

Who is My Mother? Reflecting on Mary's Role in our Lives

Tony Cosentino, 2007

Virtue Link: Faith, Hope, Love, Fortitude
Catholic Character Themes: Community, Compassion, Discipleship, Reverence, Solidarity



Vatican II: Re-Expressing Who Mary is for the Church

Mary the Mother of Jesus holds a place of honour among Christians. Through her “yes” to God, Christ entered the world. With this in mind, the bishops at Second Vatican Council wanted to write about who Mary is for the Church. The challenge was to balance two approaches:

- ❖ Some wanted an entire document set apart to speak about Mary’s uniqueness.
- ❖ Others wanted to see Mary described as special member of the People of God, who like us, is redeemed by the death and resurrection of Jesus.

What emerged from the discussions was a portrayal of Our Lady that satisfied both sets of concerns. It spoke of Mary’s unique role in God’s saving plan for humankind; at the same time, it noted that Mary is a follower of Jesus. Like us, she was redeemed by her Son. The Council fathers decided to devote a chapter to her in its *Constitution on the Church* (also referred to by its Latin title, *Lumen Gentium* [LG]). By doing so, they were reminding us that Mary is a member of the Church, who holds a special place of honour among Christ’s faithful.

The Immaculate Conception Preserved from Sin by God’s Grace

Chapter 8 of Vatican II’s *Constitution on the Church* is entitled: *The Blessed Virgin Mary. Mother of God in the Mystery of Christ and the Church*. It re-states the Church’s teaching that Mary was preserved from original sin from the first moment of her existence by God’s grace. In this way, she was able to give a complete humanity, not wounded by sin, to Jesus her divine and human Son. In re-stating this doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, *Lumen Gentium* reaffirms her ancient title, *Mother of God*. (LG 53, 66).



The New Eve

Lumen Gentium also re-states the early Church Father St. Irenaeus’ reflection on Mary as the “New Eve.” Mary’s obedient “yes” to God’s plan undid the effects of Eve’s “yes” to sin, allowing Jesus (the *new Adam*) to enter the world. (LG 56)

Redeemed by Christ

Lumen Gentium also tells us that Mary was redeemed like us, by her Son, (LG. 53) and that she “cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope and burning charity in the work of the Saviour.” Mary is thus both “model of faith and charity” (LG 53) and “mother of all Christians in the order of grace.” (LG 61) All grace comes to us through Christ and his cross, and Mary is mother to Jesus and all who are united to



him in baptism.

A Christ-centered Life

Mary's whole life and existence was and is centered around Jesus, her Son:

- At the **Annunciation**, she responded "let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1, 38), and Jesus the Eternal Word took flesh in her womb.
- In the John's Gospel, Mary's last recorded words are "**Do whatever he [Jesus] tells you.**" (Jn 2,5)
- At **Pentecost**, she who intimately knew the Holy Spirit at the Annunciation, prays with the apostles for the coming of the Holy Spirit so that Christ's work might be continued through his Church. (See Acts 1, 14ff).



Mary's Assumption: A Sign of Hope

Mary is first among Christ's followers to share in her Son's bodily resurrection. At the end of time, we too will be united with our glorified bodies. Mary's assumption body and soul into heaven thus shows the baptized their glorified destiny in Christ. She is a sign of hope and comfort to all who follow her Son and his Gospel toward the fullness of life.

Baptism: Key to understanding Mary as Mother

Baptism makes us one with the crucified and risen Christ. This is a good starting point for understanding who Mary is for us. Joined in Baptism to the crucified and risen Jesus, we too can call on Mary as our mother. We who have been re-created to share in Christ's gift of everlasting life can confidently entrust ourselves to Mary, who intercedes with him for our needs. Such a mother could not refuse to hear the prayers of her children. The divine and human Son likewise cannot refuse the requests of his mother.



Christ-Centered Understanding

Christ always must be our starting point for understanding Mary.

- ❖ Mary is honoured so that her Son might be glorified and his Gospel followed. In this way, we understand that Mary was preserved from sin for the sake of Christ and those who are joined to him in baptism, (i.e. the Church).
- ❖ Mary was (and will always be) Christ's closest follower; like us, she was redeemed by the merits of his death and resurrection.
- ❖ As mother of Christ and of his Church (i.e. those united to Christ in baptism), she is first among God's saints in advocating with her Son for the needs of his followers.

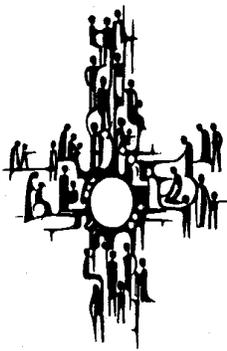
A Word About the Rosary

Pope John Paul II declared October 2002 to October 2003 *Year of the Rosary*. In his Apostolic Letter *The Rosary of the Virgin Mary (Rosarium Virginis Mariae)*, the Holy Father invited us to grow in conformity with Christ by contemplating his face together with Mary, through the Rosary. As we come to know Christ in her care, we can be sure that she will obtain for us the Holy Spirit's help on our faith journey:



“In the spiritual journey of the Rosary, based on the constant contemplation –in Mary’s company- of the face of Christ, this demanding ideal of being conformed to him is pursued through an association which could be described in terms of friendship. We are thereby enabled to enter naturally into Christ’s life and as it were to share his deepest feelings....

In this process of being conformed to Christ in the Rosary, we entrust ourselves in a special way to the maternal care of the Blessed virgin. She who is both the Mother of Christ and a member of the Church,...is at the same time the “Mother of the Church.” As such, she continually brings to birth children for the mystical Body of her Son. She does so through her intercession, imploring upon them the inexhaustible outpourings of the Spirit.” (No. 15)



Pope John Paul referred to the rosary as a prayer of *remembering*. In the liturgy, the Church *remembers* in faith the mysteries of Christ’s life. Through this sacred act of remembering, in the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ’s saving actions are rendered present to us again at Eucharist. In an analogous way, the rosary enables us to enter into the mysteries of Christ’s life with Mary and learn about them at her side. In so doing, the rosary helps sustain our prayer life that is rooted in the Eucharist and the Church’s liturgy. Contemplating the mysteries of Christ in this simple prayer can help us grow in our pilgrimage of faith to the glorious destiny that is ours together with Mary and all God’s children in Christ.



Mary, Mystical Rose

