

MARY THE MOTHER OF GOD – 5
(J.F.M.H. - 6.9.2018)

The Second Vatican Council document on the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, is called "*Lumen Gentium*". The whole of Chapter 8 is on the Blessed Virgin Mary the Mother of God, within the mystery of Christ and the Church. The opening paragraph of this chapter sets the scene for Her part in God's plan. **"God, in His loving kindness and His wisdom, has wished to bring about the redemption of the world; 'when the time had fully come, He sent His Son, born of a woman ... so that we might receive adoption as sons' (Gal. 4: 4-5). It was the Son 'who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit, of the Virgin Mary'. This is the divine mystery of salvation which is revealed to us and continued in the Church which the Lord set up as His own body, in which the faithful, in adherence to Christ, the Head, and in fellowship with all His saints, must also venerate the memory 'first of all, of the glorious Mary ever virgin, Mother of Jesus Christ, our Lord and God.'" (Lumen Gentium 8. 52)** The last sentence in this chapter tells us something important. We can see that Christ the Head of the Mystical Body is the one who leads and directs our veneration of the memory of his Mother. The saints and ourselves, being members of His Mystical Body, quite properly join in that veneration. It is Christ who sets our priorities in this veneration of His Mother. If we did not follow His lead, we would not be following our Head but our own personal views and probably a lack of understanding. Not sheep following the Shepherd, but sheep straying, and sometimes even straying into another sheepfold.

There is a difference between Our Lady and all other saints, which has a bearing on what we believe about her. The saints' purity and holiness is that of sins forgiven, but Our Lady's is that of the Immaculate Virgin, who was from the first instance of her conception untouched by any taint of sin. By reason of her function, God "by a singular grace and privilege" created her soul in the integrity of its innocence. It is understandable that Catholics of the Eastern Uniate Church call Our Lady, **"The one who most resembles the Most High"**. The virginity of Mary was a necessary prerequisite to the birth of God the Son. The involvement of a man would have meant that there would have been a second person born, a human person, and this was not the case here. There were **not** two persons, a divine person and a human person, but **only one**. That **person already existed** and was a **divine person**, with a divine nature. The mother enabled Him to be incarnate of her flesh, and from her He took His human nature, or as the Scriptures put it **"the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us."** The continued virginity of Mary was surely a most fitting gift. The Immaculate Conception, her sinlessness, her fullness of grace, are also gifts given to Mary in view of her vocation to be the Mother of God. Her motherhood was not just about bringing Christ into bodily existence. She was mother of the Redeemer in the full sense of being His assistant in the work of redemption. In order to take a worthy part in this work, she had to receive her purity and fullness of grace, fruits of the redemption, in advance.

The mystery that completes Mary's cooperation in the work of Christ is her role as Mediatrix of Grace. Because her first assent to her choice to be the Mother of God was used by the Almighty Father to be the means of bringing Christ, the source of all grace, to mankind, the help she bore Him in His work of redemption, and her unbroken loyalty to Christ in His sufferings, are effective in her supreme position as Mediatrix of grace. To Mary's position as the most perfect handmaid, corresponds her first place in the distribution of the fruits of the sacrifice. So the Church teaches the universal character of Mary's mediation by her intercession. All the graces that God accords us on account of Christ's merits come to us either directly or indirectly through Mary. Cardinal Newman made an interesting comment about Mary's intercession **"Mary intercedes according to Christ's will, and when He wills to save, Mary at once prays. He wills indeed according to her prayers, but she prays according to His Will."** (Answer to Pussey's *Eirenicon*.)

From the Cross, our Redeemer gave His Mother to us as our mother, Jews and Non-Jews, Catholics and Non-Catholics. Although the truth of Christ's divinity, and of Mary's divine maternity were clearly contained in Holy Scripture, like every other truth, it was not immune from attack. It was the occasion of just such an attack, by Nestorius, the Bishop of Constantinople and others, that caused the Catholic Church to define Mary's Motherhood of God, at the Council of Ephesus in 431. About 4 years earlier, there was consternation when from the Cathedral pulpit of Constantinople, Nestorius taught that in Christ, there is not one person with two distinct natures, but two distinct persons each with their own nature; that Mary is the mother of Christ, the human person, but not the Mother of God the Son, the divine person. The Council Fathers noting that women give birth to babies (people) and not birth to natures, confirmed what had always been the faith of the Church. The waiting crowds, greeted the news about their heavenly mother with joyful shouts of "Theotokos". (It means in English "The Mother of God".) By proclaiming the Divine Maternity of Our Lady, the dogma re-affirmed in a way that brooked no argument, the Church's faith in the divinity of Christ. While Mary's title protected the truth about her Son. The truth about her Son gave Mary her title.

Remembering that Mary is the natural Mother of Christ and the Adoptive Mother of us all, it may be worth while reading part of a letter written by a well known theologian to a friend in 1521 on the Motherhood of Mary, *"The great thing is none other than that she became the Mother of God; in which process so many and such great gifts are bestowed upon her that no one is able to comprehend them. Thereupon follows all honour, all blessedness, and the fact that in the whole race of men only one person is above all the rest, one to whom no one else is equal. For that reason her dignity is summed up in one phrase when we call her the Mother of God; no one can say greater things of her, or to her, even if he had as many tongues as leaves and blades of grass, as the stars in heaven, and the sands on the seashore. It should also be meditated in the heart what that means: to be the Mother of God."* (The author of this letter, Martin Luther was a Roman Catholic at the time. However, later, in the same year, Martin Luther was excommunicated by Pope Leo X for his teaching on the Sacraments, on the Mass and on a number of other things.) In the same year the Catholic English King, Henry VIII, published his theological treatise against Luther, in vindication of the Church's dogmatic teaching on the Sacraments, on the Sacrifice of the Mass, and, as it happened, in it, he supported the Supremacy of the Pope. The treatise was called '*Assertio Septem Sacramentorum*'. Pope Leo X read it and called him '*Fidei Defensor*' (Defender of the Faith), a title used by English Monarchs to this day. However, one seldom hears that it was defence of the Catholic Faith that earned him the title. Ten years later King and Pope fell out over the question of the King's divorce, and Henry VIII assumed the title of "Protector and Supreme Head of the Church of England". Once again a new sheepfold was in the process of being formed.

In 1534 the Church of England broke off all contact with Rome, and the influence of the German "Reformer" Martin Luther, was welcomed into this land once known as "*Our Lady's Dowry*". It was the start of what eventually caused the Church of England to discard most of the 7 Sacraments, the Sacrifice of the Mass and caused most of the great Pre-Reformation Churches to lose their "Lady Chapels". Despite the views of Martin Luther on Mary as the Mother of God, which should "be meditated in the heart" it was not the so called "Reformed Churches" that meditated on it, so as to produce great theological Marian writings, but the Church he abandoned as being so in need of reform. Over two Millennia, the Catholic Church has continued to meditate on what it means for Mary to be the Mother of God, and the Marian dogmas and a vast quantity of Catholic literature show its depths. Catholic Litanies of Our Lady give some idea of that meditation. Chapter VIII of *Lumen Gentium* ends with the acknowledgement that it gave great comfort and joy to the Council Fathers, that even among the separated brethren there were some who gave due honour to the Mother of our Lord and Saviour, especially among the Orientals, who with devout mind and fervent impulse give honour to the Mother of God, ever Virgin.

"Hail Mary, ..."

"Hail Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy..."

