

## Chapter 3

### Our Life in Christ and Mary

Two passages from Sacred Scripture serve as an excellent introduction to our discussion of Christ's role in our sanctification.

God is one. One also is the mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all (1 Tim. 2:5-6).

God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever possesses the Son, possesses life; whoever does not possess the Son of God does not possess life (1 John 5:11-12).

Since the Second Vatican Council there has been a renewed emphasis on the role of Christ in our sanctification. It is true, of course, that the spiritual life of the people of God has always been Christ-centered because Christ has always been and must always be the exemplar and efficient cause of Christian holiness. But from time to time in the history of spirituality, Christ has been eclipsed by other devotions, or at times one or another aspect of the sacred humanity of Christ has been exaggerated at the expense of his divinity. Nevertheless, in every age there have been competent theologians and spiritual writers who taught and promoted a truly Christocentric spirituality.

Since God has predestined those whom he called to share the image of his Son (Rom. 8:29), union with Christ is a central dogma in Christian revelation. Thus, St. Thomas states that "what is primary in the New Law is the grace of the Holy Spirit, shown in faith working through love. Now we obtain this grace through the Son of God-made man; grace first filled his humanity, and thence was brought to us." It follows, therefore, that "grace was conferred on Christ as the universal principle of all those who have grace."<sup>(1)</sup>

#### Scriptural Testimony

St. John speaks of our union with Christ within the framework of four basic concepts. *Christ is the Word of life*; therefore we must live in him and let him work through us by his spirit. *Christ is the vine, and we are the branches*; therefore we must remain united with him in order to produce the fruits of eternal life. Christ alone has the words of truth; therefore in the measure that we accept his teaching we shall walk in the truth and impart his truth to others. *Christ is our way to the Trinity* and can lead us to the beatific joy of union with the three divine Persons, as he stated at the Last Supper (John 17:20-24).

St. Paul was a man literally seized by Christ and so completely did he give himself to Christ that everything in his life and teaching converges on Christ crucified and risen from the dead. One of the most succinct descriptions of Christ's central position in the plan of salvation and in man's sanctification is found in St. Paul's prayer of thanksgiving in his letter to the Ephesians:

Praised be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has bestowed on us in Christ every spiritual blessing in the heavens! God chose us in him before the world began, to be holy and blameless in his sight, to be full of love; he likewise predestined us through Christ Jesus to be his adopted sons -- such was his will and pleasure -- that all might praise the glorious favor he has bestowed on us in his beloved.

It is in Christ and through his blood that we have been redeemed and our sins forgiven, so immeasurably generous is God's favor to us. God has given us the wisdom to understand fully the mystery, the plan he was pleased to decree in Christ, to be carried out in the fullness of time; namely, to bring all things in the heavens and on earth into one under Christ's headship (Eph. 1:3-15).[\(2\)](#)

It is therefore God's will that we unite ourselves ever more intimately with Christ "till we become one in faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, and form that perfect man who is Christ come to full stature .... Let us profess the truth in love and grow to the full maturity of Christ the head" (Eph. 4:13,15).

Speculative theologians have discussed the nature of the union of the just soul with Christ, but the results have not been uniformly satisfying. Pope Pius XII reminded theologians that the union between Christ and the soul surpasses all description and that any exaggeration, even if it be merely a matter of terminology, can have serious consequences in the field of spirituality. He concluded by saying that this union surpasses any moral or physical union just as grace transcends nature, and it is best described as a mystical union.[\(3\)](#)

Another point to be noted is that if the goal of the Christian life is configuration with Christ and transformation in Christ, as St. Paul explicitly teaches, there can never be a point at which the soul abandons Christ. St. Teresa found it necessary to combat this error in her day, and she did so with her customary vehemence:

You will also think that anyone who enjoys such sublime favors will not engage in meditation on the most sacred humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ, because by that time he will be wholly proficient in love. This is a thing of which I have written at length elsewhere, and although I have been contradicted about it and told that I do not understand it, because these are paths along which our Lord leads us, and that, when we have got over the first stages, we shall do better to occupy ourselves with matters concerning the Godhead and to flee from corporeal things, they will certainly not make me admit that this is a good way .... And observe that I am going so far as to advise you not to believe anyone who tells you otherwise .... The last thing we should do is to withdraw of set purpose from our greatest help and blessing, which is the most sacred humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ ....

It is true that anyone whom our Lord brings to the seventh mansion very rarely, or never, needs to engage in this activity, for the reason I shall set down, if I remember to do so, when I come to deal with that mansion, where in a wonderful way the soul never ceases to walk with Christ our Lord but, is ever in the company of both his divine and his human nature.[\(4\)](#)

Lastly, there is the problem of relating with the saving actions of Christ, all of which are now past history. Christ has ascended to glory and still intercedes for us at the right hand of the Father, but to return to the historical Christ would seem to make Christianity a religion of memorial services and Christian spirituality a nostalgia for the past. The answer to this problem was provided by Cardinal Bérulle of the seventeenth-century French school, who stated that although the actions of Christ and the events of his life took place only once and are now historical facts, they retain their salvific efficacy for all eternity. Everything that Jesus did in time redounds to the divine Person of the Word forever. The glorified Christ is still redeeming and sanctifying us through the infinite merits of his life and passion and death.

We can now discuss in greater detail the precise role of Christ in the spiritual life of the people of God, and to do so we shall proceed from the description that Christ gave of himself: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).

### Christ the Way

To say that Jesus Christ is the way means that no one can go to the Father except through him, for there has been given to us no other name under heaven by which we can be saved (Acts 4:12). According to the divine plan, the sanctity to which God calls us through grace and adoption consists in a participation in the divine life that was brought to mankind by Christ. This is expressly stated by St. Paul:

He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved (Eph. 1:4-6). Christ reestablished the divine plan of our salvation, which had been destroyed by the sin of Adam. "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him" (1 John 4:9).

Therefore the primary concern of every Christian should be to live the life that Christ brought to us, to be united with Christ to the point of being configured with him. To express this profound truth of the union of the Christian with Christ, St. Paul had to invent terms that had never before been used: "For if we have died with him (*conmortui*) (2 Tim. 2:11), we were buried with him (*consepulti*) (Rom. 6:4), but God ... raised us up together (*conresuscitati*) (Eph. 2:6), brought us to life together with Christ (*convivificavit nos*)" (*ibid.* 2:5), so that "we shall also live with him (*et convivemus*)" (2 Tim. 2:11) and sit together in heaven with Christ Jesus (*et consedere*) (Eph. 2:6). In view of this Pauline doctrine, the statements of Dom Columba summarize:

We must understand that we can only be saints according to the measure in which the life of Jesus Christ is in us: that is the only holiness God asks of us; there is no other. We can only be holy in Jesus Christ; otherwise we cannot be so at all. There is not an atom of this holiness in creation; it proceeds from God by a supremely free act of his almighty will ... St. Paul returns more than once to the gratuitousness of the divine gift of adoption, and also to the eternity of the ineffable love which determined him to make us partakers of it, and to the wonderful means of realizing it through the grace of Jesus Christ.(5)

Christ is therefore the only way of going to the Father. He is also the personification of the only true sanctity according to the divine plan. Through him alone can we attain the ideal intended by God in the creation, redemption, and sanctification of the human race: the praise of his glory (Eph. 1:5-6). The Church reminds us of this each time the Mass is celebrated: "Through him, with him, and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor are yours, almighty Father, forever and ever." Many of the saints, enlightened by God to understand more fully the mystery of Christ, yearned to be dissolved and to be absorbed in Christ. The desire expressed by St. Paul readily comes to mind (Phil. 1:23-34), but a modern mystic, Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity, seems to have penetrated the mystery of Christ as profoundly as did the Apostle to the Gentiles. Addressing Christ, she writes:

I realize my weakness and beseech thee to clothe me with thyself, to identify my soul with all the movements of thine own. Immerse me in thyself, possess me wholly; substitute thyself for me, that my life may be but a radiance of thine own. Enter my soul as Adorer, as Restorer, as Savior! O Eternal Word, Utterance of my God! I long to pass my life in listening to thee, to become docile that I may learn all from thee ....

O consuming Fire! Spirit of love! Descend within me and reproduce in me, as it were, an incarnation of the Word; that I may be to him another humanity wherein he renews his mystery. And thou, O Father, bend down toward thy poor little creature and overshadow her, beholding in her none other than thy beloved Son in whom thou hast set all thy pleasure.<sup>(6)</sup>

Our incorporation in Christ is therefore the basis of our sanctification and the very substance of our spiritual life. From this fundamental dogma of incorporation in Christ follow all the conclusions that pertain to Christian spirituality. Souls earnestly striving for perfection would do well to dedicate themselves to a deeper appreciation of the mystery of Christ and then endeavor to reproduce this mystery in their own lives. If they do this, they will surely reach the summit of sanctity and will be able to repeat with St. Paul: "The life I live now is not my own; Christ is living in me" (Gal. 2:20).

## **Christ the Truth**

Christ is the Incarnation of the uncreated wisdom of the Word, and through his sacred humanity he communicates to us all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. As the Word uttered by the Father from all eternity, he is eternally generated as Son of God, and it is precisely his divine sonship that constitutes him as the model and exemplar of the perfection of the Christian life. The reason for this is that we are called to become through grace what Christ is by his very nature: children of God. Dom Marmion has written beautifully on this doctrine:

The divine sonship of Christ is the type of our supernatural sonship; his condition, his "being" the Son of God is the exemplar of the state in which we must be established by sanctifying grace. Christ is the Son of God by nature and by right, in virtue of the union of the eternal Word with human nature; we are so by adoption and grace, but we are so really and truly. Christ has, moreover, sanctifying grace; he possesses the fullness of it; from his fullness it flows into us more or less abundantly but, in its substance, it is the same grace that both fills the created soul

of Jesus and deifies us. St. Thomas says that our divine filiation is a resemblance of the eternal filiation ....

Such is the primordial and supereminent manner in which Christ is first of all our example: in the Incarnation he is constituted, by right, the Son of God; we should become so by being partakers of the grace derived from him that, deifying the substance of our souls, constitutes us in the state of children of God. That is the first and essential characteristic of the likeness we must have to Christ Jesus; it is the condition of all our supernatural activity.(7)

This should be the basic preoccupation of every Christian: to know Christ and to cultivate the attitude of a child of the heavenly Father, who is also our Father, as Jesus told us: "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God" (John 20:17). "We shall understand nothing of perfection and sanctity," says Dom Marmion, "and we shall not even know in what simple Christianity consists, as long as we are not convinced that fundamentally it consists in being children of God and that this quality or state is given to us by sanctifying grace, through which we share in the eternal filiation of the Incarnate Word." (8) This is the most important exemplary causality that Christ exercises on us, although he is also an exemplar in his works and in his virtues.

The primary motive of the Incarnation was the redemption of the human race, but there were other secondary motives as well, and among them was that of offering us, in Christ, a perfect model and exemplar of holiness. In an absolute sense, the prototype of all holiness and sanctity is, of course, the Eternal Word, in whom the Father contemplates himself with infinite love. But it is this selfsame Word that came down to earth to assume our human nature, to be like us in all things except sin. As the Incarnate Word of the Father, Jesus Christ thus becomes for us the perfect ideal whom we ought to emulate and to whom we should become configured. Consequently, it is through Christ our model and exemplar that we are able to attain a holiness that is truly divine, imaging, however faintly, the sublime sanctity of the Eternal Word.

Christ is also the truth in the sense that he is our master and teacher. As he said at the Last Supper: "I have given them the teaching you gave to me, and they have truly accepted this, that I come from you, and have believed that it was you who sent me" (John 17:8). All of Christ's doctrine, from the Sermon on the Mount to the Seven Last Words, is directed to the one goal: the perfection of the life of grace and charity. Indeed, the very words of Christ give life, as was often manifested during his preaching and healing ministry. Rightly, then, did Peter reply when Christ asked if the Twelve also wanted to leave him: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe; we are convinced that you are God's holy one" (John 6:67-69).

## Christ the Life

Christ is our life in three different ways: ***as meritorious cause***, he obtained for us the grace that is the life of the spirit; ***as efficient cause*** he is the very source of the life of grace; ***and as Head of the Mystical Body*** he communicates life to the members.

### **Meritorious Cause**

The merit of Christ in relation to us flows from the redemptive sacrifice of his passion and death. Absolutely speaking, God could have freely forgiven the sin of Adam, but he required complete satisfaction, and this was possible only through the instrumentality of a divine Person who could bridge the infinite gap between the human and the divine. The offense of sin is measured in terms of the one offended, who is God, and that is why purely human satisfaction can never suffice as atonement for sin.

When the Word was made flesh in the person of Christ, a human nature and a divine nature were hypostatically united in the Person of the Word. And although the slightest action performed by the incarnate Word could have redeemed the human race, the Father willed that mankind be redeemed through the passion and death of Christ. Consequently, the sacrificial act by which Christ atoned for sin was far beyond the demands of strict justice. So also, the merits of Christ crucified are infinite and superabundant. This is the basis of our hope, for Christ died for us, and therefore his merits are at our disposition. Our weakness serves as a basis for appealing to the divine mercy, and the infinite merits of Christ give us the assurance that salvation can be ours.

All the graces bestowed on the human race since the original sin of Adam have been granted only by reason of the merits of Christ the Redeemer. All the graces bestowed on the human race until the end of the world will likewise be given through the merits of Jesus Christ. That is why the Church always prays "through Jesus Christ."

### **Efficient Cause**

Jesus Christ is the Mediator, the Source, and the Dispenser of all grace because he is the Redeemer of the human race. And just as the Word needed to be united with a human nature in order to die for our redemption, so also the divine Person uses the sacred humanity of Christ as an instrument for conferring on men the supernatural life of grace. Thus, St. Paul writes:

Though he was in the form of God, he did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at. Rather, he emptied himself and took the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of men. He was known to be of human estate, and it was thus that he humbled himself, obediently accepting even death, death on a cross! Because of this, God highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name above every other name, so that at Jesus' name every knee must bend in the heavens, on the earth, and under the earth, and every tongue proclaim to the glory of God the Father: Jesus Christ is Lord! (Phil. 2:6-11).

Jesus frequently referred to himself as the "Son of man" to indicate that through his sacred humanity he performed the works of his ministry, he preached his gospel, he worked miracles, he conferred grace and forgiveness of sin, and he died for our salvation. St. Thomas explains the function of the sacred humanity as follows:

To give grace or the Holy Spirit authoritatively belongs to Christ as God, but to give it instrumentally belongs to him as man, since his humanity is the instrument of his divinity. And

hence in virtue of his divinity his actions were salutary so far as they caused grace in us meritoriously and efficiently.(9)

### **Head of the Mystical Body**

St. Paul speaks of Christ's headship over the Mystical Body when he states that Christ is "head of the Church, which is his body: the fullness of him who fills the universe in all its parts" (Eph. 1:22-23). As Head of the body which is his Church, Christ exercises a capital influence over all the members of that body.

St. Thomas explains that Christ as Head exercises a threefold primacy over the Mystical Body: a primacy of order, of perfection, and of power. He has the *primacy of order* because he is the first-born of many brethren (Rom. 8:29) and has been placed above everything in this world and in the world to come (Eph. 1:21). He has the *primacy of perfection* because, as St. John says, he is full of grace and truth (John 1:16). He has the *primacy of power* because of his fullness we have all received (John 1:16). These same characteristics are listed by St. Paul when he says: "Now the Church is his body, he is its head. As he is the Beginning, he was first to be born from the dead, so that he should be first in every way; because God wanted all perfection to be found in him and all things to be reconciled through him and for him, everything in heaven and everything on earth, when he made peace by his death on the cross" (Col. 1:18-20).

So far as it relates to our spiritual life, the most important aspects of Christ's headship are the primacy of perfection and power, for here we are touching the very formality of headship, namely, the life of grace. Christ, as we have seen, possesses grace in its plenitude (primacy of perfection) and from his fullness we receive grace for grace (primacy of power). But how does Christ exercise his capital influence, his primacy of power, on souls? He exercises it in many ways, but they can be summarized under two headings: through the sacraments and through contact by faith vivified by charity.

To understand the influence of Christ on souls *through the sacraments*, we need only recall the Church's teaching that Christ instituted the seven sacraments as sensible signs that communicate grace to those who receive them worthily.(10) It goes without saying that the influence and power of Christ are not so restricted to the sacramental signs that it would be impossible for persons to receive grace outside the sacramental structure. On the contrary, we can safely assume that there are many souls who receive grace and grow in the spiritual life without having access to the sacraments. *What the sacraments do is provide greater certitude and facility for the reception of grace.*

The Church has declared that the sacraments produce grace by their intrinsic power, received from the merits of Jesus Christ. They are in fact so closely associated with Christ that after him they are the most powerful means of grace that we have at our disposal. It is necessary, however, to note that when the Council of Trent states that the sacraments can give grace by the very fact of being conferred (*ex opere operato*), it also asserts that this applies only to those recipients who place no obstacle to the sanctifying effects of the sacrament in question.(11) Hence the importance of possessing the proper dispositions for the valid and fruitful reception of the sacraments.

***Contact with Christ is effected also through a faith vivified by charity.*** St. Paul states that Christ dwells in our hearts through faith (Eph. 3:17), and St. Thomas explains this by saying that "by faith Christ's power is united to us." (12) This was especially evident during Christ's earthly ministry when power came forth from him to cure sicknesses of body and soul (Luke 6:19). On numerous occasions Christ would say, as he did to the woman who anointed him: "Your faith has saved you; go in peace" (Luke 7:50). But Christ is the same, yesterday, today, and forever; therefore we can be confident that if we approach him with faith and love, the same saving and healing power will emanate from him, as Dom Marmion points out:

How, then, can we doubt that when we approach him, even outside the sacraments, with humility and confidence, divine power comes forth from him to enlighten, strengthen, and help us? No one has ever approached Jesus Christ with faith without being touched by the beneficent rays that ever escape from this furnace of light and heat. (13)

### ***Through Him, With Him, In Him***

***The essence of the Christian life can be summarized in the following statement: the glory of God is the ultimate end, our sanctification is the proximate end, and incorporation in Christ is the only way of attaining both ends. Everything depends on living the mystery of Christ with ever-increasing intensity because Christian spirituality is nothing other than an intimate participation in the mystery of Christ. The liturgical formula that best describes the theology of our incorporation in Christ is the one that the celebrant pronounces in the Mass as he holds aloft the sacred species: "Through him, with him, in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor are yours, almighty Father, forever and ever."***

As expressed in this formula, the glory of the Trinity is the absolute end of the whole created universe and of the redemption and sanctification of mankind. But in the plan of God, the glory of the Trinity is realized through Christ, with Christ, and in Christ. Therefore the principal concern of Christians who are striving for perfection should be to configure themselves to Christ and to do all things in Christ. Then they can make a worthy offering of all their actions to the heavenly Father, and the Father will love them, as Jesus has promised: "The Father already loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God" (John 16:27). For this reason the Church never asks anything from the Father except "through Jesus Christ, our Lord."

Not only should Christians do all things and ask all things through Jesus Christ, they should also strive to do all things with Christ. We have already seen that this concept of union with Christ appears constantly in the writings of St. Paul. Blessed as he was with a profound understanding of the mystery of Christ, St. Paul could not conceive of anything that would ever separate him from Christ:

For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:38-39). Jesus Christ is the source of grace for us, and the grace that he bestows as Head of the Mystical Body is the selfsame grace that filled his sacred humanity with "all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:19). Moreover, as the second Person of the Trinity, the Word dwells in our souls through grace.



Therefore, to say that we can and should do all things with Christ is no pious exaggeration; it is a theological fact. Every soul that receives from Christ the life of grace that he came to give us, is by that very fact living a life of union with Christ. But one should also live with an awareness of union with Christ, and this is achieved through acts of faith in Christ, meditation on the mysteries of the life of Christ, and frequent reception of the sacraments instituted by Christ, especially the Eucharist.

To perform one's actions through Christ and with Christ denotes a high degree of perfection in one's faith and love, but greater still is that identification with Christ that enables the soul to do all things *in Christ*. To understand what this means it is helpful to think of our incorporation in Christ as Head of the Mystical Body or as the Vine of which we are the branches. St. Augustine taught that when Christ incorporated us to himself and made us members of his Mystical Body, *we in a sense became Christ. This being so, all our actions and sufferings take on a Christocentric modality, and it is now no longer we who live and act but Christ who lives and acts in us* (cf. Col. 1:24; 1:29; Matt. 10:42). The slightest action performed in Christ then takes on an infinite value, so to speak, gives great glory to God, and causes the heavenly Father to look on us with love and complacency.

Everything is directed to the Father. This was the constant and unique goal of everything that Jesus did. He sought always to do the Father's will (Matt. 26:39) and to glorify his Father (John 17:1). The first words of Christ recorded in the Gospel are: "Did you not know I had to be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49); and the last words he spoke on the cross were: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46). St. Paul summarizes beautifully our union with Christ and the need of directing all things to the glory of the Father: "All are yours; and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's" (1 Cor. 3:22-23).

But the glory of God does not pertain exclusively to the Father; it is glory given to the entire Trinity. In this way the divine circular motion is completed: Jesus, as Head and Mediator, gives the supernatural life of grace to his members; they, in turn, give glory to the Trinity by returning the gifts of the Spirit through Christ, with Christ and in Christ.

### **Mary--Mother and Mediatrix**

Jesus came that we might have life and have it to the full, as we read time and again in St. John's Gospel. Similarly, the Church places the following words on the lips of Mary: "He who finds me finds life, and wins favor from the Lord" (Prov. 8:35).

This indicates that Mary is not only the Mother of Christ, and therefore the Mother of God; she is also the Mother and Mediatrix of grace, and therefore the Mother of the Church, the Mystical Body and of the people of God. It is Mary's spiritual maternity that we wish to stress in these pages, for it is in her role as Mother and Mediatrix of grace that we can best appreciate Mary's role in our spiritual life. Léon Bloy touches on this aspect of Mary in the following lines:

As long as you have not learned to know Mary and have not given her your heart, you, will remain in darkness because you can receive the Holy Spirit only in her and through her .... Keep the exceptional teaching I am giving you hidden in the depths of your soul, and it will make you

glow before the Lord like a magnificent torch. You will feel, you will understand that inasmuch as the Word made flesh, Jesus the Redeemer, was given to the world by Mary his Mother, it follows necessarily that we who are his members and his brothers, must be brought forth by her, not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. The Church, whose language is ordinarily mysterious -- since she is obliged to speak in the manner in which God himself has spoken -- teaches us that **no grace, no power, no love, indeed nothing, absolutely nothing comes to us from God except through Mary** .... And that is an admirable, a sublime truth.

Now if you ask me how it happens that Mary, who is a real woman, or rather the real Woman, is so completely identified with the third Divine Person that she cannot be separated from him, I shall be obliged to leave you without an answer. I am not the confidant of the Blessed Trinity. But I know in a way that is absolutely, infinitely certain, that this is so. ***The Church, ever mysterious, calls Mary the Spouse of the Holy Ghost. This expression does not give forth much light, and yet it permits us to assume that the Mother of the Son of God possesses extraordinary importance and dignity.***(14)

The key to Mary's greatness and dignity is her divine maternity, as is beautifully expressed in the most popular of Marian prayers, the Hail Mary. **In the first part we salute Mary in the words of the angel, Hail, full of grace," to indicate that she was a chosen vessel, selected by God to be the Mother of his Son through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit.** In the light of her sublime vocation, everything in her life, before and after the Annunciation, revolves around her divine maternity. She was conceived immaculate, preserved from all stain of sin, so that she could be a ***Mater digna***, a Mother worthy of God's only begotten Son.

In the second part of the Hail Mary we implore her help and her prayers because as Mother of God she is an all-powerful advocate. In addition, she is our Mother, and she became such at the very moment that she uttered her *fiat* and the Word became flesh, although it was not solemnly ratified until that sublime moment when Jesus said from the cross: "Behold thy son .... Behold thy Mother." Thus, Mary's divine maternity is necessarily linked to her spiritual maternity as Mother of grace, which follows as a logical consequence from the fact that she is Mother of Christ. We offer two beautiful testimonies to this doctrine, the first from St. John Fades and the second from St. Louis Mary de Montfort:

From the instant the Blessed Virgin gave her consent to the Incarnation of the Son of God within her, she contributed to the salvation of all the elect. From that happy moment on, she has always carried them like a very good mother, that is, within the depths of her heart. This is true, for inasmuch as the Son of God is the Head of all the elect, they are one with him just as members are one with their head. And just as Mary has always carried this adorable Head in her maternal heart, so also she has always carried and will always carry in it all his authentic members.(15)

If Jesus Christ, the Head of men, is born in her, the predestinate, who are members of that Head, ought also to be born in her, by a necessary consequence. One and the same mother does not bring forth into the world the head without the members, or the members without the head; for this would be a monster of nature. So in like manner, in the order of grace, the Head and the members are born of one and the same Mother ....

Besides this, Jesus being at present as much as ever the fruit of Mary -- as heaven and earth repeat thousands and thousands of times a day: "and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus" -- it is certain that Jesus Christ is, for each man in particular who possesses him, as truly the fruit of the womb of Mary as he is for the whole world in general; so that if any one of the faithful has Jesus Christ formed in his heart, he can say boldly: "All thanks be to Mary! What I possess is her effect and her fruit, and without her I should never have had it." We can apply to her more than St. Paul applied to himself the words: "I am in labor again with all the children of God, until Jesus Christ my Son be formed in them in the fullness of his age" (Gal. 4:19).(16)

Through grace, every Christian is a member of Christ and, by that very fact, is also a child of Mary. The spiritual maternity of Mary is linked by logical necessity to the dogma of the Mystical Body. This indicates also that Mary's spiritual motherhood is not something added by extrinsic denomination to her divine maternity; rather, both maternities are one and simultaneous, as we have already indicated.

Mary's role in the sanctification of the Christian has been beautifully described in the writings of St. Louis Mary de Montfort. Here is a synthesis of his teaching: All Christians are called to perfection and sanctity; to reach perfection it is necessary to practice and perfect the virtues; to practice the virtues we need the help of God's grace; to obtain God's grace it is necessary to receive it through Mary. The reasons for the last statement are as follows: (1) of all God's creatures, only Mary found grace before God, both for herself and for others; (2) Mary gave birth to the Author of grace and is therefore called the Mother of grace; (3) in giving Mary his only begotten Son, the eternal Father gave Mary all graces; (4) God appointed Mary as dispenser of grace, and by reason of this office she gives grace to whom she wishes and when she wishes; (5) as in the natural order a child must have a father and a mother, so in the order of grace the Christian has God as the father and Mary as the mother; (6) since Mary formed the Head of the Mystical Body, she should also form the members; (7) Mary was and still remains the spouse of the Holy Spirit; (8) as in the natural order the child is nourished by its mother, in the supernatural order Mary nourishes and strengthens her children; and (9) he who finds Mary, finds Jesus, who is with her always.(17)

We receive grace through Jesus Christ in virtue of his merits as well as by reason of the fact that he is the source and fountain of grace as Head of the Mystical Body. In like manner we receive grace through **Mary as Mediatrix and co-Redemptrix**. Pope Benedict XV asserted that the Blessed Virgin, "in conjunction with Christ, redeemed the human race."(18) Therefore, in some unique way, Mary our Mother merited grace for us. Her cooperation with God in the Incarnation of his Son, her plenitude of grace and her ever-increasing charity, her total submission to the will of the Father -- all these qualities serve as a sound basis for her special type of merit for the sanctification of others.

It is true that only Jesus Christ could merit for us in strict justice; therefore when we speak of Mary's merit it can only be a question of congruous merit. Her merit rests completely on that of her Son, Jesus Christ, who made it possible that her life and works and prayers could be meritorious for herself and for others. Her merit is congruous in the highest possible degree, as St. Pius X indicated when he wrote: "In the work of our salvation, Christ joined his Mother to himself in such a way that she merited for us congruously what he himself merited for us

condignly."[\(19\)](#) It is on the basis of her special type of merit that she deserves to be called Mediatrix of all graces and co-Redemptrix.

Like her Son, Jesus Christ, Mary is in the state of glory. There she is closer to us and our needs and less a stranger to us than the departed souls of our beloved dead. Her love for her spiritual children bridges the vast distance between heaven and earth even as it places her before the throne of God to intercede for them. Her activity on behalf of her children is described as follows by a contemporary theologian:

The activity of the Blessed Virgin on our behalf can, it seems, be summed up in two decisive interventions that can be deduced from the Gospels .... At Cana, her intervention consisted in taking the initiative to say to her Son: "They have no wine," in having the boldness to urge him to act and then to act herself accordingly. On Calvary her intervention took place when everything within her impelled her to repeat after him: "They know not what they do." This would seem to encompass everything: on the one hand, our poor humanity in its indigence and sinfulness; and on the other hand, the incomparable maternity that wraps humanity in its grace and rushes to its rescue. Indeed these two acts are the most maternal acts possible. The first consists in giving her children something they need; the other, in winning forgiveness for their misdeeds. These acts reveal Mary in the fullness of her motherhood.[\(20\)](#)

Having seen the nature of Mary's role in our sanctification, we again turn to St. Louis Mary de Montfort to learn the characteristics of true devotion to our heavenly Mother: trustful love of a child for a loving mother. Thirdly, it should be holy; that is, it should prompt souls to avoid sin and to cultivate the Christian virtues. Fourthly, it should be constant; that is, it should strengthen the soul in good so that it will not abandon its spiritual practices. Fifthly, it should be disinterested; that is, it should enable the soul to rise above self and self-centered interest to seek God alone. [\(21\)](#)

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## CHAPTER NOTES

1. *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 108, a. 1; III, q. 7, a. 8.
2. St. Paul has another doxology in Col. 1:15-20.
3. Cf. *Mystici Corporis*, pp. 32-3; 42. See Denz.-Schön. 3811.
4. St. Teresa, *The Interior Castle*, trans. E. Allison Peers (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1946), p. 304.
5. Columba Marmion, *Christ, the Life of the Soul* (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1936), p. 39.
6. M. M. Philipon, *The Spiritual Doctrine of Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity* (Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1947), p. 54.
7. Marmion, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-1.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Summa theologiae*, III, q. 8, a. 1, ad 1.
10. Council of Trent, Denz.-Schön, 1606.
11. *Ibid.*, 1451; 1606.
12. *Summa theologiae*, III, q. 62, a. 5, ad 2.
13. Marmion, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

14. Léon Bloy, *Lettres à sa fiancée* (Paris, 1922), p. 127.
15. R. Bernard, *The Mystery of Mary*, trans. A. M. Bouchard, (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1960), p. 9.
16. St. Louis Mary de Montfort, *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Bay Shore, N.Y.: Montfort Fathers, 1949), pp. 21-2.
17. *Ibid.*, Part I, Chap. 1.
18. *Sodalitati N.D. a bona morte*, March 2, 1918.
19. *Ad diem illum*, February 4, 1904; Denz.-Schön. 3370.
20. R. Bernard, *op. cit.*, pp. 292-93.
21. St. Louis Mary de Montfort, *op. cit.*, Part I, Chap. 3.

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