

SERMON OF ST. ALBERT THE GREAT ON THE ASSUMPTION

Translated by
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"Who is she that cometh forth as the morning rising, fair as the moon,
bright as the sun, terrible as an army set in array?"

(Canticle of Canticles, 6:9)



BSERVE THAT THESE WORDS, dearly beloved, are spoken in admiration of the most admirable Mother of God, and in them there are five points that we should attentively consider:

- I. Why is the Blessed Virgin spoken of as coming forth?
- II. For what reason is she likened unto the morning rising?
- III. Why is she described as beautiful as the moon?
- IV. Why is she declared as bright as the sun?
- V. Why is she mentioned as terrible as an army set in array?

These five attributes can, in a way, be said to come from the very name of this most glorious Virgin. She is called *Maria*. This name is made up of five letters. Hence, we place *M* for Mediatrix, *A* for Alleviatrix, *R* for Reparatrix, *I* for Illuminatrix, and *A* for Auxiliatrix. Thus we find why it is said of the Blessed Virgin that she "cometh forth as the morning rising, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army set in array."

The entire human race, on account of the sins of Adam and Eve, its first parents, as well as its own excesses, has incurred five evils: offense against God the Father, tribulation of the spirit, weakness of spiritual powers, beclouding of the mind and heart, and the attacks of cruel adversaries. It is because these five evils must be taken away that Mary is made Mediatrix, Alleviatrix, Reparatrix, Illuminatrix, and Auxiliatrix.

I

We read in the Gloss the answer to our first question. "When the Holy Mother of God was assumed into heaven amidst the sweet embraces of her glorified Son, all the angelic spirits and souls of the elect, breaking forth in praise of the Most Blessed Virgin, said, *Quae est ista?* That is to say, 'Who is she that is so good, so loving, so praiseworthy, and so admirable,

who lovingly *cometh forth*? It is for the guilty that she comes forth in her rôle as Mediatrix.' They knew that she had brought forth Jesus Who had reconciled the world to God the Father with His own blood. As St. Paul has told us, 'For God indeed was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself' (II Cor. 5:19). Hence every day we sing in the Mass: "Lamb of God Who takest away the sins of the world." All the angelic hosts also recognized that Mary was elevated above all the choirs of Angels, so that she might continuously intercede for sinners as a tender Mediatrix. Hence, the Secret in today's Mass: "May the prayer of the Mother of God help Thy people, O Lord, whom we know to have passed from this life in order to intercede for us in heavenly glory." Solomon, who is a figure of Christ, said to his mother, "My mother, ask; for I must not turn away thy face" (III Kings, 2:20).

In order that the Son intercede efficaciously for us with the Father, and the Mother with the Son, we must take care to offend neither Son nor Mother. He offends Christ and Mary who on Sundays consecrated to the Resurrection of the Son and on solemn Feasts of Our Lady, goes to dances and taverns, who takes part in games in which many oaths are heard, and indulges in luxuries. It is certain that Mary never took part in frivolous entertainments. "Never have I joined myself with them that play: neither have I made myself partaker with them that walk in lightness" (Tobias, 3:17).

II

As the morning rising. Here the Angels and holy souls recognize that the Blessed Mother is the Alleviatrix of those who labor in weakness of body and soul. It is said that at sunrise, the pains of those who are ill become lighter. We read in the Book of Genesis (32: 25-26) that the Angel blessed Jacob at the break of day. Let us also not fail to note that the rising morning (*aurora*) is derived from "golden hour" (*aurea hora*). Daybreak, rather than any other time, is the most precious time of day to them that are sick. And the Blessed Mother, before all the other Saints, is the closest and sweetest friend to weak sinners. She brought forth unto the whole world the Son of God, Who is the remedy for all illnesses. "The Most High hath created medicines out of the earth: and a wise man will not abhor them" (Ecclus. 38:4). Mary is this blessed earth, from which the Most High God the Father has created medicine for the faithful. This medi-

cine is Jesus Christ in His earthly life, for as you all know; in His divine life He has existed uncreated from all eternity. The man who is truly prudent will not abhor this medicine which is shown forth to us daily in the venerable Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus we pray: *Be Thou unto us, O Lord, a medicine of mind and heart.* Many have placed a mistress, or money, or any other thing acquired in an evil way before this medicine. They would rather lack the body of Christ than lose a lover, money, or to restore something which they acquired unjustly.

III

Fair as the moon. Here every blessed subject of the eternal King bears witness that the Blessed Virgin is the Reparatrix of all weaknesses. Just as the moon in her waxing restores humors to the body, thus did Mary conceive and bring forth the God of Israel, Who gives *power and strength to his people* (Ps. 67:36). Of this moon we read in Ecclesiasticus: “. . . the moon increasing wonderfully in her perfection” (43:8). Mary increases wonderfully in perfection like the moon, but unlike this heavenly body, she does not decrease. She goes *from virtue to virtue* (Ps. 83:8). So we, dearly beloved, should increase in practice of the virtues and good works from day to day. As the Lord said to Noe: “Increase and multiply, and fill the earth” (Gen. 9:1). In Noe we should see the wealthy and those who rule, and in his sons, the poor and those who are subjects. To all these the Lord says: “Increase in virtue, and multiply in good works, for thus you shall fill the land of the living.” Those who act contrary to these words of the Lord and slide daily further and further away from the perfection of charity, will end in the depths of degradation.

IV

Bright as the sun. The heavenly army now proclaims that the Blessed Virgin is the Illuminatrix of heaven and earth. Just as the sun illumines the darkness of this world, so does she prepare his tabernacle for the eternal Sun who is born of her and enlightens those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death. The prophets of old sang in glowing phrases of the rising of this sun. Malachias writes: “But unto you that fear My name, the Sun of justice shall arise, and health in His wings” (4:2).

Christ then is this Sun of justice Who illumines the world

by His most glorious life and sublime teachings. It is He also Who will declare the excesses of the impious in judgment. Truly there is "health in His wings." Eternal health is granted him upon whom this Sun has cast its beams, that is, whose body and soul He has glorified. We read in the Scriptures (Ecclus. 42:16), of the Son of God and His Mother: "The sun giving light hath looked upon all things: and full of the glory of the Lord is his work." By these words, my beloved brethren, understand that the sun of heaven is twofold—the Son of God and His Mother. These suns look upon all things, that is, to men of every station in life, and to them that are worthy they transmit special portions of eternal retribution, as is the custom with rulers.

V

Terrible as an army set in array. Here the blessed in heaven hail the Virgin Mary as the powerful Auxiliatrix of the faithful against the demons and the seven-fold throng of demoralizing vices.¹ Of her we read in the Canticle of Canticles: "Thy neck is as the tower of David, which is built with bulwarks: a thousand bucklers hang upon it, all the armour of valiant men" (4:4). Observe, brethren, that by the neck, the holy writer wishes to express the Blessed Virgin, for through her who is so perfect, the entire body of the Church is united to the Head Who is Christ. She is as the "tower of David," because she is firm and powerful, and the faithful find in her a ready refuge. She is, as it were, built with bulwarks, that is to say, she has aid from the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. A thousand bucklers who are the Angelic hosts hang upon her for the defense of them that fly to her. All the armour of valiant men hangs upon her because all the elect help him that seeks her protection and aid.

It is a fitting thing therefore, dearly beloved in Christ, that through true penance we fly to this powerful Auxiliatrix, so that through her we might have protection against all our enemies in the day of judgment.

Which may Thou deign to grant us Who liveth and reigneth God, world without end. Amen.

¹ i.e. the seven capital sins. (Tr.)