

LIGHT & LIFE

FATHER REGINALD MARTIN, O.P., DIRECTOR

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MARY THE CHILD

One of the consoling aspects of our Faith is the utter ordinariness with which God communicates His love. The Incarnation of God's Word is a milestone event, by which we date every other event in human history, but we are hard pressed to describe anything more ordinary than the details of Christ's birth. God takes pity on our weakness and leads us by easy stages to embrace the mysteries that save us, and He reveals Himself in small ways that do not frighten us, although they mark the vital stages by which we are saved.

On September 8 we have the joy of celebrating the birth of Mary, an event of incredible significance, clothed in the homely details of a child's birthday party. Who can be frightened at the birth of a child? And yet, one of the Church's early writers tells us, "...the birth of the Mother of God is the prelude... [to] the foreordained union of the Word with flesh."

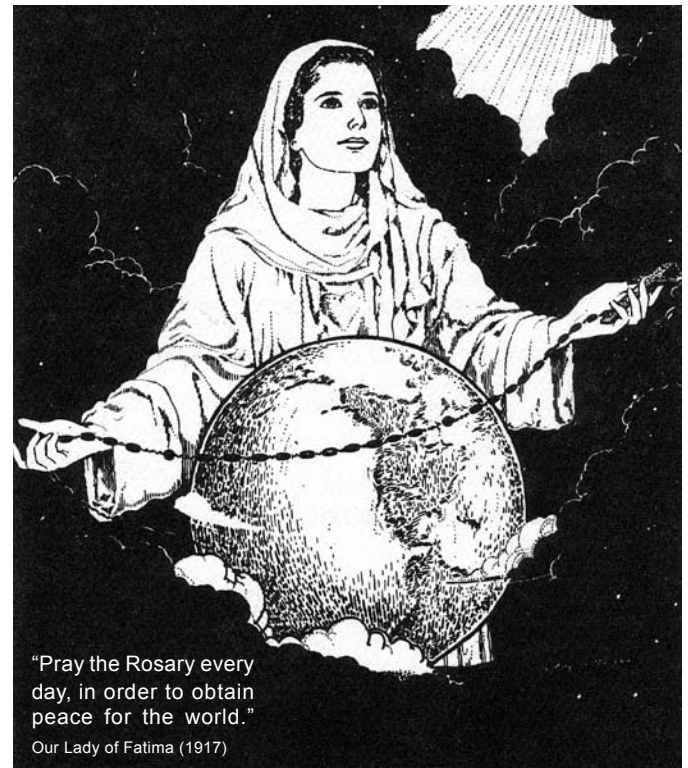
The same writer, St. Andrew of Crete, assigns a double significance to Mary's birth. "We are led to the truth," he says, "and we are led away from our condition of slavery..." The birth of Mary stands at the junction of the Old and New Testaments, where "darkness yields before the coming of the light, and grace exchanges legalism for freedom."

QUEEN OF THE HOLY ROSARY

The birth of Mary is a reminder of the way God presents His gifts in very humble wrappings. The feast of Mary as Queen of the Rosary, which we celebrate on October 7, shows how these humble origins grow, develop, and reveal occasional glimpses of God's grandeur and power.

Every schoolchild has heard of the Battle of Lepanto, which took place on October 7, 1571. Those who love Our Lady's Rosary know that the Pope at the time, St. Pius V, attributed the victory to God's assistance, invoked through praying the Rosary.

The numbers that describe Lepanto are staggering: 439 galleys (powered by oars), and 200,000 men



— engaged in a battle that lasted a single day. The losses were large, as we might expect, but 12,000 Christians were released from slavery that day. In one of his homilies, St. Bernard said, "...Mary, drawing abundantly from heaven, has caused this sweetness to overflow for us." For nearly 450 years the Church has remembered a naval victory, and the role of Mary's Rosary, as a sign of God's overflowing and providential love.

NOVEMBER, MONTH OF THE HOLY SOULS

We once again include sheets on which we invite our friends to list the names of deceased relatives and friends for whom we will pray throughout November, the month of the Holy Souls. Few who enjoy these last days of summer look forward to November, but our printing schedule forces us to provide the memorial sheets at this time.

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THE ROSARY LIGHT & LIFE

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THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

THE CREED, PART VIII

The Holy Catholic Church

By Father Reginald Martin, O.P.

FROM SEEN TO UNSEEN

Our faith continually invites us to look at the visible world and make analogies that will help us understand the spiritual world. The prayer of blessing the Baptismal water at the Easter Vigil, for example, reminds us, that the Father *“give[s] us grace through sacramental signs, which tell us of the wonders of [His] unseen power.”* Thus, when he arrives at the sentence of the Creed in which we profess our faith in the Church, St. Thomas Aquinas asks us to consider what makes us the persons we are: individuals composed of body and soul. He answers that as a human soul gives life to our bodies, so the Holy Spirit gives life to the body we call the Church.

MORE THAN A BUILDING

The ancient word for “church” is *ecclesia*, which means “assembly.” In the early days of our Christian history, the building we now call a church was called *domus ecclesiae*, “the house of the church.” To profess our faith in the Church expresses our belief that each of us is a member of something far greater than any of us is individually – an assembly of believers, animated by the Holy Spirit, to continue the work of Our Savior.

THE MARKS OF OUR IDENTITY

No matter how closely we may resemble one another, each person differs in some way from every other. One of the Church’s early writers, St. John Damascene (c.676-749), argued that these unique personal qualities are what identify us as individuals, because we do not define something by what it has in common with other similar, beings, but by what distinguishes it from the rest. When we look at the Church, and compare it to other institutions, we see that it, too, is distinguished by identifying characteristics.

THE CHURCH IS ONE

The first of these distinguishing marks is the Church’s unity. Jesus’ words, especially at the Last Supper, when He asks the Father, *“...that they may be one even as we are one, I in them, and Thou in me...”* (Jn 17:22), reveal how deeply He was concerned for unity among His followers. Similarly, unity among its members was a concern for Church leaders from the beginning. In his first letter to the Corinthians St. Paul begs the members

of the infant Church, *“...that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment”* (1 Cor 1:10).

ONE IN FAITH

The Ten Commandments, the Creed, and Christ’s words, recorded in the gospel accounts, form the basis of the Church’s unity in faith. This unity is preserved and guarded by the Church’s teaching authority, which helps the faithful to understand what Jesus demands of us, here and now, and what He promises for the future. The sermons preached at Mass, no less than the writings of the Church Fathers, theologians, and other spiritual authors, guide and help the members of the Church to grow in faith. Taken together, these explanations of God’s Word form the *“deposit of faith,”* a vast storehouse of wisdom from which individual Christians take the instruction that equips them to enlighten the world with Christ’s wisdom, and warm it with His love.

ONE IN HOPE

Faith reveals the Eternal Life Christians look forward to. So great a gift is obviously beyond our unaided grasp, but hope gives us the certainty that while the rewards of heaven may be hard to obtain, they are not impossible. Hope also enables us to trust in God’s assistance as we strive toward the reward He promises. Thus, St. Paul writes of *“...the one hope that belongs to your call”* (Eph 4:4). Here again, the Church’s teaching authority draws Christians together, by describing the good things God has prepared for His followers.

ONE IN LOVE

In his first letter, St. John describes the movement of love. It is not, he says, *“...that we [have] loved God but that He loved us and sent the Son to be the expiation for our sins”* (1 Jn 4:10). St. Thomas elaborates on these words and teaches that God’s love for us enables us to love God in return. As friends influence one another, God’s love influences us, and we begin to love God’s creatures (beginning with ourselves) as God does.

Our theology teaches that gifts are never given just to enrich the one who receives them, so God’s for us must overflow in love for one another, and for the world God has created. *“For each,”* St. Thomas preached in his homily on the Creed, *“ought to be of*

service to his neighbor by making use of the grace God has bestowed on him.”

THE CHURCH IS HOLY

“*God’s temple is holy,*” St. Paul writes, “*and you are that temple*” (1 Cor 3:17). The Church is holy, as an institution, because it is a society established by Christ and given life by His Spirit; the Church is holy as an assembly because Jesus commands it to wash its members in Baptism.

The holiness of the Church’s members is further promoted through the anointing Christians receive in Confirmation, and the daily benefits they receive through the continuing life of God’s Spirit in their midst. Finally, the Church daily invokes God’s blessing upon its members so that their actions may reflect the holiness of God.

THE CHURCH IS CATHOLIC, OR UNIVERSAL

The evangelists Matthew and Mark tell us that Jesus commanded His disciples to “*go into the whole world...*” (Mt 28:19, Mk 16:15). Thus, the Church’s faith in Christ is professed in all nations, and the testimony of the Church’s early writers reveals the efficiency of the Church’s missionary activity to carry the Gospel to all parts of the known world. The 2nd Century bishop and martyr, St. Irenaeus, wrote

...the Church, though scattered throughout the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, having received the faith from the apostles and their disciples...guards [it] with care, as dwelling in but a single house, and similarly believes as if having but one soul and a single heart, and preaches, teaches, and hands on this faith with a unanimous voice, as if possessing only one mouth.

However, the universality of Christ’s Church is not simply a matter of geography. The Church is universally, i.e., equally, present in each of its members, as St. Paul assures us “*...there is neither slave nor free*” among the members of Christ’s Body, “*neither male nor female*” (Gal 3:28), Christ is manifest equally in each member of His Church. And the Church is present in every moment of human history. Christ’s promise to His disciples, “*Behold, I am with you all days, even to the end of the world*” (Mt 28:20) is a guarantee that the Church, prefigured in the Old Testament, will exist in visible form in time, and enjoy a spiritual existence throughout eternity.

THE CHURCH IS APOSTOLIC

A famous hymn by Samuel Wesley, a nephew of Charles and John Wesley (and a convert to Catholicism) proclaims, “*The Church’s one foundation is Jesus Christ, her Lord.*” These words are easy to remember and thrilling to sing, but like the very best of the Church’s artistic tradition, they also convey a profound truth, namely, “*no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Christ Jesus*” (1 Cor 3:11).

APOSTOLIC STABILITY

Upon this foundation is laid the written testimony of the apostles, and the example of their dedicated lives and heroic deaths. Each of us is called to add to the edifice of Christ’s Church, but the testimony of the apostles remains the first – and firmest – contribution.

APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION

The leadership of the early Church was entrusted to the apostle Peter (cf., Mt 16:18, Jn 21:15 – 17). Although the administration of the Church has evolved to meet the changing demands of the centuries, the Church has always been led by a successor of Peter. But perhaps more important than the lineage of the Popes, is the unbroken tradition of the Church’s theology. The *expression* of what Catholics believe must adapt itself to the ever-changing demands of the world the Church is called to save, but the tradition of the apostles remains the standard by which all doctrine is judged.

APOSTOLIC INTEGRITY AND STRENGTH

Peter’s faith was often shaken, but each challenge was met with Christ’s promise of watchful care and eventual triumph. The Savior’s words, “*I have prayed for you, Peter, that your faith may not fail*” (Lk 22:32) remind us that the weakness of individuals may mar the glory of Christ’s Church, but cannot undermine its stability. The Church’s spiritual and political foes may assault the Church from outside, while error and internal dissent among Church members may distress those within its walls, but Christ has promised that not even the gates of hell will prevail against His Church (Mt 16:18).

EVE, MARY, AND THE CHURCH

The Book of the Old Testament is a rich treasury of symbols from which we draw images that help us understand the mysteries of God’s purpose. St. Paul was the first to remark the parallels between Adam and Christ: one brought sin into the world through his disobedience, the other grace through His obedience to God’s command to offer His life for our salvation. And as soon as Church writers made a connection between the old Adam and the new, they began to consider the person of Adam’s wife.

THE CHURCH AND EVE

The author of the Book of Genesis relates, “*the man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living*” (Gn 3:20). No individual stands in relation to Jesus in the same way the first woman did to Adam, but the Church’s activities and functions mirror the first Eve’s, although with far different – and happier – outcomes.

When the Church’s early theologians wanted to describe the Church and its part in our salvation, they looked to Eve. As she was taken from the side of Adam, they saw the Church born from the water and blood that

poured from Christ's side on the cross. And as Eve gave birth to fallen humankind, the Church became the mother of humanity redeemed by Christ.

CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

The author of the Book of Genesis looked at the physical union of our first parents and observed, *"therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh"* (Gn 2:24). The Preface of the Nuptial Mass reminds us that this companionship of husband and wife is *"the one blessing not forfeited by sin, nor washed away in the flood."* As St. Paul looked for images to describe Christ's everlasting union with His Church, the intimacy of marriage must have come quite naturally to mind, for when he describes how husbands and wives ought to relate to one another he says,

...no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the Church...for this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother...This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the Church...."
(Eph 5:19, 32).

MARY AND THE CHURCH: THE NEW EVE

Who can say why our human minds naturally seek to identify individuals who embody the qualities we admire? Whatever the reason, we are quick to confer labels on the individuals we hold in high esteem. We call George Washington the "Father of Our Country" because we hold both our nation and the notion of fatherhood in high regard. Washington never had children of his own, but the popular imagination endows him with paternal characteristics. Likewise, as we consider the Church, we look about for individuals whose behavior helps us to grasp some aspect of the Church's presence in our lives.

As we have seen, the early Church found a helpful example in Eve as it sought to define itself. But Eve's example is often negative, so when the Church sought a positive role model, it embraced the Mother of God as the exemplar of all the noble attitudes, qualities, and behavior it stands for.

THE CHURCH BELIEVES AS IT PRAYS

Most Catholics are familiar with the Litany of the Blessed Virgin, which addresses Mary by a number of lofty titles, among them: Tower of David, Ark of the Covenant, Gate of Heaven, Health of the Sick, and Refuge of Sinners. This litany dates to the end of the 16th Century, but some of the titles it confers on Mary were initially given to the Church, nearly a thousand years earlier. This evolution demonstrates that, over time, when the Church looked at itself it saw the image of the Blessed Virgin, and vice-versa.

Both Mary and the Church are honored as the "New Eve," because both said yes when our first parent said

no. Both present Christ to the world, both show what we must do if we seriously wish to follow our Savior, and both share the distinction of being without sin from the first moment of their existence. To look at the Church is to see what each of us is called to be; to look at Mary is to see the way to our salvation. ■

MONTH OF THE HOLY SOULS *(continued from page 1)*

Please compile your list of those for whom you wish us to pray and return the names to the Rosary Center. We will offer Mass each day during November for the individuals whose names you send. ■

ROSARY CENTER OFFERS NEW CDS

In an earlier issue of Light and Life we shared the good news that the Rosary Center has "inherited" Albertus Magnus Media, a Dominican venture that produces many of the CDs the Rosary Center is privileged to offer our friends. We now proudly announce the first two CDs produced by the Rosary Center, one on the truth of the Catholic Church, the other on the Blessed Virgin Mary.

These CDs are the work of Fr. Robert Christian, O.P., Assistant Dean of the theological faculty at the Angelicum, the international Dominican university in Rome. The presentations are deeply learned, yet engaging and accessible. Coincidentally, they offer a wonderful, expanded treatment of the material presented in the current Light and Life.

Fr. Christian provides a powerful explanation of the Church's traditional claim to be the True Church, and his presentation on Mary (and the Church) as the New Eve will not only enlighten listeners who wish to learn more about the evolution of the Church's theological understanding of the Mother of God, but lead them into a deeper devotional understanding of Mary's importance in our life of prayer.

Our friends may order the CDs on-line from the Rosary Center (www.rosary-center.org), or by dropping us a note. Each CD is available for \$15.00 plus postage calculated from rate chart below.

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