

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER (FIRST SUNDAY OF MAY – 2025)

Traditionally, the month of May has been dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and so, I would like to talk about this today. Let me begin with our first reading from the Acts of the Apostles. In it, Saint Peter declares to the Jews that Jesus was raised up by the God of their ancestors and is now exalted as leader and Savior sitting at the Father's right hand.

Here, Saint Peter reminds us of things we all know. We all know why Jesus came into the world, and we all know what He did, but we could and should also ask, "How did Jesus come into the world?" But we know the answer to that question too. It can be found in the Nicene Creed we recite each week at holy Mass. Here is the answer to how Jesus came into the world:

"By the Holy Spirit [He] was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man."

The fact that Jesus was incarnate of the Blessed Virgin Mary makes the role of our Lady very important, essential in fact, and here is why.

Without Mary, Jesus Christ could not have been born into the world, and so without Mary, there would have been no God-man, no crucifixion, no redemption, no resurrection, no baptism, no Eucharist, no Mass, and no possibility of salvation for any of us. Instead, we would all be stranded here in this world with no way to atone for our sins and no means of getting to heaven. We would be eternally homeless.

That is why Mary's role in the whole process of our redemption is so very important. That in fact is also why many theologians have called the Blessed Virgin our "co-redemptrix," that is, our co-redeemer. Not because she is equal to Christ, but because without her consent, we could not have been saved.

Now all of Mary's honor is linked to her relationship with her Son. In fact, it is precisely because of this unique relationship Mary has with our Lord Jesus Christ, that the Church (and all true followers of Christ) have always honored Mary, and when I say always, I mean just that.

For example, you can go to the catacombs, the ancient cemeteries around the City of Rome, and there you can find pictures of Mary with the baby Jesus, with the Prophet Isaiah, at the adoration of the Magi and so on. Some of these pictures date from the second and third centuries, and, in a few cases, to only a few decades after our Lord's ascension into heaven.

Here I should point out that these first Christians were simply following the command given to us in the Scriptures. There, our Blessed Lady, inspired by the Holy Spirit, declared, **"Behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed."** Notice that this sentence is in the imperative form. In other words, it is a command.

Note also that the Catholic Church has always been faithful to that command. We have always honored Mary and called her "blessed."

One way we have done so is to incorporate the words of Saint Elizabeth into the prayer the "Hail Mary." We say as did Saint Elizabeth, **"Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus."**

Just think for a minute of how we honor our own mothers. They were the ones who gave us life. They were the ones who cared for us when we were young. They were the ones who fed us and changed our diapers; they were the ones who took care of us when we were sick.

For those reasons, we respond to our mothers with love and respect and gratitude. Jesus did the same thing. He is the Son of God, but He is also the Son of Mary. Mary was and is His mother, and that is something He will never forget, and neither should we.

Here is something else for us to consider about the relationship between Jesus and Mary. Jesus is God which means He did all things perfectly. Now because the Commandments are about love, and God is love. That means Jesus obeyed the Commandments perfectly and that includes the Fourth Commandment, "Honor your father and mother."

That said, we are called to imitate Jesus in all things, and so, just as Jesus honors Mary who is His mother, so too He expects and even demands that we honor and respect her as well, and as a Church, we do just that.

For example, we honor Mary with numerous titles. We call her "blessed" because she is holy. Because she would become the Mother of God, Mary was preserved her free from original sin from the first moment of her conception. We call this the Immaculate Conception. Furthermore, throughout her life, Mary never sinned in even the smallest way. She always chose to do the will of God and that makes her the greatest of all the saints.

Another title we give to Mary is "virgin." We do so because the conception of Jesus was miraculous and because Mary had no other children besides Jesus. Our Lady gave herself entirely to God, so much so that there was no room for the very special and intimate relationship that a husband and wife share with each other.

We also call Mary "queen." Most people don't realize that in ancient times, it was not the wife of the king who was the queen. Rather, it was the mother of the king who was queen. So, since Jesus is the king of the world, it means Mary is the queen of the world, and that fact is just one more reason why our Lady is held in such high esteem and given such great honor.

We also call Mary our mother, and we do so because when Jesus was dying on the cross, He gave His mother Mary to us to be our mother too. That is why we can call on her and pray to her especially when we are in trouble and in need of motherly help and assistance.

Our blessed Lady wants nothing more than to help us grow in love with her divine Son. She will lead us to Him and guide us to Him in her motherly way. There is an old saying, "To Jesus, through Mary." She is the mother who points the way to her Son. We will find Jesus by staying close to Mary.

So, for all these reasons, it's a very good thing for us to honor our Lady throughout the year but especially during the month of May because May is Mary's month. It is the month set aside by the Church to remember Mary in a special way.

To that end, I would urge you during this month of May to do something special to honor Mary. Here are some suggestions:

- Say a daily Rosary.
- Make a novena to Mary.
- Entrust your family and loved ones to our Lady's maternal care.
- Read a book or an article on the Blessed Mother.
- Teach your children or grandchildren about devotion to the Blessed Virgin.
- Place a statue or picture of our Lady in a prominent place in your home (and don't forget to have it blessed).
- Set up a May altar in your home during this month.
- Say the Angelus. The prayer is said in the morning, at noon and at night. It recalls the angel Gabriel's apparition to Mary. The Church bells remind us of when to say this prayer.
- Come to our May Crowning and Procession this afternoon.

We Catholics also have another tradition, and that is naming our children after saints. That way they have a patron in heaven who will watch over them, and what greater saint is there than Mary? Women and girls named after her should be especially proud to be named after the Mother of God.

In some or all of these ways we can as individuals, as families and as a parish, honor Mary, the Holy Mother of God by whose consent was born Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. Amen.