

# THE ROSARY LIGHT & LIFE

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This issue of Light and Life invites us to rejoice as we celebrate Mary's Immaculate Conception. But it will be read in November, the Month of the Holy Souls, as we meditate on God's loving care for those who have died. Throughout November the Rosary Center offers daily Masses for our friends, and for the happy repose of the souls of their deceased loved ones. What connection can we find between Mary and the prayers we offer for the dead?

Fr. Paul Connor, O.P., is no stranger to *Light and Life* readers. In this issue he contributes a moving reflection on Mary as Queen, a model of justice and generosity in our daily lives, and a promise of solace as we face the inevitability of death.

In addition, we offer this charming reflection from the life of Blessed Henry Suso, a Dominican whose ministry spanned the first half of the 14th Century. While a student in Cologne, Henry befriended another Dominican. At the end of their studies, the two parted, with promises that the first to die would be assisted by Masses celebrated by the other.

Henry Suso's friend was the first to die, and Blessed Henry prayed and fasted for the eternal rest of his friend's soul. However, he forgot to offer the Masses he had promised. One morning, as Henry was praying privately, his friend appeared to him and asked why he had not offered the promised Masses. Henry asked, "*is it possible...that so many prayers and good works which I have offered to God do not suffice for you?*"

"No!" replied the saint's friend. "*It is the Blood of Jesus Christ that is needed to extinguish the flames by which I am consumed...I implore you to keep your word, and refuse me not that which in justice you owe me.*"

Suso asked several priests among his Dominican brothers to offer Mass for his friend, who appeared to the saint a few days later. He said, "*Behold, by the Blood of my Savior... I am now going to Heaven to contemplate Him whom we so often adored together under the Eucharistic veil.*" As we progress through this holy month, let us rejoice in the great gift Our Lord has given us!



THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

## THE FEMININE GENIUS, II *by Fr. Paul Connor, O.P.*

In Mary's exchange with the angel, at the Annunciation, Mary learns God wants her to be Queen-mother in His Son's eternal kingdom. These were undoubtedly words of the utmost importance to Mary, but in these democratic times, what is the value – to us – of celebrating Mary as Queen?

The late Pontiff, John Paul II, invites us to look beyond monarchy as a political institution, and to see Mary's Queenship as a sign of her powerful, universal, feminine concern for our well-being. Mary is, the Pontiff said, "*the feminine genius,*" a powerful spiritual force who looks out for us.

Mary's reply to the angel reveals her deep commitment to justice, a quality that will characterize her influence in our lives. She is perplexed to learn that she will conceive a child while she is a virgin. Mary is betrothed,

(Continued on page 4)

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## THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

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# **THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY**

## **THE OUR FATHER, PART IV**

### **Thy Will be Done on EARTH as It Is in HEAVEN**

*By Father Reginald Martin, O.P.*

#### **THE GIFT OF KNOWLEDGE**

Knowledge, which is capacity to live a good life, is among the gifts we receive from the Holy Spirit. In the Lenten sermons he preached in 1273, St. Thomas Aquinas remarked that the greatest proof of knowledge is our willingness to learn from others. An old joke says that a professional who consults no one but himself has a fool for a client; St. Thomas Aquinas shares this opinion. “...those who cling to their own judgment,” he said, “so as to mistrust others and trust in themselves alone, invariably prove themselves fools and are judged as such.”

#### **KNOWLEDGE AND HUMILITY**

To learn demands humility, the frank acknowledgment that we are neither the source of our talents and gifts, nor the sole guide by which we lead our lives. St. Thomas uses the example of a doctor and patient to describe this humility. “[W]hen a sick man consults a physician... he takes the medicine ...because it is the will of the physician. If he took only what he willed himself, he would be a fool.”

#### **THE IMITATION OF CHRIST**

In our moral lives, of course, we can have no greater teacher than God. Thus, we pray that God’s will be done – that is, that we may fulfill His plans for us. We may use many different words when we pray, but ultimately every prayer is – or should be – the simple request that we adapt our will to God’s. In this way we imitate Our Savior, who said, “I came down from heaven to do, not my own will, but the will of Him that sent me” (John 6:38).

#### **GOD’S WILL ON EARTH AND IN HEAVEN**

When we were small, the catechism asked, “Why did God make me?” The answer is “to know, love and serve Him in this life, and to be happy with Him in heaven.” We shall see that God’s will is manifold, but it is, first of all, a desire for our eternal happiness. Because we are the only part of material creation to enjoy this destiny, to pray for God’s will to be done is to ask that we may fulfill the uniquely human purpose God has in mind for us.

The angels and saints enjoy the everlasting happiness we can only look forward to. When we pray to do God’s will on earth as it is done in heaven, we are asking to know, love and serve God as completely as those who have already achieved the end for which God created us.

#### **ENDS AND MEANS**

When we desire something we not only will what we desire, but whatever will enable us to achieve our goal. God wills us to be saved, so He gives us the commandments by which we reach our salvation. When we pray to do God’s will, we ask to share the life of the saints; this much is very clear. What we may overlook – or fail to consider – is that to pray for an “end” or goal is to pray for all the steps necessary to reach the goal. Thus, when we pray to share the saints’ everlasting life, we pledge ourselves to follow the commandments, which are the means by which we will come to this life.

#### **A WORD ABOUT OUR WORDS**

St. Thomas asks us to pay attention to the words of our prayer. We do not urge God, “Do your will on earth,” nor do we say, “Let us do God’s will.” The first would appear to leave us out of the equation; the second to ignore God’s contribution to our salvation. St. Augustine taught, “He who created thee without thyself will not justify thee without thyself,” so when we say, “thy will be done” we acknowledge that our salvation is a project in which we will cooperate with God, asking God to provide the grace we need to achieve the full human potential of our actions.

St. John Chrysostom made the same point, in one of his homilies on St. Matthew, by asking: “see how He has taught us also to be modest, by making it clear that virtue is not of our endeavors only, but also of the grace from above?”

#### **EARTH AND HEAVEN; BODY AND SPIRIT**

To speak, as we do, of heaven and earth when we pray the Our Father, refers not so much to places as to the individuals who inhabit those places. We ask God to enlist us – and to work with us – in the quest for perfection, so that we sinful citizens of earth may embrace God’s will as the righteous have. This reconciliation of the realms of heaven and earth becomes a sign of God’s seeking to restore the human race to the dignity and harmony it enjoyed before our First Parents sinned.

In the Garden, Adam’s spirit was wholly subject to God, with the result that our first ancestor experienced no conflict between his body and his spirit. Human flesh was so (happily) subject to the human soul that it was not moved by passion. Nor was the body subject to illness or death. Sin, as we know, overturned that harmony.

For the soul to turn against God was a catastrophe; so were the consequences that our First Parents did not immediately see. Once the soul was no longer a mediating force between God and the human body, human flesh turned against the soul. The result was death, infirmity, and the ongoing struggle between the soul and the senses that is a common – and sad – fact of our human experience. St. Paul eloquently sums up the case when he writes, “*I behold another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind*” (Rom 7:23) and “*the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh*” (Gal. 5:17).

St. Augustine echoed St. Paul (anticipated St. Thomas Aquinas) when he wrote

*...it is thoroughly in accord with both our faith and hope, that we are to take heaven and earth in the sense of spirit and flesh... let the will of God be done on earth as it is in heaven; i.e., in such a way that... as the spirit does not resist God, but follows and does His will, so the body may also not resist the...soul, which at present is harassed by the weakness of the body, and is prone to fleshly habit.*

## OUR PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION

Scripture assures us the spiritual warfare that characterizes the moral life of Christians will result in God’s triumph, a triumph we will share when our bodies and souls are united in heaven, at the end of time. In the resurrection of the body, the earth of human flesh will once again embrace the heaven of the human spirit.

St. Ambrose, commenting on St. Paul, described the correlation of our earthly struggle to the reward we look forward to

*[The Apostle] urges that our joy in God and our delight in fulfilling His commands should increase more and more: the harder we strive in this world to give ourselves to the precepts of God... the more blessed shall we be in the life to come and the greater will be the glory which we attain in God’s presence.*

In the meantime, when we pray for God’s will to be done on earth as it is in heaven, we beg that we may enjoy, on earth, some taste of the righteousness, knowledge and life that characterizes the happiness of the blessed.

Although our experience of human weakness may convince us we can enjoy only the remotest taste of these blessings, St. John Chrysostom enthusiastically proclaims that we may relish these rewards even now, if we are single-minded in our pursuit of holiness.

*He hath bidden us make the earth a heaven and do and say all things, even while we are continuing in it [the earth], as having our conversation [in heaven] ...there is nothing to hinder our reaching the perfection of the powers above, because we inhabit the earth; but it is possible even while abiding here, to do all, as though already placed on high.*

He continues

*He did not at all say, “Thy will be done in me, or in us, but everywhere on the earth; so that error may be destroyed, and truth implanted, and all wickedness cast out, and virtue return, and no difference in this respect be henceforth between heaven and earth....*

## SACRAMENTAL HUMAN LIFE

Our faith teaches that Jesus chose certain elements from our life to go beyond whatever importance they may have in themselves, to become a point of connection with Him and His grace. St. Augustine taught that the results we seek from the Lord’s Prayer express a hope that we may return this favor – and that our actions, inspired by grace, may reveal Christ’s love.

*... we are to understand the words, “Thy will be done...” as in our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, as also in the Church; as if one were to say, As in the man who fulfilled the will of the Father, so also in the woman who is betrothed to Him. For heaven and earth are suitably understood as if they were man and wife; since the earth is fruitful from the heaven fertilizing it.*

## OUR PRAYER AND THE BEATITUDES

The Lord’s Prayer is a part of Jesus’ long Sermon on the Mount, an instruction that begins with the Beatitudes. “*Blessed are those who mourn,*” He says, “*for they shall be comforted*” (Matt 5:4). We ordinarily think of mourning as the sorrow we feel when we have lost something, or someone, of great value.

But our Christian life reveals another sort of sorrow – the grief we express when we ask forgiveness for sin. This is the “mourning” early Christian writers considered almost exclusively. This sorrow is blessed because it reminds us that only God can satisfy our desire for happiness. St. John Chrysostom urges us to look at the sorrow we feel when a loved one dies. Then he tells us our sorrow for sin ought to be greater. Obviously, this is a state we cannot reach without God’s grace. But the blessing promised to those who mourn reminds us that our contrition is a further link between God’s will as it is enjoyed by the saints, and as we experience it on earth.

## THE SORROW OF DELAY

St. Augustine wrote, “*Our souls are restless until they find their rest in Thee,*” a poignant description of our longing for God, and the frustration we experience because unity with God must be postponed. We may not think of this when we say the words of the Lord’s Prayer, but to ask that God’s will be done on earth is an expression of our longing for the everlasting life the saints enjoy in heaven.

## THE SORROW OF OUR STRUGGLES

Likewise, our prayer seeks resolution of the moral struggle between flesh and spirit. We grieve because

we are not nearly as good as we know we can (and ought to) be. God's commandments are fair, and reason assures us God bestowed them in love. Nevertheless, the commandments are difficult, and we often fail in our effort to keep them. To pray for God's will to be done on earth expresses our longing to enjoy once more mankind's state of original blessedness, in which the body delighted in its surrender to the spirit. ■

## THE FEMININE GENIUS II *(Continued from page 1)*

to be sure, but she does not yet fully share the life-commitment with her spouse that God has established as the foundation for mutual self-giving between a man and a woman, and created to protect and nourish human life from conception to maturity. Mary immediately sees the injustice of enjoying the fruits of married love without having completely embraced the demands of marriage.

The angel's reply sets these concerns to rest. Gabriel tells Mary her child will be conceived through God's Spirit, not a man, and – satisfied she will commit no injustice to a husband – Mary immediately shows another, richer, side of her character. Convinced that her "yes" will not impinge on the rights owed another, Mary is free to make a gift, something she does not owe.

Mary's gift, of course, is herself, body and soul, given to God for His own purposes. When Mary says, "*be it done unto me according to thy word*," she gives up the right to live for herself, and promises to live for God alone. This "yes," makes Mary a queen: God's spouse and the mother of His Son.

Mary is our guide in all things, but when we pray the fifth Glorious Mystery, and contemplate Mary as queen, we see her chastity as a special sign of justice. She teaches us that sexuality is not given solely for our personal enjoyment. Rather, it is an integral part of our relation to God and – if we marry – to the partner with whom we share the exclusive union God has provided for sexual self-giving.

But Mary's example can also inspire us to develop generosity as a significant trait. Generosity – giving beyond what is owed for the benefit of others – is the sweetest fruit of our freedom of choice, one that enriches any life-choice we make. What sister, brother or priest will not be loved by God's people who see her or him giving more than duty demands? What marriage will not suffer if husband and wife have not learned to give rather than take? What single person will not be lonely and unfulfilled who neglects to spend time and resources on the less fortunate?

One final aspect of Mary's queenship should give us immense consolation, and that is her role as our advocate. Jesus is King; His mother is Queen. The perfect man and the perfect woman reign now in the lives of God's people, and both will be present on the final day of history, when Jesus returns to earth for the Last Judgment.

Mary will be no passive spectator at that event. As Queen-mother she, too, will reign – unquestionably respecting the justice of her son's judgment, but adding the full generosity of her character, and thus revealing the ultimate value of her "feminine genius." Current events daily demonstrate the uncertainties of human life, but we may hold fast to one, unchanging truth: Our Savior's love for us will be enriched by Mary's maternal love.

## IF YOU ARE CONSIDERING CHRISTMAS GIFTS...

The Rosary Center offers a number of books and other items ideally suited for gift-giving at this holy time of the Church year.

*Advent, a Family Celebration*, provides prayers and activities for each day of the Advent season, and offers separate Scripture readings and reflections for both younger and older children.

Among Fr. Brian Mullady's CDs is *The 'O'Antiphons of Advent*. This reflection considers the special Scriptural titles given to Jesus, which form an accompaniment to Mary's Magnificat (sung at the Church's evening prayer) for the days leading up to Christmas.

*The Christmas Mouse* will delight children with its tale of an anonymous mouse who unexpectedly finds himself a witness to Jesus' birth at Bethlehem. The story incorporates verses from the gospel, to familiarize young readers with the actual inspired text.

*Day by Day with Mary* is a perpetual calendar, offering a brief daily meditation on Mary, taken from the writings of the saints. These include St. Augustine's petition, "*Holy Mary, pray for the miserable, strengthen the discouraged, comfort the sorrowful, pray for your people, plead for your clergy....*" We also find Mary's words to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, "*Fear nothing: you shall be my true daughter and I will always be your good mother.*"

We are pleased to offer a similar, perpetual, calendar, *Through the Year with Pope Benedict XVI*. Each day features an appropriate quote from one of the Holy Father's sermons or writings. On December 8, the Feast of Mary's Immaculate Conception, His Holiness observes, "*God...preserved Mary from every stain of sin. In this way, in the Mother of Christ and our Mother, the vocation of every human being is perfectly fulfilled.*"

The second volume of Fr. Paul Duffner's *To Know Him* will arrive soon from our printer. Like its earlier companion, this work contains newly-revised reflections from *Light and Life*. The thoughts are clear, concise, and – an advantage for those with limited time – brief. The publisher calls the book "*Everything You Want to Know about the Catholic Faith in Five Minutes a Day.*"

