

## THE MOTHER

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Devotion is love made manifest. It is love faithfully rendering the service that love itself dictates, and is due first and above all to God, the supreme and final object of all good actions. To Him all other devotion, if it be virtuous, must lead. Next to God, we owe a special devotion to God's Blessed Mother. Devotion to no other is so well fitted to lead us to God, to increase our love for Him. Devotion to her is a Catholic instinct. It seems that the pure God draws all faithful Catholics to the feet of the purest of all His creatures, His Virgin Mother. But we may be sure that we do not love her as much as He wishes. It is not likely that our devotion to her equals that of St. John the Beloved, her first adopted child; or of St. Bernard, who spent his life singing matchless praises of her; or of St. Dominic, to whom she gave the weapon of her servants, the Rosary. And even though our love did equal theirs, it would not be enough; it would not equal her love for us; it would not equal that which her Divine Son wishes us to have for her.

She is the most beautiful, the most pure, the most perfect, the most loving and generous of all God's creatures; and a grateful heart should lead us to respond to her love, and to the great blessings she has obtained for us, with a sincere and ever-increasing devotion. She is the Mother of God, the Help of Christians, the Comfort of the sorrowful and the afflicted, the Hope of the faithful. "I am the mother of fair, pure love," she says in the words of the inspired writer, "the mother of fear and of knowledge, and of holy hope."<sup>1</sup>

She is the Mother! There could not have been given her a name whose sound is sweeter to the ears of mankind, whose meaning touches deeper the human heart or implies such great love and sympathetic solicitude.

She is the Mother of God! Thought cannot fathom the profound depths of that truth, or of the power and dignity it gives her. But we know that mere human prudence moves men to court the favor of those who have influence with a ruler, if they wish to obtain from the ruler some concession or benefit, and especially if they be uncouth and if they have offended him and seek pardon. Now God is the supreme and almighty Ruler from

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<sup>1</sup> Ecclesiasticus xxiv, 24.

whom every great and smallest good thing comes. Far more: His constant support is absolutely necessary in order that all the things He has made for us, and all He has given us, may continue to exist. The earth, the sky, the stars, the birds, the trees, the sea, the hills, the streams, even our very bodies and souls, are in His grasp. Were He to remove His support not even dust would remain of it all and of ourselves to float about the limitless void.

Mother to this almighty Being, whose power is so great, so terrible, that it may well make us fear, but whose love for the things He has made is greater than His power, or rather is His power, and whose mercy is more far-reaching than His justice; Mother to the owner of heaven, earth, and hell; Mother to the Lord of men and of angels in the person of Jesus Christ,—is Mary, the stainless, the pure, the beautiful,—Mary, who has consented to be to us poor sinners a loving, pleading Mother before the majesty seat of the King, her Son. And of the millions and millions of beautiful creatures that the Creator-King has made and ruled throughout the countless ages, of the saints, clean of soul, of the myriads of pure brilliant angels, none is so dear to Him as Mary, none whose petitions He is so ready to grant as those she makes, because none other is so perfect—no angel so holy, no othr mere human being always sinless, none other His Mother!

Christian pilgrims journeying to the Holy Land, upon first setting foot on its soil, have fallen upon their knees and with holy emotion welling up in their hearts and lining their faces have kissed the earth; for God walked there—God, whose love so far overreached His justice that He became Man, born of a Virgin, to suffer and die to save them that had rebelled against Him. If these pilgrims were so deeply impressed with the sacredness of the trust which had been touched by the feet of the Saviour, what should be our reverence and devotion for the living earth whence the Saviour sprang—Mary, every Virgin. From her immaculate flesh the body of the God-Man was formed, as the Prophet of old had fortold: “Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above; let the earth be opened, and bud forth a Saviour.”<sup>2</sup>

He greater than whom no man was ever born,<sup>3</sup> John the Baptist, stood in his covering of goat-skin, pale, thin, and hollow-eyed from long fasting and prayer, before that Saviour, and

<sup>2</sup> Isaias xlv, 8.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. xi, 11.

thought himself unworthy to loosen the lacing of His shoe.<sup>4</sup> Yet God deemed Mary worthy to become the Saviour's Mother.

John the Baptist, the saint whom God had sent to prepare for the Christ the way to the hearts of men, would not presume to lay his sanctified hand on the sandals that covered the Saviour's feet. Yet it is given to us sinners to call Mother her who gave to the God-Man the form that clothed His divinity, and to touch her Mother's heart with our poor prayers.

Yes, she is the Mother of fair, pure love, our incomparable lover and advocate. For is she not the perfect and holy Queen of heaven and earth? A just queen loves her subjects. Is she not our blessed Mother? And where in this world is there love that equals the love of even a natural mother? Is she not, even though stainless from the instant of her conception, bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, and therefore our sister? Is she not the Mother of Christ, who gave up His life for us? Does a mother not love those whom her son loves? Does the beloved not love her lover?

"I love them that love me,"<sup>5</sup> she says in the voice of the Wise Man; and to such, to her devoted ones, above all others does she bring good things and blessings. For her love is not sham love. It is not the empty-handed urbanity of the world. It is the strongest and most powerful that men have known, save the infinite love of Christ, to which that of no creature can be compared. But just as through the Blessed Mother the greatest manifestation of Christ's love to mankind was accomplished, so through her He is pleased to answer most readily our cries for help.

And surely we need her help in the troubles and trials and temptations from which no life is free; in the fight against ourselves, our self-love, our selfishness. Surely we need her in the loneliness of a world throbbing with human hearts almost as selfish as our own, and too often bereft of true sympathy. Surely we need her to gain for us courage and strength in the struggle up the thorn-strewn path that leads from the valley of shadows, of pain and of death to the glorious summit of eternal light and life.

There are those who provide for themselves retreats in the solitude of virgin forests of the mountains, to which they may

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<sup>4</sup> Luke iii, 16.

<sup>5</sup> Proverbs viii, 17.

flee when moneyed cares or jaded appetites threaten to drive them distracted. To whom shall we go when the cares of life press so heavily that they wring from our hearts cries of anguish?

There are homes free from the burning heat of summer, and homes far-distant from the ravages of the winter's cold. Where shall we find refuge when the scorching blast of human passion threatens to wither our souls? When doubts and fears chill our hearts, when the warmth of divine comfort seems far withdrawn, and our spiritual life seems frozen to the very marrow, where shall we turn to find again a sure ray of hope to brighten the gloom? Whence shall come the flame to enkindle again in our souls the strengthening, encouraging fires of faith, hope, and devotion?

The saints found the answer to these questions—which have perplexed so many pious souls in all ages, and have turned the conceited and worldly wise to infidelity, bitterness, and despair,—the saints found the answer in Mary, the Mother of God. And every soul that ever winged its flight from this body of our death to the portals of heaven, before it entered found the same answer; for Christ, since He came to us through the Immaculate Virgin, seems to wish that we all should now go to Him likewise through her.

Who dare say, "I need not the help of God's Mother?" He perhaps who can truly say, "I have not sinned." Who can look down into the secret and innermost recesses of his soul, and say, "Were I to die now, I would go to heaven?" No, we have all offended. Even the just man falls seven times each day. We need a mother to help us and to shield us from the just wrath of our Father; and that Father, in His great love for His children, has given us a Mother who can. We hear the prophets of the Old Law thundering forth over the heads of the people the sentences of God's displeasure and condemnation. But Mary's prophecy to the faithful of the New Dispensation is one of peace and forgiveness: "His mercy is from generation unto generations to them that fear Him."<sup>6</sup> Ezechial<sup>7</sup> warned the Jews that for them there was no one to place a wall over against the vengeance of God. It is not so with us. The mercy of the Lord hath indeed appeared to us. "I am a wall," says our Mother in the Song of Songs, . . . "since I am become in His presence as

<sup>6</sup> Luke i, 50.

<sup>7</sup> Ezechial xiii.

one finding peace ;"<sup>8</sup> finding peace and mercy and forgiveness for you. I am the Mother of fear and of knowledge, the Mother of the troubled and sorrowful of heart, the Mother of them that suffer."

Was it not perhaps to let us know how she yearns to help the afflicted that, through the providence of God, we find her present in the story of the Saviour's life, in His sufferings, but not once in the scenes of His triumphs?

She saw not the manifestation of His glorious divinity on Thabor, before which His disciples, trembling, fell on their faces. She heard not the glad hosannas nor saw the forest of waving palm branches that heralded His triumphant entry into Jerusalem. She was not present at the resurrection; nor do we read that she was among those who witnessed her Divine Son's appearances during the following forty days and His ascension into heaven.

But in the darkness, beneath the black clouds rolling like frenzied demons over the sacrifice of Calvary, when all the spleen of hell seemed let loose in the jeering, frantic mob and in the turmoil of the elements—she stands beside the dying Christ. And as the earth, trembling and groaning, splits into long crevices to yield up the ghosts of dead men that walk again, the mob scatter, striking their breasts, rending their garments, tearing at their hair, hitting, kicking, pushing through the city gate in fear-stricken haste to reach their dwellings; and, in the gloom, her figure is still standing beside the dim outline of the Cross.

Long thin tongues of fire leap from the heavens and lick the dishevelled earth, lighting the surroundings in a painful flash.

Near the Cross is another figure. It is there to represent you.

The Mother lifts her tearless eyes to the face of the Son whom God had given her. There the little streams of blood that had trickled down from the thorn-crowned head have dried, and beneath is the pallor of on-rushing death. On that divine face is written pain and suffering as never before or since on human countenance. And now, Blessed Mother, we know why you have such incomparable sympathy for your suffering children; why you so readily respond to the distressful cry of your devoted ones.

The face of her dying Son has turned toward you and in the divine eyes is a tenderness and love unfathomable; and the same sweet voice that filled the little home of Nazareth for thirty years

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<sup>8</sup> Canticle of Canticles viii, 10.

with the music of heaven and thrilled her Mother's heart says: "Woman, behold thy son!" And to you: "Behold thy Mother!"

Will you take her to your own?

It is the privilege of the beloved of Christ to do so, to take the Queen of heaven and earth as their very own, their Mother, just as it was the privilege of the beloved disciple, St. John. To such is she truly the Mother of holy hope. All who remain faithful to her shall see God; for to be faithful to her is to do the will of her divine Son. Her devoted children need have no fear of death and the awakening; for they hear and heed her voice, persuading, as at the marriage feast of Cana: "Whatsoever He shall say to you, do ye!"<sup>9</sup>

—Basil Saylor, O. P.

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<sup>9</sup> John ii, 5.

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## GENIUS

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The stars shine bright  
 In the dark night;  
 The black sky seems to shimmer.  
 The moon arose,  
 Now fainter grows  
 The stars' keen light, and dimmer.  
 So thus monopolizing heaven,  
 Outshining e'en the starry seven,  
 It is a cynosure.  
 So genius doth outshine  
 Man, undivine,  
 Whiles the north star is sure!

—Chrysostom Kearns, O. P.