

FATHER REGINALD MARTIN, O.P., DIRECTOR

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## AN EMBARRASSMENT OF RICHES

### A SUMMER GREETING FROM FR. REGINALD

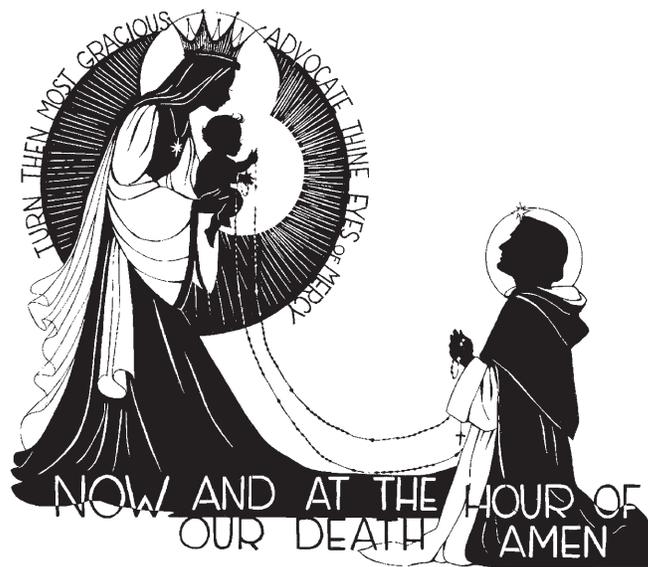
Each of us at the Rosary Center looks forward to publishing this issue of *Light and Life*. We take it to the printer while we are still enjoying the warmth of summer sunshine, but our thoughts are already turned to the autumn and our celebration of Mary as Queen of the Most Holy Rosary, while our prayers, which last through the month of November are offered for those who have died.

I am writing this on August 5, the anniversary of the Dedication of St. Mary Major, the oldest church in the West to honor Mary as the Mother of God. The great basilica is built on one of the hills in Rome, and legend says the site was chosen because a miraculous snowfall – in August – identified the spot where God wished the Mother of His Son to be honored. For this reason, the feast is sometimes called “Our Lady of the Snows.”

In our prayer, the *Hail Mary*, we express our belief in Mary as “Mother of God.” These words are so fundamental to our Catholic vocabulary that we seldom think of the controversy that led to the Council of Ephesus, in 431, at which the Church’s greatest minds gathered to debate – and finally to honor – Mary as God’s Mother.

One of those who attended the Council, St. Cyril of Alexandria (376—444), preached a magnificent homily. “*Hail Mary*,” he began

*Mother of God, august treasury of the whole world, unquenchable torch, crown of virginity, scepter of orthodoxy, temple indestructible, mother and virgin. Through you is named blessed in the holy gospel He who comes in the name of the Lord...through you heaven exults; through you the angels and archangels rejoice; through you demons are put to flight...through you the fallen creature is taken up to heaven....*



*Silhouette by Sr. Jean Dorcy*

### OUR LADY OF THE ROSARY

As the days of August unfold, we celebrate Mary’s Assumption into heaven, and her queenship over the universe. On September 8, the Church invites us to celebrate the birthday of Our Blessed Mother, and a week later we remember her silent presence at the foot of Our Savior’s Cross. Between these two great feasts falls another, often forgotten, and on September 12 we honor Mary’s holy name.

This feast recalls the 1683 Battle of Vienna, in which Catholic forces put a decisive end to non-Christian hopes of dominating Western Europe. An old Dominican prayer book recalls the victory in these words

*On account of the outstanding victory...over the fierce tyrant who has been enslaving the Christian people, and in perpetual memory of so great a favor, the Roman Pontiff, Innocent XI, ordered that the feast of this most delightful name...should be celebrated each year by the universal church.*

*(continued on page 4)*

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2 Novenas of Masses  
in honor of

#### OUR LADY OF THE ROSARY

Sep. 29 - Oct . 7 — Oct. 8 - 16

TO BE OFFERED FOR YOUR INTENTIONS

# THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

## The Virtue of Faith

By Father Reginald Martin, O.P.

In the previous Light and Life reflection we turned to St. Thomas Aquinas, who (echoing St. Augustine) defined virtue as

*A good habit of the mind, by which we live righteously, of which no one can make bad use, which God works in us.... (ST I-II, 55.4)*

With this issue of our newsletter we will begin considering the individual virtues. When we were growing up, most of us learned that we live by the Theological Virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity, as well as by the Moral Virtues: Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, and Temperance. This is the order in which we will discuss these good habits by which God works in us and brings us to everlasting life.

The word “theological” comes from two Greek words, *theos* (which means “God”) and *logos*, “word.” We call Faith, Hope, and Charity “theological” virtues because they direct us to God, and because we receive them from God alone. The immense gift of God’s revelation is further enhanced by the truths contained in Scripture, and the teaching of the Church.

Left to our own devices, we can reach a level of natural happiness by following the dictates of reason. Pope Pius XII wrote

*Though human reason is, strictly speaking, truly capable by its own natural power and light of attaining to a true and certain knowledge of the one personal God, who watches over and controls the world by His providence...yet there are many obstacles which prevent reason from the effective and fruitful use of this inborn faculty. For the truths that concern the relations between God and man wholly transcend the visible order of things.... (Humani Generis, 561).*

However, coming to know God through human skills is no easy matter. Moreover, Scripture refers to a greater happiness, one we realize when we take part in God’s divine nature

*What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him, God has revealed to us through the Spirit (1 Cor. 1:9).*

No matter how excellently human reason directs us to act (and no matter how excellent the resulting actions are), full participation in God’s life remains beyond our human reach; we enjoy it only by God’s invitation. We accept this invitation when we present ourselves for

Baptism. Before His Ascension, Jesus commanded His disciples, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mark 16:16).

Most of us cannot recall our Baptism, but the rite by which the sacrament is conferred makes a clear connection between the sacrament and the Faith that is its gift. Parents who present children for baptism are asked, “What do you ask of God’s Church for your child?” The reply is, “Faith.” The parents are next asked, “What does faith offer?” The answer, “Eternal life.”

The Sacrament of Baptism not only forgives sin, it makes us “partakers in the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4) and “identifies us as God’s adopted children” (Gal. 4:5). By God’s grace, Baptism gives us the theological virtues by which we believe in God, hope in Him, and love Him. It also enables us to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit and grow in the goodness of the moral virtues we shall consider in further reflections.

The theological virtue of Faith gives our intellect the supernatural knowledge by which we can direct our lives toward God. The virtue of Hope allows us to see this life with God as something possible to attain. The virtue of Charity transforms our human will by allowing us to enjoy the spiritual union with God that begins with Faith.

Faith is the habit by which we believe in God and what He has revealed. Because Christ entrusted His teaching authority to the apostles, Faith is also the habit by which we embrace the teachings of the Church. Faith precedes the other theological virtues because its first act is to allow us to recognize the existence of God, who is the object every virtue seeks to possess.

Here we can see a parallel to our natural lives. Until we know some thing exists, we can form no opinion of it. Likewise, until we know some place exists, we have no reason to plan to visit it. However, once we become aware of a thing’s existence, we can study it, evaluate it, and decide whether to incorporate this knowledge into the rest of our life. In a similar way, God reveals Himself to us through Faith, and once we become aware of Him, we can direct and order our lives toward a deeper and more intimate life with Him.

Here we should observe that although the God of Faith is one and unchanging, human capacities differ both in their ability to comprehend the truth, and in the speed, firmness and devotion with which they assent

to it. Jesus chides Peter when He says, *“You of little faith; why did you doubt?”* (Mt 15:28) and in another place he commends one of His listeners by saying, *“Woman, great is your faith!”* Therefore, one person’s faith may be objectively greater than another’s, but the gift of Faith itself is sufficient for each individual who grasps it.

Here we may draw another comparison between our natural lives and the life of grace. We say an individual who has greater knowledge or experience in science, grammar, mathematics, or any other object of human study, has two obligations. The first is to deepen his own knowledge, the second is to teach those who are less informed. Likewise, those whose faith gives them greater insight into the goodness of God have an obligation not only to share what they know, in order to increase the faith of others, but to study and pray so they may increase their own faith.

This may sound like a task reserved solely for professional theologians, but each of us is called to increase our faith, and to promote the faith of others. One of the axioms of our Church’s theology states that gifts are never given just to enrich the one who receives them; they are given to be shared with the entire Church. We are baptized into a community, and we are called to enrich this community by our prayer and example. We are assisted in this life-long project by grace, the free and loving gift of the God we seek to know. Our progress in faith involves both our mind and our will. The more we learn about God, the more we find to love. The more we love God, the more we want to know Him – and to know about Him.

As soon as we speak of knowledge and love we must consider the relation between the intellect and the will. Our intellect seeks to know truth; our will to embrace goodness. These two aspects of our human nature unite to produce the habits we call virtues. When he considers the virtue of Faith, St. Thomas Aquinas writes *“...to believe is an act of the intellect in assenting to the truth at the command of the will”* (ST II-II, 4:5).

We might ask why faith depends on the will’s commanding the intellect to believe, and here the Scripture comes to our assistance. The Letter to the Hebrews reminds us, *“Faith is the substance of things to be hoped for, the evidence of things that appear not”* (Heb. 11:1). The object of our faith – God – differs from an object of science precisely because we cannot see God or infer His existence simply from study and experiment. Grace reveals the invisible God to our mind, but it does not force us to believe what has been revealed. Our will apprehends what is good in revelation, and directs our intellect to accept the revelation as something that is true. Faith reveals God to be both true and good, so Faith enables both our intellect and our will to grow in perfection.

If we wonder how our Faith manifests itself, St. Thomas Aquinas replies that one of the first effects of Faith is to understand what happens if we turn away from God. This

understanding results in fear – fear of punishment, and fear of separation from God. Our faith allows us to see God’s infinite goodness, and it also makes us realize how much we sacrifice if we separate ourselves from this goodness. Indeed, Faith allows us to understand that separation from God is the greatest evil we can suffer.

But Faith also purifies our hearts, by turning us more and more toward God and more and more away from sin. As our reflections progress we will see that the virtues are connected to one another, and the virtue of Charity will appear over and over, as a catalyst that “speeds up” or deepens another good habit. The goal of human life is loving union with God, the union of Charity. As we grow in virtue, our love for God (which is itself a reflection of God’s love for us) makes us want to draw closer to the God we apprehend by Faith. In this way, the virtues work together to perfect one another.

Here we can see a natural parallel to our life of Faith. Baptism makes us part of a supernatural family, the Church. One of the reasons we call the Church “our Mother” is the Church’s task of teaching us and offering the other aids by which we grow to Christian maturity. In the course of our growth in Faith we learn many words. At some point we also learn that we do not believe in the words themselves, but in the realities they represent. Our Catechism makes a wonderful comparison between the vocation of human mothers and the Church

*As a mother who teaches her children to speak and so to understand and communicate, the Church our Mother teaches us the language of faith in order to introduce us to the understanding and the life of faith* (171).

As we grow and mature, human gifts enable us to succeed and excel. The human family of Jesus helped Him increase in wisdom and stature, and the Catechism remarks that the Church’s deposit of belief does the same for our life of Faith. *“Believing,”* it states, *“is an ecclesial act. The Church’s faith precedes, engenders, supports and nourishes our faith. The Church is the mother of all believers”* (181). The Catechism’s reflection concludes with words of St. Cyprian, *“No one can have God as Father who does not have the Church as Mother.”*

In the Mass, after we say the *Our Father*, the celebrant prays, *“Lord, Jesus Christ...look not on our sins, but on the Faith of your Church...”* Belief in God is our first act of Faith. The Church’s faith enables us to build on this initial act, and to grow in what St. Jude, in his letter, calls *“our common salvation”* (Jude 3).

We cannot speak of the Church as our mother without considering the Mother of Jesus, whom we call *“the Mother of the Church.”* Mary stands for us, and wherever we encounter her in the gospel, the evangelist wants us to find ourselves. The habit we name the virtue of Faith enables us to surrender to a great deal that we could grasp in no way other than God’s revelation.

This surrender cannot always be easy, but we are not alone in being called to make it. Mary was there first. We can easily imagine the thousand questions that must have come to mind when Mary heard the angel's proclamation that she was to become the Mother of God. We should likewise rejoice in the Faith that allowed her – and teaches us – to say, *“behold the handmaid of the Lord.”* ■

**EMBARRASSMENT OF RICHES . . .** *(continued from page 1)*

October 7, of course, calls us to honor Mary as Queen of the Holy Rosary, a feast instituted to offer thanks for Mary's intervention at the Battle of Lepanto, in 1571. In this remarkable naval encounter, the last major battle to be fought in ships powered by oars, a united Christian fleet was able to overwhelm a much larger non-Christian force, and guarantee the safety of Christian travel and trade in the eastern Mediterranean.

The Catholic sailors who fought at Lepanto prayed the Rosary the night before they engaged their enemy; later, they (and Pope Pius V, who helped assemble the multi-national Christian force) attributed their victory to Mary's aid. The Dominican prayer book recalls this gratitude, and urges

*Let us, therefore, continually venerate the most holy Mother of God by means of this devotion which is most pleasing to her, that she who, moved by the prayers of the Rosary, has so often enabled Christ's faithful to overcome and destroy earthly enemies, may likewise enable them to overcome their enemies from hell.*

The November 2 celebration of All Souls' Day calls us to reflect on our mortality, and to remember the immense value of our prayers for those who have died. The reflection on the virtue of Faith in this issue of Light and Life reminds us that Faith is a social virtue: our Baptism makes us citizens of a vast population of individuals with whom we share the Faith that allows us to embrace the truth revealed by God.

This population includes not only the peers among whom we live, but also the countless number of souls who, having died in the Catholic Faith, await their everlasting reward. St. Augustine describes the value of our prayers for those whom we aptly call the “faithful” departed

*...it is not to be denied that the souls of the dead can be assisted by the devotedness of their living friends, when the Mediator's sacrifice is offered for them or when alms are given in the church...those whom they benefit, they can so far benefit that the remission is complete, or at least that the suffering is more bearable....*

Of course, the prospect of our own death is a frightening thought, and the death of someone we love is cause for great sorrow. But at some point we must recall the words of St. Paul, who wrote, *“we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are*

*asleep, that you may not grieve as others do, who have no hope”* (1 Thess 4:13). Christian tears are no less bitter than any other, but they are different, for Christian grief is mixed with a confident trust in Christ's promise of everlasting life.

When he wrote about the death of his brother, St. Ambrose said,

*The world has been redeemed by one man's death. Christ need not have died unless he had willed it, yet he did not think a shameful death a thing to be avoided, nor was there any better way to save us than by dying. So His death is every man's life...It is His death we proclaim when we pray, that we preach when we offer sacrifice. His death is victory and sacrament, and, year by year, it is the worlds' great feast.*

The days of late summer and early autumn give us numerous opportunities to honor Our Blessed Mother, and you may be certain that each of us at the Rosary Center will remember you and your intentions on her feast days – and especially during the novenas of Masses we offer to celebrate the feast of Mary's holy Rosary. We will also remember you and your loved ones who have died when we offer our Masses each day in November. You are extremely important to us, and we thank you for your prayers and for your financial support that enable us to proclaim the Good News of Christ's love, manifest in so many ways through the life and example of His Blessed Mother. ■

**WE ARE FREQUENTLY ASKED** whether Confraternity members must pray twenty decades of the Rosary to fulfill the requirements for membership. The answer to this question is no. Pope John Paul II presented the Luminous Mysteries as a suggestion, which he hoped would contribute to the devotion of lovers of the Rosary. The present Holy Father has made no comment, so Confraternity members will continue to fulfill the requirements for membership by praying the traditional fifteen decades of the Rosary.

For those who wish to learn more about Pope John Paul's promoting the Luminous Mysteries, the Rosary Center offers a helpful new book, *The Rosary, The John Paul II Method*, by Robert Feeney. We offer it for \$7.95 plus shipping & handling, and hope it will prove helpful to devotees of the Luminous Mysteries, as well as those who wish to learn more about them.

To order please use enclosed reply envelope or visit our web page, [www.rosary-center.org](http://www.rosary-center.org).

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