

□ Reading time: 7 min.

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Chapter II. Mary shown to be the help of Christians by the Archangel Gabriel in the act of proclaiming her the Mother of God.

The things thus far set forth were gathered from the Old Testament and applied by the Church to the Blessed Virgin Mary; now let us turn to the literal meaning according to what is written in the Holy Gospel.

The Evangelist St Luke in Chapter I of his Gospel relates that the Archangel Gabriel having been sent by God to announce to Mary Most Holy the dignity of Mother of Jesus, said to her: *Ave, gratia plena, Dominus tecum, benedicta tu in mulieribus*. Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you, blessed are you among women.

The Archangel Gabriel greeting Mary calls her full of grace. Therefore Mary possesses the fullness of it.

St Augustine expounding the words of the Archangel thus greets Mary: Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you; You in your heart, You in your womb, You in the depths of your being, You in your help. *Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum, tecum in corde, tecum in ventre, tecum in utero, tecum in auxilio*. (August. in Serm. de nat. B. M.).

The angelic doctor St. Thomas says of the words *Gratia plena* that Mary must truly have had the fullness of graces and reasons thus: The closer one is to God, the more one participates in God's grace. Those Angels in heaven who are closest to the divine throne are more favoured and richer than the others. Now Mary, closest of all to Jesus because she gave him human nature, was to be enriched with grace. (*D. Thomas* 3, p., qu. 27, act. 5).

The Angel Gabriel said it very well, proclaiming Mary, full of grace, St Jerome observes, because that grace, which is communicated only in part to other saints, was lavished in Mary in all its fullness.

Dominus tecum. The Archangel to confirm this fullness of grace in Mary explains and amplifies the first words *gratia plena* by adding *Dominus tecum*, the Lord is with you. Here all doubt of exaggeration of the previous words falls away. It

is no longer only God's grace that comes in all its abundance in Mary, but it is God Himself who comes to fill her with Himself and establish His dwelling in her chaste womb, making it His temple, thus sanctifying the Most High His tabernacle: *Sanctificavit tabernaculum suum Altissimus*.

So too, according to the sense of the Church, comment st. Thomas Aquinas and St Laurence Justinian and St Bernard.

And since Mary, in her profound humility, was disturbed and asked for an explanation of such an extraordinary annunciation, the Archangel Gabriel confirmed what he had said and developed its meaning. *Ne timeas, Maria*, said Gabriel, *invenisti enim gratiam apud Deum: Ecce concipies in utero et paries filium et vocabis nomen eius Jesum*. Fear not, O Mary, for you have found favour with God: Behold, you shall conceive and bear a son, whose name you shall call Jesus. And wanting to explain how the mystery would take place, he added: *Spiritus Sanctus superveniet in te et virtus Altissimi obumbrabit tibi, ideoque et quod nascetur ex te Sanctum vocabitur Filius Dei*. The Holy Spirit will descend upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you, and for this reason also that which will be born of you is Holy and will be called the Son of God.

Let us now listen to St Antoninus, Archbishop of Florence, to explain these words of the Gospel.

"From these words (*invenisti gratiam*) the excellence of Mary is made manifest. The Angel in saying that Mary found grace does not mean that she found it only then, whereas Mary already had grace before the Angel's Annunciation; she had it from birth; therefore she never lost it, she found it rather on behalf of the whole human race that had lost it with original sin. Adam by his sin lost grace for himself and for all, and with the penance he did afterwards he only recovered grace for himself. Mary then found it for all, because through Mary all had grace virtually, inasmuch as through Mary we had Jesus who brought grace to us." (*D. Antoninus part. tit. 15, § 2*).

Therefore, what the holy Fathers teach is unquestionable, namely that Mary, finding this grace, restored to mankind as much good as the evil that Eve had brought us by losing grace.

So Cardinal Ugone, taking the floor on behalf of the men, humbly presents himself to Mary and says to her: "You must not hide this grace, which you have

found, because it is not yours, but you must put it in common so that those who lost it may regain it as is right. Therefore let those who sinned and lost grace run to the Virgin, and finding it with Mary, let them say humbly and confidently: 'Give us back, O Mother, our property, which you have found. And they will not be able to deny having found it, for the Angel bears witness to this, saying: *Invenisti*, you have found it, not bought it, for that would not be grace, but freely received it, therefore *invenisti*, you have found it.'

The same truth is gathered from the words that St. Elizabeth spoke to Mary. When the Blessed Virgin went to visit St Elizabeth, the latter, as soon as she saw her, was filled with the Holy Spirit, and so full that she began to prophesy in an inspired manner: *Benedicta tu inter mulieres, et benedictus fructus ventris tui*.

Are we not to confess that Mary had received the mission to sanctify? And yes, it was precisely Mary who brought about this sanctification of Elizabeth, since St Luke says precisely: *Et factum est ut audivit salutationem Mariae Elisabeth exultavit infans in utero eius et repleta est Spiritu Sancto Elisabeth*. And it came to pass that as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Precisely when Mary came into her house she greeted her and Elizabeth heard the greeting. Origen says that St John could not feel the influence of grace before she who bore the authority of grace was present to him. And Cardinal Ugone, observing that Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and sanctified John on hearing Mary's greeting, concludes: 'Let us greet her therefore often, so that in her greeting we too may find ourselves filled with grace, since it is written of her especially: Grace is poured out on your lips, so that grace flows from Mary's lips. *Repleta est Spiritu Sancto Elisabeth ad vocem salutationis Mariae: ideo salutanda est frequenter ut in eius salutatione gratia repleamur; de ipsa enim specialiter dietim est: Diffusa est gratia in labiis tuis (Ps. 14) Unde gratia ex labiis eius fluit.*'

Saint Elizabeth, following the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, with which she had been filled, returned Mary's greeting by saying to her: *Benedicta tu inter mulieres*: Blessed art thou among women. With these words, the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of Elizabeth, exalted Mary above every other fortunate woman, wanting to teach that Mary had been blessed and favoured by God by electing her to bring to men that blessing, which had been lost in Eve and had been hoped for for forty centuries, that blessing which, by removing the curse, was to confound death and give us eternal life. To her kinswoman's congratulations Mary also responded with divine inspiration: *Magnificat anima mea Dominum, quia respexit*

humilitatem ancillae suae, ecce enim ex hoc beatam me dicent omnes generationes. My soul exalts the greatness of the Lord.... For he has looked upon the lowliness of his handmaid, for behold, from this moment blessed shall all generations call me. (Lk 1, v. 46 et seqq.).

Why would they call her blessed of all generations? This word embraces not only all men who lived at that time, but those still to come afterwards until the end of the world. Now in order that Mary's glory might extend to all generations, and that they might call her blessed, it was necessary that some extraordinary and everlasting good should come from Mary to all these generations; so that being perpetual in them the reason for their gratitude would be reasonable the perpetuity of praise. Now this continual and admirable benefit can be none other than the help that Mary lends to men. Help that must embrace all times, extend to all places, to all kinds of people. St Albert the Great says that Mary is called blessed par excellence, just as by saying the Apostle we mean St Paul.

Antonio Gistandis, a Dominican writer, asks the question how Mary can be said to be blessed by all generations while she was never blessed by the Jews and Mohammedans? And he answers, that this was said in a figurative sense to indicate that of each generation some would bless her. For, as Liranus says, in all generations there were converts to the faith of Christ who blessed the Virgin; and in the Alcoranus [Koran] itself, which is the book written by Muhammad, we find many praises to Mary (Ant. Gistandis Fer. 6, 4 Temp. adv.). For this very reason Mary is proclaimed blessed among all generations: *Beatam me dicent omnes generationes.*

Here is how anointed and abundantly sentimental Cardinal Ugone comments on this passage: "They shall call me blessed all generations, that is, of the Jews, of the Gentiles; or of men and women, of rich and poor, of angels and men, for through her all received the blessing of health. Men were reconciled, and angels repaired; for Christ the Son of God wrought health in the midst of the earth, that is to say, in the womb of Mary, who may be called the centre of the earth. For unto her turn their eyes those who enjoy heaven, and those who dwell in hell, that is, in limbo, and those who labour in the world. The first to be redeemed, the second to be atoned, the third to be reconciled. Therefore blessed shall Mary say all generations." And here he exclaims in a rhapsody of veneration: "O blessed Virgin, because to all generations you gave life, grace and glory: life to the dead, grace to sinners, glory to the unfortunate." And applying to Mary the words with which Judith was praised, he says to her: *Tu gloria Ierusalem, tu laetitia Israel, tu honorificentia populi nostri quia fecisti viriliter.* First of all, the voice of the angels comes to praise

her, whose ruin is repaired by her: secondly, the voice of men, whose sadness is gladdened by her; then the voice of women, whose infamy is wiped out by her work; finally, the voice of the dead in limbo, who through Mary are redeemed from slavery and gloriously introduced into their homeland.

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