

Homily for the Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God

January 1st 2019

Mary, the Two-Fold Mother

Today is the Octave of Christmas, the Solemnity of Mary the Mother of God. The prayer used after Communion is taken from a liturgy of the seventh century. This prayer is notable for the fact that it invokes Mary, not only as the Mother of God but also as the Mother of the Church. It is the first recorded instance when this Marian title appears in a liturgical text.¹

I would like to read that pertinent clause for you now:

***for we rejoice to proclaim the blessed ever-Virgin Mary
Mother of your Son and Mother of the Church.***²

In the Vatican II Document on the Church in the Modern World, “Lumen Gentium” (Light of the Nations) this magisterial teaching refers to the dual theme of Mary as the Mother of God and Mother of the Church.

Mary is endowed with the high office and dignity of being the Mother of the Son of God, by which account she is also the beloved daughter of the Father and the temple of the Holy Spirit. Because of this gift of sublime grace she far surpasses all creatures, both in heaven and on earth.³

It is this dignity that we owe to Mary who is the pinnacle of the created order because she is the mother of Jesus.

Saint Thomas Aquinas, who died in 1274, teaches that Mary is the one person next to God the Father who could say to the divine Son: “You are my Son”. According to Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, who lived a century earlier than St. Thomas, having died in 1153, he writes: “Our Lady calls God Almighty, the Lord of the angels, her Son when she asks in all simplicity: ‘Son, why have you treated us so?’ What angel would dare to say such a thing? ... But Mary, fully

¹ Fernandez, Francis. In *Conversation with God – Volume 6 Part 1: Special Feasts: January – March* (Kindle Locations 189-194). Scepter (UK) Ltd. Kindle Edition.

² [*The Roman Missal: Renewed by Decree of the Most Holy Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, Promulgated by Authority of Pope Paul VI and Revised at the Direction of Pope John Paul II.*](#) (2011). (Third Typical Edition, p. 183). Washington D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

³ Catholic Church. (2011). [*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: Lumen Gentium.*](#) In *Vatican II Documents*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

aware of her motherhood, does not hesitate to call the Lord of heaven and earth ‘her Son’. And God is not offended for being called what He wanted to be. He truly is the Son of Mary.⁴

Let me return to Lumen Gentium, where having emphasized why Mary is superlative among all creatures as the Mother of God, the Vatican II Fathers go on to point out.

At the same time, however, because she belongs to the offspring of Adam she is one with all those who are to be saved. She is “the mother of the members of Christ ... having cooperated by charity that the faithful might be born in the Church, who are members of that Head.” Wherefore she is hailed as a pre-eminent and singular member of the Church, and as its type and excellent exemplar in faith and charity.

Here the Church underscores that Mary is not separate from us but “one with all who are to be saved”. There is a beautiful way this unity is expressed. “Mary having cooperated by charity that the faithful might be born in the Church”. Just as it was out of love for us that God sent His Son into the world (John 3.16). Mary shares in this same love and become the one from whom the Saviour is born. She also out of charity so that you and I can be born in the Church as she inspires us by her example and prayer to imitate her in faith and love.

It is as a consequence of this two-fold nature of Mary’s maternal role as Mother of God and the Church that Lumen Gentium declares at the end of the paragraph I’ve been quoting.

The Catholic Church, taught by the Holy Spirit, honors her with filial affection and piety as a most beloved mother.⁵

This is why we are here today. It is because Mother Church honours Mary with such filial affection that we have this passage from Galatians 4:

⁴ But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son born of a Woman.

The coming of Jesus in the fullness of time was to bring to completion what had been anticipated for centuries in the Old Testament. It is the only place in His writings St. Paul refers to Mary explicitly. Notice that as Paul celebrates how at just the right time Jesus was born of a woman he teaches that God became a child so that we could truly become adults. What do I mean by this?

In Galatians, St. Paul says that those who are still under the law are like children who have a tutor. Or like Michael and Jane Banks, who have Mary Poppins as their nanny. He says that those under the law are like minors who although heirs of their father’s estate cannot claim it as theirs. This is as far as the Old Testament can take us.

born under the law, ⁵ in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children.

⁴ Fernandez, Francis. In Conversation with God – Volume 6 Part 1: Special Feasts: January – March (Kindle Locations 226-231). Scepter (UK) Ltd. Kindle Edition.

⁵ Lumen Gentium 53

Notice Paul then says that when Jesus comes, his gracious face shines upon us in such a way that we can claim our full rights as adult children as we confidently declare God is our Father.

⁶ And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” ⁷ So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.⁶

At the heart of the story of redemption is our knowing we are adult children of our Father God.

God has, through Jesus, brought us into a place where we can know our true identity. When we look into the face of Jesus who took on our image, we discover who we really are, those who share in the family line of Jesus Christ. It is because of Jesus that the Blessing given to the Priest Aaron hundreds of years earlier, becomes fully realized:

***The LORD bless you and keep you:
²⁵ The LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you:
²⁶ The LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace. ⁷***

Those who know this blessing also know our dependence on Mary the Mother of the Church. And what is the consequence of a dependent adult faith?

With the Shepherds we are able to live with a great sense of purpose. We are told they went with haste to the manger. They desired above all else to live conformed to a life of worship centred in the One in the Bethlehem Manger. The same happens with us. The deeper our devotion to Mary as our Mother, the fuller will be our worship of Her Son, who is our Saviour, Lord and Brother.

Such purposeful living will result in our knowing with greater meaning these words at the end of our Gospel:

But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart⁸

The word “treasured” implies storing money in a bank. These words Mary heard from the shepherds were of great value that she saved and pondered them. This word “ponder” means to “piece together” It gives the connotation of Mary tossing these things around, pondering them, ruminating on them, turning over and over and piecing together the various parts of the mystery that is being revealed to her, of who her son really is.

⁶ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Ga 4:4–7). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

⁷ [*The Holy Bible*](#). (2006). (Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition, Nu 6:24–26). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

⁸ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Lk 2:19). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

On this day we are invited to treasure and ponder Mary is not only the Mother of God but our Mother too. This is the two-fold nature of her maternity. The more we piece together the meaning of her maternal care the more fully we can affirm the prayer with which we will conclude our Mass:

*for we rejoice to proclaim the blessed ever-Virgin Mary
Mother of your Son and Mother of the Church.
Through Christ our Lord.⁹*

⁹ [The Roman Missal: Renewed by Decree of the Most Holy Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, Promulgated by Authority of Pope Paul VI and Revised at the Direction of Pope John Paul II.](#) (2011). (Third Typical Edition, p. 183). Washington D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.