



The Virgin as the apocalyptic woman on the moon by Peter Paul Rubens, 1623-1625

SINCE THE MONTH OF MAY is dedicated to Mary, it is fitting to reflect on her place in the economy of salvation. In the Maronite Rite we honor the Mother of God for the happiness she now enjoys in Heaven, a joy rooted in her predestined role within God's saving plan. From all eternity, the Father chose her to be the Mother of His Son, the one through whom the Redeemer would enter the world. St. Paul speaks of this divine design when he writes that those whom God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son (Rom 8:29-30).

One can define predestination as God, from all eternity, ordering some people to eternal life. What surprises many is that God does not give everyone the same amount of grace. St. Thomas Aquinas

teaches that God loves some people more than others—because to love means to will what is good for the beloved, and He wills some a greater good.

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Pope Leo XIII wrote that, *“the dignity of the Mother of God is so lofty that naught created can rank above it,”* and that Joseph approached nearer than any other creature to that dignity by

reason of his marriage to her. Hence, the three holiest persons in Heaven are the members of the Holy Family. Among human beings, Mary is first, Joseph second and, after that, it is all speculation. That is why devotion to Mary and St. Joseph is not optional.

St. Alphonsus Liguori says that God loves Mary more than everyone combined. How can we measure this? We speak of holiness in terms of sanctifying grace, but grace is immaterial and cannot be quantified. St. Thomas teaches that charity depends on “the intensity of the act,” so that an essential increase of charity means the ability to produce an act of more fervent love. Fr. John Hardon, S.J. defines charity as *“the infused supernatural virtue by which a person loves God above all things for His own sake, and loves others for God’s sake.”* In this sense, Mary has a greater capacity to love God and neighbor than all the saints combined. That is why St. Alphonsus says that in Heaven *“the beauty of Mary will be more beautiful than that of all the angels and saints together.”*

It also surprises people to learn that Mary, in all likelihood, had no capacity to sin. This is not heresy—it is the probable opinion of theologians, grounded in the scholastic principle that *action follows being (Agere Sequitur Esse)*. As St. Thomas says, *“such as everything is, such is the act that it produces.”* If Mary had retained the capacity to sin across her long life, at some point she would have sinned. The dogma that she never did points toward her impeccability or incapacity to sin.

There are three compelling reasons why every Christian must have a deep devotion to Our Blessed Mother:

First, it is part of God’s providential plan. Pope John Paul II, in *Redemptoris Mater*, reflects on Christ’s words from the Cross: *“Behold, your mother”* (Jn 19:27). To “take Mary into one’s home,” he writes, means to receive her into one’s heart, mind, and every aspect of life. God willed that she would have a universal role: all Christians of every age are to make her their own.

Second, she has more zeal for souls than any other saint, precisely because she loves God and neighbor more than any other saint. St. Thomas teaches that zeal for souls *“arises from the intensity of love.”* The closer one’s union with Christ, the more one shares His mind, the mind of the One who said, *“Greater love has no one than this, that a person will lay down his life for his friends”* (Jn 15:13). In this respect, Mary’s zeal for souls surpasses all.

Third, Mary’s intercession is uniquely powerful. St. James tells us that the prayer of a righteous person is very powerful (Jas 5:16), and Mary is holier than all the saints combined. St. Thomas teaches that the intercession of the saints is proportionate to their degree of glory and union with God: *“The nearer a thing is to the principle, the greater the part which it has in the effect of that principle.”* Mary has the highest degree of glory of all the saints. Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange teaches that, *“Mary’s intercession is much more powerful and efficacious than that of all the other saints, even taken all together, for the other saints obtain nothing without her.”*

Priests throughout the world consistently observe that when someone returns to the faith after a long absence, there is almost always some recent devotion to Our Lady, very often the Rosary. This pattern is so common that many confessors routinely ask penitents who have been away for years whether they have recently begun praying the Rosary. Bishop Hugh Doyle expresses the principle clearly: *“No one can live continually in sin and continue to say the Rosary; either they will give up sin or they will give up the Rosary.”*

Saints and exorcists alike place devotion to Our Lady and the Rosary above all other devotional prayers. Fr. Gabriel Amorth calls the Rosary “an ex-



tremely powerful arm against the devil,” and Sister Lucia revealed that *“there is no evil that cannot be defeated by its recitation with faith.”* Fr. José Fortea adds: *“If a person prays the Rosary daily and asks God to protect him from all the snares of the Evil One, he has nothing to fear”*

Those involved in liberation ministry witness this firsthand. They see demons react when the saints are invoked, but the strongest reaction is always reserved for Mary. St. Bonaventure says, *“Oh, how the devils in Hell tremble at Mary and her great name,”* and that is extraordinary to witness in person.

Finally, true devotion to Mary leads to a knowledge of the truth. St. Louis de Montfort says: *“Never will anyone who says his Rosary every day become a formal heretic or be led astray by the devil. This is a statement I would gladly sign with my blood.”* St. Alphon-

sus says that *“through Mary is given the light of truth,”* and Pope Benedict XVI taught that *“it is necessary to go back to Mary if we want to return to the truth about Jesus Christ, truth about the Church, and truth about Man.”*

De Montfort adds: *“An infallible sign by which we can distinguish a heretic from one of God's true friends is that the heretic shows nothing but contempt and indifference for Our Lady, and endeavors to belittle the love and veneration shown to her.”*

The most indispensable of all devotions is true devotion to Mary. It is the foundation of every other devotion, including devotion to the Sacred Heart and to the saints. Without it, the rest cannot stand.



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