

DAY 23: Maternal Mediation

As one of our guides to Consecration Day, St. John Paul II is a *triple gift*. Not only is he a Marian saint, like our other three guides; not only is he brilliant and thoroughly trained in theology, like de Montfort and Kolbe; but he is also a Pope. Therefore, his words carry the teaching authority of the successor of St. Peter ... and the authoritative weight of an Ecumenical Council! Well, this is true in the sense that his teachings on the Mother of God are deeply rooted in the authoritative Mariology of the Second Vatican Council. Because of this dependence on the Council, before we look to John Paul's teaching on Marian consecration, let's see what the Council has to say about Mary. (Tomorrow, we'll begin to ponder how John Paul builds on Vatican II's teaching.)

One can find the main Marian teachings of Vatican II in the last chapter of the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, known by its Latin title, *Lumen Gentium*. The heart of these teachings has to do with what's usually called Mary's "maternal mediation." Maternal mediation basically means that Mary is our spiritual mother (hence "maternal") who assists us from heaven with her prayers and motherly care to help bring us to God (hence "mediation"). While the term "maternal" should be familiar, "mediation" may need some explaining.

A mediator is someone who stands between two people for the sake of bringing them into unity. Thus, Jesus Christ is a mediator. He is the one who, after the Fall, stands between God and fallen humanity to bring us back into communion with God. And there's only one, as St. Paul makes clear, "[T]here is one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ" (1 Tim 2:5).

If there's only one mediator between God and man, and if that one mediator is Jesus Christ, then why does the Second Vatican Council describe Mary as a mediator? Because God is generous. In other words, Jesus doesn't keep his role as mediator to himself. He wants Mary — and not just Mary, but all Christians — to share in his one mediation, though in subordinate ways. For instance, each of us shares in Christ's one mediation when we pray for one another "in Christ." I mentioned a similar point in the introduction when I wrote that God wants all of us to participate in his work of salvation. I also mentioned there that Mary has a uniquely important role in this work. Again, according to Vatican II, this special role is captured by the phrase "maternal mediation."

Among creatures, Mary's role in the ongoing work of salvation is by far the most important. She was given such an important role "not from some inner necessity" on God's part but "from the divine pleasure." Again, we see God's generosity in including us in the work of redemption, we the very same creatures he came to redeem. The following passage from *Lumen Gentium* summarizes Mary's cooperation in this work both when she was on earth and now as she is in heaven:

[T]he Blessed Virgin was on this earth the virgin Mother of the Redeemer, and above all others and in a singular way the generous associate and humble handmaid of the Lord. She conceived, brought forth, and nourished Christ. She presented him to the Father in the temple, and was united with him by compassion as he died on the cross. In this singular way she cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope, and burning charity in the work of our Savior in giving back supernatural life to souls. Wherefore she is our mother in the order of grace.

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 difficulties, until they are led to the happiness of their true home. Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked by the Church under the titles of Advocate, Auxiliatrix, Adjutrix, and Mediatrix. This, however, is to be so understood that it neither takes away from nor adds anything to the dignity and efficaciousness of Christ the one Mediator.

So, while on earth, Mary cooperated with God's plan of salvation "above all others," particularly by giving birth to and caring for Jesus. Now in heaven, Mary still cooperates in a special way in God's plan of salvation. Through her "constant intercession" and "maternal charity," she brings us grace, mercy, and the "gifts of eternal salvation." Tomorrow, we'll begin to see how John Paul develops this teaching on Mary's motherhood in the order of grace. For now, we can reflect on this great gift of God: Mary is our spiritual mother whose Godgiven task is to nurture us with tender care and the gifts and graces that come to us through her loving prayers.

Today's Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, living in Mary.

Fill my heart with praise to God for giving me Mary as my spiritual mother.