

Last week's article began a tribute to our Holy Mother by taking up the 4 great Marian dogmas. Mary, Mother of God and the perpetual virginity of Mary were covered last week. This week's article will start by continuing with the Immaculate Conception, which was started last week.

The Immaculate Conception, Mary's perfect sinlessness, reminds us, for one thing, that Mary is God's greatest creature, above even all the angels, and the only person (other than our Lord, of course) to be completely sinless her entire life, free of original sin and all personal sin. God chose His greatest creature, then, to serve as His Mother. Let us recall once again that God does not need anything from man for His fulfillment. Whatever He does, then, in regard to man is out of pure love for us and for our good. This, then, is necessarily the case for the Immaculate Conception as well. What does it teach us in regard to building relation with God, about the spiritual or interior life? It is showing us, for one thing, to always bring our best for God. Bringing our first and best of the ways of living out the first commandment, one of the ways of loving Him above all else, it part of our worship of God. Remember the sacrifices of Cain and Abel? God was pleased with Abel's sacrifices but not with Cain's because Abel brought his first and best to offer to God, reflecting his love of God. Cain did not; Cain kept the first and best for himself; his love of self was greater than his love of God, which was not good for him. God did not need their sacrifices or ours. It is rather that it was good for them (and us) to love God and to express this (thus building it) in a tangible way.

One thing the Immaculate Conception is telling us, then, is that it is good for us to bring our first and best for God. We become a burden to ourselves when we do not live for the sake of another – God first, then neighbor. Do we bring our first and best for God? How about in terms of time? Do I start the day – first thing – with just a little prayer, offering everything to our Lord? Do I make Him first and foremost when going on vacation by making sure there's a plan for getting to Mass on the weekend before even leaving? Have you ever considered trying to make it to a weekday Mass say once a week? Do I do any extra devotional practices? Maybe Stations during Lent? How about a self-examination, Confession, and a firm purpose of amendment, with emphasis on the latter? Do I say: Lord, I'm going to root out this sin because You want me too? The Immaculate Conception also reminds us of how pure we need to be in order to receive Holy Communion. Do I strive towards that purity, making monthly use of the Sacrament of Confession? All of this assumes, of course, that a person is getting to Mass every Sunday and Holy Day of Obligation, otherwise there is no way I can claim love of God or making God first and foremost.

Pope Benedict XVI brought out another dimension of the Immaculate Conception, especially relevant to our own times. Although this was covered in a previous article, it perhaps bears repeating here, especially since it will lead into the 4th Marian dogma, the Assumption. Pope Benedict articulated well the core corruption of original sin and how it is now glorified and accepted as something good today. He said that man does not trust God, God is viewed, at best, with suspicion and often as enemy – someone who wants to take away man's freedom. God must be cast aside, man must embrace sin if he is to be himself, if he is to be fulfilled. This is the New Atheism, the New Humanism. The Immaculate Conception – Mary's complete sinlessness – stands in direct contradiction to this. Not only does sinlessness not inhibit in any way, it is actually what makes a person capable of becoming more than what they are. Our Holy Mother is the prime example of this. Her heart is so great that she is capable of being a true mother, with careful attention to all detail, to each and every person. It is the Immaculate One who is Queen of Heaven of Earth, not Satan, the king of sin and destruction.

Mary's Assumption into Heaven, body and soul, is the 4th and final Marian dogma declared heretofore. In his Apostolic Constitution declaring the Assumption a dogma of the faith, Pope Pius XII himself noted the tight connection between Mary's sinlessness (Immaculate Conception) and the Assumption. The one who was never corrupted by sin would not experience bodily corruption. The reward of the Resurrection, promised to all who purify themselves and make themselves like Christ, is now lived out by Mary, the great Mother of God. St Peter Canisus, quoted by St Pope Pius XII, points out the Assumption is a declaration of glorification. No, sinlessness does not make us less, sin does not make us more; that is the lie of Satan and how so many are

seduced by it. Far from making man less, sinlessness leads to his glorification. Sinlessness, purity, is the great struggle, but also the great achievement, of man. Be part of that great struggle for victory.

Although this is a bit of an aside, the question arises as to whether or not Mary ever died, whether her human soul departed from her human body for a short time. It is generally held that she did die. Some of the mystics of the Church have said that our Lord gave her a choice – she could be assumed into Heaven without death or she could choose to die, and Mary chose to imitate her Son in death, being raised shortly thereafter, body and soul. This is sometimes called her dormition (being dormant). Pope Pius XII did not dogmatically declare Mary's dormition, so it is known with certainty. But this is generally held to be the case and Pius's Apostolic Constitution declaring the Assumption seemed to lean in that direction without formally declaring it.

All of these Marian dogmas reflect the totality of one person. Mary is the Immaculate, ever-virgin, Mother of God. Motherhood. How badly motherhood has been derided in our world today, as if it is an "add-on" at best, another thing to have, well...if you're into that sort of thing. Motherhood is vocation given by God. Was Mary glorified because of her career? Because of her political affiliations? She was glorified because she did the will of God, the most significant part of which was serving as Mother. There is an intimate connection, even physically, between mother and child. The child is completely dependent on the mother. The mother plays a special role in the building up of the Kingdom of God, as does the father. To listen to those who slight it, is to listen to a piper who leads you into the pits of hell.

There are many, many titles that have been rightly reaped upon the great Mother of God over the centuries. But one that the Mary's (possible) dormition brings out and that I would like to focus on here is that of: Our Lady of Sorrows. Mary is the Queen of Virtue. But virtue is not a pretty ornament to sit on a shelf and gaze at from a distance. It is something lived out in everyday life. Think of the intimate connection between our Holy Mother and our Lord. And imagine how devastating it was for her to see the animosity against Him building. Imagine her intense suffering as she watched Him scourged, hated, beaten, mocked, ridiculed, and finally nailed to cross and strung up like a spectacle to die. He was mocked even while dying. And yet, not once did she ask our Lord to make it stop. Not only that but she did bear even the slightest grudge, the slightest bit of animosity, towards those who did these things to her Son, desiring instead their conversion. If our Mother can be this way towards us, in spite of our countless offenses against her Son, can we not be inspired to respond? Can we not finally lay down all of the trappings of pride and worldly position and having my way and embrace genuine simplicity and humility? All there is to lose is that which creates a burden anyway. Do you not want to participate in the Resurrection? Do you not want to sit at table with our Holy Mother, the Apostles, and all the angels and saints?

Regardless of how poor of a son or daughter a person has been, they will be heard by their mother if they call out to her with all sincerity and trust, in the depths of their heart and mind. It is a choice, though, that one has to make, it doesn't just happen.

How does it happen? Take again the example of your mother: **Mary took all of these things and treasured them in her heart.** She wants to know the mystery of her own Son. She takes the things she has received and ponders them over, thinking quietly and deeply upon them. This is an essential, basic, fundamental part of forming relation with anyone, including our Lord, and it is almost certainly the most neglected aspect of the interior life of most Catholics – just giving little, if any, thought to who or what our Lord is, how He is, to what He has revealed to us, to His teachings – really pondering them over so as to get to know Him. This is how real conversion comes about. It does not take an advanced degree in theology to do this. Reading the lives and writings of the saints, for example, reading Sacred Scripture and really thinking about it, imagining the circumstances, what it says, how it applies, contemplate the mysteries of the faith; just sit and think about them – the birth of our Lord, His Passion (especially), and so on. All of this is necessary to come to know our Lord and enter into eternal life. She took all of these things and pondered them in her heart. Silence is golden, silence is necessary. Modern man has become addicted to noise – to the noise of constant communication, constant internet, constant entertainment, and this to our detriment. Take, once again, the example of our Holy Mother. She didn't go out and post the Annunciation on Facebook. *God bless you, Fr Kuhn.*