



The Church Triumphant

PRAYING WITH
THE SAINTS

A Redemptorist Pastoral Publication



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First edition

If the earthly Church that awaits the
Lord's return is the Militant Church,
the Church of the New Jerusalem
is the Triumphant Church.
It is made up of faithful disciples and
conquerors in this worldly battle.
They have exchanged the sword for a
palm of victory and the cross for a crown.

SEE REVELATION 7:9–10;
2 TIMOTHY 4:8

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Preface

“Me, a Saint?”

“The life of a saint is just the imitation of Jesus Christ.”

—ST. JOHN VIANNEY, SERMON ON THE INCARNATION

Saint Paul succinctly describes our Christian ideal: “This is the will of God, your holiness” (1 Thessalonians 4:3). Sanctification is not reserved for a privileged and elite corps; it is intended for everyone. Our universal call to imitate Christ comes first with baptism; canonization is the recognition that one has carried out the baptismal call to a heroic degree.

In a December 2007 address to the postulators of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, Pope Benedict XVI said that recognition given to saints “paves the way to true spiritual resurrection, to lasting conversions, and to the blossoming of new saints.” In other words, the canonization process is under the guidance of the Holy Spirit for the holiness of the Church’s members. Saints encourage more saints among us. Fundamentally, then, saints exist for our benefit in making it

easier for us to imitate Christ. Saint Ambrose taught, “The life of the saints is the norm of life for all others.”

Strictly speaking, canonization doesn’t *make* someone a saint; it recognizes that God has already declared the person a saint by admitting him or her into heaven. In the canonization process, the title “Venerable” is officially accorded to a Catholic “Servant of God” who has practiced all the Christian virtues to a heroic degree. The pope approves the beatification of a holy person after an investigation into the person’s life, writings, heroic practice of virtue, and, except in the case of martyrs, the certification of one miracle worked by God through his or her intercession. If the findings of the investigation are conclusive, the pope decrees that the “Venerable” Servant of God is now called “Blessed” and may be honored locally or in a limited way in the liturgy. A second miracle ascribed to the intercession of the Blessed is required for canonization, the final stage in the lengthy and rigorous process. Canonization is a papal decree that a person who died as a martyr and/or practiced Christian virtue to a heroic degree is now in heaven and is worthy of honor and imitation by all the faithful.

In these pages—beginning with Mary, the Queen of All Saints, and ending with several holy men and women in the canonization process—we glimpse the bountiful goodness of the Lord! In every generation, our God, out of love, sends witnesses of the faith as friends to uplift us, protect us, and remind us of our universal call to holiness. They not only invite intercession, inspiration, and imitation, they also instill

hope. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, “The Church recognizes the power of the Spirit of holiness within [the Church] and sustains the hope of believers by proposing the saints to them as models and intercessors” (CCC 828). When we imitate their virtues, true to the gospel of Christ, we rejoice with them in the fellowship of the saints that form the Church Triumphant—the “great cloud of witnesses” to which we all belong. (See Hebrews 12:1.)

Opening Prayer with Mary, Mother of Jesus

[Mary said,]

*"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;
my spirit rejoices in God my savior.*

*For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness;
behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed.*

*The Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.*

*His mercy is from age to age
to those who fear him.*

*He has shown might with his arm,
dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart.*

*He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones
but lifted up the lowly.*

*The hungry he has filled with good things;
the rich he has sent away empty.*

*He has helped Israel his servant,
remembering his mercy,
according to his promise to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever."*

LUKE 1:46-55

AN HOUR WITH Mary, Mother of Jesus

Spiritual Biography

Little is known for certain of the life of Mary, the Mother of Jesus. According to the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, she was the betrothed of Joseph of Bethlehem. The Gospel of Mark mentions her by name just once, and most translations of the Gospel of John describe her only as the Mother of Jesus. She appears once in the Acts of the Apostles. Symbolism and myth overlie many of these references, including the extracanonical stories, which add that her parents were Anne and Joachim of Nazareth.

Yet, from these scant mentions has developed a vast Mariology. Tradition and dogma now proclaim her the Ever-Virgin and the Immaculate Conception. The Church appeals to her as Advocate and Mediatrix and entreats her aid as Comforter of the Afflicted and Help of Christians. We call her Our Mother of Good Counsel, of Grace, of Perpetual Help, of Mercy. She is the New Eve, the Ark of the New Covenant, the Morning

Star, the Mystical Rose, and the Seat of Wisdom. By these and thousands of other names is she known throughout the world.

Mary—probably *Miryam* in Hebrew—was likely named after Moses’ sister, Miriam, an important Jewish prophet whose name can denote “princess.” The gospel writers emphasized the historical relationship between these women. While Miriam left Egypt to search, with Moses the Deliverer, for the Promised Land, Mary left Egypt to return, with Jesus the Messiah—the New Moses—to the Promised Land. Both women suffered because of their gifts of prophecy: Miriam’s vocal rebellion brought chastisement from God, and Mary’s obedient silence failed to prevent her extreme grief.

According to the Gospel of John, just before dying, Jesus entrusted his Mother to the beloved disciple. One tradition claims that Mary moved with the Apostle John to Ephesus, on the western coast of present-day Turkey (*Turkiye*). The existence of the Ephesian Church of the Virgin, the first basilica dedicated to Mary, may indicate that she once resided there, as the early Church consecrated places of worship only to persons who had lived or died locally. This tradition was so strong that a council was held at Ephesus in 431 to proclaim Mary *Theotokos*, or Mother of God.

The Church believes that having completed the course of her life, Mary was assumed, body and soul, into heaven. No tomb marks her final resting place, which is fitting, for Mary, the Mother of Jesus, belongs to no particular place or time but to all the people of God.

The Spirituality of Mary

[The angel Gabriel came to Mary and said,] "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High." ...But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" And the angel said to her in reply, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.... For nothing will be impossible for God." Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word."

LUKE 1:28–32A, 34–35, 37–38A

God blessed Mary above all people, preparing her for this very moment. Yet, despite Gabriel's reassurances, she was terrified. No one would believe this story! Was stoning to be her prize for devoted service to God?

Somehow, Mary found within her young soul the fortitude to submit to God's will. And her obedience was certainly

blessed, as the angel foretold, for without her assent, God's designs for human redemption would have been disrupted.

Only after Mary's cousin Elizabeth had reaffirmed the angel's benediction was Mary herself able to accept God's blessings and to prophesy, "Behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed. The Mighty One has done great things for me" (Luke 1:48b-49a). The greatest of these blessings was Mary's motherhood, marvelously conceived of the Holy Spirit, preserved on the way to Bethlehem, recognized at the Temple, protected in Egypt, obeyed at Cana, and honored by her crucified Son.

The blessedness of Mary's motherhood required not only submission to God but also joyful proclamation of God's blessings, for obedience without joy is mere drudgery. This joy is fundamental to the redemption story. Gabriel exhorted Mary to rejoice, and the heavenly hosts announced Jesus' birth to the shepherds as news of great joy. At the Temple, Anna and Simeon joyously greeted the Baby Jesus. As a grown man and rabbi, Jesus offered the joys of health, faith, unconditional love, and the promise of eternal life to all he encountered. Indeed, Christians believe, he was and is the source of true joy.

Mary delivered this Joy into the world, shared him with the shepherds and wise men, presented him at the Temple, raised him to be a child of God, and encouraged his active ministry, including its ultimate goal. Because of this selflessness, Christians have for two millennia praised Mary as our Blessed Mother, a glorious yet human appellation. And her

example continues to challenge us to trust the Spirit, to embrace our blessings, and to rejoice in the beauty of the persons God created us to be.

..... **Meditation**

- Slowly recite the Hail Mary, meditating upon each line. What is the Spirit telling me through this prayer?
- The key to Mary was her wholehearted gift of herself to God. Do I give myself entirely to God? What do I hold back?
- Do I really believe that nothing is impossible with God? Why or why not?

.....
Mother of God

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. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled."

LUKE 1:41-45