

## 12. Mary, the perfect disciple



## Mary's 'Immaculate Conception' (1854)

- Mary, along with all of us, including Jesus, was born into a world grievously affected by the sins of others, including the sins of our 'origins'. She was not unaffected by the hereditary and environmental sludge of sin. The point being made is that, like her Son, and unlike us, she never allowed it to affect her decisions. Heroically, from the very first moment of her existence (from her conception) she was never contaminated by sin. She always said Yes to grace. Even when she stood watching her innocent Son being crucified before her eyes, her response was one of pure love.
- There have been saints whose lives were pure from their most tender years. How does one speak of Jesus' Mother in any other way than in the language of the heart, the language of love poetry. This most saintly of women was Immaculate from the moment of her Conception.

## The Virgin Mary

The prologues to the Gospels of Matthew and Luke portray Mary as a virgin, and, in fidelity to Scripture, the Church has continued to speak of her as the Virgin Mary.

- In view of the highly symbolic nature of the prologues, it seems to me best to go to the deepest meaning of 'virgin' and for the rest to remain in silence as we contemplate the wonder of what God has done in Mary and the wonder of her complete and loving response.
- Luke's account of Mary's conceiving Jesus (1:26-38) appropriately speaks of her intimate communion with God. In Luke's delicate narrative, it is God himself who approaches Mary offering her love, and Mary says Yes, opening herself to God's embrace. It is God who comes down upon Mary. It is God who breathes into her his Spirit, pouring his life into her. A virgin is one who gives his or her first love to the betrothed. This is what Mary does. Her first love is for God.



‘Hail, Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with you.’

‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you in his shade (‘draw you into his glory-cloud’); therefore the child will be holy. He will be called Son of God’(Luke 1:35).



It is the embrace of God that made the conceiving of Jesus possible. It was her being drawn so intimately into God's embrace that accounts for the conceiving of Jesus. God, the source of all life, is, in a special way, Jesus' Father. Mary's response is perfect: 'I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be done to me as you have said'(Luke 1:38). God is asking of her only one thing: to say Yes to God's love – which she does with all her heart. God is saying to her: 'I want to love you'. She replies: 'Love me' – and the fruit of that mysterious embrace is Jesus.

‘By her complete adherence to the Father’s will,  
to his Son’s redemptive work,  
and to every prompting of the Holy Spirit,  
the Virgin Mary is the Church’s model of faith and charity.’  
(Catechism n. 967)

Luke is presenting Mary as the model for all who conceive.

- How beautiful it would be if every man and every woman in their intimate communion were to give their first love to God, so that our loving was fully open to God’s grace.
- Then the fruit conceived of that love would come from our intimacy with God.
- Is not this what we mean by the sacrament of marriage?

‘Mary set out in haste and entered the house of Zechariah, where she greeted Elizabeth, who exclaimed “Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb” ... Blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled’(Luke 1:39-45).

‘Mary treasured all that was said and pondered the words in her heart.’  
(Luke 2:19).

‘Jesus’ father and mother were amazed at what was being said by Simeon about him. Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, ... a sword will pierce your own soul too’ (Luke 2:33-35).



‘Our Lady of the Sacred Heart’

‘When Jesus was twelve years old, his parents went up to Jerusalem for the festival of Passover’

{He went missing and they found him in the temple}

‘When his parents saw him they were astonished, and his mother said to him, “Child, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you” (Luke 2:41-50).

- The catechism (n. 972) speaks of Mary’s ‘pilgrimage of faith’



‘Our Lady of the  
Sacred Heart’

‘Then Jesus went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them.

His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and with people’ (Luke 2:51-52).

It is left to us to imagine the next 20 or so years. How close must have been the communion between Jesus and his mother. Later, during Jesus’ public ministry, ‘a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, “Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that suckled you!”(Luke 11:47). Indeed!

‘On the third day

there was a **wedding** in Cana in Galilee  
and the mother of Jesus was there ...

When the wine gave out,

the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine”.

Jesus said to her, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?”

{Are you sure you know what you are asking for?}

{Do you see this the way I see it?}

“Has not my hour now come?”

His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

‘The bridegroom is with them’(Mark 2:19).

‘He who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom,  
who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice.’

(John 3:29)



‘Standing near the cross of Jesus were  
his mother,  
and his mother’s sister  
[Salome, Zebedee’s wife],  
Mary the wife of Clopas,  
[Joseph’s brother]  
and Mary Magdalene.



When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, “Woman, here is your son.” Then he said to the disciple, “Here is your mother” (John 19:25-27).

Mother of the Church



‘They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths ... since the tomb was nearby they laid Jesus there.’

(John 19:40-42).



‘In the upstairs room where they were staying, the Twelve were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers’.

(Acts 1:13-14).

‘When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together, when suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit’(Acts 2:1-4).

The Newer Testament has no more to say about Mary.

Early tradition tells us that Mary went with John to Ephesus and died there.

It is not surprising that just as Christians looked to her as the perfect disciple, free from the taint of sin from the first moment of her conception, and the perfect mother, conceiving her child from God's embrace; just as they saw her as the one who was perfectly obedient to God's will in everything; so they saw her as the one who showed us how to die, as she had lived, in God's embrace.

They knew that God took her to himself, the way God will take us all. Everything that comprised her real humanity was caught up in the eternal life enjoyed by her risen Son. Death could not separate her from him.

Mary 'was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory'(Pius XII, 1950).

In 1950, after the carnage of the Second World War in which 'Christian' Europe, for the second time in a few years, had been tearing itself to pieces, Pope Pius XII felt the need to stress that Christian life is very much about the body. We can't pray 'in the spirit' and then treat the body with such disregard. It is every part of us that is taken up into life – transformed, of course, in a way that is beyond our imagining – but everything that makes us human is sacred.

The declaration of Mary's assumption was not intended to separate her from us. On the contrary, it was to remind us that that is our destiny too. As with purgatory, so with heaven, we have to eliminate the idea of time, for time is the measure of things in the world we know. It is not a measure of eternity. 'Awaiting the end of time' is part of the hard-wiring of our brains, unable to imagine anything outside the categories of space and time. Beyond death, the notion of time is meaningless. Our prayer and our hope is that Jesus will come to us at our death, as he came to his mother, and draw us, with the whole of our human reality transformed fully by love, into God's eternal embrace.

Mary's mediation (her on-going care for her 'children') is not independent of the mediation of Jesus.

- The same can be said of all mediation within the communion of saints
- Jesus is the one and only mediator (1 Timothy 2:5).
  - It is Jesus' life that we share. It is Jesus' Spirit that gives us life. It is Jesus' priesthood, Jesus' prayer, Jesus' faith, hope and love, Jesus' mediation that he offers us, for we are his Body.
  - Paul could say: 'It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, loving me and giving himself for me'(Galatians 2:20).
- How much truer this is of Mary!

# Mary, Mother of Jesus and Mother of the Church

## Saint Therese of Lisieux

‘How I would have loved to be a priest so as to preach about the Blessed Virgin. One sermon would be sufficient to say everything I think about the subject ...For a sermon on the Blessed Virgin to please me and to do me any good, I must see her real life, not her imagined life. I am sure that her real life was very simple. They show her to us as unapproachable, but they should present her as imitable, bringing out her virtues, saying that she lived by faith just like ourselves, give proofs of this from the Gospel, where we read: 'And they did not understand the words which she spoke to them'(Luke 2:50). And that other no less mysterious statement: 'His father and mother marvelled at what was said about him'(Luke 2:33). This admiration supposes a certain surprise.

## Saint Therese of Lisieux (continued)

‘We know very well that the Blessed Virgin is Queen of heaven and earth, but she is more mother than queen; and we should not say, on account of her prerogatives, that she surpasses all the saints in glory, just as the sun at its rising makes the stars disappear from sight. My God, how strange that would be! A mother who makes her children's glory vanish! I myself think just the opposite.

I believe that she will increase the splendour of the elect very much.’