[OFFICIAL.]

PASTORAL LETTER
OF
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ON
DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

JOHN WALSH—by the Grace of God and the appointment of the Holy See, BISHOP OF LONDON.

To the Clergy, Religious and faithful of the Diocese, Health and Benediction in the Lord.

DEARLY BELOVED BRETHREN,—

On the approach of the beautiful month of May, sacred to our Blessed Lady, we deem it a duty to address you some remarks on devotion to the august Mother of God, and on the spiritual fruits that may be gathered therefrom. What the month of May is in the order of nature, that, in the mind of the church, the Blessed Virgin is in the order of Grace. May is the springtime of the year, the month of hope and promise, the harbinger of the bright Summer, the fairest and most beautiful queen of the year, decked out in all its fresh young beauty, and fragrant with blossoms and flowers. "Winter is now past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers have appeared in our land, the time of pruning is come, the voice of the turtle is heard, the fig tree hath put forth her green figs, the vines in flower yield their sweet smell." (Canticles, ii. 12 13.) The cold, stormy winter is past, Nature has risen from its tomb, and has awakened into a new life. The voice of Spring is heard on the hills and in the valleys, and behold the fields are robed in brightest green, the trees bring forth leaves and blossoms, the gardens are fragrant with flowers, the woods are vocal with the sweet music of singing birds, the air is resonant with sounds of joy and gladness, and all nature is clothed with a vesture of the most varied beauty.

Now, the Blessed Virgin was the Springtime of that season of grace and mercy, and spiritual beauty, and perfection, with which our Divine Redeemer blessed and enriched the earth. At her approach the spiritual winter of the world disappeared, the springtime of hope and promise for mankind had come, soon to be followed by the Summer of Christ's richest blessings and graces. She was the day star that appeared above the darkened horizon of a fallen world, to herald the rising of the Sun of eternal justice. Mary was the fairest flower in the garden of God. She was the flower of the field and the lily of the valley. She was the fairest, the most beautiful, and the most perfect of God's creatures. She was never stained by the sin of origin or of action, no thought allied to sin ever darkened her pure soul, no shadow of evil ever dimmed the brightness of her virginal purity. She was indeed "our tainted nature's solitary boast." Hence the inspired writer, gazing on the vision of her peerless beauty and perfection, as it appeared to his far reaching glance, exclaimed: "Who is she that cometh forth like the morning rising, fair as the Moon, beautiful as the Sun." (Canticles, VI., v. 9.)

It was, then, a happy thought of the church, who, like her Divine Master, doeth all things well, to associate the beautiful month of May with devotion to the Blessed Virgin, and to make its natural beauty and loveliness—its hopes and its promises—symbolize the moral beauty and loveliness of Mary, and the blessed hopes and promises which she brought to the wearied hearts and despairing souls of mankind.

DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

Devotion to the Blessed Virgin consists in honoring, venerating and loving her, and in earnestly and fervently invoking her powerful and most salutary intercession. All christians should honor, venerate and love our Blessed Lady, because (*a*) of the prominent place she has occupied in the economy of human redemption and reparation, because (*b*) of her transcendent sanctity and dignity, and because (*c*] God himself honored her above all other creatures, by bestowing on her the unspeakable and incomparable privilege of the Divine Maternity.

1. The Blessed Mother of God has occupied a prominent place in the work of our Redemption, and has ever been associated with our Divine Saviour in the scheme of man's salvation and in the dispensation of His graces and mercies.

Our Lord is the inexhaustible fountain of grace; Mary is its channel. Our Lord is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, our Father, our Creator, our Lord, our all, the God of our heart, the God that is our portion for ever. It is needless to tell you, dearly beloved brethren, for you are perfectly convinced of it, that our Saviour is the author and finisher of our Faith, that He is the life of our life, the Way, the Truth and the Life; that it is His precious blood that has redeemed the world; that He is the only mediator of redemption between God and man; that there is no other name under heaven, save the holy name of Jesus, whereby we can be saved; and that no soul can ever enter heaven, except through the merits of the sufferings and death of Christ. To Him alone are divine worship and adoration due. All this is Catholic truth and teaching. But as it has pleased God to rule the natural world, and to preserve and direct its marvellous harmonies by secondary agents and laws; so in the supernatural order it pleases Him to make use of secondary agents to carry out His merciful behests. Now such is the position of Mary in the divine plan of man's salvation.

She actively co-operated, but only as a secondary agent, with our Blessed Lord, in the great scheme of the world's reparation. As Eve, by her infidelity, actively co-operated in bringing on the fall of the human race in Adam, so Mary, by her superlative virtues, and her unswerving fidelity to grace, had a part in its restoration. Scarcely had the divine justice passed sentence on our guilty parents, at the gates of Paradise, when in love and pity God pronounced a sentence of mercy and of hope. He said to the serpent, "I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed; she shall crush thy head and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel [Genesis iii. c. 14 v.]

Between Eve and the serpent there arose a friendship that brought ruin and death on mankind; between Mary the woman of prophecy and the serpent there shall be an eternal enmity, an undying hostility, and she, through her seed, the incarnate God, shall bring life and salvation to mankind. The woman Mary, and her seed, Jesus Christ, has crushed and destroyed the serpent's head, the one *mediately*, the other *immediately*; Mary crushes the serpent's head by giving birth to Jesus, and Jesus by the might of His own divine power and virtue. When St. Paul instituted a contrast between the first Adam and the second, he suggested the existence of a similar contrast between Eve and Mary, and this contrast is constantly dwelt upon by the Christian Fathers. Their teaching on this subject, when summarised, is substantially as follows:—

(*a*). That Mary is the new and second Eve, as Christ is the new and second Adam; and therefore, as Adam was a type of Jesus so Eve was a type of Mary, and that as Eve was an active and efficient agent in the ruin of man, Mary was an active and efficient agent in his redemption and salvation. (*b*). The enmity between this second Eve and the serpent is in every way similar to that which existed between the serpent and the second Adam; and, consequently, it is deadly, implacable, and without interruption. (*c*.) In Mary the fall of Eve is restored; the prudence, the obedience, and the faith of the former making reparation for the imprudence, the disobedience and the unbelief of the latter. (*d*). God who condemned Eve, crowns Mary with glory. (*e*). As death flowed from the first Eve, so did life from the second; as all that is evil came through Eve, so through Mary comes all that is good; as Adam was renewed in Christ, so is Eve in Mary. (*f*.) By Mary salvation and life is within the reach of all, as by Eve all fell into ruin and death. (*g*). It is only on account of Mary that Eve is, and is called the mother of the living. (*h*). Mary raised Eve from her fall, restored Adam, despoiled hell, and opened the gates of paradise; (*i*). a curse was pronounced upon Eve; it is abolished by Mary, who is altogether blessed; (*k*). as we all die through Eve, so do we all live through Mary, we gain the adoption of sons, and return to our pristine dignity. (*l*). The new Virgin hath expiated the evil deed of the old; and (*m*). lastly, as all censure Eve, so all praise Mary. The whole force of these *antitheses* depends on the hypothesis upon which they are founded; namely, that Mary is a being wholly different from all other members of the human race, in the unspotted purity, and in the super-abundant holiness, which adorned and which filled her from the first moment of her existence; that she was not merely the physical instrument of our Lord's taking flesh but as an intelligent and responsible cause of it, her faith and obedience being accessories to the Incarnation and gaining it as her reward, that she co-operated in our salvation not merely by the descent of the Holy Ghost upon her but by specific holy acts—the effects of the Holy Ghost within her soul; that as Eve was the cause of ruin to all, Mary was the cause of salvation.

In the annunciation when an archangel announces to her on the part of God that she was to become the mother of the world's redeemer we see clearly the prominent part she played in the mystery of the Incarnation and therefore in the scheme of man's redemption. What an awful moment for the immortal hopes and eternal interests of mankind that was! Mary is a free agent, and she could if she so pleased, reject the grace and the inexpressible dignity offered to her. She for a moment suspends her consent, and God and nature are, as it were, kept in suspense and expectation, so necessary was it for mankind that she should freely and actively co-operate in the work of their redemption and their salvation. Her consent was necessary for the mystery of the Incarnation, and, it was only when she gave it, when she said her "*fiat*," that the decrees of God regarding this stupendous mystery ran on to their fulfilment, and that the work of the redemption of the world was inaugurated. "God was pleased so to arrange it," says St. Thomas, "that it might be shown that there is between the Son of God and human nature a certain spiritual marriage; and therefore in the Annunciation the consent of the Virgin was waited for, as the representative of all human nature." (Lib. iii. Art. 30.) "Answer, O Blessed Virgin," says St. Augustine, "why do you hesitate about giving life to the world? The gate of heaven once shut by the sin of Adam is opened, and the celestial ambassador has passed through it to come to you. God is at the gate, and he awaits the angel whom you detain. O Blessed Virgin, all the captive ages conjure thee to give thy consent. He who has offended has taken the first step, he has taken away the bolt by which our iniquity had closed the gate of heaven. We shall be permitted to enter there if you give your consent. *Est nobis aditus, si assensus tuus fuerit commodatus.*" (Ser. 17 in Natal Dom.)

Such, in the thought of the holy Fathers and of Catholic theology, is the prominent place the Blessed Virgin occupies in the divine scheme of man's salvation.

We should, therefore, honor, venerate and love her.

And what shall we say of her sanctity and greatness as shown forth and illustrated in the mystery of her divine maternity and of the honor and love we owe to her on these titles!

"It is an integral portion of the Faith fixed by an Œcumenical Council," says Cardinal Newman, "that the Blessed Virgin is Theotocos, Deipara, or Mother of God; and this word, when thus used, carries with it no admixture of rhetoric, no taint of extravagant affection,—it has nothing else but a well-weighed, grave, dogmatic sense, which corresponds and is adequate to its sound. It intends to express that God is her son, as truly as any one of us is the son of his own mother. If this be so, what can be said of her? what can be said too much, so that it does not compromise the attributes of the Creator? He indeed might have created a being more perfect, more admirable than she is; He might have endued that being, so created, with a richer grant of grace, of power, of blessedness; but in one respect she surpasses all even possible creations, viz., that she is Mother of her Creator. It is this awful title, which both illustrates and connects together the two prerogatives of Mary, on which I have been lately enlarging, her sanctity and her greatness. It is the issue of her sanctity; it is the origin of her greatness. What dignity can be too great to attribute to her who is as closely bound up, as intimately one, with the Eternal Word, as a mother is with a son? What outfit of sanctity, what fulness and abundance of grace, what exuberance of merits must have been hers, when once we admit the supposition, which the Fathers justify, when her Maker really did regard those merits, and take them into account, when he condescended "not to abhor the Virgin's womb." Is it surprising then that on the one hand she should be immaculate in her conception? or on the other that she should be honored with an assumption, and exalted as a queen with a crown of twelve stars, with the rulers of day and night to do her service? Men sometimes wonder that we call her Mother of life, of mercy, of salvation; what are all these titles compared to that one name, Mother of God?"

O, how greatly should we honor, how fervently should we love her whom God himself honored above all creatures by raising her to the unapproachable and incomparable dignity of being His own Mother." She herself, being inspired by the Holy Ghost, prophesied that "all generations should call her blessed," and the church of God has in every age taken up this holy canticle of praise and has made it resound throughout the whole world. In every clime the children of the church gather around the shrines of our Blessed Lady, and with loving hearts, and in every language spoken by human lips, proclaim her blessed, and sing her *magnificat*, and extol her glories, and declare her "full of grace," and radiant with the beauty of perfect holiness; and, in doing so, they are confident that they are thereby honoring, thanking, and praising her divine Son, Who crowned her with honor and with glory, Who loved her as His own Blessed Mother, and Who, when dying in agony on the cross, gave her to His children as their Mother also. Nor let it be foolishly said that the honor given by us to our Blessed Lady is so much taken away from the honor we owe to her Divine Son. In honoring her, we honor the gifts and graces which God so abundantly and magnificently lavished upon her. As the Moon shines by the reflected light of the Sun, but does not shear him of his rays or rob him of the brightness and glory of his effulgence, so Mary, shining by the gifts and graces and spiritual illuminations given her by God, and, by her faithful co-operation with them is but the reflected image of the beauty and holiness and perfection of the Son of God, who made her all beautiful and without spot or stain; and the honor given to her is ultimately referred to God, the author of all her greatness and dignity and perfections. The love of Mary leads us up to the love of God, the All-Perfect, the All-Holy, for it is chiefly for His dear sake we love and honor her; and, indeed, if we did not love the Mother, how could we love the Son, Who loved her so tenderly?

Besides, the honor we pay to God is different in kind from that which we give to the Blessed Virgin. To God we give supreme honor as to our Creator and Sovereign Lord; to the Blessed Virgin we give an inferior honor as to the most perfect creature ever fashioned by Divine hands, but still a creature, and therefore separated as by an impassable gulf from the nature, the attributes and infinite perfections of God: to our Saviour we say "*Rex tremendæ Majestatis Salva nos*, King of awful and tremendous Majesty save us; to the Blessed Virgin we say Holy Mary pray for us. God is our Sovereign Lord and Judge. Mary is our advocate, pleading before His throne for us poor sinners. This is Catholic teaching, and all devotional expressions used towards the Blessed Virgin should in truth and justice be interpreted according to this standard of Catholic belief.

2nd We should frequently and earnestly recommend ourselves to the prayers of the Blessed Virgin, and, entreat her to obtain for us from her Divine Son, by her powerful intercession, the graces and blessings we may stand in need of. The doctrine of the intercessory power of the Blessed Virgin is the result of two truths that cannot be reasonably questioned by any Christian. The first is, that intercessory prayer is an ordinance of God; the second is, that the vitality and power of intercessory prayer are in proportion to the sanctity and nearness to God of the person offering it. That intercessory prayer is of Divine appointment cannot be questioned by any person admitting Holy Scripture to be the revealed word of God. Elias prayed that it might not rain, and it rained not for three years and six months; and, again, he prayed, and God answered his prayers by abundant showers, (III Kings, 17, 18. chap.) Moses, by his prayers, saved his people from destruction (Exodus XXXII.) In the prophet Ezechiel God speaks as if intercessory prayer were a necessary condition for the bestowal of his favors. "*I sought amongst them for a man that might stand in the gap before me in favor of the land, that I might not destroy it, and I found none.*" (Ezechiel XXII,30.) 30.) St. James seems to make our salvation depend on intercessory prayer. "*Pray for one another, that ye may be saved,*" are the remarkable words he makes use of. St. Paul enjoins his brethren to "*pray with all prayer and supplication, at all times, in the spirit, with all patience and supplication for all saints, to make supplications, prayers, intercessions, giving of thanks for all men.*" And he declares that he "ceases not to give thanks for them, commemorating them in his prayers."

From these and many other Scriptural passages too numerous to cite, it is manifest that intercessory prayer is a divine ordinance—that it is a means appointed by Almighty God to obtain for ourselves and others, many graces and spiritual favors. Again, it is certain that the potency and efficacy of intercessory prayer are in proportion to the holiness and merits before God of the person who offers it. The dictates of reason alone would be sufficient to satisfy us on this point. St. James tells us that the *prayer of the just man availeth much.* (St. James v c., 15) Our Lord declares to us that "*if we remain in Him, and His words remain in us, we may ask whatever we will, and it shall be done unto us.* (St. John xv-7.) we see here that the power of intercessory prayer is in direct proportion to the closeness of the union which we maintain with God. And St. John enunciates the same principle when he says, "whatsoever we shall ask we shall receive of *Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.*" (1 St. John, iii., 22.)

We have, then, two things clearly established by God's revealed word, 1st, that intercessory prayer is an ordinance of God, and, 2nd, that the efficacy of that prayer is in direct proportion to the holiness and goodness of the one who offers it. In fact, so much in accord with the wants of human nature are these principles, so much in unison are they with the dictates of right reason and with the common sense of mankind, that even in the worldly concerns of life men unceasingly act on similar principles Thus, if persons desire favors from those in power—if they desire, for instance, a government situation, they invariably solicit the influence and intercession of the friends of those from whom the favors are sought—the friends and supporters of the government. Now, bearing in mind the two aforesaid incontestable truths, how can we exaggerate when speaking of the efficacy, the power, the irresistable mightiness of the prayers of God's Blessed Mother, offered up for those whom Her Divine Son redeemed in His precious blood. Who so holy, who so near to our Blessed Redeemer, who has such irresistible claims upon Him, as His own Mother? She bore Him for nine months in her virginal womb. She saw Him born and saw Him die. She nursed Him in His infancy, flew with Him into Egypt to save Him from the wrath of a tyrant, she labored for Him, bore poverty with Him, hungered with Him, was for years associated with Him in His daily life, was in a word, His most tender and loving Mother whom He obeyed during the years of His hidden life at Nazareth. She gave Him all that He had of that human nature with which His divinity was hypostatically united and with which He worked on earth. She gave Him that heart into which She transfused her own blood and which He poured out on the tree of the cross for us as the price of our redemption—that breath and life which He gave in atonement for sin and for the redemption of the world. O, what creature then, could be as near and dear to our adorable Lord as His own dear Mother, who could have such claims upon Him as She? Not all the Saints that ever glorified God, and honored human nature by the splendor of their virtues, not all the Cherubim and Seraphim that surround His eternal throne, not all the angelic choirs that sing forever the praises of their Creator. If, then, the power and efficacy of intercessory prayer are in proportion to the holiness and merit and closeness to God of the person who offers it, we have the most positive assurance, the most unshaken certainty, that the prayers of the Blessed Virgin must be most powerful with Her eternal Son, and most benificial to her supplicants.*

And, in fact, we find that this was the case while yet Mother and Son still lingered on the earth. The very first recorded grace given by the incarnate God to man was bestowed at the voice of Mary. After the annunciation, the Blessed Virgin visited her cousin, Saint Elizabeth; and it came to pass, says St. Luke, 1st Chap. 41st ver., "*that as Elizabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the infant in her womb leaped for joy, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost.*" Now the Fathers unanimously maintain that at the sound of Mary's voice St. John the Baptist was sanctified in his mother's womb by a special grace from Jesus Christ, for the recognition of the presence of the Redeemer given by the child, if not accompanied by the remission of his original sin, would in their estimation not cause him joy, but rather sorrow, as he would feel that by that sin he was estranged and separated from his blessed Redeemer. "There is no doubt," says Origen, "that Elizabeth was filled with the HolyGhost because of her son; for the mother did not then deserve to receive the Holy Ghost, but as John, as yet confined in his mother's womb, was filled with the Holy Ghost, then Elizabeth, after the sanctification of her son, was filled with the Holy Spirit." Now, this grace of sanctification given to St. John could have been bestowed, had God so willed, either before or after the visit of the blessed Virgin, but it pleased the Redeemer to grant it only at the moment that his mother's voice sounded in the ears of Elizabeth, to signify that it was through her instrumentality, and at her instance, grace was accorded.

We find, also, that the first] miracle which Jesus wrought was performed at the request of his blessed Mother, and *that*, even before the time marked out in the divine decrees for the manifestation of his Almighty power had arrived. This miracle took place at the marriage feast in Cana of Galilee (St. John, ii. chap.) Jesus and Mary were invited to the marriage feast. And the wine failing, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine;" and Jesus said to her, "*Woman, what is it to Me and to thee—my hour is not yet come;*" but Mary, who well knew that her request would not be refused, said to the waiters, "*Whatsoever he shall say to you, do ye.*" Then Jesus saith to the waiters, "*Fill the water-pots with water; and they filled them up to the brim.*" Then Jesus, by a miracle of almighty power, converted the water into wine. The Evangelist adds: "*This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee: and He manifested his glory.*" From the tenor of this text it is perfectly manifest that it was only at the request of his blessed Mother Jesus wrought this first miracle, and that in order to comply with her prayer, he performed it even before the time of his working miracles had arrived. We may therefore conclude that as our blessed Redeemer bestowed his first grace and wrought his first miracle at the request of his holy Mother, he would for all coming time work miracles of grace and mercy for the salvation of those for whom Mary's powerful voice would be raised in advocacy: and as the relation of mother and son has not ceased to exist in heaven, where Jesus is enthroned in the glory of his Father, and where Mary reigns above the heavenly hierarchies, and, as Jesus is still the Father of Mercies, and the charity and compassion of Mary for poor repentant sinners is, if possible, more inflamed and intensified, we may rest assured that Jesus will never refuse to listen to the voice of His blessed Mother when she pleads in accents of tender pity and compassion for the poor sinners whom he has redeemed in His precious blood. For the Blessed Virgin will not cease to plead and intercede for us with her divine Son, now that she is in the eternal heavens. The communion of Saints is a great fact attested by the revealed word of God and embodied as an article of faith in the Apostles Creed. The church is a vast society embracing the Saints in heaven, the suffering souls in Purgatory and its members who are still detained in the flesh. There is a bond of sympathy, of union and of charity binding all these children of the church into one great family of God; death cannot separate their souls nor raise up a barrier that would divide them, "for Christ, Who is our peace, hath broken down all the walls of partition which sin and death had interposed between God's children, and hath made both one—that is, hath united the Saints in heaven and his people on earth into his own body, which is his church. And as in the human body all the members are interdependent, and minister to each other's wants, and feel for each other's sufferings, and contribute to the well-being of the whole body, so, in the church, which is the body of Christ, the various members thereof do, by the appointment of God, and according to their position and the measure of their capacity, minister to each other's spiritual needs, interchange kindly and merciful offices, and are bound together by the bonds of active charity and friendship, stronger than death. We invoke the prayers and influence of the Saints; they intercede for us with God, and we bring relief to the souls in Purgatory by our prayers and other good works. In this view of the case, the office of the Blessed Virgin as our advocate and our Mother, does not cease now that she is exalted over principalities and powers in heaven. On the contrary, her interest in us is but intensified there, and as she will ever be the Mother of Jesus, and as Jesus, even in the eternal heavens, will be forever her Son, so her prayers and her intercessions for her poor way-faring children on earth will have the power and efficaciousness which the prayers of such a Mother must always have with such a Son, and they will never cease to be offered up for us in mighty advocacy before the throne of grace and mercy, for Mary, like her divine Son, will always live in heaven to make intercession for us.

"I consider it impossible," says a distinguished writer, "for those who believe the Church to be one vast body in heaven and on earth, in which every creature of God has his place, and of which prayer is the life, when once they recognize the sanctity and dignity of the Blessed Virgin, not to perceive immediately that her office above is one of perpetual intercession for the faithful militant, and that our very relation to her must be that of clients to a patron, and that in the eternal enmity which exists between the woman and the serpent, while the serpent's strength lies in being the tempter, the weapon of the second Eve and Mother of God is prayer.

This is the faith of Catholics; and hence the children of the Church have in every age turned in confidence and with loving hearts to seek her protection, and ask the benefit of her prayers; and they have not been mistaken, nor have their prayers been left unheard. Hence churches have sprung up all over Christendom raised in honor of Mary, and shrines have been established, the offerings of grateful hearts for benefits received. Let us therefore, dearest brethren, turn to Mary in our temptations, in our trials, and our afflictions; let us humbly, but with confidence, beseech her to intercede for us before the throne of grace, and we may be convinced that she will not fail to interest herself in our be-

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*So reasonable is Catholic teaching on this point, and so much is it in accord with the dictates of common sense, as well as with the revealed word of God, that even enlightened Protestants are forced to admit it. Thus the late pure-minded Longfellow beautifully expresses this teaching:—

This is indeed the blessed Mary's land;
Virgin and Mother of our dear Redeemer;
All hearts are touched and softened at her name;
Alike the bandit, with the bloody hand,
The priest, the prince, the scholar, and the peasant,
The man of deeds, the visionary dreamer,
Pay homage to her as one ever present!
And even as children, who have much offended
A too-indulgent father, in great shame,
Penitent, and yet not daring unattended
To go into his presence, at the gate
Speak with their sister, and confiding wait,
Till she goes in before and intercedes;
So men, repenting of their evil deeds,
And yet not venturing rashly to draw near
With their requests an angry father's ear,
Offer to her their prayers and their confession,
And she for them in heaven makes intercession,
And if our Faith had given us nothing more
Than this example of all womanhood,
So mild, so merciful, so strong, so good,
So patient, peaceful, loyal, loving, pure,
This were enough to prove it higher and truer
Than all the creeds the world had known before.