

Mary, Mother of Humanity



April, 2019



She shows us the way of true Christian life.
Following her example of faith, poverty of spirit,
And attentiveness to the Lord,
We hope to reflect to those around us
Mary's warmth of welcome to God and to others.
Like her, we wholly commit ourselves
To the mystery of our vocation.

Rule of Life of the Society of Mary, article 8

OPENING PRAYER

Litany of Mary of Nazareth

Glory to you, God our Creator
 Breathe into us new life, new meaning.
Glory to you, God our Savior
 Lead us in the way of peace and justice.
Glory to you, healing Spirit
 Transform us to empower others.

Mary, wellspring of peace
 Be our guide.
Model of strength ...
Model of gentleness ...
Model of trust ...
Model of courage ...
Model of patience ...
Model of risk ...
Model of openness ...
Model of perseverance ...

Mother of the liberator
 Pray for us.
Mother of the homeless ...
Mother of the dying ...
Mother of the nonviolent ...
Widowed mother ...
Unwed mother ...
Mother of a political prisoner ...
Mother of the condemned ...
Mother of the executed criminal ...

Oppressed woman
 Lead us to life.
Liberator of the oppressed ...
Marginalized woman ...
Comforter of the afflicted ...
Cause of our joy ...
Sign of contradiction ...
Breaker of bondage ...
Political refugee ...
Seeker of sanctuary ...
First disciple ...
Sharer in Christ's passion ...
Seeker of God's will ...
Witness to Christ's resurrection ...

Woman of mercy
 Empower us.
Woman of faith ...
Woman of contemplation ...
Woman of vision ...
Woman of wisdom and understanding ...
Woman of grace and truth ...
Woman, pregnant with hope ...
Woman centered in God ...

Amen

Food for Thought

Mother of Humanity by *Ambrogio Albano, SM*

Adapted from “The Marian Dimension of Human Existence,”
The Promised Woman: Proceedings of the International Symposium on Marianist Spirituality

When people speak about Mary, some of them exhibit a pious attention and willingly express personal experiences. But matters take a different turn when they are asked, “Does Mary have any influence in your life, or in human life in general?”

Others take refuge in their “Christological” convictions; if someone suggests Mary as mediator between human beings and God, they quickly reply that Christ is sufficient for them. Some consider Mary superfluous, or they respond that God does not need the pleadings of Mary. Finally, there are those who give Mary a large place in their devotions; but if she is presented as a model of faith in their workplace, they reply that her experience is so sublime and ideal that it cannot easily be repeated....

In general, I do not wish to speak about a Madonna placed “up there” in the heavens, but of a Madonna found “down here” on earth. I do not speak of the glories of Mary, but of her human aspects. I do not speak of a Mary placed outside our earthly existence, but of a Mary implanted at the very core of our lives.

As you can see, my presentation “explores” Mary with reverse binoculars. The purpose is not to diminish Mary—quite the contrary—but to reaffirm that creation, redemption, and eschatology all have a Marian dimensions, a Marian dimension which our Marianist tradition declares is, for us and for our world, “our gift from God.”

The Marian Dimension of Human Existence

Among Marianists Our Lady certainly has her theologians, her devotees, her artists, and her poets; my considerations will not rise to such heights. They will be limited rather to speaking of Marianists as sons and daughters of Mary who, having already internalized the mother-child relationship, express it and live it out in their lives as an instinctive, almost visceral, experience, the “second nature” of their existence.

Living and working as Marianists in the world does not mean diminishing the “divine” element of Mary. What it requires is language which seeks not so much to raise Mary to the greatness of God, but rather to raise human beings to the greatness of Mary. This discussion may seem less theological . . . but if it helps break through the cultural barriers of our modern world, the image of Mary will not be lessened, and the image of the human being can only gain a greater fullness and vitality. Mary will then be seen as “the mantle of Christ” for all those seeking a Messiah. And if the Son can still ask, “Who has touched me?” it will mean that a saving faith is still to be found on earth.



The great things which took place in the young woman of Nazareth do not unveil universal processes or cosmic laws; rather they are to be seen as grace-filled moments, stories of salvation veiled in obscurity for the woman who lived them: “how can this be?” (Luke 1:34); she “preserved all these things, treasuring them in her heart” (Luke 2:19, 51); “they did not understand what he was saying” (Luke 2:50). However much our reasoning may have developed concerning the mystery of the Mother of the Redeemer, it will forever necessarily remain tied to the concreteness of gospel witness. . . .

The Human Dimension of Religion

The Annunciation reveals what may be called the human dimension of religion, of faith, and therefore of life.

Mary is not the absolute, the inaccessible Godhead, invisible, fearsome, the infinitely distant being which our efforts can never touch in the mystery of its depths. Between the human being and God there always remains “the cloud of unknowing,” not only theological but also mystical.

Nor is Mary the Christ, mediator, at once God and man, Redeemer—with whom I can have an intimate contact, yet a contact that is not merely human: my

relationship with Christ . . . escapes definition in terms of human relationships.

Mary is something other. The divine announcement comes to this young girl, tailoring itself to her human condition—to her expectations and hopes, yes, but also to her doubts; to her faith, but also to her questioning; to her submission, but also to her free decision. God’s announcement seeks, accepts, and lives in the human dimension of Mary.

And this human dimension of religion, of faith, of devotion is symbolized—I might say, incarnated—in Mary. Religion which loses itself in dreamy mysticism, which evaporates into a disincarnated vagueness while perhaps grasping the mystery, loses its sense of the natural, the human, and the concrete; it is no longer substantial, human, earthly—that is to say, total. Mary is merely a creature, yet she is associated with everything, with the redemption of the human race and the mystery of God.

If I compare the Christian religion imbued with this human dimension of Mary to other religions, I discover the enormous difference between an incarnational Christianity and a certain religiosity filled with transcendental purity or fascinating mystery, but which seems to exist in some “beyond” and causes human beings to live in tension, obsessed with a destiny always more demanding. Such religion seems not to be a matter of everyday, for it is too sublime; in practice it is unattainable, for it lacks elements of humanness and naturalness.

In virtue of a *fiat* at the Annunciation, the humanity of a poor peasant girl has been associated



with the grandest insights of theology: redemption, creation, love, distribution of graces, and the divinization of human beings.

God could have become Emmanuel, God among us, appearing in splendor at the Transfiguration and parading as the victorious Lamb of the Apocalypse; and Mary could have walked about Nazareth as “the woman clothed with the sun.” But it did not happen that way. The Annunciation event reminds us of a human—terribly human—dimension of religion so forcefully that Christianity runs the risk of sometimes appearing banal, if not downright commonplace....

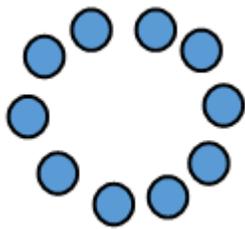
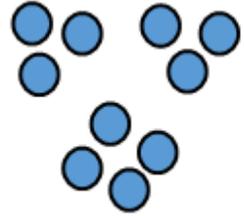
A personal relationship with Mary brings a sense of naturalness, a dimension of humanness, to religion, to devotion, to the apostolate, to mysticism, to religious devotion. Once we have established personal contact with Mary, it is difficult to confuse filial piety with the piety of formulas, or love with austere strength of will.

The Annunciation is not the spiritualization of a woman or of human nature; it is the glad tidings of God becoming a human being! If the reflections of theologians are correct, we may say that Mary, having become the human mother of God, lacked only one more thing—to become mother of humanity. Obviously, it was not a joyous moment in her life when she heard the words of Jesus, “Behold your son!” But what was proclaimed on Calvary remained even after the resurrection of Christ: to Mary was announced and confided the mission of humanizing the faith of each believer. It is good to embrace Mary, the icon of God. But it is even more pleasing to embrace Mary, the icon of humanity, of my humanity.

Sometimes the people of God have been presented with a Madonna too “divine”: all holy, clothed with the sun, miraculous image, inimitable virgin. All generations have hastened to create for her pyramids of such high and unattainable holiness such that spirituality and religion became ladders of Jacob on which were found only those people going toward heaven. Perhaps it is time to rediscover that the very God, that Mary, that all the choirs of angels and saints continue to descend toward earth and to choose human nature as their dwelling place.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ◆ What names of Mary from the Litany most speak to you?
- ◆ How does Mary make religion “a matter of every day?”
- ◆ What is an example of a grace-filled moment in your life?
- ◆ Consider the idea of Mary as “Mother of Humanity.” Can we be raised to the greatness of Mary?



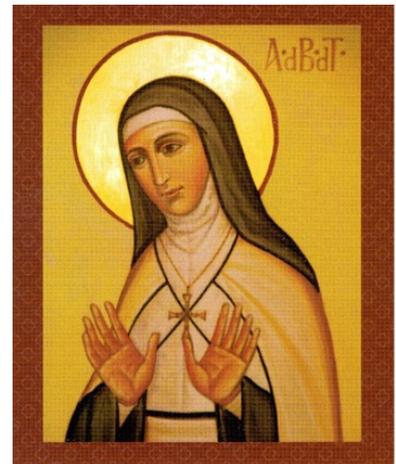
LARGE GROUP GATHERING

Review the discussion questions and share the thoughts that emerged in the small group discussions.

CLOSING PRAYER

Mary, Queen of Peace, we entrust our lives to you.
Shelter us from war, hatred, and oppression.
Teach us to live in peace, to educate ourselves for peace.
Inspire us to act justly, to reverence all God has made.
Root peace firmly in our hearts and in our world.
Amen.

(Adapted from the Prayer Service Marking the Beatification of Adèle de Batz de Trenquelléon)



FOR MORE INFORMATION

Related resources available at nacms.org include:

The Promised Woman: Proceedings of the International Symposium on Marianist Spirituality

Devotion to Mary in Chaminade's Life and Thought, Jean-Baptiste Armbruster, SM

Mary in Modern Spirituality, Quentin Hakenewerth, SM

Scripture and the Marian Writings of Father William Joseph Chaminade, Bertrand A. Buby, SM

Marianist Community Meeting Kits are provided for the Marianist Family by the North American Center for Marianist Studies, NACMS. Additional Community Meeting Kits, as well as other Marianist Studies resources, are available at nacms.org.



North American Center
for Marianist Studies
