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# *Marian Mariology*

## Chapter 18



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 18

### **The Magnificat: Mary's Own Prayer**

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

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We have many reasons to give due consideration and prayerful reflection to the Magnificat. It is the longest discourse recorded of Mary in Divine Revelation. Many are the stories written telling about the heart of Mary as shown in that beautiful prayer. Certainly inspired, it was pronounced by Mary herself when she was carrying the Divine Child in her womb. It is the perfect act of humility and of profound humble adoration. It is part of the Church's liturgy and has been such since the very first centuries. It has been recited or sung daily by ancient monks and hermits and other Religious who have consecrated themselves to God. It is indeed the prayer of consecrated souls and all clients of Mary.

“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, because He has regarded the lowliness of His handmaid; for behold henceforth all generations will call me blessed because He Who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His Name; and His Mercy is from generation to generation to those who fear Him. He has shown might with His Arm, He has scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart. He has put down the mighty from their thrones and has exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty. He has given help to Israel, His servant,

infidelities, God will not abandon us. We must remain serene and calm and never allow ourselves to be discouraged. God, our God, is a faithful God.

### **Prayer**

Mother of Jesus and Mother of God, teach us something of your quiet peacefulness and childlike confidence in your Son. Help us to trust Him, especially when things seem to go wrong. Help us to believe in Him as you did, that the promises He makes to us He will fulfill. Help us never to worry or be sad but always rejoice like you, in God, your Savior and ours, your beloved Son and our dearest Lord. Amen.

End

mindful of His mercy - even as He Spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to His posterity forever.” (Luke 1:46-55).

All the great biblical masters of the ages have affirmed that there are four parts to the Magnificat. In the first strophe, Mary expresses her gratitude to God; in the second, she praises God for his power, His holiness and His mercy; in the third, she compares how differently God deals with the proud and the humble; in the fourth, she recalls that all the ancient prophecies to the Jews are now being fulfilled in the Messiah, Who was at that moment present in her womb.

### **Mary's Gratitude to God**

Taking out some of the salient features of the Magnificat, we begin with Mary's gratitude, "My soul magnifies the Lord." My soul adores, praises, and honors the Lord. The stress is always on 'the Lord.'

What a contrast between Mary's attitude and that of so many people over the centuries, including our own day. Think of all the honor medals and statues dedicated to human beings, who are sadly undeserving of praise, but rather often condemnation. Who were the great heroes about whom we read and whose exploits we memorized; the men who ran roughshod over human beings, and who destroyed empires in order to achieve their ambitions. We all know about Napoleon and how few remember the Pope he forced into exile. How strange that we should be so ready to praise weak human flesh that dying soon decays. Let us examine our consciences on how seldom we praise God. Yet faith tells us that prayers of praise and adoration are the most important form of prayer. For, unless this form of prayer is at least implicit, we are not even praying. Unless we praise God, magnifying Him, we are not acknowledging God for Who He is and ourselves for what we are. How God longs for us to tell Him: "How great Thou art, O Lord, how great Thou art!" And by contrast, how unimportant, how trifling is everything and everyone else. Having said, "My soul magnifies the Lord," Mary immediately adds, "And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Joy follows on praising God.

God really wants us to be happy. He wants us to rejoice in Him, but on His conditions: in doing His Will and not the world's or the evil spirit's or as our natural inclinations urge. What a lie to think that joy is found in our self will. Hell was born of that myth. Not even speaking of Heaven, there is no other true joy on earth except in God, with God, and because God became man, like God. Mary had a clear idea of who she was, that she was the Mother of the Messiah, even as Elizabeth had told her she was the 'mother of the Lord Who made her.' Mary also knew by whose favor she was thus blessed. Compare the two phrases "lowliness of His handmaid" and "He that is mighty has done great things for me." God did do great things for

Mary because in her own estimation she was His lowly servant. This is all God asks us to tell Him: “You alone are mighty and I, except for You, am nothing; and the moment my conscience tells me You have spoken, I don't for a second wish to hesitate doing what you ask.” The only reason why Mary became, under God, the Mother of God is because she was so profoundly aware of being the servant of the Lord. So ends the first part of the Magnificat.

### **Mary Praises God for His Power, Holiness and Mercy**

The second strophe is Mary's praise of God. As reason and faith tell us, God does not need our poor prayers, but He wants them and wants us to recognize Him for what He is. According to Mary, He is Power, He is Holiness and Mercy. How is God Power? He is Power because He can do whatever He wills. Perhaps the clearest sign of our being just creatures, is the distance that separates what we want to do from what we can do. Not so with God. He had only to will our souls into existence and we were made, existing only because God wills it. Withdrawing His Will, we would be absolutely nothing again. In our day when power is the watchword inspiring fear into people's hearts, we have to keep our balance. I am not to be impressed by human power nor do I fear what any human being can do to me. The One I adore is the only One I fear, God Almighty. As long as He is with me, who can do me harm? He will be with me as long as I am with Him. We have infinity at our disposal, provided we have humility and the honesty to acknowledge that God alone has the right to tell us what to do. No wonder the saints were so powerful; they had Almighty power at their disposal. How is God Holiness? He is Holiness because He is Wholly Other. He alone must be; He alone cannot not be. Everything else, including ourselves, need not be. What do we mean by “growing in holiness?” We mean that we are to grow more and more like God What in the last analysis makes God Holy? He is utterly unworldly. God does not need the world, even though there would be no world without Him. Let us ask our Lord to enlighten us as to what it means to be unworldly.

When I am among people who make a profession of pursuing sanctity, I tell them, “In God's Name don't be worldly!” I do not have to tell you what worldly means. Look at the values the world respects and considers important. The unworldly are not preoccupied with things of time and space, but have their minds and hearts on eternity. Such persons are not enamored of this world, because they know this world and all its vanities will soon pass away.

How is God Mercy? God is Merciful for He loves the sinner even as He hates the sin. His mercy is boundless and His kindness towards the weak and fallen is proverbial. Let us remember that though we have sinned deeply and often, God loves us still. His love is greater than our sin. He wants us to become holy, more holy because we have sinned. He wants us to become more humble, more patient, more prayerful than we would have been had we not always sinned. Nowadays, many books of spiritual counsel warn us not to be so conscious of our sins, but to keep thinking of God's

Love. Truly we cannot think of God's Love too much, but not to look at our sins is nonsense! It is precisely that combination of Divine Love and our sins that brings us to God's Mercy. That is what mercy implies. The Eternal Infinite Love of the Trinity became Divine Mercy only when man had sinned and when God's Love could exercise its benevolence and forgiveness towards the sinner. Unless we keep contraposing God's Love with our sins, we are living in a dream world, because the principal object of God's Love is His Mercy shown to sinners.

### **Mary Compares the Lot of the Humble and the Proud**

Next, Mary compares the lot of the humble and the proud. Compare these statements: “He has scattered the proud”, “He has put down the mighty”, “He has sent the rich away empty”, versus “He has exalted the lowly”, “He has filled the hungry with good things.” It is not so much Mary telling us these things, but Jesus in her womb is speaking through His Mother's lips. When He was older and began His public ministry, this is almost the theme of His Gospels. God exalts the humble; He humbles the proud. We are inclined to take this too mechanically and mistakenly suppose that this reward of the humble and retribution of the proud always takes place regularly in our lives. Dear friends, I wish it did. Sadly but obviously the proud get prouder and are exalted. Who make the headlines? Who are honored and praised and who are ignored in this world? But no matter! The span of human life on earth, even the longest life, is short compared to eternity. That is why my faith in Heaven and Hell is strengthened when I read the Magnificat, and I am assured of what God eventually does. Heaven is the glorification of humility, and hell is the humiliation of pride. Thank God that Heaven and Hell are both real.

### **Mary Tells Us that God Keeps His Promises**

Lastly, Mary tells us that God keeps His promises. His faithfulness in the face of the disloyalty of the Jewish people over the centuries before Christ is hardly credible. We reread the Old Testament. It tells of one dreary failure after another of their failure to live up to the Covenant that Yahweh had made with them; they constantly relapsed into idolatry and resisted God's commands. Yet, after their infidelity, murdering their Prophets, ignoring Yahweh's laws and resisting His Will, there was nevertheless a Covenant between Yahweh and His people. They had failed Him miserably and sadly, but as Mary says, God does not fail. How well have we, with whom God has entered into a New Covenant, kept our part of this covenant? Our Sinai is the “Sermon on the Mount”, and our Decalogue is the “Beatitudes.” Read them and weep! God, however, does not fail us even when we fail Him. How we need this reassurance, that in spite of our