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TO JESUS THROUGH MARY

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Hail, full of Grace!

In the words of St. Louis de Montfort, the 'Angelic Salutation' to Mary is so heavenly and so beyond us in its depth of meaning, that Blessed Alen de la Roche held that no mere creature could ever understand it, and that only our Lord Jesus, born of the Virgin Mary, could really explain it. The Angelic Salutation is the most concise summary of all that Catholic theology teaches us about the Blessed Virgin. It is divided into two parts, that of praise and that of petition. The first shows all that goes to make up Mary's greatness; and the second, all that we need to ask her for, and all that we may expect to receive through her goodness.

The goodness of God is diffused much in this season of grace. But the proud person stops and impedes this diffusion. "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (Jas 4:6). Intellectual pride causes many to disbelieve, or it makes their faith weak, ineffective, and irresolute in the face of temptations and enemies. They are like mountains where the waters of divine grace do not rest on them and they remain arid. The humble are like valleys in which the waters are gathered, for "every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be made low" (Lk 3:5). Mary hopes in God, not in herself and her hope is strengthened and becomes fruitful. "Without faith it is impossible to please God, for anyone who approaches God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him" (Heb 11:6).

Mary is powerful because she is the Mother of Jesus. This is the main reason for her power. She was the first to listen to Jesus and serve him; at the same time, she remained hidden as much as possible. Her hiddenness, her spirit of sacrifice and her dignity were admirable. She was a sealed garden of God yet made known to many of the saints who sought after her in history. St. Epiphanius says, "Mary was the constant companion of Christ and was never separated from his company. She was associated to her Son from the first announcement of the redemption: in his private life, public life, sorrowful life and glorious life.

Mary's role in the Pilgrim Church is to lead the people of God in faith. Her grace is beyond measure that must be the reason why the Angel Gabriel greeted her: "Hail full of Grace." And the reason is clear that she is with Jesus, her Son she gave birth to the one who existed from even before her existence. We contemplate Mary adoring the Son of God Incarnate, to whom she had given birth. The all powerful God who created everything was supported by Mary's hands. He who governs and guides the world by his providence, depended on his mother for milk and was carried in her arms. The life of Mary at Nazareth was a life of intimate union with her son Jesus. These two most holy persons sought each other. Mary's nearness to Jesus gained for her a continual increase of love, joy and virtue.

I sincerely thank all those who contributed to this edition of the magazine, 'To Jesus through Mary.' Let us bless ourselves with the sign of the Cross of St. Francis de Sales: "By myself I can do nothing, with God I can do all things; for love of God I want to do all; to God all honor to me the humiliation."

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MARY A THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Peter Mascarenhas, smm

"Christianity is the only Religion that needs a Mother" says the great theologian Karl Rahner. The reason for saying this is that Christianity is a religion about the Person of Jesus Christ, God's incarnate Son. For this humanization of God's Son, a Mother was needed to give him a human nature. Hence, the unique role of *Myriam* of Nazareth in the economy of salvation was required. John Macquarie rightly points out saying, "a theologian cannot treat Christ and the Church without reference to her who is the Mother of Christ and the Archetype of the Church."

Jesus of Nazareth was perceived and believed as Messiah and Son of God in his Paschal Mystery. It was in the light of the Paschal Mystery and through the power of the Holy Spirit that his disciples and the early Church came to realize who he really is and what his mission has accomplished. Thus through the consciousness of the early Church the implicit Christology of the historical Jesus became explicit, and this interpretation has been given us in various Titles attributed to Jesus.

What we know about Mary is given to us by the early Christian tradition, preserved in the New Testament. The Christians, and in particular the Evangelists, have perceived and described her unique role in the mystery of Christ and of the Church, discovering even images and types in the history of Israel, since

Mary appeared to be the real "Daughter of Zion". This faith-understanding of Mary's unique personality and mission has been continued by the Fathers of the Church and expressed in the rich Liturgy, with Titles and Feasts in honor of the 'Theotokos', the Mother of God.



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MARY AND THE CHURCH IN VATICAN II

The council has integrated the decree "*De Beata*" within the Constitution of the Church, making its Mariological teaching the "crown of the whole Constitution".

- *Mary as Type of the Church* (LG 63-64): Type means a living, eminent and concrete representation of an invisible reality, to which the type is intimately joined or connected.
- Mary is the personification of the Church as community of faith, hope and love and of communion with Christ. For the Church is not just an institution or a society, but a communion!
- Mary is the transcendent archetype of the Church: the first and best member of the church

as disciple of Jesus Christ, the whole Church, as Bride of Christ must reproduce the attitude of Mary towards Jesus, an attitude of discipleship.

➤ Mary is the generating principle of the Church: by generating the whole Christ, Head and members, she generates the Church!

➤ Mary's virginal maternity makes her a perfect type of the Church:

(-Virgin = her total love for Jesus and

i) Mary is fidelity to Him;

(-Mother = her faith and service of the Lord...

(-Virgin = her faithfulness and loyalty to Christ;

ii) The Church is (-Mother = her fruitfulness by the power of the Holy Spirit.

MARY: MOTHER OF THE CHURCH

Although many council Fathers proposed the insertion of this title in the Constitution, the majority were against, because the title seemed to them a bit ambiguous, given the fact that Mary is a member of the Church. Although several Christians (Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants) did not like this papal proclamation, others hailed it as most meaningful, especially for the Church, which has to learn from Mary how to be a true mother of God's children. The Anglican theologian and philosopher John Macquarie wrote: "It seems to me that the best clue to the interpretation of Mary's place in the New Testament teaching is afforded by the title "Mother of the Church". This is the title which

Pope Paul VI proclaimed as appropriate to the Blessed Virgin... and I believe that this particular title, more than any other, provides an interpretation of Mary's place on which Roman Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans and Protestants could agree"¹

MARY AND THE CHURCH IN POST CONCILIAR MAGISTERIUM

The Post-Conciliar Popes have emphasized this relationship between Mary and the Church, having realized that an authentic renewal and reform of the Church will be achieved in the measure in which the Church reproduces the interior life and commitment of the Mother of God.

➤ Mary is the model of the Church at worship:

i) She is the Attentive Virgin, who receives the Word of God with faith, which in her case was the gateway and path to divine Motherhood;

ii) She is also the Virgin in Prayer: when in her visit to the mother of the precursor, she pours out her soul in expressions glorifying God, and expressions of humility, faith and hope;

iii) She is also the Virgin-Mother: who by believing and obeying brought forth on earth the

She is the Attentive Virgin, who receives the Word of God with faith, which in her case was the gateway and path to divine Motherhood; She is also the Virgin in Prayer: when in her visit to the mother of the precursor, she pours out her soul in expressions glorifying God, and expressions of humility, faith and hope;

¹ John Macquarie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, p. 353.

Father's Son...;

iv) She is the Virgin Presenting Offerings: as she presented Jesus to the Temple and finally offered him on Calvary. (MC. 16-20)

JOHN PAUL II: REDEMPTORIS MATER

In the Church, Mary is present as the model of believers in Jesus Christ. Among all believers, she is alike a mirror in which are reflected the most profound and the mighty works of God.... In the Upper Room, Mary's journey of faith meets the Church's pilgrimage of faith. Mary in a unique way witnessed to the mystery of Christ, so that the apostles, the Church had to learn many things about Jesus from Mary, His Mother. The Church, therefore, looked at Jesus through Mary and at Mary through Jesus. For the Church of that time and of every time, Mary is a singular witness to the years of Jesus at Nazareth. (RM. 26)

Mary's faith was there when the Church was born. Mary's faith as it were, continues and grows in the faith of the Christians, both individuals and groups, so that through the Church, Christ may be born and increase in the hearts of the faithful also.. So Mary is present in the Church's mission, present in the Church's work of introducing into the world the kingdom of her Son.. (n. 28).

MARY: THE DIVINE, IMMACULATE AND VIRGINAL MOTHER OF JESUS

The title "Mother of the Redeemer" represents Mary in a unique position within Christianity; for she alone was chosen, called and empowered by God to become the Mother

of His incarnate Son. Divine motherhood is not just a privilege for the sake of Mary, but a charismatic gift for the sake of God's Kingdom; it is a special and unique vocation for a unique mission within God's salvific plan. The greatness of Mary consisted in accepting this vocation and in fulfilling faithfully and generously this mission for the sake of her Son. Thus Mary's immaculate life, from conception to assumption, made her the first and best redeemed person, sharing in the highest degree the holiness of Jesus Christ.

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MARY: THE DISCIPLE OF THE REDEEMER

In Christianity, every Charism or consecration is for God's Kingdom: a gift of the Spirit bestowed on a particular person for his/her commitment to the establishment and spreading of God's Kingdom on earth. In Mary of Nazareth, too, her Charism was bestowed on her so that she would fulfill her mission to be the Mother of the Messiah as the Suffering Servant of Yahweh, to be associated with Him in his redemptive work. She is called to be the "handmaid of the Lord" from his conception to his glorification and forever!

Mary was associated to the life and mission of her Son in all the stages: thus she is the handmaid of the Lord during her earthly pilgrimage of Faith, and she is the Queen-

Mother of the Church in her glorified state as assumed into heaven.

MARY: THE PERFECT RADICAL DISCIPLE

Being the true Master and leader, true perfection and ultimate salvation will consist in following Him, in becoming his disciple. Jesus called many to follow him and had many disciples: some were very close to him, like Lazarus and his sisters of Bethany. But among all these, Mary, Mother of Jesus had a unique place: she was the first and best, the perfect and radical disciple of her Son from his first to his second baptism!

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross & David Kessler speak of five stages of Grief: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance. Surely, Mary must have gone through these stages of grief. Mary too must have *denied* that it was Jesus who was hanged on the Cross along with the criminals. She must have felt angry with Judas for betraying him, Peter for denying him and others for abandoning him when he needed them the most. After all, he had trusted these men for three years and shared some of the secrets of life with them. She must have bargained with God asking him, Why this type of a cruel death and not a normal death? And without doubt, she must have been *depressed* about all that happened to her beloved son. The last stage of the grief that is the *acceptance* must have been an extremely difficult period of her life².

In John's Gospel, the scene on Calvary is

the fulfillment of the "Hour" at Cana: the "woman", Mary, is there to share in the messianic and redemptive mission of her Son. While at Cana she became the instrument for the faith of the disciples in Jesus, by obtaining the first "sign" of his messiah ship, now Mary is found together with the beloved and ideal disciple, and the dying Redeemer proclaims that they are related as mother and son, not biologically but as disciples of Jesus. Both are ideal disciples of Jesus, those who believed in Him even when crucified, those who hear and accept the Word of God.

Thus, Jesus sees and says that his mission is fulfilled and breathes upon Mary and the disciple his Spirit; and this is symbolized in the blood and water gushing forth from the pierced side of Jesus (Jn 19:30; 7:37-39). On Calvary, Mary and the beloved disciple are witnesses of this breathing out of the Spirit and outpouring of water; they are pictured as receiving the first outpouring of the spirit on the newly constituted Church.

MARY : A MODEL OF THE CHURCH

Mary's cooperation and participation in the mystery of Redemption has been unique as Mother of the Redeemer. But as the first and perfect member of the Church, as the type and Mother of the Church, Mary's participation and cooperation enable us to understand the role and mission of the Church:

I) Like Mary, the Church has to be redeemed by Jesus Christ: who washes her with his own

² Dr. Shaiendra IMS, Adam to Zacheus, Emotions in the Bible, St. Pauls, Mumbai, 2017,(to be published).

blood (Eph 5:25), who liberates her from the slavery of sin and death; thus the Church owes her salvation, liberation and redemption entirely to Christ!

ii) Like Mary, the Church is called to be associated with Christ in his redemptive work, not in the objective work, but in the subjective application of his redemption to all human beings. Thus the Church has to imitate Mary in sharing in all the mysteries of the Redeemer, not only liturgically, but existentially, in the life and mission of her members.

All Christians and the entire Church have to continue and apply the mystery of salvation by receiving the life-giving Word of God in faith and by participating in Christ's life, mission, passion, death and resurrection. Historically, Mary's cooperation was and remains unique, for she alone is the Mother of the Redeemer and she alone shared fully in all the mysteries of his earthly existence and mission. Yet salvifically and sacramentally, Mary's cooperation is the type and model of the cooperation of every believer and of the whole Church; it is only by sharing in the life, mysteries and mission of the divine Redeemer that we cooperate in the work of our own redemption and became instruments of the Spirit for the redemption of our brethren.

MARY : A MODEL OF LIBERATED AND LIBERATING WOMEN

Today women are rediscovering their unique and irreplaceable role in society and in the Church. They, too, are called to be liberated from the slavery of patriarchy and centuries of prejudices; they, too, are called to join all human

beings in the struggle for liberation and redemption. "Mary - writes Paul VI -- is a strong woman who knew poverty and suffering, flight and exile. Such situations can hardly escape the attention of those who wish to collaborate the liberating efforts of human beings and society with the spirit of the Gospel. And they will present Mary as a woman whose actions nurtured the faith of the apostolic community in Christ and whose maternal function broadened to take on universal dimensions on Calvary" (MC. n.37).

Liberation theologians contemplate Mary as the person who has been perfectly and radically liberated through her faith and surrender to the Lord, through her self-sacrificing acceptance of the Liberator. Hence her "*Magnificat*" has become the Song of Liberation by the first woman believer: through the coming of the Redeemer, the poor and the lowly are being raised to the dignity of God's children, while the proud hearted and rich are put down. Mary has cooperated with God in the realization of his liberating plan.

CONCLUSION

The Preparatory Document for the Synod on the Laity states with regard to Mary as the laywoman: "Through her consummate YES, in response to God's initiative for the salvation of humanity, reaching even to the cross, Mary participates in a singular way in the threefold office of Christ - By welcoming in perfect faith the incarnation of the Son of God into this world, by living out the mysteries of her existence in a continuing relationship to the Savior and by

humbly submitting to worldly affairs.

Mary has become the model of every Christian. Her singular vocation witnesses to the greatness of the life of the lay person, called to participate in redemptive power through a free and personal acceptance in grace.

Mary's exalted position characterizes the life of the entire people of God and points the way toward reconsidering the value of women in the Church and provides a means of avoiding the Church the inequality from which women suffer in society. In the Christian community, Mary shows the way toward affirmation of the equal dignity of man and woman in the variety of their charisms and services. The place of Mary in the Church exalts the significance of femininity as opposed to lessening the image of woman in the attempt to abolish every difference and element of her complementarity to man. It is impossible to forget that Mary, woman of the people of Israel, has become the crowning point of the holiness of humanity" (*Instrumentum Laboris*, n.26).

The world of today is rich in hope, but also tormented by anguish in many forms. The world is suffering. We need a vast movement to humanize the world, to render it a community of brothers and sisters. Here again Mary offers herself to us as a kind of rainbow, an oasis of peace, a refuge for the brotherhood of men beyond what separate them. Mary is the permanent invitation to Christians of every religious tradition: she urges them to rediscover the benefits of a unity that should never have been broken. Both the Church and the world

suffer from internal divisions...

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Mary will help us to sanctify suffering and make it an instrument of redemption, if we are able to accept it humbly, in faith, like her and with her. She too did not understand very often what was happening; yet she accepted it in faith and surrender. The Church and the world are passing today through a kind of Good Friday of defections, trials and sufferings. The crisis will lead to the new life of the Resurrection, if we, like Mary and with Mary, unite ourselves to Christ in his passion and death. Our call is like that of Mary to a mature and radical discipleship to transform the world empowered by the Spirit!

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MARY FULL OF GRACE

Fr. Rajesh Rozario

The name of the Blessed Virgin Mary attracts us. Her person is convincing, appealing and soothing. Throughout the ages, it is observed that the people have a filial devotion to her. Though Mary has spoken very little in the New Testament, people speak a lot about her and draw inspiration for their lives. The integrity of her person is always upheld by the scripture and the spiritual writers throughout the ages. She was a person full of divine grace. Time and again a question is raised on the devotion we have towards Blessed Virgin Mary. Some would not accept the amount of piety expressed towards her by the faithful. When we look at Mary from the perspective of God as filled by grace, we find that our devotion to her is meaningful and enriching.

1. A Unique Name to Mary

The salutation of the angel to Mary has revealed us the significance of her identity and vocation. Mary was a simple woman, lived in the first century but her identity was much more than a woman in the Jewish society. The angelic salutation discloses that she is highly favoured by God. The Angel Gabriel came to Mary and said: "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you" (Lk 1:28). The opening expression *Chaire* (in

Greek) is the normal form of address in the New Testament and in Greek usage. It means greetings. The greeting also implies rejoice and the favour shown towards her invites her to rejoice in the God who is benevolent.



The next sets of words are significant. Mary was not addressed by her name, but with the phrase "Full of Grace" (Greek *kecharitomenē*). Though she was troubled at this, these words did not come abruptly, rather they explain a fact. At the fullness of time God sent the Angel to communicate this message in view of the goodness of humankind (Heb 1:1-4). "Full of Grace" means "completely and permanently transformed by God's grace".¹ It indicates that she has been especially favoured by God; he has already chosen her to be the mother of the Messiah (1:30)². The Greek term *kecharitomenē* implies that the grace has already been operative in her. She is already prepared for the mission and she is the recipient of the divine action. "Her transformation by grace or 'fullness of grace' is the result of God's most loving, powerful, and merciful action upon her."³ God's action in her life is vivid and

¹ Deyanira Flores, "Mary, the Virgin 'Completely and Permanently Transformed by God's Grace': The Meaning and Implications of Luke 1:28 and of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception for Mary's Spiritual Life", *Marian Studies*, LV (2004), 87.

² Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: William E. Eerdmanns Publishing), 65, 1978.

³ Deyanira Flores, "Mary, the Virgin 'Completely and Permanently Transformed by God's Grace'", 88.

effective. The angel communicates that God is working out great things in her life.

The Old Testament understanding of grace would help us to comprehend better the meaning of the angelic salutation. In the Old Testament, the term *hanan* emphasizes divine choice in bestowing grace (Ex 33:19). God out of his good pleasure and for a specific end bestowed special favour on some people. God's goodness is expressed by bestowing the grace which was expressed through the Hebrew word *hanan*. *Hānan* appears about sixty times in the Old Testament and it implies the goodness of the one who bestows grace. In more than forty instances of the usage of *hanan* in the Old Testament, God is the subject. The twenty-six occurrences in the Psalms make them the primary evidence to divine grace. Grace connotes election, favour, shared endeavour, mutual knowledge of one another and the divine face towards people.⁴ From this background, it is understood that Mary is given a special grace by God for a particular purpose. Mary is filled with grace because God fashioned her in such a manner. The angel specifies such grace saying "the Lord is with you". The grace is made

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concrete through the presence of God. This privilege is meaningful because of the one who is to be born of her. The first sentence of the Angel's greeting becomes meaningful when we come to know the birth of the Son of God. The grace of God has formed her interior self and she is totally holy.

St. John Paul II explains that the salutation of the angel has specific significance as it gives Blessed Virgin Mary a new identity. She is not addressed by her personal name: "The messenger greets Mary as 'full of grace'; he calls her thus as if it were her real name. He does not call her by her proper earthly name: *Miryam* (= Mary), but by this new name: 'full of grace.' What does this name mean? Why does the archangel address the Virgin of Nazareth in this way?"⁵ It speaks of her new identity as she is called to be the mother of God. She is identified with the grace God bestowed on her which was not given to anyone else. The greeting implies that she was endowed with special spiritual blessing.

2. Mary Received Spiritual Blessing

Spiritual blessings belong to the interior life of a person. They cannot be measured by the eloquence of speech or by the knowledge one possesses. God moves the interior life of people who are directed towards Him. Those who have spiritual union with God, as John of

⁴ Cfr. Stephen J. Duffy, *The Dynamics of Grace. Perspectives in Theological Anthropology*, (Collegeville (MI): The Liturgical Press, 1993), 17-27.

⁵ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, 8.

the Cross says, are always oriented towards God. They do not live by the worldly standards. They discern the will of God always and holiness is the visible reality in their life. He rightly points out that the soul of mother Mary was directed to God completely: "...the works and prayers of these souls are always effectual. Such were those of the most glorious Virgin Our Lady, who, being raised to this high estate from the beginning, had never the form of any creature imprinted in her soul, neither was moved by such, but was invariably guided by the Holy Spirit."⁶ Her will was always directed towards God and she chose what God wanted her to do. An essential and fundamental orientation towards God was seen in her life. It was made manifest in her *fiat* which was extended throughout her life.

God had special love towards Mary, the Mother of God. It conferred on her a unique dignity which no other created being ever had. The divine grace makes her the Mother of God and she lived a life befitting this honour. Mary, a woman who was given the freedom like any other human being, was able to stand upright to her calling. The spiritual blessings received by her had abundant fruits. St Andrew of Crete: Her life was "without spot or stain, all filled with purity and holiness that the world cannot in anyway grasp or explain in words, because it is 'the

King's mystery'."⁷ The spiritual blessings received by her prepared her to be the mother and she lived a dignified life of this kind.

St. Augustine points out in the *Enchiridion* that she was given this honour in view of Christ. This was the supreme grace that was granted to her and no human merit could inherit this grace. "Why should there be such great glory to a human nature - and this undoubtedly an act of grace, no merit preceding unless it be that those who consider such a question faithfully and soberly might have here a clear manifestation of God's great and sole grace, and this in order that they might understand how they themselves are justified from their sins by the selfsame grace which made it so that the man Christ had no power to sin? Thus indeed the angel hailed his mother when announcing to her the future birth: 'Hail,' he said, 'full of grace'... she was full of grace, since she was to be mother of her Lord, indeed the Lord of all."⁸ Gabriel's greeting is the sign of fullness of divine grace which overshadowed her life.

The angel mentioned the fact of the presence of God in Mary's life. "The Lord is with you" implies that the presence of God in her life was so evident and dense that she was freed from sin from the very beginning. Her election as the mother of the savior is a unique grace which was awaiting her.

⁶ John of the Cross, *Ascent*, III, 2, 10.

⁷ Andrew Crete, *In dormitionem S. Mariae*, II: PG 97, 1076B; cfr. Deyanira Flores, "Mary, the Virgin' Completely and Permanently Transformed by God's Grace", 48.

⁸ Augustine, *Enchiridion* 11,36: PL 40,250; Cf. Saint Augustine, *Faith, Hope and Charity*, tr. Bernard M. Peebles, *The Fathers of the Church*, Vol. 2, (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1966), 402.

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If the greeting and the name 'full of grace' say all this, in the context of the angel's announcement they refer first of all to the election of Mary as Mother of the Son of God. But at the same time the 'fullness of grace' indicates all the supernatural munificence from which Mary benefits by being chosen and destined to be the Mother of Christ. If this election is fundamental for the accomplishment of God's salvific designs for humanity, and if the eternal choice in Christ and the vocation to the dignity of adopted children is the destiny of everyone, then the election of Mary is wholly exceptional and unique. Hence also the singularity and uniqueness of her place in the mystery of Christ.⁹

If Israel is the chosen race of God and the work of his hands, Mary is so in a greater manner. Mary, Star of the sea, was endowed with special gifts in order that she may be the beacon of hope for the humanity. Her election was significant because she presented the saviour to the world.

3. Mary's Holiness

The divine grace was present in her life

throughout, from the beginning till the end. The angelic salutation indicates that Mary is completely and permanently transformed by God's grace. This process has begun much earlier.¹⁰ The complete transformation takes her to the heights of holiness. She becomes the example for the entire humanity to follow the path of holiness. She embodies in her sanctity. The holiness indicates the absence of sin whatsoever. The beloved of the Father was always oriented towards God in her body, mind and soul. The works of the Satan could not stain her life unlike Eve in the Garden of Eden. The greeting of the Angel, "Full of grace" emphasizes this holiness which was in her. As her entire person was transformed by divine presence, she lived the mission entrusted to her purely with undivided heart throughout her life. Acknowledging this transformation Elizabeth acclaims: "You are most blessed of all women" (Lk 1:42).

Mary's holiness was shining in her act of believing. She was the woman of faith. Her life of faith was reflecting the graces received from God. She became the model of the believing disciple of Jesus Christ. For this reason the church considered Mary holy from the very beginning. Mary who had share in the Holy Spirit was holy. Origen calls her *panagia*, "all holy".¹¹ Her entire person was the radiation of the holiness. Naturally, she did not have any stain of sin. St. Augustine says, "I make an

⁹ Redemptoris Mater, 9.

¹⁰ Deyanira Flores, "Mary, the Virgin 'Completely and Permanently Transformed by God's Grace'", 88.

¹¹ Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion*, Part I, (Mumbai: Pauline, 2011), 89.

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exception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, in whose case, out of respect for the Lord, I wish to raise no question at all when the discussion concerns sins - for whence do we know what an abundance of grace for entirely overcoming sin was conferred on her who had the merit to conceive and bear him who undoubtedly was without sin."¹² The dogma of Immaculate Conception reiterates solemnly the sinlessness of Mary which was believed from the beginning of the church. All the believers acknowledge her holiness when they believe that she is Immaculate Conception.

Mary's sanctity was expressed in different ways by the authors in different epochs. Pope Pius IX in his Apostolic Constitution *Ineffabilis Deus* summarizes the same as follows:

Immaculate, and in every respect immaculate; innocent, and the most perfectly innocent; undefiled, and completely undefiled;

holy, and entirely removed from all contamination of sin; all pure, all inviolate, nay, the model itself, it may be said, of purity and innocence; more beautiful than beauty itself; more graceful than gracefulness; more holy than holiness; that she alone was holy and most pure in mind and body, as she soared above integrity and virginity, and wholly constituted the abode of all the grace of the Holy Ghost, and with the exception of God alone, she is superior to all created beings.¹³

The apostolic constitution presents a synthesis of the holiness of Mary gathering information from all the sources. The great tradition of the church reflects on her holiness from different angles, especially from the point of view of the Word incarnate. The above words of the constitution leave no space for any doubt on her sanctity because Triune God had sanctified her from the very beginning of her existence through special graces. The Second Vatican Council rightly points out: "Enriched from the first instant of her conception with the splendour of an entirely unique holiness, the virgin of Nazareth is hailed by the heralding angel, by divine command, as 'full of grace'."¹⁴ She committed herself to the work of God whole-heartedly. The totality of her holiness is reflected very well in the fact of her assumption.

¹² Augustine, *Nature and Grace* 36 [42]; cfr. Saint Augustine: *Four Anti-Pelagian Writings*, tr. J. A. Mourant and William J. Collinge, The Fathers of the Church (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1992), 53-54.

¹³ Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*, Apostolic Constitution on Immaculate Conception, The Bull 'Ineffabilis' by L'Abbe Sire, translated by Ulick J. Bourke, (Dublin: John Mullany, 1869), p. 59.

¹⁴ Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Vatican Council II, vol. I, ed. Austin Flannery, (Mumbai: St Pauls, 2013), 56.

A woman who was unique in every respect was given a special honour by God through the assumption.

4. Fullness of Grace and Marian Piety

A question may be raised on this subtitle stating what would be the connection between 'fullness of grace' and Marian devotion among the faithful. Marian devotion has emerged from the fact that people admired her fortitude and her life of holiness. Filled with the Spirit, she sings the glory of God (Lk 1:46-55). The church has not invented Marian devotion, but she has been doing since the beginning what she was commanded to do. "The Church fails to carry out part of that which she has been commanded to do if she does not extol Mary. She deviates from the biblical word if praise of Mary is silenced in her."¹⁵ Devotion to Mary has Biblical foundation. Joseph Ratzinger says that the church is carrying out what she was prompted by the Spirit. Mary who is full of grace is venerated because the Church praises the Magnificat through Blessed Virgin Mary. The church joins the Mother of God in magnifying God eternally. The veneration of Mother of God enables the church to come closer to God as she remained closer to him.

For the faithful Mary appears grace-filled on certain occasions and such pictures of Mary have got more value in their devotion. For instance, Mary is filled with grace when the angel appears and when meeting Elizabeth. At

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other moments, she is a suffering woman or a sorrowful mother. In fact, such dual pictures of Mary are not possible, since she is filled with grace from the beginning till the end. Even in her sufferings and pains she experiences the presence of God through her son Jesus Christ. She was united with Christ all the time. Though there are different phases in her life, the grace dimension is present equally at all times. Such a grace-filled mother becomes model of prayer for the church and church exercises her piety towards the Blessed Virgin Mary. "Mary is not only an example for the whole Church in the exercise of divine worship but is also, clearly, a teacher of the spiritual life for individual Christians. The faithful at a very early date began to look to Mary and to imitate her in making their lives an act of worship of God and making their worship a commitment of their lives."¹⁶ The devotion to our heavenly mother helps us to enhance our spiritual life by obtaining divine grace. Through her intercession we are participants in the divine grace, that is to say, we are raised towards the divine.

Continued on... 26

¹⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, "'You are Full of Grace': Elements of Biblical Devotion to Mary," *Communio* 16 (Spring, 1989), 54.

¹⁶ Paul VI, *Marialis cultus*, 21.

MOTHER MARY AND THE ROSARY

Nympha Crasta, PDDM

Rosary! Rosary!! Rosary!!! What is this rosary and who can pray and why should we pray? Many more questions may arise but the answer is simple, very simple. Only the simple people who can accept and acknowledge the greatness of another human person can pray the ROSARY. Well!! That person is none other than MARY OUR MOTHER. She herself asked us to pray the Rosary.

Personally, the Rosary has become my companion not only now as religious sister, but much earlier in my life. And to specify, it was during my discernment period. I used to pray the Rosary, on my way to the church, to the college and at home during family prayer. I heard when I was small ***“that the family which prays together, stays together”***. We never missed the family Rosary, even now it continues, thanks be to God!

The Rosary has given me a lot of joy, peace and inner strength, in time of weakness; courage, in time of discouragement; light, in time of confusion and dark clouds. Even when I get distracted during my personal prayer and try to concentrate during Adoration, I have begun my prayer with the Rosary. Rosary stood by me as a Shield, a powerful weapon to fight against temptation.

The Rosary, as it is known to all who recite it every day in its entirety is an excellent means of prayer. It was given to St. Dominic by Our Lady, the Blessed Mother, at the beginning of

the 13th century.

On October 16, 2002, St. John Paul II published an apostolic letter titled: *“Rosarium Virginis Mariae.”* He suggested additions to the traditional fifteen mysteries of the Rosary. They are the Luminous Mysteries, (Mysteries of the Light) which centers on the public life of Christ.



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Devotion on praying the Rosary each day and meditation on each mystery draws upon us the blessings of Jesus and Mary in abundance, for it is an infallible truth that Jesus and Mary reward, in a marvelous way, those who glorify them.

Now if we say the Hail Mary properly, is this not a way to love, bless and glorify Jesus and Mary? In each Hail Mary, we bless both Jesus and Mary. “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.”

Let us admire the beauty of the Holy Rosary which is made up of the two heavenly prayers: The Lord's Prayer and the Hail Mary. The two heavenly prayers that are most pleasing to Almighty God and the Blessed Virgin. We should always have them in our hearts and on our lips to honour our Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour and his Most Holy Mother. At the end of each decade of the Rosary we honour the Most Blessed Trinity by saying "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning is now, and ever shall be, world without end, Amen,"

During the month of the Holy Rosary, ISIS suffered many setbacks - and it may not be just a coincidence. Catholics should pray their Rosaries, however, not only for peace with other religions but also for their ultimate conversion to Christianity.

Just prior to October 7, the feast of the Holy Rosary, more than a thousand Muslim terrorists from ISIS surrendered in Iraq. In Syria, shortly thereafter, ISIS was downgraded from a "terror state" to "terrorist organization." October 7 was the day assigned by Pope St. Pius V to celebrate the victory of the Rosary, which had asked all Christians to pray to defeat the Muslim forces at Lepanto in 1571. Christendom complied with his request and the result was a miraculous naval victory over which Our Lady is said to have

appeared.

The real goal, of course, isn't merely peace with Islam but the conversion of Islamic forces to Christianity, which Archbishop Fulton Sheen said would come through Our Lady's intercession. Adding to this he writes, "I believe that the Blessed Virgin chose to be known as Our Lady of Fatima as a pledge and a sign of hope to the Muslim people and as an assurance that they, who show her so much respect, will one day accept her Divine Son, too".



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It wasn't the Pope in 2014 who called for Christians to pray their Rosary to defeat a group of bellicose Muslims, but Our Lord Himself. The Islamic terrorist group, Boko Haram, had been ravaging Nigeria and seemed unstoppable. Bishop Oliver Dash e Doeme, head of the diocese of Maiduguri in Nigeria's Borno State, was in a chapel praying before the Blessed Sacrament in December of that year when Our Lord appeared to him holding a sword.

When he handed the sword to Bishop Doeme, it turned into the Rosary, and Our Lord repeated three times, "Boko Haram is gone." The bishop recalls, "I didn't need any prophet to give me the explanation. It was clear that with the Rosary we would be able to expel Boko Haram." This is a powerful testimony of God's Divine intervention at the right moment. Isn't Mary watching us??? Certainly!!!

Since then the terrorist group in Nigeria has faced crushing defeats. As recently as July of this year, some 700 members of the group laid down their arms much like Muslim militants did in Iraq earlier this month.

Archbishop Sheen points out the fact that the town in Portugal, where the Blessed Mother appeared, is named after a Muslim maiden who converted to Catholicism when she married a prince in the 13th century. What is more, the maiden was named after Mohammed's daughter.

The archbishop believed that Our Lady of Fatima is the most effective means of converting Muslims: "Missionaries in the future will, more and more, see that their apostolate among the Muslims will be successful in the measure that they preach Our Lady of Fatima."

Pray for the conversion of hearts – as the Blessed Mother instructed at Fatima – and the world will change.

That's the message that author and award-winning journalist Susan Brinkmann told some 900 attendees at the diocese's third annual Women's Conference.

Ms. Brinkmann's message was not only one of hopefulness, but also one of experience. Once a self-described "birth control pill-popping pro-choice feminist," her heart was converted to the Church and to the Eucharist.

One day after the 100th anniversary of Our Lady's final appearance to the shepherd children in Fatima, Portugal – Ms. Brinkmann presented her keynote: "The Message of Fatima for Today's Woman."

Pointing to Mary's messages of sacrifice, reparation, conversion and the acceptance of suffering, Ms. Brinkmann reiterated the words of St. John Paul II, who said that the message of Fatima is more urgent today than it was in 1917.

"That isn't hard to believe, when you look around at the battlefield of our world right now. The institution of marriage and the family, and the national morality in general is in shambles," and "if there was ever a time that we needed Mary, it is now".

"Fatima gives us direction. It tells us where to go to get help and have hope, and that is to Mary and the Blessed Sacrament," said Ms. Brinkmann.

We are given the help we need to offer ourselves to God and bear all our sufferings as an act of reparation and of supplication for the conversion of sinners, as the Blessed Mother challenged in her message, so to enjoy the fruits of peace.

"The Bible tells us that, where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more.

"If God's grace could get me that far in life,

it can certainly help us live the message of Fatima,” Ms. Brinkmann said.

The first sacrifice Mary asked of the three shepherd children was to pray the Rosary every day for peace in the world.

“In a world where terrorist attacks are occurring every other month, abortion providers are killing millions of unborn babies and selling their baby parts, Christians are being murdered and being driven out of their homelands,” here we need to pause and ask, “can the Rosary still be the answer? Yes!”

The Blessed Mother also asked for reparation for the sins which offend God.

“We take it upon ourselves to make up for the offenses that are made to our God,” Ms. Brinkmann explained. “Reparation is very powerful, especially when it's combined with prayer. And it can be little things. For example, whenever you hear someone taking the Lord's name in vain, say in your heart, 'I'm sorry, Jesus.'”

The message of Fatima also calls us to pray for the conversion of sinners.

“I was finally able to receive the Eucharist when I returned to the Church, and I believe it's because someone out there was praying for me,” Ms. Brinkmann said. “I believe it was Our Lady and all the people who follow the message of Fatima and the call to pray for the conversion of sinners.

“Praying for the conversion of hearts is the most efficient way to pray. It will get rid of all the ills of mankind,” she told the crowd.

Praying for the conversion of hearts is the most efficient way to pray. It will get rid of all the ills of mankind,” she told the crowd.

“A converted heart doesn't commit abortion. It doesn't lie or cheat or steal. A converted heart isn't dishonest, greedy, selfish, lustful, angry. It doesn't seek revenge. It doesn't hold grudges. It doesn't brag,” Ms. Brinkmann said. “If you pray for the conversion of hearts, there goes abortion, violence, drug addiction, adultery, domestic abuse.”

“Say one Hail Mary a day for the conversion of hearts, and watch how this world changes,” that's our challenge.

The Roman Catholic Rosary has a long history of being a very powerful force. This is so because it is the best method of honoring Mary.

Bear in mind that Mary, in her humility, does not need to be honored but rather through the Rosary she sends graces to her children because she loves us. Mary wants her children to pray the Rosary because it produces the fruits of holiness in those devoted to her.

The Rosary may be the most beloved devotion of the Catholic faith. It is quintessentially Catholic and the beads upon which the prayers are tracked are themselves a symbol of the Church. A Bible, a rosary, the medal of a saint, these are the material hallmarks of a Catholic. Combined with faith, prayer and action, the rosary lies at the heart of who we are.

The Rosary is one of the most crucial prayers which reminds and assists us in

reflecting on the great sacrifice, trust and complete surrender to God's word.

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The Rosary is more than a devotion to Our Lady. The beads and chain of the rosary itself are often a reflection of our character and hope. Catholics are buried with rosaries, wound carefully about folded hands. There is no greater symbol than this of the primacy the rosary has in the canon of Catholic devotion.

The Rosary is a pillar in our spiritual lives along with frequent Mass, the Bible, Liturgy of the Hours, and Eucharistic Adoration. Our daily Rosary is a powerful unifier of marriages. It has strengthened our relationship with Jesus, and with each other. Additionally, it has a legacy of keeping families together.

Mother Mary had selflessly prioritized God's word more than the worldly desires, pressure and completely surrendered her life.

Traditionally it is a prayer that is recited with family which increases the family bond and helps resolve the differences in the family specially in this age where our lives are controlled by more worldly things.

The Rosary is a powerful spiritual tool for meditation. It's better for mental, physical, and

spiritual health. Many people, including many Catholics, overlook the rosary as a meditative tool. It is sometimes seen as too simple and therefore as superficial. The rosary is simple, but the gentle repetition of its prayers makes it an excellent means of moving into deeper meditation. It gives us an opportunity to open ourselves to God's word, to refine our interior gaze by turning our minds to the life of Christ.

By focusing on the lives of Christ and Mary through meditation on the mysteries, we learn about ourselves in relation to God. Mary herself is an excellent model for the daily practice of meditation. She received the Word of God through the Archangel Gabriel. She pondered God's Word in her heart. She took in the events around her, capturing them internally and carrying them within her like a treasure. This is the essence of meditation-receiving God's Word and making it our treasure.

TAUGHT BY OUR LADY AT FATIMA (1917)

(After each decade of the Rosary repeat the following) O my Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of hell and lead all souls to heaven, especially those most in need of Your mercy! (June 13, 1917)

Sacrifice yourselves for sinners and say often, especially whenever you make a sacrifice:

O Jesus, this is for love of You, for the conversion of sinners and in reparation for the sins committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary. (July 13, 1917)

Place of Mary in the Vatican II Reform

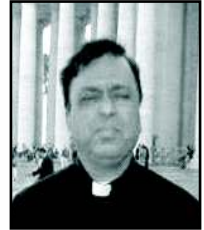
Fr. Ronald Seravo

Mother Mary has a special place in Catholic theology and worship. The Catholics do not worship Mary as Goddess, but venerate her as the Mother of God and the Church. Since this theological distinction is not crystal clear to the ordinary Christians, good many including Catholics, think that they worship Mother Mary as Goddess. The popular preachers at times tend to encourage people to pray to Mother Mary more pre-supposing the general anthropological dimension that Mother Mary is more compassionate than God the Father and Jesus, the Savior of the world, which has led to a confused devotion to Mother Mary. Though the post Conciliar theology has attempted to renew the Marian liturgy and devotion (SC 103, LG 52-69), the traditional tendency to Marian devotion has not changed much. Besides, the Roman theological thinking has renewed the Marian devotion; its effect on ordinary people has been little. That is why, in this article I wish to make an attempt to present the renewed theological thoughts in Mariology and its effects on present worship and devotions.

1. Vatican II and the Marian Devotions

Vatican II discussed the role of Mary in

reference to the understanding of Christocentrism and new way being the Church. That is why, Mother Mary was placed in the last Chapter of the Constitution on the Church



without going for a separate document on her (LG 52- 69).¹ *Even Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC), the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, brings out her role in the Church and describes her as the “most excellent fruit of redemption” and highlights the “inseparable bond” that exists between Jesus and Mary (SC 103). Indeed, the liturgical reforms of Vatican II have assigned the right place to Mary in her liturgy. Paul VI expressed the Conciliar Mariology in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Marialis cultus*, for the right ordering and development of devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary.² He wrote: “In the Virgin Mary, everything is relative to Christ and dependent upon him. It was with a view to Christ that God the Father, from all eternity, chose her. Certainly genuine piety has never failed to highlight the indissoluble link and essential relationship of the Virgin to the Divine Savior”.³

¹ The Vatican II was divided on including Mary in the Constitution on the Church. The margin was narrow; 1114 for the inclusion and 1074 against. Finally Mary was included in the constitution on the Church, the last chapter. But that was not well received by many marianists!

² Paul VI, *Marialis cultus*, Apostolic Exhortation for the right ordering and development of devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, 2nd February 1974.

³ Paul VI, *Marialis cultus*, n. 25.

The New Liturgical Calendar accommodated three solemnities (Mother of God on 1st January, Immaculate Conception on 8th December and Assumption on 15th August, two feasts (Nativity on 8th September and the Visitation on 31st May), four obligatory memories (The Queenship of Mary on 22nd August, Our Lady of Sorrows on 15th September, Our Lady of the Rosary on 7th October and the Presentation of temple 21st November) and four optional memories (Our Lady of Lourdes on 11th February, Immaculate Heart of Mary, on the following day of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Our Lady of the Mount Carmel on 16th July and the Dedication of St. Mary Major on 5th August). A new memory, Holy Name of Mary, was added later.

3. Mary in the Celebrations of Sacraments and Sacramentals

The Post Vatican II renewal makes a special reference to Mary in the celebrations of Sacraments and Sacramentals. In the celebration of Baptism, she is invoked in the litany of saints as "the Mother of God". She is also referred in the symbol of faith: Do you believe in Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary?

In the celebration of Confirmation, though an explicit mention is not made, we cannot ignore her presence in the apostolic community at the descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Since Confirmation is an outpouring of the Holy Spirit having the Pentecostal event at the helm, it indeed vibrates Marian presence (LG 59 &

Marialis Cultus 26-28).

In the celebration of the Eucharist, the Eucharistic Prayer mentions Mary. The Preface of the Eucharistic Prayer II has "...born of the Virgin Mary". At the intercession, there is a mention of Mary: "with Mary, the Virgin Mother of God". Similar references are found in other Eucharistic Prayers too. Eucharistic Prayer III refers to Mary as elect, someone who has obtained eternal life with the words...with the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God".

In the rite of Ordination, whether Episcopal, Presbyteral and Diaconal, the intercession of Mary is invoked: "Holy Mary, Mother of God". Mary is not absent in the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance, especially in the rite of Individual Penitent at the confession of sins, *I confess* and a reference at the proclamation of Praise of God and dismissal "May...the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary...."⁴ The singing of *Magnificat*, the canticle of Mary is recommended as a means to proclaim God's mercy.⁵

In the celebration of the Anointing of the Sick especially for those who are near death, while making the baptismal profession of faith

The Preface of the Eucharistic Prayer II has "...born of the Virgin Mary". At the intercession, there is a mention of Mary: "with Mary, the Virgin Mother of God". Similar references are found in other Eucharistic Prayers too.

⁴ See The Rite of Penance, 44&47.

⁵ See The Rite of Penance, 56.

the second question makes a reference to Mary: Do you... who was born of the Virgin Mary...⁶ In the rite of commendation of the dying one of the prayers has a Marian dimension: "May Mary, the angels... come to meet you as you go forth from this life."⁷ Besides, the hymn, *Hail, Holy Queen*, also is suggested at the end of the Commendation rite.⁸

In the celebration of Matrimony, though no explicit reference is found in the prayers, the Gospel of Cana (Jn 2: 1-11) makes up what is lacking.

In the Dedication of a Church, besides the Marian invocation in the litany of saints, *Holy Mary, Mother of God*, the prayer that follows has an explicit mention of Mary: "may the prayers of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of all the saints..."⁹

The preface of the Mass of Dedication of a Church too mentions Mary: "For you made the body of your Son born of the Virgin..."¹⁰

The profession of Religious women besides the litanic invocation to Mary also has a reference in the examining of the candidate: Are you resolved... to undertake that life of perfect charity... chosen for themselves by Christ Our Lord and his Virgin Mother and to persevere in it forever"?¹¹ There is also an explicit mention of

Blessed Virgin Mary, the mother of the Redeemer in the prayer of Consecration.¹²

4. Mary through the Liturgical Seasons

Marian solemnities, feasts and memories highlight a particular Marian dogma or dimension in the history of salvation. The various liturgical seasons too honor Mary and deepen the proper mystery of the season in the prayers, hymns and popular devotions (SC 103). The Roman Missal has Masses for the seasons of Advent, Christmas, Easter and eight Masses (Common of the Blessed Virgin Mary) for the Ordinary season.¹³ These Masses are useful to deepen the spirit of the season with Mary, the comforter of the pilgrim Church. Whereas the Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary, indeed a great treasure, can surely inspire the faithful to walk the journey of faith to heavenly Jerusalem. That is why, it is appropriate to have a glimpse of the liturgico-theology of the Collection of Marian Masses.

There are three Marian masses for the advent season, namely: Blessed Virgin, The Chosen Daughter of Israel, and The Blessed Virgin Mary: In the Annunciation of the Lord and The Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.¹⁴ All the Masses underline the longing of the people of Israel (old Israel) and the Church (new Israel).

⁶ See, The Rite of the Anointing of the Sick, 123.

⁷ See, The Rite of the Anointing of the Sick, 147.

⁸ See, The Rite of the Anointing of the Sick, 150.

⁹ See The Rite of Dedication of the Church, 60.

¹⁰ See The Rite of Dedication of the Church, 75

¹¹ See The Rite of Religious Profession for Women, 61.

¹² See The Rite of Religious Profession for Women, 72.

¹³ See, The Roman Missal, The Third Edition.

¹⁴ See, Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Bangalore: NBCLC, 2006), 5-13.

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The season of Advent has a strong Marian dimension, especially in the second part (17-24 December) and the last Sunday in Advent. The Advent season presents Mary as the one chosen by God, daughter of Zion, and who waits for the Messiah. Mary also is a sign for the Church to wait on his second coming, since Mary is the excellent fruit of redemption and type of the Church. Many of the prayers at this season bring out forcefully the inseparable bond she has with her son, the savior of the world, and her unique response to the Lord in realizing his plan of salvation.

There are six Marian masses that may be celebrated during this season: Holy Mary, Mother of God, The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Saviour, The Blessed Virgin Mary and the Epiphany of the Lord, Holy Mary at the presentation of the Lord, Our Lady of Nazareth, Blessed Mary Virgin of Cana.¹⁵ The liturgico-theology of these Mass texts reflect the role of Mary in the history of salvation and invites the people of God to seek her special intercession. The season of Christmas vibrates with the presence of Mary, without whom the mystery of incarnation may lack its fullness. The Lectionary

of the season brings out the presence of Mary in several passages, while the prayer texts of the various Masses underline her role in the mystery of God becoming man. The feast of the Holy Family and solemnity of the Mother of God may be considered to have strong a Marian dimension.

There are 5 masses for the Lenten season. They inspire the faithful to undertake the Lenten journey accompanied by the sorrowful Mother. These Masses are; Holy Mary, disciples of the Lord, The Blessed Virgin Mary at the Foot of the Cross, The Commending of the Blessed Virgin Mary and The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Reconciliation. Among these Masses the last one appears to be more relevant and vibrates the mood of the Lenten season well since the season of Lent is a time to reconcile with God and one another. In this process Mary can be a help and guide. Perhaps this Mass formularies will be appropriate for a Mass for the celebration of the sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.

The season of Christmas vibrates with the presence of Mary, without whom the mystery of incarnation may lack its fullness. The Lectionary of the season brings out the presence of Mary in several passages, while the prayer texts of the various Masses underline her role in the mystery of God becoming man.

¹⁵ See, Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 19-36.

The season of Easter has four Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary, namely; The Blessed Virgin Mary and the Resurrection of the Lord, Holy Mary, Fountain of light and Life, Our lady of the Cenacle, and The Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of the Apostles. All these Masses bring out the role of Mary in the light of resurrection.

Saturdays have a special Marian dimension since Mary becomes our hope in between Friday where we recall Christ's death and Sundays as we celebrate the resurrection of the Lord.¹⁶ Unless it is prevented by another solemnity of feast, the Calendar makes a provision for Marian masses on Saturdays. In order to facilitate Marian day on Saturday, the Ordinary season has 28 Masses of Our Lady which highlight her bond with the Church, as an inspirer of the spiritual life of the faithful and as a compassionate intercessor on behalf of the faithful. The prayer texts of these Masses are excellent tools for Marian spirituality.

5. Lectionary for Marian Celebrations

Marian solemnities, feasts, memories and other celebrations have proper or common scriptural readings and they bring out the role of Mary in the history of salvation. In fact, Marian Lectionary is a great help to know Mary and to accept the challenge of genuine Christian living. Since Mary listened and acted on the Word of God, it is but proper that we do the same and thus become the true sons and daughters of God. The reform of Vatican II desired to feed the people of God with the riches of the Word of God

(SC 51), the same has been paid attention to by assigning appropriate readings to various Marian celebrations. It is worth recalling what Paul VI said on this point: "The Lectionary is one of the books of the Roman Rite that has greatly benefited from the post-conciliar reform, by reason both of its added texts and of the intrinsic value of these texts, which contain the ever-living and efficacious word of God (cf. Heb. 4:12). This rich collection of biblical texts has made it possible to arrange the whole history of salvation in an orderly three-year cycle and to set forth more completely the mystery of Christ. The logical consequence has been that the Lectionary contains a larger number of Old and New Testament readings concerning the Blessed Virgin. This numerical increase has not however been based on random choice: only those readings have been accepted which in different ways and degrees can be considered Marian, either from the evidence of their content or from the results of careful exegesis, supported by the teachings of the magisterium or by solid Tradition. It is also right to observe that these readings occur not only on feasts of the Blessed Virgin but are read on many other occasions, for example on certain Sundays during the liturgical year, in the celebration of rites that deeply concern the Christian's sacramental life and the choices confronting him, as also in the joyful or sad experiences of his life on earth."¹⁷ We must admit the fact that the Bible has inspired several Marian images like seat of wisdom, tower of David, Ark of the Covenant...liturgical prayers and hymns.

¹⁶ Paul VI, *Marialis cultus*, 9.

¹⁷ Paul VI, *Marialis Cultus*, 12.

6. Mary in the Liturgy of Hours

The memory of the Blessed Virgin Mary, whether in the ordinary Four Weeks, festive or common celebration of the liturgy of the hours is quite strong. The daily *Magnificat* at vespers and the Marian anthems like *Alma Redemptoris Mater*, *Ave Regina caelorum*, *Regina Caeli*, *Salve Regina*, *O Sanctissima* and others hymns to conclude the Compline resound the unique role of Mary in the history of salvation directly, while the other Gospel canticles: *Benedictus* and the *Nunc dimittis* also echo Marian dimensions indirectly. The Marian feasts with their proper hymns; antiphons and Readings at the Office are the best means to know the “great things” the almighty has worked through Mary in the history of salvation. The “Common of the Blessed Virgin Mary” too is an excellent blend of scriptures and Mariology.

7. Mary in Popular Devotions

Since popular devotions are complimentary to the liturgy (SC 13), we cannot ignore their role in making the Blessed Virgin Mary loved and venerated by Christians. The maternal love manifested by Christians all over the world has moved the faithful to the Mystery of Christ in a profound way. The Virgin Mary has always attracted Christians and others in a special way. In fact, Vatican II invites all to foster devotion to Mary both at a personal and community level (PO, 18; OT, 8; Canon Law, 76, 663, 246). Many of the popular feasts of Mary, though not included in the Calendar, are most loved feasts

like Our Lady of Perpetual Succor, Our Lady of the Mount, the Black Madonna and Our Lady of Vailankani. Some of the devotions like the Angelus, Regina Coeli, the Rosary, Saturday devotion, has brought the faithful closer to God. Besides Marian months (October and May), novenas, Tridua, pilgrimages, litanies, consecrations and entrustments to Mary, Scapulars, medals and hymns, have been the instruments of evangelization and strengthening of the Christian faith.¹⁸

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Conclusion

Mary has a special place in the history of salvation because of her total co-operation in making God's plan a reality. That is why; venerating her is putting our trust in her as “our hope and consolation.” That is why, John Paul II said: “Marian cult is special. It bears in itself and expresses the profound link which exists between the Mother of Christ and the Church”.¹⁹ The same has been confirmed by Vittorio Messori, the popular Italian journalist, in an interview on 25th November 2005 to Zenit in Rome in his book “Everything that the Church has said and says about the Mother, is, in fact, at the service of Christ, in defense of his humanity and at the same time of his divinity. Mariology is,

¹⁸ CDWDS, Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy, nos 183-207.

¹⁹ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Mater*, 25th March 1987, n 42.

in fact, Christology. Her dogmas are but the confirmation and bulwark of her Son's".²⁰

Everything that the Church has said and says about the Mother, is, in fact, at the service of Christ, in defense of his humanity and at the same time of his divinity. Mariology is, in fact, Christology.

Mary is the type of the Church. In her, the Church sees her destiny. In fact, her presence in the liturgy is recalling the mighty deeds of God and living in anticipation what is awaited for those who co-operate with God in his plan of salvation. It is but proper that in venerating her we need to accept the challenges of Christian life so that where she is, we too may one day be, to sing the *Magnificat* to the Holy Trinity.

²⁰ Vittorio Messori, Interview, The Mary Hypothesis <http://www.zenit.org/article-14658?=english>

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Conclusion

The validity of Marian devotion is justified from the biblical point of view. A woman who was always 'handmaid' of God, became his close associate in bringing the Saviour to this world and accompanied him throughout his life. As she was filled with grace, we are invited to live in the same grace as we are called to the same destiny (Eph 1:4-7). However, the Mother of God always remained on the side of humanity, that is, she is a member of the human family and she always remained a human person. The popular tendency in Marian devotion leads us to think of her as not belonging to the humankind. The church has always reminded us about her real dignity which is human. Any tendency to disassociate her from human family is non-

biblical in its nature. We need to overcome the temptation to exaggerate Marian piety, though it is appealing to the common faithful. The rightful piety will not take us away from God, the source of grace, who sanctified Mary since her conception in her mother's womb.

The Blessed Virgin Mary shines as a pearl of the humankind who was fashioned by God in a unique manner and she on her part lived it for the glory of God. A woman, who was without sin and beneficiary of the redemption work of Jesus Christ, gives us a constant invitation to sanctify our life. The divine grace, which is the fountain of holiness, is always available for us and Mary invites us to take part in it.

Mary and the Pilgrim Church Today

Prabhakar, smm

A poor young man was in prison. A priest who regularly paid visits to this prison was grieved to see the young man among professional criminals. He approached him, put his hand on his shoulder and with a paternal look asked him: "My son how is it that you're here too?" The boy was deeply moved and with tears in his eyes, replied in a low voice: "Ah! Father, I wouldn't be here if someone had only put his hand on my shoulder like that." Love and affection can touch the hearts of others and lead them on the right path.

The digital world with advanced communication and developments has interconnected the whole world and the entire human family has become a small village. Personal accounts in Facebook, Twitter and other social networks show a few hundreds of friends who follow us. Every new status and posting is immediately followed, liked, commented and even shared. We feel the presence of others, friends, who are not physically with us, whom we have never seen, nor even know but feel their presence round the clock from all over the world. "Even our prime minister is in my followers' list in twitter", said a teenager very proudly, "and now I have sent a friend request to Mr. Trump, the President of USA". We are even proud of it all and want to show how many prominent people are in the friends list. We mistake them for actual friends when they are not and are easily disappointed.

When we need them, they cannot be there for us. The alarming rate of suicidal deaths especially among youth and school children reveals that they are left alone in their struggles, in spite of all the advanced communication. We need someone to be with us and to put a hand on our shoulders and to show us the right way.

Mary along the Way

Mother Mary is a constant guide along our life journey. She has experienced the providence and the presence of God all through her life in faith and so is the perfect example for the Church today in all its struggles and challenges. She not only shows the way, but also walks the way with the Church. The image of a journeying Mary appears clearly in the Gospels and it has been from the early Church a source of deep meditation. Mary often finds herself on the way. She leaves, she walks, she moves around much more than the regular woman of her times. Her whole life is a journey, a "pilgrimage of faith" (Lumen Gentium, 58). The conciliar Mariology underlines this "pilgrimage" of Mary, acknowledging a permanent model for the whole Church. If we

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follow this “pilgrimage” of Mary according to her footsteps we find in the Gospels, we are sure to find the way to Christ her beloved Son.

The Bible is a book full of roads and journeys. The story of God with humanity is a dynamic crossroad between departure and arrival, coming and going, going and coming back, between exodus and advent. The journeying of Mary also comes in this movement of meeting between the human and the divine, always open to the unpredictable, to surprise and novelty, but always guided by the Holy Spirit. Thus, there is always a kind of wonderful spiritual union between God and Mary in the salvific plan of God. Like our Mother Mary the whole Church journeys to encounter a surprising God. Mary accompanies us on this journey, as she has already gone this way in faith and obedience.

Thy will be done

We say it came like a bolt from the clear sky, when something unexpected happens in our life that even shake our whole being and turns everything upside down. Such would have been the experience of Mary as the Archangel Gabriel announced the message of God - not only the greeting of the Angel, but also the plan of God to become the Mother of God. She was totally overcome by something she couldn't understand immediately. Being aware of her own limitations, she was much reluctant to accept the will of God, not from the lack of faith but from the huge gap between the greatness of God's plan and the effective limits of our nature. “How will this be, since I am a virgin”, (LK. 1:34)

Mary asked the Archangel. It reflects her willingness to co-operate, but her ignorance on how to do it. She asks God what she must do in order to obey Him. Mary's spirit is like that of the psalmist who prays to God saying: “Let me know the way of your commandments and I will marvel in your wonders (Ps 119, 27).

It was this willingness to co-operate with God, which gave her the courage to understand the Will of God. The angel assures her also how it is the Spirit of God that overcomes her limitations, he empowers and beautifies her. Mary then accepts the will of God with total surrender: “Behold I am the servant of the Lord, let it be to me according to your word” (LK 1:38). Zachariah on the other hand, who also receives the message of God does not take God's plan by heart remains mute and isolated (LK 1:20). Mary instead believes. She opens her heart and becomes a co-operator in God's work of salvation to the world.

With her *fiat* she summarizes in herself the whole series of characters of the Old Testament who obey in faith and inaugurates the new People, easy to listening to God's voice, who speaks even now, in the fullness of time, through His Son. In her footsteps to recognize the will of God and accepting it wholeheartedly is a great challenge for us today.

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Reaching out

The greeting of the Angel as “full of Grace” and the status as the mother of God did not make Mary proud, but filled her with dynamism and passion. She set forth immediately on the journey into the hill country, a town in Judah to visit Elizabeth (Lk 1:39), who was expecting a child in her old age as the Angel announced her. This is proved from the fact that Luke links the story of the Annunciation with that of the Visitation: “the Angel left and she arose and went with haste” (Lk 1, 38-39). This shows the dynamic, creative and determined style of Mary to render a helping hand to the ones who are in dire need. The burning in her heart gives wings to her feet. She feels encouraged by the God she carries inside her. He is the inner force that moves, guides, enfolds and gives meaning to the external action.

With her journeying through the tortuous roads to reach Judah, Mary inaugurates the style of God, the style of “reaching out”, the style of service, of humility, of solidarity towards those who are in need. God incarnate becomes in her the God who enters our human life as in the story of Zacchaeus, to whom Jesus said: “today I must go into your house”, “today salvation has come to this house” (Lk 19, 5.9). “When Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb” (Lk 1:41) writes Luke in his Gospel. Maria becomes a blessing to those, whom she meets.

Her walking in haste is the image of the missionary Church that, suddenly after the Pentecost, full of the Holy Spirit, initiates the

journey to spread the Good News even to the ends of the earth. Paul knows well this haste: “For Christ's love compels us” (2Cor 5, 14). This is the primary duty of the Church today to learn from Mary to render helping hands to the suffering humanity in various needs. The Church must learn from Mary the secret of the vital unification between interiority and activity, between being and doing, between believing and making, between prayer and work, between memory and creativity, between concentration and spreading the Word of God, between “keeping everything in the heart” and “hasting”, between welcoming the gift of God and making herself God's gift for others.

God of Compassion

In the plan of salvation God has been portrayed as a merciful father. The prophetic literature depicts God as a Mother, who does not forget her sibling. “Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion for the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold I have engraved you on the palms of my hands. Your walls are continually before me” (JS. 49:15-16) All through the Bible God is known as a compassionate God, who forgives and accepts His folk. Whenever the Israelite was wounded, driven away or enslaved, He came to their rescue and brought them back to life. There is no hurt that God cannot heal. “He heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds”, (Ps. 147:3) confesses the Psalmist. God is merciful to the poor. Not only does God's mercy restrain wrath toward the sinner, it also

moves Him in compassion toward the poor. The significance of God's concern for the poor is expressed in many of Israel's covenantal laws. When making loans, the poor may not be charged interest (Ex. 22:25). When rendering judgment, no distinction is to be made between the rich and the poor (Ex. 23:3; Lev.19:5). The text of Deuteronomy 15:7–11 provides an apt summary of how God desires the poor to be treated. If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites in any of the towns of the land, the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward them. Rather, be open-handed and freely lend them whatever they need. Give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to. There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore, I command you to be open-handed toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land. Mercy and compassion are rooted in the very character of God.

The fullest expression of the mercy of God is found in the person and work of Jesus Christ, the compassion of God incarnate. He was also compassionate to the people, who came in search of Him. “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:36). Jesus knew that these people had been wandering, aimlessly, trying to find their way home- because they were desperate for guidance, for protection and for care. His heart ached as He saw how much they needed him. He was a caring shepherd whose

sheep had been lost, and He knew it was His job to guide them home. Jesus called his disciples to him and said, “I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way” (Matthew 15:32).

The fullest expression of the mercy of God is found in the person and work of Jesus Christ, the compassion of God incarnate. He was also compassionate to the people, who came in search of Him.

Mary has experienced this compassion of God in abundance in her life as she herself sings in her “Magnificat”: “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever” (LK 1: 46-55).

This compassion of God, which Mary has experienced from the hand of God, she gave further to those in need. At the marriage feast at Cana, where Jesus and Mary were invited, wine gave out. Mary sees the pathetic situation of the family and tries to help her. She reports Jesus,

who in turn refuses as "His time" has not yet come. Mary nevertheless turns to the servants and says to them: "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn. 2:5). Then Jesus orders the servants to fill the stone jars with water, and the water becomes wine, better than the wine which has previously been served to the wedding guests. What a deep understanding existed between Jesus and his mother? How can we probe the mystery of their intimate spiritual union? But the fact speaks for itself. It is certain that that event already quite clearly outlines the new dimension, the new meaning of Mary's motherhood. In this motherhood she leads the church to Christ and keeps it in perfect union she had with her son. Only then the church can be compassionate towards the unfortunate ones, who feel rejected, abandoned and wounded in heart and soul, chased away by poverty on the one hand and social economic systems and policies on the other, communal violence and political persecutions. Our Pope Francis invites us again and again to reach out to those people on the verge of life and give them the God of compassion.

The salvific plan of God

The Mother of the Redeemer has a precise place in the plan of salvation, for "when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" (Gal. 4:4-6)

The Second Vatican Council, by presenting Mary in the mystery of Christ, also finds the path to a deeper understanding of the mystery of the Church. Mary, as the Mother of Christ, is in a particular way united with the Church, "which the Lord established as his own body." It is significant that the conciliar text places this truth about the Church as the Body of Christ in close proximity to the truth that the Son of God "through the power of the Holy Spirit was born of the Virgin Mary." The reality of the Incarnation finds a sort of extension in the mystery of the Church-the Body of Christ. And one cannot think of the reality of the Incarnation without referring to Mary, the Mother of the Incarnate Word. In this "pilgrimage of faith" in which "the Blessed Virgin advanced," faithfully preserving her union with Christ. In this way the "twofold bond" which unites the Mother of God with Christ and with the Church takes on historical significance. Nor is it just a question of the Virgin Mother's life-story, of her personal journey of faith and "the better part" which is hers in the mystery of salvation; it is also a question of the history of the whole People of God, of all those who take part in the same "pilgrimage of faith."

The salvific plan of God is not yet over. It goes further in every activity of the Church in leading the People of God towards the "life in fullness". Each and every one of us has a role to play through our baptism. Mary, our mother, is our example and guide to play our role in the plan of God.

MY RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT

Arun D'Souza smm

"Those who will trust in the Lord will move forward and their strength renewed, they will rise on wings like eagles they will run and not get weary, they will walk and not grow weak"(Is 40:31)

As I put my pen to write on motivations and inspirations to become a perpetually professed, these two sentences penetrate my heart. 1. "You have called me Lord.... Here I am". 2. "I have come here to do your will". As I see my life, it is a journey, a journey to be encountered to make it meaningful in the company of my brothers and sisters. Life is an art which is colored by many hands. And the praise is deserved by the artist who toils to create it because they are the ones who beautify it with color. Life is a mystery it takes unknown turns and many times unpredictable, but aspiration and dedication mould us, how to become, what we should be in the future. Looking at my past varied experiences which were filled with appreciations, disappointments, hardships, failures, tears and smiles etc. Which were painful but later turned into stepping stones to success. I was tossed and puzzled but never lacked love, care and support of the fathers and brothers around me.

My life of prayer shaped the life of mission. Fourteen long years helped me to deepen my

conviction and made me an integrated person. The warmth and the affection that I received from various hands were unforgettable, as I discern my Vocation. Inspired by the experienced lives, like my parents, brothers, sisters turned into sweet chiming bells ringing in my life. Their support for my life in spiritual, emotional, intellectual growth were immense and incalculable which helped to deepen my dedication.

Perpetual vows preparation in France on the foot steps of our founder St. Louis Marie de Montfort

During the three months stay at France I with 11 of my companions five from India, three from Congo and three from Malawi had a privileged moment to have a break from routine life and trace back our past life by discerning and reflecting on God's call in our life. During those days we reflected on religious vows, and the spirituality of our founder. During these months we spent time walking in the footsteps of our founder St. Montfort by learning his life, his mission and his spirituality. By visiting the places where our founder spent his life made us to feel that we are *liberos* (free men) move like clouds without boundaries.

By being in France and walking in the footsteps of our founder, I learnt three things:

1. **To be a classical model** which stresses especially the disciplinary aspects, regular observance, uniformity, asceticism a model that produced many fruits of holiness and apostolic zeal.
2. **To be a liberal model** especially discipline and simplicity, in order to concentrate on the religious efforts toward apostolic efficiency.
3. **To be radical model** or model of radical following Lord Jesus, radicalism of discipleship which require starting afresh from Christ and from His centrality in the life of consecrated persons, living without any bond. To shed light on the meaning of living human life with a strong tension

toward that Reign of God which alone can fill human love and which is the only great timeless wealth.

Conclusion

By reflecting on my life, I realize all these land marks are mysterious and unimaginable. On the one hand I was motivated and spent time in discernment and on the other I was encouraged and strongly feel I am empowered by Christ Wisdom. I am grateful to all my superiors and the formators who guided me to reach to this stage and all the people of God who are involved directly or indirectly. I also thank the Lord for having given me this noble call to be an instrument of his love for humanity.

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MY DIACONATE

Bro. T. Ravi, smm

Jesus, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God but emptied himself and took a human nature like us. Therefore, God the Father has exalted His Name (Jesus) above every other name on the earth (Phil 2:6ff). This Jesus, who is Lord of all Lords and King of all kings said that, "I have come into this world not to be served but to serve (cf. Mt 20:28, Mk 10:45)," which has been the inspiration for all of us who willingly accept Jesus' invitation to follow Him and to serve Him at the altar and the people of God in our ministry.

Deacons are ordained for the service at the table however they cannot celebrate mass. It is only a preparation for the priesthood. They cannot hear confession nor can they anoint the sick as these sacraments are mainly the duties of priests and bishops. However, deacons can lead the penitential rite in the mass. They can proclaim the Gospel. They are permitted to preach. They are allowed to prepare the altar and the gifts. They can distribute communion especially the cup and give the dismissal at the end of the mass.

The word "deacon" is derived from the Greek word "*diakonos*", which means servant, waiting-man, minister or messenger. It is generally assumed that the office of the deacon originated in the selection of seven men by the apostles among them Stephen, who is one of the first Seven deacons in the Christian church

seen assisting with the charitable work of the early church as recorded in Acts 6:1-7. The deacons have certain duties and roles in the church today which is the body of Christ for Paul (cf. Col 1:18).

Duties of the Deacon in the Church

The main ministry of the deacons was intended to help the apostles by taking care of some of the physical needs of the congregation. Otherwise the apostles would have to lay down

the Word of God in order to serve tables (cf. Acts 6:2). The role of the Seven in Acts is clearly spelled out. They were to be in charge of the "daily serving of food," especially to the poor and to the widows.

Deacons have a special place in the church.

Role of the Deacon

1. The role of the deacon is to be a helper of the bishops and priests in the church at the altar.
2. He is to proclaim by his life the church's call to serve the needs of others.
3. He is to proclaim the Gospel message.
4. He is to live a life of fidelity to Christ and the Church.
5. He is to lead the community in building a kingdom of grace, faith, justice and compassion.
6. In other words, the deacon is to be a sign and living witness of the presence of Christ the servant in the world. Therefore, we can

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To be with the new born baby is to be with God

Prakash smm

First thing that comes to us during the Christmas is the crib. The scene of the birth of Christ can be portrayed in so many different ways. Yet, in essence, it is always the same; a child, a stable, animals and some surrounding shepherds. It is a picture of simplicity and poverty. Yet it is rich in meaning and bears much reflection, from many points of view. The crib is the elements of our created world. The hay and the straw of the stable represent the fruit of the cultivated earth. The ox, ass and the sheep are the animal kingdom. At the center is the person of Jesus. And, without ever romanticizing poverty, there is a certain harmony between all these elements. Each one has its place. And all serve the well – being of the weakest and most vulnerable person, the new – born child. This simple reflection may have a special resonance at a time when we are intensely conscious of the fragility of our world and the threats to its stability. The celebration of Christmas sets forth three basic truths: incarnation, redemption, adoption. Some of the prophets had the glimpse of the future of the birth of the Savior. Micah, the prophet predicted the place- Bethlehem. Isaiah predicted that a virgin would be the recipient of the high honor, bearing this wonderful child.

Christmas is a feast of joy and festivity that no one will deny. Memories of Christmas are endearing and pleasant: midnight mass and carols, family reunions, sharing in Christmas meals, games and gifts around the Christmas tree. Baby Jesus is cute, cuddlesome and radiant. Christmas indeed is a feast of light.

Although the month and date of Jesus birth are unknown, by the early - to - mid fourth century, the western Christian church had placed Christmas on December 25. Today most Christian celebrate on December 25. There are many factors that may have influenced to celebrate Christmas on 25th December. The Romans marked as the winter solstice, the shortest and darkest day of the year. And the first day in which the days would begin to elongate and the Sun would have longer presence in the sky: Jesus was identified with the Sun based on an Old Testament verse. 'Christmas' is a shortened form of Christ's mass. It is derived from the Middle english cristmasse, the first recorded Christmas celebration was in 336 in Rome. The feast regained prominence after 800, when Charlemagne was crowned emperor on Christmas day. Associating with drunkenness and other misbehavior, the puritans banned Christmas in the 17 century.

By the fourth century, the church decided that Christians needed a December holiday to rival solstice celebrations. Church leaders selected December 25 for the feast of nativity. Christmas gained ground over the next several hundred years, becoming a full- fledged holiday by the ninth century, although it was still less important than Good Friday and Easter. Christmas in the middle ages featured feasting, drinking, riotous behavior and caroling for money. Religious puritans disapproved of such excess in the name of Christ and considered

the holiday blasphemous. Oliver Cromwell went so far as to cancel Christmas when he seized control of England in 1645. Decorations were forbidden and soldiers patrolled the street in search of celebrants cooking meat. Puritans in the American colonies took a similarly dour view of Christmas: yuletide festivities were outlawed in Boston from 1659 through 1681.

For many people whether they care to admit or not – Christmas is about presents. Christmas gift-giving tradition has its roots in the three kings' offerings to the infant Jesus. The Magi travelled to Bethlehem to present Christ gifts. Some eastern orthodox churches and European countries still celebrate the traditional date of the magi's arrival. This is to remind people of the magi's offerings to Jesus and of

God's gift of Christ to humankind. People celebrate this memorable day in various ways, depending upon their own concept of the significance of the day.

Christmas is the commemoration of God's coming to us as poor child to let us know that our greatness is not in wealth, in high position in society, in having dignity according to the world, but in being persons, children of God. God's coming as poor child affirms the dignity of every poor person; the poor are not a burden to society, but God is in them – they are sacred. They deserve respect and care from us, for God is in them. God coming among us as a poor child challenges us to see God in the hungry, naked, homeless, imprisoned and to respond to God in them.

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understand for ourselves that the qualifications are quite high as the office of a deacon is very important.

Well then dear well-wishers, there is a good news to be shared with you that six of us belong to the Society of Montfort Missionaries namely **Arun D'souza, Jaya Kumar D., Prakash N., Bala Raju R., Arul Jose Nashwin and T. Ravi** were ordained as deacons by **His Grace Most Rev. Dr. K. A. William**, the bishop of Mysuru on 10th December 2017 at 5pm at Gurumandir Community, Mysuru. The Vicar General (Fr. Wismick Smm, Rome), the provincial (Fr. Michael Sahayaraj, Smm) and many of the Montfort Fathers were present to pray and to bless us in the mass. During the Eucharistic celebration His Grace spoke on the

importance of the Scripture, service at the table, and commitment to the mission. The bishop said that an ordained person always should be in good relationship vertically with God and horizontally with people of God. As this changing world pulls many of us to be lost in media and not with the Lord, let us pray for all of these brothers of ours that they remain faithful to their call to serve God and to serve the people of God in the Church willingly and grow in holiness to bless the people of God. Let their lives be always in relation to God and His people. These six deacons are a gift to the Montfort Fathers in India. I wish them all a fruitful diaconate ministry wherever the Lord wants them to be for a good cause.

MARIAN SEMINAR 3



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