

# Life of the Spirit

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## THE WORSHIP OF OUR LADY<sup>1</sup>

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WE should remember', says St Thomas Aquinas commenting on the *Ave Maria*, 'that of old it was a very great thing for angels to appear to men, and also was it the right thing for men to show them reverence. Thus to the credit of Abraham it is written that he showed hospitality to angels and revered them. But that an angel had shown reverence to man was a thing unheard of until the time when he reverently greeted the Blessed Virgin saying: *Ave, Hail.*' Thus in the eyes of Catholic theologians the veneration of our Lady began at the Annunciation when she was accorded honour and respect by the messenger of God himself. And it is an undeniable fact that those first simple words of Gabriel's have been taken up and repeated with such an increasing volume and intensity that they have become almost the hallmark of the Catholic. These simple words of praise have found their echo in every age. The third and fourth century pictures of the Madonna surrounded in the glory of her nimbus, the excited cry of the Ephesian populace when they learned that their veneration of the Mother of God—'Theotokos'—was vindicated, the dedication to the Blessed Virgin of some of the earliest churches after the peace of Constantine, the consequent introduction of her feasts into the calendar—all this reveals the fact not only of the close association from early times between the sacred liturgy and the veneration of the Virgin, but also that she was accorded a type

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of honour and respect not apparently granted to any other human being. To trace the development of this fact from those beginnings until its mature intensity at the present time need not occupy us here; it is too evident. The average Catholic man or woman has shown his need for a spiritual Mother not only in his private intercessions but also in his public worship of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

This characteristic of Catholic life and worship came eventually to demand some explanation and safeguards. The worship of the Virgin was evidently not to be confused with the worship in its strictest sense signifying the honour offered to God alone. By the thirteenth century the theologians had invented a terminology to meet the facts. For it was clear that no Christian could worship the Virgin as he should worship God; it was equally clear that Christians as a general rule paid far greater respect to the Blessed Virgin than to any other individual appearing in the Church's calendar as worthy of veneration in the liturgy. To meet these facts the theologians said that worship given to God was to be called *latria*, an adoration which was to be shown to God alone, or to the humanity of Christ as being one with the divine person. The honour and worship paid to the saints was called *dulia*, a word adopted from the current Greek for veneration. And then, for lack of a better word, they called the type of greater respect shown to our Lady by the manufactured term *hyper-dulia*, which simply means that the veneration shown to her is *super*, 'above', that shown the ordinary saints. So far, then, as the facts are concerned it is obvious that Catholic veneration of the Virgin soars above and beyond that of any other saint.

These distinctions, however, were not invented as a kind of convenience to guard against idolatry on the one hand and to explain a quantitative difference in worship on the other. The honour paid to the blessed Virgin and to the saints in the liturgy and devotion of the Church is one of the best examples of the union of prayer with dogma which is expressed by the phrase *lex orandi, lex credendi*. The distinctions between the different types of cult arise neither from a mere denial that the Christian adores our Lady nor from a quantitative judgment of the actual extent of her cult compared with that of other saints; but they rest on the natures of those who are to be

venerated and consequently upon the actual demands they make upon our respect. Almighty God does not—indeed cannot—leave us free to select what type of honour we should show him. He is man's creator, so that man depends on him for the entirety of his being—his personality and everything about him that is of any reality. Man is bound, therefore, by the natural law according to which he is constructed and under which his life is to be conducted, to offer him the complete subjection of all his powers of mind and will and of all his being. This he must do by means of an integral form of worship called 'sacrifice', rededicating his life to the author of life. No one but God may be offered this type of veneration, for no one is, or could be, so subject to another creature however elevated. Thus the sacrifice of the Mass, which is the most complete act of adoration, is never offered to our Lady, even though it is very frequently offered to God in her honour. This essential worship which springs from the roots of man's being has, as we have said, been called *latria* or adoration, rather as a scientist might decide to call a certain radiation 'alpha' as distinct from 'gamma'. The reality is there whatever the name, and no Christian in his senses would recognise the blessed Virgin Mary as the infinite author of his being, nor would the Church ever willingly permit such idolatry.

Creatures of God's making, however, have often some divine touch of beauty or holiness which entitles them to a special kind of respect. We must pass over here the veneration paid to the things that belong specifically to the Second Person of the Trinity, such as his humanity or the cross upon which he died—created things which do receive some share of the adoration accorded to the Son of God; here we are concerned with a human creature, a human person. Now the nobility of a human person is something which is not simply an inanimate mirror of divine glory. We revere the memory of Shakespeare, not merely that of his 'muse'. For it is man's personal superiority or nobility that calls forth respect and esteem among his fellow human beings in different ways. The mayor's office as superior in a city entitles him to be called 'his worship'. So also, just as a certain office or position demands honour, the presence of certain virtues in a person calls forth from his fellow men a respect which amounts to

eneration. His holiness originates from God, but it is due in some measure also to his co-operation with God. So the saints gather round them the devotion and veneration of their fellow Christian creatures. These qualities can obviously never reach the independence and infinity which belong to God alone, but they can establish a man head and shoulders above his fellows. This honour or worship has been called, for the sake of a name, *dulia*; and, although it can be of all sorts according to the nature of the nobility revered, such as civil *dulia* or honour paid to a mayor or a king, we are speaking here of that special type of nobility which belongs to supernatural holiness. In this case particularly the respect due to a person on account of the many graces he receives from God will be a respect which not only includes God in its orbit but which also recognises a certain dependence upon the holy one under God.

Thus the veneration of a saint is not simply a question of telling him in respectful terms what a fine fellow he is, but also of asking him for certain favours which are his to share in some way with all who come to him. This is best seen in relation to the doctrine of the mystical body, without which neither liturgical worship nor the veneration of saints can be understood. Since these highly favoured men and women are so favoured precisely by reason of a greater share in the infinite life of God, their nobility is theirs not simply for themselves but also for all men who are joined to God in any way in this same divine life. The saints are as it were the particularly well-to-do members of a very closely knit and loyal family. The worship they receive, then, is one not only of praise but also of petition, so that the liturgy often pours forth a stream of prayers to them, as is heard in the litany of the saints.

In such veneration our Lady very evidently shares. She is indeed a member of this heavenly nobility so that she necessarily enjoys great praise and receives a great number of petitions. But it is also evident that since her position in the plan of redemption is unique, her superiority must also be equally unique. We have seen how the Angel recognised the special veneration due to Mary even before she had become Mother of God. That was because she was born immaculate and full of grace. But such nobility in Mary up to that moment

might still have been regarded as being only in degree different from the nobility of other holy people who shared the same life even though Mary had it to the fullest extent. But when she had become Mother of God and had become wholly bound up with her Son's work of redemption, beginning with her *Fiat* to the Angel and concluding with his *Fiat* on Calvary, shared so intimately by her, she had acquired a nobility to which no other creature could attain. She became, in consequence, Mother of all Christians, and Queen of heaven; and as Catholics began to realise the uniqueness of her position, so veneration towards her deepened and expanded into something which was unique not merely quantitatively or in degree, as being accorded to her more than to any other saint, but also in its very nature. The liturgy became studded more and more with feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a process which has continued to the present day as the theology of Mary's place in the plan of redemption still continues to develop. And Catholics naturally recognise a greater dependence upon their supernatural Mother than upon any other saint in heaven. They turn, therefore, in a unique way to their Mother, praising her for being the Mother of her Son, for being full of grace, for being the cause under him of our joy and our salvation. For this reason, the Catholic worships our Lady in a way that he worships no one else—certainly not in the way he worships God, but also not in the way he worships other creatures for God's sake. And this veneration arises not so much from anything in the worshipper, be it from a psychological need for a 'universal Mother' or from an emotional superstition stirred by visions and apparitions, but rather from the special veneration due to the qualities in herself, qualities which are of a different nature from those of others. The Catholic does not worship our Lady because the Church or his forefathers have urged him to do so, but because this unrivalled position and quality of the Mother of God call out for a special veneration. Her honours and dignities are not put upon her from outside, as the idolater decorates his graven image with qualities from his own imagination. Mary the mother of Jesus radiates her special qualities from her person and draws this Catholic worship to herself. Catholic worship of the Virgin Mary, then, is something demanded—not something merely given. It is a

unique type of *dulia* or honour which is called forth by the special nobility of the Mother of God and Queen of Heaven.

Yet that honour, in the eyes of the Catholic, can never be seen as apart from God, still less as a rival to God's own honour. For Mary is the fairest of his creatures, and if she is praised for her beauty, so much the more praise and love does the Author receive. Every hymn to the blessed Virgin leads the singer to the Father, and to her Son in the love of the Holy Spirit. '*Corde et animo*', the Church says in her liturgy, 'In heart and spirit we sing glory to Christ in this celebration sacred to the superexcellent Mother of God—Mary'.

NOTE I.—Not every Catholic theologian regards *hyperdulia* as being different in *kind* from the *dulia* granted to the other saints. But in view of the great progress in the development of the doctrine concerning Mary's place in the redemption, it seems likely that this dissent will become a minority.

NOTE II.—Many non-Catholics seem frightened of the word 'worship' as applied to our Lady. But it is an unwarranted restriction of its meaning to limit it to the idea of adoration. A glance at the Oxford Dictionary will show that the word may be used for any type of *dulia*.



## OUR LADY AND THE GLOBE

**D**URING the Marian Congress which preceded the definition of the dogma of the Assumption last November, G. Gaetano di Sales, who leads a movement *Pro Rogalitate Mariae*, gave a paper on the meaning of the 'Miraculous Medal' and of the symbol of our Lady with a globe in her hand. He pointed out how specially indebted he was to this Marian devotion as he had been brought back to the faith by a special grace received in the Chapel of the Apparitions from which the devotion sprang. The following summary will convey the substance of the paper read in Rome.

La Salette, Lourdes and Fatima have tended, by their modern popularity, to overshadow an earlier apparition which took place in Paris and from which the others have sprung as from a hidden seed. Those later apparitions have elucidated and developed what was expressed originally in 1830 to a