

LITURGICAL FEASTS AND SEASONS

Part II

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THE MYSTERY OF MARY AND THE CHURCH

We must reduce our spiritual life to simplicity, and in order to do this we must see that the many different ideas, concepts, mysteries, devotions and so forth which seem to make up our religion, are really aspects of one great reality in which they all converge and in which they have their true life and meaning. This one great reality is the Mystery of Christ in His Church. As long as we do not reach this simple view of things, which is what St. Paul wanted his disciples to have and which is in fact the true essence of the Christian outlook, we will be perplexed, imagining that one idea stands in the way of another, one devotion rules out another, etc. For instance, so many are still uneasy about devotion to Our Lady, as if that took away something from our faith in Jesus, as if Jesus and Mary could possibly be rivals for our love and devotion. In fact, we see Jesus in and through Mary, and Mary in Him. We are united to Him and to her at the same time because the grace which He sends us comes to us through her intercession. Her love acts upon us as the instrument of His love, making our love His instrument also. Can we not see that it is really all one LOVE, poured forth in our hearts, and in hers, by the Holy Spirit Who is given us? To really understand the place of Mary in our life, and the impossibility of her interfering with the mediatorship of Christ Our Lord, we must see how closely the mystery of Our Lady is connected with the mystery of the Church. They are two great aspects of the mystery of Christ. Steps to an understanding of the mystery {include}:

1. The Incarnation: Jesus comes to save us, to share with us the light, the love, the mercy of God, to make us Sons of God, to bring us back, in and with Himself, to the Father. {This is} the purpose of the divine plan: *instaurare omnia in Christo*.¹

2. Mary is the Mother of the Lord, who by her *fiat*² cooperates in the great work of the Incarnation, who by her compassion on Calvary cooperates in the objective Redemption of man. Through Mary, whom Christ willed to have as His collaborator in His great work, all grace is given to the mystical members of Christ, who therefore have her for their mother in a much more intimate sense than the natural man is united to his own mother. The natural man received life from his mother, but goes on living without her. In the supernatural order it is not so. We not only receive life from Mary, but we continue to receive it at every moment,

1. "to restore all things in Christ" (Eph 1:10).

2. "let it be done" (Luke 1:38).

remaining always in complete dependence on her for the life of grace. {We are} like infants in the womb, therefore, in the supernatural order.

3. All who are called to membership and life in Christ are called, like Mary (but in a less strict sense), to collaborate with Jesus in the work of the Redemption—we “redeem” one another. Each one of us is his brother’s keeper. We obtain grace for one another. We help and educate one another in the faith; we grow together in the knowledge of Christ; we share His gifts with one another, until we all become “one Christ loving Himself” (St. Augustine³).

4. Hence, though Jesus is our only Savior, He wills that we should all cooperate in our own salvation and in that of others. In this we are all His instruments, Mary principally, but each one of us also in a more remote and partial fashion. THE WHOLE MYSTERY OF MAN’S COLLABORATION WITH CHRIST IN THE WORK OF SALVATION IS THE MYSTERY OF THE CHURCH. MARY IS THE PERFECT TYPE OF THE CHURCH. IN HER PERSONALLY WAS REALIZED ALL THAT THE CHURCH, COLLECTIVELY, MUST BE. BOTH MARY AND THE CHURCH ARE THE BRIDE OF CHRIST. MARY IS AS IT WERE THE MODEL AND CENTER AROUND WHICH THE CHURCH’S LIFE IS BUILT. TO LIVE IN THE CHURCH IS TO LIVE IN HER.

5. From the very first, Mary understood all that was to be realized in and by the Church:

- a) She is holy and without spot, immaculate. The Church too is without spot, holy, but made up of members *who progressively become holy*. In doing so, they become more and more like Mary. They feel more and more the maternal influence of Mary. Mary {is} the model and type of holiness. By the action of the Holy Spirit, each member of the Church gradually achieves the likeness to this model, and Christ is formed perfectly in him. Mary {is} as it were the mould—as long as we qualify this image, and remember that we are all supposed to be different.
- b) Mary {is} perfectly united to Jesus, one body and one spirit with Him in the Incarnation, suffering with Him on Calvary, united with Him in His Resurrection, reigning with Him in glory. The Church is His body. Each member becomes gradually “one body and one spirit”⁴ with Christ (mainly through {the} Eucharist).

3. “*unus Christus amans seipsum*” (In *Epistola Joannis ad Parthos*, 10.3) (Migne, PL 35, col. 2055).

4. Eph 4:4.

The Church shares in His sufferings. Each one fills out his little share in the sufferings of Jesus,⁵ so that together we form one “Bride” of Christ, perfectly conformed to Mary the Co-redeemer. The Church shares in His risen life, and looks forward to the day when, in the resurrection of the flesh, all the members will be enthroned in the glory where Mary has preceded us.

- c) In Mary, the perfect and complete member, the Church begins her life. In Mary, the Church realizes, to begin with, her most intimate and inalienable essence: union with Christ.

6. Father Laurentin points out (*Initiation Théologique*,⁶ iv, p. 300) that in the beginning, theologians made practically no distinction between the Church and Mary. Texts from Scripture were taken to represent Mary and the Church indiscriminately, so that it is often impossible to tell which one is being talked about. The “first golden age” of the Church is that in which, in fact, Mary herself alone *was* the whole Church. Gradually the Church began to realize itself apart from her; at Pentecost, for example, the Church is Mary *and* the disciples. Pentecost is the feast at which the Church takes cognizance of its identity apart from Mary, but united with her in her communion of the Word, in the Holy Spirit. The Church also takes cognizance of her vocation as mother—the fruitful womb of baptism, the seed of the Word. The “last golden age” of the Church is that in which, united with Mary in the glory of the Lord, all will surround the throne of God. Mary has already entered into that glory. In between these two terms, the Church grows in knowledge of herself and of Mary, her perfection and her model. The Church realizes at once her limits and the perfection of Mary, especially the power and importance of Mary’s intercession.

7. *Conclusions*: “There is between the *Virgo Maria* and the *Virgo Ecclesia* an interpenetration and reciprocal inclusion in which Scheeben liked to see an image of the Trinitarian Circumcession.”⁷ In so far as the Church is a hierarchical body, visibly representing Christ and preaching

5. See Col 1:24.

6. Laurentin, “La Vierge Marie,” *Initiation Théologique*, Tome 4: *L’Économie du Salut*: Livre 2: “Marie et l’Église” (c. 5).

7. “Il y a entre la *Virgo Maria* et la *Virgo Ecclesia* une inclusion réciproque et une interpénétration où Scheeben se plaisait à voir une image de la circumcession trinitaire” (Laurentin, *Initiation Théologique*, 301); see Scheeben, *Mariology*, 1:216–17; 2:66–67; 2:250–51.

to all nations, Mary is hidden in the Church. In so far as the Church is an interior and mystical reality, united to Christ, invisibly communing with Him, then Mary in whom this union is perfectly realized, as it were, contains the Church within herself. Union with Mary is therefore perfection of the interior life of the Church, {a} life of communion with the Word.

SAINT BERNARD'S SERMONS FOR THE FEAST OF SAINT ANDREW

On the Love of the Cross: in the *Imitation* we read (Bk. II, ch. 12): "In the Cross is infusion of heavenly sweetness, in the Cross is strength of mind; in the Cross is joy of spirit."⁸ This thought is an important one in St. Bernard. For him, the monk must strive not merely to suffer for Christ, but to suffer willingly and joyously, just as he must practice virtue not exteriorly but with ardent interior love. If we accept suffering unwillingly, or bear the Cross grudgingly and with complaints, then that which is given us for our salvation helps us little or not at all. At the same time, however, it is useless to try in one jump to pass from the lowest degree of the spiritual life to the highest, and to embrace the Cross with ardent desire and love when our love is still weak and untried. We must accept the sufferings and difficulties proportionate to our state and our strength and God will give us grace to take what He will send us later on.

*The first Sermon of St. Bernard on the Feast of St. Andrew*⁹ teaches us what he means by the love of the Cross:

n. 1: The joy of St. Andrew as he receives the Cross {is great}: there is no sorrow in this feast; all is rejoicing and gladness: *Nemo ex nobis compassus est sic patienti*.¹⁰

n. 2: Yet the question arises: what is this rejoicing? How can one take delight in suffering? because the Cross is not the sign of death but of life, not {of} destruction but fructification. It is not loved for suffering's sake, but for the sake of the grace and union with God which we can reach by loving the Cross. *Semper lignum crucis vitam germinat* (505).¹¹ The cross is the tree of life; otherwise it would not be planted in the midst of the paradise of the Church. There is no place for a tree of death and destruction in the garden of Christ. But the manna that is given to us in this paradise, the fruit of this tree of life, is *hidden* from us. It is a secret which

8. Thomas à Kempis, *Imitation of Christ*, 142.

9. Migne, *PL* 183, cols. 503D–509A.

10. "None of us has suffered with such patience" (Migne, *PL* 183, col. 503D).

11. "The wood of the Cross always produces life" (Migne, *PL* 183, col. 505B).

we must discover in order to rejoice in the Cross; and it is necessary to discover this secret if we would *win a complete victory over the powers of evil*. This is one of the fundamental doctrines of St. Bernard: *sapientia vincit malitiam*.¹² But *sapientia* is *sapor boni*,¹³ and the Cross is our greatest good on earth. Hence if we do not have a *sapor*, a taste, for the Cross, there is still something lacking in us. There is something missing in our spontaneity and fervor of love.

n. 3: The devil tries to cast us down by impatience or the love of pleasure. But if one really loves the Cross he will not be distressed by either of these movements and he will have a perfect defense against the tempter. Now, since St. Andrew was a fisherman, St. Bernard begins to talk about the followers of Christ under the symbol of three kinds of fish, which he finds in Leviticus 11:9 (the pure fish which it is lawful to eat): “All that hath fins and scales, as well in the sea as in the rivers and in the pools, you shall eat.”¹⁴ The apostles are fishers of men, catching souls like fish for the heavenly banquet. There are three kinds of fish: those in the sea are those who live holy lives in the world; those who are in the rivers are those who become saints by preaching the Gospel in the world; those in the pools are those who become saints in the cloister, protected from the outside world and patiently waiting to be caught by the Lord, saying, “*Quando veniet qui me deferat?*”¹⁵

n. 4: Again there are three degrees in the spiritual life: the beginners, guided by fear (the beginning of wisdom), must be content to bear the Cross patiently; {the} progressives, whose lives are dominated by hope for a reward, which they begin to see in the future, bear the Cross willingly; the perfect, who are totally governed by charity, embrace the Cross with ardent love and prefer it. St. Bernard, with his usual prudence and knowledge of human nature, spends much time explaining the first degree. No one should be downcast because he feels repugnance for the Cross at first! Jesus Himself mercifully willed to suffer agony in

12. “Wisdom overcomes malice” (Wis 7:30) (*De Diversis*, 14 [Migne, *PL* 183, col. 574D]; *In Cantica*, 82 [Migne, *PL* 183, col. 1180D]; *In Cantica*, 85 [Migne, *PL* 183, col. 1192A]).

13. “a taste of the good” (*In Cantica*, 85 [Migne, *PL* 183, cols. 1191A, 1192A, 1192B]).

14. “*Hujusmodi siquidem pisces mundos esse legalis sanctio judicabat, qui et pinnis levantur, et proteguntur squamis: sive illi in mari sint, sive in flumine, sive in stagno*” (Migne, *PL* 183, cols. 505D–506A).

15. “When will He come Who will take me away?” (Migne, *PL* 183, col. 506B).

the garden, when it would have been perfectly easy for Him to accept the Cross with even greater joy and indifference than St. Andrew; indeed He could have suffered without the slightest shadow or sorrow or inconvenience. But instead, for our sake, He willed to take upon Himself all our weakness and moral torment. *Quid enim? Agnosco vocem meam in Salvatore, et de salute desperem?*¹⁶ His example and the graces He has gained for us enable us to practice patience. His fear has made us courageous; His sorrow has brought us joy; His anguish has brought us peace; His desolation leaves us consoled (507)¹⁷. However, we must not make a virtue out of weakness and simply rest in it without seeking to love generously. This is quietism. We must make our weakness an occasion of greater strength and confidence. For the perfect it is not enough to suffer bravely, with hope, dominating our passions by reason and courage. One thing more is needed—to suffer with joy, with abandon and delight. This joy is not possible without a special gift of the Holy Ghost, and is indeed a sign that He has taken complete possession of our soul.

n. 10: Only love (not fear or hope) is strong as death. Whereas *fear* accepts the Cross saying, “It is fitting that I suffer (I have deserved it),” and *hope* accepts the Cross saying, “It is good for me to suffer—I will gain by it,” LOVE says, “*Sic volo, sic cupio, sic desidero vehementer.*”¹⁸ He adds that there were many at Clairvaux who had reached this degree, and so the others should not hesitate to try to imitate them. But how? *Nemo repente fit summus.*¹⁹ You cannot rise all at once from the bottom of the ladder to the top; you have to climb all the various rungs. We climb these rungs with two feet, *meditation* and *prayer*. Meditation teaches us what we lack, and shows us the danger we are in. Prayer obtains for us what we lack and delivers us from danger by the grace of Our Lord.

Second Sermon for {the} Feast of St. Andrew: On Obedience:

1. {This is} a magnificent sermon²⁰ on religious obedience, based on the consideration of the promptitude with which St. Andrew followed Jesus when he was called. All Christians are bound to obey, but most

16. “What then? I recognize my voice in the Savior, and should I despair of salvation?” (Migne, *PL* 183, col. 507D).

17. Copy text reads: “807.”

18. “So I want, so I wish, so I vehemently desire” (Migne, *PL* 183, col. 508D).

19. “No one reaches the summit immediately” (Migne, *PL* 183, col. 509A).

20. Migne, *PL* 183, cols. 509B–514A.

especially the monk, who by his very profession is a *debitor obedientiae*.²¹ We owe obedience in justice. That is to say that if we do not obey, our monastic life is unreal. For justice is that virtue by which we conform to what we should be by giving what is due from us. Obedience is like a coin we have received from Wisdom Itself and which we must pay back. *If we criticize and analyze*, pick and choose what commands to obey, and obey only those we like, we give back a broken coin—not the proper weight. *If we obey exteriorly while murmuring interiorly*, the coin is false; it is lead and not silver.

2. The obedience of Peter and Andrew when called by the Lord {was genuine}: *Nihil dijudicantes aut haesitantes, non solliciti unde viverent, non considerantes quomodo . . . praedicatores fieri possent: Nihil interrogantes, sine mora*.²² This is the example the Church wants monks to see each year, and put into effect. How? by *charity*. It is love that makes obedience worthwhile. *Sola enim est charitas quae obedientiam gratam facit et acceptabilem Deo*.²³ We must be “joyful givers”²⁴ (here we rejoin the theme of the First Sermon).

3. St. Andrew’s joy and exultation on going to the Cross was not merely human. It could only be a special gift from God, a heroic charity stronger than death, poured forth in his soul by the Holy Spirit. We in our turn, aware of our weakness, knowing its cause ({and the} need of special grace) should ardently desire the strength from God. *The very fact of desiring this grace is a sign that its first fruits have already been granted us*. All that is necessary is to ask, but to ask with faith and fervor, and really ardent desire. Beg at all times, without hesitation, *for the gift of the Holy Spirit*, for if we desire Christ, we must despise self, and if we seek His will we must renounce our own. But, says St. Bernard, instead of this fervent desire, we too often entertain only feelings of false security. Though surrounded by enemies, we sleep in a fatal security; we are lazy and silly, indulging in foolish jokes, and we are negligent of our spiritual exercises as if they really had little importance (see col. 512AB). Negligence would

21. “one who owes obedience” (Migne, *PL* 183, col. 509B, which reads: “*debitores*”).

22. “Not pondering or hesitating; not concerned about where they would live; not considering how they could become preachers; asking nothing; without delay” (Migne, *PL* 183, col. 509D, which reads: “. . . *considerantes quoniam . . . Nihil denique . . . sine omni mora*”).

23. “It is love alone which makes obedience pleasing and acceptable to God” (Migne, *PL* 183, col. 509D).

24. 2 Cor 9:7 (Migne, *PL* 183, col. 509D).

be a sign either that we have secretly sold out to the enemy, or that if we are still friends of God we are ungrateful for His protection.

4. The Cross is our salvation, but only if we bear it with manly courage. The four corners of the Cross {symbolize how} the Cross protects us against four great temptations²⁵ (cf. *Psalm* 90).

*A demonio meridiano*²⁶

Pride and self-complacency

*A sagitta volante in die*²⁷ *A negotio perambulante in tenebris*²⁸

Insults—fear of being despised Flattery—harmful love

*A timore nocturno*²⁹

Fear of mortification

THE PRIEST IN THE MONASTERY—Feast of St. Thomas the Apostle³⁰

1. In the Common of the Apostles, the Church reminds us of the fact that the apostles and their successors are the special friends of Jesus. *Nimis honorati sunt amici tui Deus. . .*³¹ *Isti sunt triumphatores et amici Dei. . .*³² *Vos estis qui permansistis mecum in tentationibus meis. . .*³³ And in the Mass of Ordination, at the end, the responsory is sung: “*Iam non dicam vos servos sed amicos*”³⁴ ({which is} also {the} gospel of the vigil of an Apostle³⁵). The calling to the priesthood is the loftiest of all vocations and dignities. The priest is another Christ, deputed to consecrate the Sacred Victim, the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world. *The power of the priest* {includes the power} to destroy sin, to turn back the enemies of God; to give infinite glory to God (in the Mass); to purify

25. Migne, *PL* 183, cols. 512A–513A.

26. “from the noonday demon” (Ps 90[91]:6).

27. “from the arrow that flies by day” (Ps 90[91]:5).

28. “from the business walking in the darkness” (Ps 90[91]:6).

29. “from the fear at night” (Ps 90[91]:5).

30. December 21.

31. “God, Your friends are very highly honored” (Ps 138[139]:17) (introit, alleluia) (*Missale Romanum*, 474; *Missale Cisterciense*, 337); (hymn versicle, vespers; versicle, seventh lesson) (*Breviarium Cisterciense*, 2*, 14*).

32. “They are victors and friends of God” (responsory, sixth lesson, second nocturn) (*Breviarium Cisterciense*, 14*).

33. “You are they who have remained with me in my trials” (Luke 22:28).

34. “I shall not call you servants but friends” (John 15:15) (*Pontificale Romanum*, 30).

35. John 15:12–16 (*Missale Romanum*, (2); *Missale Cisterciense*, 2*).