

Fr. Michael Polsky: The Orthodox Veneration of the Virgin Mary



Icon of the Annunciation:

Egg tempera on wood panel, by Fr. Patrick Doolan, St. Gregory of Sinai Monastery

Veneration of the Virgin Mary

By Protopresbyter Michael Polsky

“The Mighty One hath done great things to me” (Luke 1:49).

Introduction

THE VENERATION OF THE MOTHER OF THE LORD is of the same order as the veneration of all the saints, and shares with it a common foundation; excepting

only that among the saints, the Most Holy Virgin Mary naturally occupies the first place and stands higher than them all.

The “blessing” or veneration of the Most Holy and blessed Virgin is expressed in the Church of Christ on earth, in the first instance, by hymns and readings, praising and glorifying her in the divine services. The principal, solemn church hymns are texts from the sacred Scriptures: the salutation of the Angel, *Rejoice, full of grace, the Lord is with thee* (Luke 1:28), and the hymn of the Most Holy Virgin herself, *My soul doth magnify the Lord* (v.46).

The second expression of her veneration is manifest in the prayerful invocation of her aid in the multifarious needs of our temporal life and for our eternal salvation. Such prayer to the Virgin, and to all the saints, is based on the firm conviction of Orthodox Christians that all who have left the body and the earth are alive, and that the Heavenly and earthly Church are united under the one Head, Christ, that she is indeed His one Body, comprised of many members, who show compassion for one another and support one another (Luke 20; Eph. 1:10; Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12).

But how naturally, simply and easily for the Church of Christ is her understanding of the great things of the Most Holy Virgin, which the Mighty One hath done for her, and which are the bases and the aspects of her veneration; and, on the contrary, how difficult for others, who are outside the Body of Christ which is the Church, is such understanding and remembrance, whereby with all their desire and with their whole soul they might gain salvation for themselves [exact meaning not clear, part of the text here is missing; the page margin having been lost—transl.]. At the same time, the common, authoritative (for Christians within the Church and outside her) foundation is the pure fount of knowledge, the Word of God, the Sacred Scriptures, which they find it difficult to agree about, because it is difficult for people outside the Church to be ministers of the New Testament, not according to the letter, but of the spirit (2 Cor. 3:6), and it is difficult for them to trust that the very same Holy Spirit, Who granted the Scriptures, also abides in the Church and that the Scriptures themselves were only granted to the Church on the assumption that unchangeably and inseparably the Holy Spirit, Who shall teach you all things (John 14:26), will abide within her. They believe that the Holy Spirit is in the Scriptures,

but that in like power the Holy Spirit is unfailingly also in the Church they do not actually believe, and because they doubt this they have only the letter of Scripture without the spirit and life, without experiences, without incidents, without history, without practice, without life in Christ. Woe to those Christians outside the Church! It is difficult for them, the poor ones, to be saved, for what “increase” in the knowledge of God (Col. 1:10) can they offer unto God, not themselves having the Holy Spirit?

May the Lord help us to unfold the teaching of Christ’s Church about the veneration of the Most Holy Virgin Mary in accordance with the mind and spirit of the Word of God, and in accordance with the witness of the holy and God-inspired Fathers of the Church of the first centuries of Christianity, those who were immediately united to the Apostolic age, and were good witnesses of the activity of the Spirit of God in their minds, their words, their actions and in the whole of their church-life.

I. The Virgin Mary and Eve

CHRIST proceeded forth from the Virgin Mary, as Adam had from the earth: Adam by the inbreathing of the Spirit of God—*And breathed into him the breath of life*;—and Christ by the coming of the Holy Spirit—*the Holy Spirit shall come upon thee*—was said of the Virgin Mary. Thus Christ came forth according to the likeness of Adam (Gen 2:7; Luke 1:35).

But Christ also proceeded forth accordingly to the likeness of Eve: thus Eve came forth from a father without a mother (“*from the rib*”), so Christ came forth from a mother without a father (she “*knew not a husband*”). Just as the first Adam brought forth from Eve without the participation of a woman, so Mary brought forth Christ without the participation of a man. Eve appeared only by the “seed” of a man, and Christ appeared only by the “seed” of a woman. The means whereby Eve and Christ came into being are identical: both received human nature by the power of God from one sex. At first the woman (Eve) did so from a man, and thereafter the man (Christ) did so from a woman. Thus Christ received the nature of the first Adam, the nature of all mankind, or the whole Adam from Mary, who gave Him this nature of Adam. For this reason as Adam said of Eve so can we say of Mary,

and through her even of Christ: *This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh.* Through the Virgin Mary our nature exists in Christ, the Second Adam (Genesis 2:21, 23; Luke 1:34).

Just as Christ is the Second Adam, so Mary is the second Eve. This is evident from a comparison of the temptation of Eve with the Annunciation of Mary.

Then there was a manifestation of a fallen Angel, the serpent, the devil. Here there is a manifestation of a holy Angel, Gabriel. Genesis 3:1 (Rev. 20:2) Luke 1:26.

The first promised Eve, that through her man would be as God,—*ye shall be as gods.* The second promised Mary that through her God would become man—*He shall be called the Son of the Most High ... the Son of God. Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.* Genesis 3:4—Luke 1:32, 35; Matt. 1:23.

Through Eve—the fall; through Mary—salvation. When Eve was deluded and desired to be as God, she was not made God. Now God is made man so that man can in reality become divine, and first of all Mary does so, in whom He came, as being the first of all the race of man. Woman was the first to fall, and the first to be saved.

Eve was shown as one who did not trust God's commandments, who did not believe God and who longed to receive divinization by her own empirical knowledge. Mary trusted God completely; in this faith she rejected knowledge (I know not a man, and it was not necessary to know one), and she said: *Be it unto me according to thy word.* Then there was a fall for her [Eve], and through doubt and unbelief for all people; here there is salvation for her [Mary], and through faith for all people. Genesis 3:6—Luke 1:34, 37, 45.

Eve showed disobedience to God and to His commandment—*thou shalt not eat of it (of the tree) ... she took of the fruit thereof and did eat.* Mary was obedient to the will of God at the Annunciation without any doubt and she said: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord.* Genesis 2:17, 3:6—Luke 1:38.

Eve became proud in her thoughts—*ye shall be as gods.* Mary was the humble handmaid of the Lord, both in receiving the good tidings of the advent through her

of God in the flesh, and also even before this event, for which cause He had looked upon the lowliness of His handmaiden, and it was precisely for this quality of her soul that He turned His attention to her, and for it that He deemed her worthy to be His Mother. Then through pride Eve desired to be God, and now in humility Mary is deemed worthy to receive God into herself and give Him human nature for the sake of our salvation. Genesis 3:4—Luke 1:48.

Eve was deprived of the grace of the Holy Spirit and was no longer permitted to approach the tree of life. Mary received in herself the Son of God, Life Eternal; she found grace, God; she received the salutation, *Rejoice, full of grace! the Lord is with thee*, and she conceived according to the word: *the Holy Spirit shall come upon thee....*

In these first and very important examples we see that *God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble*. Genesis 3:24—Luke 1:28, 30, 35; James 4:6.

For her sin Eve was given over to the afflictions and pains of childbearing; Mary as one without a husband and one who had not sinned, painlessly gave birth to a Son.

But it was because Eve was seduced by the sweetness of the fruit of the tree of life, that a sword pierced the soul of Mary, when she saw her Son on the tree of the Cross. Christ redeemed the sin of Eve. The rib, from which Eve was fashioned, was pierced in the second Adam and, as a sign of expiation and cleansing of the first sin, blood and water poured therefrom. But to the Cross of her Son Mary brought her guiltless, redemptive moral affliction and suffering for the sin of Eve, because it was on account of the sin of Eve that her Son ascended the Cross. Mary suffered on account of Eve and at the very Cross itself, where the sin of Eve was washed away. Luke 2:35; John 19:34.

We see that if Christ is the second Adam, then Mary is in reality the second Eve, and if Eve was made as a help, meet for and like unto Adam (Gen. 2:18, 20), so Mary in all her qualities appeared as “*help, meet for and like unto*” the second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself And in so far as the greatness of the second Adam is boundless, so too the greatness of the second Eve is holy and exalted,

worthy of this Adam.

There is none among men to compare with her. At the beginning and in the middle of history, there stand two women, Eve and Mary. Eve is the mother of fallen and sinning mankind. Mary is the mother of a new, reborn mankind which is being saved. In the first there was the cause of universal evil; in the second, the cause of universal good.

II. The Life Story of the All-holy Virgin Mary from Her Birth Until the Annunciation

1. The Birth of the All-holy Virgin Mary. In the birth of the All-holy Virgin Mary we have the beginning of the the sacred history of the New Testament, the history of our salvation. It was the preparation for the incarnation of the Son of God, the advent of God in the flesh. Thereby that human nature, which was to receive God Himself, is made ready, that the race of man might be saved. This human nature had to be made worthy of God, had to be holy and immaculate; it needed a holy origin, upbringing and development. Her being chosen of God rests in the fact that she of all mankind must needs give to God reciprocally the common nature of mankind.

The time of the Virgin's birth is the time of the awaiting of the coming of the Messiah, Christ. Her parents are Joachim and Anna; he was of the kingly, and she of the high priestly, lineage.[1] The spouses, well advanced in age did not have any children. This was regarded as a disgrace among the people, and for this reason they were considered as deprived of God's blessing.

In abasement and humility they desired a child, as a mercy from God and to take away their disgrace and reproach among the people. In this way, humility, prayer and the holy promise to dedicate their child to God for service in the Temple were the spiritual prerequisite of its birth. And God heard them, and to them there was born a daughter, whom they called Mary. The name Mary is a translation from the Hebrew and it signifies: high, exalted over all.

The Mother of the Lord was in actuality born of pious parents, and indeed could only be the fruition of their spiritual endeavour, their heartfelt striving, and their tearful prayers to God. A spiritual existence could only be the fruit of the spirit, initiated not only according to the natural, blind inclinations of the flesh and the natural laws of the requirements of the nature of the flesh, but according to the aspirations of the spirit and through the action of the special mercy and grace of God for people, who were already elderly and whose flesh was withering, but who were living according to the spirit. If the origin be holy, so shall the whole, and if the root be holy, so are the branches (Rom 11:16). From a holy root there came forth a holy fruit.

An example of a promise with reference to a future child is given by the barren Hannah [Anna], the mother of the holy Prophet Samuel. *And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the Lord and wept sore. And she vowed a vow, and said, O Lord of Sabaoth! if Thou wilt indeed look upon the affliction of Thy handmaid, and remember me, and not forget Thine handmaid, but wilt give unto Thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life...* (1 Kings [Samuel] 1:10-11). Joachim and Anna also followed the example of the parents of the righteous Samuel.

The mother of the Saviour, a King according to His earthly descent and according to His eternal ministry, and High Priest of the future good things, naturally, had in herself to compass the two lines of descent, the royal and high priestly, in her people. By her father she was of the tribe of Judah and the house of David, and through her mother she was of the tribe of Levi and the house of Aaron. Although Christ came forth from a mother alone without a father, and Joseph was only the betrothed husband of Mary, the protector and guardian of her virginity and only the nominal father of the Saviour, yet the Saviour was not simply nominally of the royal house, but was in reality, through his mother and according to the flesh, of this house, of which in the person of David it had been said of the Lord, thy throne shall be established unto the ages (2 Kings [Samuel] 7:16). This throne could not be disestablished, and Mary actually was herself actually descended from the house of David that she might be the mother of the Lord.

2. The entrance Into the Temple of the All-holy Virgin Mary. When Mary was fully three years old, Joachim and Anna fulfilled their vow and brought her to the Temple in Jerusalem, that she might stay there in the Lord's service. The maiden, thus consecrated to God, was brought up at the Temple and lived nearby in the special apartments [attached thereto]. Customarily the high priest received and blessed all those consecrated to God at the gates of the Temple, but when they brought in the infant Mary, he, by the special inspiration of the Holy Spirit, led her into the Temple's Holy of Holies, where he himself was permitted to enter only once a year.

The All-holy Virgin Mary lived at the Temple until her fourteenth year, continuing in labours, in prayer and in the reading of the word of God, in the fulfilment of every virtue. But at that time it was necessary for her either to return to her parents or be given in marriage. As Joachim and Anna had at that time already reposed, and the All-holy Virgin had no desire to enter marriage, the priests of the Temple betrothed her to a distant relation, the elder Joseph, for him to be the guardian of her virginity.

The All-holy Virgin was consecrated to the Lord after fulfilling three years, following the example of the Old Testament injunction regarding the fruits of the trees: *"Three years shall it be uncircumcised unto you, it shall not be eaten of But in the fourth year all the fruit thereof shall be consecrated for the festivals of the Lord"* (Lev. 19:23-4).

Thus did Hannah say of her son Samuel: *"When the child shall be taken from the breast and weaned, then Will I bring him that he may appear before the Lord and there abide for ever."* *"And she brought him unto the house of the Lord in Silom, and the child was still an infant ... and she said: For this child I prayed, and the Lord hath fulfilled my petition, which I asked of Him; therefore also have I given him over to the Lord all the days of his life, that he may serve the Lord"* (1 Kings [Samuel] 1:21-28). In a like spirit, we must suppose, Mary's parents brought and gave over their little child in the Temple for service.

How far this comparison is true and represents the actual entry of the All-holy Virgin Mary into the Temple can be judged from the fact that that the All-holy

Virgin herself sang her festive song (“*My soul doth magnify the Lord*”) and her thanksgiving to God for her election to be His mother according to the flesh following the example of the song of Hannah, the mother of the Prophet Samuel (1 Kings 2:1-10): “*My heart rejoiceth in the Lord; mine horn is exalted in the Lord...*” It is evident that certain of the most important verses in the composition of these wondrous hymns parallel each other. Furthermore, we can not only find parallels between the All-holy Virgin and the Prophet Samuel in their birth and in their being presented in the Temple, but also in the fact that Samuel sought out and anointed the child David, the originator of the royal house, for the kingship, and Mary gave birth to his last Descendent, the Messiah, the King of an Eternal Kingdom. The ministers of the same work had the same upbringing.

Everyone who has the Holy Spirit is a temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19). In such a man, God abides by grace. But only in one person in the world did God Himself abide, in His very Being, in His nature, taking human nature and abiding in her—this one was the All-holy Virgin Mary. She is actually the Temple of God and the place of His presence and of His glory.

As she is thus herself the “Holy of Holies”—herself “the Ark”—, again the Lord shall be manifested (Ex. 22:25) unto the race of man, the All-holy Virgin does not simply enter the Temple but goes into the very Holy of Holies, behind the veil with its depictions of the Cherubims. Just as Simeon the God-receiver came by inspiration into the Temple to meet the Infant Lord (Luke 2:27), so also by the inspiration of God the high priest met the Virgin in an extraordinary way, and led her into the holy place, which corresponded to her. In “*the chambers built round the walls of the Temple, round the Temple and the oracle (the Holy of Holies), there in the chambers built around at the sides*” (3 Kings 6:5), which were by the second Temple, there it was that the All-holy Virgin spent her youth.

III. The Life Story of the All-holy Virgin Mary from the Annunciation to the Ascension of the Lord

1. The Annunciation. Why was it that for His incarnation God chose precisely the Virgin Mary from Nazareth? Like is drawn to like.

The Son of God, by the will of God the Father and the action of the Holy Spirit,

Could only take up His abode in such a Virgin, and could only receive human nature from such a human being, who was worthy thereof, and who according to the qualities of her soul was fitted to receive God in herself. From the account of the Annunciation to the All-holy Virgin it is clear that it was just such a Virgin that God sought, and that He found her in Mary.

With regard to the purposes of the incarnation of God, Mary was the best of all women on earth (“*Blessed art thou among women*”) and among all the tribes and generations of mankind (“All generations shall call her blessed”). That she might receive God in herself and might minister at the “mystery of piety,” which is the appearance in the world of “*God in the flesh*” (1 Tim. 3:16),—Mary was already sufficiently prepared on the day of the Annunciation.

God saves man, but not without man. He seeks him who will receive Him. And God sought in the world for a person through whom He might come amongst men.

God sought a “ladder” which would unite heaven with earth (Genesis 28:12).

God sought a “thorn bush” which would not be burned by the presence of His Divinity (Exodus 3:2).

God sought an “ark”—not one in which to place the tablets of the Law, but for the Word Incarnate Himself (Genesis 10:5).

He sought a “golden vessel” for the manna, the Bread That came down from Heaven, for His Son (Heb. 9:4; John 6:33).

He sought a “sanctuary” and “tabernacle,” in which He might “take up His abode among-men” (Exodus 25:8).

The time came for the incarnation of God, and the ancient “*figures for the time then present*” (Heb. 9:9) were realized in the tabernacle and ladder with a soul, in the bush, and ark and vessel which had a soul—in the Virgin.

For a long time, through many generations the faith was fostered, and at the last in Mary it achieved its highest development and perfection, its final limit and fulfilment.

She remembered the ninety year-old Sarah, who bore a son, when her husband was a hundred years old. She knew that Sarah had wrongfully doubted the fulfilment of God's promise: "*is anything too hard for the Lord?*" (Genesis 18:14). And the childless Rebecca received twins of God in no other way save by the fervent prayer of her husband (Gen. 25:2 1). The grief-stricken Rachel had children only by God's mercy (Genesis 30:22). The mother of Sampson conceived him only after the annunciation from the Lord's Angel (Judges 13:2-3). Hannah (Anna) gave birth to Samuel after many afflictions, prayers and warm tears, in accordance with the prophecy of the High Priest Eli (1 Kings 1:2-17). Finally, her kinswoman, Elizabeth, who had been called barren, conceived John the Baptist in her old age (Luke 1:36). But all these holy women had husbands, and God's great help was manifested through natural human powers. For this reason, at the Angel's greeting, Mary posed the question: "*How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?*" And then she makes a last effort of faith and the most exalted that is possible to man: that God overcomes the laws of nature and does whatsoever He wills. She believes, that without a husband, by the "*power of the Most High,*" she will have a Son.

The faith of the All-holy Virgin was marked by perfect selflessness and complete forgetfulness of self. To be pregnant in her condition as a virgin betrothed to an elder for the very purpose of guarding her virginity, [2] this entailed grieving the holy elder Joseph, to appear to have changed her calling, to subject herself to disgrace and dishonour before men, and even to a death sentence according to the law. But the power of her faith was so strong that such considerations did not restrain her, even though the danger was later to be manifest in actuality when the godly elder desired to put her away, surrendering her to the will of God and to personal responsibility for her action (Matthew 1:19). Her trust in God was without limit, and from this trust there was born humility and submission to God along with a courage and a fearlessness, which empowered her for this greatest of struggles.

The Angel testified to the Virgin: *“Thou hast found grace with God”* (Luke 1:30). Before the Angel’s greeting, throughout the course of her young life, she had found God’s mercy. In what way? How? Evidently, through faith, obedience and humility. By these virtues—which are the very essence of the holy nature common to all mankind and are the spiritual strength of the woman—with which, in her battle with the devil, she, by the dispensation of God, struck him, in his spirit of faithlessness, disobedience and pride, on the head. By the power of these virtues, even the “seed of the woman,” Jesus Christ, conquered the devil. He, Who was to appear among men as an example of humility, as the path to salvation—*“I am meek and lowly of heart”* (Matt. 11:29)—and by a humility which was precisely that of a human nature and not only of the Divine, He was to conquer the devil (Matt. 4:1-10). He had to receive that human nature, soul and body, from the most humble handmaiden of the Lord. Christ, *“the seed of the woman”* (Genesis 3:15), so that He might crush the serpent in the head, had to be authentically the seed of the woman, the bearer of a true humility taken from her common human nature. It was precisely for this reason that *“He looked upon the lowliness of His handmaiden”* and *“exalted”* her *“of low degree”* (Luke 1:48, 52).

Human nature in her was actually prepared for the saving Divine act by humility, the moral quality which is most important for the raising up again of humanity which had fallen through pride. *“And upon him will I look,”* says the Lord, *“on him that is humble and broken of heart, and trembleth at My words”* (Es. 66:2). And He looked upon her and made her a new throne of the Divinity, because He Himself said of His dwelling-place: *“I dwell in the high heaven and the holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit”* (Es. 57:15). Thus, the deeds and words of God closely correspond and are true to each other, and the All-holy Virgin Mary with the particular qualities of her character was distinctly and clearly indicated in the Sacred Scriptures in the strength of those qualities, which were not in her circumstantially, nor accidentally, nor as being commonly found among all virgins, with all their inadequacies, but that she might participate in the work of the salvation of mankind.

That which Eve threw off course and marred in her soul, Mary corrected, and raised up within herself and was made “amenable” to the Lord Himself, she

responded to God's purposes, she prepared the human nature within her to offer it as a gift to God for His work of salvation. All that could be done by human efforts for her personal sanctity Mary did, leaving to the Divine energies only the salvation of her nature unto life eternal, which salvation was worked in Christ for all mankind.

In her humanity was prepared, made ready for the reception of God, given in her all that it could be given: all the faith, all the humility, all the love towards God, all its perfection was offered to God as a gift. More than this it could not offer. After this there could only be the descent of the Divinity upon a soil tilled and made ready. And God perceived on the ground the beauty of man, and that in her, and so in her He found for Himself a place, where He might unite the earthly and the heavenly. The golden vessel for the heavenly manna was readied, and the tabernacle, in which God would dwell, was set up, the ark was made for the Word of God, the new tablets [i.e. as in the tablets of stone on which the Law was inscribed by God—*ed.*].

The Virgin Mary, it is she who is the objective of the Old Testament Church. If the race of man was prepared to receive the Saviour, for the coming of God upon earth, then it was prepared in her, that it might offer her. She is the one, through whom it was possible to receive Christ on earth. All the righteousness of the Old Testament Church was concentrated in her. She is the most exalted of all and the holiest that the Old Covenant could achieve in awaiting the Messiah.

The race of man had to give of itself the New Eve, the new mother of mankind, one being saved and faithful, in place of one unbelieving and sinning.

Thus the All-holy Virgin is the culmination and embodiment of all that had gone before in the Old Testament Church.

2. The Obedience of the Child Jesus to His Mother (Luke 2:41-52). The All-holy Virgin and Joseph sought for the Child Jesus "with great sorrowing" for the course of three days, until in the end they found Him in the Temple at Jerusalem "in the midst of the doctors." With what grief, meekness and tenderness did the All-holy Virgin pronounce those words of reproach: "*Child, why hast Thou thus dealt with*

us?” Such pain Thou hast occasioned, what suffering Thou hast brought; how Thou hast exhausted us by this behaviour! “*Behold, Thy father and I ...*” What hast Thou done unto us?

“*How is it that ye sought Me? Wist ye not that I must be about My Father’s business?*” Of course, they knew perfectly well that Joseph was not His father. “*And they understood not the saying which He spake unto them,*” as to how, precisely, He must be about His heavenly Father’s business. And Mary “*kept all these sayings in her heart,*” as things precious, beloved and noteworthy, but yet not understood until the time. How the work of this Child would develop, how it would be manifest, how the salvation of people would be effected—all this was hidden from the Mother of the Lord. She did not comprehend, but she believed and she kept His words with love and humility. And the Child did not reject or decline from the demands of parental obedience. Whilst possessing the highest rights and already fully aware of His duty, He did not disregard the lowlier human duties and He took to heart the “great sorrow” and the concern of those related to Him by the flesh. “*And was subject unto them.*” No more did He disobey or grieve His mother. Under her protection, subject to her, in the normal way of family life He “*increased in wisdom and stature, and in the love of God and man.*” His being subject to His fleshly parents, and particularly to the Mother to whom only He was related according to the flesh, did not hinder His preparation for His ministry among the people, but rather it went along with the Divine plan and worked with that ministry. The Lord accepted obedience to the Heavenly Father and to the earthly mother in the first days of His conscious life as a child.

3. The Intercession of the Lord’s Mother for the People (John 2:1-11). The fact that the All-holy Virgin sincerely “*kept all these words, and pondered them in her heart,*” as well as those things which He said and which were said of Him (Luke 2:19, 51), and that she oversaw all the “*growing and strengthening in spirit, being filled with the wisdom and grace of God*” of her Child, as an Infant, Youth and mature Man (Luke 2:40, 52) led in the end to her calling her Son to work His first miracle, to the beginning of signs and wonders for the salvation of the people, to the very start of His ministry, and to the conversion to the Faith of His first disciples. Her presence and participation in this definite and crucial moment in His life and work, at the marriage in Cana of Galilee, was necessary, From His mother

the Lord received the first call to work miracles, and to take up His acts of mercy and benefaction towards the race of man.

The lack of wine at the marriage feast was the circumstance which required the All-holy Virgin to inform her Son and desire Him to help the poor people. The need and poverty in the house were apparent. Acquaintances of the holy family of the poor carpenter from Nazareth had with difficulty provided a wedding meal, but it was soon finished. It was only so that the wedding supper should not be overshadowed by the insufficiency and poverty becoming apparent, that the heart of the All-holy Virgin was disclosed as being sensitive to the needs of her neighbour, compassionate, sincerely loving, responsive, touchingly caring and tender.

And for the first time we hear of an appeal, intercession and petition for the needs of man from the lips of the Mother of God to her Divine Son, just as He begins the work of the salvation of mankind. The kindhearted heart of the All-holy Virgin Mary, herself the representative of the race of man and sensitive to the afflictions of the latter, intercedes; it brings the needs of people before the Saviour and calls Him to the work of salvation and to the working of His first miracle at the very outset of His ministry.

“They have no wine,” says the Virgin. *“What is that to Me and thee?”* [The translation in most Protestant versions of the Gospels has “What have I to do with thee?” as if the Saviour, Who gave us the commandment to honour our parents (Exodus 20:12) were somehow rejecting His own mother. No doubt the translators were unduly influenced by their preconceived ideas in this instance—*ed.*] or put another way, What matter is it to Me and you that they have no wine? According to the understanding of men, it is not the concern of us, as guests; let the hosts themselves worry about this. The Lord has His own thoughts and concerns, which are more important and which now concern Him. But if in these words, *“What is that to Me and thee,”* and further on, *“Mine hour is not yet come,”* there is a [deeper] thought, then it means this: Why do you appeal to Me and remind Me about the hour which is not yet come? The Lord gives His mother’s words, *“They have no wine,”* a completely different meaning. She speaks of one thing, and at the

same time He considers another, and reflection on this other thing is not consonant with a wedding feast for Him and does not bring joy. Why do you speak of this now? *“For His hour”* was to be that supper and that night, of which the Gospel speaks, saying *“Jesus, knowing that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father”*... (John 13:1). The start of His ministry was at a wedding supper, and the consummation and conclusion of the ministry was to be at the Mystical Supper with the disciples. Both here and there, there would be wine. At the first supper there is the changing of the water into wine; at the second, wine into blood. And both there and here it is for the disciples. His ministry starts and concludes with one miracle in similar circumstances. *“Why are you concerned about the wine, when My hour has not yet come?”*—in such a way does the Lord speak. This tender, mild rebuke against an innocent and slight reminder concerning the future wine of His blood not only does not, however, negate the Virgin’s request, but to the contrary He wholly accepts that request. And thus indeed it is that the All-holy Virgin understood the words of her Son, that her petition was heard and would be fulfilled, and so as a ready and quick helper she gave her directions to the servants.

“Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it,” she said. In these words there is contained the one commandment, the one teaching of the holy Virgin concerning her Son. These words are crucial and the outline the only means of salvation for all—obedience to her Son. The Mother of the Lord speaks thus, and so from heaven does His Father also speak: *“This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well-pleased, hear ye Him”* (Matt. 17:5). These words of the All-holy Virgin are wholly sufficient to inform us how she thought of her Son. These words reveal how much she knew of His Divine power, what she expected of Him, how she desired people should relate to Him. *“Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it.”* See what a sermon the race of man has for itself from the lips of the All-holy Virgin Mary at the very outset, at the very start of the Lord’s ministry.

“This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Gallilee.” This beginning was inaugurated at the petition of His Mother, who was sensitive to people’s needs. The first petition of the Mother coincided with the beginning of the Saviour’s ministry and with the first miracle of His mercy and love towards the race of man. Thereafter His mercy was poured forth in miracles without end, but for the

inauguration, heart-felt participation and petition for this He first hearkened unto His Mother, the intercessor before Him concerning the needs of mankind.

“And manifested forth His glory.” Only thirty years after His birth, the Lord through this miracle manifested His glory before the people. Until this moment, that glory had been hidden—no one knew of it, except the All-holy Virgin. Now at the wedding she alone is found to be conversant with His actual power, and she contributed to its manifestation both by her petition to her Son and by her instruction to the servants. Her role was replete with meekness and humility. Nothing was manifest except kindheartedness, the movement of a heart which lived by love. She herself can do nothing, and can give no other help other than directing [us] to her Son. She has no glory of any kind for herself and does not seek it, but arranges all for the glory of the Son. She is the handmaiden of the glory of God.

“And His disciples believed on Him.” Naturally they only now believed on Him, recognizing in Him the power of God. The All-holy Virgin did not need this confirmation. From Him she only needed help for the people. But earlier, before the holy Apostles and many times more than they, she knew her Son, believed in Him and had served Him all her life. Having come to believe in the Saviour not without her mediation, the Apostles could learn from no one more than from her the details of the Annunciation and the Nativity of Christ, and they recorded this in the Gospels exactly as she had handed it down and as she desired. In faith and service to Christ she thus led the holy Apostles as also in sequence of time, and she did so as well in the power and depth of her own faith, which did not experience those doubts which the faith of the holy Apostles experienced. She excelled and was senior to the holy Apostles in all things.

4. The Endeavour of the Lord’s Mother to Protect Her Son (Mark 3:30-35). In Capernaum the Lord and His disciples *“went into an house, and the multitude cometh together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread. And when those close to Him heard (where He was), they went out to lay hold on Him: for they said, He is beside Himself. And the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He hath Beelzebub, and by the power of the prince of demons casteth He out*

demons.” It was rumoured among the people that He was beside Himself. It was not that all those close to Him themselves thought this and believed this, but this rumour necessitated their coming to take Him home. The scribes from Jerusalem said straight out that He was possessed of demons. More than once there arose divisions among the Jews concerning Him, and some said directly, “*He hath a demon, and is mad; why hear ye Him?*” (John 10:20).

What did the mother feel, when her Son had to bear these insults? How did she bear with the blasphemy and calumny, which the mass of unbelievers and evil people wove around Him? How painful it was for her, how she suffered for her Son, knowing Him and understanding Him as only a mother can. In what other way could she protect her own dear and darling Son, save only by coming to “take Him” home from amidst the company of the unbelieving? If they were dishonouring Him and slandering Him in this way, was it not better that He depart from among those evil people? Only such an impulse of compassion of the Mother towards her Son, and pain for Him, and the desire to protect and safeguard Him from the evil rumours of the people and the slanders can explain this enclavour to take the Lord home. [In English translations this desire is ascribed to the Lord’s “friends;” but the Slavonic / Russian, which Fr. Michael uses, has “close ones” which would include His kinsmen and thus particularly His mother, and see the following—transl.]

“*Then came His mother and His brethren, and standing outside the house, sent unto Him to call Him*” (Mark 3:31). Although the “*Lord’s brethren*” (Acts 1:14, 1 Cor. 9:5) later turn out to be numbered among the Apostles and are themselves made such, yet concerning some of them it is permissible to say that at the start they “*did not believe in Him*” (John 7:2-10). Nonetheless all the kinsfolk of the Saviour according to the flesh shared a common concern for Him and were of one mind with His mother in desiring to take Him out from among those who did not wish Him well.

The Lord always employed teaching only from life, deriving from life, and taught from life, and every circumstance in life gave Him a subject for instruction. So it is here. His kinsfolk are calling for Him? O, He has many kinsfolk! — “*Whosoever*

shall do the will of God, the same is My brother, and My sister, and mother,” said the Lord. In this way, from relatives according to the flesh only, [He indicates] one that is His true relative, according to the spirit, and not only according to the flesh. And we saw that she who was uniquely a relative according to the spirit of Christ the Son of God was His mother according to the flesh. She, and all those who, in this same power, are related to her according to the spirit of obedience to the will of God, are made His true kinsmen: mother, sisters, brothers.

He Who taught that *“every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life”* (Matt. 19:29), naturally himself fulfilled all this, and He left His relatives according to the flesh that He might obtain for Himself hundreds and thousands more kinsfolk for the Kingdom of God. But if the Lord taught, *“Honour thy father and thy mother”* (Matt. 19:19), then His leaving them was not dishonouring them but a form of higher honour. Such then as were close and dear to Him, as they were, He obtains by the multitude.

The Gospel does not recount whether, when they called for Him, the Lord was seen by his relations or whether He was not seen by them. And many of the commonplace events of the Lord’s life are not recounted. However, we do know of the love of Christ, how He, after as it were raising an objection to His mother, fulfilled her request in Cana, how, after as it were refusing help to the Canaanitish woman, He did heal her daughter (Matt. 15:22), how not being under an obligation to pay tax to the Temple, He nonetheless paid it (Matt. 17:24). It was just the same here; of course He fulfilled the wish of His relatives and saw them, and calmed them down, and reminded them once again that He *“must be about”* His *“Father’s business,”* in the service of the will of the Father. The Lord, without rejecting the love of His kinsfolk, directed it through a true, spiritual, and not a carnal, channel. An earthly love, that which is carnal and a temptation, that which turns aside from the struggle for salvation, was shown Christ not only by His kinsmen but even by the most devoted of the Apostles, Peter (Matthew 16:23).

5. The Blessing of the Virgin Mary by the Woman in the Crowd (Luke 11:27-28).

“As He spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto Him, Blessed is the womb that bare Thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked! But He said, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.”

The woman’s delight at the Lord’s words, for *“a multitude of the people heard him gladly”* (Mark 12:37), was naturally transferred to the person of the Divine Preacher Himself. It was precisely because He was so wondrous, beautiful and endlessly wise that His mother, having such a Son, was fortunate and so blessed. The woman enters into the joy of His mother, ingenuously envying her, and in praising her Son in the first place, through Him she also praises His mother. But He, *“receiving not honour from man”* (John 5:41), Himself blesses all those who hear the word of God and keep it. This is true blessedness. For this reason actually He is blessed Himself, as the archetype of fulfilling the word of God, and blessed also, precisely through this fulfilling of the word of God, is His mother, for only through its fulfilment was she deemed worthy to be the Mother of the Lord. Herein is the essence of blessedness both for her and for everyone. If the woman proposes that His mother is blessed, then let her come to know why she is blessed and how she herself might be made blessed together with her and others. Like the Mother of the Lord, all those who with her keep the word of God are worthy of blessing and glorification. That which is unto the salvation of all is what is important to the Lord in every instance. How was the All-holy Virgin Mary made Mother of the Lord? And, by the same token, how are those, who after her example, made His kinsfolk? She recognized the will of God. Only this brought her so close to the Lord. In this fact and on this basis is the cause of her kinship with the Lord and that of every man; it is the condition on which each person can be made His kinsman, as was the All-holy Virgin Mary.

The “blessed among women” receives a blessing from women in the person of this woman. Even during the lifetime of the Lord Jesus Christ, before Him and in His hearing this blessing was pronounced and it was accepted by Him. And He has set up His mother as an example to all, manifesting the essence of her righteousness, thanks to which she became His mother.

6. The Lord’s Love for His Mother (John 19:26-27). Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother and the other women. *“When Jesus therefore saw His mother,*

and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, He saith unto His mother: Woman, behold thy son! Then saith He to the disciple: Behold, thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto himself.”

Until this time the mother of the Lord did not need any such protection, because she had such in the person of her own Son, Who always cared for His mother. Now another period dawns. The mother is bereaved, losing the support and protection of her only Son. She is left alone.

It is clear from Christ's action on the cross, that the Lord's care for His mother was constant but that only now does its root cause emerge in the change in her position, when His care for her is about to be curtailed and brought to a close. There remains only for Him to make His last dispositions concerning her settlement.

The Lord always had love for His mother according to the flesh, actually an earthly love, and He had a concern for her material and spiritual wellbeing throughout all His life, from infancy, from His first conscious days, when He could only be “subject” unto her (Luke 2:51). It is only Such an ever-present concern which can explain this last [expression of], concern for her.

The beloved disciple of the Lord, who alone was able, because of the particular qualities of his character, to deputize for the Lord Himself with regard to His All-pure Mother, became a new Son for her in place of Him, and he is the greatest witness that the Lord loved and revered His mother. This is greater and better than what He was able to do for her. It was only through His beloved disciple that He was able to convey, express and manifest His love to His mother to a sufficient degree.

The mother of the Lord is mother only of Him alone, the Divine Person Who, for our salvation, voluntarily accepted human nature from her. Uniquely among all the mothers of the whole world, she was never left a former mother of a human person, for when the Lord left the world, He, her one and only born Son, made the human person, John, her son by adoption. Just as He Himself, not being the Son of Joseph, was adopted by him, so now in place of Himself, Mary adopts John. This was her first son from among the peoples, from among human beings, and in his person all

Christians become her sons and daughters in this way. You see the common nature of mankind, taken from her by the Lord, actually made her mother of the whole of mankind. For this reason, having made John hers by adoption, the Lord also makes all of us, Christians, hers by adoption, and grants her permission to be called the mother of all peoples, even though essentially, by nature, she is mother only of the one Divine Person, her Son. In John, in her first son from among people, we, all peoples, and more especially the Christians, become her children.

When the Lord had completed the work of redemption for the people and offered human nature itself in sacrifice, timelily [This term is unclear. Does he mean “in due time” or “at the same time” — *webmaster*] was the first bearer of His redeemed nature made fully mother of His beloved disciple and of all people. From this time forth, His mother becomes mother of all. This is the New Eve and “*mother of all the living*” (Gen. 3:20). Just as after the fall into sin Adam named his wife, so after the redemption of Adam’s sin the Lord called His Mother. Mary is first of the redeemed, but after her then all peoples.

We see, in accordance with the writings of the Gospel, the Mother of the Lord in an advisory way taking part at the start of the Lord’s manifestation on earth, in its middle, at His approaching the ministry that was saving for the whole race of mankind, and at the end of His earthly life. In these accounts from the Holy Gospel there is quite sufficient substance to indicate what significance the Mother of the Lord has in the work which He perfected for the salvation of people. In the most essential moments of the Lord’s ministry, all the holy lineaments of her character are manifest, and her relationship with her Son and with people are shown with sufficient clarity and expression. The short references of the Word of God concerning the All-holy Virgin Mary are also replete with the deepest significance and edification, as are all the other words of Scripture. Her greatness is clearly recognized, and the honouring of her blessedness and her being blessed among all generations are firmly, reasonably and thoroughly founded by the same Divine Word.

IV. The Life History of the All-holy Virgin Mary from the Lord’s Ascension Until Her Death

1. The Accord of All with the Lord's Mother (Acts 1: 14). *"Then returned they (from the mount of the Ascension) ... and they went up into an upper room, where abode (all the Apostles)... These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with certain of the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brethren."*

After the Lord's Ascension there came about a fundamental change in the mutual relations of all the first believers. The Holy Apostles had been inseparably close to the Lord, and after them there often followed many women (Luke 8:1-3; Matt. 27:55). Now the orphaned community is all gathered together, not travelling, and they are to be found in one place. And the Mother of Jesus and His brothers are with them. The "unbelief," doubts and uneasiness of His brothers are at an end, as is their closeness according to the flesh with the Great Man. There comes instead a general concord, which is now expressed in prayer and supplication. There were many women among them, for the company numbered about "*an hundred and twenty*" (Acts 1:15), but only one of them is mentioned by name, the Mother of the Lord, and this even though formerly several of them were accounted for by name. It is fitting that now she alone has a mention, just as it is that earlier in His lifetime she was not mentioned in the number of the female companions of the Lord. That was not her time; she observed her Son from afar; she saw Him at home every time He was in His hometown; then she came to His Cross. Now she, as an active member of the Christian community, is together with the Apostles and all the community. This is why she alone is mentioned here. This fact was therefore worthy of note. The Lord is not with them in the flesh; the Mother of the Lord is. There came about an exceptional solidarity within the whole community and the Lord's Mother took her own appropriate place therein, putting her prayers and supplications behind the general cause. The concord of all was now a concord with the Mother of the Lord in the strength of her participation in the common assembly.

2. The Glorious Dormition of the All-holy Virgin Mary. Several years after the Ascension of the Lord into heaven, at a time when the All-holy Virgin was fervently praying to the Lord that she might "*be absent from the body and be*

present with the Lord,” she sighed “desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven” (2 Cor. 5:1-8)—for, to whom would it be more onerous than to her to be separated from the beloved Son?—then the Archangel Gabriel, her heavenly minister, appeared to her with the good tidings that in three days she would indeed be reunited with her Divine Son. The Mother of the Lord, God’s dwelling place on earth, would now herself be translated to God’s heavenly dwelling place.

The holy Apostles, the eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word, of God in the flesh, would behold the demise of her, whose flesh God Himself had born. And in the same way as the holy Apostle Philip, through the prompting of an Angel, went down on the way to Gaza, and was subsequently “*caught away*” by the Angel and “*found at Azotus*” (Acts 8:26, 39, 40), so also all the holy Apostles, who were dispersed throughout the world, were, by the Divine omnipotence, caught up from their various places and were gathered together at the death-bed of the All-holy *Theotokos*.

But the death of the All-holy Virgin was exactly a falling asleep [dormition]: it was without the slightest heaviness or conflict at the separation of her soul from the body that she, as it were, fell asleep. The Lord Himself, appearing with a company of the holy Angels and of the spirits of the righteous, received her immaculate soul. The Son repaid His debt to the mother and received her unto Himself in Heaven, as she had received Him unto herself on earth. The One Who was Himself mortal in the flesh which He had received from her, being a man, willed that she should die and surrender her soul into His hands.

However, the physical nature of mankind, which in Christ had resurrected, could not be wholly given over to death and corruption in the one from whom the Lord had received that nature.

Like her Son, she was subject to the natural law in her death, and she dies with her Son, so that she might with Him rise again unto all eternity. Being a heaven herself, she is taken up to heaven; as the throne of God, she goes to God’s throne. Her resurrection and ascension into heaven were assured, for she was not lesser than

the Prophets Enoch and Elias, who also have not seen corruption and the dissolution of their bodies. And it was not possible that the Lord would permit the dissolution of the most pure and most sanctified divine temple of His Mother, when He Himself had in three days raised up in Himself that temple which was destroyed in Him (John 2:19). Thus the Lord, Who rose on the third day, raised the All-holy Virgin on the third day.

On this day, at the request of the Apostle Thomas, who had arrived late for the repose and burial of the Mother of God, her tomb was opened, but within the body of the Virgin was not to be found. The evening of the very same day, the holy Apostles rose from table and, according to the sacred custom, took a portion which was set aside in the Lord's honour, and they began to glorify the All-holy Trinity and desired to intone "All-holy Trinity" or "Lord Jesus Christ, help us," when they saw the All-holy Virgin in the air with a multitude of Angels, and she spoke to them: "Rejoice! I am ever with you!" The Apostles exclaimed "All-holy *Theotokos*, help us."

Thus the life of the All-holy Virgin Mary from her birth until the Annunciation is known to Christ's Holy Church from two very important facts: the circumstances of her birth itself and her entry into the Temple and her upbringing therein. And, after the Ascension of the Lord, we know of her repose.

This pure, sacred Church Tradition has been kept as being in complete accord with the spirit and the letter of Sacred Scripture, and has been immovably established in the Church of Christ by the annual festal commemorations on the 8th September (Birth of the All-holy Virgin), 21st November (her Entry into the Temple), and 15th August (Dormition).

V. The Veneration of the Saints as a Foundation for the Veneration of the Virgin Mary

The veneration of the Virgin Mary has a common foundation with the veneration of all the saints, and only occupies first place in this veneration.

1. The Heavenly Life of the saints. This common foundation consists first of all in

the fact that, as the Word of God bears testimony, *“God is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for all live unto Him”* (Luke 20:38), that is that there are no dead at all with God. Death is only the separation of the soul from the body, and the soul’s life, which enlivened and has left the body, is maintained in God. And holy souls (which immediately after death have reached *“the first resurrection”* (Rev. 20:5), which is the blessedness of life eternal, even before the second resurrection, that is the resurrection of the body) *“are, as the angels of God in the heavens”* (Matt. 22:30).

The holy souls and the angels in the heavens, being genuinely alive, hear all and see all that comes to pass on earth; they rejoice with and suffer with, they pray for and beseech on behalf of, the world; they intercede.

“Abraham,” our father, says the Saviour, *“rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad”* (John 8:56). He saw our salvation.

But holy souls in the heavens, and particularly *“souls slain for the Word of God”* grieve over the triumph of unrighteousness on earth and they thirst for the victory of truth and for God’s judgment, praying: *“How long, O Master, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell I on the earth?”* (Rev. 6:9-10).

The angels deeply suffer alongside people in their sufferings and they pray for the destiny of whole peoples. *“The angel of the Lord ... said: O Lord Pantocrator, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah”* (Zach. 1:12). Himself full of kindheartedness towards men, the angel prays to the kindhearted God.

Just how precious each human soul is to the angels, who are so sensitively loving, is apparent from the fact that in the heavens *“there is joy among the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth”* (Luke 15:10).

“Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones,” said the Saviour of the children, *“for I say unto you, That in the heavens their angels do always behold the face of My heavenly Father”* (Matt. 18:10), that is, children have in their angels

their own protectors and intercessors before God. How is it then possible to “despise” children, when even the angels have such concern for them?

The Angels, being “*ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them that shall be heirs of salvation*” (Heb. 1:14) actually and palpably appear to people when their “*prayers are heard and*” their “*alms had in remembrance before God*” (Acts 10:31). They bear testimony to the prayers and almsgiving of people and to the fact that these are acceptable to God. They are mediators between God and man and ministers of God and of the salvation of people.

In the heavens there are representatives of all the saints of the Old and of the New Testaments (the twelve sons of Jacob or tribes of Israel, and the Twelve Apostles), that is, “*four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps and golden vials full of perfumes, which are the prayers of the saints*” (Rev. 5:8). And “*another angel*” in the heavens was given “*much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense with the prayers of the saints ascended up before God out of the angel’s hand*” (Rev. 8:3-4).

Are the prayers of these saints, both those in heaven and those on earth, offered up by angels and the elders in heaven to the throne of God? One must realize that the saints that are not yet in heaven, as well as those that are in heaven, also themselves pray before the throne of God. And they [the ones in heaven] not only pray themselves, but they also present to God the prayers of the other saints, which is those that are still on earth. For all Christians are referred as saints, because they are called to holiness (1 Thess. 4:7).

When saints on earth pray, angels and holy people in the heavens offer their prayers to God. And the prayers of those on earth are not carried up to God without the intermediacy of the heavenly saints.

The participation of the saints in the care of people on earth and in their salvation, their living love, the complete compassion are yet only a temporary, median, and incomplete beatitude which exists until the general resurrection and the judgment, only after which they will enjoy the fullness of blessedness and the joy of salvation for themselves and for all those that have been saved.

2. The Earthly Gifts of the Saints in the Heavens. The fact is that the holy inhabitants of Heaven are actually alive; they see, hear, know, feel and respond to all that happens on earth, and this truth contains within another very important fact: *that the holy people leave the earth with those very same qualities, skills, and gifts of grace, which they acquired while on earth, and they have lost nothing but their bodies*, and the limitations associated therewith. The heavenly gifts of the saints are but a continuation, strengthening and broadening of their earthly gifts.

Thus, to holy people on earth there belongs the gift of the knowledge of that which is hidden and mystical. The holy Prophet Achias [Ahijah], though he was blind, yet knew Jeroboam when he came to him. The Prophet Eliseus [Elisha] knew what Giezi [Gehazi] and the Syrians did, though they were far from him. The holy Apostle Peter discovered what Ananias and Sapphira had concealed (3 [2 Kings 14:4-6; 4 [2 Kings 5:25; 6:8; Acts 5:1-11). Thus it is wholly comprehensible that for the saints in the Heavens this ability is immeasurably extended, and is made theirs from the moment that their souls are separated from their bodies.

The prayer of the righteous for others has a particular significance. *“The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elias was a man ... as we are,”* and his prayer both stopped the rains and besought rain. The Lord said of Job the Righteous: *“My servant Job shall pray for you, for only his face will I accept”* (James 5:16-18; Job 42:8). And this is because *“if our heart condemn us not,”* says the holy Apostle, *“then we have confidence toward God, and whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight”* (2 John 3:21-22).

Such are the prayers of the holy Apostles for people: *“We also pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling,” “we do not cease to pray for you and to ask that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will,” “and this also we pray for, even your perfection”* (2 Thess. 1:11; Col. 1:9; 2 Cor. 13:9).

The holy Apostle says to the Christians on earth: *“we do not cease to pray for you.”* If the prayer of the Apostles on earth was unceasing, how is it possible that it

should cease when they are “*absent from the body, and present with the Lord*”? For, “*charity never faileth, but whether there be prophecies they shall fail, whether there be tongues they shall cease, whether there be knowledge it shall vanish away*” (Col. 1:9; 2 Cor. 5:8; 1 Cor. 13:8).

If the saints, while on earth, had love for people, and by this love they obtained an earnest of life eternal, then it is apparent that, when they pass over in love “*from death into life*” (1 John 3:14), they are not deprived of this love for people, but they continue to possess it, or else they would have been deprived of the Kingdom of God itself and would have ceased to experience it. If they had compassion for people on earth, if they had an unremitting desire for their salvation, if they had prayer for them before God; if here they heard and accepted requests for prayer, if they knew the needs and deeds of man, even those which are hidden and secret, and were able to help the people by the power of grace granted them by God and by their holy prayers before God, then they will lose none of these abilities when they are “*absent from the body, and present with the Lord.*” On the contrary, “*whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord*” and “*know in part,*” yet “*when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away*” (1 Cor. 13:9-10; 2 Cor. 5:6). In Heaven the saints have the fullness of gifts of grace and knowledge, and are always ready to help, and for this they have greater possibilities than they had while on earth.

It is clear from the undoubted truth of the Word of God that all that a man [spiritually] acquires on earth remains with him, and after his death with his soul, and it serves as an earnest of his future fate and of the blessedness of Paradise itself, and thus that this earthly life is a preparation for the Kingdom of Heaven. Everyone receives in accordance with what he has “*done while living in the body, whether it be good or bad*” (2 Cor. 5:10). “*Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap ... he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting*” (Gal. 6:7-8). “*We have passed from death unto life,*” says the Apostle, “*because we love the brethren.*” Every one who loves his brother already has eternal life abiding in him, and has already tasted the blessedness of the future life (1 John 3:14-15). Further: “*The Kingdom of God is within you*” (Luke 17:21).

In this way, the active love instilled into the souls of the saints here on earth abides

with them eternally in the Heavens.

Many and various are the gifts of grace of the saints which are so essential for the Church on earth. And as soon as the saints leave "*the body to be present with the Lord*" (2 Cor. 5:8) they cannot be deprived of and lose these gifts; rather they continue to possess them exclusively unto the profit of the Church on earth, that is, without any change they grant her aid through these very gifts of theirs. As long as the Church exists on earth, it is not possible that the saints should be left without a concern for her, and their gifts have significance only in this.

3. The Earthly and the Heavenly Church. We see that the Church, in both her earthly and heavenly states, is in reality the living Body of Christ, yet it is only a body when all her members, heavenly and earthly, are to be found in full mutual unity and have a living empathy and interaction between each other. If this living and complete bond does not exist between the heavenly and the earthly, the Church is not, and cannot be, the living Body of Christ.

The Word of God confirms that the purpose of Christ's coming was our salvation, that is, that the heavenly and the earthly Church should be united in the one Body of Christ under His one headship. And God "*hath gathered together in one the heavenly and the earthly under the head of Christ.*" Further, God "*raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavens.*" He set Him "*far above all ... and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come, ... hath set Him above all, as the Head of the Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all*" (Eph. 1:10, 20-23). "*God hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth*" (Phil. 2:9-10).

With whom we, as members of the earthly Church, are united in the heavens, the Word of God shows in detail. "*Ye are come unto Mount Sion and unto the city of the living God, to the heavenly Jerusalem and to the innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly of the Church of the firstborn, which are written in the heavens, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men who have achieved perfection, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the*

blood of sprinkling”... (Heb. 12:22-24). And the thousands of angels and the assembly of the firstborn, and the souls of the righteous, who have achieved salvation, are made close to us through Christ, Who “hath redeemed us from this vain age,” and exalted us in Himself to this His Kingdom. “For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell, and, having reconciled all things, whether they be earthly or heavenly, to Himself through Him, having made peace through Him, by the blood of His cross” (Col. 1: 9-20). Thus we are made “fellow citizens with the saints and those who are of God” (Eph. 2:19).

In this way, as it is with the members of the heavenly Church, so it is with those of the earthly: *“we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another” (Romans 12:5).* The heavenly and earthly Church are not separated, together it is the fulness and the one Body of Christ.

It is only with such an organic, full, living understanding of the Church as the living Body of Christ—in which all the members are in living communion, and with the Church, heavenly and earthly, comprising one whole, inseparably bound in Christ, a body wherein the members feel for one another—that the veneration of the All-holy Virgin and all the saints is possible.

4. The Saving Ministry of the Saints. A multitude of holy people of various conditions and callings have been saved in the Church and achieved the Kingdom of God. But the majority of those who have been saved have found salvation through repentance and the forgiveness of their sins, through the virtues of a believing heart, which have enabled them to make their own the blessedness of life eternal and to be known to God, the one Judge of all. And there are in the Church saints, who in saving themselves, greatly ministered unto the salvation of other people: by the example of their lives, their labours, the grace-granted gifts of wonder-working; direction, teaching, and by their powerful prayers to God for people.

“We have many members in one body, and all the members have not the same office.” According to the grace granted us, we have different gifts: preaching, ministry, instruction, exhortation, distribution, leadership, beneficence, the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, of faith, healing, wonderworking, prophecy, discernment of spirits, tongues ... (Romans 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-12). All these are

different gifts of one and the same Holy Spirit, Who abides in the Church, unto the profit of the Church.

The Holy Spirit is everywhere present, in every place, and in Him all Heaven, with all the angels, the saints and the All-holy Virgin, are close to us. By the Holy Spirit holy people on earth behold the secret and hidden things, and by Him they see and know everything in heaven. Peace and love, mercy and every grace of help proceed from God alone, as from a spring, and all the saints draw from this spring, being God's ministers.

The holy Apostles were only the instruments of God's power: "*God wrought not a few miracles by the hands of Paul,*" "*as testimony unto the word of His grace, He wrought signs and wonders by their hands,*" "*by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people*" (Acts 19:11; 14:3; 5:12).

Thus does the word of God bear witness to the one glory of God and to His one power, which acts through people who have yielded themselves unto Him as "*instruments of righteousness*" (Romans 6:13).

The Apostle Peter heals the lame man, and says: "*In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.*" And further to the people: "*Why marvel ye at this, or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or piety we made this man to walk? ... And His name through faith in His name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is of Him hath given him this healing in the presence of you all*" (Acts 3:6, 12, 16).

Besides the Lord Jesus Christ, "*there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved*" (Acts 4:12). And the All-holy Virgin, the holy angels and holy people, both in heaven and on earth, bear witness only to this saving Name, serving Him alone, and from Him only they draw forth everything needful for our salvation.

For a man who is parched and is perishing in a waterless desert, salvation consists only in a spring of water. But if he himself cannot get to that water, and someone else brings it to him, even though the water is essentially his saviour, yet because without its being brought to him he would have perished, he must needs reckon the bringer as his saviour too. Of such a man one can say that he saved you from death,

even though without the water he himself could not have been saved, but also the water without such a man conveying it would also not have saved the man's life. Christ in the Holy Spirit is a spring of water for life eternal. In such a way (as above) holy people save us, as ministers of God by the grace-filled gifts of God, by their prayers to God, by their labours for our salvation in Christ. Their every act in God and for God, and from God, is as if from the source of salvation. When the Apostle says, "*that I might save some of them*" (Romans 11: 14), he means salvation in the name of Christ, and not in his own name. "*He (the Apostle) shall tell thee the words by which thou shalt be saved with all thy household*" (see Acts 10). He laboured by the grace that was with him (1 Cor. 15:10) for your salvation... And if thus it was from the apostle it was necessary to expect salvation for oneself, nonetheless it was not from any other but from one in Christ, and by no other powers other than those of Christ.

Thus the Lord is the source of water, which alone saves all, the very power of salvation unto life eternal, but of this power the holy Apostles and others, their successors and holy people, perfected in their deeds, are the conveyors, and thus they are shown to be many secondary saviours. There is one Father, one Teacher and Leader, one Saviour and Intercessor and Mediator, even the Lord, but there are also lesser and secondary intercessors and mediators, and fathers, and teachers, and leaders, who are ministers of the One, who are indispensable for the salvation of the people and who are commissioned and appointed by the Lord.

There is a prayerful "*intercession of the many*" (see 2 Cor. 1:11).

Some "*fathers, teachers and leaders*" (Matt. 23:5-10) act for their own glory, for human glory, and in their own name (John 7:18; 12:43; 5:43); and there are others—fathers, teachers, and leaders—who act to the glory of God and in the name of Christ (1 Cor. 4:15; 12:28). These last do not do damage to the glory of God, but they serve only that glory and not themselves, and they are glorified by God Himself with His glory. "*Them that glorify Me, I will glorify,*" (1 Kings [Samuel] 2:30). "*Father, the glory which Thou gavest Me, I have given them*" (John 17:22).

Wherefore, “*we bless them which endure*” and have them “*for an example*” for ourselves (James 5:10-11). We must “*remember them which have the rule*” over us and “*follow their faith*” (Hebrews 13:7). Such are those holy people who are not on earth but who live in the memory of the members of the Church and never will be forgotten because of their service for the salvation of the people.

But that which they manifested while on earth has ascended with them into heaven and continues to be manifest on earth in those acts of grace-filled aid for the people. And on their ascension into heaven, that glory, which holy people had while on earth, grows even greater thanks to their unbroken granting of help, and the holy Church “glorifies” these saints on earth, commending her faithful sons to their prayers and their grace-filled aid, and calling the faithful to flee unto their help and to working with them the works of our salvation.

5. Prayerful Calling Upon the Saints. It is good to have for oneself the hold, holy prayers of the righteous, of those who have been pleasing unto God and are able to receive everything from God according to their petitions.

Holy people, like “the angels of God in the Heavens,” are members with us of the one Body of the Church, they empathize with us, rejoice with us, feel for us; they see everything, they hear everything and they hear our prayers and supplications addressed to them, and they offer up the prayers of the people at the Throne of God. The “vials of incense,” which they offer up at the Throne of God, are actually the prayers which had been directed to them with the petition that they make intercession before God. These prayers of the saints (that is, of the elect, of those people or Christians set apart unto God yet still living on earth see Eph. 1:1 and elsewhere), the saints which are in heaven are aware of, that they themselves might offer them up unto God, joined with their own most powerful intercession.

Through the saints that are in Heaven, the prayers of the earthly reach God.

If even before the coming of Christ and the glorification of the saints in Him, the Prophet Samuel appeared at the unlawful summons of sinful people and showed that he knew everything about Saul (1 Kgs [1 Samuel] 28:14), how do the holy ones not hear the holy prayers of the people and their petitions for grace-filled spiritual help?

The testimonies of the Word of God have shown us that all those “who are absent from the body are present with the Lord;” that they all abide with God and that they really live, empathizing and working with those on earth, as members of the one body; that the Church is truly the heavenly and earthly living Body of Christ precisely because of this very bond and mutuality between her members; that the spirits of the saints in heaven, which are addressed by us in prayers and glorified in their festival commemorations, both hear and receive our prayers, and that they work with us that live on earth for our salvation through those same prayers, and through the powers and gifts which for our sake they have received from God.

And we bear the names of the saints as a memorial before God: “Remember Abraham Isaac and Israel,” “for David’s sake” and for the sake of the other saints help us (Ex. 32:13; 3 [1] Kgs 11:12), because “*the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous and His ears are open unto their prayers*” (1 Peter 3:12).

The Christian can pray, “My God, save me.” But in the prayer, “My God, for the sake of the prayers of Thy saints, save me,” there is more sincerity, more humility, a depth of feeling and a complete defence against pride creeping in if the prayer is successful, a firm foundation for spiritual advancement. In this way, prayer to God, addressed via the holy God-pleasers, stands nearer, closer, to God, and it throws a bridge over the abyss that exists between God and sinners, it humbles the soul of the sinner himself and invokes upon him the good pleasure of God. In their humility, true Christians do not hope on their own prayers, but on the prayers of the saints, and thus they do not think anything of themselves, and they do not glory in the strength of their own prayers hut in those of the saints, they account themselves nothing, they flee from conceit, and thus they are saved. For this reason the prayer of the true Christian is always seasoned with hoping on the concurrent intercession before God of the saints, especially of those to whom he turns to underpin and support his prayers.

The mediation of the saints not only does not hinder or obscure prayers to God, but it actually surmounts every impediment to prayer to God, it removes all the barriers caused by the sin which disturbs the sinner, and it gives wings to prayer. In praying to the saints, a man does not place his hope only in man and put him in place of God, which would be worthy of the curse (Jer. 17:5), but rather he places all his hope in God alone, Who is close to His holy ones and not to sinners, for again we repeat, “*the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous and His ears are open*

unto their prayers.”

VI. The Greatness of the All-Holy Virgin Mary

1. The Virgin Mary and the Angels. The All-holy Virgin Mary is, before God, higher than all the saints of heaven.

God was well-pleased to be a Child and to rest in the womb and in the arms of the Virgin. He exchanged His cherubic throne in the heavens for a new throne on earth: the Virgin. Thus “*He Who sitteth upon the Cherubim*” (Es. 37:16) made the All-holy Virgin “*more honourable than the Cherubim, and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim,*” because the new nature which He took on was not received from the angels, “*but He took on Him the seed of Abraham*” (Heb. 2:16) of the All-holy Virgin.

Human nature, taken on by the Son of God, was glorified by the resurrection, the ascension and its session at the right hand of God in Christ (Mark 16:19), and it was raised up and supremely exalted higher than all the angels. This nature in God the angels themselves cannot but worship.

By His incarnation the Lord quickened us, but first of all among all human nature His own Mother. Being found in her, He deified her, and in leaving her, He left her still deified.

Such great grace, as the All-holy Virgin Mary received, no one in the world has ever received nor can receive. Alone among all created beings, she is the most exalted bearer of the “*power of the Most High,*” for the Lord manifested in her the unique and greatest wonder of His condescension to the race of man, the incarnation. And this new creation was in no way less than the first creation of the world and of man itself. And the Virgin became closer to God than the highest of all creation.

Her unity with God did not come about as is the way with all the saints by grace alone, but in a way inherent in the human nature which the Son of God took from her, and in which He Himself abode in the very being of His Divine nature.

Besides this, the Mother of the Lord, while circumventing married life, combined

virginity and motherhood in herself. In her the nature of women independently and integrally, or rather chastely, without man and without passion, fulfilled its purpose to give birth to children. Virginity received its crown and highest award; passionlessness likened her to the angels, the bodiless beings, whom all the saints strive to emulate by this virtue. And belief in her conceiving supernaturally, as well as the very passionlessness of her life itself, placed her above nature.

And the one, who was thus first made a "*partaker of the Divine nature*" (2 Peter 1:4), became higher than the Angels and was made the subject of their wonder, of their reverence and of their glorification. The ministers of God [the angels] cannot but find that this Ministress of God's surpasses them, for they have given God nothing of their nature, and have not been in such a relationship with God as to partake of His Own nature, as she has done.

The nature of mankind was, in God incarnate, placed higher than the angels. This is why the Virgin, from whom He took that nature, has become higher than the angels. Thus "*the Mighty One hath done great things*" for her.

With particular honour God leads man in the All-holy Virgin up unto Himself and does so before the angels, so that His holy likeness, which had been disfigured by the fallen angels, might be displayed before all the angels in victory, triumphant and saved.

2. The Virgin Mary's Significance in Our Salvation. If not Mary, who first received the salvation of the New Testament, not rejecting it but accepting it with faith? To whose faith are we obliged for our salvation? For whom did this faith of Mary's accept the Saviour? For whom is this faith of Mary's saving, if not for the whole race of man? The faith of each man saves him alone, yet his prayer of faith can help many; but it was a faith offered from all peoples and saving for all mankind which only Mary could offer and which could be offered only by her alone, as being the one who herself ministered at God's incarnation.

The Lord does not save us without our participation, nor does He do it by force. Having granted man freewill, He does not require him to submit to Himself, but He calls, He awaits his conversion, He seeks a voluntary acceptance of salvation. He stands at the door, knocks and waits, that one might hear His voice and open the

door to Him, and only then does He enter (Rev. 3:10). Therefore even the very initial act of salvation, the incarnation of the Son of God, was achieved not by the forcible entry of the Holy Spirit and the power of the Most High into the Virgin, but rather through the salutation of the Virgin with the good tidings, through an appeal to her faith, and after she had expressed her voluntary agreement with it. Thus salvation and the incarnation were achieved not only by the fact that God alone desired this, but also by the fact that man himself, in the person of the Virgin Mary, had expressed his consent to this.

In her Christ first of all saved us. And she saves us all in Christ.

In this way, as the salvation of man directly depends on man's will, on the one hand we are obliged to the All-holy Virgin Mary for our salvation, and her significance in the work of our salvation is of the first order and enormous. At the Annunciation, when the Lord knocked, she heard His voice and opened the door for the salvation of all.

3. "All-holy *Theotokos*, save us." There is no one who served more in Christ in the good work of our salvation than the All-holy Virgin Mary. For this reason the prayerful address, "All-holy *Theotokos*, save us," always has only one meaning, which is implicit in it, and that is, "*save us in Christ*, for thou hast already done this, for in Christ thou hast already saved us." She, who has brought us to salvation in Christ, is alone more than worthy among all the saints, to receive the petition and prayerful supplication: "save us."

Because, on behalf of mankind, the Virgin offered everything to God for the salvation of man, so she is a support to man's efforts, and in human perception, which is granted us for our salvation, she is the closest associate in the work of our salvation. After her, through her and with her help, we are raised up to heaven. She is closer than all the saints to people, a mediatrix before God possessing the most praeter-perfect human nature, and one who, out of love for and compassion for people, and for the sake of their salvation, lent flesh and blood to God.

Chosen of all generations, blessed among women, uniquely from amongst all, as one who has obtained grace from God, as the elect bride of the All-holy Spirit, she

possesses the most powerful faith among all the sons and daughters of man, and the deepest humility among all; she among all peoples was the most good hearted on account of her love and compassion.

And she dwells with God, living with all her feelings, virtues and powers, ready to help everyone that calls upon her.

At the moment of her Dormition, the All-holy Virgin not only lost nothing of her powers, or of all that she had received from God, but in the power of that supernatural faith, by which all is granted (for “*all things are possible to him that believeth*” —Mark 9:23), she is the most powerful helper and intercessor for the race of man.

Just as on earth, so also in the heavens the Lord works wonders for the good and salvation of people through the loving mediation of His mother. Neither the Lord, nor the All-holy Virgin lost anything of their capabilities or of their powers in being taken up into heaven from earth. Her mediation, and the miracles which He works through that mediation, can never be cut short.

We are her kinsfolk according to the flesh, her brothers, sisters and children according to the statement of her Son, and we are related to her according to our nature, and through her mediation for us with her Son. And on account of this, her love towards us is that of a kinswoman, close, heartfelt and tender. She feels this more than we do, for she is aware of it even though we are not and cannot comprehend it.

4. The Virgin Mary—an example of making salvation our own. Twice the Lord pointed out that only those blessed people, who like His mother heard the word of God, kept it and fulfilled it (Mark 3:35; Luke 11:28), could be His kinsmen and mothers. And the one, who “*kept*” all the words of the Lord, “*laying*” them “*up in her heart*” (Luke 2:19, 51), the one who “*found grace with God*” (Luke 1:30) in fulfilling the commandments regarding faith, obedience, humility, selflessness, and love, has been made manifest as an example of making the salvation, which the Lord offered for us, our own.

The making of the salvation of Christ our own begins on earth, actually it originates with the Virgin Mary, who, as Mother of the Saviour, served at His incarnation. From her first of all saving faith and every virtue were offered to God. She received Christ, just as everyone always should receive Him, in her soul, and in her virtues. She is an example of the building up of the human soul, so that it might be the temple and home of God, and she was the first to achieve this. Every soul is a bride of Christ, fore-ordained for its heavenly bridegroom, and like the first bride, the Virgin Mary, it must be well-appointed for the reception of God.

The Most Holy Virgin by faith and through the Holy Spirit received within herself the Word of God, and carried Him within herself and nourished Him. And every soul, called to salvation, receives within itself the word of God, and carries that which has been conceived from faith and through the Holy Spirit, and by the mind and will nourishing it, and by fulfilling it and keeping it, it incarnates Christ within itself and within all its life. Thus it gives birth to Christ in itself, often in the torments of the struggle with sin, it represents Him to itself, likening itself to Him, building itself on Christ. Just as the Church gives birth to every soul in Christ, so every soul gives birth to "*an infant of the male sex*" (Rev. 12:5), that is to Christ Jesus in itself, and both the one and the other, the soul and the Church, correspond to the Virgin. And in all, the soul gives birth in Christ by the Spirit of God.

The Virgin Mary is an example of bearing God, of communion with God in the moral sense, on account of her faith, humility and every virtue.

5. The Virgin Mary and the Church. The Virgin Mary, as the one who gave God the nature common to mankind and who ministered unto the salvation of all men, is the second Eve, the new mother of all mankind and the intercessor of the whole race of man. The All-holy Virgin has granted the whole race of man rebirth with God.

Christ received a body from the Virgin Mary. And the Church is also the body of Christ. Thus the Church and the Virgin Mary are close in essence and one in nature. For this reason both the Church and the Virgin are called Bride of Christ.

The Virgin Mary is a member of the Old Testament Church; she is the summation

and final fruit of that Church and the intercessor for that Church. Thus Christ was incarnated in the Church and from the Church, and thus the Church in the Virgin Mary and through this Virgin, is the Bride and Mother of Christ. For that reason the Church is described as giving birth to Christ (Rev. 12:1-6; Es. 26:18-19).

The Church, the one body of Christ, is a complete, unbreakable union of earthly and heavenly members. In the Virgin Mary, through the descent into her and the abiding in her of the Son of God, there comes about a uniting of the earthly and the heavenly, or the human with the Divine. And for this reason in prayerful supplication to the saints the All-holy Virgin takes first place, for she is the bridge, the link between the earthly Church and the heavenly, in actuality a ladder from earth to heaven, upon which God came down, and on which we ascend. To the Virgin, as to the place where the heavenly was united to the earthly, we most especially resort for help in our ascent from earth to heaven, that is in the work of our salvation.

The Church is the union of people with God. In the Virgin there came about the first and original union of God with man.

Thus it is an undoubted fact that the All-holy Virgin Mary is manifest as the representative and personification of the whole race of man in its entirety, and thereafter, more particularly, of the chosen people of God that is of the Old Testament Church, and finally of the New Testament Church both earthly and heavenly.

The holy Apostle John the Theologian gives this the greatest emphasis. He, one of the Evangelists, proclaims the Saviour's last wish from the Cross concerning his Mother. His charge concerning His Mother has the greatest significance for the holy Apostle John, as expressing a concern not only for her personally.

The Son of God and Son of Mary establishes St John along with Himself as a son of Mary on earth. But just as the Mother of the Lord is manifest as the representative and personification of the Church, His body, then in the same sort St John is manifest as a deputy or proxy for the Lord on earth for His Church. That this is so is clear from the fact that the Lord granted His "Revelation" and gives

directions to the seven local Churches and to the fullness of the constitution of the universal Church directly through John. In the Book, “Revelation” or “Apocalypse,” there are traced through the Apostle the future courses of the Church of Christ on earth. By this same deputy of Christ in the Church, it is shown that the holy Apostle was made a son of the Virgin Mary by the Lord’s direct command. Evidently, “*the disciple, whom Jesus loved*” (John 21:20) had a special place among the Apostles. Just as His care with respect to His Mother placed a trust on St John, so by His care for the whole Church and the direct transmission of His will concerning her the Lord granted him a special commission. As an analogy of the relationship of the Apostle John to the Mother of the Lord—he is a son of the Church and the Church his mother; but on that son a special commission had been given regarding the Mother, such as could only come from the Son of the Virgin and the actual Head of the Church, Christ, Who is organically bound to her by nature. In view of his special relationship to the Mother of the Lord, St John was also made a special guardian of the Church by the Lord, and it was not in vain that the Lord said of him: “*If I will that he tarry till I come*” (John 20:22), that is until the Second Coming of the Lord. And in the heavens he remains such a deputy [of the Lord].

In this way, the last concern of the Lord on the Cross for His Mother is a concern for His Church, just as His Mother is a personification and representative of the Church.

Besides this, the holy Apostle John depicts the Church in “Revelation” in the form of a Woman, who has recently given birth, just as the All-holy Virgin Mary gave birth to a Son.

In the twelfth chapter, he depicts the Church of Christ in the image of a woman, “*clothed in the sun, under her feet the moon, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.*” The image of a woman, of a bride, of a virgin, and the image of a man or a bridegroom are the usual images for the Church and for God or Christ in the Sacred Scriptures of both the Old and new Testaments (Es. 54:5; 65:5; Jer. 31:4; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25-32; Rev. 19:7; 21:2, 9). Here then, at the close of church history and at the end of the world, the glorious Church is found in the grievous

torment of giving birth to her people in Christ (Gal. 4:19) for the life of the age to come. And as at the birth of Christ Himself, the devil chased Him in the figure of Herod, so now “*the dragon stood before the woman, when she was about to give birth, for to devour her Infant.*” And then “*she brought forth a man Child, Who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up unto God, and to His throne.*” And now, in this image, the churchly people of God, which rules over all peoples, will be caught up to the throne of God. The woman, the bride of the Lamb, represents the earthly and the heavenly Church together, the holy city of God (21:9). In the image of the woman, the Mother of the Lord, St John depicts the Church; and in the image of the Church of the last times he depicts the All-holy Virgin.

This is what the holy Apostle John made of his closeness to the Mother of his Lord, who became according to the Lord’s desire his own mother. As her faithful son, he was not able to speak of her personally because of her humility, other than speaking in imagery and in a veiled way in his book.

The veneration of the All-holy Virgin, savingly, factually, in actuality, is the authentic confession of the Church, which is the one, heavenly-earthly, living body of Christ. To revere the All-holy Virgin means actually to abide in the body of the Church of Christ: not to separate the heavenly Church from the earthly, to have a bond with heaven, to confess the true Church, in which all the members compassionate for and work for one another, in reality. Veneration of the All-holy Virgin is the preeminent confession of the unity of the Church, as the heavenly-earthly body of Christ and of one’s own communion with the heavenly Kingdom.

6. The Glorification of the Virgin Mary. Only one who recognizes the “greatness” of the All-holy Virgin, “*which the Mighty One hath done*” to her could “*call her blessed*” [see *Magnificat*].

If the Lord has done great things for her, then we must recognize this greatness, be aware of it and in turn confess it, and we must glorify both Him, Who gave this greatness, and the one to whom He gave it, and all the more so in that she to whom He gave this greatness had truthfully foretold that they would glorify her for that greatness.

That greatness consists in the fact that the Lord, wishing to be incarnate “*looked*

upon the lowliness” of her, that is on the spiritual perfection of the Virgin, and was incarnate precisely of her. He did “*great things*” for her by His incarnation and through the glory that this has among the peoples. By humility, as one who flees glory, by remaining unknown and making oneself nothing—things which seemingly contradict “*being called blessed of all generations*”—in these things the glorification consists. Thus did the All-holy Virgin herself explain the term “*called blessed,*” saying “*He hath looked upon the lowliness of His handmaiden; for behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed*” (Luke 1:48). “*To call blessed*” (Luke 1:48)—In Greek *makarizo*,—to bless, to consider blessed, which means also to glorify. “*All generations shall call me blessed.*” The veneration of the All-holy Virgin will live throughout all generations and tribes, not just for a day but perpetually, and not just in such a way that all bless her and she does not hear this, not at all, the perpetual blessing will impart unto her joy like unto the joy that the original cause of her blessedness, the incarnation of God the Word, imparted unto her. Concerning the incarnation of the Son of God she will rejoice eternally. This is joy in the glory of God.

Once she received the angelic greeting: “*Rejoice, Full of Grace, the Lord is with thee,*” and she cried out, “*My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.*” The all-holy Virgin now abides in the eternal joy of paradise with God, and neither previously nor after this is there any greater joy for her, than the people’s repetition for her of the angelic salutation. At this greeting she responds and hastens with goodwill and mercy. The Virgin Mary has been lifted up to heaven in Joy and to our aid.

VII. The History of the Veneration of the Virgin Mary

In the Sacred Scriptures there is only recorded as much as is absolutely necessary, for they were written by the Holy Spirit through members of the Church, the holy Apostles, and for the Church; they remain and are preserved only in the Church, and in the Church there eternally abides the Holy Spirit Which leads us into all truth, and for that reason it is the Church that is “*the pillar and ground of truth*” (1 Jn 2:20; 2 Cor. 3:31; 1 Tim. 3:15).

Thus what is recorded about the All-holy Virgin in the Sacred Scriptures was fully sufficient until the pouring out of the Holy Spirit in the Church, which revealed everything concerning her in its fulness and in all its details. And the Holy Spirit disposes all things in the Church for the salvation of the people, and revealing in its fulness the significance of our salvation, He “*ordained*” that the Church venerate the All-holy Virgin, recognize her “*great things*” [see Luke 1:49] and her part in our salvation, and her grace-filled and prayerful aid for us in this work [of salvation].

According to the letter, there is little written in the Word of God about the All-holy Virgin Mary, but according to the spirit and its significance for those who are “*ministers of the New Testament, not of the letter, but of the spirit*” (2 Cor 3:6), sufficiently much is written. One must attribute significance to every word of Scripture, for every word is eternal, and there is nothing in any word that is fortuitous or superfluous, and, under the illumination of the Church by the Holy Spirit, the meaning and spirit of each and every word is manifest as immeasurably great and true.

How the holy Apostles revered the All-holy Virgin is witnessed by the Word of God. The holy Apostles, who themselves wrote the Scriptures of the New Testament, knew that “*the Mighty One*” had “*done great things*” to the Virgin Mary, and that she was to be “*blessed*” or glorified by “*all generations.*” They themselves saw her moral character and the “*blessedness*” of her “*that believed, that there should be a performance of those things which were told her of Lord;*” they themselves observed “*the lowliness*” of the “*handmaiden*” of God, upon which “*the Lord looked.*” And they honoured her as “*blessed among women,*” for she had prevailed on her Son to work His first miracle, and so had brought them, the Apostles, to faith in Him! She was the senior and head among them with regard to faith and according to all the good works of salvation. Having taken hold of her words that “*all generations shall call me blessed*” they were the first and could not but reverence and glorify her. She was warmly loved by her Divine Son and was given as mother to the beloved disciple and was thus made a warmly loving mother of all of them, the holy Apostles, binding them into one family, bound by the bond of love. The holy Apostles knew that when she was with them in this life she continued “*in prayers and supplication*” and aided them by her prayers, that she

had not lost this gift at her transfer to the heavens, to the Lord, and that there too she helps them. Only with the words, "*Rejoice, full of grace!*" could they greet her in this life, and so they hymn her after her dormition. They could not do in life, other than how they had written.

The details of the holy Apostles' reverent disposition, and that of the original Christian community, to the All-holy Virgin are hidden, and for no other cause than because of the humility of the Virgin.

True humility strives to hide itself in obscurity. The disposition of women was by preference modest, and enjoying any glory among the community was alien to them. Humility, as an essential mark of the All-holy Virgin's character, is exclusively stressed by the holy Apostles and Evangelists. The Lord "*looked upon the lowliness of His handmaiden*" in her youth, even before His incarnation. But what transpired with regard to the lowliness [humility] of the Virgin after the Nativity?

See, she was made the dwelling-place of God. The Power of God came to that which could receive It and could become the bush which burned with the fire of the Divinity and was not itself burnt. She met with God face to Face and remained alive. And if one only considers and presents clearly to oneself how God might abide in one and be borne in oneself on earth, just as the All-holy Virgin bore and bears the All-Sovereign of all creation, then one would be filled with horror, and from such "*great things*" might fall into the great abyss of humility and in the unbearable abasement cry out with Peter the Apostle: "*Depart from me, O Lord! for I am a sinful man*" (Luke 5:8). Such a thing would be simply unbearable. Lest it be destroyed, the pure and holy cannot be touched, even to the very least degree, to the sin that darkens. But the All-holy Virgin received within herself this same unbearable fire of the Godhead. And it is completely comprehensible to every mortal, that humility can grow from great things according to the measure of those great things. Wherefore, after the Nativity, the All-holy Virgin became a thousand times more profound in her humility than before the Nativity; she grew therein so that she might preserve the Grace, which she had "found" with God in the days of her youth.

If the Lord forbade people to speak about Him (Matt. 9:31; Mark 7:36), so not desiring to become known and not receiving glory from men (John 7:3; 5:41), then how could His holy Mother direct the Apostles to glorify her and say more than she herself had allowed them to report?

But the Lord said of Himself. *“If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto Me.”* *“This He said, signifying what death He should He die”* (John 12:32-33). Being glorified on earth, having completed His work, and particularly after death, He drew them to Himself when He granted people remission of sins and opened the doors of Paradise.

And there can be no other regard for the All-holy Virgin than that of the Church of Christ. Although she spent her time in humility, this does not mean that she should not be glorified. Although she was concealed in obscurity, it is not impossible to find her. Although she was strictly silent about herself, yet guided by the Holy Spirit, we can come to appreciate her greatness, which was granted her from the Lord, and to bless her. *“He that humbleth himself shall be exalted”* (Luke 14:11).

Such was the honour accorded the All-holy Virgin in the first, Apostolic age after the Nativity of Christ, as is delineated by the exalted words and characteristics of the Sacred Scriptures themselves. The humility of the Virgin when living on earth enshrines this reverence due her.

The honour accorded the All-holy Virgin, which is already recorded in the words of the Apostles- Evangelists, gradually spread *in the second century*. The holy Martyr Justin the Philosopher, Tertullian, and St Irenaeus of Lyons magnify the All-holy Virgin Mary; they recognize her significance for all mankind as the second Eve. Most importantly they witness the saving significance of her ministry: through Mary “disobedience was made strengthless,” that which was being led away to destruction was by her “brought to salvation,” “the sin of the one was bathed in the good of the other,” “mankind was saved through the Virgin,” the Virgin “through her obedience became a cause of salvation for herself and for the whole race of man.” This is what they say of her, these men of the second century. Comparison of Mary with Eve according to the word of God and deducing the saving

significance of her ministry for the race of man had Apostolic authority, for the Apostles saw in Christ the second Adam. Fittingly Saint Irenaeus was, according to Papias of Hierapolis, the disciple of the holy Apostle John the Theologian.

In the third century, Origen, Saint Gregory the Wonderworker and the holy Martyr Methodius of Patara commemorate the “blessedness” of the All-holy Virgin as her glorification. In the brief reference that “all those in whom Christ lives are sons of Mary”, Origen accounts her the Mother of all Christians. Then Saint Gregory cannot find any “like her in all generations,” he sees in her “the whole treasury of graces,” he marvelled at “her spiritual virtues,” and most importantly, he believes that she “delights the souls that glorify her.” But Saint Methodius says directly: “We pray thee, most exalted of all and one deemed worthy of maternal honour and boldness, do thou constantly remember, O All-holy *Theotokos*, us who praise thee and with reverent doxologies honour thine ever-living and undefaceable memory. And thou, Elder Simeon worthy of honour, ...be also an intercessor for our race before God the Saviour...”

In the fourth century, amidst the quantity of testimonies we have concerning the worthiness of the All-holy Virgin, as being the Mother of Life, a Prophetess, Ever-Virgin and sinless, Saint Gregory the Theologian’s testimony concerning the holy Martyr Justina is extraordinarily important; therein the martyr, being stalked by a certain pagan, called upon the aid of the holy Virgin Mary to protect her virginity, with the result that this pagan was converted to Christ and subsequently they both received martyric deaths. And Saint Gregory of Nyssa tells of a vision of Saint Gregory the Wonderworker in which the holy Apostle John the Theologian fulfilled the assignment of the Lord’s Mother. Both Gregories speak of this as being something which happened a century before them. Saint Epiphanius of Cyprus, confirming the honour accorded the All-holy Virgin as “the Mother of Life and of all the living,” in his time fought against some Mary-worshipping heretics, the “Lappiditrians,” who used to offer the Virgin Mary a kind of shortbread in the form of a sacrifice and “attempted to establish her in place of God.” “Mary is not God,” he said, “We must honour Mary. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit we must render worship, but no one must worship Mary.”

*In the fifth, century, Saint Cyril of Alexandria highly glorified the Virgin Mary, as did Saint Peter Chrysologus and Saint Proclus. “There is nothing in the world that can compare with the *Theotokos*“—we can use these words of Saint Proclus to characterize the veneration of the Virgin Mary of the Fathers of this century. We can trace the naming of the All-holy Virgin as *Theotokos* [“she who gave birth to God”—*ed.*] back to the third century to the persons of Origen and Saint Methodius. But it was in the fifth century, in 431, at the Third Œcumenical Council in Ephesus, that this title that had derived from antiquity was confirmed by the universal voice of the Church, itself directed by the Holy Spirit, as exactly expressing the dogma concerning the one Divine Person of the Son of God in two natures: Divine and human. The Son of God was born before the ages of the Father according to His Divinity, and in these last days was born of Mary the Virgin according to His human nature, being in two natures one and the same God. In one Divine Person two natures are conjoined, and for that reason the All-holy Virgin gave birth to God and not just a man; she gave birth to God, although in His human nature.*

This most holy dogma, which is called the “refutation” of the heretics, those who distort the teaching concerning our salvation in Christ, when speaking of the Son of God and naturally this inevitably touches upon His mother. But in speaking of Him, to Whom the All-holy Virgin gave birth according to His humanity, the Council proclaimed that she is actually the *Theotokos*, as until that time the whole Church had believed, except for the heretics who attempted to name her “Christotokos.” The glory of the All-holy *Theotokos* is completely bound up with the glory of her Son and God; and inasmuch as one glorifies the Lord and His saving incarnation, one must also glorify her.

Thus the holy Church honoured and “called blessed” the All-holy Virgin *Theotokos* uninterruptedly from the days of the Apostles for the course of five centuries.

In the second, third and fourth centuries, the holy Church honoured the All-holy *Theotokos* in exactly the same way as she does today. All the existing evidences of this veneration, data from the very first century, from the Apostles in the Gospels, reveals this as a most widespread and established practice. Saint Justin in the East, Tertullian in Africa, St Irenaeus in Gaul, St Methodius in Asia Minor, as well as

Saint Ephraim on the banks of the Euphrates, speak of the [veneration of the] All-holy Virgin not as something new for their particular local church, but as something recognized and they speak of her as honoured by all. They speak of what had been previous to them and the situation in their own time regarding their local confessions.

However, the Holy Fathers only wrote about the necessities that arose in their time, about their circumstances, and about the questions that arose; they did not set forth systematically all that concerned the teaching, the practice and the life of the Church of their period, yet they had much to say about this [the veneration of the Mother of God] in speaking of other things, incidentally, in fragments and in separate phrases.

The voice of the Œcumenical Church, at the Third Œcumenical Council, only gave expression to the veneration of the Mother of God, which had been normative and established of old in the Church, by defining the Virgin as *Theotokos*. But for this to be said and for it to express the generally held opinion, it was necessary that in all the preceding centuries and in the life contemporary with the Council, there should have been a corresponding universally held confession. And it is just such a confession in the greatness of the All-holy Virgin, in her heavenly glory and in her prayerful and grace-filled heavenly power that the Church has always held, as the works of the holy Fathers of the Church of the first centuries of Christianity demonstrate.

Endnotes in the Russian text

[1] The name “Joachim” is related to “Eliakim” (2 Kings 23:34), which can be rendered as “Eli,” which explains the use of this name by the holy Evangelist Luke (3:24). The Talmud also refers to the All-holy Virgin as “the daughter of Eli,” which apparently was the modified form of the name Joachim. The names, Joachim and Anna, themselves not only derive from apocrypha which are heretical, but also from Saint Epiphanius of Cyprus (*Haer.* 48), and are reproduced by Saint John of Damascus (*De Orth. Fid.* 40). In the ancient catacombs there is found a depictions of St Anna with a reference to her name and that she is the mother of the All-holy Virgin. The Emperor Justinian dedicated a newly built church to them in 550 A.D. (Witness: the English docent, Blunt. I H. Blunt, *Dictionary of Doctrinal and*

Historical Theology, London 1892, p. 441).

[2] That the All-holy Virgin remained unhusbanded [i.e. a virgin—*ed.*] forever is perfectly apparent from her question: “*How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?*” This question would have been misplaced, if it was generally possible that she would enter into a marriage with Joseph. She said nothing about this. Although she was “*betrothed to a man*” (Luke 1:27), in reality there was no possibility of her marrying Joseph. This question had already been decided: if she was already betrothed, it would normally have been possible to be married in the shortest possible time, and yet she says, “*I know not a man.*” Joseph was not her husband, and could not be such. The betrothal itself was only for the securing of her remaining unmarried forever, and was actually for the protection of Mary’s virginity. Joseph was not only not contemplated as a husband; she did not even think of him or of the possibility of a quick marriage, such as would normally follow a betrothal. But there was no husband, and entering into a marriage was ruled out completely. She was betrothed to the elder Joseph and already destined to perpetual virginity. And Mary, of course, knew why she had been given over to the Temple, that she had been dedicated to God by her parents and had been born after they had given a vow regarding her dedication to God. The future mother of the Lord could not violate this dedication. And she remained a virgin both before and at the Nativity of her Son. Perceiving her to be with child, the righteous Joseph “*was minded to put her away privily,*” not wishing to subject her to the condemnation of society, but being warned of an angel, he left the Virgin alone and decided to be called the husband of Mary and the father of her Son, although in reality neither of these things had ever been so.

And after the Nativity of her Son, Mary remained a virgin in the strength of that dedication of hers from infancy, and of her betrothal to the husband-guardian of her virginity, and in the strength of the present dedication [i.e. at the Annunciation—*ed.*] and of her being chosen, which thing excelled nature, at the Birth of Christ. This last was a strengthening for the unwedded Mary and for Joseph.

The Word of God shows that the Son Who was born, her “firstborn,” was also the last and only Son of those parents, who had been foretold of His birth from on

high, through the angels: thus Sarah had home Isaac her only son (Gen. 18), the wife of Manoe had borne Sampson (Judges 13), and so Elizabeth bore John the Baptist (Luke 1). In other instances, however, without any special embassy from heaven, women who at first were barren, by God's mercy, then had issue of two or more children (Rebecca, Rachel, Hannah the mother of Samuel). A great and heavenly visitation cuts across lawful marital bonds. So much the more with the All-holy Virgin, who after giving birth, just as before the Birth and at the Birth, remained a virgin. The prophecy concerning the Incarnation of God was fulfilled in her: *"this gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter in by it; because the Lord, the God of Israel, hath entered in by it, therefore it shall be shut"* (Ezekiel 44:2).

In the Word of God, the Virgin Mary is everywhere called *"the Mother of Jesus,"* *"His Mother"* (John 19:25; Acts 1:14) and nobody else's mother. There was another Mary, *"the mother of James the Less and Josias"* (Mark 15:40; Luke 24:10), who are called His brethren (Mark 6:3) because of the kinship of the two mothers. This was as cousins apparently; *"the sister of His mother, Maria the wife of Cleopas"* (John 19:25) was the mother of the second cousins of Jesus [in Russian, third-born brothers—trans.], who had lived with Him in Nazareth. (*Webmaster note:* For more on the ever-virginity of Mary see "[Why Is Mary Considered Ever-Virgin?](#)")

Source: http://orthodoxinfo.com/generatveneration_mary.aspx