

How I Came To Call Her Blessed

By Karl Kohlhase, 2008

Prologue

And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has regarded the low estate of His handmaiden. For behold, henceforth, all generations will call me blessed; for He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name.”

Growing up Lutheran, I never gave much thought to the person of Mary, the Blessed Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ. I harbored no animosity towards her, but I had no special fondness for her either. She was, as it were, a non-issue, a mere historical figure, like the mother of Abraham Lincoln, for instance. Sadly, God Himself also became increasingly irrelevant to me as I entered my teens, and I paid no attention to His commandments.

When I was eighteen years old, however, a wonderful thing happened. Jesus Christ made it abundantly clear to me that He was, indeed, the true and living Savior of the world, and that He was calling me to follow Him. My life began to drastically change, to the consternation of my old friends, as I immersed myself in His Word and increasingly surrendered myself to His Lordship.

Unfortunately, I knew nothing of the benefits of having an earthly shepherd, such as can be found in the Bishop of Rome; so my youthful, unbridled zeal left me vulnerable to the shifting winds of false doctrine. I was blown into the camps of fundamentalism, for I felt a kinship there among other zealots. How charming zeal can be, but how dangerous also, when it carelessly runs ahead of well-seasoned wisdom.

Young and impressionable, I was quickly conformed into the image of my newfound fundamentalist friends. I joined them as they reviled the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church, calling it “the whore of Babylon”. I slanderously charged that Catholics worshipped Mary and sincerely believed that they would suffer the consequences of their idolatry in the eternal torments of Hell. I disdained those who referred to Mary as “the Blessed Mother”. I pitied them, believing them to be darkened in their understanding, deceived by the Prince of Lies. I took advantage of every opportunity I could to “enlighten” these poor souls.

And all the while, as I raged against Catholicism, my own heart—which Christ had once filled with a beautiful and joyful light—grew darker, infected with this insidious root of bitterness.

But God, who is rich in mercy, seeing that I was acting more out of ignorance than malice, lovingly corrected this wayward sheep without a shepherd. My kind but stern Father chastised me. His invisible rod of correction left the marks of a growing confusion that gradually robbed me of my inner peace and joy, like the slow erosion of soil by incessant winds and rain. I was plagued by endless questions and internal debates, as I sought to determine which church, out of the many thousand splinter groups, taught the

truth. My heart was like the little dove that Noah sent out from the ark; for I found no place to rest my wings.

At the age of thirty, after twelve years of wandering from one denomination to another, looking for truth as a man searching for water in a vast and barren wilderness, I saw the pillar of cloud come to rest over the Church that Christ built upon the rock of Saint Peter. And my soul was refreshed.

There were many issues I had to wrestle with before I could enter the Catholic Church in good conscience, but the most troublesome theological conundrum for me to pin down involved the Church's Marian doctrines. Thankfully, I was somehow filled with the same determination as Jacob, who also wrestled with God, and, like that old Patriarch, I said, "I will not let You go until You bless me." Praise, honor and glory to God for His patience and mercy, Who hears all who call upon Him in truth and seek Him with all their hearts! The answers to my nagging questions became clear to me over time, and I was again filled with the peace and joy that had once been mine as a newborn follower of Jesus.

This brings me to the reason why I decided to write this book. Our Lord Jesus prays that His Church will be one, as He and the Father are one. Saint Paul pleads with us that we will all be of the same mind, in perfect agreement, without any division, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. One body of Christ. One faith. One Lord. One baptism. My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, you see how we have fallen! We have allowed the beautiful Garden of the Lord to be trampled down by schismatics, who have sewn the weeds of dissension, and have laid their dividing axes to the One Vine.

In recent decades we have begun to speak of Ecumenism, which is wonderful, but let us now be mindful of the sort of unity envisioned by Christ and His Apostles. Instead of embracing some grey, undefined, relativistic "Unity In Diversity" (a popular catch phrase in ecumenical circles), we should strive towards "Unity In Agreement". Diversity is fine when it comes to deciding what color we will paint our social halls, but not when it comes to doctrines of faith and morals. So how can we come to the common table of agreement when there exists such a sharp division over our Lord's Blessed Mother?

It is my earnest prayer to God that He will enable me to set forth in this book the logic and principles that I've learned in the midst of my wrestling with this issue. I will largely be drawing from Sacred Scripture, in honor of my Protestant brothers and sisters in Christ, who hold that the Bible is the sole authority in all matters of faith. I realize that "because the Pope and Sacred Tradition affirm these beliefs" will probably not be a very convincing argument for such readers, while it certainly is compelling for me.

And may the Blessed Mother accept my sincere apologies for my raging insolence in years past. May I now, through this little book, draw near to her motherly protection at least as many as I turned away in the days of my ignorance. And, if it pleases the Lord, may He take into His hands this little child's offering of a few loaves and fish and multiply it to feed many more.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

I.

Catholics Do NOT Worship Mary

It is a very common accusation leveled against Catholics, and a serious one at that: “Catholics worship Mary.” I say it is serious, not because it’s accurate or has any merit whatsoever, but because of its grave implications if it were true. To worship anyone or anything other than the one true God, who has revealed Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is a serious infraction of the Divine Law. In fact, idolatry is punishable by eternal condemnation! The Bible is replete with this understanding, from cover to cover. For that reason, there are many believers who will not even grant the title of “Christian” to members of the Catholic Faith. How sad!

As serious as this charge may be, it is surprisingly easy to dismiss. The solution? Go straight to the source, and read for yourself what the official position of the Catholic Church is. Pick up a Catechism (or any Papal Encyclical, for that matter). There you will find, in black and white, that all Catholics everywhere are commanded to hold to a strict monotheistic observance, and to offer this One Triune God an adoring worship that transcends all other forms and expressions of honor, glory and praise.

When I first opened the Catechism and discovered this I was shocked, I was angry, and I was ashamed. I was shocked, because it was the exact opposite of what I expected to find, having been told so many times that Catholics worshipped Mary. I was angry, because I had been lied to. I was ashamed, because I had helped propagate this lie and was, without question, guilty of breaking the Commandment: You shall not bear false testimony.

You may find yourself objecting at this point, “But I’ve seen Catholics worship Mary with my own eyes; I’ve heard them with my own ears.” What exactly have you seen? And what have you heard? Could it be that you are thinking like the ancient Philistines? When they had captured the Ark of the Covenant, they said, “This is the god of Israel who delivered them from Egypt, for we have seen and heard how they worship this sacred object.”

Don’t be too quick to judge based on outward appearance, for the truth of God is far too beautiful to be seen by the casual observer. Come; let us break the surface of the water and dive a little deeper.

II. The Difference Between Honor & Worship

I apologize, dear Christian reader. Certainly you are a better theologian than all the Philistines put together. You understand, of course, that the Israelites did not worship this inanimate box made of acacia wood, covered with gold, and bearing the likenesses of two cherubim whose wings overshadowed the Mercy Seat. You understand that they did not worship the Ark, but that they showed a deep, reverential honor to this object, because it was made uniquely holy by the Presence of the Living God who chose to dwell there in a special way.

Now I would like you to consider two basic principles:

- 1) There is a difference between honor and worship.
- 2) There are varying degrees of honor.

As to the fact that honor is not the same thing as worship, a simple glance at the Ten Commandments is sufficient. We are called to honor our fathers and mothers, while reserving worship for God alone. Obviously, in the mind of the Author of these commandments (that is, in the mind of God Himself), there is a distinction between the two. Honor and worship are not the same.

As for there being varying degrees of honor, I would like you to imagine a ladder with four rungs. Now imagine that I have placed before you four pieces of paper, each with a picture of an object on it: 1) A toilet brush, 2) Your best silverware, 3) the golden utensils used in the outer courts of the Temple, and 4) the Ark of the Covenant itself, placed behind the veil of the Holy of Holies. If I asked you to tape these pieces of paper on the ladder rungs, according to the level of honor that you felt towards each object, what would you do?

I would be shocked if 100% of you didn't put them in the exact same order as I did, with the Holy Ark being at the top. You feel a sense of reverential awe before this object, and so you should. This wooden box was so holy that men were struck dead for simply touching it in an irreverent manner.

Stop and think. You have a high sense of honor, respect, and even reverence for a created thing that includes two golden statues representing cherubim. Does your conscience condemn you for being an idolater? Certainly not! On the contrary, the Holy Spirit confirms your conscience, as if to say, "Good. It is right for you to have these high and noble feelings toward this sacred object. Had Uzzah had the same sense, I wouldn't have had to strike him dead for thinking it a light matter to reach out his unconsecrated hand to touch the place of My habitation."

Clearly we see degrees of honor being appropriate for inanimate objects. Now let's turn our attention to that other order of creation, of rational beings. Does the principle also hold true for men, women and angels?

The Scripture teaches us to “honor all men”, but is there evidence that varying degrees of honor are appropriate? Yes! Take, for example, Saint Paul’s words to Timothy, “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.” Obviously, the phrase “double honor” implies that it is right and good to offer more honor to some than to others. The principle is so basic that I hope I’m not offending your intelligence, but sometimes the most obvious truths are left ignored, while we go looking for loftier things. And we may never build the attic if we don’t first lay a good foundation. So let this foundation stand: varying degrees of honor among created rational beings is an iron-clad reality in Scripture.

Now imagine a much taller ladder with several more rungs. Wouldn’t you agree with the ordering of the following pieces of paper that I’m taping upon these rungs?

1) A child’s peer, 2) the child’s father, 3) the father’s employer, 4) the city’s police, 5) the state’s governor, 6) the nation’s president.

Do you suppose we have reached the top of the ladder?

Would not the President of the most powerful country in the world tremble in the presence of the least ranking angel in Heaven? So let’s add a rung to the ladder for him, too. But let’s say there are many more rungs above this angel’s, all the way to the top of the clouds, where you have the highest ranking angels and exalted saints.

Think about this. As you climb the first six rungs, do you not feel a deepening sense of reverential honor? And if you lived in the kingdom of a glorious king, can you not imagine yourself reverentially bowing before him when you entered his presence, like the prophet Nathan bowed before King David? Would you be worshipping this man, this mere creature? No! Not if you didn’t herald him as a god, as the ancient Romans did to Caesar! If you can see the high degree of honor that is appropriate on this sixth rung of the ladder, now perhaps you can begin to imagine the astonishing depths of reverence that the prophet Daniel felt as he fell on his face before the angel Gabriel.

Do you see how high this ladder goes? And we still haven’t come to the realm of adoring worship, which is reserved for God alone. To get there, one must climb to the highest rung of “creature honor” and jump off the ladder altogether. There, when your heart soars high above the honor given to the greatest saints and angels, you are beginning to worship God as He deserves. O what a lofty love!

Do you not have a higher esteem for God now than you did before? Is your heart surging with a deeper love than you previously could imagine giving to God Most High? Then perhaps you will admit that the road I’m leading you on is for the greater glory of God, and not in the least bit detracting from His praises. Alleluia!

“Wait a minute!”, you may be saying, “I believe that we will all be the same in Heaven.”

Do you really? Then why does our Lord reward one servant by saying, “Be in authority over ten cities” and to the next, “and you are to be over five”? And why does He speak of those who will be least in the Kingdom of Heaven, as well as those who will be the greatest? Jesus will recompense every man and woman according to his or her deeds, and someone will sit on His right hand and another on His left. To be certain, some person will have the distinguished honor of being called the greatest in the Kingdom.

But who will he be? Or shall I say, who is she?

III.

Among All Creatures, Mary Is At The Top Of The “Honor Ladder”

I can almost see you putting up your boxing gloves after you've read the title of this chapter. You're crying, "Foul! Not Fair! That's not in the Bible! How can you make such a bold claim? I've seen you're logic up to this point, but now you've gone too far!"

Take a deep breath, go get a warm cup of tea, and come back after you have calmed yourself. I will explain where I'm coming from. The Scriptures will be forthcoming, and the logic will be made clear, with the help of the Lord.

Recall when the mother of James and John approached Jesus and requested, "Command that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and one at Your left, in Your Kingdom." Jesus replied that she really had no idea what she was asking for. This was a special privilege already determined by His Father. Then He went on to explain, "...whoever would be first among you must be your slave; even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve..."

The race was on! Someone would claim the prize of first place. But out of the billions of souls throughout human history how can we narrow it down to one winner?

Well, Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, helped us out tremendously by saying to Mary (under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, mind you) "Blessed are you among women!" That was easy. We just eliminated one half of the human race. Mary is more blessed than all the women throughout all ages, which explains why she is called "blessed" by all generations. It is now down to Mary and all the men of the world. Still a staggering number of candidates are left, I'm afraid, but we've made good progress in a short time.

To narrow the field, I would like to propose a series of questions and ask that you seriously ponder the unique qualifications of the one who referred to herself as "the Handmaiden of the Lord". Keep in mind that in this contest for the top ladder rung of honor, we are only considering human-humans. Jesus Christ is exempted from this race, since He transcends the ladder altogether and deserves worship as the one and only Man who is also God. May He be adored with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever! Amen.

Please consider the following questions. Take your time. Ponder them. Think deeply about each one. Be honest. Listen to your conscience where the Holy Spirit will speak to you.

In all of Scripture, who ever showed a greater faith than the one who believed, without hesitation, an impossible promise?

Who showed a greater humility than the Lord's Handmaiden? Was she not more obedient (and thus more humble) than Moses, whom God called the most humble man in the world? Recall that Moses was denied entrance into the Promised Land for striking the rock in anger, after He had been commanded to speak to it in order to bring forth water.

Who was more willing to endure extreme poverty for the sake of the Kingdom? Did not our Lord say of the poor that "theirs is the Kingdom of God."?

Who was ever more highly honored by a glorious angel like Gabriel, who said to Mary, "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!"?

Who else in the entire Bible was ever called "full of grace"?

In the entire history of the world, who has ever been called by God to fulfill a more important work on earth than giving birth to and nurturing the Christ Child? In like manner, what human-human has God trusted more than the Blessed Virgin?

What human being could ever more closely resemble the Ark of the Covenant, as Mary was overshadowed by God's power and presence, and then bore within her womb the Word Made Flesh?

Who endured more abusive suspicions and slanders for the sake of Christ, with people calling into question her virginal purity and her sanity? She is still slandered by millions to this day. Didn't our Lord promise great rewards for those who suffered persecution and abusive slander on His account?

Who was the first to believe that Jesus was the Messiah? Was it not Mary, who believed and said to Gabriel, "Be it done unto me according to your word"? If Christ gave Peter the "keys of the Kingdom" for being the first among the Twelve to believe and confess, what should be given to her whose faith preceded and surpassed Peter's?

Who could ever shower Christ with more love than His own dear Mother? Consequently, who could ever fulfill the greatest commandment, which is to love the Lord our God with all our being, more perfectly than Mary did?

Who cooked more meals for the Lord Jesus during His thirty-three years?

Who did more laundry for the Lord Jesus during His thirty-three years?

Who protected Him from more physical dangers during His tender Childhood?

What human provided more towards the overall education of the Master Teacher?

Who encouraged His first public miracle at the wedding of Cana?

Who took the converted women like Mary Magdalene under her accepting wing while Jesus focused on preparing the Twelve for their apostolic mission? Keep in mind that Mary Magdalene was no “second class citizen”; she was so loved by Christ that she was privileged to be the first to see our risen Lord!

Who showed the greatest courage and fidelity at the time of His suffering and death?

Who offered Him the greatest moral support at the foot of His cross?

Who shared in Christ’s suffering more intensely than Mary, of whom it was said (through Simeon’s prophecy) that her very soul was pierced through? Keep in mind that Saint Paul taught that we share in Christ’s glory to the degree that we share in His suffering.

Who mourned His death more grievously? Is she not then entitled to the greater comforting as our Lord promised in the Beatitudes?

Who among the first witnesses was never once accused of doubting His resurrection?

Who held His memory more dearly after He ascended into Heaven, treasuring all of the events of His life in her heart and constantly calling them to mind?

Who do you think prays more earnestly that Jesus’ ultimate sacrifice would not be in vain? Do you think that any one person could be more desirous to see every drop of His blood cleanse and convert the fullest number of souls?

Who has ever served the One who washed our feet more perfectly?

Who, although being so highly gifted by God, was more willing than Mary to be little and hidden, drawing all attention to Jesus Christ? Her words still ring throughout the earth, “Do whatever He tells you to do.”

If the Lord rewards His servants for a single cup of water, what will He give His Mother who has given more than any other?

Come now. Let us be reasonable. You see the truth shining before you, even though you may not want to admit it. There is no created being that shines brighter than Mary. The Holy Spirit is practically yelling it inside of your conscience. Please, don’t harden your heart.

Just in case there are one or two stubborn souls left, saying, “OK. She’s probably high on the list, but you can’t be sure that she’s on the top of that ladder you speak of”, let me offer one final consideration. Let’s compare the Blessed Mother Mary to Father Abraham, who is called the “father of all who believe.”

Abraham was so dear to God that the Lord said to him, “I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse those who curse you.” Why was he so blessed? Primarily for two

reasons: 1) Abraham believed a practically impossible promise, and 2) Abraham was so obedient that he was willing to offer to God, on the sacrificial altar, his one and only beloved son, Isaac, the child of promise. Saint Paul, for these reasons, praises Abraham as “the father of all who believe”.

You probably see where I am going with this. It’s staggering, isn’t it? Without me saying a single word, you are beginning to see that Mary is far superior to Abraham in both her faith and her obedient sacrifice. Will you then object to me calling Mary “the Mother of all who believe”? Will you object if I say that God will bless those who bless Mary, just as Saint Elizabeth was blessed when she exclaimed in the Spirit, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!”?

You may find yourself feeling a bit ill at ease with these statements, so let’s examine the premise and see if it’s sound. Does Mary’s faith and obedience outshine Abraham’s?

Consider Abraham. When he was about one hundred years old, he was promised a son, while Sarah’s womb was “as good as dead”. This promise was 99.999% impossible, but a modern doubter might argue that there was still a one-in-a-million chance that the elderly couple could conceivably conceive. The Blessed Virgin Mary’s promise, on the other hand, was a 100% scientific impossibility. Yet she still believed, as did Abraham. Do you not agree that Mary’s promise required more faith? Certainly you do.

Now let’s examine the manner of their believing. Abraham chuckled a bit. He argued a bit. Then he believed. Mary didn’t chuckle. She didn’t argue. She just believed. Abraham tried to take matters into his own hands, producing Ishmael through Hagar before Isaac through Sarah. Mary could have done the same. She was espoused to Joseph. She could have said to Gabriel, “Very well, then, I was intending to live with Joseph as a perpetually consecrated virgin, but evidently it is God’s will for me to break my vow and consummate our marriage in the traditional fashion.” Did she do that? Did she take matters into her own hands? No! She was confused by this conflict in her mind, so she asked Gabriel for some clarification, saying, “How can this be, since I have no husband?” When the angel explained that there was to be no human father, but that God Himself would overshadow her, causing her to conceive in her womb by the Holy Spirit, she said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word.”

What an extraordinary, unsurpassed faith Mary had! Rightly did Elizabeth exclaim, “Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.” Given that Mary’s faith undoubtedly outshines Abraham’s, and following Saint Paul’s logic to its natural conclusion, we may confidently say that if Abraham may be called the “Father of all who believe” then Mary may be called “the Mother of all who believe”.

Are you a believer who keeps the commandments of God and bears testimony to Jesus? If you answered Yes, then Mary is your Mother. Just as our Lord said to His beloved disciple John from the cross, He now says to you, “Behold, your Mother.” Would you like to know why your spirit is so troubled by that statement right now? It is because the

devil hates this truth. Saint John, the beloved disciple, who obviously understood Christ's intent and meaning when He spoke to him from the cross, wrote in his Revelation, "Then the dragon was angry with the Woman, and went to make war on THE REST OF HER OFFSPRING, on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus." If you call God your Father and Christ your Brother, you should call Mary your Mother, for you are one of "the rest of her offspring" in faith.

That wasn't so difficult. Was it? Now let's shift our focus and compare Mary's and Abraham's offerings.

Abraham loved Isaac. He was his only son through his beloved wife Sarah. He was the child of promise. He was more precious to him than his own life. Yet God called him to take Isaac up the mountain and offer him as a sacrifice. Abraham obeyed. He placed the wood upon Isaac's shoulders, journeyed with him to the mountain, laid his precious son on an altar, lifted up the knife, and God stopped him just in time, seeing his sincere willingness to offer what was most dear to him.

Stunning. God was so pleased with Abraham that He said, "Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven... and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies."

Now it's Mary's turn. She takes this precious little baby boy in her arms (only thirty-three days after his circumcision) and walks up the steps of the Temple to consecrate her first-born son to the service of His Father, in perfect obedience to the detailed prescriptions of the Law, as found in the twelfth chapter of Leviticus. The elderly Simeon takes the Child in his arms and prophetically announces His future fate, saying to His mother, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and a sign that is spoken against; and a sword will pierce your own soul also, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

What did Mary do, learning in this instant that the Father's will involved the ultimate suffering for both Mother and Child? She could have snatched little Jesus out of Simeon's arms and cried out, "O no! Not my one and only Son! He is the Darling of all darlings!" But she didn't do that. In fact, she made no objections at all. She offered not a single protest. Instead, she quietly and humbly submitted her will to God's and pondered Simeon's prophecy in her heart. Symbolically, she placed the Child of Promise upon the altar of sacrifice, lifted high the knife, and waited to see if the Father would still the hand of fate as He had once done for Abraham.

He did not.

Thirty-three years later, she stood at the foot of the cross, silently aching before her crucified Son. The knife had come down upon her little Lamb, and, just as Simeon prophesied, it pierced her own soul.

Again, we don't hear Mary protesting at Calvary like Saint Peter once did, "God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you." Why? Didn't she love her Son? Of course she did! More than any father or any mother ever loved since the dawning of time! All throughout Jesus' life, His Mother wrapped Him in the swaddling cloths of her love. Mary held her tongue, because she alone understood that this was God's will. She would not be rebuked as Peter was by our Lord who said, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to Me; for you are not on the side of God, but of men."

How could she do it? How could she not beg the Father to reconsider? What mother could be so strong that she could silently stand by and watch her beloved Son die for the sins of the world? What human-human could be so perfect, so as to restrain her tongue from speaking one word of complaint? Only one who was "full of grace". For the tongue, according to Saint James, is like an uncontrollable fire, tamed only by the perfect.

Do you see the submissiveness and obedience of Mother Mary? Is she not clearly greater than Father Abraham? Her sacrifice is better, in as much as her Son, Jesus, is better than Isaac. Jesus was the first-born of all first-borns, the Darling of all darlings. He was the perfectly innocent Lamb of God. How Mary adored Him!

If God told Abraham that He would multiply his descendants as the stars of heaven and cause his descendants to possess the gate of their enemies, how do you suppose our Heavenly Father will bless Mary, who offered an infinitely better offering?

You don't have to guess. Look in the twelfth chapter of Revelation. There you will find John's vision of a Woman who gave birth to a male Child "who is to rule all the nations" and "was caught up to God and to His throne". The Woman is glorified, standing on the moon, clothed with the sun, and crowned with a crown of twelve stars on her head. While theologians see many things represented in this vision, including Israel and, even more strikingly, the Church, it undeniably speaks of Mary also; for she was the highly favored Woman chosen to have the unique honor of giving birth to the Christ Child. Mary's offspring, represented by the Twelve, shine like the stars in Heaven and will be as numerous also. She is the Mother of the Church, the new Jerusalem, built upon the rock of Saint Peter, against which the gates of Hell shall never prevail.

Yes! Mary is on the top rung of the ladder of honor. You will wear yourself out looking for a more exalted creature. You know in your heart that this is true.

Climb that ladder, little children, and learn to honor your Mother as God wills.

IV. How High Does The “Honor Ladder” Go?

Perhaps you will concede that Mary is on the top rung of honor appropriate for created beings. But what exactly does “appropriate” mean? How high does that ladder go before one enters into the realm of worship? To determine this, take a walk with me through the Scriptures. I think you will find that the ladder reaches further than you once thought.

We’ll start on the lower rungs and work our way up. Again, take your time with these principles. Given that our topic is the Blessed Mother, explore how the principle may apply to her. Since we have learned that she is on the top rung of the ladder, all of these should have some application. I won’t spell out all of the implications for you, because I believe the Holy Spirit will help you to explore those in your own heart and mind.

- 1) It is Scripturally appropriate to have a respectful and obedient attitude towards someone, such as one’s father and mother. Hence, the Commandment “Honor your father and your mother.”
- 2) It is Scripturally appropriate to closely follow someone’s example, especially if he or she is a faithful follower of Christ. As Saint Paul said, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”
- 3) It is Scripturally appropriate to express gratitude to someone who has helped you. Consider how Saint Paul publicly thanked Prisca and Aquila who “risked their necks” in order to help the Apostle.
- 4) It is Scripturally appropriate, of course, to tell someone that you love him or her, which is in keeping with the Two Great Commandments.
- 5) It is Scripturally appropriate to love someone so much that you would even die for that person, as our Lord tells us to love one another “as I have loved you.”. That is a high degree of love, yet it is not considered “worship”.
- 6) It is Scripturally appropriate to greet people with honorific titles, if they so deserve, as Saint Luke addresses his Gospel to the “most excellent Theophilus”.
- 7) It is Scripturally appropriate to express a deep level of devotion to a person, as did Ruth to Naomi or David’s appointed commanders to their king.
- 8) It is Scripturally appropriate to praise a human being in song. Consider how the women sang with joy after David’s victory over Goliath, “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands!” Consider also how the prophetess Deborah commemorated Jael’s slaying of King Sisera by singing, “Most blessed of women be Jael, the wife of Heber... She put her hand to the tent peg and her right hand to the workmen’s mallet; she struck Sisera with a blow, she crushed his head, she shattered and pierced his temple.”

- 9) It is Scripturally appropriate to say, “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!”
- 10) It is Scripturally appropriate to say, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!”
- 11) It is Scripturally appropriate to call a devout human being “holy”. Recall Saint Peter’s words as he admonished women to adorn themselves with “the imperishable jewel of a gentle and quiet spirit... so once the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves...”
- 12) It is Scripturally appropriate to ask someone to pray for you, just as Saint Paul constantly implored the recipients of his letters to pray for him.
- 13) It is Scripturally appropriate to value one person’s prayers over another’s, as Saint James reminds us, “The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects.” Think about it. Would you rather have Hitler or Elijah pray for you if you had an incurable disease?
- 14) It is Scripturally appropriate to kneel before a human to earnestly request his or her prayers. Remember that the Shunamite woman took hold of Elijah’s heels and obtained her extraordinary request through his powerful intercession, even the raising of her only son who had died. If her kneeling before Elijah upset God, then why did He grant her bold request?
- 15) It is Scripturally appropriate to envision Saints as possessing great glory and power, seated upon thrones in Heaven, wearing crowns, and even “ruling over the nations” as is seen throughout the book of Revelation.
- 16) It is Scripturally appropriate to acknowledge that Heavenly Creatures help our prayers ascend to God, as seen in the book of Revelation, where we see “elders” holding golden bowls of incense, “which are the prayers of the saints.”
- 17) It is Scripturally appropriate to even bow before a created being, provided that your intention is not to worship this person as if he or she was a god. The holy prophet Nathan bowed before King David, and the righteous Daniel prostrated himself before the glorious angel Gabriel. Isaac even blessed Jacob with the words, “Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you”, which had quite a literal fulfillment in Joseph, when he was exalted in Egypt. Jesus Himself promises the faithful in the book of Revelation, “I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and learn that I have loved you.”

That ladder is getting pretty high, isn’t it?

It seems that a cautionary note is needed here. Saint John, at the end of his extraordinary Revelation, was so overcome with awe that he “fell down to worship at the feet of the angel” who had shown him such glorious things. The angel promptly said to John, “You

must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brethren the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.”

I don't believe that the physical act of falling down or bowing was the issue here. Otherwise, why weren't Daniel, or Nathan, or the Shunamite woman similarly rebuked? The issue seems to be a matter of intent. John fell down “to worship”. That's why he was corrected, for he was about to give a created being something that was to be reserved for God alone, namely worship.

It is interesting to note, however, the gentle mildness of the angel's so called “rebuke”. If God viewed John's emotional response as a dark blasphemy, it seems that the prophet would have been immediately cast out of that place of glory for his abominable act of idolatry. At least one would think that the vision would have ended abruptly and on a sour note. Instead, John is gently reminded, “You must not do that.” This seems to be the tone an understanding father would use when a little child takes his coloring book and proceeds to color a bit outside of the lines (or is about to do so). Whereas, the father's tone would change drastically were the son to intentionally slap him in the face. Now the lad would have to be stoned to death, according to the Law. Do you see the difference?

Is it possible that an occasional Catholic throughout history has become a little sloppy in his or her theology and has inadvertently crossed that line (or come too close to it) with Mary? I think so. In fact, I recall reading about instances where the Church has excommunicated groups who have stubbornly persisted in Marian heresies, even after receiving pastoral correction. However, if the soul is not stubborn but inadvertently crosses that line in an emotional moment, let us not suppose that God will quickly cast it out of His Presence. Saint John certainly wasn't treated this way. Mary will gently but firmly admonish them, saying, “Child, you must not do that. Worship God. And do whatever my Son tells you to do.”

“Well,” some may object, “if the danger exists, one must back as far away from that line as possible.”

No. That would be a bad idea. Both extremes must be avoided. If you back up too far, you may find yourself scorning God's servant, and the Lord's rebuke will be much more severe than a simple, “You must not do that.” Consider the little boys who jeered the holy prophet Elisha, saying, “Go up, you baldhead!” How did it fare for them? Did the Father in Heaven smile at their ignorance, as if to say, “Oops... Try to keep it in the lines, boys.” No! Two bears immediately came out of the woods and tore up forty-two of those irreverent fools!

Of course, you're not so foolish or bold to call Mary “baldhead”. You're just saying that you won't bow down (even figuratively) and honor her as your Queen. But let me remind you that Joseph's brothers would have starved if they, continuing in their stiff-necked pride, refused to bow before him who had been made Second In Command under Pharaoh. God decreed it, as indicated by Joseph's childhood visions. It was His will to bring the entire family of Israel (in fact, the entire world) to their knees before this man,

this human creature, named Joseph. Otherwise, the drought would overtake them, and they would have withered away, having received no grain from Joseph's storehouses.

As I mentioned in the Prologue, I suffered for twelve years from a worsening spiritual drought. I was so hungry, living off of crumbs that had fallen from my Master's table. But when I put aside my stubborn pride and learned to give an appropriate level of honor to whom it was due (especially the Bishop of Rome, the Saints, and the Blessed Virgin) the heaven's opened up, giving the most refreshing rain to a dry and weary soul. It was as if my Master said to me, "Get off the floor and join me at Table. Leave the crumbs behind. I welcome you to partake of the Feast, which is my own Body and Blood." Now I understand how David felt when he said, "My cup runneth over!"

In summary, let us be diligent to give an appropriate level of honor to those whom God has chosen to exalt. Be careful not to give too much; but be just as cautious not to give too little.

It is our Lord's will that we learn to honor His Mother to the fullest measure; for she has become our Mother as well. As our Elder Brother, Jesus will show us how to fulfill the Commandment. In honor of His Mother's simple request, He will perform His first public miracle, even though His "hour has not yet come". There are six stone jars standing before you, each one capable of holding twenty to thirty gallons, and Jesus has told you to fill them with water. He intends to turn the water into the most delicious wine for all the wedding guests, but He will wait until all six jars are filled "up to the brim".

Don't go looking for a seventh jar, for that would be excessive. Remember that God alone deserves your adoring worship. But neither should you stop pouring in the water of your honor for our Blessed Mother after only one or two jars. After you have fully learned to honor her, whom God highly favors, with all six jars filled to the brim, the eyes of your spirit will begin to behold wonderful things, for Jesus will manifest His glory to you.

Then you will understand the answer to our Lord's riddle: "O Woman, what have you to do with Me?"

Have your prayers seemed like endless knocking, with only a seldom answering of the door? Perhaps the Lord Jesus is patiently waiting for you to fill up the sixth jar, and until that time His response to you may be "My hour has not yet come." So start pouring.

May the doors be opened for you, dear brothers and sisters. May your cups overflow with the sweetest wine. May the eyes of your spirit behold the glory of the Lord!

V. Hail, Mary!

For centuries, Christians have gravitated to the Rosary, in their quest to “fill the six jars” of honor for our Blessed Mother. Imagine what it would sound like in Heaven if all those millions of “Hail Mary’s” were somehow translated into a common tongue and made to sound in perfect unison. It would be loud enough to shake the walls of Jericho to the ground!

Will you now add your voice?

You may agree with much of what I’ve said throughout this book, but you just can’t bring yourself to say those words. You may even find yourself wishing you could, but you still have some lingering questions that trouble your conscience.

I commend you for being so attentive to your conscience; this world needs more people like you. But let me remind you that it is possible for good intentioned people to have misinformed consciences in some matters. Take the Pharisees, for example. They were troubled to hear the children praising Christ in the temple after His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. It bothered their consciences and sounded blasphemous to them, so they tried to silence the children’s loud hosannas. But the Pharisees were dead wrong. Similarly, Saint Paul, who once was called Saul, used to persecute the Church, following the dictates of his misinformed conscience.

I don’t mean to label you a Pharisee, for I believe you sincerely love our Lord Jesus and only want to do that which pleases Him. This is just one of the clearest examples I can think of for illustrating how a person’s conscience can go awry, even if his desire is to follow God. Honestly, I feel deeply sympathetic for you. It wasn’t that long ago when I was in your shoes, wrestling with my own heart. I was drawn to the Rosary and repulsed by it at the same time.

There were six main objections that I needed to answer before my conscience allowed me to fully embrace the Rosary and say, with all my heart, “Hail, Mary”. I offer them here, in hopes of helping others to jump over these hurdles. Believe me, the prize at the end of this race is well worth the effort.

OBJECTION #1: To God Alone Be The Glory.

It is noble of you to jealously guard and defend the glory of God. A host of Scriptures encourages you to do so. Take, for example, Revelation 5:13, which depicts every creature in heaven and earth saying, “To Him who sits upon the Throne and unto the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might for ever and ever!” You may also have God’s words, as spoken through the prophet Isaiah, ringing in your ears, “My glory I will not give to another.”

So how can you pray the Rosary when your conscience seems to say that you must ascribe blessing, glory, and might to God alone? Is your conscience correct, or could it be that you are suffering from a lack of understanding?

It can be a dangerous thing to take Scripture out of context, without considering what the rest of the Bible (or the Church, for that matter) has to say on a given subject. If you read the surrounding verses of Isaiah, you will find that God is referring to His unwillingness to share His glory with false idols, not with His true servants. It would be completely out of step with the rest of the Bible to say that God isn't willing to glorify His holy ones, as you'll see in a moment. So be careful of isolating a single text from the whole body of Truth, just to prove your point. As Saint Peter says, "the ignorant and unstable" tend to twist the Scriptures to support their line of thinking, and they do this "to their own destruction".

When we look at the rest of the Scriptures, we learn that not only does God permit the glorification of His Saints; He actually wills it. Saint Paul writes to the Romans, "There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil...but glory and honor and peace for every one who does good." He then writes to the Corinthians, "There are celestial bodies and there are terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another of the moon, and another of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power." And, as we've already seen, the Blessed Mother prophesied in the Spirit, "all generations will call me blessed." So we see in Scripture blessing, honor, glory, power, and immortality being ascribed to the Servants of God in Heaven.

Is it a just a little bit of glory that God shares with the citizens of Heaven? No! Saint Paul said that his "momentary and light afflictions" were producing for him an "eternal weight of glory"! O, the great generosity of our God! Jesus even goes so far as to tell those who conquer the perilous temptations of this world, "He who conquers, I will grant to sit with Me on My throne... I will give him power over the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I Myself have received power from My Father..." Here we see the meek actually inheriting the earth, just as our Lord promised in the Beatitudes!

You must know that the Lord wills to be glorified in and through His Saints. Let's say you visited two kingdoms, but both kings were away on important business. The royal officials of the first king were all dressed in smelly rags, while even the servants of the second king were arrayed in majestic splendor. Based on your observations, which king would you think possessed the greater glory, even though you never saw either one? The second king, of course! So it is with the Saints who are seated on thrones very near the Throne of Christ. The more they are glorified by the Church on earth, the more the world will realize the greatness of the King of kings and Lord of lords who has given them some share of His boundless glory.

It is God's will to heap glory and honor upon His beloved Saints, and we should help spread their fame. These are the true role models for society. Sadly, many people have this completely backwards! They honor worldly celebrities, who know nothing about the Kingdom of God, while they disregard Mary and the Saints. Now that your conscience has been informed of "the rest of the story", will you not rectify this at once in your own heart?

OBJECTION #2: Christ is the one mediator between God and man.

This objection stems from Saint Paul's words in the second chapter of First Timothy: "There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all." Many Protestants claim (as I once used to) that this verse somehow prohibits people from asking the Saints to pray for them.

This is really an absurd argument when you think about it. Is Saint Paul really saying that we should never ask someone other than Jesus to pray for us? Of course not! That wouldn't make any sense, given that he starts the chapter out with the words "I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men." In like manner, Paul regularly asked the recipients of his letters to pray for him.

Was the great Apostle Paul a hypocrite, or does the "one mediator" text mean something else? Obviously, it means something else. Paul is referring to the fact that Jesus, through the blood of His cross, has purchased an ocean of graces, and He makes them available to the human race. We can now tap into that ocean and see those graces flow through our prayers, supplications and intercessions, as through a conduit. In this way we make all of our prayers "through Christ" and in His name. Had Jesus never given Himself as our ransom on the cross, our prayers would have no effect; neither would the prayers of the Saints be effective. In fact, if it weren't for our dear Savior's cross, there would be no Saints, and Heaven would be inhabited only by God and His faithful angels.

But Jesus, the one Mediator between God and man, did pay the penalty for our sins on the cross, so our prayers are powerfully effective! Paul points out to Timothy that prayer is especially effective when offered through "holy hands". One is reminded here of the efficacious prayers of the holy Apostles of our Lord, who obtained great miracles as they prayed in Jesus' name.

Actually, Saint Paul makes a much stronger argument in favor of the Rosary. How so? Well, first of all, we are encouraged to pray for others, and the Rosary is a great way to do that, as we unselfishly ask our Father in Heaven to "give US this day OUR daily bread". Secondly, Paul shows us that it is entirely appropriate to ask someone else for prayer. Why not ask the Blessed Mother to pray for you? You can be certain that her prayers are always offered with holy hands, and her Son is always eager to honor her requests.

OBJECTION #3: Speaking to the dead is forbidden.

It's true. Scripture forbids séances, spirit mediums, and conjuring up the dead (as does the Catechism of the Catholic Church). So now your conscience is worried, because in order to Ask Mary to pray for you, you would have to "contact the dead". Right?

Wrong!

Remember when the Sadducees tried to pose a trick question to Jesus about a woman who had seven husbands during her lifetime? They asked whose wife she would be in the resurrection, supposing they had stumped the Master.

Jesus answered them, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living."

I assure you that Mary is very much alive. The Catholic Church teaches that, at the end of her earthly life, she was assumed, body and soul, into Heaven. Admittedly the Scriptures do not explicitly say this, but neither do they deny it. And there is Scriptural precedence when you consider how Enoch and Elijah were both taken up into Heaven, being so approved by God that He willed not for them to experience bodily decay.

Even if you are not ready to accept the authority of the Church regarding Mary's Assumption, you have the words of Saint Paul, who taught that to be absent from the body is to be "at home with the Lord". Again, we see in the book of Hebrews: "You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the Living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect..."

This is a beautiful picture of what the Apostle's Creed calls "the communion of saints". We are connected, through the Holy Spirit, with "innumerable angels in festal gathering" and with all those who have gone before us into our heavenly home. To speak with them is not "communing with the dead", because those who are in the resurrected Christ never truly die, even though their bodies may lie in the ground for a time.

Would you accuse the sinless Christ of holding a forbidden séance? Then how will you explain His visit with Elijah and Moses on the mount of His transfiguration? Admittedly, Elijah never died, but Moses certainly did. Yet both men are seen alive, speaking with our Lord. The flock of the Lord may confidently follow the lead of their good Shepherd and dismiss this objection. Mary and the rest of the Saints are not dead. In fact, they are more alive than us.

OBJECTION #4: We are called to undistracted devotion to Christ.

Again, I agree. We need to “fix our eyes on Jesus”. But must we do this without any help whatsoever?

Saint Paul, who called the Corinthians to “undivided devotion to the Lord”, also told them to “be imitators of me”. It’s good to have role models who help us to bring our eyes into focus upon the Lord. The book of Hebrews calls a host of such role models to mind, including Abel, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses. Is the author here trying to distract our eyes away from Jesus? Of course not! The Saints are not distractions that pull us away from the Lord; they are, instead, like magnets that draw our attention heavenward, where Christ is seated, surrounded by His Friends.

Is your goal in life to love Jesus with all your heart, soul, mind and strength? Then there is no better role model for you than His Blessed Mother. Make it your goal in life to have a heart like hers, and you will do well.

I would also like to call to your attention the contemplative nature of the Rosary. As we pray, we are called to meditate on the events of Christ’s life. If a person prays the entire Rosary on a daily basis, he or she will spend close to two hours each day contemplating mysteries like the incarnation of Christ, The childhood of Christ, His baptism, His ministry, His sufferings, His crucifixion, His resurrection, and His glory. Talk about fixing your eyes on Jesus! No wonder the Rosary was the “secret weapon” of some of the world’s greatest saints!

OBJECTION #5: We are called to avoid “meaningless repetition” in prayer.

This objection stems from our Lord’s words in Matthew 6:7, “And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think they will be heard for their many words...”

First of all, be careful of what you call “meaningless” or “empty”! Will you call the prayer taught by our Lord Jesus meaningless? Will you call the angel Gabriel’s words (the first half of the Hail Mary) meaningless? Will you call the words of the Holy Spirit through Elizabeth (the second half of the Hail Mary) meaningless? I urge caution here, as it seems like borderline blasphemy, and that’s putting it mildly.

What Jesus is telling us to avoid is praying without our hearts being engaged. If we give God only lip service, while our hearts are far from Him, those would be empty prayers indeed. So bring your heart along with you—your mind also—and the Rosary will be full of meaning for you.

Don’t be fooled. Fundamentalists often spurn written or memorized prayers, in favor of being “spontaneous” and “spirit-led”. But it escapes their notice that every single word of the Rosary is led by the Spirit, as the words come from the divinely inspired Scriptures. As for written and memorized prayers, don’t forget that our Lord Himself prayed the Psalms. He also prayed spontaneously. Why should you hold to one and throw out the other? Follow Jesus’ example, and do both.

Finally, let's look at repetition. What about all those Our Father's and Hail Mary's? That's pretty repetitive, but not nearly as repetitive as the song of the angels described in the book of Revelation. "Day and night they never cease to sing, 'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!'" For all eternity, day and night, they repeat the same thing over and over again, and they mean every single word of it. One also has to consider how our Lord advises us to persevere in prayer. Keep asking. Keep knocking. The door seldom opens after the first knock.

Repetition is unavoidable for anyone who prays on a daily basis. We all tend to fall into a pattern over time. Think about it. How many times have you prayed, "God, please bless (insert name here)"? You would have to invent an entirely new language in order to avoid repetition all together, and even then you would most likely fail. I've heard charismatic Christians who thought they were "praying in tongues" (the Lord knows whether they were legitimately doing so or not). Even they tend to repeat the same syllables over and over, once they've reached the limits of their creativity. Since we tend towards repetition anyways, we might as well repeat a beautifully crafted prayer. When you consider the wordsmiths of the Rosary, I think you will be hard pressed to find a more perfect prayer.

OBJECTION #6: This is not a clearly defined doctrine in the Bible.

This argument stems from a notion popularized by Martin Luther in the Sixteenth Century called "Sola Scriptura" (Latin for "Scripture Alone"), which teaches that the Bible is the sole authority in matters of faith and morals. The Catholic Church had held for centuries prior to this that doctrinal authority rested firmly on three pillars: 1) The Scriptures, 2) Sacred Tradition (especially the teachings of the Early Church Fathers, many of whom were direct disciples of the Apostles), and 3) The Teaching Magisterium of the Church (the bishops in union with the Pope, the successor of Peter).

Most Protestants side with Luther and say, "If it's not clearly spelled out in the Bible, I won't believe it." And since the Bible doesn't explicitly command, "Thou shalt pray the Rosary", it must be (at least in their opinion) a "false doctrine". But does this argument hold water? I don't think so.

The first problem arises when we consider that "Sola Scriptura" is, itself, not a Scriptural doctrine. Saint Paul, writing to the Thessalonians, exhorted, "So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the Traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter." Here we clearly see that second pillar of three, Sacred Tradition, which is passed down orally, standing side by side with Sacred Scripture, which is obviously transmitted through writing. And one has to look no further than the book of Acts to see the first examples of the Teaching Magisterium of the Church, as the Apostles met in the Council of Jerusalem (with Peter presiding over them) to decide on controversial issues pertaining to Gentile converts and old Mosaic customs.

Let's examine a couple of later controversies to see how they were settled in the Early Church, after the death of the Apostles. First, we'll briefly consider how the Bible, as we

know it today, came down to us. In order for “Sola Scriptura” to be true (with no reliance on Tradition or the Church’s Teaching Authority), there would have to be some divinely inspired “table of contents” listing the books to be included in the Sacred Canon of Scripture. Unfortunately, there was no such “master list” given, which led to some lively debate. The book of Revelation, for instance, was hotly contested and almost didn’t make it into the Canon. So who would decide which books and letters would be included, and which would be left out? Catholic Bishops met in the councils of Hippo and Carthage to decide the matter around the year 400 AD, the Pope gave his endorsement, and the issue was settled once for all. What a gift to be able to read the entire Bible with confidence, almost 2,000 years after its composition! Catholics and Protestants benefit alike.

The doctrine of the Trinity is another example. “One God In Three Persons” certainly has solid Scriptural underpinnings, but (like some Marian dogmas of the Church) it is not explicitly defined in the Scriptures alone. For instance, opponents of the doctrine are quick to point out that the word “Trinity” is nowhere to be found in the Bible. Like the Canon of Scripture, this milestone teaching was largely defined by a council of Catholic Bishops in Nicea in 325 AD, drawing heavily on both Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture. The matter was settled, and the doctrine of the Trinity has been a hallmark of orthodox Christian theology ever since.

Jesus told His disciples before His crucifixion that He had much more to teach them, but they were not yet ready to receive those truths. Therefore, He promised to send the Holy Spirit to lead them into all truth, after His resurrection and ascension. This is precisely what happens in the Council of Jerusalem (described in the book of Acts), where the Holy Spirit guides the Apostles to open the doors of the Church to the Gentiles. And the same holds true for the later councils in Hippo, Carthage and Nicea, where the Spirit enabled Catholic Bishops (as successors of the Apostles) to decide upon the Canon of Scripture and the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Again, in 431 AD, the Council of Ephesus, defined one of the earliest Marian Dogmas, honoring the Blessed Mother with the title of “Theotokos”, which means “God-bearer” or “Mother of God”.

Keep in mind that these councils weren’t teaching some “new revelation” that didn’t have its origin in the Apostle’s original deposit of faith. They were simply “unpacking” the treasure chest left to us by the apostles. Another way to look at this is to remember how Christ taught that the Kingdom of Heaven starts out as a single little seed but grows to become a great shade tree large enough for all the birds of the air to nest in. The Church wasn’t designed to be a sterile monument set in stone, but a living, breathing organism that grows and develops over time. In this way, Jesus enables His body on earth, the Church, to respond to the questions and moral dilemmas of every age, including our own. Just because the Apostles never thought to write about abortion or human cloning, for instance, doesn’t mean that the Church is to remain silent on these modern issues. Bishops in union with the Pope speak with the authority of Christ Himself, as the Holy Spirit, Sacred Tradition, and sound biblical principles lead them.

In like manner, Marian dogmas have grown and developed over time, and we shouldn’t think it strange to find the tree looking bigger than the seed from which it came. When

you were conceived in your mother's womb, you looked very different than you do today, and yet you are very much the same person. We know this from modern studies in genetics. You were meant to grow, both physically and mentally, into the person you are today. Similarly, the Church's understanding of the Trinity, of the Canon of Scripture, and of the Blessed Mother was also meant to grow and develop into what it has become today. The Scriptural underpinnings of these doctrines are present from the beginning, just as your DNA was present at your very conception.

Are you beginning to see that your objections were unfounded? If you have a few others, ask the Lord for wisdom. As Saint James says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously and without reproaching, and it will be given to him."

And if all of your objections are answered, what are you waiting for?

A CLOSING ILLUSTRATION

Imagine yourself in the majestic palace of a well-loved King, and you're standing with thousands of people in the most breathtaking throne room you have ever seen. Two exalted thrones are before you, but they're empty. The air is thick with anticipation as you await the grand entrance of the King, but the room buzzes with speculation regarding the mysterious and unexpected second throne.

The court official gives the signal for the trumpeters to sound their fanfare. At the trumpets' final cadence, the great doors open, and the court official cries out, "All hail, the King!"

The entire assembly instinctively responds with a united shout, "All hail, the King!" The sound is almost deafening as it reverberates throughout the great hall.

The King smiles, takes his seat, and then addresses the crowd: "Thank you for coming. You have all been summoned here this day to celebrate with me a very special occasion, the coronation of my Queen. Play the trumpets!"

At the King's signal the trumpeters sound the fanfare a second time. At the trumpets' final cadence, the great doors open, and the court official cries out, "All hail, the Queen Mother!"

To the shock of the King, only one little boy responds, at the top of his lungs, "All hail, the Queen Mother!" The rest of the room is completely silent.

What do you suppose that King will do?

He will at once call for the little boy to be brought before Him. Then, in the sight of the entire assembly, the lad will be crowned a Prince of the Kingdom. Finally, the King will dismiss the crowd in disgust.

I tell you the truth. The King's official has spoken from Heaven, "Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you!" Now God wills to hear the thunderous echo on earth. Please don't let the words get stuck in your throat.

Our Father, who art in Heaven,
Hallowed be Thy name.
Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done,
On earth as it is in Heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us,
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
Amen.

Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you!
Blessed are you among women,
And blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God,
Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.
Amen.

Glory be to the Father,
And to the Son,
And to the Holy Spirit,
As it was in the beginning,
Is now, and evermore shall be.
Amen.

Think About It. Pray About It.

Thank you for taking the time to read this little book. I hope you have found it to be at least thought provoking. Would you now say a short prayer, asking God what He would like you to do with these thoughts?

It has been my intention to set down, to the best of my ability, a logic that is entirely compatible with the Holy Scriptures and the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. If in any way, I have missed either of those two marks, may this book never see the light of day, and may God have mercy on this ignorant little child. The Lord knows I am only trying to please Him. May He patiently hold my hand as I try to learn how to walk. And if I have stumbled in the course of writing this little book, in everything I have written, I humbly defer to the judgment of the Bishop of Rome.

In closing, I offer the following four “short stories”, which may be better titled “meditations”. They are designed to help the reader enter into a prayerful probing of the heart and mind. You might consider reading one, and then putting the book down for a few moments, to prayerfully reflect upon it. Then proceed to the next.

The first meditation is a parable designed to help the reader contemplate how God is glorified in and through His servants.

The second is written from the perspective of Zacharias (John the Baptist’s father) as he silently ponders, “Who is this young girl who calls herself the Lord’s handmaiden and whose presence has graced our home for these past three months?”

The third is written from the perspective of Saint John, as I imagine what it may have been like for him to step into Heaven at the close of his life on earth. I chose Saint John for his unique relationship, among the Twelve, with the Blessed Mother. Admittedly, I took some artistic licenses here, but my aim is to simply help readers lift their hearts and minds to contemplate the joys and glory of Heaven. Who knows? Perhaps you will be inspired to write your own contemplation down. It certainly was an enriching process for me.

The fourth is a short walk through the Scriptures, exploring what they have to say regarding the topic of the Saints in Heaven. My primary objective is to show the reader that honoring the Saints is not some late invention of the Catholic Church, as many would argue. Each point is made with as few words as possible, which allows the reader plenty of room for pondering and conclusion making.

Happy contemplating!

“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.” (Colossians 3:1-3)

When You See My King

When You See My King

Once upon a time a poor commoner was exceedingly surprised to receive a messenger from the King of the land. He rode in a dazzling chariot, drawn by the most magnificent steeds he had ever seen. The man was struck with fear, for he had been negligent in paying his taxes that year. He had meant to pay them, but his crop had been damaged by hail, so he had barely enough to live on. He consequently had paid only as much tax as he could afford.

He ran out to meet the messenger, prostrated himself, and begged, "Have mercy, my lord! I know I was short on my taxes, and I will pay them as soon as I can."

The messenger smiled at him and said, "Have no fear, friend. I have not come to exact your debt. The King has bid me to invite you to His Palace today."

"For what reason?" the man asked. "Certainly He must be very angry with me. What shall I prepare for a gift? What shall I wear?"

"No", the messenger replied, "He's not angry at all. For your gift bring your eyes, your ears, and your mouth, for all the King desires from you today is your visit. Step into the carriage. There is no time to change your clothes. We must leave at once."

Hearing the urgency in the messenger's tone, the man promptly obeyed and climbed into the chariot. As they sped away, the man was at a loss for what to say, so he said the first thing that popped into his mind. "I must compliment you, sir, on the sheen of your chariot and the swiftness of your steeds, for I have never seen their equal in all my life."

"Thank you for noticing," replied the messenger, "I work very hard at polishing the chariot and grooming the horses. Look. I even polished the wheels and brushed the horses' teeth before I came to pick you up today."

The man laughed a little and said, "Isn't that a bit exorbitant? Your master must be very difficult to work for."

"I'm afraid you misunderstood me!" replied the messenger with a chuckle, "He doesn't demand that I brush the horses' teeth; that was my idea. You may think it excessive, but You'll understand when you see my King."

The man fell silent and pondered the glory of such a King.

As they approached the palace gate, the man's ponderings were far surpassed by the actual sight set before his eyes. How could he have imagined such a gate, its turrets nearly reaching the clouds? He had never seen anything like it. The messenger handed the man a looking glass and bid him to see how, at the top of the towers, workmen were laying another row of bricks to extend their height still more.

Astonished, the man gasped, “So this is how my taxes are spent! These towers are already the highest in the world. Isn’t that enough? Your master must be very arrogant.”

The messenger smiled and explained, “Oh no! The workmen had to beg our King to extend the towers. They just wanted them to reflect His radiance a bit more accurately. You’ll understand when you see my King.”

Awestruck, the man fell silent again, reflecting upon the magnificence of such a King.

As they entered the gates, the man’s heart leapt. He had never seen such a beautiful garden. Everything was in full bloom. The colors were dazzling, the scents intoxicating, and the landscaping immaculate. The man, overcome with emotion, jumped down from the chariot and ran to the chief gardener who was kneeling in the lawn, trimming the grass. “I must congratulate you, sir, on your exquisite workmanship! I’ve never seen a more breathtaking garden.”

The gardener responded, “Thank you. That’s very kind of you to say. It always feels good when someone notices one’s hard work. Stoop down here, and look at my latest undertaking. The thought occurred to me that since the garden looks almost perfect upon first glance that I could start trimming each blade of grass into an interesting little shape. Just for fun. I hope the King enjoys it.”

“Enjoys it?” replied the man, “Do you really think he will even notice? This seems absurd to me. Take your rest, my good fellow, for the garden is good enough as it is.”

The gardener chuckled and said, “You may be right. The King seldom walks in this part of the garden, as He has very important duties to attend to. But perhaps some day He may take a stroll and decide to lie down in the cool grass to rest. If He turns His head and sees this blade of grass that I’ve been sculpting, He’ll know how much I love Him. You may think I’m crazy now, but you’ll understand when you see my King.”

The man’s heart was touched by the obvious sincerity of the gardener’s affection for his master, so he fell silent again and contemplated a King who could win the hearts of His subjects so completely.

The messenger then stepped down from his chariot and bid the man to follow, as it was time to enter the King’s palace. When the gilded doors swung open, the man was filled with terror, as he was confronted by a numberless legion of palace guards, girded for battle. Each of them clad in armor more resplendent than any knight he had ever seen in fairy tale books. The man quaked with fear, his knees grew weak, and finally he fell in a heap, completely unable to stand; for his breath had all but left him at the sight of such majesty. The captain of the royal guard came and helped the man stand upon his feet, bracing him with his own arm to escort him to the King’s throne.

The man stammered, “Thank you, majestic prince, but why do you stoop to help this poor commoner, seeing I that I am as nothing before you?”

The captain kindly and warmly explained, “You’ll understand when you see my King.”

As they began to walk down the corridor, approaching the throne room, the man noticed that the music ascended in intensity, and that there were festive dancers in the wings of the court. It was all perfectly choreographed, and the music was more beautiful than any he had ever heard. The captain said to the man, “I hope you enjoy the song and dance. They were written just for your visit today. They’ve all been rehearsing very diligently.”

“Just for me? Just for this one occasion?” asked the man. “But this song is finer than all the masterworks of the world’s most brilliant composers combined!”

The Captain of the Guard answered gently, “Just for this occasion, yes, but not just for you. You’ll understand when you see our King.”

The music crescendoed to a glorious climax at the very moment they reached the throne room’s door. The man said to the Captain, “I almost lost my breath in this King’s garden, and my knees gave way when I beheld the King’s palace guard. When that door opens I will surely die!”

The door slowly opened, and before the man stood a little Child, wearing the garb of a commoner, much like his guest’s. The trumpets sounded their final cadence, and the sound of the royal orchestra was now but an echo that reverberated throughout the hall. And the entire court, including the dancers, the musicians, the palace guards, and their captain fell to their knees in silence before this Child.

And the Child King said to the man, welcoming him into His throne room for supper, “Come. Don’t be afraid, for I am gentle and humble of heart. I put on these commoner’s clothes, so that you would feel welcomed and at peace in My presence. But you see, by the splendor of my courts and the radiance of my servants, a small reflection of my true nature. And forget about the matter of your taxes, for You must understand that they were a mere trifle compared to my wealth. I am mercy itself. I have only wanted the pleasure of your company this day. Thank you for coming.”

And the man understood when He saw his King.

The Contemplation Of Zacharias

The Contemplation Of Zacharias

Who is this young girl who calls herself the Lord's handmaiden and whose presence has graced our home for these past three months?

For six months prior to her arrival, and continuing now to this ninth month, I have been silent, unable to speak since the day I dared question Gabriel's good word. Would that I had remembered Abraham and the deadness of Sarah's womb when the angel promised Elizabeth and me a son in our old age. Would that I had chained my careless tongue, of my own volition, before him who stands in the presence of God.

Alas, I could restrain neither my doubts nor my lips. I spoke. The angel rebuked. And I was left speechless.

Now I have come to understand both the severity and the kindness of the Lord. This silence has been for my chastening, yes, but also for my blessing. I was in need of silence. For the Lord's kind intention was to soon thereafter place before my dim and unworthy eyes sublime mysteries that could only be comprehended by the quiet and contemplative heart.

Now, in this ninth month, like a pregnancy that has come to full term, it seems that the fullness of my recollection is about to burst forth from my fettered tongue. But before I speak, let me call to mind one last time the marvelous events, and the meditations accompanying them, that have led me to this point of delivery.

I was filled with interior questions on that day. Why had the lot fallen to me, the least of all Levites, to enter the Holy Place this year? Why had the Lord shut my noble wife's womb when we had always tried so hard to please Him? Would all our prayers remain unanswered? Had He abandoned His people altogether, because of our infidelities? How long would it be before His Christ would come to restore the glory of Israel?

But the question that affixed itself most tenaciously to my mind as I stood there offering incense in the Holy Place, was this: "Where is the Ark of Your Covenant, Lord?"

Though I had never been in this Holy Place before, the Ark's absence was immediately apparent when I cautiously stepped inside. For the Scriptures indicated that the poles of the Ark extended past the curtain on both sides and were visible from where I now stood. I beheld the curtain, but no protruding poles of gold. Of course, this was no surprise to me, since no one had seen the glorious Ark since the days of our exile in Babylon more than five centuries ago. No one knew where it was.

But somehow my foreknowledge of the Ark's absence did not ease the deep sadness that it caused me to actually see, with my own eyes, the vacated Holy of Holies. There was no more overshadowing cloud as in the days of Moses. The pillar of fire, which had always led our fathers in the wilderness, had moved on, but this time no one knew where it had gone. So how could we follow?

My heart throbbed, “Yahweh, where are You?”

And when I had quieted my soul, I thought I heard the reply, “I am with My Ark.”

I closed my eyes and prayed again, “Oh, Lord, please, no more riddles. When shall we see the Ark of Your Glory again?”

A solitary word came into my mind: “Soon”.

Just then I opened my eyes, and, much to my astonishment, there stood an angel of the Lord in glorious raiment. His blazing image will be etched into my mind forever, but there are no words in my rudimentary vocabulary to describe his radiance. He stood to the right of the altar of incense, and I was gripped with fear.

He said to me, “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and he will drink no wine or liquor; and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother’s womb. And he will turn back many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God. And it is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous; so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

A child? At our age? Now I had a firsthand understanding of the laughter of old Abraham and Sarah. Had I not been so frightened, I would have snickered just like my forefather, but I wish that my sensible fear had restrained more than my laughter. I regretted the words before they even slipped out of my loose lips, when I said, “How shall I know this for certain? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.”

The angel’s glare could have melted me. He raised his voice and thundered, “I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God; and I have been sent to speak to you, and to bring you this good news. And behold, you shall be silent until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time.”

I couldn’t speak, not even to apologize to Gabriel. The angel disappeared, and I stood there alone, gazing at the curtain, lost in recollection. In my deep silence I could almost hear the curtain speaking to me. It spoke to me of my shame and the shame of my people, Israel. It spoke to me of the absent Ark. It echoed one final word: “Soon.”

I must have stood there meditating by that curtain a long time, for when I finally came out, the people rushed upon me with concern. They apparently thought I had died while attending my priestly duties. After all, I wouldn’t have been the first unworthy Levite to be struck down in the Holy of Holies. I tried to explain as best I could with signs and gestures. I don’t know why I didn’t think of asking for a tablet and pen. I suppose I just

wanted to get away from the crowd and go home where it was quiet, where I could think. For some reason I felt an inner assurance that I would find the answers to my questions there at home.

Soon after my homecoming, the answers did, indeed, begin to present themselves to my racing mind. First of all, my dear old Elizabeth became pregnant, just as Gabriel had promised. But with the begetting of this child there was also the begetting of more questions. If this child, whose name will be John, is to be the forerunner of the Lord our God, does that mean that the Lord is finally coming to save His people? When and where shall the Lord our God appear? Will the Ark of His Covenant, overshadowed by His radiant glory, also appear at this time? And how will little John be filled with the Spirit while yet in his mother's womb?

For five months my thoughts were frozen upon these questions, and in the sixth month the blazing noonday sun peaked its warming rays into the icy chambers of my heart when I heard a gentle voice greeting Elizabeth at our door.

Then my quiet reflection was interrupted by a shout: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!"

That was Elizabeth's voice, but to whom was she speaking? And why was she shouting? I looked out the window and saw that it was Mary, Elizabeth's young cousin, who had come from Nazareth to help around the house in our time of need. Had senility finally gripped my grey-haired wife? Mary was a consecrated virgin, and her belly showed no signs of being pregnant. What was this talk of the fruit of her womb?

Elizabeth continued, "And how is it that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leapt in my womb for joy." Those words brought me to my senses. I knew that Elizabeth had a sharper mind than I. These had to be words inspired by the Holy Spirit, which explains why little John leapt for joy in his mother's womb. I had learned my lesson, not to doubt the Lord's promise again. I understood that, just as Gabriel said to me by the altar of incense, the child had been filled with the Spirit while in his mother's womb, and Elizabeth herself had been filled with the prophetic Spirit at the greeting of Mary.

The final prophetic word that issued from my wife's inspired lips pierced like a lance through my doubting heart: "And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord."

Who is this young woman who believes an impossible promise? Who is this young woman called "the mother of my Lord"? Who is this young woman, whose simple greeting imparts the same Spirit who rested upon Moses, Elijah, Elisha, and all the prophets of old? Who is this young woman, so favored by God that He blesses those who bless her? Who is this young woman who henceforth shall be called blessed by all generations?

And who is this “fruit of her womb”? I knew the answer to all my questions hinged upon this one. To understand the mystery of this woman I had to contemplate the mystery contained within her womb, for the two were inseparable.

And so I paid close attention to the conversations between Elizabeth and Mary, who had promised to stay with us for three months, before she was to be wed to her betrothed Joseph. Elizabeth asked her cousin countless times to patiently recount the story of her angelic encounter, so I had ample time to let it sink into my stubborn soul.

Elizabeth asked a host of questions, and I’m glad she did; for I would certainly have asked them myself if my tongue were able. First she inquired, “What was the angel’s name, and what did he look and sound like?” Mary responded that the angel didn’t tell her his name, but his voice resonated like a silver trumpet when he greeted, “Hail, full of grace”, and she was happy to describe his appearance as best she could.

When she began to tell of the angelic manifestation, it struck me that the messenger she described was a mirror image of the angel who appeared to me whose name was Gabriel. When I considered two appearances of the same angel, as if standing in a mirror, an interesting thought occurred to me: “That reminds me of the two identical cherubim, made of one piece of gold, who faced each other with their wings overshadowing the Ark of the....”

I couldn’t finish the thought. How could this young woman be compared to the Holy Ark of the Covenant? “That’s absurd!”, I thought. But, then again, was it really that absurd?

The Ark was made by the master craftsmen Bezalel (in whom was the Spirit of God), out of the best of Israel’s contributions—the finest acacia wood overladen with gold inside and out. Mary’s not a gilded box. Is she?

But, then again, Mary comes from the finest family in Israel and is full of grace, according to Gabriel’s word. She’s beautiful, inside and out. Three months of her tender smile and caring service have convinced me of that! She is golden in her faith, which puts my faith to shame and is even stronger than Abraham’s (and he was considered the father of all who believe). Mary’s virginal womb was more impossible than the old wombs of Elizabeth and Sarai combined, and yet she believed without hesitation. She is golden in her submission to God’s will and in her humility, saying “Behold, the handmaiden of the Lord; be it done unto me according to your word.” Her submission and humility even outshines that of Moses, the world’s most humble man who spoke face to face with God, who on one occasion angrily struck the rock after he was commanded to speak to it in order to bring forth water. She is inwardly a creature of wood, a fragile substance of the earth, but the wood of her creation is covered in gold, full of grace, preserving her from the deteriorating influences of this world’s corrosive air and water. She is extraordinarily golden in every way. In how many more ways will this be made known once her Child is born? In what ways will she accompany her holy Prodigy in his maturity?

The Ark, after it had been created by Bezalel and erected in the tabernacle by Moses, was overshadowed by the glory of the Lord. Mary doesn't have a pillar of cloud over her head. Does she?

But, then again, when Mary asked how she, a consecrated virgin, would bear a son (for noble Joseph intended to be the defender of her vow, not the spoiler of it), Gabriel explained, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you..." That explains why I find it difficult to stand in her presence without at least bowing my grey head a little. That explains why the doubts I had before the veil all vanish when Mary enters the room to announce that dinner is served. I know I am in the Divine Presence when she sits at table with us, for God is with her in a most extraordinary way. When I witness her unsurpassed love for Yahweh--when she excuses herself for evening prayer, for instance—she glows like a pillar of fire shining in the night. And when she happily washes our dishes or bakes our bread I can almost smell the sweet burning of incense ascending to the heavens like a pillar of cloud.

The Ark carried the Words of the Covenant, written by the finger of God Himself on tablets hewn out of the consecrated mountain. Mary isn't full of stone tablets. Is she?

But, then again, could it be that the fruit of Mary's womb is the very Word of God, not written on tables of stone, but actually become flesh and blood through her and in her? And as the tablets were taken from Sinai's rocky substance, made holy by the cloud of glory that overshadowed it, so this Child is formed out of Mary's created substance, she alone being found worthy by reason of the fullness of grace she had received and by the overshadowing of Yahweh's Holy Spirit. The Ark may have contained the Word made stone without the intervention of man, but Mary's virginal womb contains the Word made flesh without human father. The fruit that she bears is God incarnate, Immanuel, even the very Son of God who will save His people from their sins and sit on the throne of David forever.

The Ark went before Israel to lead us in victory over our enemies, for God was with the Ark. It was not Mary who led us into Jericho with the sound of trumpets and jubilant shouting. Was it?

But, then again, Gabriel did announce that the Lord is with Mary. And could not Gabriel's voice be compared to a trumpet (a non-human signal) when he said, "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you."? And could not Elizabeth's loud, Spirit-led exclamation, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" be like the voice of those who shouted on the seventh day, when the walls of that great city fell? What victories, I wonder, will God accomplish through this woman and her seed?

What else did Elizabeth say on that day? Ah yes, I remember. She asked, "And how is it the Mother of my Lord should come to me?" That reminds me of when David attempted to bring the Ark back to his city after the Philistines had captured it, but Uzziah was struck down for carelessly reaching out his hand and touching the holy object. David said, "How can the ark of the Lord come to me?" And he was afraid to take it to his city

at that time, so it was sent to the house of Obed-edom, the Levite. There it remained for three months, and Obed-edom's entire household was blessed due to the presence of the Ark for those three months. Can it be a coincidence that Mary has come to my Levitical house for these three months, and my house has been abundantly blessed with an outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon my wife and son, on account of Mary's presence and the presence of the One whom she bears within her womb?

The only thing this story is missing is that after David saw that Obed-edom's house was so blessed, he decided to have the Ark brought to his city, which is Bethlehem. That would be too much to ask for such a perfect parallel.

But what's this I hear? Mary is telling Elizabeth that she must leave soon. Why? She needs to get back to be wed to Joseph and to journey where? Joseph has been informed that a census is being taken, so they must travel to Bethlehem (since he is of the house and lineage of David), where the Child is to be born. No wonder little John leapt in his mother's womb, while Elizabeth shouted, just as David danced with all his might before the Lord with shouts of joy and trumpet blasts as the Ark entered that little town.

Being a student of the Law, I know, dear Mother, where you will take the Child thirty three days after his circumcision. With an offering of two turtledoves, the offering of the poor, you'll take Him up to Jerusalem and present Him, the first born of all first borns, to the service of His Father in Heaven. May God bless you, Holy Mother, with more sons and daughters, as He blessed Hannah for lending Him Samuel, the fruit of her barren womb. And may your children be as numerous as the stars of heaven, a crown upon your worthy head, just as God blessed Abraham for not withholding his one and only Isaac, who was the delight of his heart.

That's it! I have seen and heard enough.

I have beheld with my own eyes the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. I confess, and I am not lying, that the overshadowing cloud of glory was not in the worn out temple of Solomon. It has moved on, and it beckons all Israel to follow. Blow the silver trumpets! Sound the alarm! The Lord rallies his people. Pull up the tent stakes, for it is time to go out and meet the Lord in the wilderness again. He goes up, by way of the Jordan, to Nazareth, then to Bethlehem. Finally, He will draw us all to Himself when He is lifted up in Jerusalem. All you who seek the Lord and delight in the nearness of God, look to the Ark of the New Covenant; the Lord is with her.

Goodbye, Holy Mother. I wish I could speak to bid you a safe journey back to Nazareth. But do you have need of my humble prayers? The Lord our God is with you and in you. He overshadows you and takes up His residence within your womb. How blessed are you, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! I have need of your prayers. Pray that I, too, may be filled with the Spirit, and that my tongue may be loosed in order to make known the fruit of my nine-month contemplation.

Until we meet again in Bethlehem and on the hill of Jerusalem, goodbye.

Now, here I stand before Elizabeth who is holding our newborn son. She insists that his name will be John. Why are all these people making such a fuss about his name? They should listen to his mother; she knows what she is talking about. Give me a pen and paper, and I will spell it out for them: “His name is John.”

What’s this I feel welling up inside of me like a rushing river? It has reached the dam of my lips and is ready to break forth. I can hold it in no longer. I know the truth; therefore I must speak:

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people. And has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David His servant—as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old—Salvation from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us; to show mercy toward our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to Abraham our father, to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare His ways; to give His people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God with which the Sunrise from on high shall visit us, to shine upon those who sit in the darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

Now is the blessing of Obed-edom’s entire house complete. Now is the closing of the order of Levi and the dawn of the order of Melchizedek.

The Crowning Of Saint John

The Crowning Of Saint John

Here I am at last, beholding Your face again, my Lord, my God, my Brother. How I have longed for this day! You are now more radiant than the sun, but Your scars remain. And Your embrace is the same as I remembered it, too. I imagined Heaven would be like this, on the night I leaned my head upon Your breast, as You broke the bread and blessed the cup.

How good it is to be home, finally freed from the last of my sins, which stubbornly clung to my old corruptible body. How good it is to see the brethren again, rising from their thrones to greet me with joy. How good it is to finally know the fullness of this uninterrupted union with You, and Your Father (who is also my Father), and the Holy Spirit.

Holy! Holy! Holy! Let me join the unending hymn of praise. I adore You, Holy Father! I adore You, Holy Lamb of God! I adore You, Holy Spirit!

Lord, though You have promised it, lay not a crown upon my head. Let me, with the rest of my brethren, cast my crown at Your feet before I even receive it. You alone are worthy of all glory, honor, and majesty. And give me not a throne, for I prefer to eternally prostrate myself before Your ineffable holiness.

But, at Your bidding, I will rise from my knees. Take me where You will. I am Yours forever, Love Of My Heart, for You have purchased me with Your own blood.

Where are You taking me, Lord? I couldn't imagine a greater glory than at the lower gate, yet as we proceed I behold an ever-increasing splendor. From glory to glory to glory we walk, greeting angels, archangels, and holy souls made perfect by Your blood, their faces shining with unspeakable joy. At each level I stop and say, "I can fathom no greater happiness than these have, Lord. Shall I remain here while You ascend to Your throne?"

But, at Your bidding, I will follow where You lead. Take me where You will. I am Yours forever, Love Of My Heart, for You have purchased me with Your own blood.

As we ascend, my eyes are drawn to something familiar. I have seen these four creatures before, as did Your holy prophet Ezekiel. How could I forget their faces? One is like a lion, the second like an ox, the third like a man, and the fourth like a great eagle. And, behold, they have six wings! When Ezekiel saw the cherubim, they had only four wings, but at the time of my revelation they had six. Neither Ezekiel nor I could count their eyes, for these cherubim are full of eyes round about, as are the whirling wheels that accompany them wherever they go. Why, my Lord, have You fitted them with an extra set of wings? Your smile suggests that the answer lies just ahead, and that there will be plenty of time for questions once we arrive at our final destination.

And why do we still ascend, my Lord? Surely I've not merited a place higher than these exalted cherubim, whose wings touch the bottom of the crystal sea, the resting place for the soles of Your feet.

But, at Your bidding, I ascend with You. Take me where You will. I am Yours forever, Love Of My Heart, for You have purchased me with Your own blood.

Lord, it is too much! Are you sure my heart will not burst? I see an empty throne among the twelve, and it bears my name, but this is not the cause of my unsurpassable exultation. I see my Mother! Your Mother! Our Mother! Behold, she stands upon the glassy sea beside Your throne, clothed with the sun and with a crown of twelve stars upon her head!

Mother, how I have missed your gentle smile! Now is my joy complete.

Lord Jesus, surely that empty throne among the twelve, so near our exalted Mother's, could not be mine.

But, at Your bidding, I will gladly sit upon the throne of Your choosing. Seat me where You will. I am Yours forever, Love Of My Heart, for You have purchased me with Your own blood.

I am spellbound as I watch You approach our radiant Mother, both of You gushing with joy. She presents her star-jeweled crown to You, and I see Your fingers drawing something golden from the light of the first and brightest star among the twelve. Behold, You fashion it into a crown, and I know it is intended for me.

But why should I be so favored as the first star in Mother's crown? You have always seemed to treat me with a sort of preference, Lord. But why?

It was always Peter, James, and myself whom You drew into Your closest confidence. I was among the three favored ones who accompanied You on the mountain of Your transfiguration. I was among the three friends whom you chose to have nearest on the night of Your betrayal. But even among the three, I noticed some surpassing favor which I had found in Your sight. That's why I described myself as the disciple whom You loved, in the Gospel I penned at Your request.

How could I have been wrong in interpreting Your gift to me as a sign of Your preferential love? To Peter You gave the glorious keys of the Kingdom and seated him as the first Pope in Rome. To James, my beloved brother, you gave the resplendent honor of being the first among the twelve to be martyred for the sake of Your saving Gospel. But these gifts, brilliant as they were, could not be compared with mine. Your gift to me was none other than Mary, Your own Blessed Mother.

From Your sorrowful cross, Lord, You said to her, "Woman, behold your son". And to me You said, "Behold, your Mother". And from that hour I took the very Mother Of God

into my humble home. You alone know how blessed my dwelling was on her account. Just as the house of Zacharias was blessed with the Holy Spirit at the greeting of Your highly favored Mother, so I, too, was blessed with a double portion of Your Spirit, giving me insights into the most profound mysteries.

You revealed marvelous things through the pens of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, but I alone had the special honor of shedding light upon the mystery of Your Incarnation, when You, the Eternal Word of God, became flesh in our Blessed Mother's womb. I alone had the privilege of making known the mystery of the wedding at Cana, Your first public miracle, which You performed at Mother's bidding, for You have never refused even one of her requests. And I gave to the people the formula she pronounced for experiencing Your miraculous graces, full of motherly wisdom: "Do whatever He tells you."

And though You showed Saint Paul, when he was caught up to the third Heaven, things which he was not allowed to utter, You permitted me to reveal these mysteries (except for the words of the seventh angel). Through my final book, written on the Isle of Patmos, I had the distinct honor of revealing Your glory and the glory You have deigned to give all the saints, but especially to our glorious Mother, whom I saw clothed with the sun, standing on the moon, and wearing a crown of twelve stars. I manifested her maternal care for all true Christians when I named them "the rest of her offspring". I spoke of her victory over the serpentine dragon who, although being enraged with the Woman, has never been able to touch our Immaculate Mother. And I spoke of the two wings of the great eagle that were given to her and placed in the honorable service of Heaven's Queen.

Lord, is that why You have given the all-seeing cherubim an extra set of wings? What a marvelous way to honor the Queen of Heaven, the Queen of the Angels! And what a wonderful way to honor those glorious beings placed in her service! I see, by the delight in the faces of the four creatures, especially the great eagle, that this is so.

Lord, hear my prayer on behalf of the rest of Mother's children (for they are Your children), still waging war with the dragon upon the earth. May they go out and be nourished with her in the wilderness, safe, as if in an ark, from the vile flood that pours forth from the serpent's venomous mouth. May the wings of the cherubim cover them as they take refuge inside the Ark of the New Covenant, under the roof of Your Divine Mercy. May neither the wine of their offerings nor the oil of their lamps ever run out, as long as they implore her irresistible intercession. And may they discover the blessings You bestow upon all who take into their homes Your highly favored Mother, who is called Blessed by all generations.

And now, how will You bless the one who first took Your Blessed Mother into his humble household? I have already received too much, for having her under my roof was a magnificent reward in itself! I am not worthy to also receive this crown of glory from Your hand.

But, at Your bidding, I will glorify You with the glory You place upon my head. The brighter my crown, the more our glorious Mother's will sparkle; for I am but a star in her

crown, and she is but a star in Yours. Give us what You will. We are Yours forever, Love Of Our Hearts, for You have purchased us with Your own blood.

Come, let us cast our crowns before Him who sits on the throne, and let us blend our voices in thunderous praise and exultation: “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come! To Him who sits on the throne, and unto the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever! Amen.”

Saints, According To Scripture

Saints, According To Scripture

According to Scripture, Saints are very much alive in their eternal home in Heaven. (Matt. 22:32; 2 Cor. 5:8; John 11: 26) Why are Catholics charged with “conjuring up the dead” when they ask for their prayers?

According to Scripture, and by Christ’s own example, Saints can communicate with and help those living on earth. Who will be so bold to accuse the sinless Christ of conducting a forbidden séance when He spoke with Moses and Elijah on the Mount of His Transfiguration?

According to Scripture, Saints who embraced meekness during their lives “inherit the earth” (Matt 5: 5). Why do some seem to scold the Saints, saying, “You have no business in earth’s affairs now that you are in Heaven”?

According to Scripture, Saints are “like the angels” (Matt. 22:30) If the angels lift us up with their hands so we don’t dash our feet against stones, why wouldn’t the Saints have a similar concern for their little brothers and sisters on earth?

According to Scripture, Saints reign with Christ and have priestly responsibilities. (Rev 20 :6) Isn’t prayer the first duty of priests? Do you really think Saint Paul, who poured out his earthly life for souls, has been playing golf for the past 2,000 years?

According to Scripture, Saints are made to be like the risen and glorified Christ. (1 John 3:2) Is Christ not concerned with your wellbeing? Then so are the Saints. Does Christ hear, as a faithful High Priest, your cries for help? Then so do the Saints who are “like Him”.

According to Scripture, Saints are called “the spirits of righteous men made perfect”. (Heb 12:23) If they are perfected in love, why would they be so callous to refuse to pray for us when asked?

According to Scripture, Saints are imperishable, glorified and powerful, having set aside the limitations of their old bodies. (1 Cor. 15: 42-43) Why should we find it difficult to believe that they can come to our aid, by the grace of God, in times of need?

According to Scripture, Saints are given glory that is beyond compare to anything experienced on earth. (2 Cor. 4:17) Why do so many insist on placing mortal limitations on those who are now blessed with abilities and privileges that are far beyond our ability to even imagine?

According to Scripture, Saints have particularly powerful prayers. (James 5:16) The Bible is full of examples of people who were greatly blessed when they humbly asked for the prayers of an approved servant of God. Why should we stumble along by ourselves when the Lord provides such powerful intercessors?

According to Scripture, Saints (at least the twenty-four elders) help our prayers ascend to God as incense. (Rev 5:8) Is it humility or pride to claim direct, unlimited communication with God, without any help from Saints or Angels? Certainly we can pray for ourselves, and we will obtain some of our requests. But consider that if Naman had relied on his own prayers alone, never asking Elijah to pray for him, he almost certainly would have remained a leper.

According to Scripture, Saints who did the Master's will are put "in charge" of the Lord's possessions, and "in charge" of His servants, giving them their rations at the proper time (Luke 12:35-44). Consider Joseph and his storehouses of grain. Why do some shake their heads in disbelief when Catholics report countless experiences of this "ration giving" through the help and intercession of the Saints?

According to Scripture, Saints who are pure in heart always behold the face of God, and they "know fully". (Matt 5:8; 1Cor. 13:12) Who would you rather be led by—a blind man or a Saint with perfect vision?

According to Scripture, Saints who suffered persecution have a very great reward in Heaven. (Matt 11-12) Are we so covetous that we will rob the martyrs of their reward? How do we rob them? By not giving them the respect and admiration they have earned.

According to Scripture, Saints who invested their talents well are given authority over a number of "cities", depending upon the degree of their faithfulness and corresponding reward (Luke 19: 12-27). Why shouldn't we name churches, communities, and cities after these heroes in the faith? I, for one, am glad to live in Minnesota, whose capital is dedicated to my hero in the faith, Saint Paul.

According to Scripture, Saints who made good works their practice receive glory and honor. (Rom 2: 6-10) If God wills for them to be glorified, do you think He will reprimand or commend those who carry out His will on earth, by honoring them and praising their virtues?

According to Scripture, Saints like Paul are so honored by God that contact with their belongings or things they have touched (even handkerchiefs) can produce miracles. (Acts 19:11) Consider also Elijah's mantle, Moses' staff, and the fringe of Christ's garment. Elisha was so honored by God that even contact with his dried up bones produced a great miracle. (2 Kings 13:21) Why are Catholics scorned for honoring such relics?

According to Scripture, Saints who shepherded the flock of God well receive unfading crowns of glory from the Chief Shepherd. (1Pet 5: 4) Why should we let their memory fade, when their crowns fade not?

According to Scripture, Saints are given thrones, and they sit in judgment over others. (Rev 20: 4) Notice that these martyred Saints are alive and reigning while the nations still rage on earth, before the Final Judgment. 1 Corinthians 6:1-3 tells us that Saints will judge the world and even angels. Do you think it wise to exalt your judgment over theirs?

According to Scripture, Saints who overcome tribulation and keep the Lord's deeds are given "authority over the nations" to "rule them with a rod of iron". (Rev 2:26-27) Who should dare question their God-given authority? And why should we not hold their approved teachings and examples in esteem, regarding them as "authorities" on topics of spirituality? The Saints know what they're talking about. You're missing out on a great treasure, if you fail to read some of their writings or contemplate their virtuous lives.

According to Scripture, Saints stand on the sea of glass, the resting place for God's feet, above the wings of the cherubim. (Rev 15: 2) Why are Catholics then scorned for looking up to them?

According to Scripture, Saints who overcome are made "pillars in the temple of God". (Rev 3:12) Are you not a temple of the Holy Spirit? Why then should you be ashamed to lean upon the Saints in times of need?

According to Scripture, Saints who overcome sit with Christ upon His throne. (Rev 3: 21) Is your heart not a throne for Christ? Then make room there for the Saints to sit with Him.

Make room, my heart, for Mary
To reign with Christ our King
Enthroned above all angels
Who hail her as their Queen
Her love for Christ unequalled
More perfect ne'er was found
And so the stars of Heaven
Adorn her royal crown

Make room, my heart, for Mary
For God has willed it so
That every generation
Shall bless her name below
For she alone was worthy
To give the Savior birth
Her 'Yes' conceived the blessings
Of every soul on earth

Make room, my heart, for Mary
He bids me from the Tree,
"Behold My loving Mother
I give her now to thee."
Enlarge my heart, Lord Jesus
And make it as Your own
'Til all You love are welcome
To call my heart their home