



Mary: Co-Redemptrix and Mediatrix of all graces

To understand Mary as co-redemptrix we need to understand the work of redemption by Christ. He is our Redeemer. His was the work of redemption. How did Christ redeem us? Through obedience even unto death on the Cross.

An article from our Constitutions gives some insight into this obediential act of redemption: "The mystery of redemption is a paean of obediential praise. In prophecy Our Lord sang a hymn of worship, 'Behold I come to do your will, O God' (Ps 40:6). In the fullness of time, the Blessed Virgin Mary joined her 'fiat' in harmony with His (Lk 1:38); and the Incarnate Son of God continued to lift His voice in praise: 'I do always the things that please my Father' (Jn 8:29)." This beautiful wording gives us the image of redemption as an eternal song of obedience declared and lived. Notice that the Son's obedience resounds throughout all time and eternity. At a certain point, in the fullness of time, Mary joins her voice of obedience to His. Hers is not the same note, a divine note, but it is sung in harmony with the Son.

When harmony comes together, the song is one although there are many parts. The climax of the song is at the Cross, when both Mother and Son gave their full obediential embrace to the Father's will even unto death out of love for the Father and for the salvation of the world. Let's take a closer look at the Cross and redemption.

Sin entered the world through disobedience. Our disobedience separates us from God. It has always been this way since Adam and Eve. God called His people back to Him through the Covenant, which was repeatedly broken through disobedience. Yet in Jeremiah God promises a New Covenant that cannot be broken. Rather than stone tablets, this new covenant will be written on our hearts. With human nature being what it is, how is it possible to have a new covenant that cannot be broken? The old covenant began with Adam, and all peoples broke the



covenant throughout the Old Testament. The new covenant would still require our obedience, yet at our Head would be Christ, the new Adam, whose obedience was to be perfect, for He “emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, ...being made obedient even to death, death on a cross” (Phil 2:7-8). Pope Paul VI called obedience the principle which dominates the entire plan of Incarnation and Redemption (Nov. 17, 1966). The first Adam was disobedient unto death. The new Adam was obedient unto death, and His death is life for the whole human race.

What we can see in redemption is that Our Lord would never be satisfied with anything less, if more could be added. He didn't work off of a principle of what is sufficient to barely get the job done. Love goes beyond what is necessary and seeks to give ALL. What more could be added to an infinite act of obedience? Fr. William Most calls this “going beyond infinity beyond infinity”. God the Son takes care of infinity beyond infinity. What is beyond infinity beyond infinity? Something more, yet finite: adding Mary's contribution to the great sacrifice. Vatican II speaks of Mary on Calvary: “in suffering with her Son as He died on the cross, she cooperated in the work of the Savior, in an altogether sin-

gular way, by obedience, faith, hope and burning love, to restore supernatural life to souls. As a result, she is our Mother in the order of grace” (LG 61).

Looking at this excerpt closely we read that Mary “cooperated in the work of the Savior...to restore supernatural life to souls.” This clearly means that she shares in the act of redemption. The council used the word “cooperated.” There are many ways of cooperating. Two people can share a task equally and cooperate in accomplishing it. This is rare. More often than not, there emerges a leader who directs, or one who does more work, yet both are cooperating. In teaching, sometimes I beg students to cooperate with me in studying with me for their exams and doing their homework so I can give them a decent grade. I'm sure any teacher has had the experience of being pretty certain that you worked harder than the student for their grade. Many parents can also empathize I'm sure in the amount of effort they expend while asking for a very small amount of cooperation on the part of their child.

Cooperator in Redemption, or co-Redemptrix does not mean that Mary was



equal partner to Jesus in redemption, as if she on her own merit won half of the infinite graces of redemption. To what extent does Mary share or cooperate in the act of Redemption?

Mary contributed first of all by the mere fact of being the Mother from whom Jesus received His human nature, which made His death possible. Yet the Church has always recognized what we read in *Lumen Gentium* from Vatican II, that Mary “suffered with her Son as He died on the cross.” The *Imitation of Mary* states that this is why Mary is known as the Queen of Martyrs: while she was not killed for her faith, she suffered the death of her Son, who meant more to her than her own life. I’m sure any parent can affirm that the suffering of your child hurts more than your own suffering.

Christ’s death on the cross is an act of obedience. We read this in Scripture and in the consistent teachings of the Church continuing through today. The Council stresses that *Mary’s cooperation* with Christ’s death occurred primarily through *her* obedience, citing several Church Fathers. “Mary was employed by God not just in a passive way but she cooperated in human salvation in free faith and obedience... ‘The knot of the disobedience of Eve was

loosed through the obedience of Mary’” (LG 56).

Pope Benedict XV taught: “With her suffering and dying Son, Mary endured suffering and almost death. She gave up her Mother’s rights over her Son to procure the salvation of mankind and... so much as she could, immolated her Son, so that one can truly affirm that together with Christ she has redeemed the human race.”

During the Second Vatican Council, the Church Fathers stated, “This union of the Mother with the Son in the work of salvation is evident from the time of the virginal conception of Christ even to His death” Note that it is “evident” at the Incarnation; this is when we can first see it with our own eyes, not that it started there. When laying the groundwork for the declaration of the Assumption as a dogma of our faith, Pope Pius XII wrote of Mary as the New Eve, subject to the New Adam, and closely united with Him in the struggle against the devil which was foretold in Genesis 3:15 – the enmity between the woman and the serpent, her Offspring and his, with her Offspring dealing the deadly blow to the devil. He goes on to state that just as she shared in the “struggle” at Calvary, so



she shares in His glory in heaven through her assumption: “Wherefore, just as the glorious resurrection of Christ was an essential part and final sign of this victory, so also that struggle which was common to the Blessed Virgin and her Son has to be closed by the ‘glorification’ of her virginal body.” The wording of the struggle as common to both of them is strong.

Pope Leo XIII, in his encyclical on the Rosary, wrote about Mary’s role as co-Redemptrix. “In the Rosary all the part that Mary took as our co-Redemptrix comes to us.” He cites the various Mysteries of the Rosary as evidences of Mary’s role as co-Redemptrix. In the Joyful Mysteries we see St. John the Baptist sanctified in his mother’s womb, which comes to pass by the greeting of Mary “who had been inspired to visit her cousin.” He traces Mary’s offering alongside her Son’s in Gethsemane, at the Scourging, the Crowning and Condemnation. Though she was not physically beside Him at these times, Leo XII wrote that she still suffered as one with Him so aware was she of His suffering. Then she was at His side when His suffering culminated in His death, and she “died in her heart with Him, stabbed with the sword of sorrow.” In the Glorious Mysteries Pope Leo recounts that Mary’s mediation takes on a still more abundant fruitfulness as she intercedes for us in

Heaven.

Pius XII wrote, “So that more abundant benefits may flow upon the Christian family, and in fact, on the whole human race, from this worship of the most Sacred Heart of Jesus, let the faithful take care that devotion to the Immaculate Heart of the Mother of God also be closely joined to it.’ God has joined her to His Divine Son at every point in the mysteries of His life and death; what God has joined, let no one put asunder” (Most, 221). All grace flows from the Cross. Since Mary was so intimately united with Christ on the Cross, it must be that she shares in the distribution of grace from this act.

Are we going beyond what Scripture and Revelation teach regarding Our Lady’s place in the economy of Redemption? Not at all. From Scripture and historical evidence we see that God Himself CHOSE to make Mary essential and intimately united with His Son throughout His entire life. “From the fact that she shared in the acquiring or earning all graces on Calvary, it is obviously logical that she should share similarly in distributing all graces. In this role she is called Mediatrix of all graces” (Most, 92). To quote Pope Leo XIII, “May God, ‘Who in His



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most merciful Providence gave us this Mediatrix,' and 'decreed that all good should come to us by the hands of Mary' (St. Bernard), receive propitiously our common prayers and fulfill our common hopes."

The index of papal documents on the Vatican's website goes back to Pope Leo XIII, who became pope in the latter part of the 1800s. In doing a search for papal documents and addresses including Mary as Mediatrix, one can find several documents and addresses from every pope from Leo XIII on. In Pope Leo's encyclical on the Rosary, he emphasizes that when need is especially dire and singular aid from God is sought, we must have recourse to Mary to obtain aid for the Church, and to restore virtue to society. "The recourse we have to Mary in prayer follows upon the office she continuously fills by the side of the throne of God as Mediatrix of Divine grace." He also wrote, "No man can meditate upon [the Mysteries of the Rosary] without feeling a new awakening in his heart of confidence that he will certainly obtain through Mary the fullness of the mercies of God."

As with Mary as co-Redemptrix, Mary as Mediatrix is evident from what we know of her entire life, culminating at the Cross. At the Visitation, Mary brought

grace to Elizabeth and John in bringing Jesus to them. Jesus chose to need her in order to bless Elizabeth and John with His presence. Simeon receives a first glimpse of the redemption of Israel because Mary presented Jesus in the Temple. The couple at the wedding feast at Cana are blessed through the intercession of Our Lady. She is shown in the Cenacle with the Twelve, praying and ushering in the Holy Spirit for the Church. Leo XIII wrote that the Virgin Mary "was in a signal manner filled with grace by Him so that the superabundance thereof might overflow upon all men."

Mary is not the first cause of any of these events, but she is instrumental by the ordained will of God. *Lumen Gentium* beautifully clarifies Mary's role as co-Redemptrix: "Mary's function as mother of men in no way obscures or diminishes this unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power. [Her] influence on men... flows forth from the superabundance of the merits of Christ, rests on His mediation, depends entirely on it, and draws all its power from it" (LG 60). "... Just as the priesthood of Christ is shared in various ways both by His ministers and the faithful, and as the one goodness



of God is radiated in different ways among His creatures, so also the unique mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude but rather gives rise to a manifold cooperation which is but a sharing in this one source” (LG 62). Pope John Paul II wrote that while in Heaven, “she does not cease her saving service, which expresses her maternal mediation.” He also wrote, “Mary’s mediation does not cease to be subordinate to Him who is the one Mediator.”

The share in redemption is measured by two things: how much He suffered, and her love for Him. We know that His suffering is beyond our ability to comprehend. How much did she love Him? Pope Pius IX stated that her love for Him was so great that “none greater under God can be thought of, and no one but God can comprehend it” (*Ineffabilis Deus*).

We share in this co-redemption. After our Constitutions illustrate the mystery of Redemption as a song of praise from the Son and joined by His Mother, the next article reads: “In this divine drama all are called to share, for there is no other way to eternal life except that of perfect unity of will with God’s will” (Const. 31).

“No creature can be counted [as if on the same plane] with the Incarnate Word and Redeemer ... [but] just as the one goodness of God is really poured forth in crea-

tures in various manners, so also the one mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude, but [rather] produces among creatures a participated cooperation, from the one sole font” (LG 62).

This is what the phrase “offer it up” flows from. We are called to unite our sufferings, inconveniences, uncomfortable situations, as well as our joys with Christ. We must suffer in this life because our world is not perfect nor are we. However, our sufferings have infinite salvific value if we unite them with His on the Cross. Ours is a finite offering, but in a mystical union with our Crucified Lord, our offering can become redemptive. Without Him, the one Redeemer and Mediator, all our efforts are fruitless, but He wills for us to cooperate in our redemption and the redemption of others. “In this divine drama all are called to share...”

Be like Mary: Completely docile to God’s will. We must ask continuously “What is God’s will?” We must always ask Him as the Fatima children did: “What do you want of me?” We need to remember that redemption is wrought through the Cross. When we ask God what He wants of us, the answer is always union with His Son. The particular path to this union changes with time



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and situation, but the end is always the same: our death joined with Christ's so that we may gain new life. Christ defeated the devil's weapon of death by turning it around to bring new life, but the only kind of death that brings life is that which is united with the Crucified. Mary shows us how to embrace the Cross and gain new life. This is how we can share in the work on redemption, become co-redeemers with Christ. We cannot do it in so perfect and grand a way as Our Lady, but she can show us how to grow continually in her likeness and thus to be more intimately united with her Son. A life lived for this purpose is a life well lived, and at our judgment, we will meet the divine Bridegroom of our souls without regret.

When we seek prayers, spiritual help from others, don't we turn to those we know who are special friends of the Lord? We surely don't go to those who have abandoned the faith for spiritual aid and prayer. Isn't it natural that Mary, who has always been the most intimately united with Jesus, be the one we turn to most often and with the most confidence? Let's end our reflection with a prayer taken from Leo XIII's encyclical on the Rosary, written in 1894, which beautifully turns to our Blessed Mother with confidence as Mediatrix and co

-Redemptrix:

Yes, we fly to thee, we miserable children of Eve, O holy Mother of God. To thee we lift our prayers, for thou art the Mediatrix, powerful at once and pitiful, of our salvation. Oh, by the sweetness of the joys that came to thee from thy Son Jesus, by thy participation in His ineffable sorrows, by the splendours of His glory shining in thee, we instantly beseech thee, listen, be pitiful, hear us, unworthy though we be!

Immaculate Heart of Mary, Co-Redemptrix and Mediatrix of divine grace, *pray for us!*

SOURCES:

Many ideas are from [Our Father's Plan: God's Arrangements and Our Response](#) by Fr. William G. Most, published by Christendom Press, 1988.

Church Documents referenced:

Lumen Gentium - Second Vatican Council, signed by Pope Paul VI

Ineffabilis Deus - Pope Pius XII

Redemptoris Mater - Pope John Paul II

Lucinda Semper Expectatione - Pope Leo XIII

Inter Sodalicia - Benedict XV

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