

*St. John Paul II's Redemptoris Mater - Mary's Maternal Mediation*  
*June 19, 2014*

I was asked to open our annual novena talks this year with Pope St. John Paul II's encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, which he wrote to announce the Marian Year of 1987-88. In this encyclical, John Paul II recalls and develops the Mariological teachings of the Second Vatican Council, especially Chapter 8 of *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. The encyclical falls into three Parts: Mary in the Mystery of Christ, the Mother of God at the Center of the Pilgrim Church and finally, Maternal Mediation. This talk will focus on the third part of this encyclical.

The Pope opens this section with the quote from 1 Timothy, which most Protestants cite as their objection to praying to Mary or calling her "Mediatrice":

"The Church knows and teaches with Saint Paul that *there is only one mediator*: "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all" ( 1 Tim 2:5-6)" "The maternal role of Mary toward people in no way obscures or diminishes the unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power":(LG 60) it is mediation in Christ"(RM 38).

Christ's mediation is unique, but it is not exclusive. Every member of his Mystical Body, the Church shares in this mediation by participation. How much more so can this be said of Mary, who by God's choice is asked to share inextricably in the

mystery of Her Son's incarnation and redemptive mission. Mary's singular mediation is intimately linked with her role as Mother of God and Mother of the Church.

*"All the saving influence of the Blessed Virgin on mankind originate ... from the divine pleasure. They flow forth from the superabundance of the merits of Christ, rest on his mediation, depend entirely on it, and draw all their power from it. In no way do they impede the immediate union of the faithful with Christ. Rather, they foster this union."* (LG 60, emphases are John Paul II's own)

"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord." By her acceptance of Motherhood she submits and cooperates with the one mediation of Her Son. Her consent is total self-gift, which constitutes her as virginal bride and mother. The eternal Father entrusts Himself to Mary, giving her His Own Son. Therefore Mary is not just a "biological mother" but an associate of unique nobility. God waits for her free consent to His plan. Beginning in Bethlehem, through Nazareth to Jerusalem, Mary faithfully follows Jesus as the first disciple of God-made-man (cf. LG 61). She is first to experience this one mediation and the first to cooperate and subordinate to it. In response to this willingness, Jesus prepared her ever more completely to be the mother in the order of grace for all mankind at the foot of the Cross (Jn 2:1-12;19:25-27).

Mary's role as handmaid of the Lord does not end with the Resurrection of Her Son. Jesus leaves her as Mother in the midst of the infant Church where Mary continues in her service of prayer and maternal self-gift. This role of mediation through intercession continues even after her Assumption into Heaven, which "will last without interruption until the eternal fulfillment of all the elect." (LG 62)

Through her mediation, subordinate to that of the Redeemer, Mary contributes to the union of the pilgrim Church and connects the Church on earth with Heaven by her Assumption. In Mary, Christ's redemption is brought to completion "As she was singularly united in the *first coming* so she will play a maternal role of Mediatrix of mercy *at his final coming*... (RM 41)". As true disciple of Christ, who came to serve, Mary serves Christ also in others with humility and patience loyally persevering even to the Cross. She continues the glory of service in Heaven by her maternal mediation until all the elect are safely in the eternal Kingdom of Her Son.

"Thus in her Assumption into heaven Mary is as it were clothed by the whole reality of the communion of saints, and her very union with the Son in glory is wholly oriented toward the definitive fullness of the kingdom when God will be all in all... her mediation does not cease to be subordinate to him who is Mediator." (RM 41)

Next, Pope John Paul II turns to explaining Mary's role in the life of the Church and of every Christian.

Mary is the "figure and type of the Church in the matter of faith, charity and perfect union with Christ (LG63)." She is present in the mystery of Christ and also in the mystery of His Mystical Body the Church, who is also called mother and virgin.

The Church is a mother by faithfully accepting the Word of God, and by preaching and baptism She brings forth to a new and immortal life children who are conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of God (Gal 4:19). From Mary, the Church learns her own Motherhood: "[the Church] contemplating Mary's mysterious sanctity, imitating her charity, and faithfully fulfilling the Father's will" (LG 64) brings forth and nurtures her members. "For just as *Mary is at the service of the mystery of the Incarnation, so the Church is always at the service of the mystery of adoption to sonship* through grace. (RM 43)" The Church as virgin remains always faithful to her Spouse Eph 5:21-33; 2 Cor 11:2 as "Bride of the Lamb" Rev. 21:9. The Church preserves the Faith *received from* Christ. Following Mary's example, who kept and pondered Her Son's words and action in her heart (Lk 2:19, 51).

However, Mary is not just a "model" of the Church through her motherly mediation "*she cooperates in the birth and development* of the sons and daughters of Mother Church (RM 44)." Jn 19:26-27 determines Mary's place in the life of Christ's disciples "... a spiritual motherhood, born from the heart of the Paschal Mystery of the Redeemer of the World." She implores the gift of the Holy Spirit

who raises up new children of God. Christian piety rightly senses the *profound link* between devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and worship of the Eucharist – the true flesh born from her. *Mary guides the faithful to the Eucharist*, as can be seen in all the major Marian shrines of the world. (RM 44)

Even natural motherhood establishes a unique, unrepeatable *personal* relationship between Mother and Child. Even if there is more than one child, there is a unique relationship with each child that makes the child able to grow and mature. This is true on the supernatural level as well. That is why Christ used the *singular*: “Behold, your son.” “Mary’s motherhood ... is a gift: *a gift which Christ himself makes personally to every individual.*” Entrustment or consecration is *the response* to a person’s love and in particular *to the love of a mother*. (RM 45) John (representing every Christian disciple) takes Mary into his own – not as a possession, but in communion of life. “Thus, the Christian seeks to be taken into that “maternal charity” with which the Redeemer’s Mother “cares for the brethren of her Son,” (LG 62) in whose birth and development she cooperates” (LG 63) in the measure of the gift proper to each one through the power of Christ’s Spirit.” (RM 45) Mary is the unique link with the two descents of the Holy Spirit at the Annunciation which formed the God-man and at Pentecost which formed His Mystical Body.

This filial relationship originates and is *definitively* directed toward *Christ*. The more we entrust ourselves to Mary the more she conforms us to Jesus – “Do whatever he tells you.” *God* in the incarnation entrust Himself to a *woman* thus shedding light on the role of all women.

*Mary is the Mother of the Church* carrying on her maternal role – cooperating in the birth and development of divine life in the souls of the redeemed. She is the key to an exact understanding of the mystery of Christ and the Church. Mary embraces each and everyone *in the Church and through the Church*, the most authentic form of perfect imitation of Christ. (RM 47 quoting Paul VI)

The woman mentioned in Gen 3:15, Jn 2 and 19 and Rev. 12:1-17— is Mary, the New Eve to Christ’s New Adam. She takes part in the monumental struggle against “the powers of darkness: as a mother she is already the Church without spot or wrinkle. Christians raise their eyes to her in the course of their earthly pilgrimage and Mary helps all her children “*to find in Christ the path to the Father’s house.*” (RM 47)

In the last part of the section on Motherly Mediation the Pope turns to why he called the Marian Year. He states that he wishes to put emphasis on the *special presence* of the Mother of God in the mystery of Christ and his Church – the fundamental dimension emerging from the Mariology of Vatican II. The Marian Year is meant

to promote new and careful reading of what Vatican II said about the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the mystery of Christ and the Church. Both doctrine AND the life of Faith and therefore, authentic “Marian spirituality” seen in the life of Sacred Tradition ... here he especially mentions St. Louis de Montfort’s True Devotion. The Marian Year is not just to call to mind her mediation of the past, but her cooperation in the second Christian Millennium.

John Paul II also makes an ecumenical appeal, especially to the Orthodox – “we all feel as brothers and sisters in her presence. (RM 50)” He calls to mind the Woman Clothed with the Sun

(Rev. 12:1) as a sure sign of hope for the pilgrim people of God. The sinless handmaid of the Lord, Mary’s guileless, humble faith and cooperation with God’s plan spans the whole of Salvation History. “The knot of Eve’s disobedience was untied by Mary’s obedience.” (RM 19 quoting St. Irenaeus) Only by and through faith did she participate in the mysteries of Her Son: Incarnation, birth, ministry, death resurrection, ascension and Pentecost. Through her maternal intercession, she obtains the graces we need in our own pilgrimage of faith. She will ceaselessly work for the salvation of all her children, until all of them are safe in the Kingdom of Her Son.

