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*Immaculate Mother
of God*

JAMES FRANCIS CARDINAL McINTYRE

Number 28

ABOUT THE AUTHOR . . .

James Francis Cardinal McIntyre, Archbishop of Los Angeles, is the first prelate in western United States to be elevated to the college of cardinals. Born in New York in 1886, Cardinal McIntyre spent the first sixty-two years of his life there. He began his studies for the priesthood at the age of 30, after spending several years working for a Wall Street firm and supporting his father. He was ordained in 1921, consecrated a bishop in 1941, and named a cardinal by Pope Pius XII in 1953.

Immaculate Mother of God is the text of a sermon delivered at the Solemn Pontifical Evening Mass, September 8, 1954, in the Seattle Civic Auditorium. The Mass was the principal Marian Year observance of the Archdiocese of Seattle.

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IMMACULATE MOTHER OF GOD

JAMES FRANCIS CARDINAL McINTYRE

In this Marian Year we commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the solemn proclamation of the dogma that Our Lady, the Mother of God, was from the moment of her conception free from the stain of original sin.

It was no new truth that Pope Pius IX defined on that memorable eighth of December in 1854. It was a belief that echoed down the Christian centuries, firm in faith since that joyful moment when the Archangel Gabriel saluted her as "Hail, full of Grace" and won her awed consent to the unique role she was to play in the drama of man's redemption.

Now a hundred years later another Pius, gloriously reigning, calls the whole world to a more intense spiritual awakening under the inspiration of the Immaculate Mother of God.

It is Pius XII who speaks to us, whose whole life has had the blessing of Our Lady since the days of his youthful devotion at her humble shrine in the great basilica of St. Mary Major.

There he was ordained a priest, there he was consecrated a Bishop, there he went last Dec. 8 solemnly to open this Marian Year in her honor, a year of fervor and of spiritual renewal—**ad Jesum per Mariam**, to Jesus through Mary—that has swept over the world encouraging and comforting the children of God in a time of ever-mounting material crisis.

His is indeed the Marian pontificate, and we yet thrill over his solemn definition of Mary's Glorious Assumption where she reigns as Queen of Heaven, Queen of Angels and of Saints.

Cardinal Newman has told us that the glories of Mary are for the sake of her Divine Son. Mother and Child are forever associated. You cannot take away the mother and leave the child suspended in mid-air. No, Mother and Son are in indissoluble association.

When we remember that Mary's Son was the eternal Word of God, born of her flesh in the loom of time by the overshadowing power of the Holy Spirit, then we recognize her unique role in the work of redemption, and understand the privileges and prerogatives with which she has been gifted. For she is the Mother of God—this is her highest privilege, her most sublime title.

It is because of this that she was conceived without original sin. St. Augustine tells us that she was utterly sinless **propter honorem domini**, because the honor of her Divine Son demanded it.

The same divine thoughtfulness ensured that her crown of motherhood should not lack the precious jewel of virginity, and that her sinless flesh should be immune to the corruption of the grave.

If, while on earth, she was adorned with every conceivable grace and virtue, and if, in heaven, she has place of honor at the side of her Son

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—this is because the Word who became flesh has deemed no glory too ennobling for her whom He, from all eternity, predestined to be His Mother. “Thus shall she be honored whom the king delights to honor.”

Thus Mother and Son are forever associated in the intimate, personal union that existed between them in the days of their years upon earth. Mary listened, dismayed, to the words of the Archangel Gabriel as all creation breathlessly awaited her free consent. “Be it done to me according to Thy word,” she said, and Mary’s unalterable place in the divine economy began.

‘MATER AMABILIS’

There were the months of quiet confidence and ecstatic anticipation, sheltered and protected by Joseph, a just man, and then the anxious journey to Bethlehem where in a cave, homeless, there was only rapt adoration for the Lord of heaven and of earth as Mary found, helpless in her arms, the Babe of Bethlehem.

She was indeed the ‘Mater Amabilis’ — the Mother Most Loving, and she cared for her Divine Child with all the tenderness of gentle affection.

Our liveliest imagination cannot conceive the thoughts of Mary as she lovingly pondered all these things in her heart. Ever conscious was she of the precious charge uniquely committed to her care.

Throughout His childhood, as He grew in wisdom, in age, and in grace; through His young manhood when He dutifully helped Joseph in the carpenter shop, hammering nail to crossbeam; through the years of His public life when she hung on the edge of the throng or waited longingly at some trysting place for His blessed coming; through all the bitterness of His Passion when she stood by the roadside with her sevenfold sword of sorrow as He passed; at the foot of the cross in utter desolation — she knew His secret as she lived in close union of heart and mind with her Child, her Son.

She knew God’s goodness was unfolding in the mighty and mysterious work of man’s redemption, for she was His mother, the Mother of God who came to bear man’s infirmities and to carry man’s sorrows.

No wonder the nations rise up and call her blessed. No wonder the Church hails her: “Thou art all fair, O Mary, and the stain of original sin is not in thee.” No wonder the faith and fervor of her children, as they hymn her praise in childlike simplicity: “O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee.”

FAITH IS STRONG

Jesus and Mary, Son and Mother, their days together are so intimately interwoven that they are inseparable in our thoughts — He in adoration and she in veneration.

And this faith of ours is strong and vibrant because it sweeps in

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upon our awareness so naturally, so fittingly, so in accordance with right reasoning, so consoling to all human emotions and sympathies, that we would spontaneously acclaim the Mother even if we knew nothing of the design of her Son.

Mother and Son have been forever associated also in the formulation of Christian belief. Indeed, the centuries witness to the truth that no one acknowledges Our Savior as the Eternal Son of God who does not reverence and exalt Mary as the Mother of God. These two truths are inextricably intertwined in the pages of Holy Scripture and in Apostolic tradition.

"I and the Father are one," He said. "Before Abraham was born, I am." "He that seeth Me, seeth the Father also." It was for this claim to divinity that He was condemned, and for this He died.

So too the Scriptures give us the twin truth that if Christ is God, Mary is the Mother of God. Her cousin Elizabeth thus revered her when she saluted Mary as "Blessed art thou among women." So too she herself proclaimed God's condescension toward her when in her Magnificat she sang: "Behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed."

These truths have secure place also in the earliest Apostolic traditions. St. Irenaeus, linked through Polycarp with the Beloved Disciple, St. John, solemnly affirms at the middle of the second century the unshaken Christian belief that "as by a virgin, who did not obey, man was stricken, and, falling, died, so also by a virgin, who obeyed the word of God, man, aroused again by life, received life."

There is nothing clearer in the history of dogma than that reverence for Mary as the Mother of God safeguards and insures belief in the role of her Son as the incarnate word of God — Emmanuel, God with us.

FAITH CLARIFIED

Thus it is that the Church heralds her as the Queen who vanquishes all heresies. You find this in the fourth century when, in the mental meanderings of Eastern philosophers, these crystal-clear truths of scripture and tradition were clouded and confused, and attempts were made to conform the mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation to the errors of a false Platonism.

Then, as now, there were those who sensed an opposition between revelation and reason. Some, the Docetists, taught that Christ was only God and had but the appearance of man. Others, the Arians, taught that Christ was only man and had but the appearance of God.

To clarify the ancient Faith, the Church called a council of theologians and philosophers, learned men of the time from over the Christian world. In this council, held at Nicaea in the year 325, the faith of the scriptures and of the fathers was solemnly affirmed.

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Here the truth was declared for all time that there are three Divine Persons in God, each really distinct yet equal in all things, and that Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, is God, and Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, become man to take away the sins of the world. Thus the council in reaffirming the truth that Christ is God implicitly reaffirmed the truth that Mary is truly the Mother of God.

But these clear implications of the Council of Nicaea were soon again questioned in the stubbornness of errant minds, and a new council was assembled to dissipate new errors, this time at Ephesus in the year 431.

'THE GOD-BEARER'

Here the fathers and doctors of the Church condemned the so-called Nestorian heresy. This heresy contended that there were two persons in Christ — not merely the nature of God and the nature of man, but two persons, two centers of reference — the divine and the human.

If this error prevailed, it could have been logically reasoned that Mary was not truly the Mother of God but only the mother of the man who was Christ.

After long prayer and scholarly discussion, the Council of Ephesus carefully and precisely affirmed the faith of the ages, that our Savior was one Divine Person in two distinct natures, the nature of God and the nature of man, two perfect natures united hypostatically in the one person of the Eternal Word, the Second Person of the august Trinity, perfect God and perfect man.

Immediately, rejoicing filled the whole Christian world at this reaffirmation of the divine maternity of Mary. She was the "Theotokos" — the God-bearer. Her Son was indeed the Son of God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, whose divine nature was of the Father in eternal generation. But He was also the Son of Man, whose human nature was conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the sinless flesh of His Blessed Mother. Let him be anathema, the council decreed, who henceforth questions the truth that Mary is the Mother of God.

This is the faith that Christian men have ever held and hold. These beliefs were solemnly enunciated many centuries ago. They have perdured down the ages as unchanging and infallible faith.

It is well for us in the Marian Year to recall these truths of fundamental doctrine and belief. For they are not the invention of any man or group of men, they are not the fruit of human imagination.

These are truths committed to the Apostles in the revelation of Christ Himself, and since the time of the Apostles they have been truths that have shaken the heavens, truths that have been proved affirmative and decisive for the bewildered world of time.

TODAY'S DENIAL

Sadly, there are those who even today make shipwreck of the Faith

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by refusing to accept the divinity of Christ and by hesitating to reverence the divine motherhood of Mary. We have seen them assembled in a recent world-wide gathering, denying these ancient affirmations of Christian truth.

They looked for unity and found it not because they turned their minds from the stirring pronouncements of Nicaea and Ephesus and fixed them barrenly on the bleak vistas of reason.

Having eyes they see not and having ears they hear not the Christian word and voice that illumine the centuries with the splendor of integral belief, and they sadly disintegrate into multiplying division and confusion in the lack of a resolute and unshakeable belief in the Son and the Mother.

“Shine on them, dear Mother of God, like the sun in its strength, **O stella matutina**, O harbinger of peace, until their year is one perpetual May” — this be our Marian Year prayer for our separated brethren as they grope in the darkness for the harbor of unity and of truth.

There is yet a final association of Mary with her Divine Son in His Mystical Body which is the Church. She who brought forth her Divine Son without pain in Bethlehem's cave, brought us all forth in sorrow at the foot of the Cross.

On the Cross, Our Saviour shared His mother with all mankind as He said to John: “Son, behold thy mother.” And He gave each of us to Mary when He said: “Mother, behold thy son.” As her Divine Son continues through His Church the work of teaching, sanctifying and saving all men, so does Mary continue her role of inspiration and help and encouragement and example.

In our day too she broods in motherly concern over a wandering world. Repeatedly she has warned us in mounting solicitude and worrisome care, at Lourdes, at La Salette, at Fatima, to hearken again to her Son lest our waywardness reap the whirlwind. She will be with us again as the enemies of God hedge the world around.

Let her name be our rallying cry as we summon the Christian hosts against the designs of the last of the enemies. She in the long Christian centuries has conquered every foe of her Son, every heresy in His Church, nor will this last and final and complete apostasy of Communism fail to feel the heel of her sandal.

SHE WILL NOT FAIL

What need, then, have we to fear? Mary is our mother, and her Divine Son has made her the dispenser of the riches of His Redemption. She is the Mediatrix of Grace — all grace through Mary. In return for the human life He received from her, Christ gave to His Mother the keys to the divine life of which He is the font and source.

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“Never was it known,” says St. Bernard, “that anyone who fled to her protection was left unaided.” Let us then go to her confidently, as children, in ever-spiralling devotion. She will never fail us.

Whatever it is that we ask, whether success in study, or comfort in sorrow, or the winning of a pure love, or help in misfortune, or true sorrow and repentance, or even the strength and steadfastness of the nations against the fearful inroads of Communism — she will lead us to her Son and say to Him: “This too is my child.”

To the stewards at the marriage feast of Cana she spoke some of her few recorded words: “Whatsoever He shall say to you, do ye.” This is what He says to us again during this Marian Year of grace: “If you love Me, keep My commandments.” “By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love one for another.” “Take up your cross daily and follow Me.” “Be ye perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect.”

Through her inspiration and with her help, we will hear Him in new faithfulness with new courage, in ever heroic resolve. This we solemnly pledge on this happy Marian Year festival: to fill the little world of our own hearts and the wider circles in which we move with the joy of Christ in the reign of Christ, that we may remain holy in the making of a new world, renewed and redeemed with the spirit of Christ in a kingdom of truth and grace, a kingdom of holiness and mercy, a kingdom of justice and charity and peace.

