



Seasons of Holiness

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Why is Mary so Important?

Last month, I shared with you some highlights about Mary, the Mother of God. Many people are under the assumption that only Catholics have honored Mary. However, some early Protestants venerated and honored her. For example, Martin Luther said: “*Mary is ‘the highest woman,’ we can never honor her enough.*” He continued and said that: “*the veneration of Mary is inscribed in the very depths of the human heart,*” and that we should “*wish that everyone know and respect her.*”¹

Similarly, John Calvin said: “*It cannot be denied that God in choosing and destining Mary to be the Mother of his Son, granted her the highest honor.*”² Therefore, the idea of respect and high honor was not rejected by the first Protestants; they, however, came to criticize Catholics for blurring the line between high admiration of the grace of God wherever it is seen in a human being, and worship given to another creature. Many Protestants view the Roman Catholic practice of celebrating saints’ days and making intercessory requests addressed especially to Mary and other departed saints as idolatry.

For Catholics, Mary is not only our mother in the order of grace, but by her constant intercession she continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation. Hence, the Blessed Virgin Mary is also known as “*Advocate and Mediatrix.*” However, this neither takes away from nor adds anything to the dignity and efficaciousness of Christ the one Mediator.³ The Church continues to reiterate that no creature is equal to Jesus and that Mary has a subordinate role. She is a symbol of hope and solace to us during our life. Furthermore, since she is exalted above all angels and saints, she intercedes before her Son in the fellowship of all saints, whether Christian or not.

John Paul II, in his encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, emphasized that Jesus Christ is the sole mediator. However, this mediation is not exclusive, rather inclusive. “*In other words, Christ as the only mediator does not take away our task to stand before God as persons linked to each other and responsible for each other... for nobody stands in the Faith all alone, everybody depends for a living faith on human mediation.*”⁴ Moreover, John Paul explains that her intercession is above the ordinary.

As an example, he reflects on the miracle at Cana. “*She*

puts herself ‘in the middle’, that is to say she acts as mediatrix not as an outsider, but in her position as mother.”⁵ His basic thesis is that Mary’s mediation is unique because it is maternal mediation, related to Christ, who is always born anew into this world. Her mediation presents the female dimension in salvation history.

In John’s Gospel we learn how Jesus gave us His mother at the foot of the cross; hence, at that moment, Mary, who stood at the very center of the Paschal Mystery, embraced each individual and all humanity as her children. As a result, she received a new dimension to her motherhood, where she assumed a special personal relationship with each of us. So then, Mary not only intercedes for humanity, the Mother of Christ [as at Cana] but presents herself as the spokeswoman of her Son’s will.⁶

We see that through Mary’s unconditional “yes,” she models true discipleship. Her role has not skewed us away from Jesus, but rather, throughout history, she has served as a model of a woman of faith who draws her strength from God. Hence, our relationship with Christ is not diminished but rather, she brings the Gospel message close to our hearts and reminds us that Jesus is our salvation.

She models for us how to be people of faith, how to trust God, and how to find strength in Him. Based on this, Marian devotion is our connection with her humanity. Devotion to Mary is not an “old-fashioned” idea. On the contrary, Mary’s life of faith, charity and hope continues to provide us with a living example on how to live out the Gospel message.

The Mother of God is a woman of all time and for all time. She is a symbol of liberation, love, faith, and strength. And we, the Christian faithful, are reminded to be like Mary: the handmaids of the Lord open to doing His will. Her role in our lives only brings us closer to our Lord.

1 Norman F. Cantor. *The Civilization of the Middle Ages: A Completely Revised and Expanded Edition of Medieval History* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993). 450.

2 Cantor, *The Civilization of the Middle Ages*, 450.

3 Ibid., 61.

4 Pope John Paul *Redemptoris Mater* 31.

5 Ibid., 88.

6 Ibid., 88.



Recommended Books for the Month

The Story of the Three Wise Kings by Tomie de Paola
(Great book for all ages!)

The Kingfisher Book of Religions: Festivals, Ceremonies, and Beliefs from Around the World (edited by Trevor Barnes) is a good book that is easy to read and understand. It is great for pre-teens and teens. It covers religions around the world. It is very well written and the illustrations are beautiful.

Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton: Daughter of America (Encounter the Saints Series(3)) by Jeanne Marie Grunwell and illustrated by Mari Goering. It is part of a series of biographical books about the saints.

Parenting Tips

As parents, we face the daily challenge of balancing our lives. In Mel Levine's most recent book, *Ready or Not, Here Comes Life*, he reminds us that as parents, we are charged to help and guide our children through good and bad times, but most especially we are reminded that good parents do not rescue their children from failure, but rather help them learn and cope with life's daily challenges. He states: "Childhood and adolescence should contain a healthy blend of victories and defeats, of authoritarian rule and appropriate private autonomy, of admiration and criticism, of fun and stress. Kids need to be raised not feared, loved not revered."

May God continue to guide us in our sacred vocation of parenthood.

Celebrating the life of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

On January 4th, we celebrate the feast day of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton (1774-1821). Mother Seton founded the first American religious community for women, the Sisters of Charity. She opened the first American parish school and established the first American Catholic orphanage. All this she did in the span of 46 years while raising her five children.

By birth and marriage, she enjoyed the fruits of high society. Reared a staunch Episcopalian by her mother and

The first end I propose in our daily work is to do the will of God; secondly, to do it in the manner He wills it; and thirdly, to do it because it is His will.

stepmother, she learned the value of prayer, Scripture and a nightly examination of conscience. Her father, Dr. Richard Bayley was a great humanitarian, teaching his daughter to love and serve others.

At 19, she married a handsome and wealthy businessman, William Magee Seton. They had five children before his business failed and he died of tuberculosis. At 30, Elizabeth was widowed, penniless, with five small children to support.

While in Italy with her dying husband, Elizabeth witnessed Catholicity in action through family friends. She soon became a Catholic in 1805; but because of it, many of her family and friends rejected her. To support her children, she opened a school in Baltimore. She founded a religious community in 1809.

She suffered great trials of sickness, misunderstanding, the death of loved ones and the heartache of a wayward son. She died January 4, 1821, and became the first American-born citizen to be beatified (1963) and then canonized (1975). She is buried in Emmitsburg, Maryland.

For reflection:

How are we responding to God's call this week?

Source: www.catholic.org/saints



Isn't Christmas over? No!

The early Church celebrated four different manifestations, which focused on Jesus' appearance near the beginning of each Gospel. Luke focuses on Jesus' birth with the angels' announcement to the shepherds (Lk. 2). Matthew looks at the manifestation of Jesus to the Magi (the "Wise Ones" of Gentile origin, Mt 2). Mark begins his Gospel with God's declaration of Jesus as the "Beloved Son" at his baptism (Mk 1). John focuses on Jesus' first miracle at the wedding in Cana (Jn 2).

By the fifth century, the Western Church celebrated the feast of the Epiphany with the themes of the adoration of the wise men. Epiphany is also called the Twelve Days of Christmas (December 26 to January 6). It marks the time the star traveled across the sky before resting above the stable in Bethlehem.

Some families move the Magi in their nativity set a bit closer each day until they are placed in the stable on the Feast of Epiphany. Until then, we celebrate Christmas!

Source: www.daily-word.com