

Wonders of the Mother of God invoked under the title of Mary Help of Christians (3/13)

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Chapter III. Mary manifests her zeal and power with her son Jesus at the wedding feast of Cana.

In the Gospel of St John we find a fact that clearly demonstrates Mary's power and zeal in coming to our aid. We report the fact as told to us by the evangelist St. John in chap. II.

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.' His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.' Now standing there were six stone water-jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, 'Fill the jars with water.' And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, 'Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.' So they took it. When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said to him, 'Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.' Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

Here St John Chrysostom asks: Why did Mary wait

until this occasion of the wedding in Cana to invite Jesus to perform miracles and did not beg him to perform them before? And he answers, that this Mary did out of a spirit of submission to divine providence. For thirty years Jesus had led a hidden life. And Mary, who treasured all the acts of Jesus, *conservabat haec omnia conferens in corde suo*, as St Luke says (chapter II, v. 19), venerated with respectful silence that humiliation of Jesus. When he then realised that Jesus had begun his public life, that St. John in the desert had already begun to speak of him in his sermons, and that Jesus already had disciples, then he followed the initiation of grace with that same spirit of union with Jesus with which he had for thirty years respected his concealment and interposed his prayer to urge him to perform a miracle and manifest himself to men.

St Bernard, in the words *Vinum non habent*, they have no wine, sees a great delicacy on Mary's part. She does not make a long-winded prayer to Jesus as Lord, nor does she command him as a son; she only announces to him the need, the lack of wine. With beneficent hearts and inclined to liberality, there is no need to wrest grace from them with industry and violence, it is enough to propose the occasion. (St Bernard serm. 4 in cant.)

The angelic doctor St Thomas admires Mary's tenderness and mercy in this short prayer. For it is characteristic of mercy to consider the needs of others as our own, since the word merciful almost means a heart made for the miserable, to lift up the miserable, and here he quotes St Paul's text to the Corinthians: *Quis infirmatur et ego non infirmor?* Who is weak, and I am not weak? Now since Mary was full of mercy, she wanted to provide for the needs of these guests and therefore the Gospel says: Lacking wine, the Mother of Jesus said to him. Hence St Bernard animates us to turn to Mary, because if she had such compassion on the shame of those poor people and provided for them, even if she did not pray, how much more will she have mercy on us if we invoke her with confidence? (St Bernard *serm. 2 domini* II *Èpif.*)

St Thomas again praises Mary's solicitude and diligence in not waiting until the wine was completely lacking and the guests came to realise this to the dishonour of the invitees. As soon as the need was imminent, she drew help according to the saying in Psalm 9: *Adiutor in opportunitatibus, in tribulatione*.

Mary's kindness towards us demonstrated in this event shines out even more in her behaviour after her divine son's reply. At Jesus' words, a less confident, less courageous soul than Mary would have desisted from hoping further. Instead, Mary, not at all disturbed, turned to the servants at the table and said to them: Do whatever he tells you. *Quodcumque dixerit vobis, facite* (ch. II, v. 4). As if saying: Although he seems to deny doing, nevertheless he will do (Bede).

The learned Fr Silbeira lists a great range of virtues that shine in these words of Mary. The Virgin gave (says this author) a shining example of faith, for although she heard from her son the harsh reply: What have I to do with thee, yet she did not hesitate. When faith is perfect, it does not hesitate in the face of any adversity.

She taught trust: for although she heard from her son words that seemed to express a negative, indeed, as the above-mentioned Bede says, she could well believe that Christ would reject her prayers, nevertheless she acted against hope, trusting greatly in her son's mercy.

She taught love of God, while she procured that by a miracle his glory might be manifested. He taught obedience as he persuaded the servants to obey God not in this nor in that but in everything without distinction; *quodcumque dixerit*, whatever he tells you. She also gave an example of modesty when she did not take advantage of this occasion to boast of being the mother of such a son, for she did not say, 'Whatever my son will tell you;' but spoke in the third person. She still inspired reverence towards God by not pronouncing the holy name of Jesus. I have never yet found, says this author, in Scripture that the blessed Virgin

pronounced this most holy name because of the great reverence she professed for it. She gave an example of readiness, for she did not exhort them to hear what she would say, but to do it. Finally, he taught prudence with mercy, for he told the servants to do whatever he told them, so that when they heard Jesus' command to fill the jars with water, they would not consider it ridiculous: it was a supreme and prudent mercy to prevent others from falling into evil (P. Silveira, *tom. 2, lib. 4, quest. 21*).

Chapter IV. Mary chosen as the help of Christians on Mount Calvary by the dying Jesus.

The most splendid proof that Mary is the help of Christians we find on Mount Calvary. As Jesus hung agonisingly on the cross, Mary overcoming natural weakness assisted him with unprecedented strength. It seemed that nothing more remained for Jesus to do to show how much he loved us. His affection, however, still made him find a gift that was to seal the whole series of his blessings.

From the top of the cross he turned his dying gaze upon his mother, the only treasure he had left on earth. Woman, said Jesus to Mary, behold thy son; thence he said to his disciple John: behold thy mother. And from that point, the evangelist concludes, the disciple took her among his possessions.

The holy Fathers in these words recognise three great truths:

1. That St John succeeded Jesus in all things as the son of Mary;
2. That therefore all the offices of motherhood which Mary exercised over Jesus passed over to the new son John;
3. That in the person of John Jesus intended to include the whole human race.

Mary, says St Bernardine of Siena, by her loving co-operation in the ministry of Redemption has truly begotten us on Calvary to the life of grace; in the order of health we

are all born from Mary's sorrows as from the love of the Eternal Father and the afflictions of his Son. In those precious moments Mary became strictly our Mother.

The circumstances that accompanied this solemn act of Jesus on Calvary confirm what we assert. The words chosen by Jesus are generic and appellative, observes the aforementioned Father Silveira, but they are sufficient to make us know that we are dealing here with a universal mystery, which includes not just one man, but all those men to whom this title of beloved disciple of Jesus befits. Thus the words of the Lord are a most ample and solemn declaration that the Mother of Jesus has become the mother of all Christians: *Ioannes est nomen particulare, discipulus commune ut denotetur quod Maria omnibus detur in Matrem.*

Jesus on the cross was not a mere victim of the malignity of the Jews, he was a universal pontiff working as a repairer for the whole human race. So in the same way that by begging forgiveness from the crucifiers he obtained it for all sinners; by opening Paradise to the good thief he opened it to all penitents. And just as the crucifiers on Calvary according to St Paul's energetic expression represented all sinners, and the good thief all true penitents, so St John represented all the true disciples of Jesus, the Christians, the Catholic Church. And Mary became, as St. Augustine says, the true Eve, the mother of all those who spiritually live, *Mater viventium*; or as St. Ambrose says, the mother of all those who believe; *Mater omnium credentium*. Mary therefore becoming our mother on Mount Calvary not only had the title of helping Christians, but she acquired the office, the magisterium, the duty. We therefore have a sacred right to have recourse to Mary's help. This right is consecrated by Jesus' word and guaranteed by Mary's maternal tenderness. Now that Mary interpreted Jesus Christ's intention on the cross in this sense and that He made her the mother and helper of all Christians is proven by her subsequent conduct. We know from the writers of her life how much zeal she showed at all times for the health of the world and for the increase and glory of holy Church. She directed

and advised the Apostles and disciples, exhorted and animated all to keep the faith, to preserve grace and to make it active. We know from the Acts of the Apostles how regular she was at all the religious gatherings that those first faithful of Jerusalem held, because never were the divine mysteries celebrated without her taking part in them. When Jesus ascended to heaven she followed him with the disciples to Mount Olivet, to the place of the Ascension. When the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles on the day of Pentecost, she was in the Upper Room with them. So says s. Luke who, after naming one by one the Apostles gathered in the Upper Room, says: "ll these persevered in prayer together with the women and with Mary the mother of Jesus."

The Apostles, moreover, and the disciples and as many Christians as lived in and around Jerusalem at that time, all flocked to Mary for advice and direction.

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