

THE YOUNG FRANCISCAN

Autumn Edition 2022
Vol #18

Mary

Jesus had an indescribable love for his Mother, Mary. It was a love that surpassed that of any other child for their mother, since God himself had created her to be the most perfect of all creatures. She was the masterpiece of creation. God had created her so perfectly as to be the only vessel worthy to bring into the world the Incarnation of God himself—Jesus Christ. So great was the Mother of God, that she held in her womb Him whom not even heaven could contain.

The great Franciscan Doctor of the Church, St Bonaventure, wrote of her,

“Mary is that being than which God cannot make a greater. He can make a greater earth and a greater heaven, but not a greater mother”.

Throughout the centuries, many visionaries and mystics were visited by the Blessed Virgin Mary. Of her they spoke that she was a woman of indescribable beauty, and more brilliant than the sun. In the book of Revelations, we read that she was clothed with the sun, the moon served as her footstool, and she was crowned with the stars. What a woman!

Of all titles and honours ever bestowed upon any created being, there is no greater than being named the ‘Mother of God’. It was her human heart that Jesus inherited

at his Incarnation, and it was the loving Immaculate Heart of Mary who remained central to the life of Jesus from the crib, to his Redemption on the cross.

Saint Francis of Assisi also had an indescribable love for Blessed Virgin Mary. It is said that Francis was among the greatest Marian devotees in the history of the Church. As Thomas Celano, the first biographer of St Francis, tells us:



“He embraced the Mother of Jesus with inexpressible love, since she made the Lord of Majesty a brother to us. He honoured her with his own Praises, poured out prayers to her, and offered her his love in a way that no human tongue can express. But what gives us greatest joy is that he appointed her the Advocate of the Order, and placed under her wings the sons to be left behind, that she might protect and cherish them to the end.”

Devotion to Mary, the Mother of God, is among the most fundamental of all Franciscan devotions. Just as Mary lies at the centre of the mysteries of the Incarnation, so does she also lie prominently in Franciscan spirituality. She is the mother and protectress of the Franciscan Order, and quite simply put, it is not possible to be a Franciscan without having a deep devotion and love for Mary.

Mary, a Mirror of the Gospel

It is not uncommon for those outside of the Catholic Church to rebuke us Catholics for our love and devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Often, we are accused of “worshiping” Mary and turning her into the central focus of our worship, as if we put her in place of God! This would in fact be a very serious crime against God had it been true; and in fact, if any such case should exist it must be reported to the bishop!

Our Church is a Christ-centered Church, and in order to be Christ centered, it is also important to include in our worship all those who were central to Jesus’ life, starting with the Most Holy Trinity, Mary his Mother, the angels, apostles and saints as well.

The role of Mary in the life of Jesus was second to that of the Father and Holy Spirit. The whole story of the Incarnation was centred around Mary; she was there from the crib to the cross. It was only because of her “Yes” that God was made flesh and dwelt among us; It was only through her “Yes” that we gained our eternal salvation; and it was only through her “Yes” that we came brothers and sisters of our Lord Jesus Christ.

St Francis, whose great desire it was to become a living example of the gospel, found much inspiration through Mary, whose life was so intimately united to the mysteries of Jesus that it shone as a perfect reflection of the gospel life.

In first place, Mary was attentive to the Word of God. She listened to, and meditated on the words of God through the life of her Son. Throughout the gospels we hear that she “pondered all these things in her heart”. Contemplation and conversing with God was central to her spiritual life.

As revealed in her Magnificat, we learn that Mary, the little one, possessed great humility and rejected pride. She referred to herself as the ‘Servant of God.’ In union with her Son, she lived a life of poverty, and defended the poor, lowly and starving, whom God “lifted up...and filled with good things”. This spirit of littleness and humility resonated especially with Saint Francis.

Mary was completely open to the will of God. Her proclamation, “be it done unto me according to thy word”, which she spoke at the Annunciation, became the pattern of her life. By putting her complete trust and dependency on God in every situation, she wilfully accepted every cross that came her way, especially the Cross of her Son. Through the crucifixion of Jesus, Mary stood at the cross and offered up her prayers for all of humanity. This is why she is called the “Co-Redemptrix.”

Mary, the perfect imitator of her Son, is a shining example of perfect gospel living. May her motherly guidance lead us all closer to her Son Jesus.

Mary Our Queen

To understand Mary’s role in the hierarchy of heaven, it is important to know a little about Old Testament customs. In the days of King David, the ruling Queen was in fact not the wife of the king, as he often had so many wives, and no wife had as much influence over the king as did his mother. So, it was indeed the mother of the king who was crowned as queen, and who occupied a throne next to her son. The king’s mother was the most highly placed person in the kingdom after her son. It was the king’s mother who would advise the king and act as an intercessor. Whatever she asked of him, he would carry out.

In the Gospel of Luke, the angel Gabriel said to Mary, “the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father.” From the very beginning of the Christian story, even before the Incarnation of God took place in the womb of Mary, she knew that her Son was to be King in the line of King David, and therefore she was to be the Queen. The angel Gabriel continued, “and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” If Jesus will be King without end, then it is Mary, the eternal Mother of the King, who will be the Queen of heaven for all eternity.

Marian Writings of St Francis

Among the writings of St Francis which still exist today, are included a number of Salutations and Antiphons to the Blessed Virgin Mary that describe her role in the plan on salvation. In *A Salutation of the Virtues*, tradition suggests that St Francis saw these virtues as Mary's, as well as all Christian who have died to sin.

A Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Hail, O Lady,
Holy Queen,
Mary, holy Mother of God,
Who are the
Virgin made Church,
chosen by the most Holy
Father in heaven
whom he consecrated
with His most holy
beloved Son
and with the Holy Spirit
the Paraclete,
in whom there was and is
all fullness of grace and
every good.

Hail His Palace!
Hail His Tabernacle!
Hail His Dwelling!
Hail His Robe!
Hail His Servant!
Hail His Mother!

And hail all You
holy virtues
which are poured into the
hearts of the faithful
through the grace and
enlightenment of the
Holy Spirit,
that from being
unbelievers,
You may make them
faithful to God.

A Salutation of the Virtues

Hail, Queen Wisdom!
May the Lord protect You,
with Your Sister, holy pure
Simplicity!

Lady holy Poverty,
may the Lord protect You,
with Your Sister, holy
Humility!

Lady holy Charity,
may the Lord protect You,
with Your Sister, holy
Obedience.

Most holy Virtues,
may the Lord protect
all of You
from Whom You come
and proceed.

There is surely no one in
the whole world
who can possess
any one of You
without dying first.
Whoever possesses one
and does not offend the
others
possesses all.

Whoever *offends one*
does not possess any
and offends all.
And each one confounds
vice and sin.

St Francis composed the following Antiphon to be said at the beginning and end of each of his daily prayers, also known as 'The Office of the Passion'. Even though the Office had its own antiphons, Francis only ever used this antiphon in honour of Our Lady. St Francis would have said this prayer fourteen times each day.

Antiphon

Holy Virgin Mary,
among the women born
into the world,
there is no one like you.
Daughter and servant
of the most high and
supreme King
and of the Father in heaven,
Mother of our most holy Lord
Jesus Christ,
Spouse of the Holy Spirit,
pray for us
with Saint Michael the Archangel,
all the powers of heaven
and all the saints,
at the side of your most holy
beloved Son,
our Lord and Teacher.
Glory to the Father, and to the
Son, and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning, is now,
and will be forever. Amen.

The Angelus is one of the best known and loved prayers of the Church. Daily at 6am, 12 noon and at 6pm, bells from church towers ring to remind the faithful to meditate on the Incarnation of the Word Made Flesh inside the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The prayer itself originated from the early Franciscan friars in the year 1263, only 37 years after the death of St Francis. Although the origins of the Angelus are unknown, it was most likely inspired by St Francis' love for the Incarnation and the Mother of God, whom Francis prayed to daily.

Secular Franciscan Saints



St Pedro de San José Betancur 1626-1667

Canonised in 2002, St Pedro became the first saint for Central America. Born in the Canary Islands, at a young age he worked as a shepherd and often retreated to small caves to pray. At the age of 24 Pedro followed his brother and travelled to the 'New World'. There he made his way to Guatemala in search of work. However, his great desire was to be a priest. Pedro spent three years in the seminary, however, no matter how hard he tried, the academic study proved beyond his ability, and so he withdrew. In 1655 Pedro joined the Third Order Franciscans, and thereon he would often visit the hospitals, lepers, prisons, the unemployed, and taught catechism to poor children. Pedro also opened a hospital and school for the poor, and a shelter for the homeless. In order to bring charity to the wealthy residents of the city, he would often walk around ringing a bell calling them to repentance. In his work, Pedro was assisted by other members of the Franciscan third order. After a life of labour and penance, Pedro died at the age of 41.

Bl Anthony of Hungary d. 1398

Blessed Anthony was a pilgrim from Hungary. In the year 1350 he travelled to Italy during a special jubilee year promulgated by the Pope, in order to obtain the special indulgences attached to such pilgrims. After having visited Rome, Anthony then travelled to Assisi where he joined the Third Order of St Francis. Soon afterwards, in the nearby town of Foligno, he fell ill. He was taken to hospital, where he eventually recovered. During his time in that particular hospital, he was filled with so much love from the care he received. In gratitude, after he had recovered, Anthony consecrated his life to remain in the hospital and give back the same love which he had received. He displayed a remarkable level of holiness and charity towards all the sick patients, and became a light and model to the nurses in the institution. In addition, he led a very strict life of prayer and penance. After serving in the hospital for 48 years, Anthony, who was regarded as a saint by all, died. After his death many wonderful miracles took place at his grave.

Catherine of Bosnia 1424- 1487

Catherine was the Queen of Bosnia, and wife of King Stjepan Thomas. She was born at a time when the Republic of Bosnia was under constant attack from the Muslim Turks. Queen Catherine was a strong support to the local Franciscans who were defending the Christian religion in the land. Around the year 1468, the Turks took captive the king and their son, demanding they give up their faith. The king, having refused to apostatize, was tortured to death. The son, however, gave into the Turks demands and turned to Islam. The son's apostacy grieved Queen Catherine more than the death of her husband. Having fled Bosnia, Catherine took refuge in Rome where she was received by Pope Sixtus IV, who entered her into the Third Order of St Francis, and was himself a member. From there on, Catherine lived a life of charity to the poor, and gave the last of what she had to alleviate their needs. Through the spirit of humility, piety and patients, Catherine offered up all her works in prayer for her lost son, and for all of Bosnia.

OFS Australia Website: www.ofsaustralia.org.au

Facebook: www.facebook.com/ofsaustralia

Email: national@ofsaustralia.org.au



'Secular Franciscan Saints' are adapted from the Franciscan Book of Saints, by Marion A. Habig OFM



Like us on
Facebook