

THE MOTHER OF THE ETERNAL PRIESTHOOD

Mary is preeminently the Mother of God. This is her greatest title. As Mother of our God she is also Mother of all that belongs to His divinity. Now, Jesus Christ her Son was not only Eternal God but also Eternal Priest. We are then fully justified in saying that Mary is Mother of Jesus, the Eternal Priest. All through the hidden life she is associated with Jesus, not only as child, youth, and full-grown man, but also as Eternal Priest, "anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power" (Acts x, 38). We claim but a small knowledge, indeed, of this hidden life; yet with the eyes of faith a pious, holy soul can by fervent meditation elicit some beautiful reflections on what these relations of Jesus and Mary must have been. Let us consider only a very few of the more important points of analogy between Jesus the Priest and Mary His Mother. Having done this, we may consider Mary's relations to the Eternal Priesthood, which certain chosen souls by a special divine calling exercise and gloriously share in Christ.

Holy Scripture tells us that the everlasting love of God for man was clearly shown when God became man, "that men might become gods," as St. Augustine adds. Yet God in His eternal counsels deigned to become man only through the consent of His chosen Mother, preselected and foreordained to this sublime dignity. It was only after Mary had consented that the Holy Ghost came upon her, and through His power and operation "the Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us." A wondrous mystery, indeed! And how full of the goodness of God towards man, in its operations how rich in grace and mercy!

The principal result of Christ's Incarnation was the universal redemption of mankind. This was effected chiefly through His bitter Passion and Death. Herein Christ showed Himself the true Paschal Victim, slain for us on the altar of the cross. He offered a true sacrifice—Himself as both Priest and Victim. This sacrifice was of infinite atonement for infinite malice, because Christ was infinite God. It was thus He showed us the nature of His Eternal Priesthood. And Mary was the Mother of such a Son. Not only the poverty, humility and hard labor of the hidden life shared with Jesus was here, but also the deepest association with His cruel Passion. Here we find her close to Him

in the most solemn period of His career. For as Jesus on the Cross loved us to the end, so Mary, clinging to the Cross of her Son, also loved us to the end. Through tears and blood she followed Jesus up Calvary. There would she stand beneath His Cross and listen to His last words, each cry one of the swords of Simeon's prophecy, keenly piercing her Mother-heart. Finally Jesus bows His head and dies, and as His spirit flies forth, an infinite reparation to His Father for our guilt, Mary, the sorrowful Queen of Martyrs, gladly offers Him up as well. Jesus alone did not commend His spirit into His Father's hands, for Mary, too, could say: "Father, into Thy hands I commend the spirit of my Son." If our Redeemer was Eternal Priest and the source of all the powers and prerogatives of the Eternal Priesthood of chosen souls, why should not Mary, Mother of this redeeming Priest, be also Mother of her Son's Eternal Priesthood shared by men?

But our Lady has other claims to this title. In the first place, let us recall the sad scene on Calvary. Together with St. John the Beloved, she stands by the Cross of Jesus, when lo! from His sacred lips come words of solemn tenderness: "Woman, behold thy son. After that, He saith to the disciple: Behold thy mother. And from that hour, the disciple took her to his own" (John xix, 26, 27). What a beautiful act on the part of Our Lord, and how full of meaning for men, especially for priests. We are told that St. John there represented the human race, of which Mary in that sad hour became the Mother. Well did she merit this. As in the cave of Bethlehem she brought forth Jesus the Sinless without pain or sorrow, so here she brought forth in the pains and cruel anguish of His Passion the sinful sons of men, whose crimes had demanded His life in expiation. Thus is she styled "Mother of Sorrows" and "Refuge of Sinners."

St. John represented not only the human race, but the Priesthood also, being a priest, ordained at the Last Supper. Hence we see that Our Lady was appointed by her dying Son, Mother of St. John as man and as priest. Justly may we cry, then: "Mother of the Eternal Priesthood, pray for us!" Consequently, she can say to each newly-ordained priest: "Thou art my son; this day have I begotten thee!" Yes, begotten us truly, as priests, by a twofold birth, first, in Jesus Christ her Son, the Eternal Priest, by temporal birth; and, secondly, in St. John the Beloved by a spiritual and adoptional birth on Calvary.

Let us now consider some of the relations existing between Mary, Mother of the Eternal Priesthood, and the Priesthood itself. These fall into two general groups: (1) as to the name of the Priesthood; and (2) as to its principal functions. The more we examine these two headings, the more are treasures of Divine Wisdom in these holy relations made manifest.

According to its Latin terminology the word "priest" signifies "one giving sacred things," that is to say, giving divine gifts to the people. "Sacerdos," says the Angelic Doctor, "quasi sacra dans."* Now, who under God Himself was the first giver of Divine things but the Mother of Divine grace, sinless and immaculate? And just as the priest gives the Sacramental Jesus to the people in Communion, so did Mary, our Mother, give us Jesus the Word made Flesh, true God and true Man, that we might be joined to Him in the communion of a tender brotherhood, having as our Father even God.

Another Latin word for "priest" is "presbyter." According to St. Alphonsus, in his admirable book, "Dignity and Duties of the Priest," the word "presbyter" means "praebens iter," i. e., "one who shows the way." Truly, Our Lady showed the way when she brought forth Jesus her Son, who afterwards said, "I am the way." Moreover, our gracious Mother has been chosen as the way to Jesus. As she gave Jesus to us at Bethlehem, we who have lost Him through our negligence must find Him again through Mary. And St. Bernard has said that as we have access to the Father through His Son Jesus Christ, so we have access to the Son through the Mother. And Holy Church sings of her: "He that shall find me shall find life (Jesus Christ). In me is all grace of the way and of the truth" (Eccl. xxiv, 25). Mary is also the Star of the Sea that guides faithful souls by the ways of justice and holiness; she is the way at whose end is the gate whose portals open on the resplendent vision of God; and for this reason we sing: "Gate of Heaven, pray for us." As the priest shows the way of virtue to souls, so Mary our Mother leads souls to the end of the way—eternal glory. We might go on to show how the third word for "priest," i. e., "pontifex," which means "bridge-maker," contains a wealth of analogy between the mediatorship of the priesthood and the intercessory power of Mary. It suffices to say that she has been termed by a holy soul the "viaduct"

* Summa 3^a pars. Q. xxii, Art. 1.

through which God has deigned to pour graces and blessings upon men.

Lastly, the analogies between Mary and the functions of the priesthood are many and striking. The chief offices of the priesthood are concerned with the true Body of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, and with His Mystical Body, that is to say, with jurisdiction over the faithful, in the Sacrament of Penance. Now, even as the priest gives sacramental being to Christ by the words, "This is my body," so did Mary, through her "fiat," by the power and operation of the Holy Ghost, give fleshly being to Jesus Christ. St. Thomas tells us that the Body of Christ was formed from the most pure blood of the Virgin Mother;† and so, like the priest, Mary could say of her Son, "This is my body." He was flesh of her flesh and bone of her bone. Moreover, Mary, the altar on which the dead Christ lay when taken down from the cross, becomes like that other altar on which every day He lies mystically slain. She is the very temple and throne of God, the sacred resting-place of the Holy Spirit; as the Church sings of her, "The Most High hath sanctified His Tabernacle" (Ps. xlv, 5). She is the ciborium containing Our Lord: "Hail Golden Vase," says St. Epiphanius, "containing the heavenly manna." She is the incense ever ascending to God in the sweet odor of her virtues, drawing virgins after her to the palace of the Divine King. She is all that the priest daily handles and touches; and when the priest goes out of this world she will show Him Jesus the blessed Fruit of her womb, as he often showed the Sacramental Jesus in the monstrance to the people. Let us then rejoice to have such a Mother and show our love for her, like St. John, who "took her to his own."

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† Summa 3^a pars. Q. xxxv, Art. 3.