

Poor Mary!?

By Father Benedict A. Ehmann

Many Catholics today, in a kind of "pathetic fallacy," feel that way about the mother of Jesus. Poor Mary! Whatever became of the old-time devotion to her, so all-pervading in the Catholic community that it seemed to pre-empt the place of Jesus, much to the offence of our Protestant brethren? Is the almost total decline of Marian devotions according to the present mind of the Church? Is it a concession to Protestant sensitivities, a compromise toward ecumenical reconciliation? The answer must be a round NO.

That the situation of our Lady has changed, the evidence around us is too strong to be denied. The devotional habits of the older Catholics remain firm enough. But in the junior sector of the Catholic faithful, the Rosary is no longer their "thing," the dedication of May and October to Mary is obsolete, their prayer hardly takes note of Mary. Old-timers can hardly fail to notice that the *Hail Mary* is almost never said at the opening or closing of Catholic meetings; most of the time the Lord's Prayer stands alone.

But there is not one word of the teaching Church to authorize, certainly not to cause, this decline. Yet may not this "decline" be seen as a phase, a stage, in a process of purification? Let's face the truth. There was much that was excessive, unintelligent, distasteful, sometimes even unorthodox, in the recent era of Marian devotion. There's no space here to document this, or illustrate it. But it is not a rash assessment, nor should it give offense to those lovers of Mary who

INSIGHTS On Pastoral Liturgy

are keeping alert to what is being renewed in the Church.

Someone has said, and often been quoted: "There's never too much about Mary." It's a statement, though, open to serious misinterpretation! If it's meant to say that Mary's greatness surpasses anything we are able to say about her, that's true. But if it's taken to mean anything which would put Mary on a par with Jesus, it's heresy, and it says "too much."

We should look much more to our Lady of the Bible than to our Lady of Fatima. It's in the Bible and in the living word of the Church through her 19 centuries that we are to base our faith in Mary. True faith and devotion to her idealize her; they do not idolize her. She is the "seat of Wisdom," and wisdom means ideas, the right ideas, not the rhapsodies of emotion and imagination. Mary should be to every Catholic far more than a "rhapsody in blue."

In the center of our inner selves it is Jesus who must reign. He is to be the life of our lives, the love within our loving. It was so in Mary, to a superlative degree. Yet, greatest of all God's creatures, she remains a creature, with all that this means of infinite distance from the Creator. The grace by which God unites Himself to her and bridges that distance is essentially the same grace by which He unites Himself to us. The difference between her and us is not of the essence, but only of degree, though indeed that degree is beyond our reckoning. Still, in that inner shrine of self where Jesus makes His abode in each of us, Mary too, always close to Him, has her place of honor,

superior to all others except Him.

So, our Mary devotion should never outweigh or eclipse our Jesus devotion. We are never to regard Mary as our way of "getting through" to Jesus, as if He were hard to reach, and to persuade. At all times Jesus is our loving intercessor to the Father. Mary's role as intercessor is derived from His: He is the only essential Mediator. We find this beautifully said by the Fathers of Vatican Council II in that superb chapter 8 of the Constitution on the Church which is devoted to Mary and which should be required reading for all who really want to appreciate and love Mary better.

"All the salvific influence of the Blessed Virgin on men (and women) originates, not from some inner necessity, but from the divine pleasure. It flows from the superabundance of the merits of Christ, rests on His mediation, depends entirely on it and draws all its power from the same. In no way does it impede, but rather does it foster the immediate union of the faithful with Christ."

Mary is Jesus' mother, immeasurably less than He, yet immeasurably greater than we, because she is His mother, given by Him during His Calvary sacrifice to be the Mother of the Church. She is not to be a mediator between us and Jesus. Jesus needs no mediator. He is the only Mediator. Dedicating her to be our Mother, He assigns to her the supreme place in the Communion of Saints. All of us in this Christian community share in Jesus' merits, and we have the privilege thereby of being intercessors with Him. Mary is the closest to Him, and so is able now in heaven to plead our cause with her. Son more efficaciously than anyone else among the elect. It is for this reason she is called "mother of divine grace," and "Virgin most powerful."

The magisterium of the contemporary Church has not dethroned Mary. Rather, removing the devotional-kitsch and schmaltz, the Vatican Council reasserted where her true honor is to be found, and invited us to find it there, putting aside baby talk and childish attitudes.

Retreat Set

Campion Renewal Center, a recently opened Jesuit facility in Weston, Mass., 20 miles west of Boston, is conducting two Genesis 2 retreats during the summer months: July 1-8 and Aug. 10-17. The retreats integrate spiritual and psychological insights within a prayerful atmosphere. Through multi-media presentations, dialogue and quiet this retreat invites each participant to a deeper level of human and Christian living. There will be two guided retreats this summer: July 21-27 and Aug. 17. For more information Father Edward F. Hallen, SJ, should be contacted at Campion Renewal Center Weston, Mass. 02193, (617) 894-3199.

SPEAKER

Dryden — Dr. Howard Keeley, a surgeon, will address the Holy Cross Church Guild at 8 p.m., May 5, on his recent trip to Israel.

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WORD FOR SUNDAY



Fr. Albert Shamon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Jn. 10:1-18. (R1) Acts 4:8-12. (R2) 1 Jn. 3:1-2.

This Sunday's liturgy is devoted to the theme of the Good Shepherd. Twice in the Gospel Jesus says, "I am the Good Shepherd."

The shepherd is good, because he loves his own even to the point of giving his life for them; loves them with an intimacy much like that which exists between God the Father and His Son. Moreover, this love is not restrictive; it reaches out to others. "I have other sheep I must lead them too."

The shepherd loves his sheep as they are, with their fortunes and faults, some healthy and some sick, some better and some worse. He loves them, not because of their qualities, good or bad, but because they are his sheep and he is their shepherd. Parents love their children, no matter what — just because they are their children and parents are parents.

Generally, the sheep follow the shepherd. They follow him because they know him and know he would lay down his life for them. But, if they do not know him, then they will think him too demanding, and they will look for other shepherds. And here is where the hired hands come in. They take advantage of the ignorance of the sheep and conspire with them by offering an easy road.

Let a new prophet rise up and

ridicule, for instance, the recent Vatican document on sexual ethics, or let him deny personal sin or say there is no room for private auricular confession or that for the past 2,000 years the Church did not well understand the presence of our Lord in the Eucharist or that the Holy Rosary is obsolete, out of style for adult, mature Christians, let the new prophet arise and bruit his message and sure enough there will be sheep to follow the hireling! They might not know why they follow him, except they have to follow somebody and it is the hirelings today, the false shepherds, who blow their horns loudest and get all the coverage.

Just recently, for instance, WNET-TV, the metropolitan New York flagship station of the Public Broadcasting Service, has arbitrarily and capriciously denied air time to Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen because he is "a widely known Roman Catholic clergyman."

And yet, just recently the same network aired defamatory and biased programs designed to attack and ridicule the belief of Catholics. In fact just recently WNET interviewed a priest indicted in 1969 for morals, drug and liquor violations and introduced him as a "liberated priest" who disagreed with Vatican views on sex. The "liberated priest" blasted the Church. WNET aired his views but refused to let Archbishop Sheen present his series "What Now America?" This is happening all too frequently today in the mass media!

Sheep are capricious. They cannot be left alone. They need a shepherd. So do we. In matters of faith and morals we too have to be led. Why not follow a good shepherd — even if he takes us along the way of the cross?

Jesus said He was the Good Shepherd — He, and His Vicars, the Popes, and all bishops and pastors in union with the Pope. Whoever teaches anything foreign to the Gospel and the Magisterium of the Church is not a good shepherd, but a hireling, much to be feared and much to be avoided.



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