

Mary, the New Eve

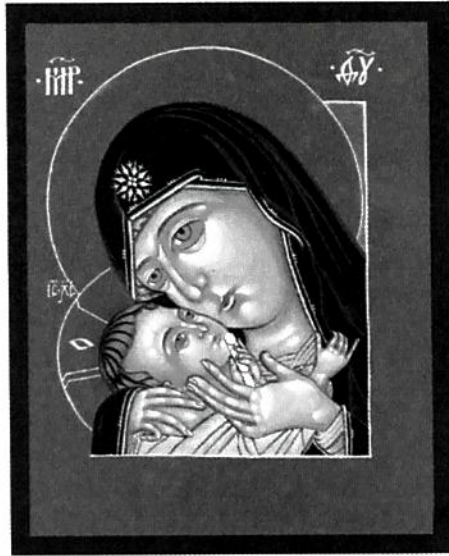
*And Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord;
let it be to me according to your word." ~ Luke 1:38*

THE ROLE OF MARY in Christ's work of salvation takes us back to the story of the fall of Adam and Eve at the beginning of creation. In a very important passage in Scripture called the *Protocospelium* (the first gospel), God announces the coming of the Messiah, the battle that will take place between the Woman and the serpent, and his eventual defeat at the hands of her Son: "*The Lord God said to the serpent, ... I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.*" (Gn 3:14-15). The Church has

always understood that Christ, the new Adam, "*born of a woman*" (Gal 4:4) fulfilled this prophecy.

In the New Testament, St. Paul is the first to reflect on the relationship between the first Adam and the new Adam: "*For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive*" (1 Cor 15:21-22). The comparison continues: "*The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.... The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from Heaven*" (1 Cor 15:45, 47). What Adam bound up through his disobedience, the new Adam loosened through his obedience: "*For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous*" (Rom 5:19).

Through reflecting upon these Scriptures and others like them, the early Church began to see in Mary the image of the "new Eve." Already in the second century, the parallel between Eve and Mary is well understood. St. Irenaeus, a bishop and theologian



Our Lady of Tenderness, by Renata Grzan

from this century, explains: "Just as [Eve] ... having become disobedient, was made the cause of death for herself and for the whole human race; so also Mary ... being obedient, was made the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race ... Thus, the knot of Eve's disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary. For what the virgin Eve had bound in unbelief, Mary loosed through faith" (*Against Heresies*). In the fourth century, the bishop of Milan, Italy, St. Ambrose, whose fiery sermons brought St. Augustine into the Church, asserts that

while Eve is called mother of the human race, Mary is called "Mother of salvation." And to sum up let us not forget the frequent claim of St. Jerome, the celebrated Doctor of Scripture: "Death through Eve, life through Mary"¹ (CCC 494). All this illustrates the importance of Mary's role in Christ's redemption.

Her role as "new Eve" expresses not only her relationship to Christ but also to us. Her work in our salvation, though secondary to the primacy of Christ, is nonetheless a part of God's design and so necessary and powerful. The Church understands this, and so from ancient times has commended all Christians to her care and intercession.

Let us acknowledge Mary's role in salvation as the "new Eve" and join our voices in the words of the ancient prayer: "We fly to thy patronage, O holy Mother of God, despise not our petitions in our needs, but deliver us from all dangers. O ever glorious and blessed Virgin. Amen" (Prayer entitled *Under Thy Protection*, from 250 AD). (CCC 411, 494, 504-505)

***"Death through Eve, life
through Mary."***

¹ *Lumen Gentium* 56; Epiphanius, Haer. 78, 18 from J.P. Migne, ed., *Patrologia Graeca* 42, 728CD-729AB (Paris, 1857-1866); St. Jerome, Ep. 22, 21 from J. P. Migne, ed., *Patrologia Latina* 22, 408 (Paris: 1841-1855).

Mother of God and Our Mother

When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home. ~ John 19:26-27

THese words of Jesus to Mary and John are often passed over without much reflection. After all, the Son of God is hanging on the cross with the weight of the sins of the world on his back. This is the climax of his mission, the reason the Father sent him into the world: to save us from our sins and show us the Father's love. "God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8).

It would seem that much greater things are being accomplished at Calvary, so why pay attention to what happens to Mary at the foot of the cross? Having no brothers and sisters and knowing that Mary is already a widow (according to most traditions), Jesus is simply making future provisions for his Mother as any son would. That is all that seems to be going on here. But before turning away from this scene, let us remember what has led up to Calvary. Jesus is in extreme agony. He has been beaten; tied to a post and whipped; crowned with thorns which are piercing into his scalp; dragged, kicked, and mocked as he carried the cross strapped to his back; and finally stripped of his garments and nailed to the cross to die by suffocation. In such a position, a person can only breathe by pulling the body up high enough so that the lungs can expand, but this action at the same time tears the flesh around the nails in the wrists (or hands) and in the ankles (or feet). Eventually the body gets too exhausted and can no longer do this, and the person dies from lack of oxygen. Why should we pay attention to what Jesus said from the cross? Because his words not only express his concern for his moth-

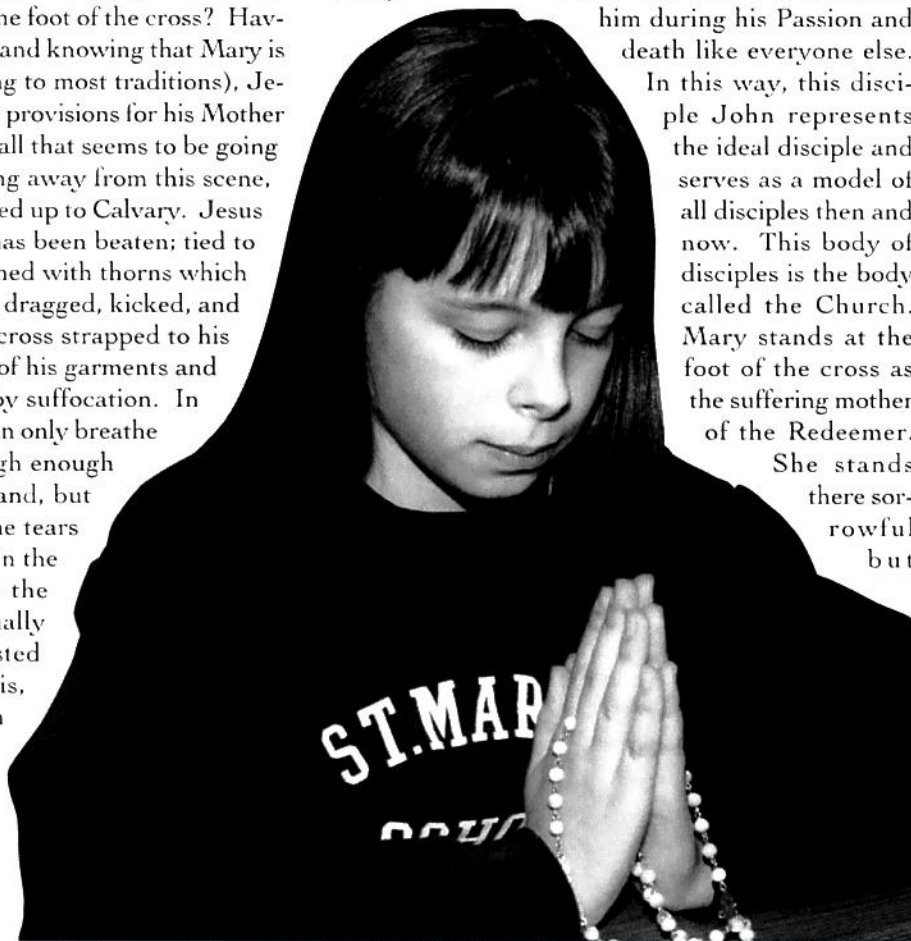
er on a human level but also reveal Mary's motherhood to us. Jesus never ceases to be the Savior of the world, so his words to John are his words also to us, "Behold, your mother" (Jn 19:27).

"His words to John are his words also to us, 'Behold, your mother'"

his disciple, "behold your mother." Those who have studied John's Gospel know that what is recorded plainly has deep theological meaning. This disciple standing with Mary is a true disciple; he did not deny Jesus like Peter or abandon him during his Passion and death like everyone else.

In this way, this disciple John represents the ideal disciple and serves as a model of all disciples then and now. This body of disciples is the body called the Church. Mary stands at the foot of the cross as the suffering mother of the Redeemer.

She stands there sorrowful but



DAVID CHARLES PHOTOGRAPHY

resolved, having already accepted her role in God's redemptive plan. By giving her to the Church, represented by his disciple John, Jesus reveals his desire and the plan of God the Father to make Mary mother of the Church and our mother in the order of grace.

Mary accepted her role as our mother when she gave consent to the angel's greeting. Let us consider her words in

Scripture to understand her role in God's plan and to develop according to his will the relationship he desires us to have with our mother in Heaven.

Mary's Words in Scripture

"How shall this be, since I have no husband?"
~ Lk 1:34

Mary's response to the angel Gabriel's announcement that she would conceive a son is not one of doubt, but rather of readiness to obey the will of God. Mary fully believed Gabriel, yet wished to know how she would conceive a son without a husband.

"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." ~ Lk 1:38

Mary's response to the angel's message is not passive. Rather, it is the active acceptance and choosing of God's will. Mary desired whatever God wanted with all her heart. It was at this moment that the Word of God became flesh in her womb. And it was at this moment that she accepted her motherhood to all Christians as mother in the order of grace.

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior; for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm, he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich



Saints from Predella, detail of the Madonna of San Domenico, by Fra Angelico, 1587-1455

"Such love and devotion for her is pleasing to the Father and in no way detracts from our love for Jesus."

he has sent empty away. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity forever." ~ Lk 1:46-55; emphasis added

This song of rejoicing recorded in Scripture is known as the "Magnificat" from the words of the first phrase in Latin *Magnificat anima mea*. Mary sang this Canticle when she visited her cousin Eliza-

beth, the mother of John the Baptist. In this prayer, Mary recalls the mighty work of the Lord in her, the Incarnation, and how this work is the fulfillment of God's promise to Israel to save them from slavery to sin.

"Do whatever he tells you." ~ Jn 2:5

The wedding feast at Cana is the site of Jesus' first miracle. When the wine had run out, Mary told Jesus the problem. She then turns to the servants and instructs them with these words. Mary knew that her Son would answer her request, which he did. Jesus performed this miracle, the beginning of his work, at Mary's request, thus showing the importance and value of her intercession. Her words, "do whatever he tells you" are for all of us when we ask Jesus for help.

These few passages from Scripture express her motherhood in and through her discipleship to Jesus. She is always ready to do God's will. God's plan has placed her as Queen over all things. It is through her intercession, expressed in a mother's love for her children, that the grace and gifts of salvation are brought to us. We cannot afford to be without her help, and so we are invited like John at the cross, to take her into our home. Such love and devotion for her is pleasing to the Father and in no way detracts from our love for Jesus. Part of taking on the image of Christ is taking on the same love that he has for his Mother and accepting her as our mother as he once accepted her as his Mother.

(CCC 968-972)

The Five Doctrines on Mary

For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. ~ Luke 1:48

THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY has a very special place in the teaching and devotional life of the Catholic Church. Here, we examine what the Church teaches about Mary. Why does the Catholic Church give so much attention to Mary? Mary is honored because of her Son. In other words, Mary is important because her Son is so much more important. Her great dignity flows directly from her being the human mother of Jesus Christ. No human being could be more blessed and exalted than the woman whom God chose to be the mother of Christ. It is a uniquely high calling and privilege.

It must be made clear at the outset that the Catholic Church does not teach that Mary is divine. She is no goddess but a creature like all of us, who has been made by almighty God. God alone is to be adored and worshipped.

God's Redemptive Plan and the Role of Mary

God knew before he created Adam and Eve that they would disobey him and thereby bring sin, suffering and death into human history. Yet God's desire to share his life with us could not be squelched by human sin. He chose to create humanity anyway, knowing that he would send his own Son as our Savior to make it possible for those who love him to be with him forever in Heaven.

This is an important point. God knew that humanity would sin against him, and yet from the very beginning he knew

what he was going to do about it. His own Son, the second person of the Blessed Trinity, would become a man. God the Father desired that his Son become truly one of us. He would live among us and reveal God the Father to us. He would restore our friendship with God that had been lost by the sin of Adam and Eve.

Mary is the woman out of all human history who was chosen by God the Father to give human flesh and blood to his divine Son. This fact makes Mary absolutely unique and special. God knew that Mary would be the mother of Christ before he ever created Adam and Eve — and long before he created Mary. Certainly God could have done things differ-

ently. God is not bound to do anything in particular, for he is the Almighty. Nonetheless, he freely chose to give Mary a very special role in the redemptive work of Christ.

Throughout the Scriptures he calls mere human beings to participate in his plan of salvation. He continually comes down to meet us where we are. He speaks with us through his Word and reveals himself to us in ways that we can understand and relate to. Nothing could be more comforting than the fact that the almighty Creator of the universe loves us so much that he became one of us. He became a tiny embryo, and was born as a helpless babe into the arms of his mother Mary. This is our Lord coming to save us in the same way that

“Mary is important because her Son is so much more important.”



Virgin and Child, by Daniel Tipton, copy of an original painted on the wall of an Ethiopian monastery

all of us come into the world — through a mother.

All doctrines of the faith come from the Word of God that consists of both Scripture and Tradition. The Church is the handmaid to God's Word; she faithfully transmits and interprets this Word to the world. Nothing that the Church teaches is her own. It is the same teaching given to her by Christ. Therefore, doctrines concerning Mary are also part of the Word of God, either in Scripture or Tradition.

Let us now take a deeper look into Mary's role in God's plan of salvation, as it is revealed to us in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. There are five key doctrines that reveal the truth of who Mary is. All of these doctrines are rooted in the Bible, either explicitly or implicitly. If we are to know and understand the mother of Christ as she really is, then we must understand these five doctrines.

Mother of God

"And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High" (Lk 1:31-32).

One of the central truths about Jesus is that he is both fully God and fully man. To understand this, one must understand the distinction between the terms "person" and "nature." Person refers to *who* we are. Nature refers to *what* we are. If we ask, "who is Jesus Christ?" the answer is that this is the name of God the Son, the second person of the Holy Trinity *Incarnate*. If we ask "what is Jesus Christ?" the answer is that he is a being with two natures — divine and human.

When Mary, newly pregnant with Jesus, left Nazareth to go to her heavily-pregnant kinswoman Eliz-

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Annunciation of the Archangel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary, 15th century illuminated manuscript, French Book of Hours

abeth, Elizabeth greeted her with the words, "And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy" (Lk 1:43-44). The Greek word used by St. Luke in writing these words for "leaped" is precisely the same word in the Greek Septuagint translation of the Hebrew, which we render into English as "danced": "And David danced before the Lord with all his might... So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting, and with the sound of the horn" (2 Sm 6:14-15). This is no accident: St. Luke intended us to understand Mary as the new Ark of the Covenant, she who carries within herself not the Ten Commandments, but the Lawgiver himself; she who carries not manna from the desert, but the very Bread of Life; she who carries not the rod of Aaron the high priest, but the eternal

high priest himself. This understanding is reinforced in the book of Revelation: "Then God's temple in Heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple... And a great portent appeared in Heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars" (Rv 11:19, 12:1) — that is, the Ark of the Covenant is Mary, the "woman clothed with the sun."

At the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD, the Church proclaimed that Mary is "the Mother of God." In doing so, the Church was actually defending and protecting the whole truth about Christ which, at the time, was being denied by a man named Nestorius.

The term "Mother of God" is often misunderstood. It has a very specific meaning. It does not

“The merit and grace of Christ’s redemption was applied by God to Mary at the very first moment of her conception in her mother’s womb. In this way she was preserved from being born with original sin.”

mean that Mary gave to Jesus his divine nature. The almighty God is one God existing from all eternity as three Persons — the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit. This is the Holy Trinity. At a particular moment in history, the second person of the Holy Trinity took to himself a human nature. He became a man, while remaining at the same time, fully God. This is called the “Incarnation.” This is where Mary comes into the picture. When the Son of God “stepped into” human history, he did so through Mary. The womb of Mary is where he received his human nature. But Mary did not give to Jesus his divine nature. He possessed his divine nature already; he has always been divine. In childbirth, however, mothers bring forth persons, not natures. The person that Mary gave birth to is the Lord of Heaven and earth Incarnate. It makes perfect sense, really:

Mary is the mother of Jesus.

Jesus is God.

Therefore, Mary is the Mother of God Incarnate.

The Immaculate Conception

“The Lord God said to the serpent... I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Gn 3:14-15).

The term “Immaculate Conception” is also frequently misunderstood. It does not refer to the conception of Jesus in Mary’s womb. The term for that is “Incarnation.” Rather, it refers to the conception of Mary in her own mother’s womb. This truth about

Mary was officially proclaimed a dogma of the Catholic Church by Pope Pius IX in 1854, although it can readily be documented that it has been taught and believed at least as far back as the third century.

At this point we must recall that God knew what he was going to do to save us all along. From all eternity, God knew that Mary would be the mother of Christ. This helps us to understand why Mary would receive

special graces and privileges from God. She would need all the grace that God could give her in order for her to fulfill such an awesome task. The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception means that at the moment of her own conception in her mother’s womb, God intervened and preserved Mary from original sin. Therefore, Mary was born with a perfect, sinless human nature, the same sinless nature that she would be giving to her Son Jesus.

Jesus was like us in all things except sin (see Heb 4:15). Since Mary was Jesus’ mother and gave him his human nature, it is appropriate that her nature also would be sinless. Though as a daughter of Eve she deserved to be born in the state of original sin like

the rest of mankind, as the future mother of his Son, God preserved Mary from original sin at the first moment of her conception in her mother’s womb.

What basis is there for this doctrine in Scripture? Because of the sin of Adam and Eve, their friendship with God had been ruptured. And in them all humanity became subject to sin, Satan and death. Sacred Scripture reveals that almighty God is holiness



Immaculate Conception, by Bartolomé Murillo, 1617-1682



The Humble House of Nazareth, c. 1901, by Giovanni Gagliardi

itself, that nothing impure can exist in his presence. He is a consuming fire of holiness. Knowing this, the Church found it unthinkable that the all-holy God could receive his human nature from a mother stained with original sin.

Yet all humanity was affected by the sin of Adam and Eve, and thus needed to be redeemed by Christ. The early Church soon began to see in Sacred Scripture clues to answering the dilemma. One of the first images of Mary in the early Church was the "new Eve." Just as Christ was the "new Adam," the early Church began to see that Mary filled the role of a new Eve. (The difference, of course, is that Jesus is God as well as man, while Mary is a human being.) Nonetheless, the parallel is undeniable. In Genesis 3:15, God tells the serpent, *"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."*

This passage was understood as God's first promise of our redemption — as foreshadowing the time when the seed (Jesus) of the woman (Mary) would conquer the seed (sin) of the serpent (Satan). But even more, the word "enmity" in this context means absolute opposition. The mother of the Messiah would share in the same kind of "enmity" against the

devil as that of her Son; total opposition would exist between the devil and sin on the one hand, and Mary and Jesus on the other. This would mean that Mary and Jesus would have absolutely nothing in common with the devil — especially sin. It was necessary for Christ to be free from all sin so that he could be the perfect expiation for our sins. Mary was to be the mother of the Redeemer, so it was appropriate for her, too, to be free from sin.

The second key passage of Scripture is Luke 1:28. The angel Gabriel appeared to the Virgin Mary and said, *"Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!"* The English phrase "full of grace" is a translation of the Latin Vulgate *gratia plena*, itself a translation of the unique Greek word *kecharitomene*. In the original Greek of the New Testament, the angel's greeting literally reads as "Hail, you who have been graced, the Lord is with you." Although a multitude of renditions exist in modern translations of the Bible, *gratia plena* has the great virtue of antiquity, dating back to the late fourth century and based on even older Latin translations, putting it very close to the time the Greek original was written. The angel's greeting expresses something about who Mary is and what God has done for her. The angel can call her "full of grace" because Mary had received the fullness of grace at her Immaculate Conception.

For Mary to truly be the mother of Christ, he would have to receive his human nature from her. That is the very meaning of motherhood. A mother gives her own nature to her child. Yet, if Mary had been born with a fallen nature, one tainted with original sin, then that is what she would have given to Christ. No one can give what he or she does not have. Yet we know from St. Paul that *"all have sinned*

and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). What, exactly, does St. Paul intend to say? From the context of his words, it is clear that by the word "all"

St. Paul meant "both Jews

and Gentiles." The human race as a whole has been affected by the sin of Adam and Eve. Unless God intervenes, all human beings are born with original sin. Every single human being needs the saving grace of Jesus Christ. But there is nothing in Scripture that dictates exactly how God applies the redemption of Christ to each person. There is nothing that would prevent God from doing something unique if he chose to. After all, he is the Lord and Ruler of all creation.

"Her virginity is a sign of her singular devotion and total gift of herself to God."



The Blessed Virgin receives the body of her Son, by James Tissot, 1856-1902

When God gives someone a high calling, he also gives the grace needed for it. There is no role that any human being has ever been called to that is higher than Mary's. She was called to be the Mother of Jesus Christ, who is God. The highest calling requires the highest grace. The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception does not in any way mean that Mary was not also redeemed by Christ. God is outside of all space and time, and therefore could easily redeem Mary in a unique way. The Church teaches, based on the teaching of Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, that the merit and grace of Christ's redemption was applied by God to Mary at the very first moment of her conception in her mother's womb. In this way she was preserved from being born with original sin. She was given a sinless nature so that she could then give a sinless nature to her Son Jesus as a true human mother.

Think about it. The Son of God became flesh, the Incarnate Word of God. "All things were made through

him" (Jn 1:3). This means that the Son of God created his own mother, Mary. Anyone who had the opportunity to create his or her own mother would create her as perfectly as possible, without the stain of sin. Jesus created his mother Mary as the most perfect and holy human being in all creation. As she proclaimed in her Magnificat, "he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name" (Lk 1:49).

Perpetual Virginit

"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Is 7:14).

Belief in Mary's perpetual virginity — before, during, and after Jesus' birth — is of great antiquity. Ancient Christian writers saw in the prophecy of Ezekiel, "This gate shall remain shut; it shall not be opened, and no one shall enter by it; for the Lord, the God of Israel, has entered by it; therefore it shall remain shut"

***"Her Assumption strengthens our faith in the future resurrection
and hope for eternal life."***

(Ez 44:2), the Old Testament foundation for this belief. At the Lateran Council in 649 AD, the Church affirmed the ancient belief in Mary's perpetual virginity.

Scripture attests to the fact that Mary was a virgin before the birth of Jesus. *"The angel Gabriel was sent from God ... to a virgin ... and the virgin's name was Mary"* (Lk 1:26-27). Mary conceived Jesus without any loss of her virginity: *"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God"* (Lk 1:35). By the time Jesus was conceived, the prophecy found in Isaiah was considered to refer specifically to a virgin, not merely a "young woman" (see Mt 1:25, which used the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scripture in citing Isaiah).

Just as Jesus' conception was miraculous, so too was his birth.

Mary retained her virginity even in the act of giving birth to Jesus as a sign of her everlasting purity and holiness. Following Jesus' birth, Mary and Joseph did not engage in marital relations and therefore had no other children. What about the "brothers and sisters" of Jesus mentioned in the Bible? In the original language of the New Testament, the term for brother or sister can refer to any close relative. James and Joseph are called "brothers of Jesus" but were in fact sons of another Mary who is called *"the other Mary"* (Mt 27:61; Mt 28:1) to distinguish her from Mary the mother of Jesus (see Mt 13:55; Mt 27:56).

Mary is a virgin not because sex is evil or incompatible with holiness. Sex is a good created by God

"Mary watches over and protects the human race through her powerful intercession in Heaven."



Mary is our Mother in the order of grace

in the beginning and sanctified by Christ through the sacrament of Matrimony. Her virginity is, rather, a sign of her singular devotion and total gift of herself to God. Because she is both virgin and mother, Mary's life is a supreme example of holiness to both those who are married and those who have made themselves virgins for the sake of the Kingdom (see Mt 19:12).

The Assumption

The Assumption of Mary clearly rests on the fact that Mary was sinless. The Church has always understood the reference to the *"woman clothed with the sun"* found in Scripture (see verses at beginning of handout) as referring to Mary once she had been assumed body and soul into Heaven. There is scriptural precedent for this in the stories of Enoch (Gn 5:23) and Elijah (2 Kg 2:11).

All humanity suffers as a result of original sin. But by the singular grace of her Immaculate Conception, Mary was preserved from original sin for her special mission as the mother of the Messiah. When her mission was finished, the time came for her to enter into the glory of Heaven. At the end of her life, God assumed her body and soul into glory. This event is called the dogma of the Assumption. Her Assumption should not be confused with the Ascension of Christ. He ascended into Heaven by his own power; she did not. She was assumed into Heaven by God.

Evidence for the Church's belief and teaching of this dogma can be found in the prayers and writings of the early Church. The Dormition (the fall-

“The world, which received Christ through Mary over two thousand years ago, continues to receive Christ through Mary even today.”

ing asleep) of Mary celebrated as a feast in the East attests to her Assumption: “In your Dormition you did not leave the world, O Mother of God, but were joined to the source of Life. You conceived the living God and, by your prayers, will deliver our souls from death”¹ (CCC 966).

Depictions of the Assumption in sacred art also confirm the common belief of this dogma. Although it has been part of the Church’s Tradition for many centuries, it was declared a dogma only in 1950, by Pope Pius XII. He declared that “when the course of her earthly life was finished, [Mary] was taken up body and soul into Heavenly glory, and exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things”² (CCC 966). (The statement of the dogma does not address the question of whether or not she died first.) Her Assumption strengthens our faith in the future resurrection and hope for eternal life.

Mother in the Order of Grace

Jesus is our Redeemer so Mary can be called the mother of the Redeemer. But her motherhood does not stop there. Because of her unique cooperation with the work of redemption brought about by Christ, she also becomes the mother in a spiritual sense of all those who have been joined to her Son in Baptism. The Church teaches that “this motherhood of Mary in the order of grace continues uninterruptedly from the consent which she loyally gave at the Annunciation and which she sustained without wavering beneath the cross, until the eternal fulfillment of all the elect”³ (CCC 969).

Mary is our mother in the order of grace, but what does this mean? First, it means that Mary watches over and protects the human race through her powerful intercession in Heaven. She intercedes for our needs in the same way that she went to Jesus when the wine had run out at the wedding feast of Cana (see Jn 2:1-11). She not only prays for us, but also leads us back to Christ. Mary’s words to us are always the same: “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:5).

Second, Mary is our mother in the order of grace

because she is the mother of the Church. The Church is the body of Christ and “Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior” (Eph 5:25). All who are joined to Christ in Baptism make up “the body of Christ and [are] individually members of it” (1 Cor 12:27). Going one step further with this analogy, Mary then is also the mother of Christ’s body because she gave birth to the head of this body who is Christ. We “who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus” are “the rest of her offspring” (Rv 12:17).

Third, she is our mother in the order of grace because she is the handmaid of the Lord upon whom the Holy Spirit came to rest. No human being is closer to the Holy Spirit than Mary. She was chosen by the Holy Spirit to bring Christ into the world. God did not have to give Mary this role; but he chose to do so, according to his own designs. Scripture says that, “Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb 13:8), so God’s designs do not change. Therefore the world, which received Christ through Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit over two thousand years ago, continues to receive Christ through Mary even today.

Last, Mary is our mother in the order of grace because she uniquely participates in the mediation of Christ. This mediation is prefigured in the Old Testament in the way the mother of the king, the queen mother, would act as an intercessor to the king for the needs of others (see, for example, 1 Kgs 2:19). All Christians are called to participate in his work; St. Paul even goes so far to say that we are “God’s fellow workers” (1 Cor 3:9) in mediating Christ and his grace to the world. Mary also is called to be God’s co-worker, but her role is unique. In a wholly singular manner Mary cooperates in his work of “restoring supernatural life to souls”⁴ (CCC 968). For all these reasons Mary is the mother in the order of grace and our mother. It is through her help that God’s grace reaches us, transforming us more and more into the image of her Son Jesus Christ.

(CCC 487-507, 963-970, 2673-2679)

¹ Byzantine Liturgy, Troparion, Feast of the Dormition, August 15th

² *Lumen Gentium* 59; cf. Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus* (1950) from Denzinger-Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum, definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum* 3903 (1965); cf. Revelation 19:16

³ *Lumen Gentium* 62

⁴ *Lumen Gentium* 61

Praying to Mary: Idolatry or the Will of God?

On the third day there was a marriage at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; Jesus also was invited to the marriage, with his disciples. When the wine failed, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Now six stone jars were standing there, for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the steward of the feast." So they took it. When the steward of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, "Every man serves the good wine first; and when men have drunk freely, then the poor wine; but you have kept the good wine until now." This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

~ John 2:1-11



IF ALL HUMAN PASSIONS, love and its expression is the most likely to be misunderstood. Love for Mary by Catholics is a case in point. Caught up in the contemplation of what God has done for Mary, preachers, poets, artists, architects, and everyday Catholics have given to Mary titles, praises, and prayers that naturally pour out of the human heart and mind when rapt in love. But for all its emphasis on Mary, the Church has always and consistently taught that Mary is a mere human, like us, and is therefore not to be adored, since adoration is due to God alone. Mary is honored and venerated, but not adored. Long ago, St. Ambrose said: "Mary was the temple of God, not the God of the temple."

Many who are not familiar with Catholicism, however, see Catholic veneration of Mary as wor-



"Mary was the temple of God, not the God of the temple."

*“Jesus will grant her prayers
to him on our behalf as he
did at Cana.”*



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ship. Making the misperception worse is the fact that Catholics pray to Mary, seemingly therefore asking favors from a human even though we profess to believe that Jesus is the “*one mediator between God and men*” (1 Tm 2:5).

The Church teaches that there is an infinite difference between the human person of Mary and the divine person of her Son, Jesus. When Catholics pray to Mary, they are praying to one who is human like themselves, but who is nearer the Throne of God than any other created being.

All the honor and veneration that is given to Mary has its source in her freely-chosen cooperation with the will and purpose of God in the Incarnation — the conception of her Son, the second person of the

Trinity, in her womb. The Christ-centered dogma of the Mother of God (in Greek, *Theotokos*, or “God-bearer”), declared by the Church at the Council of Ephesus in 431, emphatically highlights the unique and divinely-conceived relationship of Mary with Christ, the Son of God. The God-designed Incarnation clearly reveals the stunning relationship that the Father himself created between the Holy Trinity and this specially-chosen human person — one of our own, but kept free from original sin because of the intended motherhood that God asked of her. In the Incarnation, she most wonderfully became the daughter of the Father, mother of his Son, and spouse of the Holy Spirit (see Lk 1:35).

Because God so honored Mary and brought her into the most intimate possible relationship with the Holy Trinity, faithful Catholics throughout history joyfully — and sometimes exuberantly — responded to the divine example by paying honor to Mary. He specifically chose her and made his request of her to accomplish the salvation of all humanity. Gladly do Catholics request of her, as God himself did, favors and needs dear to our own hearts. In her wholehearted cooperation with the Father’s plan of salvation, from Jesus’ conception to his salvific death on the cross, Mary learned how to accept and grant requests. Therefore, we her other children (see Rv 12:17) approach her with a confidence born of our knowledge that her maternal heart will respond with the same tender compassion as it did at the marriage feast at Cana (see Jn 2:1-5) and that Jesus, in turn, will grant her prayers to him on our behalf as he did at Cana (see Jn 2:6-10).

When Mary was newly pregnant with Jesus, she sang that “*he who is mighty has done great things for me*” (Lk 1:49) and prophesied that “*all generations will call me blessed*” (Lk 1:48). With the little life he had left in him as he hung near death on the cross, Jesus gave Mary to us, in the person of the beloved disciple, as our mother, and gave us to her as her children (see Jn 19:26-27). Given this prophecy and that she was her Son’s dying bequest to us, honoring Mary and going to her in prayer pays heed to God’s *intended* path to approach him who is the source of all grace and goodness. We all are to offer supplications to God for each other (see Mt 5:44; Lk 6:28; Acts 7:60; 2 Cor 13:9; Col 4:3; Jas 5:16), and Jesus offers his Mother preeminently in this role, presenting our requests to her Son. The wine that Mary’s request brought forth from Jesus’ hands at Cana will flow in an endless abundant stream until the end of time.

(CCC 2675-2679)