

LIGHT & LIFE

FATHER REGINALD E. MARTIN, O.P., DIRECTOR

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THE ASSUMPTION OF MARY

In his book, *Mary, Mother of the Son* (see our order form, if you would like to investigate this easy-to-read and very well-researched work), author Mark Shea points out Mary's Assumption "completes the picture of redemption for us." At the Wedding at Cana, Mary tells the servants (and us), "Do whatever he tells you." Mary leads by example, and by serving as our model in prayer and obedient ministry, Mary shows us what we mere, mortal creatures have to look forward to if, like her, we are faithful to God's call.

Our faith tells us Jesus was like us in all things but sin. Our reflection on the Ninth Commandment in this issue of *Light and Life* observes how sin confirms our identity as creatures, noble but fallen. The absence of sin in Jesus may render Him a somewhat remote figure in our spiritual lives, so we must be thankful for the presence of Mary, who shared our need to be delivered from sin and its effects. And who so generously shares with us both the example of a life lived in God's service and the reward we may look forward to if we are willing to surrender to the example of her "yes."

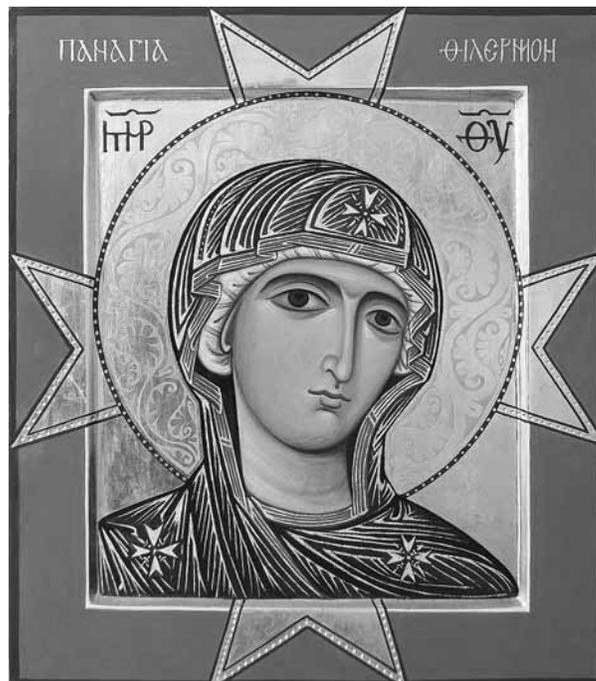
In his Apostolic Constitution on the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, Pope Pius XII, wrote,

It is to be remembered that, from the second century onwards, our Lady has been identified by the Fathers of the Church as the second Eve. Not on the same level, indeed, as the second Adam, but intimately associated in a warfare against the enemy of our race.

This is an important point – for Mary, and for us. We honor Mary for her fidelity and service; if we are to share her everlasting triumph, we must embrace that transforming attitude and way of life.

NEW BOOKS

In the last issue of *Light and Life* we promised two new books, which we are pleased to offer. The first is the latest reflection by our Dominican scholar, Fr. Brian Mullady, *Christian Social Order*. This is,



The Holy Virgin of Philermo
Icon written by Philip Davydov

as we mentioned earlier, a concise summary of the Church's history of social teaching, as well as a very moving presentation of the consequences of our Fall from grace, and the Salvation Christ won on the Cross. Fr. Mullady also undertakes a deep consideration of marriage and the family, and the threats both face in the present age.

The second work, *The Sacred Story Rosary* is by a Jesuit, Fr. William Watson, who invites the reader to embrace the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius when praying the Rosary.

The *Exercises* are traditionally undertaken with the guidance of a spiritual director. This is the role Fr. Watson assumes, leading us through each

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THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

The Ten Commandments: Part X

"Thou Shalt Not Covet Thy Neighbor's Wife"

By Father Reginald Martin, O.P.

The Ninth and Tenth Commandments sound so similar – “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife... Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s goods” – we may wonder what distinguishes them. Our theology teaches that concupiscence is the distinguishing characteristic.

CONCUPISCENCE

In Latin, the word “concupiscence” means “to desire strongly,” and our *Catechism* defines concupiscence as “...any intense form of human desire. Christian theology has given it a particular meaning: the movement of the sensitive appetite contrary to the operation of human reason.” (CCC, No. 2515)

Concupiscence is one of the results of Original Sin. It is not sinful in itself, but its presence within us can incline us to make poor moral choices when faced with certain attractive options. Concupiscence is what St. Paul has in mind when he employs the very apt image of the flesh rebelling against the spirit.

THE IMPORTANCE OF REASON

Lest we imagine the Ninth Commandment is urging us to embrace a moral Puritanism, St. Thomas Aquinas is quick to point out, “...none can live without some sensible and bodily pleasure.” (ST I-II, 34.1) What sets good pleasures apart from evil is their alignment with reason. The example St. Thomas uses is the sexual act between men and women. It is praiseworthy when enjoyed by a married couple, but worthy of blame when adulterous.

FLESH VS SPIRIT

The struggle between our flesh and our spirit is both a consequence of sin and, the *Catechism* observes, a confirmation of it. Our moral growth teaches us to maintain a balance between what our senses find attractive here and now and our minds tell us will lead to our ultimate happiness in heaven. This is not a process we can successfully undertake or accomplish on our own. Thus, St. John Paul II writes

For the Apostle (St. Paul) it is not a matter of despising and condemning the body which with the spiritual soul constitutes man’s nature and personal subjectivity. Rather, he is concerned with the morally good or bad works, or better, the permanent dispositions – virtues and vices – which are the fruit of submission (in the first case) or the resistance (in the second case) to

the saving action of the Holy Spirit. For this reason the Apostle writes, “If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.”

In other words, our surrender to God’s will is the means by which we are able to choose whatever is best for us at any moment. Those who followed our earlier reflections on the moral virtues will recall that virtue is a habit and, like any habit, virtue becomes easier with practice. Concupiscence can never be eliminated or erased from our lives, but its negative effects and influence can be moderated by the antidote of virtue, particularly the virtue of Temperance.

THE VALUE OF TEMPERANCE

The history of a “Temperance Movement” in the United States has conditioned us to think of Temperance in connection with moderating the use of alcohol, or encouraging citizens to forego its use altogether. While moderation regarding food or drink is certainly a part of the virtue of Temperance, it is far from the only part we must consider if we are to understand this virtue.

Temperance concerns itself with the most basic human needs: the need for food and drink, which guarantee the survival of the individual, and the need to guarantee perpetuation of the human race, by means of sexual relations between men and women. Since each of these is connected with the sense of touch, and because each is pleasant, St. Thomas Aquinas teaches that “...temperance is about the pleasures of touch” (ST 141.5).

Our sense of the word Temperance is intimately linked to our notion of quantity, “how much” of something we need or plan to use. Virtue concerns ordering the things of our life to their proper ends, which we understand by reason, so Temperance is the virtue by which we employ the pleasant things of creation only to the extent required by our needs. Our *Catechism* teaches

Temperance is the moral virtue that moderates the attraction of pleasures and provides balance in the use of created goods. It ensures the will’s mastery over instincts and keeps desires within the limits of what is honorable. The temperate person directs the sensitive appetites toward what is good and maintains a healthy discretion.... (CCC, No. 1809).

TEMPERANCE AND REASON

At first glance this might seem a recipe for a very dull life, but we must remember that the purpose of virtue is

to make us good and to make our actions good. When we consider Temperance we find ourselves once again considering the role of reason in our actions, and the necessity to embrace the mean between the extremes of harmful self-denial and the immoderate self-gratification that can prove equally harmful.

Rather than taking the pleasure out of life, Temperance confers a calm control over the things that delight us most, enabling us to enjoy them fully because we enjoy them in their proper measure. The *Catechism* quotes an early Christian writer, who urged his listeners to “*Remain simple and innocent, and you will be like little children who do not know the evil that destroys man’s life.*” (CCC, No. 2517) Temperance calls us to the purity of heart Jesus commends in his Sermon on the Mount.

LISTEN TO OUR HEARTS

Our modern age has done two things with the human heart, and neither is particularly helpful for our spiritual life. On the one hand we have become quite technical and schooled ourselves to view the heart as the all-important source of our physical health. On the other hand, we have sentimentalized the heart and localized it as the site of our emotional life.

Neither of these views is wrong, but each is incomplete. In the Scripture, the heart is much more than we commonly acknowledge. It is the place where we find our will, our thought, and our emotions. To be pure “in heart” is to be pure in every important aspect of our being, and God promises a blessing to the pure in heart precisely because they seek to be faithful in all ways.

This is an extremely important point; we must not spiritualize Jesus’ words and imagine that so long as we keep our hearts pure we can do what we like with the rest of ourselves. Purity of heart is very hard to maintain if that is the only part of our lives where purity counts. The Ninth Commandment calls us to a spiritual integrity. We experience this through a life of charity, chastity and a love of truth. These qualities may seem unrelated, but St. Augustine observes

The faithful must believe the articles of the Creed “so that by believing they may obey God, by obeying they may live well, by living well may purify their hearts, and with pure hearts may understand what they believe.”

THE VALUE OF VIRTUE

The saint is telling us that virtue not only enables us to align our will to God’s, but helps remove the veil of ignorance that prevents our penetrating the truth of our faith. The future reward for cultivating purity of heart is the promise of seeing God – face to face. But the reward begins now, giving us eyes to see “as God sees,” to acknowledge others as neighbors, not objects, and to look at the human body “...ours and our neighbor’s – as a temple of the Holy Spirit, a manifestation of divine beauty.” (CCC, No. 2519)

This insight is a gift we receive at Baptism, but it is only a foundation. We must strive, with God’s grace, to build on it, throughout our lives. We do so by the gifts of chastity, purity of intention, purity of vision, and prayer.

THE GIFT OF CHASTITY

The Ninth Commandment, like most of the others, is presented as a negative precept: “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife.” But when we considered the Sixth Commandment in an earlier reflection, we pondered the words of St. John Paul II, who invites us to look at God’s word in a more positive light

*God is love and in himself he lives in a mystery of personal **loving** communion. Creating the human race in his own image.... God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and **communion.*** (*Familiaris Consortio*, 11)

Chastity is the virtue and gift that enables and strengthens us to love with hearts undistracted by sensual desire.

THE GIFT OF INTENTION

Purity of intention is our effort to discern our true end. Our prayer for simplicity should beg God to grant us the grace to see, understand and fulfill His will in everything we strive to accomplish.

PURITY OF VISION

Our *Catechism* quotes the Book of Wisdom, which – rather ominously – warns, “*Appearance arouses yearning in fools.*” The Ninth Commandment’s close relation with the virtue of Temperance, and the union of both with a desire for simplicity and purity of heart, urges us to strive for what religious superiors have historically termed “chastity of the eyes.”

This phrase undoubtedly explains itself. Our *Catechism*, however, expands upon it, and extends its embrace to include, “...*discipline of feelings and imagination, by refusing all complicity in impure thoughts that incline us to turn aside from the path of God’s commandments....*” (CCC, No. 2520) The Ninth Commandment clearly invites us to a life of mature, reverent respect for one another. This by no means suggests we cannot acknowledge or celebrate another’s charms; it does mean we cannot succumb to an inappropriate lure of these charms.

PRAYER

In his Confessions, St. Augustine admits

I thought that continence arose from one’s own powers, which I did not recognize in myself. I was foolish enough to not know...that no one can be continent unless you grant it. But you would surely have granted it if my inner groaning had reached your ears and I with a firm heart had cast my cares on you.

These words express both our misguided belief in our unaided capacity to achieve personal holiness, and the necessity for our turning to God for all our needs, even the most basic. Our complete surrender to God is an essential element of our chastity (continence). At the same time, God's disinterested (which must be distinguished from uninterested) love must set the pattern for all our affections.

PURITY'S PRACTICAL EXPRESSION: MODESTY

We seldom think of modesty as a part of Temperance, but the two are nonetheless related. Temperance is the virtue that enables us to exercise control over our desires. Modesty guides how we look at others, and encourages us to protect what ought to remain hidden from view in our own lives. While many may scoff at the "old fashioned" notion of modesty, it nonetheless encourages respect for the individual, and, at a time when modern media seem determined to "tell all" about everyone, modesty stands guard over an individual's interior life.

MODESTY: WHAT AND HOW?

St. Thomas Aquinas describes modesty as "moderation and restraint" in bodily movement and action, and he discerns three aspects of the virtue: method, which is the capacity to grasp what we should do, or avoid doing, refinement or decorum in what we do, and gravity – the manner and quality of our conversation with our friends. (ST, II-II, 143)

Our *Catechism* describes modesty's traditional role in Christian life. "*It encourages patience and moderation in loving relationships... [it] is decency. It inspires one's choice of clothing. It keeps silence or reserve where there is evident risk of unhealthy curiosity. It is discreet.*" (CCC, No. 2522)

MODESTY AND THE MEDIA

If we perceive a disconnection between modesty and many advertisements we encounter, or feel offended by the headlines on supermarket tabloids, this is probably nothing more than we should expect. Embracing the Ninth Commandment is a challenge to embrace a "counter-culture," one in which neither the individual nor the human body reigns supreme.

To be modest means to be a subject, an individual willing to live under a law higher than our own wants and needs. And this awareness should lead us to an appreciation of the value of the other individuals with whom we share citizenship in the Kingdom of God. All the commandments on the "second" tablet of the law govern our relations with others; the Ninth reminds us that our bodies are precious, far too precious to be sacrificed to the whims of fashion or misunderstood notions of human freedom.

True freedom, our faith teaches, is a willingness to allow ourselves to be formed by the truth of God's law. This may align us against many aspects of our popular culture, but we must consider the eternal

consequences of our choices. The advertisers who promise exquisite delights today are not the source of the everlasting bliss we anticipate in heaven.

THE EXAMPLE OF MARY

The Litany of Loreto praises the Blessed Mother for her prudence, chastity, and wisdom. The litany makes no mention of Mary's Temperance, but we must assume this was among the virtues which adorned her life. We find one charming illustration of this Temperance in her actions during the Wedding at Cana.

When the host's supply of wine ran out, Mary was reasonably concerned to provide more. No one would ever suggest that Mary was advocating drunkenness. On the other hand, she realized very clearly that a certain amount of wine was necessary if the festivities were to continue. Her intervention resulted in what was undoubtedly just the proper amount of superior wine.

Her actions at Cana are a delightful reflection of Mary's on-going concern for us, for she gave flesh to Jesus, whose Incarnation takes the watery "stuff" of our humanity and transforms it into something far more precious and delightful. Likewise, her command to the servants at Cana, "*Do whatever he tells you,*" is a reminder that our everlasting happiness depends on cultivating the purity of heart Jesus teaches is requisite for life in his Kingdom. ■

NEW BOOKS *Continued from page 1*

Mystery of the Rosary, directing us to ponder its truth and its value to us. In many ways, this book enables the reader to unite Jesuit and Dominican spirituality – Jesuit because it challenges the one who prays to place her or himself in the "situation" of the Mystery, and Dominican, because it invites us to "study," which is the defining element of Dominican spirituality.

For Dominicans, study is – or ought to be – a great deal more than sitting at a desk and learning details from a book. Study is a way of life that directs our minds and hearts to seek God above all things, and to discern ways to share our knowledge with those we meet. St. Thomas Aquinas observed, "*...even as it is better to enlighten than merely to shine, so it is better to give to others the fruits of one's contemplation than merely to contemplate.*" This is a worthy goal, and study is the means by which we approach it.

Fr. Watson's book is quite engaging, and those who follow his method will find it immensely rewarding.

Fr. Mullady's and Fr. Watson's – as well as Mark Shea's – books are available now. Check them out on our order form!

