

# The Blessed Virgin Mary: Doctrine and Devotion/Session 2

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*Required Reading: Lumen Gentium, ("The Role of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Mystery of Christ and the Church")*

## III. The Blessed Virgin and the Church

60. In the words of the apostle there is but one mediator: "for there is but one God and one mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself redemption for all" (1 Tim 2:5-6). But Mary's function as mother of men in no way obscures or diminishes this unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power. But the Blessed Virgin's salutary influence on men originates not in any inner necessity but in the disposition of God. It flows forth from the superabundance of the merits of Christ, rests on his mediation, depends entirely on it and draws all its power from it. It does not hinder in any way the immediate union of the faithful with Christ but on the contrary fosters it.

61. The predestination of the Blessed Virgin as Mother of God was associated with the incarnation of the divine word: in the designs of divine Providence she was the gracious mother of the divine Redeemer here on earth, and above all others and in a singular way the generous associate and humble handmaid of the Lord. She conceived, brought forth, and nourished Christ, she presented him to the Father in the temple, shared her Son's sufferings as he died on the cross. Thus, in a wholly singular way she cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope and burning charity in the work of the Saviour in restoring supernatural life to souls. For this reason she is a mother to us in the order of grace.

62. This motherhood of Mary in the order of grace continues uninterruptedly from the consent which she loyally gave at the Annunciation and which she sustained without wavering beneath the cross, until the eternal fulfillment of all the elect. Taken up to heaven she did not lay aside this saving office but by her manifold intercession continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation. By her maternal charity, she cares for the brethren of her Son, who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and difficulties, until they are led into their blessed home. Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked in the Church under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix. This, however, is so understood that it neither takes away anything from nor adds anything to the dignity and efficacy of Christ the one Mediator.

No creature could ever be counted along with the Incarnate Word and Redeemer; but just as the priesthood of Christ is shared in various ways both by his ministers and the faithful, and as the one goodness of God is radiated in different ways among his creatures, so also the unique mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude but rather gives rise to a manifold cooperation which is but a sharing in this one source. The Church does not hesitate to profess this subordinate role of Mary, which it constantly experiences and recommends to the heartfelt attention of the faithful, so that encouraged by this maternal help they may the more closely adhere to the Mediator and Redeemer.

63. By reason of the gift and role of her divine motherhood, by which she is united with her Son, the Redeemer, and with her unique graces and functions, the Blessed Virgin is also intimately united to the Church. As St. Ambrose taught, the Mother of God is a type of the Church in the order of faith, charity, and perfect union with Christ. For in the mystery of the Church, which is itself rightly called mother and virgin, the Blessed Virgin stands out in eminent and singular fashion as exemplar both of virgin and mother. Through her faith and obedience she gave birth on earth to the very Son of the Father, not through the knowledge of man but by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, in the manner of a new Eve who placed her faith, not in the serpent of old but in God's messenger without wavering in doubt. The Son whom she brought forth is he whom God placed as the first born among many brethren (Rom. 8:29), that is, the faithful, in whose generation and formation she cooperates with a mother's love.

64. The Church indeed contemplating her hidden sanctity, imitating her charity and faithfully fulfilling the Father's will, by receiving the word of God in faith becomes herself a mother. By preaching and baptism she brings forth sons, who are conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of God, to a new and immortal life. She herself is a virgin, who keeps in its entirety and purity the faith she pledged to her spouse. Imitating the mother of her Lord, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, she keeps intact faith, firm hope and sincere charity.

65. But while in the most Blessed Virgin the Church has already reached that perfection whereby she exists without spot or wrinkle (cf. Eph 5:27), the faithful still strive to conquer sin and increase in holiness. And so they turn their eyes to Mary who shines forth to the whole community of the elect as the model of virtues. Devoutly meditating on her and contemplating her

## The Blessed Virgin Mary: Doctrine and Devotion/Session 2

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in the light of the Word made man, the Church reverently penetrates more deeply into the great mystery of the Incarnation and becomes more and more like her spouse. Having entered deeply into the history of salvation, Mary, in a way, unites in her person and re-echoes the most important doctrines of the faith: and when she is the subject of preaching and worship she prompts the faithful to come to her Son, to his sacrifice and to the love of the Father. Seeking after the glory of Christ, the Church becomes more like her lofty type, and continually progresses in faith, hope and charity, seeking and doing the will of God in all things. The Church, therefore, in her apostolic work too, rightly looks to her who gave birth to Christ, who was thus conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin, in order that through the Church he could be born and increase in the hearts of the faithful. In her life the Virgin has been a model of that motherly love with which all who join in the Church's apostolic mission for the regeneration of mankind should be animated.

### **IV. The Cult of the Blessed Virgin in the Church**

66. Mary has by grace been exalted above all angels and men to a place second only to her Son, as the most holy mother of God who was involved in the mysteries of Christ: she is rightly honored by a special cult in the Church. From the earliest times the Blessed Virgin is honored under the title of Mother of God, whose protection the faithful take refuge together in prayer in all their perils and needs. Accordingly, following the Council of Ephesus, there was a remarkable growth in the cult of the People of God towards Mary, in veneration and love, in invocation and imitation, according to her own prophetic words: "all generations shall call me blessed, because he that is mighty has done great things to me" (Lk 1:48). This cult, as it has always existed in the Church, for all its uniqueness, differs essentially from the cult of adoration, which is offered equally to the Incarnate Word and to the Father and the Holy Spirit, and it is most favorable to it. The various forms of piety towards the Mother of God, which the Church has approved within the limits of sound and orthodox doctrine, according to the dispositions and understanding of the faithful, ensure that while the mother is honoured, the Son through whom all things have their being (cf. Col 1:15-16) and in whom it has pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell (cf. Col 1:19) is rightly known, loved and glorified and his commandments are observed.

67. The sacred synod teaches this Catholic doctrine advisedly and at the same time admonishes all the sons of the Church that the cult, especially the liturgical cult, of the Blessed Virgin, be generously fostered, and that the practices and exercises of devotion towards her, recommended by the teaching authority of the Church in the course of centuries be highly esteemed, and that those decrees, which were given in the early days regarding the cult images of Christ, the Blessed Virgin and the saints, be religiously observed. But it strongly urges theologians and preachers of the word of God to be careful to refrain as much from all false exaggeration as from too summary an attitude in considering the special dignity of the Mother of God. Following the study of Sacred Scripture, the Fathers, the doctors and liturgy of the Church, and under the guidance of the Church's magisterium, let them rightly illustrate the duties and privileges of the Blessed Virgin which always refer to Christ, the source of all truth, sanctity, and devotion. Let them carefully refrain from whatever might by word or deed lead the separated brethren or any others whatsoever into error about the true doctrine of the Church. Let the faithful remember moreover that true devotion consists neither in sterile or transitory affection, nor in a certain vain credulity, but proceeds from true faith, by which we are led to recognize the excellence of the Mother of God, and we are moved to a filial love towards our mother and to the imitation of her virtues.

### **V. Mary, Sign of True Hope and Comfort for the Pilgrim People of God**

68. In the meantime the Mother of Jesus in the glory which she possesses in body and soul in heaven is the image and beginning of the Church as it is to be perfected in the world to come. Likewise she shines forth on earth, until the day of the Lord shall come (cf. 2 Pet 3:10), a sign of certain hope and comfort to the pilgrim People of God.

69. It gives great joy and comfort to this sacred synod that among the separated brethren too there are those who give due honor to the Mother of Our Lord and Savior, especially among the Easterns, who with devout mind and fervent impulse give honor to the Mother of God, ever virgin. The entire body of the faithful pours forth urgent supplications to the Mother of God and of men that she, who aided the beginnings of the Church by her prayers, may now, exalted as she is above all the angels and saints, intercede before her Son in the fellowship of all the saints, until all families of people, whether they are honored with the title of Christian or whether they still do not know the Savior, may be happily gathered together in peace and harmony into one People of God, for the glory of the Most Holy and Undivided Trinity.

# The Blessed Virgin Mary: Doctrine and Devotion/Session 2

## COURSE OUTLINE: Blessed are You Among Women (Dogma)

Principal Guide: Faith + Doctrine = True Devotion of Mary

DVD

### I. HAIL HOLY QUEEN

Hail, holy Queen, Mother of mercy! Hail, our life, our sweetness and our hope. To you do we cry, poor banished children of Eve; to you do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears. Turn then, most gracious Advocate, your eyes of mercy toward us, and after this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of your womb, Jesus.

O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary! Amen.

### II. Theology: Faith seeking understanding.

### III. Dogma: A truth proclaimed infallibly by the Church's Magisterium as being contained in the Deposit of Revelation (roots in Scripture and Tradition.)

### IV. Marian dogmas: related to Christ and the Church

- i. Mary, Mother of God (Theotokos) linked to Incarnation of Christ
- ii. Mary, Ever-virgin linked to Incarnation of Christ
- iii. Immaculate Conception of Mary linked to Redemption of Christ
- iv. Assumption of Mary linked to Eschatology (death, heaven, hell, purgatory)

### DISCUSSION:

Dogmas are lights along the path of faith; they illuminate and make it secure." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*)

-How do dogmas help to keep a "balanced" understanding of Mary?

-Why do many Protestants find Catholic dogmas about Mary troubling?

### V. Mother of God (Greek word: Theotokos)

- i. Early Church: Struggle in the understanding of Jesus
  - Jesus: Was Jesus divine? Human? Divine and human (two natures)
  - Theological articulation: struggle due to much debate
  - Heresies: Two major heresies develop
    - + Arianism denied divine nature
    - + Docetism denied human nature
- ii. 431- Council of Ephesus: Theotokos/Mother of God
  - Defines two natures of Jesus:
    - + Truly God/divine (conceived by the Holy Spirit)
    - + Truly Man/human (born of a woman)
- iii. Feast: Mother of God/January 1/World Day of Peace

### VI. EVER-VIRGIN (no formal declaration)

- i. From earliest tradition, Christians thought of Mary as ever-virgin. However, this was not a question which concerned early New Testament writers
- ii. Mary's virginity makes it clear that salvation began as God's initiative, not ours.
- iii. Scripture: Evangelists use Greek word, Adelphe

## The Blessed Virgin Mary: Doctrine and Devotion/Session 2

- Translates as “brothers and sisters of Jesus”
- Apocryphal Writings: Protoevangelium of James/Infancy Narratives of Gospel of Thomas
  - + Joseph is an older man who is a widower with children who marries Mary
  - + Joseph’s children become step-brothers and sisters of Jesus.
- Three meanings of Adelphos:
  - + Blood [Most Protestants- blood brothers and sisters]
  - + Kinship, relative
    - Original understanding up to the Reformation
    - Catholics = cousins (Jerome’s translation into Latin)
    - Anglicans = Joseph’s children/step brothers and sisters
  - + Spiritual, extended sense

### BREAK AND DISCUSSION:

Review the three Christian perspectives regarding the translation of the word, “adelphos,” as it relates to Jesus in the Scriptures. Discuss why some Catholics may be confused regarding the Church’s understanding of “brothers and sisters of Jesus.”

- VII. Immaculate Conception: Dogma proclaimed on 1854 December 8
- “Through the centuries the Church became ever more aware that Mary, ‘full of grace’ thought God, was redeemed from the moment of her conception” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, # 491); celebration of what God did for Mary (positive)
  - “Full of [sanctifying] grace”/”Radically redeemed” (Karl Rahner)
  - Biblical Foundations
    - Genesis 3: 15 - “Woman” refers to Mary
    - Song of Songs - “without a blemish”
    - Luke - “Hail, full of grace”—God’s new name for Mary (identity and mission) ~ “kecharitomene” (gift, favor, grace)
  - Theological Articulation: Long, slow development of the doctrine
    - Early Church - Tradition about Mary
      - “From the earliest times, Christians have sought Mary’s prayers and help. There has been a basic sense on the part of the Church that Mary continues in heaven to be concerned for the growth of all members of the Church into holiness and an intimate relationship with her Son.” (USCCA, p. 147)
    - Middle Ages:
      - + Thomas Aquinas: “God prepares and disposes those whom He has chosen for a special purpose in such a way as to make them capable of performing that for which He selected them...”
      - + John Duns Scotus; Mary was “preserved” in right relationship with God (free from sin); “a singular grace,” “at the first moment of her existence”
    - “In anticipation that she was to bear the Son of God, Mary was preserved from the time of her conception from Original Sin.” (USCCA, p. 143)
  - Apparitions:
    - 1830—Mary appears to St. Catherine Laboure and asks that a Medallion which included the words: “O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee.”
    - 1858—Mary identifies herself to Bernadette: “I am the Immaculate Conception.”

## The Blessed Virgin Mary: Doctrine and Devotion/Session 2

### DISCUSSION:

Sister Sheila reminds us that Baptism celebrates what God has done for us; we become “full of grace;” we experienced a “kecharitomene” moment!

-Discuss your understanding of these Marian notions as they relate to your faith life and mission.

### VIII. Assumption (Dogma) proclaimed on November 1, 1950.

#### i. Document: “Most Bountiful God”

- “The Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory.”
- Historical Context (Post World War II and end of Church’s Marian Era)
  - + The intellectual assault on the dignity of the human person bore abundant fruit in the twentieth century
  - + Be defining this dogma the Church hoped that the faithful would recognize more clearly the value of human life and our eternal destiny (resurrection)
  - + Destiny of Body and Soul...Assumption reaffirms the importance of the human person as an embodied person/value of the flesh
- Tradition
  - + Early Celebration of the Church
  - + By the 4<sup>th</sup> century: Feast of the Falling Asleep of Mary; the Dormition (Later named Assumption)
  - + Middle Ages: Rosary /Glorious Mysteries
    - Assumption
    - Mary crowned Queen of Heaven
    - Hail Holy Queen (Queenship/maternal intercession)

### SESSION III ASSIGNMENT:

*There are two documents for Session III posted at:*

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

*-Bring Session III handout to class.*

*-Read “required reading” prior to class. It is not necessary to bring this document to class.*