

Know Your Faith

Session 8 - Mary

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.

Some foundations for our veneration of Mary

- I. Mary is the Mother of God
 - a. Mary's unique role and place of honor are based primarily on her relationship with her Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.
 - b. As mother of the head, she is mother of the body. Mary's motherhood extends in a spiritual way, to all believers. Cf. John 19:27 and Revelation 12:17.
- II. 4th Commandment + Imitation of Christ
- III. The Concept of Intercessory Prayer
 - a. We ask others to pray for us, and we naturally pray for others, and we know this is efficacious.
 - b. James 5:16b: "Pray for one another that you might be healed. The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects."
 - c. What reason do we have to believe that the intercessions of those before the throne of God are any less efficacious?
 - d. Revelation 5:8 – "...the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each of the elders held a harp and gold bowls filled with incense, which are the prayers of the holy ones."
 - e. Tobit 12:15 – "I am Raphael, one of the seven holy angels who present the prayers of the saints and enter into the presence of the glory of the Holy One."
- IV. Mary the model of discipleship
 - a. Her *Fiat*
 - b. She pondered these thing in her heart – Luke 2:51
 - c. "Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord" (Luke 1:45).
 - d. Mary at the foot of the cross
- V. Mary points others to Christ
 - a. "Do whatever he tells you." – John 2:5

Answering Common Objections

- I. Catholics pray to Mary. Prayer is a form of worship. Therefore, Catholics worship Mary.
 - a. Certainly, prayer *can take on* the character of worship.
 - b. For many Protestants, prayer is the heart of worship, as where for Catholics, sacrifice is at the center of worship of God. So it's not surprising that we would have different understandings of the same word or even aspects of the same reality.**
 - c. When Catholics pray to anyone other than God, it lacks a certain reality of self-abandonment and honor that is due solely to God.
 - d. It reflects the old English word *prithoe* or "I pray you..." It is a form of request of another: "I pray you pass the salt." In this context, praying to Mary is a request, most often for her intercession.
 - e. If, at a dinner table, I said to you, "I pray you pass the pepper," would you accuse me of worshiping you?
 - f. When, in Psalm 148:2, the psalmist addresses angels ("Praise him, all his angels, praise him, all his hosts!"), is the psalmist worshiping the angels?
- II. Do you know how many prayers she would have to hear? She'd have to be omnipotent and omniscient. But those are qualities of God, not a human.
 - a. The number of prayers is not *infinite*. So, despite being many, it would not require omniscience or omnipotence.
 - b. This suggests a limited notion of heaven with the time/space limitations of this life.
 - c. It is through God's will that those in heaven can hear the prayers of those on earth.
- III. The scriptures forbid contacting the dead (Necromancy). Cf. Deuteronomy 18:10–11.
 - a. Not a blanket prohibition against contact with the dead. For example Moses and Elijah appear with Christ to the disciples at the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:3).
 - b. What God has forbidden is necromantic practice of conjuring up spirits. "There shall not be found among you any one who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, any one who practices divination, a soothsayer, or an augur, or a sorcerer, or a charmer, or a medium, or a wizard, or a necromancer. . . . For these nations, which you are about to dispossess, give heed to soothsayers and to diviners; but as for you, the Lord your God has not allowed you so to do. The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brethren—him you shall heed" (Deut. 18:10–15).
 - c. The divine prohibition is against conjuring the dead for purposes of gaining information; one is to look to God's prophets instead.
 - d. This is a far cry from asking a saint to pray for us.
- IV. Veneration to Mary distracts from, or takes away from our worship of God.
 - a. What gives an individual more glory, honoring those he loves, or ignoring the ones he loves?

- b. If you were to come to my house and ignore my mother....? But how am I honored if you also honor my mother?
 - c. Do we sumptuously decorate the throne room of the king, and bring in all his subjects, or do we strip it of any decor and empty the room, so that nothing will distract from the glory of the king?
 - d. The glory of God's creation reflects his glory. Praising creation is just a way of praising God *for* His creation.
 - e. Why can I bless God for a mountain or waterfall, but I can't open my mouth about His other without taking away from Him?
- V. Mary is not the Mother of God, but of the human nature of Jesus. "Mother of God" is a title of divinity.
- a. A woman does not become the mother of a nature, but of a person. "...Awww....look at the cute little nature you gave birth to..."
 - b. Mary gave birth to a Person. That Person happens to be the second person of the Blessed Trinity.
 - c. Just as a human parent does not give the immortal soul, God does directly, we still say that she is the mother of the =whole person, not just the body. In the same way, even though Mary did not contribute to His divinity, she remains the mother of the whole person.
 - d. "Why is it granted to me that the *mother of my Lord* should come to me?" Luke 1:43
 - e. "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to ransom those under the law, so that we might receive adoption." Galatians 4:4-5
 - f. The title "Mother of God" does not suggest Mary as the source of divine being, nor as prior to the divine Person. It is simply not a term of divinity, but a term the upholds the reality of who Christ is.
- VI. Mary was not perpetually a virgin. Scripture tells us of her other children: brethren of the Lord.
- a. Early Church writers were quick to note that these references in the Greek could as easily have meant cousins or other close relatives.
 - b. Another common interpretation is that these brethren of the Lord were Joseph's children from a previous marriage.
 - c. 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]).
 - d. 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]).

- e. "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).
 - i. Speaks of a state of affairs *up to* a particular point, without necessary reference to a change after that point.
 - ii. "I am with you always, until the end of the age" (Mt28:20).
 - iii. "For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet" (1 Cor 15:25).

VII. How can Mary be without sin (The Immaculate Conception) if she herself called God "my savior?" (Luke 1:47)

- a. Salvation by restoration vs. salvation by preservation
- b. "The most Blessed Virgin Mary was, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God and by virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, Savior of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin." (Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus* (1854))

VIII. Mary wasn't sinless. Romans 3:23 says that **ALL** have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

- a. "Have all people committed actual sins? Consider a child below the age of reason. By definition he can't sin, since sinning requires the ability to reason and the ability to intend to sin. This is indicated by Paul later in the letter to the Romans when he speaks of the time when Jacob and Esau were unborn babies as a time when they "had done nothing either good or bad" (Rom. 9:11).

We also know of another very prominent exception to the rule: Jesus (Heb. 4:15). So if Paul's statement in Romans 3 includes an exception for the New Adam (Jesus), one may argue that an exception for the New Eve (Mary) can also be made.

Paul's comment seems to have one of two meanings. It might be that it refers not to absolutely everyone, but just to the mass of mankind (which means young children and other special cases, like Jesus and Mary, would be excluded without having to be singled out). If not that, then it would mean that everyone, without exception, is subject to original sin, which is true for a young child, for the unborn, even for Mary—but she, though due to be subject to it, was preserved by God from it and its stain." (From Catholic Answers Tract "Immaculate Conception and Assumption")

IX. The Dogma of the Immaculate Conception makes Mary equal with Jesus, who alone was without sin.

- a. In the beginning, Adam and Eve and the angels were created without sin, but were not equal to God.
- b. In heaven, we will not sin, but we will not be equal to God.

- c. Freedom from sin does not make us *less* human, it makes us *more* human, more what we were created to be. In that sense, Mary was not equal to God, rather, she was most authentically human.
- X. Scripture nowhere mentions the so-called “Bodily Assumption of Mary.”
 - a. Neither does it mention her burial. The Bible is silent.
 - b. We should expect this. Much of the NT could very well have been written *before* the end of Mary’s earthly life. Of course there would be no mention. In addition, the point of the scriptures was not to detail to events of Mary’s life, but of Christ’s. And one of the later books of the NT does make reference to Mary in glory (Revelation 12).
- XI. The Assumption is another attribution of divine qualities (ascension) to Mary, making her equal to God.
 - a. There is a distinction between ascension (by one’s own power), and assumption (taken up by the power of another). Only Christ, as divine, ascended.
 - b. Both Elijah and Enoch were assumed into heaven in scripture, but they are never claimed as divine.