
A Sermon for October:

HONOR THE MOTHER TO HONOR THE SON

by Rev. Clarence Kelly

Since the beginning of the Modern era, there have been many objections raised against doctrines of the Catholic Church concerning Mary, the Mother of the Savior, Our Lord, Jesus Christ. This is the woman whom Catholics used to refer to universally as *their* Blessed Mother. Unfortunately, we say “used to” because today there is an increasingly widespread questioning, doubting and even denial of the doctrines of the Church concerning Mary in what are nominally Catholic circles. Some so-called Catholic theologians and writers have themselves become advocates of these denials. I, myself, read from the pen of a nationally famous priest-columnist, statements about the Virgin Mother of Christ which are shocking and grossly sacrilegious. One might expect such things written about the Immaculate Virgin by a Satanist, but hardly can one believe that a Catholic priest could stoop so low.

Such are the iconoclasts of this new modern Reformation. They attack our cherished beliefs as shams, and they shatter the external expressions of our faith. They have reduced the Bible to a book of myths, at least to the satisfaction of their own superficial and sophomoric scholarship; and they have removed the Blessed Sacrament from our altars; they have substituted tables for altars of sacrifice; and a meal for the covenant sacrifice of

the New Testament, the Mass; they give us “presidents of the assembly of the people of God” instead of sacrificing priests of Jesus Christ. Not satisfied with that, they have even waged their war on the pious practices of the centuries. And so the rosaries lie unused and the churches stand bare—resembling meeting halls or Masonic lodges rather than dwelling places of the living God in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar.

It is important for us, therefore, to go back, to look again and to appreciate the precious heritage that is ours, so that we will not so easily give it up because the new Reformers say it needs to be modernized. We must, at the same time, remind ourselves that the Church itself does not and never could need reform, for it is the Mystical Body of Christ. It is the sinful souls of men that need to be reformed—not the Church. And in going back, we should reflect upon and hold dear to our hearts the teaching of the Church concerning the Blessed Virgin Mother of God. For this teaching is timeless and unchangeable, and must never be compromised or surrendered by loyal Catholics.

I am sure it is true that some people may think that the position of Mary in the Catholic Church diminishes, or decreases the degree and quality of honor that is due to her Son, Our Lord,

Jesus Christ. Some, perhaps, go a step further and say that to honor Mary, as Catholics have traditionally done, is a denial of the fact that there is only one Savior and only one Name under heaven by which we are to be saved.

What do you think? Do we deprive Christ of the honor that is due Him by honoring His Mother with such emphasis and devotion as all loyal Catholics do? The answer, of course, is no. For it is scripture itself which exalts Mary and lavishes praise upon her.

Even from the point of view of common sense, it is evident that I cannot dishonor someone by showing honor and respect to his mother. Indeed, Jesus Christ Himself is obliged, according to His own Fourth Commandment, to honor Mary. "Honor thy father and mother," the commandment says. The first three commandments deal with our obligations directly related to God: "I am the Lord thy God...Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain...Keep holy the Sabbath Day." The remaining commandments, however, deal with our relations with men. And the first of this group says "Honor thy father and mother." Are we to do less than Christ? Should we neglect the woman Jesus Christ honors as *His Blessed Mother*? How can we honor Our Lord if we refuse to honor His Mother? Would you like it if I said that I honored and respected you, but refused to show honor to *your* mother? Indeed not. If I do not honor your mother, then my honor toward you will not only be vain and shallow, but will itself be offensive.

The dictionary gives a definition of the word honor which says that it is "esteem due or paid to worth; a manifestation of respect or reverence." Dishonor is the reverse of honor. To refuse to honor the Blessed Virgin is to fail to recognize her worth and the respect and reverence which that worth compels. The point is, that when we lavish our praise on the Blessed Virgin Mary, we do not detract from her Son. Indeed, the opposite is true. For the more we love and honor the Son of God, the more we will honor the Mother of God, and likewise, the more we honor the Mother, the more we love the Son. Mary is not an obstacle to Christ. She is a one-way signpost pointing to Him.

It also must be said that that proposition is false which says that our attitude toward the exalted Virgin is an implicit denial of the truth that there is only one Savior and only one Name under heaven by which we are to be saved. There *is* only

one Name under heaven by which we can be saved and that is Jesus Christ and, precisely because of that, we honor her, for she gave not just the name, but her own flesh to the Incarnate Word of God.

From the Gospel of St. Luke you will recall the course of events. The angel of the Lord appeared to Zachary to tell him that Elizabeth was going to have a child whose mission it would be to prepare the people for the coming Messiah. Elizabeth was the wife of Zachary and both were very old. Just as the angel said, they did have a child, and the child was John the Baptist.

Before the birth of John, the angel Gabriel was sent to Mary in the town of Nazareth. And the words which the angel first spoke to Mary reveal what God thinks of her. The angel said, "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women." And he went on to say to her: "Mary...thou hast found grace with God." These are not the words of a Catholic theologian of the Middle Ages, but of the angel who described himself to Zachary as he "who stands in the presence of God." And what did Mary say? She said, simply, eloquently, and beautifully: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word." What an example for us when we are unwilling to submit to God's word or God's will! Quite naturally, Mary must have been excited about this whole matter. We can imagine what Mary's mother and father must have thought on learning that the long-awaited Messiah would be their grandchild, born of their virgin daughter.

Mary was also close to her cousin Elizabeth who was also with child, but who was probably several times Mary's age. In any case, Luke tells us that Mary went to a town of Juda in the hill country with haste. She was in a hurry to see Elizabeth and to recount to her the glorious events that took place. We can imagine Mary walking along the rough roads, anxious to talk to Elizabeth. When she finally drew near to the house we can see her running with joy, and calling out Elizabeth's name.

Little did either of them expect the incredible thing that would happen next. As Mary entered, she called out to Elizabeth. Elizabeth was overwhelmed because John the Baptist, the yet unborn child of Elizabeth, leapt inside her. Then, moved by Almighty God, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, Elizabeth expressed the type of reverence that all true Catholics must have for Mary. She said, as we say in the Rosary every day—"Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of

thy womb.” And then she said, “How have I deserved that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” Elizabeth is saying that the very presence of Mary, the mother of her Lord, is an honor of which she is unworthy.

Thus, when we honor Mary, we are doing what Elizabeth was prompted to do by the Holy Ghost. Could the Holy Ghost have been wrong? Blasphemy! To honor Mary is to fulfill the will of God and not to deprive God of what is justly His. This is thus clearly demonstrated from the Sacred Scriptures. Even the word *blessed*, which was applied to Christ, was also used in reference to the mother. Elizabeth had said, “*Blessed* art thou and *blessed* is the fruit of thy womb.” It is important to keep in mind that Elizabeth, here, is just a spokesman through whom the Holy Ghost Himself is speaking. And so we honor Mary because God honors her. Keep in mind that of all the women who ever lived or would live, she was chosen to be the one to represent the human race, in that from her God would take His human nature.

We respect places and things and people that intimately and importantly are linked to us as Americans because we revere and love our country. What then of the Virgin Mother who gave flesh to our Savior and who loved with such unutterable love that nothing could separate her from Him, not even the sight of His tortured and dying body upon the Cross? The story of Mary and her connection with the Savior is not just the story of the Incarnation, for Mary was with the Savior through the whole of His life and ministry and priesthood. From the Annunciation by the angel Gabriel, to the Presentation of Our Lord; from the Finding of Our Lord in the Temple, to the opening of His public ministry by performing a miracle at Mary’s request; from the three long years of work, to the three long hours on the Cross—to the coming of the Holy Ghost—Mary is there.

Mary, you see, is not just intimately close to Christ because He is flesh of her flesh, but she is close to Him also because of her devotion, her goodness, her loyalty, her love, and her holiness. As St. Augustine tells us, Mary conceived Christ in her heart by faith before she conceived Him in her body. That is why the very sound of her voice was able to cause a miracle in Elizabeth.

What power the word of Mary carries with it! And how much should this faithless generation of ours imitate her! She is blessed and we revere her because the things promised her by the Lord shall

be accomplished.

And what was to be accomplished through Mary’s faith? Just this—in the words of the angel who appeared to her: “Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb and shalt bring forth a Son; and thou shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God Will give to him the throne of David his father, and he shall be king over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.” (Luke 1: 31-33)

These were the good tidings of great joy the would be announced to the shepherds in the fields at Bethlehem. These were the things that prompted the heavenly army to praise God before these humble shepherds saying, “Glory to God in the highest: and on earth peace to men of good will.”

The distance between the dignity of Mary and the dignity of her Son’s divine nature is infinite, for Jesus is God, and Mary is but the creature of His hands. Yet Mary comes nearest to Jesus, and is therefore the first of creatures in the order of grace and glory. “The nearer a thing approaches its principle,” says Saint Thomas, “the more does it partake of the effect of that principle, ...but Christ is the principle of grace, and Mary is nearest to Him, since He received from her His human nature. Hence, she ought to receive from Christ a greater fullness of grace than any other.”

Dear friends, if God Himself, Who is infinitely holy and perfectly good, honors the Holy Virgin, what of us, sinful men that we are?

It was Mary herself, moved by God, who perfectly expressed the reality of the unique honor which had been bestowed upon her, and who at the same time prophesied that the honor of all men for her would extend from generation to generation until the end of time: “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior; because he has regarded the lowliness of His handmaid: for, behold, henceforth all generations shall call me blessed; because He who is mighty has done great things for me.”

We must, then reverence the very name of Mary, because she gave us our Savior, and because God Himself honored her exceedingly. We implore her intercession because she has great power before the throne of God. We honor her and we love her, and, in so doing, we are numbered among all those generations who call her Blessed. □