

May, the Month of Mary

What the Catholic Church teaches about Mary!

To discuss the dogmas of the Catholic Church regarding Mary, we must first understand some theological background. No other Church holds Mary in the esteem we Catholics do. Why? Because no other understands her enormous role in God's plan of salvation for man as we. **The Catholic Church is the only church that can claim God for its founder (Jesus is both God and man) and, therefore, it has a fullness of revelation in Jesus as no other, for He comes directly from the Father and speaks and does only what the Father wills. Jesus also gives His Church the protection of His own Holy Spirit to unfold the mystery of God's Revelation and to protect it from error.** No other church has a divine founder and protector, for no other can trace itself back to the apostles and Jesus, Who founded *this* Church on the rock, Peter, our first Pope. There were no divisions in the Christian Church the first 1,000 years, none until Martin Luther, who correctly opposed some errors that had come into the Church but sadly broke the unity of the Church by starting his own church. With that division he brought his own errors, which led others to do the same. Jesus' prayer at the Last Supper was that there would be but one flock and one shepherd. *He alone is the heavenly ordained, Good Shepherd Who lays down His life for His sheep. He is the new Passover Lamb slain for our sins who sits at the right hand of God.*

With Christ as our Head, it is no surprise that we have an understanding of Mary, His Mother, like no other. **Protestants often "accuse" Catholics of worshipping Mary over Jesus. That is not true, as only God can be worshipped. We venerate Mary in imitation of God Himself, for no one can come near to honoring Mary as much as God Himself has.**

When God created man, he was in perfect harmony with God until Eve, mother of all the living in the natural order, gave in to temptation and coaxed Adam into her sin of pride and disobedience. Sin was passed on through Adam, not Eve, for in God's plan, all headship in the human family is with the father of the family. **Original sin hardened the hearts of man, filled him with concupiscence (weakness of the flesh and self-centeredness) and darkened his intellect. It brought suffering and death and closed the gates of heaven to mankind.** In His mercy and omniscience (eternal knowledge) God also planned man's salvation by willing to send His only begotten Son into the world, to take flesh, live and die for us, and be raised from the dead so the reign of sin and death would be overturned. The gates of heaven would be reopened to man and God's Holy Spirit would be poured out on man with the promise of man's own resurrection if he would believe in The Christ, The Anointed One, Jesus, our Savior and Lord. *There is no other Savior or Mediator for man before the throne of the Father but Jesus!*

God's promise of the Messiah and all blessing throughout the Old Testament was passed on through the firstborn son all the way to Jesus, who is called the firstborn of God and the firstborn of Mary, precisely to show the passage of God's blessing in Him (not to question whether there were other children). Infinite justice required the God-Man, for, since man sinned against God, only one who could fully represent man (be a man), and also represent God (be a God), could make perfect satisfaction for the offense. For God to become man, He would need a human mother and father and a human family in concrete human history. The chosen people was formed for that purpose and Mary was destined to give her flesh to the Son of God, to become the Mother of Jesus, the Divine Humanity. Since Jesus is a divine person, and remains so even when he takes on our human nature, she is mother of the person,

therefore the Mother of God as well as of Jesus the man. Since Jesus cannot be 2 persons but is 1 person with 2 natures, divine and human, and has God for his Father by divine generation and does not become a human person, he does not need a human father by way of human generation, only a legal father who would care for Him and His mother for God's purpose. Hence, Joseph, too, was chosen for this exalted role, legal father -- to stand in the place of God the Father over Jesus in his infancy and hidden life, until the time of his public mission. It is assumed Joseph dies just prior to Jesus' public ministry around age 30. Mary alone then walks all the way to the cross with Jesus, sharing His Passion as no other. Because Mary and Joseph were given such exalted missions for man's salvation, unlike any others, acting as co-redeemers with Christ, God also bestowed on them singular privilege, grace, unlike any others. ***Next to Jesus, Mary and Joseph are the most important and exalted human beings in the history of man. They are the Holy Family, the earthly trinity, God's paradise on earth.*** (visit www.ourladyofamerica.com)

For Mary to become the mother of God, the infinitely All Holy One, she, too, must be holy, untouched by sin to be a fitting tabernacle in the flesh, the new Ark of the Covenant in flesh, to carry the Infinite Beloved Son in her very womb. To prepare her for her divine motherhood, God gave her the singular privilege (no other has it) of the Immaculate Conception. This privilege was in anticipation of Christ's death, which merits cleansing from original sin for the rest of us in Baptism. Not the slightest sin can come into the presence of God (hence our belief in purgatory). Mary would live in God's presence from the moment of her conception in Anne's womb, for she was filled with the Holy Spirit, the fullness of grace. Hence, the Angel Gabriel greeted her at the Annunciation: "Hail Mary, full of grace."

All of Mary's other singular privileges depend on and flow from this first, her divine maternity, the center of all Marian devotion. It was because of and for Mary's divine maternity that she was conceived immaculate, ever-virgin, and assumed into heaven to be crowned Queen of heaven and earth. In being Mother of the Son of God, she becomes Mother of His Church whom He weds to Himself as a Bride; hence, she is mother of the physical Christ and the spiritual Christ, the Church, his living Body, all Who are one with Him, all who are baptized into Him, the new chosen race, the family of God. Since Christ participated in our humanity, Mary becomes mother, too, of all humanity, the whole Christ. By her ***humility and obedience*** to God's will (fiat – be it done unto me according to thy word), she undoes the evil that Eve passed on to us through ***pride and disobedience*** and Mary is now the mother of all the living, the new Eve, our Mother in the order of grace, a higher order than nature.

So what is a dogma? What dogmas does the Church binds us to believe about Mary?

Dogmas are defined when error or heresy is prevalent. They are clear statements by the Pope and his Council regarding our beliefs and are binding upon us as a matter of faith. In Jesus, God spoke his full and final Word; Jesus is the Word of God, the Logos through whom all things were made. (John 1). His revelation of God ended with his death and Resurrection and Ascension back into heaven. **There is no new revelation until Jesus comes again in His glory; this is called the "deposit of Faith"** – the fulfillment of all Old Testament prophecy in Jesus, the Messiah who was promised from the beginning of time for the redemption from sin. **However, our understanding of that Revelation unfolds through the centuries.** Constant reflection on the Word, in union with the Holy Spirit, is the mission of the teaching magisterium of the Church and leads to clearer definition of our doctrine and the refuting of heresy. When doctrine held by the Church is under attack, the Church, through prayer and reflection on the Scriptures and Tradition, our 2 sources of divine revelation, acting in her magisterial (teaching authority from Christ) and in union with the Holy Spirit (papal infallibility) will define doctrine in dogmatic statements. We have 4 dogmas on Mary and a 5th in the making.

Dogma 1: the Divine Maternity of Mary and her Spiritual Motherhood of the Church, Us

In 431 A.D. the Church Council of Ephesus was convened to refute the heresy of Nestorian who denied the divinity of Jesus and his true humanity, which would also deny Mary's true motherhood of the man Jesus and of the divine person of Jesus as the Son of God, Second Person of the Holy Trinity. The Council stated: ***"If anyone does not confess that the Emmanuel (Christ – God with us) in truth is God and that on this accord the Holy Virgin is the Mother of God (Theotokos = God-bearer) since according to the flesh she brought forth the Word of God made flesh – let him be anathema."*** Councils in 148, 218 and 290 A.D. also confirmed this belief in Mary's divine motherhood. Mary is a real mother who contributed her flesh to the body of Jesus. She is the mother of God because she bore the Second Person of the Trinity, not according to his divine nature but according to his assumed human nature. As the Mother of God, Mary transcends in dignity all created persons, angels and men, because dignity of the creature is the greater the nearer one is to God. Having born the Second Person of the Trinity in her very flesh, Mary is nearest the Triune God than any other and sits at the right hand of the Son of God upon his heavenly throne.

(www.ourladyofamerica.com/understandingthemessage/the_solemnity_of_Mary_Mother_of_God)

(Catechism of the Catholic Church, pg 125)

(Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma, Dr. Ludwig Ott, pgs. 196-199)

Dogma 2: the Immaculate Conception of Mary

On December 8, 1854, Pope Pius IX in his Bull "Ineffabilis" promulgated the dogma of Mary's Immaculate Conception, stating: ***The Most Holy Virgin Mary was, in the first moment of her conception, by a unique gift of grace and privilege of Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of mankind, preserved free from all stain of original sin.*** This freedom from original sin was an exception to the law and was a singular gift, not given to any other creature. This means Mary is redeemed in a more exalted fashion and received every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. The Father chose her in Christ before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless before Him in love. Not only was she free of original sin from the moment of her conception but she was free also of any personal sin her whole life long. ***This singular privilege, this fullness of grace, of the Holy Spirit, from the moment of conception was bestowed on her precisely because she was chosen to be the Mother of the Son of God, the Word made Flesh and must be the most holy receptacle to carry the living God into our world.***

See www.ourladyofamerica.com/understandingthemessage/the_immaculate_conception

(Fundamentals, pgs. 199-203)

(Catechism, pgs. 123-124)

Dogma 3: Mary's Perpetual Virginity – Before, During and After the Birth of Jesus

In 649, under Pope Martin I, the Lateran Synod stressed the threefold character of Mary's virginity, teaching of the ***"blessed ever-virginal and immaculate Mary, that she conceived without seed (of man) but by the Holy Spirit, generated without injury (to her virginity – the miraculous conception and birth of Jesus), and her virginity continued unimpaired after the birth."*** The Church has believed Mary, full of the Spirit in the womb, was enlightened to take a permanent vow of virginity in her tender youth. Her parents had consecrated her to God and sent her to live at the temple at age 3. Mary's virginity then includes a constant virginal disposition, freedom from inordinate motions of sexual desire, and physical integrity. It is why she questioned the angel Gabriel when he announced she was to give birth to a son, "How can this be, as I do not know man?" He who was to be born of her would be conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. All things are possible to God. His ways transcend nature. **Because Mary was**

to be the Mother of the Son of God, she would also be totally consecrated to God for His purpose – divine motherhood. Many holy people are so set aside for God alone by consecration and vow. (Fundamentals, pgs.203-207) (Catechism, pgs. 125-128)

Dogma 4: The Bodily Assumption of Mary into Heaven

On November 1, 1950 Pope Pius XII promulgated the Apostolic Constitution “Munificentissimus Deus” stating: “*Mary, the immaculate perpetually Virgin Mother of God, after the completion of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into the glory of Heaven.*” This means, since Mary was free from original sin, she was also free from its curses and the decay of the body. Some question whether that would mean freedom from death itself. The Greek Orthodox Church speak of Mary’s falling asleep (Dormition) before being taken to heaven. Our Roman Tradition generally believes Mary died to share in Jesus’ triumph over death but was immediately assumed into heaven to share in the Resurrection of Her Son.

(Fundamentals, pgs 207-210)

Dogma 5: Mary, Mediatrix and Co-Redeemer

Christ is the only Mediator between God and man since He alone, by His death on the Cross, fully reconciled mankind with God. **This does not exclude a secondary mediatorship, subordinate to Christ, more of an intercessory role, co-redeemer in the sense of cooperating with most intimately, not in the sense of being equal to.** The Church has always regarded Mary as such a Mediatrix of the grace Christ won for us, but has never defined it as dogma. For some years now there has been a movement toward defining that dogma. Fear of curtailing the ecumenical movement with our Protestant brethren has delayed this dogma. Many believe it must happen soon, for Jesus Himself has indicated Mary’s intercessory role in the New Testament and it has been prefigured in the Old Testament. Mary cooperated most fully in the Incarnation of the Word made Flesh and walked the road to Calvary as no other. Jesus presented Mary to us at the foot of the cross and us to Mary in the person of John. Approved visions speak of Jesus’ desire that we come to Him through her who is most pleasing to Him. *When we honor the Mother, we honor the Son.*

This Motherhood of Mary in the order of grace continues uninterruptedly from the consent that she loyally gave at the Annunciation and that she sustained without waivering beneath the cross, until the eternal fulfillment of the elect. Taken up to heaven she did not lay aside this saving office but by her manifold intercession continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation. Therefore, the Blessed Virgin is invoked in the church under the titles Advocate, Helper, Benefactress and Mediatrix. (Catechism, pg. 252)

Considering the role of Mary in our salvation -- by God’s design,-- it would behoove all of us to foster great devotion to her. Mary will be at His side. He can refuse her nothing as seen at the wedding feast of Cana. What a comfort for us if we have her pleading for us with Jesus at that awesome and fearful moment of judgment.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners

now and at the hour of our death. Amen

To Jesus through Mary!