

QUEEN OF PEACE

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OF THE MANY INVOCATIONS in Our Lady's Litany, no one comes to the lips more readily today than "*Queen of Peace, pray for us.*" Our hearts urge this petition heavenward with a great earnestness. Even after this plea for help has been uttered, it lingers on in the recesses of our minds. The words echo and re-echo through the chambers of the soul, a constant reminder of the modern world's greatest need, peace. The peace, which we seek through the most powerful intercession of our heavenly Queen, is harmony among nations, concord between the peoples of one country, and basically peace of soul.

What does it mean to call Mary Queen of Peace? Is this just a nice sounding title, a merely figurative tribute paid to her by loving children? The salutation signifies something infinitely greater than that. For Mary is a queen in the truest and noblest sense of the word. She is not named Queen of Peace only because of all creatures she is the most peace-loving. Our Lady is the Queen of Peace on account of her unique association with Christ the King.

To appreciate the solid basis for her royal dignity, we must first know the source of any queen's power and prerogatives. A queen, in the truest sense of the word, is not the woman who rules a country as its monarch simply because there is no male heir to the throne. In fact, she is king in everything except name since in her resides the royal power to command. Neither are we speaking of a Queen-Mother, who actually is queen before becoming mother of the present king. Therefore she does not derive her queenly status from him, but from his deceased Father who had been her husband. Properly speaking, a queen is the woman who reigns beside the king, because of her unique relationship to him. Since the royal couple are spouses, they are intimately united in all that concerns one another. His interests become hers. The two of them are made one in their mutual rights and duties.

The real king is not free to lead a private existence. He is a public person. The welfare of the entire kingdom is his own con-

cern. The common good is personified in him. The duties toward his subjects regulate the king's whole life. Along with this royal responsibility goes the right to rule all the people living within his realm. In practice this means to promulgate laws and to pass judgment on his subjects. Although the king usually governs indirectly through his ministers, the power to rule flows directly from him. His delegates can act only in his name.

Where a good king and queen are in power, peace also reigns. In their personal dedication to the general welfare, they stand in complete agreement with one another. She does not possess the right to command as he does. But prior to the royal command is a period of important deliberation, and here is where the queen exercises her power. The king looks to her as the only other person in the realm completely dedicated to the cause of the common good. Everyone else is influenced by his own private interests. And so the sovereign consults his royal consort about the course to be taken in the particular circumstances. The queen then enjoys a strong influential power in determining the king's command. This royal order in turn exercises a powerful influence upon the lives and actions of their subjects.

Among the primary concerns of a good king and queen is the establishment and preservation of peace in their land. They know well what tremendous hardships the waging of war visits upon their people. A program of peace always calls for a most wise rule. They must strive to order all their activity toward the harmony of friendly relations inside and outside the realm. The citizens of a country are much better disposed to live peacefully among themselves when they are convinced that their rulers are motivated by what is best for the well being of all. And so just laws will be issued that are truly directed toward the common good without imposing unnecessary burdens upon the shoulders of the people. Justice will be tempered by mercy in the execution and maintenance of law and order. The royal rulers will realize and sympathize with the social and economic conditions of their subjects. They themselves are regulated by wisdom, charity, justice, and mercy in governing the affairs of state. Certainly if this were the case in every country, there would be no difficulty in continuing concord with other nations. Of course we are speaking of the ideal government, and restrict our consideration to a royal government because of our purpose to appreciate better the Kingdom of Jesus and Mary. Since a true king and queen are united in their willing devotion to the happiness of their people,

the persuasions of one and the commands of the other, if obeyed, will lead to a true peace.

The ideal kingdom is perfectly realized where Christ reigns as our King, and Mary as our Queen. This kingdom has been referred to under various titles: the Communion of Saints, the Catholic Church, the Mystical Body of Christ. Even though all the names indicate the same community, each one emphasizes some special aspect. A brief consideration of them will help us to understand how Our Lady is truly a Queen because of her unique association with Our Lord. The definite causal connection existing between Christ's title to kingship and Mary's right to be queen will be more clearly seen.

Jesus' first claim to royal dignity is the fact that He is divine. Because He is the Son of God in Person, uniting the divine nature with a human nature, He is truly the Lord of all creation. At the beginning of his Gospel (1:3), St. John says of Him: "All things were made through him, and without him was made nothing that has been made." Christ as divine Creator made His own kingdom. Since Mary is truly the Mother of God, she shares in her Son's first title to royalty. She it is who conceived Him at Nazareth when He Whom the heavens cannot contain, at her free consent, took up His abode as true man in her virginal womb. St. Luke in the opening chapter of his Gospel gives us the inspired account of this most sacred event. "And the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God. And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb and shalt bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great and called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of David his father, and *he will be king over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.*'" (1:30-33); "But Mary said, 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word.' And the angel departed from her" (1:38). What greater indication of Mary's intimate association with Christ and His kingdom than the fact that a heavenly messenger awaits her consent to become His Mother. In a cave at Bethlehem, she gave birth to Him. Having a manger for His throne and a stable for His palace did not lessen Christ's royal dignity, but only enhanced the expression of His noble love for us. For He, a divine Person, the Lord and Master of all, came forth in His humanity from the most pure womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

On Calvary's heights our King and Queen gain their second

title to royal sovereignty. On the cross Christ conquered the powers of darkness. By the merits of His sacrifice He overcame the threefold force of sin, death, and Satan. His triumph was decisive. From His pierced side flowed the life-giving blood that was the price to be paid for His royal kingdom of the Church. The first Pope of that Church tells us: "You know that you were redeemed . . ., not with perishable things, with silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ" (I Peter, 1:18, 19). At the foot of the cross stood Mary, His Mother. She had freely consented to be His Mother knowing what the Prophets of the Old Testament had foretold about the sufferings of the Messiah. She had conceived Him not only that He might become man, but also that He might be our Redeemer. Her life of union with Him and the Kingdom He came to found reaches its climax on Calvary. Through her compassion, Mary made her will one with Christ's in suffering for the common good, the salvation of all mankind.

The Kingdom that was firmly founded at the foot of the cross is an eternal one. Christ rules forever with Mary as His Queen. She never ceases to be the Mother of God, a truth which is the root source of all her royal prerogatives. Of all women she alone was called to consent to become the Mother of Him Who is King from all eternity. This divine Maternity gave rise to her spiritual motherhood toward all men. For in giving birth to Christ, the Head of the Mystical Body, she also brought forth His members. He took human flesh from her virginal body in order to save us from our sins through His passion and death. Although Mary did not suffer the pangs of child-birth at Bethlehem, on Calvary she mothered the Kingdom of the Church amidst the greatest pain. She was Co-Redemptrix with Christ for our salvation. The merits of her compassion, united with and subordinated to the merits of His passion, gained eternal happiness for us. Our Lady's life of perfect union with Our Lord found its final completion with her Assumption into heaven. There Christ our King and Mary our Queen bestow upon us, the members of their Kingdom, the fruits of their merits. And so we see more clearly that Mary is truly a Queen because of her unique association with Christ the King.

The Kingdom of Jesus and Mary is pre-eminently one of peace. This peace is primarily spiritual, the tranquillity of order in the human soul. On the night before He died, Christ Himself, the Prince of Peace, said to His Apostles: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to

you. Do not let your heart be troubled or be afraid" (John, 14:27). The peace of Christ sets a man in order inside himself. Without this inner harmony, the concord of the whole community is jeopardized. We know only too well how difficult, even impossible, it may be to get along with others when something is wrong inside us. If we are selfish, then another person's rights are injured. Multiply the same basic disorder many times, and you see what can happen to a nation, in fact to the world.

The peace of Christ, which is the cornerstone of the common good, can come to us only through the grace of Christ. His grace alone lifts up and heals our fallen human natures. Since we all sinned in Adam, the father of our race, our souls begin their existence stained with original sin. Even after it has been washed away by the cleansing waters of Baptism, some disturbing effects of this sin remain. We do have difficulty at times in keeping our passions in order. There is a conflict between what we know should be done and what our lower appetites are attracting us to do. Even our understanding is darkened and our wills weakened by our inheritance of original sin. This makes for a devastating disorder in our lives which recede further and further from God, the source of all order. Without the grace of Christ giving us the strength sufficient to overcome temptations, peace of soul is impossible.

According to the magnificent wisdom and goodness of the divine plan, this grace of peace comes to us through Jesus and Mary. In all creation, both of them stand alone in their sovereign dedication to the common good of all mankind. Christ most perfectly personifies in Himself the common good. For in Him is resident the fullness of grace, and from Him, as Head of the Mystical Body, grace flows down into His members. Through Mary, who is called the Neck of this Body, comes every grace that we receive. She, the Mediatrix of all graces, enjoys the most powerful intercession in the Kingdom of Heaven. Because of her unique relationship with Christ, with Whom she is in perfect accord, her petitions infallibly lead to His command. And Christ's royal order is that His Queen distribute grace throughout the kingdom. For His rule, which is found in the New Law, is one of grace. This is truly His grace which brings peace into our souls by healing our fallen natures and at the same time elevates them to a share in the intimate and most peaceful life of God. Mary, who is the mediatrix and dispensatrix of this grace, is therefore most truly the Queen of Peace.

In his encyclical on the Kingship of Christ, Pope Pius XI tells us: "If the nations enter into the Kingdom of Christ, loyal to His Law, then the world of nations will receive that peace, which the King of Peace came to bring upon earth. For He came to reconcile all things in Himself; to serve and not to be served, a model of humility, teaching all men that 'His yoke is sweet and His burden light'." Since it is only in a world where men are at peace with themselves, that they can be at peace with one another, Jesus and Mary provide the only foundation for a true world peace. If men are not motivated by justice and charity in their dealings with one another, no treaty can be very secure or permanent. Only if men come to realize their higher unity in the Kingdom of Christ and Mary will there be harmony among nations and concord between the peoples of one land.

No more fitting conclusion to our consideration of the Queen of Peace could be placed than a quotation from Pope Pius XII's encyclical on the Queenship of Mary in which he designated May 31st as the date for the feast of Mary as Queen: "We also think that the feast which we have instituted through this Encyclical Letter, so that all may more clearly acknowledge and more zealously venerate the kind and maternal rule of the Mother of God, can contribute a great deal toward keeping, strengthening, and continuing the peace among nations which almost every day disquieting events disturb. Is she not the bow that God has placed in the clouds, the sign of the covenant that brings peace? 'Look upon the rainbow, and bless him that made it; it is very beautiful in its brightness. It encompasseth the heaven about with the circle of its glory, the hands of the Most High have displayed it' (Ecclesiasticus, 43:12, 13). Whoever, therefore, honors the Lady ruler of angels and of men—and let no one think himself exempt from the payment of that tribute of a grateful and loving soul—*let him call upon her as most truly Queen and as the Queen who brings peace.* Let him honor and guard the peace that is neither unpunished wickedness nor unrestrained license, but is concord well-ordered under the command and decree of the Divine Will. The maternal exhortations and orders of the Virgin Mary work to protect and increase this peace."