



LIGHT & LIFE

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AM I NOT YOUR MOTHER?

By Fr. Joseph Sergott, OP

On Saturday, December 9, 1531, as dawn was breaking and the sun was coming over the hills, Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin was going to Tlatelolco for divine worship when he encountered a beautiful Lady of unearthly grandeur whose clothing was as radiant as the sun.¹ She stood in a glowing halo as though before the sun, with the stars on her mantle, the moon beneath her feet, and an angel holding up her tunic. Her hair and skin reflected the appearance of the local Indian people. She spoke in the native language of Juan Diego as she addressed him affectionately, "Juanito, Juan Dieguito!"

With gentleness and courtesy, the Lady—Our Lady of Guadalupe—reveals things about God and herself to Juan Diego and also makes some requests of him. Along with asking Juan Diego to speak to the bishop on her behalf, she also requests that a church be built.

Regarding the Lord, she says to Juan Diego, "I will show Him, I will exalt Him, and make Him manifest." Further, in revealing her special role as Mother, she tells Juan Diego, "I will give Him to the people in all my personal love, in my compassion, in my help, in my protection: because I am truly your merciful Mother, yours, and all the people who live united in this land and of all the other people of different ancestries, those who love me, those who seek me, those who trust in me. Here I will hear their weeping, their complaints, and heal all their sorrows, hardships and sufferings."

So begins an intimate relationship with Our Lady of Guadalupe and her people—those who look to her as Mother. Which child doesn't want this kind of a promise from their mother? It is no wonder that the peoples of Mexico and the Americas have looked to Our Lady of Guadalupe for guidance, help and protection for almost 500 years?

In her conversations with Juan Diego, she reveals more about herself and the Lord whom she serves, "Know and understand

that I am the ever Virgin Mary, Mother of the true God through whom all things live." In her simple greeting, Our Lady reveals three things to Juan Diego and to us: 1) that she is the ever Virgin Mary, 2) that she is appropriately called the Mother of God, and 3) that God is the One through whom all things live.

It is curious that she says "ever Virgin Mary" because we know that she appeared to Juan Diego with a black bow around her waist signifying that she was with child. In this way, the Blessed Virgin makes clear that she conceived Jesus in her womb through the power of the Holy Spirit, and that even after giving birth to him, never had marital relations with a man.²



Regarding her role as Mother of God, the Holy Scriptures reveal to us that Mary of Nazareth was chosen by God to be the Mother of his Son.³ Thus, because the Son's human nature was assumed by his divine Person at the very beginning of conception, we can say that God was conceived and born of the Virgin Mary.⁴

As the Eternal Word assumed our human flesh through the power of the Holy Spirit, because the dignity of Jesus' humanity could not be tainted by original sin,⁵ it would seem that his Mother must also be preserved from any sin. It is not widely known that when Our Lady of Guadalupe appeared to Juan Diego it was on the actual Feast of the Immaculate Conception.⁶ This is not coincidental: the Immaculate Conception refers to Mary's conception in the womb of her mother, that is, that she was conceived without

the stain of original sin. Therefore, Mother and Child were both conceived without any sin. There can be no doubt that Our Lady of Guadalupe had the explicit intention of us linking herself with the Immaculate Conception.

In addition, as Our Lady says that she is the Mother of the true God through whom all things live, we are reminded of the words of Holy Scripture: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came

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THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

Invoking Mary as Helper in Dire Need

By Fr. Richard Schenk, O.P.

[A native of California, Fr. Richard Schenk OP is a member of the Western Dominican Province. After studies in Santa Barbara, Berkeley and Munich, including post-graduate work on the edition of medieval texts, he taught philosophy and theology in Berkeley, Eichstaett and Freiburg in Breisgau, Germany. He directed centers of philosophical, theological and cultural research in Hannover, Germany, and Washington, D.C. From 2011-2014 he served as president of the Catholic University of Eichstaett-Ingolstadt. Now semi-retired, he continues to write and to teach part-time in Freiburg, Germany, and Heiligenkreuz, Austria, while helping with Newman work and the Dominican church in Freiburg.]

“What we do through others, we somehow (*aliqua*liter) do through ourselves.” Thomas Aquinas found in this casual observation from Aristotle’s Ethics an insight that he could use to unravel in good part several of the theological puzzles around the human goals of nature and grace and his own pioneering interpretation of charity as friendship. In a far more pedestrian sense, it is also true of several of “my” contributions to Mariology, that they stemmed from the initiative of others. To be a novice of the Novice Master Fr. Thomas Aquinas Feucht O.P. at St. Albert’s Priory in Oakland in the early 1970’s meant not just reading and hearing about but also working on occasion for his beloved *Light & Life*. I had managed for most of the novitiate year to keep from him the knowledge that I had done a bit of off-set printing in the summers prior to my vestition, yielding the privilege of printing the issues to more capable student hands, but in the summer, with the students out on their summer assignments, I finally had to confess that I could access the press and use it to complete an overdue issue featuring Mariological articles. When I was sent to Munich a few years later for theological studies, I was invited by my doctoral director, the acknowledged Mariologist Leo Scheffczyk (1920-2005), later Cardinal Scheffczyk, to become his last academic assistant before his retirement. I was also “invited” by him after the end of his and my official service at the university to continue to work with him (quasi as his Sancho Panza) on a number of Mariological projects, including the six volumes of the *Marienlexikon* (1988-1994), which he was editing with the noted church historian, Remigius Bäumer. In addition to a good bit of proof-reading, I was able to revise or author just over thirty articles, including original entries on the Mariological themes in the writings of St. Thomas, Karl Rahner, and C.G. Jung (in this last case, together with my former teacher at St. Albert’s, Fr. Antonio Moreno, an expert on Jung). So I was not all that surprised when recently Fr. Joseph Sergott, Promoter of the Rosary Confraternity and current editor of *Light & Life*, asked what I might contribute *inter alia* to the Marian themes of this publication.

That Mariological Lexikon co-edited by Scheffczyk contains a long and informative article on the history and theology of the so-called “Litany of Loreto”, written by Walter Dürig, for many years professor for liturgical theology in Munich and director of the “Georgianum”, the residence there for graduate student priests where Joseph Ratzinger and many others had resided during their university studies: (“*Lauretansche Litanei. I. Geschichte. II. Theologie*”, *Marienlexikon*, St. Ottilien, EOS 1992, Vol. 4, pages 33-42, followed by a concise discussion of the iconography

of the litany, authored by G. Nitz, 42-44). The article would likely be of considerable interest to today’s readers of *Light & Life*.

Dürig distinguishes there the successive series of invocations, as they had developed from Marian meditations on the Litany of All Saints several centuries prior to the use of the meanwhile independent litany at the shrine of Loreto in the sixteenth century. Dürig refers to several of the older manuscripts that show the Litany at various stages of its genesis from the eighth to the twelfth century. Several of the groups of invocations can be named after the initial word by which they invoke Maria: the twelve invocations of Mary as mother, the five invocations of the Blessed Virgin, the thirteen invocations of Mary linked to visible symbols (like the mirror of justice or the seat of wisdom). Prior to the dozen invocations of Mary as Queen, there is a smaller group of four invocations that Dürig calls the invocations of Mary as helper in times of dire need (“*Nothelferin*”). Together with the introductory (and seemingly the oldest) three invocations, this last named group is also the shortest, but arguably it is one that merits our particular attention: *Salus Infirmorum* - Health of the Sick; *Refugium Peccatorum* - Refuge of Sinners; *Consolatrix Afflictorum* - Comforter of the Afflicted; *Auxilium Christianorum* - Help of Christians.

In the years since Dürig’s article, the once neglected treatise of Thomas Aquinas on “*religio*” in the *Summa Theologiae* (ST II-II 80-100) has become increasingly studied and debated. Part of the reason for this new interest are still open questions on the relationship between Christian and non-Christian religions, between theological and moral, infused and acquired virtues, between grace and nature. These complex questions go beyond the scope and possibilities of this article. But three central theses on prayer that Thomas developed here help us begin to gauge the importance of these four Marian invocations. 1. Religion is a paradigmatic act of justice. Although many who do not know how to pray can show us nevertheless what true justice is, they cannot show us that particular fullness of true justice that consists in religion as reverencing God (“*religio*” as a powerful and the most transcendent part of that “potential whole” which is justice), the reverential acknowledgement of God, from whom all goods come that we have ever received or could ever hope for and, above and behind them all, God himself. 2. Prayer, especially interior prayer, is the paradigmatic act of religion. 3. Prayers of petition, at their core an “*interpres desiderii*”, an articulation of the dire needs of ourselves and others, are key to understanding all forms of prayer. They are not just about our needs, but about God, who is thereby acknowledged and revered as the ultimate and unique fulfillment of all that we desire most. Turning to God in our and others’ need is a paradigmatic act of prayer. Religion, a paradigm of justice. Prayer, a paradigm of religion. Petition and intercession, a paradigm of prayer.

Salus Infirmorum - Health of the Sick. Dürig cites an important manuscript from Paris around the year 1200 to show that the invocation, “*salus infirmorum*”, belongs to the earliest stages of the litany, recognizing in Mary a trusted intercessor in times of sickness. To appreciate Mary’s role in

What Would Mary Say?

By Fr. Richard Schenk, O.P.

bringing this plea for the fullness of life and the restoration of health before God, we need to recall what it means that Christ himself became our “*salus*” precisely by bearing our infirmity. Here, too, another text by Thomas Aquinas can be of particular help. In the brief but foundational prologue to the Christological culmination of his *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas brings in the three sentences of this prologue seven references to Christ as our “*salus*” and “*salvator*” (ST III, prol.) It might well be that God’s eternal providence has predestined Christ from all eternity to be the Omega point of all evolution towards universal perfection, but we, who are not the World-Spirit, first and foremost understand the reality and importance of Christ not as a strategy for the optimization of the universe but by seeing in him and his vicarious sufferings the unique grace of “salvation”, the only “salvaging” of the many particular, non-divine, yet rightly cherished and endangered goods that are ours and our loved ones. Christ becomes our “Salvation” and our “Savior” not just by his divine perfection and omnipotence but by his fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy of the Suffering Servant: “Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed.” (Is 53: 4-5). Christ, bearing for all eternity the marks of our woundedness, is our primordial *salus* and *salvator*.

The invocation of Mary as helper in our direst needs expresses our confidence that she effectively intercedes as our “*interpres desiderii*”, praying with and for us in reverence for the Savior as the source of our salvation. And like the Savior, she does this as a disciple who has shared in his affliction. Not just in John 19, but already near the beginning of Luke (Lk 2, 34f.), the Gospels point to this share by Mary in the strength and the infirmity of the Savior: “Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against, (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed.” It is due both to her attention to the Savior and to her share in his and our infirmity that she can be invoked as “*salus infirmorum*.”

Refugium peccatorum - Refuge of sinners. The moment of solidarity that Mary shares with the Savior and those seeking salvation is clearer here in a formulation of this invocation that Dürig shows to be at least as old: *Refugium reorum*, Refuge of the accused. “*Reus*” can, but need not, refer to someone who has incurred guilt. A famous principle of jurisprudence regarding the burden of proof includes such a nuance: “*In dubio pro reo*”, “In cases of doubt, the decision must be for the accused”, who might possibly be innocent. Again, the paradigm of accepted accusation is Christ. From the beginning of his ministry among the sinners coming to John for baptism, well through his death under Pilate’s inscription, which was designed as a mockery and accusation of the futility of Jesus and his people’s covenant, “Jesus of Nazareth, Jew-King”, Jesus, though innocent, shared in solidarity the pain of accusation. “And they made his grave with the wicked” (Is 53:9). It was against such accusations of the futility of faith and hope that he became our Advocate and promised to send “another Paraclete”, the Holy Spirit, who as the soul of the Church enables all Christians to be “paracletic” against the external and internal voices that try to tell us that our hope is mere folly. Under the Cross, Mary endures in unbroken hope the sting of this written accusation and becomes for the accused, the innocent and the guilty, a *refugium reorum*, (Continued on page 4)

What do we expect Mary to say when we invoke her in the Litany of Loreto as a helper in times of dire need (German Catholics see her here as the principal “*Nothelferin*” among the saints)? Something or nothing? And to whom?

Our invocation, whether spoken quietly for ourselves or out loud in a group, asks Maria under a particular title to become one with us in prayer as the *interpres desiderii*, to articulate with us and for us and others the particular need we are seeking to bring before the Lord. “*Ora pro nobis*. Pray for us”, was already the basic request expressed in the Litany of Saints, from which the Litany of Loreto developed.

The Roman Catholic and Eastern rite traditions of Christianity, like what came to be representative of the ancient and medieval Church but otherwise than several of the early modern Western communities that have separated from them, trust that Mary and all the souls of all the saints will join them in common intercession to God. There is a wise abstinence in trying to imagine the precise mode of speaking. In his treatise on religion and the question on prayer, Thomas Aquinas names the central point: “The greater the charity of the saints in heaven, the more they pray for wayfarers” (ST II-II 83, 11 co.) The Church in heaven is not so “triumphant”, that she has ceased to be “paracletic” and intercessory. She continues to share in the intercession of the crucified and risen Lord, in his “*pro nobis et pro vobis*”, and in the providential care of the Father. Not blessed chiefly on the condition of oblivion, the Church represented in Mary continues to be ensouled by the Paraclete: “But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words (Rom 8:26).

In asking Mary to join us in prayer, we are also asking that the charity in us be deepened from which true prayer arises. The devotion that generates “devotions”, like the inner prayer that expresses itself in vocal prayers, is internal before it expresses itself externally. To ask here, “What would Mary say?” is also to ask also what are the deeds and words that will be elicited in us from that charity that has intensified in our paracletic love for those who are infirm, accused, afflicted or persecuted for their faith. We wayfarers might well be surprised by all that Mary has to say in the new deeds and the new words of those who in the Spirit have joined her in intercession and petition. ■

A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.

Revelation 12:1

Please remember the Rosary Center in your will. By arranging a gift to the Rosary Center through your will, you can continue to support our apostolate of serving the Lord and his Mother into the future.



Invoking Mary as Helper (Continued from page 3)

a *refugium peccatorum*, the mother of a paracletic Church, a defender of hope in God's love for us. It is this share in the paracletic mission of Christ and his Spirit as continued in the Church that invites us to invoke Mary and to seek in prayer, religion and justice to join her as the "*Consolatio afflictorum*" and the "*Auxilium Christianorum*". It is also one of the profound truths of intercessory prayer: "What we do through others, we somehow do through ourselves."■

Am I Not Your Mother? (Continued from page 1)

to be. What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race." (John 1:1-4)

So, when Our Lady of Guadalupe pleads with us to take to heart her question, "Am I not your Mother?" she wants us to know that she is also God's Mother. Moreover, she wants us to have the same confidence, security, trust, and love for her that the Baby Jesus had! Truly we can call her Our Mother: we can bring anything to her and trust that she will always look over us.

Accordingly, just how are we to reach out to Our Lady in our time of need? How do we call upon our Mother? St. Louis de Montfort speaks of the marks of authentic devotion to Our Lady. First he says, "True devotion to Our Lady is interior, that is, it comes from within the mind and the heart and follows from the esteem in which we hold her, the high regard we have for her greatness, and the love we bear her." He also says that we must trust her, that is, we must have confidence in her like a child has for its loving Mother. This means that we can look to her for help always, everywhere and for everything. St. Louis also says that true devotion to Our Lady is holy, constant, and disinterested; that is, it leads us away from sin and toward the virtues of Mary; it strengthens us in our desire to do good and prevents us from giving up our devotional practices too early; and it inspires us to seek God alone in his Blessed Mother and not be overly concerned for ourselves.⁹

St. Louis also recommends enrolling in the Rosary Confraternity and praying with attention, devotion and reverence the mysteries of the Rosary.¹⁰ To be a member of the Rosary Confraternity, one is required to: 1) pray at least three rosaries (five decades each) per week (this does not bind under sin), 2) have your name officially inscribed in the register of the Rosary Confraternity (If you live on the West Coast, register at rosarycenter.org, or fill out a form and mail it to us), and 3) pray for the intentions of all the other members of the Rosary Confraternity worldwide, living and deceased.

Why should we join the Confraternity and why is the Rosary considered so essential?

The Rosary Confraternity is a spiritual association of the Catholic Church, under the care and guidance of the Dominican Order¹¹, whose members honor the Blessed Virgin Mary and place themselves under her protection by the praying of the Rosary. Members gain the special protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary and share in the prayers and works of hundreds of thousands of Confraternity members throughout the world (even after death), in the prayers, Masses and apostolic works of the entire Order of Preachers, and in the numerous indulgences granted to the Confraternity.

When we pray the Rosary, we are assured of the presence and protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary; the Rosary is the means by which she attaches souls to herself.¹² Further, because she is our Mother, there is nothing that we should keep from her; thus, we can bring to her our weaknesses, daily

faults, and even the worst of our sins, including whatever is impure or unseemly.¹³

The story of Our Lady of Guadalupe reminds us of what it means to be under Our Lady's protection. When Juan Diego's uncle became very ill and he had to go to Tlatelolco to find a priest to hear his uncle's confession, he went around the hill toward the east in order to arrive quickly in Mexico City, and thus avoid being detained by Our Lady. But, she, of course, intercepted him and said, "Listen and understand, my humblest son. There is nothing to frighten and distress you. Do not let your heart be troubled, and let nothing upset you. Is it not I, your Mother, who is here? Are you not under my protection? Are you not in my care?"

As children of God who hope for eternal life in heaven once our earthly life is finished, we look to a real Mother whose earthly life was entirely dedicated to looking after her Child—and who for eternity continues in her role as our Mother. Like she did with Juan Diego, who was stressed and worried, she sought him out, met him where he was, and assured him that she was his Mother, declaring her love, care and protection.

In seeking out Juan Diego—and all of us—Our Lady of Guadalupe reveals her role in bringing us to her Son, Jesus; this is the essential task that she still strives to fulfill as his Mother. In his letter to the Mexican people, Pope St. Paul VI said, "In the first place, she exhorts us to make Christ the center and summit of our whole Christian life."¹⁴ Thus, true devotion to Our Lady "reaches its fullness and its most rightful expression when it is a path to the Lord and directs all its love toward him."¹⁵

In the annual celebration of the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe on December 12th, the Church in her wisdom, uses intercessions in the breviary, the official prayer of the Church, prayed by millions of priests, religious and laity throughout the world, that reveal Our Lady's role as Mother of the Church and thus our Mother. Accordingly, knowing that God sent us the Blessed Virgin Mary to console us in our sorrow and to lead us to himself, we confidently pray each year, "Grant us her love, help, and protection." In addition, in this time of civil unrest and racial inequality, as "Mary is the gate through which the true Light shone over the earth," we seek, by the Light of her Son, justice for the oppressed, and peace and prosperity for all people—in our hearts, in our families and in our world. As God changed the barren landscape of Tepeyac into a fragrant garden of Castilian roses through Our Lady, may he transform us through our Mother that we may bear fruit as Christians.■

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1. From a Report by Don Antonio Valeriano, *Nican Mopohua*, 12th ed., 3-19, 21.
 2. Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-III.28.3.
 3. Cf. Luke 1:30-32
 4. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III.35.4.
 5. *Ibid*, II-III.28.1.
 6. Franciscan Friars of the Immaculate, *A Handbook on Guadalupe*, New Bedford, MA, 1997, p. 3.
 7. St. Louis de Montfort, *True Devotion to Mary*, Bay Shore, NY: Montfort Publications, 2010, #106.
 8. *Ibid*, #107.
 9. *Ibid*, #'s 108-110.
 10. *Ibid*, #116.
 11. Cf. Pope Leo XIII, *Ubi Primum*, "On the Confraternity of the Most Holy Rosary", 1898.
 12. *In Sinu Jesu*, Angelico Press: Kettering, OH, 2016, p. 96.
 13. *Ibid*, p. 110.
 14. Pope St. Paul VI, "Message of Pope Paul VI to the Mexican People," *L'Osservatore Romano*, October 18, 1970.
 15. *Ibid*