

quite pointedly in criticizing the Sadducees, who do not believe in the resurrection of the body (cf. Mt 22:22–32). Those who have died continue to live and, now being purified, they love us *more* not less than they did when alive on this earth. My mother loved me, and she has

gone to God. It would surely be strange if she did not continue to pray for me that I persevere in the Faith to the end. And Mary, too, being our spiritual mother, continues to be concerned, one might say desperately concerned, that all the members of her Son's Body, the Church, make it through to Heaven.

At the Wedding Feast at Cana, Jesus seems reluctant to act. "What have you to do with me?" He says. Yet, with confidence, Mary speaks the last words she will speak in Scripture, "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:4–5). Mary's request moves Jesus to act, to perform His first miracle, and set in motion the events that will lead to His Passion, Death, and Resurrection. I don't know about you, but I certainly want Mary to be on my side when I am asking Jesus to do things for me.

One of my favorite images was developed in the seventeenth century by St. Louis De Montfort. St. Louis called Mary the "Mold of God." He describes God pouring Himself into Mary as we might pour wax into a mold. After nine months in Mary's womb, Jesus is born. In this way, Mary becomes a Jesus-mold. If we pour ourselves into her, we will be shaped by her to be just like her Son, Jesus. Is this not the goal of every Christian life? Is this not the very meaning of the word "Christian" — to be a "little Christ," to make Christ present in the world?

Honoring Mary Gives Glory to God

Many, even some Catholics, seem to fear that if we honor Mary we are detracting from Jesus. But that would be as if praising an artist's paintings detracts from praise of the artist. However, it has been proven repeatedly that the quickest way to Jesus is through and with Mary. It is a basic truth of Scripture that God is unchanging. If God chose to come into the world once through Mary, this sets a pattern for us. If God is to be born in us, in our hearts, then this, too, will be a work done most quickly and most completely in cooperation with Mary.

Conclusion

In closing, I think it is safe to say that a devout Christian has nothing to fear in letting Mary into his or her life. We can never forget that Mary's last recorded words in Scripture are, "Do whatever He [Jesus] tells you" (Jn 2:5). When we let Mary into our lives, we can be assured

that she will make it her direct business to draw us quickly into a deep, intimate, personal relationship with Jesus, so that we are doing what He tells us every day of our lives.

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Prayer of Consecration to Jesus

Lord God, I thank You for the gifts of life and of Your boundless love for me. "I praise you, because I am wonderfully made; wonderful are your works!" (Psalm 139)

Yet I know that many times I have sinned against You and against those You have called me to love. I am truly sorry. I know that You love me despite my sins, and have sent Your Son to die for me, to save me from sin and hell.

Today, I say "yes" to Your love, revealed in Your Son Jesus. I give my life to You and ask You to fill me with Your Holy Spirit.

Lord Jesus, come into my heart as King. Rule my thoughts, words, and actions, that I might always live as Your disciple. Amen.

What About Mary?

Explaining Catholic Devotion to Mary



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Introduction

The issue of Mary, the mother of Jesus of Nazareth, is sure to arise in any conversation between Catholics and other Christians. C. S. Lewis, in the preface of his book *Mere Christianity*, remarks,

“There is no controversy between Christians which needs to be so delicately touched as this [concerning Mary]. The Roman Catholic beliefs on that subject are held not only with the ordinary fervour that attaches to all sincere religious belief, but (very naturally) with the peculiar and, as it were, chivalrous sensibility that a man feels when the honour of his mother or his beloved is at stake. It is very difficult so to dissent from them that you will not appear to them a cad as well as a heretic. And contrariwise, the opposed Protestant beliefs on this subject call forth feelings which go down to the very roots of all Monotheism whatever. To radical Protestants it seems that the distinction between Creator and creature (however holy) is imperilled: that Polytheism is risen again. Hence it is hard so to dissent from them that you will not appear worse than a heretic — a Pagan.”

For those who know their history it is perhaps ironic that the person of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, should become a point of division between Catholics and our separated Christian brethren. If you look back to the sixteenth century, the time of Martin Luther, it is very easy to find numerous quotations from him praising devotion and prayer to her, whom he called the Blessed Virgin and the Mother of God. However, the reality is that today the person of Mary and devotion to her is a point of contention between Catholics and many Christians of various denominations. Why do Catholics hold Mary in such esteem? Why do they seek her intercession? Why do they attribute such prerogatives to her as calling her “Mother of God”?

Why Hold Mary in High Esteem?

The Church holds Mary in such esteem first because Scripture tells her to do so. In the Gospel of St. Luke, Mary herself says that all generations shall call her blessed (cf. Lk 1:48). Thus, every time we speak in praise of Mary, we fulfill biblical prophecy. Most non-Catholic Christian communities rarely speak of Mary and, when they do, it is often to condemn Catholic views or at best to make passing reference to her in the Christmas season as perhaps a necessary part of the apparatus to bring about the birth of Jesus. But Catholics are generous in their praise of Mary to fulfill that prophecy that all generations will call her blessed. On a regular, sometimes daily basis, Catholics repeat that other closely associated scriptural verse, “Blessed are you [Mary] among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb [Jesus]” (Lk 1:42).

Later in the Gospels, a woman will cry out to Jesus, “Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that you sucked.” In a response that many take to be an “anti-Marian” swipe, Jesus says no, “blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it” (Lk 11:27–28). (As an aside, the idea of Jesus saying anything even vaguely disrespectful of or to Mary is, of course, absurd since He, above all, perfectly observed the Ten Commandments, including “honor your father and your mother” [Ex 20:12].) And did Mary hear the word of God and keep it? In Luke 1, Elizabeth exclaims upon Mary’s arrival, “Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord” (Lk 1:45). And, later, it is said that Mary “kept all these things in her heart” (Lk 2:51).

The Church also holds Mary up for us as the perfect example of one who heard God’s word, believed it, kept it, and in whom that obedience bore perfect fruit — Jesus living in the world. Mary was, thus, the first Christian, the first to believe in Jesus, and the first to follow Him. The Church holds Mary up for our esteem and respect since she was the first disciple and since we, too, are called to be disciples of Jesus. In a sense, the Church would invite us all to become like Mary. We should listen for and receive into our hearts the Word of God and allow that Word to shape us so that we can make Jesus present in the world.

The Mother of God?

Many balk at hearing Mary referred to as “Mother of God.” They ask, “How can God, who had no beginning or end, have a mother?” Yet, this merely brings us face-to-face with the great mystery of the Incarnation. In referring to Mary as the Mother of God, the Church’s primary focus and intention has always been to preserve the identity of Jesus. If Jesus is God Incarnate, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity taking up a human nature, then the woman who gave birth to Him, Jesus, is His mother — the Mother of God. In the fifth century, some sought to separate the human Jesus from the divine Christ. But to attempt some separation of the human nature and the Divine Person is to cut Jesus in two and to risk a denial of the reality of the Incarnation. In response, the fifth-century Council of Ephesus gave Mary the title Theotokos, “Mother of God,” not as a compliment to Mary but rather as a means of reinforcing the dogma of the unity of the identity of her Son, Jesus, as the God-Man.

Mary, Our Mother

The broad Christian tradition of the first Christian millennium saw in Mary not only the Mother of Jesus, and hence the Mother of God, but also the Mother of all who believe in Jesus. In Jn 19:26–27, Jesus entrusts His beloved disciple to Mary and Mary to His beloved disciple with the words, “Woman, behold your son” and “to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother.’” The historical reality here is that Jesus was providing for the material care of His mother by entrusting her to His favorite disciple, very likely, St. John. Very quickly it became commonplace to see the “beloved disciple” as a kind of scriptural “everyman” or at least “every believer.” Every believer could place himself or herself in St. John’s shoes, gaze upon Jesus crucified, and receive this last bequest — to be given into Mary’s care and to take Mary into his or her own home and heart. Jesus gives each of us who believe in Him, His own mother, to be our mother in our life with Him.

The idea of Mary as both Jesus’ mother and our mother can also be understood in the Pauline image of the Church as the Body of Christ. St. Paul describes the Church as the Body of Christ where Jesus is the Head of the Body and we are the members (cf. Eph 5:23, 29; Col 1:18). Now in the natural world we would consider it monstrous if one woman gave birth to the head of a child and another gave birth to the body or members. So, too, in the order of grace, Mary gave birth to the Head of the Body and she continues, in a spiritual manner, to give birth to and nurture those men and women who come to be members of Christ’s Mystical Body, the Church.

Up to this point, I have largely been making rational arguments based on various points of doctrine or interpretations of Scripture. Yet the issue of Mary is not simply a rational one. It is an issue of the heart. Jesus loved His mother. Should we not imitate Jesus? Imagine for a moment that you could have created your own mother. How would you have made her? Wouldn’t you have made her beautiful, smart, holy, loving, and compassionate? Jesus had this opportunity. Do you think He made her anything other than the best?

Seeking Mary’s Help

Perhaps, in some ways, the reason one might seek Mary’s intercession has already been given, but it is probably a good idea to unfold it a little bit more here. The New Testament is abundantly clear that we ought to pray for one another constantly. Therefore, the concept of intercession for fellow believers ought not to be foreign to any Christian. Jesus is quite clear that those who have passed through death live on in God. He says this

