

THE LORD'S MOTHER

AN ADDRESS TO CHRISTIANS ⁱ

"Mary, the mother of Jesus"—Acts i. 14

Well! These few words go right into our hearts, because we are the people of God. Let me say them over again; because there is such a wonderful charm and such a wonderful power in them. "Mary, the Mother of Jesus." What! Do you believe, and do I believe, that Jesus had a Mother? Do you believe and do I believe that Jesus has a mother now—at this very moment? Do we believe that there is such a being in existence, at this very moment, as the Mother of Jesus? It seems blasphemy, at first sight, to say that Jesus had a Mother, and has a Mother. But we do believe it, and, at this very moment, while our blessed Lord Jesus is in our midst, and while we are now enjoying a sense of His presence, we believe that He has a Mother.

It is an awful thought, but it is a true thought. Our blessed Lord and Saviour has a Mother; and if He had not we should all be damned for ever. Why?

Because it is the Blood of the Lamb that has saved us, and there is no pardon except through the human blood of Jesus. If Jesus had no Mother He would have no blood! What an awful mystery is this!

I am speaking to Christians only now. But I am also speaking to men and women who, all, every one of them, have mothers. The greyest-bearded man, listening to me now, has a mother either here or in the spirit world; and most of us love our mothers; most of us love them with a love with which we have never loved anyone else.

There is a peculiarity about the love for a mother which there is in no other love. It is nothing like (if I may use the words reverently) the selfish love of the husband towards the wife. It is not the love which we have for a friend, or for any other relation. The love of a mother is something that seems to be one of the initiatory mysteries of our existence. The very first sensation of our hearts was love for our mothers. We can almost recall the time when we could only just put our arms round our mother's neck with tenderness, in giving her the first kiss.

My mother! There is no other relationship that touches the heart like the one expressed by these two words "My mother!" Of course I am not speaking now to those who, unhappily, have had very bad, wicked mothers. Though, even then, there is something in the thought of "my mother" that would make it agonising to think anything that was bad of her.

But now we are only thinking of the general run of Christian mothers, and of the charm there is in the words "my mother."

Do I not recollect, myself, how proud I used to be of my mother? I remember when a boy at school, and the Apposition Day came round, when the boys had to make speeches, and their parents used to come to the school to hear them—I remember when my mother came into the room, how proud I was of her; and I used to like to point her out to the other boys. I did not think there was anybody in the world like my mother.

And I am sure that is what Jesus thinks about His Mother, with His human heart; for He

is very Man as well as very God. And Jesus knows one Being to whom He can look up and say, before the angels, before devils, before men, "My Mother!"

There is to me, as a man, and as a Christian, a charm that is unutterable in the thought; "Mary, the Mother of Jesus!"ⁱⁱ Oh! to speak her name is, to me, such a bringing of Jesus to my heart, as man to man. If Mary be His Mother, I can realise that Jesus is my Brother.

He has the flesh and blood and bones of man though He be God of Heaven! "He came down from Heaven, and was Incarnate, by the Holy Ghost, of the Virgin Mary, and was made man."

"Mary, the Mother of Jesus!"

Why, if anyone pointed out to me the mother of a very great statesman, or the mother of a very great orator, or philanthropist, I should feel a kind of reverence for the woman for her son's sake. Supposing, when the Duke of Wellington came back from the wars, during which he had sustained the honour of the British Empire, and in which he had, a thousand times, risked his life, for dear Old England; supposing, when he came back from the last of his wars, that the first person whom he had met was his mother: do you not think that the people would have said: "Look, that is the mother of Wellington"? And they would at once have made way to let the mother pass to her son's side.

But she was not half so much the mother of Wellington as Mary was the Mother of Jesus. Mary is the Mother of Jesus in a far deeper, intenser sense. Jesus had no human father. Mary was the centre connecting Jesus with humanity. When Jesus thinks of Mary, there His thoughts must rest; for Mary is the beginning and the end of His humanity.

I cannot give utterance to one-millionth part of the feelings, in my own heart, when I think of Mary, the Mother of Jesus; and it does not seem to me to matter one single iota, what people say to me about this, for I feel that I have Jesus on my side; and that I have the Father on my side, Who, from all eternity, elected Mary to be the Mother mystic of His Son Incarnate!

The words "Mary, the Mother of Jesus" have a sound that makes me feel quite at home with God; because God, through Mary, became very Man.

Do you not all feel this? Are there any listening to me who think that I am exaggerating? If so, let me just refer them to one verse, in the 1st chapter of St Luke, and let me ask them to listen to these words. They are in the 35th verse of St Luke i; and it is a verse the like of which there is not, in all the Bible, for mystery tremendous—for marvel unutterable and ineffable.

"And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the Power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that Holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God."

Nazareth was busy in the fields, for it was spring time—the corn was beginning to grow, the birds were singing in the trees, and the farmers and the labourers were hard at work preparing for the planting of the earth—all nature's toil was going on its way; but, in a little cottage, on the hill, there was a mystery of eternity being enacted between the Archangel of Heaven and the lowly maiden Mary.

No eye but the eye of Mary saw the tremendous glow of the gleaming light, when the Archangel came to her and said: "Hail, thou that art highly favoured,"ⁱⁱⁱ and told her that

she was to be the Mother of the Son of God. Then Mary asked him: "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" ^{iv}

And now listen to the Angel's answer: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the Power of the Highest (that is of God the Father) shall overshadow thee: therefore also that Holy Thing Which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." ^v

My brethren, "the Holy Ghost shall come upon thee:" that is the Third Person. The Power of the Highest shall overshadow thee:" that is the First Person. "The Holy One born of thee" is the Second Person. There is the whole Trinity.

How awful, how blasphemous, if it be not true! Is it true? Is it true that Mary became the Mother of Jesus, by this tremendous and overwhelming revelation of mystery and truth? Is there, in existence, a Being who was the Mother of God the Son by the overshadowing of God the Father, and by the conception of the Holy Ghost?

It cannot be true! It is an utter impossibility! It is the stumbling block in the way of Christianity! People who would believe in Christianity are turned from believing through the mystery of the "Mother of Jesus". Really, to take in the mystery of Christ's Incarnation is to be wading in the depths of the waters of mystery.

Oh! brethren, need I urge any argument to convince my present hearers that really and truly Mary became the Mother of Jesus, the Son of God, by the overshadowing of God the Father, and by the Holy Ghost coming upon her? No, because I know that you all believe it quite as much as I do. Mary, the Mother of Jesus, is a mystery; but we do believe in this mystery of the New Testament; it is the foundation of all the other mysteries of Christianity; and they would be nothing but for this. Of course the outside world does not believe it; and a great many in the visible Church do not believe it either.

I was once travelling from Marseilles to Genoa, when a gentleman and fellow-traveller, on board the steamer, entered into conversation with me; and a question that he asked me was whether I believed in the Virgin Mary. I said: "What do you mean?" He said: "Do you believe that Mary, while a virgin, was the Mother of Jesus?" I said: "Of course I do; I should not be a Christian if I did not". "Well," he said, "I cannot."

And he was a Roman Catholic, and said his prayers most devoutly; but he told me that he could not believe in the Virgin Mary. He said it was perfectly impossible that she was the Mother of Jesus by the Holy Ghost.

But if he did not believe in the miracle of the Mother of Christ he could not believe in the Divinity and in the Incarnation of Christ, nor in the Atonement of the Cross; for if the Blood that Jesus shed on the Cross was not that of the Son of God, It could not save us any more than any other blood.

Protestants would not seem to believe it by the way they speak of her; but they do, in their hearts, believe it as much as we Catholics do. All Evangelical Christians believe it as a revealed, divine mystery, a most tremendous mystery, of God.

We cannot prove it by argument; no logic can prove it; it cannot be proved by any other means than the Holy Ghost convincing the heart of the reality of this awful, and unutterable, mystery.

Of course if there be any individuals here who do not believe this mystery, my words must seem most blasphemous to them.

Can you feel how sweet it is to call Mary the Mother of God? I say I should not be a Christian if I could not believe that she was. What! God have a mother! Certainly. And yet people who call themselves Christians, scarcely acknowledge that Mary is the Mother of God.

Mary is not the Mother of God in the way in which my mother is my mother. She is not the mother of the Godhead. Mary is the Mother of the humanity of Him Who was God—of a Divine Person who, though He took human nature upon Him, was still very God. And this is a mystery that all must believe.

May I ask you, first of all, is it not tremendously necessary, in these evil days of rationalism and materialism, that we should be sound on this fundamental doctrine of our holy religion? Is it not necessary that we should know what we believe on this point, and why we believe it? Shall I, because I am afraid of the ridicule of an unbelieving world, say I do not believe that Christ is really God; and that Mary is only the Mother of a God-like person? Shall we say this? No; to settle the matter, we give the title to “Mary, the Mother of Jesus”^{vi} of “Mother of God.”

And now, my brethren, consider how comfortable it is to be very clear on this point; because, when we are clear on this doctrine of Christ’s Mother, it brings Jesus so very close to us. We see Him, and we realise that He is our High Priest. If this mystery be not true, Christ is either not God or not man. If Mary be not the Mother of God, Christ is not God; and if Mary be not God’s Mother, God has never taken our nature and never redeemed us.

Therefore we cling pertinaciously to the truth that “God so loved us” that He came down from Heaven, took our nature upon Him, and “bought His Church with His Own Blood.”^{vii} He so loved the Church that He gave Himself for it. Oh! my brothers and sisters in Jesus, this truth brings home to me so plainly that Jesus is the “Friend that sticketh closer than a brother.”^{viii} Jesus is the true friend—born for adversity. It makes me to realise that I may cast all my sorrows on Him, for once He bore our sorrows; once He was “in all points tempted like as we are.”^{ix}

How could He have been tempted like we are if He had not become “very man?” God could not be tempted. Therefore He came down and was Incarnate, and “was made man,” that He might be able to “be touched with the feeling of our infirmities.”^x

When you, yourselves, are nearly overcome with grief, when tears stream down your cheeks, then comes the thought to you that He suffered, that “Jesus wept,”^{xi} that Jesus was weary! Oh! what calm it brings to the soul to know that He is able “to be touched with the feeling of our infirmities,” because He “was in all points tempted like as we are.”^{xii} It makes life so different to go through it with Him on our side. He once was like us, because He was “very man,” “born of the Virgin Mary.”

I have touched on the doctrine, at great length; and now I want you to ask yourselves the question: “What can we think,—knowing what we do of the feelings of the best sons, among men, towards their mothers,—*what can we think our Lord’s feelings towards His Mother are?*”

My love for the Blessed Virgin is one of the chief things for which I have been persecuted for twenty years, and misrepresented, and for which I have had to suffer a very great deal. I was about to preach a mission in a church, where I should very much have liked to have gone; but, all at once, the clergyman drew back because of my great love for the “Mother of God.”

There are plenty of people in the Church of England who do not believe it right to love her; and if there be any such people here present, may I ask them not to let their party spirit prevent their listening patiently to what I say. Do they think we can grieve Our Lord by loving His Mother? Instead of loving her too much, I feel that I cannot love her enough.

The answer to my question would probably be: "Look at our Roman Catholic brethren, how they exaggerate the honour due to the Mother of Jesus." But there is no argument in that, for if we are not to use a thing because of the abuse of it, there would be an end to using the Bible itself. The Blessed Virgin could not have been saved without the merits of her Son; and to make a goddess of her would be heretical and ridiculous. I have "heard of" Roman Catholics who do make a goddess of her; but I have never yet met one, myself, who did.

Brethren, I ask you quietly to put this question to yourselves: is it pleasing to our Lord that His people's hearts should dwell with love on the remembrance of His Mother, or is it not? If it be pleasing that His people should love and reverence His mother, what a sad thing it is to think that, in the majority of the churches of our land, the Blessed Virgin may scarcely be mentioned. If a clergyman happen, from his pulpit, to eulogise our Lord's Mother, people rise, stamp their feet, and walk out. But they do not mind the mention of the devil. They have not the least objection to hearing about Satan himself.

Once I was catechising a little girl in school, and I asked her if she knew who our Lord's Mother was. She said, "Please sir, she was Mary Magdalene, out of whom He cast seven devils." That is the idea she had of our Lord's Mother. It is no wonder. That child had been taught how shocking it was to give honour to the Virgin Mary; and so it got into her head that the Mother of our Lord was some monster of iniquity. I only just mention this little incident in passing.

The very name of the Virgin Mary is "like a red flag to a bull" to some people; and as I have this week chosen these subjects for our meditations—viz., "The Lord's People," "The Lord's Day," "The Lord's Prayer," "The Lord's Supper," and "The Lord's Cross," I determined that, on this Saturday, I would speak words very clearly and emphatically about "our Lord's Mother;" because if we do not hold right views about her, the atonement of the Cross is invalidated; for if Jesus be not divine the Blood on Calvary would be of no use.

I am here, therefore, to speak now of the Lord's Mother; but I do not speak dictatorially; and I know that you have quite as much right to your opinions as I have to mine.

But the feeling that I have is, that the more we revere the Blessed Virgin Mary, the more we please her Son.

If you were to go to Margate Cemetery, at the end of July, where my own darling mother's mortal remains are lying, till Jesus comes and "the dead in Christ rise first," you would see her grave covered with beautiful flowers. Pounds and pounds are lavished on my mother's grave, and this by people who have never seen her; but they have a love for her for my sake; and they will spend money on her grave, for my sake, out of gratitude for what I have done for their souls. And for Jesus' sake we do honour to the memory of the Mother of Jesus.

It is for *Jesus Only* that I love the Virgin Mary. She would be no more than any other woman to me if she were not His Mother. Therefore, all the glory that I pay to Mary is for love of her Son; and I am sorry that anybody should think this wrong.

The next point is “praying to the Virgin.”

You ask your wife to pray for you, and you teach your child to pray for you, and in the same way I can understand our asking the prayers of those who are departed. I do not believe in asking the prayers of dead saints; but I never heard of a dead saint! I do not believe in dead saints. I believe that Jesus lives; and because He lives they live also; and that is the reason why we ask their prayers. I believe that they are “alive for evermore.”

The Apostle Paul says of the departed, “ We are compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses.” ^{xiii} While we are “running the race” they are the witnesses looking on. So that when a person speaks of “dead saints,” and says that they cannot hear, he has no authority for his assertions from the Word of God.

So, my brethren, I not only believe that it is not wrong, but that it is right, and very helpful, to ask the prayers of my fellow-believers; and you will have to prove to me that the Blessed Virgin is not among the Living “Cloud of Witnesses” before condemning me for asking the prayers of her who is our Lord’s Mother.

Perhaps some of you do not believe with me; but I feel taught of God to ask her prayers; and I do not think that the faith with which I ask her prayers, and with which I long to exalt our Lord’s Mother, grieves Him.

If you say: “where are we told in the Bible to give all this honour to the Virgin Mary?” I would answer: “if Queen Victoria were to walk into this room now, should I sit still and say: ‘I am not going to rise, I shall not get up, I am not told anywhere to do so when I see the Queen?’” No, I should rise instantly, as an Englishman, because I believe the Queen is the Lord’s anointed over us, in civil matters; and I should wish to show her every honour that I could. I should not require to be told to rise; and therefore all that I want to be told is that Mary is the Mother of Jesus, and nothing else, and I must give her the honour that is her due.

There is the Mother of your Lord—treat her as you please; but, for myself, I say that the more I love my Lord and Saviour the more I shall reverence the Mother, whom “all generations are to call blessed.” ^{xiv}

On the Cross Jesus said to His best loved disciple “Behold thy Mother;” ^{xv} and in these words He speaks to me, “ Behold thy Mother;” and therefore I say: “ Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for me.”

Do not let prejudice cause us to misunderstand a simple thing like this.

If this belief should not commend itself to you personally, do not rush into the persecution of those who do think that it does glorify our Lord; and let us Catholics be very tender towards the tenets of our Protestant brothers on the subject. Let us be joined one to another in love; and if the Holy Spirit teach you that it does glorify God to pay reverence and devotion to our Lord’s Mother, pay the reverence; if you do not believe it right to do so, do not pay it, as in that case it would be wrong.

But again I say, I believe it to be right; and I have received very many blessings through the prayers of my Saviour’s Mother. Therefore do not condemn me.

And I ask you, before I conclude, does my love to the Blessed Virgin hinder me from enjoying Christ in His fulness? Do I mix up the mystery of the Virgin with the message of the Gospel to sinners? Certainly not; and I think that the more I love and reverence the

Lord's Mother, the more I realise what her Son is, and the more I long to proclaim what He is to a world that is "dead in trespasses and sins." ^{xvi}

ⁱ From *MISSION SERMONS AND ORATIONS delivered by Father Ignatius, O.S.B., (Rev. Joseph Leycester Lyne), Evangelist Monk of the Church of England, at Westminster Town Hall* (London: William Ridgway, 169 Piccadilly, W. / Hamilton, Adams & Co., 23 Paternoster Row, E.C. / MDCCCLXXXVI)

ⁱⁱ Acts i. 14

ⁱⁱⁱ St. Luke i. 28

^{iv} St. Luke i. 34

^v St. Luke i. 35

^{vi} St. Luke i. 35

^{vii} Acts xx. 28

^{viii} Proverbs xviii. 24

^{ix} Heb. iv. 15

^x Heb. iv. 15

^{xi} St. John xi. 35

^{xii} Heb. iv. 15

^{xiii} Heb. xii. 1

^{xiv} St. Luke i. 48

^{xv} St. John xix. 27

^{xvi} Ephesians 11. 1