



Marian Doctrine and Devotion

Chapter 22



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.

Commentary on the book of Isaiah is by noted theologian Rev. William G. Most (1914-1999). His contributions to theology have been recognized all over the world. He published 12 books and a host of articles on topics ranging from biblical studies to Mariology and Latin grammar.

Chapter 22

Some Special Marian Devotions:

1) The Rosary: Although certain devotional practices of reciting many Aves and even counting devices of beads were known before the time of St. Dominic, yet it seems clear that we ought to consider him as the author of the Rosary in some sense at least, even if we do not believe that Our Lady appeared to him and gave him the Rosary as a weapon against the Albigensian heresy. Many Popes have given this title to St. Dominic—e.g. Alexander VI, Leo X, St. Pius V, Gregory XIII, Sixtus V, Clement VIII, Alexander VII, Clement IX, Clement X, Innocent XI, Benedict XIII, Benedict XIV, Clement XIV, Pius VII, Pius IX, Leo XIII, Benedict XV, Pius XI. They do not seem, however, to have intended to impose this as a teaching. Really, it could not be done, for it is a historical matter rather than a matter of faith, and it is also a matter of private revelation. The teaching commission of the Church extends only to public revelation.

Leo XIII was especially outstanding for his love of the Rosary, for which he wrote numerous Encyclicals—we have seen citations from them in connection with the title Mediatrix of all Graces.

However the value and the power of the Rosary is quite independent of the question of St. Dominic's relationship. Especially important is the fact that St. Pius V attributed that defeat of the Turkish fleet at Lepanto in the Gulf of Corinth on the first Sunday of October, 1571 to the fact that Rosary confraternities at Rome and elsewhere were holding their processions that day. The Turks then posed a real threat, wanting to take over all of Europe. So he ordered a commemoration of the Rosary to be made on that day. Two years later, Gregory XIII allowed the celebration of a feast of the Rosary in churches having an altar dedicated to the Rosary. In 1671 Clement X extended the feast to all Spain. A second great victory over the Turks came on August 5, 1716 when Prince Eugene defeated them at Peterwardein in Hungary. Thereupon Clement XI extended the feast of the Rosary to the whole Church.

The apparitions at Lourdes and at Fatima, warmly approved by the Church, called for the Rosary, and Popes Pius XII, John XXIII, Paul VI, and John Paul II have strongly favored it.

In saying the Rosary, we are not asked to attend to the words of each Ave—it would be virtually impossible. Rather we are urged to meditate on the mysteries while reciting the prayers.

2) The Brown Scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel: A tradition for which the historical evidence is very good reports that St. Simon Stock, Prior of the Carmelites in England, where they had newly been transplanted in 1251, prayed earnestly to her for help. In an early Carmelite Catalog of the Saints, we find the following account: "The ninth was St. Simon of England, the sixth General of the Order. He constantly begged the most glorious Mother of God to fortify the Carmelite Order... with some privilege. He prayed most devoutly... . To him did the Blessed Virgin appear with a multitude of angels, holding the scapular of the Order in her blessed hands, and saying: 'This will be a privilege for you and for all Carmelites, that he who dies in this will not suffer eternal fire,' that is, he who dies in this will be saved." The vision came on July 16, 1251.

The above account it taken from an early Carmelite Catalog of Saints. Since this vision is a part of private revelations, we need to investigate. For there are two kinds of revelation, public and private. Public revelation is that which is found in Scripture and Tradition; it was complete, closed when the last Apostle died and the New Testament was finished. There is to be no new public revelation until His glorious return at the end of the world. All other revelations are called private. The term is not too good, for we

use that term even for Fatima, which is addressed to the whole world. Yet since the term is usual, we will employ it now.

A great difference exists between public and private revelation. In public revelation, the Church has the promise of divine protection in teaching, such as that found in Luke 10:16: "He who hears you, hears me". But for private revelations, the Church does not have such a commission.

As a result it is important for us to explore the evidence for the historicity of this vision given to St. Simon Stock. However, even though it is a matter of private, not public revelation, we will soon find that not only is the historical evidence for it very good, but we have a different kind of assurance even stemming from the area of public revelation. But first, we explore the history of the vision.

There are six different forms of the Carmelite Catalogs of the Saints. The oldest copy we possess, the Oxford manuscript, was composed in 1426. But the Paris manuscript probably comes from the last part of the 1300s—we recall the vision was in 1251. So this is close. However, we mean merely that our oldest copy comes from the late 1300s. More importantly we ask: when was the original composed, of which we have these copies? It seems that all six catalogs that we possess go back to some earlier original. There is reason for this: the Catalog must have had a rather large circulation in the 1300s since it was able to appear in several forms by the end of that century. So the original must be well before the end of the 1300s.

But there is added reason to push back the date of the original Catalog well into the 1300s, namely one of these catalogs, the third form, mentions only a Constitution of Pope Boniface VIII issued in 1298 in favor of the Carmelites, whereas text 1 cites other later papal texts, namely, those from John XXII of March 13, 1317 and Clement VI, of July 19, 1347. Since the #3 form of the text does not seem to know these documents of 1317 and 1347, but knows only a papal text of 1298, it seems that the text 3 goes back to within 50 years of the vision. This is really remarkable.

But there is more. Around the year 1291, William of Sanvico, a Carmelite in the Holy Land, recorded that at that time the Order was in great difficulties in England, and the Blessed Virgin appeared to the Prior and told him to go to Pope Innocent IV for help. Now since Sanvico gives no details of the vision, this very fact helps to show his testimony is independent of the catalogs. Yet he does agree with the catalogs in reporting a vision as taking place at precisely the right time and in the right circumstances. Still another point shows that Sanvico has independent sources for his information, namely the catalogs do not mention the appeal to Pope Innocent, which Sanvico does mention.

So we have it seems two independent and early witnesses, each within about 50 years of the vision.

What is our conclusion? We have seen that the historical evidence that the vision to St. Simon Stock really did take place. We saw that that evidence is very solid. But we can add: even if by some chance that vision never did take place, yet one who cultivates a real consecration to her, of which Pius XII spoke, cannot be lost, for the reason that she, suppliant omnipotence, will not permit it to happen that such a one be eternally lost. We saw the question raised of just how much devotion to her is needed to assure us of this effect. While we cannot measure it, we can say with fullest confidence: One who not only makes, but most fully lives a complete consecration to her will surely obtain this priceless privilege. Later in this chapter we will explain how to make and live such a consecration.

There is also a Sabbatine Privilege connected to the Brown Scapular. The report is that Pope John XXII had a vision of Our Lady on March 3, 1322, in which liberation from purgatory was promised on the first Saturday after death, on three conditions: 1) Wear the Scapular 2) Observe 6th and 9th commandments according to one's state in life 3) say the Little Office, or, if illiterate, observance of the fasts of the Church plus abstinence on Wednesdays and Saturdays. The requirement of the Office can be commuted by a priest who has the faculty. A daily rosary is a common commutation. Those bound to the large office fulfill the condition by saying it.

The original copy of the bull was lost. This is not too strange in view of the disturbed state of Rome after the sack of 1527. Some other documents of the same Pope are also lost. There was a copy of the bull, given by Pope Clement VII, dated May 15, 1528, but for some reason it was never solemnly issued, and so is technically invalid. The same Pope on August 12, 1530 did issue a transcript, but it promised only special help, not liberation.

End

the Scapular as a sign of a solid and lived consecration will surely suffice. We are going to present the fullest possible form of Marian consecration. We do not say that all must go that far. But we can say that to go so far removes all question.

But we want to note specially the very wording of Pius XI. He said flatly that, "he will not incur eternal death." To explain this we recall that there is a vital question of final perseverance. To illustrate: If I look ahead to the next time I will have a temptation, and ask: Will God then give me the graces needed to win? The answer is of course: Yes. And it is yes no matter how many times I look into the future. But—and this is the critical point—to continue cooperating with these graces, not just once, but over a long period, even to death—that needs something extra and special. That something special is called the grace of final perseverance. Does God offer everyone such a gift? Some older theologians, sadly, said no. He might decide simply not to offer it to some. Would it be to those who were in mortal sin? Not necessarily, they used to reply. He might decide simply without any such reason not to give it...

But this amounts to heresy. For St. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: (1 Thes. 5:23-24): "May the God of peace make you holy in all things, so that your entire spirit and soul and body may be kept without complaint at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who called you is faithful and He will also do it." Similarly, he wrote in Phil 1:6: "He who has begun a good work in you will complete it, up to the day of Christ Jesus." And in 1 Cor 1:8-9: "He will confirm you even to the end without blame, on the day of Our Lord Jesus Christ. God through whom you were called into sharing with His Son Jesus Christ our Lord is faithful."

So we have triple assurance from St. Paul of this: God will offer this grace of final perseverance to everyone. How then could the Council of Trent teach that we cannot be sure of having this grace? Very easily. We watch the wording. St. Paul made clear God will offer it—but it is one thing for God to offer it, another thing for me to have it. If He offers, but I do not accept, but instead reject, I will not have it.

Is there then any way of protecting the possibility, that I might reject it? There is no promise in Scripture for that. But yet Pius XI said flatly that he whom the Blessed Virgin assists at his last hour will not suffer eternal death. In other words, he is promising that one devoted to her will not, as a matter of fact, reject that grace of perseverance. She, of course, whom Pope Benedict XV called "suppliant omnipotence" will bring it about. That expression "suppliant omnipotence" is fascinating. It means that everything that God Himself can do by His own inherent power, she can obtain by her intercession. So she will obtain for those devoted to her that they will not fail that all important final grace.

Again, we recall that this assurance comes not from private revelation, over which the Church does not have the authority to guarantee it, but it comes from three Popes speaking without the support of any private revelation. Rather, Pius XI appeals to the fact that she, "shared in the work of redemption" with Jesus. We have already dwelt at length on this sharing.

In addition, the Carmelite Constitutions at a very early date show remarkable insistence on wearing the scapular. Thus the Constitution of 1369 orders automatic excommunication for a Carmelite who would say Mass without his scapular. And even earlier, the Constitutions of 1324 and even 1294 consider it a grave fault to sleep without the scapular.

There are still other pieces of evidence. But let us single out just one thing. We have the minutes of the meetings of a Carmelite confraternity for laymen in Florence, from August 22 1280 to Nov. 1, 1298. In the entry for November 1, 1298 we read that some men who had been deprived of membership for some reason, came to the officers to the Confraternity to seek pardon. They were wearing capuches—and we know the Scapular was once called a capuche. Still another entry in the minutes of the same Confraternity has what seems to be an allusion to the great promise. It says that the members met "to render glory to God and to His glorious Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary, that she may grant and give us the grace that we may be able to persevere in good and to come to a truly good end."

Further, many saints and scholars are shown remarkable esteem for the Scapular. We mention just one item. St. John Bosco who died in 1888 was buried in his Scapular. When his body was exhumed in 1929 the scapular was found intact beneath the rotted garments, for the rest of his clothing had decayed.

Does this sound a bit technical and difficult? It is not really difficult. We regret that it has to include so much discussion of data. But our purpose is to show that the historical evidence that the Scapular vision really took place is very solid. And it is solid.

However, there is another way of working, which is much easier and even more satisfactory. It is this. The great Pius XII wrote a letter to the major superiors of the Carmelites, to celebrate the 700th anniversary of the vision. Among other things he said: "There is no one who is not aware how greatly a love for the Blessed Virgin Mother of God contributes to the enlivening of the Catholic faith... . In the first rank of the most favored of these devotions that of the Holy Carmelite Scapular must be placed." This is indeed a very high recommendation. The Pope continued: "Therefore it has pleased us greatly to learn of the decision of our Carmelite Brethren... to take all pains to pay homage to the Blessed Virgin Mary in as solemn a manner as possible on the occasion of the Seventh centenary of the Institution of the Scapular."

Ordinarily, when Popes make mention of any private vision or revelation, they will inject some qualifying expression such as, "it is said" or similar things. This is to show that he is speaking of something from private revelations, and that on them the Church does not, strictly speaking, have

the authority to give a definitive interpretation. Now such is the case with the Scapular too. Yet Pius XII did not add any such qualifier to this letter. Instead he said, "Most willingly do we commend so pious an undertaking... . For not with a light or passing matter are we here concerned but with the obtaining of eternal life itself which is the substance of the Promise of the Most Blessed Virgin which has been handed down to us. We are concerned, namely, with that which is of supreme importance to all and with the manner of achieving it safely."

These are indeed remarkable words. The Pope spoke of the scapular as of the "manner of achieving safely" our eternal salvation. He then added: "For the Holy Scapular, which may be called the Habit or Garment of Mary, is a sign and a pledge of the protection of the Mother of God."

What conditions are required to gain so great a promise? First of all, the vision spoke of this as a privilege for "all Carmelites." So it is necessary to be in some way affiliated with the Order of Carmel. For most Catholics, this is accomplished through enrollment in the Confraternity of the Scapular. Formerly this was commonly done at the time of First Communion. Sadly, today many churches ignore it. So if one is not sure that he or she has had this done, it is important to check, and if certitude cannot be had, the pastor can provide a conditional enrollment.

But is there anything else required? Not a few Catholics—including some who should know better—insist that she should know what the requirements are. That she mentioned nothing other than wearing the Scapular at the time of death. Therefore we must not add anything else.

Again, Pius XII helps us. In the same letter he also wrote: "But not for this reason, however, may they who wear the Scapular think that they can gain eternal salvation while remaining sinful and negligent of spirit, for the Apostle warns us: 'In fear and trembling shall you work out your salvation. '"

Pope Benedict XIV, writing as a private theologian, not as Pope, has given us a most valuable treatise, "On the Feasts of Our Lord Jesus Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary." He points out that Sacred Scripture contains many promises that seem to demand only one condition, e.g. , St. Paul in Romans 3:28 seems to promise salvation for Faith alone; but in Romans 8:24 he says that we are saved by hope". And Tobias in 12:9 says that "It is almsgiving that saves one from eternal death. And Our Lord Himself promises eternal life to those who receive the Holy Eucharist. So Pope Benedict XIV pointed out that it is obvious that there are other conditions presupposed. What other things? Kilian Lynch, Prior General of the Carmelites of the Ancient Observance, puts it this way: "How much good will is required to obtain the promise of the Scapular? Eternity alone will answer the question, for we should be careful not to place limits on the mercy of her who is the refuge of sinners and the Mother of mercy."

Pius XII helped much at this point: "Finally, may it be to them a Sign of their consecration to the Most Sacred Heart of the Immaculate Virgin, which in recent times we have so strongly recommended."

If one follows that recommendation , there is no need to measure: he most surely has all that is needed. For a consecration, properly understood, is indeed a great act of devotion to Our Lady.

But now it is time to add something of even greater importance. We have been saying more than once that the Vision of St Simon Stock belongs to the area of private revelation, and that the Church, strictly speaking, does not have a divine promise of interpreting these rightly, or of guaranteeing that the vision did indeed take place. But we said at the outset that we have something that is of a greater assurance. And we do have it.

We get this from a teaching we have already cited of Pope Pius XI in *Explorata res* of Feb. 2, 1923:". . . nor would he incur eternal death whom the Most Blessed Virgin assists, especially at his last hour. This opinion of the Doctors of the Church, in harmony with the sentiments of the Christian people, and supported by the experience of all times, depends especially on this reason, the fact that the Sorrowful Virgin shared in the work of redemption with Jesus Christ."

Let us note well: here we have crossed over from the area of merely private revelations into that of public revelation. There the Church does have teaching authority, and Pius XI has just told us that the protection of the Blessed Virgin will protect one from eternal death. Further, besides this teaching of Pius XI, we have very similar words from Pius XII and Benedict XV. Benedict XV wrote (*Apostolic Letter Inter Sodalicia*, March 22, 1918. AAS 10, 1918, 182): "There is a most constant view among the faithful, proved by long experience, that whoever employs the same Virgin as Patron, will not perish forever." Pius XII spoke similarly in his *Encyclical, Mediator Dei* (Nov. 20, 1947. AAS 29, 1957. 584: "The cult of the Virgin Mother of God which, according to the view of holy men, is a sign of 'predestination'."

Comments: We note that the Popes say that the view that solid Marian devotion makes salvation certain is the constant view of the Christian people. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* (LG) 12 wrote: "The entire body of the faithful, anointed as they are by the Holy One, cannot err in matters of belief." That is, if the whole Church, authorities and people alike, have ever believed (accepted as revealed) a truth, that belief cannot be in error. It is infallible.

As Prior Kilian Lynch said, in the citation above, we cannot measure precisely how much devotion is needed. Yet it is surely safe to say, as Pius XII said in his Letter for the 700th anniversary of the Scapular, that wearing