



Marian Doctrine and Devotion

Chapter 9



Marian devotions are those prayers and acts undertaken to honor Mary and with the intent of seeking her intercession with her Son, Jesus, and his Father. Devotion to the Virgin Mary does not, however, amount to worship - which is reserved for God alone. Catholics view Mary as subordinate to Christ, but uniquely so, in that she is seen as above all other creatures. In 787 the Second Council of Nicaea affirmed a three-level hierarchy of *latria*, *hyperdulia* and *dulia* that applies to God, the Virgin Mary and then to the other saints.

The Roman Catholic Church holds many teachings associated with the Blessed Virgin Mary. Four of these specific doctrines have been raised to the level of dogma, meaning in technical terms that they must be held by the faithful as essential to participation as Roman Catholics. The four Marian dogmas have been defined by the magisterium over the course of Christian history, using both Scripture and Sacred Tradition, the two elements of the one source of Revelation, as evidence for these proclamations. These four dogmas are: Mary the Mother of God, Perpetual Virginity of Mary, The Immaculate Conception, and The Assumption of Mary into Heaven. The twentieth-century has seen a significant drive to establish a fifth and final Dogma-Mary as Co-Redemptrix.

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Chapter 9

The Presentation in the Temple:

a) The Scene:

Commentators often worry about the plural "their" purification. Really, Luke is being general, for Mary and Joseph went up to Jerusalem with Jesus, and all took part in the event. Jerusalem was only 5 miles from Bethlehem. Leviticus 12. 2-8 prescribed that a mother was ritually unclean—was not to touch anything sacred or enter the temple—for 40 days after the birth of a son. After that she was to bring to a priest serving that week in the temple, a one year old lamb for a holocaust and a young pigeon or turtledove for expiation. If she could not afford the lamb, she would bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons. Of course, the birth of Jesus did not make His Mother unclean in any sense. But Mary was always obedient to the law, did not claim she was an exception, even though that would have been supremely true. We think of the words of Jesus to John the Baptist in Mt 3. 15 that He willed to fulfill everything that righteousness called for.

In Exodus 1. 1-2 God ordered: "Consecrate to me every firstborn... both human and animal." The firstborn human was to be redeemed by paying five shekels of the sanctuary to member of a priestly family, according to Numbers 18. 15-16.

b) The Significance:

Jesus was not really being bought back. He was formally turning Himself over. This was, as it were, the offertory of the Great Sacrifice. The Epistle to the Hebrews 10. 5 says: "When Christ came into the world, he said: 'Sacrifices and offerings you did not will, but you prepared a body for me. You took no pleasure in burnt offerings and sin offerings. Then I said, 'Behold, I come to do your will, O God'" The will of the Father was that He should go to the cross.

How could Jesus make such an act of will when He first was conceived? Pope Pius XII, in the encyclical *Mystici Corporis*, June 29, 1943, DS 3812 taught: "But the most loving knowledge of this kind, with which the divine Redeemer pursued us from the first moment of the Incarnation, surpasses the diligent grasp of any human mind; for by the blessed vision which He enjoyed when just received in the womb of the Mother of God, He has all the members of the Mystical Body continuously and perpetually present to Himself, and embraces them with salvific love... . In the manger, on the Cross, in the eternal glory of the Father, Christ has all the members of the Church before Him and joined to Him far more clearly and far more lovingly than a mother has a son on her lap, or than each one knows and loves himself." The Pope means that the human soul of Christ from the very first instant saw the beatific vision, in which all knowledge is contained. By means of it He could know each member of His mystical body, and could make the offering pictured in the Epistle to the Hebrews. This same teaching has been repeated many times, e. g, in *Sempiternus Rex*, Sept 8, 1951, DS 3905 and *Haurietis aquas*, May 15, 1956, DS 3924, For additional texts and data on Scriptural, Patristic, and speculative aspects of the matter, cf. Wm. G. Most, *The Consciousness of Christ, Christendom*, Front Royal, 1980.

Even without the help of the magisterium, it is easy to show theologically that Jesus human soul not only happened to have that vision, but had to. For any soul to have the beatific vision, two things are required:

- (1) Elevation of its power to know by grace. Of course this was present in Jesus.
- (2) The divinity needs to join itself directly to the human mind without even an image in between (images are finite, God is infinite). Then the divinity does the work an image would have done. But in Jesus, not just His human mind, but His entire humanity was joined most directly to the

divinity, in the hypostatic union, that is, union within the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. So the union of His mind with the divinity is inescapable, and is far closer than that of an ordinary soul that attains the vision.

It follows that He surely could and did make the offering at the first instant of which Hebrews speaks. The vision of all He had to endure was wearing, a constant stress, that increased from its very prolongation. Twice during His public life He allowed us to see within Himself, as it were. In Luke 12. 50 He said: "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished." That is, I must be plunged into the deep waters of suffering; I cannot be comfortable until it is over with. In John 12. 27 He allowed Himself to break into a discourse to a crowd not long before His death: "Now is my heart troubled. What shall I say? Father, save me from this hour." Then not long after, all the tension grew to such a point that the capillaries near the sweat glands burst, and poured out their red blood through His skin: the agony in the garden. Such a phenomenon is medically known as hematidrosis. In passing we note: If someone has a long running anxiety, which normal measures do not remove, that one can accept it as a means of greater likeness to Christ.

Someone will ask: How could He suffer when He had the beatific vision? We reply: Let us think of a mountain 25, 000 feet high. It can easily happen that on some days the peak will stick out through black clouds, and be in calm and sunshine. But all the lower slopes will be in darkness and storm. Similarly, a human has many levels of operation, both in body and in soul. There can be a peace on the fine point of the soul, as St. Francis de Sales calls it, while all the lower slopes are in great distress. Some mystics have had such an experience. On this cf. *The Consciousness of Christ*, pp. 150-153.

His Mother too knew, as we have seen, through her understanding of the Old Testament prophecies. If even the stiff-necked Jews could know so much as the Targums show, then she, full of grace would know all the more clearly. So she knew all too much for comfort even before the prophecy of the sword that Simeon gave. And as His public life advanced, it would be easy, and frightening, to see events moving to their climax.

At the presentation, He would renew in His heart the offering He made on entering into this world. In unison with His offering, she would renew her fiat. This was, then truly the offertory of the Great Sacrifice.

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