

"MARY, MOTHER OF THE CHURCH"

Jerry Johnson

"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)

With these words from the cross, the Church understands that Jesus has given his mother to the entire Church, as represented by John the apostle. She has become the spiritual mother to each of us, who claim Jesus as our brother. What does this relationship mean for us and how should it affect our lives? To begin, the catechism explains that the role of Mary, in the work of our salvation, flows directly from her union with Christ. A union that formed as she accepted the will of the Father and Jesus was conceived in her womb. A union that would carry her throughout Christ's life and ministry, but cause her heart to be pierced as she witnessed his suffering and death on the cross. This eternal union would certainly give her a powerful role to play following the death and resurrection of Jesus. It would begin with her presence at the foot of

the cross, when the Church was birthed as the blood and water flowed from the side of Christ, and at Pentecost, the first manifestation of the Church as the Holy Spirit was poured out in that upper room. It would culminate as she "was taken up, body and soul into heavenly glory and exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things, so that she might be the more fully conformed to her son, the Lord of lords and conqueror of sin and death." (CCC 966)

So then, what is this role that flows from her union with Christ and how does it impact our lives in a very real and practical way? Who is Mary to you and to me? Paragraph 963 of the Catechism explains that "She is clearly the mother of the members of Christ...since she has, by her charity, joined in bringing about the birth of believers in the Church, who are members of its head". In other words, as our mothers in the flesh have given us birth into this physical world, our spiritual mother, Mary, has played a role in our spiritual birth into the Church, the Body of Christ. This role is described in the Catechism, paragraph 968, as one of cooperating "by her obedience, faith, hope, and burning charity in the Savior's work of restoring supernatural life to souls". This is why she is also described as our "mother in the order of grace".

As our mother, and "by her

complete adherence to the Father's will, to his Son's redemptive work, and to every prompting of the Holy Spirit" she is our perfect model of faith and charity... the "exemplary realization" of the Church itself. (CCC 967) We look to her shining example in order to live out our lives of faith, both as individuals and as Church. We are a family with an exceptional mother! Finally, as the Queen of Heaven, she is a powerful intercessor on our behalf, and is "...invoked under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix". (CCC 969) This powerful influence "flows forth from the superabundance of the merits of Christ. Again, because of her union with her Son, she cooperates with the unique mediation of Jesus and draws power from that mediation for our benefit. (CCC 970) We must not ignore this great gift of the Father to us and must continue to "fly unto you, O Virgin of virgins, our Mother". Pray for us O Holy Mother of God, that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ. Amen.

Jerry is a charter member of St. Lambert's and a Master Catechist for the Diocese.

Previous issues of the Formation Monthly can be found online at stlambertparish.org

SACRED SCRIPTURE



"In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!" ... And the angel said to her, "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 ... And Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word." (Luke 1:26-28, 30-32, 38)

"... And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!' ... 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 hand-maiden. 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.' " (Luke 1:41,42,46-49)

SACRED TRADITION

"Mary's role in the Church is inseparable from her union with Christ and flows directly from it. "This union of the mother with the Son in the work of salvation is made manifest from the time of Christ's virginal conception up to his death"; it is made manifest above all at the hour of his Passion:

Thus the Blessed Virgin advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and faithfully persevered in her union with her Son unto the cross. There she stood, in keeping with the divine plan, enduring with her only begotten Son the intensity of his suffering, joining herself with his sacrifice in her mother's heart, and lovingly consenting to the immolation of this victim, born of her: to be given, by the same Christ Jesus dying on the cross, as a mother to his disciple, with these words: "Woman, behold your son." (CCC 964)

"This motherhood of Mary in the order of grace continues uninterrupted 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. Taken up to heaven she did not lay aside this saving office but by her manifold intercession continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation. . . . Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked in the Church under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix." (CCC 969)

"In the meantime the Mother of Jesus, in the glory which she possesses in body and soul in heaven, is the image and beginning of the Church as it is to be perfected in the world to come. Likewise she shines forth on earth, until the day of the Lord shall come, a sign of certain hope and comfort to the pilgrim People of God." (CCC 972)

"By pronouncing her "fiat" at the Annunciation and giving her consent to the Incarnation, Mary was already collaborating with the whole work her Son was to accomplish. She is mother wherever he is Savior and head of the Mystical Body." (CCC 973)

THOUGHTFUL QUESTIONS

- **Do I recognize Mary as my spiritual mother?**
- **Is my relationship with the Blessed Mother growing and developing?**
- **Do I appreciate and seek the powerful intercession of the Mother of God?**