



Theology Corner

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Theological Reflections by Paul Chutikorn - Director of Faith Formation

“Understanding the Catholic View of Mary - Mother of God”

I thought that it would be fitting after having celebrated the Solemnity of Mary the Holy Mother of God, that we should briefly discuss why Mary is important to us. We often hear from many of our non-Catholic brothers and sisters that Mary was an ordinary woman and that the Catholic Church gives her needless and excessive attention. But is this true? Is our honoring of Mary “needless” and “excessive”? Well, let’s think about it...

We know that God is omniscient and therefore his foreknowledge pointed to the fact that man would fall from grace. Being that God created man for himself, in his image, so that man may come to know and love him, he always had a plan to restore fallen man back to a state of grace. We see this plan at the beginning of salvation history in Genesis 3:15 **“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel.”** Here, God immediately calls to mind Mary’s place in the divine plan. God would conquer sin and death through the seed of “the woman.” Granted, the most important piece here is the “seed” of Mary and we must always recognize that Mary’s importance is not anywhere close to the level of important of God himself, but her importance flows from our love of God. I think this concept is best explained by St. Louis de Montfort when he tells us that while we always give more honor to God than we would Mary, the very purpose behind honoring Mary is so that we may honor Christ all the more perfectly. I think that this understanding is key in order to see precisely how the Church views Mary.

I’ve touched on this in a previous article, so I won’t give much time to it, but we refer to Mary as the Mother of God because she gave birth to Christ who is fully God and fully man. So, rejecting this title attributed to Mary would consequently reject Christ’s divinity. This is because Mary, as the mother of Christ’s human-self, must bring with it his divine-self due to the inseparability of Christ’s nature in the hypostatic union. However, this does not make her more important than God because we know that while she gave birth to Christ who is the God-man, his divinity was not an effect of being born of Mary, but rather something that preceded her. Thus, Mary did not *cause* the divinity of Christ, but was the vessel through which God took on human flesh. So, we do not “worship” Mary since that is reserved for God alone. Rather, we honor her just as Christ honored her in an obedience to the fifth commandment.

We believe that Mary was immaculately conceived, and this places her in the highest place among the saints because she received special graces which preserved her from original sin. This is very different in quality from our liberation from original sin through the sacrament of baptism. Instead of being *liberated* from original sin, she was *preserved*. The best explanation I’ve heard of this concept is that through baptism, we are given a sort of divine medicine through grace by which our nature is healed. But in the case of Mary, God provided her a sort of vaccination by which she was never ill in the first place. Does that mean she didn’t need a savior? Well, yes and no. She did not need a savior in the sense of looking at things temporally (in time), but she did need one in the sense that the preservation of original sin was still one fundamentally based on the merits of her Son. It is just a matter of God applying those foreseen merits to her in advance. Understanding this, of course, depends on our ability to look at things from the perspective of God as opposed to the perspective of human beings existing in time.

Mary is special because of these special graces given to her by God in order that she may be **“enriched by God with gifts appropriate to such a role.”** (CCC 490). We honor her for her role in the salvation of man, and we pray to her not because we think she is a goddess, but because she of her relationship with her Son, she serves as the ideal intermediary through which we can communicate with Christ himself. Who else better than to ask for prayers to God than Christ’s own mother? Therefore, may we all pray: *“Sancta Maria, Mater Dei, ora pro nobis, nunc, et in hora mortis nostrae... Amen.”*