



in Lourdes, France, identifying herself this way: “I am the Immaculate Conception.” The numerous miracles at Lourdes are a divine confirmation of the doctrine defined by Pius IX.

A twentieth-century Franciscan, St. Maximilian Kolbe, founder of the Militia of the Immaculata (MI), not only deeply embraced the truth of the Immaculate Conception, but saw it as the blueprint of God’s plan for redeemed humanity: “*The Immaculata... The apex of the perfections of creation, the Mother of God, among the creatures the one who is most divinized*” (*The Writings of St. Maximilian Maria Kolbe*, 1325). Following in St. Maximilian’s footsteps, the MI’s ongoing mission is to introduce the Immaculata to every person and to invite all to be consecrated to her for the coming of the kingdom of the Most Sacred Heart in the world.

MARY’S ASSUMPTION INTO HEAVEN

As did his predecessor, Pope Pius XII proclaimed that a longstanding belief about Mary was now a divinely revealed dogma of the Faith. On November 1, 1950, the Pope responded to the nearly unanimous request of the Catholic hierarchy by making a formal recognition of Mary’s bodily Assumption into heaven: “By the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and by our own authority, we pronounce, declare and define as divinely revealed dogma: The Immaculate Mother of God, Mary ever Virgin, after her life on earth, was assumed body and soul to the glory of heaven.”

The day after the proclamation, Pius XII told the assembled hundreds of bishops of his hope for the future. May this honor given to Mary, said the Pope, introduce “*a spirit of penance to replace the prev-*



alent love of pleasure and a renewal of family life stabilized where divorce was common and made fruitful where birth control was practiced.” If there is one feature that characterizes the modern world, he observed, it is the worship of the body. Mary’s bodily Assumption into heaven reminds us of our own bodily resurrection on the last day, provided we use our bodies on earth according to the will of God.

MARY: MOTHER OF THE CHURCH

Never in the history of Christianity has any general council spoken at such length and with such depth about Mary as did the Second Vatican Council. This is not surprising in view of the extraordinary devotion to the Blessed Virgin in our day. What the Council did was to place this devotion into focus and to spell out its doctrinal foundation.

First, in quiet admonition, the Council “*charges that practices and exercises of devotion to her be treasured as recommended by the teaching authority of the Church in the course of centuries.*” True Marian piety consists neither in fruitless and passing emotion, nor in a certain empty credulity. Rather, authentic devotion to Mary “*proceeds from true faith by which we are led to know the excellence of the Mother of God, and are moved to filial love toward our Mother and to the imitation of her virtues*” (*Lumen Gentium*, nos. 67, 68).

What are we being told? We are told that true devotion to Our Lady is shown in a deep love of her as our Mother, put into practice by the imitation of her virtues, especially faith, chastity and charity. These are the three virtues that the modern world most desperately needs.

Faith: Like Mary, we need to believe that everything that God has revealed to us will be fulfilled.

Chastity: Like Mary, we need to use our bodily powers to serve their divine purpose at no matter what sacrifice of our own pleasure.

Charity: Like Mary, we are to be always sensitive to the needs of others. We are to respond to these needs without being asked, and, like her, even to ask Jesus to work a miracle to benefit others.

No wonder the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, citing the teaching of Pope Paul VI, makes this astounding profession of faith: “*We believe that the most holy Mother of God, the new Eve, Mother of the Church, continues to exercise in heaven her maternal role toward the members of Christ*” (CCC, no. 975). Understanding Mary’s intercessory role in human history—and realizing this power in our own lives—depends on our faith in her maternal care and our trust in her influence over the almighty hand of her Son.

As of 2018, the feast of Our Lady, Mother of the Church, is celebrated universally on the Monday following Pentecost Sunday.

(Adapted from a meditation by the Servant of God Fr. John Hardon, SJ, a noted theologian, historian, catechist, author, counselor to St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta and consultant on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.)

If you wish to grow in your devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and be consecrated to her in the spirit of St. Maximilian Kolbe, please contact



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BEHOLD YOUR MOTHER!



Discovering the Blessed Virgin Mary

MILITIA OF THE IMMACULATA



Christianity would be meaningless without the Blessed Virgin. Her quiet presence opened Christian history at the Incarnation and will continue to permeate the Church's history until the end of time. Our purpose in this presentation is to take a brief look at the past two thousand years to answer one question: What are the highlights of our Marian beliefs as found in Sacred Scripture and the teaching of the Catholic Church?



MARY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Regarding Mary, three of the evangelists were mainly concerned with tracing Christ's ancestry as Son of Man, and, therefore, as Son of Mary. St. Matthew, writing for Jews, stressed Christ's descent from Abraham. St. Luke, disciple of St. Paul, traced Christ's origin to Adam, the father of the human race. Yet both writers were at pains to point out that Mary's Son fulfilled the Old Testament prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 about the Messiah. He was to be born of a virgin and become Emmanuel, which means "God with us." Luke gave a long account of the angel's visit to Mary, to announce to her that the Child "will be called holy, Son of God" (Lk 1:35).

St. John introduces Mary as the Mother of Jesus when He began His public ministry. In answer to her wishes, Christ performed the miracle of changing water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana in Galilee. In his account, St. John recorded Our Lady's words to the servers and to all of us ever since: "Do whatever He tells you" (Jn 2:5).

It is also St. John who tells us that Mary stood under the Cross of Calvary as her Son was dying for our salvation. Speaking of John, Jesus told His mother, "This is your son." To John, He said of Mary, "This is your Mother." The apostle John represents all of us. On Good Friday, therefore, Christ made His mother the supernatural Mother of the entire human race and made us her spiritual children.

MARY: MOTHER OF GOD

In the early fifth century, a controversy arose in Asia Minor, where the Bishop of Constantinople claimed that Mary was only the mother of Christ (Greek =

Christotokos) in His human nature. This idea was condemned by the Council of Ephesus in 431, which declared that "the holy Virgin is the Mother of God" (Greek = *Theotokos*).

St. Cyril (376-444), Bishop of Alexandria in Egypt, was principally responsible for this solemn definition of Mary's divine maternity. It was Cyril who composed the most famous Marian hymn of antiquity. It praises Our Lady as Mediatrix of the graces of the Trinity:

Through you, the Trinity is glorified.

Through you, the Cross is venerated throughout the world.

Through you, angels and archangels rejoice.

Through you, the demons are driven away.

Through you, the fallen creature is raised to heaven.

Through you, churches are founded in the whole world.

Through you, people are led to conversion.

Every other title of Mary and all the Marian devotions of the faithful are finally based on the Blessed Virgin's primary claim to our extraordinary love. She is the Mother of God. She gave to her Son what every human mother gives the child whom she conceives and to whom she gives birth: She gave Jesus His human body. But for her fiat (her "yes" to the angel), there would have been no Incarnation, no Redemption, no Eucharist; in a word, no Christianity.

MARY'S PERPETUAL VIRGINITY

Logically related to her divine maternity is Our Lady's perpetual virginity. From the earliest days the Church has taught that Mary was a virgin *before* giving birth to Jesus, *during* the act of His birth and *after* His birth in Bethlehem.

These beliefs are directly stated or implied in the Gospels. In St. Matthew's genealogy of Jesus, all the previous ancestors are called "father." But Joseph is not called "father"; instead we are told he was "Joseph, the husband of Mary of whom Jesus was born" (cf. Mt 1:16). St. Luke identifies Mary as "virgin," who "knows not man."

Those who questioned Christ's divinity in the early Church were the same ones who denied His Mother's virginity. In response, St. Augustine (354-430) explained, "When God vouchsafed to become Man, it was fitting that He should be born in this way. He who was made of her, had made her what she was: a virgin who conceives, a virgin who gives birth, a virgin with child, a virgin labored of child – a virgin ever-virgin."

Given the fact of the Incarnation, its manner of becoming follows as a matter of course. Why would Jesus—who created his mother and healed the world—not also have preserved intact the virginal integrity of the body from which He would be born? But the appropriateness of Mary's perpetual virginity makes sense only if one believes that Mary's Son is the living God.

MARY'S IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

That Mary was free from original sin at the moment of her conception was already taught by St. Ephraem in the fourth century. In one of his hymns, he addresses Our Lord, "Certainly You alone and Your Mother are from every aspect completely beautiful. There is no blemish in You my Lord, and no stain in Your Mother."

By the seventh century, the feast of Mary's Immaculate Conception was celebrated in the East. In the eighth century, the feast was commemorated in Ireland and from there spread to other countries in Europe.

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, some leading theologians, even saints, raised objections to the Immaculate Conception. Their main difficulty was how Mary could be exempt from all sin before the coming of Christ, the Redeemer. The Franciscan Bl. John Duns Scotus (1266-1308) stood firm in Our Lady's defense. He explained that through a special privilege of God the benefits of Christ's redemption were applied to her *before* she could contract the stain of original sin; she was redeemed "in anticipation" of the merits of Jesus on the Cross.

Scotus thus paved the way for the infallible definition of the Immaculate Conception by Pope Pius IX in 1854. Wrote Pope Pius: "We declare, pronounce, and define that the doctrine which holds that the most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instant of her conception.... was preserved from all stain of original sin, is a doctrine revealed by God and therefore to be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful."

Four years later, Our Lady appeared to St. Bernadette

"Stay often with the Immaculata, converse with her often, linger one on one with her often, and you shall become more and more like her." M.K.