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# *Marian Mariology*

## Chapter 14



The veneration of Mary, when properly understood, permeates the entire life of the Church; it is a dimension of dogma and of piety, of Christology and of ecclesiology. This dimension needs to be made explicit today in connection with the problems of humanity. Mariology expresses something fundamental to the Christian life itself, to the Christian experience of the world.

Sound Mariology has always been understood in Christological terms. If the Gospel revealed nothing more than the fact that Jesus Christ, God and man, was born of Mary, this alone would be sufficient for the Church to love her and to draw theological conclusions from pondering this relationship of Mother and Son. We need no other revelations. Mary is a self-evident and essential *datum* and dimension of the Gospel.

Chapter one centers on Catechesis flowing from Byzantine Marian spirituality with commentary by Brother John M. Samaha, S.M. Chapter 2 discusses Mariology today with commentary by Rev. Professor Michael Lapierre, S.J. The remaining chapters are commentaries on various Marian topics by Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J. (1914– 2000).

## Chapter 14

### Devotion to Our Lady

*by Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J.*

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Over the years in speaking on the Blessed Virgin Mary, you naturally fall into certain categories and almost routine ways of speaking about Our Lady. Yet, as with anything we love, repetition is no hindrance to the increase of our affection.

Devotion to the Blessed Virgin is one of the cardinal features of not only professing to be, but being a Catholic. You might say a Catholic is one who is devoted to Mary. What I will suggest for our reflections is that we look at and check our devotion to Mary on six norms. The one who is devoted to Mary thinks of her, reads about her, talks about her, speaks to her, invokes her and tries to imitate her.

**First**, if we are devoted to Our Lady we think of her. We instinctively think about and of the people that we admire, those we love. I'm not sure how we would define pleasant thoughts, but I hazard to guess that pleasant thoughts are about people we love. One reason, by the way, that some people are sad is because they may not be loving others the way they should and, as a consequence, deprive their minds of the most pleasant mental experience on earth. A fair index, therefore, of how much we admire or love a person is how much they are consciously on our minds.

In order to think of Mary, we need reminders of Mary in our lives. It may be a picture, an image, a symbol or a 3x5 card, bent in half, like the one on my desk next to the telephone with the inscription "Mary, teach me to know the Will of Jesus." We have to keep making the effort of remembrance until it becomes habitual. As we know, the formation of character is the result of consciously formed habits. Thus, the first recommendation is to cultivate by all the means at our disposal the habit of having Marian thoughts.

**Secondly**, a person who wishes to cultivate a strong devotion to Our Lady reads about her. There is a great deal of literature about the Blessed Virgin Mary. There are books and periodicals to such an extent that anyone who claims that they are devoted to Our Lady and never opens a book, or reads an article, or bothers to find out a little more about her can well be suspected as to the soundness and sincerity of their devotion. Read, then, about Mary in the Scriptures, in the lives of the saints, in the stream of literature about Lourdes, Fatima, Guadalupe, La Salette and Beaurang.

**Third.** One who is devoted to Mary talks about her. As you see, I feel perfectly safe in talking about her to you because I am confident you want to talk about her to others yourselves. What we think and read about should give us much to talk about. Or better, what is on the mind and in the heart will inevitably be on the lips. Our Lady wants to be talked about.

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**Fourth.** One who is devoted to the Mother of God speaks to her. No speeches, just plain conversation. This is evidently very pleasing to her and honors her Son. Talking things over with her, I admit, can be easier for some than others, but this is the way great Catholics live, they talk to Our Lady. It makes sense. She is alive; she is the Mother of God and she is accessible. Speaking to God is, of course, the top priority in our prayer life. But we are human, we all know what it means to have a mother. I know that speaking to her just about anything and everything that is on our minds can take up those slack moments in our day. I hate to think of what is on the majority of people's minds most of the time. My calculated guess is that most people are talking to themselves even, as I have discovered, when they seem to be talking to you!

Self-love properly controlled is the condition and norm, as God Himself tells us, for our loving others. But this self-love can become, as I am afraid it is for many people, an addiction. And one of the symptoms of this addictive self-love is an almost uninterrupted soliloquy. Talking to Mary will not only help break through the crust of the egoism to which we are all so pathetically prone. It will also keep us in contact with that person who, the infallible Church tells us, after God, is the most important mediatrix on the way to our salvation.

**Fifth.** The one who is devoted to Our Lady invokes her. You notice I distinguish between speaking to Mary and invoking Mary. When I speak to her, as I do in conversation with other people, I am sharing with her what is on my mind and in my heart; when I invoke, I ask. This I dare say is the most familiar and common form of Marian conversation and it is part of the daily life of every Catholic.

What bears emphasis, however, in this invoking of Mary, is that it should be done consciously. It is just plain spiritual common sense that when we begin prayer we should become consciously aware of who we are talking to and what we are saying. Every time we pray, however distractedly, we are adoring God and pleasing Him, but the more aware and conscious I am of what I am doing the better. There is all the difference in the world between two people in conversation when one is just talking, you might almost say “just to hear himself”, and when one is speaking from the heart. Moreover, when we invoke Mary we should do so not only consciously and heartedly but also confidently. Mary listens to our requests, even the trifling ones, as Cana for all times symbolizes.

**Finally,** a person devoted to Mary strives to imitate her. This, I don't hesitate saying, is the acme of devotion to Mary; it is also the acid test of whether she means what she should in our lives.

Among the virtues that we should especially try to imitate in Our Lady, I would place her simplicity somewhere near the top. As I have mentioned more than once, the more you deal with souls, the more you learn of their struggles in life, the more evident it is that what we need in our spiritual life today is simplicity. This is partly brought on by the high complexity of modern civilization.

What does it mean to live a Marian life modeled on the simplicity of Our Lady? It means first of all no pretense.

True greatness does not have to parade itself. Pretense is pride; pretense is claiming to have or to know what I don't have or don't know in order to have people think better of me. Simplicity means I put on no airs; it is humility manifested. Just compare in your lives the difference in the way you deal with different people. How instinctively it seems, in a moment, in a split second, we can decide whether this person is my inferior or my superior. I cannot give you a more valuable formula for the practice of Christ-like charity than to say, treat everyone as your equal. God will bless you far beyond what you think. Or I would even go farther, and this is Ignatius speaking to his sons and I pass it on to you: treat others as your superiors.

The simplicity of Our Lady was that of humble service. The moment the angel informed her about Elizabeth's condition what did Mary do? She went immediately to take care of such household chores as Elizabeth needed help with. No airs. There should never be a menial task that we are unwilling to do. No vanity. No display. No artifice. Just childlike simplicity; but let it be as Mary's was - simplicity of heart.

Saints tell us that no one devoted to Mary will be lost. This must be true. Devotion to Our Lady is a sign that we are pleasing to God, because God, you would expect, loves those who love His Mother. That is why He gave her, entrusted her, to us and we to her. So that by doing the Will of her Son we may thus enjoy His presence in her company not only on earth but in eternity. You see, heaven is possessing Jesus and Mary. Son and Mother cannot be separated; we cannot choose between them. We either love them both and are devoted to them both or we shall not possess either. But if we love them and serve them in this life we shall be with them forever in the company of all the saints who are there because they loved the Mother of God.

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