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Marian Mariology

CHAPTER 33



The veneration of Mary, when properly understood, permeates the entire life of the Church; it is a dimension of dogma and of piety, of Christology and of ecclesiology. This dimension needs to be made explicit today in connection with the problems of humanity. Mariology expresses something fundamental to the Christian life itself, to the Christian experience of the world.

Sound Mariology has always been understood in Christological terms. If the Gospel revealed nothing more than the fact that Jesus Christ, God and man, was born of Mary, this alone would be sufficient for the Church to love her and to draw theological conclusions from pondering this relationship of Mother and Son. We need no other revelations. Mary is a self-evident and essential *datum* and dimension of the Gospel.

Chapter one centers on Catechesis flowing from Byzantine Marian spirituality with commentary by Brother John M. Samaha, S.M. Chapter 2 discusses Mariology today with commentary by Rev. Professor Michael Lapierre, S.J. The remaining chapters are commentaries on various Marian topics by Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J. (1914– 2000).

Chapter 33

Through Mary to Jesus

by Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J.

When we say through Mary, to Jesus, we mean that:

- Through Mary's voluntary consent we have received Jesus.
- Through Mary's example we are better able to imitate Jesus.
- Through Mary's intercession we obtain graces from Jesus.
To better understand what these phrases mean, is to more deeply appreciate what it means to be a Catholic.

We are so accustomed to thinking that what God wants, He also does, that we have to tell ourselves this must be qualified.

There are two kinds of creatures in this world:

- There are those that do the will of God necessarily, because they have to, like the sun which has to shine, and the trees which have to grow, and the fish which have to swim.
- And there are creatures that do the will of God voluntarily, because they want to.

In order to teach us this most important lesson in life, that God wants us to do His will voluntarily, He did not become Incarnate without human cooperation. At the Annunciation, Mary represented the whole human race with whom God wished to join Himself, as the Church says, in marriage. God asked Mary to consent. She did. And by her consent, Jesus the Son of God became the Son of Mary.

If Jesus was conceived and born into the world because of Mary, He also best reflects His virtues for us to imitate in the person of His Mother. What are we saying? We are saying that when God became man, He not only used her body, so to speak, to take on our humanity, He also used her soul to manifest the attributes of His divinity.

We should expect, in human language, Christ who is the Incarnate God, to be all holy. But Mary was not divine; she was not infinite; she was not the Creator. She was human like us, finite like us, and a creature like us. That is why Mary is so profoundly imitable. We can identify with her humanity and see that we, too, although pathetically human, have a chance to become holy.

Unlike Mary, we were not conceived without sin. But we may legitimately aspire to die without sin. Moreover, like Mary, we are to become holy. It must be possible. Why? Because what God did in Mary, He can also – though in lesser measure – do in us.

All the while we should remind ourselves that like us, Mary had to live by faith. Unlike Christ, she did not enjoy the vision of God. She had to believe, as Elizabeth told us, that the promises God made to her would be fulfilled. Mary is the living refutation of the myth that human nature – mere human nature – is capable of great virtue.

We need this reassurance in our day, when all around us there is so much lust and cruelty, so much crude self-esteem and pride, so much cowardice in high places and so much forgetfulness of God.

Humanity is not to be despaired of, in ourselves or in others. It is made for heaven, and therefore holiness, as the goodness as Mary demonstrates. In the *Paradiso*, the poet Dante addresses our Lady: "Thou art she who didst man's substance glorify. So that its own Maker did not fear, even to be made of its mortality."

Yes, Mary glorified our humanity. She has also given us hope. We dare not despair of our own future sanctity, seeing what marvels God has produced in Mary's humanity.

The Church in her teaching and the saints in their writings sometimes appear excessive in the power they attribute to Mary's intercession with her Son. But her intercessory power is not exaggerated as Cardinal Newman so clearly explains.

"This is why the Blessed Virgin is called powerful, because she has, more than anyone else, more than all angels and saints, this great, prevailing gift of prayer. No one has access to the Almighty as His Mother has; none has merit such as hers. Her son will deny her nothing that she asks; and herein lies her power. While she defends the Church, neither height nor depth, neither men nor evil spirits, neither great monarchs, nor craft of man, nor popular violence can avail to harm us; for human life is short, but Mary reigns above, a Queen forever."

The source of her powerful intercession with Christ, therefore, is her sanctity, her nearness to Christ as His Mother, and her appointment by Christ to be our Mother, too.

The holier a person is the more effective is that person's prayer, and Mary is the Queen of all saints.

The closer a person is to Christ, the more certainly He hears that person's prayer. And Mary could not have been closer to the One she carried for nine months, gave Him birth, and reared Him as man, for the Redemption of the world.

The more sublime the office in the Church to which a person is chosen, the more effective channel of grace that person becomes. But Mary has no mere office in the Church. When Christ on the Cross told John, "Behold thy Mother," John represented all of us. And when the Savior told her, "Behold thy son," He made her the Mother of us all.

Is it any wonder the Church has us say what must sound like an impossible prayer, the *Memorare*. We pray, "Remember O most gracious Virgin Mary that never was it known that *anyone* who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, and sought thy intercession was left unaided."

This is the infallible Church teaching us to trust that Mary will *never* forsake those who call upon her aid, but will infallibly and successfully present their needs to her Divine Son.

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