

4th Sunday Easter Year "A"

*Sub tuum praesidium.*

May 10-11, 2014

Readings: Acts 2:14,36-41; 1Peter 2:20-25; John 10:1-10

During a month dedicated to her honor, and on a weekend dedicated to our own mothers in this nation, it is especially appropriate to reflect briefly upon the unique and indispensable role of the Blessed Mother in the life of the Church.

I still recall with some fondness my first spirited about the faith with a protestant Christian- and it took place at summer camp. The camper who shared the canoe asked me a question about being Catholic and wondered why we made such a fuss about Mary. "After all," he said, "all she ever did was just have Jesus." Of course, at eleven, no boy is able to comprehend theology, or even biology in a complete manner. Motherhood is an incredible calling, a most difficult vocation and one worthy of our highest admiration. Still, he did not see what all the fuss was about. I recall saying to him, "Just have Jesus?...That is pretty important, don't you think?" I forgot what happened after that!

In truth, since the earliest days, Christians have turned directly to Mary, asking for her protection. Consider this mid 3<sup>rd</sup> century hymn:

Under thy protection  
we seek refuge,  
Holy Mother of God;  
Despise not our petitions  
in our necessities,  
but from all dangers  
deliver us always,  
Virgin Glorious and Blessed.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Sub tuum praesidium*, ca. 250-280 A.D.

“Virgin Glorious and blessed” – indeed, our Blessed Mother is all that and more. The original Greek version actually says “only pure, only blessed,” but in the Western tradition the Latin uses the word glorious. Regardless of its versions, in just that brief hymn, we see key elements of the Church’s perennial teaching regarding the Blessed Mother reflected: (1) The special election of Mary by God (“only blessed”); (2) The perpetual Virginity of Mary (“only pure”); and (3) The Divine Motherhood (“Mother of God” – *Theotokos* Θεοτόκε· τὰς ἡμῶν). This prayer is more ancient than the second half of the “Hail Mary,” and may rightly be seen as the oldest prayer outside of the Scripture to Mary.

We as Catholics give highest honor to the Blessed Mother, though we in no way, shape or form worship her or see her as equal to Christ. She too, like every one of us, was in need of a Redeemer. The Father blessed Mary more than any other created person, and she is “redeemed, in a more exalted fashion, by reason of the merits of her Son.”<sup>2</sup>

Still, that brief discussion at Summer Camp on a lake in Northern Minnesota taught me to know and understand my faith, as well as the importance of being able to explain it. Mary, like any good mother, has the best spiritual interests of her children in mind at all times. Mothers never stop being mothers, and nor should they. True, one aspect of their role ends upon their children’s approach to adulthood, and yet from another perspective, it does not end.

Mary’s intercessory role is predicated upon the conviction that her role as mother of humanity in no way obscures or diminishes the unique mediation of Christ, the Good Shepherd. Like us, she is completely dependent upon Christ, but unlike us, she is now in a position to intercede for us better than anyone else.

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<sup>2</sup> *Lumen Gentium* 53, 56, quoted in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, para. #492

The Blessed Virgin Mary is not an “add-on” in the Church. When I was in the seminary twenty-five years ago, I distinctly recall my pastor telling me that “any priest worth his salt will have a some devotion to the Blessed Mother.” While this can take different forms, certainly the Rosary is a noble prayer that enjoys the fullest endorsement of the Church.

The Virgin Mary “cooperated through free faith and obedience in human salvation.”<sup>3</sup> As St. Thomas Aquinas wrote, she uttered her yes “in the name of all human nature.”<sup>4</sup>

The account of the Good Shepherd in today’s Gospel places emphasis on the voice of the shepherd. This is not merely an image; this is fact. Those who shepherd sheep for a living will still tell you that if someone comes and speaks to the sheep, they simply will not leave the gated area. Even if someone imitates the voice of the shepherd, they will not follow because they recognize the voice of the shepherd. You cannot recognize someone’s voice if you do not know him or if you never speak with him.

We need to recognize the voice of the Lord and thankfully, His mother is pointing us in his direction. She is joyfully directing us into His presence, where we will be safe. “Under Thy Protection, we take refuge.”

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<sup>3</sup> *Lumen Gentium* #56

<sup>4</sup> See, CCC para. #511, quoting St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* III, 30, 1