

Mary

RCIA Session 10
November 23rd, 2010

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. We don't
- b. Prayer does not equal worship
 - i. The Bible directs us to invoke those in heaven and ask them to pray with us. Thus in Psalms 103, we pray, "Bless the Lord, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, hearkening to the voice of his word! Bless the Lord, all his hosts, his ministers that do his will!" (Ps. 103:20-21). And in Psalms 148 we pray, "Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the

heavens, praise him in the heights! Praise him, all his angels, praise him, all his host!" (Ps. 148:1-2).

- ii. Not only do those in heaven pray with us, they also pray for us. In the book of Revelation, we read: "[An] angel came and stood at the altar [in heaven] with a golden censer; and he was given much incense to mingle with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar before the throne; and the smoke of the incense rose with the prayers of the saints from the hand of the angel before God" (Rev. 8:3-4).

And those in heaven who offer to God our prayers aren't just angels, but humans as well. John sees that "the twenty-four elders [the leaders of the people of God in heaven] fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and with golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints" (Rev. 5:8). The simple fact is, as this passage shows: The saints in heaven offer to God the prayers of the saints on earth.

- iii. See also Hebrews 11-12

- c. Certainly, prayer *can take on* the character of worship.
- d. 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.**
- e. When Catholics pray to anyone other than God, it lacks a certain reality of self-abandonment and honor that is due solely to God.
- f. It reflects the old English word *prithie* 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.
- g. If, at a dinner table, I said to you, "I pray you pass the pepper," would you accuse me of worshiping you?
- h. 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. Why pray to Mary? Why not go straight to Jesus?

- a. We can and we do
- b. Not mutually exclusive; why not both/and?
- c. We ask each other to pray for each other; why not go straight to Jesus?
- d. Wedding feast at Cana

III. 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.

IV. Veneration to Mary distracts from, or takes away from our worship of God.

- a. It's not a zero-sum game
- b. What gives an individual more glory, honoring those he loves, or ignoring the ones he loves?
- c. If you were to come to my house and ignore my mother....? But how am I honored if you also honor my mother?
- d. 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?
- e. The glory of God's creation reflects his glory. Praising creation is just a way of praising God *for* His creation.
- f. Why can I bless God for a mountain or waterfall, but I can't open my mouth about His mother without taking away from Him?

Biblical tour of Mary as new Eve, and Ark of the Covenant

We start with the words of Christ to His Mother in the Gospel of John: Jesus said to her, "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?" At first glimpse, it doesn't seem to be the most respectful of terms. But I think 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). John, I think, is making the point that Mary is 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]).

There is another place that the scriptures refer to a woman. In Revelation:

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.

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.