

‘Mary Our Dear Supplement’

The title ‘Mary our Mother’ is intriguing and entrancing. Sometimes by mechanical repetition phrases lose their force. We must not let this happen to that title of Mary for it is divinely intended to mean all that it says. So we must make sure by meditating that we do not fall too much below what is comprised in that divine intention. Mary loves us utterly but in a sense going beyond the emotional – which by itself would amount to little. Her love is nourishing and practical. It takes in every aspect of our lives. It is as vital to us as the mother is to her baby. But it is more comprehensive. The baby after birth *can* get along without its mother but the soul cannot manage without Mary. This is clear from the ordinary teaching of the Church. Mary has been made by God to be a part of salvation. Therefore that part must be acknowledged and co-operated with.

Her part is no minor one. The Immaculate Conception raised her capacity for loving to heights beyond the normal maternal level, such indeed that it can be said to exceed the love of all human mothers put together. This is the description of Mary’s greatness which is ordinarily

presented. It goes to a point which our minds cannot compass. Nevertheless it remains in the human category.

But *her* maternal part ascends almost infinitely beyond that. It has been incorporated into the secret Plan of God (Eph 1:9) as an expression of the divine love itself; and even made the turning point of that plan.

In every way Mary's motherhood surpasses that of nature which so often falls short of its purpose. Many women do not want to have children. Even in better cases, affection can be grudgingly bestowed, or there are defects in the manner of showing it. And the child suffers. What a contrast is the Marian motherhood!

As her destiny is motherhood, first of Christ and then of man, God has moulded her to that function so that it has to operate to perfection.

Nor should we make a radical distinction between the love which she gives to Jesus and that which she gives to us her other children. For she sees Jesus and his members as one, practically identified; and it is the same sort of love which she bestows on them all. Accordingly, her love is unique, invincible and inexhaustible. It cannot be shaken off or forfeited. It is proof against the worst of behaviour. It triumphs against ignorance and even hatred. Hers is the faithful love which never varies.

As this is something for which every man longs in his heart but never experiences on Earth, the mere suggestion that it is available to him through Mary will exercise an attraction. It is unquestionable that people are moved by presenting that thought to them. Then to think about Mary from that angle opens the door to her influence in their souls. Out of this consideration alone we must discuss Mary with everyone. She is their mother and they must know her. They must receive her mothering which

is vital to them. As the Legion has been so insistently proclaiming to you, the germ of love for her has been implanted, irrespective even of baptism itself, in the heart of every man. Instinctively it will respond to a favouring touch.

There is a peculiar quality about Mary's mothering which must be probed. It is that in the measure we permit her to exercise that function over us (and we have the power to hinder it), God identifies us with her. He sees our behaviour through her, or so to speak in her light. This light, as in nature, modifies what it falls on. This aspect is important because the light that Mary sheds is soft and sympathetic, bringing out qualities, adding charm, indeed making everything look different. But Mary's influence is far more potent than that; mere copper is not only made to resemble gold but is made into gold. In Mary's action we see the fabled philosopher's stone made real.

This Marian process is somewhat differently pictured by St Louis Marie de Montfort. He describes Mary as our 'Supplement'. She is an addition to us which takes hold of everything in us and elevates it to a higher, even heavenly plane. He insists that if we are properly mindful of her, our prayer takes on the quality of Mary praying in us. Of course, this also applies to our actions; her virtue passes into them. Our intentions are filled with her purity which supernaturalises them. Our timidities and weaknesses are submerged in her strength.

The consciousness of this Supplement at work in our lives can be truly inspiring. It will neutralise that feeling of inadequacy which limits our powers in every way. Especially this will apply in the supernatural order where faith is the motive power. Human considerations tend to overshadow and dominate faith.

If we can realise that such a Supplement is really available to us, eager to work in our lives, the effect can be startling. Our faith is realised and enabled to act boldly. It becomes like a captive bird set free. Then how different is our approach to Mary herself, and with her, to the Three Divine Persons! How changed for us would be Mass and Holy Communion where ordinarily we are so oppressed by our weakness of faith and the worthlessness of all that we are in a position to offer; and those moments of dryness and desolation which paralyse the soul. Imagine the strengthening force of the feeling that we are supplemented by Mary and that our painful inadequacies are lost in the tremendous ocean of her faith and love! I repeat: it is rather she than us whom God sees in that partnership. You will recall that cry of pain of St Teresa which is given to you in the handbook: 'To receive so much and to return so little, oh, that is torment to which I succumb.'

The remedy for that is De Montfort's idea. Once we get hold of that idea of Mary's supplemental place in every phase of our life, we need not be oppressed by that sense of our inability to love and to give properly. Mary is making up for what we are unable to supply. To rest on that thought is utterly comforting.

But it is essential that we do not reduce this splendid transaction of Mary's mothering help to the level of the merely psychological. Of course it does influence our minds but that is incidental. Mary's gift is the intensely real one of grace which is the intervention of God. There is nothing imaginary about that and it infinitely transcends nature.

Furthermore, that gift is there for the asking. Mary's motherhood is of that utterly superior order that it has

to respond to the call of the child. Mary cannot be found wanting. She cannot hold back when the child summons. She is under constraint to give. Thus no cry to her can go unanswered. But to a certain extent it is a condition that we do look to her. Faith in her role, and co-operation with it, has to enter in; such is the law. Mary is the divinely constituted mother of every man. Just as Jesus died for those who did not know him, so Mary is mother of those who do not know her. But in order to make claim men must look in her direction and give her at least a glance of recognition. That glance given, at once the blessed motherhood is enabled to embrace its objective.

Out of this dispensation proceeds the positive necessity for introducing Mary to all her children. Even those of the household of the Faith are to be found defective in knowledge of her. As for those outside the fold: how deprived they are! With many of these it is even a case of being hostile and prejudiced against her.

The gravity of this is to be gauged by the following declaration of the council, taken from the Decree on the Church in the Modern World: 'As a result of the Fall, all of human life whether individual or collective shows itself to be a dramatic struggle between good and evil, between light and darkness.' This is a harkening back to that fundamental text in the third chapter of Genesis which from afar delineates the future Redemption: 'I will set enmities between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed.' That awesome confrontation convulses the world and will continue to the last day. All men are in it – on one side or the other. Of course it is through her son that the woman will triumph. But the importance of her role is to be measured from the primary pointing to her. Therefore, what a catastrophe it would be

for anyone to be seen as missing from the woman's side in that warfare which decides each one's eternal fate.

Perhaps the retort will come from those who do *not* align themselves with Mary that they are on the side of her son. That is not good enough. The text in question unites the woman and her seed and depicts them as exercising a joint and indivisible mission; such that a rejection of the woman entails a separateness from her son. Is this a 'hard saying which some will not hear'? Those who thus limit their faith should call to mind the doubting ones who by the same phrase cut themselves off from the Eucharist (Jn 6:61).

Why is Mary designated with such drastic prominence? It is because it was part of God's design to make her as great as he could. As no obstacle to this desire of his was interposed by her, who on the contrary gave unreserved co-operation and receptivity, God had his will with her. Thus she reached heights so incomprehensible that Fr Faber has said that God could not reveal all of it to men at once because it would only overwhelm; and that he is doling out new knowledge to us gradually according as we assimilate what we have received. The declarations of the recent council represent the latest lights in that process of revelation. It forms interesting speculation as to what the next step will be. Presumably it will be the clarification or formal definition of the doctrine of Our Lady's mediation – this in spite of the new breed of theologians who are so feverishly assuring us that it is washed out as a doctrine. Then I would imagine, the Church may do something about enlightening us in regard to the spouseship of Mary to the Holy Spirit, into which our present degree of understanding only dimly peers.

After that – what? The imagination fails but there must be another step and then others again. We cannot

bankrupt God. It is important to keep in mind the principle that God has willed to make her as great as is consistent with her human condition. St Thomas says that through the grandeur of her divine motherhood she touches on the infinite. Even what we have already received is portentous. The council has declared her to be our Advocate, the helpmate of the new Adam, his Co-operator and Mediatrix. These expressions must not be read in a merely devotional or partly unreal sense, but literally as the full truth. She is not to be thought of as a mere channel through which grace mechanically flows to us. If Our Lady's role were no more than that, it would amount to nothing. It would not dignify her to compare her to the wire through which the electrical current moves to accomplish its varied works.

Moreover, one must not casually conclude that those different roles which the council has attributed to her are no more than shadings of each other. No, they are not repetitive. Each one has its own independent wealth of meaning. To omit one item of a medical or mathematical formula might spoil the whole. Similarly we do not compress Mary's wonders into a single theme. We must seek to differentiate just as the conductor senses every instrument in a great orchestra.

So, every one of the many different terms which the Constitution of the Church applies to her must be separately inspected from this point of view. Each one has a profound meaning of its own and adds something distinctive.

To pursue this idea would be a valuable exercise. We should analyse the multitude of expressions which the Church and its saints and doctors have bestowed on her from that point of view that each one strikes a new

note. And each new item of appreciation of Mary gives insight into God's loving method in regard to us. An understanding of Mary is part of the knowing of God.

God helps those who help themselves, says the proverb. In this case the proverb asserts a religious principle. God deals with man on the basis of co-operation. He supplies what man cannot give. But man must then do what he can towards his own salvation. The loving plan had envisaged the precise reversal of the Fall. He who does most towards restoring himself co-operates best with the plan. The fuller the contribution of man the greater play has grace in him. This in turn merges into a more glorious eternity.

If the Redeemer were to give what man could supply with such spiritual benefit to himself, it would mean that the Redeemer would be exercising a limitation; it would be depriving man of the opportunity for responsibility and growth in grace. This would be unthinkable view of the fact that the Incarnation and Redemption were enacted for the benefit of man; in order to save, sanctify and develop him in the fullest way. This policy of enrichment would be restricted if Jesus were to take over from man what man could do for himself. Accordingly, a portion of the work of atonement was left to co-operating mankind to fill in, and which Jesus therefore did not directly bear. It is this contribution which is referred to in scripture as the portion which is wanting in the sufferings of Christ (Col 1:24). Needless to say, this assignment of a contribution to man offers no offence to the perfection of Our Lord's own work but indeed enhances it.

This vital element of Catholic teaching is seemingly not understood at all outside the Church. Of course God could have granted us salvation and the fullness of perfection

without any co-operation on our part. Some sections of Protestantism propose only baptism and an act of faith as the condition for being saved, and some even omit the baptism. Such terms would mean that the human co-operation would descend to a point below which it could not go. A life so reduced as that would poorly reflect the life of Our Lord who daily took up his cross who prayed incessantly, who practised every virtue and good work and who is described as growing in age and wisdom and grace (Lk 2:52).

The Christian life is to be an imitating of and an ascent in Christ. We are to live in him and share his life in its various aspects. That principle of co-operation with Christ reaches heights in the saints. It rises to its ultimate pinnacle in Mary.

Mary is at the apex of that loving arrangement. The council describes her as being the Type of the Church, by which is meant that she is now what the Church will be like when it finally assembles in Heaven complete and without flaw. I suppose that this would entitle us to regard Mary as likewise the Type of the individual saved man. For each one will partake of the quality of the Church. Mary is the Type of the Redeemed. God's will that man should play his part in his own redemption found its chief realisation in her. She contributed more to the Redemption than all other pure creatures put together.

The prayer of the just of all ages before the coming of the Messiah would not have sufficed without her decisive contribution to it, so that she can be said to have prayed the Redeemer down to Earth. Her supreme act of faith did what would not have otherwise been available: it provided the basis for the Incarnation. She was alone but she set in motion the salvation of the world. Then in every other redemptive act her part was so special that she

has been called the New Eve; that is the Co-operatrix par excellence.

Here arises an interesting point. The Blessed Virgin's co-operative office was so large that by itself alone it could have formed the human contribution for which Our Lord was looking. But again that was not the divine policy; man was not thus to be spared from supplying what was in him to give. That would diminish his stature in time, and so in eternity.

Therefore we may borrow that text about Jesus leaving something to be done by man and apply it to Mary. She does not take over from man what is in man's power to offer. She does not deprive man of one jot or tittle of his unspeakable privilege of working towards his own salvation with Mary and in Jesus. Man is thus enabled to present himself for judgement as a responsible Christian and to hear the words which will assure him for all eternity of the deeper intimacy which that assumption of responsibility had merited for him.

Between that glorious day and now, there lies the time of pilgrimage. In this valley of tears we share in Jesus' expiation and in Mary's co-operation with Jesus.

Jesus is our Redeemer. Mary is our mother. Both are necessary to us in their own orders. According to this disposition of things we cannot love one and push aside the other. We must serve the one and the other with an undivided love.

Having said all those justifiable things, I think it is reasonable to add that the office of Mary in regard to salvation is so great that if we do not realise it we miss so much that we cannot be said to grasp God's idea at all.

Over and above that, Mary is divinely intended to reflect to us whole aspects of God which otherwise would

not come to us, or at least would not reach the less erudite ones. I give you an intriguing example of this. In one of his books Dr Orchard, the celebrated convert, advances the peculiar point which consideration will show to be important: that without Mary we might be found adoring and loving what we regarded as a purely male Deity: whereas God in himself is neither masculine or feminine. It will be correctly argued that Jesus Christ, although truly a man, must none the less present all the attributes of perfect human nature, feminine as well as masculine. But the less discerning among us, who constitute the bulk of humanity, will be found regarding Jesus as perfect man in the masculine sense. Dr Orchard contends that Mary is the divinely provided supplement or counterpoise; that she shows forth in bold and unmistakable light the femininity which is in God.

That is an aspect which would not occur to many minds, but it exhibits an additional Marian principle. In a simple, effective way that woman of few words puts things right by her mere presence. It is her role thus to intervene. She is found doing it at every pivotal moment in the New Testament and outside it.

She safeguards her divine son as she did in his earthly career. A great authority says that Mary preserves us from a purely abstract Christ. Thomas Merton puts this more simply when he says that 'without her, the knowledge of Christ is only speculation'. So necessary is she side by side with Jesus to explain his origin and nature, that if she were removed, we would not know what to make of him. We would be found regarding him as a mere human personage or not as a real person at all.

While she is in such mighty ways, so to speak, defining God to us, she is incidentally displaying herself

under another title: *Exaltatrix Mulierum*. Or Exalter of Womanhood.

St Thomas Aquinas describes her as 'the Golden Book, written by the finger of God's right hand, which brightens the darkness of this world'. She is the special device of the Holy Spirit for teaching us the eternal truths, for defining Jesus Christ, for destroying the heresies.

Jesus is not only the son of his Father but is also the true son of his mother. Therefore it is unquestionable that if we look with discernment, her image and likeness will be discovered in everything that he has done.

Such in the divine design is the place and scope of the Marian motherhood that, along with grand old Alphonsus Liguori, we must conclude that 'the salvation of the world depends on presenting Mary and exciting all souls to confidence in her intercession'. So never and on no account diminish her or leave her out.