

LOVING CHRIST WITH THE HEART OF MARY

In the order of nature human beings, who are social beings, are not and can never be alone. They are born, grow, and live in a society, that is, first and foremost, the family, which cannot come into being without a mother. The things a mother represents and does in and for the family cannot be completely described or listed, because many of these things, perhaps the majority of them, remain invisible and ineffable. It is certain, however, that her role is always essential and irreplaceable.

The feeling for a mother is one of the deepest and [most] unexpressible of the human heart. What would become of us, poor and weak as we are, if during our years of helplessness and need there were not someone to care for us and love us? If we did not carry in our being the certainty that we were valued by someone? Recourse to a mother is one of life's instincts: it is the first cry of the infant in the cradle and the last appeal of a stricken person in a hospital.

Theology teaches that grace does not destroy nature but completes it. Therefore, in his providential plan of salvation God has decreed that human beings cannot be alone in the supernatural order but are rather placed in the communal setting of a great family [the Church]. This is the family of those redeemed by Christ and invigorated by the powerful movement of the divine Spirit and the radiant presence of a Mother: Mary. She is both a silent, unobtrusive presence and a presence that, more than that of any other mother, is active, creative, and truly concerned about the well-being of all her children. She is a mysterious but undeniable presence, interior to all Christians but also real, alive, and personal; a presence that is gentle and makes no one uneasy but instead opens the hearts of all to life, hope, and joy. (Rosa Lombardi, MPF, *Mary: Reflection of the Trinity and First-Fruits of Creation*, 108-109.)

+ + +

A mysterious bond connects and, at the same time, distinguishes the scene of the Annunciation in Luke and the scene of seduction described in Genesis 3:1-20, the two scenes representing two actions, each of which begets a history (a history belonging both to God and to humanity). Human beings destroy, God rebuilds; human beings sin, God saves; human beings introduce death, God restores life. But a unique entity guides both processes: a virginal woman. By means of Eve, still a virgin, Adam sinned; by means of Mary, a virgin, Christ, God incarnate, is born. "When Eve was still a virgin and unblemished, she allowed the serpent's words into her bosom and brought forth disobedience and death. In contrast, Mary, a virgin, brought forth faith and joy when the angel Gabriel brought her glad tidings." (St. Justin Martyr). "Thus the knot of Eve's disobedience was untied by Mary's obedience; what the virgin Eve bound through her disbelief, Mary loosened by her faith." (St. Irenaeus)

The disobedience of Eve, which flowed out over the whole human race, was answered by the obedience of Mary, which had the same universal echo, but with diametrically opposed results. In the drama of the fall the woman had entered the path of disobedience and evil, thereby "becoming the cause of death for herself and for the entire human race; in the plan of salvation a woman enters upon the path of obedience and the good, thereby becoming the cause of eternal salvation for herself and for the entire human race." (St. Irenaeus). (Ibid, 182-183)

+ + +

In accordance with this design, Mary the Virgin is found obedient, saying, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done unto me according to thy word" (Lk 1:38). But Eve was disobedient; for she did not obey when as yet she was a virgin. Even though Eve had Adam as a husband, she was still a virgin. For "they were

both naked in paradise and they were unashamed” (Gn 2:25) since they were created a short time previously to become adults, and only then did they begin to multiply. Having become disobedient, she was made the cause of death, both to herself and to the entire human race. So also did Mary, having a man betrothed to her, and being nevertheless a virgin, by yielding obedience, become the cause of salvation, both to herself and the whole human race.

And on this account does the law call a woman betrothed to a man, the wife of him who had betrothed her, although she was as yet a virgin; thus indicating a parallelism in reference back from Mary to Eve. For what was tied together once cannot be loosened except by untying the knot in reverse order so that the second knot be dissolved by untying it first and the first knot be dissolved by untying it second. In this way the former knots become canceled by a latter untying, and the latter ties are set free by the former untying. ... In this way the Lord declared that the first will be the last and the last first (cf. Mt 19:30). (Saint Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, III, 22, 4.)