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Marian Mariology

Chapter 19



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 19

Marian Practices of Piety

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

Our present conference is, again, on the Blessed Virgin in our lives and more specifically on Marian practices of Piety. We have already said that devotion, in this case to the Blessed Virgin, is a composite of veneration, imitation and invocation. In our present conference, and I should add, in the next one - we are having four conferences on Our Lady, I think that she deserves it - in the present and in the next conference we are concentrating the third element of devotion to the Mother of God, namely invocation.

We might make the obvious observation that prayers to the Blessed Virgin are so typically Catholic as almost to identify Catholicism. The reason for that, before we go into detail, is that we believe that the Mother of God was the holiest human person who ever lived, keeping in mind that her Son is a divine Person. We further believe that a person's influence with God, a person's power of intercession with God, is in direct proportion to that person's sanctity. Believing as we do that Mary, as the Mother of God, as full of grace, is the holiest of human persons, inevitably Catholic piety from the very beginning invoked Mary so that she in turn might intercede with her Son.

Father Gerald recommended especially the three following forms of piety, in the sense of invocation of the Blessed Virgin. The first is the rosary; second, the

Unquote Father Gerald. Prosaic Father Hardon would not have written those words, but Father Hardon appreciates them and believes that they have great meaning for all of us.

Third Piety - Sacrifices in Honor of Mary

One more Marian practice of piety. Sacrifices in honor of Mary. Just for the record, the highest faculty, that we have as human beings, is our will enlightened by the mind. The highest use to which we can place our free will is to pray. The highest form of prayer is adoration of the Infinite God. And the highest form of adoration is offering sacrifice to God. When Father Gerald speaks of making sacrifices in honor of Mary, he means exactly what he says. We do not offer sacrifices to Our Lady, frankly, we cannot. Only God may be adored and only toward Him may we offer sacrifice. But that is not what Father Gerald is talking about. We offer sacrifice indeed to Mary's Son who is her God and ours, but it helps immensely to offer these sacrifices to the Son of God in honor of, after the example of, modeled after, inspired by, the Mother of God. Having said what we did just a moment ago, having escalated our highest faculty, the free will, the highest use of that free will in prayer, the highest form of prayer being adoration, the highest form of adoration being sacrifice, I have one question left. What is the highest form of sacrifice? Ah! Perfect. On target. Mary is our perfect model. The highest form of sacrifice is the surrender of our free will to the Will of God. That is where the verb, now consecrated by centuries of usage, Our Lady simply declared; "Be it done to me according to Thy Word". What are we saying? We are saying that the Blessed Virgin by her total submission to the Will of God, as occurred at the Annunciation, is giving us the pattern and the way that we should offer sacrifice to her Son who is God, but after the example of His Mother, who surrendered her will to God. And because of her total sacrifice she was privileged to become the Mother of God. Had it not been for Mary's submission to the Will of God at the Annunciation - well, there might have been an Annunciation but there would not have been an Incarnation. The Incarnation of the Son of God, we believe, was the consequence of Mary's total sacrifice of her free will. To whom? To the God who made her. To the God who invited her to become His Mother.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, You want us to live Marian lives by the practice of devotion to Your Mother, make us more aware than we have been, dear Lord, to not only Your presence in our lives but hers too, so that following in Your footsteps under her Motherly gaze, we may be protected from evil in this life and enter that happiness reserved for those who have been faithful to Jesus and lived Marian lives in this world. Amen.

End

gloriously assumed into heaven? Does she behold the Face of God? Is Our Lady now in heaven perfectly happy? Can Our Lady physically speaking, in her physical person now in heaven experience sorrow and pain?

However, and this is where I think that I am privileged to make some distinctions, can we say that we contributed to Christ's sorrow and agony, we, *now* to his sorrow, and agony in the first century in Palestine; did we? Can we say that we contributed to Mary's sorrow? Yes, but as we touched on this before, the insights of Father Gerald, I assure you, are profound. Is there a mystical sense, really true, that Our Lady, no less than her Son, identifies herself with the members of her Son's Mystical Body? Remember what Christ told Saul on the way to Damascus. "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me"? Is there a sense in which Our Lady as Mother of the Mystical Body is suffering in the members of this Body which physically, is no longer capable of pain? Yes! Only in heaven will we know or, better, on the last day, the day of final judgement for the whole universe will it be revealed, on the one hand, the benefits and blessings that the good actions that we have performed, the blessings and benefits over the centuries that have come to perhaps untold - I don't hesitate saying millions, and correspondingly, whatever we do which is against the Will of God - hear it! - always has an impact on the whole world.

Back to the examination of conscience. There is no such thing as sinning in isolation, consequently and I am going to go on with Father Gerald, there is a deeply mystical sense in which both her Son and she are suffering and are enduring pain, not in their own physical persons but in the Mystical personality of all those whom Christ has identified with Himself. I will continue with Father Gerald:

The examination of conscience is one of the standard practices of the spiritual life. It is one of the ways for the soul who is truly in earnest to make any progress - likes to check or check out that progress. If we're runners we would carefully check our time for our daily trial runs, so too, the spiritual person who takes his life in earnest will check over his daily life in earnest, will check over his daily life, his record, his score sheet.

I'm quoting, I like the work sheet. We were trained from the novitiate, to never make an examination of conscience without putting something on paper. My friends, it is more humiliating to look at something than to just think of something. I go on. "The eyes of Mary would make a very practical, very searching way of making that check". Than Father Gerald goes through the sequence of, especially, of a priest's day and I now as a priest pass on his directives to you, the sequence of your day, and he asks:

Was she happy over it? Did she see my distractions? Our Blessed Mother saw my Mass - saw your participating in it and mine saying it. Did it leave her happy? And so on through the day. Oh how supremely well a person whether priests, religious or lay believers would have to live to say honestly; "I've held the smile in Our Lady's eyes all day, over my soul."

examination of conscience; and third, sacrifices in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary. So far for the present conference.

First Piety - Rosary

We begin by asking ourselves, what is the rosary? In the devotional life of the Catholic Church, the history of the rosary is shrouded in the early centuries, in obscurity. We do know, however, that already in the first century Church, it had become customary to recite the Divine Office and more specifically the hundred and fifty Psalms. In time, as we also know, what we now call the Breviary though originally - let us remind ourselves - originally, what we call the Divine Office or the Breviary was already practised by the faithful laity. Only in time did, what we now call the Divine Office become part of the monastic and sacerdotal life, and indeed by the time of St. Benedict, the Divine Office as the *Opus Dei* was the center around which the whole monastic life revolved. The *Opus Dei*, the work of God. Those hundred and fifty Psalms, the total number known - instead of the hundred and fifty Psalms we know historically, very early in the Church, the lay people not reciting the Divine Office, in time what we call the rosary - Father Gerald uses the expression - it came to be known as the laymens' breviary, the hundred and fifty Psalms corresponding to the hundred and fifty Hail Marys, on the complete rosary. It was as we know the Order of Preachers, they did not inaugurate the rosary but under St. Dominic and his followers, made the recitation of the rosary among the faithful the most powerful way in which the Church can intercede through Mary to God, especially for protection against errors, the heresies and the calamities that threaten the Catholic Church. We speak of the rosary as so many invocations, and they are. We repeat the Hail Mary. I think it is well to realize that the efficacy of the rosary, other things being equal, depends upon the depth of the awareness and the realization that we have when we not only recite the Hail Mary but try to be conscious and aware, at least mentally, of the mystery on which we are reflecting. That is why I strongly recommend following the directives of St. Ignatius that we take time out - and retreat time is a good occasion to remind ourselves - that we periodically take time out during the year and meditate at some length on the specific vocal prayers that we recite in the rosary. Thus in order to obtain the graces that God wants to give to us and to the world through Mary. We are Christians and Catholics, and I say this with deep reverence, we are not Orientals, Hindus or Buddhists. Christ Himself, remember, warned us not to just multiply prayers which we are not aware of what we are saying. What is the dogmatic content of the rosary? There is the Apostles Creed, the Our Father, there are the Glorias and there are, especially, the Hail Marys. Father Gerald, if anything, is lavish, extravagant, in his insistence on the daily recitation of the rosary, first of all by priests so they in turn might encourage the faithful to recite the rosary daily. However the degree of invocative power which vocal prayers have - and

the rosary is not only, but also, a vocal prayer - the degree of invocative power that vocal prayers have is in direct proportion to our awareness in mind and heart of what we are saying when we are praying. It does not mean of course that we have to be mentally conscious and even theologically reflective on every word that we are saying when we are saying it. But this is why, and I repeat, St. Ignatius wants us when we give the Spiritual Exercises to urge the retreatants to periodically meditate on the meaning of their vocal prayers. On the first level of our reflection may I strongly recommend that you do and even on a thoroughly regular basis, spend a half hour or an hour or more slowly meditating on every significant word: Hail Mary - pause - what am I saying? What do I mean? Then I apply what my mind has found in the meaning of the words of the prayer to myself. The same with the Lord's prayer, the same with the Apostles Creed, the same with the Gloria.

However - we are still on the rosary - the more vocal prayers are multiplied, and we multiply the Hail Mary, fifty-three times three, if we recite the full rosary every day. I will not ask, is this part of your rule to recite the full rosary every day? The fifteen mysteries every day? I am so happy that I asked the question. For just one more moment, may I urge you to periodically meditate on the meaning of the vocal prayers you recite. This applies to the vocal prayers of the rosary, the Memorare, the Regina Coeli during the Easter season, the Salve Regina.

However, the rosary is also a series of meditations. You have the custom of beginning each mystery with some reflection. May I suggest, whether it is a Community custom or as an individual, I think the best way of insuring that the decade of Hail Mary's that will follow will not just be another repetition but there will be meditation, is to pause. When I say to myself or in the company of others, the first Joyful Mystery, the Annunciation, at least momentarily reflect. The reflection can be in our imagination, our reflection can be in our intellect or both. I believe the surest way of insuring that our rosaries will be meditative is to introduce each decade, with at least a momentary pause; picture to myself the scene, or place before my mind's eye the mystery. The Annunciation is the Incarnation. Then, depending upon the grace that God gives to me, some people find it easier to just vocalize the words and concentrate on the mystery. Some people, as I have just indicated, meditate for a moment as the mystery is introduced and then reflect on what they are saying. But I wish to emphasize the efficacy of our prayer first of all comes from the very fact that we are praying. However, other things being equal, the more my mind and my will are involved in what I am praying when I am praying the rosary, the more graces for myself and others, Our Lady will obtain.

Second Piety - Examination of Conscience

Second Marian practice recommended by Father Gerald. In order to put into practice our Marian piety - I must say when several years ago I came across this among the typed scripts of Father Gerald's conferences, I don't say that I gulped but I thought to myself - well, Father Gerald, was not a Jesuit. St. Ignatius made what we now call the examination of conscience one of the critical essentials of the spiritual life. His

biographers tell us that when our men were sick in bed or bogged down with all kinds of responsibilities, Ignatius might dispense his followers from other practices of piety but the examen of conscience, never! Including Jesuits on their death bed. Good to know that Ignatius himself, methodically, we are told, made the examines of conscience seven times a day. He spared his followers; we are required to make it twice a day, fifteen minutes each time. I want to tell you, I have been doing it over the years. So the Rookies around me make no difference, I get my two examen of fifteen minutes each day at Jemez Springs. What surprised me, however, and I want to share this with you, what surprised me regarding Father Gerald's approach to the examen of conscience is that he made it so unabashedly Marian. This will be a long quotation with periodic pauses. Father Gerald begins with a premise that:

The Mother of God, now gloriously assumed into heaven, is aware of our moral conduct. Her eyes rest upon us day by day, hour by hour, for it is a mother's privilege and duty to watch over her sons and daughters. And now from the high heaven she watches over the world and in particular over the Christian world.

Father Gerald wouldn't be here if he did not add "and most especially are those who on earth by their vocation are called to be other Christ's." The particular genius of Father Gerald relative to the examination of conscience is that he saw it as an examination of conscience which is made with the full awareness that not only Christ her Son but Mary, His Mother, has been watching over us and that when we make the examination of conscience, we are aware of His presence and hers. Again, the Marian focus:

For one who is willing to face the facts honestly, it would make a very searching and penetrating examen of conscience, to ask himself, 'Have I brought joy or sorrow or have I even made it necessary for the Mother of God to turn her eyes from me this day?'

I am dripping with theological lore, but I promised Mother David Marie that this retreat will be on the spirituality of Father Gerald Fitzgerald. I might have transmitted this part about the examination of conscience but I know, said to myself, give it. What can we mean if we say as Father Gerald asks; "Have I brought joy or sorrow, have I even made it necessary for the Mother of God to turn her eyes from me this day?" Can Mary now be sorrowful? Can Our Lady now be sad? Can the Blessed Virgin now experience pain? I want to get to the bottom of this. You know what I am saying? Father Gerald was a profoundly intelligent man. He knew his faith. My question. Can we now cause Our Lady sorrow or pain? Is Mary