



Relationship with GOD

More than Just SUNDAY

What Does the Church Really Teach about Mary?

Introduction

A magnifying lens of any type, from microscope to telescope, helps the human eye gain a deeper perspective and appreciation of objects it would ordinarily be unable to view clearly or, perhaps, to even see at all! A series of bulletin inserts will explain the heart of what the Catholic Church really teaches regarding Mary, and how, through this wondrous handmaiden, we can gain a powerful “lens” which for us will always magnify the Lord Jesus. She is forever helping us to see and understand Him, and ourselves, with ever greater clarity.

During this 100th Anniversary year of the apparitions of Our Lady at Fatima, it will be helpful to learn more about Mary in order to know her more deeply and personally. We will then become more eagerly committed to her request of praying a daily Rosary. And drawing closer to her as our spiritual Mother through prayer, she will lead us closer to her Son, Jesus—her primary role and foremost desire.

Before carefully examining the four dogmas of the Church regarding Mary and the doctrine of her Spiritual Motherhood, we must acknowledge that authentic love and true devotion is always based on divinely-revealed truth. Our response to Mary must avoid two extremes: Marian “excess”, which is placing Mary on the level of God Himself and Marian “defect”, which is minimalizing the position of the Blessed Virgin in revelation, denying in any way that she is Mother of God or our Mother. We find the perfect balance in authentic Marian doctrine defined and safeguarded by the “tripod” of Sacred Scripture, Sacred Tradition, and the Teaching Authority of the Church. There is no contradiction here, as we shall see, for all Church-recognized and defined beliefs about Mary are found, at the very least, implicitly in the Bible.

Dogma represents the highest level of revealed truth as taught by the Church. A dogma is defined as a truth which one must accept in order to be identified as Catholic. It is important to realize here that we are speaking of deep mysteries which will very often transcend our understanding. What the Church is requiring is, initially, a willingness to give at least some kind of an assent to the defined truth with an ongoing commitment to embrace it ever more fully through prayer and study.

We must remember, too, that with the help of the Holy Spirit as promised by Jesus (see John 14:26), there is a “growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been

handed down.”¹ God’s timing is always perfect. As holy men and women down through the ages have pondered and “prayed through” the truths of faith, the Holy Spirit has continued to unfold and deepen our understanding of Mary’s role in God’s plan, for “the Church constantly moves forward toward the *fullness* of defined truth.”² Hence, as the centuries have succeeded we have truths being defined and proclaimed, truths which have always existed in the heart of God, which we can, with certitude, receive and celebrate:

- **Mary as “Mother of God”** in 431 A.D.,
- **the “Perpetual Virginity”** of Mary in 649 A.D.,
- **the “Immaculate Conception”** in 1854 A.D.,
- **the “Assumption”** in 1950 A.D.

From the Second Vatican Council’s *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* (n. 62), we are enlightened about our relationship with Mary, about her

- **Spiritual Motherhood and Maternal Mediation.**

One note: “Adoration” is the worship that is deserved and rightly offered to God, the Creator, alone. The adoration of Jesus is firmly rooted and grounded within the heart of the Church before any secondary veneration of Mary is progressively inspired and evoked by the Holy Spirit. “Veneration”, that is, the special honor, reverence, and recognition of excellence we give to Mary, God’s creature, deepens and points us toward a more perfect homage of God Himself. In appreciating and honoring Mary, the masterpiece, we give greater honor and glory to God, the Divine Artist.

This bulletin insert was written by Carol Lankford, consecrated virgin and spiritual director, and is a shortened version of one of a series of six pamphlets. For access to all six pamphlets—which contain additional exposition, more detailed referencing—contact Ann Lankford, Director, Office for Catechesis and Evangelization, alankford@diolc.org.

1. Second Vatican Council’s *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, n. 8
2. *ibid*, n. 8,

