



The Virtues of the Blessed Virgin Mary

by St. Alphonsus de Liguori

Mary's Humility

"Humility," says St. Bernard, "is the foundation and guardian of the virtues." He is right, for without it no other virtue can exist in the soul. Were a soul to possess all the virtues, all would disappear were humility to go. But, on the other hand, as St. Francis de Sales wrote to St. Jane Frances de Chantal, "God loves humility so much, that whenever He sees it, He immediately goes there." This beautiful and necessary virtue was unknown in the world in early days. But the Son of God came on earth to teach it by His example, and He willed that we should endeavor to imitate Him in that virtue particularly: *Learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart* (Mt. 11:29).

Since Mary was the first and most perfect disciple of Jesus in the practice of the virtues, She naturally excelled in the practice of humility. For this reason She deserved to be exalted above all other creatures. It was revealed to St. Matilda that it was humility in which the Blessed Mother particularly excelled, even from Her very childhood.

The first effect of humility of heart is a lowly opinion of oneself. Mary always had such a humble opinion of Herself that, as was revealed to the same St. Matilda, al-

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St. Louis de Montfort on the Most Holy Rosary

Freed from satan

In 1578 a woman in Anvers had given herself to the devil and had signed the contract with her own blood. Shortly afterwards she was stricken with sincere remorse and had an intense desire to make amends for this terrible deed. So she sought out a kind and wise confessor who advised her to go to Father Henry, one of the Fathers of the Dominican Friary, who was Director of the Rosary Confraternity in that town, to ask him to enroll her in it and hear her confession.

Accordingly she went to ask for him but met, not Father Henry, but the devil disguised as a Dominican Father. The latter scolded her pitilessly and said that she could never hope to receive Almighty God's grace again as long as she lived, and that there was absolutely no way in which she could regain possession of her contract. This grieved her greatly but she did not quite lose hope

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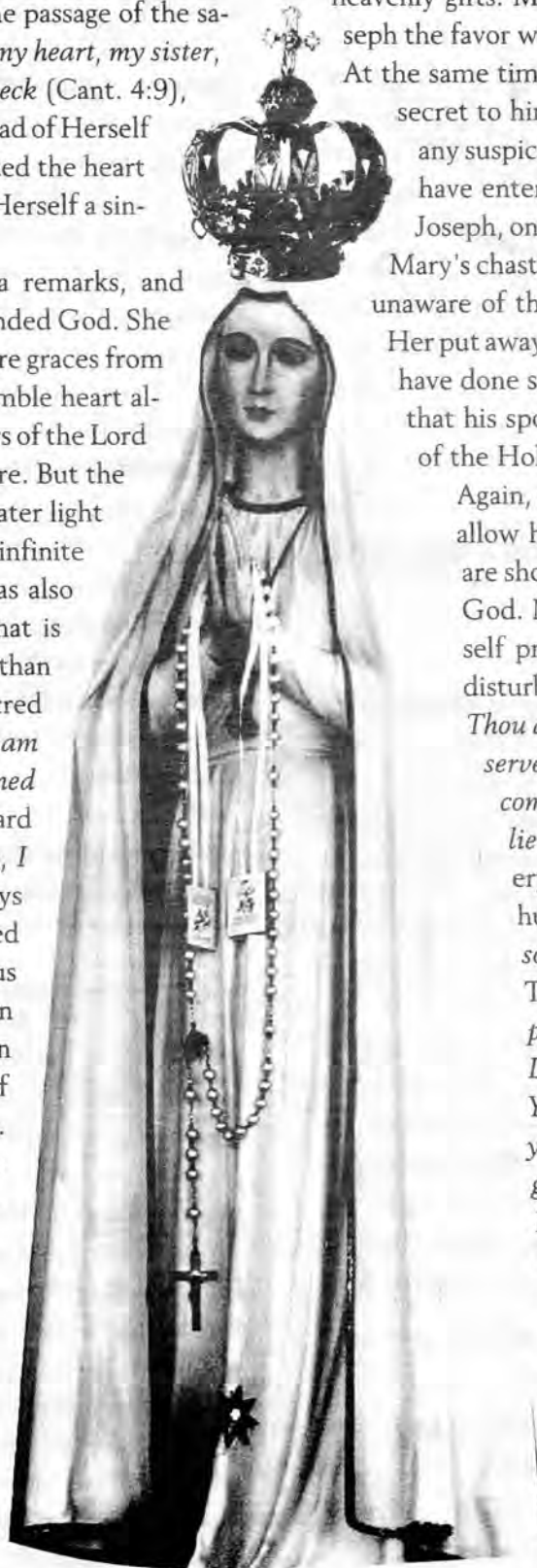
of God's mercy and sought out Father Henry once more, only to find the devil a second time, and to meet with a second rebuff. She came back for the third time and then at last, by Divine Providence, she found Father Henry in person — the priest whom she had been looking for — and he treated her with very great kindness, urging her to throw herself upon the mercy of Almighty God and to make a good confession. He then received her into the Confraternity and told her to say the Rosary frequently.

One day while Father Henry was saying Mass for her Our Lady forced the devil to give her back the contract which she had signed. In this way she was delivered from the devil by the authority of Mary and by her devotion to the Most Holy Rosary.

though she saw Herself enriched with more graces than all other people, She never put Herself ahead of anyone.

Abbot Rupert, commenting on the passage of the sacred Canticles: *Thou hast wounded my heart, my sister, my spouse, ... with one hair of thy neck* (Cant. 4:9), says that the humble opinion Mary had of Herself was the hair with which She wounded the heart of God. Not that Mary considered Herself a sinner.

Humility is truth, as St. Teresa remarks, and Mary knew that She had never offended God. She also knew that She had received more graces from God than all other creatures. A humble heart always acknowledges the special favors of the Lord in order to humble itself all the more. But the Blessed Mother, because of the greater light which made Her aware of the infinite greatness and goodness of God, was also aware of Her own nothingness. That is why She humbled Herself more than everybody else, saying with the sacred Spouse: *Do not stare at me because I am swarthy, because the sun has burned me.* (Cant. 1:5) That is, as St. Bernard explains it: *"When I approach Him, I find myself black."* This is true, says St. Bernardine, because the Blessed Virgin was always vividly conscious of the majesty of God and Her own nothingness. When a beggar is given a costly gift, he does not show off with it in the presence of the donor. He receives it humbly and remains conscious of his own poverty. So when Mary saw herself enriched with grace, She humbled Herself, reminding Herself that it was all God's gift. That is why She told St. Elizabeth of Hungary that She looked upon Herself as a worthless creature and unworthy of the grace of God. And that is why St. Bernardine says



that *"after the Son of God, no one in the whole world was ever so exalted as Mary, because no one ever humbled himself to the extent that She did."*

Moreover, it is characteristic of humility to conceal heavenly gifts. Mary wished to conceal from St. Joseph the favor which made Her the Mother of God. At the same time it seemed necessary to reveal the secret to him, if only to remove from his mind any suspicions as to Her virtue which he might have entertained on seeing Her pregnant. St. Joseph, on the one hand, did not wish to doubt Mary's chastity; and yet on the other hand, being unaware of the mystery, he was minded to have Her put away privately. (Mt. 1:19) And he would have done so had the angel not revealed to him that his spouse was pregnant by the operation of the Holy Spirit.

Again, a soul that is truly humble does not allow herself to be praised. And if praises are showered on her, she refers them all to God. Mary was disturbed at hearing Herself praised by St. Gabriel. She was also disturbed when Elizabeth said: *Blessed art Thou among women ... And how have I deserved that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ... Blessed is she who has believed.* (Lk. 1:42-45) Mary referred everything to God, and replied in the humble words of Her Cantic: *My soul magnifies the Lord.* (Lk. 1:46) This was the same as saying: *"You praise Me, Elizabeth, but I praise the Lord, to whom alone all honor is due. You wonder why I have come to visit you, while I wonder at the divine goodness that has come to me. And My spirit rejoices in God my Savior.* (Lk. 1:47) *You praise Me because I have believed; but I praise My God, because He has exalted My nothingness. He hath regarded the lowliness of His handmaid* (Lk. 1:48)."

Our Lady said to St. Bridget: *"I humbled Myself so much, and have merited so much grace, be-*

cause I knew that of Myself I possessed nothing. That is why I did not want to be praised. I desired only that praise be given to the Creator and Giver of all things." Referring to the humility of Mary, an ancient author says: "O truly blessed humility, which has given God to men, opened heaven, and delivered souls from hell!"

It is also characteristic of humility to serve others. Mary did not hesitate to go and help Elizabeth for three months. St. Bernard aptly remarks: "Elizabeth wondered why Mary had come to visit her; but - what is still more remarkable - that She came not to be ministered to, but to minister."

Humble persons are usually retiring and choose the least honorable places for themselves. Therefore, as St. Bernard remarks, "when Jesus was preaching in a house (as we learn in St. Matthew), Mary, wishing to speak to Him, would not enter of Her own accord but remained outside, and did not avail Herself of Her maternal right to interrupt Him." And when She was with the Apostles waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit, She chose the lowest place, as St. Luke relates: *All these with one mind continued steadfastly in prayer with the women and Mary, the Mother of Jesus (Acts 1:14)*. St. Luke was not ignorant of the Blessed Mother's merits, which should have caused him to name Her first. However, Mary had taken the last place among the Apostles and the women. And therefore he described them, as an author remarks, in the order in which they were. St. Bernard says: "The last has rightly become the first, because being the first of all She became the last."

Finally, people who are sincerely humble do not look for favor. In fact, they love to be despised. That is why we note that Mary did not show Herself in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday when the people received Jesus with so much honor. On the other hand, at His death She did not hesitate to appear on Calvary. She was undeterred by fear of the ridicule She would incur when it became known that She was the mother of the criminal. On one occasion Mary said to St. Bridget: "What is more humbling than to be called a fool, to be in need of things, and to believe oneself the most unworthy of all? Such was My humility, O daughter. It was My constant joy and desire to please My Son in this way as much as I could."

Venerable Sister Paola of Foligno was privileged to see in an ecstasy how great the humility of the Blessed Virgin was. Giving an account of it to her confessor, she

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was so filled with astonishment that she could only say: "Father, you can never understand how great the humility of the Blessed Virgin was! There is no humility in the world comparable to the humility of Mary."

On another occasion Our Lord showed St. Bridget two women. The one was all glamor and vanity. "She is Pride" He said, "but the other one whom you see with her head bowed, courteous to all, devoted to God alone, and considering herself as a nobody, is Humility, and her name is Mary." God chose that way of letting us know

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Dear Father Gruner,

In expressing my deep gratitude to you for mailing the "Fatima Priest" 3rd edition to me, it is the best detective story I ever read in my life.

As I was reading chapter after chapter of your book with all its evil and wickedness of your enemies against you, it was a marvelous surprise to me how Our Blessed Mother came through for you, Her beloved priest-son. Thank you for sending it to me.

I highly recommend it and as my pastor has a life-size statue of Our Lady of Fatima, I will offer this book to him. It is hope and faith we must have as you have shown the courage we must take when inspired by the Holy Ghost...

In my daily prayers for the Consecration of Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I hope it will be soon.

Continuing my prayers for you, I am faithfully yours,
Regina M., Milwaukee, WI

THE VIRTUES OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY
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that Mary is the personification of humility.

There can be no doubt, observes St. Gregory of Nyssa, that of all the virtues there is perhaps none more difficult for our nature to practice, tainted as it is by sin, than humility. At the same time we cannot evade this truth: We can be true children of Mary only if we are humble.

"If you cannot imitate the virginity of the Blessed Virgin," says St. Bernard, "imitate Her humility." She de-

tests the proud, and invites the lowly to come to Her: *Whosoever is a little one, let him come to Me* (Prov. 9:4). Richard of St. Lawrence writes: "*Mary protects us under the mantle of Her humility.*" The Blessed Mother explained to St. Bridget what Her mantle was, "Come," She said, "*and hide yourself under My mantle. This mantle is My humility.*" She then added that meditation on Her humility was a cloak or mantle with which we could warm ourselves. But since a mantle gives this service only to those who wear it and not to those who merely think about it, She said: "*Mary's humility will not help anybody except those who endeavor to imitate Her.*" And She concluded with these words: "*Therefore clothe yourself, My daughter, with this humility.*"

O, how devoted Mary is to humble souls! St. Bernard says: "She recognizes and loves those who love Her. And She is ready to help all that call on Her, especially those who resemble Her in chastity and humility." So the saint exhorts all those who love Mary to be humble: "Strive to imitate this virtue of Mary, if you really love Her." Marinus or Martin d'Alberto, of the Society of Jesus, used to sweep the house and collect the trash out of love for the Blessed Virgin. One day Mary appeared to him, as Father Nieremberg relates in his life, and thanked him saying: "*I am very much pleased by this humble action which you do for love of Me.*"

It follows then, O my Queen, that I can never really be your child unless I am humble. But surely You understand that my sins, after having made me ungrateful to my Lord, have also made me proud? O Mary, You must provide the remedy. By the merit of Your humility make me truly humble, and help me in that way to become Your child.

We'd like to hear from YOU! Write or call:

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