

Mary's Motherhood Is Linked to All Mothers

Following are excerpts from the text of an address by Pope John Paul II.

The Christmas period has drawn to an end. The feast of the Epiphany has passed too. But (we) still refer to the fundamental content of the truths which the Christmas period puts before our eyes every year.



They appear in a particular depth. It takes time to look at them with the open eyes of the spirit, which has the right and the need to meditate on the truth, to contemplate its whole simplicity and depth.

During the octave of Christmas, the Church turns the eyes of our spirit towards the mystery of Motherhood. The last day of the octave, which is also the first day of the new year, is the feast of the Motherhood of the Mother of God. In this way, stress is laid on the "place" of the Mother, the maternal "dimension" in the whole mystery of the birth of God.

This Mother bears the name of Mary. The Church venerates her in a special way. The cult it renders to her surpasses the cult of all other saints. It venerates her precisely because she was the Mother; because she was elected to be the Mother of the Son of God; because she gave that Son, who is the Eternal Word, his "body" in time, she gave him "humanity at a moment of history."

The Church inserts this particular veneration of the Mother of God in the whole cycle of the liturgical year, during which the moment of the human conception of the Son of God is stressed, discretely but also very solemnly, by means of the Annunciation, celebrated on March 25, nine months before Christmas. It can be said that during this whole period,

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from March 25 to Dec. 25, the Church walks with Mary who, like every mother, waits for the moment of the birth: Christmas Day.

And at the same time during this period Mary "walks" with the Church. Her maternal waiting is inscribed discretely in the life of the Church every year. All that happened between Nazareth, Ain Karin, and Bethlehem, is the subject of the liturgy of the life of the Church, of prayer — especially the prayer of the rosary, and of contemplation. A particular feast dedicated to the Virgin's maternal waiting which used to be celebrated on Dec. 18, has now disappeared from the liturgical year.

Inserting in this way the mystery of the Virgin's maternal waiting in the rhythm of its liturgy the church — against the background of the mystery of those months which unite the moment of birth with the moment of conception — meditates on the whole spiritual dimension of the motherhood of the Mother of God.

This spiritual motherhood began at the same time as the physical motherhood. At the moment of the annunciation, Mary had the following conversation with the announcing angel: "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" (The angel answered:) "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God."

Her spiritual motherhood started at the same time as her physical motherhood. Thus this motherhood filled the nine months of waiting for the moment of the birth, like the 30 years spent between Bethlehem, Egypt and Nazareth, as well as the later years during which Jesus, after leaving his home in Nazareth, taught the Gospel of the Kingdom, the years that ended with the events of Calvary and the Cross. There the spiritual motherhood reached its key moment, in a certain sense. "When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!"

Thus he bound her, his own Mother in a new way to man: to man, to whom he transmitted the Gospel. He bound her to every man. He bound her to the Church on the day of its historic birth, the day of Pentecost. From that day the whole Church has her as Mother. All men have her as Mother. They understand the words spoken from the Cross as addressed to each of them. The Mother of all men. Spiritual motherhood knows no limits. It extends in time and in space. It reaches so many human hearts. It reaches whole nations. Motherhood is the favorite subject, and perhaps the most frequent one, of the creativity of the human spirit. It is an element which constitutes the inner life of so many men. It is the keystone of human culture. Motherhood: a great, splendid, fundamental human reality from the beginning called with its own name by the Creator. Accepted again in the Mystery of the Birth of God in time. Contained in it, in this mystery. Inseparably united with it.

Christian Unity

'Almost a Universal Observance'

By Father Charles Angell, SA

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More and more each year we find Christians coming together to discuss the cause of their divisions and to pray for the unity which Christ wishes all his followers to enjoy.

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is now an almost universal observance among Christians during January.

(The week opens this year on Friday, Jan. 18.)

Yet it is interesting to note that more than half a century had to pass from the time of its beginning, when Christians had to pray separately for unity, until recently when, for the first time, they found themselves able to pray together that God would unite them.

From the beginning of the Christian era, all the great Christian liturgies have contained petitions for Christian unity. For example, the Anglican Book of Common Prayer contains an invocation which asks God "to inspire continually the universal Church with the spirit of truth, unity and concord." Prayers for unity are also found in Patristic, Roman, Byzantine and Protestant forms of worship.

In addition to the official worship of the various Christian churches, there have been in recent times a number of movements which sought to unite members of various confessions in a common effort to promote prayer for the unity of all Christians. We shall sketch some of these briefly.

In the early nineteenth century several prayer campaigns promoted by Evangelical Protestants and — associated with the great revivals of the period, called upon God to send forth the Holy Spirit upon all Christians. Even though these prayer movements transcended denominational lines, they usually did not contain specific reference to the visible unity of Christians as we now think of it.

The initiative for explicit prayer for Christian

reunion came principally from Anglicans and from individual Roman Catholics, however.

The first society formed with the explicit aim of unity was the Association for the Promotion of Unity of Christendom. Founded in 1857 by Dr. Frederick George Lee, an Anglican, and Ambrose Philips de Lisle, a Roman Catholic layman, the association claimed a membership of 5,000 Anglicans, 1,000 Roman Catholics and 300 Greek Orthodox by 1864. Catholic participation was short-lived however. On the petition of the Catholic bishops of England, the association was condemned by the Holy Office in 1864.

Despite the Holy See's opposition, because of the possible danger of religious indifference, the papacy did encourage prayer on the part of Catholics for the return of "dissidents" to the Church. Pope Leo XII asked the prayer of the rosary and a novena for this purpose, the latter to take place before the feast of Pentecost.

The Lambeth Conferences also regularly called on Anglicans to pray for the reunion of all Christians according to the will of Christ.

However, none of the hierarchical initiatives resulted in any immediate or notable upsurge in prayer among Christians for unity.

That was to be effected by a remarkable man whose career as an apostle of prayer for Christian unity left an indelible mark upon the world.

He was Paul Francis Wattson, a clergyman of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States. Early in his career, he came to the conclusion that the successor of St. Peter, the Roman pontiff, was by divine plan the center of unity of the Church.

In 1898, after 13 years of preaching and pastoral work, Father Wattson founded (in conjunction with a similarly minded Anglo-Roman nun, Lurana Mary White) a new Franciscan religious community within the Anglican Communion known as the Society of the Atonement. Father Wattson began his community

atop an isolated mount of the Hudson Valley, which he called Graymoor.

In 1903, Father Wattson founded "The Lamp," a journal to promote Christian unity. Across every page ran the heading "Ut omnes unum sint," "That all may be one," the priestly prayer of Christ for unity.

Toward the end of 1907, Spencer Jones, an Anglican priest, wrote to Father Wattson suggesting that the Feast of St. Peter be observed throughout the world as a day of prayer, and that sermons be given on the question of reunion with the Holy See. Father Paul, in turn suggested eight days of prayer from Jan. 18 to 25.

At first the week of prayer was known as the Church Unity Octave; it was blessed by Pope St. Pius X in 1909 when Father Wattson and his community entered the Roman Catholic Church; and Pope Benedict XV extended the observance to the entire Church in 1916.

In 1935, Father Paul Couturier promoted the week as one of prayer for the reunification of all Christians and not simply the union of Anglicans and Catholics.

Meanwhile, beginning in 1920, the Conference of Faith and Order in Geneva, Orthodox, Anglicans and Protestants had been cooperating in the promotion of a week of prayer for unity each year at Pentecost. In 1941 they changed the dates to coincide with the January week of prayer so that Christians could unite at one-time in prayer for reunion.

During those years, many Catholics were opposed to the program because they feared that vague formulas which spoke simply of unity "according to the mind of Christ" might sow confusion and religious indifference among the faithful.

That was solved in 1964 with the Decree on Ecumenism of the Second Vatican Council. Thus, in 1966, for the first time in the long and varied history of prayers for unity, all Christians were able to cooperate in a common Week of Prayer for Unity.