and washed in the blood of Jesus Christ, but now defiled by sin. We present them to you, for you to purify. Obtain for us true sorrow; obtain for us the love of God, perseverance, heaven. We ask for very much, but there is nothing you cannot obtain. Is there anything that is too much for the love which God has for you? You have only to open your lips and ask your son. He will deny you nothing. Pray, then, O Mary, pray for us! You shall certainly be heard and we shall certainly reach heaven.

Mary Pleads the Cause of Even the Greatest Sinners

There are so many reasons for loving our most loving queen, that if Mary were praised throughout the world—if in every sermon preachers spoke only of her—if all men laid down their lives for Mary—still everything would be very little in comparison with the honor and gratitude we owe her for the tender love she has for men, even for the most miserable sinners who happen to have the slightest spark of devotion for her.

Blessed Raymond Jordano who, because of his humility, called himself the Unlearned, used to say that Mary cannot help loving those who love her. And she cannot help doing favors for those who serve her. If they are sinners, she uses all her power to get forgiveness for them from her blessed son. And he adds that her kindness and mercy are so great, that no one, no matter how far gone in sin he may be, ought to be afraid to cast himself at her feet, for she never rejects anyone who appeals to her. “Mary, as our most loving advocate, herself offers the prayers of her servants to God, especially those who place themselves in her hands. For as the Son intercedes with the Father for us, so she intercedes with the Son and does not cease to plead with both for the great affair of our salvation and for the graces that we request.” It is with good reason, then, that Denis the Carthusian calls the Blessed Virgin the unique refuge of the lost, the hope of the most abandoned, and the advocate of all sinners who appeal to her.

But suppose a sinner has no doubts about her power, but does wonder about her mercy, because he fears she will be reluctant to help anyone with sins as great as his. That sinner should take courage from the words of Saint Bonaventure: “The great, the special privilege of Mary is that she is all-powerful with her son.” But, he adds, what would be the purpose of such great power if she did not bother about us? “Let us have no misgivings,” he concludes, “but be quite certain and always thank Our Lord and his Blessed Mother for the fact that, just as her power with God exceeds that of all the other saints, so to the same extent she is also our most loving advocate and the one who is the most solicitous for our welfare.”

“Who, O Mother of Mercy,” exclaims Saint Germanus, “after Jesus, is as tenderly solicitous for our welfare as you are? Who defends us in the temptations to which we are subject as much as you do? Who protects and fights for sinners as you do? That is why your patronage, O Mary, is more powerful and loving than we can ever understand.”

Blessed Raymond Jordano says that the other saints can do more for their own clients than for others. Mary, however, as queen of the world, is everybody’s advocate and is interested in the salvation of everyone.

Mary takes care of all, even sinners. As a matter of fact, she glories in being called their special advocate, as she herself declared to the Venerable Sister Mary Villani when she said: “Next to the title of Mother of God, I am most happy with that of advocate of sinners.”

Blessed Amadeus says that our Lady constantly stands before the Divine Majesty, interceding for us by her powerful prayers. And since she is well acquainted with our miseries and wants in heaven, she cannot help but have mercy on us; and so, with the tender affection of a mother, she is always trying to help and save us. That is why Richard of Saint Lawrence encourages everyone, no matter how bad they may be, to appeal to this sweet advocate with confidence, and to feel sure that they will always find her ready to help them. As the Abbot Godfrey says, “Mary is always ready to pray for all.”

How effectively and lovingly this good advocate, according to Saint Bernard, takes an interest in our salvation! Considering the affection and zeal with which Mary always intercedes with the Divine Majesty for us,

in order that Our Lord may pardon our sins, help us with his grace, free us from dangers, and relieve us in our wants, Saint Bonaventure, addressing the Blessed Virgin, uses these words of an ancient author: “We know that we have, as it were, but one person solicitous for us in heaven, and that person is you.” That is to say: O Mary, it is true that all the saints wish for our salvation and pray for us, but the love, the tenderness which you show us in heaven, by obtaining so many mercies for us from God through your prayers, compel us to admit that we have but one advocate in heaven, namely you, and that you alone are truly loving and solicitous for our welfare.

Who can ever understand the solicitude with which Mary stands before God and pleads for us? Saint Germanus says that she is never weary of defending us. This is a beautiful thought, meaning that Mary has so much pity for our miseries and so much love for us, that she is always praying for us and never relaxes her efforts on our behalf. By her prayers she defends us from evil and secures for us sufficient grace to be saved. “There is never any end to her defense.”

We poor sinners would be in a bad way, indeed, if we did not have this great advocate, who is so powerful and compassionate, and at the same time “so prudent and wise, that the judge, her son,” according to Richard of Saint Lawrence, “cannot condemn the guilty when she defends them.” And therefore Saint John Geometra greets her by saying: “Hail, O court that puts an end to litigation!” Every single case defended by this most wise advocate is always won.

For this reason, Mary is called by Saint Bonaventure the “wise Abigail.” Abigail was the woman we read about in the Second Book of Kings, who knew how to appease King David, when he was indignant with Nabal, by her beautiful entreaties. In fact, David was inspired to bless her for having prevented him, by her gracious manner, from taking vengeance on Nabal with his own hands. This is exactly what Mary does in heaven, on behalf of innumerable sinners. By her tender and affectionate prayers, she knows how to appease the divine justice, so that God himself blesses her for it and, as it were, thanks her for having prevented him from abandoning them and punishing them as they deserve.

That is why, says Saint Bernard, the Eternal Father, wishing to show

all the mercy possible, besides giving us Jesus Christ, our principal advocate with him, also gave us Mary as our advocate with Jesus Christ. "There is no doubt," he says, "that Jesus Christ is the only mediator of justice between men and God. By virtue of his own merits and promises, he can and will obtain for us pardon and divine favors. But because men recognize in him the majesty of God, since he *is* God, and because they fear his divine majesty, it was necessary to assign us another advocate to whom we can appeal with less fear and more confidence. This advocate is Mary. We cannot find anyone more powerful with the Divine Majesty than she is, nor more merciful towards us."

If anyone, therefore, feels the slightest fear in approaching this most sweet advocate, who has nothing about her that is severe or terrible, but on the contrary is all courtesy and kindness, such fear would be an actual insult to the tender compassion of Mary, as Saint Bernard goes on to say: "Read, and read again, as often as you please, all that is said of her in the Gospels, and if you can find a single instance of severity in her story, then you may fear to approach her. But you will never find any place where this is mentioned. Therefore go to her with a joyful heart, and she will save you by her intercession."

How beautiful the exclamation which William of Paris puts into the mouth of a sinner who appeals to Mary: "O most glorious Mother of God, full of confidence I appeal to you in the miserable state to which I am reduced because of my sins! If you reject me, I remind you that you are, as it were, bound to help me, since the whole Church calls on you and proclaims you as the Mother of Mercy." He then goes on: "You, O Mother, are the one to whom God always listens, because you are so dear to him. Your great compassion never failed anyone. You have never looked down on any sinner who recommended himself to you, no matter how great his sins were. Does the whole Church err in calling you the advocate and the refuge of sinners? Never let my sins, O great Mother, keep you from fulfilling your great office of charity, by which you are at the same time our advocate and our mediatrix of peace between men and God. After your son, you are our only hope and the certain refuge of the miserable. All your grace and glory, even your dignity as Mother of God, you owe, in one sense, to sinners, for it was on their behalf that the Divine Word made you his mother."

Far be it from this Blessed Mother, who brought the source of tender compassion into the world, to think that she could ever deny mercy to any sinner who appeals to her. Since your office, O Mary, is to be the peacemaker between God and men, let your tender mercy, then, which far exceeds all my sins, move you to help me.

Be comforted, therefore, you who are afraid, I will say with Saint Thomas of Villanova. Breathe freely and have courage, O wretched sinners. This great mother, who is the mother of your God and judge, is also the advocate for the whole human race. Moreover, she is the proper person for this office, because she can do with God whatever she wills. She is all-wise, for she understands all the ways to appease him. And her solicitude is really universal, in the sense that she welcomes everybody and refuses to defend no one.

Example

How merciful Mary can be toward sinners is well illustrated in the case of a nun named Beatrice, who belonged to the monastery of Fontevrault. This story is told by Caesarius of Heisterbach.

The unfortunate girl was overcome by her passion for a young man and resolved to flee from the convent with his help. So one day she went up to a statue of Mary and laid there the keys of the convent, since she was the portress, and then slipped away.

When she reached a strange country, she lived as a harlot and followed this profession for fifteen miserable years. Finally, one day she happened to meet the gardener of the convent where she had lived, and thinking that she was not recognized, asked him if he knew Sister Beatrice. “I know her very well,” he replied; “She is a holy nun and is now mistress of novices.” On hearing this she was dumbfounded, not understanding how this could be. In order to find out the truth, she disguised herself and went to the convent. There she called for Sister Beatrice and was astounded to find before her the Blessed Virgin, who had the appearance of the statue at whose feet she had laid the keys and her habit when leaving the convent. And this is what the Blessed Mother said to her: “Beatrice, to save you from shame I have assumed your

form, and during these past fifteen years, while you have been absent from the convent and from God, I have taken your place and done what you should have done. Return and do penance, for my son is still waiting for you; and see that by a good life you maintain the good name that I have won for you." After saying this, she disappeared.

Beatrice, of course, returned to the convent, put on her habit once more, and offering thanks to the Blessed Mother for her mercy, lived a holy life thereafter. At the time of her death, she revealed the whole story for the greater glory of the Mother of God.

Prayer

O great Mother of my Lord, I understand very well that my ingratitude toward God and you for so many years has merited that you should quite justly abandon me and no longer care for me. An ungrateful soul is no longer worthy of favors. But I have a very high opinion of your goodness, O Mary. I believe that it is much greater than my ingratitude. Continue, then, O refuge of sinners, to help, and never cease helping, a desolate sinner who trusts in you. O Mother of Mercy, extend your hand to a poor fallen soul who asks you for pity.

O Mary, either defend me yourself, or tell me to whom I may appeal who can defend me better than you. Where can I find an advocate with God more merciful and more powerful than you, his own mother? When you became the mother of the Savior, you became at the same time the proper instrument to save sinners and were given me for my salvation. O Mary, save one who appeals to you. I have not deserved your love, but it is your desire to save sinners that causes me to hope that you love me. And if you love me, how can I be lost?

O my beloved Mother, if I am saved by your help, as I hope, I shall never be ungrateful again. I shall make up for my past ingratitude and for the love that you have shown me, by my everlasting praises and all the love that my soul is capable of. I shall forever sing your mercies happily in heaven, where you reign and shall always reign; and I shall eternally kiss those loving hands which have so often delivered me from hell which, time after time, I have deserved by my sins.

O Mary, O my liberator, O my hope, my queen, my advocate, my mother, I love you. I desire your glory and I shall love you forever. Amen, Amen. This is my hope.

Mary Is the Peacemaker Between Sinners and God

God's grace is, of course, the greatest and most desirable treasure of every human soul. The Holy Spirit calls it an infinite treasure. By means of divine grace we are raised to the honor of being the friends of God. These are the words of the Book of Wisdom: *For to men she is an unfailing treasure; those who gain this treasure win the friendship of God* (Wis 7:14). Therefore Jesus, our redeemer and God, did not hesitate to say to those who are in grace: *You are my friends* (Jn 15:14). O wretched sin that dissolves that friendship! *But your iniquities*, says the prophet Isaiah, *have divided between you and your God* (Isa 59:2). And when hatred comes between the soul and God, the soul is changed from a friend to an enemy of God, as the Book of Wisdom puts it: *Equally odious to God are the evildoer and the evil deed* (Wis 14:9).

What must the sinner do, then, who has the misfortune to become God's enemy? He must find a mediator who will seek pardon for him and will enable him to regain God's friendship. "Be comforted, O unfortunate soul who has lost God," says Saint Bernard. "Your Lord himself has provided you with a mediator, his son Jesus, who can obtain for you everything you beg for."

But why, O God, exclaims the saint, should this merciful savior who gave his life to save us ever be thought severe? Why should men believe him terrible, who is all love? O distrustful sinners, why are you afraid? If your fear arises from having offended God, you should remember that Jesus has fastened all your sins on the cross with his own lacerated hands, and having satisfied divine justice for them by his death, has already removed them from your souls. As Saint Bernard has so beautifully expressed it: "They imagine that he is rigorous, who is all compassion; terrible, who is all love. Why do you fear, O ye of little faith? With his own hands he has fastened your sins to the cross."

But if by any chance, adds the saint, you are afraid to appeal to Jesus

because the majesty of God in him overawes you, and you desire another advocate with this divine mediator, go to Mary, for she will intercede for you with her son, who will surely hear her. And then he will intercede with his Father, who can deny nothing to his Son. Saint Bernard concludes by saying: "The Blessed Mother, O my sons, is the ladder of sinners, by which they re-ascend to the height of divine grace; she is my greatest confidence, she is the whole basis for my hope."

The Holy Spirit in the Canticle of Canticles causes the Blessed Virgin to utter the following words: *I am a wall; and my breasts are as a tower, since I am become in his presence as one finding peace* (Cant 8:10). That is to say, I am the defender of those who appeal to me, and my mercy toward them is like a tower of refuge. That is why I have been appointed by my Lord the peacemaker between sinners and God. Mary, says Cardinal Hugo commenting on this text, is the great peacemaker who reconciles enemies, brings salvation to those who are lost, pardon to sinners, and mercy to those who are in despair. Hence she was called by the Divine Bridegroom: *Beautiful … as the curtains of Solomon* (Cant 1:4). Behind the curtains of David's tent, only questions of war were discussed, but in the tents of Solomon only questions of peace. Thus the Holy Spirit gives us to understand that this Mother of Mercy never treats of war and vengeance against sinners, but only of peace and pardon.

Mary was prefigured by the dove which returned to Noah and the ark with an olive-branch in its beak, as a sign of the peace which God granted to men. With this idea in mind, Saint Bonaventure addresses the Blessed Virgin: "You are the faithful dove of Noah. You were a true mediatrix between God and the world lost in a spiritual flood. By presenting yourself before God, you have obtained peace and salvation for a lost world." Mary, then, was the heavenly dove which brought to a lost world the olive branch, the sign of mercy, since she in the first place gave us Jesus Christ, who is the source of mercy, and then, by his merits, obtained all graces for us. And since by Mary, says Saint Epiphanius, heavenly peace was given to the world once and for all, so it is by her that sinners are still reconciled to God. Saint Albert pictures her saying: "I am the dove of Noah which brought the olive-branch of universal peace to the Church."

Another figure of the Blessed Virgin was the rainbow seen by Saint

John, which encircled the throne of God: *And there was a rainbow round about the throne* (Apoc 4:3). Cardinal Vitalism explains the image this way: "The rainbow round the throne is Mary, who softens the judgment and sentence of God against sinners." He means that she always stands before God's tribunal and mitigates the penalties which sinners have to pay. Saint Bernardine of Siena says that God was speaking of this rainbow when he promised Noah that he would place it in the clouds as a sign of peace, so that when he looked at it he might be reminded of the covenant of eternal peace he had with man. *I will set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a token of the covenant between me and the earth … I will look upon it and recall the perpetual covenant* (Gen 9:13). According to the saint, Mary is this bow of eternal peace; for when God sees it he remembers the peace he promised to the earth; and then, by Mary's prayers, he forgives the crimes of sinners and confirms his peace with them.

For the same reason, Mary is also compared with the moon in the Canticle of Canticles: *As beautiful as the moon* (Cant 6:10). As Saint Bonaventure says, just as the moon is situated between heaven and earth, so Mary continually places herself between God and sinners in order to appease the Lord and to give sinners the light to return to him.

Mary's chief office, on being placed in this world, was to raise up souls that had fallen from divine grace and to reconcile them with God. *Feed your goats* (Cant 1:7) was Our Lord's command when he created her. It is well known that sinners are represented by goats, and that at the Last Judgment the just, under the figure of sheep, will be on the right hand, while the goats will be on the left. These goats, says Abbot William, are entrusted to you, O great Mother, that you may change them into sheep. And those who, because of the judgment passed on them, deserve to be on the left, will by your intercession be placed on the right. Therefore, Our Lord reveals to Saint Catherine of Siena that he had created his beloved Daughter to be a kind of alluring bait to catch men, and especially sinners, and so draw them to God. But on this subject we must not pass over the beautiful thought of William the Englishman on the above text of the Canticles. He says: "God recommended her own goats to Mary, for the Blessed Virgin does not save all sinners, but only those who serve and honor her." This is

certainly true, for those who live in sin and neither honor her with any particular act of devotion nor recommend themselves to her to be freed from their sins, are certainly not Mary's goats. And at the Last Judgment they will be driven to the left along with the damned, to their eternal punishment.

There was a certain nobleman, who despaired of salvation because of his many sins. He was encouraged by a monk to appeal to the Blessed Virgin. With this intention in mind, he visited a much venerated statue in a particular church. When he entered the church and saw the statue, he felt that Mary was inviting him to throw himself at her feet and to confide in her. He knelt down and kissed her feet, and as he did so she extended her hand for him to kiss. On Mary's hand he saw written the following words: "I will deliver you from those who oppress you." As though she had said: "My son, do not despair, for I will deliver you from the sins and sorrows that weigh so heavily on you." The sinner read these consoling words and was immediately filled with such great sorrow for his sins and such an ardent love for God and his tender Mother that he expired immediately at the feet of Mary.

How many obstinate sinners this magnet of hearts draws every day to God! A magnet is what Mary called herself one day when speaking to Saint Bridget: "As the magnet attracts iron, so I attract hearts." Yes, even the most hardened hearts, in order to reconcile them with God. And we must not suppose that such prodigies are rare; they are everyday occurrences. I myself could relate many examples of this kind that have occurred in our missions, when certain sinners with hearts harder than iron have remained obdurate through all the other sermons, but when they heard the one on the mercies of Mary were immediately filled with sorrow and returned to God.

Saint Gregory says that the unicorn is so fierce an animal that no hunter can capture it. Only when it hears a virgin crying will it approach, and then without resistance allow itself to be bound by her. How many sinners there are, much more savage than the wild beasts, who flee from God, yet at the voice of the Virgin Mary approach and allow themselves to be sweetly bound to God by her!

Saint John Chrysostom used to say that another reason why the Blessed Virgin was made the Mother of God was that she might also

obtain salvation for the many who, because of their evil lives, could not be saved according to the normal course of divine justice, but might be saved with the help of her sweet mercy and powerful intercession. Saint Anselm confirms this when he says that “Mary was raised to the dignity of Mother of God primarily for sinners rather than for the just, because Jesus Christ declares that he came to call not the just, but sinners.” For this reason, Holy Church sings: “You do not abhor sinners, because were it not for them you would never have been worthy of such a son.” For the same reason, William of Paris invokes her, saying: “O Mary, you are obliged to help sinners, because of all the gifts, graces, and high honors which are comprised in the dignity of Mother of God which you have received. You owe everything, so to say, to sinners; it is because of them that you were made worthy to have God for as a son.” “Therefore,” concludes Saint Anselm, “if Mary was made Mother of God because of sinners, how can I, no matter how great my sins may be, ever despair of forgiveness?”

Holy Church tells us in the oration of the Mass for the Vigil of the Assumption that “the Blessed Mother was taken from this world so that she might confidently intercede with God for the forgiveness of our sins.” Hence Saint Justin calls Mary an arbitrator. “The Eternal Word uses Mary as an arbitrator.” An arbitrator is a person to whom contending parties entrust their case for decision. The saint means to say that, just as Jesus is the mediator with the Eternal Father, so Mary is our mediator with Jesus.

Saint Andrew of Crete calls Mary a pledge or security for our reconciliation with God. That is, God goes about seeking for reconciliation with sinners by pardoning them; and in order that these may not be in any doubt regarding their forgiveness, he has given them Mary as a pledge or guarantee of forgiveness. The saint salutes her with this greeting: “Hail, O reconciliation between God and men!” Saint Bonaventure encourages a sinner by saying to him: “If you are afraid that God in his anger will take revenge on you because of your sins, what can you do? Go, appeal to Mary, who is the hope of sinners. And if you are afraid that she may refuse to listen to your case, be assured that she cannot do this, for God himself has imposed on her the duty of helping the hopeless.”

The Abbot Adam also says: “Does any sinner need to be afraid of being lost for whom the Mother of the Judge is willing to act as mother and advocate?” And he adds: “You, O Mary, who are the Mother of Mercy, will you refuse to intercede with your Son who is the Judge, on behalf of another son who is a sinner? Will you refuse to intervene on behalf of a redeemed soul with the redeemer who died on a cross to save sinners?” No, certainly not. You will not reject him, but you will pray with the utmost affection for all who appeal to you, knowing well that “the Lord who has made your son a mediator of peace between God and man has also made you mediatrix between the Judge and the culprit.”

Therefore, O sinner, says Saint Bernard, never despair. Thank God, who has not only given his Son as an advocate for you, but, to encourage you to have greater confidence has also provided you with a mediatrix who is able to obtain by her prayers whatever she wishes. Go then, appeal to Mary, and you will be saved.

Example

The story is told of a young girl, a native of Florence, who was named Benedetti but who might better have been called by some other name, so scandalous was the life she was living. It happened that Saint Dominic was preaching a sermon in that city and she decided to go and hear him out of mere curiosity. But the Lord moved her heart when she heard what he had to say, and full of sorrow for her sins she went to the saint to confess them. He heard her confession, absolved her, and imposed as a penance the recitation of the rosary. But the unfortunate girl was still under the influence of her bad habits and returned to her evil ways. The saint knew this and sought her out, persuading her to go to confession again. In order to strengthen her in her good intentions, God one day permitted her to see hell and showed her some of the people who were damned there because of what she was doing. Then, opening a book, he read her the dreadful account of her sins. Benedetti was overcome, and full of confidence appealed to Mary to help her. She was given to understand that our Blessed Lady was already imploring from God a certain interval during which she might repent and do penance.

When the vision was over, the girl resolved to lead a better life; but

she kept seeing before her eyes that terrible list of sins. One day, she determined to ask for help from her comforter. “Mother,” she said, “it is true that because of my sins I ought to be in the bottom of hell, but since by your intercession you have delivered me from there, obtaining a period of penance for me, O gracious Mother, I beg you for one other grace. I wish never to stop weeping for my sins. Please cause them to be erased from that book.” Hearing this prayer, the Blessed Virgin appeared to her and said that, in order to obtain what she asked for, it would be necessary for her from that day forth always to bear her sins in mind and God’s mercy with regard to them. Moreover, she must remember the Passion suffered by her Son for love of her; and again she must bear in mind how many had been damned for far lesser crimes than hers. Mary then revealed to her that a small boy only eight years old was being condemned to hell that very day for only one sin. When Benedetti had faithfully obeyed the Blessed Virgin, Mary one day caused her to see Jesus, who showed her the book and said: “See, all your sins have been erased; the book is now white. See that you now write it in acts of love and virtue.” That is what Benedetti did, living a good life and dying a holy death.

Prayer

O sweet Virgin Mary, since your office, as William of Paris says, is to be mediatrix between God and sinners, I will address you in the words of Saint Thomas of Villanova: “Fulfill your office on my behalf, O tender advocate; perform your task.” Do not say that my case is too difficult to be won, for I know, and everybody tells me, that every case, no matter how desperate it may be, if undertaken by you, will never be lost. Will mine be lost? No, I have no fear of this. The only thing I might be afraid of is that, on seeing the number of my sins, you might be disinclined to defend me. But, in view of your immense mercy and the great desire of your ever-loving heart to help even the most abandoned sinners, I do not fear even this. Who ever was lost who appealed to you? That is why I invoke your help, O my great advocate, my refuge, my hope, my Mother Mary.

To your hands I entrust the cause of my eternal salvation. To you I commit my soul. It was lost, but it is your task to save it. I will always thank

Our Lord for having given me this great confidence in you, which, in spite of my unworthiness, I feel is an assurance of salvation.

There is but one fear that afflicts me, O beloved queen, and that is that I may one day, through my own negligence, lose confidence in you. Therefore I implore you, O Mary, by the love you have for Jesus, preserve and increase in me more and more this sweet confidence in your intercession, which gives me the certain hope of recovering the divine friendship which I have so recklessly despised and lost until now. And having recovered it, I hope, with your help, to be able to preserve it. And preserving it by the same means, I hope finally to be able to thank you for it in heaven and there to sing God's mercies and yours for all eternity. Amen. This is my hope; may it be so; it will be so.

7

TURN THEN, YOUR EYES OF MERCY TOWARD



Mary Is All Eyes to Pity and Help Us

Saint Epiphanius calls the Blessed Mother "many-eyed," because she is ever on the watch to help all poor creatures in this world. Once a possessed person, while being exorcised, was asked by the exorcist what Mary does. The devil in him replied: "She descends and ascends." By that he meant that Our Lady is constantly coming down from heaven to bring graces to men and going up again to obtain divine favor for our prayers. Saint Andrew of Avellino fittingly calls the Blessed Virgin the "heavenly messenger," for she is constantly carrying messages of mercy and obtaining graces for everybody, for the good and for sinners. God has his eyes on the good, according to David: *The eyes of the Lord are on the just* (Ps 33:16). But, according to Richard of Saint Lawrence, the eyes of Mary are on the good and on sinners. Her eyes are the eyes of a mother; and a mother not only keeps an eye on her child to see that it does not fall down, but when it does fall, she picks it up again.

Jesus himself revealed as much to Saint Bridget, when he one day permitted her to overhear him speaking to his mother like this: "My Mother, ask me for whatever you wish." In fact, this is what Jesus is constantly saying to Mary in heaven, delighted as he is to grant his beloved mother whatever she asks. But what does Mary ask? Saint Bridget overheard her reply: "I ask for mercy for sinners." This is as if she had said: "My Son, you have made me the Mother of Mercy, the refuge of sinners, the advocate of the miserable, and now you tell me to ask for whatever I desire. What can I desire except mercy for them? I ask for mercy for those who need it."

"And so," says Saint Bonaventure with deep feeling, "you are so full of mercy, O Mary, so anxious to help the miserable, that you seem to

have no other desire, no other concern." And since nobody is more miserable than sinners, the Venerable Bede declares that Mary is always praying to her Son for them.

Saint Jerome asserts that even while Mary was living in this world, her heart was so filled with tenderness and pity for men, that no one ever suffered so much distress for his own troubles as Mary did for the troubles of others. This compassion which she felt for those in affliction was well shown at the marriage feast of Cana, which we mentioned in the preceding chapters. When the wine failed, according to Saint Bernardine of Siena, without being asked, Mary acted to save the situation. Moved to pity by the embarrassment of the bride and bridegroom, she intervened with her Son and obtained the miraculous conversion of the water into wine.

But perhaps now that Mary has been raised to the high dignity of queen of heaven, remarks Saint Peter Damian, she is inclined to forget us. Let such a thought be far from our minds, he says, for it would hardly be consistent with the great pity which reigns in the heart of Mary to forget the great misery which is ours. The proverb "High station makes one aloof" does not apply to Mary. With worldlings it is different. Once they have achieved a certain amount of prominence, many become proud and forget their friends of other days. But not Mary. She is happy to use her high position to help us all the more.

Saint Bonaventure applies to the Blessed Virgin the words which Boaz addressed to Ruth: *May the Lord bless you, my daughter! You have been even more loyal now than before* (Ruth 3:10). He then gives the reason for this, saying that, if the mercy of Mary toward the down-fallen was great while she was living in this world, it is much greater now that she is reigning in heaven, where she is more aware of their miseries. And so he adds that "as the splendor of the sun surpasses that of the moon, so does the compassion of Mary, now that she is in heaven, surpass the compassion that she had for us when in the world." In conclusion, he asks: "Who is there living in the world who does not enjoy the light of the sun? And on whom does the mercy of Mary not shine?"

That is why, in the Canticle of Canticles, she is called *bright as the sun* (Cant 6:9). No one is excluded from the warmth of the sun, says Saint Bonaventure, repeating the words of the Psalmist (Ps 18:7). Saint Agnes

revealed the same thing to Saint Bridget when she told her: “Our queen, now that she is united to her Son in heaven, is not going to forget her innate goodness. That is why she shows mercy to everybody, even to the worst sinners. And we may say that, just as everything on earth and in the sky is illumined and warmed by the sun, so there is not a person in the world who will not share in the light and warmth of the divine mercy through the tender love of Mary—if only he asks for that mercy.”

A great sinner in the kingdom of Valencia once resolved to become a Mohammedan to escape from the arm of justice. On his way to the place of embarkation he happened to pass by a church in which the Jesuit Father Jerome Lopez was preaching on the mercy of God. Moved by the sermon, he went to confession to the same Father who asked him whether he practiced any special devotion which might be responsible for this great grace. He replied: “I simply pray to Mary every day not to abandon me.”

This Jesuit priest met one day in a hospital a sinner who had not gone to confession for fifty-five years but had only practiced this little devotion: whenever he passed a picture of Mary he greeted her and asked that she would not let him die in mortal sin. He then told how one day while fighting with an enemy his sword broke. Turning to Mary, he cried out: “Now I shall be killed and eternally damned. O Mother of sinners, save me!” He had scarcely said this when he found himself, in some mysterious way, transported to a safe place. He made a general confession and died full of confidence.

Saint Bernard writes that Mary has made herself all to all and opens her merciful heart to all, that all may receive of its fullness: the slave, his freedom; the sick, health; the afflicted, comfort; the sinner, pardon; and God, glory. She does this, says Saint Bernard, so that there may be no one who does not share in her warmth. Can anyone in the world, exclaims Saint Bonaventure, refuse to love this most loving queen? She is more beautiful than the sun and sweeter than honey. She is a treasure of goodness, amiable to all and courteous to all. “I salute you, therefore,” continues the enraptured saint, “O my Lady and Mother—no, even my heart and my soul! Forgive me, O Mary, if I say that I love you. Even if I am not worthy to love you, you at least are fully worthy of being loved by me.”

It was revealed to Saint Gertrude that when anyone calls on Our Lady with these words: “Turn, then, O most gracious advocate, your eyes of mercy towards us,” Mary cannot resist. She is forced to listen and to grant the demand of anyone who addresses her in this way.

“O great Lady,” says Saint Bernard, “your measureless mercy fills the whole earth.” And that is why, according to Saint Bonaventure, this loving mother has such a great desire to do good to all. She is not only offended by those who do her actual harm but she is even offended at those who do not ask her for favors and graces. So that Saint Hildebert addresses her, saying: “You teach us, O Mary, to hope for far greater graces than we deserve, because you never cease to dispense graces far beyond what we deserve.”

The prophet Isaiah foretold that, along with the great work of the redemption of the human race, a throne of divine mercy was to be prepared for us poor creatures: *And a throne shall be prepared in mercy* (Isa 16:5). What is this throne? Saint Bonaventure supplies the answer: “Mary is this throne, at which all—just and sinners—find the consolations of mercy.” He then adds: “For just as we have a most merciful Lord, so we also have a most merciful Lady. Our Lord is bountiful in mercy to all who call upon him, and Our Lady is bountiful in mercy to all who call upon her.” As Our Lord is full of mercy, so also is Our Lady; and as the son does not know how to refuse mercy to those who call upon him, neither does his mother. Therefore, the Abbot Guerric addresses Mary thus, in the name of Jesus Christ: “My Mother, I will establish the seat of my government in you; through you I will pronounce judgments, hear prayers, and grant the graces asked of me. You have given me my human nature, and I will give you my divine nature, that is, omnipotence, by which you will be able to help save all whom you please.”

One day, when Saint Gertrude was addressing to Mary the words, “Turn your eyes of mercy toward us,” she saw the Blessed Virgin pointing to the eyes of her Son whom she held in her arms, and then saying: “These are my eyes—the most merciful eyes I can turn toward all who ask me for help.”

A sinner was once weeping before an image of Mary, imploring her to obtain pardon for him from God, when he noticed that the Blessed

Virgin turned toward the child that she held in her arms and said: “My son, shall those tears be lost?” And he understood that Jesus Christ had already forgiven him.

How is it possible then that anyone can perish who commends himself to this good mother, since her son, as God, has promised to show to all her clients as much mercy as she asks for? Our Lord allowed Saint Gertrude to hear him make this promise to his mother: “In my omnipotence, O Mother, I have granted you the reconciliation of all sinners who devoutly call upon the help of your mercy.”

In view of this assurance, the Abbot Adam of Perseigne, bearing in mind the great power of Mary with God, and her great compassion for us, says, full of confidence: “O Mother of Mercy, your tender compassion is as great as your power, and you are as compassionate in forgiving as you are powerful in obtaining whatever you wish.” “And when did it ever happen,” he asks, “that you, who are the Mother of Mercy, did not show mercy? When was it that you, who are the Mother of Omnipotence, could not provide help? Yes, with the same ease with which you behold our misfortunes, you obtain for us whatever you will.”

“Take your fill, O great queen,” says the Abbot Guerric, “of the glory of your son, and out of compassion, though not for any merit of ours, graciously send us, your servants and children here below, the crumbs that fall from your table.”

If the sight of our sins should ever discourage us, let us speak to the Mother of Mercy in these words of William of Paris: “O Mary, do not hold my sins against me. Bear in mind your mercy rather than my offenses. Let it never be said that my sins outbalance your mercy, which is far more powerful to obtain pardon for me than my sins are to obtain condemnation.”

Example

In the Annals of the Capuchin Fathers, it is told how there was a famous lawyer in Venice who had made himself rich by fraud and malpractice, and was living a life of evil. There was apparently nothing good about him except that he was accustomed to recite a certain prayer to the

Blessed Virgin every day. And it was this small devotion which enabled him to escape from eternal death through the mercy of Mary. This is how it came about.

It happened that this lawyer struck up a friendship with Fra Matteo da Basso. He invited the priest repeatedly to visit him and one day Fra Matteo accepted an invitation to dinner. When he arrived at the lawyer's home, the man said to him: "Now, Father, I want to show you something which you have never seen before. I have here a wonderful monkey who acts as my valet, washes the glasses, sets the table, and opens the door." "It seems to me," observed the priest, "that we are involved here with something more than a mere monkey. Have him come here." They called the monkey, called him again and again and looked for him everywhere but he seemed to have disappeared. Finally, they found him hiding under a bed in a remote corner of the house. The monkey would not come out. "Well," said the religious, "we shall have to go to him." So together with the lawyer he went to the spot where the monkey was hiding and said: "Hellish beast, come forth; I command you by the power of God to reveal who you are." The creature had to admit he was the devil and that he was only waiting until the day when the sinner should fail to utter his prayer to the Mother of God, because the first time that he did so, he had permission from God to strangle him and carry him off to hell.

When the poor lawyer heard this, he fell upon his knees and begged the priest for help. The priest reassured him and commanded the devil to leave the house without doing any harm. "But I give you permission," he said, "as proof that you have really departed, to make a hole in the wall of the house." No sooner had he said this than with a great crash a hole suddenly appeared in the wall, which, even though it was closed up several times with mortar and stones, remained open by the will of God for a long time; until, finally, on the advice of the servant of God, the owner placed in it a block of marble with the image of an angel on it. The lawyer was converted, and gave every reason to believe that from that time forth he would follow a new way of life.

Prayer

O greatest and most sublime of all creatures, most holy virgin, I salute you from this earth, a miserable and ungrateful rebel against my God, who deserves punishment rather than favors, justice rather than mercy. O Mary, I do not say this because I doubt your mercy. I know that the greater you are, the more you glory in being kind. I know you rejoice that you are so privileged, because you are thus enabled to help us poor abandoned creatures. I know that the greater the poverty of those who have recourse to you, the more you exert yourself to protect and save them.

O my Mother, it was you who one day wept over your son who died for me. Offer your tears to God, I beseech you, and by means of these obtain for me true sorrow for my sins. Sinners were then a great source of affliction to you, yet I have also afflicted you with my crimes. Obtain for me, O Mary, that at least from this day forth I may stop afflicting you and your son by my ingratitude. What good would your sorrow be to me if I continued to be ungrateful to you? What would be the point of showing me mercy, if I were again unfaithful and lost my soul? No, my queen, do not permit it. You have made up for all my shortcomings. You obtain from God whatever you wish. You grant the prayers of all. I ask of you two graces; I expect them from you and will not be satisfied with less. Obtain for me that I may be faithful to God in not offending him any more, and that I may love him during the remainder of my life as much as I have offended him.

8

AND AFTER THIS, OUR EXILE, SHOW UNTO US THE BLESSED FRUIT OF YOUR WOMB, JESUS



Mary Saves Her Servants From Hell

It is impossible for a servant of Mary to be lost, if he faithfully honors her and recommends himself to her. This statement may appear to some, at first sight, to be exaggerated; but I beg anyone to whom this might seem to be the case to withhold judgment, and to read first what I have to say on this subject in the following pages.

When we say that it is not possible for a servant of Mary to be lost, we are not speaking, of course, of those who take advantage of their devotion to sin all the more freely. Those who disapprove of saying so much about Mary's mercy toward sinners, on the grounds that this only causes them to sin all the more, do so without cause, for such presumptuous sinners deserve punishment, not mercy, for their rash confidence. We are referring rather to those clients of Mary who, with a sincere desire to mend their ways, are faithful in honoring and recommending themselves to her. It is morally impossible, I say, for such persons to be lost. And I find that Father Crasset has also said the same thing in his book on devotion to the Blessed Virgin. So also Vega before him, in his *Marian Theology*, Mendoza, and other theologians. And we can see that they were not speaking at random when we examine what other saints and learned men have said on the subject. Let no one be surprised to find that many of these quotations are similar in content. I give them all in order to show how unanimous the various writers have been on the subject.

Saint Anselm says that, just as it is impossible for one to be saved who is not devoted to Mary and is therefore not protected by her, so it is impossible for one who recommends himself to her and is consequently

loved by her to be lost. Saint Antoninus repeats the same idea in almost identical words: “Just as it is impossible for those from whom Mary turns her eyes of mercy to be saved, so also it is impossible for those toward whom she turns her eyes and for whom she prays not be justified and glorified.” Consequently, the saint adds, the servants of Mary are necessarily saved.

Note particularly the first part of the opinions of these saints, and let those tremble who do not take seriously their devotion to Mary or who give it up out of carelessness. They say that it is impossible for those to be saved who are not protected by Mary. Others have said the same thing, such as Saint Albert, who proclaims: “All those who are not your servants, O Mary, will perish.” And Saint Bonaventure: “Anyone who neglects Mary will die in his sins.” In another place, he says: “Whoever does not call upon you in this life will not get to heaven.” And in commenting on the Psalm Ninety-Nine, Saint Bonaventure even goes so far as to say that those from whom Mary turns her face not only will not be saved, but will have no hope of salvation. Before him, Saint Ignatius the Martyr said that it was impossible for any sinner to be saved without the help and favor of the Blessed Virgin, because those whom God does not save out of justice he saves in his infinite mercy through the intercession of Mary. Some doubt whether this passage is actually from Saint Ignatius. In any case, Father Crasset says the same idea was expressed by Saint John Chrysostom. It is also repeated by the Abbot of Celles. And it is with this meaning that Holy Church applies to Mary the words of Proverbs: *All that hate me love death* (Prov 8:36). That is, all who do not love me, love eternal death, because, as Richard of Saint Lawrence says, commenting on the words: *She is like the merchant’s ship* (Prov 31:14), all those who are not on this ship shall be drowned in the sea of this world. Even the heretic Oecolampadius regarded a lack of devotion to the Mother of God a sure sign of reprobation, for he said: “Let it never be said of me that I reject Mary, for I regard it as a certain sign of a reprobate mind when one is not devoted to her.”

On the other hand, Mary says: *He that hearkens to me shall not be confounded* (Ecclus 24:30). That is, he who has recourse to me and listens to what I say, shall not perish. That is why Saint Bonaventure says: “He who renders homage to you, shall be far from perdition.” And

Saint Hilary says that this will be the case even with one who has greatly offended God in the past: “No matter how great a sinner he may have been, if he has become devoted to Mary he shall never be lost.”

It is for this reason that the devil does his utmost to make sinners lose devotion to Mary after they have lost the grace of God. When Sarah saw Isaac playing with Ismael, who was teaching him evil ways, she told Abraham to banish Ismael and his mother Agar: *Cast out this slave girl and her son* (Gen 21:10). She was not satisfied to have the son driven out of the house but also wanted the mother sent away, because she thought that otherwise he would keep coming back to the house if he saw his mother there. In the same way, the devil is not content to see a soul drive out Jesus Christ unless his mother is also banished: *Cast out this slave girl and her son.* Otherwise he fears that the mother will bring back her son by her intercession. “And his fears are well grounded,” says the learned Father Paciucchelli; “for he who is faithful in serving God’s mother will soon get back to God himself.”

Saint Ephrem is right in calling devotion to Mary the “charter of liberty,” our safeguard against hell. He also calls Mary the “protector of the damned.” And, rightly, for it is certain, according to Saint Bernard, that Mary lacks neither the power nor the will to save us. She does not lack the power, Saint Antoninus asserts, because it is impossible for her prayers not to be heard. Saint Bernard says that her requests can never be in vain, and that she obtains whatever she wills. She is not lacking in the will to save us, because she is our mother and desires to save us more than we do ourselves. So if this be true, how can anyone who is devoted to Mary ever perish? He may be a sinner, but if he perseveres in his intention to mend his ways and recommends himself to this good mother, she will make it her business to beg for him light to leave his wicked ways, sorrow for his sins, perseverance in virtue, and finally a good death. What mother, able to free her son from death by merely asking the judge on his behalf, would not do so? And can we imagine that Mary, the most loving mother her faithful servants could ever have, would not save her children from eternal death when she can so easily do so?

Devout reader, let us thank the Lord when we see that he has given us affection for and confidence in the Queen of Heaven, because, as

Saint John Damascene says, he does not give this grace except to those whom he wishes to save. These are the beautiful words of the saint with which he rekindles his own and our hope: “O Mother of God, if I place my confidence in you I shall be saved. If I am under your protection I have nothing to fear, because the fact that I am your servant means that I possess the invincible weapons of salvation, which God gives only to those whom he wishes to save.” Erasmus salutes the Blessed Virgin with these words: “Hail, O terror of hell and hope of Christians! Confidence in you is a pledge of salvation.”

How enraged the devil must be when he sees a soul persevering in devotion to Our Lady! We read in the life of Father Alfonso Alvarez, who was deeply devoted to Mary, that once when he was at prayer and very much troubled by the impure temptations of the devil, Satan said to him: “Give up devotion to Mary and I shall give up tempting you.”

Blosius tells us that God revealed to Saint Catherine of Siena that out of regard for his only-begotten Son whose mother she was, no sinner who devoutly recommended himself to Mary would ever become the prey of hell. Even the prophet David begged to be delivered from hell, for the sake of the love he bore for the honor of Mary: *I have loved, O Lord, the beauty of your house.… Take not away my soul, O God, with the wicked* (Ps 15:8–9). He says *of your house*, because Mary was that house which God, in becoming man, built for himself here on earth as his dwelling and resting place, as it is written in Proverbs: *Wisdom has built herself a house* (Prov 9:1). Saint Ignatius the Martyr said that no one will ever perish who has been diligently devoted to the Virgin Mother of God. And Saint Bonaventure confirms this by saying: “O Mary, those who love you enjoy peace in this life and their souls will never see eternal death.” The devout Blosius assures us that it has never happened and never will happen that a humble and devoted servant of Mary will be eternally damned.

“How many would remain eternally damned or obstinate in sin,” asks Thomas à Kempis, “unless the Virgin Mary interceded with her son?” It is the opinion of many theologians, especially of Saint Thomas, that sometimes Mary induces God to suspend the sentence of certain souls who die in mortal sin and enables them to return to life in order to do penance.

Serious authors cite instances when this has occurred. Among others, Flodoard, who lived in the ninth century. He tells us in his *Annals* of a certain deacon Adelman who was pronounced dead—yet, when he was about to be buried, he returned to life and said that he had seen the place in hell to which he had been condemned. It was by the prayers of the Blessed Virgin that he had been sent back to the world to do penance.

Surius has a similar case of a Roman citizen who had died impenitent, and for whom Mary obtained permission to come back to life and be forgiven. Moreover, Pelbart says that in his time, when the emperor Sigismund was crossing the Alps with his army, a voice was heard coming from a skeleton asking for a confessor and declaring that the Mother of God, for whom he had had a great devotion when a soldier, had obtained permission for him to live on in those bones until he had been able to confess his sins. The man made his confession and then died.

These and other examples of this type, however, must not encourage rash persons to live in sin in the hope that Mary will eventually save them from hell, even if they die in sin. Just as it would be madness for anyone to throw himself into a well in the hope that Mary would save him from death, simply because she had once saved a person in similar circumstances, so too it would be even greater madness to risk dying in sin, on the presumption that she would save him from hell. Nevertheless, these examples serve to revive our confidence when we realize that our Blessed Lady has been able to preserve from hell by her intercession even those who have died in sin, and that she can do even more in keeping those from falling into hell who turn to her in this life with a purpose of amendment and serve her faithfully.

Let us therefore say with Saint Germanus: “If you abandon us, O Mother of God, what will become of us sinners who want to amend and turn to you who are the life of Christians?” Let us listen to Saint Anselm, who says that no one for whom Mary has once prayed will ever experience eternal punishment. He says: “Those for whom you have prayed but once will not be damned.”[35] Therefore pray for us and we shall be saved from hell. When I come before the divine tribunal, who will be able to say to me that I shall not find the judge favorably

disposed as long as I have you, O Mother of Mercy, to defend me? As Richard of Saint Victor says: “If I approach the judgment and have the Mother of Mercy on my side, who will say that the Judge will not be favorable to me?”

Blessed Henry Suso used to maintain that he placed his soul in Mary’s hands and that, if the Judge wanted to condemn him, he wanted the sentence to be handed down by Mary. He meant by this that, if sentence of condemnation were passed on him, he was confident that it would not be carried out if the execution had to pass through the merciful hands of the Blessed Virgin. I say and hope the same for myself, O most blessed queen. I say with Saint Bonaventure: “In you, O Mary, I have hoped and I shall not be confounded forever.” I have placed all my hopes in you, O Blessed Mother; therefore I confidently hope never to be lost, but to be saved, and so to praise and love you forever in heaven.

Example

In the year 1604, in a city in Flanders, there lived two young students who, instead of devoting themselves to their studies, gave themselves over to a life of drink and debauchery. One night, when they had both been together in the house of an evil woman, one of them, named Richard, remained but a short time and then went on home, while his companion stayed behind. When he had got home and had begun to prepare for bed he remembered that he had not said the few Hail Marys which he was accustomed to say every day. Feeling very drowsy, he was inclined to skip them, but he forced himself to recite them anyway, sleepy as he was. He said the prayers without any particular devotion. Then he fell asleep. But while he was still in the first stages of sleep, he heard a violent knocking on the door. The door remained closed, but the figure of a young man passed through it, ugly and deformed. “Who are you?” Richard said. His companion replied: “Don’t you recognize me?” “Yes, but how you’ve changed! You look like a devil.” “I know I do,” exclaimed the poor fellow, “for I am damned!” “How did that happen?” “As I was leaving the evil house a devil came up and strangled me. My body lies in the middle of the street, but my soul is in hell. And the same fate was in store for you, but because of those few Hail Marys the

Blessed Virgin saved you. If you are not a fool, you will profit by this warning which the Mother of God sends you through me!" After saying this, he opened his cloak so that Richard could see the flames and the serpents that were tormenting him. Then he vanished. Richard threw himself on the floor and with many tears thanked Mary for having saved him. While he was thinking about how he intended to change his life, he heard the bell in the Franciscan monastery ringing for matins and said to himself: "God is calling me to do penance!" At once, even though it was very early in the morning, he went to the monastery and begged the Fathers to receive him. Knowing his evil reputation, they were of course reluctant to do so. So, with tears in his eyes, he told them all that had happened. Two of the Fathers went out into the street and there they found the corpse of Richard's companion, strangled and black as coal. Only then would they accept Richard into their community. From that day on, he led an exemplary life. In the course of time, he went to India to preach the faith, and from there to Japan, where he finally had the good fortune and grace to die a martyr for Jesus Christ by being burned alive.[36]

Prayer

O Mary, my dearest Mother, in what a terrible abyss of evil would I be now, if I had not been saved so often by your merciful hands! How many years I would have spent in hell by now, had not your powerful prayers freed me! My grievous sins sent me there; divine justice had already condemned me, and the devils were anxious to carry out the sentence. But, even though I did not call you, O Mother, you came to my rescue and saved me. O cause of my salvation, how can I ever repay you for so much grace and so much love? You conquered my hard heart, you drew me to love you and place confidence in you. Into what a terrible abyss I would have fallen, had not your merciful heart so often rescued me from the dangers into which I was about to plunge headlong! O my hope and my life, O Mother dearer to me than life itself, continue, I beg you, continue to preserve me from hell and from the sins into which I still may fall!

Let me never experience the misery of cursing you in hell. O beloved Mary, I love you! How can your goodness bear to see one of your servants

who loves you damned for all eternity? Obtain for me the grace never again to be unfaithful to you and to my God, who has bestowed so many graces on me out of love for you. O Mary, what do you say to me? Shall I be condemned? I shall certainly be condemned if I leave you. But who could ever dare to leave you? Can I ever forget the love you have shown me? After God, you are the love of my soul. I dare not live any longer without loving you. I want to make you happy. I love you, and I hope that I will always love you, now and in eternity, O most beautiful, most holy, most gentle, most loving Mother in all the world. Amen.

Mary Helps Her Servants in Purgatory

The servants of Mary are fortunate indeed: they enjoy her help not only here on earth, but also in purgatory, where they are assisted and consoled by her protection. In fact, because the souls there need help so desperately, since in their torments they cannot help themselves, Mary makes it her business to relieve them all the more. Saint Bernardine of Siena says that over the souls detained in that prison—all spouses of Jesus Christ—Mary exercises a certain dominion and plenitude of power, not only to relieve them, but even to deliver them from their sufferings.

Consider first the relief that she gives. In applying to her the passage of Ecclesiasticus: *I have walked in the waves of the sea* (Ecclus 24:8), Saint Bernardine adds that Mary comforts her servants by visiting and helping them in their torments, because they are her children. The pains of purgatory are called *waves*, according to him, because they are transitory and differ from the pains of hell which never end. And they are called *of the sea*, because they are very bitter. When Mary's servants are afflicted by these pains, she often comes to visit and comfort them. This is why it is important, according to Novarinus, to serve this gracious lady: because she simply cannot forget her servants as long as they are suffering in those flames. Though Mary helps all the poor souls suffering in purgatory, she obtains more indulgence and relief for those who have been devoted to her.

Our Blessed Lady said to Saint Bridget in a revelation: "I am the mother of all souls in purgatory; for, as long as they remain there, all the sufferings that they have deserved for their sins are, every hour, in some

way, relieved by my prayers." The merciful mother even deigns, at times, to enter this holy prison to visit and comfort her suffering children. *I have penetrated into the bottom of the deep* (Ecclus 24:8). In these words of Ecclesiasticus, she says equivalently: "I have penetrated into the depths of purgatory, to help those holy souls." As Saint Vincent Ferrer says: "O how good is Mary to the souls in purgatory, because through her they obtain comfort and relief."

What other consolation can they have in their suffering except Mary and the relief that they receive from the Mother of Mercy? Saint Bridget one day heard Jesus say to his mother: "You are my mother, the Mother of Mercy, and the consolation of the souls in purgatory." The Blessed Virgin herself told the saint that as a poor bedridden man left to himself is refreshed by some comforting word spoken to him, so the poor souls in purgatory are consoled by merely hearing her name. The mere mention of Mary's name, a name of hope and salvation, which is frequently invoked by her children in their prison, is a great source of comfort to them. Novarinus says that when Mary hears them invoking her name, she offers her prayers to God, and instantly the suffering souls find their pains relieved.

Mary not only consoles and relieves her servants in purgatory, but she also frees them from that prison by her prayers. According to Gerson, on the day of her Assumption into heaven, purgatory was entirely emptied. And this is confirmed by Novarinus, who says that many serious authors maintain that when Mary was going to heaven, she asked as a favor from her son permission to take along with her all the souls then in purgatory. From that time on, says Gerson, Mary had the privilege of delivering her servants from the pains of purgatory. Saint Bernardine of Siena asserts positively that the Blessed Virgin has the power of delivering souls from purgatory, especially those of her servants, by her prayers and by applying her own merits to them. Novarinus is of the same opinion and says that not only are the pains of those souls lessened by the merits of Mary, but the time of their suffering is shortened by her intercession. She has only to ask, and it is done.

Saint Peter Damian mentions a certain woman named Marozia, who appeared after her death to her godmother and told her that on the feast of the Assumption she had been delivered by Mary from purgatory,

together with a number of souls greater than the population of Rome. Denis the Carthusian relates something similar with regard to the feasts of Christmas and Easter, saying that on those days Mary comes down to purgatory accompanied by legions of angels and frees many souls from their torments. Novarinus also gives us to understand that this happens on every solemn feast of Our Lady.

The promise made by Mary to Pope John XXII is well known. She appeared to him and ordered him to inform all those who wore the Carmelite scapular that on the Saturday after their death she would deliver them from purgatory. According to Father Crasset, the Pope published this in a bull, which was later confirmed by Alexander V, Clement VII, Pius V, Gregory XIII, and Paul V. The latter, in 1612, declared in his bull, that "Christian people may piously believe that the Blessed Virgin will help them after death by her continual intercession, her merits, and special protection; and that on Saturdays, the day consecrated by the Church to her, she will give special help to the souls of the brethren of the Confraternity of Our Blessed Lady of Mount Carmel who have departed this life in a state of grace, provided that they have worn the scapular, observed the chastity of their state, and recited her Office; or, if they could not recite it, if they have observed the fasts of the Church and abstained from meat on all Wednesdays except Christmas Day." In the solemn Office of Our Blessed Lady of Mount Carmel, we read that it is piously believed that the Blessed Virgin comforts the brethren of this Confraternity in purgatory with maternal love, and that by her intercession she soon delivers them and conducts them to their heavenly home.

Why should we not hope for the same graces and favors, if we are devoted children of this good mother? And if we serve her with very special love, why should we not also hope for the grace to enter heaven immediately after death, without even going to purgatory? This really took place in the case of Blessed Godfrey, to whom Mary sent the following message by Brother Abondo: "Tell Brother Godfrey to advance in virtue, for he will then belong to me and to my son. And when his soul leaves his body, I will not allow it to enter purgatory, but I will take it personally and offer it to my son."

If we wish to relieve the sufferings of the poor souls in purgatory by

our prayers, let us do so by imploring the aid of the Blessed Virgin, and especially by offering the rosary for them, for that gives them great relief, as we shall see in the following example.

Example

Father Eusebius Nieremberg relates that in the town of Aragon there lived a young lady named Alexandra. She belonged to the nobility and, being very beautiful, was loved very much by two young men. One day, out of jealousy over Alexandra, the two youths quarreled and killed each other in a duel. Their parents were very much angered by this and, considering that the poor young girl was the cause of so much harm, they killed her too. They cut off her head and threw her into a well. A few days later, when Saint Dominic happened to be passing by the spot, he was inspired by the Lord to go to the well and call down: "Alexandra, come up!" With that, the head of the dead girl appeared, settled on the edge of the well, and begged Saint Dominic to hear her confession. In the presence of a great crowd that had by then gathered to watch this incredible occurrence, the saint heard her confession and gave her Holy Communion. Then he commanded her to reveal why she had received such a grace. Alexandra replied that the day her head was cut off, she happened to be in mortal sin, but that, because of her devotion to the rosary which she has just recited, the Blessed Virgin preserved her life. For two days, her head remained alive on the edge of the well, then her soul went to purgatory. Two weeks later, Alexandra's soul, beautiful and brilliant as a star, appeared to Saint Dominic. She told the saint that one of the chief means by which the souls in purgatory are relieved is the recitation of the rosary. She said that as soon as these souls reach heaven, they pray for whoever has applied this powerful prayer to them. After she had said that, Saint Dominic saw this fortunate soul jubilantly winging her way to the kingdom of the blessed.[37]

Prayer

O queen of heaven and earth, O Mother of the Lord of the world, O Mary, creature most grand, most exalted, and most loving, it is true that many here

on earth do not know or love you. But there are millions of angels, millions of saints in heaven, who do love you and constantly sing your praises. Even here on earth, how many souls there are who burn with love for you and go through life enamored of your goodness! O most loving Mother, would that I could also love you! Oh, that I could always remember to serve you, to praise you, to honor you, and make you loved by everybody! You have attracted the love of God, whom, by your beauty, you have, so to speak, torn from the bosom of his Eternal Father and drawn to earth, to become man and to be your son. Why can I, poor worm of the earth, not love you too? Sweetest Mother, I, too, want to love you and love you very much. I want to do all in my power to make you loved by others. And so, O Mary, graciously grant that I may love you, and help me to do so.

I know that God looks with a benevolent eye on all who love you. Besides his own glory, God desires nothing more than your glory, to see you honored and loved by all. From you, O Mary, I hope for every grace. You must obtain for me the forgiveness of all my sins and the gift of perseverance; you must assist me in the hour of my death; you must rescue me from purgatory; and finally you must lead me to heaven. Your lovers expect all this from you and are not disappointed. I also, who love you with so much affection, who love you above all other beings after God, I also expect the same.

Mary Leads Her Servants to Heaven

What a beautiful sign of predestination it is to be a servant of Mary! Holy Church applies to her these words of Ecclesiasticus, which are such a comfort to her servants: *In all these I sought rest, and I shall abide in the inheritance of the Lord* (Ecclus 24:11). Commenting on this passage, Cardinal Hugo says: "Blessed is he in whose home the Blessed Virgin finds her rest." Because she loves us, Mary endeavors to make devotion to her reign in the hearts of all. Many people either never engage in this devotion at all, or fail to persevere in it if they do. Blessed are they who both welcome it and persevere in it! *I shall abide in the inheritance of the Lord.* That is to say, adds the learned Paciucchelli, I shall abide in those who are the inheritance of the Lord. Devotion to the Blessed Virgin is found in all who are the Lord's inheritance, that is, all who will praise him eternally in heaven.

In the passage from Ecclesiasticus above, Mary continues by saying: *He that made me, rested in my tabernacle, and he said to me: Let your dwelling be in Jacob, and your inheritance in Israel, and take root in my elect* (Ecclus 24:12–13). That is to say: My Creator has deigned to rest in my bosom and wants me to dwell in the hearts of all his elect (who are prefigured by Jacob and who are my inheritance) and he has decreed that devotion to me and confidence in me shall take root in all those who are predestined.

How many saints would not be in heaven today, had Mary not brought them there by her powerful intercession! “I have caused unfailing light to rise in the heavens,” says Cardinal Hugo, applying to the Blessed Virgin the words in the same chapter of Ecclesiasticus, “I have made as many eternal lights to shine in heaven as there are servants of mine.” And the Cardinal adds: “Because of her intercession, there are many saints in heaven today who would not be there but for her.”

Saint Bonaventure says that the gate of heaven will be open to receive all who trust in the protection of the Blessed Virgin. And with the same thought in mind, Saint Ephrem asserted that devotion to Mary unlocks the entrance to paradise. Addressing her, the devout Blosius says: “The keys and the treasures of the heavenly kingdom are entrusted to you.” Hence we must constantly pray to her in the words of Saint Ambrose: “Open heaven to us, O Blessed Virgin, for you have the keys!” O Mary, open the gates of paradise to us, for you are the keeper of the keys; in fact, you are the very entrance to paradise, for Holy Church calls you the “gate of heaven.”

That is why the great Mother of God is also called the “star of the sea,” *Ave, Maris stella*. Saint Thomas, the Angelic Doctor says that Christians are guided on their way to heaven by Mary, just as sailors are guided to port by a star.

Similarly, Saint Peter Damian called her the “ladder of heaven.” According to him, God came down from heaven by means of her in order that, through her, men might merit to rise from earth to heaven. You were filled with grace, says Saint Anastasius, so that you would be our road to salvation and the way to our heavenly home. With this in mind, Saint Bernard calls her the “vehicle to heaven,” and Saint John

Geometra greets her with the words: “Hail, resplendent chariot!” meaning that she is the means by which her servants are transported to heaven. Blessed are they who know you, O Mother of God, says Saint Bonaventure, because to know you is the path of immortal life, and to make known your virtues is the road to eternal salvation.

The *Franciscan Chronicles* tell how Brother Leo once saw a red ladder at the top of which Jesus was standing, and a white ladder on which Mary stood. He saw how some tried to mount the red ladder, but fell to the ground after climbing a few rungs. Again and again they tried, but each time they fell down. Then they were urged to mount the white ladder. This they did without difficulty, because the Blessed Virgin stretched out a helping hand and led them safely to paradise.[38]

Denis the Carthusian asks: “Who will be saved, who will reign in heaven?” and immediately answers: “Those for whom this queen of mercy offers her prayers.” Mary asserts this herself when she says: *By me kings reign* (Prov 8:15). By my intercession, souls will reign first on earth by conquering their passions, then eternally in heaven where, as Saint Augustine puts it, everybody is king. In short, says Richard of Saint Lawrence, Mary is mistress of paradise: there she commands as she wishes and brings in whomsoever she pleases. So he applies these words of Ecclesiasticus to her: *My power was in Jerusalem* (Ecclus 24:15), and adds: “That is, by commanding what I wish and bringing in whom I please.” Because Mary is mother to the Lord of heaven, the Abbot Rupert is right in saying that she is also the First Lady of heaven: “By right, she possesses the whole kingdom of her son.”

Saint Antoninus tells us that by her powerful prayers and aid the Blessed Mother has already obtained heaven for us, provided we do not put obstacles in the way. The Abbot Guerric says that whoever serves Mary and benefits from her intercession is as sure of heaven as if he were already there. Saint John Damascene assures us that to serve Mary and to belong to her court is the greatest honor we can have, and to live under her rule is even better than to reign. “The highest honor consists in serving Mary and belonging to her family, for to serve her means to reign, and to be governed by her is more than to have the power of kings.” On the other hand, says the same saint, those who do not serve Mary will not be saved; because, deprived of this great mother’s aid,

they are abandoned and lack the help of her Son and the whole heavenly court.

May the infinite goodness of our God be forever praised, says Saint Bernard, for having given us Mary as our advocate in heaven, that she, at the same time the mother of our Judge and a mother of mercy, may be able, by her intercession, to bring to a safe conclusion the great affair of our eternal salvation. The monk James, a Doctor of the Greek Church, says that God destined Mary to be a bridge of salvation, so that we may safely pass over the stormy sea of this world and reach the happy haven of paradise. Saint Bonaventure exclaims: "Hear, O nations; all you who desire God's kingdom, serve and honor the Blessed Virgin and you shall certainly have eternal life."

Even those who have deserved hell should not despair of reaching heaven, provided they faithfully serve this queen. How many sinners, says Saint Germanus, have striven to find God through you, O Mary, and have been saved! Richard of Saint Lawrence recalls that Saint John pictured Mary as crowned with stars: *And on her head a crown of twelve stars* (Apoc 12:1); but that the Sacred Canticles, on the other hand, depict her as crowned with wild beasts, lions, and leopards: *Come from Libanus, my spouse, come from Libanus, come; you shall be crowned … from the dens of the lions, from the mountains of the leopards* (Cant 4:8). How can this be? He replies that the wild beasts are sinners who, by the intercession of Mary, become stars of heaven, which bring more splendor to the brow of this queen of mercy than all the material stars of the sky.

We read in the life of the servant of God, Sister Seraphina of Capri, that once during the novena of the Assumption she asked Our Blessed Lady for the conversion of a thousand sinners. Afterwards she feared that she had asked too much, but Mary appeared to her, reproached her, and said: "Why fear? Do you think I am not powerful enough to obtain from my son the conversion of a thousand sinners? Look—I have already obtained this favor for you." With that, Mary led her in spirit to heaven and showed her the innumerable sinners who had deserved hell, but who through her intercession had been saved and were already enjoying eternal happiness.

It is quite true that no one can be certain in this life of his eternal salvation: *Man knows not whether he be worthy of love or hatred; but all*

things are kept uncertain for the time to come (Eccles 9:1–2). Lord, asked David, who shall be saved? *Lord, who shall dwell in your tabernacle?* (Ps 14:1). Saint Bonaventure replies: "Let us sinners follow in the footsteps of Mary and cast ourselves at her blessed feet. Let us hold on to her and not let go, until we deserve to be blessed by her." This means: O sinners, let us follow in Mary's footsteps and throw ourselves at her blessed feet; and let us not leave her until she blesses us, because her blessing assures us of paradise. "It is enough, O Mary," says Saint Anselm, "that you desire to save us, for then we must be saved." And Saint Antoninus assures us that souls protected by Mary are certainly saved.

Behold, henceforth all generations shall call me blessed (Lk 1:48). Saint Ildephonsus maintains that the Blessed Virgin had every reason to predict that all generations would call her blessed because all the saints achieve eternal happiness through Mary. "You, O great Mother, are the beginning, the middle, and the end of our happiness," says Saint Methodius. She is the "beginning" because she obtains the pardon of our sins; the "middle" or means, because she obtains our perseverance in divine grace; and the "end" or goal, because she finally obtains paradise for us. "Through you," says Saint Bernard, "heaven has been opened, hell emptied, and paradise regained." In short, eternal life has been bestowed on so many miserable creatures who had deserved eternal death.

But what ought to encourage us more than anything else to be confident of salvation is the beautiful promise which Mary herself made to those who honor her, and especially to those who endeavor, by word and example, to make her known and honored by others: *They that work by me, shall not sin. They that explain me, shall have life everlasting* (Ecclus 24:30–31). Fortunate then are all those who acquire favor with Mary, says Saint Bonaventure. They shall be recognized as fortunate by their companions. And fortunate all those who wear the livery of a servant of Mary, for they shall be registered in the Book of Life. What good is it then to be worried about the opinions of scholars as to whether predestination to glory precedes or follows the prevision of merits—whether we are written in the Book of Life or not? If we are true servants of Mary and obtain her protection, we shall certainly be inscribed in the Book of Life; for, as Saint John Damascene says: "God

only grants devotion toward his holy mother to those whom he wants to save." This is in line with what the Lord himself revealed to Saint John: *He that overcomes … I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God* (Apoc 3:12). He then who is to conquer and be saved will bear written on his heart the name of the city of God. But who, if not Mary, is this city of God, asks Saint Gregory in his commentary on these words of David: *Glorious things are said of you, O city of God* (Ps 86:3).

We may well say here with Saint Paul: Having this seal, *the Lord knows who are his* (2 Tim 2:19). Whoever bears this seal, the seal of devotion to Mary, is recognized by God as his own. Therefore Saint Bernard wrote that "devotion to the Mother of God is the surest sign of obtaining eternal salvation."

Speaking of the Hail Mary, Blessed Alan says that whoever frequently honors the Blessed Virgin with this angelic greeting has a very good guarantee of predestination. And with regard to the daily recitation of the rosary, he says: "If you persevere in reciting the rosary, this will be a most probable sign of your eternal salvation." In his book on the love of Mary, Father Nieremberg says that not only are the servants of God's mother privileged and favored here on earth, but that they will be even more distinctly honored in heaven. He also says that in heaven they will wear a specially rich vesture which will enable them to be recognized as servants of the heavenly queen and as members of her court, as the book of Proverbs puts it: *All her domestics are clothed with double garments* (Prov 31:21).

Saint Mary Magdalen of Pazzi had a vision in which she saw all of Mary's servants on board a ship which was piloted by Mary herself and which brought them safely to port. The saint understood this vision to mean that all those who live under Mary's protection will escape from the shipwreck of sin and damnation, because they are safely guided by her to the port of paradise. Let us therefore enter this blessed ship and thus be sure of the kingdom of the blessed. For in her chant Holy Church says: "O holy Mother of God, all those who will be partakers of eternal happiness dwell in you, living under your protection."

Example

Caesarius of Heisterbach tells the story of a certain Cistercian monk who was greatly devoted to the Blessed Virgin and who consequently desired very much to see her. For this favor, he prayed constantly. One night he went into the garden and looked up at the sky. While he was praying and hoping to see his queen, all of a sudden he beheld a beautiful maiden surrounded by light coming down from heaven. The maiden said to him: “Thomas, would you like to hear my song?” “Certainly,” he replied. Then she sang so sweetly that the devout religious thought he was in paradise. When the song ended, she disappeared, leaving him with a great desire to know who she was. Then suddenly another maiden stood before him. She too was very beautiful and had him listen to her song. At this point, he could not refrain any longer from asking who she was, and she answered: “The one you saw a little while ago was Catherine. I am Agnes. Both of us are martyrs of Jesus Christ and we have been sent by the Blessed Mother to console you. Thank Mary, and prepare to receive an even greater grace.” With that she, too, disappeared. But the religious now had even higher hopes of finally seeing his queen. Nor was he disappointed, for in a little while he saw a great light. He felt his heart thrilling with a new joy. Suddenly, in the midst of the light, he saw the Mother of God, surrounded by angels. She was indescribably more beautiful than the other two saints who had appeared to him. Addressing him, she said: “My dear servant and son, I have been pleased with your devotion to me and I have heard your prayers. You wanted to see me and so here I am. Now I want you to hear my song too.” The Blessed Virgin then began to sing. She sang with so much sweetness that the devout religious lost his senses and fell down on the ground. The bell for matins rang and all the monks gathered for prayer. When they did not see Thomas, they went looking for him in his cell and elsewhere. Finally they went into the garden and found him lying there as if dead. The superior ordered him to tell them what had happened. In response to the call of obedience, he returned to his senses and told all the favors Our Lady had granted him.

Prayer

O queen of heaven, mother of holy love, since you are the most loving of creatures, the most beloved by God and his greatest lover, please allow a disconsolate sinner living in this world, who has been freed from hell by your help and has been so benefited by you without any merit on his part, to love you too. This sinner has fallen in love with your goodness and has placed all his hopes in you. I love you, O Mary, and I would like to love you more than all the saints did who were so devoted to you.

If possible, I would like to make all men who do not know how worthy you are of being loved know this, so that they may love and honor you. I would also be happy to die for love of you, in defense of your virginity, your dignity as Mother of God, and your Immaculate Conception, if it should ever be necessary for me to die to protect these great prerogatives.

O most beloved Mother, accept my love, and do not permit that a servant who loves you should ever have to become the enemy of the God who has loved you so much. True, it was once my misfortune to be such an enemy, when I offended my Lord. But at that time, O Mary, I neither loved you nor did I seek to be loved by you. Now, however, I desire nothing, apart from God's grace, but to love you and to be loved by you, O most kind and gracious Mother. Do not refuse to love even the most miserable sinners who love you. Let your love conquer everyone!

Most lovable queen, I desire to love you in heaven. There, at your feet, I shall understand better how worthy you are of love and how much you have done to save me; and then I shall love you with even greater love. I shall love you eternally, without fear of ever ceasing to love you. O Mary, with your help, I am certain of being saved. Pray to Jesus for me. Nothing else is needed. You have to save me, you are my hope. I will therefore always sing: O Mary, my hope, it is you who must save me.

9

O CLEMENT!
O LOVING!



The Clemency and Compassion of Mary

Speaking of Mary's great compassion for sinners, Saint Bernard says that she is the land promised by God, the land overflowing with milk and honey. And Saint Leo asserts that Mary's mercy is so great, that she deserves to be called not only merciful but mercy itself. Considering that Mary was made Mother of God for the sake of sinners and that the office of dispensing his mercies was committed to her; and considering her great interest in all the distressed, an interest that makes her so rich in mercy that she seems to desire nothing but to help the needy, Saint Bonaventure said that when he looked at Mary, he seemed no longer to be beholding the divine justice, but only the divine mercy, of which Mary is full. These are his fervent words: "O Mary, when I behold you, I discern only divine mercy, for you were made Mother of God for the sake of the wretched and therefore the office of exercising mercy was entrusted to you. You look out for the unfortunate wherever they may be; you are armed with mercy; your only wish is to show it."

In brief, Mary's compassion is so great that, according to Abbot Guerric, her heart cannot stop even for a moment from pouring out its fruits of mercy on us. What else, exclaims Saint Bernard, can flow from the font of mercy but mercy? That is why Mary is called an olive tree: *As a fair olive tree in the plains* (Ecclus 24:19). Just as nothing but oil, the symbol of mercy, comes from the olive tree, so nothing but grace and mercy flow from the hands of Mary. And so, the Venerable Louis de Ponte says that Mary may properly be called the "mother of oil," because she is the Mother of Mercy. When we go to this good mother, therefore, for the oil of mercy, we need not be afraid that she will refuse

it, as the wise virgins in the Gospel did to the foolish ones: *lest there may not be enough for us and for you* (Mt 25:9). Certainly not, because she has a superabundant supply of this oil of mercy. Saint Bonaventure says: "Mary is full of the oil of mercy." The Church calls her not merely a prudent virgin, but a most prudent one, so that, as Hugh of Saint Victor says, we may understand that Mary is so full of grace and mercy that, without lacking any herself, she can supply us all. "You are full of grace, O Blessed Virgin, and indeed so full that the whole world may draw on this overabundance of oil. For if the prudent virgins provided themselves with an extra vessel of oil for their lamps, you, O most prudent Virgin, provided yourself with an overflowing and inexhaustible vessel from which to pour out the oil of mercy and to light the lamp of everyone's soul."

But why, I ask, is this beautiful olive tree said to stand in the midst of the plains: *As a fair olive tree in the plains* (Ecclus 24:19), and not rather in the center of a garden surrounded by walls and hedges? The same Hugh of Saint Victor tells us why—"so that all may look upon her and take refuge in her"; that all may easily see her and have recourse to her, to obtain the remedy for all their ills. This beautiful thought is supported by Saint Antoninus, who says that just as anyone can go and gather fruit from an olive tree that stands in an open field, so everybody, both the just and sinners, can have recourse to Mary to obtain mercy from her. The same saint then adds: "How many sentences of condemnation for sin this most holy virgin has revoked in her mercy!" That is, by her prayers. And what surer refuge can one have, asks the devout Thomas à Kempis, than the compassionate heart of Mary? "There the poor find a home, the infirm a remedy, the afflicted relief, the doubtful counsel, and the abandoned help."

We would indeed be distressed, if we did not have this Mother of Mercy always attentive and solicitous to relieve us in our needs! *Where there is no woman, he mourns that is in want*, says the Holy Spirit (Ecclus 36:27). This woman, according to Saint John Damascene, is none other than the Blessed Virgin Mary; for whenever she is absent, the sick man groans. Surely this must be so, since God wishes that all graces shall be dispensed through Mary's prayers. Where they are lacking, there can be no hope of mercy, as Our Lord gave Saint Bridget to understand, when

he said: “Unless Mary’s prayers intervene, there can be no hope of mercy.” Do we fear perhaps that Mary does not see our miseries or does not feel pity for them? No, she sees and pities them far more than we do ourselves. As Saint Antoninus says: “There is no one among the saints who can ever feel compassion for us in our miseries like this woman, the most Blessed Virgin Mary.” So that, wherever she sees misery, she cannot help but hasten to our assistance with her great mercy. Richard of Saint Victor repeats the same thing, and Mendoza confirms it by saying: “Wherever you find misery, O Blessed Virgin, you pour out your mercies.” Our good Mother herself protests that she will never cease to fulfill this office of mercy: *And unto the world to come I shall not cease to be, and in the holy dwelling place I have ministered before him* (Ecclus 24:14). According to the commentary of Cardinal Hugo, Our Lady is really saying: “I will never cease relieving the miseries of men and praying for sinners until the end of the world,” in order that they may be delivered from eternal misery and saved.

Suetonius relates that the Emperor Titus was so eager to do favors to those who asked him, that whenever he missed the opportunity of granting somebody a favor, he became sad and used to say: “I have lost a day, for I have spent it without benefiting anyone.” It appears very likely that Titus uttered these words more from vanity or a desire for esteem than out of a love of charity. But if it should ever happen that our queen, Mary, were to pass a day without granting any grace, she too would have to say what Titus did, but in her case it would be from a genuine desire to serve us and because she is filled with charity. She is so eager to help us, says Bernardine of Bustis, that she is more eager to grant us graces than we are to receive them. And, therefore, he says that whenever we go to her, we always find her hands filled with mercy and generosity.

Rebecca was a figure of Mary. When Abraham’s servant begged Rebecca for a drink of water, she replied that she would give him enough water not only for himself but for his camels (Gen 24:19). With this in mind, Saint Bernard devoutly turns to Mary and says: “O Mary, you are far more generous and compassionate than Rebecca; for you are not satisfied with distributing the treasures of your immense mercy only to the servants of Abraham, who are a figure of the faithful servants of

God. You also give them to sinners, who are typified by the camels." As Rebecca gave more than she was asked for, so too Mary gives more than we request. The generosity of Mary, says Richard of Saint Lawrence, resembles that of her son: He always gives more than is sought. And that is why Saint Paul says: *He is rich toward all who call upon him* (Rom 10:12). This is what a devout author says to the Blessed Virgin: "O Mary, pray for me, for you will ask for the graces I need with greater devotion than I can myself; and you will obtain far more graces for me from God than I dare seek myself."

When the Samaritans refused to receive Jesus Christ and his doctrines, Saint James and Saint John asked him whether they should command fire to come down from heaven and consume them? Our Lord replied: *You do not know of what manner of spirit you are* (Lk 9:55). He meant: I am of a tender and compassionate nature and came from heaven to save, not to chastise sinners, but you wish to see them lost. What do you mean: fire, punishment? Let us hear no more about punishing, for that is not my nature.

The same in Our Lady's case. Her spirit is the same as that of her son; she is all inclined to mercy. As she said to Saint Bridget, she is called the Mother of Mercy, and it was by God's own mercy that she was made so merciful and kind. That is why Saint John saw her clothed with the sun: *And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun* (Apoc 12:1). This passage inspired Saint Bernard to turn to her and say: "You, O Mary, have clothed the sun, that is, the Eternal Word, with human flesh. But he has clothed you with his power and mercy."

Our queen is so merciful and kind, continued Saint Bernard, that when a sinner, regardless of his condition, recommends himself to her, she does not question his merits, or whether he is worthy or unworthy to receive her attention; she hears and helps everybody. Mary is called *fair as the moon* (Cant 6:9), according to Saint Hildebert, because, just as the moon shines on and assists even the lowliest of earthly creatures, so Mary enlightens and assists even the most unworthy sinners.[39] And though the moon, says another writer, receives all its light from the sun, yet it completes its task more quickly than the sun: "What the sun accomplishes in a year, the moon does in a month." For this reason, Saint Anselm says: "At times we are saved more quickly by invoking

Mary's name than by invoking the name of Jesus." On this subject, Hugh of Saint Victor exhorts us, saying that "though our sins may cause us to be afraid of approaching Almighty God, because it is his infinite majesty that we have offended, we must never be afraid of going to Mary, for in her we shall find nothing to terrify us. She is truly holy, immaculate, the queen of the world and Mother of God; but she is also of our flesh, and, like us, a child of Adam."[40]

Finally, says Saint Bernard, everything that pertains to Mary is filled with mercy and grace. Why? Because, as mother of mercy, she has become all things to all men. Because, by her abundant charity, she has made herself a debtor to the devout and to sinners and opens her compassionate heart to all, that all may receive from her fullness. Just as the devil, according to Saint Peter *goes about seeking someone to devour* (1 Pet 5:8), so, according to Bernardine de Bustis, Mary goes about seeking to impart life and to save whom she can.

Furthermore, we must keep in mind that Mary's protection is greater and far more powerful than we can imagine. Saint Germanus says this. Another writer, the author of the *Pomerium*, asks how it is possible that the Lord, who under the Old Law was so severe in punishing, is now so merciful toward those who are guilty of even greater sins. And he answers by saying that "it is all for the love of Mary, and on account of her merits." The world would have been destroyed long ago, exclaims Saint Fulgentius, if Mary had not sustained it by her prayers! But, says Arnold of Chartres, now that we have the Son as our mediator with the Eternal Father, and the Mother as a mediator with the Son, we have full access to God and can go to him with entire confidence and hope for every good thing. "How can the Father refuse to hear the Son when the Son shows him the wounds he suffered for the sake of sinners? And how can the Son refuse to hear his Mother when she shows him her bosom and the breasts that nursed him?" Saint Peter Chrysologus says forcefully that "a gentle maiden lodged a God in her womb and now asks, as its price, peace for the world, salvation for those who are lost, and life for the dead."

How many would deserve to be condemned by the justice of the Son, exclaims the Abbot of Celles, who are saved by the mercy of the Mother! For she is God's treasure and the treasurer of all graces. Our salvation

lies in her hands and depends on her. Let us, then, always turn to this compassionate mother and confidently hope for salvation through her prayers. For, according to the comforting assurance of Bernardine de Bustis, she is our salvation, our life, our hope, our counsel, our refuge, and our help. Saint Antoninus says that Mary is truly the throne of grace to which the apostle Saint Paul exhorts us to turn, in order to obtain divine mercy and all the help we need for salvation. *Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace: that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need* (Heb 4:16). *To the throne of grace*, that is, to Mary, says Saint Antoninus. And Saint Catherine of Siena does not hesitate to call Mary "the dispenser of divine mercy."

Let us conclude with the beautiful and tender exclamation of Saint Bernard on those words: "O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary!" He says that "she is clement and merciful to those in need, loving to those who pray to her, and sweet to those who love her; clement with the penitent, loving to those who make progress, sweet to the perfect. She is clement in delivering us from punishment, loving in bestowing graces, and sweet in giving herself to those who seek her."

Example

Father Carlo Bovio tells the story of a married man who lived in the province of Puy de Dôme in France. This man had had sinful associations with another woman while his wife was still living. The wife could not endure this and constantly begged God to punish him. One day she visited the Blessed Virgin's altar in a certain church and prayed that justice be visited on the woman with whom her husband was in love. The other lady was also accustomed to visit that altar and say a Hail Mary every day.

One night, Mary appeared to the wife in a dream and the woman at once began her old refrain: "Justice, Mother of God, justice!" But the Madonna answered: "Justice? Do you ask me for justice? Go, look for someone else to give you justice; I will not grant what you ask. For that woman says a Hail Mary in my honor every day, and whenever anyone does this, regardless of who it is, I simply cannot allow that person to suffer and be punished for sin."

On the following morning, the wife went to hear Mass in the same church of the Madonna. As she was leaving the church, she encountered her husband's friend. She no sooner saw her than she began to insult the woman, saying that she was a witch, that by her witchcraft she had cast a spell even on the Blessed Virgin. "Be silent!" the people said. "What do you mean by such an accusation?" And she said, "Why should I be silent? What I say is true. Last night the Madonna appeared to me and when I asked her for justice, she replied that she could not obtain this for me because this woman said a prayer to her every day." Then the people asked the other woman what prayer it was that she daily said to the Blessed Virgin, and she replied that it was the Hail Mary. When the woman learned that the Blessed Virgin was so merciful to her simply because of such a small devotion, she threw herself at the feet of the Madonna's statue and, in the presence of all the people, begged pardon for the scandal she had caused and made a vow of perpetual chastity. This was not all. She donned the habit of a nun, prepared a small room for herself near the church, locked herself in it, and lived there in continuous penance until she died.

Prayer

O Mother of Mercy, since you are so merciful and so eager to help us short-sighted creatures and grant our prayers, I, the most miserable of all, appeal to your mercy today and beg you to grant what I ask. Let others ask what they please: health of body, earthly possessions and advantages. But I ask you, O Mary, for the things that you desire me to ask for, the things that are most in accordance with your will and most pleasing to your holy heart.

You were so humble: obtain for me humility and love of contempt. You were so patient amid the trials of this life: obtain for me patience in adversity. You were so full of love for God: Obtain for me the gift of a pure and holy love. You were all charity toward your neighbor: Obtain for me charity toward all, particularly toward those who are in any way my enemies. You were entirely united to the divine will: Obtain for me complete conformity to the will of God in whatever way he may be pleased to dispose of me. Finally, you are the most holy of all creatures: O Mary, make me a saint.

You are not lacking in love for me: You can do everything, and you have

the will to obtain everything for me. The only obstacle to receiving your graces is either my neglect in turning to you, or my lack of confidence in your prayers. But this recourse to you and this confidence in you are what you must obtain for me. These two greatest of graces I ask of you, I desire of you, and I hope from you, with complete confidence, O Mary, my Mother, my hope, my love, my life, my refuge, my help, and my consolation. Amen.

10

O SWEET VIRGIN MARY!



Mary's Name Is Sweet in Life and in Death

The great name of Mary did not come to her from her parents. And it was not given to her by the mind or will of man, as is the case with other names that are imposed in this world. Her name came from heaven and was given her by a divine command. This is declared to have been the case by Saint Jerome, Saint Epiphanius, Saint Antoninus, and others. "The name of Mary came from the treasure house of God," according to Richard of Saint Lawrence. "Your exalted and admirable name, O Mary, came from the treasure house of God, because all the Persons in the Blessed Trinity bestowed on you a name that is superior to every other name except that of your son." And they ennobled it with such majesty and power that whenever it was heard, all who were in heaven, on earth, or in hell, would bend their knees and reverence it. Among the many privileges which the Lord gave to the name of Mary, let us see now how sweet God made that name for the servants of this most holy mother, both in life and in death.

First, as regards the course of our life, the holy anchorite Honorius used to say that "this name of Mary is full of every kind of sweetness and divine flavor."[41] Saint Anthony of Padua found in Mary's name the same sweetness which Saint Bernard found in that of Jesus. "Name of Jesus!" exclaimed the one. "Name of Mary!" replied the other. "Joy in the heart, honey in the mouth, and music in the ears" of those who are devoted to her. We read in the life of the Blessed Father Juvenal Ancina, Bishop of Saluzzo, that whenever he pronounced the name of Mary there came to his mouth such a remarkable sensation of sweetness that he used to lick his lips. We also read that a certain lady at Cologne told Bishop Marsilius that whenever she pronounced the name of Mary, she experienced a

taste in her mouth sweeter than honey. The bishop followed the edifying practice suggested by the lady and experienced the same sweetness.

We gather from the sacred Canticles that when Our Lady was assumed into heaven the angels asked her name three times. *Who is this coming up the desert, like a column of smoke?* (Cant 3:6). Again: *Who is this that comes forth like the dawn?* (Cant 6:10). And again: *Who is this coming up from the desert, leaning upon her lover?* (Cant 8:5). "Why," asks Richard of Saint Lawrence, "do the angels ask so often for this queen's name?" His answer: "Because the name of Mary is so sweet even to the angels, they desire to hear it over and over again."

I am not speaking here of an actual sensation of sweetness, for this is not granted to everyone. What I mean is the salutary sweetness of consolation, love, joy, confidence, and reassurance, which the name of Mary usually inspires in those who pronounce it with devotion.

Speaking on this subject, the Abbot Francone says that there is no other name after that of the son, in heaven or on earth, which gives the minds of the faithful so much grace, hope, and sweetness as that of Mary, because it is so rich in every good thing. He goes on to explain that Mary's name has about it something so admirable, so sweet, and so exquisite, that when it reverberates in loving hearts, it breathes into them an odor of holy sweetness. He adds, in conclusion, that this name is so wonderful that even though it be heard a thousand times by the lovers of Mary, they always hear it again as if it were entirely new to them, and they always experience the same sweetness each time that it is pronounced.

Speaking about this sweetness, Blessed Henry Suso used to say that, when he mentioned the name of Mary, he felt so full of confidence and was inflamed with such love and joy, that between the joy and the tears with which he uttered this exquisite name, he thought his heart would leap right out of his mouth. He asserted that this sweet name was like a honeycomb melting in the recesses of his soul. This caused him to exclaim: "O most sweet name! O Mary, what must you yourself be, when the mere mention of your name causes such love and such joy!"

Turning to the Blessed Mother, Saint Bernard, inflamed with love for her, says tenderly: "O great Mary, so amiable and deserving of all praise,

your name is so sweet and lovable, that no one can pronounce it without being inflamed with love of you and God. Your lovers need only to think of your sweet name and they are moved to greater love." "And if riches afford comfort to the poor because they relieve them of their miseries, how much more," says Richard of Saint Lawrence, "does your name, O Mary, comfort us. It comforts us much more than the wealth of this world. It relieves the poverty of our souls."

In short, O Mother of God, "your name is filled with divine graces and blessings," as Saint Methodius says. So much so, that your name cannot be pronounced, according to Saint Bonaventure, without bringing some grace to the one who says it devoutly. Blessed Raymond Jordano says that "no matter how hardened and skeptical a heart may be, the power of your name, if it is only pronounced, O most gracious virgin, is enough to cause such a heart to be miraculously softened. You are the one who leads sinners to the hope of pardon and grace."

According to Saint Ambrose, "your sweet name, O Mary, is a fragrant ointment that breathes forth the odor of divine grace." He then goes on to pray: "May this ointment of salvation penetrate to the innermost recesses of our souls." He means: O Mary, let us often remember to mention your name with love and confidence, because doing this is a sign that we already possess divine grace, or that we will soon recover it.

Truly, the remembrance of your name comforts the afflicted, O Mary. It recalls those who have erred to the path of salvation, and encourages sinners not to abandon themselves to despair, as Ludolph of Saxony says. Father Pelbart maintains that, just as Jesus Christ has cured the evils of the world by his five wounds, "so Mary, by her most holy name, Maria, which is composed of five letters, daily brings pardon to sinners."

That is why the sacred Canticles liken Mary's name to oil: *Your name is as oil poured out* (Cant 1:2). Commenting on this passage, Blessed Alan says that the glory of her name is compared to oil poured out, because oil heals the sick, gives off a sweet odor, and nourishes fire. In the same way, the name of Mary heals the sick, gladdens the soul, and inflames with divine love. Therefore, Richard of Saint Lawrence encourages sinners to have recourse to this great name, because it alone is enough to cure them of all their ills. He says: "There is no disease, however malignant, that does not immediately yield to the power of the name of

Mary."

On the other hand, Thomas à Kempis asserts that the devils fear the queen of heaven to such an extent that, when they merely hear her name pronounced, they flee from the person who pronounces it, as from a burning fire. The Blessed Virgin revealed to Saint Bridget that there is no sinner on earth, however far from God's grace, from whom the devil will not immediately flee, if he invokes Mary's name with a determination to repent. The Blessed Virgin confirmed this on another occasion by saying that "all the devils respect and fear my name so much that, as soon as they hear it, they immediately loosen their grasp on the soul they hold captive."

Our Blessed Lady also told Saint Bridget that, as the rebel angels flee from sinners who invoke the name of Mary, so the good angels draw near to pious souls who pronounce this name.

Saint Germanus maintains that as breathing is a sign of life, so also is the frequent pronunciation of the name of Mary a sign that the life of divine grace is there, or that it will soon be present; for this powerful name is capable of obtaining help and life for the person who invokes it with devotion. "As breathing is a sign of life in the body, so the frequent repetition of your most holy name by your servants, O Mary, is not only a sign of life and strength, but it also procures and assures these benefits."

"In short," adds Richard of Saint Lawrence, "this admirable name is like a fortified tower. If the sinner takes refuge in it, he will be delivered from death; for it defends and saves even the most abandoned souls." But it is a tower of strength which not only delivers sinners from punishment, but also defends the good from the assaults of hell. The same Richard maintains that, "after the name of Jesus, there is no other in which men find such powerful assistance and salvation as in the great name of Mary." Moreover, it is well known and is a daily experience of the servants of Mary, that her powerful name affords the strength necessary to resist the temptations of the flesh. The same author in his commentary on the words of Saint Luke: *And the virgin's name was Mary* (Lk 1:27), says that the Evangelist mentions these two names together, *Mary* and virgin, to signify that the name of the most pure virgin should always be coupled with the virtue of chastity. And Saint Peter

Chrysologus says that “the name of Mary is a symbol of chastity.” He means that if anyone is in doubt whether he has sinned by consenting to thoughts against this virtue and remembers that he has invoked the name of Mary, he has a certain proof that he did not sin against chastity.

Let us therefore always profit by the splendid advice of Saint Bernard, who says: “In dangers, in perplexities, in worries, think of Mary, call on Mary. Let her name never leave your lips, let her love never leave your heart.” Whenever we are in danger of forfeiting divine grace let us think of Mary and invoke her name, together with that of Jesus; for these two names always go together. Let us never permit these two most sweet and powerful names to depart either from our hearts or our lips, because these two great names will give us the strength to resist and to conquer all temptations.

Very consoling are the graces which Jesus Christ promised to those who are devoted to his mother’s name, as he gave Saint Bridget to understand when he allowed her to overhear him conversing with Mary. He revealed to the saint that whoever invoked Mary’s name with confidence and a firm intention to repent would receive three special graces, namely, perfect sorrow for his sins, reparation for them along with the courage to persevere, and, finally, the glory of paradise. And then our Divine Savior added: “For your words, O Mother, are so sweet and dear to me, that I cannot deny you whatever you ask.”

Finally, Saint Ephrem says that Mary’s name is the “key to the gates of heaven” in the hands of those who devoutly invoke it. And so it is not without reason that Saint Bonaventure addresses Mary in these words: “O salvation of all who invoke you!” By that he means, that to obtain eternal salvation and to invoke her are one and the same. And Richard of Saint Lawrence declares that “the devout invocation of her sweet and holy name leads to the acquisition of superabundant graces in this life, and a very high degree of glory in the next.” “If then, O brethren,” concludes Thomas à Kempis, “you desire consolation in every trial, turn to Mary, invoke her name, honor her, and recommend yourselves to her. Rejoice with Mary, weep with Mary, walk with Mary, and seek Jesus with Mary. Finally, yearn to live and die with Jesus and Mary. By doing this, you will always make progress on the path of the Lord, for Mary will always be glad to pray for you and her son will certainly hear his

mother."

And so we see that the most holy name of Mary is very sweet indeed to her servants in this life, because of the very great graces that she obtains for them. But sweeter still will it be to them in their last hour, because of the tranquil and holy death she will secure for them.

Father Sertorius Caputo, S.J., exhorted all who assist the dying to pronounce the name of Mary frequently. He said that this hopeful and life-giving name, when repeated at the hour of death, is sufficient to put the devils to flight and to comfort the dying in all their sufferings.

Likewise Saint Camillus de Lellis warmly recommended to his religious that they urge the dying to invoke the names of Jesus and Mary frequently. He personally followed this practice in his care of the sick, and when he himself came to die he called upon the sacred names of Jesus and Mary with such tenderness, as we read in his biography, that he inspired all those standing about with great love. Finally, fixing his eyes on an image of Jesus and Mary, and extending his arms in the form of a cross, he expired with a look of heavenly contentment on his face. His last words in this life were an invocation of the sweet names of Jesus and Mary.

The short prayer invoking the sacred names of Jesus and Mary, says Thomas à Kempis, is easy to remember, sweet to meditate on, and at the same time powerful to protect those who use it against all the enemies of their salvation.

Happy is he, says Saint Bonaventure, who loves your sweet name, O Mother of God! Your name is so glorious and admirable, that no one who remembers it at the point of death need have any fear of the assaults of hell.

Oh, that everyone might have the good fortune to die as did Father Fulgentius of Ascoli, a Capuchin, who expired singing: "O Mary, O Mary, most beautiful of creatures, I want to die and join you!" Or as did Saint Alberic of the Cistercian Order, who died "in the very act of pronouncing the most sweet name of Mary."[42]

Let us then, devout reader, beg God to see to it that at the hour of death the name of Mary may be the last word on our lips. This was what Saint Germanus prayed for: "May the last movement of my tongue be to

pronounce the name of the Mother of God."[43] Sweet and safe is the death accompanied and protected by this powerful name! God grants this grace only to those whom he is about to save.

O my sweet Lady and Mother, I love you very much, and because I love you, I also love your holy name. I intend and hope, with your help, always to pronounce it in this life and at death. In the tender words of Saint Bonaventure: "I ask you, O Mary, for the glory of your name, to come and greet my soul when it is leaving this world, and to take it in your arms. Do not fail, O Mary, to come then and comfort me by your presence. May you be my ladder and my way to heaven. Obtain for me the grace of forgiveness and eternal repose. O Mary, my advocate, it is your task to defend your servants and to take up their cause before the tribunal of Jesus Christ."

Example

Father Rho in his *Saturdays* and Father Lireo in his *Trisagion of Mary* relate that in the province of Gelder, around the year 1465, there was a young girl named Mary, whom her uncle one day ordered to go to the market in Nimwegen and to stay overnight with her aunt in that city. The girl obeyed her uncle and went to her aunt's to spend the night, but she was received so unkindly that she at once decided to return home. Night fell, and because she was so irritated by what had happened she called on the devil in a loud voice. At once the devil appeared, but in the guise of a young man who promised to help her, provided she fulfilled certain conditions. The unhappy girl replied: "I shall do anything." "The only thing I want you to do," answered the devil, "is to stop making the Sign of the Cross from now on, and to change your name." But she said: "As for the Sign of the Cross, I agree not to make it again; but my name, the name of Mary, is too dear to me for me to change it." "Then I won't help you," protested the devil. Finally, after much discussion, they agreed that she would henceforth be called by the first letter of her name, namely, "M." After this was settled, they traveled together to Antwerp. There the girl spent six years with her evil companion and lived such a wicked life that everybody was scandalized.

One day, she told the devil that she wanted to visit her native town

once again. The devil tried to put her off, but finally he was forced to agree. As they were entering Nimwegen, they came upon a play being given which depicted the life of the Blessed Virgin. As soon as she saw this, poor "M," because of the little devotion to the Mother of God which she still retained, began to weep. "What are we doing here?" said her companion. "Do you want to create a scene?" With that he seized her by the hand and attempted to drag her away, but she resisted. When the devil realized that he was on the point of losing her, he grew angry, lifted her up in the air, and dropped her on the middle of the stage. The poor girl then related her whole story. She went to confess her sins to the parish priest. The priest sent her to the bishop of Cologne, who in turn sent her to the pope. Finally, the pope heard her confession and imposed the penance of wearing three iron rings, one around her neck and one on each arm. The girl obeyed, and when she reached Maastricht she entered a convent of penitent nuns, where she remained for fourteen years, doing penance all the while. One morning, as she was getting out of bed, she noticed that the rings had broken of their own accord. Two years later, she died in the odor of sanctity. According to her wish, she was buried with these three rings, which had transformed her from a slave of hell into the joyous slave of her liberator, Mary.

Prayer

O great Mother of God and my Mother Mary, it is true that I am unworthy to call upon your name. But you, who love me and desire my salvation, must grant me the grace always to call upon your most holy and powerful name, even though my tongue is impure, because your name is the help of the living and the salvation of the dying.

O Mary most pure, Mary most sweet, grant that henceforth your name may be the very breath of my life. O Mary, do not hesitate to help me whenever I call upon you, for in all the temptations that assail me and in all my needs, I will never cease calling upon you, repeating again and again, Mary, Mary. I hope that I shall do this during life and at the hour of death, so that I may afterwards praise your beloved name forever and ever in heaven: "O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary."

Most lovable Mary, what comfort, what sweetness, what confidence, what

tenderness I feel in every part of my soul when I merely mention your name or think of you! I thank my Lord and God, who, for my sake, has given you so sweet, so powerful, so lovely a name.

But, O Mary, I am not satisfied with merely pronouncing your name; I wish to pronounce it with greater love. May my love for you induce me to call upon you at every hour, so that I too may exclaim with Saint Anselm: "O name of Mary, you are my love."

O my dear Mother Mary, O my beloved Jesus, may your most sweet names live forever in my heart and in the hearts of all humankind. May my mind forget all other names in order to remember and invoke only your blessed names forever.

Jesus, my Redeemer, and Mary, my Mother, when the moment of death comes and I am about to leave this world, as I breathe forth my soul, grant, through your merits, that I may then pronounce as my last words, repeating them over and over again: "O Jesus and Mary, I love you; Jesus and Mary, I give you my heart and my soul."

PART II



PRAYERS
TO OUR LADY

1

FERVENT PRAYERS OF SOME SAINTS TO THE MOTHER OF GOD



I have added these prayers here, not only that they may be used, but that they may also indicate what a high regard the saints had for the power and mercy of Mary, and the great confidence they placed in her patronage.

Prayer of Saint Ephrem

O immaculate and all-pure Virgin Mary, Mother of God, Queen of the Universe, our own good Lady, you surpass all the saints; you are the only hope of the Patriarchs, the joy of the saints. Through you we have been reconciled with our God. You are the only advocate of sinners, the safe port of the shipwrecked. You are the consolation of the world, the ransom of captives, the joy of the sick, the comfort of the afflicted, the refuge and salvation of the whole world.

O great Princess, Mother of God, cover us with your wings of mercy and have pity on us. No other hope is given us but you, O most pure Virgin. We have given ourselves to you, and have consecrated ourselves to your service. We are your servants. Do not, then, permit Lucifer to drag us into hell.

O Immaculate Virgin, we are under your protection, and therefore we have recourse to you. We beseech you to prevent your beloved Son from being angry at our sins and abandoning us to the power of the devil.

O you who are full of grace, enlighten my understanding, loosen my tongue that it may sing your praises, and especially the Angelic Salutation, which is so worthy of you. I salute you, O peace and joy, O salvation and consolation of the world. I salute you, O greatest of miracles, O paradise of delights, O safe haven for those in danger,

fountain of graces, mediatrix between God and men.

Prayer of Saint Bernard[1]

We raise our eyes to you, O queen of the world. We must appear before our judge after so many sins. Who will appease him? No one can do it better that you can, O holy Mother, who have loved him so much, and whom he loves so tenderly. O Mother of Mercy, open your heart to our sighs and prayers. We fly to your protection; appease the wrath of your son, and restore us to his grace. You do not despise any sinner, no matter how miserable he may be. You do not reject him, if he hopes in you, and in repentance begs your intercession. By your merciful hand, you deliver him from despair. You give him reason to hope, you comfort him, and you do not leave him until you have reconciled him with his judge.

You are that chosen woman in whom our Savior found repose, and in whom he deposited all his treasure without measure. Therefore, the whole world, O holy Mary, honors your chaste womb as the temple of God, in which the salvation of the world began. In you, God and man were reconciled. You, O great Mother of God, are the enclosed garden, which no sinner ever entered to gather its flowers. You are the beautiful garden in which God has planted all the flowers that adorn the Church, among which are the violet of your humility, the lily of your purity, the rose of your charity. To whom can we compare you, O Mother of grace and beauty? You are the paradise of God; from you there issued forth the fountain of living water that drenches the whole earth. How many blessings you have bestowed on the world by meriting to be such a salutary channel!

It is of you we speak when we ask: *Who is this that comes forth like the dawn, as beautiful* as *the moon, as resplendent as the sun?* (Cant 6:10). You came into the world, O Mary, as a resplendent dawn, preceding, with the light of your sanctity, the Sun of Justice. The day on which you came into the world can indeed be called the day of salvation, a day of grace. You are as beautiful as the moon. Among all the planets, the moon is the one that is most like the sun; so among all creatures you are the one nearest to God. The moon illuminates the night with the light it receives from the sun, and you enlighten our darkness with the splendor of your

virtues. But you are more beautiful than the moon, for in you there is neither spot nor shadow. You are as resplendent as the sun; I mean as the Sun that created the sun. He was chosen among all men, and you were chosen among all women. O sweet, O great, O loving Mary, no one can pronounce your name without being inflamed with love for you. Those who love you cannot think of you without feeling themselves compelled to love you even more.

O holy Mother, help us in our weakness. Who is more worthy to speak to our Lord Jesus than you, who are so near to him and enjoy his sweet conversation? Speak, then, speak, O Mary; for your son listens to you, and you will obtain all that you ask from him.

Prayer of Saint Germanus

O my dear Mother, you are the only consolation I receive from God. You are the celestial dew that gives me refreshment in my trials. You are the light of my soul when it is surrounded by darkness. You are my guide on journeys, my strength in weakness, my treasure in poverty, the medicine for my wounds, my consolation in sorrow. You are my refuge in miseries and the hope of my salvation. Hear my prayers, have mercy on me, as is fitting for the Mother of God who loves men so much.

O you who are our defense and joy, grant me all that I ask. Make me worthy to enjoy with you the great happiness that you enjoy in heaven. Yes, O Mary, my refuge, my life, my help, my defense, my strength, my hope, grant that I may one day be with you in heaven. I know that, since you are the Mother of God, you can obtain everything for me, if you wish. O Mary, you are all-powerful and can save sinners, and you do not need any recommendation to do so, for you are the mother of true life.

Prayer of Blessed Raymond Jordano, Abbot of Celles

Draw me after you, O Virgin Mary, that I may run after the odor of your perfumes. Draw me, for I am held back by the weight of my sins and by the malice of my enemies. As no one goes to your son unless the heavenly Father draws him, so I presume to say, in a certain manner,

that no one goes to him unless you draw him by your holy prayers. It is you who teach true wisdom, you who obtain grace for sinners, for you are their advocate. It is you who promise glory to those who honor you, for you are the treasurer of graces.

You, O most sweet Virgin, have found grace with God, for you were preserved from the stain of original sin, were filled with the Holy Spirit, and did conceive the Son of God. You, O most humble Virgin, received all these graces not only for yourself, but also for us, that you might help us in all our needs. And this is indeed what you do. You help the good, preserving them in grace; and you prepare the wicked to receive divine mercy. You assist the dying, protecting them against the snares of the devil; and you help them also after death, receiving their souls and conducting them to the kingdom of the blessed.

Prayer of Saint Methodius

Your name, O Mother of God, is filled with all graces and divine blessings. You have contained him who cannot be contained, and nourished him who nourishes all creatures. He who fills heaven and earth, and is the Lord of all, was pleased to be in need of you, for it was you who clothed him with that flesh which he did not have before. Rejoice then, O Mother and handmaid of God! Rejoice, because you have made him a debtor who gives being to all creatures. We are all God's debtors, but he is a debtor to you. That is why, O most Holy Mother of God, you have greater goodness and greater charity than all the other saints, and have freer access to God than any of them, for you *are* his mother. Remember us, we beseech you, in our miseries, who celebrate your glories and know how great your goodness is.

Prayer of Saint John Damascene

I salute you, O Mary; you are the hope of Christians. Receive the supplication of a sinner who loves you dearly, who honors you in every possible way, and places in you his entire hope of salvation. From you I have my life. Restore me to the favor of your son. You are my guarantee

of salvation. I beg you, therefore, deliver me from the burden of my sins, dispel the darkness of my mind, banish earthly affections from my heart, repress the temptations of my enemies, and so direct my life, that, by your help and under your guidance, I may attain the eternal happiness of heaven.

Prayer of Saint Andrew of Crete

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you. I salute you, O cause of our joy, through whom the sentence of our condemnation has been revoked and changed into one of blessings. Hail, temple of God's glory, sacred home of heaven's King! You are God's reconciliation with men. Hail, mother of our joy and gladness! You are indeed blessed, because you alone of all women have been found worthy to be the Mother of your Creator. All generations call you blessed.

O Mary, if I put my trust in you, I shall be saved. If I am under your protection, I have nothing to fear; because being your servant means the possession of salvation, which God grants only to those whom he wills to save.

O Mother of Mercy, appease your beloved son. While you were on earth, you occupied only a small part of it, but now that you have been raised above the highest heavens, the whole world considers you as the common intercessor of all nations.

We implore you, therefore, O holy Virgin, grant us the help of your prayers with God; prayers which are dearer and more precious to us than all the treasures of the earth; prayers which render God propitious to us in our sins, and obtain for us a great abundance of graces, grace to receive pardon for our sins and grace to practice virtue; prayers which check our enemies, confound their designs, and triumph over their efforts.

Prayer of Saint Ildephonsus

I come to you, O Mother of God, and implore you to obtain for me the forgiveness of my sins. Cleanse me from those faults which I have

committed all my life. I beseech you to grant me the grace to unite myself in affection to your Son and to yourself: to your Son as to my God, and to you as the Mother of my God.

Prayer of Saint Athanasius[2]

Hear our prayers, O most holy Virgin, and be mindful of us. Dispense to us the gifts of your riches and the abundance of graces with which you are filled. The Archangel in greeting you called you full of grace. All nations call you blessed. The whole hierarchy of heaven sings your praises. And we who belong to the earthly hierarchy also address you: Hail, O full of grace, the Lord is with you. Pray for us, O holy Mother of God, our Lady and our Queen.

Prayer of Saint Anselm[3]

We beseech you, O most holy Mary, by the favor God granted you in raising you so high as to make all things possible to you with him, so act that the plenitude of grace which you merited may make us sharers in your glory. Strive, O merciful Mother, to obtain for us that for which God was pleased to become man in your chaste womb. Lend us a willing ear. If you deign to pray to your son for this, he will immediately grant it. It is enough if you will our salvation, for then we are sure to obtain it. Who can restrain your great mercy? If you, who are our mother and the Mother of Mercy, do not pity us, what will become of us when your son comes to judge us?

Help us then, O most compassionate Mother, and do not take into consideration the number of our sins. Remember always that our Creator took human flesh from you, not to condemn sinners, but to save them. If you had become the Mother of God only for your own advantage, we might say that it was of little concern to you whether we were saved or not. But God clothed himself with your flesh for your salvation and for that of all men. What good would your great power and glory be to us, if you did not make us sharers in your happiness? Help us, then, and protect us. You know how much we are in need of your help. We

recommend ourselves to you. Do not let us lose our souls, but make us eternally love and serve your beloved son, Jesus Christ.

Prayer of Saint Peter Damian[4]

O holy Virgin, Mother of God, help those who implore your assistance. Turn toward us. Have you perhaps forgotten men, because you have been raised to a position so close to God? No, certainly you know well in what danger you left us. You know the miserable condition of your servants. No, it would not befit such great mercy as yours to forget such great misery as ours. Turn toward us, then, with your power, for he who is powerful has made you omnipotent in heaven and on earth. For you, nothing is impossible. You can raise even those who are in despair to a hope of salvation. The more powerful you are, the greater should be your mercy.

Turn also to us in your love. I know, O Mary, that you are all kindness and that you love us with a love that no other love can surpass. How often you appease the wrath of our divine judge, when he is on the point of punishing us! All the treasures of the mercy of God are in your hands. You will never cease to benefit us, I know, for you are only seeking an opportunity to save all sinners and to shower your mercies upon them. Your glory is increased, when through you, penitents are forgiven and thus reach heaven. Turn then toward us, that we may also be able to go and see you in heaven; for the greatest glory that we can have, after seeing God, will be to see you, to love you, and to be under your protection. Be pleased, then, to grant our prayer; for your beloved Son wishes to honor you by refusing nothing that you ask.

Prayer of Saint William, Bishop of Paris[5]

O Mother of God, I appeal to you, and I beg you not to reject me, for all the faithful call you the Mother of Mercy. You are the one whose prayers are always heard because you are so dear to God. You have never refused to show mercy to anyone. Your kindness and affability have never turned away any sinner who recommended himself to you, no

matter how great his crimes were. Is the Church wrong or misled when it calls you the advocate and refuge of sinners? May my sins never be responsible for preventing you from fulfilling your great office of mercy. You are the advocate and mediatrix of peace, the only hope and refuge of the miserable. Never let it be said that the Mother of God, who for the benefit of the whole world gave birth to the fountain of mercy, should ever refuse mercy to any sinner who turns to her. Your office is that of a peacemaker between God and men. Let, then, the greatness of your compassion, which is far greater than any sins, come to my assistance.

Prayer of the Venerable Louis Blosius

Hail, most benign Mother of Mercy! Hail, our comforter, the desire of our hearts! Who is there that does not love you? You are our light in doubts, our comfort in sorrows, our relief in distress, our refuge in dangers and temptations. You, after your only-begotten son, are our certain salvation. Blessed are they who love you, O Lady! Listen, I beseech you, with compassion to the prayers of your servant, a forlorn sinner. Dispel the darkness of my vices by the rays of your holiness, so that I may be pleasing to you always.

Prayer of Saint Ephrem

O Immaculate and thoroughly pure Virgin Mary, Mother of God, queen of the world, hope of the despairing: you are the joy of the saints, the peacemaker between sinners and God, the advocate of the abandoned, the haven of the shipwrecked. You are the consolation of the world, the ransom of captives, the comforter of the afflicted, the salvation of the universe. O great queen we fly to your protection. We have no trust in anyone but you, O most faithful virgin! After God, you are our only hope. We call ourselves your servants; do not allow Satan to drag us to hell. Hail, most wonderful mediatrix between God and men, Mother of Our Savior, to whom be glory and honor with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayer of Saint Thomas Aquinas

O most blessed and most sweet Virgin Mary, so full of mercy: to your love I commend my soul and my body, my thoughts, my deeds, my life, and my death. O my Mother, help me and strengthen me against the attacks of the devil. Beg for me a true and perfect love so that I may love with my whole heart your devoted son, my Savior Jesus Christ. And after him, may I love you above everyone else. O my queen and my mother, by your most powerful prayers, see to it that this love remains in my heart until my death, after which I expect you to conduct me to the kingdom of the blessed.

> *In you I have placed the whole hope of my heart* (Saint John Damascene).
>
> *It is not possible for you, O Lady, to abandon anyone who hopes in you* (Saint Bernard).
>
> *You desire nothing but our salvation, and truly we could not be saved without you* (Saint Anselm).
>
> *Hail, daughter of God the Father! Hail, Mother of God the Son! Hail, spouse of the Holy Spirit! Hail, temple of the Trinity!* (Simon Garcia).

The Rosary of Our Lady's Sorrows

Incline unto my aid, O God! O Lord, make haste to help me! Glory to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. Amen.

> Mother, share your grief with me;
> Let me bear you company
> Mourning Jesus' death.

First Sorrow: I grieve with you, O afflicted mother, because of the first sword of sorrow that pierced your soul when Simeon in the Temple told you of the outrages men would commit against your beloved Jesus. You already knew of these outrages from sacred Scripture. *You* knew he was to die before your very eyes on a disgraceful cross, drained of all his blood, abandoned by everybody, and you, unable to help or defend him.

By that bitter memory which for so many years tormented your heart, obtain for me, my queen, the grace to keep your son's Passion and your sorrows impressed upon my heart during my life and at my death.

Recite the Our Father once, the Hail Mary seven times, and the verse "Mother, Share Your Grief" after each Sorrow.

Second Sorrow: I grieve with you, O afflicted mother, because of the second sword of sorrow that pierced your soul when, shortly after your son's birth, you saw his life threatened by the very men he had come to save. In the dead of night, you had to flee secretly with him into Egypt. A delicate maiden, you endured many hardships in company with your exiled child on that journey, so long and so fatiguing, through rough and desert country. While you lived in Egypt you were a stranger and unknown. You lived for years in poverty and contempt. As a result of these hardships, my Lady, beg for me the grace to bear with patience the trials of life until death, so that in the next world I may escape the punishments of hell which I have deserved.

Recite the Our Father once, the Hail Mary seven times, and the verse "Mother, Share Your Grief" once.

Third Sorrow: I grieve with you, O afflicted mother, because of the third sword of sorrow that pierced your soul in the loss of your dear son as he remained three days in Jerusalem. You no longer had him at your side and you did not know the reason for his absence. Those nights, O my queen, must have been sleepless ones for you as you sighed for your lost treasure. By the sighs of those three days, for you so long and so bitter, I beg of you to obtain for me the grace never to lose my God, the grace to cling to him always, so that I may leave this world united to him.

Recite the Our Father once, the Hail Mary seven times, and the verse "Mother, Share Your Grief" once.

Fourth Sorrow: I grieve with you, O afflicted mother, because of the fourth sword of sorrow that pierced your soul when you saw your son condemned to death, bound with cords and chains, covered with blood and wounds, crowned with a wreath of thorns. You saw him fall under

the weight of the heavy cross he carried on his wounded shoulders. You saw him go like an innocent lamb to the slaughter to die for love of us. Your eyes met his, and your looks became as so many arrows to wound those hearts which loved each other so tenderly. By this great sorrow, I beg you to obtain for me the grace to live in all things resigned to God's holy will and to carry my cross cheerfully with Jesus as long as I live.

Recite the Our Father once, the Hail Mary seven times, and the verse "Mother, Share Your Grief" once.

Fifth Sorrow: I grieve with you, O afflicted mother, because of the fifth sword of sorrow that pierced your soul on Mount Calvary. You saw your loving son Jesus slowly dying amid so many torments and insults on the hard bed of the cross. You were unable to provide him with even the least of the comforts granted to criminals at the hour of their death. By the agony you endured with your dying son, and by the sorrow you felt as he said farewell on the cross and left all of us, in the person of Saint John, to you as children, and by the constancy with which you watched him bow his head and expire, I beg you, most loving mother, to obtain for me from my crucified Savior the grace to live and die crucified to all earthly things. May I spend my life for God alone and thus attain one day to Paradise to enjoy him face to face.

Recite the Our Father once, the Hail Mary seven times, and the verse "Mother, Share Your Grief" once.

Sixth Sorrow: I grieve with you, O afflicted mother, because of the sixth sword of sorrow that pierced your soul when you saw the sweet heart of your son transfixed by a lance. He was already dead; and he had died for those ungrateful individuals who were not satisfied, even after his death, with the torments they had showered upon him. By this cruel sorrow, obtain for me the grace to dwell always in the heart of Jesus, pierced and opened for me. In that heart, which is the abode of all love, all souls who love God repose. May I dwell there and never think of or love anything but God alone. Most Blessed Virgin, you can obtain this grace for me. I hope you will.

Recite the Our Father once, the Hail Mary seven times, and the verse

"Mother, Share Your Grief" once.

Seventh Sorrow: I grieve with you, O afflicted mother, because of the seventh sword of sorrow that pierced your soul when you held in your arms your son already dead. He was no longer so fair and beautiful as he was when you held him in the stable of Bethlehem. He is now covered with blood, livid and full of wounds through which even his bones can be seen. At that time you said: "My son, my son, what has love brought you to?" And when you carried him to the tomb, you wanted to go along and place him there with your own hands. In bidding him farewell, you left your loving heart buried with your son. By this martyrdom of your beautiful soul, O mother of fair love, obtain for me forgiveness of the many offenses I have committed against my God. I repent of them with my whole heart. Protect me in temptation. Help me at the moment of my death, so that I may save my soul through the merits of Jesus and your merits, so that one day, after this miserable exile, I may go to Paradise to sing the praises of Jesus and your praises forever. Amen.

Recite the Our Father once, the Hail Mary seven times, and the verse "Mother, Share Your Grief" once.

Pray for us, O most sorrowful Virgin; that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let Us Pray

O God, in whose Passion, according to the prophecy of Simeon, a sword of sorrow did pierce the most sweet soul of the glorious virgin and Mother Mary; grant that we, who commemorate and reverence her sorrows, may experience the blessed effect of your Passion, who lives and reigns world without end. Amen.

Little Rosary of Mary Immaculate

Incline unto my aid, O God.…

After this, an Our Father is recited in honor of God the Father in thanksgiving for all the graces conferred on Mary. This is followed by

four Hail Marys. The same is repeated in honor of God the Son, and again in honor of God the Holy Ghost. After each Hail Mary are added the words: *May the Immaculate Conception of Mary be ever praised!* The rosary concludes with the collect of the feast of the Immaculate Conception.

Dedication of Oneself to Mary

Most holy Virgin, Mother of God, I *(Name)* am most unworthy to be your servant. Yet, moved by your wonderful mercy and by my strong desire to serve you, I choose you, in the presence of my Guardian Angel and the whole court of heaven, to be my special advocate, my Lady and my Mother. I firmly resolve to love you and to serve you for the rest of my life, and to do all I can to get others to love and serve you also. I beg you, O Mother of God and my own most merciful and loving mother, by the blood your Son shed for me, to receive me as your servant and child forever. Be with me in all my thoughts, words, and actions, in every moment of my life. See to it that every breath I draw, every step I take, will be directed to the greater glory of God. As a result of your powerful intercession, may I never more offend Jesus. May I glorify and love him throughout my life. And may I love you, most loving mother, so that I may love you and be happy with you for all eternity in heaven. Amen. Mary, my mother, I recommend my soul to you, particularly at the hour of my death.

Dedication of a Family to Mary

Most Blessed Virgin, Immaculate Queen and my Mother Mary, refuge and consolation of all miserable creatures: prostrate before your throne, with my entire family, I choose you for my Lady, my Mother, and my advocate with God. I dedicate myself, with all who are near and dear to me, forever to your service. I beg you, O Mother of God, to receive us as your children. Take us under your protection. Protect us in life, but especially at the hour of our death. O Mother of Mercy, I appoint you the mistress and ruler of my whole household, my family, my interests, my affairs. Do not refuse this charge. Dispose of everything as you please.

Bless me and my loved ones and never allow us to offend your son. Defend us in temptations, deliver us from dangers, provide for our necessities, counsel us in doubts, comfort us in affliction, assist us in infirmity and especially in the pangs of death. Never let the devil glory in enslaving any one of us now consecrated to you. Grant that we may all go to heaven to thank you, and together with you, to praise and love Jesus, our Redeemer, for all eternity. Amen.

Ejaculatory Prayers to Our Blessed Lady

Mother of God, remember me *(Saint Francis Xavier)*.

O Virgin and Mother, see to it that I may always remember you *(Saint Philip Neri)*.

Virgin Mary, Mother of God, pray to Jesus for *me (Saint Philip Neri)*.

O Lady, grant that Jesus may never cast me aside *(Saint Ephrem)*.

O Mary, may my heart never cease loving you and my tongue never cease praising you *(Saint Bonaventure)*.

O Lady, by the love you have for Jesus, help me to love him *(Saint Bridget)*.

O Mary, deign to make me your servant *(Saint Jeanne of France)*.

O Mary, I give myself entirely to you. Accept me and preserve me *(Saint Mary Magdalen de Pazzi)*. Mary, do not abandon me before my death *(Father Spinelli, S.J.)*.

Hail Mary, my Mother *(Fr. Francis Brancaccio, S.J.)*.

Holy Mary, my advocate, pray for me *(Fr. Sertorio Caputo)*.

If I love Mary, I am sure of perseverance and salvation, for Mary will obtain from God whatever I want *(Saint John Berchmans)*.

Prayer of the Venerable Louis Blosius

Hail Mary, hope of the despairing, help of the destitute! Your son honors you so much that whatever you ask, he gives to you. Whatever you wish, is done at once. To you are entrusted the treasures of the kingdom of

heaven. Grant, O Lady, that during all the storms of this life I may remember you. To you I commend my soul and my body. O my sweet protectress, direct and protect me in every moment, at every hour of my life. Amen.

Prayer of Saint Alphonsus Rodriguez, S.J.

Jesus and Mary, my two sweet loves, for you I will suffer; for you I will die; I am entirely yours and in nothing my own.

Prayer of Saint Bernard

We cry to you, O Queen of mercy! Come to us, so that we may see you dispensing favors, providing remedies, giving strength. Show us mercy and we shall be saved. O sovereign Lady, saint of saints, our refuge and our strength, ornament of the world, glory of heaven, receive those who love you. Hear us. Your son honors you and denies you nothing.

Hasten, O Lady, and in your mercy help your sinful servant who calls on you; snatch him from the hands of the enemy.

A Favorite Prayer to Our Lady

I thank You, O Eternal Father, for the power You gave to Mary, Your Daughter. *Recite one Our Father, one Hail Mary, and one Glory Be.*

I thank You, O Eternal Son, for the wisdom You gave to Mary, Your Mother. *Recite one Our Father, one Hail Mary, and one Glory Be.*

I thank You, O Eternal Holy Spirit, for the love You gave to Mary, Your spouse. *Recite one Our Father, one Hail Mary, and one Glory Be.*

Live Jesus, our Love, and Mary, our Hope!

2

PRAYER TO BE SAID TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN AFTER A DAILY VISIT[6]



Most holy Immaculate Virgin, my Mother Mary, I turn to you, who are the Mother of my Lord, the queen of the world, the advocate, the hope and the refuge of sinners, I, who am the most miserable of all sinners. I venerate you, O great queen, and I thank you for the innumerable graces which you have bestowed upon me until now. In particular, I thank you for the grace of being delivered from hell, which I have so often deserved. I love you, dear Mary, and because of the love I have for you, I promise to serve you always and to do all that I can to make others love you also. I place in you all my hopes for salvation. Accept me as your servant, and shelter me under your mantle, O Mother of Mercy. Since you are so powerful with God, deliver me from all temptations, or rather give me the strength to triumph over them until death. I implore you to give me a true love for Jesus Christ. Through you I hope to die a holy death. My dear Mother, by the love you have for Almighty God, I beg you to help me at all times, but especially at the last moment of my life. Do not forsake me until you shall see me safe in heaven, where I can bless you and sing your mercies for all eternity. Amen. This is my hope; so may it be.

PART III



SERMONS ON THE PRINCIPAL FEASTS OF MARY

1

SERMON 1:

MARY'S IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

December 8



It was fitting that each of the three Divine Persons should preserve Mary from original sin.

The ruin which sin brought to Adam and to the whole human race was incalculable. When Adam unfortunately lost divine grace, he lost at the same time all the other gifts with which he had been enriched from the beginning. He drew down upon himself and all his descendants the enmity of God and countless other evils. But from this general misfortune God wished to exempt the Blessed Virgin whom he had destined to be the Mother of Jesus Christ, the Second Adam, who was to repair the evil done by the first.

Let us see now how appropriate it was for all three Divine Persons to preserve the Blessed Virgin from original sin. It was fitting for the Father to preserve her because she was his daughter; for the Son, because she was his mother; for the Holy Spirit, because she was his spouse.

First Point

In the first place, it was fitting for the Eternal Father to preserve Mary from the stain of original sin because she was his daughter, in fact his first-born daughter, as she herself testifies: *I came out of the mouth of the most High, the first-born before all creatures* (Ecclus 24:5). This text is applied to Mary by sacred interpreters, by the Fathers of the Church, and by the Church herself on the feast of Mary's Conception. Whether she is God's firstborn in the sense that she was predestined in the divine decrees together with the Son before all creatures, according to the

Scotists; or whether, sin having been foreseen, she is the firstborn of grace as the predestined Mother of the Redeemer, according to the Thomists; all agree in calling her the firstborn of God. This being the case, it was proper that Mary should never become the slave of Lucifer, but should only and always be possessed by her Creator, as indeed she was, according to her own words: The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his ways (Prov 8:22). Denis of Alexandria rightly calls her "the one and only daughter of life." She is the one and only daughter of life, as distinct from all others who are the daughters of death because they are born of sin.

It was also proper for the Eternal Father to create her in grace because he destined her to be the repairer of the lost world and the mediator of peace between human beings and God. This is the way the holy Fathers speak of her, especially Saint John Damascene, who says: "O Blessed Virgin, you were born to minister to the salvation of the whole world." Saint Bernard says that Mary was prefigured by the ark of Noah. As humanity was saved from the flood by this ark, so we are saved from the shipwreck of sin by Mary; but with this difference: that in the ark only a few were saved, whereas with Mary the whole human race is rescued from death. Saint Athanasius calls her "the new Eve, the mother of life." She is the new Eve because the first Eve was the mother of death, while Mary is the mother of life. Saint Theophanes, Bishop of Nicaea, says to her: "Hail, you who have taken away the sorrow of Eve." Saint Basil[1] calls her the peacemaker between God and men: "Hail, arbiter between God and men." And Saint Ephrem calls her the peacemaker for the whole world: "Hail, reconciler of the whole world!"

Now it would certainly not be logical to appoint an enemy of an offended party to be a peacemaker with him; still less, one who had been involved as an accomplice in the same crime. Saint Gregory says that no one who is an enemy of a judge can expect to appear before him and appease him. If he attempts to do so, he will only make the judge all the angrier. Therefore, since Mary was destined to be the peacemaker between God and men, it was entirely logical that she appear not as a sinner and an enemy of God, but as a friend, and absolutely sinless.

It was fitting from still another standpoint that God should preserve her from original sin, because he had destined her to crush the head of

the infernal serpent who, by seducing our first parents, brought death to all. The Lord himself foretold: *I will put enmities between you and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head* (Gen 3:15). Now, if Mary was to be that valiant woman brought into the world to conquer Lucifer, it would certainly be out of place for Lucifer first to conquer her and make her his slave. Rather, it was far more reasonable that she should be free from even the slightest subjection to the enemy. The devil tried to infect the pure soul of Mary with his poison, just as he had infected the rest of mankind. But, thanks be to God, he prevented this by filling Mary with so much grace that she remained free from every stain of sin and was able, as a result, to beat down and conquer Satan's pride. As Saint Augustine rightly says (or whoever may be the author of this commentary on Genesis): "Since the devil is the source of original sin, Mary crushed him; because no sin ever entered the soul of Mary, therefore she was free from all stain." Saint Bonaventure puts it more precisely: "It was fitting that the Blessed Virgin Mary, through whom our shame was to be blotted out, should conquer the devil, so that she might never be under his sway even for a moment."

But above all, it was especially fitting that the Eternal Father should keep his daughter unspotted by Adam's sin, as Saint Bernardine of Siena remarks, because he chose her to be the Mother of his only-begotten Son: "You were set apart in the mind of God before all creatures, because you were to bring forth God himself as man." Therefore, if for no other reason than for the honor of his Son who was God, it was reasonable that the Father should create Mary free from every stain. The angelic Saint Thomas says that all things set aside for God should be holy and free from blemish: "Holiness should be a characteristic of those things that are destined for God." So when David was planning the temple of Jerusalem on a scale of magnificence becoming the Deity, he said: *A house is being prepared not for man, but for God* (1 Par 29:1). With much more reason, then, should we believe that the supreme Architect, who destined Mary to be the Mother of his own Son, adorned her soul with the most precious gifts, so that she might become a worthy dwelling-place for his Son. And Holy Church herself, in the oration after the *Salve Regina*, assures us that God prepared the body and soul of the Blessed Virgin to be a worthy dwelling-place for his only-begotten Son:

“Almighty and Eternal God, who, by the cooperation of the Holy Ghost, prepared the body and soul of the glorious Virgin and Mother Mary, that she might become a worthy abode for Your Son.…”

We know that people consider it a high honor to be born of noble parents: The glory of children is their parentage (Prov 17:6). In the world, the shame of being considered poor and ignorant is of less concern than being of low birth. While a poor man may become rich by his industry, and an ignorant man learned by study, a person of low birth finds it very difficult to enter the ranks of the nobility. Should such a person succeed in doing this, the old charge of being low-born can always be brought up against him. Can we then suppose that God, who could arrange to have his Son born of a noble mother by preserving her from sin, would permit him to be born of someone infected by sin, and thus make it possible for Lucifer to reproach him forever with the shame of having a mother who had once been his slave and the enemy of God? No, the Eternal Father certainly did not permit this. On the contrary, he made every provision for the honor of his Son by preserving his Mother ever immaculate, so that she would be a mother suitable for such a Son. The Greek Church emphasizes this when it says: “By a singular act of Providence, God kept the most Blessed Virgin perfectly pure from the first moment of her existence, as was fitting for one who was destined to be a worthy Mother of Christ.”

It is a common axiom among theologians that no gift was ever bestowed on any creature that was not also bestowed on Mary. Saint Bernard says in this regard: “It is certainly correct to suppose that what was given to mortals, if only to a few, was not denied to such a great Virgin.” And Saint Thomas of Villanova says that no prerogative has ever been granted to any of the saints which did not shine forth even more brightly in Mary from the first moment of her existence. Since it is true that “there is an immense difference between the Mother of God and the servants of God,” according to the celebrated saying of Saint John Damascene, we must certainly conclude, according to the teaching of Saint Thomas, that “God conferred privileges of grace on his Mother which were in every way greater than those conferred on his servants.”

Admitting this, Saint Anselm, the great defender of Mary Immaculate, takes up the question and asks: “Was the wisdom of God powerless to

form a pure dwelling, free from every stain of human nature? God was able to preserve certain angels in heaven and keep them pure despite the downfall of so many. Could he not then preserve the Mother of his Son and the Queen of Angels from the common fall of men?" And I may add here, that if God could grant Eve the grace of coming into the world immaculate, could he not then grant the same favor to Mary?

Indeed, he could—and he did. And it was perfectly proper from every point of view, as Saint Anselm says, that "the Virgin on whom the Eternal Father intended to bestow his only-begotten Son should be adorned with such purity as would not only exceed that of all men and angels, but would be inconceivable in anyone except God himself." Saint John Damascene puts it even more clearly when he says: "Our Lord preserved the soul as well as the body of the Blessed Virgin in that purity which was fitting for one who was to receive a God in her womb. He is holy—he reposes only in holy places." That is why the Eternal Father could well say to his beloved daughter: As a lily among thorns, so is my beloved among women (Cant 2:2). My daughter, among all my other daughters you are as a lily in the midst of thorns; for they have all been stained with sin, while you were always immaculate and always my beloved.

Second Point

In the second place, it was fitting that God the Son should preserve Mary from sin: she was his mother.

The children of this world are not permitted to choose the mother they would like to have. But if this privilege were ever granted, would anyone who could have a queen want a slave? Or if one could choose a person of means, would he select a pauper? And if he were permitted to choose a friend of God, would he pick an enemy? Since the Son of God was actually able to choose the mother he wanted, we must take it for granted that he chose one suitable for a God. Saint Bernard says: "The Creator of men in becoming man must have selected for himself a mother who he knew would be worthy of him." Since it was eminently proper for a pure God to have a mother free from every sin, he naturally made her so. Saint Bernardine of Siena, in a passage in which he speaks

of the different degrees of sanctification, declares: “The third degree is that acquired by becoming the Mother of God. It consists in preservation from every trace of original sin. This is what took place in the Blessed Virgin. We can be certain that God created her with such perfection of nature and grace as would be fitting for one who was to become his mother.”

The words of the Apostle to the Hebrews have a bearing here: *For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, set apart from sinners* (Heb 7:26). A learned author observes that, according to Saint Paul, it was fitting that our Blessed Redeemer should not only be set apart from sin, but also from sinners. He quotes the explanation of Saint Thomas who says: “It was necessary that he who came to take away sins should be set apart from sinners, with regard to Adam’s sin.” But how could Jesus Christ be said to be set apart from sinners if he had a mother who was a sinner?

Saint Ambrose says that Christ chose this vessel into which he was about to descend, not from earth, but from heaven; and he consecrated it a temple of purity. The saint is referring to the text of Saint Paul: The first man was of the earth, earthly; the second man is from heaven, heavenly (1 Cor 15:47). The saint calls our Blessed Lady “a heavenly vessel”—not because Mary was not earthly by nature, as heretics have imagined, but because she was heavenly by grace. She was as superior to the angels of heaven in sanctity and purity as was becoming for a King of glory who was destined to dwell in her womb. Saint John the Baptist revealed this to Saint Bridget: “It was not becoming that the King of glory should repose anywhere but in the most chosen and pure vessel, purer than that of all angels and men.” We may also add to this what the Eternal Father himself said to Saint Bridget: “Mary was a clean and unclean vessel: clean in that she was all fair; unclean in that she was born of sinners. She was conceived, however, without sin, that my Son might be born of her without sin.” Note these last words: “Mary was conceived without sin, that My Son might be born of her without sin.” Not that Jesus Christ could have been capable of contracting sin, but that he might not be reproached with having a mother infected by it, who would consequently have been a slave of the devil.

The Holy Spirit says that the glory of a man is from the honor of his

father, and a father without honor is the disgrace of the son (Ecclus 3:13). That is why, says Saint Augustine, Jesus preserved the body of Mary from corruption after death. It would have redounded to his dishonor if the virginal flesh with which he had clothed himself had rotted away. Corruption, he adds, is a misfortune of human nature, and since Jesus was not subject to it, Mary also was exempted; for the flesh of Jesus is the flesh of Mary. Now if it would have been a disgrace for Jesus Christ to have been born of a mother whose body was subject to corruption of the flesh, how much greater a disgrace would it have been for him to have been born of a mother whose soul was infected with the corruption of sin. Not only is it true that the flesh of Jesus is the same as that of Mary, says the same saint, but "the flesh of our Savior, even after his Resurrection, remained the same as that which he had taken from his mother."

And Abbot Arnold of Chartres says: "The flesh of Mary and the flesh of Christ are one and the same; and therefore I consider the glory of the Son as being not so much common to, as one with, that of his mother." Since this is so, then if we assume that Mary had been conceived in sin, even though her Son could not have contracted its stain, nevertheless there would always have been a certain blemish in him for having united himself with flesh once infected with sin, a vessel of uncleanness and subject to Lucifer.

Mary was not only the mother, but the worthy mother of Our Savior. She is called so by all the learned Fathers. For example, Saint Bernard says: "You alone were found worthy to be chosen as the one in whose virginal womb the King of kings should have his first abode." Saint Thomas of Villanova says: "Before she conceived she was already fit to be the Mother of God." Holy Church herself asserts that Mary merited to be the mother of Jesus Christ when she sings in the Office of Our Lady: "The Blessed Virgin, who merited to bear in her womb Christ our Lord. …"

Saint Thomas Aquinas, commenting on these words, says that while the Blessed Virgin did not merit the Incarnation of the Eternal Word, she merited, by divine grace, such a degree of perfection as to become worthy to be the Mother of God. In a writing attributed to Saint Peter Damian we read: "Her remarkable sanctity, the result of grace, merited

that she alone should be considered worthy of bringing forth a God into this world."

Now supposing that Mary was to be a worthy Mother of God, says Saint Thomas of Villanova, with what excellence and what perfection should she be endowed?

The Angelic Doctor says that when God chooses anyone for a particular dignity, he prepares that person fittingly for it. And so, when God chose Mary for his mother, he naturally made her worthy of this highest of all dignities. This he did by his grace: "The Blessed Virgin was divinely chosen to be the Mother of God, and therefore we cannot doubt that God had made her worthy of this by his grace. In fact, the angel assures us of this: *For you have found grace with God. Behold, you shall conceive in your womb* (Lk 1:30)." From this, the saint argues that the Blessed Virgin never committed any actual sin, not even a venial one. Otherwise, she would not have been a worthy mother of Jesus Christ; for the ignominy of the mother would also have been that of the Son, in that he would have had a sinner for a mother.

Now if Mary would not have been a worthy Mother of God on account of a single venial sin, which does not deprive a soul of divine grace, how much more unworthy would she have been had she contracted the guilt of original sin, which would have made her an enemy of God and a slave of the devil? Reflection on this caused Saint Augustine to utter those celebrated words: "In speaking of Mary, I do not wish to mention sin, because of the honor of Our Lord whom she merited to have as a Son, and on account of whom she was given the grace to conquer sin altogether. For we know that an abundance of grace to conquer sin in every form was conferred upon her who merited to conceive and bear him in whom, of course, there was no sin."

Therefore, we must consider it as certain that "the Incarnate Word chose for himself a suitable mother and one of whom he need not have been ashamed," as Saint Peter Damian says. Saint Proclus also says: "He dwelt in a womb which he had created free from all that might be to his dishonor." It was no disgrace for Jesus to hear himself called by the Jews the "Son of Mary," meaning that he was the son of a poor woman: *Is not his mother called Mary?* (Mt 13:55). He came into this world to give us an example of humility and patience. On the other hand, it would

undoubtedly have been a disgrace if he had heard the devil say: "Was not his mother a sinner?" or, "Was he not born of a sinful woman, of a mother who was once my slave?" It would have been somewhat unbecoming, to be sure, if Jesus had been born of a woman whose body was deformed, or crippled, or perhaps possessed by devils. But how much worse would it have been for him to be born of a woman whose soul had once been deformed by sin, a soul in the possession of Lucifer!

God, who is Wisdom itself, knew well how to prepare for himself a suitable dwelling in which to live on earth: *Wisdom has built herself a house. The Most High has sanctified his own tabernacle.… God will help it in the morning early* (Prov 9:1; Ps 45:5–6). David says that Our Lord sanctified his dwelling *in the morning early;* that is, he sanctified Mary from the beginning of her life in order to make her worthy of him. It was not fitting that a holy God should choose for himself a dwelling that was not holy: *Holiness befits your house* (Ps 92:5). Now if God declares that he will never enter an evil soul or dwell in a body subject to sin—for *wisdom will not enter into a malicious soul, nor dwell in a body subject to sin* (Wis 1:4)—how can we ever think that the Son of God chose to dwell in the soul and body of Mary without having first sanctified and preserved it from every stain of sin? For, according to the teaching of Saint Thomas, the Eternal Word dwelt not only in Mary's soul, but also in her womb. Holy Church sings: "You, O Lord, have not disdained to dwell in the Virgin's womb." Yes, God would have shrunk from becoming incarnate in the womb of an Agnes, a Gertrude, a Teresa, because these virgins, even though holy, were nevertheless stained with original sin for a time at least. But he did not hesitate to become man in the womb of Mary, because this beloved Virgin was always pure and free from the least shadow of sin, and never in the power of Satan. And therefore Saint Augustine maintains that "the Son of God could not have built himself a worthier home than Mary, who was never possessed by the enemy, nor despoiled of her prerogatives."[2]

On the other hand, Saint Cyril asks: "Who ever heard of an architect who built himself a magnificent temple and then surrendered the first use of it to his worst enemy?" It is only natural, argues Saint Methodius, that the very Lord who gave us the commandment to honor our parents should have no other thought but to do likewise. And so when he

became man, he gave his mother every grace and honor: “He who said, *Honor your father and your mother*, that he might observe his own decree, gave all grace and honor to his mother.”

And Saint Augustine says: “We must certainly believe that Jesus Christ preserved Mary’s body from corruption after death, for if he had not done so he would not have observed the law which, while ordering that a mother is to be honored, also ordered that no disrespect is to be shown her.” How little would Jesus have guarded his mother’s honor if he had not preserved her from the sin of Adam! “That Son would certainly be acting sinfully,” says the Augustinian Father Thomas of Argentina, “who would not preserve his Mother from original sin if he had the power to do so … But what would be considered a sin with us,” continues the same author, “would certainly be unbecoming to God’s Son who, when he could have made his Mother immaculate, failed to do so.” No, adds Gerson, since you, the Supreme Prince, chose to have a mother, you certainly owe her honor. But it would appear that you would not be honoring her if you permitted her who was to be the dwelling-place of all purity to be contaminated by original sin.

Moreover, we know that Jesus came into the world to redeem Mary more than all other creatures, according to Saint Bernardine of Siena. Now there are two modes of redemption, as Saint Augustine teaches: the one by raising up someone who has fallen, and the other by preventing that person from falling. The second is no doubt the nobler method, for then the injury or stain which the soul always contracts when it falls is avoided. So says Saint Antoninus. This being the case, we ought certainly to believe that Mary was redeemed in the more honorable way, the way more fitting for the Mother of God. Saint Bonaventure says: “It is to be believed that the Holy Spirit, by a remarkable grace and by a new mode of sanctification, saved and preserved Mary from original sin in the first moment of her conception—not in the sense that original sin had been in her, but that otherwise it would have been.” The sermon from which this passage is taken is proved by Frassen to be really the work of the holy Doctor. On the same subject, Nicholas of Cusa brilliantly remarks: “To others Jesus was a liberator, but to Mary he was a pre-liberator.” He means that other human beings had a Redeemer who delivered them from sin with which they were already defiled, but

that Mary had a Redeemer who, because he was her Son, preserved her from ever being defiled by it.

In conclusion, let me quote Hugh of Saint Victor who reminds us that we know a tree by its fruits. “If the Lamb was always immaculate,” he argues, “so was the Mother of the Lamb; for the tree is known by its fruit.” And he salutes Mary, saying: “O worthy Mother of a worthy Son,” meaning that no one except Mary was worthy to be the Mother of such a Son, and no one except Jesus was worthy of such a Mother. And then he adds these words: “O beautiful Mother of beauty itself, O exalted of the most exalted One, O Mother of God!” Let us then speak to this most blessed Mother in the words of Saint Ildephonsus: “Give suck, O Mary, to your Creator. Give milk to him who made you, and who made you such that he could be born to you.”

Third Point

Since then it was fitting that the Father should preserve Mary from sin because she was his daughter, and the Son because she was his mother, so also it was appropriate that the Holy Spirit should preserve her from sin because she was his spouse.

Saint Augustine says that Mary was the only one who merited to be called the Mother and the Spouse of God. Saint Anselm asserts that “the Divine Spirit, the love of the Father and the Son, came corporally into Mary and enriched her with graces above all creatures, reposed in her and made her his Spouse, the Queen of heaven and earth.” When he says that he came into her corporally, he means that he came to form out of her immaculate body the immaculate body of Jesus Christ, as the Archangel had already predicted to her: *The Holy Spirit shall come upon you* (Lk 1:35). And that is why, says Saint Thomas, Mary is called the temple of the Lord and the sacred resting-place of the Holy Spirit: because by the operation of the Holy Spirit she became the Mother of the Incarnate Word.

Suppose an accomplished painter were capable of making his bride look as beautiful as he could portray her, would he not bend every effort to make her as lovely as possible? Then how can we say that the Holy

Spirit would not have done the same thing with Mary? Would he not have made her who was to be his spouse as beautiful and unblemished as it was fitting that she should be? Of course. He acted just as we might assume that he should. In the Song of Solomon we read: *You are beautiful, my beloved, and there is no blemish in you* (Cant 4:7). Both Saint Ildephonsus and Saint Thomas declare that these words refer to Mary, as Cornelius à Lapide informs us; and Saint Bernardine of Siena and Saint Lawrence Giustiniani assert that they have actual reference to her Immaculate Conception. Blessed Raymond Jordano addresses Mary and says: "You are all fair, O most glorious Virgin—not merely partially but wholly—and there is no stain of mortal, venial, or original sin in you."

The Holy Spirit had already said as much when he called his Spouse an enclosed garden and a sealed fountain: *You are an enclosed garden, my sister, my bride, and enclosed garden, a fountain sealed* (Cant 4:12). According to Saint Jerome, this enclosed garden and sealed fountain were Mary, into whom no guile could enter, against whom no wiles of the enemy could prevail, and who was always holy in mind and body. Saint Bernard makes the same application to Mary: "You are an enclosed garden into which no sinner has ever entered to pluck its flowers."

We know her Divine Spouse loved Mary more than he loved all the saints and angels put together, as Father Suarez, Saint Lawrence Giustiniani, and others assert. As David put it in the Psalms, he loved her from the very beginning and made her more holy than all the others: His foundation (is) upon the holy mountains; the Lord loves the gates of Sion more than any dwelling of Jacob.… One and all were born in her; and he who established her is the Most High Lord (Ps 86:1, 2, 5). These words simply mean that Mary was holy from the moment of her conception.

The Holy Spirit says the same thing of Mary in other passages. In Proverbs we read: *Many are the women of proven worth, but you have excelled them all* (Prov 31:29). If Mary then excelled all others in the riches of grace, she must have been adorned with original justice like Adam and the angels. In Canticle we read: *There are … maids without number. One alone is my dove, my perfect one, my mother's chosen* (Cant 6:8, 9). (In the Hebrew, the reading is: *my unsullied one, my immaculate one.)* All just souls are daughters of divine grace. But among these, Mary

was the *dove* without the bitterness of sin, the *perfect one* without blemish in her origin, the *chosen one* conceived in grace.

Even before she became Mother of God, the angel found her full of grace and greeted her with the words: *Hail, full of grace!* With reference to these words Saint Sophronius writes: “To the other saints grace was given partially, but to the Blessed Virgin, all grace was given.” So much so that Saint Thomas maintains that “grace not only rendered the soul but even the flesh of Mary holy, so that she might fittingly clothe the Eternal Word with it.” Now all this leads to the conclusion that Mary was enriched and filled with divine grace by the Holy Spirit from the first moment of her conception, as Peter of Celles observes: “The fullness of grace was in her; for from the very moment of her conception the whole grace of the divinity overflowed upon her by the operation of the Holy Spirit.”

This is the reason why Saint Peter Damian says: “The Holy Spirit snatched entirely for himself this privileged one who was chosen by God and chosen before all others.” The saint uses the term “snatch” to indicate the speed with which the Holy Spirit acted in making this spouse his own, before Lucifer could take possession of her.

Conclusion

I now wish to conclude this discourse during which I have spoken at somewhat greater length than in the others. This is because our humble Congregation has the Blessed Virgin Mary for its principal patroness under the title of her Immaculate Conception. I wish to conclude by stating in as few words as possible the reasons which make me certain—and which, it seems to me, should make everybody certain—that Mary was free from original sin, a belief that is so edifying and gives so much glory to Our Blessed Mother.[3]

There are many scholars who are of the opinion that Mary was even exempt from contracting the debt of sin; for example, Pietro Galatino, Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa, De Ponte, Salazar, Catharinus, Novarinus, Viva, De Lugo, Aegidius, Richelius, and others. And this opinion seems probable. For if it is true that the will of every man was included in that

of Adam as the head of the human race—an opinion which is based on the doctrine of Saint Paul that all men have sinned in Adam (see Rom 5:12)—then it is also probable that Mary did not contract the debt of sin. Since it is obvious that God singled her out from the common run of human beings by so many graces, we ought piously to believe that he did not include her will in that of Adam.

This opinion is only probable, but I adhere to it as being more complimentary to Our Lady. On the other hand, I consider as certain the opinion that Mary did not contract the sin of Adam. As a matter of fact, others not only consider it as certain but even as being proximately definable as an article of faith, such as Cardinal Everard, Duval, Raynauld, Lossada, Viva, and many others. For this reason, I pass over in silence the private revelations which confirm this belief, particularly those of Saint Bridget, which were approved by Cardinal Torrecremata and by four Supreme Pontiffs, and which are found in various parts of the sixth book of her *Revelations*.

But under no circumstances can I omit the opinions of the Fathers of the Church on this subject which prove how uniform they were in assigning this privilege to the Mother of God.

Saint Ambrose says: “Receive me not from Sarah but from Mary, that it may be from an uncorrupted Virgin, a Virgin free by grace from every stain of sin.”

Origen, speaking of Mary, says that “she was not infected by the venomous breath of the serpent.”

Saint Ephrem, that “she was immaculate and far removed from all stain of sin.”

Saint Augustine, commenting on the angel’s words *Hail, full of grace*, says: “By these words the angel shows that Mary was entirely [notice the word ‘entirely’] excluded from the wrath of the first judgment and that she received the grace of every blessing.”

Saint Jerome: “The cloud was never in darkness, but always in light.”

Arnald the Abbot: “Justice did not suffer this vessel of election to be exposed to common injuries. Since she was far exalted above other creatures, she partook of their nature but not of their sin.”

Saint Amphilochius: “He who formed the first virgin without deformity also formed the second one without spot or sin.”

Saint Sophronius: “The Blessed Virgin is called immaculate because she was corrupt in nothing.”

Saint Ildephonsus: “It is clear that she was exempt from original sin.”

Saint John Damascene: “The serpent never had any access to this paradise.”

Saint Peter Damian: “The flesh which the Virgin took from Adam gave no admittance to the sin of Adam.”

Saint Bruno: “This is that uncorrupted land which God blessed, and which was therefore free from all contagion.”

Saint Bonaventure: “Our Blessed Lady was full of prevenient grace in her sanctification; that is, of grace preserving her from the corruption of original sin.”

Saint Bernardine of Siena: “It is unbelievable that the Son of God would be born of a Virgin and take flesh from her, if she had been in the slightest degree tainted by original sin.”

Saint Lawrence Giustiniani: “In her very conception she was filled with the blessings of prevenient grace.”

Blessed Raymond Jordano, called the Idiot, commenting on the words, *Thou has found grace*, says: “You have found a unique grace, O most sweet Virgin, that of preservation from original sin.”

Many other learned scholars say the same thing.

Finally there are two arguments that prove conclusively the truth of this pious belief. The first of these is the universal consensus of the faithful. Father Giles of the Presentation assures us that all the religious orders follow this opinion. A contemporary author mentions that, while there are ninety-two Dominican authors who deny it, there are at the same time a hundred and thirty-six who favor it. We are particularly induced to hold that this is the general sentiment of Catholics from the celebrated bull of Alexander VII. In *Sollicitudo omnium ecclesiarum*, published in 1661, the Pope says: “This special devotion toward the Mother of God was again increased and propagated by the fact that so

many universities adopted this opinion and now nearly all Catholics have embraced it."

Actually this opinion is defended by the universities of the Sorbonne, Alcalá, Salamanca, Coimbra, Cologne, Mainz, Naples, and many others. All who take their degrees there are obliged to swear that they will defend the doctrine of Mary's Immaculate Conception. The learned Petavius is particularly impressed by this argument from the common belief of the faithful. And the learned doctor, Bishop Julius Torni, writes that we cannot help being convinced by this argument. If it is the common consent of the faithful that makes us certain with regard to Mary's sanctification in the womb and her assumption, body and soul, into heaven, why then should not the same general consensus of the faithful also make us certain with regard to her Immaculate Conception?

The second reason, even more convincing than the first, which makes us certain the Blessed Virgin was exempt from the stain of original sin, is the fact that the Church has ordered the feast of her Immaculate Conception to be celebrated throughout the world. With regard to this point, I note first of all that the Church celebrates the *first moment* in which her soul was created and infused into her body. This was declared by Alexander VII in the abovementioned bull. He says that the Church gives to Mary in her conception the same veneration which is given to her by those who hold the pious belief that she was conceived without original sin. And second, I regard it as certain that the Church cannot celebrate anything that is not true and holy. According to the teaching of Pope Saint Leo and Pope Saint Eusebius: "In the teaching of the Apostolic See, the Catholic religion has always been preserved from error." All theologians, including Saint Augustine, Saint Bernard, and Saint Thomas, agree on this point. And Saint Thomas uses this very argument to prove that Mary was sanctified before her birth: "The Church celebrates the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin. Now a feast is celebrated only for a saint. Therefore it stands to reason that the Blessed Virgin was sanctified in her mother's womb." But if it is certain that Mary was sanctified in her mother's womb as the Angelic Doctor maintains—for it is only on that supposition that the Church can celebrate her birth—why can we not consider it as equally certain that Mary was preserved from original sin from the first moment of her

conception, knowing as we do that this is the mind of the Church in celebrating the feast?

Finally, in confirmation of this great privilege of Mary, we may cite the innumerable graces and gifts which the Lord was pleased to distribute throughout the kingdom of Naples by means of the pictures of her Immaculate Conception.[4] I could tell the story of many favors which passed, so to speak, through the hands of the Fathers of our own Congregation; but I will content myself with two that are truly admirable.

Examples

One day a woman came to one of our monasteries and told one of the Fathers that her husband had not been to confession for many years. She said that she was at a loss how to bring him back to the sacraments. Every time she mentioned confession, he beat her. The priest told her to give him a little picture of the Immaculate Conception. That evening when she again asked him to go to confession, he turned a deaf ear as usual. So she gave him the picture. The man had scarcely taken the picture in his hand, when he said to her: “Very well, when do you want me to go to confession? I am willing to go.” The good woman wept for joy on seeing this sudden change of heart.

The next morning the man came to church to make his confession, and when the priest asked him how long it had been since his last confession, he replied: “Twenty-eight years.” “And how is it,” continued the priest, “that you were moved to come this morning?” “I was very stubborn, Father,” he said; “but last night my wife gave me a picture of the Blessed Mother and I immediately felt my heart change. So much so, as a matter of fact, that last night every minute seemed like a thousand years. I could hardly wait for morning to come so that I could see the priest.” He made a fervent confession and changed his way of life and remained for a long time under the direction of the same kind confessor.

In another place, in the diocese of Salerno, where our Fathers were giving a mission, there was a man who hated a neighbor of his who had offended him. One of the Fathers urged him to be reconciled but he only

said: “Father, did you ever see me at any of your sermons? No, and this is the reason I do not come. I know that I am damned, but nothing else will ever satisfy me. I must have revenge.” The priest did all he could to get him to change, but when he saw that he was wasting his words, he said: “Here, take this picture of Our Lady.” The man asked: “What good is that to me?” But no sooner had he taken it than he said to the missionary, as if he had never uttered those words about revenge: “Is anything else necessary besides reconciliation? I am ready.” So an appointment was made for him to meet with his enemy the next morning. But when morning came, he had changed his mind and would have nothing to do with the plan. The priest offered him another picture, but he refused it. Finally, after much pleading on the part of the priest, he took it. As soon as he looked at this second picture, he said: “Let us hurry. I want to make peace at once.” He became reconciled with his enemy and then went to confession.

Prayer

O Immaculate Mary! I rejoice with you on seeing you enriched with such great purity. I thank God, and resolve always to thank him for having preserved you from every stain of sin. I firmly believe this doctrine and am willing to lay down my life—and even swear to do so if this be necessary—in defense of this great and unique privilege, the privilege of your Immaculate Conception.

I would like to see the whole world know and proclaim you as that beautiful “Dawn” which was always illumined with divine light; as that chosen “Ark” of salvation, free from the common shipwreck of sin; as that perfect and immaculate “Dove” which your Divine Spouse declared that you are; that “enclosed Garden” which was the delight of God; that “sealed Fountain” whose waters were never troubled by the enemy; and finally, as that “white Lily” which you are even though you were born among the thorns of the sons of Adam, all of whom are born with sin and enemies of God. You alone were conceived pure and spotless, and are in all things the beloved of your Creator.

Let me praise you as God himself praised you: You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no flaw in you (Song 4:7). O most pure Dove, all

fair, all beautiful, always the friend of God: How beautiful you are, my love, how very beautiful! (Song 4:1). O most sweet, most lovable, immaculate Mary, you who are so beautiful in the eyes of the Lord, do not disdain to cast your compassionate eyes on the wounds of my soul, loathsome as they are. Behold me, pity me, heal me.

O beautiful magnet of souls, draw my heart also! You who from the first instant of your life appeared pure and beautiful before God, pity me. I was not only born in sin, but after baptism I again soiled my soul with sin. What grace will ever be denied you by God who chose you as his daughter and spouse, and therefore preserved you from every stain, and in his love preferred you to all other creatures? O immaculate Virgin, you must save me. I will say with Saint Philip Neri: "Grant that I may always remember you, and do you never forget me." The happy day when I shall go to behold your beauty in paradise to praise and love you even more than I now do seems a thousand years away, O my Mother, my Queen, my beloved, my beautiful one, my sweet, pure, immaculate Mary. Amen.

2

SERMON 2:

MARY'S BIRTH

September 8



God enriched Mary with great grace at her birth and Mary always cooperated faithfully with this grace.

We customarily celebrate the birthdays of children with joy and festivity. But in a sense we ought to pity the youngsters and feel sorry for them. I refer, of course, to the fact that children are born not only deprived of grace and reason, but even worse—infected with sin and children of wrath, and therefore condemned to misery and death. However, it is right and reasonable to celebrate the birth of the infant Mary with joy and festivity. Mary saw the light of this world as a babe in point of age, but mature in merit and virtue.

Mary was born a saint, a great saint. But to appreciate how holy Mary really was when she was born, we must understand two things: first, how great was that first grace with which God enriched her; and second, how faithfully she immediately corresponded with it.

First Point

To begin with the first point, it is certain that Mary's soul was the most beautiful that God had ever created. In fact, after the Incarnation of the Eternal Word, this was the greatest and most worthy act that the omnipotent God ever accomplished in this world. Saint Peter Damian calls it "a work surpassed only by God himself." It follows, therefore, that divine grace did not come into Mary slowly, by drops as it were as in the case of other saints, but *like rain upon the fleece* (Ps 71:6), as David

predicted. The soul of Mary was as soft as fleece and absorbed the whole shower of grace without losing a single drop. Saint Basil says: “The Blessed Virgin was drenched with all the grace of the Holy Spirit.” Therefore, in the words of Ecclesiasticus, Mary said: *My abode is in the full assembly of the saints* (Ecclus 24:16). That is to say, as Saint Bonaventure explains it: “I have a fullness of that which other saints have only in part.” And Saint Vincent Ferrer, speaking especially of the sanctity of Mary before her birth, says: “The Blessed Virgin was sanctified in her mother’s womb beyond all saints and angels.”

In his beautiful work, *The Grandeurs of Jesus and Mary*, the very learned Father Francis Pepe, S.J., proves that the grace which Mary possessed surpassed the grace of every saint individually and of all the saints and angels collectively. He claims that this opinion, so glorious for our queen, is the common opinion and is considered certain by theologians such as Cartagena, Suarez, Spinelli, Recupito, Guerra, and many others who have gone into the question, a subject which the ancients did not investigate. Moreover, he relates that Mary ordered Father Martín Gutiérez to thank Father Suarez in her name for having courageously defended this opinion as most probable; an opinion which, according to Father Segneri in his *Client of Mary*, was later taught as the common opinion of the University of Salamanca.

Now if this opinion is general and certain, that other is also very probable, namely, that Mary received this grace which exceeds that of all men and angels together in the first moment of her Immaculate Conception. Father Suarez strongly defends this, as do Father Spinelli, Father Recupito, and Blessed de la Colombière in his Twenty-Seventh Sermon.

In addition to the authority of these theologians, there are two very convincing arguments in support of this opinion.

The first is that Mary was chosen by God to be the Mother of the Divine Word. Hence Blessed Denis the Carthusian says that since Mary was chosen for a position superior to that of all other creatures (for, in a certain sense, the dignity of Mother of God, as Father Suarez asserts, belongs to the order of the hypostatic union), it is reasonable to suppose that from the very beginning of her life Mary was endowed with gifts that must have incomparably surpassed those granted to all other

creatures. As a matter of fact, it cannot be doubted that when the person of the Eternal Word was predestined to become man according to the divine decrees, the mother from whom he was to take his human nature was also destined for him; and this mother was our infant Mary.

Saint Thomas teaches that the Lord gives everyone grace proportionate to the dignity he is called upon to fill. Saint Paul taught this before him when he said: *Who has made us fit ministers of the new covenant* (2 Cor 3:6). By this he meant that the apostles received from God the gifts proportionate to the great office to which they were called. Saint Bernardine of Siena adds: "It is an axiom in theology that whenever a person is chosen by God for any position, he receives not only the necessary qualities, but also the special graces which enable him to fulfill the duties of that state with proper decorum."

Now since Mary was chosen to be the Mother of God, it was certainly fitting that God should adorn her from the very first moment of her existence with an immense grace, one of an order superior to that of all other men and angels, since it had to correspond to the immense and most high dignity to which God had raised her. All theologians reach this conclusion with Saint Thomas who says: "The Blessed Virgin was chosen to be the Mother of God; therefore it cannot be doubted that God fitted her for this position by special grace." He saw to it that before becoming the Mother of God, Mary was adorned with a sanctity so perfect that it rendered her fit for this great dignity. The Angelic Doctor says: "In the Blessed Virgin Mary there was a preparatory perfection which rendered her fit to be the Mother of Christ, and this was the perfection of holiness."

Before making this last remark, the holy Doctor had said that Mary was called full of grace not with respect to grace itself, for she did not possess it in the highest possible degree. Even the habitual grace of Jesus Christ (according to the same Doctor) was not of such a kind that the absolute power of God could not have made it greater. It was, however, a grace sufficient for the end for which his humanity was ordained by the divine Wisdom, that is, for its union with the Person of the Eternal Word. Although God could make something greater and better than the habitual grace of Christ, as the Angelic Doctor teaches, nevertheless he could not make it fit for anything greater than the personal union with

the only-begotten Son of the Father—a union to which that measure of grace sufficiently corresponds, according to the limit placed by Divine Wisdom.

Saint Thomas goes on to say that God's power is so great that, however much it gives, it can always give more; and although the natural capacity of creatures to receive is in itself limited so that it can be entirely filled, nevertheless the creature's capacity for being subjected to the divine will is unlimited, and God can always give it further perfection by increasing its capacity to receive: "As far as its natural capacity goes, it can be filled; but it cannot be filled as far as its power of receiving greater capacity is concerned."

Now to return to our argument, Saint Thomas says that the Blessed Virgin was filled with grace, not in the sense that all grace was in her, but in this sense: that she had at every moment as much grace as she could bear. "The Blessed Virgin is not full of grace from the standpoint of grace itself, for she did not have grace in the highest degree of excellence in which it can be had, nor did she have it in all its effects. But she was said to be full of grace from the standpoint of her capacity for grace, because she had sufficient grace for the state to which she had been called by God, that is, to be the Mother of his only-begotten Son." Benedict Fernández says: "The measure by which we may know the greatness of the grace communicated to Mary is her dignity as Mother of God."

Rightly therefore does David say that the foundations of this city of God, that is, Mary, are planted above the tops of the mountains: *The foundations thereof are in the holy mountains* (Ps 86:1). We are to understand by this that Mary, in the very beginning of her existence, was to be more perfect than all the saints together. And the Prophet continues: *The Lord loves the gates of Sion more than any dwelling of Jacob* (Ps 86:2). And he also tells us the reason why God loved her. It was because he was to become man in her virginal womb: And a man is born in her (Ps 86:5). And so it was fitting that God should give the Blessed Virgin at the very moment when he created her a grace corresponding to the dignity of Mother of God.

Isaiah pointed out the same thing when he said that a mountain of the house of the Lord (which was the Blessed Virgin) was to be prepared

on the top of all other mountains; and that all nations would run to this mountain to receive divine mercy. *And in the last days the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be prepared on the top of mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow unto it* (Isa 2:2). Saint Gregory, commenting on this passage, says: "It is a mountain on top of mountains, for the perfection of Mary transcends that of all other saints." And Saint John Damascene: "A mountain in which God was well pleased to dwell." Mary's preeminence over all others is the reason why she was called a cypress, but a cypress of Mount Sion; a cedar, but a cedar of Libanus; an olive tree, but a fair olive tree; beautiful, but beautiful as the sun. Saint Peter Damian says: "The light of the sun so greatly surpasses that of the stars that in it they are no longer visible. It so overwhelms them that they are as if they never existed. So does the great Virgin Mother surpass in holiness the merits of the whole heavenly court." Saint Bernard expresses this idea elegantly and beautifully when he says that the sanctity of Mary was so sublime that "no other mother was fitting for God than the Blessed Virgin, nor was any other son than God fitting for Mary."

The second argument by which we prove that Mary was more holy than all the saints together from the first moment of her existence is based on her great office as mediatrix of men. This is an office which she held from the beginning and which made it necessary for her to possess a greater treasure of grace than all humankind together. It is well known that the Church Fathers and the theologians give Mary this title of mediatrix because, by her powerful intercession and her merit "of congruity," she procured the great benefit of redemption for the world. We say merit "of congruity" because, as the theologians say, Jesus Christ alone is our mediator by way of justice and "condign" merit since he offered his merits to the Eternal Father who accepted them for our salvation. Mary, therefore, is a mediatrix of grace by way of simple intercession and merit "of congruity" since, as theologians maintain with Saint Bonaventure, she offered her merits to God for the salvation of all men. And God, as a favor, accepted them with the merits of Jesus Christ. Because of this, Arnold of Chartres says: "Mary brought about our salvation together with Christ." And Richard of Saint Victor says that "Mary desired, sought, and obtained salvation for all. In fact, she even

brought about the salvation of all." Every blessing, every gift in the order of grace which each of the saints received from God, was obtained for them by Mary.

And holy Church wishes us to understand this when she honors Mary by applying to her these verses of Ecclesiasticus: *In me is all grace of the way and the truth* (Ecclus 24:15). "Of the way," because all graces are dispensed by Mary to those still on the road to heaven; "of the truth," because the light of truth is imparted through her. *In me is all hope of life and of virtue* (Ecclus 24:25). "Of life," because through Mary we hope to obtain the life of grace here on earth and glory in heaven; "of virtue," because through Mary we obtain virtue, especially the theological virtues, which are the principal virtues of the saints. *I am the mother of fair love, and of fear, and of knowledge, and of holy hope* (Ecclus 24:24). By her intercession Mary obtains for her servants the gifts of divine love, holy fear, heavenly light, and holy confidence. From all this Saint Bernard concludes that the Church teaches that Mary is the universal mediatrix of our salvation: "Sound the praises of this finder of grace, the mediatrix of salvation, the restorer of the world! This is what the Church sings to me concerning her, this is what she has taught me to sing to her."

Saint Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem, asserts that the reason the Archangel Gabriel called her "full of grace" was that only limited grace is given to others, whereas full measure was given to Mary: "She was truly filled with grace; grace is given to other saints partially, but the whole plenitude of grace was poured into Mary." Saint Basil declares that she received this plenitude that she might be a worthy mediatrix between men and God: "Hail full of grace and, for this reason, mediatrix between God and men by your intercession." "If this were not so," remarks Saint Lawrence Giustiniani, "if the most Blessed Virgin were not filled with divine grace, how could she ever be the ladder to paradise, the advocate of the world, and the true mediatrix between men and God?"

Thus, the second argument now becomes clear and evident. If Mary, as the destined Mother of our common Redeemer, received the office of mediatrix of all men and even of the saints from the very beginning, it was also necessary that from the very beginning she should have grace

exceeding that of all the saints for whom she was to intercede. If, by means of Mary, all men were to endear themselves to God, Mary was necessarily more holy and more dear to him than all men together. Otherwise how could she have interceded for all others? In order that an intercessor may obtain the ruler's favor for all the citizens, it is absolutely necessary that the ruler be more devoted to him than to all the other citizens. And so Saint Anselm concludes that Mary deserved to be made the worthy repairer of the lost world because she was holier and purer than all creatures: "The pure holiness of her heart, surpassing the purity and holiness of all other creatures, merited for her that she should become the repairer of the lost world."

Someone is bound to say: "Mary may well be the mediatrix of men, but how can she also be the mediatrix of angels?" Many theologians maintain that Jesus Christ merited the grace of perseverance for the angels also. In that case, Jesus was their mediator "by condign merit," and Mary may be said to be their mediatrix "by congruous merit," since she hastened the coming of the Redeemer by her prayers. At least if Mary merited to be the Mother of the Messiah "by congruous merit," she merited for the angels that the thrones lost by the devils should be filled. And in that way she at least merited this accidental glory for them. Richard of Saint Victor says: "Every creature was restored by her; by her the loss of the angels was repaired and the human race was reconciled." Anticipating him, Saint Anselm had said: "All things were recalled to their original state and restored by the Blessed Virgin."

Let us conclude by saying that this heavenly child, by becoming the world's mediatrix and by being destined to be the Redeemer's Mother, received at the very beginning of her existence grace greater than that of all the other saints together.

What a delightful sight then must this happy infant's beautiful soul have been to heaven and earth, even though she was still enclosed in the womb of her mother! In the eyes of God she was the most lovable of creatures because she was already permeated with grace and merit, and could even then say: "When I was a little one I pleased the Most High" (Office of Blessed Virgin Mary). She was also the creature who loved God more than any other who had thus far come into the world. In fact, if Mary had been born immediately after her immaculate conception, she

would have come into the world richer in merits and more holy than all the saints together. How much greater then must her sanctity have been at her birth after all the merits she acquired during the nine months spent in her mother's womb!

Let us pass now to the consideration of the second point: Mary's great faithfulness in cooperating with God's grace.

Second Point

A learned author, Blessed Claude de la Colombière, in his Thirty-First Sermon, says that it is not merely a private opinion but the belief of the whole world, that when the holy child Mary received the grace of sanctification in the womb of Saint Anne, she received the perfect use of her reason at the same time, and was also divinely enlightened in a degree corresponding to the grace with which she was enriched.[5] So we may well believe that from the first moment that her beautiful soul was united to her most pure body, she was illumined by the light of divine wisdom. She became aware of the eternal truths, the beauty of virtue, and, above all, the infinite goodness of God. She was particularly aware of how much he deserved to be loved by everybody, especially by herself; on account of the unique gifts with which he had adorned and distinguished her above all other creatures by preserving her from the stain of original sin, by bestowing on her such immense graces, and by destining her to be the Mother of the Eternal Word and Queen of the universe.

From that very moment, Mary, grateful to God, began to do all in her power to utilize the huge capital of graces that had been bestowed upon her. She made every effort to please and love the divine goodness. From that moment, she loved God with all her strength and continued to love him in this way during the nine months that preceded her birth. During this time she never ceased for a moment to unite herself more and more closely with God by fervent acts of love. Already free from original sin, she was also free from every worldly attachment, every inordinate emotion, every distraction, every opposition on the part of the senses, everything which could in any way hinder her from always advancing more and more in divine love. Her senses concurred with her blessed

spirit in tending toward God. Her beautiful soul, free from every impediment, never lingered but always flew toward him, always loved him, and always increased in love for him.

It was for this reason that she called herself a plane tree planted by flowing waters: *As a plane tree by the waters … was I exalted* (Ecclus 24:19). She was that noble plant of God which kept growing near the stream of divine grace. And for the same reason she also calls herself a vine: *As a vine I have brought forth a pleasant odor* (Ecclus 24:23), not only because she was so humble in the eyes of the world, but also because she continued to grow like a vine which, according to the common proverb, never stops growing. Other trees—the orange tree, the mulberry, the pear tree—grow to a definite height. But vines keep on growing. They grow to the height of the tree to which they are attached. Similarly, Our Lady continued to grow in perfection. Because she was always united to God, on whom alone she depended, Saint Gregory Thaumaturgus greets her with the words: "Hail, O evergrowing vine!"

And it was of Mary that the Holy Spirit spoke when he said: *Who is this coming up from the desert, leaning upon her lover?* (Cant 8:5). Saint Ambrose paraphrases it like this: "Who is this that comes up like the shoot of a vine, clinging to the Word of God? Who is this, accompanied by the Divine Word, that grows as a vine against a great tree?"

Many learned theologians maintain that as often as a soul that possesses a habit of virtue corresponds to the actual grace which it receives from God, it produces an act equal in intensity to the habit it possesses; so much so that it acquires each time a new and double merit equal to the sum of all the merits previously acquired. This kind of increase, they say, was granted to the angels at the time of their probation. And if it was granted to the angels, who will deny that it was granted to the Mother of God, especially during the time of which I am now speaking when she was in the womb of her mother and when she was certainly more faithful than the angels in corresponding to divine grace? Therefore, during every moment of that entire period, Mary doubled the sublime grace which she possessed at the first moment of her existence because she always corresponded with her whole strength and with every perfection she possessed. Thus, supposing that she had a thousand degrees of grace at the first moment, she had two thousand at

the second, four thousand at the third, eight thousand at the fourth, sixteen thousand at the fifth, thirty-two thousand at the sixth. We are still only at the sixth moment, but multiplying in this way for a whole day, or for nine months, what treasures of grace, merit, and sanctity must Mary already have acquired by the time she was born!

Let us therefore rejoice with the infant Mary who was born so holy, so dear to God, and so full of grace. Let us be happy not only on her account, but on our own, too, for she came into the world full of grace, not merely for her glory, but also for our benefit.

In his *Eighth Opusculum*, Saint Thomas notes how the Most Blessed Virgin was full of grace in three ways. First, she was full of grace in her soul, so that from the first her beautiful soul belonged entirely to God. Second, she was full of grace in her body, so that she merited to clothe the Eternal Word with her most pure flesh. Third, she was full of grace for the benefit of humankind, so that all people might share in that grace. The Angelic Doctor adds that some saints have so much grace that it is sufficient not only for them, but also for the salvation of many others, though not for all men. Only to Jesus Christ and to Mary was so much grace given that it was sufficient to save all. This is how Saint Thomas words it: “If anyone were to have enough grace to save everybody, this would be the greatest grace possible; and this grace was in Christ and in the Blessed Virgin.”

What Saint John says of Jesus: *And of his fullness we have all received* (Jn 1:16), the saints apply to Mary also. Saint Thomas of Villanova calls her: “Full of grace, of whose fullness all have received.” And Saint Anselm says: “There is no one who does not partake of the grace of Mary. Did anyone ever exist to whom Mary was not kind and to whom she did not show some mercy?”

Nevertheless, we must bear in mind that from Jesus we receive grace as from the author of grace, from Mary as from an intermediary; from Jesus as a Savior, from Mary as an advocate; from Jesus as a source, from Mary as a channel.

Hence Saint Bernard says that God established Mary as the channel of the mercies that he wishes to dispense to men. For this reason he filled her with so much grace that everyone can receive his share from her

fullness. Then the saint urges us to consider how much God wishes us to love Mary since he has placed the whole treasure of his gifts in her. This is the way he expresses it: “See how tenderly God wants us to love her! He has placed the whole fullness of his gifts in her. Whatever we have of hope, grace, or salvation, has come to us as having overflowed from her.”

How foolish the soul that obstructs this channel of grace by neglecting to recommend itself to Mary! When Holofernes wanted to take the city of Bethulia, he saw to it that the aqueducts were destroyed (Jud 7:6). And that is what the devil does when he wants to become master of a soul. He causes it to give up devotion to the Blessed Virgin. Once this channel has been cut off, the soul easily loses supernatural light, the fear of God, and ultimately eternal salvation.

In the following example you will see how great the compassion of Mary’s heart can be, and what calamity that person brings on himself who closes this channel by abandoning devotion to the Queen of Heaven.

Example

Trithemius, Saint Peter Canisius, and others relate that in Magdeburg, a city in Saxony, there was a young man named Otto who as a youth was so simple-minded that he was the laughingstock of his fellow students. One day when he was more than usually disturbed over his backwardness, he knelt before a statue of the Blessed Virgin and prayed to her. A short time later, Mary appeared to him in a dream and said: “Otto, I come to reassure you, for I shall obtain from God such talents that the others will not only stop taunting you but will even admire you. Moreover, I promise that after the bishop’s death, you will be chosen to succeed him.” Everything Mary told him came true. He made progress in his studies and eventually became bishop of that city.

But Otto was so ungrateful to God and to Mary, his benefactress, that he gave up all semblance of devotion and became a scandal to everybody. One night while he was lying in a bed of sin, he heard a voice saying to him: “Otto, stop this at once; you have gambled enough

with your soul's salvation." When he first heard these words he became angry, thinking that someone was whispering to him in order to scold and correct him. But when he heard the same words repeated the second and third night, he began to be afraid that it was a voice from heaven. Nevertheless, he went on with his sinful way of life. When the three months which God had given him to amend had elapsed, the punishment came. And this is what it was.

One night, a certain devout canon named Frederick was praying in the church of Saint Maurice and begging the Lord to remove the scandal of this prelate from the diocese. Suddenly, the door was opened by a strong blast of wind. Two young men entered carrying torches in their hands and took up positions on either side of the high altar. These two were followed by two others who laid a carpet before the altar and put two golden chairs on it. Then came another youth in the uniform of a soldier, a sword in his hand. The soldier stopped in the center of the church and shouted aloud: "O you saints of heaven, whose relics are here in this church, come and be present at the great act of justice which the Supreme Judge is about to perform." At this, many saints appeared, along with the twelve Apostles who were to be assistant judges in the trial. Finally, Jesus Christ entered and sat down on one of the two chairs. Next, Mary entered with a retinue of holy virgins and sat down on the chair beside her son. Eventually, the court was called to order and the criminal bidden to appear. The criminal, of course, was none other than the unfortunate Otto.

In the name of the people who had been scandalized, Saint Maurice demanded justice because of the evil life of the bishop. All cried out and said: "Lord, he deserves death!" The Eternal Judge answered: "Let him die!" Mary's merciful heart was filled with grief. Before the death sentence was carried out, she left the church so that she would not have to witness this terrible act of justice. Only then did the heavenly minister of justice, the one with the sword in his hand, approach Otto. With one stroke he lopped off his head. Then the vision disappeared.

The church was left in darkness. Trembling, the canon went to light a lamp at the lower end of the church. When he came back to his place, he saw Otto's beheaded corpse and the floor of the church all stained with blood. Morning came and the people all began to flock into the church.

The canon told them what he had seen and what had actually happened. The same day, the unfortunate Otto, now condemned to hell, appeared to one of his chaplains who was unaware as yet of what had taken place in the church. Otto's corpse was thrown into a swamp. The blood spots on the floor remained there as a perpetual reminder of the event, though they were always covered by a carpet. Ever since that day, it has been the custom to uncover them whenever a new bishop takes possession of the see, so that he may be moved by the sight to order his life properly and not be ungrateful to the Lord and his most holy mother for their graces.

Prayer

O holy and heavenly child, destined Mother of my Redeemer and great mediatrix of miserable sinners, have pity on me. Behold at your feet another ungrateful soul who appeals to you and asks for mercy. It is true that because of my ingratitude to God and to you, I deserve that God and you should abandon me; but I have heard, and I believe it to be so (knowing the greatness of your mercy), that you do not refuse to help anyone who recommends himself to you with confidence.

Therefore, O most exalted Lady, since there is no one but God above you, and the greatest saints in heaven are small compared with you, O saint of saints, O Mary, abyss of charity and full of grace, help me, a senseless sinner, who has lost grace through his own fault.

I know that you are so dear to God that he denies you nothing. I know, too, that you are happy to employ your greatness in helping suffering sinners. Come, then, show me the great favor which you enjoy with God. Obtain for me a grace so powerful that I may be changed from a sinner into a saint. Let me detach myself from every earthly affection, so that divine love may be enkindled in me. Do this, O Mary, for you can do it. Do it for the love of God, who made you so great, so powerful, and so merciful. This is my hope. Amen.

3

SERMON 3:

MARY'S PRESENTATION

February 2



The offering that Mary made of herself to God was prompt and unreserved.

There never was, and never will be, an offering on the part of a creature greater or more perfect than that which Mary made to God when, at the age of three, she presented herself in the Temple. She offered him not aromatical spices, nor calves, nor gold, but her entire self, consecrating herself as a perpetual victim in his honor. She understood well the voice of God calling her to devote herself entirely to his love when he said: *Arise, my beloved, my beautiful one, and come!* (Cant 2:10). The Lord willed that from that time on she should forget her country, her parents —everything—to devote herself exclusively to loving and pleasing him: *Hear, O daughter, and see: turn your ear, forget your people and your father's house* (Ps 44:11). Promptly she obeyed the divine call.

Let us therefore consider how pleasing this offering of Mary's was. For a proper appreciation of this truth, let us recall first, that Mary's offering was prompt and without delay; second, that it was entire and without reserve.

First Point

Mary's offering was prompt. From the first moment that she was sanctified in her mother's womb, which was at the instant of her Immaculate Conception, she received the perfect use of reason so that she might begin to merit grace at once. This is the general opinion of theologians, and that of Father Suarez in particular. He quotes Saint

Thomas as teaching that the most perfect way in which God sanctifies a soul is by its own merit. Accordingly, we must believe that it was in this way that the Blessed Virgin was sanctified.

And if this privilege was granted to the angels and to Adam, as the Angelic Doctor maintains, all the more should we believe that it was granted to Mary, because we must certainly assume that God, having condescended to make her his Mother, also conferred greater gifts on her than on all other creatures. From her he took his human nature, and therefore she must have received a greater fullness of grace than anybody else. “Being a mother,” says Father Suarez, “she has a sort of special right to all the gifts of her son.” And as it was proper that Jesus should receive the fullness of graces on account of the hypostatic union, so on account of the divine maternity it was fitting that Jesus, by way of fulfilling a natural debt, should confer greater graces on Mary than on all the angels and saints.

From the very beginning of her life Mary knew God, and she knew him so well that, as the angel said to Saint Bridget: “No tongue will ever be able to express how clearly the Blessed Virgin understood his greatness in that first moment of her existence.” Enlightened in this way, she immediately offered herself entirely to her Lord, dedicating herself without reserve to his love and glory. “Immediately,” the angel went on to say, “our Queen determined to sacrifice her will to God and to give him all her love for the rest of her life. No one can understand how submissive she was to the divine will, and how determined she was to do everything that pleased Him.”

Later on—as various authors relate—this immaculate child realized that her parents, Saint Joachim and Saint Anne, had promised under oath that if God granted them offspring, they would consecrate the child to his service in the Temple. We know from Baronius, Nicephorus, Cedrenus, and Suarez, as well as Josephus the Jewish historian, and also Saint John Damascene, Saint George of Nicomedia, Saint Anselm, and Saint Ambrose, that it was the ancient custom of the Jews to place their daughters in special rooms within the walls of the Temple so that they would receive a better education. This can also be seen from the Book of Machabees, when Heliodorus besieged the Temple in order to get possession of the treasure kept there, *because the place was like to come*

into contempt … the virgins also that were shut up came forth… (2 Mac 3:18, 19).

Realizing this when she had scarcely attained the age of three years, as Saint Germanus and Saint Epiphanius assert—an age when children need their parents most—Mary desired to offer and consecrate herself solemnly to God by presenting herself in the Temple. And so, of her own accord, she begged her parents to take her there so that they could fulfill their vow. And her holy mother, according to Saint Gregory of Nyssa, "did not delay in taking her to the Temple and dedicating her to God."

How generously Joachim and Anne sacrificed to God the most precious treasure they had in the world, the one that was dearest to their heart! They set out from Nazareth and carried their little daughter in their arms by turns for, as some authors relate, she was not yet able to make such a long journey herself. In covering the distance between Nazareth and Jerusalem, some eighty miles, they were accompanied by a few relatives, according to Saint George of Nicomedia, but choirs of angels also acted as their retinue and served the immaculate little Virgin, who was about to consecrate herself to the Divine Majesty. *How beautiful are your steps, O prince's daughter!* (Cant 7:1). Oh how beautiful—the angels must have sung—how pleasing to God are your steps on the way to offer yourself to him, O noble and beloved daughter of our common Lord!

God himself, says Bernardine de Bustis, with the whole heavenly court, was greatly pleased and glorified the day when he beheld his spouse being led to the Temple. Never had he seen a holier creature, nor one whom he loved so tenderly, come to offer herself to him. "Go then," says Saint Germanus, Archbishop of Constantinople, "go, O Queen of the world, O Mother of God, go joyfully to the house of God and there await the coming of the Divine Spirit who will make you the Mother of the Divine Word."

When the holy family reached the Temple Mary turned to her parents and, on her knees, kissed their hands and asked for their blessing. Then, without turning back, she ascended the fifteen steps of the Temple (according to Arias Montano, quoting Josephus) and, as Saint Germanus tells us, presented herself to the priest Saint Zachary. After bidding farewell to the world and renouncing all the pleasures it promises to its

devotees, she offered and consecrated herself to her Creator.

At the time of the flood, a raven sent out by Noah remained behind to feed on the bodies of the dead. *But the dove, unable to find a resting place, quickly returned to him in the ark* (Gen 8:9). Many whom God sends into this world unhappily remain there to feed on earthly delights. But not so Mary, the heavenly dove. She knew full well that God should be our only good, our only hope, our only love. She knew that the world is full of dangers and that the sooner one leaves it, the sooner one will be free from its snares. And so this is what she sought to do at a very tender age. She shut herself up in the sacred retirement of the Temple where she could better hear God's voice and honor and love him more.

Thus, the Blessed Virgin made herself very dear and pleasing to her Lord from her tenderest years, as holy Church says in her name: "Rejoice with me, all you who love God; for when I was a little one I pleased the Most High" (Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary). For this reason, too, she was compared to the moon; for as the moon completes its course with greater speed than the other planets, so Mary attained perfection sooner than all the saints by giving herself to God promptly and without delay, and making herself all his without reserve.

Now let us pass to the second point, on which we shall have much to say.

Second Point

The enlightened child well knew that God does not accept a divided heart, but wishes it to be completely consecrated to his love. He had commanded: *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart* (Deut 6:5). Therefore, from the first moment of her existence, Mary began to love God with all her strength and to give herself entirely to him. But her holy soul eagerly awaited the day when she could consecrate herself to him in a more solemn and public way. Picture then the fervor with which this loving young virgin, on finding herself actually enclosed in the holy place, first prostrated herself and kissed that ground as the house of her Lord, and then adored his infinite majesty. She thanked him for the favor of having been brought to dwell for a time in his house,

and offered her entire self to God. Without any reservation whatsoever, she offered him all her powers and her senses, her whole mind and her whole heart, her whole soul and her whole body.

It was then, as some authors maintain, that in order to please God she vowed him her virginity. According to Abbot Rupert, Mary was the first one ever to make such a vow. And the offering which she then made of herself was without any limit as to time. Bernardine de Bustis declares: “Mary offered and dedicated herself to the perpetual service of God.” Her intention at the time was to dedicate herself to the service of his Divine Majesty in the Temple for the rest of her life if that should be the pleasure of God, and never to leave that sacred place. With what an effusion of love she must have exclaimed: *My beloved to me, and I to Him!* (Cant 2:16). Cardinal Hugo paraphrases these words and has Mary say: “I will live all his, and die all his.” My Lord and my God, I have come here to please you alone, and to give you all the honor that it is in my power to give. Here I will live all yours, and die all yours, if that is your will. Accept the sacrifice which your poor servant offers you, and help me to be faithful to you.

Now picture the holy life Mary led in the Temple where, *like the dawn* (Cant 6:9), she rapidly grew in perfection. Picture the splendor of her virtues increasing from day to day. This fair olive tree, as Saint John Damascene reminds us, planted in the house of God and nurtured by the Holy Spirit, became the dwelling place of all virtues: “Led to the Temple, and then planted in the house of God and cultivated by the Spirit, like a fruitful olive tree she became the abode of all virtues.” Elsewhere he says: “The countenance of the Blessed Virgin was modest, her mind humble; her words proceeded from a tranquil soul, gracious and loving.” And in another place he asserts that she turned her thoughts far from earthly things and practiced all the virtues. She made such rapid progress in so short a time that she merited to become a temple worthy of God.

Saint Anselm also speaks of the life of the Blessed Virgin in the Temple and says: “Mary was docile, spoke little, was always composed, did not laugh, and her mind was never disturbed. She persevered in prayer, in reading the sacred Scriptures, in fasting, and in all virtuous works.”

Saint Jerome goes into more detail. He says that Mary regulated her life during this time as follows: In the morning she prayed until the third hour; from the third hour to the ninth hour she busied herself with work; and from the ninth hour she again prayed until an angel brought her food, as he was accustomed to do. She was always the first at vigils, the most exact in observing the divine law, the most profoundly humble, and the most perfect in every virtue. No one ever saw her angry. Everything she uttered was so mild that it was obvious to all that God was with her.

In Saint Bonaventure's *Life of Christ* we read that the Blessed Mother revealed to Saint Elizabeth of Hungary that when her father and mother left her in the Temple she was determined to have God alone for her Father, and her only thought was what she could do to please him most. She resolved to consecrate her virginity to him, to possess nothing in this world, and to surrender her entire will to him. The Blessed Virgin also told Saint Elizabeth that of all the commandments she kept this one most constantly before her eyes: *You shall love the Lord your God* (Deut 6:5). She revealed that at midnight she was accustomed to go to the altar of the Temple and pray to the Lord for the grace to observe all the commandments and to be able to live to see the birth of the mother of the Redeemer. She begged the Lord to preserve her eyes to behold her, her tongue to praise her, her hands and her feet to serve her, and her knees to adore her Divine Son in her womb. Hearing this, Saint Elizabeth said to her: "But, Lady, were you not full of grace and virtue?" Mary replied: "I considered myself most undeserving and unworthy of divine grace, and that is why I continually prayed for grace and virtue." And finally, that we may all realize how absolutely necessary it is for us to beg God for the graces that we need, she added: "Do you imagine that I had grace and virtue without any effort on my part? As a matter of fact, I obtained no grace from God without great effort, continual prayer, ardent desire, and many tears and mortifications."

But we must above all recall the revelation made to Saint Bridget with regard to the virtues and practices of the Blessed Virgin during her childhood: "From her childhood Mary was filled with the Holy Spirit, and as she progressed in age, she also advanced in grace. From her infancy, she determined to love God with her whole heart, and never to

offend him. She despised earthly goods. She gave to the poor all that she could. She was so temperate at meals that she took only the food necessary to sustain her body. Later on, when she discovered in the holy Scriptures that God was to be born of a virgin to redeem the world, her soul became so inflamed with love for God that she could not desire or think of anything but God. Finding her pleasure in him alone, she even avoided conversation with her parents so that they might not distract her from thinking about God. In short, she burned with the desire to be alive at the time when the Messiah would appear, so that she could become the servant of that virgin chosen to be his mother." All this is disclosed in the *Revelations* of Saint Bridget.

Yes, out of love for this unique child, the Redeemer hastened his entrance into the world. Even though in her humility she considered herself unworthy to be even the servant of this exalted mother, as a matter of fact she had been chosen to be that Blessed Mother herself. By the attraction of her virtues and by her powerful prayers, she drew the Son of God into her virginal womb. That is why the Sacred Spouse called her a turtle dove: *The voice of the turtle dove is heard in our land* (Cant 2:12). Not only because, like the turtle dove, she always loved solitude, living in this world as in a desert; but also because, as the turtle dove sighs for her companion, Mary always sighed in the Temple when she thought of the lost world and begged God for the redemption of humankind. With much greater feeling and fervor than even the prophets, she repeated their sighs and longings for the coming of the Redeemer: *Send forth, O Lord, the Lamb, the ruler of the earth. Drop down dew, you heavens, from above, and let the rain clouds rain the just. O that you would rend the heavens, and would come down* (Isa 16:1; 45:8; 64:1).

God was delighted to see this young virgin constantly rising higher and higher toward the peak of perfection. She was like a pillar of smoke, rich with the sweet odor of all the virtues, as the Holy Spirit himself clearly describes her in the sacred Canticles: *Who is she coming up from the desert, like a column of smoke laden with myrrh, with frankincense, and with the perfume of every exotic dust?* (Cant 3:6).

Saint Sophronius says this holy child was truly the Lord's garden of delight, for he found there every kind of flower, and the sweet fragrance of all the virtues. Saint John Chrysostom asserts that God chose Mary for

his mother in this world because he found on earth no other virgin more holy or more perfect than she was, and no dwelling more worthy than her sacred womb. Saint Bernard says: “There was not a more worthy place on earth than Mary’s virginal womb.” This agrees with what Saint Antoninus says, namely, that for the Blessed Virgin to be chosen and destined for the dignity of Mother of God, she had to be possessed of a perfection so great and complete as to surpass the perfection of all other creatures: “The highest grace of perfection is preparation for the conception of the Son of God.”

Since the holy child Mary presented and offered herself to God in the Temple promptly and unreservedly, let us too present ourselves to Mary this day without delay and without reserve. Let us beg her to offer us to God. He will not reject us when he sees us presented by the hand of her who was the living temple of the Holy Spirit, the delight of her Lord, and the chosen Mother of the Eternal Word. Let us place all our hopes in this exalted and gracious Lady who rewards with so much love the homage she receives from her servants, as we learn from the following example.

Example

In the life of Sister Domenica of Paradise, written by the Dominican Father Ignatius of Nente, we read that she was born of poor parents. From her infancy she was devoted to the Blessed Mother. In Mary’s honor she fasted every day of the week. On Saturdays, she gave the food which she had deprived herself of to the poor. Every Saturday she went into the garden of her home or into the nearby fields and gathered flowers to place before the statue of the Blessed Virgin with the child in her arms which she kept in the house.

Mary repaid the honor offered her by this faithful little servant with many favors. One day, at the age of ten, Domenica was looking out of the window. She saw a beautiful woman and a small child in the street holding out their hands to beg for alms. Domenica went to get some bread. All of a sudden, without the door being opened, she saw them standing by her side and noticed that the child had wounds in his hands, his feet, and his side. So she asked the lady: “Who wounded this little child?” The mother answered: “It was love.” Touched by the beauty and

charm of the little boy, Domenica asked him whether the wounds hurt him at all. His only answer was a smile. As the three were standing near the statue of Jesus and Mary, the lady said to Domenica: “Tell me, child, why do you decorate these statues with flowers?” And Domenica replied: “Because of the love I have for Jesus and Mary.” “And how much is that?” “As much as they help me to love them.” “Continue to love them then,” added the lady, “for they will repay you in heaven.”

At this point, the young girl became aware of a beautiful fragrance issuing from the wounds of the child. She asked the mother what kind of ointment she used to dress the wounds and where it could be bought. The lady answered: “It can be bought with faith and good works.” Then Domenica offered her the bread; but the lady said: “Love is the food of my son: tell him that you love Jesus and you will make him happy.” When the child heard the word “love,” he began to beam with joy and, turning to Domenica, asked her how much she loved Jesus. She replied that she loved him very much, so much in fact that she thought of him always, day and night, and wished for nothing but to give him as much pleasure as she could. “Very well,” he replied, “keep on loving him, for love will teach you what to do to please him.” The sweet odor given off by the child’s wounds kept on increasing and caused Domenica to cry out: “O God, this fragrance will make me die of love! If the odor of this child is so sweet, what must the fragrance of heaven be?”

All of a sudden there was a change. The mother appeared clothed as a queen, and the child resplendent with the beauty of the sun. He took the flowers in front of the statue and placed them on Domenica’s head. At that point, Domenica recognized Jesus and Mary and fell to her knees before them.

Later, Domenica entered the Dominican Order and died in the odor of sanctity in the year 1553.

Prayer

O beloved Mother of God, most amiable child Mary! Just as you presented yourself in the Temple, and with promptitude and without reserve consecrated yourself to the glory and love of God, I wish I could offer you this day the

first years of my life, to devote myself without reserve to your service, most holy and most sweet Mary! But it is too late for this because I have lost so many years serving the world and my personal whims. I seem to have forgotten God and you altogether: "Woe to that time in which I did not love you!"[6] *But it is better to begin late than never. And so, Mary, I offer myself to you today, I devote myself to you entirely during the long or short time that still remains to me on earth. In union with you, I renounce all created things and dedicate myself entirely to the love of my Creator.*

I consecrate my mind to you, O Queen, and vow always to think of the love you deserve. I consecrate my tongue to praise you, and my heart to love you. O most Holy Virgin, accept the offering which I, a miserable sinner, now present to you. Accept it, I beg you, by the consolation that your heart felt when you gave yourself to God in the Temple. Since I am a latecomer to your service, it is only reasonable that I should redouble my acts of homage and love in order to make up for lost time.

Help my weakness, O Mother of Mercy, with your powerful intercession. Obtain for me from Jesus the strength and perseverance to remain faithful to you until death, so that having served you in life, I may praise you in paradise for all eternity. Amen.

4

SERMON 4:

MARY'S ANNUNCIATION

March 25



Mary could not have humbled herself more; God could not have exalted her more.

Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted (Mt 23:12). These are the Lord's words and they cannot be untrue. Therefore, when God determined to become man in order to redeem lost humankind and reveal his infinite goodness to the world in this way, and when it was necessary for him to choose a mother on earth, he looked for the woman who was the holiest and most humble of all. And among all the women in the world, there was only one on whom his eyes rested, namely the sweet Virgin Mary. She was already perfect in every virtue, but she considered herself as simple and lowly as a dove. *There are young maidens without number: one is my dove, my perfect one* (Cant 6:8). So God said: This one shall be my mother. Let us now see how great Mary's humility was, and to what heights God exalted her.

Mary could not have humbled herself more than she did in the Incarnation of the Word. This will be the first point. God could not have exalted Mary more than he did. This will be the second point.

First Point

Speaking of this humble Virgin's humility in the Canticles, the Holy Spirit says: *While the king was at his repose, my spikenard sent forth the odor thereof* (Cant 1:11). Commenting on this passage, Saint Antoninus says that because the spikenard is so small and lowly a plant, it was a figure of Mary's humility. Her fragrance rose to heaven and, so to speak,

awakened the Divine Word reposing in the bosom of his Father, and drew him into her virginal womb. The Lord, attracted by the fragrance of this humble Virgin, chose her for his mother when he wished to come and save the world.

Nevertheless, in order to give greater honor and merit to his future mother, God did not wish to become her son without previously obtaining her consent. The Abbot William says: "He would not take flesh from her unless she gave her consent."[7] So while this humble Virgin was in her poor little cottage—as was revealed to Saint Elizabeth of Hungary—praying and fervently beseeching God to send the Redeemer, behold, the Archangel Gabriel came as God's ambassador and brought her the tremendous message. He entered and greeted her with the sublime words: *Hail, full of grace; the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women* (Lk 1:28).

Hail, Virgin, full of grace, for you had always been richer in grace than all the other saints. The Lord is with you, because you are so humble. Blessed are you among women, because all other women have fallen under the curse of sin. But because you are the Mother of the Blessed One, you have been and always will be blessed and free from every stain.

But what does Mary in her humility answer to this greeting so full of praise? She makes no reply at all. Reflecting on the angel's words, she is disturbed by them: *When she had heard him she was troubled at his word, and kept pondering what kind of greeting this might be* (Lk 1:29). Why was she disturbed? Was she perhaps afraid of an illusion? Or was she disturbed at the sight of a man, for, according to some, the angel appeared to her in the form of a man. No, the text is clear: *She was troubled at his word.* "Not at his appearance, but at his words," observes Eusebius of Emesa. It was precisely because she was so humble that she was disturbed, because his praise was so far above her own opinion of herself. The more the angel praised her, the more she humbled herself. In this connection, Saint Bernardine remarks that if the angel had said that she was the greatest sinner in the world, Mary would not have been so surprised. But when she heard such high praise from him, she became quite disturbed. She was disturbed because, being thoroughly humble, she hated flattery and desired only that her Creator, the giver of all good

gifts, should be praised and blessed. Mary revealed this to Saint Bridget: "I did not wish to hear myself praised, but only to have my Creator, the giver of everything, praised."

The Blessed Virgin was already well aware from the sacred Scriptures that the time for the coming of the Messiah as foretold by the prophets had arrived; that the weeks of Daniel were completed; that the scepter of Judah had already passed into the hands of a strange king—Herod—as predicted by Jacob; and that a virgin was to be the mother of the Messiah. And now she hears the angel praising her in terms that seemed appropriate only for the mother of God. The thought perhaps occurred to her: could I be this chosen mother of God? But no, her humility would not have allowed such a thought to linger in her mind. The angel's praises only caused her to be afraid. "So much afraid," remarks Saint Peter Chrysologus, "that she had to be reassured by an angel in the same way that Christ was pleased to be comforted by one." Seeing Mary completely bewildered by his greeting, Gabriel was obliged to comfort her, saying: *Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found grace with God* (Lk 1:30). Do not be afraid, Mary, and do not be surprised by my greeting. For although you are small and lowly in your own eyes, God who exalts the humble has given you the grace that human beings have lost; he has preserved you from the stain common to the children of Adam. From the moment of your conception, he has honored you with a greater grace than that of all the saints. And he is now exalting you to the dignity of being his mother. *Behold, you shall conceive in your womb, and shall bring forth a Son: and you shall call his name Jesus* (Lk 1:31).

Mary hesitates. Why? "The angel waits for her reply," observes Saint Bernard, "and we too, O Mary, wait for your reply, for that word of mercy for miserable creatures on whom the sentence of condemnation weighs so heavily. Behold, the price of our salvation is being offered to you. We shall be freed at once if you will only consent." O Mother of us all, the price of our salvation is now being presented to you, namely that the Divine Word should become man in you. The moment you accept him for your son, we shall be delivered from death. "For with as much desire as the Lord desired your beauty, he now desires your consent so that he may save the world" (Saint Bernard). "Give your answer quickly, O sacred Virgin!" says Saint Augustine. "How can you delay giving life

to the world?"

And Mary at last gives her answer. She says to the angel: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to your word* (Lk 1:38). What more beautiful, more humble, or more prudent answer could men and angels together have devised in all their wisdom if they had thought about the matter for a million years? It was the answer that made all heaven rejoice and brought an immense sea of graces and blessings into the world! Scarcely had it fallen from her lips when the only-begotten Son of God was drawn from the bosom of the Eternal Father to become man in her most pure womb! Yes, Mary had no sooner uttered these words: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to your word,* when instantly *the Word was made flesh* (Jn 1:14). The Son of God became the son of Mary. "O powerful *Fiat!"* exclaims Saint Thomas of Villanova; "O efficacious *Fiat!* O *Fiat* to be venerated above all other *Fiats!* For with a *Fiat* God created light, heaven, earth; but with Mary's *Fiat,* God became man, like us."

But let us not wander from the point. Let us see the great humility of Mary in this answer. She was fully enlightened as to the greatness of the dignity of the mother of God. She had already been assured by the angel that she was this mother chosen by the Lord. Nevertheless, in spite of this, she does not rise in her own estimation, she does not stop to rejoice in her exaltation. Aware of her own nothingness on the one hand, and of the infinite majesty of God who chose her to be his mother on the other, she acknowledges herself to be unworthy of such a great honor; yet she has not the slightest wish to oppose his will. So, when she is asked for her consent, what does she do? What does she say? Wholly annihilated within herself, and yet at the same time inflamed by the desire to unite herself still more closely to God, abandoning herself completely to the divine will, she says: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord.* Behold the *slave* of the Lord, obliged to do whatever the Lord commands. It is as if she intended to say: Since God chooses for his mother one who has nothing of her own, and since all that I have I have received from him, who could ever think that he has chosen me because of my merits? *Behold the handmaid of the Lord.* How could a slave ever possibly merit to become the mother of her Lord? *Behold the handmaid of the Lord.* May the goodness of the Lord alone be praised, and not his slave, since it is due

to his goodness alone that he has cast his eyes on a creature as lowly as I am with a view to making her so great.

"Such humility!" exclaims the Abbot Guerric. "Amounting to nothing in her own eyes, yet great in the sight of the Godhead. Insufficient as far as she herself is concerned, yet sufficient for him whom the world cannot contain!" O great humility of Mary, which makes her little to herself, but great before God! Unworthy in her own eyes, but worthy in the eyes of that immense Lord whom the world cannot contain!

But the exclamation of Saint Bernard in this regard in his fourth sermon on the Assumption of Mary is even more beautiful. Admiring her humility, he says: "And how, O Mary, could you unite in your heart such a humble opinion of yourself with such great purity, such innocence, and such a fullness of grace as you possess?" "And how, O Blessed Virgin," continues the saint, "did this humility, this great humility, ever take such deep root in your heart, when you saw yourself so honored and exalted by God?"

When Lucifer saw himself endowed with such great beauty, he desired to exalt his throne above the stars and make himself like God: *I will exalt my throne above the stars of God … I will be like the Most High* (Isa 14:13). What would that proud spirit have said and what would he have aspired to, if he had found himself adorned with the gifts of Mary! But Mary had no aspirations to glory. The higher she saw herself raised, the more she humbled herself. O Mary, concludes Saint Bernard, because of your beautiful humility you made yourself worthy to have God look upon you with the most unusual love; worthy to captivate your King by your beauty; worthy to draw by the sweet odor of your humility the Eternal Son from his repose, from the bosom of God, into your most pure womb.

Bernardine de Bustis was right in saying: "Mary merited more by her humble reply, *Behold the handmaid of the Lord*, than all pure creatures could merit by all their good works." And Saint Bernard says that while this innocent Virgin made herself dear to God by her virginity, it was by her humility that she made herself worthy—as far as a creature can be worthy—of becoming the mother of her Creator. "Although she pleased by her virginity, she conceived by her humility."

Saint Jerome confirms this, saying that "God chose her for his mother more on account of her humility than because of all her other sublime virtues." Mary herself, in fact, assured Saint Bridget of this when she said: "How was it that I merited the great grace of becoming the mother of my Lord except that I was aware of my nothingness and that I possessed nothing, and so humbled myself?" She had already declared this in her humble canticle, the *Magnificat*, when she said: *Because he has regarded the humility of his handmaid … He that is mighty has done great things to me* (Lk 1:48, 49). With regard to these words, Saint Lawrence Giustiniani observes that the Blessed Virgin "did not say that he had regarded her virginity, or her innocence, but only her humility." Saint Francis de Sales notes that, by mentioning humility, the Blessed Virgin did not intend to praise the virtue of her own humility, but to declare that God had looked with favor upon her nothingness—"for humility means nothingness"—and that because of his pure goodness he had been pleased to exalt her as he did.

Saint Augustine's comment is that Mary's humility was the ladder by which Our Lord was pleased to come down from heaven to earth in order to become man. Saint Antoninus confirms this when he says that the humility of Mary was her most perfect virtue, and the one that immediately prepared her to become the mother of the Savior. "The ultimate grace of perfection is preparation for the conception of the Son of God, a preparation brought about by profound humility." This is the meaning of the prophecy of Isaiah: *And there shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of his root* (Isa 11:1).

Saint Albert the Great, reflecting on these words, declares that the flower, the only-begotten Son of God, was to be born not from the summit and not from the trunk of the tree of Jesse, but from the root to denote the humility of his mother: "By the root is understood humility of heart." The Abbot of Celles is even more explicit when he says: "Notice that the flower rises not from the summit but from the root." It is for this reason that God said to his beloved daughter: *Turn away your eyes from me, for they have made me flee away* (Cant 6:4). Saint Augustine asks: "Where have they made me flee from, unless it is from the bosom of the Eternal Father into the womb of the Virgin Mother?"[8]

Along the same lines, the learned scriptural commentator Fernandez

says that the humble eyes of Mary which she kept always fixed on the divine greatness had such a powerful effect on God himself that they drew him into her womb: “Her humble eyes kept God captive in such a way that the Blessed Virgin drew the Word himself of God the Father into her womb by a kind of sweet violence.” This explains, says the Abbot Franco, why the Holy Spirit praised his Spouse so greatly for having the eyes of a dove: *How beautiful are you, my love! How beautiful are you! Your eyes are dove’s eyes* (Cant 4:1). For Mary, looking at God with the eyes of a simple and humble dove, so attracted him by her beauty that she made him a prisoner in her chaste womb by bonds of love. The Abbot goes on to say: “Where in the whole world could so beautiful a virgin be found who could capture the King of heaven by her eyes, and lead him captive by a kind of holy violence, bound by chains of love?”

To conclude this point, let us repeat what we said at the beginning: Mary could not have humbled herself more than she did in the Incarnation of the Word. Let us now see how God, by making her his mother, could not have exalted her more than he did.

Second Point

One cannot understand the greatness to which Mary was exalted without first understanding the sublimity and greatness of God. It is sufficient, then, to say simply that God made this Blessed Virgin his mother to understand that God could not have exalted her more than he did.

Arnold of Chartres was right in asserting that, by becoming her son, “God raised Mary to a height above all the saints and angels.” As Saint Ephrem puts it: “Her glory is incomparably greater than that of all the heavenly spirits.” This is confirmed by Saint Andrew of Crete who says: “She is higher than everyone but God.” Saint Anselm says: “No one is equal to you, O Mary, for all others are either above you or beneath you: God alone is above you, and everyone that is not God is inferior to you.”[9] In short, says Saint Bernardine: “The greatness and dignity of this Blessed Virgin are so great that God alone does, and can, understand it.”

This consideration is sufficient to remove the perplexity, remarks

Saint Thomas of Villanova, which anyone may feel when he realizes that the four Evangelists have so much to say in praise of John the Baptist and Mary Magdalen, but have so very little to say about the gifts of Mary: "It was sufficient to say of her: *Of whom was born Jesus."* "What more could we wish the Evangelists to have said about the greatness of Mary?" continues the saint. "Is it not enough that they declare that she was the Mother of God? In these few words they described the greatest and most precious of her gifts. It was not necessary for them to enter into details." And why? Saint Anselm replies, "When we speak of Mary as the Mother of God, we affirm that her greatness transcends everyone and everything that can be mentioned or thought of after God." On the same subject Peter of Celles adds: "Address her as Queen of heaven, Mistress of angels, or any other title of honor you may please, you can never honor her as much as by calling her the Mother of God."

The reason for this is obvious. As the Angelic Doctor teaches, the nearer a thing approaches its maker or source, the greater the perfection it receives from that source. Therefore Mary, as the creature nearest to God, partakes of his grace, perfection, and greatness more than all other creatures. "The Blessed Virgin Mary was as close to Christ as it was possible to be, for it was from her that he received his human nature. And therefore she must have obtained from him a greater fullness of grace than all other creatures did."

Father Suarez deduces from this the reason why "the dignity of the Mother of God is above every other created dignity." He says: "It belongs in a certain way to the order of hypostatic union; it pertains to it intrinsically, and has a necessary connection with it." Denis the Carthusian maintains that "with the exception of the hypostatic union, no union is more intimate than that of the mother of God with her son." According to the teaching of Saint Thomas, this is the highest type of union that a creature can have with God: "It is a quasi-supreme union with an infinite person." Saint Albert the Great also asserts that "to be the mother of God is the highest dignity after that of being God." And he adds: "Mary could not have been more closely united to God than she was without becoming God."

Saint Bernardine says that for Mary to become the mother of God, it was necessary for her to be raised to a kind of equality with the Divine

Persons by an almost infinite amount of grace. And as children are, morally speaking, regarded as one with their parents so that children and parents share the same prestige and privileges, it follows, says Saint Peter Damian, that God who dwells in creatures in different ways dwelt in Mary in a very special way. He was in fact in a unique way identified with her, making himself one and the same being with her. “The fourth manner in which God is in a creature,” he says, “is by identification, and this is the way he is in the Blessed Virgin.” Then he utters those daring words: “Therefore let every creature be silent and tremble, and scarcely dare glance at the immensity of this great dignity. God dwells in the Blessed Virgin and has become, as far as his human nature is concerned, one with her.”

That is why Saint Thomas asserts that when Mary became the mother of God, by virtue of her very close union with an infinite good she received a certain infinite dignity, which Father Suarez calls “infinite in its own way.” The dignity of being the mother of God is the greatest dignity that can be given to any mere creature. The Angelic Doctor explains it this way. First of all, he says: “The humanity of Christ could have received even greater habitual grace from God—since grace is a created gift and therefore finite in its essence. All creatures have a determined measure of capacity; therefore, it is in God’s power to make another creature whose determined capacity is greater.” However, inasmuch as Christ’s humanity was destined for union with a Divine Person, it could not have received anything greater. He sums up this thought in another place by saying: “Though the divine power could create something greater and better than the habitual grace of Christ, nevertheless, it could not destine it to anything greater than personal union with the only-begotten Son of the Father.” By the same token, he goes on, the Blessed Virgin could not have been raised to any dignity greater than that of mother of God. “The Blessed Virgin, by reason of the fact that she is the mother of God, has a certain infinite dignity drawn from the infinite goodness which is God. In this respect, then, she could not have been made greater.” Saint Thomas of Villanova says the same thing: “There is something infinite in being the mother of him who is infinite.” Saint Bernardine also says that “the state to which God exalted Mary in making her the mother of God was the highest that could be

conferred on a creature; he could not have exalted her more." And this opinion is confirmed by Saint Albert the Great who says: "In making Mary the mother of God, he conferred upon her the greatest gift of which a pure creature is capable."

Hence the celebrated saying of Saint Bonaventure that "to be the mother of God is the greatest grace that can be conferred on a creature. It is so great, in fact, that God cannot create a greater. He could make a greater world, a greater heaven, but he cannot exalt a creature more than by making her his mother." But no one has so well expressed the greatness of this dignity than Mary herself when she said: *He that is mighty has done great things in me* (Lk 1:49). Now why did the Blessed Virgin not make known the wonderful things that God had conferred on her? Saint Thomas of Villanova replies that Mary did not explain what they were because they could not be expressed: "She did not explain them, because they were unexplainable."

For this reason, Saint Bernard was right in declaring that God created the whole world for the Blessed Virgin who was destined to be his mother. And Saint Bonaventure was right in saying that its existence depends on her will: "The world, O most holy Virgin, which you with God formed from the beginning, continues to exist at your will." This thought is suggested to the saint by the words of Proverbs which the Church applies to Mary: *I was with him forming all things* (Prov 8:30). Saint Bernardine of Siena adds that it was because of love for Mary that God did not destroy man after Adam's sin. "He preserved man on account of his unique love for the Blessed Virgin."

Holy Church with reason sings of Mary: *She has chosen the best part.* She not only chose the best things, but the best part of them. As Saint Albert the Great says: "The Blessed Virgin was full of grace because God endowed her in the highest degree with all the general and special graces which other creatures have."

Thus Mary was a child, but of the state of childhood she possessed only the innocence and not the incapacity, for from the first moment of her existence she always had the perfect use of reason. She was a virgin, but without the reproach of sterility. She was a mother, but at the same time was gifted with the precious treasure of virginity. She was beautiful, most beautiful, as Richard of Saint Victor, Saint George of

Nicomedia, and Saint Denis the Areopagite assert—the latter of whom, it is believed, was once fortunate enough to behold her beauty in a vision and declared that if faith had not taught him that she was only a creature, he would have adored her as God.

Our Lord revealed to Saint Bridget that the beauty of Mary is more beautiful than that of all men and angels. Permitting the saint to hear him addressing Mary, he said: "Your beauty is greater than that of all the angels and all created things." In other words, she was superlatively beautiful. But her beauty was not a harmful beauty. It did not arouse impure thoughts, but on the contrary inspired pure ones, as Saint Ambrose asserts: "Her grace was so great that it not only preserved her virginity but conferred the admirable gift of purity on those who saw her." Saint Thomas confirms this when he says: "Sanctifying grace not only repressed every unlawful suggestion in the Blessed Virgin herself, but was also efficacious in doing the same for others; so that in spite of the greatness of her beauty she was never carnally desired by others."

That is why she was called myrrh, which prevents corruption, in the words of Ecclesiasticus which are applied to her by the Church: *I yielded a sweet odor like the best myrrh* (Ecclus 24:20). Her union with God was not interrupted by her daily activity. She was wrapped up in him in contemplation, but not so much as to cause her to neglect her material duties or the charity due her neighbor. She was destined to die, but her death was not accompanied by the usual sorrow, nor was it followed by the usual corruption of the body.

In conclusion, then, we repeat that the Blessed Mother is infinitely inferior to God, but immensely superior to all other creatures. And just as it is impossible to find a son more wonderful than Jesus, so it is impossible to find a mother more wonderful than Mary.

This reflection should cause us not only to rejoice in her greatness, but also to increase our confidence in her most powerful intercession. Father Suarez says: "As Mother of God, she has a certain peculiar right to the gifts of her Son," and can procure them for those for whom she prays. Saint Germanus goes further and says that God cannot help granting the petitions of this mother, because he cannot help acknowledging her as his true and immaculate mother. This is the way the saint addresses the Blessed Virgin: "By virtue of your maternal

authority you have great power with God and you can obtain the grace of reconciliation even for those who have sinned very much. It is impossible for you not to be heard graciously; for God acts toward you and recognizes you in all things as his true and immaculate mother."

Therefore, O Mother of God and mother of us all, you do not lack the power to help us. "Neither the power nor the will is lacking to her," says Saint Bernard. And I will say, using the words of the Abbot of Celles, that "you are well aware God did not create you for himself alone, but that he gave you to the angels as their restorer, to men as their repairer, and to the devils as their vanquisher. It is through you that we recover divine grace, and by you that the enemy is conquered and crushed."

If we really want to please our Blessed Lady, let us greet her often with the words of the *Hail Mary*. She once appeared to Saint Mechtilde and assured her that no one could honor her more than by repeating that prayer. If we do this we shall certainly obtain very special graces from the Mother of Mercy, as the following example shows.

Example

The event recorded by Father Paul Segneri in his *Christian Instructed* is well known. There was a young man in Rome who was burdened with sins of impurity and was a victim of vicious habits. He went to Father Nicholas Zucchi to confession. The confessor received him kindly and assured him that devotion to Mary could deliver him from the miserable habits to which he was addicted. He therefore imposed this penance on him: to say a *Hail Mary* to the Blessed Virgin every morning on rising and every evening on going to bed until his next confession. While doing that he was to offer Mary his eyes, his hands, and his whole body, begging her to preserve them as something belonging to herself; and he must kiss the ground three times. The young man performed the penance, but at first there was only a slight improvement. The confessor continued to impose the same penance, and encouraged him to increase his confidence in the intercession of Mary.

In the course of time, the penitent left Rome with some companions and toured the world for several years. On his return, he again sought

out his confessor who, to his great joy and admiration, found that the young man was entirely changed and free from his former evil habits. "My son," he said, "how did God bring about this wonderful change in you?" The youth replied: "Father, our Blessed Mother obtained this great grace for me because of that little devotion you taught me."

But that is not all. With the penitent's permission, the same confessor told the story in one of his sermons. A captain who for many years had carried on an improper relationship with a certain woman heard it. He resolved to practice the same devotion in the hope that he would be delivered from the horrible chains which bound him a slave to the devil. He too gave up his wicked ways and changed his life.

But there is still more. After six months, foolishly relying too much on his own strength, the captain went to pay a visit to the woman to see if she also had been converted. But when he came up to the door, where he was in obvious danger of relapsing into sin, an invisible power drove him back and he found himself a whole block away from the house—in fact, in front of his own door. He then clearly understood that Mary had delivered him from danger. This example shows us how solicitous our good Mother is, not only to draw us away from a state of sin if we appeal to her with this good purpose in mind, but also to deliver us from the danger of falling back into sin.

Prayer

O holy and immaculate Virgin! O creature most exalted and most humble! You were so lowly in your own eyes, but so great in the eyes of the Lord that he exalted you and chose you for his mother, and then made you queen of heaven and earth.

I thank God therefore for having honored you so greatly, and I rejoice in seeing you so closely united to him that no other creature can ever be your equal. Proud as I am in the midst of my many sins, I am ashamed to appear before you who are so humble yet endowed with such great gifts. But miserable as I am, I will nevertheless greet you with the words: Hail Mary, full of grace. You are already full of grace; grant a portion of that grace to me.

The Lord is with you. That Lord who was always with you from the very first moment of your creation has now united himself more closely to you by becoming your son.

Blessed are you among women. O Mary, blessed among all women, obtain divine blessing for us also.

And blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. O blessed plant which has given the world such a noble and holy fruit!

Holy Mary, Mother of God. O Mary, I acknowledge that you are the true Mother of God, and to defend this truth I am willing to lay down my life a thousand times.

Pray for us sinners. Even though you are the Mother of God, you are also the mother of our salvation and of us poor sinners. God became man to save sinners, and made you his mother so that your prayers might be powerful enough to save any sinner.

Hasten, then, O Mary, and pray for us, now, and at the hour of our death. Pray always! Pray now when we live in the midst of so many temptations and dangers of losing God; but still more, pray for us at the hour of our death, when we are about to leave this world and appear before God's tribunal; so that, being saved by the merits of Jesus Christ and by your intercession, we may come one day without fear of being lost to greet and praise you with your Son in heaven for all eternity. Amen.

5

SERMON 5:

MARY'S VISITATION

May 31



Whoever desires graces must go to Mary; whoever goes to Mary is sure to obtain what he desires.

A home that has been visited by some well-known personage is considered fortunate, both because of the honor such a visit brings it and because of the advantages that may be expected to follow. But still more fortunate is the soul that is visited by the queen of the world, the most holy Virgin Mary, for Mary cannot help filling that soul with grace and virtue.

The house of Obededom was blessed when the ark of God visited it; *And the Lord blessed his house* (Par 13:14). But those persons who receive a loving visit from the living ark of God, Mary, are enriched with much greater blessings. "Happy is the house which the mother of God visits," says Engelgrave.

Take, for example, the home of Saint John the Baptist. As soon as Mary entered it, she heaped graces and blessings on the entire family. That is why the feast of the Visitation is frequently called the feast of "Our Lady of Graces."

We shall endeavor to show that the mother of God is the treasurer of all graces. The subject will be divided into two parts. In the first we shall show that everyone who desires graces must have recourse to Mary. In the second, that a person who has recourse to Mary should be confident of receiving the graces he asks for.

First Point

When the Blessed Virgin heard from the Archangel Gabriel that her cousin Saint Elizabeth was six months pregnant, she was inwardly enlightened by the Holy Spirit, and understood that the Incarnate Word who had become her son wished to manifest the riches of his mercy to the world by imparting the very first graces to all the members of that family. So without any delay, according to Saint Luke, *Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country* (Lk 1:39).

Rising from the quiet of contemplation and leaving the solitude she loved, she immediately set out for the home of Saint Elizabeth. And because *charity bears all things* (1 Cor 13:7) and cannot brook any delay, without a thought for the arduousness of the journey, this tender and delicate Virgin set out immediately.

On reaching the house, she greeted her cousin: *And she entered the house of Zachary and saluted Elizabeth* (Lk 1:40). Saint Ambrose notes that it was Mary who greeted her cousin first. The visit of Mary, however, bore no resemblance to those worldly visits which often are no more than mere show or a display of empty courtesies. Mary's visit brought the family an increase of graces. As soon as she entered and greeted her cousin, Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and Saint John was delivered from original sin and sanctified. As a sign of his joy and an indication of the grace that he had received through the Blessed Virgin, he leaped in his mother's womb. Saint Elizabeth herself attests to this: *The moment that the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leapt for joy* (Lk 1:44). Bernardine de Bustis too remarks that it was by Mary's salutation that John received the grace of the Divine Spirit which sanctified him: "When the Blessed Virgin greeted Elizabeth, the sound of her words entering her cousin's ears descended to the child, and by virtue of them he received the Holy Spirit."

It is clear then that these first fruits of the Redemption all passed through Mary as through a channel, namely grace to the Baptist, the Holy Spirit to Elizabeth, the gift of prophecy to Zachary, and many other blessings to the whole household. These are the first graces, to our knowledge, that the Eternal Word granted on earth after his Incarnation. It is perfectly reasonable to hold, therefore, that God henceforth made Mary the universal channel, as Saint Bernard calls her, through which all other graces would pass to us. We have already dealt with this point in

the fifth chapter of the first part of our work.

It is quite right therefore to call Mary the treasury, the treasurer, and the dispenser of divine graces. That is what the venerable Abbot of Celles calls her: “The treasury of God, the treasurer of graces.” Saint Peter Damian calls her “the treasury of divine graces”; Saint Albert the Great, “the treasurer of Jesus Christ”; Saint Bernardine, “the dispenser of graces”; a learned Greek quoted by Petavius, “the storehouse of all good things.” Saint Gregory Thaumaturgus observes that Mary is said to be full of grace because “the whole treasury of graces was hidden in her.” Richard of Saint Lawrence declares that Mary is a treasury because God has placed all gifts of graces in her as in a vault from which he dispenses mercies and favors to all his servants.

Saint Bonaventure speaks of the field in the Gospel in which a treasure is hidden and which should be purchased no matter how great the price: *The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field; he who finds it hides it, and in his joy goes and sells all that he has and buys that field* (Mt 13:44). He says that this field is Mary, in which is hidden Jesus Christ, the treasure of God the Father, and in him the source and fountain of all graces. Saint Bernard declares that the Lord “has deposited the fullness of all graces in Mary so that we may know that if we have any hope, any grace, or anything salutary, we have all this from her.” Mary herself assures us of this when she says: *In me is all grace of the way and of the truth* (Ecclus 24:25). That is, in me are to be found all the graces and blessings which you human beings are capable of desiring in your lives.

Yes, sweet mother and our hope, we are convinced, says Saint Peter Damian, “that all the treasures of divine mercy are in your hands.” Before Saint Peter Damian, Saint Ildephonsus asserted the same thing even more forcefully. Speaking to the Blessed Virgin, he said: “O Mary, all the blessings God has determined to grant to men he has determined to grant through your hands; that is why he has committed to you all the treasures of grace.” Saint Germanus also maintains that no grace is dispensed to anyone except through the hands of Mary: “No one is saved, except through you; no one receives a gift from God, except through you.”

Saint Albert the Great beautifully paraphrases the words of the angel

to the Blessed Virgin: *Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found grace with God* (Lk 1:30), by saying: “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found, not stolen, grace, as Lucifer tried to do. You have not lost it, as Adam did. You have not bought it, as Simon Magus tried to do. But you have found it, because you desired it and looked for it. You have found uncreated grace”—that is, God himself who became your son—“and with it you have found every created good.” Saint Peter Chrysologus confirms this thought when he says: “This great Virgin and Mother found enough grace to restore salvation to all men.” Elsewhere he repeats this thought and says that Mary found a grace so plenteous that it was enough to save everybody: “You have found grace, but how much? More than enough for yourself and enough to rain down on every creature like a downpour. Richard of Saint Lawrence makes this comparison: “God made the sun so that it might diffuse its light throughout the whole world; he made Mary so that she might dispense all divine mercies to the world.” Saint Bernardine adds: “From the time that the Virgin Mother conceived the Divine Word in her womb, she obtained a kind of jurisdiction, so to speak, over all the temporal manifestations of the Holy Spirit; to this extent, that no creature can obtain any grace from God unless it is dispensed by this tender and compassionate Mother.”

We may conclude this point with the words of Richard of Saint Lawrence who says: “If we wish to obtain any grace we must have recourse to Mary, the finder of grace. She cannot help obtaining everything that she asks for her servants.” He borrowed this thought from Saint Bernard who said: “Let us seek grace and let us seek it through Mary; for whatever she asks for she obtains, and she cannot be thwarted.”

It follows that if we desire grace, we must obviously go to this treasurer and dispenser of graces. This is the will of God, the giver of all good gifts. Saint Bernard asserts this categorically when he says: “For this is the will of him who is pleased that we should have everything through Mary.” Note the word “everything.” When we say “everything,” we exclude nothing.

But because confidence is necessary to obtain graces, let us now consider how confident we ought to be when we appeal to Mary.

Second Point

Why did Jesus deposit all the riches of his mercy in the hands of his mother unless it was that she could dispense them to all her servants who love and honor her and appeal to her with confidence? *With me are riches … that I may enrich them that love me* (Prov 8:18, 21). The Church applies this passage to the Blessed Virgin on so many of her feasts precisely to assure us of this. The riches of eternal life are kept by Mary, as the Abbot Adam says, for no other purpose than to be of use to us. In her bosom Our Lord deposited a treasury for the poor so that they may be provided for and become rich: "The riches of salvation are in the custody of the Blessed Virgin for our use. Christ has made Mary's womb the treasury of the poor, from which the poor are enriched." And Saint Bernard says in his famous passage: "She was given to the world for this purpose, to be a full aqueduct, so that heavenly gifts may flow from God through her to all men."

The same lover of Mary goes on to ask: "Why did Saint Gabriel, when he found the Blessed Mother already full of grace—*Hail, full of grace*—afterwards say that the Holy Spirit would come upon her and fill her still more with grace? If she was already full of grace, what more could the Holy Spirit do by coming to her?" His answer is: "Mary was indeed already full of grace, but the Holy Spirit filled her to overflowing for our benefit, in order that we sinners might be provided for from her superabundance." And this is why Mary was called the moon. Of the latter it is commonly said: "The moon is full for itself and for others."

He that shall find me shall find life, and shall have salvation from the Lord (Prov 8:35). Blessed is he who finds me by having recourse to me, the Blessed Mother says. He will find life and will find it easily. Just as it is easy to find and to draw as much water as we wish from a large well, so it is easy to find grace and eternal salvation by appealing to Mary. A holy soul once said: "All we have to do is ask Mary for graces and we receive them."[10] Saint Bernard explains that "it was because the Blessed Virgin was not yet born that in ancient times the great abundance of grace which we now see flowing in the world was then lacking: for Mary, the desired channel of grace, did not yet exist."

But now that we have this Mother of mercy, there is no grace that we

need to be afraid to ask for as we kneel at her feet. “I am a city of refuge”—Saint John Damascene has her say—“for all those who appeal to me. Come to me, all my children, for from me you will receive more abundant graces than you have ever imagined.”

What the Venerable Sister Mary Villani saw in a vision has actually been the experience of many people. The servant of God saw the Blessed Mother as a huge fountain to which many came to draw off the waters of grace. But what happened then? Those who had sound jars preserved these graces. Those who brought broken vessels (that is, those whose souls languished in sin) received graces, to be sure, but did not keep them very long. The point is that all kinds of people, even ungrateful sinners, daily receive innumerable graces from Mary. Saint Augustine, speaking to Mary, says: “Through you the abandoned obtain mercy, the fallen, grace; sinners, pardon; the weak, strength; the worldly, heavenly things; mortals, life; and exiles, a fatherland.”

Let us therefore, O devout servants of Mary, have more and more confidence in her each time that we appeal to her for graces. Let us always remember her two great prerogatives: her desire to do us good, and the power she has with her son to obtain whatever she asks for.

To be convinced of Mary’s desire to help everybody, we have only to reflect on the mystery of this feast of the Visitation, that is, Mary’s visit to Saint Elizabeth. The journey from Nazareth where the Blessed Virgin lived to the city of Hebron, which Saint Luke calls a city of Judea, and in which according to Baronlus and other authors Saint Elizabeth resided, was sixty-nine miles. This we learn from Brother Joseph of Jesus Mary, the author of the life of the Blessed Virgin, from Saint Bede, and Brocardus.[11] Nevertheless, in spite of the difficulties of such a journey, the Blessed Virgin, delicate as she was, did not hesitate to set out. What made her do so? She was impelled by that great charity with which her loving heart was always filled to go and begin at once her office of Dispenser of Graces.

This is how Saint Ambrose puts it: “She did not go as one skeptical about what she had been told, but as one who gladly fulfills a duty. It was joy that caused her to hasten in fulfillment of her unique responsibility.” The saint meant: She did not go in order to find out if what the angel had told her about the pregnancy of Elizabeth was true

or not. She hastened because she was happy to be able to help her cousin. She hastened because of the joy she felt in being able to do good to others. Having no thought except for those she loved, *Mary arose and went with haste*. Note here that when the Evangelist speaks of Mary's departure for the house of Elizabeth, he says that she went *with haste*. But when he speaks of her return, he makes no mention of haste, but simply says: *Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her own house* (Lk 1:56). What else could the Mother of God have had in mind, asks Saint Bonaventure, when she hastened to visit the house of Saint John the Baptist, except a desire to be of service to the family? "What else impelled her to hasten in performing that act of charity but the charity which glowed in her heart?"

Mary certainly did not stop being charitable to human beings when she went to heaven. On the contrary, she is more charitable now, for she is in a better position now to know our wants and to compassionate our miseries. Bernardine de Bustis writes: "Mary is more eager to do us good and to grant us graces than we are to receive them." She desires so much to do so, as a matter of fact, that according to Saint Bonaventure she considers herself offended by those who do not ask her for graces: "It is not only those who injure you who offend you, O Mary, but also those who neglect to ask for favors." It is part of Mary's nature to desire to enrich everybody with graces, and she does, in fact, superabundantly enrich her servants, as Blessed Raymond Jordano testifies: "Mary is God's treasury and the treasurer of his graces. She dispenses these gifts generously to those who serve her."

The same author also says: "He who finds Mary finds everything that is good." And he adds: "Her kindness is so great that no one need be afraid to approach her. And her mercy is so great that no one will be repulsed." Thomas à Kempis has her say: "I invite everybody to appeal to me; I await all, I desire all, and I never repel any sinner who comes to seek my help no matter how unworthy he may be." Richard of Saint Lawrence says that whoever goes to ask for graces from Mary "finds her always prepared to help"; that is to say, ready and eager to obtain every grace of eternal salvation by her powerful prayers.

I say, by her powerful prayers. This is another reflection that should increase our confidence. We know with certitude that Mary obtains from

God everything that she asks for her servants. Saint Bonaventure tells us to observe, especially with regard to this visit of Mary to Elizabeth, the great power of her words. As the Evangelist says, at the sound of her voice the grace of the Holy Spirit was conferred on Saint Elizabeth and on her son, Saint John the Baptist: *And it came to pass, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe in her womb leapt. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit* (Lk 1:41). Saint Bonaventure adds: "See how great the power of Mary's words is: She has no sooner uttered them than the Holy Spirit is imparted."

Theophilus of Alexandria tells us that Jesus is very much pleased whenever Mary intercedes with him for us. "Yielding, as it were, to the prayers of Mary, he considers all the graces which he gives us as granted not so much to us, as to his Blessed Mother." Notice the words "Yielding, as it were, to the prayers of Mary." Saint Germanus testifies that Jesus cannot do otherwise than graciously acquiesce to Mary's wishes, desiring as he does to obey her as his true mother. Therefore the saint says: "The prayers of this mother have a certain authority over Christ because by means of them she obtains pardon for even the most hardened sinners who recommend themselves to her." And he concludes: "It is not possible for you not to be heard, for in all things God acts toward you as his true and spotless mother."

This is fully confirmed, observes Saint John Chrysostom, by what took place at the marriage feast of Cana when Mary asked her son to replenish the wine which had given out: *They have no wine*. Jesus answered: *What would you have me do, woman? My hour has not yet come* (Jn 2:34). Both Chrysostom and Theophylact explain that the time for miracles had not yet come. Yet, as the former stresses, "the Savior, in spite of this answer, and in order to obey his mother, performed the miracle that she asked for by converting the water into wine."

Let us therefore with confidence go to the throne of grace, the Apostle exhorts us, *that we may obtain mercy, and find grace in seasonable aid* (Heb 4:16). "The throne of grace is the Blessed Virgin," says Saint Albert the Great. So if we want graces, let us go to the throne of grace, which is Mary. Let us go with the conviction that we shall be heard. For Mary will intercede for us and she will obtain from her son whatever she asks. "Let us ask for grace," I repeat with Saint Bernard, "and let us ask for it

through Mary," trusting in what the Blessed Virgin herself told Saint Mechtilde, namely, that the Holy Spirit, in filling her with all his sweetness, has made her so dear to God that anyone who asks for graces through her intercession is certain of obtaining them.

And if we place any credit in that celebrated saying of Saint Anselm, that "salvation is sometimes more easily obtained by calling on the name of Mary than by invoking that of Jesus," we may safely feel that sometimes we will obtain graces sooner by appealing to Mary than by appealing directly to our Blessed Savior—not because he is not the source and Lord of all graces, but because when we appeal to Mary and she prays for us, her prayers, being those of a mother, are more efficacious than ours. Let us then never stray away from this treasurer of graces; let us always address her in the words of Saint John Damascene: "O Blessed Mother of God, open the gate of mercy to us, for you are the salvation of the human race." O Mother of God, open the door of your compassion to us by always praying for us; your prayers are the salvation of all humankind!

When we appeal to Mary, it would be wise always to ask her to obtain those graces which she knows we need most. This is what the Dominican, Fra Reginald, did, as the chronicles of his Order tell us. This servant of Mary once became ill and he asked her to restore his health. Mary appeared to him in the company of Saint Cecilia and Saint Catherine, and said with great tenderness: "My son, what do you want me to do?" The good religious was confused by such a gracious offer on the part of Our Lady and did not know what to reply. Then one of the saints gave him this advice: "Reginald, I will tell you what to do. Ask for nothing, but place yourself entirely in her hands, for Mary is prepared to grant you greater graces than you can ever imagine." The sick man followed this advice and Our Lady secured the restoration of his health.[12]

If we also desire to receive these happy visits from the queen of heaven, we should often visit her by praying before her image or in churches dedicated to her. Read the following example, and see what special favors she gives to those who visit her devotedly.

Example

The Franciscan Chronicles tell about two monks of the Order who went to visit a shrine of Our Blessed Lady and happened to find themselves in a dense forest when night fell. They were worried and disturbed and did not know what to do. However, they went a little farther until, dark as it was, they thought they saw a house ahead. When they reached the door, they knocked. A voice inside asked them who they were. They replied that they were monks who had lost their way in the woods and were now looking for shelter, at least as protection from the wolves that roamed the forest. The door opened, and they saw before them two extremely courteous servants who welcomed them with great kindness. The monks asked the servants who lived in the house and their answer was that it was a very good and hospitable lady. “We would like to pay her our respects,” they said, “and thank her for her charity.” “We are taking you to her,” they said; “she wants to talk to you.”

As they walked up the stairs they noticed some richly decorated rooms and an unusually fragrant odor. Finally, they entered the apartment occupied by the lady of the house and saw before them a woman who was both sad and very beautiful. She received them with great kindness and asked them where they were going. The monks replied that they were on their way to visit a certain shrine of the Blessed Virgin. “Since that is the case,” said the lady, “I shall give you a letter that will be of great help to you.” While the lady was speaking to them, the monks experienced an inexplicable sense of joy and were very grateful to God for his kind protection. They then went to bed.

The next morning they rose and went to bid good-bye to the lady of the house, to thank her for her hospitality and to receive the letter she had promised. On receiving it, they took their departure. Only a short way from the house, however, they noticed that the letter bore no address. Turning this way and that, they tried to find the house, but it was no longer there. Finally, they opened the letter to see to whom it was addressed and what it said. Then they realized that it was from the Blessed Virgin, who was the lady in the house. In return for their devotion, Mary had provided them with shelter and nourishment in the forest, so that they would continue to serve and love her. And they felt

confident she would continue to protect them always.

At the bottom of the letter they saw her signature in the words: "I, the Blessed Virgin Mary." It is not difficult to imagine how thankful these two monks were to our Blessed Lady and how much they were inflamed with love for her and a desire to serve her the rest of their lives.

Prayer

O Blessed Immaculate Virgin, since you are the dispenser of all divine graces, you are the hope of humankind and my only hope. I will always thank you for having granted me the grace of knowing you, and for having shown me the means by which I can obtain grace and be saved. You are the means, O great Mother of God, for I now realize that it is principally through the merits of Jesus Christ, and then by your intercession, that my soul must be saved.

O my Queen, you hastened so in paying that visit to sanctify the home of Saint Elizabeth. I implore you, therefore, visit me, visit the poor home of my soul. Hurry, for you know very well, much better than I do, how poor it is and how weak from many diseases: from disordered affections, vicious habits, and numberless sins—all of which will lead it to eternal death. You can enrich it, O treasurer of God, and you can heal all those infirmities.

Visit me, visit me while I live, and especially when I am about to die, for then I shall need your help more than ever. I do not expect, and in fact I am not worthy, that you should visit me on earth by appearing to me as you have appeared to so many of your other servants. But they were not unworthy and ungrateful as I am. I shall be satisfied to see you in your kingdom of heaven, to be able to love you there, and to thank you for all you have done for me. I shall be happy now if you visit me with your mercy. Your prayers are all that I ask.

Pray then for me, O Mary, and commend me to your son. You know much better than I how miserable I am and what I need most. What more can I say? Have pity on me! I am so wretched and ignorant that I do not know what graces I need most, nor how to ask for them. My sweet queen and mother, I beg you to seek and obtain for me from your son the graces that you know are the most expedient and necessary for my soul. I abandon

myself entirely into your hands, and only beg the Divine Majesty that by the merits of my Savior Jesus he will grant me the graces which you ask him for me.

Ask, therefore, O most Holy Virgin, ask for what is best for me. Your prayers are never rejected, for they are the prayers of a mother addressed to her son who loves her so much that he is pleased to do everything she asks. He does this in order to honor her all the more, and to prove the great love he has for her.

Let us make a bargain, O Mary. As long as I live I will have confidence in you, if you will guarantee my eternal salvation. Amen.

6

SERMON 6:

MARY'S PURIFICATION

February 2



The great sacrifice Mary made to God on this day in offering him the life of her son.

Under the Old Law there were two precepts concerning the birth of firstborn sons. One was that the mother was regarded as unclean and was to remain in her house for forty days and then purify herself in the Temple. The other was that the parents of the firstborn son should take him to the Temple and offer him there to God.

On the day of her purification, the Blessed Virgin carried out both these precepts. Although she was not bound by the law of purification since she was still a virgin and was absolutely pure, nevertheless her humility and sense of obedience made her wish to go and purify herself like other mothers.

At the same time, she fulfilled the other precept by presenting and offering her son to the Eternal Father. *And when the days of her purification were fulfilled according to the law of Moses, they took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord* (Lk 2:22). But the Blessed Virgin did not offer him as other mothers offered their sons. The others offered them to God, but they knew that this offering was a mere ceremonial fulfillment of the Law. By symbolically redeeming their children they made them truly their own, and they would not be obliged to sacrifice them to death at some other time. Mary, however, really offered her son to death. She knew for certain that the sacrifice of the life of Jesus which she was then making would actually be consummated on the altar of the cross. Because she loved him so much, in offering the life of her son Mary actually sacrificed her entire self to God.

Let us leave aside all other considerations that we might reflect on today and dwell only on the greatness of the sacrifice Mary made of herself to God when she offered him the life of her son. This will be the subject of our discourse.

The Eternal Father had already determined to save man who had fallen through sin, to deliver him from eternal death. At the same time, he willed that divine justice should not be deprived of a worthy satisfaction. And so he did not spare the life of his son who had already become man to redeem men, but willed that he should pay with the utmost rigor the penalty which all men deserved. *He who has not spared even his own son, but has delivered him for* us *all* (Rom 8:32).

Sending him to earth to become man, he gave him a mother. He willed that this mother should be the Blessed Virgin. But since he willed that the Divine Word should not become her son before she had accepted him by an express act of her will, so he also willed that Jesus should not sacrifice his life for the salvation of humankind without the consent of Mary. The heart of the Mother was to be sacrificed along with the life of the son.

Saint Thomas teaches that the very office of motherhood gives mothers a special right over their children.[13] Thus, inasmuch as Jesus himself was innocent and did not deserve punishment, it seemed only fitting that he should not be condemned to the cross as a victim for the sins of the world without the consent of his mother.

Now while Mary consented to his death from the moment that she became the mother of Jesus, God nevertheless wished that she should make a solemn sacrifice of herself in the Temple on this day by making a solemn offering of the life of her son. And it is because of this sacrifice that Saint Epiphanius calls Mary a “priest.”[14]

We begin to see now how much this sacrifice cost Mary in the way of sorrow, and what heroic virtue she had to practice in order to assent to the sentence of death passed on her son.

Imagine, for instance, Mary on the road to Jerusalem on the first Presentation Day. She hurries toward the place of sacrifice and holds the beloved Victim in her arms. She enters the Temple, approaches the altar, and there, unassumingly, humbly and devoutly presents him to the Most

High. Meanwhile, holy Simeon, who had been promised by God that he should not die without first having seen the expected Messiah, takes the Divine Child from the hands of the Blessed Virgin and, inspired by the Holy Spirit, tells her how much the sacrifice of her son will cost her. He tells her, too, that together with him her own blessed soul will also be sacrificed.

In a sermon on the Purification, Saint Thomas of Villanova pictures the holy old man becoming troubled and silent at the thought of having to make such a gloomy prophecy. Then he pictures Mary asking: "Why are you troubled on such a happy day, Simeon?" "O royal Virgin," he replies, "I wish I did not have to give you such bitter news. But God wills it for your greater merit. Listen then to what I have to say. This child who is now such a joy to you—and how rightly so, O God—this child will one day cause you such bitter grief as no other creature has ever experienced. You will see him persecuted by men of all types and made a butt for their scoffing and outrages. They will even go so far as to put him to death as a criminal before your very eyes. You are most happy to have this child, but I tell you that he will be a stumbling block to many, a sign of contradiction. After his death, there will be many martyrs who will be tortured and put to death for the love of your son. They will suffer martyrdom in their bodies, but you, O holy Mother, will suffer it in your heart."

Yes, Mary was to suffer in her heart. Her compassion for her most beloved son was the sword which was destined to pierce her motherly heart, as Saint Simeon accurately foretold: *And your own soul a sword shall pierce* (Lk 2:35).

Saint Jerome assures us that the Blessed Virgin was well versed in the sacred Scriptures and therefore was aware what the Redeemer would have to suffer during his life, and even more at the time of his death. She fully understood from the prophets that he was to be betrayed by one of his own disciples: *Even my friend who had my trust and partook of my bread, has raised his heel against me* (Ps 40:10). And that he would be abandoned by them: *Strike the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered* (Zach 13:7). She knew all about the contempt, the spitting, the blows, the scorn that he would be made to suffer at the hands of the people: *I have given my body to the strikers, and my cheeks to them that plucked them:*

I have not turned away my face from them that rebuked me and that spit upon me (Isa 50:6). She knew that he was to become the reproach of the vilest men and the outcast of the people, and would be overwhelmed with insults and injuries: *But I am a worm, not a man: the scorn of men, despised by the people* (Ps 21:7); *he shall be filled with reproaches* (Lam 3:30). She knew also that at the end of his life his most sacred flesh would be torn and mangled by scourges: *But he was wounded for our iniquities, he was bruised for our sins* (Isa 53:5). She knew that his whole body would be disfigured and become like that of a leper—all wounds, with the bones exposed where they pierced the flesh: *There is no beauty in him nor comeliness.… and we have thought him, as it were, a leper* (Isa 53:2, 5). *They have numbered all his bones* (Ps 21:18). She knew that he was to be pierced by nails: *They have pierced my hands and my feet* (Ps 21:17). And would be ranked with criminals: *And he was reputed with the wicked* (Isa 53:12). And that finally, banging on a cross, he would die for the salvation of all people: *And they shall look upon me, whom they have pierced* (Zach 12:10).

Mary, I say, was already well aware of all these tortures that Jesus would have to suffer, but Simeon's words, *And your own soul a sword shall pierce*, revealed to her all the details of those sufferings, internal and external, that were to torment him, as Our Lord himself revealed to Saint Teresa.[15] She consented to everything, however, with a steadfastness that filled even the angels with astonishment. She pronounced the sentence that condemned her son to death—a death so ignominious and painful—when she said: "Eternal Father, since you will that it should be so, *not my will, but yours be done* (Lk 22:42). I unite my will to your most holy will, and I sacrifice my son to you. I am happy to have him lose his life for your glory and the salvation of the world. At the same time, I sacrifice my heart to you so that it may be pierced with sorrow as much as you please. It is enough for me, O my God, that you be glorified and content with my offering: *Not my will, but yours be done."* O immeasurable charity! O unparalleled constancy! O victory deserving the eternal admiration of heaven and earth!

This explains why Mary was silent during the Passion of Jesus when he was being unjustly accused. She said nothing to Pilate who was somewhat inclined to set him free, fully aware as she was of his

innocence. She only appeared in public to be present at his great sacrifice which was to take place on Calvary. She accompanied him to the place of execution. She was with him from the first moment he was nailed on the cross: *There stood by the cross of Jesus his mother* (Jn 19:25). She stood there until she saw him expire and the sacrifice was consummated. All this she did in order to complete the offering she had made of him to God in the Temple.

To appreciate what this sacrifice meant to Mary it would be necessary to understand the love she had for Jesus. Generally speaking, the love of mothers is so great that when their children are about to die and there is danger of losing them, they forget all their faults and shortcomings. They even forget the injuries they may have received from them, and suffer unimaginable heartache. But many times the love of these mothers is a divided love, a love that extends to other children, or at least to other creatures. Mary had only one child—the most admirable ever born. He was most lovable, for he had everything to make him so. He was most obedient, most virtuous, most innocent, most holy. In a word, he was God. And Mary's love stopped right there. It did not extend to any other created being. She concentrated all her love on her only son. Nor was she afraid of going too far in loving him. This son was God and he deserved limitless love. This was the son who was at the same time the victim she was voluntarily sacrificing to death.

Let us then imagine how much it must have cost Mary, what strength of soul it must have taken, to perform this act which amounted to sacrificing the life of her son on the cross. On the one hand, she was the most fortunate of all mothers because she was the Mother of God. On the other hand, she was at the same time the mother most to be pitied, the most sorrowful mother imaginable, because she was obliged to see her son destined for the cross from the day he was born. What mother would accept a child knowing that she was destined to lose him later on by a disgraceful death, and knowing that she herself would be there and see him die? But Mary willingly accepted her son on these difficult terms. She not only accepted him, but on this day offered him to death with her own hands, sacrificing him to divine justice.

Saint Bonaventure says that the Blessed Virgin would have gladly agreed to suffer the pains and death of her son personally. But in order

to obey God, she made the great offering of the life of her Jesus, conquering the tender love she had for him, but with an excess of grief. “Had it been possible, she would willingly have endured all the torments of her son. But God willed that his only-begotten son should be offered up for the salvation of the human race.”

By this sacrifice Mary brought herself more grief and was more generous than if she had offered to suffer in her own person all that her son was to endure. That is why we may say that she surpassed all the martyrs in generosity; for the martyrs offered their own lives to God, but the Blessed Virgin offered the life of her son whom she loved and esteemed infinitely more than her own life.

The pain of this sorrowful sacrifice did not end here. This was actually only the beginning. For from that time on, during the whole life of her son, Mary had constantly before her eyes the bitter death and all the torments he was to endure. The more charming, gracious, and loving her son became, the more her heart was filled with increasing anguish.

O sorrowful Mother, if you had loved your son less, or if he had been less lovable or had loved you less, your sufferings would certainly not have been so great when you offered him to death. But there never was, and never will be, a mother who loved her son more than you did. And there never was, and never will be, a son more lovable, or one who loved his mother more than Jesus did. O God, had we beheld the beauty, the majesty of the face of that Divine Child, would we ever have had the courage to sacrifice his life for our salvation? And yet you, O Mary, although you were his mother and loved him with such a tender love, had the courage to offer him for the salvation of humankind, to a death more cruel and painful than any criminal ever suffered on earth!

How sad a scene must love have placed before the eyes of the Blessed Virgin from that day on, a scene in which all the outrages and mockeries which her poor son was to endure were delineated. See how love already represents him agonized with sorrow in the garden, torn with scourges, crowned with thorns in the praetorium, and finally hanging on a cross of shame on Calvary! “See, O Mother,” says love, “what an amiable and innocent son you are offering to such terrible tortures and to such a horrible death!” And what is the use of trying to save him from the hands of Herod when you are only destining him for a far more

sorrowful fate?

Mary not only offered Jesus to death in the Temple, but she renewed that offering every moment of her life. She revealed to Saint Bridget: “That sorrow (foretold by the holy Simeon) never left my heart until I was assumed, body and soul, into heaven.” Therefore Saint Anselm addresses her in these words: “O compassionate Mother, I cannot believe that you could have endured such excruciating torments even for a moment without dying, unless God himself, the Spirit of Life, had sustained you.” But Saint Bernard, in speaking of the great sorrow which Mary experienced on this day, says that from this time on “she endured a living death, bearing a sorrow more cruel than death.” Every moment that she lived she died, for she was assailed at every moment by sorrow for the coming death of her Jesus, a torment more cruel than any death.

Because of the immense merit she acquired for the salvation of the world by this great sacrifice to God, Saint Augustine was quite right in calling the Blessed Mother the “repairer of the human race.” And Saint Epiphanius, “the redeemer of captives”; Saint Germanus, “our deliverer from all calamities”; Saint Ambrose, “the mother of all the faithful”; Saint Augustine, “the mother of the living”; Saint Andrew of Crete, “the mother of life.”

Arnold of Chartres says: “The will of Mary and the will of Christ were then united so intimately that both offered up the same sacrifice. Because of that union of wills, Mary brought about with Christ that one effect, namely, the salvation of the world.” Jesus accomplished it by making satisfaction for our sins; Mary by obtaining the application of this satisfaction to us.

Denis the Carthusian likewise asserts that “the Blessed Mother can be called the savior of the world. By reason of the pain that she suffered in feeling sorrow for her son (whom she willingly sacrificed to the divine justice), she merited by her prayers that the fruits of the Passion of the Redeemer should be applied to all men.”

Mary, then, by the merit of her sorrows and by sacrificing her son, became the mother of all the redeemed, and it is only right to believe that it is through her hands that the milk of divine grace, the fruit of Christ’s merits and the means for obtaining eternal life are given to all

people. Saint Bernard refers to this when he says: “When God was about to redeem the human race, he deposited the whole price in Mary’s hands.” By this he meant that the merits of the Redeemer are applied to our souls through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, for the graces which are the fruit of the merits of Jesus Christ are dispensed by her hands.

If God was so pleased by the sacrifice of his son Isaac which Abraham was to make to the Divine Majesty that he promised to multiply Abraham’s descendants as the stars of the heavens—*Because you have done this thing, and have not spared your only-begotten son for my sake, I will bless you, and I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven* (Gen 22:16–17)—we must surely believe that the far nobler sacrifice of her son Jesus which Mary made was immeasurably more acceptable to God. And as a result, he has granted that by her prayers the number of the elect should be increased. That is, the number of souls coming to heaven through her shall be great.

God promised Saint Simeon that he would not die until he had seen the birth of the Messiah: *And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Christ of the Lord* (Lk 2:26). But it was only through Mary that he received this grace, for it was in her arms that he found the Savior. So we may say that anyone who wants to find Jesus will find him only through Mary. Let us therefore go to this holy Mother if we wish to find Jesus, and let us go with great confidence.

Mary told her servant Pudenziana Zagnoni that every year on the feast of her Purification some sinner would receive a great grace. Who knows but that you or I may be the favored sinner this day? Our sins may be great but the power of Mary is still greater. “The son can deny nothing to his mother,” says Saint Bernard. If Jesus is angry with us, Mary will immediately placate him. Plutarch reports that Antipater wrote a long letter to Alexander the Great denouncing Alexander’s mother, Olympia. After reading the letter, Alexander observed: “Antipater does not know that a single tear of my mother is enough to cancel six hundred letters of denunciation.” We may also imagine Jesus giving the same answer to any denunciations made against us by the devil when we have Mary praying for us: “Does Lucifer not know that a

prayer of my mother in favor of a sinner is enough to make me forget all the accusations against him?" The following example illustrates this thought.

Example

This story is not to be found in any book but was reported to me by a priest friend of mine as something that happened to him personally. The priest was hearing confessions in a church one day—(in order not to compromise anyone I shall not mention the name of the place, though the man gave the priest permission to make the facts known)—when a young man came to him who seemed anxious to confess, yet at the same time seemed afraid. The priest watched him for a few moments and then spoke to him and asked him if he wished to make his confession. He replied that he did, but since his confession would probably be very long, he asked the confessor to take him into a private room.

The penitent began by saying that he was a foreigner and a wealthy man, but that he had led so wicked a life that he did not believe God would pardon him. He admitted to murder and innumerable other crimes and shameful acts. Then, he said, after he had begun to despair of his salvation, he took to committing sins, not because of any inclination to do so, but purposely to provoke God and to show his hatred for him. He admitted among other things that he wore a crucifix and that he used to strike it out of hatred for God. That very morning, only a short time before, he had gone to holy Communion sacrilegiously. Why? So that he might be able to trample on the sacred Host. He had actually received the Host, but had been prevented from carrying out his purpose because of the large number of people who would have seen him do it. He then handed over the sacred particle to the confessor in a piece of paper. Then he went on with his story and said that later he was passing in front of the church and felt a strong impulse to enter. Unable to resist, he had gone in. After entering, he was overcome by great remorse of conscience and by a kind of confused and irresolute desire to confess his sins. That is why he was standing in front of the confessional. But while he was standing there, his confusion and reluctance became so great that he tried to leave, but it seemed that he was held there by some unseen

force. “Then you called me, Father,” he said, “and here I am making my confession to you. I cannot explain it.”

The confessor then asked him whether during all this time he had ever practiced any devotion to the Blessed Virgin, for such conversions only come about through the hands of Mary. “No, I did not, Father. Why should I practice any devotion when I considered myself damned!” “But think carefully,” the confessor insisted. “I am quite sure I did nothing, Father,” the young man replied. He placed his hand on his breast to protest his sincerity and then remembered that he was wearing the scapular of Mary’s dolors. “You see, my son,” the confessor said, “our Blessed Mother is the one who has obtained this remarkable grace for you. And you know, of course, that this church is dedicated to her.”

The young man was deeply moved, and began to feel great sorrow, and to cry. He continued his confession, and became so disturbed that he fainted at the confessor’s feet. When he had been revived he finished his confession and received the great consolation of absolution. Completely contrite and resolved to change his way of life, he went back to his own country, after giving the confessor permission to preach and make known the great act of mercy which Mary had performed for him.

Prayer

O holy Mother of God, my Mother Mary, you were so deeply concerned for my salvation that you offered to death the dearest object of your heart, your beloved Jesus! Since you were so eager to save me, it is only right that I should place all my hopes in you, after God.

Yes, most Blessed Mother, I trust entirely in you. By the merit of the great sacrifice of the life of your son which you offered to God this day, beg him to have mercy on my poor soul for which he the Immaculate Lamb did not hesitate to die on the cross.

I would like today, O my queen, to offer my poor heart to God in imitation of you. But I am afraid that if he should see it so vile and sordid, he might reject it. But if you offer it to him, he will not reject it. Whatever your pure hands offer him is always pleasing and acceptable to him. Therefore, O Mary, I make a present of myself to you today, miserable as I am. I give

myself to you without reserve. Offer me to the Eternal Father, along with Jesus, as something belonging to you, and beg him, by the merits of your son and for your sake, to accept me and to make me his own.

My sweet mother, for the love of your sacrificed son, help me always and do not abandon me. Never permit me by my sins to lose this most loving Redeemer whom you offered today with great sorrow to the cruel death of the cross. Tell him that I am your servant and that I have placed all my hopes in you. Tell him, finally, that you pray for my salvation and he will certainly hear you. Amen.

7

SERMON 7:

MARY'S ASSUMPTION

August 15



The death of Mary[16] was precious:
(1) because of the special graces that accompanied it; and (2) because of the way it took place.

Death is a punishment for sin. It would seem therefore that our Blessed Mother, who was all holy and free from all fault, should also have been exempt from death and that she would not have to experience the misfortunes the sons and daughters of Adam are subject to as a result of their infection by the poison of sin. But God wanted Mary to resemble Jesus in all things. Jesus died. It was fitting therefore that his mother should also die. Moreover, since he wished to provide the just with an example of the precious death that would be theirs, he willed that the Blessed Virgin should die a death that was sweet and happy.

Let us consider how precious Mary's death was: first, because of the special favors that accompanied it; and secondly, because of the way it took place.

First Point

There are three things that make death bitter: attachment to the world, the memory of past sins, and the uncertainty of salvation. The death of Mary was entirely free from all these causes of bitterness and was accompanied by three special graces which made it precious and joyful. She died as she lived, entirely detached from the things of this world; she died in perfect peace; and she died certain of eternal glory.

There can be no doubt that attachment to earthly things makes the death of worldly people bitter and miserable. The Holy Spirit says: *O death, how bitter is the remembrance of you to a man that has peace in his possessions!* (Ecclus 41:1). But because the saints die detached from the things of this world, their death is not bitter, but sweet, lovely, and precious. As Saint Bernard says, it is worth purchasing at any price, no matter how great. *Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord* (Apoc 14:13). But who are those who die when they are already dead? They are, of course, the fortunate souls who pass into eternity already detached and dead, so to speak, to all affection for earthly things. Like Saint Francis of Assisi who said: "My God and my all," they have found all their happiness in God alone.

But what soul was ever more detached from the things of the world and more united to God than the beautiful soul of Mary? She was even detached from her parents, for at the age of three, when youngsters are more devoted to their parents and more in need of their help than ever, Mary left them with complete self-assurance and went to shut herself up in the Temple to serve God alone. She was detached from material things, content always to live poor and to support herself by the labor of her hands. She was detached from honors, loving a humble and abject existence, even though the honors due to a queen were hers since she was descended from the kings of Israel. The Blessed Virgin revealed to Saint Elizabeth of Hungary that when her parents left her in the Temple, she made up her mind to have no earthly loves and to love no one else but God.

Saint John saw Mary in a vision as the woman clothed with the sun, standing on the moon. *And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon was under her feet* (Apoc 12:1). Interpreters explain the moon to mean the goods of this earth which, like the moon, are uncertain and changeable. Mary never had any love for these things; in fact, she despised them and trampled them, as it were, under her feet. She lived in the world like a solitary turtledove in the desert, never allowing her affections to become attached to any earthly thing, so that it was said of her: *The song of the dove is heard in our land* (Cant 2:12).

Elsewhere we read: *Who is she coming up from the desert?* (Cant 3:6).

The Abbot Rupert says: “You went up by the desert. That is, you had a soul that loved solitude.” Having lived detached from the things of this world and united to God alone, Mary did not have a bitter death but a sweet and happy one—a death which united her intimately and eternally to God in heaven.

Second, peace of mind makes the death of the just precious. Sins committed during life are the worms that torment and gnaw at the hearts of poor dying mortals. About to appear before the divine tribunal, sinners see themselves surrounded by their crimes which cry out, according to Saint Bernard: “We are your works; we will not abandon you!” Mary certainly could not be tormented at death by any remorse of this kind, for she was always pure and always free from the least shadow of actual or original sin. Scripture says of her: *You are beautiful, my beloved, and there is no blemish in you* (Cant 4:7).

From the moment that she first had the use of her reason, that is, from the first moment of her immaculate conception in the womb of Saint Anne, Mary began to love God with all her strength. And she continued to do so, advancing more and more in love and perfection throughout her life. All her thoughts, desires, and affections were for God alone. She never uttered a word, made a movement, cast a glance, or drew a breath that was not directed to God and his glory. She never strayed even so much as a step from the love of God and never detached herself from him even for a single moment. It stands to reason then that all the beautiful virtues that she had practiced all her life surrounded her blessed bed at the happy moment of her death. That fearless faith, that loving confidence, that unconquerable patience in the midst of so much suffering, that humility in the midst of so many prerogatives, that modesty, that meekness, that compassion for souls, that zeal for the glory of God, and above all, that perfect love for God and total conformity to his will—all these surrounded Mary at her deathbed and spoke reassuringly: “We are your works; we will not abandon you.… We are all daughters of your beautiful heart. Now that you are leaving this earthly life, we will not abandon you. We will be your eternal companions to honor you in heaven, where by means of us you will reign as queen of all men and of angels.”

Finally, the assurance of salvation makes death sweet. Death is called

a passage or a transition, because by death we pass from a short to an eternal life. The dread of those who die uncertain of their ultimate salvation, as well as those who approach the solemn moment expecting to pass into eternal death, must be very great. By the same token, the joy of the saints who end their life hoping with reasonable assurance that they will go to heaven and possess God there, must also be very great. When a doctor told a nun of the Order of Saint Teresa that she was about to die, she was so overjoyed that she exclaimed: "How is it, doctor, that you are giving me such good news and are not asking for any fee?"

When he was on the point of death, Saint Lawrence Giustiniani noticed that the servants around him were weeping and he said: "Away with your tears; this is no time to mourn. Weep somewhere else. If you want to remain with me, be happy, as I am happy to see the gates of heaven opening to me so that I can be united with God." Saint Peter of Alcántara, Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, and many other saints broke into exclamations of joy when told that death was near. And yet they were not as certain of possessing divine grace nor as sure of their own sanctity as Mary was.

What incomprehensible joy our Blessed Mother must have felt when she received the news that she was about to die! For she had the most complete certainty of possessing divine grace, especially after the Angel Gabriel had assured her that she was full of grace and that she already possessed God. *Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you … you have found grace* (Lk 1:28, 30). And she was fully aware that her heart was continually burning with divine love. As Bernardine de Bustis says: "By a unique privilege granted to no other saint, Mary actively loved God at every moment of her life." And she loved him so intensely that Saint Bernard declared that it required a continuous miracle to preserve her life in the midst of such flames of love.

The Canticle of Canticles had already asked with respect to Mary: What is *this coming up from the desert, like a column of smoke laden with myrrh, with frankincense, and with the perfume of every exotic dust?* (Cant 3:6). The myrrh typified her complete mortification, the incense, her fervent prayers. All her holy virtues together with her perfect love of God kindled in her such a great flame that her beautiful soul, wholly devoted

to and consumed by divine love, arose continually to God like a column of scented smoke. The Abbot Rupert says: “Like a spiral of fragrant smoke, O Mary, you gave forth a sweet odor to the Most High.”

Saint Jerome expresses this idea in even stronger terms: “She was as a spiral of smoke and gave out a most sweet odor because she burned interiorly like a holocaust with the flame of divine love.”

As this loving virgin lived, so did she die. Just as divine love gave her life, so did it cause her death. The Doctors and Fathers of the Church generally say that she died of only one illness—pure love. Saint Ildephonsus says that Mary either should not have died, or she should have died only of love.[17]

Second Point

Consider now how Mary’s blessed death actually took place. After the Ascension of her son, Mary remained on earth to help spread the faith. The disciples of the Lord came to her in their difficulties and she solved their doubts. She comforted them in persecution and encouraged them to work for God’s glory and the salvation of souls. She remained on earth willingly, knowing that this was the will of God for the good of the Church. But she could not help feeling the pain of being separated from the presence and sight of her son who had ascended to heaven. *Where your treasure is, there also will your heart be* (Lk 12:34), the Redeemer had said. Where one believes that his treasure and happiness are, there the love and desire of his heart will always be found. Mary loved nobody but Jesus. Now that he was in heaven, all her desires were in heaven too.

Tauler says that “heaven was Mary’s dwelling place,” for her affections were constantly there; “her school was eternity,” for she was always detached from temporal and worldly things; “her teacher was divine truth,” for she always acted in accordance with divine inspiration; “her mirror was the Divinity,” for she saw no one but God and never had any other aim than to conform herself entirely to his will; “her interest was devotion,” for she was constantly concerned about fulfilling his divine commands; “her repose was union with God,” for she found peace only in uniting herself completely to God; “the treasure of her heart was

God alone," that is, he was the abode and resting place of her heart.

Mary consoled her loving heart during this painful separation, we are told, by visiting the holy places of Palestine where her son had been during his life. She frequently visited, for example, the stable at Bethlehem where Jesus had been born; at another time, she visited the workshop at Nazareth where her son had lived so many years poor and despised; again, the Garden of Gethsemane where he had begun his Passion; then, the praetorium of Pilate where he had been scourged, and the spot on which he had been crowned with thorns. But the spot she visited most frequently was Mount Calvary where Jesus had expired, and the holy sepulcher where she had finally left him. In this way, Christ's loving mother soothed the pains of her sad exile.

But this was not enough to satisfy her heart, which could find no repose in this world. She yearned continually to be united to her Lord, exclaiming in the words of David: *Who will give me wings like a dove, and I will fly and be at rest?* (Ps 54:7). *As the heart pants after the fountains of water: so my soul pants after you, my God* (Ps 41:1).

Surely the sighs of this turtledove could not help penetrating the heart of her God who loved her so tenderly. *The song of the dove is heard in our land* (Cant 2:12). Unwilling to put off the desires of his loved one any longer, God graciously hears her prayer and calls her to his kingdom.

Cedrenus, Nicephorus, and Metaphrastes tell us that a few days before the death of the Blessed Virgin, Our Lord sent the Archangel Gabriel to her, the same angel who had announced that she was the blessed woman chosen to be the Mother of God. The angel said: "My Lady and my Queen, God has heard your prayers and has sent me to tell you to prepare yourself to leave the earth, for he wills that you shall be with him in heaven. Come, therefore, take possession of your kingdom. All its holy inhabitants eagerly await and desire your arrival." What else could Mary have done on hearing this happy announcement than answer, in the utmost humility, with the same words than she had used when Gabriel announced that she was to become the Mother of God: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord* (Lk 1:38). I am the servant of the Lord, she says again. In his pure goodness he has chosen me and made me his mother; and now he calls me to paradise. I did not deserve that great

honor, nor do I deserve this one. But since he wishes to show me his infinite generosity, I am now ready to go where he pleases. *Behold the handmaid of the Lord*. May the will of my God and Lord always be accomplished in me!

After receiving this welcome news she told Saint John about it. It is not difficult to imagine how he must have felt when he heard it. For many years he had stood by her side as a son and had enjoyed the companionship of the most Blessed Mother.

Once more, Mary visited the holy places at Jerusalem, tenderly taking her leave of them, and especially Mount Calvary where her Jesus had died. Finally, she withdrew into her little cottage to prepare for death.

All during this time the angels paid visits to their queen, comforting themselves with the thought that they would soon see her crowned in heaven. Many authors, such as Saint Andrew of Crete, Saint John Damascene, and Euthymius, assert that before her death the apostles and many other disciples who were scattered throughout the world were miraculously transported to Mary's room. When she saw them gathered together in her presence, she said to them: "My beloved children, because of love for you and in order to help you, my son left me on this earth. Our holy faith is now spread throughout the world. Already the fruit of the divine seed has sprung up. So my Lord, seeing that my presence on earth is no longer needed, and out of compassion for my grief in being separated from him, has graciously listened to my prayer that I may leave this life and go to him in heaven. But you must remain to work for his glory. Although I am leaving you, my heart remains with you. I shall always carry with me and cherish the great love I have for you. I go to paradise to pray for you."

What words can describe the sorrow of those disciples as they realized that they would soon be separated from their mother? Sobbing and weeping, they began to say: "Are you really going to leave us, Mary? Is it true that the world is not a place worthy of or fit for you? As for us, we are unworthy to enjoy the presence of the Mother of God in our midst. But remember that you are our mother, too. You have been so helpful to us in our difficulties, so consoling to us in our afflictions. How can you now abandon us and leave us alone in the midst of so many

enemies and so many conflicts, without the benefit of your help and consolation? We have already lost Jesus. Our Master and Father on earth has ascended to heaven. Until now, you have been our mainstay, O Mother. How can you leave us as orphans, without father or mother? Either remain with us or take us with you."

According to Saint John Damascene, the Blessed Virgin is supposed then to have said: "No, my children, this would not be according to the will of God. Be content to do what he has decreed is best for me and for you. Your lot will be to remain on earth and work for the glory of your Redeemer, and thus weave for yourselves an eternal crown. I leave you, not in order to abandon you, but to help you even more in heaven by my intercession with my son. Be satisfied with this. I commend holy Church to you; I commend all redeemed souls to you. Let these be my last words of farewell and my last words of advice. If you love me, do what I tell you: Labor for the good of souls and the glory of my son. One day we shall all meet again in paradise, never to be separated for all eternity."

She then begged them to provide for her burial, blessed them all, and commissioned Saint John to give two of her gowns to two young maidens who had been serving her for some time.[18] Then she composed herself peacefully on her little bed and lay there eagerly awaiting death. With death, she would know reunion with her son, who would come to conduct her to the kingdom of the blessed. In her heart, she experienced great joy, the forerunner of the coming of the Bridegroom, which filled her with a new and unaccustomed sweetness. The holy apostles began again to weep and fall on their knees at her bedside. Some kissed her feet, some begged a special blessing from her, some appealed to her to remember a special request, and all felt their hearts pierced with grief at the thought of being separated from their beloved mother for the rest of their earthly lives. Mary, loving mother that she is, looked with love on all of them and consoled each one. Some were promised her help in heaven, others were blessed with particular affection, and others encouraged to work for the salvation of the world. She called Saint Peter in particular to her, as the head of the Church and vicar of her son, warmly urging the spread of the faith and promising him her special protection in heaven. But it was to Saint John that she turned with the greatest affection, because he felt more keenly than the others the loss of

his mother. Mindful of the affection and devotion this holy disciple had lavished on her during all the years after her son's death, Mary said: "My son John, I thank you for all the assistance you have given me. Be assured that I shall never forget it. I am leaving you now, but I go to pray for you. Remain here in peace until we meet again in heaven, where I shall be waiting for you. Never forget me. Whenever you need anything, do not hesitate to call upon me, for I will never forget you. I bless you, my son. Live in peace. Farewell!"

Death was now at hand. Divine love had nearly consumed her with its blessed and vehement ardor. The heavenly phoenix was losing her life in the midst of the flames. Hosts of angels came to meet her, preparing for the great triumph with which they would accompany her to paradise. Mary was consoled by the sight of these blessed spirits, but not completely consoled, for she did not yet see her Jesus, the one love of her heart. She kept repeating to the angels who had come to greet her: *I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem*, if *you find my beloved, that you tell him that I languish with love* (Cant 5:8). Tell him to come, and to come quickly. I am actually dying because of my longing to see him.

Then Jesus came to take his mother to the kingdom of the blessed. It was revealed to Saint Elizabeth that Jesus appeared to Mary before she died with a cross in his hands to show the special glory that he had obtained by the redemption.[19]

Our Lord himself gave Mary Viaticum (according to Saint John Damascene), saying to her lovingly: "Receive, O my Mother, from my hands the same body that you gave me." And Mary, receiving her last Communion with infinite fervor, said with her last breath: "My Son, into your hands I commend my spirit. I commend to you my soul which you created from the very first so rich with many graces and uniquely privileged to be preserved from the stain of original sin. I commend my body to you, from which you deigned to take your flesh and blood. I commend these holy children of mine to you [meaning the disciples who were gathered around her]. They are indeed sad to see me leaving them. You love them more than I possibly can; please console them, bless them, and give them strength to do great things for your glory."

The life of Mary was now at its close. Delicate music, as Saint Jerome relates, was heard in the room where she lay. According to a revelation

made to Saint Bridget, the room was also filled with a brilliant light. The sweet music and the unusual light warned the disciples that Mary's soul was about to depart. Again they began to sob. Raising their hands, with one voice they exclaimed: "O Mother, you are now leaving us and going to heaven. Give us your last blessing and promise never to forget us." Mary turned her eyes around the room, as if to bid them all a last farewell and whispered: "Goodbye, dear children. I bless you. Do not be afraid, I will never forget you."

Death came at last, not clad in garments of mourning and grief as is the case with others, but adorned with light and gladness. But what are we saying? How can we speak of death? We must rather say that divine love came to cut the thread of that noble life. And just as a candle gives off one last valiant flicker before going out, so this beautiful creature, hearing Christ's invitation to follow him, gave a last sigh of even greater love, breathed forth her soul, and expired. Thus was that great soul, that beautiful dove of the Lord, loosed from the bonds of this life. Thus did she enter into the glory of the blessed where she is now enthroned, and where she will be enthroned as queen of paradise for all eternity.

Mary has left the world. She is now in heaven. From there this compassionate mother looks down upon us who are still in the valley of tears. She pities us and promises to help us if we wish her to. Let us always beseech her by the merits of her blessed death to obtain a happy death for us. And if it should be God's pleasure, let us beg her to obtain for us the grace of dying on a Saturday, a day dedicated specially to her honor, or during one of her novenas, or within the octave of one of her feast days. She has obtained this grace for so many of her devoted servants, and especially for Saint Stanislaus Kostka. For him she obtained the privilege of dying on the feast of her Assumption, as Father Bartoli relates in his life of the saint.

Example

This pious youth, Stanislaus, was very much devoted to Our Lady. One day, the first of August, he heard a sermon given by Father Peter Canisius to the Jesuit novices. With the greatest fervor, the good Father urged them all to live every day as if that were to be their last, and the

one on which they were destined to appear before the divine tribunal.

After the sermon, Saint Stanislaus told his companions that this admonition had a special meaning to him, as if it were the voice of God, and that he was destined to die during that very month. He said this either because God had expressly revealed it to him, or because God had given him a certain inner presentiment of what was to happen later.

Four days after this, the holy novice went to the church of Saint Mary Major with Father Emmanuel Sa. As they were entering the church, they began to speak about the approaching feast of the Assumption, and Stanislaus said: “Father, I believe that on that day a new paradise appears in heaven when the glory of the Mother of God is seen, crowned queen of heaven, and seated so near Our Lord, above all the choirs of angels. And if, as I firmly believe, this feast is celebrated anew each year in heaven, I hope to be there for the next celebration.”

According to Jesuit custom, lots had been drawn for a monthly patron, and Saint Stanislaus had drawn the glorious martyr Saint Lawrence. It is said that Stanislaus wrote a letter to the Blessed Mother in which he begged her to obtain for him the grace of being present at her next feast in heaven.

On the feast of Saint Lawrence he received holy Communion, and then begged the saint to present his letter to the Blessed Virgin and to support his petition with his prayers so that the Blessed Virgin would accept it.

Toward the end of that day, he was seized with fever. Though the attack was slight, he nevertheless considered it as certain that his request for a speedy death had been granted. In fact, as he went to bed, he smiled joyfully and said: “I shall never rise from this bed again.” And speaking to Father Claudius Acquaviva he added: “Father, I am sure that Saint Lawrence has already obtained for me from Mary the grace of being in heaven on the feast of her Assumption.” However, no one took his words seriously.

On the vigil of the feast his illness still seemed not too severe, but Stanislaus assured a Brother that he would die that very night. The Brother replied however: “Frater, it would be a greater miracle to die of your illness than to be cured of it.” Nevertheless, during the afternoon

Stanislaus became deathly sick. A cold sweat came over him, and he lost all his strength. The Superior hurried to his bedside and the youth begged to be laid on the bare floor so that he might die like a penitent. His request was granted, and he was laid on a thin mattress on the ground. Then he made his confession and, in the midst of much sadness on the part of those present, received Viaticum. When the Blessed Sacrament was brought into the room, his eyes began to glow with heavenly joy, and his face became inflamed with holy love, like the face of a seraph. He received Extreme Unction, and while this was being administered he did nothing but constantly raise his eyes to heaven and lovingly press an image of Mary to his heart. One of the Fathers asked him: "Why twine that rosary around your hand if you don't recite it?" He replied: "It is a consolation to me, because it is something belonging to my mother." "How much greater your consolation will be," said the Father, "when in a short time you see her and kiss her hands in heaven!" When the saint heard this, his face became all aflame with love, and he raised his hands as an expression of his desire to be in her presence. Mary then appeared to him, as he himself told those who were standing around. Shortly afterward, as the fifteenth of August was beginning to dawn, he died like a saint, without the slightest struggle and with his eyes fixed on heaven. His passing was so quiet that it was only when they presented the image of the Blessed Virgin to him and noticed that he did not see it that they realized he had already gone to greet his beloved queen in heaven.

Prayer

O sweet Mary, our Mother, you have already left the earth and reached your kingdom where you are enthroned as queen above all the choirs of angels. As holy Church sings: "She is exalted above the choirs of angels in the heavenly kingdom."

We are well aware that we poor sinners are not worthy to possess you in this valley of darkness; but we also know that in your greatness you have never forgotten us miserable sinners. Now that you have been exalted to such great glory, your pity for us poor children of Adam has really increased. From your throne on high then, O Mary, turn your compassionate eyes on us and

have mercy on us. Remember that when you left this world, you promised not to forget us. Look at us and help us. See what tempests and dangers we find ourselves in constantly and shall always find ourselves in until we die.

By the merits of your blessed death, obtain for us the grace of remaining in God's friendship to the end, so that we may finally pass from this life in God's grace. Then we, too, shall one day come to greet you in paradise, and unite with the blessed spirits in praising you and singing your glories as you deserve. Amen.

8

SERMON 8:

SECOND SERMON ON MARY'S ASSUMPTION



(1) Mary's glorious triumph when she entered heaven; (2) Mary's exalted throne in heaven.

One might imagine that on this day of Mary's assumption into heaven Holy Mother Church would invite us to mourn rather than rejoice inasmuch as our good mother has taken her leave of this world and left us deprived of her presence. Saint Bernard long ago said: "It seems that we ought to weep rather than rejoice." But no; Holy Mother Church invites us to be glad: "Let us all rejoice in the Lord, celebrating a festival in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary."

And rightly so. For if we love Mary we ought rather to exult in her glory than be concerned with our own personal feelings. What son would not be happy to learn that his mother was about to become a queen, even though it meant he would have to be separated from her? Today Mary is crowned Queen of Heaven, and we should be happy to celebrate the event if we truly love her. "Let us rejoice, then; let us all rejoice." That we may derive all the more consolation from her great feast, let us consider first how glorious Mary's triumph was when she entered heaven; and secondly, how magnificent the throne was to which she was raised.

First Point

After Jesus Christ our Savior had completed the work of redemption by his death, the angels yearned to have him in their midst in heaven. They begged him continually in the words of David: *Arise, O Lord, into your*

resting place: you and the ark which you have sanctified (Ps 131:8). Come, O Lord, now that you have redeemed man, come to your kingdom and join us, bringing with you the ark you have sanctified, your mother. You sanctified that ark by dwelling in her womb. This is precisely what Saint Bernard has the angels say: "Let Mary, your most holy mother, who was sanctified by conceiving you, also come up to heaven." It pleased Our Lord finally to satisfy the desire of those faithful angels by calling Mary to paradise. But if it had been his will that the ark of the old dispensation be brought with great pomp into the city of David: *And David and all the house of Israel brought the ark of the covenant of the Lord with joyful shouting, and with sound of trumpet* (2 Kings 6:15), how much more gloriously did he arrange to have his mother enter heaven! The prophet Elias was carried to heaven in a fiery chariot, which interpreters tell us was nothing else than a group of angels who bore him away from the earth. "But to conduct you to heaven, O Mother of God," says the Abbot Rupert, "a fiery chariot was not enough; the whole court of heaven, headed by its King, your son, went forth to meet and accompany you."

Saint Bernardine of Siena says the same. He says that to honor the triumph of his most sweet mother, "Jesus went forth in his glory to meet and accompany her." Saint Anselm says that it was precisely for this purpose that it pleased Our Redeemer to ascend to heaven before his mother; that is, not only to prepare a throne for her in that kingdom, but also so that he could go to meet her with all the angels and saints and thus make her entry into heaven more glorious, as was fitting for one who was his mother.

Saint Peter Damian, contemplating the splendor of Mary's assumption into heaven, says: "We find it more glorious than the ascension of Jesus Christ; for to meet the Redeemer, angels alone came forth; but when the Blessed Virgin was assumed into glory, she was met by the Lord of glory himself accompanied by all the saints and angels." For this reason, the Abbot Guerric pictures the Divine Word saying: "To honor my Father, I descended from heaven; to honor my Mother, I re-ascended there"; that is to say, that I might be able to go forth to meet her and bring her to heaven myself.

Let us now picture Jesus going forth from heaven to meet his mother.

When he first encountered her, in order to console her he said: *Arise, make haste, my love, my dove, my beautiful one, and come, for winter is now past and gone* (Cant 2:10–11). Come, my own dear mother, my pure and beautiful dove, leave that valley of tears in which you have suffered so much for love of me. *Come from Libanus, my spouse, come from Libanus, come; you shall be crowned* (Cant 4:8). Come in, soul and body, to enjoy the reward of your holy life. Great as your sufferings have been on earth, the glory which I have prepared for you in heaven will be even greater. Come then, and take your place beside me; come and receive the crown which I shall bestow upon you as queen of the universe.

Picture Mary leaving the earth, remembering as she goes the many graces she has received from its Lord. She views it with affection and compassion because she is leaving behind so many souls exposed to sufferings and trials. See Jesus offering her his hand, the Blessed Mother ascends above the clouds and stars. Now she arrives at the gates of heaven. In olden days when monarchs took solemn possession of their kingdoms, they did not pass through the gates of the capital. Either the gates were removed or the kings passed over them. So when Jesus Christ entered paradise, the angels cried out: *Lift up your gates, O you princes, and be you lifted up, O eternal gates; and the king of glory shall enter in* (Ps 23:7). So also, now that Mary goes to take possession of the kingdom of heaven, the angels who accompany her cry out to those within: Lift up your gates, O you princes, and be you lifted up, O eternal gates; and the queen of glory shall enter in!

Mary now enters heaven. But as she enters, the celestial spirits, seeing her so beautiful and glorious, ask the angels outside, as Origen puts it: *Who is this that comes up from the desert, flowing with delights, leaning upon her beloved?* (Cant 8:5). Who can this beautiful creature be who comes from the desert of the earth, a place of thorns and tribulations? She comes all pure and rich in virtue, leaning on her beloved Lord, who graciously arranged to accompany her himself with such great honor. Who is she?

The angels accompanying her answer: “She is the Mother of our King, she is our queen and the blessed one among all women; full of grace, the saint of saints, the beloved of God, the immaculate one, the dove, the fairest of all creatures.” Then all the blessed spirits begin to bless and

praise her, singing with more reason than the Hebrews did to Judith: *You are the glory of Jerusalem, you are the joy of Israel, you are the honor of our people* (Jdt 15:10). Our Lady and our queen, you are indeed the glory of paradise, the joy of our country; you are the honor of us all! Welcome! May you be blessed for ever! Behold your kingdom. Behold us also, all your servants, ready to do whatever you command.

Then all the saints in paradise came to greet their queen. All the holy virgins came: *The daughters saw her, and declared her most blessed, and they praised her* (Cant 6:8). "We," they said, "O most blessed Lady, are also queens in this kingdom, but you are the Queen of queens. For you were the first to give us the beautiful example of consecrating our virginity to God. We bless and thank you for it." Then came the holy confessors to greet her, for by her holy life she had taught them so many beautiful virtues. The holy martyrs welcomed her as their queen. By her constancy during the sorrows of her Son's Passion she had taught them and obtained strength for them to lay down their lives for the faith. Saint James, who was the only one of the apostles already in heaven, came to thank her in the name of all his colleagues for the comfort and help she had given them while she was on earth. Next the prophets greeted her and said: "Lady, you were the one who was foreshadowed in our prophecies." The holy patriarchs came and said: "O Mary, you are the one who was our hope. It was for you that we sighed so much and so long." And with the patriarchs there appeared our first parents, Adam and Eve, who came to thank her with the greatest affection. "Beloved daughter," they said, "you have repaired the injury which we afflicted on the human race. You have obtained for the world that blessing which we forfeited by our crime. You have saved us. May you be blessed for it forever!"

With that, Saint Simeon approached to kiss her feet and reminded her with joy of the day when he received the Infant Jesus from her hands. Saint Zachary and Saint Elizabeth also came and thanked her again for the loving visit she had paid to their home with such great humility and charity, and from which they had received such treasures of grace. Saint John the Baptist appeared with an even greater show of affection to thank her for having sanctified him by her voice. But what must have been the sentiments of her parents, Saint Joachim and Saint

Anne, as they approached! With what devotion they must have greeted her, saying: “Beloved daughter, what good fortune it was for us to have such a child! May you now be our queen, for you are the mother of our God, and as such we greet and honor you.”

Is it possible to imagine the love and affection with which her devoted husband Saint Joseph met her? Can anyone describe the joy that flooded his heart as he saw Mary enter heaven so triumphantly and become the queen of heaven? Do we dare to listen as he says to her: “My Lady and my spouse, how can I ever thank our God for having made me your husband, you who are his true mother! Through you I have been privileged to assist the Divine Child on earth, to carry him so often in my arms, and to receive so many special graces from him. Forever memorable will be those moments I spent in life serving Jesus and you, my holy spouse. Behold our Jesus! How happy we may be that he no longer lies on straw in a manger, as he did when he was born at Bethlehem. He no longer lives poor and despised in a shop, as he once did with us in Nazareth. He is no longer nailed to a shameful cross, as he was when he died in Jerusalem for the salvation of the world. He is seated now at the right hand of his Father, as King and Lord of heaven and earth. And now, O my Queen, you and I shall never again be separated from him. Here in heaven we shall bless him and love him for all eternity.”

All the angels then came to salute her. And she, the great Queen, thanked them all for the assistance they had given her on earth. Especially did she thank the Archangel Gabriel, the happy ambassador, the messenger of all her glories, who announced to her that she was the chosen Mother of God.

Mary then knelt and adored the Divine Majesty. All absorbed in the consciousness of her own nothingness, she thanked him for the graces he had brought to her, and especially for having made her the Mother of the Eternal Word. Let him who can, comprehend the love with which the most Blessed Trinity then blessed her. Let him comprehend the welcome given to his daughter by the Eternal Father, to his mother by the Son, to his spouse by the Holy Spirit. The Father crowned her by imparting his power to her; the Son, his wisdom; the Holy Ghost, his love. And the three Divine Persons, placing her throne at the right of that of Jesus,

declared her queen of heaven and earth, and commanded the angels and all creatures to acknowledge her as their Queen, and as such to serve and obey her.

Let us now consider how exalted was the throne to which Mary was raised.

Second Point

If the mind of man, says Saint Bernard, can never comprehend the immense glory prepared in heaven by God for those who have loved him on earth, as the Apostle tells us, who can ever comprehend the glory that he prepared for his Beloved Mother who loved him on earth more than all others together? Or rather who loved him more, even from the moment she was born, than all men and angels combined? Rightly then does Holy Church sing that since Mary loved God more than all the angels, she "has been exalted above them all in the heavenly kingdom." "Yes," says the Abbot Guerric, "she was exalted above the angels, so much so that she saw above her no one except her son," the only-begotten of the Father.

The learned Gerson asserts that, just as the orders of angels and saints are divided into three hierarchies (according to the Angelic Doctor and Saint Denis), so Mary herself constitutes a separate hierarchy, the sublimest of all, and second only to God. And, as Saint Antoninus adds, just as the lady of a house is vastly superior to her servants, so "Mary, who is the sovereign lady of the angels, is incomparably exalted above the angelic hierarchies." To understand this, we need only recall what David said: *The queen stood on your right hand* (Ps 44:10). In a sermon by an ancient author among the works of Saint Athanasius, these words are explained as meaning that "Mary is placed at the right hand of God."

It is certain, as Saint Ildephonsus says, that the good works of Mary incomparably surpassed those of all the saints in merit; and therefore her reward must have surpassed theirs in the same proportion. For just as "that which she bore was incomprehensible, so the reward which she merited and received is incomprehensible." It is certain that God rewards according to merit, as the Apostle declares: *Who will render to*

every man according to his works (Rom 2:6). It is also certain, as Saint Thomas teaches, that the Blessed Virgin, "who was equal to and even superior in merit to all men and angels, was exalted above them all." "In short," adds Saint Bernard, "let us measure the unique grace that she acquired on earth, and then we may measure the unique glory she obtained in heaven; for according to the measure of her grace on earth is the measure of her glory in the kingdom of the blessed."

A learned author, the Blessed Claude de la Colombière, remarks that the glory of Mary, which is full and complete, differs to that extent from the glory of all other saints in heaven. It is true that all the blessed in heaven enjoy perfect peace and full contentment, but it is also true that none of them enjoys as much glory as he could have merited if he had loved and served God with greater fidelity. And so, although the saints in heaven desire nothing more than they possess, there is, in fact, something that they could desire. While it is true that the sins they have committed and the time they have lost do not bring sufferings, nevertheless it cannot be denied that had a greater amount of good been done in life, had virtue been more strenuously practiced, and time better employed, these would have brought them greater happiness.

Mary desires nothing in heaven and has nothing to desire. Who among the saints in paradise, says Saint Augustine, if asked whether he had committed sins, could say no? It is certain, as the Council of Trent has defined, that Mary never committed any sin, nor even the slightest imperfection. She not only never lost divine grace, and never even obscured it, but she never even kept it inactive. She never performed an action that was not meritorious. She never pronounced a word, never had a thought, never drew a breath, that was not directed to the greater glory of God. In short, she never cooled in her ardor or paused a single moment in her onward course toward God. She never lost anything by negligence, but always corresponded to grace to the best of her ability and loved God as much as she could love him. "O Lord," she now says to him in heaven, "if I did not love you as much as you deserved to be loved, at least I loved you as much as I could."

In each of the saints there were different graces, as Saint Paul says: *There are varieties of gifts* (1 Cor 12:4). Each of them cooperated with the graces received and excelled in some particular virtue: one in zeal for

souls, another in leading a penitential life, another in enduring torments, another in a life of prayer. And this is why, when Holy Church celebrates their feasts, she says of each: “There was not found one like him.” And just as the saints differ in their merits, so they differ in their heavenly glory: *for star differs from star in glory* (1 Cor 15:41). Apostles differ from martyrs, confessors from virgins, the innocent from penitents. Our Blessed Lady, being full of all graces, surpassed each saint in every particular virtue: she was the apostle of the apostles, the queen of martyrs (for she suffered more than all of them), the standard bearer of virgins, the model of spouses. She surpassed them all because she united in herself perfect innocence with perfect mortification. In short, she blended in her heart all the most heroic virtues that any saint ever practiced. And that is why Holy Writ says of her: *The Queen stood on your right hand in gilded clothing, surrounded in variety* (Ps 44:10). All the graces, privileges, and merits of the other saints were fused in Mary, as the Abbot of Celles says: “The prerogatives of all the saints, O Blessed Virgin, you united in yourself.”

As the brilliance of the sun surpasses the splendor of all the stars, to quote Saint Basil, so Mary’s glory surpasses the splendor of all the saints. Saint Peter Damian adds that “as the light of the moon and the stars is entirely eclipsed when the sun appears, so that it no longer seems to exist, so Mary’s glory so far exceeds the glory of all men and angels that it almost obscures them in heaven.” Saint Bernardine of Siena agrees with Saint Bernard in saying that the blessed participate in the divine glory to a degree; but the Blessed Virgin has been so enriched with it that no creature could be more closely united with God than Mary is. “She has penetrated into the depths, and is immersed as deeply as it is possible for a creature to be immersed in that inaccessible light.”

Saint Albert the Great confirms this, saying that Mary “contemplates the majesty of God incomparably closer than all other creatures.” Saint Bernardine of Siena says: “As the other planets are illumined by the sun, so all the blessed receive light and an increase of happiness from the sight of Mary.” And in another passage he maintains: “When the glorious Mother of God ascended into heaven, she increased the joy of everybody there.” With the same thought in mind, Saint Peter Damian also says: “The greatest glory of the blessed in heaven, after seeing God, is the

presence of this most beautiful queen." And Saint Bonaventure: "After God, our greatest glory and our greatest joy is Mary."

Rejoice then with Mary that God has exalted her to such a high throne in heaven. And let us rejoice also on our own account. For although our mother is no longer with us on earth, having ascended in glory to heaven, still she is always with us in affection. Moreover, being closer now to God, she knows our miseries better and is better able to have pity on us and to help us. "Is it possible, O Blessed Virgin," asks Saint Peter Damian, "that you have forgotten us because you are so exalted? No, certainly not. God forbid that we should have such a thought. A heart as compassionate as yours cannot help but pity our great miseries." "If Mary's compassion for those in trouble was great when she lived on earth," says Saint Bonaventure, "it is certainly far greater now that she reigns in heaven."

Let us then dedicate ourselves to the service of this queen, and honor and love her as much as we can. As Richard of Saint Lawrence remarks: "She is not like other rulers who oppress their subjects with burdens and taxes. She enriches her servants with graces, merits, and rewards."

Let us entreat her in the words of the Abbot Guerric: "O Mother of Mercy, who sits on such a lofty throne and in such close proximity to God, satiate yourself with the glory of your Jesus, and give us, your servants, fragments of what is left. You now enjoy the heavenly banquet of your Lord. We who are still on earth, as whelps under the table, ask for your mercy."

Example

Father Silvanus Razzi tells of a pious priest who loved our Blessed Lady very much. One day he became inflamed with the desire to see the Blessed Mother. He decided to pray for this favor. Mary sent an angel to tell him he could have his wish—but under this condition: that after the vision he would be blind. The man accepted the condition.

One day the Blessed Virgin appeared to him. But the man had become somewhat reluctant to settle for blindness, and so he decided to look at Our Lady with one eye only. However, entranced by her beauty,

he could not help opening the other eye. But at that moment Our Lady vanished. The man became sad. He did not regret that his one eye had gone blind, but he was sorry not to have seen Mary with both eyes. So he resumed his prayers and begged to see the Blessed Virgin again, protesting that he would gladly accept total blindness in return for the favor. The man's devotion pleased our Blessed Lady and so she appeared a second time. But this time, instead of allowing him to become totally blind, Mary healed the other eye and restored its sight.

Prayer

O great, exalted, and most glorious Lady, prostrate at the feet of your throne we venerate you from this valley of tears. We rejoice at the immense glory with which Our Lord has enriched you. And now that you are enthroned as queen of heaven and earth, do not forget us, your poor servants. Do not disdain, from the high throne on which you reign, to turn your eyes of mercy toward us poor creatures.

The nearer you are to the source of graces, the more abundantly you can procure those graces for us. In heaven you see our sorrows more plainly; therefore have compassion on us and help us the more. Make us your faithful servants on earth that we may one day bless you in heaven.

On this day, when you were made queen of the universe, we also consecrate ourselves to your service. In the midst of your great joy, grant us the consolation of being accepted as your servants.

You are our Mother. O most sweet Mother, most loving mother, your altars are surrounded by many people; some ask to be cured of a sickness; others, to find relief in their troubles; some, for an abundant harvest; others, success in various projects. We ask you for graces which are more pleasing to your heart. See to it that we may be humble and detached from the world, and resigned to God's will. Obtain for us the holy fear of God, a good death, and paradise.

O Mary, change us from sinners into saints. Work this miracle, which will redound more to your honor than if you restored sight to a thousand blind persons or raised a thousand people from the dead.

You are so powerful with God, we need only say that you are his mother,

his beloved one, his most dear one, filled with his grace. What can he ever deny you?

O most beautiful queen, we do not aspire to see you on earth; but we do desire to see you in heaven. And it is up to you to obtain this grace for us. We hope with confidence that you will. Amen, amen.

PART IV



THE SORROWS OF MARY

Mary is the queen of martyrs because her martyrdom lasted longer and was more severe than that of all other martyrs.

Whose heart will not melt when he hears about the most tragic event that ever happened in this world?

There was once a wonderful and holy mother who had an only son. This son was most exemplary—innocent, virtuous, handsome—and he loved his mother dearly. He was so devoted that he never caused her the least displeasure. He always showed her the utmost respect, obedience, and affection. By the same token, this mother loved her son with all the affection of her generous heart. Now this is what happened.

Out of envy, this son was falsely accused by his enemies. And although the judge knew and admitted that the young man was innocent, nevertheless, in order not to offend his enemies, he condemned him to the disgraceful death they demanded. This poor mother had to suffer the grief of seeing her son unjustly snatched from her in the flower of his youth. By dint of various tortures and torments, his blood was all drained away and he was made to die a criminal's death in a public place of execution—and this before her very eyes.

O devout souls, what do you say? Are not these events and this unhappy mother worthy of your compassion?

You already know of whom I speak. This son, so cruelly put to death, was our loving Redeemer Jesus; and this mother was the Blessed Virgin Mary. Because of her love for us, she was willing to see him sacrificed to divine justice by the barbarity of men. This great torment which Mary endured for us was more dreadful than a thousand deaths and deserves our sympathy and our gratitude. If we cannot return this love in any other way, let us at least for a few moments consider how great were the sufferings by which Mary became the queen of martyrs. The sufferings of Mary's martyrdom surpassed those of all other martyrs. First of all, they lasted longer; and second, they were more intense.

First Point

We call Jesus the King of sorrows and the King of martyrs because during his life he suffered more than all the martyrs. We call Mary the queen of martyrs because she too suffered a cruel martyrdom, the most cruel that anyone could suffer after that of her son. Richard of Saint Lawrence rightly called her "the martyr of martyrs." To her we can well apply the words of Isaiah: *He will crown you with a crown of tribulation* (Isa 22:18). The sorrows that tortured her soul were the crown that proclaimed her the queen of martyrs. Her sufferings surpassed the sufferings of all other martyrs together.

There can be no doubt that Mary was a true martyr. Denis the Carthusian, Pelbart, Catharinus, and others prove it clearly. The opinion is generally accepted that suffering sufficient to cause death is martyrdom, even though death may not result from it. Saint John the Evangelist is revered as a martyr even though he did not die in the caldron of boiling oil. He "came out more vigorous than when he went in," as the Breviary used to say. Saint Thomas says: "To have the glory of martyrdom it is sufficient to exercise obedience in the highest degree, that is, to be obedient unto death."

"Mary was a martyr," says Saint Bernard, "not by the sword of the executioner, but by the bitter sorrow of her heart." Although her body was not wounded by the hand of the executioner, her heart was pierced by a sword of grief at the Passion of her son, grief which was sufficient to cause her death not once but a thousand times. And so it follows that Mary was not only a real martyr, but that she suffered more than all others, as we shall see. Her martyrdom was longer than that of all others; so much so, that it can be said that her whole life was a protracted death.

"The Passion of Jesus began with his birth," says Saint Bernard. Now, just as Jesus suffered throughout his whole life, so Mary, too, in all things like her son, endured her martyrdom throughout her whole life. One of the meanings of the name of Mary, Albert the Great tells us, is "bitter sea." Hence the text of Jeremiah is applicable to her: *Great as the sea is your destruction* (Lam 2:13). Just as the sea is extraordinarily bitter and salty, so was the life of Mary always full of bitterness, for the

thought of the Passion of her son was always present in her mind. “There can be no doubt that Mary was enlightened by the Holy Spirit in a far higher degree than all the prophets, and so understood far better than they the prediction they recorded in the sacred Scriptures concerning the Messiah.” This is what an angel revealed to Saint Bridget, and he added: “The Blessed Virgin, even before she became his mother, knew how much the Incarnate Word was to suffer for the salvation of humankind. Out of compassion for this innocent Savior who was to be put to such a cruel death for crimes not his own, Mary began even then her great martyrdom.”

Her sorrow was immeasurably increased when she actually became the mother of the Savior. The sorrowful sight of the torments her son was to endure caused her to suffer a long martyrdom, a martyrdom which lasted her whole life, as the Abbot Rupert says. This was made clear in a vision which Saint Bridget had in the church of Saint Mary Major in Rome. The Blessed Virgin appeared to her along with Saint Simeon and an angel carrying a long sword dripping with blood. The sword denoted the bitter sorrow which transfixed the heart of Mary during her whole life. The Abbot Rupert has Mary speak as follows: “My beloved children, do not pity me merely for the hour when I had to look at my Jesus dying before my eyes; for the sword of sorrow predicted by Simeon pierced my soul during my entire life. When I was nursing him and when I was warming him in my arms, I foresaw the bitter death awaiting him. You can easily understand the long and cruel torments I must have endured.”

Mary might well say in the words of David: *My life is spent with grief and my years with sighing* (Ps 30:11). *My grief is with me always* (Ps 37:18). That is to say: “My whole life was spent in sorrow and tears, for I always foresaw the sufferings and death my son would one day have to endure.” Our Blessed Lady revealed to Saint Bridget that even after the death and ascension of her son, whether she was eating or working, the memory of his Passion was as deeply impressed on her mind as if it had just begun. Tauler therefore says that “the most Blessed Virgin spent her whole life in continual sorrow,” implying that her heart was constantly preoccupied with sadness and suffering.

The element of time, which usually mitigates people’s sorrows, did

not relieve Mary. In fact, it increased her sorrows. For on the one hand as Jesus grew older and more and more dear to her, so also on the other hand did the time of his death draw ever nearer. Understandably, her heart became more and more bowed down with grief at the thought of having to lose him on earth. “As the rose grows among the thorns,” said the angel to Saint Bridget, “so the Mother of God grew in the midst of suffering. And as the thorns increase in size with the growth of the rose, so the thorns of her sorrows increased in Mary, the chosen rose of the Lord, as she advanced in years. All the more deeply did they pierce her heart.”

We have considered the duration of Mary’s sorrows. Let us now pass on to a consideration of the second point, namely, their intensity.

Second Point

Mary is queen of martyrs not only because her martyrdom lasted longer than all others, but also because it was the most intense of all martyrdoms. Who can ever measure the intensity of Mary’s sorrows? Jeremiah seems unable to find anyone he can compare her to, especially when he considers what she endured at the death of her son. *To what shall I compare you? or to what shall I liken you, o daughter of Jerusalem? … for great as the sea is your destruction: who shall heal you?* (Lam 2:13). Cardinal Hugo, in a commentary on these words, says: “O Blessed Virgin Mary, as the sea is more bitter than anything else, so is your sorrow more bitter than any other sorrow.” Saint Anselm maintains: “If God had not by a special miracle preserved the life of Mary at each moment of her life, her sorrow would have been such as to cause her death.” Saint Bernardine of Siena goes so far as to say: “The grief of Mary was so great that, if it were divided among all men, it would be sufficient to cause their death immediately.”

Let us now consider the reasons why Mary’s martyrdom was greater than that of all other martyrs.

In the first place, we must remember that the other martyrs suffered their martyrdom physically, by means of fire and sword and other tortures. Mary, on the contrary, suffered hers in her soul, as Saint

Simeon had foretold: *And your own soul a sword shall pierce* (Lk 2:35). In effect, the holy old man had said: "O most Blessed Virgin, the bodies of other martyrs will be torn with hooks of iron, but you will be transfixed and martyred not in body but in soul by the Passion of your Son." Just as the soul is more noble than the body, so Mary's sufferings were greater than those of all the martyrs. Our Blessed Savior himself disclosed to Saint Catherine of Siena: "There is no comparison between the sufferings of the soul and those of the body." Abbot Arnold of Chartres does not hesitate to say: "Anyone who had been present on Mount Calvary and had witnessed the great sacrifice of the Immaculate Lamb would have seen two great altars there, one in the body of Jesus and the other in the heart of Mary. For on that mountain, at the same time that the son was sacrificing his body by his death, Mary was sacrificing her soul by her compassion."

Moreover, says Saint Antoninus, while other martyrs suffered by sacrificing their own lives, the Blessed Virgin suffered by sacrificing her son's life, a life dearer to her than her own. She not only endured in spirit all that her son endured in his body, but the very sight of his torments brought more sorrow to her than if she had undergone them all physically. No one can doubt that Mary suffered in her heart all the outrages she saw inflicted on her Jesus.

Everyone knows that the sufferings of children are also those of their mothers who see them suffer. Speaking of the sorrow the mother of the Machabees felt when she witnessed the torture of her sons, Saint Augustine says: "Seeing their sufferings, she suffered in each one of them. Because she loved them all, she endured in her soul what they endured in their flesh," Mary also suffered all the torments—the scourges, the thorns, the nails, and the cross—which tortured the innocent flesh of Jesus. All pressed at the same time into the heart of Mary to complete her martyrdom. "He suffered in the flesh, and she in the heart," writes Blessed Amadeus. And Saint Lawrence Giustiniani says: "The heart of Mary became, as it were, a mirror of the Passion of her Son, in which one could see, faithfully reflected, the thorns, the blows, the wounds, and all that Jesus suffered."

Saint Bonaventure remarks that "the wounds which were scattered over the body of Our Lord were all united in the single heart of Mary."

Our Blessed Lady, therefore, because of her compassion for Jesus, was scourged, crowned with thorns, insulted, and nailed to the cross. Saint Bonaventure, contemplating Mary on Calvary at the death of her son, questions her and asks: "O Lady, tell me, where were you on Calvary? Near the cross? No, I would rather say that you were actually on the cross, being crucified with your Son." Richard of Saint Lawrence comments on the words Isaiah placed on the lips of the Redeemer: *I have trodden the wine press alone, and of the Gentiles there is not a man with me* (Isa 63:3). He says: "It is true, O Lord, that you suffered alone in the work of human redemption, and there was no man who sufficiently pitied you. But there was a woman with you, namely your own mother. She suffered in her heart all that you had to endure in your body."

But all this is saying too little of Mary's sorrows. As I have already observed, she suffered more by seeing him suffer than if she had endured the outrages and the death of her son in her own person. Erasmus says, speaking of parents: "They are more cruelly tormented by their children's sufferings than by their own." This is not always true. But it certainly was true in Mary's case. For she loved her son and his life a thousand times more than she loved herself or her own life. Blessed Amadeus claims, and rightly, that Mary "endured far more at the sorrowful sight of the torments of her Jesus than she would have suffered if she had endured his whole Passion herself." The reason is obvious for, as Saint Bernard says: "The soul is where it loves, rather than where it lives." Our Lord himself had already said the same thing: *Where your treasure is, there also will your heart be* (Lk 12:34). If then Mary lived more in her son than in herself by reason of her indescribable love, she must have endured far greater torments in his sufferings and death than she would have endured if the most cruel death in the world had been inflicted on her personally.

Now let us reflect on another circumstance which made the martyrdom of Mary incomparably greater than the torments of all the other martyrs, namely, that in the Passion of Jesus she endured what she suffered without the least relief.

The martyrs suffered from the torments inflicted on them by tyrants, but the love of Jesus made their pains sweet and bearable. Saint Vincent suffered excruciatingly during his martyrdom. He was tortured on a

rack, torn with pincers, burnt with red-hot iron plates. But he spoke to the tyrant with such energy and contempt for his torments that Saint Augustine remarks: “It seemed as if there were one Vincent who was suffering and another who was speaking.” Saint Boniface had his body torn with iron hooks; sharp-pointed reeds were thrust between his nails and flesh; melted lead was poured into his mouth. Yet in all this torture he never stopped repeating: “I give you thanks, O Lord Jesus Christ.” Saint Mark and Saint Marcellinus were bound to a stake and their feet pierced with nails. When the tyrant taunted them and said: “Wretches, see what a miserable condition you are reduced to; save yourself from these torments,” they replied: “What pains, what torments do you mean? We have never felt better than we feel at the present moment, now that we are suffering joyfully for the love of Jesus Christ.”

Saint Lawrence suffered while roasting on the gridiron but, according to Saint Leo, “the inner flame of love which consoled his soul was more powerful than the outer flame which tortured his body.” Love made him so courageous that he mocked the tyrant and said: “If you want to feed on my flesh, part of it is now roasted; turn it and eat.” How could the saint possibly rejoice in the midst of so many torments which were, for all practical purposes, a living death? Saint Augustine replies: “Intoxicated by the wine of divine love, he felt neither torments nor death.”

The more the martyrs loved Jesus, the less they felt their torments. The very thought of the sufferings of a crucified Christ was enough to console them. But was not our Mother of Sorrows also consoled by love of her son and the sight of his torments? No, for this son who was suffering was the real cause of her sorrows. Her love for him was unfortunately her only and her most cruel executioner. Mary’s whole martyrdom consisted in beholding and compassionating her innocent son who was suffering so much. The more she loved him, the more bitter and inconsolable was her grief. *Great as the sea* is *your destruction; who shall heal you?* (Lam 2:13).

O Queen of heaven, love has mitigated the sufferings of the other martyrs and healed their wounds; but who soothed your grief? Who healed the cruel wounds of your heart? *Who shall heal you?* asks Jeremiah. Your son, who could afford you this consolation, caused your

sufferings by his own sufferings, and your love for him was what constituted your martyrdom. “Other martyrs,” Diez remarks, “are all represented with the instruments of their sufferings—Saint Paul with his sword, Saint Andrew with his cross, Saint Lawrence with his gridiron—but Mary is represented with her dead son in her arms. Jesus himself, and he alone, was the instrument of her martyrdom, because of the love she had for him.” Richard of Saint Victor confirms all that I have just said in a few words: “In other martyrs, the greatness of their love soothed the pains of their martyrdom; but in the Blessed Virgin, the more she loved, the greater were her sufferings and the more excruciating her martyrdom.”

It is a truism that the more we love something the more pain we feel when we lose it. We grieve more at the loss of a brother than we do at the loss of some animal. We are more distressed at the loss of a son than at the loss of a friend. Now Cornelius à Lapide says that “to understand how much Mary grieved at the death of her son, we must understand how much she loved him.” But who can possibly measure that love? Blessed Amadeus says: “Two kinds of love for Jesus were united in the heart of Mary—supernatural love by which she loved him as her God, and natural love by which she loved him as her son.”

These two loves were fused into a single love, a love so intense that, according to William of Paris, the Blessed Virgin loved Jesus as much as it was possible for a creature to love him. And Richard of Saint Victor asserts that “as there was no love like her love, so there was no sorrow like her sorrow.” If Mary’s love for her son was immense, her grief at losing him by death must also have been immense. “Wherever you find the greatest love,” says Saint Albert the Great, “there you will also find the greatest grief.”

Let us now imagine this Blessed Mother standing near her son expiring on the cross. Picture her applying to herself the words of Jeremiah and saying to us: O all you that pass by the way, attend and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow (Lam 1:12). O you who spend your lives on earth and do not pity me, stop a while to gaze at me as I see my beloved son dying before my eyes. Then tell me whether, of all the anguish you have ever witnessed, you have ever seen any sorrow like my sorrow. “No, O most suffering of all mothers,” replies Saint

Bonaventure, “no sorrow can be found more bitter than yours. For no son could ever be found more dear than your son.” “There was never a more lovable son in the whole world than Jesus,” says Richard of Saint Lawrence; “nor was there ever a mother who loved her son more devotedly than Mary. And since the world has never seen a love like Mary’s love, how can there be any sorrow like Mary’s sorrow?”

Saint Ildephonsus did not hesitate to call it an understatement to maintain that Mary’s sorrows were greater than all the torments of the martyrs combined. And Saint Anselm adds: “The cruelest tortures inflicted on the holy martyrs were as nothing compared with the martyrdom of Mary.” Saint Basil of Seleucia writes: “As the sun exceeds all the other planets in brilliance, so Mary’s sufferings exceed those of all the other martyrs.” A learned author, Father Pinamonti, expresses the thought that the sorrow of this devoted mother in the Passion of Jesus was so great that she alone of all God’s creatures could adequately compassionate the death of a God made man.

Addressing the Mother of Sorrows, Saint Bonaventure says: “Why, O Lady, did you go to sacrifice yourself on Calvary? Was it not enough for God to be crucified in order to redeem us? Did you, his mother, also have to go to be crucified with him?” It goes without saying that the death of Jesus was more than enough to save the whole world and an infinite number of worlds. But because of her boundless love for him, Mary wished to help the cause of our salvation with the merits of the sufferings she offered for us on Calvary. Saint Albert the Great was induced to say that “as we are under great obligation to Jesus for what he suffered for our sake, so also are we under great obligation to Mary for the martyrdom she voluntarily suffered for our salvation in the death of her son.” I say voluntarily, since as Saint Agnes revealed to Saint Bridget, “our merciful and compassionate mother was willing to endure any torment to save the souls of men.” Indeed we may say that Mary’s only relief in the midst of her tremendous sorrow was in seeing the lost world redeemed and the men who were his enemies reconciled with God. “She rejoiced in her sorrow,” says Blessed Simon of Cassia, “because a sacrifice of appeasement was being offered for all humankind.”

Such love on the part of Mary deserves our gratitude, and we can

show this gratitude by meditating upon and sympathizing with her sorrows. But she complained to Saint Bridget that very few people do condole with her and that the greater part of the world lives completely oblivious of her sorrows. “I look around me at all who are on earth to see if there are any who pity me and who meditate on my sorrows, and I find that there are very few. Therefore, my daughter, while I may be forgotten by most people, at least do you not forget me. Meditate on my sorrows and share in my grief, as far as you can.”

To understand how pleased Our Lady is when we meditate on her sorrows we have only to remember that in the year 1239 she appeared to seven devout servants of hers (who were afterwards to found the Order of the Servants of Mary) with a black garment in her hand, and asked them to meditate often on her sufferings. To remind them of her sorrows, she expressed the desire that in future they should wear nothing but garments of mourning.

Our Lord revealed to Blessed Veronica of Binasco that he is more pleased to see compassion shown to his mother than to himself. He said to her: “My daughter, I certainly appreciate the tears shed for my Passion. However, because I loved my mother so intensely, meditation on the torments she suffered at my death is even more agreeable to me.”

And so we may say with reason that Jesus promises extraordinary graces to those who are devoted to the sorrows of Mary. Pelbart relates that it was revealed to Saint Elizabeth that, after the assumption of the Blessed Virgin into heaven, Saint John the Evangelist was eager to see her again. God granted this favor and Mary appeared to him accompanied by her son. The saint then heard Mary ask Jesus to grant some special grace to all those who are devoted to her sorrows. So Jesus promised her four principal ones. First, those who invoke Mary in the name of her sorrows will obtain before death true repentance for all their sins; second, he will protect in all the trials of life and especially at the time of their death all those who practice this devotion; third, he will impress on their minds the remembrance of his Passion and will reward them in heaven for their devotion; and fourth, he will place such devout servants in Mary’s hands to do with them as she wishes and to obtain for them all the graces she desires.

The following example proves how beneficial to salvation is devotion

to the sorrows of Mary.

Example

In the revelations of Saint Bridget, we read that there was a certain rich man who, as a result of his sinful habits, had given himself up by an express compact to be a slave to the devil. For sixty years he had served Satan, leading a most vicious life and never approaching the sacraments. Now this nobleman lay dying. To show mercy to him, Our Redeemer commanded Saint Bridget to tell her confessor to go and visit him and exhort him to confess his sins. The confessor went but the sick man replied that he had no need to confess his sins since he had frequently gone to confession. The priest went a second time, but the poor slave of the devil remained obdurate in his determination not to go to confession. Jesus once more told the saint to have her confessor go and see him. He did so. On the third occasion he told the dying man about the revelation made to the saint and said that he had come back repeatedly because Our Lord wished to show mercy to him and had told him to come. On hearing this the dying man was touched and began to weep: "How can I be saved?" he asked. "For sixty years I have been a slave of the devil and my soul is black with innumerable sins." "Do not be afraid," answered the confessor; "if you are sorry for your sins I can promise you pardon on the part of God." The man began to grow confident. "Father," he said, "I had regarded myself as lost and had despaired of my salvation because of my sins; but now I feel real sorrow and this gives me hope. Since God has apparently not yet abandoned me, I will go to confession." He made his confession with the greatest fervor. The following morning he received holy Communion. Soon after, contrite and resigned, he died.

Some time later, Our Lord again spoke to Saint Bridget and told her that the sinner was saved and was in purgatory. He revealed that it was to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin that the man owed his salvation. Even though he had led a wicked life, he had nevertheless always preserved a devotion to Mary's sorrows and whenever he thought of them he had always said a prayer to her.

Prayer

O sorrowful Mother! You wept so bitterly over your son who died for my salvation; but what good will all those tears do me if I am lost? By the merits of your sorrows, obtain for me true contrition for my sins and a genuine amendment of my life, together with a constant and tender compassion for the sufferings of Jesus and your own sorrows.

Since Jesus and you, innocent as you both are, have suffered so much for love of me, help me, who am deserving of hell, to suffer something for love of you.

O Lady, I will say with Saint Bonaventure, if I have offended you, wound my heart in all justice. If I have served you, I now ask for wounds as my reward. I am ashamed to see my Jesus wounded, and you wounded along with him, and myself without a wound.

In short, O my Mother, by the grief you experienced in seeing your son bow down his head and expire on the cross in the midst of so many torments, I beseech you to obtain for me a good death.

Be on hand, O advocate of sinners, to aid my afflicted soul in the combat it will have to engage in as it passes into eternity. Since at that hour I will probably be unable to speak and unable to call upon your name and that of Jesus, who are my only hope, I do so now. I call upon your son and you to come to my help during my last moments. And to you, O Jesus and Mary, I commend my soul. Amen.

1

THE FIRST SORROW:

THE PROPHECY OF SAINT SIMEON



Suffering is everyone's lot in this valley of tears, and all of us must put up with the evils and miseries that are a daily occurrence. Yet how much more vexatious life would be if we knew what was in store for us! "Unhappy would that man be," says Seneca, "who knew what the future would bring and would have to suffer all the more by anticipation."

God is merciful by not allowing us to foresee the crosses that are in store for us. It is a blessing that whatever it is we have to endure, we have to suffer it only once. But he was not so compassionate toward Mary. He willed that she should be queen of sorrows and in all things like his son, and so Mary was obliged to have continually before her eyes all the torments that awaited her, especially her participation in sufferings of the Passion and death of her beloved Jesus. In the Temple, Saint Simeon had received the Divine Child in his arms and predicted that this child would be a symbol of contradiction and persecution for all people. *Behold this child* is *set … for a sign which shall be contradicted*. Then he added that dreadful prophecy: *And your own soul a sword shall pierce* (Lk 2:34–35).

The Blessed Virgin told Saint Matilda that when Saint Simeon pronounced these words "all her joy was changed into sorrow." For, as was revealed to Saint Teresa, although Mary already knew that the life of her son would be sacrificed for the salvation of the world, she then received a more explicit knowledge and learned in greater detail what sufferings and what a cruel death awaited him. She knew that he would be persecuted and opposed in every way. He would be opposed in his teaching: instead of being believed, he would he called a blasphemer for claiming to be the Son of God. The reprobate Caiphas was to say: *"He has blasphemed.… he is guilty of death"* (Mt 26:65, 66). He would be

opposed in his reputation: for though he was of noble, even royal lineage, he was despised as a nobody: "*Is not this the carpenter's son?"* (Mt 13:55). "*Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?"* (Mk 6:3). He was Wisdom itself, yet was treated as an ignoramus: *"How does this man know letters, having never learned?"* (Jn 7:15). As a false prophet: *And they blindfolded him, and smote his face … saying: "Prophesy, who is it that struck you?"* (Lk 22:64). He was treated as a madman: *"He is mad, why hear you him?"* (Jn 10:20). As a drunkard, a glutton, and a friend of sinners: *"Behold a man that is a glutton, and a drinker of wine, a friend of publicans and sinners"* (Lk 7:34). As a sorcerer: "*By the prince of devils he casts out devils"* (Mt 9:34). As a heretic and one possessed by the evil spirit: "*Do we not say well of you that you are a Samaritan and has a devil?"* (Jn 8:48).

In short, Jesus was considered so notoriously wicked that, as the Jews said to Pilate, no trial was necessary to condemn him. *"If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up to you"* (Jn 18:30). He was opposed even in his very soul: for his own Eternal Father, in order to meet the demands of divine justice, opposed him by refusing to hear his prayer when he said: *"Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me"* (Mt 26:39). His Father abandoned him to fear, weariness, and sadness—so much so that Jesus exclaimed: *"My soul is sorrowful unto death"* (Mt 26:38). His inner sufferings even caused him to sweat blood. In a word, he was persecuted and tortured in body and in soul in every way until finally, drained of every drop of his blood, he expired—an object of scorn on a cross of shame.

When David, in the midst of his pleasure and regal splendor, heard from the prophet Nathan that his son would die (2 Kgs 12:14), he could not be consoled. He wept, fasted, and slept on the ground. Mary, on the other hand, received with the greatest calm the announcement that her son would die. She submitted to it peacefully. Yet, what grief she must have suffered, living daily in the presence of this devoted son, hearing from him the words of eternal life, edified day after day by his sacred conduct.

Abraham had much to suffer during the three days that he spent with his beloved Isaac after he learned that he was to lose him. But, O God, it was not for three days but for thirty-three years that Mary had to endure

a similar sorrow! A similar sorrow? It was a far greater sorrow, inasmuch as Mary's son was infinitely more lovable than the son of Abraham.

The Blessed Virgin revealed to Saint Bridget that when she was on earth there was not a moment that this sorrow did not pierce her soul: "Whenever I looked at my son," she said, "whenever I wrapped him in his swaddling clothes, whenever I saw his hands and feet, my soul was enveloped in grief, for I realized that he would be crucified."

The Abbot Rupert contemplates Mary nursing her child and saying to him: My lover is for me a sachet of myrrh to rest in my bosom (Cant 1:12). Ah, my son, I clasp you in my arms, because you are so dear to me. But the more I love you, the more you become a source of sorrow to me when I think of all that you will have to suffer. According to Saint Bernardine of Siena, Mary realized that he who was the strength of the saints was to be reduced to agony; he who was the beauty of paradise would be disfigured; the Lord of the world would be bound as a criminal; the Creator of all things would be made livid with blows; the Judge of all would be condemned; the Glory of heaven would be despised; the King of kings would be crowned with thorns and treated as an impostor.

Father Engelgrave says that it was also revealed to Saint Bridget that our afflicted Mother, already aware what her son was to suffer, "thought of the gall and vinegar when she suckled him; of the cords that would bind him when she swathed him; of the cross to which he would be nailed when she carried him in her arms; of his death when he slept." Whenever she dressed him, she reflected that his clothes would one day be torn from him so that he could be crucified. And when she gazed at his sacred hands and feet, she thought of the nails that would one day pierce them. Then, as Mary told Saint Bridget, "my eyes filled with tears, and my heart was tortured with grief."

The Evangelist says that as Jesus grew older, he also *advanced in wisdom and in grace with God and men* (Lk 2:52). Saint Thomas explains this as meaning that Jesus advanced in wisdom and grace in the eyes of men in as far as their opinion of him was concerned. He advanced before God in the sense that all his actions would have sufficed to increase his merit continually if it had not been for the fact that all grace had been

conferred upon him in its complete fullness from the beginning by virtue of the hypostatic union.[1] But if Jesus advanced in the love and esteem of others, how much more must Mary have grown to love him! Yet, at the same time that her love increased, all the more did her sorrow increase at the thought of having to lose him by such a cruel death. The nearer the time of his Passion approached, the more deeply the sword of sorrow foretold by Simeon pierced the heart of his mother. An angel revealed this in so many words to Saint Bridget when he told her: "That sword of sorrow approached the Blessed Virgin hour by hour, as the time for the Passion of her son drew near."

It is most reasonable therefore that, since our King and his holy mother did not refuse to suffer the most cruel pains throughout life for our sake, we at least should not complain if we too have to suffer something. Jesus crucified once appeared to the Dominican Sister Magdalene Orsini who had long been suffering under a great trial. He encouraged her to remain with him on the cross by bearing her affliction. But Sister Magdalene objected and said complainingly: "O Lord, you were tortured on the cross for only three hours, but I have endured my pain for many years." The Redeemer replied: "O ignorant soul, you do not know what you are saying. From the first moment of my conception I suffered in my heart everything that I would have to endure later on while dying on the cross." When we are in the mood to complain of our sufferings, let us picture Jesus and his Mother Mary addressing the same words to us.

Example

Father Roviglione, S.J., tells how a young man accustomed to visit daily a statue of Our Lady of Sorrows, one in which Mary was represented with seven swords piercing her heart. One night the youth unfortunately committed a mortal sin. The next morning, going as usual to visit the statue, he noticed that there were no longer only seven, but now eight swords in the heart of Mary. Wondering at this, he heard a voice telling him that it was his sin that had added the eighth sword. He was so moved by this that he immediately went to confession and through the intercession of his heavenly advocate recovered divine grace.

Prayer

O Blessed Mother, I have not pierced your heart with one sword alone, but with as many as are the number of sins I have committed. O Lady, it is not you who are innocent who ought to suffer, but I who am guilty of so many crimes. But since you have suffered so much for me, obtain for me by your merits great sorrow for my sins and patience in the trials of this life. These are bound to be light in comparison with my crimes, by which I have so often deserved hell. Amen.

2

THE SECOND SORROW:

THE FLIGHT OF JESUS INTO EGYPT



A stag wounded by an arrow carries the pain with him wherever he goes, because he still bears the arrow that wounded him. Similarly, the Blessed Mother, after hearing the sad prophecy of Saint Simeon, always carried her sorrow with her in continual remembrance of the Passion of her son. Explaining this passage of the Canticles: *Your hair is like draperies of purple; a king is held captive in its tresses* (Cant 7:5), Algrino says that it refers to Mary's continual thoughts about the Passion of Jesus. The blood which was one day to flow from his wounds was kept continually before her eyes: "Your mind, and your thoughts, O Mary, steeped in the blood of Our Lord's Passion, were always filled with sorrow, just as if they actually beheld the blood flowing from his wounds." The arrow in the heart of Mary was her son himself. And the more precious he appeared to her to be, the more deeply the thought of losing him by such a cruel death wounded her heart.

Let us now turn to the second sword of sorrow which wounded Mary, the flight of her Infant Jesus into Egypt to escape the persecution of Herod.

Having heard that the long-awaited Messiah had been born, Herod foolishly feared that he would deprive him of his kingdom. Saint Fulgentius, rebuking the king for his foolhardiness, addresses him saying: "Why are you disturbed, Herod? The King who is born does not come to conquer kings by the sword. He will subjugate them in a most remarkable manner by his death." Herod waited to hear from the holy Magi where the young King was born, and planned to take his life. When he found he had been deceived, he ordered all the infants in the neighborhood of Bethlehem to be put to death. It was then that the angel appeared in a dream to Saint Joseph and told him: *"Arise, and take the*

child and his mother, and flee into Egypt" (Mt 2:13). According to Gerson, Saint Joseph immediately told Mary about the command. They took the Infant Jesus and they set out at once. *He arose and took the child and his mother, by night, and withdrew into Egypt* (Mt 2:14).

"O God," Saint Albert the Great pictures Mary as saying, "must he who came to save men now flee from them?" No sooner is Jesus born than he is persecuted. Mary began to realize that Simeon's prophecy regarding her son was already being fulfilled: *He is set for a sign that shall be contradicted* (Lk 2:34). What anguish the realization of the impending exile must have caused Mary. Saint Peter Chrysologus sees fit to paraphrase the angel's words: "Flee from your friends to the abode of strangers; flee from the temple of God to the shrines of demons! O what tribulation for a newborn Infant, still at his mother's breast, to have to flee into a foreign land!"

It is easy to imagine that Mary must have suffered on the journey. The distance to Egypt was considerable. Some authors estimate that it was four hundred miles, requiring a journey of up to thirty days. The road was "rough, unknown, and not very much traveled," according to Saint Bonaventure's description. It was wintertime, so that they had to make their way through snow, rain, and wind, over rough and dirty roads. Mary was then only fifteen years old, a delicate young girl, unused to such travel. They had no one to accompany them. Saint Peter Chrysologus says: "Joseph and Mary had no servants; they were obliged to be both servants and masters."

What a touching sight it must have been to see this delicate Virgin, the newborn babe in her arms, wandering through a strange land. "How did they get their food?" asked Saint Bonaventure. "Where did they stop for the night?" They probably were satisfied with a hard piece of bread, either brought along by Joseph or begged as alms. The only place that they could have slept along the road (especially through two hundred miles of desert where there were no houses or inns) was on the sand or under a tree, in the open air and exposed to the dangers of robbers and wild animals with which Egypt abounded. If anyone had met these three —the greatest personages in the world—would he not have thought that they were but three poor wandering beggars?

According to Brocard and Jansenius, they resided in Egypt at a place

called Matarea. Saint Anselm, on the other hand, says that they lived in the town of Heliopolis, or at Memphis, now the town of Cairo.[2] Imagine the pinching poverty they must have endured during the seven years they spent there, according to Saint Antoninus, Saint Thomas, and other authors. They were strangers—unknown, without income, money, or relatives, and barely able to support themselves by the work of their hands. "Since they were destitute," says Saint Basil, "it is obvious that they must have worked very hard to provide themselves with the necessities of life." Ludolph of Saxony has written (and let this be a consolation to the poor) that "Mary lived there in such poverty that there were times when she did not have even a piece of bread to give her son when he was hungry."

After the death of Herod, according to the account in Saint Matthew, the angel again appeared to Saint Joseph in a dream, and told them to return to Judea. With reference to this return, Saint Bonaventure reflects how much more the Blessed Virgin must have suffered this time since Jesus was now older—about seven years of age—as the saint remarks, an age when children are too big to carry and not yet strong enough to walk long distances by themselves.

The thought of Jesus and Mary wandering as fugitives through a strange land teaches us that we must also live as pilgrims here below, detached from the material things that the world offers, and which we must soon leave to enter eternity: *Here we have no permanent city, but seek for the city that is to come* (Heb 13:14). To which Saint Augustine adds: "You are only a guest here. You glance around and then pass on."

It also teaches us to embrace crosses, for we cannot live in this world without them. Blessed Veronica of Binasco, an Augustinian nun, accompanied Mary and the Infant Jesus in spirit on their way to Egypt. Afterwards, the Blessed Mother said to her: "Daughter, you have seen how difficult it was for us to reach this country. Learn from this that no one receives graces without suffering." Anyone who wishes to have the sufferings of this life lightened must travel in the company of Jesus and Mary: *Take the child and his mother* (Mt 2:20). All sufferings become light, and even sweet and desirable, to one who lovingly bears Jesus and Mary in his heart. Let us then prove that we love them. Let us make Mary happy by welcoming her son in our hearts, the son whom men still

continue to persecute by their sins.

Example

One day the Blessed Virgin appeared to Saint Colette, a Franciscan nun, and showed her the Infant Jesus in a basin, bruised and mutilated. Mary said to her: “This is the way sinners continually treat my dear son, renewing his death and my sorrows. My daughter, you must pray for them so that they will be converted.”

We may also cite another vision seen by the venerable Sister Joanna of Jesus and Mary, also a Franciscan nun. One day, when she was meditating on the Infant Jesus persecuted by Herod, she heard a loud noise, like that of armed men pursuing someone. Immediately she saw before her a beautiful child all out of breath and running, who exclaimed: “O Joanna, help me, conceal me! I am Jesus of Nazareth, I am fleeing from these sinners who wish to kill me and persecute me as Herod did. Please save me!”

Prayer

O Mary, your son expired at the hands of men who persecuted him to death. These ungrateful men still go on persecuting him by their sins and they continue to afflict you, O sorrowful Mother! O God, I too am one of these. My most sweet Mother, let me have tears to weep over my ingratitude. By the sufferings you endured on that journey to Egypt, help me in the journey I now have to make to eternity so that I may finally be united to you in loving my persecuted Savior in the kingdom of the blessed. Amen.

3

THE THIRD SORROW:

THE LOSS OF JESUS IN THE TEMPLE



The apostle Saint James says that our perfection consists in the virtue of patience. *And let patience have a perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing* (Jas 1:4). Since Our Lord gave us the Blessed Virgin Mary as a model of perfection, it was necessary for her to be burdened with sorrows so that we may admire her heroic patience and endeavor to imitate it. The sorrow we are considering today was one of the greatest that Mary had to endure in all her life—the loss of her son in the Temple.

A person born blind does not feel the deprivation of daylight as much as someone who becomes blind later in life. If anyone has once enjoyed the sunlight, he suffers much more keenly when deprived of it. The same applies to those unhappy souls who live blinded by the world. They have very little knowledge of God. They suffer very little from the fact that they cannot find him. But those souls who, illumined by divine light, have enjoyed the sweet presence of God through love—how bitterly they feel the loss when they find themselves deprived of his presence! Let us now see how much Mary must have suffered from this third sword of sorrow that pierced her heart when she lost Jesus in Jerusalem for three days, and when she was deprived of his sweet presence which she was so accustomed to enjoy.

Saint Luke relates in the second chapter of his Gospel that the Blessed Virgin was accustomed to visit the Temple each year at paschal time along with Saint Joseph and Jesus. When her son was twelve years old she went there as usual, and Jesus remained behind in Jerusalem. At first, she did not notice it, thinking that he was with their kinsfolk. When she reached Nazareth and looked for him, she could not find him. She immediately returned to Jerusalem and found him only after three days.

What anxiety this broken-hearted mother must have felt during those three days when she searched everywhere for her son, and asked for him as the spouse did in the Canticles: *Have you seen him whom my soul loves?* (Cant 3:3). How disconsolately must she have repeated those words of Ruben referring to his brother Joseph: *The boy is not there, and I, where shall I turn?* (Gen 37:30). Weeping uninterruptedly, she could make her own the words of David during those three terrible days: *My tears have been my bread day and night, while it is said to me daily: Where is your God?* (Ps 41:4). Pelbart is right in saying that "during those nights Mary did not sleep; she wept constantly and besought God to help her find her son." According to Saint Bernard she frequently addressed Jesus during those days by using the words of the spouse in the Canticles: *Show me where you feed, where you lie in the midday, lest I begin to wander* (Cant 1:6). My son, tell me where you are, that I need no longer wander about looking for you in vain.

There are some who say, and not without reason, that this sorrow was not only one of the greatest, but the very greatest and the most painful that Mary had to endure during her life.

In the first place, during her other sorrows, Mary always had Jesus with her. She suffered when Saint Simeon made his prophecy to her in the Temple. She suffered during the flight to Egypt. But at both times Jesus was with her. Now, however, she was suffering far from Jesus, not knowing where he was: *And the light of my eyes itself is not with me* (Ps 37:11). That is, while she sorrowed she said: "The light of my eyes, my dear Jesus, is no longer with me. He has left me and I do not know where he is." Origen says that because of Mary's love for her son "she suffered more from this loss of Jesus than any martyr ever suffered in the separation of his soul from his body." Excruciatingly long were those three days for Mary; they seemed to last for ages. And they were filled with bitterness, because there was no one to console her. Who can ever console me, she could say with Jeremiah, because the only one who could do so is far away? And therefore my eyes cannot weep enough: *Therefore do I weep, and my eyes run down with water; because the comforter … is far from me* (Lam 1:16). And she could repeat with Tobias: *what manner of joy shall be to me who sit in darkness and see not the light of heaven?* (Tob 5:12).

In the second place, during all her other sorrows Mary knew what their cause and purpose was—the redemption of the world and the divine will. But in this case she did not know why her son had left her. "Our sorrowful Mother," says Lanspergius, "was grief-stricken by the loss of Jesus because in her humility she regarded it as a sign that she was no longer worthy to remain with him or attend him on earth, or to be in charge of such a treasure." "And who knows," she may have thought to herself, "but perhaps I have not served him as I should have done; perhaps I have been guilty of some negligence, and that is why he has left me." "They looked for him," says Origen, "fearing he might have left them for good."

It is certain that a soul who loves God can experience no greater pain than the fear of having offended him. It was the sorrow caused by this thought that made Mary complain lovingly to Jesus when she found Him: *Son, why have you done so to us? Your father and I have sought you sorrowing* (Lk 2:48). These words do not mean, as the heretics blasphemously assert, that she was reprimanding Jesus. They were intended merely to give expression to the grief she felt during his absence. "It was not a rebuke," says Denis the Carthusian, "but a loving complaint."

What happened to Blessed Benvenuta brings out graphically the deep sorrow this third sword occasioned Mary. This pious soul had begged Mary to let her share in this dolor. Our Lady complied and appeared to her with the Child Jesus in her arms. But while Benvenuta was enjoying the sight of the Divine Infant, all of a sudden he disappeared. She was so brokenhearted by this that she begged Mary not to let her die of grief. Three days later, Mary appeared to her and said: "My daughter, you have asked to share in my sorrow. I want you to know that what you have gone through during these past three days is only an infinitesimal part of the anguish I suffered when I lost my son."

This third sorrow of Mary ought to serve in the first place as a consolation to souls who are desolate, and who no longer enjoy, as they once enjoyed, the sweet presence of the Lord. They may weep, but they should weep confidently, just as Mary wept over the loss of her son. They should be encouraged and not be afraid that they have lost divine grace, for Saint Teresa was assured by God that "no one is lost without

knowing it, and no one is deceived without wishing to be deceived." If Our Lord withdraws himself from the sight of a soul that loves him, he does not thereby necessarily withdraw himself from the heart. He often conceals himself from a soul so that it may seek him with a keener desire and a more ardent love. But whoever wants to find Jesus must look for him as Mary did, not amid the pleasures and delights of the world, but amid crosses and mortifications. "We sought you sorrowing," Mary said to her son. "Learn then from Mary," says Origen, "how to search for Jesus."

Moreover, we should look for no other good in this world than Jesus. Job did not despair when he lost everything he possessed on earth: wealth, children, health, and honors. He even came down from his throne and sat on a dunghill. Because he had God with him, he was happy even then. Saint Augustine says that Job "had lost what God had given him, but not God himself." Souls who have lost God are really miserable and unhappy. If Mary wept over the loss of her son for three days, how much more should sinners weep who have lost sanctifying grace. To them God says: *You are not my people, and I will not be yours* (Osee 1:9). For this is the effect of sin: it separates the soul from God. *Your iniquities have divided between you and your God* (Isa 59:2). Sinners may possess all the wealth in the world, but inasmuch as they have lost God, everything in this world becomes a source of affliction to them, as Solomon confessed: *Behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit* (Eccl 1:14). But the greatest misfortune of these poor blind souls is, as Saint Augustine remarks, that "when they lose an ox they do not hesitate to go and look for it; when they lose a sheep, they leave no stone unturned to find it; when they lose a beast of burden, they cannot rest until they have discovered it; but when they lose God, who is the supreme Good, they eat, drink, and sleep as usual."

Example

In the Annual Letters of the Society of Jesus, we read that a young man in the East Indies was about to leave his room to commit a sin when he heard a voice saying to him: "Stop! Where are you going?" He turned, and saw an image of the sorrowful Mother take a short sword from her

bosom and say to him: “Here, take this sword and stab me rather than my son with that sin you are about to commit.” The young man prostrated himself on the ground, and contritely begged God and the Blessed Virgin to pardon him for his sinful intention, a favor they readily granted him.

Prayer

O Blessed Virgin, why do you afflict yourself, looking everywhere for your lost son? Is it because you do not know where he is? Do you not know that he is in your heart? Are you not aware that he feeds among the lilies? You yourself have said: My beloved to me, and I to him, who feeds among the lilies (Cant 2:16). Your thoughts and your love—all so humble, so pure, and so holy—are the lilies which invite your divine Spouse to dwell in you.

Mary, do you sigh after Jesus, you who love no one but Jesus? Leave sighs to me, and to so many sinners who do not love him, or have lost him by offending him. Most loving Mother, if it is my fault that your son has not yet returned to my soul, obtain for me the grace of finding him. I know well that those who seek him find him. The Lord is good to the soul that seeks him (Lam 3:25). Help me to search for him as I should. You are the gate through which all find Jesus. I too hope to find him through you. Amen.

4

THE FOURTH SORROW:

THE SORROWFUL MEETING OF JESUS AND MARY



Saint Bernardine says that to form an idea of the unspeakable sorrow Mary felt when Jesus went to his death, we must first try to realize how much she loved him.

All mothers feel the sufferings of their children as if they were their own. When the Canaanite woman begged Our Savior to deliver her daughter from the devil that was tormenting her, she asked him to have pity on her, the mother, rather than on her daughter: *"Have pity on me, O Lord, son of David! My daughter is sorely beset by a devil"* (Mt 15:22). But what mother ever loved her son as much as Mary loved Jesus? He was her only son, a most loving and most lovable son. He was at the same time her son and her God. He had come on earth to enkindle in all hearts the fire of divine love: "I have come to cast fire upon the earth, and what will I but that it be kindled?" (Lk 12:49).

It is not difficult to imagine how ardent a flame he must have enkindled in the pure heart of his mother, empty as it was of every earthly affection. The Blessed Virgin herself told Saint Bridget that "love had made her heart and the heart of her son one." That blending together of servant and mother, and of son and God, created in the heart of Mary a fire made up of a thousand flames. But this whole furnace of love was later changed into a sea of grief at the time of the Passion when, as Saint Bernardine declares: "If all the sorrows of the world were fused into one, they would not equal the sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary." Saint Lawrence Giustiniani gives the reason for this: "The more tenderly she loved, the more deeply she was wounded." The greater her love for him, the greater her grief at the sight of his sufferings, especially when she met him on that dolorous way, dragging his cross to the place of execution. This is the fourth sword and it forms the subject of our

meditation today.

The Blessed Virgin revealed to Saint Bridget that, as the time of Our Lord's Passion approached, her eyes continually filled with tears whenever she thought of losing her Jesus. She described how a cold sweat covered her whole body as a result of the fear that seized her whenever she thought of his approaching sufferings.

The appointed day finally arrived. Jesus went in tears to say goodbye to his mother before going to his death. Saint Bonaventure, contemplating Mary on that night, says to her: "You spent it without sleep. And while others slept, you kept watch." In the morning, the disciples came to Mary bringing her the accounts of the night's proceedings. It was all sorrowful news and it verified the prophecy of Jeremiah: *Weeping, she has wept in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks: there is none to comfort her among all them that were dear to her* (Lam 1:2). Some told her about the cruel treatment of her son in the house of Caiphas; others, about the insults he had received from Herod. Finally—to come to our point quickly—Saint John came and broke the news that fickle Pilate had just now condemned him to die on the cross. I say "fickle" Pilate because, as Saint Leo remarks, "This unjust judge condemned him to death with the same lips with which he had declared him innocent." "O sorrowful Mother," exclaimed Saint John, "your son has now been condemned to death; he has already set out on the road to Calvary, carrying his own cross. Come, if you desire to see him and say farewell to him, as he passes through the streets."

Mary goes along with Saint John, and from the blood which she sees bespattering the ground learns that her son has already gone by. She revealed this later to Saint Bridget: "I knew from the footsteps of my son that he had already passed by, for the ground was stained with his blood."

Saint Bonaventure represents Mary taking a short-cut and stationing herself at the corner of a certain street in order to see Jesus. "The sorrowing Mother," says Saint Bernard, "went to meet her sorrowful son." While she waited for him to come along, the throngs recognized her—and what dreadful things she must have heard them say against her and her loved one.

What a frightening picture as the nails, the hammers, the ropes and all the fatal instruments that were to put an end to her son's life were paraded by. What a heartbreaking sound, as the trumpet proclaimed the sentence of death against her Jesus!

But now the implements, the trumpeter, the executioners have all passed by. Mary raised her eyes and, O God, saw a figure all covered with blood, wounded from head to foot, a wreath of thorns on his brow and carrying two heavy beams on his shoulders. She gazed at him, but hardly recognized him, saying with Isaiah: *We have seen him and there was no sightliness* (Isa 53:2). The wounds, the bruises, and the clotted blood gave him the appearance of a leper, so that he could no longer be recognized. *His look was, as it were, hidden and despised; whereupon we esteemed him not … We have thought him, as it were, a leper* (Isa 53:3, 4).

But, finally, love revealed who he was, and as soon as Mary realized that it was her son, what affection and fear filled her heart simultaneously, as Saint Peter of Alcántara says. On the one hand she was very eager to see him, and on the other, she dreaded the heartrending sight. At length their eyes met. Jesus wiped away the clotted blood which, according to Saint Bridget, prevented him from seeing Mary. The mother and the son looked at each other. And their looks became as so many arrows to pierce those hearts which loved each other so tenderly.

When Margaret, the daughter of Saint Thomas More, met her father on his way to death, she could only exclaim: "Father, Father!" and fell fainting at his feet. Mary did not faint when she met her son on the way to Calvary. It was not becoming, as Father Suarez remarks, for Christ's mother to lose the use of her reason. Nor did she die, for God was reserving for her still greater grief. She did not die, but she was nevertheless obliged to suffer sorrow sufficient to cause a thousand deaths.

His mother would have embraced him, says Saint Anselm, but the guards thrust her aside with insults and pushed the suffering Savior forward. Mary followed. O holy Virgin, where are you going? To Calvary. Can you trust yourself to see him hanging there who is your very life? *And your life shall be*, as *it were, hanging before you* (Deut 28:66).

Saint Lawrence Giustiniani pictures Jesus speaking to Mary: “Mother, where are you going? If you follow me, you will be tortured by my sufferings, and I along with you.” Even though the sight of her dying son was to cost her such bitter sorrow, Mary would not leave him. Jesus went forward and his mother followed, to be with her crucified son. As Abbot William says: “Mary also took up her cross and followed him, to be crucified along with him.”

Saint John Chrysostom mentions that “we humans feel pity even for wild beasts.” If we see a lioness following her little cub to death, we are all moved at the sight. Should we not be much more greatly moved to compassion on seeing Mary following her immaculate Lamb to death? Let us pity her, and accompany her and her son by patiently carrying the cross Our Lord imposes on us.

Saint John Chrysostom asks why in his other sufferings Jesus was content to bear them alone, but when he carried his cross he was assisted by the Cyrenean. He replies that it was “so that we may understand that the cross of Christ is not sufficient to save us, unless we also bear our cross with resignation until the day of our death.”

Example

One day Our Savior appeared to Sister Diomira, a Florentine nun, and said: “Think of me and love me, and I will think of you and love you.” At the same time, he presented her with a bouquet of flowers and a cross, indicating that the consolations of the saints in this world are always accompanied by the cross. The cross unites souls to God.

Saint Jerome Emiliani, while still a soldier and laden with sins, was locked up in a tower by his enemies. There, moved by his misfortune and inspired by God to change his way of life, he appealed to the Blessed Virgin. From that time on, with the help of Mary, he began to lead the life of a saint, so much so that he once merited to see the high place in heaven which God had prepared for him. He became the founder of the religious order of the Somaschi, died as a saint, and has been canonized by the Church (1766).

Prayer

My sorrowful Mother, by the merit of the sorrow you felt at seeing your beloved Jesus led to his death, acquire for me the grace to be able to bear with patience the crosses God sends me. I shall really be very happy if I can only learn how to accompany you with my cross until my death. You and Jesus—both innocent as you were—have carried a far heavier burden. Shall I, a sinner who has deserved hell, refuse to carry mine? O immaculate Virgin, help me to bear patiently all the crosses of my life. Amen.

5

THE FIFTH SORROW:

THE DEATH OF JESUS



We are now about to witness a new type of martyrdom—that of a mother condemned to see her innocent son, whom she loves with all the ardor of her motherly heart, barbarously tortured and put to death before her very eyes.

There stood by the cross of Jesus his Mother (Jn 19:25). Saint John did not feel it necessary to say more than these words with reference to the martyrdom of Mary. Picture her now at the foot of the cross beside her dying son, and then ask yourself if there can ever be sorrow like her sorrow. Remain for a while on Calvary and consider the fifth sword which transfixed the heart of Mary—the death of Jesus.

As soon as our agonized Redeemer had reached Mount Calvary the executioners stripped him of his clothes. Then, piercing his hands and feet "not with sharp but with blunt nails," as Saint Bernard says, to torment him all the more, they fastened him to the cross. They raised the cross and placed it in a hole, and left him to die. The executioners left him, but not Mary. She came up close to the cross to be near him in death. "I did not leave him," she revealed to Saint Bridget, "but stood nearer the cross."

"What good did it do you to go to Calvary," asks Saint Bonaventure, "and see your son expire? Shame should have prevented you from going, for his disgrace was your disgrace since you were his mother. And if not shame, at least horror of witnessing such a crime as the crucifixion of a God by his own creatures." He goes on: "But your heart had no regard for its own sorrows, but only for the sufferings and death of your loved one. And so you wished to be present to suffer along with him." "True Mother," says Abbot William, "most loving Mother, not even the fear of death could separate you from your beloved son."

But, O God, what a spectacle of sorrow must have confronted those who could see Jesus hanging in agony on the cross, and his mother there at the foot of the cross suffering all his torments with him! This is how Mary described to Saint Bridget the doleful state of her son dying on the cross: “My Jesus was breathless, tormented, and in the last stages of exhaustion on the cross. His eyes were sunk, half-closed, and lifeless. His lips were swollen and his mouth hung open. His cheeks were hollow and drawn in. His face was gaunt, his nose sharp, his countenance sad. His head had fallen on his breast, his hair was matted and gory, his stomach collapsed, his legs and arms stiff, and his whole body covered with wounds and blood.”

All these sufferings of Jesus were also Mary’s sufferings. “Every torture inflicted on the body of Jesus,” says Saint Jerome, “was a wound in the heart of his mother.” “Anyone who had been present then on Mount Calvary,” says Saint John Chrysostom, “would have seen two altars on which two great sacrifices were being offered: the one in the body of Jesus, the other in the heart of Mary.” In fact we may even say with Saint Bonaventure: “There was only one altar—the cross of the son on which together with the divine Lamb, the Victim, his mother was also being sacrificed.” And therefore the saint asks Mary: “O Lady, where are you? Near the cross? No, you are actually on the cross, being crucified, sacrificing yourself along with your son.” Saint Augustine says practically the same thing: “The cross and nails of the son were also those of the mother; crucified with Christ was also his mother.” This is actually true, for as Saint Bernard says: “Love inflicted on the heart of Mary the tortures which the nails caused to the body of Jesus.” So much so that Saint Bernardine writes: “At the very same time that the son was sacrificing his body, Mary was sacrificing her soul.”

Mothers ordinarily would like to flee from the sight of their dying children; but when a mother is obliged to witness such a scene, she attempts to do everything possible to relieve her child’s suffering. She smooths out his bed so that he can rest more comfortably; she gives him something to drink. In this way, the poor mother soothes her own grief. O Mary, most afflicted of all mothers! You were obliged to stand at the deathbed of your Jesus, but you could offer him no relief. Mary heard her son exclaim: *I thirst*, but she could not even give him a drop of water

to assuage that thirst. She could only say, as Saint Vincent Ferrer remarks, “My son, I have only the water of my tears.” She saw that on that bed of torture her son, hanging on the three nails, could find no comfortable position. She longed to clasp him in her arms to comfort him and to let him expire there, but she could do nothing. “In vain,” says Saint Bernard, “she stretched forth her arms; they only sank back empty on her breast.” She beheld that poor son looking for consolation, but unable to find any, as was foretold by the prophet: *I have trodden the winepress alone.… I looked about and there was none to help; I sought, and there was none to give aid* (Isa 63:3, 5). Who would be willing to console him when all people were his enemies? Even on the cross he was taunted and blasphemed: *Now the passers-by were jeering at him, shaking their heads* (Mt 27:39). Some said to his face: *“If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.”* Others said: *“He saved others, himself he cannot save.”* Again: *If he be the king of Israel, let him now come down from the cross* (Mt 27:42). Our Blessed Lady told Saint Bridget: “I heard some say that my son was a thief; others, that he was an impostor; others, that no one deserved death more than he did; and every word was a new sword of grief to my heart.”

What increased Mary’s sorrows was hearing him complain on the cross that even his Eternal Father had abandoned Him: *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* (Mt 27:46). These words the Blessed Virgin told Saint Bridget she was never able to forget for the rest of her life. She saw her Jesus suffering on every side. She longed to help him, but could not.

But what caused her the greatest pain was to see that by her presence and her sorrow she was increasing the suffering of her son. “The grief which filled Mary’s heart,” says Saint Bernard, “flowed like a torrent into the heart of Jesus and aggravated his martyrdom to such an extent that on the cross Jesus suffered more from compassion for his mother than from his own torments.” Speaking in the name of our Blessed Lady, Saint Bernard says: “I stood with my eyes fixed on him, and his on me, and he was more sorry for me than for himself.” And then speaking of Mary beside her dying son, he says: “She stood there dying, without being able to die.”

Passino writes that Our Lord himself one day, when speaking to

Blessed Battista Varani of Camerino, assured her that when he was on the cross, he was so saddened at seeing his mother at his feet in such bitter anguish that pity for her caused him to die without any consolation whatever. Blessed Battista, supernaturally enlightened as to the greatness of this suffering of Jesus, exclaimed: "O Lord, tell me no more about your sorrow, for I cannot bear to hear any more."

"Everybody who saw Mary standing there silently and uttering no complaint amid such suffering," says Simon of Cassia, "was filled with astonishment." But while Mary's lips were silent, her heart was not, for she was incessantly offering the life of her son for our salvation. We know that by the merits of her sorrows she cooperated in our birth to the life of grace. That is why we can truthfully say we are the children of her sorrows. According to Lanspergius, "Christ willed that she, the cooperator of our redemption and the one whom he had determined to give us for our mother, should be present there. It was at the foot of the cross that she was to bring forth us, her children." If any consolation at all filtered into that sea of bitterness which was the heart of Mary, it could only have been this, that she knew that by her sorrows she was leading us to salvation. Jesus himself revealed this to Saint Bridget: "My Mother Mary, because of her compassion and love, was made the mother of all in heaven and on earth." The last words with which he said farewell to her before death were those with which he gave us to her as her children in the person of Saint John: *Woman, behold your son* (Jn 19:26). From that time on, Mary has always been our devoted mother. Her good offices began right on Calvary. Saint Peter Damian asserts that "by the prayers of Mary, who stood between the cross of the good thief and that of her son, the thief was converted and saved, and Mary thereby repaid a previous favor." Many authors relate that this thief had been kind to Jesus and Mary on their journey to Egypt. And our Blessed Lady has always acted, and still continues to act, as a devoted mother to all people.

Example

There was a young man in Perugia who promised the devil that if he would help him to commit a certain sin, he would give him his soul. He

sealed the bargain by writing down the promise in his blood. After the sin had been committed, the devil wished to claim his due, and so he led the young man to a well, threatening that if he did not throw himself in, he would drag him, body and soul, into hell anyway. In despair as to how he could escape the clutches of the evil one, the poor boy mounted the edge of the well and prepared to throw himself in. But he was terrified by the thought of death and told the devil that he did not have the courage to die. If the devil wished him to die, he would have to push him himself. The boy was in the habit of wearing the black scapular of Our Lady of Sorrows around his neck. The devil told him: "You must first remove that scapular before I push you in." Knowing that the scapular would still afford him the protection of the Blessed Mother, the boy would not remove it. After a great argument, the devil was forced to leave him, and the sinner, grateful to Mary, went to give thanks to her. As a sign of his sincere sorrow, he determined to leave a perpetual votive offering near her altar in the church of Santa Maria la Nuova in Perugia.

Prayer

O most sorrowful of all mothers, your son is now dead—that son so loving, who loved you so much! Weep, for you have reason to weep. Who can ever bring you any consolation? Only this thought can console you: that, by his death, Jesus conquered hell, opened heaven, and gained so many souls. From the throne of the cross, he will reign in millions of hearts. Conquered by his love they will serve him with love.

Do not hesitate in the meantime, O my Mother, to keep me near you so that I may weep with you. I have good reason to shed bitter tears for the many crimes I have committed against my Savior. O Mother of mercy, I hope first through the death of my Redeemer, and then through your sorrows, to obtain forgiveness and eternal salvation. Amen.

6

THE SIXTH SORROW:

THE PIERCING OF THE SIDE OF JESUS AND HIS DESCENT FROM THE CROSS



O all you that pass by the way, attend, and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow (Lam 1:12). O devout souls, hear what our sorrowful mother has to say to us today: "My beloved children, I do not ask you to comfort me, for my soul is no longer capable of being consoled now that my Jesus has died. But if you wish to commiserate with me, look at me and see if there has ever been a sorrow like mine in the world, for the one I love so much has been torn from me with such great cruelty." But, O Lady, since you will not be comforted, and since you have such a great thirst for sufferings, it is only fair to tell you that your sorrows have not yet come to an end, even though your son is dead. You will be wounded today with another sword of sorrow. A cruel lance will pierce the side of your dead son, and you will receive him in your arms after he has been taken down from the cross.

We must now consider the sixth sorrow which weighed upon the heart of our Blessed Lady. Listen attentively and weep. Until now, Mary's sorrows have tortured her one by one. But now they converge, as it were, to assail her all at once.

It is enough to tell a mother that her son is dead to arouse in her heart all her love for the dead child. In order to lessen a mother's grief, some people remind her of things that the child may have done in the past to displease her. But, O my Queen, if I wished to lighten your grief for the death of Jesus, what reprehensible things could I remind you of that he had ever done to you? There are none. He always loved you, always obeyed you, always respected you. Now that you have lost him, who can ever hope to describe your grief? You alone can describe it, you who have experienced it.

A devout author says that when Our Redeemer died, the first care of his Blessed Mother was to accompany in spirit the soul of her son and to present it to the Eternal Father. “I present to you, O my God,” he pictures Mary as saying, “the immaculate soul of your and my son. He has obeyed you to death. Receive him therefore in your arms. Your justice has now been satisfied, your will accomplished. The great sacrifice to your eternal glory has now been consummated.” Then turning toward the lifeless body of her Jesus: “O wounds, O wounds of love, I adore you, and I am happy because of you. By means of you, salvation has been given to the world. You will remain open in the body of my son and be the refuge of all who have recourse to you. How many will be pardoned for their sins through you! How many will be inflamed by you with love for Jesus!”

The Jews wanted the body of Jesus taken down from the cross so that the joy of the following paschal Sabbath might not be disturbed. But since this could not be done until it was certain that the criminals were dead, men came with iron bars to break Our Lord’s legs, as they had already done to the two thieves crucified with him. Mary was still weeping over the death of her son when she saw these armed men advancing toward Jesus. At first she trembled with fear. Then she said: “My son is already dead. Do not harm him any more. Do not torment me any more; I am his poor mother.” According to Saint Bonaventure, she begged them not to break his legs. But while she was speaking, a soldier rode up brandishing a lance and plunged it through the side of Jesus. *One of the soldiers with a spear opened his side, and immediately there came out blood and water* (Jn 19:34). The cross shook when the lance pierced the body of the Savior and, as was later revealed to Saint Bridget, the heart of Jesus was divided in two. Blood and water came out, for only a few drops of blood remained. Yet even these our Savior was pleased to shed, that we might understand that he had no more blood to give us. The blow of the centurion’s lance injured the body of Jesus, but Mary suffered its pain. “Christ,” says the devout Lanspergius, “shared this wound with his mother. He received the hurt; his mother endured the pain.”

The Fathers maintain that this was actually the sword foretold by Saint Simeon—a sword, not of iron, but of grief; a sword that pierced

her blessed soul in the heart of Jesus where her soul always dwelt. That is why Saint Bernard and others have said: “The lance which pierced his side passed through the soul of the Blessed Virgin, a soul that could never leave her son’s heart.” Mary revealed the same thing to Saint Bridget: “When the spear was drawn out, the point was red with blood. It was then, when I saw the heart of my own dear son pierced, that I felt as though my own heart were also pierced.” An angel told the same saint: “Mary’s sufferings were so great that it was only by a miracle on God’s part that she did not die from them.” When she suffered before, she at least had her son to pity her; but now she had no son to commiserate with her.

Fearing that still other frightful things might be done to Jesus, Mary begged Joseph of Arimathea to obtain the body from Pilate so that it could be guarded and spared from further outrage. Joseph went and explained to Pilate the sorrow and the wish of the victim’s mother. Saint Anselm believes that pity for Mary softened the heart of Pilate and moved him to grant the request.

And so Jesus was taken down from the cross. O most holy Virgin, now that you have given your son to the world with such great love and for our salvation, behold, the world now gives him back to you. But, O God, what a condition he is in! *My beloved* [was] *white and ruddy* (Cant 5:10), Mary says to the world, but you return him to me blackened with bruises and red from the wounds you inflicted on him. He was beautiful, but now he is no longer beautiful, but all disfigured. His appearance used to make people happy, but now he excites only horror in those who look on him. “Oh, how many swords,” says Saint Bonaventure, “pierced that poor mother’s soul” when she received the body of her son from the cross! Just think of the anguish it would cause any mother to receive in her arms the lifeless body of her tortured son.

It was revealed to Saint Bridget that three ladders were placed against the cross to take down the body of Jesus. The disciples first drew the nails out of his hands and feet and, according to Metaphrastes, gave them to Mary. Then one supported the upper part of the body of Jesus and the other the lower, and thus they eased him down from the cross. Bernardine de Bustis describes the Blessed Mother standing there and holding out her arms to receive him. She embraced him and then sat

down at the foot of the cross. His mouth was open, his eyes were dim. She examined his mangled flesh and his exposed bones. She took off the crown and gazed at the wounds the thorns had made in his brow. She saw the gaping holes in his hands and feet. Then she said to him: “O my Jesus, your love for men has brought you to this. What harm did you ever do them that they should treat you so cruelly? You were my father, my brother, my spouse, my delight, my glory. You were everything to me! O my dear son, see how desolate I am! Look at me and comfort me. But you can no longer look at me. Say only one word and comfort me. But you cannot speak any more, for you are dead. O cruel thorns, O cruel nails, O merciless spear, how could you possibly torture your Creator? But why do I speak of thorns and nails? It is you, O sinners, who have treated my son so cruelly!”

That is what Mary said then, as she sat at the foot of the cross. But what would she say now if she were capable of sorrow? How pained she would be to see men continue to torment and crucify her son by their sins even after his death. Let us resolve not to torment our sorrowful mother any longer. And if we have saddened her in the past by our sins, let us now do what she wants us to do. She says: *Return, you transgressors, to the heart* (Isa 46:8). Sinners, return to the wounded heart of Jesus. Return sorry for your sins, and he will welcome you. “Flee from him to him,” she says, with the Abbot Guerric; “from the Judge to the Redeemer, from the tribunal to the cross.”

Mary revealed to Saint Bridget that “she closed the eyes of her son when he was taken down from the cross, but she could not close his arms.” Jesus intended us to understand by this that he wanted to remain with his arms extended to receive all penitent sinners who return to him. “O world,” continues Mary, *“behold, then, your time was the time of lovers* (Ezek 16:8). Now that my son has died to save you, it is no longer a time of fear for you, but a time of love; a time to show love to him who, in order to show you the love he has for you, was willing to suffer so much.” “The heart of Jesus,” says Saint Bernard, “was wounded so that through the visible wound, the invisible wound of love might become visible.” “If then,” concludes Mary, in the words of Blessed Raymond Jordano, “my son was pleased that his side should be opened through an excess of love[3] so that he could give his heart to you, it is right, O man,

that you should give him yours in return." And if you desire, O children of Mary, to find a place in the heart of Jesus without fear of being rejected, "Go," as Ubertino da Casale says, "go with Mary, for she will obtain this grace for you."

Example

The Dominican Father John Herolt relates that there was a poor sinner who in addition to his other wicked acts killed his father and his brother, and therefore became an outlaw. One day during Lent while he was listening to a preacher discourse on the theme of divine mercy, his heart was moved and he decided to go to confession. When the confessor heard what he had done, he sent him to an altar of the sorrowful Mother to get her to obtain true sorrow for him and the pardon of his sins. The sinner went and began to pray to Mary, when suddenly he fell down dead. The next day, when the priest was recommending the soul of the poor man to the prayers of the faithful, a white dove appeared in the church and dropped a note at the feet of the priest. Picking up the note, he opened it and read the following words: "As soon as the soul of the dead man left his body, it went to heaven. Continue therefore to preach the wonders of divine mercy."

Prayer

O sorrowful Virgin! O soul great in virtue but also in sorrow, for both were born of that mighty flame of love which you have for God, your heart can love no one but God and him alone. Have pity on me, O Mother, for I have not loved God and have offended him so much. Your sorrow encourages me to hope for pardon. But this is not enough. I desire also to love my Lord. And who can obtain this grace of love for me better than you who are the mother of fair love? O Mary, you are a consolation to everybody; console me also. Amen.

7

THE SEVENTH SORROW:

THE BURIAL OF JESUS



A mother standing at the bedside of her dying child undoubtedly feels and suffers all his pains. But when the child has actually died and is about to be buried, and the brokenhearted mother must say goodbye to him for the last time, then surely the realization that she will never see him again is a sorrow that must surpass all other sorrows. Let us meditate now on Mary's last sword of sorrow. She has witnessed the death of her son on the cross. She has embraced his lifeless body for the last time. Now she has to leave him in the tomb and reconcile herself to the fact that she will never enjoy his presence on earth again.

But in order to grasp the meaning of this last sorrow more fully, let us return to Calvary and picture our afflicted mother there, still holding the lifeless body of her son clasped in her arms. O my son, she seems to say in the words of Job: *You are changed to be cruel toward me* (Job 30:21). Yes, for all your noble qualities, your beauty, grace, virtues, your charm—all the special marks of love you have shown me, the special favors you have granted me—all are now changed into so many arrows of grief. The more those features caused me to love you, the more they now cruelly make me feel your loss. My beloved son, in losing you I have lost everything. This is what Saint Bernard says in Mary's name: "O truly begotten of God, you were to me a father, a son, a spouse: You were my very soul! Now I am deprived of my father, widowed of my spouse, a desolate, childless mother. Having lost my only son, I have lost everything."

And so we see Mary plunged in grief, her son locked in her arms. The disciples, afraid that Mary may die of grief, approach and take the body of Jesus from her arms to bury it. With reverence, they lift it from her arms, embalm it with aromatic herbs, and wrap it in a shroud they have

already prepared. On this cloth, which is still preserved at Turin, Our Lord was pleased to leave to the world an impression of his sacred body.[4]

The mournful procession sets out for the tomb. The disciples raised him on their shoulders. Choirs of angels from heaven accompanied them, and the holy women followed behind. Among them was the afflicted mother following her son to his last resting place. When they reached the tomb, "O, how willingly would Mary have buried herself alive with her son had this been his will!"—as she herself revealed to Saint Bridget. But since this was not his will, many authors declare that she followed the sacred body of Jesus into the tomb where, according to Baronius, the disciples also deposited the nails and the crown of thorns. When it was time to raise the stone to close the entrance, the grief-stricken disciples approached our Blessed Lady and said to her: "It is time now, O Lady, to close the tomb. Forgive us; look at your son once more, and say goodbye to him for the last time."

"O my beloved Son" (for that is what Mary must have said), "am I not going to see you any more? Receive, then, my last farewell, as I gaze upon you for the last time, the last farewell of your devoted mother. Receive my heart, which I bury with you." According to Saint Fulgentius, the Blessed Virgin ardently desired "to bury her soul with the body of Christ." And Mary revealed in a vision to Saint Bridget: "I can truly say that when my son was buried, there were two hearts laid in one tomb."

Finally, they took the stone and sealed off the sacred body of Jesus in the sepulcher, that body which is the greatest treasure there can possibly be on earth or in heaven. Mary left her heart in the tomb of Jesus, because Jesus was her whole treasure: *For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be* (Lk 12:34). But where do we keep our hearts buried? In creatures—perhaps even in sin? Why do we not imitate Mary and bury our hearts in Jesus? Even though he has gone to heaven, he still remains on earth, not dead, but alive, alive in the Blessed Sacrament of the altar, so that our hearts may be near him and that he may enjoy the possession of them always.

But we must return to Mary. Before leaving the sepulcher, Saint Bonaventure maintains that she blessed the sacred stone: "O fortunate

stone," she said, "you now guard him whom I bore for nine months in my womb. I bless you and envy you. I leave you to watch over my son, who is everything to me, my whole love." And then turning to the Eternal Father, she said: "O Father, I recommend my son to you, for he is your son too." After speaking her last farewell to her son and the tomb, she left and returned to her home. Mary was so desolate and so sad that, according to Saint Bernard, she "moved many to tears." In fact, wherever she passed, those who saw her could not help weeping with her. Saint Bernard also says that the holy disciples and women who accompanied her "mourned even more for her than for their Lord."

Saint Bonaventure tells us that her sisters covered her with a mourning cloak: "The sisters of Our Lady veiled her like a widow, almost covering her whole face." He also says that, passing by the cross still dripping with the blood of her son on her return from the tomb, Mary was the first to adore it. "O holy cross," she said, "I kiss you, I adore you! You are no longer an instrument of torture, but a throne of love and an altar of mercy. You have been consecrated by the blood of the divine Lamb, immolated on you for the salvation of the world."

She then left the cross and returned home. When she reached there, Mary cast her eyes about and no longer saw her Jesus. Instead of the physical presence of her dear son, there rose before her the memory of his beautiful life and excruciating death. She remembered how she had pressed him to her bosom in the stable at Bethlehem. She remembered the conversations she had with him during the many years they dwelt together in the house in Nazareth. She remembered their deep affection for each other. She remembered the words of eternal life which fell from those divine lips. Finally, she recalled the sad scene she had witnessed that very day. The nails, the thorns, the lacerated flesh, those deep wounds, those naked bones, that open mouth, those swollen eyes, all appeared to her. Oh what a night of sorrow Mary must have passed. We can picture her turning to Saint John and saying: "John, tell me, where is your Master?" We can picture her asking Magdalen: "Mary, tell me, where is your beloved? O God, who has taken him from us?" Mary wept, and all who were there wept with her.

And you, my soul, do you not weep also? Turn to Mary and say to her with Saint Bonaventure: "O my own sweet Lady, I am the one to

weep. You are innocent, I am guilty." Beg her at least to let you weep with her. She weeps out of love. You should weep out of sorrow for your sins. If you do so, you may have the happy lot of the religious about whom we read in the following example.

Example

Father Engelgrave relates that a certain religious was so tormented with scruples that he was sometimes almost driven mad. But since he was greatly devoted to Our Lady of Sorrows, he always prayed to her when he was spiritually depressed and he derived great consolation from meditating on her dolors. When he came to die, the devil tormented him more than ever with scruples and even tempted him to despair. The Mother of Sorrows, seeing her client in such anguish, appeared to him and said: "Why are you so downcast, my son? Why are you so afraid? You have so often consoled me by meditating on my sorrows. Jesus is now sending me," she said, "to be a comfort to you. Be consoled, my son, and come with me to paradise." On hearing these words, the devout religious was filled with joy and confidence, and died peacefully.

Prayer

My sorrowful mother, I will not leave you to weep alone. No, I will weep along with you. This is the grace I ask you to obtain for me: to be able always to bear in mind and to have a tender devotion to the Passion of Jesus and your sorrows. May I spend the remainder of my days, sweet mother, in grieving over your sufferings and the sufferings of my Redeemer. These sorrows, I hope, will give me the confidence and strength I will require at the hour of my death, so that I will not despair at the thought of the many sins by which I have offended my Jesus. You must obtain pardon, perseverance, and heaven for me. In heaven I hope to be happy with you; may it be so. Amen. Amen.

PART V



THE VIRTUES OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Saint Augustine says that if we wish to win the favor of the saints with greater certainty and in greater abundance, we must imitate them. When they see us imitating their virtues, they are more inclined to pray for us. As soon as the queen of saints and our chief advocate, Mary, delivers a soul from the grasp of Lucifer and unites it to God, she wants it to imitate her. Otherwise, she cannot enrich the soul with graces. Mary called *blessed* those who imitate her life diligently: *Now, therefore, children, hear me; blessed are they that keep my ways* (Prov 8:32).

There is a proverb that lovers come to resemble the persons they love: "Love either finds or makes lovers alike." Saint Sophronius urges us to strive to imitate Mary if we love her, because this is the best way to please her: "My beloved children, serve Mary, whom you love. You will prove that you love her if you endeavor to imitate her." Richard of Saint Lawrence says: "They are true children of Mary and can call themselves true children, who strive to imitate her life." "Let a child, then," concludes Saint Bernard, "imitate his mother, if he wants to have her favor; for when Mary sees herself treated as a mother, she will treat him as her child."

Although the Gospels have little to say about Mary's virtues in detail, we do learn from them that she was full of grace, and this implies that she possessed all virtues in a heroic degree. "So much so," says Saint Thomas, "that whereas other saints excelled in some particular virtue—one in chastity, another in humility, another in mercy—the Blessed Virgin excelled in all, and is offered to us as a model of all." Saint Ambrose says: "Mary was so outstanding that her life was a model for everybody." And he concludes with the words: "Let the virginity and the life of Mary be ever before your eyes like an image, in which the form of virtue is resplendent. You will learn from that image how to live, what to correct, what to avoid, and what to retain."

Since humility is the foundation of all the virtues—as the Fathers of the Church teach—let us consider in the first place how great Mary's humility was.

1

MARY'S HUMILITY



"Humility," says Saint Bernard, "is the foundation and guardian of the virtues." He is right, for without it no other virtue can exist in the soul. Were a soul to possess all the virtues, all would disappear were humility to go. But, on the other hand, as Saint Francis de Sales wrote to Saint Jane Frances de Chantal, "God loves humility so much, that whenever he sees it, he immediately goes there." This beautiful and necessary virtue was unknown in the world in early days. But the Son of God came on earth to teach it by his example, and he willed that we should endeavor to imitate him in that virtue particularly: *Learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart* (Mt 11:29).

Since Mary was the first and most perfect disciple of Jesus in the practice of the virtues, she naturally excelled in the practice of humility. For this reason, she deserved to be exalted above all other creatures. It was revealed to Saint Matilda that it was humility in which the Blessed Mother particularly excelled, even from her very childhood.

The first effect of humility of heart is a lowly opinion of oneself. Mary always had such a humble opinion of herself that, as was revealed to the same Saint Matilda, although she saw herself enriched with more graces than all other people, she never put herself ahead of anyone. Abbot Rupert, commenting on the passage of the sacred Canticles: *You have wounded my heart, my sister, my spouse … with one hair of your neck* (Cant 4:9), says that the humble opinion Mary had of herself was the hair with which she wounded the heart of God. Not that Mary considered herself a sinner. Humility is truth, as Saint Teresa remarks, and Mary knew that she had never offended God. She also knew that she had received more graces from God than all other creatures. A humble heart always acknowledges the special favors of the Lord in order to humble itself all the more. But the Blessed Mother, because of the

greater light which made her aware of the infinite greatness and goodness of God, was also aware of her own nothingness. That is why she humbled herself more than everybody else, saying with the sacred Spouse: *Do not stare at me because I am swarthy, because the sun has burned me* (Cant 1:5). That is, as Saint Bernard explains it: "When I approach him, I find myself black."

This is true, says Saint Bernardine, because the Blessed Virgin was always vividly conscious of the majesty of God and her own nothingness. When a beggar is given a costly gift, he does not show off with it in the presence of the donor. He receives it humbly and remains conscious of his own poverty. So when Mary saw herself enriched with grace, she humbled herself; reminding herself that it was all God's gift. That is why she told Saint Elizabeth of Hungary that she looked upon herself as a worthless creature and unworthy of the grace of God. And that is why Saint Bernardine says that "after the Son of God, no one in the whole world was ever so exalted as Mary, because no one ever humbled himself to the extent that she did."

Moreover, it is characteristic of humility to conceal heavenly gifts. Mary wished to conceal from Saint Joseph the favor which made her the Mother of God. At the same time it seemed necessary to reveal the secret to him, if only to remove from his mind any suspicions as to her virtue which he might have entertained on seeing her pregnant. Saint Joseph, on the one hand, did not wish to doubt Mary's chastity; and yet on the other hand, being unaware of the mystery, he was minded to have her put away privately (Mt 1:19). And he would have done so had the angel not revealed to him that his spouse was pregnant by the operation of the Holy Spirit.

Again, a soul that is truly humble does not allow herself to be praised. And if praises are showered on her, she refers them all to God. Mary was disturbed at hearing herself praised by Saint Gabriel. She was also disturbed when Elizabeth said: *Blessed are you among women.… And how have I deserved that the mother of my Lord should come to me? … Blessed is she who has believed* (Lk 1:42, 43, 45). Mary referred everything to God, and replied in the humble words of her canticle: *My soul magnifies the Lord* (Lk 1:46). This was the same as saying: "You praise me, Elizabeth, but I praise the Lord, to whom alone all honor is due. You

wonder why I have come to visit you, while I wonder at the divine goodness that has come to me. *And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior* (Lk 1:47). You praise me because 1 have believed; but I praise my God, because he has exalted my nothingness. *He has regarded the lowliness of his handmaid* (Lk 1:48)."

Our Lady said to Saint Bridget: "I humbled myself so much, and have merited so much grace, because I knew that of myself I possessed nothing. That is why I did not want to be praised. I desired only that praise be given to the Creator and Giver of all things." Referring to the humility of Mary, an ancient author says: "O truly blessed humility, which has given God to men, opened heaven, and delivered souls from hell!"

It is also characteristic of humility to serve others. Mary did not hesitate to go and help Elizabeth for three months. Saint Bernard aptly remarks: "Elizabeth wondered why Mary had come to visit her; but—what is still more remarkable—that she came not to be ministered to, but to minister."

Humble persons are usually retiring and choose the least honorable places for themselves. Therefore, as Saint Bernard remarks, "when Jesus was preaching in a house (as we learn in Saint Matthew), Mary, wishing to speak to him, would not enter of her own accord but remained outside, and did not avail herself of her maternal right to interrupt him." And when she was with the Apostles waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit, she chose the lowest place, as Saint Luke relates: *All these with one mind continued steadfastly in prayer with the women and Mary, the Mother of Jesus* (Acts 1:14). Saint Luke was not ignorant of the Blessed Mother's merits, which should have caused him to name her first. However, Mary had taken the last place among the Apostles and the women. And therefore he described them, as an author remarks, in the order in which they were. Saint Bernard says: "The last has rightly become the first, because being the first of all she became the last."

Finally, people who are sincerely humble do not look for favor. In fact, they love to be despised. That is why we note that Mary did not show herself in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday when the people received Jesus with so much honor. On the other hand, at his death, she did not hesitate to appear on Calvary. She was undeterred by fear of the ridicule

she would incur when it became known that she was the mother of the criminal. On one occasion, Mary said to Saint Bridget: “What is more humbling than to be called a fool, to be in need of things, and to believe oneself the most unworthy of all? Such was my humility, O daughter. It was my constant joy and desire to please my son in this way as much as I could.”

Venerable Sister Paola of Foligno was privileged to see in an ecstasy how great the humility of the Blessed Virgin was. Giving an account of it to her confessor, she was so filled with astonishment that she could only say: “Father, you can never understand how great the humility of the Blessed Virgin was! There is no humility in the world comparable to the humility of Mary.”

On another occasion, Our Lord showed Saint Bridget two women. The one was all glamour and vanity. “She is pride,” he said, “but the other one whom you see with her head bowed, courteous to all, devoted to God alone, and considering herself as a nobody, is humility, and her name is Mary.” God chose that way of letting us know that Mary is the personification of humility.

There can be no doubt, observes Saint Gregory of Nyssa, that of all the virtues there is perhaps none more difficult for our nature to practice, tainted as it is by sin, than humility. At the same time, we cannot evade this truth: We can be true children of Mary only if we are humble. “If you cannot imitate the virginity of the Blessed Virgin,” says Saint Bernard, “imitate her humility.” She detests the proud, and invites the lowly to come to her: *Whosoever is a little one, let him come to me* (Prov 9:4). Richard of Saint Lawrence writes: “Mary protects us under the mantle of her humility.” The Blessed Mother explained to Saint Bridget what her mantle was. “Come,” she said, “and hide yourself under my mantle. This mantle is my humility.” She then added that meditation on her humility was a cloak or mantle with which we could warm ourselves. But since a mantle gives this service only to those who wear it and not to those who merely think about it, she said: “Mary’s humility will not help anybody except those who endeavor to imitate her.” And she concluded with these words: “Therefore clothe yourself, my daughter, with this humility.”

O how devoted Mary is to humble souls! Saint Bernard says: “She

recognizes and loves those who love her. And she is ready to help all that call on her, especially those who resemble her in chastity and humility." So the saint exhorts all those who love Mary to be humble: "Strive to imitate this virtue of Mary, if you really love her." Marinus or Martin d'Alberto, of the Society of Jesus, used to sweep the house and collect the trash out of love for the Blessed Virgin. One day Mary appeared to him, as Father Nieremberg relates in his life, and thanked him saying: "I am very much pleased by this humble action which you do for love of me."

It follows then, O my Queen, that I can never really be your child unless I am humble. But surely you understand that my sins, after having made me ungrateful to my Lord, have also made me proud? O Mary, you must provide the remedy. By the merit of your humility, make me truly humble, and help me in that way to become your child. Amen.

2

MARY'S LOVE FOR GOD



Saint Albert says that "where we find the greatest chastity, there we find also the greatest charity." The more pure a heart is and the more empty of self, the more it is filled with love for God. Because Mary was thoroughly humble and thoroughly unselfish, she was filled with divine love. "Her love for God surpassed that of all men and angels," writes Saint Bernardine. Saint Francis de Sales beautifully calls her "the queen of love."

God has indeed given man the command to love him with his whole heart: *You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart* (Mt 22:37). However, Saint Thomas declares: "This commandment will be fulfilled by men fully and perfectly only in heaven, not on earth. On earth it is fulfilled only imperfectly." On this subject, Saint Albert the Great remarks that, in a certain sense, it would be unfitting for God to give a commandment that could never be perfectly fulfilled. But this would have been the case if Our Lady had not fulfilled it perfectly. The saint says: "Either someone fulfilled this precept, or no one did. If anyone did, it must have been the Blessed Virgin."

Richard of Saint Victor confirms this opinion when he says: "The mother of our Emmanuel practiced all virtues as perfectly as possible. Whoever fulfilled the first commandment the way she did: *You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart?* Divine love burned so ardently in her that no defect of any kind could come close to her." Saint Bernard says: "Divine love penetrated and filled the soul of Mary to such an extent that no part of her was left untouched. She loved with her whole heart, with her whole soul, with her whole strength, and she was full of grace." Therefore Mary was in a position to say: *My lover belongs all to me and I to him* (Cant 2:16). "Even the Seraphim," according to Richard, "might have come down from heaven to learn how to love God from the

heart of Mary."

God, who is love, came to earth to kindle the flame of his divine love in the hearts of all people. But in no heart did he kindle so much love as in the heart of his mother. Her heart was entirely free from all earthly loves and fully prepared to burn with this precious flame. Saint Sophronius says that divine love inflamed her so much that nothing earthly could enter her heart. She was, so to speak, incandescent with divine love. The heart of Mary became all fire and flames, as we read of her in the sacred Canticles (Cant 8:6); fire burning within through love, as Saint Anselm explains it, and flames shining without by the example she gave in the practice of virtue. When Mary was in this world and held Jesus in her arms, she could well be called "fire carrying fire"; and with far more reason than the woman spoken of by Hippocrates who was called this because she carried fire in her hands. Saint Ildephonsus says: "The Holy Spirit heated, inflamed, and melted Mary with love, as fire does iron; so that nothing was seen in her but the flame of this Holy Spirit, and nothing was felt but the fire of the love of God." Saint Thomas of Villanova says that the bush seen by Moses, which burned without being consumed, was a true symbol of Mary's heart. And Saint Bernard rightly says that Mary was seen by Saint John clothed with the sun: *And a great sign appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun* (Apoc 12:1). She was so closely united to God by love, and she penetrated the abyss of divine wisdom so deeply, that apart from personal identification with God, it would seem impossible for a creature to have a closer union with him.

Saint Bernardine of Siena maintains that the Most Blessed Virgin was never tempted by hell. He says that "as flies are driven away by a great fire, so the evil spirits were driven away by her ardent love. They did not even dare to approach her." Richard of Saint Victor says: "The Blessed Virgin was such a terror to the princes of darkness that they did not dare to come near her. The fire of her charity kept them off." Our Lady revealed to Saint Bridget that she never had any thought, desire, or joy in this world, but only in and for God: "I thought of nothing but God; nothing pleased me except God." Since her blessed soul almost continually contemplated God while on earth, the acts of love she performed were innumerable. Father Suarez writes: "The acts of perfect

charity Mary performed in this life were without number. Practically speaking, her whole life was spent in contemplation, and while she was in that state she constantly repeated acts of love."

A remark of Bernardine de Bustis pleases me even more. He says that Mary did not repeat acts of love as other saints do; her whole life was one continual act of love. By a special privilege, she was always actually expressing love for God. As a royal eagle, she always kept her eyes fixed on the divine Sun of Justice. As Saint Peter Damian says: "The duties of an active life did not prevent her from loving, and love did not prevent her from performing her duties." That is why Saint Germanus says that the altar of propitiation, on which the fire was never extinguished day or night, was a symbol of Mary.

Sleep was no obstacle to Mary's love. Saint Augustine asserts: "The dreams of our first parents, when sleeping in their state of innocence, were as happy as their lives were when they were awake." And if they had such a privilege it certainly was not denied to our Blessed Lady, as Suarez, the Abbot Rupert, and Saint Bernardine fully admit. Saint Ambrose also holds this opinion. He says: "While Mary's body rested, her soul watched." She verified in herself the words of the Holy Spirit: *At night her lamp is undimmed* (Prov 31:18). While her blessed body found its necessary repose in sleep, according to Saint Bernardine, her soul freely winged its way to God. In fact, she was then wrapped in more perfect contemplation than the average person when awake. And so she could well say with the spouse in the Canticles: *I was sleeping, but my heart kept vigil* (Cant 5:2). "She was as happy in sleep as when awake," says Suarez. In short, Saint Bernardine asserts that as long as Mary lived in this world she continually loved God: "The mind of the Blessed Virgin was always wrapped in the ardor of love." The saint adds moreover: "She never did anything except what divine Wisdom revealed as pleasing to him. She loved God as much as she thought he should be loved by her."

As a matter of fact, according to Saint Albert the Great, we can say that Mary was filled with such great love for God that no creature on earth could possibly possess more. Saint Thomas of Villanova maintains that Mary by her ardent charity became so attractive to God, that he was captivated by her love and descended into her womb to become man.

This thought caused Saint Bernardine to exclaim: “See the power of the Virgin Mary! She captured the heart of God!”

But since Mary loves God so much, there is nothing she wants us to do more than to love him as much as we can. This is what she told Blessed Angela of Foligno one day after holy Communion: “Angela, may you be blessed by my son. And on your part, may you endeavor to love him as much as possible.” She also said to Saint Bridget: “Bridget, if you want me to love you, love my son.” Mary desires nothing more than to see her beloved, who is God, loved.

Novarinus asks why the Blessed Virgin begged the angels to make known to the Lord the great love she had for him in the words of the spouse in the Canticles: *I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him that I languish with love* (Cant 5:8). Was God not aware how much she loved him? “Why did she try to show the wound of love to her beloved, since it was he who had inflicted it?” He answers that Mary wished to make her love known in that way to us, not to God. She wanted us also to be wounded with divine love, just as she was wounded. He continues: “Because Mary was all on fire with love of God, all who approach her and are close to her are also inflamed with this same burning love, for she makes them like herself.” This is why Saint Catherine of Siena called Mary “the bearer of fire,” meaning the bearer of the fire of divine love. If we want to burn with this blessed flame, let us try always to draw nearer to Mary by our prayers and our devotions.

O Mary, you are Queen of love. Of all creatures, you are the most lovable, the most beloved, and the most loving, as Saint Francis de Sales said. My own sweet Mother, you were always and in all things inflamed with love for God. Give me at least a spark of your fervor. You intervened with your Son on behalf of the spouses at Cana. Will you not also pray for us who are so wanting in the love of God, whom we are under such great obligation to love? Say of us: “They have no love,” and obtain this love for us. This is the only grace we ask for. O Mother, graciously hear and pray for us. Amen.

3

MARY'S LOVE FOR HER NEIGHBOR



Love of God and love of neighbor are commanded by God in the same precept: *And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also* (1 Jn 4:21). Saint Thomas says that the reason for this is that the person who loves God loves all that God loves. One day, Saint Catherine of Genoa said: "Lord, you say that I should love my neighbor, but I can love no one but you." God replied to her in these words: "Everybody who loves me loves what I love." But since there never was and never will be anyone who loved God as much as Mary did, so there never was and never will be anyone who loves her neighbor as much as she did.

Father Cornelius à Lapide commenting on this passage from the Canticles: *King Solomon has made him a litter of the wood of Libanus … the midst he covered with charity for the daughters of Jerusalem* (Cant 3:9, 10), says that "this litter was Mary's womb in which the Incarnate Word dwelt, filling it with charity for the daughters of Jerusalem. Christ, who is love itself, infused into the Blessed Virgin the greatest possible amount of charity, so that she could he helpful to all who appeal to her."

While Mary was on earth, her charity was so great that she was on the alert to help the needy even without being asked. We see this clearly in the case of the marriage feast at Cana when she reminded Jesus of the family's distress: *They have no wine* (Jn 2:3). She asked him to perform a miracle. How quickly she always acted when there was need to relieve her neighbor! When she went to the house of Elizabeth to fulfill a duty of charity, *she went into the hill country with haste* (Lk 1:30). But she could not display her overflowing charity more fully than she did when she offered the death of her son for our salvation. With regard to this, Saint Bonaventure says: "Mary so loved the world as to give her only-begotten Son." This also inspired Saint Anselm to exclaim: "O blessed among

women, your purity surpasses that of the angels, and your charity that of the saints." "And this love of Mary for us," says Saint Bonaventure, "has not diminished now that she is in heaven. On the contrary, it has rather increased, for she is now in a better position to see the miseries of men." And therefore, the saint goes on to say, the mercy of Mary toward those in distress when she was still on earth was prodigious, but it is far greater now that she reigns in heaven. Saint Agnes assured Saint Bridget that there was no one who ever prayed for grace who did not receive it through the charity of the Blessed Virgin. We would be extremely unfortunate if we did not have Mary to intercede for us! Jesus himself, speaking to Saint Bridget, said: "Were it not for the prayers of my mother, there would be no hope of mercy."

Blessed is he that listens to my instructions, who imitates my charity, and practices that charity toward his neighbor, says Mary: *Happy the man who obeys me … happy the man watching daily at my gates, waiting at my doorposts* (Prov 8:33, 34). Saint Gregory Nazianzen assures us that there is no better way to make Mary love us than by practicing charity toward our neighbor. Just as Jesus exhorts us with the words: *Be merciful, therefore, even as your Father is merciful*, so Mary seems to say to us: "Be merciful, even as your mother is merciful."

We may take it for granted that our charity toward our neighbor will be the measure by which God and Mary will show charity toward us: *Give, and it shall be given to you.… For with what measure you measure, it shall be measured to you* (Lk 6:38). Saint Methodius used to say: "Give to the poor and get paradise in return." Saint Paul maintains that charity toward our neighbor makes us happy both in this world and in the next. *Godliness is profitable in all respects, since it has the promise of the present life as well as of that which is to come* (1 Tim 4:8). Saint John Chrysostom commenting on these words of Proverbs: *He that has mercy on the poor lends to the Lord* (Prov 19:17), says: "Whoever helps the needy makes God his debtor."

O Mother of Mercy, you have everybody's welfare at heart. Be mindful of my troubles. You know them very well. Recommend me to God, who will give you everything. Ask him to let me imitate you in holy love, love for God and for my neighbor. Amen.

4

MARY'S FAITH

I am the mother of fair love, and of fear, and of knowledge, and of holy hope (Ecclus 24:24). Just as Mary is the mother of love and hope, so she is also the mother of faith. Saint Irenaeus says that this is so for a very good reason, for "the evil done by Eve's unfaithfulness was remedied by Mary's faith." Tertullian confirms this by saying that because Eve believed the serpent against the warning she had received from God, she brought death into the world; but because Mary believed the angel at the Annunciation she brought salvation into the world. He puts it this way: "Eve believed the serpent; Mary believed Gabriel. What Eve demolished by her foolish credulity, Mary restored by her genuine faith." Saint Augustine says: "It was Mary's faith that opened heaven to men when she agreed to cooperate in the Incarnation of the Eternal Word." Richard of Saint Lawrence commenting on these words of Saint Paul from Corinthians: *For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the believing wife* (1 Cor 7:14), says: "Mary is the believing woman by whose faith the unbelieving Adam and all his posterity are saved." It was as a tribute to her faith that Elizabeth called Our Lady "blessed": *Blessed are you that has believed, because those things shall be accomplished in you that were spoken by the Lord* (Lk 1:45). And Saint Augustine adds: "Mary was blessed more by receiving the faith of Christ than by conceiving the flesh of Christ."

Father Suarez says that the most holy Virgin had more faith than all human beings and angels together. She saw her son in the crib at Bethlehem and believed that he was the creator of the world. She saw him flee from Herod and believed that he was the King of kings. She saw him born, yet believed him to be eternal. She saw him poor and in need of food, and believed that he was the Lord of the universe. She saw him lying on straw, and believed that he was omnipotent. She observed that

he did not speak, and yet believed that he was filled with infinite wisdom. She heard him cry, and believed that he was the joy of paradise. Finally, she saw him in death, despised and crucified, and even though faith wavered in others, she remained firm in the conviction that he was God.

Commenting on those words of the Gospel: *There stood by the cross of Jesus his mother* (Jn 19:25), Saint Antoninus says: "Mary stood there, supported by her faith, which she firmly retained in the divinity of Christ." And this is the reason why, the saint adds, in the midst of the Tenebrae service only one candle is left lighted. With reference to this, Saint Leo applies to our Blessed Lady the words of Proverbs: *At night her lamp is undimmed* (Prov 31:18). And with regard to the words of Isaiah: *I have trodden the winepress alone, and … there is not a man with me* (Isa 63:3), Saint Thomas remarks that the prophet says "a man," because of the Blessed Virgin who never failed in faith. Saint Albert the Great assures us: "Mary displayed perfect faith. Even when the disciples doubted, she did not doubt."

By her magnificent faith, therefore, Mary merited to become "a light to all the faithful," as Saint Methodius calls her; and the "Queen of the true faith," as she is called by Saint Cyril of Alexandria. Holy Church herself attributes the destruction of all heresies to the merits of Mary: "Rejoice, O Virgin Mary, for you alone have destroyed all heresies throughout the world." Saint Thomas of Villanova, explaining the words of the Holy Spirit: *You have wounded my heart, my sister, my spouse … with one of your eyes* (Cant 4:9), says: "These eyes denoted Mary's faith, by which she pleased the Son of God so much."

Saint Ildephonsus makes a point of urging us to imitate Mary's faith. But how can we do this? Faith is both a gift and a virtue. It is a gift of God because it is a light infused by him into our souls; it is a virtue inasmuch as the soul must strive to practice it. Hence faith must not only be the rule of our belief, but the rule of our actions as well. That is why Saint Gregory says: "That man really believes who puts what he believes into practice." And Saint Augustine: "You say 'I believe.' Do what you say and then it will be faith." To live according to our belief is what is meant by the expression "to have a living faith." *My just one lives by faith* (Heb 10:38). The Blessed Virgin lived very differently from those who do

not live according to what they believe. Saint James declared: Faith without works is dead (Jas 2:26).

Diogenes lighted a lantern and looked around for a man on earth. But God seems to be looking for a Christian. Among the baptized on earth, there are many who perform no good works at all. The majority are Christians only in name. The words once addressed by Alexander to a cowardly soldier should be applied to these people: “Either change your name or change your conduct.” Father Ávila used to say: “It would be better to lock these poor creatures up as madmen. They believe that eternal happiness is in store for those who lead good lives and an eternity of misery for those who lead bad lives. And yet they act as if they believed nothing.” Saint Augustine exhorts us to look at things with the eyes of Christians, that is, with eyes that see everything in the light of faith. Saint Teresa often used to say: “All sins come from the lack of faith.” Let us therefore beg our Blessed Lady, by the merit of her faith, to obtain a living faith for us. “O Lady, increase our faith!”

5

MARY'S HOPE



Hope is born of faith. God enlightens us by faith to know his goodness and the promises he has made, thereby to rise by hope to the desire of possessing him. Mary had the virtue of faith in the highest degree, and she also had the virtue of hope in the same high degree. And this enabled her to say with David: *But it is good for me to adhere to my God, to put my hope in the Lord God* (Ps 72:28).

Mary was the faithful spouse of the Holy Spirit. Scripture asks regarding her: *Who is this that comes up from the desert, flowing with delights, leaning on her beloved?* (Cant 8:5). Since Mary never relied either on creatures or on her own merits but only on divine grace in which she had the fullest confidence, she continually advanced in the love of God. Algrino said of her: "She came up from the desert, that is, from the world which she had renounced so completely that she turned all her affections away from it. She leaned upon her beloved because she did not trust in her own merits but relied entirely on God."

The Blessed Virgin gave a clear indication of her confidence in God, first of all when she saw the anxiety of Saint Joseph. Unable to understand the mystery of her pregnancy, he thought of leaving her: *But Joseph … was minded to put her away privately* (Mt 1:19). It then appeared necessary, as we have remarked above, to reveal the secret to him. But Mary could not bring herself to disclose the grace she had received. She thought it better to abandon herself to Divine Providence in the full confidence that God himself would protect her. This is precisely what Cornelius à Lapide says in his commentary on the words of the Gospel quoted above: "The Blessed Virgin was unwilling to reveal this secret to Joseph, lest she might seem to be boasting of her gifts. She therefore resigned herself to the care of God in the fullest confidence that he would guard her innocence and reputation."

Mary showed confidence in God again when she knew that the time for the birth of Our Lord was approaching, and when she was driven even from the lodgings of the poor in Bethlehem and obliged to bring forth her child in a stable: *And she laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn* (Lk 2:7). She did not utter a word of complaint, but abandoned herself wholly to God.

She also showed her great confidence in Divine Providence when she learned from Joseph that they had to flee to Egypt. That very night she was obliged to undertake a long journey to a strange and unknown country, without any provisions, without money, and accompanied only by her infant and her poor husband. *He arose and took the child and his mother by night, and withdrew into Egypt* (Mt 2:14).

She showed her confidence much more when she asked her son for wine at the marriage feast in Cana. When she said: *They have no wine*, Jesus answered her: *What would you have me do, woman? My hour has not yet come* (Jn 2:3, 4). Even after this answer, which seemed such an obvious rebuff, her confidence prompted her to tell the servants to do whatever her son would tell them to do. She was certain that the favor would be granted. *Do whatever he tells you* (Jn 2:5). And everyone knows what happened: Jesus ordered the jars to be filled with water and then changed the water into wine.

Let us therefore learn from Mary to have confidence in God—in every sphere of life—but principally in the business of our eternal salvation. This is an affair in which we must, of course, cooperate. At the same time we must hope for the necessary grace to attain the result. We must distrust our own strength and say with the Apostle: *I can do all things in him who strengthens me* (Phil 4:13).

O most holy Lady, Ecclesiasticus tells me that you are the mother … of holy hope (Ecclus 24:24): and holy Church, that you are "our hope." Where else need I look for hope? After Jesus, you are all my hope. This is what Saint Bernard said, and this is what I say: "You are the whole basis for my hope." And with Saint Bonaventure I will repeat again and again: "O salvation of all who call upon you, save me!"

6

MARY'S CHASTITY

After the fall of Adam, man's senses became rebellious to reason. As a consequence, chastity is the most difficult of all the virtues to practice. Saint Augustine says: "Of all inner conflicts the most arduous are concerned with chastity. These battles are of daily occurrence, but victory is rare."[1] May God be praised eternally, however, because in Mary he has given us such a shining example of this virtue.

"Mary is with good reason called the Virgin of virgins," says Saint Albert the Great. "Without the advice or example of others, she was the first to consecrate her virginity to God." In this way, she led to God all who imitated her virginity, as David had foretold: *After her shall virgins be brought … into the temple of the king* (Ps 44:15). Without advice and without any example! Saint Bernard says: "O Virgin, who taught you to please God by your virginity and to lead an angel's life on earth?" Saint Sophronius replies: "God chose a pure virgin for his mother, that she might be an example of chastity to everybody." That is why Saint Ambrose calls Mary "the standard-bearer of virginity."

Because of Mary's purity the Holy Spirit declared that she is as beautiful as the turtledove: *Your cheeks are beautiful as the turtledove's* (Cant 1:9). "A most pure turtledove" is what Aponius calls her. For the same reason, Mary is also called a lily: As the lily among the thorns, so is my love among the daughters (Cant 2:2). On this passage Denis the Carthusian remarks: "Mary was compared to a lily among thorns because all other virgins were thorns, either to themselves or to others; but the Blessed Virgin was not so, either to herself or to others." She inspired everybody who saw her with chaste thoughts. Saint Thomas confirms this when he says that the beauty of the Blessed Virgin incited to chastity all who looked at her. Saint Jerome maintains that Saint Joseph remained a virgin as a result of living with Mary. Writing against the

heretic Helvidius who denied Mary's virginity, Saint Jerome said: "You say that Mary did not remain a virgin. I say that not only did she remain a virgin, but that even Joseph preserved his virginity through Mary."

Saint Gregory of Nyssa says that the Blessed Virgin loved chastity so much, that to preserve it she would have been willing to renounce even the dignity of Mother of God. This seems evident from her reply to the archangel: *How shall this happen, since I do not know man?* (Lk 1:34). And from the words she added then: *Be it done to me according to your word* (Lk 1:38), signifying that she gave her consent on the condition that, as the angel had assured her, she should become a mother only by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit.

Saint Ambrose says that "anyone who preserves chastity is an angel; anyone who loses it is a devil." Our Lord assures us that those who are chaste become angels: *They … shall be as the angels of God in heaven* (Mt 22:30). But the unchaste become hateful to God, like devils. Saint Remigius used to say that the majority of adults are lost by this vice.

We have quoted Saint Augustine as saying that a victory is very seldom gained in this combat. Why is this? Because the means by which the victory may be gained are very seldom used. These means are threefold, according to Bellarmine and the masters of the spiritual life: fasting, the avoidance of dangerous occasions of sin, and prayer.

1. By fasting we mean especially mortification of the eyes and the appetite. Although our Blessed Lady was filled with divine grace, she nevertheless practiced mortification of the eyes, according to Saint Epiphanius and Saint John Damascene. Her glances were always modest and she never gazed fixedly at anyone. She was so unassuming, even from childhood, that everyone who saw her was charmed by her reserve. Saint Luke remarks that when she went to visit Elizabeth, she went with haste (Lk 1:39), in order to avoid the public gaze. Philibert relates that it was revealed to a hermit named Felix that as far as her food was concerned, when she was a baby she took milk only once a day. Saint Gregory of Tours maintains that she fasted throughout her life. Saint Bonaventure explains this: "Mary would never have found so much grace if she had not been moderate in her meals, for grace and gluttony do not go together." In short, Mary was mortified in everything, so that it was true to say of her: *My hands dripped with myrrh* (Cant 5:5).

2. The second means is avoidance of the occasions of sin: *He that is aware of the snares shall be secure* (Prov 11:15). Saint Philip Neri coined the expression: "In the war of the senses, cowards conquer." By cowards he means those who flee from dangerous occasions. Mary fled as much as possible from the gaze of men. Remember Saint Luke's remark that, in going to visit Elizabeth, Mary went with haste into the hill country. One author calls attention to the fact that Our Lady left Elizabeth before Saint John was born: *And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her own house. Now Elizabeth's time was fulfilled that she should be delivered, and she brought forth a son* (Lk 1:56–57). Why did Mary not wait for Saint John's birth? Because she wanted to avoid the hubbub and excitement that usually accompany such an event.

3. The third means is prayer. The Wise Man said: *And as I knew that I could not otherwise be continent except God gave it … I went to the Lord and besought him* (Wis 8:21). Mary revealed to Saint Elizabeth of Hungary that she did not acquire any virtue without effort and without continual prayer. Saint John Damascene calls our Immaculate Mother "a lover of purity." She cannot endure those who are content to be unchaste. And if anybody appeals to her to be delivered from unchastity she will certainly help him. All he has to do is call upon her confidently. The Venerable John of Ávila used to say that many have conquered impure temptations merely through devotion to Mary Immaculate.

O Mary, most pure dove, how many are now in hell on account of impurity! Most gracious Lady, obtain for us the grace always to fly to you in our temptations, and always to invoke your name, pleading: "Mary, Mary, help us!" Amen.

7

MARY'S POVERTY



Our Redeemer chose to be poor on earth, so that we could learn from him to despise worldly things. Being rich, says Saint Paul, *he became poor for your sake, that through his poverty you might be rich* (2 Cor 8:9). Jesus exhorts each one who wishes to be his disciple: *If thou will be perfect, go sell what you have, and give to the poor … and come, follow me* (Mt 19:21).

Mary, his most perfect disciple, imitated his example most perfectly. Saint Peter Canisius proves that Mary could have lived in comfort on the property she inherited from her parents, but she preferred to remain poor. Retaining only a small portion for herself, she distributed the rest to the Temple and the needy. Many authors even believe that Mary made a vow of poverty. Perhaps the basis for this is what she said to Saint Bridget: "From the beginning I vowed in my heart that I would never possess anything on earth."

The gifts she received from the wealthy Magi were surely not of little value. But we are assured by Saint Bernard that she distributed them to the poor through the hands of Saint Joseph. It is quite clear that Mary immediately disposed of these gifts from the fact that at her purification in the Temple she did not offer a lamb, as was prescribed in Leviticus for those who could afford it (Lev 12:6), but two turtle doves or two pigeons, which was the offering prescribed for the poor (Lk 2:24). Mary told Saint Bridget: "I gave to the poor all that I could, and only kept a little food and clothing for myself."

Because of her love of poverty she was willing to marry Saint Joseph who was only a poor carpenter. She helped maintain the family by working with her hands, by spinning or sewing, as Saint Bonaventure assures us. The angel told Saint Bridget that "worldly riches were of no more value in Mary's eyes than dirt." She always lived poor, and she died poor. Metaphrastes and Nicephorus tell us that at her death she left

nothing except two simple dresses. She left these to the two women who had served her during the later years of her life.

Saint Philip Neri used to say that “no one who loves the baubles of the world will ever become a saint.” We may add that Saint Teresa said on the same subject: “It follows that anyone who chases after perishable things is in danger of perishing himself.” But, on the other hand, she adds that the virtue of poverty is a treasure that comprises in itself all other treasures. She says the “virtue of poverty,” for as Saint Bernard remarks, poverty does not consist merely in being poor, but in loving poverty. Therefore Jesus Christ said: *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven* (Mt 5:3). Such persons are blessed because they do not desire anything but God and find everything in God. Poverty for them is paradise on earth. This is what Saint Francis meant when he exclaimed: “My God and my all.”

Let us then, as Saint Augustine exhorts us, “love that one good in which all good things are found.” Let us address Our Lord in the words of Saint Ignatius: “Give me only your love and your grace, and I shall be rich enough.” “When we have to suffer from poverty,” says Saint Bonaventure, “let us console ourselves with the thought that Jesus and his mother were also poor like ourselves.”

Most holy Mother, you had good reason to say that your whole joy was in God: *And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. In this world you desired and loved nothing but God. Draw me … after you* (Cant 1:3). O Lady, detach me from the world, that I may love him alone, who alone deserves to be loved. Amen.

8

MARY'S OBEDIENCE



Mary loved obedience so much that when the angel made his astonishing announcement, she chose in response to call herself merely a servant: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord* (Lk 1:38). According to Saint Thomas of Villanova, "this faithful servant never opposed the will of her Master in thought, word, or deed. Completely despoiled of any will of her own she lived always and in all things obedient to the will of God." She herself made it known that God was pleased with her obedience, for she said: *He has regarded the humility of his handmaid* (Lk 1:48). The humility of a servant consists precisely in a willingness to obey promptly. Saint Irenaeus says that by her obedience Mary repaired the evil done by Eve's disobedience: "As Eve by her disobedience caused her own death and that of the entire human race, so Mary by her obedience became the cause of her own salvation and that of all mankind."

Mary's obedience was much more perfect than that of the other saints. All other men are prone to evil and find it difficult to do good because of original sin; but not so Mary. Saint Bernardine writes that because Mary was free from original sin, she did not find it difficult to obey God. "She was like a wheel," he says, "which was easily turned by every inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Her only object in the world was to keep her eyes constantly fixed on God, to learn his will, and then to perform it." The Canticles refer this saying to her: *My soul melted when* [my Beloved] *spoke* (Cant 5:6). As Richard of Saint Lawrence explains it: "My soul was as metal, liquefied by the fire of love, ready to be molded into any form, according to God's will."

Mary proved her love for obedience first of all when, to please God, she obeyed the Roman emperor and undertook the long journey to Bethlehem. It was winter. The distance was seventy miles. Mary was pregnant and so poor that she had to give birth to her son in a stable.

She was equally obedient when she undertook on the very same night that Saint Joseph suggested it, the longer and more difficult journey to Egypt. The Carmelite Father Silveira asks why the command to flee to Egypt was given to Saint Joseph rather than to the Blessed Virgin since she was to suffer the most from it? And he answers: "So that Mary might not be deprived of the opportunity to perform an act of obedience, for which she was always most ready."

Our Blessed Lady showed her heroic obedience above all when, in conformity with God's will, she offered her son to death. And this with such perfect abandonment, as Saint Anselm and Saint Antoninus remark, that had there been no executioners waiting for him on Calvary, she herself would have been ready to crucify him. Venerable Bede explains Our Lord's answer to the woman in the Gospel who exclaimed: *Blessed is the womb that bore you … Rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it* (Lk 11:27, 28). He says that Mary was very blessed by being the Mother of God, but was even more blessed by always loving and obeying his divine will.

For this reason, all who love obedience are highly pleasing to our Blessed Lady. She once appeared to a Franciscan friar named Accorso, who was in his cell. While Mary was still there, obedience required that he go to hear the confession of a sick person. He went, and on his return found that Mary had waited for him. She commended him highly for his obedience. On the other hand, she censured another religious who had remained to finish some private devotions after the refectory bell had rung.

Mary once spoke to Saint Bridget about the confidence with which one ought to obey one's spiritual director, and said: "It is obedience that brings chosen souls to glory." As Saint Philip Neri used to say: "God demands no accounting of things done by obedience, since he himself said: *He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me* (Lk 10:16)." Mary revealed to Saint Bridget that it was through the merit of her obedience that she obtained such great power that no sinner who appealed to her with a desire to mend his ways would fail to obtain pardon, however great his crimes.

Most sweet Queen and Mother, intercede with Jesus for us. By the merit of your obedience obtain that we may be faithful in obeying God's

will and the injunctions of our spiritual guides. Amen.

9

MARY'S PATIENCE



Since the world is a place of meriting, it is rightly called a valley of tears. We are placed here to suffer, so that by patience we may bring our own souls to life eternal, as Our Lord himself says: *By your patience you will win your souls* (Lk 21:19). God gave us the Blessed Virgin as a model of all virtues. But particularly as a model of patience. Saint Francis de Sales commenting on the marriage feast at Cana, remarks that it was precisely for this reason that Our Lord's answer to the Blessed Virgin seemed to pay but little attention to her request: *Woman, what is that to you and to me?* (Jn 2:4). He did this to give us an example of his mother's patience.

But why do we have to look for examples? Mary's whole life was one continual exercise of patience. The angel said to Saint Bridget: "As a rose grows up among thorns, so did the Blessed Virgin grow up among tribulations." Her compassion for the sufferings of the Redeemer was enough in itself to make her a martyr of patience. Saint Bonaventure says: "A crucified Mother conceived a crucified Son." In speaking of her sorrows, we have already mentioned how much she suffered during her journey to Egypt and during her stay there, as well as during the time she spent with her son in the house at Nazareth. But what Mary had to endure when her son was crucified on Calvary is enough in itself to show how constant and steadfast her patience was: *There stood by the cross of Jesus his mother*. It was then, according to Saint Albert the Great, that she brought us forth to the life of grace.

If then we wish to be children of Mary, we must strive to imitate her patience. "What can enrich us with greater merit in this life," asks Saint Cyprian, "or with greater glory in the next, than the patient endurance of sufferings?" Divine Wisdom said, by the prophet Osee: *I will hedge in her way with thorns* (Osee 2:6). Saint Gregory adds: "The way of the elect

is hedged with thorns." As a hedge of thorns protects a vineyard, so God protects his servants from attaching themselves to the earth by surrounding them with tribulations. Saint Cyprian concludes, therefore, that it is patience that delivers us from sin and hell.

It is also patience that produces saints: *Let patience have its perfect work* (Jas 1:4). Patient souls bear in peace not only the crosses that come immediately from God, such as sickness and poverty, but also those that come from men—persecution, injuries, and the like. Saint John saw all the saints carrying palm branches, the emblem of martyrdom, in their hands: *After this I saw a great multitude … and palms were in their hands* (Apoc 7:9). This meant that all adults who are saved must be martyrs in some sense, either through shedding their blood for Christ or through the practice of patience. Saint Gregory urges us to take courage, maintaining that "we can be martyrs without the executioner's sword, by merely preserving patience." "Provided, of course," adds Saint Bernard, "that we endure the trials of this life not only patiently but willingly and with joy." What fruit every pain borne for God's sake will produce for us in heaven! The Apostle encourages us, saying: *For our present light affliction, which is for the moment, prepares for us an eternal weight of glory* (2 Cor 4:17).

Saint Teresa's reflections on this subject are beautiful. She used to say: "Those who embrace the cross do not feel it." And again: "Once we have made up our minds to suffer, there is no more pain." When our crosses weigh heavily upon us, let us have recourse to Mary whom Holy Church calls "comforter of the afflicted," and whom Saint John Damascene calls "the remedy for all the sorrows of the heart."

O my sweet Lady, you who were innocent endured suffering with so much patience. Why do I, who deserve hell, refuse to suffer at all? My mother, I now ask you for this favor—not to be delivered from crosses, but to bear them more patiently. For the love of Jesus, I beg you to obtain at least this grace from God. I confidently hope for this from you.

10

MARY'S SPIRIT OF PRAYER



No other soul on earth ever practiced so perfectly as the Blessed Virgin the great lesson taught by our Savior that *we must always pray, and not lose heart* (Lk 18:1). No one can give us a better example, says Saint Bonaventure, of how necessary it is to persevere in prayer. Saint Albert the Great asserts that, after Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lady excelled all souls who ever existed or ever will exist in her spirit of prayer. Her prayer was continual and persevering. From the very first moment that she had the use of reason (which was, as we have said in the discourse on her Nativity, the first moment of her existence) she began to pray. So that she could devote herself still more to this pious practice, she retired into the solitude of the Temple when she was only three years old. There, as she revealed to Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, in addition to the other hours set aside for prayer she always rose at midnight and went before the altar to offer her petitions to God. Later in life (as we learn from Odilo), so as to meditate more fervently on the sufferings of Jesus, she frequently visited the places of Our Lord's nativity, passion, and burial. Moreover, she prayed with the most complete recollection of spirit, free from every distraction and inordinate affection. Nor did any exterior occupation ever interfere with the light of her unceasing contemplation, as Denis the Carthusian assures us.

Because of her love of prayer, Mary was so enamored of solitude that, as she told Saint Bridget, when she lived in the Temple she avoided association even with her own parents. Saint Jerome comments on the words of the prophet Isaiah: *The virgin shall be with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel* (Isa 7:14). He says that in Hebrew the word "virgin" properly means a "retired virgin." So we see that the prophet even foretold the love Mary would have for solitude. Richard of Saint Lawrence says that the angel addressed her in these words: *The*

Lord is with you, because of her great love for seclusion. That is why Saint Vincent Ferrer maintains that Mary "left her house only to go to the Temple, and that when she did so her demeanor was modest and she kept her eyes cast down." For the same reason, when she went to visit Saint Elizabeth *she went with haste*. This prompted Saint Ambrose to admonish virgins to avoid the world and public appearances as much as possible.

Saint Bernard claims that it was Mary's love of prayer and solitude that prompted her "to avoid the society of men and useless conversation with them." The Holy Spirit called her a turtledove: *Your cheeks are* as *beautiful as the turtledove's* (Cant 1:9). According to Vergello, this is a reference to Mary's love of seclusion and her spirit of recollection. Turtledoves were known to seek solitude and to flee from association with other birds. Mary lived such a retired life in the world that the words of Canticles apply to her: *Who* is *she that goes up by the desert, as a pillar of smoke?* (Cant 3:6). Commenting on these words, the Abbot Rupert says: "You came up as from a desert, because you had a soul that loved solitude."

Philo assures us that "God only speaks to souls in solitude." Holy Writ says the same thing in the prophecy of Osee: *I will lead her into the desert and speak to her heart* (Osee 2:14). "Happy solitude!" exclaims Saint Jerome, "where God converses familiarly with his own." "Yes," says Saint Bernard, "solitude and silence force the soul to leave the thought of earth behind and to meditate on heavenly things."

Most holy Virgin, help us to love prayer and retirement, so that we may detach ourselves from the love of creatures and may aspire only to God and heaven where we hope one day to see you, to praise you, and to love you, together with Jesus, your son, for ever and ever. Amen.

Come over to me, all you that desire me, and be filled with my fruits (Ecclus 24:26). Mary's fruits are her virtues.

"There has never been anyone like you, nor shall there ever be. You alone of all women, without any rival, have pleased the Lord" (Sedulius).

PART VI



PRACTICES OF DEVOTION IN HONOR OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

The Queen of Heaven is so gracious and generous, says Saint Andrew of Crete, that she rewards magnificently even the most trifling tributes of our affection.

There are however two conditions that must be fulfilled: the first is that when we honor her we must do so with a soul free from sin. Otherwise, she will say to us what she said to a reprobate soldier mentioned by Saint Peter Celestine. Despite his crimes, this soldier used to perform some devotion in honor of Mary every day. One day, when he was particularly hungry, Our Lady appeared to him and offered him some delicious food, but in such a filthy dish that he could not bring himself to taste it. “I am the Mother of God,” the Blessed Virgin said, “and I have come to satisfy your hunger.” “But I cannot eat from such a dirty dish,” he said. “Then how can you expect me to accept your devotions when you offer them to me with such a defiled soul?” replied Mary. When he heard this, the soldier had a change of heart, became a hermit, and lived in a desert for thirty years. At his death, the Blessed Virgin again appeared to him and took him to herself in heaven.

Earlier in this work, we said that it was morally impossible for a servant of Mary to be lost. But this must be understood, of course, on condition that he either lives without sin or, at the very least, dies with a desire to abandon sin. Then the Blessed Virgin will help him. But if on the other hand, anyone should sin in the hope that Mary will save him anyway, Mary would be unable to help him and he at the same time would be making himself unworthy of her protection.

The second condition is perseverance in devotion to Mary. It is perseverance, says Saint Bernard, that merits the crown. When Thomas à Kempis was a young man he used to practice devotion to the Blessed Virgin every day and offer her certain prayers. One day he omitted them. Then he omitted them for some weeks. Finally he gave them up altogether. One night he saw Mary in a dream. She embraced all his companions, but when his turn came she said: “What do you expect me to do when you have given up your devotions? You do not deserve any marks of affection from me.” Thomas woke up in alarm and from that time on resumed his usual prayers.

Richard of Saint Lawrence with good reason says that “anyone who perseveres in devotion to Mary will be rewarded for his confidence and will obtain everything he wishes.” But since no one can be certain of this perseverance, no one can be certain of salvation before death. The advice given by Saint John Berchmans deserves our particular attention. When this holy young man lay dying, his companions begged him, before he left this world, to tell them what devotion they could perform that would be most pleasing to Our Blessed Lady. He gave this remarkable answer: “Perform any devotion whatever, no matter how small, provided you do it regularly.”

I shall now enumerate in a few simple words various devotions we can offer Our Blessed Lady to obtain her favor. I consider this the most useful part of my work. But I am not recommending, dear reader, that you practice them all. Choose the ones that please you most and practice them constantly. Do not omit them, for you may lose the protection of Our Lady. How many there are now in hell who might have been saved if they had only persevered in the devotions they once practiced in honor of Mary!

1

THE HAIL MARY



This “angelic salutation,” as it is called, is very pleasing to the Blessed Virgin. Whenever she hears it, it seems to renew in her the joy felt when Saint Gabriel announced that she was to be the Mother of God. That is why we should frequently recite the Hail Mary. “Greet her with the angelic salutation,” says Thomas à Kempis, “for it makes her very happy to hear that prayer.” Our Lady revealed to Saint Matilda that no one could greet her in a more pleasing way than by reciting the Hail Mary.

Those who greet Mary will also be greeted by her. Saint Bernard once heard a statue of Mary address him with the words: “Hail, Bernard.” Mary’s greeting, says Saint Bonaventure, will always take the form of some grace corresponding to the needs of the person who greets her: “She gladly salutes us with grace, if we joyfully salute her with the Hail Mary.” Richard of Saint Lawrence adds: “If we greet the Mother of Our Lord and say ‘Hail, Mary,’ she cannot refuse the grace we ask.” Mary herself promised Saint Gertrude as many graces at death as she had said Hail Marys. Blessed Alanus maintains that “just as all heaven rejoices when a Hail Mary is said so the devils tremble and flee.” Thomas à Kempis reports that this is so on the basis of his own experience. He says that one day a devil appeared to him but fled instantly when he heard the Hail Mary.

We can practice this devotion in the following ways:

1. Every morning when we rise and every evening when we retire, we ought to say three Hail Marys either in a prostrate position, or at least kneeling. To each Hail Mary we should add the following short prayer: “By virtue of your Immaculate Conception, O Mary, make my body pure and my soul holy.”[1] Then, like Saint Stanislaus, we should ask for Mary’s blessing, since she is our Mother. Placing ourselves

under her protection, we should implore her to guard us from sin during the coming day or night. For this purpose, it is advisable to have a picture of the Blessed Virgin near our bed.

2. We can say the Angelus with the usual three Hail Marys in the morning, at noon, and in the evening. Pope John XXII was the first to grant an indulgence for this devotion. The occasion was as follows, according to Father Crasset: A criminal was condemned to be burnt alive on the vigil of the Annunciation. When he recited the Hail Mary in the midst of the flames, both he and his clothes remained completely unscathed. In 1724, Benedict XIII granted a hundred days' indulgence to all who recited the Angelus, and a plenary indulgence once a month to those who during that time have recited it daily as above, on condition of going to confession and receiving holy Communion and praying for the usual intentions.[2]

Formerly, everybody used to kneel at the sound of the bell to say the Angelus, but at the present time there are some who are ashamed to do so. Saint Charles Borromeo however was not ashamed to leave his carriage or get off his horse to recite the Angelus in the street, and sometimes even in the mud.

There is a story that once there was a lazy religious who neglected to kneel down when he heard the Angelus bell ring. Then he saw the belfry itself bend over three times and a voice said to him: "Will you not do what even inanimate creatures do?" Here we must mention that Benedict XIV directed that during the paschal time, instead of saying the Angelus we should say the *Regina Coeli:* and that on Saturday evenings, and all day Sunday, the Angelus should be said standing.

3. It is well to greet Our Lady with a Hail Mary whenever we hear the clock strike. Saint Alphonsus Rodriguez used to salute her every hour, and at night angels awoke him so that he would not omit this devotion.

4. Whenever we leave the house or return, we can greet Mary with a Hail Mary, so that she will preserve us from sin both at home and

while we are away. We might also kiss her feet in spirit each time, as the Carthusian Fathers do.

5. We should reverence every statue of Mary we pass by, saying a Hail Mary. For this purpose, those who can afford to do so should have a statue of the Blessed Virgin in their homes, so that all who come there may venerate her. In Naples, and still more in Rome, there are beautiful images of our Blessed Lady which have been placed in the streets by Mary's devoted clients.

6. Holy Church has ordained that the Canonical Hours of the Divine Office shall begin and end with a Hail Mary.[3] We may therefore very well imitate her by beginning and ending all our actions with a Hail Mary. I say all our actions, whether spiritual—like prayer, confession, communion, spiritual reading, hearing sermons, and so on; or temporal—like study, giving advice, working, eating, going to bed, and so on. Very meritorious are the acts that are enclosed within two Hail Marys. We should do this on waking in the morning, on closing our eyes before going to sleep, whenever we are tempted, or in danger, or inclined to be angry, and so on. On such occasions, we should always say a Hail Mary.

My dear reader, do this and you will see what immense advantages will come to you. Father Auriemma relates that the Blessed Virgin promised Saint Matilda a happy death if she recited three Hail Marys every day in honor of her power, wisdom, and goodness. Our Lady herself revealed to Saint Jane Frances de Chantal how pleasing the Hail Mary is to her, especially when it is recited ten times in honor of her ten virtues.

2

NOVENAS



Souls devoted to Mary love to celebrate her novenas; that is, the nine days preceding one of her feasts. Mary rewards them for this, and gives them innumerable special graces on these occasions. One day Saint Gertrude saw under Mary's mantle a band of souls whom the great Lady was protecting with great affection. She was given to understand that they were persons who, during the preceding days, had prepared themselves with various devotions for the feast of the Assumption.

The following are some of the devotions that can be used during novenas:

1. We may engage in mental prayer in the morning and in the evening, and visit the Blessed Sacrament, adding nine times the Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory Be to the Father.

2. We may pay a daily visit (or three visits) to a picture or shrine of Mary and thank Our Lord for the graces he has granted her. At each visit, we should ask the Blessed Virgin for some special grace. On one of those visits we might well recite the prayer that is found at the end of the discourse for that particular feast.

3. We may make many acts of love to Mary (at least fifty or a hundred), and also to Jesus. We can do nothing that pleases Mary more than loving her son, as she herself said to Saint Bridget: "If you wish to gain favor with me, love my Son."

4. Every day during the novena we might read for a quarter of an hour some book that treats of her glories.

5. We may perform some external act of mortification, such as wearing a haircloth, or performing some other penance of this kind. We may also fast, or abstain from a favorite dish at meals, or at least take a little less, or even take something bitter or unpleasant with our food. On the vigil of the feast, we might even fast on bread and water. But none of these things should be done without the permission of our confessor.

Interior mortifications, however, are the best of all. For example, we may avoid looking at or listening to things out of mere curiosity; we may remain in seclusion; keep silence; make a particular point of being obedient; try to be patient with our answers; put up with contradictions, and the like. All these things we can practice with less danger of vanity and with greater merit. Besides, it is not necessary to have our confessor's approval beforehand.

The most useful practice is to make up our minds at the beginning of a novena to correct some fault we have been accustomed to commit. With this intention in mind, each time that we make one of the visits mentioned above, we can ask pardon for our sins of the past, renew our resolution not to commit them in the future, and implore Mary's help in keeping our resolve.

The devotion dearest to the heart of Mary is the determination to imitate her virtues. Therefore it is well to try to imitate some special virtue of hers corresponding to the feast being celebrated. For example, on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, purity of intention; on her Nativity, a renewal of the spiritual life and the rejection of lukewarmness; on her Presentation, detachment from something of which we are particularly fond; on her Annunciation, humility and patience in putting up with contempt; on her Visitation, charity toward our neighbor, almsgiving, or at least prayer for sinners; on her Purification, obedience to superiors; and finally, on her Assumption, detachment from the world, coupled with a diligent preparation for death and a resolve to live each day of our life as if it were to be the last. Novenas made in this way can be of great profit to the soul.

6. Besides going to holy Communion on the day of the feast, it would be well to ask our confessor for permission to go more frequently during the novena.[4] Father Segneri used to say that we cannot honor Mary in any

better way than with and through Jesus. Mary herself revealed to a holy soul, according to Father Crasset, that we can offer her nothing more pleasing than holy Communion; for in that sacrament Jesus gathers the fruits of his Passion in our souls. It is quite evident then that the Blessed Virgin desires nothing more than that we receive holy Communion frequently. She says to us: *Come, eat my bread, and drink the wine which I have mingled for you* (Prov 9:5).

7. Finally on the feast itself, after holy Communion, we should offer ourselves to the service of our Blessed Mother and ask her for the grace to practice the virtue we have asked for during the novena, or for whatever special grace we may need. It is well each year to choose one of her feasts for which we have a special devotion, and to make a very special preparation for this one by dedicating ourselves again to her service in a very special way, proclaiming again that we choose her as Our Lady, our advocate, and our mother. Then let us ask her to pardon all our failings of the past year, and promise to serve her with greater fidelity in the future. Finally, let us conclude by begging her to receive us as her servants and to obtain a holy death for us.

3

THE ROSARY AND THE OFFICE OF OUR BLESSED LADY



It is well known that the devotion of the rosary was revealed to Saint Dominic by the Blessed Mother herself. This occurred at a time when the saint was troubled and bemoaning to Our Lady the fact that the Albigensian heretics were doing a great deal of harm to the Church. The Blessed Virgin said to him: “This land will always be sterile until rain falls on it.” Saint Dominic was then given to understand that this rain would be devotion to the rosary, which he was to propagate. This he proceeded to do, preaching the new devotion everywhere until it was embraced by Catholics all over the world. So successful was he that, even today, there is no devotion more widely practiced by the faithful of all classes than the recitation of the rosary. What is there that heretics—Calvin, Bucer, and others—have not said to discredit the use of the beads? But the extraordinary good that this precious devotion has brought to the world is too well known. How many souls have been delivered from sin by means of the rosary! How many have been converted to a holy life; how many have died a good death and are now saved! To be convinced of this, all we have to do is read any of the numerous books on the subject.

It is enough to know that this devotion has been approved by the Church and that the sovereign pontiffs have enriched it with many indulgences. Principal among these is the plenary indulgence which may be gained when the rosary is recited in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, either exposed or in the tabernacle, provided one goes to confession and receives holy Communion.[5]

The rosary should be recited as devoutly as possible. And here we may call to mind what the Blessed Virgin said to Saint Eulalia: that she was more pleased with five decades said slowly and devoutly than with fifteen said in a hurry and with little devotion. It is well to say the rosary

kneeling, before an image of the Blessed Virgin; and before each decade, to make an act of love to Jesus and Mary, and to ask them for some special grace. It is also preferable to say it with others rather than alone.

The Little Office of the Blessed Virgin is said to have been composed by Saint Peter Damian.[6] Many indulgences have been granted to those who recite it, and the Blessed Virgin has shown many times how pleasing this devotion is to her. This is brought out especially in the little work by Father Auriemma.

Mary likewise is very much honored when we recite the Litany of Loreto which is also indulgenced. The hymn *Ave Maris Stella* pleases her too. She recommended that Saint Bridget recite it every day. The canticle *Magnificat* is very dear to her because these are the very words she herself used to praise God.

4

FASTING



Many who are devoted to Mary honor her by fasting on bread and water on Saturdays and the vigils of her feasts.

Holy Church dedicates Saturday to the Blessed Virgin because, as Saint Bernard says, on the day after the death of her son she remained steadfast in her faith. That is why we honor her on that day by some particular devotion. For example, we may fast on bread and water, as Saint Charles Borromeo, Cardinal Toledo, and many others did. Nithard, Bishop of Bamberg, and Father Joseph Arriaga, S.J., preferred to eat nothing at all on Saturday.

Father Auriemma describes in his little book many of the graces the Mother of God had dispensed to those who follow this practice. One example will suffice: There was a famous leader of a band of robbers who did not die when his head was cut off but remained living until he could make his confession because the poor man was in a state of sin. After confession, he announced that the Blessed Virgin had granted this great favor because of this devotion. Then he expired.

It would not be a very great burden for one who claims to have a special devotion to Mary to offer her this fast on Saturdays, particularly if he has already deserved hell on account of his sins. I maintain that those who follow this practice can hardly be lost. I do not mean to say, of course, that if they reach the point of death in mortal sin the Blessed Virgin will deliver them by a miracle, as she did the bandit. These are prodigies of divine mercy which occur very rarely, and it would be the height of folly to expect eternal salvation by means such as these. But I do maintain that Mary will make perseverance in God's grace easy for those who practice this devotion, and will obtain a good death for them. All the members of our humble Congregation, who are able to do so, practice this devotion. I say those who are able to do so. For if health

does not permit it, we should at least content ourselves with something less on Saturday, or observe an ordinary fast, or abstain from fruit, or something that we particularly like.

All the faithful should try to practice some special devotion to the Mother of God on Saturday, such as receiving holy Communion, hearing Mass, visiting a shrine dedicated to Mary, wearing a haircloth or something of that sort. On the vigils of her seven principal feasts, they could profitably make the attempt to fast, or to do whatever their health allows.

5

VISITING MARY'S SHRINES



Father Segneri says that the devil could think of no better way to make good his losses from the destruction of idolatry than by goading the heretics on to attack sacred images. But Holy Church has defended images even with the blood of martyrs. And the Blessed Mother has proved by miracles how pleasing to her are visits paid to her shrines.

Saint John Damascene had his hand cut off for daring to defend the icons of Mary by his writings, but Our Lady miraculously restored it to him. Father Spinelli relates that in Constantinople a veil covering a picture of the Blessed Virgin used to draw itself aside every Saturday, and then after vespers closed again of its own accord. The veil over a picture of our Blessed Lady that Saint John of the Cross used to visit was once withdrawn the same way. The sacristan, thinking that the saint was a robber, kicked him, but his foot at once withered.

Lovers of Mary are fond of visiting shrines and churches dedicated in her honor. Saint John Damascene calls these places "cities of refuge" where we can be safe from temptation and the punishment we have deserved for our sins. The first thing that the Emperor Saint Henry used to do on entering a city was to visit a church dedicated to Mary. Father Thomas Sanchez would never return home without having visited some church named after her.

Let us therefore not regard it as too much of a burden to visit our queen every day in some church or chapel, or even in our own home, where we can have a quiet place set aside as a little oratory, with her statue or picture which we can keep decorated with drapery, flowers, candles, or lights. Before it, we should recite the litany, rosary, and other prayers. For this purpose, I have published a little book (which has already been reprinted many times) of visits to the Blessed Sacrament as well as to the Blessed Virgin, for every day in the month.[7] A devout

client of Mary could also arrange to have one of her feasts celebrated in a church or chapel with greater solemnity than it would otherwise be—perhaps by having it preceded by a novena, with exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, and even with sermons.

May I here relate a fact recorded by Father Spinelli in his book *Miracles of the Madonna*. In the year 1611, on the vigil of Pentecost, an immense crowd of people had gathered at the celebrated shrine of Mary at Montevergine. While the people were profaning the feast with dances, drunkenness, and immodest acts, a fire suddenly broke out in the hall, and in less than an hour and a half the building was reduced to ashes and more than fifteen hundred persons perished. Five people who escaped swore that they had seen the Mother of God herself set fire to the place with two torches. I implore all lovers of Mary, therefore, to keep far away from such places on her feasts and, if they are able to do so, to prevent others from going there. Such occasions afford more honor to the devil than they do to the Blessed Virgin. Let those who are devoted to the Blessed Mother visit her shrines, to be sure, but not as an occasion for merrymaking and sin.

6

THE SCAPULAR



In bygone days, the servants of famous people were distinguished by the fact that they wore the livery or distinctive garb of their masters. The servants of Mary, too, can be distinguished by the fact that they wear her livery, namely, her scapular, as a sign that they have dedicated themselves to her service and that they are members of the household of the Mother of God. Heretics, as a rule, ridicule this devotion. But Holy Church has approved it by many bulls and indulgences. Fathers Crasset and Lezzana, in their accounts of the scapular of Mount Carmel, relate that in the year 1251 the Blessed Virgin appeared to Saint Simon Stock, an Englishman, and gave him the scapular, telling him that all who wore it would be saved from eternal damnation. She said: “Receive, my son, this scapular of your Order, the badge of my confraternity, a privilege granted to you and to all Carmelites. Whoever dies while wearing this will not suffer hell-fire.”

Father Crasset also relates that Mary appeared to Pope John XXII and commanded him to make it known that all who wear this brown scapular will be delivered from purgatory on the Saturday after their death.[8] He declared this in a bull which was later confirmed by Alexander V, Clement VII, and other popes. Pope Paul V, as we have already remarked, clarified the bulls of his predecessors, and set out the conditions that must be observed in order to gain the promised privilege. These conditions are: that each one should observe the chastity required of his state of life[9] and that he should recite the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin.[10] If a person is unable to read, he should at least observe the fasts of the Church and abstain from meat on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

The indulgences attached to the scapular of Mount Carmel, as well as those attached to the scapulars of the Seven Sorrows of Our Lady, of the

Blessed Trinity, and especially of the Immaculate Conception, are innumerable—both partial and plenary—during life and at the hour of death. I have made it a point to be invested in all these scapulars. It is worth knowing that the scapular of the Immaculate Conception which is blessed by the Theatine Fathers, enjoys many special indulgences.[11]

7

CONFRATERNITIES OF OUR BLESSED LADY[12]



Some disapprove of confraternities because they say they give rise to quarrels, and because many join them for purely social reasons. But just as we do not condemn churches and sacraments just because there are many who make a wrong use of them, so neither should we condemn confraternities. The supreme pontiffs, far from condemning them, have approved and highly commended them.

Saint Francis de Sales earnestly exhorts the laity to join them. Saint Charles Borromeo spared no pains to establish and increase the number of these confraternities. In his synods he particularly recommends that confessors urge their penitents to join them. And with good reason. For sodalities, and especially those of our Blessed Lady, are like so many Noah's arks, in which the laity may find a refuge from the deluge of temptations and sins which inundate the world. From our experience with missions, we are well aware of the benefits of such institutions. As a rule, a person who does not attend the meetings of some spiritual society commits more sins than twenty who do attend them. A confraternity can well be called a *tower of David; a thousand bucklers hang upon it—all the shields of valiant men* (Cant 4:4). The reason such societies do so much good is that the members acquire many defensive weapons against hell, and are provided with the means for preserving divine grace. Those who are not members of confraternities use these weapons and resources only rarely.

1. In the first place, one means of salvation is meditation on the eternal truths: *Remember your last end, and you shall never sin* (Ecclus 7:40). How many people are lost because they neglect to do this! *With desolation is all the land made desolate; because there is none that considers in the heart* (Jer 12:11). Those who attend the meetings of their society, on the other

hand, are led to think of these truths by the many meditations, lectures, and sermons that they hear: *My sheep hear my voice* (Jn 10:27).

2. To save one's soul, prayer is necessary: *Ask, and you shall receive* (Jn 16:24). This is what the members of confraternities are constantly doing. God hears their prayers more willingly because he himself has said that he grants graces willingly to all those who pray in common: *If two of you shall agree on earth about anything at all for which they ask, it shall be done for them by my Father* (Mt 18:19). Commenting on this, Saint Ambrose says: "Many who are individually weak become strong when united, and it is impossible that the prayers of so many should not be heard."

3. Confraternities are likely to encourage persons to frequent the sacraments, both by reason of the rules and because of the example set by the other members. Perseverance in grace is obtained more easily. The Council of Trent has declared that holy Communion is an antidote which frees us from daily faults and preserves us from mortal sins.

4. Besides frequenting the sacraments, the members of these societies also perform acts of mortification, humility, and charity toward sick brethren and toward the poor. It would be well if this practice of aiding the sick and poor were extended to all the confraternities.

It would also be very profitable to introduce the custom of having private confraternities of the more devout brethren in honor of the Blessed Mother. I will briefly describe here the exercises which such groups are accustomed to practice: (1) They make a half-hour's spiritual reading; (2) Vespers and Compline of the Holy Spirit are said in common; (3) The litanies of the Blessed Virgin are recited, during which the members perform some act of mortification; (4) They meditate for a quarter of an hour on the Passion of Jesus Christ; (5) Each one accuses himself of transgressions against the rules, and receives an appropriate penance from the Father Confessor; (6) One of the brethren designated for this purpose reads the list of mortifications performed the preceding week, and then an announcement is made of coming novenas, and so on. The meeting is closed with some form of external penance during which the *Miserere* and the *Salve* are recited, and then each member approaches

and kisses the feet of our crucified Savior, placed at the foot of the altar.[13]

The rules could then provide that each member should: (1) Make some mental prayer every day; (2) Visit the Blessed Sacrament and the Blessed Virgin; (3) Examine his conscience every night; (4) Read something spiritually edifying; (5) Avoid worldly pursuits; (6) Receive holy Communion frequently and perform some act of mortification regularly; (7) Pray for the souls in purgatory and for sinners every day; (8) Visit some sick members.

5. We have already noted how profitable it is for our salvation to serve the Mother of God. But what else do the members of confraternities do except serve her? They praise her. They offer prayers to her. Members are consecrated to her service the moment they join the society. They choose her in a special way as their patroness and protectress. Their names are inscribed in the book of the children of Mary. Every member of a confraternity of Mary can justly say: *All good things together come to me in her company* (Wis 7:11).

Let each member however pay attention to two things: First of all, the object he should have in view above all else should be to serve God and his mother Mary, and to save his own soul. Second, he should not allow worldly interests to interfere with his attendance at the regular meetings. What is discussed there is the most important business in the world for him, namely, his eternal salvation. He should also try to induce as many others as he can to join the confraternity, and especially to bring back to active membership those who have lapsed.

What drastic punishments the Lord has inflicted on those who have abandoned the confraternity of our Blessed Lady without reason! There is a story told of a man in Naples who did so. When he was urged to return, he answered: “I will do so when my legs are broken and my head is cut off.” Without knowing it, he had made a prophecy. Not long afterward, certain enemies of his broke his legs and cut off his head.

On the other hand, Mary looks after all the needs of the members who persevere. *All her domestics are clothed with double garments* (Prov

31:21). Father Auriemma tells of many special graces granted by Mary to members of confraternities, especially at the moment of death. Father Crasset gives the account of a young man who lay dying in the year 1586. He fell asleep, but afterwards awoke and said to his confessor: “Father, I was almost damned, but our Blessed Lady saved me. The devils presented my sins before Our Lord’s tribunal, and they were preparing to drag me off to hell. But the Blessed Virgin came and said to them: ‘Where are you taking this young man? You have nothing to do with this servant of mine who has served me so long in my confraternity.’ When the devils heard this, they fled, and I was delivered from them.” The same author tells about another member who also had a great battle with hell at the hour of death. But, finally, having won the victory, he exclaimed: “What a blessing it is to belong to Mary’s confraternity!” Filled with consolation, he expired.

Father Crasset gives another example. When the Duke of Popoli was dying in Naples, he said to his son: “Son, you know that I attribute what little good I have done during my life to membership in the confraternity. I can leave you no more valuable treasure than the confraternity of Mary. I consider myself luckier to have been a sodalist than Duke of Popoli.”

8

ALMSGIVING



Servants of Mary are accustomed to give alms to the poor in honor of our Blessed Lady, especially on Saturdays.

Saint Gregory tells in his *Dialogues* about a holy shoemaker named Deusdedit who used to distribute to the poor on Saturdays whatever he had left of his week's earnings. A privileged soul once saw in a vision a gorgeous palace which God was preparing in heaven for Deusdedit, but it was being built only on Saturdays.

Saint Gerard the Martyr never refused anything that anyone ever asked for in the name of Mary. Father Martin Guttierez, S.J., followed the same practice, and later admitted that he had never asked Mary for a single grace which he had not obtained. When this servant of hers was put to death by the Huguenots, Mary appeared to his companions, accompanied by virgins who, at her direction, wrapped his body in linen and carried it away.

Saint Eberhard, Bishop of Salzburg, also gave alms in honor of Our Lady, and a holy monk once saw him as a child in the arms of Mary who said: "This is my son Eberhard, who has never denied me anything." Alexander of Hales, who followed the same practice, was once asked by a Franciscan brother to join the Order in the name of Mary. He complied at once, gave up the world, and became a friar.

Let no servant of Mary therefore think it too much of a burden to give some alms every day in her honor, no matter how trifling the amount, and to increase this on Saturdays. If he can do nothing else, he should at least perform some charitable act for the love of Mary, such as visiting the sick, praying for sinners, or for the souls in purgatory, and so on. Works of mercy like these are very pleasing to the heart of the Mother of Mercy.

9

FREQUENT RECOURSE TO MARY



No devotion is more pleasing to our Blessed Mother than that of calling upon her in all our special needs. For example, when we have to give or ask for advice, or when we are beset by dangers, afflictions, and temptations, most particularly temptations against purity. Mary will certainly listen to us and help us if we appeal to her and recite the antiphon "We fly to your patronage…."; or if we recite the Hail Mary, or even if we merely invoke the most holy name of Mary, which is endowed with special power against devils.

Blessed Fra Santi, the Franciscan, was once tempted with an impure thought and appealed to Mary. She immediately appeared to him, placed her hand on his shoulder and delivered him.

It is also useful on these occasions to kiss or press to our heart our rosary or scapular, or to look at an image of the Blessed Virgin. And it is well to note that the Church has enriched with special indulgences the invocation of the sacred names of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.

10

OTHER PRACTICES IN HONOR OF MARY



1. To say or hear Mass, or to have Mass offered in honor of the Blessed Virgin. It is true that the holy Sacrifice can be offered to God alone. It is offered to him principally as an acknowledgment of his supreme dominion. But the Council of Trent says that this does not prevent Mass from being offered at the same time in thanksgiving for the graces granted to the saints and to our Blessed Mother, so that while we are mindful of them they may intercede for us. That is why at Mass we say: "That it may avail to their honor, but also to our salvation."

Our Blessed Lady personally revealed to a holy soul that this devotion of offering the Mass, as well as the saying of the Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory Be to the Father three times, in honor of the Holy Trinity and in thanksgiving for the graces granted to her, are very pleasing to her. Since the Blessed Virgin is unable to thank Our Lord adequately for all the precious gifts he has given her, she is very glad when her children help her to thank God.

2. To have a special devotion to the saints who are more closely related to Mary, such as Saint Joseph, Saint Joachim, and Saint Anne. The Blessed Virgin herself recommended to a certain nobleman devotion toward her mother, Saint Anne. It is well also to honor the saints who were most devoted to the Blessed Mother, such as Saint John the Evangelist, Saint John the Baptist, Saint Bernard, Saint John Damascene, the defender of her images, Saint Ildephonsus, the defender of her virginity, and others.

3. Every day to read some book that deals with the glories of Mary. Also to try to instill into all, particularly those close to us, a devotion to the Mother of God. The Blessed Virgin once said to Saint Bridget: "See to it

that your children are also my children." It is commendable to pray every day for those most devoted to Mary, both living and dead.[14]

I omit many devotions which may be found in other books, such as the devotion of the seven joys of Mary, of the twelve privileges of Mary, and the like. I conclude with the beautiful words of Saint Bernardine of Siena: "O Lady, blessed among all women, you are the glory of the human race, the salvation of all our people. Your merits are limitless, and you have power over all creation. You are the Mother of God, the sovereign lady of the world, and the queen of heaven. You are the dispenser of all graces, and the ornament of Holy Church. You are the model of the just, the consolation of the pious, and the root of our salvation. You are the joy of paradise, the gate of heaven, the glory of God. We have been happy to sing your praises. We beg you, O Mother of Mercy, to make up for our weakness, to excuse our presumption, to accept our devotion, to bless our labors. Imprint your love in the hearts of all of us, so that after having loved and honored your son on earth, we may with you praise him and bless him forever in heaven. Amen."

PART VII



FURTHER EXAMPLES RELATING TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN[1]

Some people pride themselves on their open-mindedness and declare that they believe in no miracles except those recorded in sacred Scripture. They maintain that all others are nothing but fables and old wives' tales. It is well, however, to remember the wise judgment of a learned and devout man, Father Jean Crasset, who said that it is just as easy for persons of good will to believe in miracles as it is for those of bad will to scoff at them. It is a weakness, of course, to believe in everything. By the same token, it is unwise to reject miracles when they are attested by serious and sensible men. This smacks either of a lack of faith, in that it implies that such things are impossible to God, or of rashness, in refusing to believe the testimony of credible persons. If we are prepared to believe a Tacitus or a Suetonius, how can we reasonably refuse to believe competent and trustworthy Christian authors? There is less risk, according to Saint Peter Canisius, in believing and accepting as probably true what is reported as such by well-meaning persons, and what serves for the edification of our neighbor, than in rejecting these reports in a rash and disdainful way.

TESTIMONIES OF DEVOTION TO OUR LADY



1. A certain man in Germany once fell into a grave sin. Unwilling to confess what he had done because of shame, and on the other hand unable to bear with his conscience, he went to throw himself into the river. At the last minute, however, he weakened and begged God, with many tears, to pardon him without having to go to confession. One night while he was asleep he felt someone shake his shoulder and heard a voice say: “Go to confession.” He went to the church, but did not confess. Another night he heard the same voice. Again he went to the church, but when he arrived there he decided that he would rather die than confess his sin. Before going back home, however, he recommended himself to the prayers of the Blessed Virgin and knelt down in front of her statue there in the church. No sooner had he knelt at Mary’s shrine than a complete change came over him. He got up at once, rang for the confessor and, amid many tears received as the gift of Our Lady, made a complete confession. Afterward he said that he had experienced greater happiness as a result of that confession than if he had been given the wealth of the whole world.

2. Once, while a young nobleman was making a sea voyage, he began to read an indecent book of which he was very fond. A monk said to him: “Would you be willing to give something to the Blessed Virgin?” The young man replied that he would. “Well then,” the monk said, “tear up this book and throw it into the sea for the love of Mary.” “Here it is, Father,” he said. “No,” replied the monk, “I want you to do it yourself as a gift of it to Mary.” He did so. No sooner had he returned to his native city of Genoa than the Mother of God inflamed his heart with such fervor that he decided to become a monk himself.

3. There once lived in Rome a wicked woman nicknamed Catherine the Beautiful. One day she heard Saint Dominic preach on devotion to the

rosary, so she had herself enrolled in the society. She began to say the rosary, but did not give up her evil life. One evening, a young nobleman came to see her. She received him graciously and while they were at dinner she noticed that drops of blood appeared on his hands whenever he broke the bread. Then she saw that all the food he touched was stained with blood. So she asked him what this blood was. The young man replied that a Christian should not eat any food except that which had been stained by the blood of Christ and seasoned by the memory of his Passion. Amazed by this reply, she asked him who he was. “I will soon tell you who I am,” he said. When they had withdrawn to another room, the young man changed his appearance and, crowned with thorns and with his flesh all wounded, said to her: “Do you want to know who I am? Do you not know me? I am your Redeemer. When will you stop offending me, Catherine? You see how much I am suffering for you. Enough of this! You have grieved me enough. Change your way of life.” Catherine broke out in tears and Jesus said to her by way of encouragement: “Well now, that’s better. Love me as much as you have offended me. You have received this grace from me because you have said the rosary in honor of my mother.” Then he disappeared. Catherine went the next morning to confess her sins to Saint Dominic. After giving all that she had to the poor, she led a holy life and reached a high state of perfection. The Blessed Virgin appeared to her several times; and Jesus himself revealed to Saint Dominic that this penitent had become very dear to him.

4. In the mountains above Trent there once lived a notorious bandit. One day, a monk warned him to change his life. The bandit replied that there was no longer any hope for him. “Nonsense!” replied the monk. “Do as I say. Fast on Saturday in honor of Our Lady and do not molest anybody on that day, and Mary will obtain for you the grace of dying in the grace of God.” The bandit not only carried out this advice but made a vow to do so. In order not to violate his vow, he went about unarmed on Saturday. One Saturday, he happened to run into the police. So as not to break his vow he allowed them to capture him without offering any resistance. When the judge saw that he was a white-haired old man, he wished to commute the death sentence, but the bandit, moved to

repentance by the grace of Mary, said that he wished to pay the penalty for his crimes. So in the very courtroom where he was he made a public confession of all the sins he had ever committed. All who heard him were profoundly moved. The man was beheaded and buried in a simple grave with little ceremony.

Later, the Mother of God was seen ordering four holy virgins to rescue his body from that humble burial place and wrap it in a rich cloth of gold. Taking it herself to the gates of the city, Mary told the guards: "Tell the bishop for me that he should give this man an honorable burial in some church, because he was one of my faithful servants." This was done. The whole town flocked to the spot and found the body wrapped in its rich golden shroud. From that day on, says Caesarius, all the faithful in that area began to fast on Saturdays.

5. One of the Fathers of our Congregation, after preaching the sermon on Mary which we usually preach on missions, once had a very old man come to him to go to confession. The man began by saying to him: "Father, Our Lady has given me a great grace." "What grace has she given you?" the confessor asked. "For thirty-five years, Father, I have gone to confession sacrilegiously, because I was ashamed of a certain sin. I have had many narrow escapes and several times I was on the point of death. If I had died then, I would certainly have been damned. Now Our Lady has given me the grace of making a good confession." As he said this he began to weep. After hearing his confession, the priest asked him what devotion he had practiced toward the Blessed Virgin. He said that he had never failed to abstain in honor of Mary on Saturdays, and that that was why the Mother of God had had pity on him. He gave the confessor permission to mention the fact in his sermons.

6. A certain criminal was once condemned to death in Germany, but he would not go to confession. A Jesuit Father did all he could to get him to change his mind. He begged, he entreated, he threw himself at his feet; but he saw that he was simply wasting his time. Finally, he said to the man: "Well, at least recite the Hail Mary with me." The condemned man did so and all at once he began to weep. He confessed his sins with great sorrow, and expressed a desire to die embracing a picture of Mary.

7. A woman of Cologne who kept up sinful relations with a libertine one day found him hanging in her room. Soul-stricken, she entered a convent. She was often tempted by the devil, even in visible form, and was at a loss what to do to rid herself of his attentions. One of the Sisters suggested that she say a Hail Mary every time he appeared, which she did. With that, the devil said to her: “A curse on the one who told you to do that.” And he did not bother her after that.

8. There was a certain nobleman of evil life who lived in a castle. By chance, a certain monk happened to visit him. Enlightened by God, the monk asked him to summon his servants. All came except the valet. When he was finally brought in by force, the monk said to him: “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to tell us who you are.” The valet replied: “I am a devil from hell. For fourteen years I have served this miserable rascal waiting for the day when he would fail to say the seven Hail Marys which he is accustomed to say, so that I could strangle him and carry him off to hell.” The monk ordered the devil to leave, which he did at once, and the nobleman fell at his feet, was converted, and led a holy life thereafter.

9. Once a certain monk in Spain became so angry that he killed his superior. After this dreadful act, he fled to Barbary, where he denied the faith and married. While the rest of his life was unworthy in every respect, he did only one good thing each day, and that was to recite the Hail, Holy Queen. One day, while he was saying this prayer alone, the Blessed Mother appeared to him, scolded him, and urged him to change his way of life, promising to help him if he would. When he returned to his house, his wife asked him why he was so upset. He finally broke down and explained who he was, what he had done, and how he had had a vision. His wife proved very understanding. She gave him money to return and even had one of their sons go back with him. He returned to the monastery and proved himself so penitent that he was again received into the Order along with his son. This time he persevered and died a holy death.

10. A student was once taught by his teacher to begin his prayers with

the words: “Hail, Mother of Mercy.” When he was on his deathbed Mary appeared to him and said: “My son, do you not recognize me? I am the Mother of Mercy whom you have greeted so many times in your prayers.” The servant of Mary then stretched out his arms as if to follow her and gently breathed his last.

11. A pagan in the Indies found himself abandoned by everyone when he came to die. Having heard Christians say so much about the great power of Mary, he decided to ask her to help him. The Blessed Virgin appeared to him and said: “Here I am. I am the one you are invoking. Go and become a Christian.” The man at once felt completely well and had himself baptized. Many others were converted as a result of this miracle.

12. In the year 1610, there was a certain man in Madrid who was very devoted to Mary, and especially to a famous shrine called Our Lady of Antioch. He married a woman who gave him no peace because of her insane jealousy and suspicions. Every Saturday he used to go barefoot early in the morning to visit this shrine. But the woman was convinced that he was going somewhere else. One day, she reprimanded him so severely that in a fit of impatience he took a rope and hanged himself. But just as he was about to breathe his last, he called upon the Blessed Mother to help him, and suddenly he saw a beautiful Lady approach him and cut the rope. People outside the door were aware that something was going on, so he explained what had happened. When his wife heard about it, she regretted what she had done and from that time on they lived in peace, both devoted to the Mother of God.

13. One day a great sinner was weeping at the foot of a crucifix and begging the Lord to show him a sign of his pardon. When he received no such sign, he prayed to Our Lady of Sorrows, who then appeared to him. He saw her present his tears to her son and say to him: “My Son, are these tears to be in vain?” Then he realized that Jesus had now pardoned him and lived a holy life ever afterward.

14. One of our Fathers named Don Cesare Sportelli—who finally died in the odor of sanctity and whose body was found intact after many months

—once had a man of advanced age come to him for confession during a mission. This happened right after the sermon we deliver at every mission on the powerful intercession of Mary. Kneeling down at the feet of the confessor, he said: “Father, Our Lady has given me this grace.” “That is her way of doing things,” replied the confessor. “But you cannot give me absolution,” the man said, “because I have never been to confession.” This last was true; although the man was a Catholic, he had never been to confession. So the priest encouraged him, heard his confession, and to the great joy of the old man granted him his first absolution.

15. Blessed Bernard Tolomei, the founder of the Olivetan Fathers, who had been very devoted to Our Lady from childhood, was very troubled one day in his hermitage at Accona, called Monte Oliveto. He was afraid that he would not be saved and that God had not yet pardoned him his sins. The Blessed Mother appeared to him and said: “Why are you afraid, Bernard? Set your mind at rest. God has pardoned you and is pleased by the life you are leading. Continue as you are. I will help you and save you.” The blessed man went on contentedly with his holy way of life, until the time came for him to die a happy death in the arms of the Blessed Virgin.

16. While a certain canon was saying some prayers in honor of the Blessed Mother, he happened to fall into the Seine River and was drowned. Because he was in mortal sin, the devils came to carry him away to hell. But at that moment the Blessed Virgin said to them: “How dare you carry off one who died in the act of praising me?” Then, turning to the poor sinner, she said: “Change your life and practice devotion to my Immaculate Conception.” The man was restored to life, became a monk, and never ceased thanking his deliverer and spreading everywhere devotion to her Immaculate Conception.

17. In the year 589, there was a unique plague in Rome. Many men sneezed and fell down dead. Saint Gregory the Great was carrying a statue of the Blessed Virgin through the city in procession and came to the spot now called the Castel S. Angelo. Suddenly he saw an angel in

the air placing a sword dripping with blood in its scabbard. Then he heard the angels singing: *Queen of heaven, rejoice, alleluia, because he whom you have deserved to bear, alleluia, has arisen, as he said, alleluia.* Saint Gregory thereupon added the words: *Pray to God for us, alleluia.* The plague ceased at once, and ever since, the Church has celebrated the Greater Litanies every year on the twenty-fifth of April.

18. A certain novice overcome by temptation once made up his mind to leave the monastery. But before leaving he went to say a Hail Mary before a statue of Our Lady and found himself nailed to the floor, unable to move. He had a change of heart, and as soon as he had resolved to persevere, he felt himself free to get up. He went and explained everything to the master of novices, and his vocation was saved.

19. One morning Blessed Clement, a Franciscan monk, left the community table to go and recite certain private devotions to the Blessed Virgin of which he was very fond. But the statue of Our Lady told him to rejoin his brethren. Obedience, Mary said, was more pleasing to her than any other devotions.

20. The pious author of *Secret for Every Grace*, in speaking about the rosary, says that Saint Vincent Ferrer once asked a man who was dying in despair: "Why do you wish to damn yourself, when Jesus Christ wishes to save you?" The man replied that he felt he would be lost in spite of Our Lord. Saint Vincent replied: "You will be saved in spite of yourself." The saint began saying the rosary with the members of the family and the man was soon asking for the confessor. He received absolution and died in peace.

21. A missionary relates that once when he was preaching a mission to those who had been condemned to the Neapolitan galleys, he found that there were some who obstinately refused to go to confession. He persuaded them at least to have their names enrolled in the Rosary Society and to begin to recite the rosary. They had no sooner done this than they asked to go to confession, even those who had not been to confession for many years.

22. In the town of Cesena there were two friends who were sinners. One of them, named Bartholomew, managed to preserve amid his many vices the custom of reciting a *Stabat Mater* every day to Our Lady of Sorrows. Once, while he was doing so, he had a vision in which he saw himself in a fiery lake along with his friend. The Blessed Virgin extended a hand to him out of pity, and finally dragged him out of the fire and advised him to ask her son for pardon. Jesus indicated that he would pardon him because of the prayers of his mother. The vision then came to an end, but just at that moment Bartholomew received word that his friend had been killed by a gun and he knew that the vision had been true. So he left the world and entered the Capuchin Order, where he led a holy and rigorous life until he died in the odor of sanctity.

23. Saint Jerome Emiliani, the founder of the Somaschi Fathers, was once the governor of a certain territory. He was captured by enemies and shut up in a tower. Turning to Mary, he vowed to go on pilgrimage to Treviso if she would free him. So she appeared to him in the midst of a great light and with her own hands unfastened the chains that bound him and gave him the keys of the prison. No sooner had he got outside, however, and begun to set out for Treviso to fulfill his vow, than he found himself again confronted by his enemies. So he again appealed to Mary and she took him by the hand and led him unharmed as far as the gates of Treviso. Then she disappeared. He made his pilgrimage, left the chains of his imprisonment at the foot of Mary's altar, and devoted himself from that time on to leading a holy life. Eventually he was numbered among the saints of the Church.

24. A noble lady who had an only son was one day told that her son had been killed and that the murderer had taken refuge in her own palace. Mindful of the fact that Mary had pardoned those who had crucified her son, she too wished to pardon this criminal for the love of Our Lady of Sorrows. She not only pardoned him but provided him with a horse, money, and clothes so that he could escape. Her son then appeared to her and told her that he had been saved, and that because of the kindness she had shown his enemy the Blessed Mother had freed him from purgatory, where he would otherwise have had to suffer for a long

time, and that he was now on his way to heaven.

25. In a certain town in the Papal States, a young girl who was very much devoted to Mary once happened to encounter a highwayman. Afraid that he might harm her, she begged him not to hurt her for the love of Our Lady. “Do not be afraid,” he replied, “since you have begged me in the name of the Mother of God. I wish only that you would recommend me to her in your prayers.” He then accompanied her through the street and saw her safely home. The following night Mary appeared to the bandit in his dreams and commended him for what he had done because of his love of her. She told him that she would remember this act and would in time reward him for it. Later, the thief was captured by the authorities and condemned to death. The night before he was to be killed, the Blessed Virgin again appeared to him in a dream and asked him: “Do you know who I am?” The bandit replied: “It seems that I have seen you somewhere before.” “I am the one,” Mary said, “who promised to reward you for what you did for me. You will die tomorrow, but you will die with such perfect contrition that you will at once go to heaven.” The condemned man awoke and felt such sorrow for his sins that he began to cry and thanked Our Lady for her great mercy. He summoned the priest and contritely confessed all his sins, telling him about the vision that he had had and begging him to spread word about the great grace that Mary had shown him. He went to his death with great calmness, and it is said that after his execution his face had such a contented air about it that all who saw it believed that the promise of the Mother of God had indeed come true.

26. When a Cistercian nun in Toledo named Mary was about to die, the Blessed Mother appeared to her. The nun said: “O Mary, the favor that you do me in paying me a visit emboldens me to ask for another grace, namely, that I may die at the same hour you died and entered heaven.” “You shall,” Mary replied. “I will do you this favor. You shall hear when you are dying the canticles and hymns of praise that the blessed sang when I entered heaven. So, be prepared.” After saying this, she vanished. The other nuns hearing her talk to Our Lady thought that she had become delirious, but she told them about her vision and the grace that

had been promised her. She waited patiently for the longed for hour and when it arrived—the writer does not inform us when it was—hearing the clock strike, she said: “Now the hour has come; now I hear the music of the angels; this is the hour when Our Lady ascended to heaven. I am content, because I am going now to see her.” After saying this, she died. And while she breathed her last, her eyes became as bright as stars and her face took on a most beautiful color.

CONCLUSION



And with this, my dear reader and friend, lover of our Mother Mary, I bid you farewell, and I say: Continue joyfully to honor and love Mary and do all you can to make others love her. Feel confident that if you persevere until death in true devotion to Mary, your salvation will be assured.

I bring my book to a close, not because there is not much more I could say about the glories of Mary, this great queen, but so as not to tire you. The little I have written should be more than enough to make you yearn for this priceless treasure of devotion toward the Mother of God. She will reward you by interceding for you always.

The main purpose I have had in this work is to lead you to salvation and to sanctify you by inflaming you with love and devotion for this most loving queen. And if you should find that I have helped you even a little bit with this book, as a favor I ask you to recommend me to Mary, and ask for me the grace which I ask her for you, that we may one day be together at her feet, in the company of all those who love her.

And in conclusion I turn to you, O Mother of my Lord, and my Mother Mary. I beg you to accept my poor labors and the desire I have to see you praised and loved by everyone. You know how eager I have been to complete this little work on your glories before the end of my life, which is already drawing to its close. Now I can die contented, leaving this book on earth to continue to praise and glorify you as I have tried to do during the years which have passed since my conversion, which I obtained from God through your help.

O Immaculate Mary, watch over all those who love you and especially those who read this little book. Protect in a special way those who have the charity to recommend me to you. O Lady, grant them perseverance, make them all saints, and lead them all to heaven.

O my most sweet Mother, it is true that I am only a poor sinner, but I

glory in loving you. I hope for great things from you, especially the grace to die loving you. I trust that in my last agony, when the devil holds up my sins before me, the Passion of Jesus in the first place, and then your intercession will strengthen me. I trust that they will enable me to leave this troublesome life in the grace of God, so that I may go to love him, and thank you, my mother, for all eternity. Amen.

APPENDICES



REPLIES TO CRITICS

APPENDIX 1:

REPLY TO AN ANONYMOUS CRITIC



Reply to an Anonymous Critic Who Censured Certain Passages in The Glories of Mary

By chance I happen to have before me a book printed last year, 1775, which bears the title *Advisory Letter of Lamindus Pritanius Redivivus to Father Benedict Plazza*. Toward the end of the Appendix, I find that this anonymous author criticizes what I wrote in the Fifth Chapter of the Glories, relating to the pious opinion held by Father Plazza (an opinion which I myself maintain) to the effect that all graces come to us through Mary. This opinion contradicts what the famous Louis Muratori wrote under the name of Pritanius in his book *Well-Regulated Devotions*.

First of all, the anonymous author claims that I am mistaken in asserting that Pritanius said this opinion is hyperbolical and exaggerated and that it slipped from the lips of some saints in the heat of their fervor. Fearing I might have been deceived, I read the book again. I find now that Pritanius does not use this exact combination of words in the passage where he speaks of the saints. Nevertheless, it is evident from the context that he does ascribe this mistaken opinion to saints who have spoken on the subject.

Speaking of another proposition, namely, that in heaven Mary commands, he says: “In all soberness we must admit that this and similar expressions fell from the lips of the saints in their fervor, and will not stand when examined in the light of sound theology.” Then he speaks of the Church and says: “We must listen to her, and not to the exaggerations of some private author, even though he be a saint.” He adds immediately: “Likewise, we may meet with some who assert that no grace comes to us from God otherwise than through the hands of Mary.” Note the word, “likewise.” Later he says: “To pretend that all

God's graces come through Mary would be a pious exaggeration."

But even supposing that the dead Pritanius had not said this, there is a living Pritanius who says it in Number 545 of his book! Here, among other things, he states that the saints, in praising the Blessed Mother, sometimes exaggerated and used figures of hyperbole. Now, therefore, I answer him and I say that beyond any doubt the figure of hyperbole cannot be called a lie when it is evident from the context that it is merely an embellishment of the truth. Take as an instance the passage where Saint Peter Damian says: "Mary approaches as one who commands, not as one who asks." And the passage from Saint Anselm where he says that "in heaven Mary weeps for those who offend God." In cases such as these, in which the implication is unmistakable, figures are admissible. On the other hand, this is not the case in positive assertions where the exaggeration is not evident. In such instances, the hyperbole is tantamount to real deception.

But let us move to the principal point under discussion. To prove it, I will not bring forward the intrinsic reasons which support my opinion. Let me refer merely to the reasons I have mentioned in my book which indicate that God was pleased in this way to honor Mary, who in her life had honored him so much. Saint Thomas says that "in proportion to the graces they have merited, the saints can save many others." He adds that "the Redeemer and his Mother have merited so many graces that they can save all men." Moreover, since Mary is the universal advocate of all men, it is fitting that all who are saved should obtain salvation through Mary.

There is another reason—and this seems to me to be the most solid of all—that as Mary, by her charity, cooperated in the spiritual birth of the faithful, as Saint Augustine says, so also God wills that she cooperate, by her intercession, in securing for them the life of grace in this world and the life of glory in eternity. That is why the Church bids us call Mary, without any restriction, "our life" and "our hope."

What has encouraged me, and still encourages me, is the fact that this opinion is held not only by so many learned authors, but also by the saints. Our anonymous author believes that he has proved in particular that Saint Bernard never meant to assert that all graces come to us through Mary's hands, but only that through Mary we received Jesus

Christ, the source and fullness of all grace. I think I shall prove the contrary quite clearly by what I am about to say.

Saint Bernard says that Mary received the fullness of God. Then he explains what this fullness is. He says that Mary received this fullness mainly because she received within herself Jesus Christ, the fount of all graces. Then he says that, as a consequence, Mary received another fullness, the fullness of grace, in order that, as mediatrix before God, she might dispense graces to all men by her own hand. Here is what he says in one of his sermons: "Why should human weakness be afraid to approach Mary? There is nothing austere, nothing severe about her. She is all sweetness and she offers milk and wool to everyone. Thank him, then, who has provided you with such a mediatrix. She has made herself all things to all men; to the wise as well as the foolish." Note that he says, *to all men*. He continues: "She opens her merciful heart to all, so that all may receive of her fullness: the captive, redemption; the sick, health; sinners, pardon; the just, grace; the angels, joy, and her son, flesh —so that no one may hide himself from her heat." The words, *that all may receive of her fullness*, indicate clearly that Saint Bernard speaks here not of the first fullness, which is Jesus Christ—otherwise he could not say that *of her fullness* he had received his flesh—but of that second fullness, the fullness of grace which Mary received from God to distribute among us every grace we receive.

Mark these words too: "There is no one that can hide himself from her heat" (Ps 18:7). Should anyone receive a grace not coming through Mary, he would be hidden from the warmth of this sun. But Saint Bernard says that no one can hide himself from the warmth of Mary: "Through you we have access to the Son, O finder of grace, O Mother of salvation! He who was given to us through you, will receive us through you." By this, the Saint gives us to understand clearly that, as we have access to the Father only through the Son, who is the mediator of justice, and who by his merits obtains for us all graces, so do we have access to the Son only through the Mother, who is the mediatrix of grace, and obtains for us by her prayers all the graces that Jesus Christ has merited for us.

This becomes even clearer when we consider what Saint Bernard said in his sermon on "The Aqueduct." At the very beginning, he states that

Mary received from God the principal fullness of grace, which is Jesus Christ, in order to share him with us. A little further on, he speaks clearly about the second fullness, which is a result of the first, namely, the fullness of the graces which we receive through her prayers. Then he goes on to exhort us never to cease honoring Mary and invoking her with the greatest confidence. He says that God has already done what we would like him to do, namely, deposited in Mary the fullness of every grace, so that whatever we receive from God, we will acknowledge as having come to us through the hands of Mary, who goes up flowing with delights. "She is a garden of delights," says the saint (and note that he is still speaking of the graces given to us through Mary's hands), "upon which the south wind not only breathed in passing, but which he so thoroughly pervaded that her fragrance, the wonders of her grace, spreads everywhere." Alluding to the text I first quoted: "There is none than can hide himself from her heat," Saint Bernard continues: "Take away the sun which illumines the world, and where is the day? Take away Mary, the 'star of the sea' and what is left but darkness and gloom?"

Here he continues to exhort us to have recourse to Mary and to take her as our advocate before Jesus Christ. He encourages us by saying that when Mary prays for us, there is no doubt that she will be heard by her son. "The Son will hear the Mother," he says, "and the Father will hear the Son." And he goes on: "My children, she is the sinners's ladder; she is my greatest hope; she is the whole foundation of my confidence." When he calls Mary the ladder of sinners, and the whole foundation his confidence, he does so for no other reason than that he considers her as the intercessor for and dispensatrix of all graces. She is called a ladder because, just as on mounting a ladder we cannot reach the third rung without having touched the second, nor the second without having touched the first, so neither can we reach God without first reaching Jesus Christ, nor Jesus Christ without first reaching Mary. He calls her his greatest hope and the whole foundation of his confidence. Why? Because, since God willed that all graces should come through Mary, he would have considered himself deprived of grace and hope if he were deprived of her intercession.

That is why he exhorts us to do what he did: to put all our hope in

Mary. He assures us that, if Mary prays for us, we shall be saved. Just as the Father cannot help but hear the Son, so the Son cannot help but hear his mother. He tells us that if Mary does not pray for us, we shall not be saved, because it is Mary who obtains for us that particular grace without which we cannot be saved. He concludes: “What more can we ask? Let us seek grace and seek it through Mary. Whatever she seeks, she finds, and she is not able to be disappointed.”

In my book, I have referred to many other passages, and have given the volume and the page where the citations may be found. I have quoted both the saints and other well-known authors. None of these citations can be interpreted in any other way than according to the opinion I expressed. I shall simply give them here in a group, and without comment, and shall leave their interpretation to the reader’s judgment.

Saint Jerome, or, as others will have it, Saint Sophronius, a contemporary of Saint Jerome, says in a sermon on the Assumption: “The fullness of grace was in Christ, as in the Head which infuses grace, and in Mary, as in the neck through which they are passed along.”

Saint Bernardine of Siena: “Life-giving graces from Christ, the Head, are transmitted to his Mystical Body through the Blessed Virgin. From the time that the Virgin Mother conceived the Divine Word in her womb, she, so to say, acquired a certain jurisdiction over all the gifts of the Holy Spirit; so much so that no creature has ever obtained the grace of God without Mary’s intercession. Therefore, all gifts, all virtues, all graces are dispensed by Mary to whomever she pleases, whenever she pleases and in whatever way she pleases.”

Saint Bonaventure: “Since all of the Divine Nature dwelt in Mary’s womb, I do not hesitate to say that Mary had a certain jurisdiction over the flow of graces. From her womb, as from a divine ocean, all graces streamed as from a source.” “As the moon is a kind of intermediary between the sun and the earth, and reflects upon the earth what it receives from the sun, so does Mary act as an intermediary between God and us, pouring out on us the grace she receives. Without her, God will not save you.… As an infant cannot live without its nurse, so you cannot have salvation without Our Lady.”

Saint Ephrem: “We have no other hope but you, Most Holy Virgin!”

Saint Germanus: “What will become of us, O life of Christians, if you desert us?”

Saint Ildephonsus: “All the good his Majesty has determined to do to men, he has determined to entrust to your hands; he has entrusted all the treasures and riches of grace to you.”

Saint Antoninus: “To beg for something without Mary’s help, is like trying to fly without wings.”

Saint Peter Damian: “In your hands are all the treasures of God’s mercy.”

Gerson: “She is our mediatress, through whose hands God decreed that every grace to man should pass.”

Raymond Jordano: “She is the dispensatrix of all graces. Her Son gives us nothing that does not pass through her hands. Our salvation is in her hands.”

Cassian: “The salvation of all depends upon their being favored and protected by Mary.”

Saint Bernardine of Siena: “You are the dispensatrix of all graces; our salvation is in your hands.”

Richard of Saint Lawrence: “God wills that whatever good he does to man shall pass through the hands of his Virgin Mother.” In another passage he pictures Our Lord saying: “Nobody comes to me, unless my mother draws him by her prayers.” Alluding to the words of Proverbs, *She is like the merchant’s ship* (Prov 31:14), he says: “In the ocean of this world all are lost who do not board this ship. Therefore, whenever we see the waves of the sea rising high we must cry to Mary: ‘O Lady, save us; we perish!’” Again he says: “As a stone falls into the abyss, once the ground sustaining it is removed, so also does a man fall into sin and into hell if Mary’s help is not available.”

Father Noël Alexandre writes the same: “God wills that we should expect to receive all blessings from him, once we have asked for them (as is fitting) through the intercession of his Virgin Mother.”

Father Contenson, commenting on the words of Christ on the cross to Saint John, *Behold your mother* (Jn 19:27), says: “This was the same as

saying: ‘Nobody shall share in my Blood except through my mother’s intercession. My wounds are fountains of grace, but their waters will not be brought to anyone except by Mary, their channel. My love for you, John, my disciple, will be in proportion to your love for her.’”

In addition, I would say that I am much encouraged at seeing how the faithful in general always turn to the intercession of Mary for the graces they desire. From this, I gather that the abovementioned pious opinion is, as it were, the common sentiment of the Church. Petavius used this argument (from the common opinion of the faithful) to prove the opinion I hold for certain in regard to Mary’s Immaculate Conception at the first moment of her existence.[1] To me, and to many other authors, such as Segneri, Paciucchelli, Crasset, Mendoza, Nieremberg, Poire, and others, the opinion that all graces pass through Mary’s hands is both very probable and very fitting. I shall always consider myself happy to have held it and preached it. And if I held it for no other reason than that it enkindles devotion to Mary, while the opposite opinion chills it, I consider it worthwhile.

APPENDIX 2:

REPLY TO THE ABBÉ ROLLI[1]



A brief comment on the extravagant reform recommended by Abbé Rolli; reform that is in opposition to the love and devotion we owe our Blessed Lady.

I recently came across a learned and devout little work written by Father Ildephonsus Cardoni of the Order of Minims. In it, the author competently refutes a book published by the Abbé Leoluca Rolli, entitled *The New Project*, in which the Abbé attempts to reform the various prayers and devotions of the Catholic Church in honor of our Blessed Lady and the other saints. For the honor of our Blessed Mother and because of the special devotion I have always had to her, even from my boyhood, I have determined to synopsize the contents of these two works. I shall recount the dangerous propositions of the one and then give the convincing refutations of the other.

1. The Abbé Rolli speaks of the miraculous transference by the angels of the holy House of Loreto from Nazareth to Dalmatia. From Dalmatia, it was removed to the property owned by a certain lady named Laureta, in the diocese of Recanati near the border of Ancona. Finally, it was moved to a hilltop a mile and a half from that property, where it is still venerated. Abbé Rolli refers to this and says: *"They tell the story,"* implying that it is a fable. He is unmindful of the fact that in his beautiful work on the feasts of Mary the illustrious Pope Benedict XIV says: "The dwelling where the Divine Word assumed human flesh was moved by the ministry of angels. This is attested by ancient documents and unbroken tradition, as well as by the testimony of Sovereign Pontiffs, the common consent of the faithful and continual miracles

which are worked there even to the present day."

Father Tursellino, S.J., in his *History of the House of Loreto* tells us that nearly all the Popes after Pius II have made mention of the miraculous transference of the Holy House. Pope Sixtus V, in 1583, founded or revived the Order of Cavaliers of Our Lady of Loreto. Notwithstanding all this, Abbé Rolli, without reason, follows the tack of Launoy, Verger, Hospinien, and other non-Catholics who deny the miraculous translation, and also of Theodore Beza and the Calvinist David Pareus who call the House of Loreto the "Lauretanian Idol."

But all of these have been refuted by the incontestable evidence of many learned Catholic writers—Saint Peter Canisius, Francis Torres, S.J., James Gretscher, S.J., and others—as we learn from the writings of Father Theophilus Reynaud, S.J. On the authority of sound authors, Father Tursellino relates the details of the miracle and his evidence is confirmed by Peter Giorgio, Jerome Angelita, and John Bonifacio. Benedict XIV himself quotes these authorities and mentions that even heretics who enter the Holy House are sometimes converted and thus silence the impious tongues of those who deny the miracle.

2. The Abbé Rolli then criticizes the titles "Tower of David," "Tower of Ivory," and "House of Gold" which we find in the Litany of our Blessed Lady. He calls them affected and meaningless—in fact, almost ridiculous. Are they really meaningless and insignificant? They signify the power with which Mary defends souls who are devoted to her. They evidence the ardent love of her blessed soul which made her worthy to become the temple of the Eternal Word. That is how Saint Bernard, Saint Ephrem, Richard of Saint Lawrence and others explain these titles.

Afterwards, he speaks of the titles "Mirror of Justice," "Refuge of Sinners," "Morning Star," and "Gate of Heaven." He says that when a Catholic hears these titles applied to the Blessed Virgin, he must make an act of faith and must believe that they are applicable only to our Blessed Savior and not to Mary. He implies that the use of these titles in reference to Mary is prejudicial to faith. He would like to see all these litanies abolished, even though they have been recited and sung in churches throughout the world for centuries by priests and laity alike—and this with the approbation of many Sovereign Pontiffs. All of which

goes to prove that these titles are not only not affected and ridiculous, but are filled with piety and devotion to Our Lady and calculated to inspire greater confidence in her protection. Will anyone deny that these litanies, according to the established custom of so many years, have become a part of the public worship of the Church?

The Abbé Rolli then goes to great pains to discredit the custom of singing the Litany of Loreto when the Blessed Sacrament is exposed. He refers to this custom as "an abuse." In this he follows the opinion of Louis Muratori. In his book *Well-Regulated Devotion* Muratori does not expressly call this "an abuse," as Rolli does, nor does he actually disapprove of it. He merely suggests that it might be worthwhile to consider whether it might not be better during exposition to use prayers immediately addressed to our Blessed Lord. For my part, I do not see how it is unbecoming to ask Mary to offer her prayers for us to Jesus exposed in the Blessed Sacrament. Everyone knows that God has given us Jesus Christ so that we can have recourse to him as our principal mediator. But Saint Bernard says that God has also given us Mary to be an advocate with Jesus: "Would you like to have someone intercede with him? Go to Mary! The son will certainly listen to his mother." And in another place he says: "We need a mediator with Christ the Mediator, and we cannot find a better one than Mary." He uses the words *"We need …"* implying that a mediator with Christ is necessary. Necessary, of course, not with absolute necessity nor with "necessity of means" as we say, but *morally* necessary to increase our confidence. Jesus Christ alone is our mediator by absolute necessity. So as to banish any scruple we may have in having recourse to Mary, Saint Jerome tells us that we must go to her not as to the author of grace—as Calvin falsely asserted we do—but only as to an intercessor. And that is why we say to Jesus Christ: "Have mercy on us," and to our Blessed Lady: "Pray for us." That is how Saint Jerome convinced Vigilantius on this point.

3. The Abbé Rolli is not satisfied with calling Our Lady's titles in the litany "affected, meaningless, and almost ridiculous." He has the audacity to attack also the antiphon *Hail, holy Queen*, even though he knows that Holy Church has approved it by making its recitation obligatory in the daily Office. Luther had already said that this prayer is

scandalous and that it gives Our Lady the attributes of God. The heretic Peter Martyr claimed that since Jesus Christ is our only mediator, it is derogatory to him to call Mary our advocate and mediatress. Our Abbé Rolli in his *New Project* is not ashamed to write these words: "It is a matter of blind respect and partisanship that the titles given to the Blessed Mother in the *Salve Regina* are retained." He says, moreover, that Herman Contractus (who composed the prayer) called Mary "our hope" and "our advocate" merely out of devotion and piety, since Jesus Christ is our only hope and our only advocate. What Rolli says actually differs very little from what the heretic Peter Martyr said.

But Saint Epiphanius calls Mary our "mediatrix," which is the same as calling her our advocate, and Saint Ephrem calls her "the hope of those who are in despair." How then does Abbé Rolli dare to assert that "these titles are retained out of blind respect and partisanship"? Does the Church permit the prayer *Hail, holy Queen* out of blind respect and partisanship?

4. The Abbé then leaves the litany and the *Salve Regina* and passes on to other devotions like the scapular, the rosary, cords, and the like. He calls them trifling, and for all practical purposes, useless. We know that the Sovereign Pontiffs have approved of these devotions and have enriched them with indulgences. The learned Papebroeck says that only someone who is very dishonest will deny that the Popes have granted many benefits and that God himself has given many special favors to those who wear the scapular devoutly.

Bzovius, and the Bollandists, too, speak in high praise of Our Lady's rosary and we know that this devotion has the praise and approval of Leo X, Saint Pius V, Gregory XIII, Sixtus V, and many other Pontiffs. In speaking of those who ridicule these devotions, the learned Pouget writes: "They criticize something they know nothing about."

5. Abbé Rolli next vents his spleen against people who practice these devotions in the state of sin, hoping that, as a result, God will show them mercy. He exclaims: "Those people are already damned." In this matter, as I have already remarked, he follows the lead of Lamindus Pritanius (Louis Muratori) who, in his book *Well-Regulated Devotion,* maintains: "If

a Christian lives at enmity with God and trusts that on account of his devotion to Mary she will not allow him to be surprised by sudden death and that he will have time to make his peace with God, or if he hopes that Mary will grant him some temporal benefit, he hopes rashly. His hope is presumptuous, superstitious, and contrary to the teaching of the Church. It is to be wholly rejected."

In this matter, both Pritanius and Rolli are in direct opposition to Saint Robert Bellarmine whom Pope Benedict XIV quotes in his book on feasts. Saint Robert Bellarmine writes: "Devotions performed in the state of sin, while they do not in themselves justify, at least dispose the soul to be justified through the merits of the Blessed Mother or of the saints."

However, what is of even greater weight and what fully condemns them is the doctrine of the master-theologian Saint Thomas who teaches that "the devotions of the faithful performed in the state of sin, even though they are not sufficient to obtain salvation, nevertheless do accomplish three things: first, they secure temporal blessings; second, they dispose the soul for the reception of divine grace; and third, they keep people in the practice of performing good works." The Angelic Doctor also teaches that "although the prayer of a sinner is not worthy of grace in justice, it does obtain it through the pure mercy of God." He even adds: "It is possible that the prayer of a sinner who does not even have an efficacious purpose of amendment may be heard, out of the infinite mercy of God, provided the sinner is not in so obstinate a state of mind as constantly to reject every exhortation to repentance."

6. Pritanius (or Muratori) also says another thing in his book. He maintains that "when the Blessed Virgin or the saints pray for us, they do not offer their own merits, but only the efficacy of the merits of Jesus Christ." The learned Don Constantine Gaudio has fully refuted him on this point in his book *Defense of the Spotless Devotion, etc*.

In another section of his book, Pritanius says: "It is alleged that our prayers will have more power when they are accompanied by those of the Blessed Mother." Then he proceeds to give an inconsistent answer to this assertion and one that in no way corresponds with his scholarship. He says: "This statement proves too much and therefore proves nothing at all. Otherwise it would never be fitting to pray to Our Lord without

joining to our prayers the intercession of Mary." What an answer! So it would be unbecoming always to join Mary's prayers to our intercession with Jesus? The Council of Trent states clearly: "It is good and useful earnestly to invoke the saints." Now if the intercession of the saints, and especially of Mary, is good and useful, it is also good and useful *always* to obtain that intercession. That is why Saint Bernard exhorts us all to ask God for graces and to ask them through Mary. Mary's prayers to God are the prayers of a mother and therefore they are never refused.

How strange all this is! Louis Muratori, whom I have always respected, was famous throughout Europe, as you can see from his beautiful biography written by his nephew. Yet, in so many parts of his writings, as we have already pointed out, he does not show that devotion toward the Mother of God you would expect to find in a soul such as his. There is no need for me to write more on the subject. What prompted me to write the little I have was that I saw the various prayers and titles given to Our Lady in the litanies and in the *Salve Regina* held up to discredit. I also heard the devotion to the rosary and the scapular referred to as "trifling," whereas they are really so beautiful and have meant so much to me all my life. If anyone wants to see the reform which the Abbé Rolli intended to bring about refuted fully and at length, let him read the work of Father Cardoni, the Minim, to which I referred at the beginning of this short treatise.

NOTES

Part I

1. This excerpt appears to be from the writings of Thomas the Englishman *(Thomas Anglicus)* rather than from the works of Saint Thomas Aquinas *(Thomas Angelicus)*.
2. According to Suetonius, this same Titus was reputed to have authored the famous aphorism: “I have lost a day.” He said this to his guests at dinner on the evening of a certain day when he had been unable to do a favor for anyone.
3. This reference is to George, not Gregory of Nicomedia. George is not a canonized saint, although several biographers say that he merited the title. He was an outstanding panegyrist of Our Lady.
4. Sister Catherine of Saint Augustine who tells this story was born in Bayeux, France, and died in 1688 in Canada where she had started the first North American foundation of her Order. Her biography, written by Father Ragueneau, S.J., contains the direct report of Mary’s conversion: “For more than twenty years before her death, she had never prayed to God, the Blessed Virgin, or the Saints. She had abandoned the sacraments, had lost all respect for holy things and had given herself over completely to a life of vice. What saved her was this: As death drew near, she reflected on the name of Mary which she bore. She turned to our Blessed Lady and said: ‘O Blessed Virgin, I am unworthy to bear your name. But I pray you not to let me be damned. I ask you for this out of respect for your holy name.’ Mary obtained for her the grace to make an act of perfect contrition, after which that fortunate soul passed away.”
5. It is interesting to note that modern scientists substantiate this reference to the maternal solicitude of the mother-whale. She does not actually swallow her young ones but hides them under her fins

and defends them to the death.

6. Turano relates in his *Life of Sister Mary Crucified* that the nun was severely beset by diabolical temptations. These temptations vanished immediately when the harassed religious recited the *Sub tuum*. The nuns of her convent by reciting the same prayer were believed to have been cured of an epidemic of eye disease brought on by diabolical intervention.
7. Elphinstone was born in 1563 and died in 1584 in the Jesuit monastery in Naples, just two years before Saint Aloysius Gonzaga applied for admission there in the company of another Elphinstone named George. It has not been determined whether the two Elphinstones were brothers.
8. King James VI of Scotland and England. Born 1566, crowned King of Scotland in 1567, King of England 1603, successor to Queen Elizabeth by virtue of the will of Henry VIII. Died 1625.
9. Saint Alphonsus quotes Paciucchelli who quotes again Philostratus (A.D. 170?–245). Philostratus adds that if the ships have already set out to sea by the time the tigers get there, the tigresses will often wail for hours on the shore and will sometimes even die of heartbreak.
10. Tursellini in his *Life of Saint Francis Xavier* says that the ultimate purpose of this journey was to get to the capital and win the support of the leaders of the people for his apostolate. He reached the capital but did not succeed in gaining the support of the governing powers.
11. Some scholars affirm, some deny, the truth of this statement. Saint Gregory the Great is Saint Alphonsus's authority for maintaining that Saint Paulinus sold himself into captivity for the purpose mentioned.
12. It would seem that Father Ferdinand Salazar, S.J., not Cornelius à Lapide, is the authority for this citation.
13. The Jesuit companion was Father Emmanuel, S.J., and the shrine they visited was that of Saint Mary Major in Rome.
14. Blessed Herman, a Premonstratensian monk, lived about the year 1230. The Bollandists record that he was later given the name Joseph as a result of this unusual incident. Herman was praying in

the choir of the monastery one evening when Our Lady appeared to him accompanied by two angels. One of the angels took the monk's hand and joined it to the hand of Mary in a symbolic espousal, saying these words: "Behold, I give this virgin over to you as she was given to Joseph, so that you may receive the name of the spouse together with the person of the espoused. And from now on, your name shall be Joseph." Some time afterward, Mary again appeared to him holding her child in her arms. "Carry my child," said Mary, "as he was carried by Joseph into Egypt. And since you bear the same burden, have the honor of bearing henceforth the same name."

15. Cepari in his biography mentions that Saint Aloysius, because of his great desire to do everything pleasing to Our Lady, made a vow of perpetual virginity even before he entered religious life.
16. Father James Martinez, S.J., was a great Peruvian missionary. He died at Lima in 1626 at the age of 84.
17. This tale bears a remarkable resemblance to events found in the life of the Venerable Germaine Cousin.
18. Aristotle probably never expressed this thought in precisely the terminology Saint Alphonsus used: *Amor aut similes invenit, aut facit.* He did however give utterance to the ideas contained in the aphorism. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, for example, he wrote: "True friendship is discernible in the willingness to share all things." In the *Eudemian Ethics:* "God always attracts similar things to each other." Also: "The quality of equality is always pleasing to an equal."
19. This is not a direct quotation, but an adaptation of the words of Adam, Abbot of Perseigne, who died in 1203.
20. Although attributed to Saint Bernard by medieval and later writers, these words are not found in his works. However, they represent an accurate paraphrase of his thought.
21. These words no longer are found in the Mass for the feast of the Immaculate Conception.
22. Saint Mary of Egypt has always been greatly venerated in the Eastern Church. She was probably converted in 383 and died in 431.
23. Another more recent example of the Blessed Virgin's power over

death was the case of a Carmelite nun, Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, who as a young girl of thirteen was killed in Alexandria, Egypt, by a Mohammedan and restored to life by the Mother of God. She died in the odor of sanctity in 1878.

24. The author of these words died on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, December 8, 1630.

25. The phrase is not found in Saint Augustine's authentic works but comes from a sermon later attributed to him.

26. This phrase is not found among the extant works of Saint Ephrem. The word "damned" is usually explained as meaning "those who are in imminent danger of damnation."

27. The treatise to which reference is made is now recognized as being by Eadmer of Canterbury, the pupil and friend of Saint Anselm, not by the saint himself.

28. This famous prayer was not, in all probability, composed by Saint Bernard in its present form. It appears to be of later medieval origin and is based upon the words of Saint Bernard.

29. The words are not found in Rupert of Deutz. Saint Alphonsus appears to have had in mind a passage of Richard of Saint Lawrence which is to be found among the collected writings of Saint Albert the Great.

30. This quotation is not found verbatim in either Saint Bonaventure or Saint Bernard. After quoting the Scriptural text, Saint Bonaventure says: "By this we learn that if we wish to find Jesus, we must first go to Mary."

31. This sentence is not found in Saint Bernard, but the thought is expressed by Saint Anselm.

32. These words are not found in Saint Bernard's works, but the thought is his. Saint Bridget in her *Revelations* says: "The saints who appeared spoke these words: 'O Blessed Lady, what is there that you cannot do? For whatever you will, that is accomplished.'"

33. The thought is in accordance with the teaching of Saint Augustine, as expressed in his commentary on Saint John.

34. These exact words do not appear in the works of Saint Thomas.

Saint Alphonsus was quoting from a seventeenth century *Defense of the Blessed Virgin* by Lodovico Bona. It is Bona who attributes the quotation to Saint Thomas.

35. The quotation is from Godfrey, Abbot of Vendôme, a contemporary of Saint Anselm.
36. Richard Trouve or Richard of Saint Anne, O.F.M., martyred at Nagasaki in 1622, was not the same as the Richard mentioned in the first part of the story. Both, however, were Franciscans.
37. Some authors say that Saint Dominic also raised her body from the well and joined it to her head, in order to make the reception of holy Communion seem more normal, but this detail is not part of the original version of the story.
38. This is an authentic instance taken from the *Franciscan Chronicles* by Wadding (a. 1232). The apparition is certainly not incredible. Nor is it right to say it makes the power of Mary superior to that of Christ. The idea has been expressed repeatedly by Saint Bernard and others. "As we have no access to the Father except through the Son, so no one can come to the Son except through the Mother." Eadmer, the companion and disciple of Saint Anselm, has been quoted as saying: "Frequently our petitions are heeded sooner when we address ourselves to Mary, the queen of mercy and compassion, than when we go directly to Jesus who, as king of justice, is our judge."
39. Venerable Hildebert, archbishop of Tours, who died in 1134. The passage occurs in a letter thanking Queen Matilda of England for the gift of two golden candelabra.
40. The quotation is not found in Hugh of Saint Victor, but does appear Vincent of Beauvais, in virtually the same words.
41. Not Honorius of Autun, the twelfth-century theologian, but another Honorius, a spiritual writer, cited by Denis the Carthusian.
42. Saint Alberic, first abbot of Citeaux, declared the Queen of Heaven to be the Protectress of the Cistercian Order and ordered all monasteries of the Order to be dedicated to her, a custom still observed.
43. Not Saint Germanus, Patriarch of Constantinople, who died in 740,

but Germanus II, Patriarch from 1222–40.

Part II

1. According to Richard of Saint Lawrence, this prayer is by Eckert, Abbot of Schoenauge in the diocese of Trier, who died about 1160, and not by Saint Bernard of Clairvaux.
2. This prayer is probably not by Saint Athanasius. It is found in a sermon (erroneously attributed to him) on the Annunciation, which must be dated much later.
3. Possibly not by Saint Anselm, but by his pupil and biographer, Eadmer of Canterbury. The Pope appointed Eadmer to be Anselm's religious superior, so as not to deprive the Archbishop of the grace of obedience.
4. Not by Saint Peter Damian, but by Nicholas, the secretary of Saint Bernard.
5. William of Auvergne, Bishop of Paris, 1228–49, was an excellent bishop but is not a canonized saint.
6. This beautiful prayer was composed by Saint Alphonsus himself and is eminently worthy of inclusion in this garland of *Prayers to Our Lady*.

Part III

1. Not Saint Basil of Caesarea, but Basil of Seleucia (d. 458). Basil was never canonized, possibly because he was not unwavering in his opposition to the Eutychian heresy.
2. Scholars fail to find this quotation in the authentic writings of Saint Augustine.
3. Saint Alphonsus wrote all this, of course, many years before the pronouncement of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.
4. These small pictures were called *cartelle* or *cartelline* and they had printed on them the abbreviation of the following words: "You were immaculate in your Conception, O Mary; pray for us to the Father, whose Son Jesus you bore by the Holy Spirit."

5. The opinion that Our Blessed Lady was blessed with the use of reason from the moment of her conception in the womb of Saint Anne is not shared by all theologians. However, the saints are witnesses to the religious sentiments of their times. The consensus of the faithful serves in a special way as a channel for the development of theological thought. That development is first and foremost a work of the Holy Spirit on behalf of the whole Church for the sanctification of souls. The opinion of the saints on doctrinal matters (while not infallible) is something added to their personal gifts and is usually not disregarded by discreet theologians
6. An echo of Saint Augustine's *Soliloquies:* "You have enlightened me, O Light! And I saw you and I loved you. No one loves you unless he sees you; and no one sees you without loving you. Too late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient and ever new; too late have I loved you. Woe to those days in which I did not love you."
7. Saint William's context: "The Son of God, about to become man, sent his messenger to obtain Mary's consent. He did not wish to work this miracle in her without her consent; He would not take flesh from her without her consent. And so it can be said that God became man not only from Mary but also by Mary's consent."
8. This quotation seems in reality to be from Saint Thomas of Villanova.
9. The words are not found in Saint Anselm, but the thought is his, expressed in somewhat different terms: "Nothing is equal to Mary; nothing greater than Mary, except God."
10. This "holy soul" was most likely Msgr. Giovanni de Vita, Bishop of Rieti (1764–1774). Like Saint Alphonsus, he had studied law at Naples but left law for the priesthood. Alphonsus and de Vita were good friends.
11. The distance from Nazareth to Jerusalem is about seventy miles; from Jerusalem to Hebron about eighteen and two-thirds miles; from Jerusalem to Ain Karim about four and a half miles. The city of Judea in which Zachary lived is now generally believed to have been Ain Karim.

12. This Reginald was Dean of the Cathedral of Orleans and a famous Doctor of Laws at the University of Paris in the lifetime of Saint Dominic. It was through him, according to tradition, that the Dominicans have the habit they now wear. While in Rome on his way to the Holy Land, Reginald became ill and nearly died. Both he and Saint Dominic prayed to Our Lady. Mary appeared to Reginald and healed him with some oil carried by Saint Cecilia and Saint Catherine the Martyr, who were with her. He was not only healed but given the grace from that moment "of never experiencing any evil sentiment or inclination." Mary showed Reginald the scapular and white habit and told him: "This is the habit of the Order you seek and which has already been promised to you." Saint Dominic saw all this while praying in his own house. Reginald asked Dominic to be received into his Order and to wear the habit which had been shown him. Saint Dominic ordered all his brethren to adopt this habit, abandoning the rochet of the Canons Regular which they had been wearing. After taking his vows, Reginald made the pilgrimage to the Holy Land at the command of Saint Dominic. Before his death he became one of the leading lights of the newly founded Dominican Order.
13. Scholars have been unable to locate a text corresponding to this in the works of Saint Thomas Aquinas.
14. This title of "priest" was also given to Mary in a prayer composed at the direction of Pope Saint Pius X and approved by him on May 9, 1906.
15. Saint Teresa probably received this revelation in the Convent of the Incarnation in 1572.
16. On this day the church celebrates two events: first, Mary's departure from this earth; second, her Assumption into heaven. This discourse treats of her departure; the following one, of her Assumption.
17. Theologians today are not in agreement as to whether Mary died or not. Saint Alphonsus seems to have taken it for granted that she died.
18. Saint John Damascene does not mention the detail of the gowns, but

it is mentioned by Metaphrastes, Nicephorus, and others.

19. This was revealed to Saint Elizabeth not in her vision of Mary's departure from earth but in her vision of the Assumption.

Part IV

1. Saint Thomas puts it this way *(Summa Theologiae* III, qu. 7, art. 12, ad 3): A person may advance in wisdom and grace in two ways: first, inasmuch as the very habits of wisdom and grace are increased; and in this way Christ did not increase. Second, as regards the effects of wisdom and grace, i.e., inasmuch as a person works wiser and greater works. In this way, Christ increased in wisdom and grace even as in age, since in the course of time he did more perfect works to prove himself true man, both in the things of God and in the things of man.
2. The common tradition is that the Holy Family sojourned at Matarea (Matarieb), part of the ancient city of Heliopolis, about six or seven miles from Cairo.
3. Not from Blessed Raymond Jordano, but from the author of the *Stimulus amoris* printed among the works of Saint Bonaventure.
4. The Holy Shroud is commonly regarded as one of the most precious relics of Our Savior. It is a linen cloth, all of one piece, 14' 3" long and 3' 7" wide, with the double image of a human person—front and back view. Visible on the cloth are the traditional marks of wounds and stigmata.

Part V

1. He speaks here of those who appear anxious to win the battle against unchastity but are unwilling to use the means and flee the dangers.

Part VI

1. The Brief of Saint Pius X of December 5, 1904, granted an indulgence of 300 days for reciting the Hail Mary three times

morning and evening, adding the invocation "By virtue of your Immaculate Conception, O Mary, make my body pure and my soul holy." The occasion was the fiftieth anniversary of the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. The Brief recalled the zeal of Saint Alphonsus in promoting this practice, so effective in preserving chastity.

2. Pope Pius XI granted an indulgence of ten years *toties quoties* and a plenary indulgence once a month under the usual conditions.
3. It is no longer obligatory to begin and end the Canonical Hours with the Hail Mary.
4. Saint Alphonsus wrote, of course, in the days before frequent Communion became a common practice. In his days, penitents usually asked the confessor for permission to receive. This is no longer customary.
5. Saint Alphonsus here (and in other passages) enumerates the indulgences in vogue in his day, many of which have been rescinded. A complete list of indulgences available today may be found in the Enchiridion Indulgentiarum.
6. Saint Peter Damian did not compose the Little Office but he did ardently propagate its use. So much so that he can well be called the "restorer of the Little Office."
7. Saint Alphonsus's *Visits to the Blessed Sacrament and to the Blessed Virgin Mary* has appeared in more than two thousand separate editions and has been translated into at least sixty-five languages. More than fifty-four editions of the *Visits* have appeared in English alone.
8. This privilege is called the "Sabbatine privilege."
9. Should anyone fail into a sin of unchastity and subsequently regain God's grace through perfect contrition or confession, that person again qualifies as one observing the chastity required of his state of life.
10. Those bound to the daily recitation of the Canonical Hours satisfy this condition by their recitation of the Divine Office.
11. These four scapulars together with the scapular of the Passion are

often fastened together and referred to as the “five scapulars.”

12. What Saint Alphonsus says here obviously pertains to membership in societies like the Sodality, the Legion of Mary, the Rosary Society, and so on.
13. Some of the practices recommended here may seem unusual to the modern reader but they were not uncommon in Saint Alphonsus’s day.
14. Saint Alphonsus then lists numerous indulgences granted in his time for popular Marian devotions. A revision of these indulgences, together with many new ones, may be found in any approved hook of indulgences.

Part VII

1. Many have objected to the inclusion of these examples in a modern edition of *The Glories of Mary*. The editors of the critical edition have investigated the sources of these examples and have been able to trace most of them to writers or speakers known to Saint Alphonsus. Some examples, no doubt, are of the saint’s own fashioning. It must be remembered that Saint Alphonsus wrote and worked for a simple, credulous people—people whose faith was deep, but whose technical knowledge of the truths of faith was often sparse. Like our Blessed Savior, Saint Alphonsus chose the approach of stories and parables to bring home doctrines difficult of comprehension by unlettered minds. The examples are printed here because they do form an integral part of the critical edition of *The Glories of Mary*. Since many of them are repetitious, however, a selection has been made. The stories printed here are representative of those that have been omitted.

Appendix 1

1. When Saint Alphonsus wrote this, the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception had not yet been defined as an article of faith.

Appendix 2

1. Saint Alphonsus first published this “Reply” in 1775. From that time on, however, it has usually been incorporated into editions of *The Glories of Mary* as an appendix.

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