

MARY

By REV. WILLIAM P. O'KEEFE, C.M.

GOD'S MOTHER—OUR MOTHER

WHEN life is pleasant care is cast out. When the summer sun shines down on us from the blue vault of heaven, gladdening human hearts with its radiance and warming the world into life, unremembered are the chill winds of winter, and clouds of driving rain, and the harshness of sleet and snow.

So, too, in the things of the spirit. When temptations trouble us not and we have almost tangible proofs of God's love for us, it is easy to believe that He is shining down on us from Heaven, and we find joy and gladness in the daily duties of religion.

But let us be careful, "When they shall say: Peace and security; then shall sudden destruction come upon them as the pains upon her that is with child . . . Therefore, let us not sleep, as others do: but let us watch." (1)

In our spiritual life we cannot afford to be heedless of the morrow. For as sure as there is a winter complementary to every summer, so in the Christian life is Thabor followed by Calvary. The bright noonday of God's presence gives place to a darkness so dense that even the bravest are dismayed, and cry out: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" (2)

Temptations and troubles are sure to come. "The cross everywhere awaiteth thee. Thou canst not escape it, whithersoever thou runnest. Turn thyself upwards or turn thyself downwards: turn thyself inwards or turn thyself outwards everywhere thou shalt find the cross." (3)

It is very important, therefore, that we should realise that God in His goodness has given us a light that will always guide us, a hand that will always lift us up, a voice that will always speak tender words of comfort and consolation to us. He has given us Mary, in whose Motherhood we have a wellspring of Hope, a never-failing fountain of strength and courage.

It is in the sorrow and suffering of her children that a mother's love and care are most apparent. And it is also in time of trouble that mankind becomes most sensible of the mothering of Mary. Grief-stricken souls find heavenly solace in the thought of her. Anguished hearts are soothed by the remembrance of her. All who are in distress can turn to her "knowing that she will communicate to me of her good things and will be a comfort to me in cares and grief." (4)

When our spirits grow faint under the burden of unhappiness when, like the disciples at the burial of Christ, we feel that all is lost and that henceforth life holds naught but emptiness and heartache let us turn and see Mary beside us. She speaks and hope is reborn. She takes us by the hand, and we go bravely into the dark night of the future. She comes with us, and remains to console us in the lonely Upper Room among our sad memories and shattered dreams.

She prays and we pray with her. Then we are at peace. We know that the tomb will give up its dead. Dark night will give place to the beauty of dawn. The shadows of sadness will vanish in the sunshine of resurgent gladness, and all our tears will be dried in a joy that no man can take from us.

"The Virgin is the royal road by which the Saviour came to us . . . Therefore let us also walk faithfully in this road. Let us strive to ascend by it to Jesus, Who by the same has descended to us. I repeat; let us try to go by Mary to share in His grace Who by Mary came to share in our misery" (*St. Bernard*)

HOPE OF HUMANITY

When Adam sinned the entire human race shared in his downfall. His disobedience affected us all. It brought death on Adam and all his children. The sunshine of God's presence was gone from us and we were left in bleakness and desolation as of arctic winter.

In His mercy however God reached out to help us. In the first sad day of Adam's crime God gave us hope saying to the Evil One: "I will put enmities between thee and the Woman and thy seed and her Seed: she shall crush thy head and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel." (5)

1 Thess, v, 3-8; 2 Matt. xxvii, 46; 3 Imitation of Christ, Bk. II, C.12. 4 Wisd. viii, 9; 5 Gen. iii, 15.

Over the wintry world God speaks of Mary. His words fall soft as a breath of Spring on the hearts of humanity and these are strangely moved. The divine sap of grace re-animates them. The dead branches come to life and bud forth and offer their gifts of blossoms to heaven. Though midsummer is not yet come one can already foretell its fullness and its bounty: one can already dream happily of rich harvests and lands flowing with milk and honey.

God's promise of Mary filled mankind with hope. All through the long night of expectation men lived in the dream that was Mary. They prayed for her coming as an invalid would pray for the dawn of a new day. Eagerly and anxiously they awaited her arrival.

Mankind was poverty-stricken and wretched. Mary would "open her hand to the needy, and stretch out her hands to the poor." (1) She would be the mouthpiece of her kindred, a mediatrix with Him Whom they had so grievously offended. To her they would say: "Do thou call upon the Lord; and speak to the King for us; and deliver us from death." (2)

What lovely appeals they composed: "Arise, make haste, my love, my beautiful one, and come. For winter is now past; the rain is over and gone. The flowers have appeared in our land. The time of pruning is come. The voice of the turtle is heard in our land. The fig tree hath put forth her young figs. The vines in flower yield their sweet smell. Arise my love, my beautiful one, and come. My dove, show me thy face. Let thy voice sound in my ears. For thy voice is sweet and thy face comely." (3)

But God has taken good time for the fashioning of Mary. She must be the Divine Artist's masterpiece, something beautiful beyond words, a creature of incomparable perfection.

At length the task was completed. And God rested from His labour of love, and paused in admiration of the Mary He had made. "How beautiful art thou," He said: "Thou art all fair, O my love, and there is not a spot in thee . . . One is my dove: My perfect one is but one . . . How beautiful art thou, and how comely, my dearest." (4)

"A greater heaven God could have made, or a greater earth but a greater mother than the Mother of God even God could not make." (5)

And God said: "Come, my beloved. Let us go forth into the field, . . . and let us see if the flowers be ready to bring forth fruits." (6)

"Flowing with delights and leaning upon her Beloved," (7) Mary came forth. Heaven's angels bowed in lowly reverence. "Hail, full of grace," they said, "the Lord is with thee." (8)

And the legions of Satan were sore afraid at the sight of the gleaming throng of her virtues "terrible as an army set in battle array." (9) They knew Mary would accomplish God's Will and would crush them under her heel. "Behold, all that fight against thee shall be confounded, and shall be as nothing. . . . For I am the Lord thy God, Who take thee by the hand." (10)

So Mary came among men, and such as had spiritual insight like Elizabeth and holy Simeon, recognized her for what she was. They saw in her the fulfilment of the prophecies. They received her with glad welcome, and for doing so were "filled with the Holy Ghost." (11)

Mary's coming was truly the dawn of a new day, the end of a long winter. And this new day would know no evening; this Summer would see no Autumn. For the angel saluted her as "Ave," a new "Eva" who is the reverse of the old. She is wise where Eve was foolish. She is humble where Eve was proud. She gives Life where Eve gave Death. She brings back God, whom Eve had rejected. Mary undoes the evil wrought by Eve, so that we, as Mary's children, are the reverse of evil; we live with a divine life of grace.

MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

Thus far I have tried to let you see the Mary of the Old Testament, the Woman of God's promise to our first Parents, the Woman for whose coming the prophets sighed, the Woman who would crush the serpent's head and remove the reproach from Israel.

But the Old Testament sight of the supernatural was dark night compared with the bright noon-day of the New Testament revelation. In the light of the Gospels, Mary is a creature of truly exquisite beauty. She appears to us as a *1 Prov. xxxi, 20. 2 Esth. xv, 3 3 Cant. ii, 4 ib. iv, vi, vii. 5 Mirror of Mary. 6 Cant. vii. 7 ib. viii. 8 Luke 1, 28. 9 Cant. vi, 3-9. 10 Is. xli, 11-13. 11 Luke 1, 41, II, 25-27.*

vision that we cannot paint with human colours, a tale that we cannot relate in human words. We make use of all our most delicate tints: we heap words on words and metaphor on metaphor; but at the end of all we know that we have failed. For Mary's sanctity is greater than our minds can comprehend. "Creatures cannot conceive her sanctity. Nobody knows it fully but God alone." (*Pope Pius IX*).

In truth, the Word's becoming Flesh contains more mystery than the wonder of God made man. In addition to the marvel of the Incarnation, the mystery of God's condescension, there is the cognate marvel of Mary's Maternity, the mystery of such Glory in a creature.

All Mary's graces are related to her Motherhood of God. All the truths concerning her are hidden in the depths of this most profound truth.

We are astonished at the privilege of her Immaculate Conception. We are amazed that she unites spotless Virginity and perfect Motherhood. We are filled with awe when she is assumed, body and soul, into Heaven. We rejoice to think that God has made her Dispensatrix of all His graces.

But God has given all these gifts to Mary because of her divine Maternity. Those other privileges are but the fit apparel for so august a personage as the Mother of God, the proper ornaments of such a Queen.

The God of the universe, the Lord of the angels, is called Son by her. Once, as we are told in the Gospel, she said to Him: Son, why hast Thou done so to us? Which, indeed, of the angelic princes would dare to speak like that to God?

"But Mary does not forget that she is God's Mother, and can confidently call Him Son, Whom the angels are content to serve with lowly reverence. And, for His part, the Lord is happy to be called what He was happy to become—Mary's Son.

"Choose, then, which of the two marvels thou wilt admire the more? The gracious condescension of the Son, or the glorious exaltation of the Mother? Each of the two overwhelms the mind. Each of the two surpasses all understanding." (*Saint Bernard*).

There is undoubtedly no understanding of the mystery of the Incarnation without some appreciation of the marvel of Mary's Motherhood. There is no Christianity without Mary. Hence the late Holy Father, Pope Pius XI, wrote: "The dogma of the divine Maternity follows of necessity from the fundamental Catholic doctrine of the Hypostatic Union." God's generosity and Mary's exaltation are two aspects of one and the same mystery. They are the divine and human facets of the one and the same miracle. Emmanuel, God with us.

Some good souls suffer from perplexity and timidity in their attitude to Mary. They fear lest they should exalt her too much, and thus take from the honour due to God alone. They are afraid to honour her, lest they should be really adoring her.

Yet they do not hesitate to honour very ordinary persons, their employers and their friends. While hesitating to reverence some representation of Mary, they will tolerate no want of respect to their country's flag or to the image of their earthly rulers.

Let them remember that in honouring Mary they but follow God's example. He gave Himself entirely to her in becoming her Son, and in addition He accorded her several striking and singular privileges. Do we need to be fearful of doing as God did? Or did He do wrong in treating Mary in such an unique fashion? Do we not rather honour God if we imitate His example? "The more we honour Mary, the more we shall honour God." (*St. Alphonsus*).

Hence, "we must not imagine that Mary is a hindrance to our union with our Creator. Mary is made for God alone, and far from ever detaining a soul in herself, on the contrary, she casts the soul upon God and unites it with Him so much the more perfectly as the soul is perfectly united with her. Mary is the marvellous echo of God." (*Saint Marie-Louis de Montfort*).

In devotion to other saints one must observe some limit, but Mary is beyond praise. We can never exceed in our devotion to her, because God has given her the fullness of grace and has made her His Mother, so that in some sense she is infinitely admirable. The Blessed Virgin, from the fact that she is the Mother of God, has a certain infinite dignity from the Infinite Good which is God." (*Saint Thomas Aquinas*).

And we have the assurance of the Pope that in honouring Mary we do but give glory to God: " Nothing can be more pleasing to Jesus Christ, Who certainly has a burning love for His Own Mother, than that we should venerate her

as she deserves, that we should eagerly return her love and that by imitating her most holy example we should seek to gain her most powerful patronage.” (*Pope Pius II*).

MARY, MOTHER OF MEN

Though the angels in Heaven reverence Mary as the Mother of God, and honour her as their Queen, they are in a sense less privileged than we are. For to us alone who are the blood-brothers of Jesus Christ, Mary's Son, is it given to feel for her the tender affection and love of children for a mother. What a privilege! What a strikingly beautiful token of God's thoughtful regard for us! What a source of hope and confidence!

Mary is doubly a Mother at the moment of the Incarnation. To give God a human nature she became His Mother. To make us share in the Divine Nature, she becomes our spiritual Mother.

To her we owe it that we recovered our hope of entering Heaven.

Strange, indeed, are the ways of providence. The Incarnation rests on Mary's word. In her hands is the fate of the whole human race. There in the quietness and remoteness of the village of Nazareth, a modest and retiring little maid has to make, unknown to all the world beside, the most momentous and awesome decision of all time.

God does not leave her quite without help. His angel is there to assist her. Gratefully she accepts his aid, his encouraging: "Fear not Mary" (1), and his gentle, gracious solution of her uncertainties.

But the final decision rests with her alone. The ultimate choice must be made by Mary. Is God to become Man? Is mankind to be redeemed? Time stands still. The angel is silent. Creator and creatures await.

"Behold, O Mary, the entire world is at thy feet, and tremblingly awaits thy reply . . . O Virgin, delay not. Do, please, answer quickly. Say the word, O Lady, for all on earth all in Limbo, all in Paradise itself are eager to hear thee speak. The King and Lord of the Universe, Christ Himself, longs to hear thee answer

“O Blessed Maiden, open thy heart to faith; open thy lips to consent, open thy bosom to thy Maker. Behold, the Desired of all nations stands without. He knocks at thy door. Oh, what if He should pass on while thou dost delay to open!" (Saint Bernard).

Have no doubt about it. The Incarnation of the Word and the salvation of each one of us depended on Mary's Fiat. How grateful we should be that she did not fail in her love for God or man. But Mary was never found wanting. She spoke—and her word was echoed back from the highest Heavens, to give humanity the Substantial Word of God, the Son of God Himself.

Thus in one tremendous moment Mary achieves a two-fold Motherhood. By one wondrous act she gives human life to God and divine life to us. And it is precisely this element in the New Testament revelation of the Woman of God's promise that shows us the really surpassing greatness of Mary, and establishes in eternal security our Christian hope and trust in her power and wish to assist us.

The prophets of old hoped in Mary because of God's promise.

They believed in her as a blind man might believe in the beauty of dawn or sunset. They had not "the motive and the cue" for confidence in her that we have. For we see where they were sightless. They knew little more than that Mary would be very powerful with God. We know that, *as His Mother*, she is all powerful with God. They could not quite appreciate what further reason than pity and generosity she could have for coming to the aid of mankind. We know that she assists us *because she is our Mother*, and cannot bear to see us suffer hurt or harm.

Mary's Motherhood of God and of men: this is the twin foundation of our hope of salvation. This is a twofold truth that can never fail, a fortress against which the forces of evil ever rage in baffled despair. We know that we are now safe for ever, because in the Mother-love of Mary's Most Pure and Immaculate Heart God is eternally and inseparably united to man.

BETHLEHEM AND CALVARY—BIRTH AND DEATH

Jesukin, the Baby God of Bethlehem, was Mary's Firstborn. Mary had yet to bring forth Christ's brethren. Her life, therefore, from Bethlehem to Calvary was but the completion of her Motherhood: Golgotha is for Mary also a *consummation* (2) of what was begun at the Annunciation and in the Stable of Bethlehem. The Sorrows promised her by Simeon, her anguish between Bethlehem and Calvary, these were the birth-pains she endured in bringing us forth
1 Luke. I, 30. 2 John xix, 30.

into the world of the supernatural, the travail through which, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, we were born as her children, and children, therefore, of God also.

Christ, the new Adam, the new Head of mankind, had to "go before" us. He had to "prepare the way" for us. And it was not until He had merited for us, His brothers, the fullness of supernatural life that we, so to speak, came from our Mother's womb, and formed with Him one glorious Mystical Body.

To those who like to contemplate the profound mystery of Mary, I suggest that they search for the unity of Bethlehem and Calvary. Those two strangely different scenes are one in Mary's Motherhood. They show the tremendous mystery of Birth and Death: and prove that every grave can be a gateway to greater life.

At Bethlehem, Birth is the centre of the picture, and because Birth means Motherhood, Mary's presence at Bethlehem is easily understood. Here Death is in the background. It is seen only with the eye of Faith. Birth is physical at Bethlehem.

Death is mystical. It is seen in the emptying out (1) of His Divinity by the Word, the voluntary humiliation of the Eternal Son of God, Christ's concealment of His Godhead. Thus Bethlehem is truly a foreshadowing, a beginning of Calvary.

On Calvary the parts are reversed. Here Death struts across the stage. It is too obviously physical, too painfully visible, and for that reason claims all our attention. But Birth is also present at Calvary—mystically, spiritually, but none the less really for that—and how could there be Birth without a Mother? For those with Faith Calvary is utterly incomprehensible without Mary's presence.

These thoughts may serve to show the meaning of Mary's part in the drama of Calvary. The Gospel narrative tells us that our dying Saviour acknowledged Mary's mystical Motherhood of Men. As the nurse might place a new-born babe in its mother's arms, for her consolation and comfort, while saying to her: "Courage now. It's nearly all over. *Here is your little son.*" So Christ gave mankind (in the person of the Beloved Disciple) to the Virgin-Mother, saying: "Woman, behold thy son." (2)

Furthermore, the Evangelist would have us realise that the suffering Christ was keenly conscious of His kinship with the rest of Mary's children. "After that, He said to the Disciple: 'Behold thy Mother.'" Notice now that He did not call John: Son; He did not say: "My son, behold thy Mother," because Jesus and John are brothers. Each is Mary's child. "And," therefore, "from that hour the Disciple took her as his own."

BETHLEHEM AND CALVARY: JOY AND SORROW

Despite its loneliness and isolation, the Stable at Bethlehem was a happy place when Mary brought forth her Firstborn. Angels sang. Shepherds adored. Great Kings offered gifts. "The Virgin Mother who knew not man felt no anguish in the birth of her Firstborn." (3)

Calvary, on the contrary, spells dreadful sadness and limitless sorrow. Here the angels are silent. The great ones of earth offer nought but blows and insults. This is darkness and blood and tears—*And this is the place of our supernatural Birth.*

As Christ is the second Adam, atoning for the crime of the first Adam by taking on Himself the sentence of death passed on Adam, so is Mary the second Eve. "Associated with Christ in the salvation of the human race" (Pope Leo XIII), she freely undergoes the punishment of the first woman: "I will multiply thy sorrows and thy conceptions. In sorrow shalt thou bring forth children." (4)

The eye that despiseth the labour of his mother in bearing him, let the ravens of the brooks pick it out and the young eagles devour it." (5) We are truly the children of Mary's Sorrows, and it would, indeed, ill become us to forget the labour in which she brought us forth. Until God readmitted us to the life of grace her voice was heard "mourning and weeping, weeping for her children, and refusing to be comforted because they are not." (6)

Mary's Motherhood of us is no mere pious sentiment. It is far more than poetic exaggeration or extravagance of devotion. To Mary we truly owe it that we now share in the divine life that we are really adopted children of God. If

1 The kenosis referred to by Saint Paul in Philipp. II, 7: "He emptied Himself taking the form of a servant.. ."

2 John xix, 26-27. 3 The Roman Breviary. 4 Gen. iii, 16. 5 Prov. xxx, 17. 6 Jer. xxxi, 15.

Mary's Motherhood of us is no more than metaphor, then, one might say, so too is God's Fatherhood: but that cannot be, since Christ has taught us all to call Him "Our Father," (1) and it is precisely "because we are sons, God hath sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying Abba, Father." (2)

When the hour of her child-bearing is at hand, every mother must be filled with the spirit of sacrifice. She has to journey into the sad land of suffering. She must stand at the foot of the Cross and look on Death face to face. She must be prepared to risk her life in order that the new life within her may come forth and achieve its destiny.

So, too, with Mary. That we might be born to the life of grace she made the grim ascent of Calvary, and endured anguish beyond the power of words to describe. All that Christ suffered in His Flesh, Mary suffered in her soul. "Ah, truly O Blessed Mother, did the sword pierce thy soul, for only by doing so could it penetrate thy Son's Body " (*Saint Bernard*).

That we might live, Mary gave what was dearer to her than her own life. She gave Him Who is LIFE ITSELF, and for that she is a peerless Mother. All may turn to her with most sure and certain confidence, for Mary, our Mother, won for us more than a life that comes to an end: Mary gives Eternal life to her children. "He that shall find me shall find Life." (3)

MARY MEDIATRIX OF ALL GRACES

Thus far I have tried to show that "neither in the prophecy, nor in the preparation, nor in the winning of the Redemption has Mary been separated from Her Son." (4) And in doing so I have concerned myself chiefly with Mary's relation to mankind in general.

I would now ask you to consider her relation to the individual soul. Does she play a part in the distribution to you and to me of the graces that were won for us during the lifetime of her Son? "Does the past suggest a future for her, and, if so, of what description?" (5)

There can be no doubt that Mary's Motherhood of our Lord gives her an altogether unique position in the Communion of Saints. It is commonly believed, however, that, over and above her rank as Saint of saints, she enjoys in the sanctification of individual souls the dignity of a mediatorship, secondary to, but inseparable from the Mediatorship of Christ. Because Mary co-operated so intimately in the acquisition of grace, it seems fitting that she should have a like part in its distribution. But there is even a deeper reason than this for saying that she is the Mediatrix of all graces.

According to the Fathers of the Church, the Sacred Humanity of our Saviour represented all humanity, all mankind. Christ as Man is a perfect Model from which each one of us may learn how God loves him and how he is to love God in return. Christ's life is the pattern of our living and of our sanctification. Every grace that we receive conforms us more and more to Christ, builds up His likeness in us, makes us resemble Him.

Recollect now that the Incarnation depended on Mary's Fiat. It was at her word that the fullness of grace, the grace of hypostatic union with the Word, was given to Christ's Sacred Humanity. Surely that is in itself a cogent argument that she is Mediatrix of all graces. If there is any real meaning in the statement that "we make one with Christ in the divine thought." (6) And if our (progressive) sanctification follows the pattern of the (instantaneous) sanctification of the Sacred Humanity, all our holiness, the fullness of our graces, depends on the Virgin's Fiat, and is given to us at her word.

Thus we are always the "little children" of Mary, her tiny babes, "of whom she is in labour until Christ is formed in us." (7) In our spiritual lives we depend unceasingly on her "as the unborn babe on its mother." (8) No smallest grace, not the least drop of the Blood of Christ, "comes to us of the Mystical Body otherwise than through the Heart of Mary." What a picture of all-embracing dependence! (9) What motive for being utterly devoted to her!

Mary Mediatrix. Mary Mother of Divine Grace. This is the Virgin's real destiny. She must be Mother of the full Christ, of the Saviour and His Mystical Body. This is truly the only future that would accord with her sublime past and keep intact her mysterious unity with her Son.

1 Matt. vi, 9. 2 Gal. iv, 6. 3 Prov. viii, 35. 4 *The de Montfort Way*, B.O.W. 1942, p. 16. 5 *ib* 6 *Abbot Marmion: Christ in His Mysteries: Sands & Co., p. 13.* 7 Gal. iv, 19. 8 *The de Montfort Way*, p. 21. 9 *ib*.

"O my Lady, most holy and graceful Mother of God, boundless Ocean of the unseen riches and treasures of the Divinity, thou who art after the Mediator also a universal Mediatrix, behold my faith.

"Thou hast wiped all tears from the face of the earth. Thou hast filled creatures with all manner of blessings. Thou hast brought joy to Heaven and salvation to earth.

"In thee we have an unfailing guarantee of our resurrection. Through thee we hope to reach the Kingdom of Heaven. From thee, who alone art Immaculate, Apostles, Prophets, all the just and humble of heart, since the first Adam to the very end of time, have received, still receive and ever will receive all glory and honour and holiness. (*St. Ephrem, IV cent.*).

"None indeed can attain salvation but through thee, O Most Holy One. None may be saved from evils but through thee, O most Immaculate One. To none may gifts be granted but through thee, O Most Chaste One. On none may the boon of grace be mercifully bestowed but through thee, O Most Honoured One. Who, then, will not proclaim thee blessed?" (*Saint Germanus, VII cent.*).

"God has placed the fullness of all good in Mary. If, then, we have any hope, any grace, any salvation, we can be certain that it has overflowed into us from her, 'who has gone up from the desert overflowing with delights'."

Hence with every fibre of our hearts, with every inmost feeling and affection, let us honour Mary. Such is God's Will, Who would have us obtain everything through her. Yes, such is His Will, His Will for us." (*St. Bernard, XI cent.*).

FAMILY LIFE

God is our Father, Mary is our Mother. Christ is our Brother. And with them we are privileged to form one wonderful Family -the Household of the Faith. "You are the domestics of God," (1) that is to say, members of His Family.

The Blessed Trinity is a sublime Family Circle. Theologically speaking, the Father is Parenthood. The Word is Childhood. The Holy Ghost is Oneness of Will, Mutual love. Thus you have the eternal cycle of Life in the Trinity, the Father always begetting the Son, to Whom He is bound and welded by the Spirit of Love.

Now, it is into this Family Life of God that we are drawn by grace. The Spirit reaches us and encircles us. By His indwelling in us we are brought within the Family Circle of the Trinity, for it is "the Spirit Himself giveth testimony to our spirit that we are the sons of God." (2) In a word, God's Fatherhood is achieved in us by the overshadowing of the Holy Ghost.

How significant, then, it becomes that in the Gospels we are told that Mary's Motherhood is also a work of the same Holy Spirit. "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee," the angel said to her, "and the Power of the Most High shall overshadow thee, and, therefore, the Holy One that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." (3)

Look at it another way. When the angel saluted her, Mary was "full of grace." But as I have said above, grace brings one into the Family Life of the Godhead. Mary's unique grace brought to her, therefore, an altogether unique participation in the Life of the Trinity. It made her God's Mother. "Her fervent love and charity drew the Word to her." (Saint Albert the Great).

Moreover, because, from that moment onwards, our human notion of the Family Life of God must include His Mother, Mary, our adoption by grace into that Family must give us sonship of Mary as surely as it gives us sonship of God the Father. We cannot be in God's Family unless we are Mary's children. If we reject her, we reject Him. Unless we acknowledge her as our Mother, God most certainly will not acknowledge us as His sons.

Hence in our spiritual life let us not forget that in so far as our union with Mary increases, in so far as we really regard her as our Mother and treat her as such, to that extent the Holy Spirit *is achieving the likeness of Christ—Sonship of God—in us. We are making progress in genuine holiness and in the grace and favour of our Heavenly Father.*

THE FAMILY LIKENESS

I have said that our adoption by grace into the Family Circle of the Trinity is effected by the Holy Ghost dwelling
1 Eph. ii, 19. 2 Rom. viii, 16. 3 Luke i, 35.

in us. He is the Bond of Divine kinship between the members of the Holy Family of God. "In one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, and in one Spirit we have all been made to drink." (1)

Well, now, to borrow again from the theologians; in the Blessed Trinity the Holy Ghost is God's Will—as the Word is God's Thought. Consequently, it is no mere coincidence that what I may call the Family Likeness, the external resemblance, between the members of God's Family, is a "showing forth of the Spirit," (2) doing the Will of God.

Such was the lesson of Christ's Life. "In the head of the book it is written of Me: Behold I come to do Thy Will, O God." (3) Such, too, was His spoken word: "Whosoever shall do the Will of God he is My brother, and My sister and Mother." (4)

Mary's life teaches the same truth. Her "behold the Handmaid of the Lord " (5) is the perfect parallel to Christ's "not as I Will, but as Thou Wilt." (6) And it is very significant that no other spoken lesson of hers has been preserved in the Gospels but one brief phrase, that could serve as a motto for would-be saints, a single sentence in which she gives her children the secret of sanctity: "Whatsoever He shall say to you do ye." (7) This she spoke at Cana, on the eve of Christ's public life, as He was about to commence His revelation of the hidden mysteries of God. This is how she introduces Him to His audience. Knowing that He is God, she tells us: "Do His Will in all things."

And in this context I cannot refrain from mentioning the person whose love for Mary brought him to Jesus, the one who learned from her this wisdom of ready obedience to the Will of God. I refer, of course, to Saint Joseph, who as Mary's earthly spouse typified her Heavenly Spouse, the Holy Spirit, the Will of God, in a very special way. With Saint Joseph there was no bartering, no bargaining with God about what he would or wouldn't do. Once his duty was clear he straight away went and did it. "Joseph, rising up, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him." (8)

This simple, unostentatious piety appeals to me, partly because it is so much in the spirit of Christ, so simple and Mary-like, so much more certain and safe, than emotionalism and mere sentiment, and partly also because it has everything in common with the unquestioning, simple faith of our Irish ancestors who were prepared to leave all things, to sacrifice home and friends and their beloved fatherland, for the sake of Christ and His Blessed Mother.

We often refer glibly and most thoughtlessly to the Fiat of Mary, by which the "Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us." Let us not forget that we, her children, must say Amen to our Mother's prayer. We must echo her Fiat. Christ also taught us to say Fiat to God: Fiat voluntas tua, "Thy Will be done on earth as it is in Heaven." (9) Like Mary, our Mother, and like Christ, our Brother, we ought to translate this prayer into living words, into our actions. If we do so the Holy Ghost will come upon us, and the Might of the Most High will overshadow us, and cause to be reproduced in us the likeness of the Son of God Himself.

MARIA ASSUMPTA

The Mother of God belongs to Heaven. Her place is in the bosom of the Divine Family. Hence it was most fitting that, when her work on earth was accomplished, God should take her to Himself. Her most Pure Body had been the instrument by which the Holy Spirit had fashioned Flesh for God made Man and surely that Divine Lover would not leave the virginal beauty of his Spouse to suffer the inglorious corruption of the grave. God is more generous than that to those who have served Him. Hence in her death God bestowed the singular favour of the Assumption on the Maiden who had rendered Him such ready obedience in her life.

And for us who are her children it is comforting to know that Mary is in Heaven. There she is nearer to each one of us than if she had remained in some particular place on earth. There she can foster the cause of our salvation more effectively than here below. If Christ brought His glorified Humanity into Heaven in order that by the presentation of His Sacred Wounds He might intercede for us with the Father, so was it granted to Mary to come before God in the anticipated glory of bodily resurrection, that the Father might be moved still more at the sight of the Immaculate and Virginal Purity of His Son's Mother.

Mary's Assumption is the perfect complement of all her other privileges and graces. Grace always gives us some familiarity with God, increases our union with Him, tends to bring us deeper into the Life of the Trinity. Therefore, the *1 I Cor. xii, 13. 2 ib. ii, 4. 3 Ps. xxxix, 8. 4 Mk iii, 35. 5 Luke i, 38. 6 Mt. xxvi, 39. 7 Jo. ii, 5. 8 Matt. 1, 24 ; 11, 14, 21. 9 ib. vi, 10.*

incomparable fullness of Mary's grace was fittingly shown forth in the unique intimacy with God to which she was admitted in her Assumption. "If Christ, Who is the Life and the Truth, could say: 'Where I am, there also shall My servant be,' how much more certainly will not His Mother be there with Him?" (*St. John Damascene*).

MARY: OUR LIFE, OUR HOPE

Mary's Assumption, like Christ's Ascension, lifts our thoughts to Heaven, the ultimate goal of our existence, makes life worth living, and is an inspiration and stimulus to us in all joys and sorrows. To those especially, who are unhappy and fearful because of past sins, and to those who are uneasy or overanxious about their salvation, I say: Remember Mary. Turn to your Mother, God has welcomed her into His inmost Heaven. There she thinks of you and prays for you. God cannot refuse her anything, because she is His Mother, and because this is the hour of her triumph. He has committed to her the distribution of all His graces. Among these is the grace of your salvation. Pray, therefore; Pray to Mary, and then put aside your anxiety and fearfulness. For Mary, who is a revelation of the gentle sweetness of God, does not like to see her children in unnecessary and harmful unhappiness.

"Our great Queen has gone before us. God has welcomed her with such honour that we, her poor servants, may follow after her with confidence Our exiled nation has sent home an advocate, who, being the Mother of the judge and also the Mother of Mercy, will undoubtedly further the cause of our salvation

"With thirsting souls, therefore, let us hasten to this fountain of mercy. With most eager desire let our misery turn to this treasure of compassion.

"O Most Blessed One, I beseech thee, that, in thy loving kindness thou wouldst strive to let the world see what grace thou hast found with God. By thy holy prayers obtain pardon for sinners, health for the sick, courage for the fearful, comfort for the afflicted, help and relief for all who are sore pressed.

"And may we, O Most Gracious Queen, may we, who praise thee and call on thy most sweet name of Mary, merit to receive by thy intercession an abundance of heavenly grace from Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Lord, Who is over all things, God blessed for ever. Amen. (*Saint Bernard*).

Nihil Obstat:
JOSEPH P. Newth, C.C.,
Censor Theol. Deput.

Imprimi Potest:
✠ IOANNES CAROLUS,
Archiep. Dublinen,
Hiberniae Primas.
Dublini, die 22^o Junii anno 1961.
