



## Jubilee of the Immaculate Conception

### Encyclical Letter of the Holy Father

TO THE PATRIARCHS, PRIMATES, ARCHBISHOPS, BISHOPS AND OTHER ORDINARIES IN PEACE AND COMMUNION WITH THE APOSTOLIC SEE.



PIUS X., POP.

Venerable Brothers: Health and the Apostolic Blessing.

An interval of a few months will again bring around that most happy day on which, fifty years ago, Our Predecessor, Pius IX., Pontiff of holy memory, surrounded by a noble crown of Cardinals and Bishops, pronounced and promulgated with the authority of the infallible magisterium that it was revealed by God that the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instant of her conception, was free from all stain of original sin. All the world knows the feelings with which the faithful of all the nations of the earth received this proclamation and the manifestations of public satisfaction and joy which greeted it, for truly there has not been in the memory of man any more universal or more harmonious expression of sentiment shown toward the august Mother of God or the Vicar of Jesus Christ.

And, Venerable Brothers, why should we not hope today, after the lapse of half a century, when we renew the remembrance of the Immaculate Virgin that an echo of that holy joy will be awakened in our minds and that those magnificent scenes of former times, of faith and of love toward the august Mother of God will be repeated? Of all this We are indeed rendered ardently desirous by the devotion united with supreme gratitude for benefits received, which We have always cherished toward the Blessed Virgin; and We have a sure pledge of the fulfilment of Our desires in the fervor of all Catholics ready and willing as they are to multiply their testimonies of love and reverence for the great Mother of God. But We must not omit to say that this desire of Ours is especially stimulated by a species of secret instinct which leads Us to believe that not far distant is the fulfilment of those great hopes to which, certainly not rashly, the solemn promulgation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception opened the minds of Pius, Our predecessor, and of all the Bishops of the universe.

#### GIFTS GIVEN THROUGH MARY

Many, it is true lament the fact that until now these hopes have been unfulfilled and are wont to repeat the words of Jeremias: "We looked for peace and no good came; for a time of healing, and behold fear." (Jer. viii., 15). But all such will be certainly rebuked as "men of little faith" who make

no effort to penetrate the works of God or to estimate them with the light of truth. For who can number the secret gifts of grace which God has bestowed upon His Church through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin throughout this period? And even overlooking these gifts, what is to be said of the Vatican Council so opportunely convoked, or of Papal infallibility so suitably proclaimed to meet the errors that were about to arise? or finally of that new and unprecedented fervor with which the faithful of all classes and of every nation have long been flocking to venerate in person the Vicar of Christ? Surely the Providence of God has shown itself admirable in Our two predecessors, Pius and Leo, who ruled the Church in most turbulent times with such great holiness through a length of Pontificate conceded to no other before them? Then again, no sooner had Pius IX. proclaimed as a dogma of Catholic faith the exemption of Mary from the original stain, than the Virgin herself began in Lourdes those wonderful manifestations, followed by vast and magnificent movements which have produced these two temples dedicated to the Immaculate Mother, where the prodigies which still continue to take place through her intercession furnish splendid arguments against the incredulity of our days.

Witnesses then as we are of all those great benefits which God has granted through the benign influence of the Virgin in those fifty years now about to be completed, why should we not believe our salvation is nearer than we thought—all the more since we know from experience that in the dispensation of Divine Providence when evils reach their limit deliverance is not far off: "Her time is near at hand and her days shall not be prolonged. For the Lord will have mercy on Jacob, and choose one out of Israel." (Isaias xiv. 1). Wherefore the hope we cherish is not a vain one that we, too, may before long repeat: "The Lord hath broken the staff of the wicked the rod of the rulers. The whole earth is quiet and still, it is glad and hath rejoiced." (Ibid. 5 and 7).

#### CHIEF CAUSE OF JOY.

But the first and chief reason, Venerable Brothers, why the fiftieth anniversary of the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception should excite a singular fervor in the souls of Christians lies for us in that restoration of all things in Christ which we have already proposed in Our first Encyclical letter. For can any one fail to see that there is no surer or more direct road than Mary for uniting all in Christ and obtaining through Him the perfect adoption of sons, that we may be holy and immaculate in the sight of God? For if to Mary it was truly said: "Blessed art thou who hast believed because in thee shall be fulfilled the things that have been said to thee by the Lord." (Luke i., 45)—that she would conceive and bring forth the Son of God; and if she did receive in her breast Him who is by nature truth itself in order that "He, generated in a new order and with a new nativity, though invisible in Himself, might become visible in our flesh." (St. Leo the Great ser. 2, De nativ. Dom.), the Son of God made man being the "author and consummator of our faith," it surely follows that His Mother Most Holy should be recognized as participating in the divine mysteries and as being

in a manner the guardian of them. and that upon her as upon a foundation, the noblest after Christ, rises the edifice of the faith of all centuries.

How think otherwise? Could not God have given us in another way than through the Virgin the Redeemer of the human race and the Founder of the Faith? But since Divine Providence has been pleased that we should have the Man-God through Mary, who conceived Him by the Holy Ghost and bore Him in her breast, it only remains for us to receive Christ from the hands of Mary. Hence, whenever the Scriptures speak prophetically of the grace which was to have appeared among us, the Redeemer of mankind is almost invariably presented to us as united with His Mother. The Lamb that is to rule the world will be sent—but He will be sent from the rock of the desert; the flower will blossom but it will blossom from the root of Jesse. Adam the father of mankind, looked to Mary crushing the serpent's head, and he dried the tears that the malediction had brought into his eyes. Noah thought of her when shut up in the ark of safety, and Abraham when prevented from the slaying of his son; Jacob at the sight of the ladder on which angels ascended and descended; Moses amazed at the sight of the bush which burned but was not consumed; David escorting the Ark of God with dancing and psalmody; Elias as he looked at the little cloud that rose out of the sea. In fine, after Christ, we find in Mary the end of the law and the fulfilment of the figures and oracles.

And that through the Virgin, and through her more than any other means, we have offered us a way of reaching the knowledge of Jesus Christ, cannot be doubted when it is remembered that with her alone of all others Jesus was for thirty years united, as a son is usually united with a mother, in the closest ties of intimacy and domestic life. Who could better than His mother have an open knowledge of the admirable mysteries of the birth and childhood of Christ, and above all of the mystery of the Incarnation, which is the beginning and the foundation of faith? Mary not only preserved and meditated on the events of Bethlehem and the facts which took place in Jerusalem in the temple of the Lord, but sharing as she did the thoughts and the secret wishes of Christ, she may be said to have lived the very life of her Son. Hence nobody ever knew Christ so profoundly as she did, and nobody can ever be more competent as a guide and teacher of the knowledge of Christ.

#### MARY'S POWER.

Hence it follows, as We have already pointed out that the Virgin is more powerful than all others as a means for uniting mankind with Christ. Hence, too, since according to Christ Himself: "Now this is eternal life: That they may know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." (John xvi., 13), and since we obtain through Mary the knowledge of Christ, through Mary also we gain more easily that life of which Christ is the fount and principle, and if we consider how many and how potent are the causes which render this Most Holy Mother all eagerness to bestow upon us these precious gifts, oh! how our hope will increase.

For is not Mary the Mother of Christ? Wherefore she is our Mother also. We are all bound to believe that Jesus, the Word made Flesh, is also the Saviour of the human race. Now, as the Man-God he had a physical body like every other man; and as Saviour of the human family he had a spiritual and mystical body; that is the society of those who believe in Christ.

"We are many in one body in Christ." (Rom. xii., 5). But the Virgin conceived the Eternal Son not only that He might be made man, taking His human nature from her; but also that by means of the nature assumed from her, He might be the Redeemer of mankind. Hence the angel's words to the shepherds: "Today is born to you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord." (Luke ii., 11). In the bosom, then of his most chaste Mother, Christ took to Himself human flesh and united to Himself the spiritual body formed of those "who were to believe in Him." So that Mary, bearing in her breast the Saviour, may be said to have borne also all those whose life was contained in the life of the Saviour. Hence all of us who are united in Christ and are, as the Apostle says, "members of His body and His flesh and of His bones" (Eph. v., 30), have come forth from the bosom of Mary, as the body united to its head. It follows that spiritually and mystically we are called children of Mary, and that she is the Mother of us all. "The Mother spiritually but truly, of the members of Christ which we are." (St. Aug. l. de St. Virginitate, ch. 6).

Since the Blessed Virgin is the Mother at once of God and of men, who can doubt that she uses all means to obtain from Christ, "the head of the body of the Church" (Coloss. i., 18), that He transfuse His gifts through His members and above all the gift of knowing Him and of "living by Him." (I. John iv., 9).

Furthermore, the Most Holy Mother had not only the honor of "having given the substance of His flesh to the Only Begotten Son of God Who was to be born with human members" (Ven. Bede. l. iv., in Luc. xi.); from whose substance the victim was to be prepared for the salvation of men; but she was also entrusted with the charge of guarding and nourishing the victim and of presenting Him for the sacrifice at the appointed time. Hence that never broken communion of life and labor between the Son and the Mother, so that of both the Prophet's words are true: "My life is being consumed in sorrow, and my years in mournings." (Ps. xxx. 11). And when the last hour of the Son arrived, "there stood by the cross of Jesus His Mother," not occupied merely in contemplation of the cruel spectacle, but rejoicing that "her Only-Begotten was offered for the salvation of the human race," and also so participating in His passion that had it been possible, "she would much more willingly have suffered all the torments which her Son suffered." (St. Bonav. Sent. d. 48, ad Litt. dub. 4). And by this communion of pain and of will between Christ and Mary "she merited to become most worthy the restorer of the lost world" (Eadmeri Mon. de excellentia Virginis Mariae, cli. 9), and hence, too, the dispenser of all the gifts which Jesus won for us by His death and His blood.

#### MARY AS MEDIATOR.

We do not deny that the distribution of these gifts belongs by strict and peculiar right to Christ, since they are the fruit of His death, and He is of Himself the mediator between God and man. Yet by that participation we have described of pain and sorrow of the Mother and her Son, it was granted to the august Virgin "to be with her Only-Begotten Son, the most potent mediatrix and advocate in all the earth." (Pius X., Bull Ineffabilis). Christ is therefore the fount "and of His fullness we have all received" (John i., 16); "from whom the whole body being compactly and fitly joined together by what every joint supplieth, according to the operation in the measure of every part, maketh in-

crease of the body unto the edifying of itself in charity" (Eph. iv., 16); Mary, as St. Bernard justly remarks, is "the channel" (Sermo de temp. in Nativ. B. Mariae Virg. de Aquaeductu, ne 4.) or to use another phrase, she is the neck by which the body is united to the head, and the head sends life and strength through the body. "For she is the neck of our head through which every spiritual gift is communicated to His mystical body." (St. Bernardine of Siena, Quadreg. de evangel. actern. Serm. x. a 3 ch. 3). From all this it is clear we are very far from attributing to the Virgin the power of producing supernatural grace, for this belongs to God alone. But as she surpasses all human creatures in sanctity and in union with Christ, and as she was chosen by Christ to be His companion in the work of human salvation, she has merited for us, "de congruo," what Christ has merited for us, "de condigno," and she is the first of Ministers in the distribution of grace. Christ "sitteth on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb. i., 3); and Mary stands at His right hand as Queen, "the surest refuge and most faithful helper of all in peril, so that there is no place for fear or despair, where she is the guide and protector and intercessor and defender." (Pius IX., Bull Ineffabilis).

Returning now to Our purpose after laying down these principles, who can fail to see that We had reason to affirm that Mary, who from Nazareth to Calvary was the inseparable companion of Jesus, who knew better than all others the secrets of His heart, and who by right of motherhood administers the treasures of His merits, is the chief and most efficacious assistance to us for arriving at the knowledge and love of Christ? Only too strongly is this confirmed by the deplorable condition of those who, either through diabolical deceit or through prejudice, think that they can do without the help of the Virgin. Hapless are they who neglect Mary under pretext of the honor to be paid to Jesus Christ! As if the Child could be found elsewhere than with the Mother.

#### KNOWLEDGE AND LOVE OF CHRIST.

All this being so, Venerable Brothers, We will that in this sense above all, be directed those celebrations which are now everywhere being prepared in honor of the Immaculate Virgin. For no homage is more acceptable or more pleasing to Mary than that we should rightly know and love Jesus. Let the faithful, then, flock in thousands to the temples, let there be splendid solemnities and public joy in the cities—for all this is of no small aid in the fostering of devotion. But unless all this be accompanied by the assent of the will, we shall have merely external ceremony, which gives only the semblance of religious feeling. And the Virgin on beholding it, will have reason to rebuke us in the words of Christ, "This people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." (Matthew xv., 8).

True devotion to the Virgin is only that which springs from the soul, and the external acts of the body are of absolutely no avail when they are divided from acts of the soul. Now it is necessary that the action of the soul should aim solely in making us obedient in all things to Mary's Divine Son. For the only true love is that which possesses efficacy for uniting wills; our will and Mary's will must be one—that of serving the Lord Christ. Hence the Virgin most prudent repeats to us what she suggested to the servants at the marriage of Cana, "Do whatever he shall say to you." (John ii.,