

MARY, MOTHER OF GRACE

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"So mighty art thou, lady, and so great,
That he who grace desireth, and comes not
To thee for aidance, fain would have desire
Fly without wings." Paradiso XXXIII; 14-17.



WHEN St. Bernard through the pen of Dante voiced these words from that prayer "which has been called the sweetest, loftiest and most inspired religious lyric ever uttered by the lips of man" he gave expression to a conviction, the doctrine of Mary the "Mediatress of All Grace" which is daily gathering new adherents in the ranks of the faithful. In a day like unto the present when the veneration of Our Blessed Lady is belittled by many, such as those who deny the Virgin Birth, such an opinion, sponsored by "most theologians of note at the present day," is not to be off-handedly rejected, as some among Catholics have done, but rather efforts should be made to harmonize this belief with the teachings of the Church especially since there is a movement under way to have this proposition ratified by official declaration of the Church.

St. Paul tells us in the Acts of the Apostles, "Neither is there salvation in any other. For there is no other name under heaven given to men, whereby we must be saved." All Catholics are bound to uphold this teaching as a matter of Faith. The Church, that we may be ever mindful of this, offers all her prayers "Through Christ Our Lord." Hence, when we assert that Mary is the Mother of all grace, that all grace comes to us through her hands, we do not mean to deny the redemption of man through Christ, but we associate Mary with Christ in this great work of salvation.

Christ has reconciled us with God. But who is to bridge the chasm between Christ the Son of God, and mere man? St. Bernard asks this question and at the same time proposes the solution of the difficulty when he writes: "There is need of a Mediator to that Mediator, Christ, and there is no more useful one to us than Mary." In his encyclical "Jucunda Semper" Leo XIII gives us a similar reply quoting St. Bernardine of Sienna to the effect that "Every grace that is sent to the world has a

triple procession, for it is dispensed in the following order; from God to Christ, from Christ to the Virgin, from the Virgin to us." Similarly Millinot, in a work on the Blessed Virgin writes; "It seems just as the Eternal Father wished the Church to ask of Him through the merits of His Son, so the Son also desires that our prayers be offered to Him, in all our necessities, through the hands of His Mother."

The title "Mediatress of All Grace" is conferred upon Mary, in virtue of her intimate union with Christ the Redeemer of mankind. Christ alone merited for us in the true and strict sense of the word, whereas grace comes through Mary because of her participation in the work of the redemption and by reason of her share in the satisfaction and merit of Christ. For just as she was singled out as the one least unworthy to be associated with Christ in the works through which the redemption was accomplished, so it is but fitting that she should be given a share in the distribution of the grace which resulted from these labors. Hence to show that Mary shared in the redemption of mankind and in the satisfaction and merit of Christ is to give reason why Mary should participate in the dispensation of grace and looked upon as the Mother of Grace.

Mary so partook in the reclamation of mankind as to be styled the Co-redeemer. In the *Ecclesiastical Review*, September, 1925, Austin O'Malley writes: "Benedict XV in a letter to the Sodality of Our Lady for a Good Death," 22 March, 1918, tells us, "It may rightly be said that Mary with Christ redeemed the human race." Physically speaking our restoration was purchased at the cost of Christ's body and blood. Mary's part in this cannot be denied. For she gave birth to Christ. From her the body and blood of the Son of God was taken which was necessary that He,—who alone could make infinite reparation,—become like unto one of us in order to appease the justice of God which required satisfaction proportionate to our offense. In the moral order our freedom from spiritual death is attributable to Christ's willingness to offer Himself as a holocaust for our sins. In this too Mary participated in as much as at the time of the Annunciation she freely consented to become the Mother of God and submitted to the reparation which He was to accomplish. Concerning Mary's liberty in this regard St. Bernard says, "The price of our redemption is offered to you, we shall at once be freed if you consent." Nor is St. Bernard alone in this, for the Fathers

of the Church from earliest ages often applied to Mary the title of Co-Redemptrix as is evident from the writings of St. Justin Martyr, St. Iranaeus and St. Ephrem to mention but a few.

The gospel abounds with illustrations testifying that Mary suffered for and with Christ. It is but necessary to call to mind that Mary was His mother, the Mother of Sorrows. We have a touching example of the pain caused by Mary's motherly solicitude from the writer of the third gospel. In relating the incident when the Child Jesus had been lost in the temple for three days, St. Luke places on the lips of the Virgin these melancholy words: "Behold thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing." The fact that through her was prepared the oblation which was to be offered for mankind is not the only title by which Mary may claim to have suffered with Christ. For it was at Calvary that those prophetic words, addressed to Mary by Simeon at the time of the Presentation,—“And thy own soul a sword shall pierce”—were realized. Instances without number might be adduced portraying Mary's sufferings. She had been styled the “Queen of Martyrs.” She has been referred to as a priest standing at that first altar, the Cross, offering sacrifice with Christ for the salvation of the world. In this same connection, Millinot, whom we have quoted above, speaks of a painting uncovered in the Catacombs during the nineteenth century, which depicts Mary under the figure of our Intercessor, with arms extended in the position similar to that of the priest at Mass during the prayers and preface.

So far we have seen Mary's share in the redemption of man, and we have noted her part in the satisfaction made by Christ. But what of her place in the merit of Christ? Our Redeemer merited for us by His works. To accomplish our redemption He was born of the Blessed Virgin, suffered under Pilate, was crucified and died. In all this Mary was one with Christ. For from Bethlehem to Calvary they were inseparable. Where we see Christ, we see Mary standing ready to minister unto Him. Surely since she helped to sow the seed she should share in the harvesting. Pius X in his encyclical “Ad Diem Illum” emphasizes the efficacy of this union between Mary and her Divine Son when he says, “From this communion of pain and will between Mary and Christ she well merited to become the Restorer of a lost world, and the dispenser of all the gifts which Jesus obtained for us by His Death and Blood.”

In the Epistle to the Romans we read, "And whom He predestinated, them He also called. And whom He called, them He also justified. And whom He justified, them He also glorified." From this it may be said that the three principles of salvation are firstly, the calling to the life of grace, secondly the establishing in grace or justifying, and thirdly the work of perseverance or glorifying. Carrying out this idea Hugon in his "Tractatus Dogmatici" relates three incidents taken from Sacred Scripture wherein Christ visibly produced these three effects and the thing to be noted is that in each of these three instances Mary was the medium through whom these graces were transmitted. For it was through Mary that Christ called John the Baptist whom He sanctified in the womb of his mother, it was at Mary's request that He performed the miracle at the Marriage feast of Cana through which the Apostles were established in the Faith for in concluding the narration of this event St. John writes, "And His disciples believed in Him." And finally through Mary Our Lord established St. John the beloved disciple in good at Calvary when, to St. John, He entrusted Our Blessed Lady. Continuing Hugon assures us that Mary's cooperation was not restricted to the time when Christ dwelt among men by pointing out one incident after the Ascension in which Mary was the aqueduct of grace when he says, "Christ wished that the effusion of the Holy Spirit should be made to the Apostles through Mary, who in the Cenacle prepared the Apostles for the coming of the Paraclete."

St. Bernardine of Sienna commenting upon the words of Holy Scripture, "Behold thy Mother" says, "Mystically therefore we comprehend in St. John all the souls of the elect whose mother the Blessed Virgin became through love." This position of Mary as Mother of mankind gives us another reason why she should be looked upon as the Mother of Grace. For St. Thomas tells us that "No beatified intellect fails to know in the Word whatever pertains to it." Now Sylvius speaking of the knowledge of the Blessed in heaven tells us that although they are no longer inhabitants of this vale of tears they know "What was entrusted to them here on earth, the care of which they very probably still retain." And so just as a father, now numbered among the Blessed,—to take an example given by Sylvius,—knows his family and their earthly affairs, so does Mary, our Mother, know the affairs of her children still enrolled in the

Church Militant. Hence she is acquainted with our spiritual needs, our difficulties and trials, the temptations with which we are faced, in a word she knows everything of which we stand in need. Mary, knowing these needs will seek to obtain them for us, for a mother should not only know the requirements of her children but also seek to alleviate them.

Summing up, we have once again professed our belief in Christ, the one and only redeemer of mankind. We have seen Mary's share in the redemption of mankind, her part in the satisfaction and merits of Christ, and her association with Him in the work of man's salvation whereby she has obtained favor with Her Divine Son greater than any other creature. From Scripture we have seen Christ visibly bestow grace through Mary. We have looked upon Mary as our spiritual Mother at the same time calling to mind what we may expect from one who fills this position. It is for these reasons that we invoke Mary as the "Mediatress of All Graces." For as Leo XIII tells us, "She is placed on the highest summit of power and glory in Heaven, that she may give the aid of her protection to those who, in labors and in dangers, are striving to reach the Eternal City."





Courtesy, Rev. Dr. McKenna, National Shrine.

Our Lady of Washington



The Foster-Father of Christ