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Marian Mariology

CHAPTER 36



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 36

Mary As Model

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

Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Lord, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.
Christ, hear us.
Christ, graciously hear us.
God the Father of Heaven, have mercy on us.
God the Son, Redeemer of the world, have mercy on us.
God the Holy Spirit, have mercy on us.
Holy Trinity, one God, have mercy on us.

Holy Mary, pray for us
Holy Mother of God, pray for us
Holy Virgin of virgins, pray for us
Mother of Divine grace, pray for us
Mother most pure, pray for us
Mother most chaste, pray for us
Mother inviolate, pray for us
Mother undefiled, pray for us

Mother most amiable, pray for us
Mother most admirable, pray for us
Mother of good counsel, pray for us
Mother of our Creator, pray for us
Mother of our Savior, pray for us
Virgin most prudent, pray for us
Virgin most venerable, pray for us
Virgin most renowned, pray for us
Virgin most powerful, pray for us
Virgin most merciful, pray for us
Virgin most faithful, pray for us
Mirror of justice, pray for us
Seat of Wisdom, pray for us
Cause of our joy, pray for us
Spiritual vessel, pray for us
Vessel of honor, pray for us
Singular vessel of devotion, pray for us
Mystical rose, pray for us
Tower of David, pray for us
Tower of ivory, pray for us
House of gold, pray for us
Ark of the Covenant, pray for us
Gate of heaven, pray for us
Morning star, pray for us
Health of the sick, pray for us
Refuge of sinners, pray for us
Comforter of the afflicted, pray for us
Help of Christians, pray for us
Queen of Angels, pray for us
Queen of Patriarchs, pray for us
Queen of Prophets, pray for us
Queen of Apostles, pray for us
Queen of Martyrs, pray for us
Queen of Confessors, pray for us
Queen of virgins, pray for us
Queen of all Saints, pray for us
Queen conceived without original sin, pray for us
Queen assumed into heaven, pray for us
Queen of the most Holy Rosary, pray for us
Queen of the family, pray for us
Queen of peace, pray for us
Queen of the Society of Jesus, pray for us
Queen of the Order of Saint Francis, pray for us

Lamb of God, Who takes away the sins of the world, spare us, O Lord.
Lamb of God, Who takes away the sins of the world, graciously hear us, O Lord.
Lamb of God, Who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.

Pray for us, O holy Mother of God.
That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let us pray:

Pour forth, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy grace into our hearts. That we to whom the Incarnation of Christ thy son was made known by the message of an angel, may by His passion and cross be brought to the glory of His Resurrection, through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Mary As Model

I have been asked to speak on the subject of the role of Mary as catechist. We do not usually talk about Mary as a catechist. And we do not commonly think of her as a model for those who catechize, but the Blessed Virgin Mary is not only a pattern, she is the perfect model of what every catechist in the Catholic Church should be.

Before we go more deeply into our subject it may be well to ask ourselves what is a catechist? A catechist is one who instructs others in the one true faith. Notice we are saying two things. Instruct others. This means that he or she teaches others by enlightening the mind in order to inspire the will. A catechist never merely teaches to instruct the mind but always to enlighten the mind in order to inspire the will. Secondly, a catechist is one who instructs others in the one true faith. There are many things. There is really no one who is an unbeliever. Every one believes, but not everyone believes in the one true faith. This instructing others in the one true faith is the faith professed by the Church founded by Jesus Christ. We go on.

We say that Mary is the perfect model of what every Catholic catechist should be. In saying this, we affirm what may not be obvious. That Mary was a catechist. She did instruct others in the one true faith and she did so, so admirably that we may legitimately call her, the Mother of Catechists. This brings us up to the fundamental question we should ask. How, how is Mary the perfect catechist? And then how can we who are trying to instruct others in the Catholic religion, how are we to learn from her? The answer is simple. What were the main qualities of the Blessed Virgin that we should try to imitate in our own catechetical lives so that by following the example of Mary we shall become more like her who was the perfect communicator of the revelation of her Divine Son.

I will identify these qualities especially as three:

Third Level: The Life of Catechists

The spiritual life of a catechist is the principle textbook from which he or she instructs the children, adolescents, or adults under the catechist care. This is where Mary is more than just a role model for catechists to imitate. She is of the deepest sense the Divinely chosen guide. Remember Mary, unlike her Divine Son had to believe and hope in God. Her spiritual life therefore, was based on the same two fundamental virtues that all of the catechists must possess- faith and hope. In the measure in which their lives are built, like Mary's, on faith in God and trust in God, God will use them not only to catechize but to evangelize, not only to convert souls but, how I like to say this, to work miracles. And in today's world either a catechist expects to work miracles or the catechesis will not be successful. Remember to the servants in Cana? This is the directive she gives to all catechists. His time he told his mother had not yet come, but, well, it was His mother. So, it wasn't stilling a storm at sea, or raising someone from the dead. Only a mother could even think of asking her Son to work this kind of a miracle. God will work miracles through us provided we follow Mary's directives and do everything her Son tells us to do.

I am almost finished but not quite. I have an epilogue. Pope John Paul II assures us, "That Mary was the first of Christ's disciples. She was the first in time because even when she found her adolescent Son in the temple she received from Him lessons that again she kept in her heart. Not only was she the first of Christ's disciples, she was the greatest. Because no one else had been taught by Him to such depth as the mother who lived with Him for most of His earthly years. She was both mother and disciple. Indeed we may dare say her discipleship was more important than her motherhood," unquote Pope John Paul II. That is why the Vicar of Christ did not hesitate to call Mary the "Mother and Model of Catechists". How is she our mother and model? In the measure that like her we are catechists who believe, catechists who pray, catechists who live what we pray for and believe.

Mary, mother and model of catechists, pray for us.

Thank you for being here.

End

extensive knowledge of theology of itself cannot give that person a deep interior awareness of revealed truths which only Divine Grace can promote. I have said this to other audiences so I won't feel silly in saying it here. Most of the books that Lord has allowed me to publish have been written before the Blessed Sacrament. We need grace and the first most fundamental grace is light for the mind. Not only is prayer necessary to really know what is the meaning of what as a catechist I am teaching. Prayer is also needed to know how I am to teach. Adaptation to different ages and abilities is assured but this is much, much more. Only God who reads the hearts of people knows how best I can teach and reach their hearts and He will tell me on one condition, that I have the wisdom and the humility to ask Him to enlighten me. That is part one.

Part two. As a catechist I also need to have my will inspired by God's grace so He may use me as His channel to inspire others as I teach. There is such a thing as wanting to teach others the Faith. A lot of people teach themselves. For many people even the largest audience they address is really a soliloquy. There is not only a willingness to instruct others it is the deep desire to bring others closer to God by what I teach them. And I will have this desire only in the measure that I am a person who prays. We all want to become apostolic catechists. Very well! To the apostolic and effective catechists we must like the Queen of the Apostles be persons who pray. Like Mary, we are, I do not hesitate saying, always to be pondering prayerfully in our hearts even why we are speaking to others.

Finally, the life of Mary.

Third Level: The Life of Mary

If I were to describe the life of the Blessed Virgin in one sentence I would say that Mary lived in constant conformity with the will of God. We return to the Annunciation. There it was the will of God that Mary submit to His will. She did. The angel did not tell her to visit her kinswomen Elizabeth. At most he intimated she might do so. But watch this, she recognized immediately what we may call the implied will of God. She acted on the implication immediately. St. Luke even tells us she did so with haste. The least Divine suggestion and Mary was off doing what, God did not even have to tell her just implied, is His will. Mary's Magnificat is a library of information of what it means to do the will of God. To do the will of God is to magnify the Lord. That means to praise Him and not to look for praise or recognition for oneself. To do the will of God is to rejoice in God's will no matter how naturally (what a mild word), how naturally reluctant we may be. There is such a thing as rejoicing in doing God's will while I am in pain. To do God's will is to see oneself as lowly no matter how great things God may do through me, I never make the mistake, never, of taking credit for anything that God does through me. To do God's will is not to aspire to earthly power or riches, but to be satisfied with little and to be willing to be poor. In a word, to do God's will is to see oneself as a mere servant who claims no rights from God but is always conscience of the duties that a servant must fulfill.

- First, Mary's clear and unquestioning faith;
- Second, Mary's union in prayer with the heart of her Son
- And third, Mary's plain and courageous living out of the will of God in her life.

I am still, by the way, on the introduction.

Giving these qualities in the Blessed Virgin we have the bedrock of Mary's qualifications as the model of catechists. Why? Because the essence of catechesis is not in what is said. The essence consists in what is communicated. In order to communicate the Truth a person must have a clear faith, a deep union with God in prayer, and be courageously living in conformity with the will of God. No one else, I don't say, is a perfect catechist. No one else is even a real catechist. These three, therefore, are not only the bedrock of all authentic catechesis, they are in my estimation its soul. Without them instruction in the Catholic religion is just that instruction or academic pedagogy, but lifeless. Not everyone who opens his mouth and talks religion is catechizing. Without these qualities, I dare say, what may go by the name of catechesis is empty words that have little or no effect on others because such people are talking machines without a soul.

That is my introduction.

What I want to do now is to cover each of these three levels of our subject:

- Mary's faith and of the faith it should be in catechists
- Mary's prayer and the prayer of a genuine catechist
- And Mary's life in complete conformity to the will of God, and the corresponding life of a authentic and not merely academic catechist.

First Level: The Faith of Mary

To speak of Mary as a model catechist we begin where her spiritual life began and her deep and unquestioning faith. That adjective, unquestioning, by the way, is of the essence of a true faith. Faith we know is the acceptance by the mind of what God reveals. It means believing without a shadow of a doubt in everything that God tells us is true. Why? Because whatever God says cannot be untrue because He can neither deceive nor be deceived. Mary had this kind of faith. At the Annunciation she believed what the angel told her. That the child she was to conceive would be the Son of the Most High. Hers was a prudent faith. After she asked, "How would this be?" Since she had consecrated her virginity to God

the angel ensured her that the Holy Spirit would make the humanly impossible, possible. She believed. That's faith! What is humanly impossible to believe that God makes possible.

Knowing her scriptures and what the prophets had foretold about the sufferings of the Messiah, Mary had no illusion of what being the Messiah's mother would cost her. But she did not hesitate. She told the angel, "Be it done to me according to Your Word." That preposition "to", I consider one of the most important words in the New Testament. True faith is ready to believe not only in God, not only in what He can do for us, true faith includes, and did, what God can do to us, and He can do plenty, and He can be painful. And we believe that the One causing the pain loves us. To see God's love in the trials of life is the proof of a clear and understanding faith. Faced with a dilemma that her being with child placed her in, and seeing the struggle of Joseph who knew she was innocent Mary's faith did not weaken. She remained silent. Silent under the humiliation until God worked the miracle of sending the same angel, by the way, to Joseph. Oh God's timing. Why didn't He tell Joseph first? Not God! Mary's faith sustained her through the years at Nazareth. But it was especially her faith from Calvary to Easter Sunday that the Church has been commemorating since the first century every Saturday. It has come to be called, "The Day of Faith". She alone had absolutely no doubt that her Son though crucified and buried would rise from the dead. Talk about believing in the humanly impossible!

Now we turn to the faith of catechists.

First Level: The Faith of Catechists

There is nothing more fundamental for a catechist, nothing more necessary, than a share in Mary's clear and understanding faith. Only those who believe teach the faith, no one else does. Unbelief does not teach the faith. Unbelief can undermine the faith. Faith alone inspires. Unbelief does not. Faith alone is used by God to communicate the faith to others. Everyone in this room with a moments reflection will admit; the only reason we believe is because someone who had the faith shared it with others. Right? No exceptions! Unbelief, no matter how learned or erudite, can not give others what it does not have. Academic knowledge is useful. Faith is indispensable. Pedagogy is an asset provided it is built on faith, but without faith pedagogy is not only a liability it is a seduction.

Like Mary, a catechist teaches almost without catechizing. Our Lady did not conduct classes and the number of her spoken words recorded in the Gospels is very small. Yet St. Augustine does not hesitate calling Mary a living catechism - *Catechismos vivens*. Why? Because that is what she was. You see catechisms are not cold print. Real catechisms are living, believing human beings. All catechists since Mary's day teach only in so far as like her they really, really, really believe.

Our second level of reflection: the prayer of Mary.

Second Level: The Prayer of Mary

The Blessed Virgin Mary prayed. Tradition tells us she was at prayer when the angel appeared to her to tell her she was chosen to become the Mother of God. At the Visitation she prayed, we can say she sang the Magnificat. At Bethlehem there was not a single word of conversation with other people related by Mary. There was only one sentence. After the shepherds had seen the infant Jesus and proceeded to tell everyone about their marvelous experience the evangelist simply says, "But," (I like that word 'But'- no speeches) "But Mary kept in mind all these things honoring them in her heart." Mary's principle prayer was prayer of the heart, prayer in the heart, prayer with the heart. In a word, Mary prayed with the depths of her being uniting herself with Jesus who she knew was at once her creator and her child. Again at the Presentation not a single word quoting Mary in conversation with the priest of the temple, or with Simeon or with Anna. Simeon spoke to Mary, but we are not told whether or what she spoke with him. She was we know wrapped in prayer. Once more the finding in the temple, after Joseph and Mary found Jesus His mother asked Him why He had done what He did? His answer was that He had to be out about His Real Heavenly Father's business. So for the second time St. Luke tells us that His mother kept all these things carefully in her heart. This is the only recorded statement of what Mary did during the long years that she lived with her Son at Nazareth. He was always on her mind. He was always in her heart.

Now the prayer of catechists.

Second Level: The Prayer of Catechists

As with faith so with prayer. It is impossible to really catechize unless the catechist really prays. Call it vocal prayer or meditation, call it mental prayer or the liturgy, call it aspirations or quiet moments with God, by whatever name, prayer is the life beloved of religious instruction. And a person will be only as supernaturally successful, as a catechist, as a person is a man or women of prayer. Forty-one years in the priesthood has taught many things that I will never publish. This is one thing. Those who pray communicate what they believe.

Here we touch on the heart of catechetics. When we say that a catechist must pray there are many reasons for this, but especially two: prayer is the ordinary source of grace to enlighten our minds and prayer is the ordinary source of grace for moving our wills. This midsection will be the longest part of my presentation. There are really two minds and two wills involved and both need, absolutely need, the grace that in God's ordinary providence comes only from prayer. There is first of all the mind of the catechist. Grow in knowledge of the Church's teaching, or even the most