

THROUGH US JESUS LOVES HIS MOTHER

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I talk about devotion to Our Blessed Lady, and I take as my starting point the True Devotion to St. Louis Marie de Montfort. I ask you to join with me in examining as to whether that Devotion is justifiable. It is a method which is considerably controverted all over the world. In far too many quarters it arouses a sort of antagonism which is not easy to understand. A lot of people are prejudiced against the Legion and refuse to take it up because, they say, it builds its system on that Devotion. So let us have a critical look at the matter.

Slavery of Mary

The True Devotion prescribes a state of dependence on Mary, the committing of ourselves to her by a pact of ownership which takes in everything we have, the spiritual things and the temporal things. It invites us to submit our concerns and actions to her in a way that no earthly slave would be subject to. Note the word "slavery," because that is the alternative name of the Devotion. This gift of ourselves to her is to be made without reservation. This is a wholesale sort of transaction, and so I repeat: Is there any justification for assigning such a place to her?

Let us perhaps approach the question after the manner in which one would plot a position on a map. Lines starting from widely different angles are prolonged, and the point where they intersect is the place one is looking for. I will take a number of aspects of Mary and draw lines of logic from them. Let us see if, and where, they converge.

As our first indication, I refer to a previous chapter on the subject of the New Eve. Its contention was that the very earliest, and indeed apostolic, teaching compels us to see Mary as the Mother of the living, distributing the life of grace to her children, not indirectly and remotely as in the case of Eve's giving to her descendants, but a direct communicating to each one, a giving of each individual grace. If that is the case, and so it seems to be, then does it not amount to an intimacy with Mary akin to that proposed by the true Devotion?

Problems Solved by the Mystical Body

A second of these lines or indications is afforded by the doctrine of the Mystical Body. It is astonishing to probe that doctrine and see how many answers it produces to things that are called problems. Its imagery assigns to Our Lady the role of neck or heart. This shows her as subordinate to and dependent on the Head, who is Our Lord; but at the same time made necessary to the body. You will note that either of those two images pictures the Head in a sort of dependence, because the neck or the heart has to supply the life blood to the head. This reflects the position in regard to Jesus and Mary. He gave her supernatural life and she gave Him natural life, a mutual dependence. He contributed His Divinity to the partnership. She furnished the material for His body, and likewise she gave what He could not give, that is faith. This co-operation not only initiated and carried through Redemption, but also applies to the care of the Mystical Body. Mary is the indispensable Mother of each soul.

A kindred line of thought is put before us by St. John Eudes, who is styled the Doctor of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. His system of devotion was built on the idea of those two Hearts

working in conjunction with each other, each dependent on the other. She administers the Precious Blood. Every drop of it passes through her heart which keeps it in motion, delivering its nourishment to every cell in the body, passing on the principle of life which she has received for that purpose from the Divinity. Here again we see the soul set in a relation of closeness and dependence equivalent to that proposed by the True Devotion.

Love and Service as Thanks to Mary

But this only refers to half of the transaction, that is to Mary's giving to us. There is another aspect which has to be taken into account. It is the reciprocal one, that is our behaviour to Mary. The idea of religion is the rendering of acknowledgment for what has been done to us. The worship must reflect what we have received. We must comprehend the nature of the services rendered to us and we must return gratitude accordingly. The gratitude which would only take in some angles of what has been done for us would be incomplete.

Furthermore, that return of ours must not confine itself to sentiments and words. It must go on to action of a worthy sort, including apostleship. We must pray to her in return for her potent prayer for us. We must have faith in her by way of recompense for her heroic faith which brought down the Redeemer upon earth. We must give her love and service in thanksgiving for her superhuman mothering of Christ and of ourselves.

Was there ever such a motherhood? It is one of the great sorrows of life that it is only as the years pile up we realise what we owe to our parents. Then perhaps we try to do something about it. But at that stage what return can we make to our mothers for the tireless, selfless attention which they lavished on us? It is impossible, and this forms one of the crowning sorrows of life. Though we can pass on love and service to others, we cannot repay properly that person. Such is the case in regard to the natural relationship, but it is not the case completely in regard to Our Blessed Lady. Here we can make some attempt at repayment, because she is still living and because we have it in our power to love her ardently and to render supreme service to her.

Reproduce the Love Jesus Gave Mary

But a common return is not enough. How far are we to go? Obviously as far as we can go. In this matter, as in all others, we must imitate our divine Head. We must seek to reproduce the love which Jesus gave Mary. A quaint phrase from one of the saints or great writers of the Church declares that as Christ was better in every way than Mary, so He was a better Son than she was a mother. This gives us a glimpse of what His love for her was, and is. Because after a fashion we do realise how much Mary loved her Child. Then to be told that it was as nothing compared with the way He loved her - that is something startling and stimulating. We must stress this intriguing idea as a counterblast to Protestantism and cold Catholicism.

We are bound to take Our Lord as our model in all things, and so we must imitate His most prominent characteristic, which was His love for His mother. After His love for His eternal Father, His love for His earthly Mother was his special feature, exceeding any other. We must enable the special feature, exceeding any other. We must enable the Mystical Body to carry on that unique relation to Mary. The essential idea of the Mystical Body is the reproducing of the life of Christ in its completeness. It is no shadow, no mere projection, but a true living of Our Lord in our conditions and through us. In this new life He has made Himself dependent upon us as a person is dependent on his limbs. We can portray Him, we can falsify Him.

Remember that He got from Mary almost indefinitely more than the natural child receives even from the best mother. Nothing could be more comprehensive than her co-operation, because

that was the design of the Holy Trinity. Her prayer was instrumental in drawing down the Redeemer. Not all the other prayers of man through the ages would have sufficed to bring Him. Her prayer added in settled that question. It attracted Him irresistibly. Then her consent to the Incarnation was pivotal and necessary. So was her care of Him during His youth, and her co-operation with Him during His whole life, and on Calvary. This offers a mystery, for that Pair who seemed to be living the usual separate lives of mother and adult son, were as but one, more united even than when He was a Babe unborn. He was the child of her prayer, of her faith, of her will, of her flesh, of her humility, of her purity, of her love.

Mary and the Church

Such was she that it is declared that Our Lord got from her all the consolation that He needed; even if He were deprived of everything else, after a fashion that would have been enough. As a consequence, He loved her more than all other creatures put together. It can be said that He saw all other creatures through her. So to speak, she was His foothold in this world. And that is what she continues to be. That order of things was not terminated on Calvary. She maintains the same relation to the Mystical Body that she had held in regard to Our Lord.

This relation is described by the Church under various titles: Mother of Divine Grace, Mediatrix of All Graces, Mother of our Souls, and so on. She lavishes on us everything that she gave to Jesus. In fact her love for us is not a separate love from her love for Him. It is the one love, the same love carried on. She loves us as she loved Jesus. She loves us because she sees Him in us. We reproduce Him. So must we continue in the Mystical Body that amazing love which Jesus bestowed on her. We must love her distractedly. We must catch a glimpse of her immensity. We must unite ourselves to her in all our actions, and in spirit live inseparably with her.

As Jesus united her to His mission in such a way that it would not be carried on at all without her, so must we unite her to our course in life. She is just as necessary to us as she was necessary to Jesus Christ. We are familiar with that idea because it is put before us in every page of our Handbook. We must live in a state of union with her, seeing everything and doing everything along with her, so that Mary is veritably doing those actions through us. We must live that life of union with such an intensity as to reflect that faith and love and heroism of hers which drew the Second Divine Person down on earth and brought forth the Mystical Body.

Such a programme may seem unrealisable, so lofty is it. Lofty it is, but not unrealisable. Because just as Our Lord depends on His members to carry on His present-day existence, so does He give them the grace to do it. As He lives on in the Mystical Body with a real life perpetuating His earthly mission, so part of this is the perpetuation of that immense love which He had for His Mother and of the state of union which He had with her. Therefore, He will fill with His own love for Mary those who open their hearts for it; through them His love for her continues. That is a consequence and a vital one of the doctrine of the Mystical Body. We produce something which is absolutely necessary, something which was supremely characteristic of Our Lord, that is the extraordinary love which He had for her and His dependence upon her and His co-operation with her. And it is through the Mystical Body, that is through His Members, that He is put in to a position to fulfil that vital requirement.

Our Love Bears Christ's Love

There is much more at stake than our imitating Jesus in our feeble way. The Mystical Body means Jesus living and acting in us. Therefore our poor attempt at loving Mary is made the material and channel of His love of her. Our love bears His love. So that when Mary pours out on us her love

for Jesus, she receives back through us the very love of Jesus.

Things being so, the undertaking of what is entailed in the True Devotion or analogous devotion (for there are others which are most worthy) is evidently nothing very extreme after all. It is no more than a sort of reflection of Our Lord's behaviour to her.

If certain people do not like particular features of the True Devotion, they are not under compulsion to adopt them. But let them make sure that they are not watering down the quality of the transaction; that they are not diminishing the love and acknowledgment and dependence which must be proceeding to her from them.

If they do lessen it, they are to that extent hindering Jesus from showing through them His love for His Mother. If they are hindering Him in that way, so are they hindering Him from working through them in every other way. Our Lord either works through a person or He does not. There is a little phrase in the *Handbook* which should cause us to reflect when we are thinking in terms of half-measures and compromise.¹ It is that we cannot pick and choose in Christ. We must take Him in His fullness: the things that do not appeal to us along with those that do. This principle applies to His relation to His Mother. If we follow Him inadequately in that direction, we may miss Him altogether. We may be falsifying, so far as we are able to do it, the whole idea of the Mystical Body. We may be paralysing whole sections of that Body because that malady of defective love for our Mother will tend to spread to others as all ailments affect the body. This would be a dire disaster, for it would mean that our Christian voyage would be bound in shallows and in misery.

On the other hand, in the measure that Jesus is permitted and facilitated to be in us the Son of Mary, so will He be in us the Son of God in all His power, looking out through us to every soul in the whole world, loving them, saving them.

¹ Cf. 1993 Edtn., pps.31, 57 [Ed.]