

## THE DAUGHTERS OF MARY

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*"Who shall find a valiant woman? far and from the uttermost coasts is the price of her." Proverbs, 31: 10.*



OMAN'S place in Christianity has always been a high one. A woman, she who gave the Eternal Word His human nature, Mary, is raised above all creatures and honored as Queen of Heaven. Her daughters—martyrs, virgins, holy women—are invoked as saints, the equals of her sons. In the Mass of matron-saints, the Church reads an appropriate passage of *Proverbs* in praise of the strong, the valiant woman:

Her children rose up, and called her blessed: her husband, and he praised her. Many daughters have gathered together riches: thou has surpassed them all. Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: the woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised (*Proverbs*, 31: 28, 30.)

Divine Providence orders the human race to its end by giving women definite offices distinct from the more rigorous duties of men. The Eternal Word Incarnate, the Head of the Mystical Body, Christ Our Lord, in governing and guiding the Church has made use of toilers from the weaker sex to accomplish great works in His vineyard.

Why? One reason is natural. By nature women have special talents and dispositions ordained to special, appropriate ends. Another reason is supernatural. These very talents are perfected by supernatural grace for the personal sanctification of the soul and to manifest the glory of God. God chooses weak instruments in order to manifest His glory more perfectly. ". . . the weak things of the world hath God chosen, that he may confound the strong" (I *Corinthians*, 1:27). Since women are so distinct from men, it is to be expected that Providence use women for special ends: that some tasks be performed only by women, that some souls be converted only by women.

### WOMEN IN HISTORY

Woman's natural talents stem from her vocation as a companion and mother to man. "It is not good for man to be alone"

(*Genesis*, 2:18). From the time of Eve, therefore, down through history women have played an important part in carrying out the designs of God. Eve herself gave the first sons and daughters to man. As companion and helpmate to Adam and mother of mankind, she fulfilled woman's natural and noblest function.

Women have been a powerful influence over men at all times—leading them to good and to evil. Eve seduced Adam to sin. Dalila, the Philistine harlot, brought about the downfall of Samson by coaxing him to tell her the secret of his strength. But women have also influenced men for good. Mary led St. John to a courageous act of loyalty in bringing him to watch with her at the foot of the Cross.

St. Mark names some of the women disciples at the crucifixion "... looking on afar off; among whom was Mary Magdalen, and Mary the mother of James the Less and Joseph, and Salome: who also when he was in Galilee followed him, and ministered to him, and many other women that came up with him to Jerusalem" (*Mark*, 15:40-41). For women played an important part throughout the public life of Christ. St. Luke mentions the company of Galilean women who traveled through the cities and towns with Our Lord and the twelve apostles: "... certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities; Mary who is called Magdalen, out of whom seven devils were sent forth, and Joanna the wife of Chusa, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who ministered unto him of their substance" (*Luke*, 8:2-3). The contribution of these holy women to the public life of Our Lord should not be forgotten. They provided the alms on which He and the disciples lived, at least during the Galilean ministry. They assisted at His burial (*Luke*, 23:55), provided spices for a more complete anointing after His burial, were witnesses of His resurrection (*Luke*, 24:1-10). Some of them were of wealth and social position. Joanna, the wife of the steward of King Herod is twice mentioned by St. Luke, as a follower of Christ in Galilee (Chapter 8) and as a witness of the resurrection (Chapter 24). Mary Magdalen seems also to have been a woman of some means. Witness the costly ointment which she poured on the feet of Christ.

Martha and Mary, of course, are the best known among the women who provided hospitality for Christ and His disciples. That they too had considerable resources is evident from their ability to entertain many guests in their home. Both were totally devoted to our Lord, Martha as the active servant "busy about

much serving," Mary as the contemplative at His feet, who had "chosen the better part" (*Luke*, 10:40-42).

The principal woman in the life of Christ, of course, was His mother, Mary. She was the most dedicated to Him of all women. Consecrated by her singular grace of freedom from original sin, she was set apart by the Holy Trinity from the first moment of her conception. Even before her Annunciation she had made a vow of virginity. Her *fiat*, "Be it done unto me according to thy word" (*Luke*, 1:38), sealed her dedication to her Creator and Son. By this *fiat* of dedication she gave Him more than any other human being ever gave: His human nature, herself as mother of His human nature, and her consent to the Incarnation in the name of the entire human race. This dedication carried Mary to the foot of the cross. It placed her among the disciples after the Resurrection, at the descent of the Holy Ghost on the infant Church. It continues even in eternity, for Mary as Queen of Heaven and Mediatrix of all Graces now rules the Church in the sense that she dispenses all graces given to men. As on the first Pentecost Sunday, when the Holy Ghost descended in tongues of fire, so today God makes the prayers of Mary the condition on which all favors are granted to men.

In the Old Testament, God often used women for virile tasks, choosing weak things of the world to confound the strong. By means of women, God delivered His chosen people from their enemies. Deborah led Israel to battle and afterwards sang a canticle of victory (*Judges*, 4-5). Esther, Queen of the Persians and a Jewess, interceded with her husband to save the Jews in Persia from being massacred. Judith single-handed killed the general of the Assyrian army, for which brave deed she was blessed and praised by her people: "Thou art the glory of Jerusalem, thou art the joy of Israel, thou art the honour of our people: For thou hast done manfully, and thy heart has been strengthened" (*Judith*, 15:10-11). These were some of the valiant women of the Old Testament, precursors and types of Mary, who saved their people from their enemies, as Mary saved us from our enemy, Satan. The Church uses the words quoted above in praise of Judith to honor the Blessed Virgin. They are to be found in the Marian Year Prayer by Pope Pius XII and in the Tract of the Mass for the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes: "Tu gloria Jerusalem . . ."

The women of the apostolic age were true daughters of Mary. Tabitha of Joppe (*Acts*, 9:36), "full of good works and

alms-deeds," was raised from the dead by St. Peter, who came to Joppe at the entreaty of the disciples after her death and found "the widows . . . weeping, shewing him the coats and garments which Dorcas made them" (*Acts*, 9:39). Lydia, St. Paul's first convert in Europe, "a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, one who worshipped God," placed her resources and house at his disposal, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there." And she "constrained" him to accept (*Acts*, 16:13-15).

One could not begin to list the wonders worked by valiant women in the Church since the apostolic age. Tender virgins like St. Agnes, Cecilia, Lucy, Anastasia and others resisted persecuting emperors and watered the soil of the Roman Empire with their life's blood, preparing it to receive the seed of faith. Catholic wives were sometimes the means of converting kings and nations. Clotilde influenced Clovis of the Franks, Bertha was instrumental in persuading Ethelbert of Kent to accept the faith.

Later the Church was preserved and reformed through women, always against bitter opposition. St. Catherine of Siena, the illiterate daughter of a dyer, induced the Pope to return to Rome from Avignon and effected a spiritual revival in parts of northern Italy. St. Teresa of Avila, who was in delicate health throughout most of her life, instituted the reform of the Carmelites in spite of the hostility of her own fellow-religious, of bishops, of secular rulers, and of whole cities.

The faith has been spread through women. In the year 1819, Pauline Jaricot, a wealthy young French woman, founded the Society for the Propagation of the Faith when she was only twenty years old. She spent the rest of her life in the active service of the Church, promoting the Association of the Living Rosary for the return of the French working class to the Church, and the Association of the Holy Childhood for the ransom of pagan babies. Her cause for beatification was introduced in Rome in 1930. The Pontifical Society of St. Peter the Apostle for Native Clergy was founded by two women, Stephanie and Jeanne Bigard.

And St. Therese of Lisieux, who died at the age of twenty-four and who never left the cloister of the Carmel in her native town, accomplished many spiritual wonders by her life of prayer and penance. A group of Eskimos in Canada were converted after dust from her grave had been sprinkled on them. At the universal request of missionaries, she was declared patroness of the missions by Pope Pius XI.

## THE NATURE OF WOMAN

Such great works done by such frail instruments! What is the nature of the humble creature which God has used for such varied tasks? All that is essentially womanly can be comprehended in one word—MOTHERHOOD. Womanliness can be summed up in two representative types of women, two symbols of motherhood—Eve, mother of mankind according to the flesh, and Mary, the Mother of God and the Mother of Mankind according to the spirit.

Woman the daughter of Eve, woman naturally considered, differs profoundly from man. She differs from him in temperament, talents, tastes, emotions. These differences have a physical basis in woman's biological function of bearing, feeding, and rearing children. Woman is made to cling to her husband, to protect and nourish her children. From this natural vocation flow her distinct mental endowments. By nature she is psychologically distinct from man.

Human nature has two spiritual powers: the reason, which knows, thinks, directs, and the will, which love, hates, moves. While every human being has both a reason and a will, the reason is generally more predominant in man, the will and the affections in woman because of her vocation as mate and mother of man. She is less intellectual and theoretical than man, more affectionate and practical; less active and aggressive, more passive and self-surrendering. Her realm is not the abstract but the particular, the concrete. Her role is to love and serve *this man, these children*. Her special field is loving, doing. Woman has more capacity for sympathy than man, more patience in suffering.

Naturally speaking, therefore, woman's status is that of a loving help-mate who follows the leadership of man. Men are at the head of the Church, of states, armies, universities, families. They plan and carry out the great works of human society. Woman's role is less striking and alluring but nevertheless essential. By her capacity for love, by her attention to the details of domestic life she gives man indispensable aid in his vocation of leadership. Hence woman's basic psychological need is to love totally, to surrender totally, to serve totally in a service of love. This is wifehood. This is motherhood. By such dedication alone will woman find outlet for her deepest instincts.

However, woman the daughter of Mary, woman supernaturally considered, is the equal of man as an adopted child of God and heir to the glorious life of heaven. In this life of grace she is



even at times the superior of man. St. Catherine of Siena and St. Theresa of Avila were advanced spiritually far beyond the men who ruled the Church in their day. They even surpassed their own spiritual directors. And the blessed Virgin is exalted not only above all men, but even above all the angels. This equality of women along with their distinctive traits has been emphasized by Pope Pius XII in a recent allocution (*Questa grande vostra adunata*):

As children of God, man and woman have a dignity in which they are absolutely equal; and they are equal, too, in regard to the supreme end of human life, which is everlasting union with God in the happiness of heaven. . . . But man and woman cannot maintain or perfect this equal dignity of theirs unless they respect and make use of the distinctive qualities which nature has bestowed on each sex. . . .

The supernatural exaltation of Mary is in perfect harmony with her feminine nature. It was fitting that the supreme elevation of the human *person* occur in a woman. For the human person must be subordinate to God, must be dedicated and devoted to Him in the relation of bride to bridegroom, must be more or less passive to His guidance. And Mary was the most perfect bride ever created by the divine Spouse. She was the most dedicated, the most devoted, the most loving.

It was also fitting that for the supreme elevation of human *nature* in the Incarnation God should choose the male sex. Thus the Eternal Word, when He assumed a human nature and became flesh, preserved his divine dignity as King, Leader, and Bridegroom of the creature. In Mary, His mother, He found His most loyal creature and subject, His most devoted and dedicated handmaid.

#### MARY THE MODEL OF SANCTITY

A woman, then, Mary most perfectly represents the relationship of creature to creator. She is the model of sanctity. Sanctity, or holiness, consists in the love of charity. And the essence of love is *to will good to someone*. Mary was the holiest of all creatures because she loved most intensely, because she willed good to God and man with the greatest fervor.

First, she willed good to God. But how can a creature will good to her Creator, who is infinite Goodness, who needs no creature's service for the enjoyment of His own eternal beatitude? By charity the creature wills God's own goodness to Himself. By the loving adoration of charity, the creature recognizes that

God is God, consents to God's possession of his own goodness, rejoices in the eternal beatitude of God, in the infinite joy which the three Persons of the Holy Trinity have in the possession of one another. Of course, this love of charity adds nothing to God; rather it perfects the creature. Yet it satisfies the definition of love: *to will good to someone*. And in this way from the moment of her conception Mary loved God more perfectly than all the angels and men.

She also loved God by willing another good to Him: that all men honor, praise, serve Him. And again she did this in a super-eminent degree. As Mother of God, she cooperated in the redemption of mankind, in restoring the human race to the friendship of God, in giving all men the opportunity of knowing and loving God. This divine role began with her consent at the Annunciation. It was continued through all the sorrows and joys of the infancy and hidden life of her Son. It was perfected and completed by her sharing in the Passion and Death of her Son as Co-Redemptrix and Queen of Martyrs. It goes on in eternity, in heaven, where as Mother of Mankind and Mediatrix of All Graces, she mothers every grace that is given to the human race from the merits of her Son. Thus she also wills the greatest good with the most intense love to all men: salvation, the happiness of possessing God eternally.

Mary was holiest then because she had the greatest charity. As creature and bride of the Holy Trinity she loved God most perfectly. As Mother of God, Co-Redemptrix, and Queen of Martyrs, she shared most intimately in offering extrinsic glory to God through the redemption of man. As Mother of Mankind she loves men more than any human mother, more than any saint, more than any angel.

Mary's sanctity was accomplished through MOTHERHOOD, the natural vocation of woman, for grace perfects nature, does not change or destroy it. Mary became the greatest saint as the physical Mother of the God-Man, Jesus Christ, and as the spiritual Mother of Mankind.

#### WOMAN'S VOCATION TODAY

Woman today and always must pursue her sanctification in accord with her nature, following Mary as her model. Like Mary, she will attain her temporal and eternal happiness through MOTHERHOOD, either physical or spiritual.

Physical motherhood is achieved of course in holy matrimony.

The married woman must imitate Mary, her exemplar, by practicing purity in wedlock: by total loyalty to her husband, by scorning the lewdness of birth prevention, by rejecting the possibility of the legalized adultery of divorce. She will not allow the pagan cult of youth and beauty to blind her to the fact that the generation of new life is the noblest operation of the body. She will see the bearing of children as the primary, necessary means of bringing souls to God. She will likewise follow Mary in her attention to the details of domestic life, in serving her husband and children. She will not only nourish but also educate her children, knowing that the home is the most effective place for teaching religion and morality. Thus she will be a mother, both spiritually and physically. Following Mary's example, she will work out her own salvation in accord with her nature and the grace given her in the sacrament of matrimony. She will fulfill the description of the ideal wife in *Proverbs*: dedicated to her household, providing for it, cherishing it—"a valiant woman . . . that feareth the Lord."

Spiritual motherhood after the pattern of Mary is the vocation of the unmarried woman. She will give expression to her maternal instincts by serving the Church in a celibate life—either as a consecrated religious or as a dedicated laywoman living a single life. Without children of her own flesh, she will yet love with a more intense and universal charity than if she were married, for

. . . the unmarried woman and the virgin thinketh on the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit. But she that is married thinketh on the things of the world, how she may please her husband.  
(I *Corinthians*, 7, 34)

Like Mary, her Mother, the virgin consecrated by religious vows makes a complete oblation of herself. By the vow of chastity she sacrifices all the rights of marriage, by the vow of poverty all rights to own and control the goods of this world, and by the vow of obedience her own will—the greatest, most precious sacrifice of all. In giving up these good things, in returning them to God, their source, the woman religious makes a supreme act of charity, of willing good to God and man. At the same time she sanctifies herself and works for the salvation of souls. The cloistered nun by her prayers wins the graces needed to convert souls from error and sin. The active sister not only prays for the conversion of sinners; she works for it also by ministering to the mental and physical needs of mankind. Women are essential to



the growth of the Church. Without their prayers, priests would be seriously impeded in preaching. Without their works, there would be few schools and hospitals at home and in the foreign missions.

The unmarried woman living in the world constitutes a special category in our day. It is estimated that there are about ten million single women in the United States who will never marry. If they are to escape the snares laid for women by efficient, organized, publicized paganism, to evade alcoholism, lust, and the idolatry of youth and beauty, if they are to attain happiness and salvation, it will be only by imitating their model and Mother, Mary. Dedicated to God in charity, the unmarried daughter of Mary will have the greatest respect for virginity and purity, despite modern disrespect for these virtues, despite the debasing and exploiting of sex in current entertainment and advertising. Although unmarried she will yet reverence matrimony as a holy union and the normal state of life for a laywoman. With the eyes of faith she will place the proper value on new life, knowing that every infant is born for a supernatural happiness. Personal sanctity, not worldly success, will be the goal of her life. She will "put . . . on the Lord Jesus Christ." She will "walk honestly, as in the day: not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and impurities, not in contention and envy" (*Romans*, 13:13-14). She will bring forth fruits worthy of a bride of Christ and child of Mary: "charity, joy, peace, patience, benignity, goodness, longanimity, mildness, faith, modesty, continency, chastity" (*Galatians*, 5:22-23).

In her activities the single woman will not try to rival men, but will be content to be a woman. Moved by an intense spiritual life and by her deep maternal instincts, she will offer her services to the Church as a spiritual mother. For there is as much for a woman to do for the Church now as there was in the days of Tabitha, Lydia, and Pauline Jaricot. There is greater need than ever for valiant women. There are many ways for a woman to bring forth Christ in souls today.

She can bring Christ into the market place by exemplifying His virtues in her own life, by showing His image in herself as she goes about making a living. She can also give generously of her income to support the charitable, educational, and missionary causes of the Church. She can give her time as well as her money in actually working for the Church, whether for the parish, diocese, or foreign missions.

She can pray. She can offer some prayer each day for the Church at home or in the missions—ejaculations, a rosary, Mass, or Holy Communion. To do this regularly requires generosity, sacrifice.

She can offer herself daily as a sacrifice by patiently accepting whatever suffering each day may bring. To resign oneself cheerfully to irritations, disappointments, fatigue, illness, and death demands great courage. To accept these crosses and offer them to God is to make oneself a sacrificial victim. And sacrificial victims are essential to the growth of Christ's Mystical Body. They do more than preachers to convert souls.

She can go farther and give herself as a lay worker, for example in the foreign missions. After a period of training, she can devote a number of years or her whole life to work in the missions. To give oneself in such work is most valiant, most sacrificial, most in the pattern of Mary, most Christ-like.

Whether married or single, a religious or a laywoman, the modern daughter of Mary must strive to become a valiant woman whose price is "far and from the uttermost coasts. Many daughters have gathered together riches." The daughter of Mary must surpass them all. "Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: the woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised."