

The Blessed Virgin Mary: Doctrine and Devotion/Session 1

REQUIRED READING

The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council reaffirmed the Church's special love for Mary due to her role in salvation history and her important link to Christ's work. The following is excerpted from Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium, promulgated by His Holiness, Pope Paul VI, on Nov. 21, 1964.

I. Introduction

52. Wishing in his supreme goodness and wisdom to effect the redemption of the world, "when the fullness of time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman . . . that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal 4:4). "He for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnated by the Holy Spirit from the Virgin Mary." This divine mystery of salvation is revealed to us and continued in the Church, which the Lord established as his body. Joined to Christ the head and in communion with all his saints, the faithful must in the first place reverence the memory "of the glorious ever Virgin Mary, Mother of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ."

53. The Virgin Mary, who at the message of the angel received the Word of God in her heart and in her body and gave Life to the world, is acknowledged and honored as being truly the Mother of God and of the redeemer. Redeemed, in a more exalted fashion, by reason of the merits of her Son and united to him by a close and indissoluble tie, she is endowed with the high office and dignity of the Mother of the Son of God, and therefore she is also the beloved daughter of the Father and the temple of the Holy Spirit. Because of this gift of sublime grace she far surpasses all creatures, both in heaven and on earth. But, being of the race of Adam, she is at the same time also united to all those who are to be saved; indeed, "she is clearly the mother of the members of Christ ... since she has by her charity joined in bringing about the birth of believers in the Church, who are members of its head." Wherefore 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. The Catholic Church taught by the Holy Spirit, honors charity. The Catholic Church taught by the Holy Spirit, honors her with filial affection and devotion as a most beloved mother.

54. Wherefore this sacred synod, while expounding the doctrine on the Church, in which the divine Redeemer brings about our salvation, intends to set forth painstakingly both the role of the Blessed Virgin in the mystery of the Incarnate Word and the Mystical Body, and the duties of the redeemed towards the Mother of God, who is mother of Christ and mother of men, and most of all those who believe. It does not, however, intend to give a complete doctrine on Mary, nor does it wish to decide those questions which the work of theologians has not yet fully clarified. Those opinions therefore may be lawfully retained which are propounded in Catholic schools concerning her, who occupies a place in the Church which is the highest after Christ and also closest to us.

II. The Function of the Blessed Virgin in the Plan of Salvation

55. The sacred writings of the Old and New Testaments, as well as venerable tradition, show the role of the Mother of the Savior in the plan of salvation in an ever clearer light and call our attention to it. The books of the Old Testament describe the history of salvation, by which the coming of Christ into the world was slowly prepared. The earliest documents, as they are read in the Church and are understood in the light of a further and full revelation, bring the figure of a woman, Mother of the Redeemer, into a gradually clearer light. Considered in this light, she is already prophetically foreshadowed in the promise of victory over the serpent which was given to our first parents after their fall into sin (cf. Gen 3:15). Likewise she is the virgin who shall conceive and bear a son, whose name shall be called Emmanuel (cf. Is 8:14; Mic 5:2-3; Mt 1:22-23). She stands out among the poor and humble of the Lord, who confidently hope for and receive salvation from him. After a long period of waiting the times are fulfilled in her, the exalted Daughter of Sion and the new plan of salvation is established, when the Son of God has taken human nature from her, that he might in the mysteries of his flesh free man from sin.

56. The Father of mercies willed that the incarnation should be preceded by the acceptance of her who was predestined to be the mother of His Son, so that just as a woman contributed to death, so also a woman should contribute to life. That is true in outstanding fashion of the mother of Jesus, who gave to the world Him who is Life itself and who renews all things, and who was enriched by God with the gifts which befit such a role. It is no wonder therefore that the usage prevailed among the Fathers whereby they called the mother of God entirely holy and free from all stain of sin, as though fashioned by the Holy Spirit and formed as a new creature. Adorned from the first instant of her conception with the radiance of an entirely unique holiness, the Virgin of Nazareth is greeted, on God's command, by an angel messenger as "full of grace", and to the heavenly messenger she replies: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to thy word". Thus Mary, a daughter

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of Adam, consenting to the divine Word, became the mother of Jesus, the one and only Mediator. Embracing God's salvific will with a full heart and impeded by no sin, she devoted herself totally as a handmaid of the Lord to the person and work of her Son, under Him and with Him, by the grace of almighty God, serving the mystery of redemption. Rightly therefore the holy Fathers see her as used by God not merely in a passive way, but as freely cooperating in the work of human salvation through faith and obedience. For, as St. Irenaeus says, she "being obedient, became the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race." Hence not a few of the early Fathers gladly assert in their preaching, "The knot of Eve's disobedience was untied by Mary's obedience; what the virgin Eve bound through her unbelief, the Virgin Mary loosened by her faith." Comparing Mary with Eve, they call her "the Mother of the living, and still more often they say: "death through Eve, life through Mary."

57. This union of the Mother with the Son in the work of salvation is made manifest from the time of Christ's virginal conception up to His death it is shown first of all when Mary, arising in haste to go to visit Elizabeth, is greeted by her as blessed because of her belief in the promise of salvation and the precursor leaped with joy in the womb of his mother. This union is manifest also at the birth of Our Lord, who did not diminish His mother's virginal integrity but sanctified it, when the Mother of God joyfully showed her firstborn Son to the shepherds and Magi. When she presented Him to the Lord in the temple, making the offering of the poor, she heard Simeon foretelling at the same time that her Son would be a sign of contradiction and that a sword would pierce the mother's soul that out of many hearts thoughts might be revealed. When the Child Jesus was lost and they had sought Him sorrowing, His parents found Him in the temple, taken up with the things that were His Father's business; and they did not understand the word of their Son. His Mother indeed kept these things to be pondered over in her heart.

58. In the public life of Jesus Mary appears prominently; at the very beginning when at the marriage feast of Cana, moved with pity, she brought about by her intercession the beginning of miracles of Jesus the Messiah (cf. Jn 2:1-11). In the course of her Son's preaching she received the words whereby, in extolling a kingdom beyond the concerns and ties of flesh and blood, he declared blessed those who heard and kept the word of God (cf. Mk 3:35; par. Lk 11:27-27) as she was faithfully doing (cf. Lk 2:19; 51). Thus the Blessed Virgin advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and faithfully persevered in her union with her Son unto the cross, where she stood, in keeping with the divine plan, enduring with her only begotten Son the intensity of his suffering, associated herself with his sacrifice in her mother's heart, and lovingly consenting to the immolation of this victim which was born of her. Finally, she was given by the same Christ Jesus dying on the cross as a mother to his disciple, with these words: "Woman, behold thy son" (Jn 19:26-27)

59. But since it had pleased God not to manifest solemnly the mystery of the salvation of the human race before he would pour forth the Spirit promised by Christ, we see the apostles before the day of Pentecost "persevering with one mind in prayer with the women and Mary the Mother of Jesus, and with his brethren" (Acts 1:14), and we also see Mary by her prayers imploring the gift of the Spirit, who had already overshadowed her in the Annunciation. Finally the Immaculate Virgin preserved free from all stain of original sin, was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, when her earthly life was over, and exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things, that she might be the more fully conformed to her Son, the Lord of lords, (cf. Apoc 19:16) and conqueror of sin and death.

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COURSE OUTLINE Mary's Marvelous Mission

Principal Guide: Faith + Doctrine = True Devotion of Mary

I. THE MEMORARE

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thine intercession was left unaided. Inspired by this confidence, I fly unto thee, O Virgin of virgins, my mother; to thee do I come, before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in thy mercy hear and answer me. Amen.

II. INTRODUCTION : AN OVERVIEW OF GOD'S PLAN FOR MARY

A. Mary: Marian Profile

- i. Mother of the Redeemer, Mother of the Redeemed
- ii. Member of the Church
"The Second Vatican Council reminds us that Mary is a member of the Church who "occupies a place in the Church which is the highest after Christ and also closest to us." She is the first and the greatest of all the Disciples of Christ..." (*United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, p. 143)
- iii. Model
- iv. Messenger (Apparitions)

DISCUSSION:

Sr. Sheila described the four "M's" of the Marian Profile.

What image of the Marian Profile was most familiar to you? Why? Which was the least familiar to you?

B. Mary: Ecclesial Role (post Vatican II: Hans Urs von Balthasar)

- i. Paul: The Church of Evangelization
- ii. John: The Church of Contemplative Prayer
- iii. Peter: The Church as Institution
- iv. Mary: The Church as Disciple/ Marian Profile

III. THE BIBLICAL PORTRAIT OF MARY: FIRST & GREATEST OF DISCIPLES

A. BLESSED Virgin Mary: The descriptive "Blessed"/interpretive key in light of the Marian Biblical profile

B. BLESSEDNESS: Jesus' Definition/ Luke 11

"Blessed are those who hear God's word and put it into practice."

- i. Blest vs. Blessed
- ii. Blest (Barak/Benedictus): ask for God's favor or bestow a blessing
- iii. Blessed (Ashre, Makairos, Beatus): state of being/geography of the heart joy & peace (Beatitudes)

C. BIBLICAL EVIDENCE of MARY'S BLESSEDNESS

Scriptural texts consistently portray Mary as a "Blessed" one or disciple

- i. Model of Discipleship
- ii. Luke(1): "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord Let it be done to me according to your word."
-FIAT: Mary's faith/ humility/ obedience of a disciple
- iii. Luke (Elizabeth as witness): "Blessed is she who believed the Lord's words to her would be fulfilled."
- iv. Luke (Mary's Magnificat): All generations will call me blessed.
- v. Luke (Presentation of Jesus): Mary as model disciple of perseverance of faith and determination of hope "a sword would pierce her heart." (Luke 2)
- vi. John (Cana) "Do whatever he tells you." (John 2)
- vii. Acts of the Apostles: "All these devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers." (Acts 1)

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BREAK & DISCUSSION:

Discuss the biblical sense of “makairos.” How does this understanding of “blessed” differ from the word “happy,” especially as it relates to translations of the Beatitudes?

IV. THE CHURCH’S TEACHING: LUMEN GENTIUM CHAPTER 8

(The Role of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Mystery of Christ and the Church)

“...true devotion consists neither in fruitless and passing emotion, nor in a certain vain credulity, rather, it proceeds from true faith by which we are led to know the excellence of the Mother of God and are moved to filial love toward our mother and to the imitation of her virtues ...”

A. “Marialis Cultus” (Paul VI)

- i. Mary: an *example to the faithful* for the way in which in her own particular life
- ii. Mary: fully and responsibly accepted the will of God, because she ♥ *heard the word of God and acted on it*; charity and spirit of service were the driving force of her actions.
- iii. Mary is worthy of imitation because *she was the ♥ first and ♥ most perfect of Christ’s disciples.* (#35)
- iv. *(She) offers them the perfect model of the disciple of the Lord: the disciple who builds up the earthly and temporal city while being a diligent pilgrim towards the heavenly and eternal city, the disciple who works for that justice which sets free the oppressed and for that charity which assists the needy. But above all, the disciple who is the active witness of that love which builds up Christ in people’s hearts.* (#37)

B. CONSEQUENCE: Mary is FIRST and most perfect DISCIPLE

- i. Quintessential role model (CCC 494, 970, 2030)
- ii. luminous witness
- iii. shows us how Christians must be open to God’s call and respond as she did: (Cf. USCCA, p. 104)

DISCUSSION:

Discuss the differences between a high, middle and low Mariology.

-How would you describe your own devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary in light of these terms?

V. OLD TESTAMENT TYPOLOGY (hints/clues)

A. Mary is the New Eve (Mother of the Church)

- i. “Thus the knot of Eve’s disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary. What the virgin Eve had bound in unbelief, the Virgin Mary loosed through faith. (St. Irenaeus, “Adversus Haereses”/189AD)
- ii. Just as Jesus is the New Adam (I Cor 15:45) Mary is the New Eve (whose name means “mother of the living”) The New Adam (Jesus) has a corresponding figure: the New Eve, whose “Yes” to God

B. Mary is the Ark of the New Covenant

- i. Tablets of Moses/ the Decalogue:: Mary bears the New Moses/ New Law
- ii. Aaron’s Staff :: Mary bears Jesus: The Good Shepherd
- iii. The Manna :: Mary bears Jesus: The Bread of Life

C. Mary is Queen

SESSION II ASSIGNMENT:

-Bring Session II handout (which includes the “required reading”) to class posted at:

<http://archphila.org/catechetical/DVD/blessedvirginmary.htm>

-Read “required reading” prior to the next class.