

A Tribute to My Mother and Your Mother

I cannot let this month of May slip by without pausing to express my love and devotion to her who has meant so much to me.



The words of the Book of Wisdom (Wis. 6:15-16) express my gratitude so perfectly: "To fix one's thoughts on her is perfect understanding, and he who is vigilant on her account will soon be free of care, because she goes about seeking those worthy of her, and she graciously appears to them in their paths and meets them in every thought."

She who is Christ's own gift to me has brought me close to Him. The II Vatican Council has assured me that true love for Mary leads to a deeper love for her Son: "The maternal duty of Mary toward men in no way obscures or diminishes this unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power. For all the saving influences of the Blessed Virgin on men originate, not from some inner necessity, but from the divine pleasure. They flow forth from the superabundance of the merits of Christ, rest on His mediation, depend entirely on it, and draw all their power from it. In no way do they impede the immediate union of the faithful with Christ. Rather, they foster this union." (Lumen Gentium #60, paragraph 6)

How this statement could have been interpreted by some as an official downgrading of Marian devotion surely puzzles me. I consider it rather a promotion of devotion to her by placing it on solid ground — free from the aberrations of sentimentality that have obscured it in the past. The II Vatican Council brought Mary from the pedestal of our idolatry and superstition in which she became remote from our daily pilgrimage and placed her firmly at the very center of our lives — as one identified with our daily needs.

The Council has proclaimed her again as a woman of faith so needed in a world filled with doubt and confusion; as a woman wrapped in

silence so needed as a model in a day of noise and confusion; as a woman of humility in a day of boastful self-esteem. She who dared to risk the unknown "Your will be done" is the model of all human salvation born of faith in Jesus, the Lord of our personal history and of all of human history and the only Name in which we are to be saved.

The essential truth about Mary is her role in making her Son perfectly human. God could have created a human nature for His Son without the cooperation of Mary. But He would not have been truly identified with us. It was through Mary that He chose to give His Son a human body and a human heart. The Heart of Jesus was formed physically in the womb of Mary, and began to throb within her. Through the mystery of Divine Providence, the Holy Spirit used the flesh and blood of the Virgin of Nazareth to fashion a perfect and complete nature for the Son of God. The laws of heredity were not repudiated in His birth! Since Mary was the only human parent of Christ, these laws applied to her relationship in a special way. All children are prolongations of both parents, but Christ is a human prolongation of Mary alone. Cardinal Newman wisely remarked: "He received her lineaments and her features."

But motherhood is more than a physical function. It involves a moral relationship to a child. Mary received everything from her Son on condition that she give everything back to Him. When the Gospels tell us that Jesus was subject to Mary, it makes reference to the mystery of a divine person submitting Himself to a formation and schooling from one whom He, Himself had created and formed. To Mary, then, we can attribute somewhat the moral beauty of Christ. Essentially, we know, the moral excellence of the humanity of Christ came from its contact with divinity. But Mary was allowed a mother's role in His training to be perfectly human and to advance like us in wisdom, age, and grace before God and man. Though the Gospels cloak the years of His infancy in silence, we can be secure in our belief that she had the great honor

of helping Him in His first utterance of the name of God, in teaching Him how to pray, how to honor His Father. We might well consider the Lord's prayer as a permanent form which He gave to the devotional thoughts He had learned from His mother. Her 'Magnificat' expresses the same ideas of honoring the Father, of prompting His Kingdom and of gratitude to the Father as the source of all blessings. It is also safe to believe that He learned lessons of human compassion and sympathy from Mary's example and that His emotional maturity was derived from the wholesome environment of Nazareth.

Most important for all of us is Mary's relationship to us. She is our Mother — yours and mine. My personal experience confirms my faith in the awesome truth. The artists from the XII to the XV Century represented Mother and Child in a way that expressed this truth. Mary was shown in apparent aloofness of Mother to Son. Her eyes were not upon Him. She held Him in front of her — rather than cradling Him in her arms and looking into His eyes. The artists were attempting to reveal Him to us who are His children and trying to show us the model for our own lives. Mary was saying: "Here is my Son — the model of what you should be."

Her Son consecrated His Mother to be the woman to enable us to be formed into the likeness of Her Son on Pentecost day. Assumed into Heaven, she pours forth the blessings which bring us to maturity as the life of her Son, is formed in us.

If I am to err in devotion to Mary, I hope it will be by excess rather than defect. Bypassing her can quickly lead to forgetting her Son. Our excesses she moderates through the assurance of her Magnificat which channels all praise to its unique source — her Son, the Lord Jesus, Who directed her whole history as he does ours.

I pray that I shall always remember you, Mary, as my Mother, and that I shall always remember that I am your son.

Pope Paul's Message for Vocations Sunday

On this Sunday set aside for the celebration of the World Day of Prayer for Vocations, we once again feel the need to address ourselves to you in a spirit of affectionate and trustful communion, not only in order to associate ourselves with the prayer which you are offering today to the Lord but also in order to share with you the intentions and thoughts which fill our heart.



We speak to you in fact on behalf of a cause which is essential and therefore permanent and decisive in the Church; we speak to you, taking once again in our

hand the text of the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* which we addressed to you at the climax of the Holy Year, in the fervor of religious reawakening evoked by the Jubilee celebration; we speak to you under the ever fresh and salutary effect of the very words of the Gospel.

"And there are other sheep I have and these I have to lead as well. They too will listen to my voice" (Jn 10:16). And how will they listen — we may ask with Saint Paul — if there is no one to speak, if there is no one to preach and evangelize? The voice of Jesus, the Word of God, the living Word of the Father, is always there. But it is also necessary — and this is a wonderful aspect of the mystery of the Church — that there be men and women to take it up and repeat it, to transmit it and spread it, enabling it to resound through every generation and in all parts of the world. As if to illustrate in a graphic manner the intimate connection between vocation and evangelization, Jesus has given to us in himself an incomparable example; through the entire span of his public life he made his voice heard among his own people and in his own country: "Now after this he made his way through towns and villages preaching, and proclaiming the Good News of the kingdom of God" (Lk 8:1). He was thus the first and the greatest evangelizer. And then when he left this world, he wished his word and his Gospel to

remain with us always: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away" (Matt 24:35). He wished his voice to continue to be heard by humanity: "Go out to the whole world; proclaim the Good News to all creation" (Mk 16:15). And in order that this might come about, he gathered together the new People of God, which "is also used by him as an instrument for the redemption of all, and is sent forth into the whole world as the light of the world and the salt of the earth" (Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 9). For this reason "the whole Church is missionary, and the work of evangelization is a basic duty of the People of God" (Decree *Ad Gentes*, 35).

Now, therefore, it devolves upon us, upon our generation of believers, to listen to the voice of the Lord and to lead others to listen to it; to accept his word and to give it to others; to live it and bear witness to it; to be evangelized and to evangelize. All this is one and the same commitment, the various elements of which are inseparable, as the complementary acts of one single mission.

Now, Brothers and sons and daughters, let us reflect together. You know that in the Church there exists this oneness of mission, but the roles, the ministries and the service are different. There is, then, a variety of vocations: "There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are varieties of service, but the same Lord. There are many forms of work, but all of them, in all men, are the work of the same God" (1 Cor 12:4-7). Within this variety of calls the mission of the priest stands out above all in an unmistakable manner, for it is at the very heart of the marvelous and never-ending venture of evangelization. To be priests! "By the power of the sacrament of Orders... they are consecrated to preach the Gospel... Partakers of the function of Christ the sole Mediator they announce the divine word to all. They labor in word and doctrine, believing what they have read and meditated upon in the Law of the Lord, teaching what they believe, and practicing what they teach" (Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 28). As wise collaborators with the episcopal order, they must also sanctify and guide their brothers and sisters in the faith, once

they have preached that faith. In this variety of vocations, a special place is occupied by deacons. To be deacons! They are ordained to serve the People of God, in communion with the bishops and the priests; they serve particularly in the ministry of the Divine word, teaching, exhorting, evangelizing, as they walk in the truth of the Lord.

In this variety of callings a privileged place is held by those consecrated by religious vows. To be consecrated to God! This means to offer one's life in the service of the Gospel, often in the outposts of the missions, and to render the Gospel credible through many different forms of works of charity and through the witness of Christian holiness. This is a most noble task which is offered to all men and women, without any distinction; it is a vast field which lies open to the generous zeal and well-known energy of men religious and to the dedication, particular sensitivity and inventiveness of women religious.

In this variety of callings we cannot forget the laity, who are called precisely "to collaborate with their pastors in the service of the ecclesial community, by exercising a great variety of ministries, according to the grace and charisms which the Lord is pleased to give them."

And now, dearly beloved sons and daughters, let us pray together. We have spoken of graces and charisms: every vocation in the Church is a gift of God, and he alone possesses the treasury and secret of his gifts.

So many ways open up before us. But we know that they remain untrodden unless people decide to follow them. And we also know that this decision does not come only from free choice: the grace of the Lord is necessary — the grace which calls us, enlightens us and encourages us. For this, we must now pray:

We ask you, Lord, to continue to bless and enrich your Church with the gifts of your vocations. We pray that many may be willing to listen to your voice and may continue to give joy to the Church with the generosity and faithfulness of their response.

Amen.