

✠ Luke 1:39-55 ✠

IN NOMINE IESU

Why honor and remember St. Mary? Because she is co-redemptress with her Son? Certainly not. For there is one mediator between God and man, the Lord Jesus. And there is no other name by which we are saved or through whom we pray. No, we honor Mary, remembering her because she plays a special role in salvation history.

She is the Mother of God. And to doubt this is to doubt the divinity of Jesus. For it was not merely flesh and blood that was in the womb of Mary, but God Himself. For in Jesus the fullness of God is pleased to dwell in bodily form. Therefore Mary is not just the mother of a man, but she is the Mother of God, as Elizabeth rightly teaches, “What is this that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” Mary is highly favored, the recipient of grace upon grace, destined by God to not only carry the Word of God on her lips and in her heart as all the other saints of God, but to also carry the Word of God in her womb. A resting place for the One who has no place to lay His head. A mother to the One who is begotten of God. The source of flesh and blood into which God was born. She was the source of life and nourishment for the Giver of Life and the for the One who nourishes body and soul with His body and blood. Indeed it is as Elizabeth prophesied by the Spirit: Blessed is Mary among women, and blessed is the fruit of her womb.

But as honored and blessed as the Virgin Mother is, more blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it. For those who hear the Word of God and keep it are they whom our Lord calls His mother and brothers. Thus, she who is the Mother of God according to the flesh is a child of God according to the Spirit. For as the Holy Spirit overshadowed the blessed Virgin and she conceived and gave birth to the Son of God, so that same Spirit, the Spirit of her Son, overshadows His Word and Sacraments, which give birth to many sons of God, born of water and the Spirit. In this way, the Virgin Mother is a picture of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church that we confess in the Creed.

The miracle of the Virgin Birth gives us a picture of how salvation is given to those who are conceived not by the Holy Spirit, but by man. For all but our Lord Jesus have fathers from whom we receive sin and death, passed on from generation to generation. The seed of Adam is infected and diseased, not giving life but bringing death. For death reigned from Adam until Christ, taking victim after victim. But in Christ there is victory over death. God remembers His mercy, promised to Abraham, and gives His Son who is able to give life even where death reigns. And just as God once gave the Life of the world through the womb of the Virgin, so even now He gives you that life through His Church. The blood of Jesus, blood received from His mother and made the blood of God by His Father, washes you clean from all sin and shame, guilt and fear, and gives you a share in the life of God. For with His blood you are purchased, bought back from sin, death, and Hades. And by it you are made sons and daughters of God, conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Church.

So also, the story of St. Mary gives us a picture, an example of how God cares for us. For just as God gave His Son a mother to care for and love Him as only a mother can, so He gives you a mother. Not one of flesh and blood but one of the Spirit of God. He gives you His Church in whom He conceives His saints and by whom He brings forth life where death reigns. Therefore rejoice! Rejoice that God has given you a Mother. A Mother who cares for you and feeds you, a place to lay your head and rest in an otherwise restless and chaotic world. He has not left you to fight the good fight on your own, to stand on your own two feet, to make your

way in this world, to slug it out with the devil and all his minions. Instead He gives you a Mother to hold you and comfort you; to kiss your sinful boo-boos and remind you that everything is going to be okay. A Mother to worry and fret over you so and to tell you whom to play with and whom to avoid. He gives you the Church as your Mother. Do not mishear me. I am not saying that it is the Church that gives you salvation; it is God alone who works faith in a man's heart. But He works that faith, He gives and sustains the life you have in Christ through His Church. For it is His Church who bears the Word of God and has been given the Sacraments whereby we receive God Himself. This is no mysticism or medieval mumbo-jumbo. There's no ploy here for you to worship the Church instead of or along side of God. This is the truth as it is set forth in Scripture.

The Church is not just clergy or just laity. It is both. The Lord Jesus, when He ascended on high, gave gifts to men: apostles, prophets, pastors and teachers. And those who are called into this office give the gifts of God as stewards of the mysteries of God, giving them as they have been called to do. So also you are console and comfort one another with the Word of God. You are to forgive as it has been forgiven and to show mercy even as God has shown you mercy. You are to love, laying down your life for one another. The Church of God is built upon the witness of the apostles and prophets and she is full of priests who intercede on one another's behalf. Thus it is written, "the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to one another that you may be healed. For the prayers of a righteous man availeth much."

No individual owns the Bible or the Sacraments. These things are not abstract realities to be grasped by reason along. Indeed, they cannot be grasped by reason. For who can reason that God resides in Words or that He saves with water? Who can fathom that God is in bread and wine, that these things carry the life of God? These things are concrete realities; spoken into existence by the eternal Word. And they belong to no one individual but to the Church and she gives them out to all of her children. No exceptions. One child does not get more attention and love than another. One child is not favored over another. You are all special in her sight. You are all the apple of your Father's eye. And you are all raised on your Mother's knee. Hearing the wonderful things your Father has done for you.

You hear from your Mother, even before you can read, the Words of God read and spoken to you with love and compassion; correcting you where you err and encouraging you when you are in need. You hear from her how, though because of your sin you are weak and of lowly estate, your Father sent His Son, the Lord Jesus, born under the Law to redeem you who are under the Law, that He is strong and lifts you up on high. He exalts you far above the cherubim and you are more glorious than the seraphim. You lead their praises singing, "Alleluia!" And now you, a purer Virgin than your forerunner, a more beautiful Bride than Joseph's betrothed, you are the bearer of the eternal Word for He dwells within you.

And indeed it is you, O Church of God that picks up Mary's song, the Magnificat, as your own. For it is we upon whom the Spirit of God has fallen that go around the altar of God proclaiming thanksgiving aloud and telling all His wondrous deeds. Our soul magnifies the Lord and our spirit rejoices in God our Savior. For He has done great things to us, and holy is His name. His mercy is for those who fear Him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with His arm. For though the arm of the Lord appeared weak, dying a criminal's death on the cross, it is actually strong, enduring the cross, drinking the chalice of the wrath of God for those whom the Lord has chosen. The arm of the Lord spilled His blood so that there is redemption promised in Him. And blessed are you, O Church of God, for you believed that

there is a fulfillment of the promise spoken to you, redemption through the blood of Mary's Son.

In the name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.

✠ AMEN ✠