

As the Advent season comes to its 3rd week and the Christmas season approaches, it will perhaps be helpful to consider the one through whom He came – our Holy Mother, Mary. For this, I would like to begin with the words of St Alphonus Ligouri, Doctor of the Church:

“So great is Mary’s merit in the eyes of God, that, according to St. Bonaventure, her prayers are infallibly heard. “The merit of Mary is so great before God, that her petition cannot be rejected.” But why are the prayers of Mary so powerful in the sight of God? It is, says St. Antonine, because she is his mother. “The petition of the mother of God partakes of the nature of a command, and therefore it is impossible that she should not be heard.” The prayers of the saints are the prayers of servants; but the prayers of Mary are the prayers of a mother, and therefore, according to the holy doctor, they are regarded in a certain manner as commands by her Son, who loves her so tenderly. It is then impossible that the prayers of Mary should be rejected.

...St. Bridget heard our Savior one day addressing the Virgin in the following words: “Ask from me whatever you wish, for your petition cannot be fruitless.” My mother, ask of me what you please; I cannot reject any prayer which you present to me; “because since you refused me nothing on earth, I will refuse you nothing in Heaven.” St. George, Archbishop of Nicomedia, says that Jesus Christ hears all the prayers of his mother, as if he wished thereby to discharge the obligation which he owes to her for having given to him his human nature, by consenting to accept him for her Son. Hence, St. Methodius, martyr, used to say to Mary: Rejoice, rejoice, holy virgin; for thou hast for thy debtor that Son to whom we are all debtors; to thee he owes the human nature which he received from thee.

St. Gregory of Nicomedia encourages sinners by the assurance that, if they have recourse to the Virgin with a determination to amend their lives, she will save them by her intercession. Hence, turning to Mary, he exclaimed: “Thou hast insuperable strength, lest the multitude of our sins should overcome thy clemency.” O mother of God, the sins of a Christian, however great they may be, cannot overcome thy mercy. “Nothing,” adds the same saint, “resists thy power; for the Creator regards thy glory as his own.” Nothing is impossible to thee, says St. Peter Damian: thou canst raise even those who are in despair to hopes of salvation.

... It was revealed to St. Gertrude, that all the graces which we ask of God through the intercession of Mary, shall be given to us. She heard Jesus saying to his divine mother: “Through thee all who ask mercy with a purpose of amending their lives, shall obtain grace.” If all Paradise asked a favor of God, and Mary asked the opposite grace, the Lord would hear Mary, and would reject the petition of the rest of the celestial host. Because, says Father Suarez, “God loved the Virgin alone more than all the other saints.” Let us, then, conclude this first point in the words of St. Bernard: “Let us seek grace, and let us seek it through Mary; for she is a mother, and her petition cannot be rejected.” Let us seek through Mary all the graces we desire to receive from God, and we shall obtain them; for she is a mother, and her son cannot refuse to hear her prayers, or to grant the graces which she asks from him.

...St. Peter Damian says that the Virgin “loves us with an invincible love.” How ardently soever the saints may have loved this amiable queen, their affection fell far short of the love which Mary bore to them. It is this love that makes her so solicitous for our welfare. The saints in Heaven, says St. Augustine, have great power to obtain grace from God for those who recommend themselves to their prayers; but as Mary is of all the saints the most powerful, so she is of all the most desirous to procure for us the divine mercy.

And, as this our great advocate once said to St. Bridget, she regards not the iniquities of the sinner who has recourse to her, but the disposition with which he invokes her aid. If he comes to her with a firm purpose of amendment she receives him, and by her intercession heals his wounds, and brings him to salvation. “However great a man’s sins may be, if he shall return to me, I am ready instantly to receive him. Nor do I regard the number or the enormity of his sins, but the will with which he comes to me; for I do not disdain to anoint and heal his wounds, because I am called, and truly am, the mother of mercy.”

The blessed Virgin is called a “fair olive tree in the plains:” From the olive, oil only comes forth; and from the hands of Mary only graces and mercies flow. According to Cardinal Hugo, it is said that she remains in the plains, to show that she is ready to assist all those who have recourse to her. In the Old Law there were five cities of refuge, in which not all, but only those who had committed certain crimes, could find an asylum; but in Mary, says St. John Damascene, all criminals, whatever may be their offences, may take refuge. Hence he calls her “the city of refuge for all who have recourse to her.” Why, then, says St. Bernard, should we be afraid to approach Mary? She is all sweetness and clemency; in her there is nothing austere or terrible.”

As a side note, notice how the saints (St. Alphonsus, in this case) know the saints, their lives, and their writings so well. This is true of all the saints – those who get to Heaven get to know, in this life, those who are already there. This alone is a good lesson for us.

St Alphonsus’ words regarding Mary’s power are certainly striking. But, at least for me, his words of her great succor for each of us, even regardless of our sins, is downright inspiring. Provided I come with sincerity – with humility, conviction, repentance, and so on – my mom will hear my prayer; she will not turn her back.

I have perhaps mentioned this before but during Advent and in anticipation of the upcoming Christmas season, it bears repeating. Bishop Sheen said he believed we are in a Marian age. The evidence for it would seem to be substantial. No Council in the history of the Church has said as much about Mary as the Second Vatican Council. Pope Benedict said Mary was the entire direction or mindset of the Council. Marian apparitions have never been as plentiful as in the last two centuries. There has never been a sign for any apparition as powerful as that at Fatima, nor seen by so many people – atheist and faithful alike. But St Alphonsus’ brings out another dimension of our Holy Mary that lends credence to our time being a Marian age, namely her clemency. It reminds me of something our Lord said to St Faustina: Apart from the mercy of God there is no other source of hope for mankind; and: Before the Day of Justice, I am sending the Day of Mercy.

Why would our times be a Marian age? Certainly the clemency of Mary is one significant reason. But mercy cannot be received without correction. And it is perhaps here that Mary stands out the most. There is much that could be said about this but here I will turn to just one thing – something from one Pope Benedict XVI homilies for the Immaculate Conception, which draws out another reason that it is especially fitting for our times to be a Marian age. Based on the first reading for the IC (the Fall of Adam & Eve), Pope Benedict said the following:

“What picture does this passage show us? The human being does not trust God. Tempted by the serpent, he harbors the suspicion that in the end, God takes something away from his life, that God is a rival who curtails our freedom and that we will be fully human only when we have cast him aside; in brief, that only in this way can we fully achieve our freedom. The human being lives in the suspicion that God’s love creates a dependence and that he must rid himself of this dependency if he is to be fully himself. Man does not want to receive his existence and the fullness of his life from God. He himself wants to obtain from the tree of knowledge the power to shape the world, to make himself a god, raising himself to God’s level, and to overcome death and darkness with his own efforts. . . .Dear brothers and sisters, if we sincerely reflect about ourselves and our history, we have to say that with this narrative is described not only the history of the beginning but the history of all times, and that we all carry within us a drop of the poison of that way of thinking, illustrated by the images in the Book of Genesis. We call this drop of poison original sin.”

Not since the time of Christ has the mentality described by Pope Benedict gained such a strong foothold as in our own times. What is evil is now considered good. This is the new atheism, the new humanism. Pope Benedict goes on to point out that the Immaculate Conception – complete sinlessness – stands in direct contradiction to this mindset of sin that has overtaken the world today. Does freedom from sin really limit us? Look at the one who was perfectly sinless. Is she limited in some way? Her heart is so vast that she is capable of being a perfectly loving mother to all of mankind. She alone has been assumed into eternal bliss body and soul (the Assumption). She alone is Queen of Heaven and earth. Who else can make such exalted claims? Far from limiting her, sinlessness has made her vast and great.

God bless you, Fr Kuhn.