



LIGHT & LIFE

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Keeping our Sights Set on Heaven

Fr. Joseph Sergott, OP

What is the ultimate goal of our life on earth? What about when our life is over? Have we thought enough about the next life? And, how do our hopes for the next life influence our life on earth?

St. Paul says, "Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body..." (Philippians 3:20-21a)

We also are quite familiar with another quote from St. Paul: "Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it so much as dawned on man what God has prepared for those who love him. (1 Cor 2:9) For, as Jesus says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Have faith in God and faith in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places; otherwise, how could I have told you that I was going to prepare a place for you? I am indeed going to prepare a place for you, and then I shall come back to take you with me, that where I am you also may be. (John 14:1-3)

In its glossary, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines heaven rather succinctly as "eternal life with God; [a] communion of life and love with the Trinity and all the blessed. Heaven is the state of supreme and definitive happiness, the goal of the deepest longings of humanity." (C.C.C., Glossary; Cf. #1023)

The Book of Revelation gives us a striking description of the blessed in heaven: "After this I had a vision of a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue. They stood before the throne and before the Lamb, wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice: 'Salvation comes from our God, who is seated on the throne, and from the Lamb.'" (Rev 7:9-10)

St. Thomas Aquinas speaks of the blessed life that awaits us in heaven. He states that it is fitting that the end of all our desires, namely eternal life, coincides with what we profess at the end of the Apostles' Creed [and similarly in the Nicene Creed] when we say "We believe ...in life everlasting. Amen." St. Thomas says that in heaven,

1) we shall be united with God and shall see him face to face; 2) heaven will consist in the complete satisfaction



Pentecost by Jean Restout - 1732

of desire, for there the blessed will be given more than they wanted or hoped for, since only God can satisfy and infinitely exceed all other pleasures; 3) the blessed will possess God completely and their longing will be satisfied and their glory will be even greater; 4) whatever is delightful in heaven is there in superabundance; 5) eternal life will consist of the joyous community of all the blessed, a community of supreme delight Everyone will love everyone as himself, and

therefore will rejoice in another's good as in his own. So, that it follows that the happiness and joy of each grows in proportion to the joy of all. (Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, Coll. super *Credo in Deum*: Opuscula theologica 2, Taurini 1954, pp. 216-217)

Many people see heaven as a place; but, perhaps it is more accurate to say that heaven is a state of being: when we pray, "Our Father, who art in heaven," we are not implying that the Father lives "elsewhere" in a specific place (C.C.C., #2794); rather, we refer to "heaven" as a "communion of life and love with the Trinity, with the Virgin Mary, the angels and all the blessed." (C.C.C., #1024) The Father, of course, transcends all things of time and space. As Our Lord says, "Anyone who loves me will be true to my word, and my Father will love him; we will come to him and make our dwelling place with him." (John 14:23)

The mysteries of the Rosary draw our attention to eternal life in heaven, reminding us that for those who die with

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THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

The Church's devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary

By Bishop-elect Robert Christian, O.P.

[Bishop-elect Robert Christian, O.P. entered the Dominican Order in the Western Dominican Province in 1970. He was ordained a priest in 1976. These past few years, he has served as Student Master of the Western Province. Bishop-elect Christian was appointed an auxiliary Bishop of San Francisco by Pope Francis on March 28, 2018. He will be ordained bishop in the near future.]

The Church's devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary is shown in many ways, but one of the more subtle is that Mary can be celebrated liturgically every Saturday in the "Ordinary Time" of the liturgical year unless that Saturday happens to be taken by another obligatory memorial or feast. This means that on perhaps half of the total number of Saturdays in a calendar year, Mary can be specially honored.

The reason for giving special tribute to our Blessed Mother on Saturdays is one we have meditated on especially during the seasons of Lent and Easter. On Holy Saturday, when Jesus lay in the tomb, with His apostles gripped by fear, Mary alone maintained faith in her Son. It is said that the Church's unflinching faith was found only in Mary during the time of the Crucifixion and Jesus' burial. This "infallibility in belief" was not, of course, comparable to the infallible teaching office of the College of Bishops or its head, the Pope. It was not an infallibility that resulted in her articulating dogmas. It was, instead, a tenacious clinging to what her Son had revealed, a clinging made steadfast by virtue of the fullness of grace that she enjoyed.

Mary's faith, therefore, is a perfect exemplar of the belief of the entire Church. In fact, her faith is an instantiation of the belief of the Church throughout the centuries.

When, therefore, the Church sings *Stabat Mater* during Lent or on the memorial of Our Lady of Sorrows on September 15, she is mindful of much more than the poignant grief of a mother for a son executed despite his innocence. Indeed, the Church is extolling a faith that did not waver, even though what that faith promises seemed utterly divorced from the scene of Jesus' ignominious crucifixion between two criminals.

Our faith promises us the resurrection from the dead. It promises us an eternal life which will seem like an ecstatic instant, but will be in fact unending. We believe that if we follow Jesus, heed His commandments, and welcome Him into our lives in the sacraments, we can live with Him in the communion of saints, enjoying perfect beatitude.

But when we look at Mary, we recognize that the hope to which our faith points is also a hope sorely tried. In Mary's case, the trial was uniquely acute: she saw the object of all hope, her Son Whose name means "One who saves," die and be laid in a tomb intended for someone else. We would understand it if she were to grieve because her hope came to nothing. But instead, while the Sorrows of Mary are real, and Mary's anguish was genuine, she did not lose hope where everyone else did. Even though her Son was dead, Mary believed in His coming victory. The Church's

charism of infallibility in belief was maintained in Mary even on that darkest of days, Holy Saturday. And so, we remember Mary not only when we commemorate her triumphs, as in the decades of the Rosary dedicated to the Annunciation, the Visitation, and her Assumption and Coronation. We remember her most frequently in our liturgical calendar on Saturdays; we imagine her holding fast to what she believed despite what seemed like invincible evidence to the contrary.

We have the advantage that Mary did not, of knowing that Jesus rose from the dead, that He ascended to the right hand of the Father, and with the Father sent the Holy Spirit upon the apostles and Mary, the initial cell of the Church, at Pentecost. We are able to ponder God's word and receive the sacraments Christ instituted to make the saving effects of His cross a living reality in all the baptized.

Nevertheless, we can be plagued by doubt and incredulity when afflicted by trials. We are acutely aware that events beyond our control can seriously threaten our perseverance in the faith. When someone manages to persevere in the faith despite mortal challenges, we are impressed by that person's *martyria* or witness, and we perhaps wonder if we could be martyrs in similar circumstances.

At this time, we think of the plight of Christians in many countries of the Middle East. Thousands have fled their homelands. Others have remained to face persecution or even death. We in the West rarely, if ever, hear of Christians renouncing their faith in Christ even when fidelity to Him can lead to a loss of life. We hear, instead, of their heroic fidelity. They stay with the cross, carry the cross, and invoke the intercession of the Mother who stood resolutely (*Stabat Mater*) at the cross. The twentieth century was called the century with the most martyrs in the history of Christianity, and the twenty-first century is off to an equally bloody start. Mary's calm perseverance indicates her persevering intercession on behalf of all who belong to her Son.

In the West, we are now witnessing a growing hostility to any expression of Christianity that, in order to remain faithful to Christ, challenges the mores of an increasingly secular and individualized society. We are most familiar with this phenomenon when we think of asserting the right to life of every human from conception to natural death, but anyone who stands with the Church on issues ranging from the nature of matrimony to the human rights of immigrants knows the cost of *martyria*, of standing at the foot of the Cross like Mary. And some believe that the cost of fidelity will only grow.

Francis Cardinal George, the late archbishop of Chicago, famously wrote:

Speaking a few years ago to a group of priests, entirely outside of the current political debate, I was trying to express in overly dramatic fashion what the complete secularization of our society

could bring. I was responding to a question and I never wrote down what I said, but the words were captured on somebody's smart phone and have now gone viral on Wikipedia and elsewhere in the electronic communications world. I am (correctly) quoted as saying that I expected to die in bed, my successor will die in prison and his successor will die a martyr in the public square. What is omitted from the reports is a final phrase I added about the bishop who follows a possibly martyred bishop: 'His successor will pick up the shards of a ruined society and slowly help rebuild civilization, as the Church has done so often in human history.' What I said is not 'prophetic' but a way to force people to think outside of the usual categories that limit and sometimes poison both private and public discourse.

Most of us are tested in less public, but no less painful, ways. When afflicted with a painful and debilitating illness, even the most pious Christian can begin to despair of God's mercy or even of His existence. For precisely this sort of situation, the Church has a remedy both practical and supernatural—in fact, practical *because* it is supernatural, namely, the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick. The theological virtue that St. Thomas Aquinas associates with this sacrament is hope, the hope that enables one to see in the cross a sign of triumph over sin and death: the hope that Mary had on that first Holy Saturday.

The Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick is intended for the living, preferably those who are well enough to participate in the liturgical action. Priests and bishops, who are the only ministers of this sacrament, should be called to administer it in sufficient time in order to allow the sick person to feel, even physically, the consoling comfort of the Church's rite. And it should be remembered that the Church holds that if Christ wills for the sake of the sick person's spiritual healing that he or she undergo a physical healing of some kind, it may occur.

Besides persecutions both blatant and subtle, and end-of-life challenges, there are many situations that prompt us to see in Mary's constancy a model for our own spiritual behavior. In a world where the latest addictive plague has made us familiar with the word *opioid*, where homeless people—often mentally ill—live and die on our city streets, where families know the wrenching pain of divorce, and where many find it difficult to believe in the goodness of a provident God, it is clear that the image of Mary we recall on Saturdays is an image of our own suffering. As Pope St. John Paul II wrote in his encyclical on human suffering issued on the World Day for the Sick, the Memorial of our Lady of Lourdes, February 11, 1984:

It is obvious that pain, especially physical pain, is widespread in the animal world. But only the suffering human being knows that he is suffering and wonders why; and he suffers in a humanly speaking still deeper way if he does not find a satisfactory answer. This is a *difficult question*, just as is a question closely akin to it, the question of evil. Why does evil exist? Why is there evil in the world? When we put the question in

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What would the Blessed Virgin say to the Church about being Church?

by Bishop-elect Robert Christian, O.P.

Pope Francis has decreed that henceforth the Monday after Pentecost shall be celebrated as the feast of Mary, Mother of the Church. This insertion in the liturgical calendar will remind the faithful that the Holy Spirit came down upon both the apostles and Mary. On Pentecost, the liturgical texts emphasize the preaching of the apostles. On the feast of Mary, Mother of the Church, we can see the concept of Mary's maternity being extended to include the entire Mystical Body of Christ.

When first overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, Mary assented to the message of the Archangel Gabriel and conceived the Son of the Most High. In this second descent of the Holy Spirit, Mary's initial "Yes" to Gabriel reached its fullest significance: Mary would be the Mother not only to Christ, the fruit of her womb, but also to all who are made members of Christ's Body, the Church, through Baptism.

Since Mary is the most exalted member of the Mystical Body, sometimes compared to the "neck" of the Body, channeling graces from Christ the Head of the Body to other members, it is interesting to ask what Mary would say to the Church, since obviously what she says would only be motivated by pure love.

Mary's maternal concern is first of all that the eternal life she enjoys, thanks to the merits of her Son, be enjoyed by all who share Christ's life through Baptism. Since, in Baptism, one shares in Christ's priestly, prophetic, and pastoral functions, Mary wants us to use that gift to build up Christ's body, and by so doing, to become truly "other Christs" ourselves who will someday know Him because we will be like Him.

Were she to speak to us, then, she might speak as she has at places where her apparitions have engendered devotions approved by the Church. There, she has spoken of the need for mortification, prayer, and consecration. Mortification takes on different forms, but it always entails a dying to attachments that can seduce us away from our true good. Prayer involves listening as well as speaking to God. Mary, who told the servants at Cana to do what Jesus told them to do, would ask the same of us. Consecration means setting the whole project of our lives under the banner of the risen Lord, seeking to do above all what leads us to heaven, and to avoid considering the passing things of this life as the things that give this life its ultimate meaning.

What would Mary say to the Church about how to be Church? Pointing to her Son, she might say, "Love Him so completely that you count not the cost. Love Him so intensely that you pray without ceasing. Love Him so entirely that nothing else matters as much. Then, like Him, serve those for whom He gave up His life." ■

The Church's Devotion (continued from page 3)

this way, we are always, at least to a certain extent, asking a question about suffering too.

Mary, ever free from sin, teaches us that suffering, an involuntary separation from or deprivation of the good, afflicts us all. Even she was deprived of the presence of her Son. But her steadfastness likewise reminds us that when we purify and refine our sense for what makes us truly happy, so that our answer is only Christ, Christ will find us. If we seek Christ, Christ *will* meet us. Christ's initiative is seen in the sacrament of Penance, in Eucharistic communion, and in the Anointing of the Sick. The One Mary sought is truly risen, and finds us watching like Mary for Him. ■

Keeping Our Sights Set (continued from page 1)

faith in God, a state of blessedness awaits them. In the Glorious Mysteries we meditate upon the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and his Ascension into heaven. We also reflect upon the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into heaven and her Coronation as Queen of heaven and earth.

Pope Benedict XVI says that the essence of heaven is oneness with God's will, and in fact heaven is the place where God's will is fulfilled. Therefore, he says that because Jesus Christ has done the will of the One who sent him (John 4:34), we now understand that Jesus himself is "heaven" in the deepest and truest sense because it is through him that God's will is wholly done. (*Jesus of Nazareth*: Vol. I) Thus we call to mind the words of Christ himself: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:1-7) Accordingly, St. Ambrose says, "For life is to be with Christ; where Christ is, there is life, there is the kingdom." (St. Ambrose, *In Luc.*, 10, 21: PL 15, 1834a)

If we don't have the ultimate goal of heaven in our minds and hearts, then we risk losing our way. How can one live their life on earth if they don't know what they are living it for? With the assurance of God's love and guidance—"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16)—we can live life to the fullest with faith in God, knowing that when the time comes to depart this world, Our Lord will be there to greet us and welcome us home: "On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you." (John 14:20) ■

Note From Fr. Joseph

Dear faithful supporters of the Rosary Center & Confraternity, we are grateful for your support. There are three kinds of benefactors: those who support us financially, those who pray for us and those who volunteer for us. We could not do this ministry if not for our benefactors. Please join us in asking God to bless all of our benefactors abundantly. Let us also ask our Blessed Mother to intercede for them and watch over them and their families.

Blessings & Petitions Corner

Please pray for my nephew, who has been having trouble mentally, spiritually, psychologically and emotionally for about two years now. He's frequently in and out of hospitals, three months ago he had an overdose with prescribed medicine and nearly died. Please pray for Our dear Lord to have mercy upon him and to restore him to good health. Please pray for all his family members, so we can have wisdom, peace and love for him.

Diana, California

Please pray for me as I struggle to break out of a sinful lifestyle: that God's grace will carry me and help me to live a life of holiness. I am also undergoing some medical tests and am deeply worried about my health. Please pray for God's healing power in my life, and that no matter what I face, God will give me the gifts of faith and hope to move forward.

F, Jakarta

Please pray to the Blessed Mother and to Bl. Fr. Solanus Casey for the healing of our daughter, Christine, who is very sick and in a lot of pain. After an unsuccessful surgery, she is now in palliative care.

Angela, Pittsburgh

Please pray for the repose of the soul of my beloved late wife, Alexis, who offered her suffering of lung cancer to Jesus.

John, Somerset, PA

Please pray for Julijeanne Malloy who is in an Olympia Hospital, recouping from a heart attack, and other complications.

Marjie, Olympia WA

Your Help Needed

Please pray always for those who are in prison--it is our Christian duty. The Rosary Center is asking for financial help in order to send bibles, Catholic Catechisms, rosaries and pamphlets to the incarcerated. Any help would be appreciated.

Offerings From the Rosary Center

Fr. Joseph recommends these two classic titles available online at www.store.rosary-center.org or by mail order. (see order form enclosed)

The Rosary, The Little Summa by Robert Feeney. This fourth and enlarged edition is a compendium of papal teachings on the Rosary, and of Our Lady's call for the Rosary in her apparitions. This volume of 351 pages contains lengthy meditation on each of the 20 mysteries of the Rosary. 4.3 x 8.9". Paperback.

True Devotion to Mary by St. Louis de Montfort. Pope John Paul II said of this devotion "This perfect devotion is indispensable to anyone who means to give himself without reserve to Christ and to the work of redemption. It is from Montfort that I have taken my motto: '*Totus Tuus*' (I am all thine)."