

Mary, as model of faith and as perfect disciple is found again in the gospel of John. John never gives Mary her proper name. In two key places (at the beginning of the public ministry in Cana, and at the end of his ministry at Calvary) where the mother of Jesus appears, she is called “woman.” By calling her in this more generic word, John is consciously taking her out of the role of motherhood simply in the biological sense, and placing her in the symbolic role of disciple. He is setting her forth as a type or model of faith and discipleship. Thus, at Cana, Mary is showing her trust in the power of Her Son, as well as her great faith in his power and love. (Jn. 2:5; 19:27).

Statement-3

The understanding of Mary as model of faith and perfect disciple gives a basis for the Church’s teaching on Mary as (a) mother of Jesus Christ, (b) mother and type of the Church, and (c) ever Virgin. That is her faith is the basis for her biological motherhood; her faith like the faith of the Church is fruitful in giving life to Jesus, and her virginity is not only physical, but a total, integral commitment and giving of herself to God in faith and in love. Three major ways of pointing to the greatness of Mary would be by saying that she is: 1. Mother of God; 2. Mother of the Church; and 3. Blessed Mary ever Virgin.

1. Mary is Mother of God because of her faith. She did not become Mother of God. Only because she spoke a generous “fiat” in faith, did she become Mother of God.
2. Mary has been proposed as mother and type of the Church. This has deep roots in the patristic era of the Church. This point was noted by Pope Paul VI, when at the close of Vatican II stated that Mary most fittingly belonged in the Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) rather than in a separate statement or decree, because at Bethlehem, her yes brought forth her firstborn, Jesus, who is the Church. Again Mary is present with the apostles as they await in prayer for the Holy Ghost (Acts 1:14). She assists and strengthens the apostles by her faith for the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost.
3. Mary is ever a virgin. Not only is she a virgin in the physical sense, but in the true and deepest meaning of a virginal life, one that places itself unconditionally at God’s disposal. Mary is the woman of faith, who heard God’s call and surrenders unconditionally. This attitude is maintained through her whole life as she remains with her Son even to the cross.

In pamphlet-1 (statements 1-3), we have reflected on the biblical basis for the greatness of Mary. In pamphlet-2 (statements 4-9), we will explore the various dimensions of her faith and their significance for Christian faith today. In pamphlet-3 (statements 10-12), points specifically to the Catholic nature of devotion to Mary.

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Mary, Model of Faith and Perfect Disciple



Part I of III

Reflection on the Study of the Life of Mary

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“All ages to come shall call me blessed” (Lk. :48)). This prophetic statement of Mary in her Magnificat is being fulfilled in the Catholic tradition. In this study we shall examine why we call her blessed. What does the greatness of Mary consist of? This is a topic of interest not only to Roman Catholics, but one of deep ecumenical significance. By reflecting on the mystery of God’s love in the life of Mary, especially as revealed in the Scriptures, we hope to show that all Christians should both reverence and learn from Mary, who is Model of Faith and Perfect Disciple.

Our reflections take the form of twelve summary statements. Statements 1-3 focus on the biblical basis for the greatness of Mary. Statements 4-9 explore the various dimensions of her faith and their significance for Christian faith today. The final statements 10-12 point to the specifically Catholic nature of devotion to Mary.

These reflections will only be successful if they lead the reader to a deeper understanding of the faith life of Mary and a deeper understanding of the grace and love of God which called Mary to faith and calls us to faith today.

Statement-I

Faith means basically a firm YES to God and God’s revelation. Thus a contemporary understanding of Mary aptly views her as MODEL OF FAITH and PERFECT DISCIPLE. “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the Word of God and put it into practice” (Lk. 8:21).

We need concrete examples, particularly persons who show what is the meaning of Christianity. Saints are precisely those men and women whom the Church designates by canonization to serve as role models. Above all the saints is Mary, Queen of all Saints. From an article in *The Church Today*, we read of Mary: “She is hailed as pre-eminent and as a wholly unique member of the Church, and as its type and outstanding model in faith and charity.” (No. 53).

What is faith? In essence, faith is our YES to God—a graced response to God’s call and word. Mary is the model of faith for her strong, generous, and continual YES to God’s revelation, “I am the servant of the Lord: let it be done to me according to your word” (Lk. 1:38).

Mary is also the perfect disciple. Christian discipleship has two key elements. A disciple (stemming from the Latin) is one who learns, who listens to, and follows the teaching of the master. As the gospel stories show, Mary was the closest to Jesus from his birth to his death on the cross. Thus she is the supreme example of the one who follows the way or teaching of Jesus (the master), and follows him on the way.

Statement-2

Scripture basis for this understanding of Mary is found in the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles (Lk. 1:38-45; 8:19-21; 11:27-28; Acts 1:14; Jn. 2:1-12; 19:25-27).

Devotion to Mary should draw its inspiration from the Bible. To show that Mary is model of faith and perfect disciple, we will begin not with the stories of the conception and birth of Jesus, but with an incident from the public life as found in Luke 8: 19-21.

Jesus is teaching, when word comes that his mother and brothers are outside and wish to see him. Jesus answers, somewhat surprisingly, “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and put it into practice” (Lk. 8:21). Here Jesus the master points to the true greatness of Mary. He is not rebuffing her, but saying that true greatness is her faith. Even if she is his biological mother, more important, and the basis for the deepest relationship to Jesus is that she hears God’s word and keeps it.

The same point is made in Luke 11:27-28. An unknown woman exclaims to Jesus: “Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breast that you sucked.” Jesus replies: “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!” By this answer Jesus does not deny the greatness of Mary as his physical mother, but says that true blessedness consists essentially in hearing and doing God’s will.

Another perspective is also seen in the story of the Annunciation, where Mary gives her “fiat”, her free and complete act of faith in the power of God. “Be it done to me according to your word” (Lk.1:38). The story of the Visitation makes the same point. Elizabeth blesses Mary, among all woman, and blessed is the fruit of her womb. Then Elizabeth praises Mary, and points to her greatness, her faith: “Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord” (Lk. 1:45). This same message is in the Acts of the Apostles (1:14), where we find Mary waiting with the apostles for the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and when Christ is again born in them and the Church and its mission begins.