



Relationship with GOD

More than Just SUNDAY

“Am I not here who am your Mother?”

Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe - December 12

In keeping with the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Fatima, Carol Lankford wrote five bulletin inserts from May through September based upon Church teaching in regard to Mary’s role in God’s plan to save us. The four teachings of the Church examined Mary’s role in her relationship to God: “Mother of God”, “Perpetual Virginity”, “Immaculate Conception”, and the “Assumption”. In this bulletin insert, the focus will be to look more closely at what the Church teaches in regard to Mary’s relationship with us—her “Spiritual Motherhood.”

In addition to the foundational Scriptural basis found in Luke 1:26 of Mary’s indispensable “yes” to being the Mother of the Savior at the Annunciation, the principal Scriptural basis for the doctrine of Mary as Spiritual Mother of all humanity is found in John 19:26-27: “When Jesus saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing near, He said to his mother, ‘Woman, behold, your son.’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother’”.

The “beloved disciple” in this Scriptural passage is John. The beloved disciple John is a symbol of all humanity and, in a special way, of every person who likewise seeks to be a “beloved disciple” of Jesus. This has been confirmed throughout history, including Pope John Paul II who expresses “Mary’s motherhood as a personal gift which Christ gives to John, *and beyond John to every individual.*” (*Mother of the Redeemer*, no. 23, 45; *italics added*)

The teaching that Mary is our Spiritual Mother is clearly stated in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*, *hereafter LG*) from the Second Vatican Council when it declares:

“Thus, in a wholly singular way she cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope and burning charity in the work of the Savior in restoring supernatural life to souls. For this reason she is a Mother to us in the order of grace.” (*LG*61)

Significantly, this relationship with our heavenly Mother is not “general” or “collective”, in the sense that it is a gift for *all* humanity, but *very personal* to each one of us. Pope Saint John Paul II explains:

Motherhood always establishes a unique and unrepeatable relationship between two people; between mother and child

and between child and mother. Even when the same woman is the mother of many children, her personal relationship with each one of them is of the very essence of motherhood. For each child is generated in a unique and unrepeatable way. (*Mother of the Redeemer* no. 45)

I came to know this truth in an unforgettable way during a very difficult period in my life...a time of seemingly unending physical pain in which I was steadily losing hope. Jesus had always been very close to me and I had a deep personal relationship with Him, but now my disappointment and seemingly unanswered prayer for some relief—*any* kind of relief—had led me to a very honest, “in no polite terms”, outpouring of my feelings to Him. I reminded him of my pain and even more so, my broken heart and sense of abandonment. I remember telling Him, with tears flowing freely, that I didn’t have anything nice to say to Him and, therefore, I was not going to say *anything* at all. I wasn’t going to speak to Him!

The following morning I had an amazing spiritual encounter with Mary, Jesus’ Mother, which will remain with me forever. Suddenly, and unbidden, I felt her presence in a very real and vivid way. She let me know how much she loved me, and indeed I knew, beyond a shadow of a doubt, in a very *personal* way that she really was **my** Mother! With a true Mother’s love, she comforted and consoled me, and let me know that she understood exactly what I was going through. I felt her very close to me for the next three days, and I began to regain strength and hope. Then, to my surprise, I sensed her taking me by the hand and leading me back to Jesus, with the directive: “Now, you two ‘make up’”! And we did just that...as I felt her slowly and quietly recede into the background.

This is her role; she always **leads us to Jesus**. Her love for Him and for us compels, encourages, and strengthens us. Scripture gives us, in her words, one of its most concise directives: “Do whatever He tells you” (*John* 2:5).

The Council Fathers of Vatican II provide further insight on the Virgin Mary’s unique motherly participation with her Son Jesus on our behalf:



DIocese of LA CROSSE, WI

This motherhood of Mary in the order of grace continues without interruption from the consent which she loyally gave at the Annunciation and which she sustained without wavering beneath the cross, until the eternal consummation of all the elect. Taken up to Heaven, she did not lay aside this saving office but by her manifold **intercession** continues to procure for us the gifts of eternal salvation. By her motherly love she cares for her Son's sisters and brothers who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and difficulties, until they are led into their blessed home. (LG62)

In highlighting Mary's role of intercession on our behalf, it is essential to remember that Jesus Christ is the one Mediator between God and man. (1 Tim. 2:5). Mary, a human person created by God for her unique role in His saving plan, possesses a mediation that is subordinate to that of her Divine Son, Jesus. However, Mary's mediation is made extremely significant, nonetheless, by His will and in His providential design. **Mary, as an intercessor, shares in this one mediation of Jesus Christ like no other human being.** Her mediation is secondary, subordinate to, and dependent on the one mediation of Jesus Christ.

It's amazing to realize that God, through the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ saves us and makes us His children, bestowing a dignity upon us that allows us to also participate in His redemptive work—the salvation of others. We, too, are called to participate with God and become intercessors for others through our prayers and sacrifices. (1 Pet.2:5, 9; 1 Cor. 3:9). There is a spiritual battle going on all around us, a battle for the souls of God's precious children. While God is certainly big enough to “fight his own battles”, He offers to you and me the amazing privilege and invitation to join Him in this battle. Hence, we hear Mary at Fatima asking for our prayers and sacrifices for sinners (ourselves as well as others)!

The great mission to redeem mankind began with trust. God the Father trusted Mary to become the Mother of His Son in the Incarnation. Pope St. John Paul II explains:

For it must be recognized that before anyone else it was God himself, the Eternal Father, who entrusted himself to the Virgin of Nazareth, giving her his own Son in the mystery of the Incarnation. (*Mother of the Redeemer*, no.39)

The Saints down through the ages—most notably Pope St. John Paul II—have encouraged the faithful in a very specific and prayerful way to “entrust” themselves to Mary through prayers of consecration. This “filial entrustment” can be made with the help of preparation and prayers of formal consecration as handed down to us by St. Louis de Montfort, St. Maximilian Kolbe, and in a very helpful book recently written by Fr. Michael Gaitley MIC, entitled, “33 days to Morning Glory” (Lighthouse Catholic Media 2011), which includes the Marian spirituality of St. de Montfort and St. Kolbe, along with that of St. Teresa of Calcutta, and St. John Paul II.

It must be said that many are afraid that if they have a relationship with Mary, it somehow will take something away from their relationship with Jesus. Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen has some helpful words in this regard. Archbishop Sheen once responded

to a listener who asked the following question: “By praying to Mary aren't you taking away something from Jesus?” He responded, “Well, if I love your mother, does that mean I love you any less?” Extending Sheen's insight, we can pose an additional question: “If I care deeply for your mother, doesn't that enhance my love for you?” Of course the answer is yes! Love of one family member would never take away from another; it only increases or compounds it. True love, that is God's love in us, is never diminished; the more it is received and given, the more it grows. (This insight is found in the book *The Light Shines on in the Darkness, Transforming Suffering through Faith*, Fr. Robert Spitzer, SJ, p.180, 2017)

The Blessed Mother knows and loves all humanity. More profoundly, she loves each one of us individually. Perhaps this can best be pondered and understood in her tender and maternal words spoken to St. Juan Diego under her title of “Our Lady of Guadalupe”. The tone and timbre, the delicate sensitivity, of her caring message to him is meant for each one of us. May we appreciate the strength and gentleness of this message given by her, letting it seep into our minds and hearts as we ponder it frequently and allow it to become our very own:

Listen and let it penetrate your heart, do not be troubled or weighed down with grief. Do not fear any illness or vexation, anxiety or pain. **Am I not here who am your Mother?** Are you not under my shadow and protection? Am I not your fountain of life? Are you not in the folds of my mantle? In the crossing of my arms? Is there anything else you need?



Image from the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in La Crosse

Mary never fails to fulfill her amazing God given role of leading souls—all of her children, brothers and sisters of her Son Jesus Christ—into an ever deepening, personal relationship with Him as Lord and Savior. Have you specifically opened your heart to Mary, inviting her to be your personal Mother? After all, the Church teaches, and the Saints down through the ages testify, that she *already* is!

This bulletin insert was written by Carol Lankford, consecrated virgin and spiritual director, and is the sixth in a series of inserts. For access to all six bulletin inserts on Mary, contact Ann Lankford, Director, Office for Catechesis and Evangelization, (608) 791-2658.