



Relationship with GOD

More than Just SUNDAY

What does the Church teach about Mary as Mother of God?

The early Christians, prompted by the Holy Spirit, came to honor and eventually address Mary as the Mother of God, *Theotokos* in Greek (literally “God-bearer”). This title, declared definitively at the Council of Ephesus in 431 A.D., states that Mary is Mother of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity made Man.

We can arrive at a very logical conclusion from the Council’s declaration:

1. Jesus is God
2. Mary is the mother of Jesus and, *therefore...*
3. Mary is the Mother of God

It seems simple enough, but a critical point must be made here because when we say Mary is the Mother of God, it sounds as if she somehow pre-exists God (all mothers pre-exist their children in time and space); doesn’t that somehow make her God, or at least equal with God? The answer to this question, asked frequently by many who are not Catholic, is of course, “no.” A clear understanding of the mind of the Council Fathers and the revealed truth regarding the Person of Jesus and the person of Mary is required here. Jesus is one divine Person with two natures, a divine nature and a human nature, which are inseparably united in this one divine Person. Mary is a human person with one nature, a human nature.

What is it then that Mary gives to Jesus? She gives to God, to Jesus, a human nature, and only a human nature. Because she gives birth to the one, undivided Person of Jesus Christ – fully God and fully man – the Church holds that Mary is to be honored as the “Mother of God.”

Is it legitimate to say that Mary is the Mother of God if she did not give to Jesus His divine nature? We need to take a minute and consider what our mother gave to us. Did she give us an immortal soul? Clearly she did not. God infuses our created soul at the moment of conception and yet, we have no problem calling the woman, in whom we were conceived and eventually birthed, our “mother.” The definition of motherhood is “one who begets in time the same nature as one has herself.” Though our mother gives us only the gift of her like nature, her human nature, the fruit of maternal generation is the whole child, the entire person, and not only the physical body. In the same sense, Mary is rightly called the “Mother of God.” She gives “flesh”—a human nature—to the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity.

History has born witness that this title has more to say regarding the divinity of Christ than it does the reverence due Mary because of her relationship with Him. Any “less” of a title for her would deny the preeminent revelation of Jesus’ divinity. Authentic Mariology, which is the study of the life and prerogatives of the Blessed Virgin Mary and her place in God’s plan of salvation, and authentic Christology, which is the study of the Person of Jesus Christ, especially in the mystery of the union of His divine and human natures, are always compatible; they always relate to and safeguard each other.

Having said this, we must never forget that the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity dwelt in utero in Mary for nine months. For nine months in time and space there was only one way to come into the presence of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity made Man and that was to come into the presence of Mary! Everyone knows the incredible intimacy that exists between mother and child. Imagine not only the physical, but the spiritual union of this Mother and her Child, prepared sovereignly by God for such an exalted vocation, not only “pre-partum” but throughout all time and eternity. This is why the saints down through the ages have emphasized that, yes, we must clearly distinguish and understand the “Who” of Jesus and the “who” of Mary, but we must never “pull them apart!”

We have in Scripture the explicit revelation of Mary’s divine motherhood at the “Annunciation” from the words of the Angel Gabriel: “Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God” (Luke 1:31, 35b).

During this time of the 100th Anniversary of the apparitions of Mary to the shepherd children at Fatima, Portugal, let us renew our love and devotion to her under her title as the Mother of God.

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, (608) 791-2658.

