

Gifts of Finest Wheat

Fall 2009 - Ecclesiology

November 19th, 2009

Session 8 – Mariology

- Prayer –
Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love.
V. Send forth your Spirit, and they shall be created.
R. And You shall renew the face of the earth.
Let us pray.
**O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations.
Through Christ Our Lord.
Amen.**

- Questions/Clarifications up to this point? From the reading?
- Our goal this evening: To examine the person of the Mother of God and her role in salvation history with special emphasis on the four Marian Dogmas and the scriptural witness to Mary.

“There is but one Mediator as we know from the words of the apostle, "for there is one God and one mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a redemption for all". The maternal duty of Mary toward men in no wise obscures or diminishes this unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows His power. For all the salvific influence of the Blessed Virgin on men originates, not from some inner necessity, but from the divine pleasure. 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. In no way does it impede, but rather does it foster the immediate union of the faithful with Christ” (LG 60).

- Mother of God
 - “And why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” (Luke 1:43)
 - Lord= Greek Kyrios; The LXX used this word to translate the Hebrew Adoni (lord), which was used as a circumlocution to the Divine name YHWH.
 - Early Church debate: could Mary rightly be called Mother of God, or simply Mother of Christ?
 - After the Council of Nicaea affirmed that Christ was both human and divine, the Nestorians tried to split into two the person of Jesus: a human person and a divine person.
 - Mary was seen as the mother of only the human person.
 - The early Church held that there is only one Person, one subject in Christ, and that is the Divine Person – the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity.
 - It was God the son that was born into the world. And mothers give birth to persons, not to mere natures.
 - The Council of Ephesus in 381 defined that Mary can indeed be called *Theotokos* – “God-bearer” – Mother of God.

- This belief had further repercussions. If it were indeed God that was born to a woman, then it was God who lived a human life, it was God who died on the cross, and only then are we saved from our sins.
- The ancient prayer *Te Deum* says to Christ: “When you became man to set us free, you did not spurn the Virgin’s womb.”
- Perpetual Virginity
 - Scripture is clear enough regarding the Virgin Birth.
 - “How can this be since I do not know man?” (Luke 1:34)
 - Mary’s total dedication to the mission of the Son of God
 - The so-called “brethren” of the Lord mentioned in scripture.
 - Early Church writers were quick to note that these references in the Greek could as easily have meant cousins or other close relatives.
 - Another common interpretation is that these brethren of the Lord were Joseph’s children from a previous marriage.
 - Origen had this to say around the year 248: “The Book [the *Protoevangelium*] of James [records] that the brethren of Jesus were sons of Joseph by a former wife, whom he married before Mary. Now those who say so wish to preserve the honor of Mary in virginity to the end, so that body of hers which was appointed to minister to the Word . . . might not know intercourse with a man after the Holy Spirit came into her and the power from on high overshadowed her. And I think it in harmony with reason that Jesus was the firstfruit among men of the purity which consists in [perpetual] chastity, and Mary was among women. For it were not pious to ascribe to any other than to her the firstfruit of virginity” (*Commentary on Matthew 2:17* [A.D. 248]).
 - And again, referring to the words of Christ on the cross, Hilary of Poitiers says: “If they [the brethren of the Lord] had been Mary’s sons and not those taken from Joseph’s former marriage, she would never have been given over in the moment of the passion [crucifixion] to the apostle John as his mother, the Lord saying to each, ‘Woman, behold your son,’ and to John, ‘Behold your mother’ [John 19:26–27], as he bequeathed filial love to a disciple as a consolation to the one desolate” (*Commentary on Matthew 1:4* [A.D. 354]).
 - “When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel commanded him; he took his wife, but knew her not **until** she had borne a son” (Matthew 1:24-25).
 - Speaks of a state of affairs *up to* a particular point, without necessary reference to a change after that point.
 - “I am with you always, until the end of the age” (Mt28:20).
 - “For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet” (1 Cor 15:25).
- Immaculate Conception
 - Not Jesus’ virgin birth.
 - We are all born in a state of lacking sanctifying grace – in a certain estrangement from God. Not so with Mary.
 - From the first moment of her existence, Satan had no dominion over her. If you could create your own mother, wouldn’t you create her as perfectly as possible. How could the one who bore in her womb the Son of God have anything to do with sin or fallen-ness?
 - “I will put enmity between you and the woman” (Gen 3:15).

- We see in the Angel's greeting to Mary at the Annunciation: "Hail full of grace." The English translation doesn't do it justice. I quote here from a Catholic Answers tract:
 - "The grace given to Mary is at once permanent and of a unique kind. *Kecharitomene* is a perfect passive participle of *charitoo*, meaning "to fill or endow with grace." Since this term is in the perfect tense, it indicates that Mary was graced in the past but with continuing effects in the present. So, the grace Mary enjoyed was not a result of the angel's visit. In fact, Catholics hold, it extended over the whole of her life, from conception onward. She was in a state of sanctifying grace from the first moment of her existence."
- Some of the earliest affirmations regarding the Immaculate Conception actually arose from a heretical sect known as Pelagians. This group believed that we could be sinless through our own will power, without God's help. They appealed to the Blessed Virgin Mary, whom they said *must have been without sin*. In response, St. Augustine, while not denying Mary's sinlessness, stressed the *unique* character of this grace of God, not extending it to all of humanity like the Pelagians.
- Reflections on Mary as Conceived without sin sprung, like many Church beliefs, from liturgical practice and popular devotion. Around the seventh century, feasts of Mary's conception were being celebrated, and titles such as "all-holy" and "all pure" were being attributed to her. It was these liturgical reflections that deepened the Church's conviction that God had indeed revealed to his Church that Mary was without all stain of Original Sin.
- It was on December 8, 1854 (The Feast of the Immaculate Conception) that Pope Pius IX exercised the gift of Papal infallibility in defining as a Dogma of the Faith the Immaculate Conception of Mary. In the Apostolic Constitution *Ineffabilis Deus* he stated that:
 - "We declare, pronounce, and define that the doctrine which holds that the most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instance of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin, is a doctrine revealed by God and therefore to be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful."
 - Notice that this grace of being preserved from Original Sin is in view of the merits of Jesus Christ. Mary declared herself that "My spirit rejoices in God my savior." She did not merit this on her own, but through the anticipated merits of Jesus Christ's redemptive death and resurrection.
- Mary's sinlessness was not only a matter of her conception. The Catechism says that "Mary benefited first of all and uniquely from Christ's victory over sin: she was preserved from all stain of original sin and by a special grace of God committed no sin of any kind during her whole earthly life" (CCC 411).
- Assumption
 - Gen 5:24 (Heb 11:5) Enoch was taken to Heaven without dying
 - 2 Kings 2:11 Elijah assumed into heaven in a fiery chariot
 - Close connection to the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception
 - Death and corruption are a result of sin, which Mary never experienced.
 - Mary was so united to her Son, that it was fitting she should be the first to share in His glory in the resurrection of the Body.

- It is commonly agreed that Mary ended her life in Ephesus, but unlike almost all other Biblical figures, no one claims to have the remains of Mary. It could very well be that this is because the Apostles' knew of the event of her Assumption.
- Though there is no record of the Assumption in the scriptures, remember that we also hold Sacred Tradition of the Apostles as the Word of God.
- Again, it was liturgical feasts that spurred on the Church's devotion to the Assumption of Mary.
 - In the East as early as the Fourth Century, the Church celebrated the Dormition, or falling-asleep of Mary.
 - In the eighth Century, the feast was Changed to be called the Assumption of Mary by Pope Hadrian I.
- It was in 1950 that Pope Pius X, also exercising the chrism of Papal Infallibility, defined as a dogma of the faith that Mary was assumed body and soul into heaven. He proclaimed in *Munificentissimus Deus* that:
 - “ 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.”
 - Notice that he avoids saying whether or not Mary actually died. Many early church writers are split on the matter. Was Mary freed from all the effects of Original Sin, including bodily death? Or would she have been so conformed to her Son that she chose to unite herself to Him even in undergoing death. This is something we do not know.
- Mother of the Church
 - “Then the dragon [the ancient serpent] became angry with the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring, those who keep God's commandments and bear witness to Jesus (Revelation 12:17)”.
 - The giving of Mary to the “Beloved Disciple” at the foot of the cross.
 - “This maternity of Mary in the order of grace began with the consent which she gave in faith at the Annunciation and which she sustained without wavering beneath the cross, and lasts until The eternal fulfillment of all the elect. Taken up to heaven she did not lay aside this salvific duty, but by her constant intercession continued 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 cultics, until they are led into the happiness of their true home. Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked by the Church under the titles of Advocate, Auxiliatrix, Adjutrix, and Mediatrix” (LG62).
- Scriptural Witness
 - "Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come" (2:4). And again on the cross: "When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son."(19:26). Why did Jesus refer to his mother as “woman?”
 - Is John is calling us back to the beginning? Back to Genesis. Back to the promise of salvation when God said: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will strike at your head, while you strike at his heel” (3:15).
 - Mary is often seen as the woman promised in Genesis in the first announcement of salvation.
 - Mary is the new Eve. St. Irenaeus made this connection explicit in the year 189 when he wrote:

- Thus, the knot of Eve's disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary. What the virgin Eve had bound in unbelief, the Virgin Mary loosed through faith The Lord...was making a recapitulation of that disobedience that had occurred in connection with a tree, through the obedience that was upon a tree [i.e., the cross]. So if Eve disobeyed God, yet Mary was persuaded to be obedient to God. And thus, as the human race fell into bondage to death by means of a virgin, so it is rescued by a virgin. Virginal disobedience has been balanced in the opposite scale by virginal obedience. For in the same way, the sin of the first created man received amendment by the correction of the First-Begotten"(Against Heresies 3:22:24 [A.D. 189]).
- "Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the **ark of his covenant** could be seen in the temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, and peals of thunder, an earthquake, and a violent hailstorm. A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was with child and wailed aloud in pain as she labored to give birth... She gave birth to a son, a male child, destined to rule all the nations with an iron rod. Her child was caught up to God and his throne" (Rev 11:19-12:5).
- What was the Ark of the Covenant? In the Old Testament, it was the mercy seat of God, the very presence of God among the people.
- It was thought to be lost when the Babylonians sacked Jerusalem.
- The Letter to the Hebrews tells us what was contained in the Ark: "...the ark of the covenant entirely covered with gold. In it were the gold jar containing the manna, the staff of Aaron that had sprouted, and the tablets of the covenant" (Heb 9:4).
 - So in the ark was the bread from Heaven, the staff that symbolized Aaron's authority, and the tablets of the law.
- What happened to the ark? We don't exactly know, but 2 Maccabees 2:4-7 tells us this: "The same document also tells how the prophet, following a divine revelation, ordered that the tent and the ark should accompany him and how he went off to the mountain which Moses climbed to see God's inheritance. When Jeremiah arrived there, he found a room in a cave in which he put the tent, the ark, and the altar of incense; then he blocked up the entrance. Some of those who followed him came up intending to mark the path, but they could not find it. When Jeremiah heard of this, he reproved them: "The place is to remain unknown until God gathers his people together again and shows them mercy."
- When did God gather His people and show him his mercy? When he sent his only son into the world at Mary's yes.
- Like the ark carried the presence of God, now Mary carries inside her very self God Himself. She carried not the manna from heaven, but the true bread of life; not the rod symbolizing authority, but the one destined to rule the nations; and not the tablets of stone, but the law to be written on our hearts.
- Mary is not only the new Eve, she is the New Ark of the Covenant. And the other New Testament writers know this too. Compare these two passages: in the first, the Ark comes to visit King David; in the second, Mark comes to visit her cousin Elizabeth.

David feared the LORD that day and said, "How can the ark of the LORD come to me?" So David would not have the ark of the LORD brought to him in the City of David, but

diverted it to the house of Obed-edom the Gittite. **The ark of the LORD remained in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite for three months**, and the LORD blessed Obed-edom and his whole house. When it was reported to King David that the LORD had blessed the family of Obed-edom and all that belonged to him, David went to bring up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom into the City of David amid festivities. As soon as the bearers of the ark of the LORD had advanced six steps, he sacrificed an ox and a fatling. Then David, girt with a linen apron, came **dancing before the LORD** with abandon. (2 Sam 6:9-14)

During those days Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the **infant leaped in her womb**, and Elizabeth, filled with the holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, "Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. *And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?* For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. **Mary remained with her about three months** and then returned to her home. (Lk 1:39-44; 56)

- Luke knew the Old Testament background about the Ark. He knew the connection with Mary. Sometimes the role of Mary is hidden in scripture, but the Catholic devotion to Mary is firmly rooted in the writings of the Bible.
- Common Objections
 - Catholics Worship Mary.
 - Why pray to Mary? Why not go straight to Jesus?
 - Devotion to Mary takes away from our honor of God.
 - “All generations will call me Blessed” (Lk 1:48).
 - Mary’s Immaculate Conception and sinlessness makes her seem like a goddess.
 - The Bible doesn’t use phrases such as “Immaculate Conception” or “Assumption.”
- Questions?
- Evaluations
- Announcements
 - Winter session: Church History
 - Women of Grace
 - Advent Bible Study
 - Know Your Faith
 - At Home with the Word
- Closing prayer – Memorare

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thine intercession was left unaided.

Inspired by this confidence, I fly unto thee, O Virgin of virgins, my mother; to thee do I come, before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in thy mercy hear and answer me.

Amen.