

Mary, The Mother Of Christ

By Father Clement Beck, S. V. D.

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Mary! My Mother told me the sweet name of Mary together with the name of Jesus, when I was a child. When grown a youth, Mary was to me the ideal of how to love Jesus and to keep away from sin in the temptations of life; grown into manhood, I felt I could not live without her help. Mary I hope to love till I die and after death forever in heaven. This little book is written in her honour, the Mother of Christ and our own God-given Mother. It deals with her holy life, our devotion to her and our love for her.

THE LIFE OF MARY.

I. BEFORE ALL TIME.

The beginning of the life of Mary leads us back to eternity. When God in His infinite mercy decreed that His only begotten Son should become man in order to redeem mankind from sin, He also decreed that Mary should be the mother from whom the Son of God should take His human nature. Mary is thus the eternally chosen one. The Church applies to her the words of Holy Scripture: "From the beginning and before the world was I created and to the world to come I shall not cease to be" (Ecclesiasticus 24:9-16). Saint Bernard called Mary the divine concern of the ages, which means that God planned her life, when He prepared the way for the Incarnation of His Son.

Let us see how God prepared the way for her, who was to become the mother of Jesus.

Prophecies.

In the very first book of the Holy Scriptures, we read that Mary was promised by God to mankind. God inflicting punishment on the tempter of our first parents said: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and your seed and her seed; she shall crush your head" (Genesis 3:15). Here we have a first prophecy referring to Mary; a woman is promised by God, who shall be the deadly enemy of the tempter, the serpent. This woman is Mary, who through her divine Son shall be so completely victorious over the devil, that she shall crush his head. The crushing of the head is fatal to a serpent. So is Mary's victory over the tempter to sin.

A second prophecy referring to Mary we find in the book of Isaiah (Isaias), who said: "The Lord Himself shall give you a sign. Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and his name shall be called Emmanuel (God with us)" (Isaiah 7:14). The virgin mentioned here by the prophet more than 700 years in advance is Mary, who was to conceive Christ, the Emmanuel in a miraculous way. Such is the authentic explanation of this prophecy by Saint Matthew (Matthew 1:18).

A third prophecy with regard to Mary and her Divine Child is made by the prophet Michah (Michaeas) (5:1-2), who declares Mary as the mother of the Eternal King to be born at Bethlehem.

Types and Figures.

But Mary is not only promised by God and foretold by the prophets; she is also foreshadowed in types and figures throughout the holy books — the Ark of Covenant was the sacred place where God’s presence manifested itself in a special way among His people. Mary is the true Ark of the Covenant, because in her womb God Incarnate was really present. Furthermore, in the Ark of the Covenant was the Manna, the bread that was rained from heaven to nourish the Chosen People of God. Mary carried in her womb Him Who is the true Manna of His people in the Blessed Sacrament.

It is written about the Ark of Noah, that it alone was saved in the deluge, which destroyed everything else. Thus, Mary alone escaped the deluge of sin, which swamped all men.

There is given in Holy Writ an account of a bush that was afire and yet not consumed. In like manner, Mary was a mother without losing her virginity. Referring to this the Church exclaims: “In the burning bush, which Moses saw, we recognise, O Mother of God, your stainless virginity.”

There is mention in the Song of Songs of an enclosed garden and a sealed up fountain. Mary’s soul is this enclosed garden; for the enemy never gained entrance into it, not even in original sin. Mary’s soul is the sealed up fountain; for the purity of her soul was never touched by any sin.

As Mary was foreshadowed in types, so also is she in figures. There is Eve, the mother of all the living in the order of nature; Mary is the new Eve, as she is the mother of all the living in the order of grace. There is the sister of Moses who saved her brother and through him made free the Israelites; in like manner Mary saved mankind through her divine Son. Furthermore, as the sister of Moses led her people from exile to the Promised Land and sang a hymn of praise to God, so Mary leads us from the servitude of sin to our heavenly home and sings her hymn of praise to God in the “Magnificat” (My soul, it does Magnify the Lord).

There is Esther, the queen, interceding for her people and by her intercession saving them from ruin; Mary intercedes for us and her intercession is called “Intercessory omnipotence.”

There is Judith destroying the enemies of her people; so does Mary help us to victory over the enemies of our souls.

There is the mother of the Machabees, whose sons were martyred in her presence; like another Machabean mother, Mary stands sorrow-laden beneath the cross of her divine Son.

Saint Bernard meditating on Mary exclaims: “O Mary, mother of God, from all eternity you were chosen by the Most High, prepared for Him, protected by the angels, foreshadowed by the patriarchs and foretold by the prophets.”

Thus, God had prepared the way for Mary to enter this world.

II. MARY’S LIFE ON EARTH.

At the appointed time in history, a fact took place known to us by divine revelation: Mary was conceived immaculate; from the very first moment of her existence, by a singular grace of Christ the Redeemer, Mary was preserved from all stain of original sin. Not only was there no vestige of sin, but she was filled with divine grace. Her entire life was to be lived without an actual sin or imperfection. Her life is grouped around the life of Jesus. He is the sun and Mary the sunflower bending towards Him. Therefore, the best description of Mary’s life is in relation to the life of Jesus, her divine Son.

Childhood.

The first phase in her life is that before the Incarnation of Jesus. Here we follow mainly tradition, according to which the holy parents of Mary, Joachim and Anne, possessed two houses, one in Jerusalem and another in Nazareth. Mary was born in their house in Jerusalem, as Saint John Damascene tells us. Mary is therefore really “the glory of Jerusalem and the daughter of Sion.” (Sion is sometimes spelt Zion.) Mary was of kingly descent, being descended from David. The prophet Isaiah had foretold her as the flowering plant, springing forth from the root, which was Jesse (Isaiah 11:1). Saint Augustine, commenting on these words, says: “Jesse is the father of David, the root from which there came Mary the plant and Jesus the flower.” The angel Gabriel points out that the Son miraculously born of Mary without the agency of man shall be given the throne of David, his father (Luke 1:32). If Mary were not of Davidic descent, then Saint Paul could not have called her Son Jesus, the seed of David (Romans 1:3).

Tradition again tells us that Mary was a child received by her holy parents after many prayers. But their child Mary was predestined and privileged as no other child, entering this world. From the very outset, her soul was filled with grace and untouched by original sin. Her birthday was an occasion for rejoicing the world over. Holy Mother Church recording this auspicious occasion exclaims: “Your nativity, O Virgin, Mother of God, heralded joy to the whole world; for from You arose the Sun of Justice, Christ Our Lord who, destroying the curse, bestowed on us His blessing, and confounding death has blessed us with life everlasting.” Truly, we must rejoice and thank God on the birthday of the child Mary; for her coming announced the coming of Christ as the dawn announces the rising of the sun.

Mary was a beautiful child, it being fitting for her to be so, having been chosen by God to bear His Son. As she grew in age, so did she in wisdom and grace before God and men. These words, which describe the childhood of Jesus, can certainly be applied to Mary as well; for her life was in every respect like that of her divine Son.

Of the early childhood of Mary, the Church in her feasts commemorates the occasion when her holy parents took her to the Temple in Jerusalem, to dedicate her life to God. Mary about this time began her schooling also. Saint Ambrose is of the opinion that her parents were now living again in their house in Jerusalem, which was not far from the Temple and the school. Mary could thus easily attend her school and visit the Temple, where she often prayed. Both at home and at school Mary was the perfect child, loving God and her parents, being kind to others, obedient, pious and intelligent. How much she advanced in learning and piety we can see from the “Magnificat,” the canticle she composed, when she was only about fourteen years of age.

When Mary’s school years were completed, she moved with her parents to Nazareth. Now a grown-up girl, perfect in body and soul — her body of great natural beauty, untouched by any sin, her soul pure and endowed with all that was good, beautiful, noble and heavenly — her parents were anxious to see their daughter engaged and married, because of the hope of the Saviour Who, according to the prophets, was to come from the descendants of David. Mary being obedient agreed, although she had already, under divine inspiration, made the vow to remain a virgin. She trusted that God, under Whose inspiration she had made her vow, would enable her to keep it also in marriage. The bridegroom predestined for Mary was Saint Joseph, like her of Davidic descent and after her the greatest Saint. He would certainly consent to and protect the vow of his holy spouse. By this

time the plant, Mary, spring from the root of Jesse, had grown and was ready to bear the flower, Jesus.

Annunciation.

What now happened in the life of Mary we learn from the Gospel itself: the virginal conception of Mary's divine Son, the wonder announced by the angel, performed by the power of God, and so perfectly expressed in the classical words of Saint John: "The Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us." This climax of Mary's life is recorded by Saint Luke in his simple but masterly words: "In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God into a city called Nazareth to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David; and the name of the virgin was Mary; and the angel being come in said to her: Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women. And when she had heard, she was troubled at his saying and thought within herself what manner of salutation this should be" (Luke 1:26-29). We can well understand that Mary the humble virgin was confused, when the angel with divine authority spoke to her about her fulness of grace and her future peerless dignity; true humility is always confused when praised. And the angel said to her: "Fear not, Mary; for you have found grace with God; behold you shall conceive in your womb and you shall bring forth a Son and you shall call His name Jesus; He shall be great and shall be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of David His father and He shall reign in the house of Jacob for ever. And of His kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:30-33).

With these words, the angel had conveyed the substance of his message, namely, that, the Son of God would become man in order to establish His kingdom on earth, and it was through Mary that He would enter the world. Mary believed and so she inquired how this should be done, since she had made a vow of virginity, and yet the angel's words promised her the dignity of motherhood. "How shall this be done, because I know not man?" The angel thereupon explained to her that she would remain a virgin, as the Son of God would be her Son without having a human father. "The Holy Ghost shall come upon you and the power of the Most High shall overshadow you. And therefore also the Holy which shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God. And behold your cousin Elizabeth, she also has conceived a son in her old age; and this is the sixth month with her that is called barren; because no word shall be impossible with God." (Luke 1:34-37). Mary having fully understood the divine message said in adoration of God: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to Your word" (Luke 1:38). We too believe with Mary in Jesus, Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, and was made man (from the 'Credo' or Creed, the 'I believe'). And because of the exalted dignity which God has bestowed on Mary, we shall never cease repeating the salutation of the angel, "Hail Mary."

Visitation.

The angel in his message had mentioned Elizabeth, and so the Gospel says: "Mary rising up in those days went into the hill-country with haste into a city of Judah" (Luke 1:39). It was a journey of about thirty hours, and it might well have taken Mary some four days to reach Elizabeth's house. It is quite possible, according to the custom of the Jews, that Saint Joseph accompanied his bride until she reached the house of her relative safely. Joseph might have been surprised at his bride's profound recollection and quiet meditation, but neither did he ask her nor did she tell him the mystery of the coming Redeemer. Mary entering the house saluted Elizabeth. "And it came to pass

that when Elizabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the infant leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost and she cried out with a loud voice and said: Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And whence is this to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold as soon as the voice of your salutation sounded in my ears the infant in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed are you that has believed, because those things shall be accomplished that were spoken to you by the Lord” (Luke 1:41-45). Saint Bernard, commenting on these happenings, said: “Wonder follows wonder.” The miracle of the Annunciation in Nazareth is followed by the miracle in the house of Elizabeth. Illumined by the Holy Ghost, she spoke as if she had witnessed the Annunciation. She was the first to call Mary by her most exalted title, “Mother of my Lord,” that is, Mother of God. Another wonder took place; the infant in her womb leaped for joy: this being the moment foretold by the angel about the child who was to be the forerunner of Jesus, that it should be filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother’s womb (Luke 1:15). Thus, mother and child were sanctified by the presence of Mary and the Word Incarnate in her. Already here Mary exercised her office of mediating graces through Jesus.

Mary’s reply to Elizabeth’s salutation is the canticle of praise to God, familiarly called the “Magnificat” from its first word. It runs thus: “My soul does magnify the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour. Because He has regarded the humility of His handmaid; for behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. Because He that is mighty has done great things to me; and Holy is His name. And His mercy is from generation unto generations, to them that fear Him. He has showed might in His arm, He has scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart. He has put down the mighty from their seat and has exalted the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things and the rich He has sent empty away. He has received Israel His servant, being mindful of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham too, and his seed forever” (Luke 1:46-55).

This hymn of praise to God for the favours bestowed on Mary and all mankind has never ceased being sung throughout the ages after Mary’s example.

The Bible concludes the account of Mary’s visit to Elizabeth with the following words: “And Mary abode with her about three months; and she returned to her own house” (Luke 1:56). From this, we conclude that Mary remained with her cousin till the birth of John the Baptist. The lesson we learn from Mary’s visitation and stay, during which time she must have been of incalculable help to her cousin, is that we too should be charitable and always ready to help our neighbour in whatever way we can.

Anxious Days.

On her returning home, Joseph saw in his bride the signs of motherhood. As he did not know the mystery of the Incarnation, the situation must have been very painful both to Mary and to him, especially as Mary must have told him previously of her vow of virginity. She did not explain things to him, but praying hard asked God to reveal the mystery to Joseph, as He had done to Elizabeth. And God, hearing her prayer, revealed her true condition to Saint Joseph in His own good time. The Gospel tells us that “Joseph, her husband, being a just man and not willing publicly to expose her, was minded to put her away privately. But while he thought on these things, behold the angel of the Lord appeared to him in his sleep, saying: Joseph, son of David, fear not to take unto you Mary, your wife, for that which is conceived in her, is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a Son and you shall call His name Jesus; for He shall save His people from their sins. Now all this was

done that it might be fulfilled which the Lord spoke by the prophet saying: Behold a virgin shall be with child and bring forth a son and they shall call His name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.” (Matthew 1:19-23.) We can well imagine how glad Saint Joseph was at this revelation and we easily understand what the Gospel adds: Joseph rising up from sleep did as the angel had commanded him and took unto him his wife. (Matthew 1:24.) This was a true marriage, although Joseph, accepting God’s revelation, respected Mary’s vow of virginity.

The question may well be asked here, why Mary married Saint Joseph, when she had consecrated her virginity to God. The Fathers of the Church offer many reasons. First of all, we must not forget that divine Providence was at work here in a special way. Saint Augustine says that Joseph was a just man and such a great Saint, that Mary was given to him to protect her virginity in holy wedlock, as the Jewish custom was not favourable to virginity. The good name of Mary had also to be protected against calumnies for the sake of Christ, her Son. The enemies of Jesus later on said in order to destroy His influence: “Is this not the carpenter’s son?” (Matthew 13:55). What would they not have said, had Jesus been born out of wedlock? Furthermore, who was to look after Mary and her Child and furnish them with the necessities of life? Saint Joseph’s help was vitally necessary in Bethlehem, in their flight to Egypt, and during their long stay in Nazareth. We can only admire God’s Providence in making Saint Joseph the foster father of Jesus and the true but virginal spouse of Mary.

The Birth of Jesus.

The next scene in Mary’s life lies in Bethlehem. Saint Luke tells us that Mary and Joseph journeyed from Nazareth to Bethlehem, obeying the decree of the Emperor Augustus prescribing a general census. As they belonged to the house of David, they had to be enrolled in the city of David, which was Bethlehem. On account of the census many people had come to Bethlehem, and Mary and Joseph, unable to find suitable accommodation, were forced to seek shelter in a cattle-shed, where Jesus, the Saviour of mankind, was born in the humblest circumstances. The Gospel recording the birth of Mary’s divine Son says: “And it came to pass that when they were there, her days were accomplished, that she should be delivered; and she brought forth her first-born Son (Luke 2:6).

The Church during Christmas, untiringly sings the praises of the mother of our newborn Saviour. “Behold Mary has brought forth unto us the Saviour. Giving birth to the eternal King, she has combined the joys of a mother with the honour of a virgin; no one was privileged thus before her nor shall anyone be after her. On this day, the Creator of mankind and King of Heaven deigned to be born of the virgin. The root of Jesse has budded forth, the virgin has brought forth the Saviour. O blessed Mother of God, undefiled you have borne today the Saviour of the world. Oh, holy and immaculate virginity high above all praise; He Whom heaven could not enclose, you have enclosed in you. Mother of God, intercede for us.” Such are the praises of the Church for Mary on the festival of the Nativity of Jesus. And indeed, it is because she bore Jesus, that Mary is honoured with the highest title, “Mother of God.” For He, who was born of her, remained what He was, true God, and He assumed from her, what He did not have, His human nature.

The Gospel tells us that Mary, after having brought forth her Son, wrapped Him in swaddling-clothes and laid Him in a manger. We conclude from this that Mary did not suffer the pains of childbirth; her delivery was miraculous and glorious. Soon afterwards, the shepherds summoned by the angels arrived and adored with Mary their new-born Saviour. How did Mary’s heart rejoice over this homage of the poor shepherds, and how must not her heart have overflowed with joy, when the

three holy 'kings', the magi, came to adore the divine Child! Let us, too, kneel down at the manger and with Mary and Joseph, the shepherds and kings; let us adore our divine Saviour.

Presentation of Jesus.

Forty days after Christmas a festival is celebrated, which is called the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Presentation of the Child Jesus. According to the religious law of the Jews a mother had to visit the Temple for legal purification and offer her first-born son to God; the child being redeemed by a customary symbolical offering. Mary, the mother of the supreme Lawgiver and virgin most pure, was exempted from such a law; but nevertheless she wished to fulfil it and thank God and show her readiness to surrender her divine Son as the victim of our redemption. The Gospel of Saint Luke describes this presentation of Jesus in the arms of His mother, and the Church jubilantly sings on the feast of the Purification: "O daughter of Sion, welcome Christ the King; greet Mary with loving embrace; for she, who is the very gate of heaven, brings to you the glorious King of the new light; though in her arms she bears a Son begotten before the day-star, yet ever she remains a pure virgin. Hers was the Child whom Simeon, taking up into his arms, declared unto all peoples to be the Lord of life and of death, the Saviour of the world."

Simeon, who was a just and holy man, had received the assurance from the Holy Ghost, that he would see the Saviour before he died. Led by the Holy Spirit, he came to the Temple, and recognising in the helpless Babe the promised Saviour, he took with joy the Child Jesus from His Mother's arms, and praising God, thanked Him for the fulfilment of His promise to send the Saviour. Death no longer held any terrors for Simeon, now, that he held in his arms his Lord and God, his Saviour, the Light of revelation for all those in darkness and the Glory of his people. Mary and Joseph wondered at the things which were said about their child. And holy Simeon blessing them turned to Mary and, as if preparing her for her coming sorrows, said to her: "Behold this Child is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel and. for a sign which shall be contradicted and your own soul a sword shall pierce" (Luke 2:34). The evangelist concludes the record of the presentation of Jesus by His Mother with the words: "When they had fulfilled everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned home to their city Nazareth" (Luke 2:39). Remembering the example of the mother of Jesus, Christian mothers today visit the church with their new-born infant in order to thank God and make a small offering, usually a candle. (Luke tells us of the return to Nazareth at this point as he has decided to omit recounting the incident which follows.)

The Flight Into Egypt.

The prophecy made by Simeon was soon to be fulfilled. (It is most likely that it is now that the magi or 'three kings' arrive to worship the new-born Saviour and offered gifts including gold. If these gifts had been given earlier, then Mary and Joseph would not have had to offer the 'poor man's offering' at the Presentation in the Temple. However, Luke is at pains to point out the poverty of the Holy Family's offering.) Herod, then king of the Jews, having heard of the birth of Jesus, Whom he was told was of kingly descent, decided secretly in fear and hatred to kill the Child. However, the angel of the Lord was sent with a message to Saint Joseph telling him of Herod's evil designs and directing him to take Mary and the Child Jesus and flee into Egypt. Joseph, acting immediately upon the instruction given by the angel, left Bethlehem by night on this difficult and hazardous flight to a foreign country. It was a journey of at least ten days, not spent in a comfortable train, but in great anxiety and discomfort on the back of an ass.

How must not Mary's motherly heart have grieved, that the Saviour of the world had to go into exile at the very beginning of His life. How great her suffering during the journey across the trackless desert! Fatigue, hunger, thirst must have tortured them, apart from the dangers of being attacked on the way by wicked men or wild animals. Such was the sword of sorrow and anguish piercing Mary's heart, that we commemorate the flight to Egypt as one of her seven dolours. Mary, who must have suffered so much on this occasion, will certainly understand all those who come to her in their hour of need; and there are such situations in every human life which may be compared with the flight into Egypt. Be assured that in all the troubles of this life on earth we have an understanding Mother in heaven.

We do not know for how long Mary lived in exile. Possibly it was for some years, (but some scholars suggest the time was quite short as Herod's death was fast approaching,) during which time Egypt was privileged to be the centre of the world, as our Lord and Saviour lived there, cared for by His holy Mother. Of one thing we are certain, that Mary did not despair in her exile, nor did she question God's will. Jesus was her all, and He being with her, even exile was tolerable. Mary did not complain, for she knew that God's arrangements are always the best. She did not question the reason, why God did not stay the hand of the tyrant king, Herod, instead of sending innocent people into exile. Mary, who had promised at the time of the Annunciation that she would be the handmaid of the Lord, was ready to serve Him not only in joyful days, but also in times of trial. In the days spent in Egypt, she fulfilled her pledge. Remembering the words her great ancestor, David, had sung in Psalm 22, "My road may run through the shadow of death, but I fear no harm, for You, O God, are at my side," her resignation in God's holy will was complete. (This is verse 4 of the Psalm in the Vulgate, though the Psalm is numbered 23 in the Hebrew.) What a lesson for us; if we be exiled or misunderstood, hated, persecuted or forced to live in surroundings and circumstances not to our liking, we should never despair, but, bearing in mind the sufferings of our heavenly Mother, we should resign ourselves like her. God is also with us in whatever circumstances we are.

In Nazareth.

In due course, the angel of the Lord brought news of wicked King Herod's death to Joseph and commanded him to return to the Holy Land with the Holy Family. Joseph therefore took the Child and His Mother, Mary, and went to Nazareth, where they settled down in a humble home. In Mary, the people of Nazareth saw only a beautiful young mother and her lovely child. Little did they realise that they were privileged to have living among them the Saviour of mankind and His Mother. They saw her preoccupied in her home, performing the various household duties, filling water at the well, lighting the fire, and cooking their frugal meals, cleaning, sewing, caring for her Divine Child, holding Him to her heart, whilst waiting for Joseph, who earned the wherewithal to maintain the Holy Family by the work of his hands. So it was that Mary lived in Nazareth, humble of heart, kind towards all, unwaited upon and unattended, like any servantless mother. And yet this simple life of Mary in Nazareth was a life most pleasing to God, a life over which the angels rejoiced; it was the life most perfect and most holy ever lived on earth by a mere creature, a life in perfect compliance with the holy will of God and entirely consecrated to the service of Jesus. Mary's fine and skilful hands worked only for Jesus; the fine garments she made, the fine meals she prepared were for Him; the home she kept so clean out of love for Him; with her kind voice she spoke to Him; with her loving eyes she looked upon Him, Who was her only delight.

With what reverence, devotion, perfection and piety must not Mary have served Jesus during those years. And what an excellent example our heavenly Mother sets us. Like her, we should dedicate our lives to Jesus and do everything out of love for Him.

The Finding in the Temple.

Of Mary's simple but heavenly life at Nazareth, we find one instance recorded in the Gospel, which was again a trial for this loving mother. The Gospel tells us that the holy parents of Jesus went every year up to Jerusalem for the festival of the Pasch. When Jesus was twelve years old, He accompanied them on this pilgrimage. Mary must have remembered her visit to the Temple with Jesus in her arms and what Simeon had said to her in his prophecy. This visit caused Mary and Joseph great sorrow; for when they were returning home after the festival, Jesus remained in the Temple and His parents knew it not. According to the custom, Mary had joined a group of women, who went homeward like her, whilst Joseph had likewise joined a group of men, each thinking that Jesus was with the other. When the pilgrims camped in the evening, they sought Jesus among their kinsfolk and acquaintances. How alarmed they must have been, when they discovered that Jesus was not among them. They hurried from group to group of the resting pilgrims, inquiring and hoping to find their lost Child. Their search proving fruitless, they lost no time in returning to Jerusalem that very night. Reaching the city at daybreak, they searched the streets of Jerusalem with unspeakable anxiety in their hearts; they stopped the passers-by, inquiring whether they had seen anything of a beautiful child. But no one knew anything about their Son. The day passed and the night found Mary and Joseph still in their indescribable anguish and grief.

O Mother of Jesus, what did you suffer in these days, what excruciating torture in your heart! By that anguish in your heart, O Mother, help us to search for and to find Jesus again, if we have lost Him through our committing sin. Finally, after three weary days and two sleepless nights, Mary found her Beloved Son in the Temple. Upon seeing Him, she said: "Son, why have You done so to us? Behold Your father and I have sought You sorrowing." (Luke 2:48.) And Jesus answering them said that He had stayed back according to the will of His heavenly Father, Whose will He had come to fulfil in all circumstances. By His answer, Jesus was preparing His loving mother for the time when His heavenly Father would bid Him leave her and start His public life in order to teach and to die for the redemption of mankind. The answer which Jesus gave were not words of rebuke, but words dictated by His messianic mission, in which Mary was to play so important a part.

Jesus then returned to Nazareth with His holy Mother and Saint Joseph and remained obedient unto them, the Gospel tells us. (Luke 2:51.) Saint Bernard, unable to conceal his profound astonishment, exclaims: "He was subject to Mary! Think and choose which is the greater wonder, the all-kind condescension of the Son or the all-surpassing exaltation of His Mother; both are miracles; the fact that God is obeying a woman shows a humility without parallel; the fact that a woman gives precepts to God reveals a dignity without equal." "One consideration we must add here: when Jesus, the Son of God, subjected Himself to Mary by obeying and honouring her, is it possible then for any follower of Christ not to honour and love her?"

Humble Labour.

For the next eighteen years, Mary lived with Jesus at Nazareth. Who can describe those years? Saint Paul says: "You are dead and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3). Of no other one are these words more true than of Mary; she was indeed dead to sin and her life was hidden with Christ in God. Mary continued her unremitting care and service for Jesus. But how to describe

her interior life? Real spiritual value and beauty lie in the soul. Mary's heart, soul and mind were in all respects a most perfect imitation of Jesus. Saint Paul tells us that according to God's will the life task of each one of us is to conform our lives with that of Christ. In Mary, this conformity with Christ was most perfect. During all these years, Mary was continuously learning from Jesus, observing His life, taking in His words and applying them to her own life. Thus co-operating with the graces which God had bestowed upon her from the beginning, Mary proceeded from virtue to virtue, till all the virtues of Jesus were shining in her in the full splendour of highest personal sanctity. There, living with Jesus, the Author of all graces, Mary grew in grace; her Son had come that all should receive the divine life of grace in abundance (John 10:10); how did He fill the heart of His Mother with grace during those eighteen long years!

Jesus, Whose heart was a burning furnace of love for God, enkindled in Mary's heart an ever-growing love for God. Jesus, Who had come to save the souls of men, made His Mother's heart equally zealous for souls. There in Nazareth Mary lived with Jesus, the teacher of charity, humility, obedience; with Jesus, the lover of holy and chaste souls; with Jesus, Eternal Wisdom. In this school of Jesus, Mary became the Mother of Fair Love, the virgin most kind, most humble, most obedient, most chaste and most prudent; in short, there in Nazareth Mary's life became the most perfect imitation of that of Christ, till it was true to say that Mary lived no more, but Christ was living in her. So Mary's life in Nazareth is a life hidden with Christ in God, a life which was simple and unobserved by the world, but most precious in the eyes of God.

Some have said: "Why not leave Mary in her hidden life, instead of making so much of her now?" To all those we reply in the words of Saint Paul that, having lived with the hidden Christ, we shall also live with the glorious Christ. (Colossians 3:4.)

After Mary's example, our life also must be hidden with Christ in God. He must live in our thoughts, words and actions. We, too, must co-operate with God's will and preserve unspotted for the Day of Judgment the white garment of sanctifying grace which we received in baptism.

Death of Saint Joseph.

Tradition tells us one thing more of Mary's hidden life in Nazareth; the death of Saint Joseph, who, dying so lovely a death in the arms of Jesus and Mary, has become for all time the Patron of the Dying — the Saint of a happy death. In every "Hail Mary", we implore our heavenly Mother also to be present with Jesus by us at the hour of our death.

Three Episodes.

Now the day was approaching, when, according to the will of His heavenly Father, Jesus had to bid His Mother Mary farewell and to begin preaching publicly about the kingdom of God. During this apostolic life of Jesus, Mary is not found at the side of Jesus, but continued her hidden life at Nazareth. It is only on three occasions that she is mentioned during this period.

The first is at Cana, at a marriage feast where, the wine running short, Mary, wishing to save the bridal couple from embarrassment, approached Jesus, Who had also been invited, and explaining the situation, requested Him to help them. The answer which Jesus gave His Mother was no refusal, since, in accordance with the will of His heavenly Father, Jesus performed the miracle Mary had asked for. The meaning of the reply to His Mother was: "Lady, why are you troubled; has not the hour for manifesting My power come?" Mary, understanding her Son and, knowing that He would grant her request, instructed the servants saying: "Whatever He shall say to you, do ye." (John 2:5.)

On the second occasion, we read of a visit Mary paid to her Son, while He was preaching to a great multitude. When Jesus was told by one of His hearers: “Behold Your mother and brethren stand outside seeking You,” He answered: “My mother and brethren are they who hear the word of God and do it.” (Luke 8:19-21.)

A similar statement was made by Jesus when a woman from the crowd listening to Him exclaimed: “Blessed is the womb that bore You and the paps that gave You suckle.” But Jesus said: “Yea rather blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it.” (Luke 11:28.)

These are the only three occasions on which Mary is mentioned during the public life of Jesus. Does this suggest, perhaps, that Jesus was wanting in honouring His Mother? Certainly not; such an interpretation would overlook the great privileges Christ had bestowed on His Mother, to whom He had been obedient for thirty years. What Jesus did on these occasions was to give His hearers a lesson, as they were proud of their carnal descent from Abraham, supposing themselves thereby predestined for heaven. Jesus made it clear to them that it was not the carnal descent that mattered in the kingdom of God, but the fulfilling of the will of God. These words of Jesus were in fact a public praise of His Mother, who excelled all others in fulfilling God’s will, being the most faithful and perfect handmaid of the Lord.

During the Passion of Jesus.

Mary continued her hidden life at Nazareth, whilst Jesus was preaching the kingdom of God. But when our divine Saviour, according to the will of His Father, began His Sacred Passion in order to redeem mankind by His death on the Cross, then Mary left the shelter of her home to share with her Son the sufferings of His Passion. Mary met Jesus as He struggled beneath the weight of the Cross on His way to Calvary. How sad must not that meeting have been. Never had a mother loved a child, as Mary loved Jesus; and now to see Him in the midst of soldiers, and an excited and derisive mob, dragging Himself beneath His heavy, cross! Such was the treatment meted out to Him Who was the delight of the angels in heaven; so was the Redeemer of mankind treated by them, whom He had come to save. Who can fathom the depths of sorrow felt by Mary at this meeting? Like a sword did sorrow pierce her mother’s heart again — true to the prophecy made in the Temple by Simeon. How much Mary must have suffered at this meeting no words can describe adequately; but what we know is that she bore her suffering in the same spirit as Jesus. O Mother of God, help us to carry our crosses through life as you did, with fortitude.

Again, we find Mary on Mount Calvary, compelled helplessly to witness her Son stripped of His garments and having His hands and feet nailed to the cross. How the blows of the hammer that nailed His adorable hands and feet to the cross must have echoed in His Mother’s heart. How an agonising grief must have overwhelmed her, when she saw Him being roughly raised up on His cross!

Now Mary, the Mother of Sorrows, as the Gospel describes her, stands beneath the cross. For three torturing hours, which must have been for her like an eternity, she stood and watched her Son’s indescribable sufferings; knew Him tortured by a thirst which she was unable to assuage; heard Him mocked, derided and insulted, and was unable to defend Him; saw His eyes dimmed with blood from the wounds in His head, made by the crown of thorns, but could not wipe them; gazed on His tortured body, sagging heavily on His transfixed hands, causing agony beyond description, which she was powerless to relieve. Saint Bernard, commenting on Mary’s sufferings, says: “Never can a tongue express or a heart conceive into what depths of sorrow Mary’s soul was plunged as she stood

beneath the cross.” Holy Mother Church, in deep understanding, exclaims: “To whom can we compare you, O daughter of Jerusalem? As great as the ocean is your sorrow.” In the hymn, “Stabat Mater,” (‘By the Cross, there was Standing, the Mother,’) the sentiments of the Christian soul for this sorrowful Mother are admirably expressed. Is there a heart so hard as not to be touched by grief at the thought of this Mother’s unimaginable suffering; and remembering that our sins made Jesus and Mary suffer so much, must we not detest sin.

As Jesus hung from the cross, while His Mother and Saint John stood beneath, He turned to His Mother and said: “Woman, behold your son,” and to Saint John: “Behold your mother.” According to the explanation of the Fathers of the Church, in that solemn moment Jesus made His Mother the spiritual Mother of all mankind; for Saint John, as he stood there beneath the cross, represented all humanity. And by the words addressed to Saint John, “Behold your mother,” Jesus exhorts all those who believe in Him to love and honour His Mother, Mary. We should never forget the great kindness of Jesus in giving us His Mother for ourselves in His last agonising moments on the cross; selfless to the last, He thought only of us. Should we not then in undying gratitude to Jesus give Mary in our lives all the love, honour and respect that she deserves?

Standing there beneath the cross, Mary watched her Son die for the salvation of mankind. Her tears flowed as a river, yet she was completely resigned to God’s Will, the performance of which, to her as to her Son, was the sole purport of life. Again, Holy Mother Church, in deep understanding of Mary’s immense sorrows, makes her exclaim in the words of the prophet: “O all you who pass by, stop and see, if there is any sorrow as great as mine.” (Lamentations 1:12) Mary had drained to the very dregs the cup of suffering with her divine Son; her heart had been pierced by the sword of sorrow, as her Son’s Heart had been pierced by the soldier’s lance.

The Descent from the Cross.

What must have been Mary’s feelings, when the dead Body of Jesus, taken down from the cross, was laid in her arms once more? With what love and tenderness did she hold His lifeless Body! She saw the terrible wounds made by the nails that transfixed His hands and feet; those hands and feet that had only worked for the good of others; tenderly she drew out the thorns which still pierced His head; with the gentle hands of love she washed His blood-smearred eyes and face, and, for the last time, combed and parted His hair. What memories must have tortured her then! Memories of the same hands, so tiny then, stretched out to her at Bethlehem; of those same feet when first He tried to walk in the exile days in Egypt; memories of when she first had combed His baby hair; memories leading back to Nazareth, in the quiet and so happy life with Joseph; memories of their parting, when He began His life of Ministry; memories of those years, when she had followed His public life from her retreat at Nazareth — all memories now, whilst there remain only the all-precious Body of her Son and her unbounded sorrow.

How often have not artists represented Mary with the dead Body of Jesus in her arms, and how many grief-stricken and afflicted people gazing thereon have found in the figure of Mary, with her dead Son, the meaning of their sufferings and the strength and courage to carry their crosses. Suffering makes us like unto Christ. Whosoever desires to follow Jesus must, like Mary, draw closer to Him and learn to carry the cross; but taking a greater share of His sufferings here on earth shall also mean to receive a greater share in His glory hereafter.

At the tomb Mary had to bid farewell to her adorable Son; only a mother bereft of her only son, who was her all, may feel, perhaps, what the loss of the best Son must have been to the best of

Mothers. Simeon's prophecy had been fulfilled; for the sake of Jesus, Mary's heart had been transfixed by the sharpest sword of sorrow.

For Mary, Holy Saturday dawned as a day of mingled grief and hope; grief in memories of the dreadful happenings of the previous day, hope in the certain knowledge of His glorious resurrection.

After the Resurrection of Jesus.

We come now to the last phase of Our Lady's earthly life. We cannot but believe that Jesus, upon His resurrection, appeared to His Mother, Mary, first. She who had taken the greatest share in His suffering should have been also the first to see Him upon His glorious Resurrection. And as Jesus repeatedly thereafter appeared to His disciples, instructing them about His Church, so He must have repeatedly visited Mary, who had to play so important a part as the Mother of the young Church. Again, although the Gospel does not say so explicitly, we are sure, nevertheless, that Mary was present and saw her Son ascend gloriously into heaven. She who had seen Him lifted up upon His cross, sharing with Him His agony and ignominy, certainly was entitled to witness His greatest triumph, His glorious Ascension.

Upon returning from Mount Olivet, the place of the Ascension, Mary went with the disciples to the house in Jerusalem, where Jesus had eaten His last supper and instituted the Blessed Sacrament. There they spent their time in prayer, while waiting for the coming of the Holy Ghost. When, on the feast of Pentecost, all the disciples were filled with the Holy Ghost, Mary, who was His divinely chosen spouse from the time of the Incarnation, must have been endowed in superabundance with all His graces, for the motherly care, guidance and protection she had to afford to the early Church of Christ.

Further, we learn from the Holy Scripture that the apostles, together with the faithful, gathered regularly for prayer and the breaking of the bread, thereby carrying out the command of Jesus: "Do this, all of you, in commemoration of Me." Mary was certainly present at those gatherings, which were no other than the early form of Holy Mass and Holy Communion. It is sweet indeed to think how Saint John, celebrating Holy Mass, turned to Our Blessed Lady and gave her Holy Communion. Who could attend Holy Mass, receive Holy Communion and give thanks as Mary did; certainly, it must have been a spectacle for angels and men. It was the presence of Jesus in Holy Communion that sustained her until the day she was assumed into heaven to join Him in perfect union.

Mary was the inspiration and encouragement of the early Christians. The success of the apostles in spreading the Gospel and in consolidating the early Church is greatly due to her prayers and help.

Assumption and Crowning in Heaven.

According to Our Lord's wish, expressed on the cross, Mary lived under the care of Saint John, travelling with him on his apostolic mission. We learn from tradition that they spent some time in the city of Ephesus. Again, we know from tradition that Mary died in Jerusalem about the year 48 A.D. Her death was not the result of the penalty due to sin or disease, but of her burning desire to be dissolved and united with her divine Son in heaven. There she reigns as Queen and intercedes for us, that we, her children, may at the end of our earthly pilgrimage, join her and Jesus in heaven, glorifying God forever.

And so concluding the history of Mary's earthly life, let us turn our thoughts to her, who is our Mother in heaven. Let us strive to be her children and lift our hearts in prayer, saying: "Draw us after you, O Virgin Mother, and intercede for us at the throne of God."
