

The Heart of Motherhood

St. Peter's Mary Mother of Mercy Marian Conference 2016

The ROLE OF MOTHERHOOD at work in our world is so interwoven within the Fabric of Humanity's existence that experts from all walks of life have posited thoughts concerning what it is that makes up "a mother." **SOCIOLOGISTS** have defined her. **PSYCHOLOGISTS** have analyzed her. **POLLSTERS** have surveyed her.

Popes, Bishops and Priests have exalted her... But here's what those who know her best – **CHILDREN between the ages of 6 and 8** – have to say about 'Who a Mother **IS**'?

- **Jimmy:** "A mommy is a wife. A mommy looks after children and **SHE YELLS.**"
- **Gary:** "A mother doesn't do anything except what she wants to. Nobody makes her take baths and naps – or takes her frog away."
- **Harry:** "If I forget to tell my mom: 'I need my shepherd costume tomorrow morning,' she finds one in the night. That is a mother."
- **Laura:** "Mothers are wonderful! **She spends all her time on you.** A mother is like God, except God is better."

There are certain experiences in this life which are just TOO BEAUTIFUL to be forgotten - **such as THE EXPERIENCE OF LOVE from a Mother.** And that's why around the year 150, Christians in the **Catacombs of Priscilla**, painted on the wall an image of Mary nursing the infant Jesus! Ever since the beginning of Mary's Motherhood, the faithful have Treasured the BEAUTY of Her Motherhood in Paintings, Icons and Statues.

To discover and embrace the sublime **Gift of Motherhood** as God desires for us to grasp through the life example of Mary, she who is not only the Mother of God, but of all the redeemed, WE MUST **anchor our understanding of the role entrusted to her care within the context of Salvation History as that of being the "New Eve."** We inherited death through Eve and life through Mary – hence why Mary is oftentimes referred to as "The Mother of all the living."

What an HONOUR! It's no wonder that our Blessed Mother said so eloquently when she visited her cousin Elizabeth: "**All generations shall call me BLESSED, because he that is Mighty has done a mighty thing for me!**" (Luke 1:48)

For Mary, like Eve before the fall, was preserved from all stains of Original Sin and by a SPECIAL GRACE of God committed NO SIN of any kind during her entire earthly life.

St. Irenaus, who lived back during the second century captured it this way: "**The knot of Eve's disobedience was untied by Mary's obedience; what the Virgin Eve bound through her unbelief, the Virgin Mary loosened by her Faith.**" In Mary, we discover that: **where God's will is done, there is heaven!**

Where God's will is done, THERE: **Earth becomes HEAVEN...**

Out of all things that have come to pass on this earth, at no other APPOINTED TIME THROUGHOUT HISTORY has there ever been "**an Hour**" whereby Heaven and Earth embraced the perfection of God the Father's will then at that very moment when His Beloved Son hung suspended between Heaven and Earth – nailed to a cross – **while looking into the eyes of his Beloved Mother...**

If anyone's ever wondered where and when **True Devotion to Mary** originated from, this NEW **dimension of being** was born onto the world by means of the Eternal Word's Command but minutes prior to his death out of love for us...

"Seeing his Mother and the disciple whom he loved standing near her, Jesus said to his mother, '*Woman, this is your son.*' Then he said to the disciple, '*This is your Mother.*' And from that hour – the disciple took her into his home." (John 19:25-27)

Back in the seminary when we were studying the Gospel of John, I'll forever remember our professor drawing our attention to **THREE words that are spoken over and over again all throughout John's Gospel**: "*THE BELOVED DISCIPLE*". For whatever reason, Tradition has instilled within us the idea that the Gospel writer is referring to John – **but that's a supposition on our part** – because when one takes a careful read through the entire Gospel of John, what you find is that '*The Beloved Disciple*' is never once mentioned by name!

I mean, we all know that Peter is clearly established as the representative of the institution known as the Church and the hierarchical structure given to us by our Lord, but **when it comes to WHO it was that was standing at the foot of the cross with Mary receiving our Lord's Final Instruction** – concerning the NEW KIND OF RELATIONSHIP that is to be embraced from that hour onwards with the Mother of the Word made Flesh – the Mother of God – in the Gospel of John, that **Beloved Disciple** is never mentioned by name...

And that's because EACH ONE OF US is being invited to **place ourselves in the shoes of this Disciple!** Everybody – men, women, children, the elderly – **EVERYONE is being invited to experience throughout the course of their lives that close and personal relationship with Jesus in such a way that we become 'The Beloved Disciple!'** That's THE FIRST THING: we have to first of all become his disciples - and we do so by means of picking up our crosses daily and following him. **For he is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.** And the Ultimate Witness that we give to our Master that we are truly in love with him, Disciples after his own heart, happens when we can look at who we are and what were doing with our lives and in all humility say: "*I have come here not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent me.*"

When that happens for us along the PATHWAY OF CONVERSION, then we become **PLEASING TO THE EYES of our Heavenly Father**. And when we please our Father, we please the Son – who by the power of the Holy Spirit bestows upon us the **GIFT**, the **PRIVILEGE** of tenderly saying to each one of us while he is PAYING THE PRICE for our Eternal Salvation: "**THIS is your Mother!**"

It's at the FOOT OF THE CROSS – and nowhere else – that **believers have the opportunity** to enter into a Special Relationship with Mary. And from there, we are to follow the example of the Beloved Disciple in the Scriptures – and **take her into the Home of our Heart...**

A priest well aged in years, **Fr. Leonce**, shared how when he was just a boy, a beautiful prayer originated out from his heart towards our Lady – and he carried through offering this prayer every day during the course of his entire life: "**Mother - KEEP ALIVE in me the heart of a child.**"

Russians call her, "BOGORODITZA" – '**She Who Gave Birth to God!**' Catherine Doherty relates that in every traditional Russian home, **there is an Icon of Mary hanging in the eastern corner of the bedroom**. There, VIGIL LIGHTS will burn before it night and day throughout the years. In every traditional Russian home, it's RIGHT THERE, before the image of Our Lady that the life of the family starts and ends.

On the day of Marriage, the bridegroom brings his bride inside that room while **they kneel together before her Gentle Face and ask for her benediction upon their marital love**, begging her and her son Jesus to make their love fruitful. There and then, they pray for a child which, even before a child is conceived, they dedicate to her and her Son – for she is the Mother of Him who is: **THE GIVER OF LIFE.**

What a beautiful tradition...

They say that the old Russian greeting begins with: "**May the peace of God be with you.**" But the farewell belongs to Mary: "*May the Blue Mantle of Our Lady cover you with its gracious folds and keep you safe.*"

As our Mary, Mother of Mercy exhibition draws to a close, now is a great time to pause and ask ourselves: "**How is my relationship with my Heavenly Mother?**" There is no right or wrong answer, but there is an answer...

As embarrassing as it is for me to say, nearly 17 years ago when **I entered the seminary in order to follow the Peace in my heart which the world could no longer offer me**, I wasn't able to list off the Mysteries of the Rosary of my life depended on it! During my first few months there, as I got used to the routine of things, I noticed that every night after supper, which was indicated by a bell, when we all went back to the Chapel in order to sing a **Marian Hymn to Our Lady**, well over half the seminarians would stay afterwards and pray a Rosary!

I was one of the first to grab my stuff and walk out of there thinking to myself: "**Man alive – that's like another 20 minutes of prayer. I don't have time for that...**"

When I was home following my first year in the seminary, at some point over the summer, the priest serving at my home parish said something in passing that stuck with me for whatever reason – and I can't even remember the context, he said: "*A priest's relationship with his mother is very important.*" 2x

And so I would ponder those words every once in a while because **I'm built in such a way that I can only handle talking to my mom on the phone, or I should say listening to my mom, once every three weeks or so for about 20 minutes or half an hour.** Even to this day... And so I would wonder, 'WHAT DOES THIS EVEN MEAN?'

And then one day, news came from home that there was a slight chance for mom to be diagnosed with something terminal. As I was walking towards the chapel in order to spend some time with our Lord, I remember pondering: "*You know Lord, if my relationship with my mother as a priest really is that important what's going to happen to me now or in the future when she dies?*"

SUDDENLY, something within me clicked and I realized that in as much as my relationship with my earthly mother **WAS** and **IS** important: there is a relationship with another Mother (*that I had yet to open myself to*) which **was of EVEN MORE IMPORTANCE in and for my life!!!**

Shortly thereafter, following the **Hymn to Our Lady** after supper, I began dropping to my knees and praying the Rosary daily with my brothers in the seminary...

Then he said to the disciple, '*This is your Mother.*' And from that hour – the disciple took her into his home." (John 19:25-27)

Taking Mary into the **HOME OF OUR HEARTS** means allowing her to have an Active Role in our lives and not some passive reality like clouds drifting by the noonday sun. The way that Mary responded to God's presence in her life as a young woman when she spoke her FIAT – "**Let it be done to me according to thy Word,**" – her example is meant to **serve as a Template** for each of us throughout the course of our own lives.

For *JUST AS* Salvation History was **completely dependent upon Mary's free assent to the Angel's message at the time of the Annunciation**, likewise, ever since Pentecost, the Spirit of the living God has been lavished

upon the world in such a way that there is a **DIALOGICAL CHARACTER** at work among creation when it comes to discerning how God DESIRES to shape and influence our lives.

The KEY that opens the doorway that leads into a **Fruitful Spiritual Life** – one that is ‘FILLED WITH GRACE’ is found in taking in the whole of Mary’s life example. For Our Blessed Mother, more than anyone else on earth following her Son, shows us the possibility of what can happen in us, with us, and through us if we are FULLY OPEN to God's Word!

Just as Mary receives life from the One *who gives her life*: THIS IS THE PATTERN of every believer’s life as well. She cheerfully and obediently submitted to God's will. **Her body became God's instrument by which He entered the world as a human being.** As God the Father depended upon the human willingness of Mary to cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that the will of his Son's presence on earth could become reality, so, **IF Christ is to be born in us, WE MUST let God use us.** Like Mary, we need to offer all of who we are and what we have: our bodies and our minds to the Living Spirit as INSTRUMENTS desiring to carry out the Will of the Lord.

But to surrender our lives in **complete abandonment** to God?? Well, that’s a TALL ORDER!! There’s a tendency in us to SEEK a compromise in ‘how much we give ourselves to God’ – ***we need Our Blessed Mother’s help in fighting our TENDENCIES to compromise.*** Throughout the history of the Church, Holiness of Life has always been connected to Devotion to Our Lady!!!

And if we’re going to actually go that route, something has to CLICK inside of us whereby we come to the realization that only by means of this Way of Life will we come to discover that **JOY, PEACE,** and **FULFILLMENT OF LIFE** can be a TRUE EXPERIENCE on earth.

It reminds me of what Mother Eagles have to do with their young in order to teach them how to fly. Sitting there in the comfort of a nest, being fed and kept warm is a nice way to spend one's day. Looking at what it would take to soar in the sky sure seems like a TALL ORDER for a young Eagle chick... and yet – that is the **ONLY WAY** through which they will **fulfill the perfection for their being in existence in the first place.**

And so it takes a Mother Eagle, ***one that lives within the HOME OF THE NEST,*** to come forward and through her example, teach the young ones how to fly by means of deliberately pushing them out of the nest – and then **catching them before they plunge to their doom.**

This pattern way of developing into **GOD'S INSTRUMENTS** after the example and now the HELP of Mary – she who literally Incarnated the Son of God on earth and who desires for us to ***analogously incarnate*** Jesus in our lives so that we can bring His resurrected presence into the world is what is expected of us.

This idea of being assisted with Help from Heaven in our development towards Holiness of life like a ‘young chick receives help from Mama Eagle’ is one that’s found in the Scriptures. This comes from the book of Deuteronomy chapter 32: “**God guarded Jacob as the apple of his eye, like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that SPREADS ITS WINGS TO CATCH THEM and carries them aloft.**” (Deuteronomy 32:10-11)

Chapter 68 of Vatican II’s document entitled “**Lumen Gentium**” meaning, “**LIGHT FOR THE NATIONS,**” reminds us that as we speak, our Blessed Mother Mary is glorified in heaven in body and soul. Mary and Jesus are in the kingdom of Heaven with their souls united to a **GLORIFIED ETERNAL BODY** – one that will never grow old or taste death again.

Mary is the image of our Hope that is TO BE PERFECTED IN THE WORLD.... And perhaps it's precisely because she is the fulfillment of every believer's deepest desire that **she has been commissioned to appear on earth numerous times over the last few centuries with Messages for us from Heaven.**

Earlier this week, I spent some time in the quiet of a morning reading and taking in a PANORAMIC UNDERSTANDING of all the Vatican apparitions we have displayed in this church. By the time I was halfway through reading our Blessed Mother's Messages, **I was left feeling DISTURBED and DISCONCERTED to say the least...** Her messages are filled with a *Motherly Heart tenderized by the pain of having to sit back and watch her children self-destruct through sin.*

The most common theme behind our Blessed Mother's **Warnings and Messages** is that we all best start Praying from the Heart as soon as possible! For **OUR WORLD is poised on the edge of an abyss of darkness that we at times catch a glimpse of by means of the craziness at work in our society** – but for the most part, the Horrors of Mortal Sin that surrounds us end up buried in the past like a Facebook post from a week ago...

Take for example that which gave rise to the Church's approval of the messages that have come to us from Akita, Japan. **Local Bishop John Ito**, declared the events of Akita, Japan, to be of SUPERNATURAL ORIGIN! He authorized, throughout his entire diocese, the veneration of **the Holy Mother of Akita**, on Easter Sunday, April 22, 1984. On that day, he said: **“The Message of Akita IS the Message of Fatima.”**

And while he approved the apparition – as is a Bishop's right within his own diocese: he sought Council from Rome a number of times to make sure that he was on the right path... In 1988, he went to Rome for the third time to seek the opinion of the Holy See. He said: **“I was worried because of the SERIOUSNESS of the Message.”**

Then JOSEPH CARDINAL RATZINGER, **our now Pope Emeritus Benedict the 16th**, was the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith during those days and he personally reassured **Bishop Ito** that he had acted properly, and **gave DEFINITIVE JUDGEMENT on the Akita events and Messages as reliable and worthy of belief.**

Our Blessed Mother has A MESSAGE FOR US, but *‘have we taken her into the home of our heart’* and will we allow for her to display a Message from Heaven BEFORE OUR INNER MINDS EYE?

“If men do not repent and better themselves, the Father will inflict a terrible punishment on all humanity. It will be a punishment GREATER THAN THE DELUGE, such as one will never have seen before. Fire will fall from the sky and will wipe out a great part of humanity, the good as well as the bad, sparing neither priests nor faithful.”

The survivors will find themselves so desolate that they will envy the dead. The only arms which will remain for you will be the Rosary and the Sign left by My Son. EACH DAY recite the prayers of the Rosary. With the Rosary: pray for the Pope, the Bishops and the priests.

“The work of the devil will infiltrate even into the Church in such a way that one will see Cardinals opposing Cardinals, Bishops against other Bishops. The priests who venerate Me will be scorned and opposed by their confreres (other priests). Churches and altars will be sacked. The Church WILL BE FULL OF THOSE WHO ACCEPT COMPROMISES, and the demon will press many priests and consecrated souls to leave the service of the Lord.

“...Pray very much the prayers of the Rosary. I alone am able to still save you from the calamities which approach. Those who place their confidence in Me will be saved.” (Saturday, October 13, 1973)

DISTURBING and DISCONCERTING – to say the least... It's practically in every single one of our Blessed Mother's Apparitions: the answer for her children to once again find peace in our hearts, in our families, and in our world. The solution is RIGHT NEXT TO US!

Ever so gently and softly, **the thread that would lead us out of the Labyrinth of our Fears, our Doubts and Turmoil *has already been placed into our sinful hands.*** The solution is **PRAYING A DAILY ROSARY.**

The rosary itself is so tiny, seemingly so weak – **and yet IT IS SO POWERFUL and profound that the World's Greatest Geniuses have not even begun to probe its depths...** It will lead us out from the Desert of Darkness, the place with the Prince of darkness tempts us to fall down and adore him.

Our Lady commands it of us over and over again – **much like a mother commands her young children to 'clean up their room' over and over again until finally:** it begins to stick – for some...

Why do we leave the Rosary un-said day in and day out, or *I should say un-prayed?*

During the sixth century BC, Aesop composed a fable entitled: **“The Young Thief and His Mother.”**

It's the tale of a young man who has been CAUGHT STEALING and he's about to be executed for his crime by the state. Moments prior to being let out to his execution, he makes a final request: **"I would like to speak with my mother."**

As his mother somewhat unhesitatingly approaches her son, with everyone watching, he says: **"Come closer, I want to whisper something to you."** And as she LEANS HER EAR IN towards him, he suddenly lunges forward with his mouth open and nearly bites off her ear!

Everyone is HORRIFIED!!!

She steps back grasping for her ear **while staring at her son in disbelief** while people all around begin making comments and asking him: **“Why? Why would you do such a cruel and inhumane thing towards your own mother? – you SICK!”**

“It's TO PUNISH HER,” he said **“when I was young I began stealing little things and I brought them home to Mother, but instead of rebuking and punishing me she laughed it off and told me it would never be noticed.**

IT'S BECAUSE OF HER that I am here today”.

Aesop's fable serves as a WARNING for all mothers throughout the world... Gotta **watch over the Temptation of PROVIDING EVERYTHING for your children that ensures all of their WORLDLY and MATERIAL desires are met in this life.**

Earthly mothers are entrusted with the formation of God's children for a certain number of years – and during that time – the most important, **the most BEAUTIFUL gift** that can be handed on to them is to bring them to the foot of the cross. For while children can be shielded from suffering, sin and death for a number of years, **eventually THE CROSS finds everyone!**

And that's because IT'S ONLY AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS that we are entrusted with the Gift and the Privilege of meeting our Heavenly Mother. All of us – especially young children – are in need of seeing our Savior suspended between Heaven and Earth – nailed to a cross – **while looking into our eyes with love beyond all telling as he addresses each one of us personally.**

"Seeing his Mother and the disciple whom he loved standing near her, Jesus said to his mother, '*Woman, this is your son.*' Then he said to the disciple, '*This is your Mother.*' And from that hour – the disciple took her into his home." (John 19:25-27)

As it is in every traditional Russian home, so it needs to be in each of our homes: **an icon, a painting, a statue of Mary blessing the family home.** Cause its RIGHT THERE, before the image of Our Lady that the life of the family starts and ends...

To introduce your children to their TRUE MOTHER, Mary – especially on this Mother's Day weekend – is the INSURANCE OF A LIFETIME that no amount of money can buy. For everyone who takes Mary as their Mother, '**takes Mary into the home of their heart**', when the time comes for them to cross through the Pearly Gates, they will be able to exclaim before all of the Angels and Saints in Heaven:

"IT'S BECAUSE OF HER! It's because of her that I am here today..."

Saluted by an Angel, **Mother of the Messiah**, given to the Church at Calvary, **Assumed into Paradise**, Declared the Second Eve, **PRAYED TO by Christians as early as the 2nd Century**, declared THEOTOKOS in the year 431, **Her Image carried by St. Gregory the great through the streets of Rome in 590**, credited by the Greeks with saving Constantinople in 626, **Inspirer of the Chartres Cathedral...**

Honored and revered by means of THE ROSARY, THE SCAPULAR, THE ANGELUS – A glorious sight to those **PURE OF HEART beginning with Catherine Laboure at the Rue du Bac in 1830** – the means through which Heaven has reached down-to-earth in **La Sallette, Lourdes, Knock, Fatima just to name a few apparition sites...**

She is the MAJESTIC MOTHER OF ALL THE LIVING and the **Mediatrice of all Graces** and she comes to us with a Message from Heaven:

Dear children, my Motherly Heart desires your **True Conversion** and a firm Faith – so that you may be able to spread Love and Peace to all those who surround you. But, ***my children***, do not forget: each of you is a unique world before the Heavenly Father. Therefore, ***permit the continuous working of the Holy Spirit to work on you***. Be my spiritually pure children.

In SPIRITUALITY *is beauty...*

Do not forget: that **in the Eucharist**, which is the HEART OF FAITH, my Son is always with you... He comes to you and breaks bread with you; because, **my children**, for your sake He died, He resurrected and IS COMING ANEW. These words of mine are familiar to you because they are the Truth, and **the Truth does not change.**

I invite you, **my children**: observe well THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES... and **know that you are my Son's most 'Beloved Disciples.'**