

St. Paul Mother

Mater Christi: Meditations on Our Lady



Mother St. Paul

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St. Paul M.

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PREFACE

Jesus Christ, yesterday and to-day, the same also for ever. (Heb. xiii. 8.) His salvation extends to all generations. *My salvation shall endure for ever, and My righteousness shall not fail.* (Isaias li. 6.) Also He says: *My words shall not pass away.* (Matt. xxiv. 35.) He is the Teacher of all times, and that as well by His actions as by His words, by what He said and by what He did. It was His *to do and to teach.* (Acts i. 1.) It is ours, ours in this twentieth century, to listen to what He says, and to mark what He does. It is ours to hear Him and to see Him, spiritually. That we do by reading of His gospel, by listening to sermons, and very particularly by meditation, or by what St Ignatius calls "contemplation" of the mysteries of His life. To "contemplate" in the Ignatian sense is to make yourself present at some scene of our Saviour's life and behold it all, as it were, re-enacted before your eyes. It is the process called in modern philosophy "visualisation." These Meditations are composed on the Ignatian plan of *visualising* what Our Lord did, said, and suffered. *Blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it.* (Luke xi. 28.) Blessed are they who take pains thus to *hear* what their Saviour says, to *contemplate* and *visualise* what He does. They are the persons most likely, with Mary, to *keep all these words in their heart* (Luke ii. 51), and in their measure to fulfil the teaching of the *Teacher of all nations.* (Matt. xxviii. 19.)

JOSEPH RICKABY, S.J.

20th October 1918.

Dignare me laudare te, Virgo sacrata

PRAYERS

Before Meditation

O Holy Ghost, give me a great devotion and a great attraction towards Mary, Thy spouse; a great support in her maternal bosom, and an abiding refuge in her mercy; so that in her and by her Thou mayest form in me Jesus Christ.

(Blessed Grignon de Montfort.)

Memorare, O piissima Virgo Maria, non esse auditum a saeculo, quemquam ad tua currentem praesidia, tua implorantem auxilia, tua petentem suffragia, esse derelictum. Ego, tali animatus confidentia, ad te Virgo virginum, Mater, curro. Ad te venio; coram te gemens peccator assisto. Noli, Mater Verbi, verba mea despiciere; sed audi propria et exaudi. Amen.	Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, and sought thy intercession was left unaided. Inspired with this confidence, I fly to thee, O Virgin of virgins, my Mother. To thee I come; before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in thy mercy hear and answer me. Amen.
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(300 days, each time.)

After Meditation

My Queen and my Mother, to thee I offer myself without reserve; and to give thee a mark of my devotion, I consecrate to thee during this day, my eyes, my ears, my mouth, my heart, and my whole person. Since then I belong to thee, O my good Mother, preserve and defend me, as thy property and possession. Amen.

(100 days, once a day, if said morning and evening.)

Sub tuam praesidium confugimus, sancta Dei Genitrix! nostras deprecationes ne despicias in necessitatibus nostris, sed a periculis cunctis, libera nos semper Virgo gloriosa et benedicta.	We fly to thy patronage, O holy Mother of God. Despise not our petitions in our necessities, but deliver us always from all dangers, O glorious and blessed Virgin.
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Immaculate!

"*Thy Holy Tabernacle which Thou hast prepared from, the beginning.*" (Wisdom ix. 8.)

1st Prelude. A picture or medal of the Immaculate Conception.

2nd Prelude. Grace to understand.

Point I.– The Preparation of the Tabernacle

Why should Mary be called a Tabernacle? She tells us herself – for the Church applies these words to Mary: "He that created me rested in my tabernacle." (Ecclus. xxiv. 12.) He sojourned there for a time Who "was made flesh and dwelt (*tabernacled* the Greek word means) among us." When did God begin to prepare His Tabernacle? Was it on the day of the Holy and Immaculate Conception? Was it when He spoke to our first parents of "the seed of the woman"? Was it just before the War in Heaven, when He revealed His plans to the first creatures of His Hands? Long, long before! "From the beginning," the Holy Tabernacle was being prepared. And *He* says this, Who had no beginning, with Whom is "neither beginning of days nor end of life," (Heb. vii. 3), Who says of Himself: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end." (Apoc. i. 8.) From all Eternity, then, the Holy Tabernacle was being prepared in the mind of God.

What care God took in the preparation of Mary, because she was to be the Mother of His Son! And what care He takes in His preparation of me! I, too, have always been in the mind of God. "From the beginning" He has prepared me to fulfil the end for which He created me. Here on earth we are very careful about the training of those who are destined to fill certain offices, and the higher the office the more careful the training. How carefully are princes of royal blood trained! How careful is the preparation of a Priest, of a Religious! But God has been at work at the preparation long before we begin ours, and He is training for a most important office, namely, the salvation of the soul – the end for which He created every single child of Adam. All the chequered picture of the life of God's child forms a part of His preparation – all the ups and downs, and windings and turnings, and things that seemed at the time, perhaps, so useless. Mistakes and failures – even sin itself, He can, by means of the contrition which it causes, turn to good account, as He did in the cases of St Mary Magdalen, of St Peter, and of innumerable others. He knows how to bring good out of evil, and to make all work together for good to those who love Him.

What have I got to do, then, in the matter? Do as Mary did, prove my love to Him by *co-operation* in His plans for me. There must be no complaint about what He arranges. Faith must be strong enough to believe that, not only now in the present, all things are working together to enable me to fulfil the end for which God created me; but that in the past, too – that past which I so often allow to disturb my peace – God was working, and preparing me step by step for what He intended me to be. It is want of faith, really, which is often at the bottom of all my problems and difficulties. I will not believe that He forgives and forgets and brings good out of the evil. This it is which interferes in God's preparation of me, and makes me unfit for the work for which He has so patiently been preparing me. Let me think to-day of Mary's perfect co-operation, and ask her to obtain for me more faith and more love.

Point II.– The Holy Tabernacle

What was it? A human body and soul specially prepared by God to be the Tabernacle where His Son should rest – a body, we may well believe, more than usually beautiful, for that body from which He that was "fairer than the sons of men" was to take flesh, must needs be fair too. "Thou art *all fair*." But it was the *soul* which made the Tabernacle holy. Here the preparation had been special and unique. Mary's soul had a beauty all its own, for neither original sin nor any of its effects had ever touched it. Not only was it sinless, as my soul was after Baptism, but, instead of being prone to evil, it was upright, and ever aspiring after good. Never once was there a wilful imperfection in Mary's soul. It is probable, too, that her understanding was enlightened, and that she had the full use of reason from the moment of her Conception, that is, from the moment when her body and soul were joined together. In her will there was no weakness, it was in perfect conformity with God's Will; and in her heart there was no concupiscence. Her body, too, shared in this wondrous liberty, for it knew neither sickness nor corruption.

But are we not making Mary almost equal with her Son? No, for the gulf between them is that between the Creator and the creature. Could any gulf be wider? Her Son was God, and was impeccable *by nature*. Mary was impeccable *by grace*. Mary was sinless because God her Creator chose to make her so, so that at the moment of her conception He was able to say: "Thou art all fair – there is no spot in thee."

Such was "the Holy Tabernacle prepared from the beginning."

And Mary is my model! Does it seem impossible? Does it almost weary me to have such perfection given me to copy? Let me answer my question by another: *Could God* do otherwise? Would it be worthy of Himself if He were to give me anything less than a *perfect* copy? If for our pupils, who are studying merely things of time, we seek ever the best models, can we expect God, Who is training for eternity, to give His pupils a copy that is less than perfect? And the task need not discourage us. God is not a hard master expecting to reap where He has not sown. He does not expect more than He has given; He does not expect perfection; but He does expect generous efforts. He does expect fidelity, and correspondence to the grace He has given. It was her constant perseverance in these virtues which kept Mary always full of grace and pleasing to God, not the privilege of her Immaculate Conception.

"O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee." Pray that I, who with all a child's love and admiration desire to copy my Mother, may never be discouraged, but may go on, ever aiming at perfection, and never surprised at the want of it; full of faults and failings always, but full, too, of love and confidence and conformity to God's Will. So shall I one day, with my Mother's prayers and help, be presented "spotless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy." (Jude 24.)

Colloquy. "O God, Who by the Immaculate Conception of a Virgin didst prepare a worthy habitation for Thy Son, we beseech Thee that Thou, Who through the foreseen death of Thy same Son didst preserve her from all stain of sin, wouldst grant also to us through her intercession to come pure to Thee." (*Collect for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.*)

Resolution. To strive to copy my model.

Spiritual Bouquet. "Be diligent, that ye may be found undefiled and unspotted to Him in peace." (2 Peter iii. 14.)

Mary's Birthday

"*In me is all grace.*" (Ecclus. xxiv. 25.)

1st Prelude. A picture of Our Lady's Nativity. St Anne is holding up her babe, just swaddled, and offering it to God; the nurse is waiting to put the little one in its cradle. St Joachim is coming into the room. A Dove is hovering over the babe's head. Angels are looking on.

2nd Prelude. Grace to look on with the Angels, and try to understand.

Point I.– The Angels

What does it all mean? Why are the Angels so full of interest? Was the birth of this little one so different from any other? It was indeed miraculous, but Joachim and Anne were by no means the only ones thus favoured. No, there is something beyond this which is engaging the interest of the Angels. They see in this little babe, whom Anne is offering to God, a sight to make them wonder and adore – they see a soul which has never been touched by original sin. They had seen Adam created in grace; they had seen Jeremias, and later would see John Baptist, both spotless from their birth, but spotless because they had been *cleansed* from original sin before birth. In these souls, however, they saw no more than they see in each little soul as it leaves the baptismal font, grace having taken the place of original sin. But in Mary they see a sight which they have never seen before – a soul whose sanctity surpasses that of angels and of men, a soul which will glorify God more perfectly than any other creature ever has done, or will do. No wonder the Angels are lost in admiration!

They have known about the Incarnation ever since the War in Heaven; now they see one of the steps by which it was to be accomplished. They see the "tabernacle prepared," and at its side they will never cease to wonder and praise God, as long as that pure soul stays in this land of exile.

Point II.– The Babe

Mary was born with an end to fulfil, just as I was. She was created to praise, reverence, and serve God, just as I was; created to save her soul, just as I was. And because of her absolute purity, she understood her end perfectly from the first moment of her existence, and followed it always without swerving. While her mother was offering her to God, she, with the full use of her reason (as many hold) offered herself to fulfil the end for which she had been created. She did not know what the *particular* end was to be – God did not reveal to her till the day of the Incarnation, that she was to be the Mother of God – but she offered herself to do what God wished, she put herself at His disposal.

And this is what I must do every day of my life if I would fulfil the end for which God has created me. Here I am, Lord, to do Thy bidding, to do whatever Thou didst intend me to do to-day. I may not know, any more than did the Immaculate babe in her cradle, what the *particular* end is for which He has destined me; but that does not matter. If I am found faithfully doing my duty of the moment, whatever it may be – doing it, that is to say, for God, praising, reverencing, and serving Him in it – I shall not miss the important moment in my life when God calls me to the special work for which He has destined me. I can, if I will, do each little duty of my everyday life for God, with the pure motive of giving Him pleasure. It is the surest way of making myself indifferent as to whether or not the duty gives *me* pleasure! And it ensures that, from one point of view, *all* duties will be a pleasure. I was created by God to do this particular thing for Him at this particular moment, so I do it. What an uplifting thought! It puts me at once on to another plane – the supernatural plane – where

the whole aspect is different. This is the truth, which the little one whose birthday I am thinking about to-day understood so perfectly. "Behold the handmaid of the Lord," was her cry even then. It was because Mary understood the value of the "Sacrament of the moment," as it has been called, that when *the* moment of her life came, and her great end was revealed to her, she was able to say: "*Ecce ancilla Domini!*" She was used to saying it; it was the most natural thing for her to say. And so will it be for me, if only I will practise as Mary did. I shall bow to His Will in the *great* crises of my life – not naturally but supernaturally – because I have formed the habit in all the *little* things that make up my life.

Point III.– The Dove

Overshadowing His spouse is the Holy Ghost. He it was Who filled her with grace at the moment of the Immaculate Conception. He it is Who will keep her "full of grace" at every moment of her life. Never for one instant will He leave her. Never for one instant will she cease to be the Temple of the Holy Ghost. (1 Cor. vi. 19.) Always will He be able to say to her: "Thou art all fair, O my love, and there is not a spot in thee." (Cant. iv. 7.) Why? Because Mary will never "*extinguish* the Holy Spirit." (1 Thess. v. 19.) She will never "*grieve*" Him. (Eph. iv. 30.) And not only will she never resist a single one of His inspirations, but she will never let *one* pass by unnoticed. Her correspondence to grace will be perfect.

Oh, what need I have to turn to the little one in her cradle to-day, and say: "Pray for me *now*"! Pray that I may never extinguish the Holy Spirit, but live always in a state of grace. Pray that I may never grieve Him, Whose temple I am, by resisting His pleadings with me.

Colloquy with the babe in her cradle.

Resolution. To make much of the "Sacrament of the moment" to-day.

Spiritual Bouquet. "In me is all grace." (Ecclus. xxiv. 25.)

Mary's Presentation in the Temple

"*In the holy dwelling-place I have ministered before Him.*" (Ecclus. xxiv. 14.)

1st Prelude. The child on the Temple steps.

2nd Prelude. Grace to present myself to God.

Point I.– Mary

At the age of three years, tradition tells us, Mary left her home to go and live in the Temple – not merely, as other little girls of her time, to attend the Temple school, but to dedicate herself to God, and to live continually under the shadow of His Presence, as Samuel of old had done. Her desire, even at that tender age, was to confirm her parents' dedication of her at her birth, by giving herself up entirely to God, to live a hidden life with Him away from everything, however lawful, that might disturb her union with Him. She waited only for His call, and as soon as it was given, she left all and followed – even her parents must take a second place.

So, joyously and eagerly, did Mary fulfil her end of the moment. God called her, and she went to Him. She did not know what He wanted her for, nor did she seek to know. Sufficient for her that He wanted her, and was calling. At once she presented herself before Him as the little Samuel of old. "Here am I, for Thou didst call me. Speak, for Thy servant heareth." (1 Kings iii. 9.) She was ready for anything that He might want.

And this should be the attitude of all who would serve Him – a constant presentation of themselves to Him for whatever He wants. This attitude can only be arrived at by the spirit of sacrifice. To be always at liberty for God's service, the soul must be disentangled from all else, free from all that would hold it back. And this means sacrifice. Mary, presenting herself at the Temple, is specially, though not exclusively, the model of those who are called to the Religious Life. But do not let us make any mistake – a Religious is not *free* to give himself to God because he has left parents and home and possessions. He may go through all these preliminaries, and yet not be, by any means, at God's service. The great work of disentangling the soul and setting it free is done *inside* the Cloister, while the Religious is learning that it is *self* which stands in the way, and that until *that* is crushed, he is not able to render to God free and joyous service, such as Mary did. And this lesson has to be learned by those outside the Cloister too, if they would follow Mary in being always ready to answer God's calls and do His biddings. It is not their home and friends and possessions that they are asked to quit, but *themselves*. God will constantly want them in the midst of their busy lives, and they will never be too much occupied or engrossed to answer His calls, if self is out of the question. "Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing unto God, your reasonable service." (Rom. xii. 1.) Present yourselves each day, each hour, each moment, with each joy, each sorrow, each duty, each difficulty – present all as an offering to Him, Who expects your reasonable service. This is the lesson which the child on the Temple steps teaches us to-day – the lesson of *self-sacrifice*.

Point II.– Joachim and Anne

Her parents did not thwart her in her wish. They had made their sacrifice three years before, and they were not likely to take it back now. They had probably told Mary the story of their long, childless years; of their earnest prayers to God; and of their promise to give the child back to Him should He bless them with one. They would have told her, too, that they had offered her to God at birth, and that, as soon as she was old enough, she would present herself in God's Temple, as something dedicated

to His service. And now, to-day, they accompany their little one to the "holy dwelling-place" where she is to "minister before Him," and watch her climbing the Temple steps, at the top of which the Priest is waiting to receive her in God's name. Desolate though their home would now be, Joachim and Anne would rather have it so than interfere in any way with the call of God to their child. They recognised that God has *His* rights, and that these must come first.

What an honour God shows to parents, when He gives a vocation to a child of theirs; and what a blessing is thereby bestowed on the whole family! And surely, if there is merit laid up for the one who, in answer to God's call, leaves father, mother, brother, sister, friend, to follow Him, there is merit also for those who make perhaps an equally great sacrifice, even if it is somewhat grudgingly made. God will not forget the hearts and homes which have been made desolate because He has ravished a heart there. He is never outdone in generosity. Those who have given up their treasure on earth will find treasure in Heaven.

Children sometimes give themselves unnecessary pain by presuming too readily that their parents' consent will be withheld. They will often find their parents more ready than they think to make the sacrifice. It is not likely that God would give a vocation in a family without making *some* sort of preparation there for it. His ways are not our ways, and so it happens that there are many surprises.

Point III.— Mary's Vow

It is not known exactly when she made it – probably not on the day of her Presentation. She would take then the *Temporary Vow* of Virginity, as all the pupils at the Temple school did till they left to be married. But some time during her stay in the Temple, Mary, probably unknown to anyone but God, Who inspired her, took a vow of *Perpetual Virginity*. She could keep nothing back from God; He must have all. She presented herself "wholly acceptable unto God."

To understand what a strange thing this Vow of Mary's was, we must remember that in those days *everyone* married, even priests and High Priests, and everyone hoped – and especially now that the expectation was getting keener – that his would be the favoured family in which the Messiah was to be born. Mary had more reason to hope than many others, for was she not of the tribe of Judah, and of the House of David? Yet she took a vow which cut her off from all hope that this greatest of blessings would be hers. Why? Because her sacrifice of self was perfect. Self was laid entirely on one side, and, as a consequence, her humility was so great that she never thought it possible that the honour of being the Mother of the Messiah could be hers, and she cut herself off from all prospect of it. It was this very self-abnegation which was fitting Mary for the destiny God intended for her. Her Vow of Virginity, made in response to God's inspirations, was the necessary means for the carrying out of His plans. God's ways are not our ways. "Behold a *virgin* shall conceive and bear a Son, and His name shall be called Emmanuel." (Is. vii. 14.) But there were no virgins; and the fact that every Mother in Israel was hoping to be the Mother of the Messiah was a proof that this "sign," which God Himself gave, was wholly ignored. It was contrary to the spirit of the age. And this was God's moment. Clearly He gave His call: "Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline thy ear, and forget thy people and thy father's house; and the King shall greatly desire thy beauty." (Ps. xlv. 11, 12.) And as the little one, in answer to the appeal, joyously mounted the Temple steps, the Angels were already saluting her as *Queen of Virgins*. She was the first; how many would follow in her train! "After her shall virgins be brought to the King; her neighbours shall be brought to Thee; they shall be brought with gladness and rejoicing; they shall be brought into the Temple of the King. Instead of thy fathers, sons shall be born unto thee." (Verses 15-17.)

May there not be a warning here for those who, having, in imitation of Mary, taken the Vow of Virginity, desire too ardently to be the "spiritual Mothers of children"? Mary had no such desires. Her whole desire was for union with God – there was not a tinge of self in it. The soul which thinks itself unworthy of being used is the one God uses, the soul which is wrapped up in seeking after

its own perfection, hiding itself in its interior life, living its life in solitude with God and for God. Blessed are the Mothers of spiritual children! Yes, but rather blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it. There should be no limit to our zeal for souls, but it should be covered up by an annihilation of self, and an unobtrusive humility – a humility which teaches us to *act*, not to talk, as if *we* could never be the ones chosen by God to do His work. Humility, far from being an obstacle, always makes it easier for God to carry out His plans.

Colloquy. "O Mary, Queen of Virgins, grant that by thy intercession we may deserve to be presented one day to the Most High in the Temple of His glory." (*Collect for the Feast of the Presentation, B.V.M., Nov. 21.*)

Resolution. To present myself often to God to-day.

Spiritual Bouquet. "Congratulate me, all ye that love the Lord, because when I was a little one, I pleased the Most High." (*Common Office of Our Lady.*)

Mary's Marriage

"Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, Who is called Christ." (St Matt. i. 16.)

1st Prelude. Picture of the marriage of Our Lady and St Joseph.

2nd Prelude. The grace of confidence in God.

Point I.– Mary

Twelve years have passed since the little child mounted the Temple steps to present herself to God. Never, during that time, has she taken back the smallest part of her offering. Always has she been presenting herself as a living sacrifice; always has she been *full* of grace, doing God's will perfectly, glorifying Him by her every thought, word, and action, as no human creature had ever glorified Him. How much Mary added during those twelve years to the Treasury of merits from which the Church was to draw, through all time, in answer to the appeals of her children, who were anxious to make satisfaction for their sins! In return for a little Indulged Prayer, or Act, the Church unlocks the Treasury, and the superabundant merits of Mary, added to the infinite merits of her Divine Son, are given to the suppliant, either to make satisfaction for his own sins, or, if he will, to be applied to the souls in Purgatory, and thus lessen the debt they owe to God, and shorten the distance that lies between them and the Beatific Vision, for which they so earnestly long.

Oh, blessed Treasury of merits! Jesus, Who poured into it His infinite merits, has an interest in it. Mary, whose wondrous merits all went into it, has an interest in it. The Saints, whose superabundant satisfactions are stored up there, have an interest in it. The Holy Souls must watch with the keenest interest for the moments when the Church, coming with the keys, entreats from Him, Who alone has jurisdiction in Purgatory, that her treasures may be handed to this or that particular soul; and He, Whose justice, as well as His mercy, is infinite, will distribute them as He will. And shall not I, too, take an interest in this wondrous Treasury? Let me never forget to make use of it; and let my prayer every morning be a fervent and a heart-felt one: "I desire to gain all the Indulgences that I can this day."

But the time came when Mary had to leave the seclusion of the Temple, and give herself in marriage. She was helpless to prevent this, for her Vow was a secret, unknown even to her parents. All she could do was to leave the matter in God's Hands. It was to Him she had offered her virginity, and she trusted Him to guard it. How simple and child-like was her trust! The path pointed out to her *appeared* to be directly opposite to the one she had chosen, but it was pointed out by those whom God had chosen to represent Himself to her – the priests of the Temple, or her parents, or both. Her faith was great enough to believe that God can make no mistakes, that He cannot call in two different directions, that all will work together to fulfil His Will, if only His Will is put *first*. What a lesson for us! How often in my life has something happened, some way opened, which seemed to cut at the very root of some cherished plan! And yet, on looking back, I see that had I not followed God's call along the path which *seemed* to be leading the wrong way, I should never have been able to carry out that plan which I had made for His glory. Why was Abraham called the friend of God? Was it not because of his confidence in God – confidence shown in his readiness to follow wherever God called – even when He called him to sacrifice the child of the promises? God loves to lead us about, by circuitous paths, and thus to bring out our love and trust and obedience. Had Mary taken a line of her own, and refused to marry because of her Vow, she would have frustrated God's plans for the Incarnation.

I do not want to frustrate His plans for me. Let me remember this the next time I am tempted to turn a deaf ear to a call of His, which does not fit in with my tastes and desires and hopes.

Point II.– Joseph

The husband, chosen by God for this most delicate and most responsible position, was our dear St Joseph. He was the one man in all the world of whom God could be sure. He was "a just man," one who would put no obstacle to God's designs, but would, by his silence, tact, self-sacrifice, and fidelity lend himself to further them.

Let me dwell for a little while on these qualities – qualities which God values and looks for, when He wants someone to whom He can entrust His work or His secrets; and perhaps I shall discover things which may help me to be more zealous in His service, to be less for self and more for Him.

Some have thought that Mary confided her secret to Joseph; and that he showed his sympathy, and readiness to enter into all her interests, by taking the Vow of Virginity too, thus preparing himself to be the husband of Mary and the foster-father of Jesus.

Point III.– The Marriage

And so this most beautiful marriage took place; and the Holy Spirit, Who was ever watching over His spouse, blessed and sanctified the union of these two virgin souls. It was a union in which the body was forgotten – or rather, the spiritual life had reached such heights by means of the body, that is, of the senses, that the soul was able to live entirely in those heights. The soul was helped upwards by the body, as God intended it to be. When the body is dead, the soul can grow no more. The level of the spiritual life, at which I am found at death, will be mine through all eternity. The converse of this truth is, that the body is necessary for the growth of the spiritual life, and that the soul grows in proportion to the help it gets from the body. These thoughts will help me to understand how much the chaste marriage of Joseph and Mary must have aided their spiritual life, and how the Angels must have rejoiced at a union which savoured so much more of Heaven than of Earth.

Now, all was ready. The Virgin who was to conceive and bear a child, Whose name was to be Emmanuel – God with us – had got a guardian. God could work His stupendous miracle, and keep it hidden, as He willed it to be for the present, from the curious gaze of unbelievers. Mary, by her self-abandonment, was supplying God with all He needed, never thwarting Him, nor putting the least obstacle in His way.

And so we leave her, doing the work of the little cottage at Nazareth, while her carpenter-husband labours to support her. Mary has changed her abode; her outward circumstances have altered; but her union with God suffers no change; it remains unbroken, undisturbed; nothing has the power to disturb her thoughts of Him. And Mary is my model. What I have to aim at, too, is a union with God so real and so close that the changes and chances of this mortal life have no power to interrupt it. This blessed lot will be mine when I have faith enough to see God's Hand in every circumstance of my life. If I know that He is there, why need I trouble so much about the ups and downs? The sea of life is bound to have waves. What I have to do is to see to it that my little barque rides on the top of them in the most perfect security and peace. The Master is at the helm, and I am *with Him* in the boat. My thoughts, surely, will be fixed on Him rather than on the changes in the weather!

Colloquy with Our Lady, asking her to get me more faith.

Resolution. To let nothing interrupt my union with God.

Spiritual Bouquet. "Sancta Virgo virginum, ora pro nobis."

Hail Mary!

"The Angel Gabriel was sent from God into a city of Galilee, called Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the Virgin's name was Mary. And the Angel, being come in, said unto her: Hail! full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women!" (St Luke i. 26-28.)

1st Prelude. Gabriel saying the first Hail Mary.

2nd Prelude. Grace to say my Hail Maries well.

When all was ready and God's moment had arrived – "when the fulness of the time was come" (Gal. iv. 4) – heaven opened, and one of God's messengers, Gabriel, an Archangel, was sent to Nazareth on a secret errand to Mary. He knew her well, and he expressed his knowledge in the first *Hail Mary* that was ever said. Let us meditate on these familiar words, and try to find a few thoughts which may help us to say our *Hail Maries* better.

Point I.– Hail!

Reverently he salutes her; for though she is not yet the Mother of God, she is immaculate, and worthy of all honour; besides, he is in the secret, and knows God's designs. "Hail! full of grace."

What does it mean – this word "*Ave*," *Hail!* with which Gabriel begins his message? It is an expression of respect, honour, and reverence. It was the salutation always given to the Roman Emperor: *Ave! Caesar Imperator*. But it is not only a form of greeting; it implies also that he who uses it is anxious to attract attention because he has something to say or some favour to ask.

How often I say it! —*Hail Mary!* What do I mean by it? I ought to mean that I am saluting the Queen of Heaven with all respect, honour, and reverence; and also that I, her child, am calling my Mother's attention. When she hears my *Hail!* she expects that I have something to say to her, or that I want something. Is it so? And if Mary turned and said: "Yes, my child, what is it?" should I know?

My *Hail!* should be also to call my Mother's attention to the fact that I am there if *she* has anything to say to me, or if she wants anything. *Hail Mary!* Your child is here, ready to do anything for you. When she turns at my *Hail!* to ask me for something, does she always get it? Or is she disappointed to find that her child's thoughts are not really with her at all?

What shall I do, for I know that I stand convicted; and much though I should like each *Hail Mary* that I say to mean all this, I know that it does *not*? Would it be better not to say it at all, than to risk any want of respect to that Mother whom I love so dearly?

Oh no. Does not a mother love to hear the voice of her babe in its cradle, even though the sounds it makes are quite inarticulate, and it cannot say what it wants? She always understands, and is able to interpret the baby language, and will give it what is good for it, though it may be all unconscious of its needs. None but the mother would recognise that the babe was calling her attention – not even the babe itself. Is not this something like my *Hail Maries* carelessly and lightly said? I say them because I am Mary's child; it is the most natural thing to do; and she will interpret them as her Mother's heart knows how. And, like the babe in its cradle, I love to feel that she is at my side, because I have attracted her attention, even though I may have done it almost from habit, and may not know exactly why.

Hail Mary! I will say the blest words as often as I can, putting into them all the meaning and fervour of which I am capable, and leaving it to my Mother to make up all deficiencies.

Point II.– Full of Grace

How is Mary full of grace?

1. Because she was conceived without sin: that is, her soul was full of grace instead of original sin. She was full of grace always – even before she was the Mother of the Author of grace.

2. Because of her correspondence to grace. She was always faithful to grace. She never let one single opportunity pass by her unused. The more faithful I am to the inspirations of grace, the fuller shall I be of grace. It is a question of my fidelity, not of God's generosity. He never fails – the grace is always there waiting for me.

3. Because she was always meriting grace. Each correspondence to grace entitled her to more, as it does me. It is by virtue of her merits that she can obtain from her Divine Son all the grace that her children need. Confidently may they appeal to her, for she is the "Mother of Divine Grace."

"*In me is all grace of the way.*" (Ecclus. xxiv. 25.) So Mary says to her children, and she has all I need for the way – that is, for my journey through life. The way is hard – it is the Highway of the Cross, the way that Jesus trod before me. Let me never attempt to tread it alone – not for a single hour, for the pitfalls are many; but let me ask Mary to accompany me – Mary with her never-failing supply of grace. It was Jesus Himself Who gave me His Mother, and He gave her also all the grace that He knew I should need for the way. What a provision He has made for me! If I drew upon my stores more confidently, I should be much fuller of grace than I am.

Hail Mary! full of grace, thou art my Mother. Let me put my hands in thine and keep close to thee. So shall the way have no terrors for me, and so shall I be able to tread in the Footsteps of thy Son, along His Own Highway of the Cross.

Point III.– The Lord is with Thee. Blessed art Thou among Women

The Lord is with thee. These words were often said of or to those to whom God was about to entrust some special work. He was "with Joseph" while he was in Putiphar's prison, preparing him for the great work of serving the nation during the famine. (Gen. xxxix. 21.) "I will be with thee," God said to Moses at the burning bush, when He told him that it was he who was to bring the children of Israel out of Egypt. (Ex. iii. 12.) And to Josue, who had to bring the chosen people into the promised land, He said: "As I have been with Moses, so I will be with thee. Fear not, and be not dismayed: because the Lord thy God is with thee in all things whatsoever thou shalt go to." (Jos. i. 5-9.) "The Lord is with thee, O most valiant of men." This was the message the angel brought to Gedeon at the threshing floor, for he was to leave his wheat and go to deliver God's people from idolatry and from their enemies. (Jud. vi. 12.)

And now when Mary is being singled out for the greatest work that was ever entrusted to any child of Adam – that of being the Mother of Him Who was to save not one nation only, but the whole world, God sends an Archangel and bids him say to her: *The Lord is with thee.* God was with Mary always; but now all three Persons of the Blessed Trinity are to be with her in a very special way, to enable her to co-operate with God's designs for her. But the message goes further: "Blessed art thou among women." Gabriel tells her that God's message to her is that she is blessed, and more blessed than all other women! It is praise indeed, and praise from God Himself. But God can trust Mary with praise. She is full of humility, for she is full of grace; and God knows that she will look at things from His point of view – not from her own.

I may get some consolation from these words for myself. God sometimes gives me work to do for Him. How blessed I am to be picked out and chosen by Him! And I may be quite sure that He is *with me* for it. It is His own work, and He will look after it Himself; but He needs an instrument. The workman is never far from his tools, unless he has thrown them on one side as useless. "The Lord is

with thee." If I see to it that I am an instrument fit and ready for His service, I need have no other anxiety. He will use me when He wants me; the responsibility of the work will be all His, and He will be with me, doing His work by means of me.

O Mary, my Mother, help me to see things from God's point of view, as thou didst. Obtain for me the grace to be full of confidence about any work with which God may entrust me. And while I rejoice to be amongst those *blessed* ones whom He picks out to do His work, obtain for me the grace of humility. And if the Workman should allow any words of praise to be given to the instrument, may it be because He can count on the humility of His instrument – because He knows that the praise will all be passed on to Himself.

Colloquy with my Mother as we walk along "the way" together – a colloquy about correspondence to grace, about being never alone in my work, about the blessedness of being chosen by Him, about humility.

Resolution. To let my Rosary recall some of these thoughts to-day.

Spiritual Bouquet. "Among the blessed she shall be blessed." (Ecclus. xxiv. 4.)

Mary's First Word

"And Mary said to the Angel: How shall this be done, because I know not man?" (St Luke i. 34.)

1st Prelude. A picture of the Annunciation.

2nd Prelude. That my love for God may be great enough to separate me from all else.

Point I.– Mary's Silence

We do not know what Mary was doing when the heavenly visitor arrived with his message. She is generally represented as kneeling in contemplation. She may have been: or she may have been about her work. In any case, she was engaged in prayer, for Mary's heart and mind were ever lifted up to God; and that is prayer. And God can reveal His secrets just as easily to those who are working as to those who are given up to contemplation.

No wonder Mary's attention is arrested, for not only does she see one of God's Archangels, but it is to *her* that he has come, to *her* that he is showing such reverence and honour, to *her* that he is now delivering his message: "Hail! ... full of grace; the Lord is with thee... Blessed art thou among women." Each sentence of the message seems more wonderful and startling than the last. Mary does not speak, but she is *troubled*, as she thinks within herself what manner of salutation this is. Her intelligence is perfect, and she knows at once what the message means. It means that she, the one woman who has cut herself off from every prospect of being the Mother of the Messiah; that she, who has felt herself so utterly unworthy that legend tells us she used to pray that she might be His Mother's *servant*; that *she* has been singled out by God as the one who was to be blessed among women. And she is *troubled*. It is not the presence of the Angel nor the dignity of his message which is disquieting her – her trouble goes deeper; but still she does not speak – she waits in silence for God to explain Himself or to direct her.

How much wiser in *most* cases it would be for me, if I kept silence, for a time at any rate, when I am face to face with trouble, or difficulty, or perplexity. Of one thing I may be sure – that the trouble is a message from God, and if I wait patiently, He will reveal more to me, and throw light upon what seems so obscure. Nothing is gained by making complaints, and losing my calm and self-possession. Much is gained by silence; for silence to man, at such times, generally means converse with God, and to obtain this more intimate union with my heart is one of His chief reasons for sending me His messages.

Gabriel, seeing that she is troubled, hastens to reassure her: "Fear not, Mary." He is God's messenger, and he is giving God's consolation, so he calls her by her name. Consolation is never far off when it is to God alone that we turn for it. Gabriel then tells her quite plainly what are God's intentions concerning her, if she gives her consent and co-operation – that she is indeed to be the Mother of the Messiah; that she is to call Him Jesus; that her Son is to be great, and is to be called the Son of the Most High; that God will give Him a throne and a kingdom; and that of His kingdom there shall be no end.

Point II.– Mary's First Word

She has pondered in her heart, and now she speaks: "*How shall this be done?*" St Bernardine, who calls the seven recorded words of Our Lady, "*Seven Flames of Love,*" calls this first word "A Flame of *Separating Love*" (*flamma amoris separantis*). Let us try to find out why.

"How shall this be done?" Her question shows clearly what is the cause of her trouble. It is the thought of her vow of virginity – that precious offering which, as a little child, she had made to God. This it is which forces Mary, who so values silence, to speak. "How shall this be done," and yet my vow be left intact? To it at any cost I must be faithful. Mary, by her first word, shows that her love for God is so intense that it separates her from all else besides. It was out of love for Him that she made that vow. It was a flame of separating love that burnt within her, making a clear division between God and anything, however lawful and even desirable in itself, which might hinder her union with Him. And it is the same flame of love which now impels her to speak: "How shall this be done?" seeing that I am separated, consecrated to God. Her love so detaches her from all else that even the honour of being singled out to be the Mother of God has no attraction for her in comparison with keeping that contract made with God, by which she promised to be wholly His.

Am I, like Mary, absolutely faithful to any contract that I may have made with God? Do I say: "How can this be done?" seeing I have made that promise, seeing I am a Christian, seeing I have been to Holy Communion, seeing I have taken certain vows. All these are so many cords of love which should separate me from the world. My contract with God must come before everything else – all turns upon my fidelity to it. Mary was troubled because she feared her vow was in danger; and her trouble was pleasing to God.

Mary's separating love for God was the outcome of God's separating love for Mary. Her very vow of virginity, which, humanly speaking, made it impossible for her to be the Mother of the Messiah, was part of God's plan, separating her from the rest of the world for this honour. When God wants something done, He separates the soul which He has chosen to do it, though at the moment the soul may be wholly unconscious of the reasons for the process which gives it so much pain. The separation may be one of place, or family, or affections, or cherished hopes and plans. God's separating love takes various forms: but in some way or other He must and will separate from self those whom He intends to use for His service. St Paul says of himself that God separated him from his earliest infancy. (Gal. i. 15.) None would have guessed that he was separated when he was haling the Christians to death and persecuting the Church of God beyond measure. We understand so little of God's plans, and of His preparation of souls for His service. St Paul tells us that later he was "separated unto the Gospel of God." (Rom. i. 1.) And when Our Lord wanted him for a special mission, the order went forth to the Church: "Separate me Saul and Barnabas for the work whereunto I have taken them."

Help me, my Mother, to co-operate with grace, lest I hinder God's designs for me; and while *His* love is a separating one, may mine be the same – a love strong enough to separate me from all but His Will.

Colloquy with Mary, asking her to obtain for me the grace to say with her: "How shall this be done?" whenever the least thing comes between me and my duty to God.

Resolution. To let nothing to-day separate me from the love of God. (Rom. viii. 39.)

Spiritual Bouquet. "How shall this be done?"

Mary's Second Word

"The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee. And therefore also the Holy, which shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God. And Mary said: Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to Thy word." (St Luke i. 35, 38.)

1st Prelude. Picture of the Annunciation.

2nd Prelude. Grace to meditate more deeply on the *First Joyful Mystery*.

Point I.– Gabriel's Explanation

In answer to Mary's question, the Angel explains quite simply how God's plans are to be brought about. "*The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee.*" No prophecy had ever said a word of this; the agency of the Holy Ghost had never been hinted at till the Angel made it known to Mary to quiet her legitimate trouble. And as soon as Mary knew that it was to be the work of the Holy Ghost, she was at rest – all trouble disappeared. Do I follow my Mother's example in this? As soon as I know that whatever is being asked of me is the Holy Spirit's doing, am I at rest? Is there no more trouble, no more indecision, no more questioning, even though the inspiration may seem to be going to upset my plans, and may be contrary to all that has hitherto seemed right? It is not necessary to *understand* God's dealings with me, but as soon as I know that they are His dealings, it *is* necessary to co-operate at whatever cost – otherwise there will be trouble in my soul. The co-operation with the work of the Holy Spirit will produce a calm and a peace which no exterior things, however changed they may be, will have the power to disturb.

And then the Angel tells her about her cousin Elizabeth and the miraculous things which are happening to her, in order to prove to Mary that "no word is impossible with God" – that He, the God of nature, has power over nature's laws – that when he makes such promises as she has just heard, "the Holy which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God," all will be fulfilled.

Point II.– Mary's Second Word

Then Mary speaks again: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to Thy word." She gives her consent, shows herself ready to co-operate with God; and at the same moment, the Word is made Flesh; Gabriel adores the God-Man, as he had pledged himself to do at the time of the War in Heaven, and, his mission accomplished, departs from her.

St Bernadine calls this second word: "A flame of *transforming* love" (*flamma amoris transformantis*). It was certainly *love* that prompted the word, but in what sense was it a *transforming* love?

(1) *It was a transformation for Mary.* Her first word *separated* her for Him Who loved her; her second word *transformed* her into Him Who loved her. It made them for ever one. "Behold the handmaid of the Lord." Here I am for Thee to do whatever Thou wilt with me. I put no obstacle in Thy way. *Fiat.* "Be it done to me according to Thy word." This word was not only the outcome and the proof of her perfect union with God, it was also the turning point of her life – and not only of her life but of the life of the whole world. Heaven – and earth too, though unconsciously – was waiting for this word of Mary's, a word which she could have withheld. The word was spoken, and by it she lent herself to God as His co-worker; by it she was transformed from a maid into a mother, and in that moment of transformation she saw all that it meant – she saw Calvary, and she said *Fiat*.

"Be it done to me." She saw herself transformed into the image of Christ (2 Cor. iii. 18) by pain and suffering, and yet she would not withhold her *Fiat*. Why? Because she *loved*, and from that moment the transforming process was ever going on in her soul; and the flame of transforming love was ever burning more brightly, showing her the way to greater heights and deeper depths of the love of God, and so transforming her at each further step, that she shrank from nothing.

(2) *It was a transformation for the world.* This word of Mary's, by which she gave her consent to God's plan of Redemption, changed the face of the whole world. It began a new era – A.D. instead of B.C. It settled the moment of the arrival of the "fulness of time" (Gal. iv. 4) – of God's time. As a result of it, God was already tabernacling among men. The leaven of the Gospel, which was to leaven the whole world, was already beginning to work. Mary's word produced a transformation in the world, and though it "knew Him not," it was never the same world again.

(3) This word is a *transformation for the soul* which makes it its own. Any soul which really says: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it done to me according to Thy word," is transformed, for it is "made conformable to the image of His Son." (Rom. viii. 29.) Nothing but love has the power to bring about this transformation in the soul, for it means the effacement of self; it means a readiness to do God's will at whatever cost; it means a holy indifference to one's own plans and theories and even judgment – it means what it says: "*Fiat*," for everything that God arranges. When this is so there is a complete transformation; the selfish soul becomes selfless; the weak, strong; the timid, courageous; the hesitating, decided; the doubting, confident; the agitated, peaceful and calm. Heaven has already begun in the soul. Love – God's love for it first, and then its love for God – has transformed it.

Are these great things possible for me? Yes, quite possible. How was Mary transformed? By Christ dwelling within her. How was the world transformed? By Christ dwelling within it. And this is how I am to be transformed, by Christ dwelling within me. Each Communion should be to me a "flame of transforming love." It is then that, in answer to the appeal: "My child, give Me thy heart," I say to Him: "Be it done to me according to Thy word," and He comes to do what He will in my heart; and if only I put no obstacles in His way, His love will transform me into all that He wants me to be.

Colloquy with Our Lady, asking her to get me the grace of submission, which alone can transform me.

Resolution. To do nothing to-day to hinder the transforming process in me.

Spiritual Bouquet. "Angelus Domini nuntiavit Mariæ et concepit de Spiritu Sancto."

Mary's Third Word

"*And she entered into the house of Zachary, and saluted Elizabeth.*" (St Luke i. 40.)

1st Prelude. Mary saluting Elizabeth.

2nd Prelude. The grace of Charity.

Point I.– Mary's Charity

When the Angel left her, Mary's thoughts seem to have been fixed, not, as we should have expected, on the part of the heavenly message which concerned herself, but on what had been incidentally revealed to her about her cousin Elizabeth. What a total oblivion of self there is in Mary and what charity! She picks out just the little bit of the message that concerns somebody else, decides that it is not for nothing that she has been told this – it may be that her cousin has need of her; and so, instead of giving herself up to dwelling on the great things that have been said and done to her, she rises up in those days and goes into the hill country, with haste, to pay a visit of charity. And she takes Jesus with her.

Mary is my model, and I can surely find some lessons to study here. One is that charity passes before everything, even sometimes before spiritual exercises and contemplation and meditation, going to Mass and Benediction. I see too that though I must be ever mindful of God's benefits, I need not dwell too much – if at all – on the interior graces He has given to my soul; on any words of praise – though they may have come almost directly from Himself; on any piece of work that He has effected through my instrumentality. It is far more wholesome to be rising up to go to the next duty, starting forth into the hill country of difficulties, if need be, and thus taking my thoughts off myself by doing something for somebody else. I shall not, by thus acting, lose any of the graces or any of the sweetness, for I shall take Jesus with me, and together we shall face the difficulties of the next bit of life's journey.

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