

We 'hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful'; but we know that without our friend it is not possible. Fundamentally presumption is a trying to find our own way to heaven, neglecting the way that our friend has opened, the way of the cross, the way of sacrifice and love.

Hope is the virtue of reliance that strengthens us to move toward the sanctuary: it is the virtue of approach, of advent. It puts dynamism into our faith and our love. It routs despair and presumption. For it binds us to Christ himself as he rends the heavens and comes down, as he journeys along the road to Calvary, as he ascends once more to his heavenly Father. For as Christ is the wisdom of God that inspires our faith, so he is the power of God inspiring our hope. And only by our continual closeness to him can we *hope* to enter into the kingdom prepared for us, to the 'riches and glory of this mystery which is Christ in you, the hope of glory' (Coloss. i, 27).



ROSA MYSTICA

PHILIP HOLDSWORTH, O.S.B.

'Behold all generations shall call me blessed.'

WE hear the words of the Mother of God and we think how much the generations have fulfilled them. Over the centuries, increasingly, men have recalled the wonder that is Mary and have held her blessed. What is that glory in her soul that causes us to halt and gaze in awe and love? *Rosa mystica*, the mystic rose, is before us and therein is a whole world of mystery, a life, a deep-set complex of relations. Look into the heart of a rose, of a rosebud, you will see an interweaving, interscrolled patterning of petals and from it you will breathe a scent as of all heaven. So, in the Spirit, is Mary, containing the divine mysteries and breathing the very 'odour of Christ Jesus'. 'The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee.'

Mary is the spouse of the Holy Spirit. When she heard this

promise of the angel she was already one possessed most deeply by the divine Spirit, since she was, as the angel had declared, 'full of grace'. Grace is the raising up of the soul to the life of God, first taking from it all that would make it unable to share this life. It endows the soul with supernatural virtues and with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. But more than this, it gives it a special union with God himself and makes it the temple, as it were, in which God is pleased to dwell in a new and more intimate way. Mary was 'full of grace' and she was not only most completely endowed with the virtues and gifts but most specially the subject of the indwelling of the divine presence.

But now the angel has a further gift for her. She had just been declared to be the mother of the Messiah. She was going to bring forth him who would 'reign in the house of Jacob for ever' and for this the 'power of the Most High would overshadow her'. At her consenting to this the very power of God enables her to conceive his Word and so enter, in a way granted to none other, into relation with Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

This time when the Holy Ghost came upon her he did not merely endow her more fully with his grace, though he did that, but he caused a mystery of quite unparalleled holiness to take place in her womb. He is the divine Spirit, that love which the heavenly Father has eternally for his image, his Son. He is in the same eternity the love the Son returns to the Father. Now he empowers the fruitful flesh of the virgin to conceive a child whose human nature is from the first united with the personal being of the Son of God. She becomes in this act the mother of the Word. She thereby undergoes the action of the Holy Spirit in being made by him to conceive without the intervention of a man. The child is from the Holy Ghost and Mary. She is in this therefore specially under the power of the Holy Ghost, especially full of the divine Spirit. She is also, quite literally, temple of the divine Word. She is full of Jesus. The human race is given its saviour, and it is Mary that receives him on behalf of herself and of all.

We say that all the actions of God 'outside' his own intimate life are the actions of all three Persons of the blessed Trinity. But this does not prevent us speaking of some of those actions as being done by one of the Persons. We are not there excluding the actions of the others, we are just mentioning the one whom it

helps us most to think of as doing the action. And so we think of our Lady responding to the power of the Holy Spirit and receiving in her womb the eternal Word of the Father whom he begets eternally and with whom he is united eternally in that same divine Spirit who is their mutual love. The three Persons all act at the taking flesh of the Son of God, although he is the only one to whom that human nature is united. Mary enters into new relations with each of them. It is by their Spirit that the Father and Son cause her to give human nature to the Son, now her Son as well as the Son of the Father. To the infinite love of the Holy Spirit she unites her own love, the purest love that a mere creature is capable of. Together she and the Holy Ghost bring about the conception of Christ. At once she is in unique relationship with him. She holds the intimate position of mother. A mother is as close to her child as possible, physically before birth, psychologically after it. Her very life is knit with that of the child. Mary is now in that position with regard to the Son of God. She has conceived a Person who is God. Therefore we can and must say that she is the mother of God. She has the position of providing for him who is almighty Lord of all. She exercises a continuous and active ministry towards her creator. Her life is given up in every way to Jesus. Jesus is her sole concern. She is full of him.

She is therefore fully occupied with his heavenly Father. 'I came to do the will of him that sent me', said our Lord. His whole existence is given over to his heavenly Father and in the womb of the virgin mother this was already true of him. Involved with him and with his life and its purpose, she also was now given over with him to do the will of the heavenly Father and to be occupied solely with that. She is then in a special way directed towards the Father with whom she shares her Son. Completely united to Jesus Christ, while she feeds his physical life she is fed by the life of his Spirit and so is absorbed into the love with which in his human nature he serves to the full his heavenly Father.

Mary is in this way caught up into the life of the blessed Trinity. Nor does the situation alter when she has given birth to Christ. It is true that she no longer has the physical relation with him that she had when he was not yet born. But that has given way to another in a way more intimate still. The bond between mother and child after birth, when normal, is of an almost physical character. The mother thinks of the child as her own flesh and

blood. Its pains are her pains, its joys her joys. This almost physical bond is, however, one of personalities. The child is now beginning to develop, though only by stages, into a separate human being. It is beginning to become a distinguishable personality. The bond is now becoming one of reciprocation, of mutual relation. Love is now received as well as given, and returned as well as received. In the case of Jesus and Mary, certainly, her love for her Son was both received and returned by him even before she gave him birth, but after that it was held between them in another way. Now she could look upon his face 'upon which the angels desire to gaze'. Now she could see in him the 'brightness of eternal light' that had hidden, in order to reveal, itself. She was now in daily and intimate converse with the divine wisdom in person, 'before him I played always'. We read how she responded to this new stage in her handmaid service. 'And his mother kept all these words in her heart.'

Schooled, as none other, in the way of Christ, she was ready when the time came for him to go away. We might think for a moment of the heart of the mother as she sees him set out on his course which she knows will end with the cross. What thoughts unspoken were exchanged between mother and Son at that parting! But it was not to be a separation of the spirit. She had long since been warned by Simeon of the sorrows to come. She had learned Jesus Christ at first hand and she knew by now of his consuming desire to become 'obedient unto death, even the death of the cross'. She was at one with him even if she did not know in detail all that he would do. 'Whatsoever he shall say unto you, do ye', she tells the waiters at Cana.

Without surprise, therefore, do we find her standing at the very cross itself. She is there to join in the sacrifice. No other mere human being had her holiness and completeness of abandonment to the will of God. Now was the hour of its testing. She offered her Son to God for his glory and our redemption. Closer now than ever to the divine redeemer, she was with him in his pain, his endurance of rejection and insult and his supreme agony of desolation. With him she entered into that last terrible time of absolute deliverance up to the will of the Father and seeming complete desertion by him. Thus her growth in union with the Son went, as always, together with increasing filial devotion to the Father. It was therefore empowered by an increasing docility

to the movements of the Holy Spirit that are his gifts. Not that she had ever been anything but sensitive to his touch, but now she was strengthened quite unimaginably by his action and enlightened in the same way for the all but infinite trial of faith that she had to endure.

When therefore she had lived into the days of the risen Christ and had seen him ascend into heaven, she was already immeasurably more under the power of the Holy Ghost when the time came for the apostles to be 'persevering in prayer' with her and the other holy women. Her prayer was the most powerful of all in that company. Conceived without sin, she had never been in any way under sin. She had been called to co-operate most intimately with the blessed Trinity in the redemption of the world. Now she was the first, and greatest, to intercede for the bestowal of the 'unsearchable riches of Christ' on his followers and those who should hear and obey them. Indeed she then took up her appointed role of mediatrix of all sanctifying grace. In being the mother of the Saviour she had enabled him to perform the redemptive act which he did in becoming man and living and dying on earth. Through bearing him she was necessarily bringing grace to man. Now at Pentecost she begins to exercise the motherly care over the Church which he had, as he was dying on the cross, authorized her to maintain. This motherhood is over all his brethren, all his followers. The life which this mother brings and fosters and draws to its fulfilment is the divine life. She is mother of divine grace and this grace brings to the soul that receives it a share in the life of the blessed Trinity. Mary it was that received for mankind the coming of Father, Son and Holy Ghost when she first conceived the Son of God. She now is active in the bringing of this life, this presence, to the souls of all who are incorporated into the body of Christ, which is the Church. This Christ-life which she gives is at the same time the life of the Father and the Holy Spirit.

First of all it is the life of submission to the Holy Spirit. We have seen how our Lady was exceptionally under the influence of the Holy Ghost and how this influence was increased immeasurably on two occasions, at the annunciation at Nazareth and at Pentecost. She is the one who most calls down the Spirit. In her he finds his most sensitive and obedient servant among the sons of men. 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord.' That supreme possession of the Holy Spirit that she always had and ever advanced in until

the day of her being taken up by it to the heights of heaven, she does not have as something merely private. It is characteristic of a common way of thought to conceive the function of grace in the soul as but sanctifying the individual rather than as 'building up the body of Christ'. But it is that. The holier each one is and the more each is united with Christ, the more the bond of union and sanctity of all his members is strengthened. On this ground alone is Mary's supreme absorption by the Spirit of the Lord Jesus to be reckoned the means, after Christ himself, by which we receive that Spirit.

'I will not leave you orphans. I will come to you.' So said our Lord. This coming was by the Holy Spirit. 'He shall glorify me.' It is because of this divine Spirit working invisibly in our inmost soul that we know our Lord. As man he lived and died in a distant land in far-off times. But we know him as if he had been with us yesterday. Rather he is with us now, and it is because of his Spirit, who keeps him alive in our hearts. 'No man can say the Lord Jesus but by the Holy Ghost.' But Mary was the first and the greatest to enjoy this abiding presence of the Christ-bringing Spirit and she it is who won and wins him for us.

She wins for us the permanent indwelling of one whose task it is to form us in the image of Jesus Christ. 'He shall glorify me.' He keeps before us the image of Christ. The effect, if we respond to him, is that we grow in that image which he has already given to us with his first grace. 'God . . . hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Christ Jesus', and again, 'But we all, beholding the glory of the Lord with open face, are transformed in the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord'.

'But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent his Son, made of a woman, made under the law: that he might redeem them who were under the law: that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because you are sons, God hath sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying: Abba, Father.' The woman then brings to us the power to be the sons of God, by adoption indeed, but in such fashion that the Spirit in our hearts gives us the very attitude of Christ himself, so that we murmur 'Father' as we pray to our God. This is how the original paradisaical state of man is in certain respects restored; not wholly, since the preternatural gifts are not restored, but the all-important gift of

the supernatural life is renewed. Put most profoundly, God's friendship is once again possessed by man. Once again man walks with God. And the paradise in which this is done is Mary. Such at least she has been called by earlier Christians and we may be tempted to regard it as a mere rhetorical flourish. Far from it, it is the truth. She is the heaven wherein

Men here may draw like breath
More Christ and baffle death;

She, the

wild web, wondrous robe,
Mantles the guilty globe,
Since God has let dispense
Her prayers his providence:

Again,

She holds high motherhood
Towards all our ghostly good. . . .

Thus sang the Victorian poet. His words have been confirmed by innumerable statements of the Roman pontiffs on our Lady's universal mediation which derives from, and operates in subordination to, the unique mediation of the Son of God. Our Lady then is endeavouring, as true mother, to foster in us the divine Life, that of Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

In this earthly paradise we can walk with security and peace. 'In me is all grace of the way and the truth; in me is all hope of life and of virtue.' We are called to holiness and to such holiness as our servile spirits cannot readily even begin to surmise. We cannot, furthermore, find this call easy to follow, and we can only too readily either give it up or, more likely, compromise unjustifiably our fidelity to it. The vocation of the Christian is a supernatural one, not only exceeding the powers of man in its demands but, if only partly seen as our Lord has designed it, offering to man a prospect that would seem too difficult to face undertaking. That is to say, if we really attempt to follow the path of self-denial that Jesus Christ has led us on, we shall either fail through fear or be compelled to resort to those sources of strength that he has provided. The sacraments are the manner of our being brought into the way of receiving his grace, but it is our Lady that provides the personal guidance, inspiration and encouragement to 'seek the things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God'. She also obtains for us these graces, by her unremitting

intercession, and her motherly care keeps us in good spiritual health, seeing to it that we do not neglect to persevere in the following of Christ, even Christ crucified.

He has taught us what our prayer should be, 'Our Father who art in heaven . . .', but some of it requires great self-sacrifice to say and mean, 'Thy will be done. . . . Forgive us as we forgive . . .'. If we, in all our selfishness and weakness, are ever to be followers of Jesus Christ we need a constant and unsparing adherence to the care and guidance of the mother of God. 'He who reads my lesson aright will find in it life eternal.' By her aid we can become governed by the Spirit so that we can begin to say, 'I live, now not I, Christ liveth in me'. And because it is the life of the Son of God that we live, it is one in which we count nothing dearer than that we do the Father's will.



FRIENDSHIP IN CHRIST

JANE FARRELL

They are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple, and he who is seated on the throne will diffuse his glory on them. No longer will they thirst or hunger. No longer will the sun or any heat strike them. For the Lamb before the throne will be their shepherd and will guide them to the springs of living waters, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. (Apoc. vii, 14-17.)

ALREADY, to us who are yet *in via*, there belongs some share in this apocalyptic vision. Already there is diffused upon us some measure of God's glory, in that grace which is the seed of glory. And so we need not wait until angelic trumpets herald the *parousia*; already God is accomplishing in us these very wonders that St John saw in heaven.

The Lamb is even now our shepherd, drawing us to himself, to himself as the well-spring of those still waters that inundate our total being, and quiet our every striving, our every hunger,