



Mary in America

Thursday, June 4, 2026

Mary, Mother of the Church

Although Sts. Leo, the Great and Augustine speak of Mary as “mother of the faithful”, the title “Mother of the Church” is relatively new. Declared by St. Paul VI on November 21, 1964, at the conclusion of 3rd session of Vatican II, notwithstanding the council fathers’ reticence to pronounce it in the dogmatic constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*. In 1975, a votive Mass was approved and St. John Paul II in 1980 inserted this invocation into Litany of Loretto. Pope Francis established Mary, Mother of the Church as an obligatory memorial on the day after Pentecost on Feb. 11, 2018. Most recently, Pope Leo XIV in his catechesis on Vatican II, May 13, 2026, stated that

She “is hailed as a pre-eminent and singular member of the Church, and as its type and excellent example in faith and charity” (LG, 53). These words invite us to understand how in Mary, who under the action of the Holy Spirit welcomed and brought forth the Son of God made flesh, we can recognize both the model and the pre-eminent member and *mother of the entire ecclesial community*.

By allowing Herself to be shaped by the work of Grace, which came to fulfilment in Her, and by welcoming the gift of the Most High with Her faith and Her virginal love, Mary is the perfect model of what the whole Church is called to be: a creature of the Word of the Lord and mother of the children of God, begotten in docility to the action of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, as She is the believer par excellence, in whom we are offered the perfect form of unconditional openness to the divine mystery within the communion of God’s holy people, Mary is an excellent member of the ecclesial community. Finally, inasmuch as She brings forth children in the Son, loved in the eternal Beloved who came among us, *Mary is the mother of the whole Church*, which can turn to her with filial confidence, in the certainty of being heard, protected and loved. [emphases by the author]



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Tonight's talk will briefly cover the scriptural and magisterial basis of this title of Mary.

In one sense, Mary is a member and type of the Church, how can she be its mother? Obviously, we are dealing with mystery. The mystery of the Incarnation and the Church, Christ's Mystical Body. She is "the mother of the members of Christ . . . having cooperated by charity that faithful might be born in the Church, who are members of that Head." (St. Augustine, *De S. Virginitate* 6). I propose seven Scripture citations to help us understand the title:

Genesis 3:15 "I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike at your head while you strike at his heel." The New Eve, the woman at enmity with the serpent, cannot be Eve who has just worked hand in glove with the serpent for the fall of the human race. The woman is sinless, for every sin is a cooperation with him. She is not his slave and therefore free of the original sin. For a slave, even if he hates his master cannot be his enemy because he is his master's property.

Mary because of the foreseen merits of Her Son is immaculately conceived and therefore she can make her unconditional yes to God's will. Thus, she conceives the Word of God first in her soul and then in her body in complete obedience of faith.

Genesis 22:1-19 "Take your son Isaac, your only one, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. There you shall offer him up as a holocaust on a height I will show you." Abraham our father in faith, foreshadows Mary our mother in faith. Both receive their sons in believing God's word, which humanly speaking is impossible: a ninety-year-old woman and a virgin conceiving. Both will be called to sacrifice willingly even though sorrowfully their beloved son. Finally, both will receive their son back: one through replacement by a ram, the other through resurrection.

Luke 1:26-38 "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you...How can this be since I do not know man?... the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; hence, the holy offspring to be born will be called Son of God... Mary said: "I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me according to your word." God does not give Himself to abstract ideas, but to persons. Mary as daughter Zion and sinless representative of the human race, gives her obedience of faith to be the Mother of God and Spouse of the Holy Spirit. The Church is all those who believe in Jesus and obey his commandments (cf. Rev. 12:17). Thus, Mary becomes the Church at its source, the first believer and disciple of Her Son.

Mark 3:34-35 “Who are my mother and my brothers?... ‘Whoever does the will of God is brother and sister and mother to me.’” As we already saw in the last quote Mary is the Doer of God’s will as first disciple, following Him faithfully throughout His life even to the Cross.

John 19:26-27 “Woman, behold your son...son behold your Mother.” Jesus gives Mary to John, the apostle, who we can see as representative of the Hierarchy, and of the entire Church, as Mother. Here is our “proof text”, the origin of the title “Mother of the Church”. Mary cares for Her children, but also the Church takes care of her. As Hans Urs von Balthazar brings out, the Church is by her nature feminine. The Hierarchy is the incarnate service of the Marian Church. Like Joseph and John in relation to Mary, the Pope and bishops protect, discern and serve the holiness of the Church. They serve the charismatic/Marian community, who is the Bride and Mother of Christ (*Mary, the Church at Its Source*, pp. 166-176).

Acts 1:13-14 “[the Apostles] went to the upper room where they were staying... Together they devoted themselves to constant prayer. There were some women in their company, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.” Mary at the descent of the Holy Spirit becomes the Mother of Jesus at the annunciation and the Mother of the Church, His Body at Pentecost. Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit conceives the God man in Head and members. St. Louis de Montfort says, “the more the Holy Spirit finds Mary in the soul, the more effectively He can form Jesus in it.” (Cf. *True Devotion* 20)

Revelation 12:1-17 “A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun... Because she was with child, she wailed aloud in pain as she labored to give birth...” Mary escaped the pangs of birth at the physical birth of Her Son, but at the foot the Cross she suffered “labor pains” as she “gave birth” to His Mystical Body, sharing His bitter passion. Some scholars say that the woman is the Church and only attributed to Mary. But John is the author of the Apocalypse: when there are two ways of interpreting a text He means both, for example John 1:5 the word translated as “overcome”, can also be translated as “comprehend” and he means both. So yes, the Woman clothed with the sun is both Mary and Church, the fruitful Virginal Mother of Christ and His followers (cf Rev. 12:17).

To conclude, I would like to quote at length Paul VI’ apostolic exhortation *Signum Magnum* (May 13, 1967):

The great sign which the Apostle John saw in heaven, "a woman clothed with the sun,"(Rev. 12:1) is interpreted by the sacred Liturgy, (Feast of OL of Lourdes) not without foundation, as referring to the

most blessed Mary, the mother of all men by the grace of Christ the Redeemer.

... the Virgin is "rightly honored by the Church with a special veneration, particularly liturgical," not only as "the most holy Mother of God, who took part in the mysteries of Christ,"(LG 66) but also "as the Mother of the Church."(L.G. 67)

Mary is the Mother of the Church not only because she is the Mother of Christ and His most intimate associate in "the new economy when the Son of God took a human nature from her, that He might in the mysteries of His flesh free man from sin,"(LG 55) but also because "she shines forth to the whole community of the elect as a model of the virtues."(LG 63,65) Indeed, just as no human mother can limit her task to the generation of a new man but must extend it to the function of nourishing and educating her offspring, thus the blessed Virgin Mary, after participating in the redeeming sacrifice of the Son, and in such an intimate way as to deserve to be proclaimed by Him the Mother not only of His disciple John but - may we be allowed to affirm it - of mankind which he in some way represents, (Leo XIII encyclical letter *Adiutricem populi*) now continues to fulfill from heaven her maternal function as the cooperator in the birth and development of divine life in the individual souls of redeemed men.

Mary's motherhood of the Church is not just her past cooperation with Her Son's mission of suffering and redemption, nor just Her present example of a virtuous life now crowned in Heaven. She continues to intercede, guide and protect Her children still on earth until the Second coming of Her Son Jesus.

Holy Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.