

19th Sunday after Pentecost

Most Beloved in Christ: Today I wish to speak briefly about the Feast of the Motherhood of God, a feast we celebrated earlier this week, even though it is the 19th Sunday after Pentecost. This is not difficult to understand since the prerogatives of Mary flow from her relationship to Jesus. It was in view of the salvation of the human race to be effected through the Second Person of the Holy Trinity who would be born of her womb, that Mary was conceived without stain of original sin in the womb of her own mother, Saint Anne. It is always in relation to Jesus that the Church ever speaks of Mary, and so it is always simple to draw Mary into the subject of Our Lord and His Holy Church.

In today's Epistle Paul exhorts us to "be renewed in the spirit of your mind and put on the new man who, according to God, is created in justice and truth." Christ is the New Man, the Second Adam from whom we receive the *true life* of a second birth, a newness of being which God alone can give, mediated as it is through the mystery of Baptism. In today's epistle reading Paul enumerates the ways in which the new man in us is made evident: he rehearses the virtues by which we avoid sin and carry out meritorious works under grace which make us fit for the glory of the Jerusalem which is above.

Most Beloved, Mary is the new and Second Eve, the renewal of womanhood itself, and the human agent by which God chose to open the gates of glory to us who would otherwise be destined to hell, the fruit of our fallen condition and personal sin.

In today's Gospel reading we heard proclaimed Christ's parable of the Wedding Feast and the guest found without his proper garment. Many understand his fault as symbolizing a man's lack of grace and thus, relative to eternity, incapable of coming into the glory of the true feast which is Heaven. The Fathers of the Church saw in this man, and the condition of the feast with him present, as a type of the Church. For here, in our present life, here in this very place, we see that the Church is made up of saints and sinners who at the Table of the Lord. That which distinguishes the sorts of men is their possession and practice of charity.

The feast *we* celebrate so often as Christians is this one – the Eucharistic Mystery where divine Sacrifice is made Sacrament and the nuptial relationship of God to His people is brought into a living reality, a living presence. Here we feast upon the sublime food of Christ's own Flesh and Blood. No less, here we are bid by God Himself to love one another as a foretaste of that perfect and endless love which will be the experience of the elect in heaven. The grace of such charity is made possible by the Second Adam: Jesus, in His life, His works, His words, all of which are communicated to us, through time and space, by the ministry of the Church and her Mysteries, the Holy Sacraments, celebrated and conferred by priests, sinners though we are.

But the Mystery of Our Lady is a particularly fecund reality and it is to her, precisely as the Mother of God, the *Theotokos*, that sinners have such free access in prayer. She is the wedding garment *par excellence* of the whole of our race; Mary is the charity of God through whose maternal love we have received Jesus, God, born into our very flesh and like us in all ways but sin.

In the year 1931 a jubilee marking the fifteenth centenary of the Council of Ephesus was celebrated to the great joy of the whole Catholic world. That council, by far the largest up until its time, was one of the first four general councils of the of the early Church; together they were considered as four pillars, and likened to the four Gospels themselves. The fathers at that Council, under the guidance of Pope Celestine, formally condemned the errors of Nestorius concerning the two natures in Christ and declared as Catholic faith the doctrine that the Blessed Virgin Mary, who gave birth to Jesus according to his human nature, was truly the Mother of God. Pope Pius XI determined that the memory of so important an event continue to live in the Church at large. For this reason he ordered the renovation of Rome's famous memorial to the Council of Ephesus – the triumphal arch and transept in the Basilica of St. Mary Major. One of his predecessors, Pope St. Sixtus III, had embellished the arch with a beautiful mosaic but the centuries had taken their toll on it. In the encyclical *Lux Veritatis* Pius

XI underscored the principal teachings of the Council at Ephesus, developing in detail the singular privileges which the divine maternity endowed the Blessed Virgin. Through it he singled out Mary - as Mother of God and blessed among women, together with the holy Family of Nazareth - as the leading model for the dignity and sanctity of chaste married life and the religious education of youth. Lastly, so that this monumental centenary would have a liturgical commemoration, Pius XI decreed that a feast in honor of the Divine Maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, with proper Mass and Office, be celebrated annually throughout the Church on October 11.

Beloved, it was on this date, October 11, 1962, that Pope John XXIII opened the Second Vatican Council under Our Lady's patronage. Later Pope VI would conflate this feast with that of the Octave Day of Christmas, January 1st, and thus create the Feast of Mary, the Mother of God. But the liturgical texts of January 1 certainly reflect the oldest cultic expression of devotion to Mary in the western liturgy and stand in testimony to the truths we not only believe by faith, but which are made present to us, living and actually, through the enactment of our rich forms of public worship.

As I said earlier, on this 19th Sunday after Pentecost we are bidden by Saint Paul to "put on the new man according to the mind of God." Jesus and Mary are the new Adam and Eve, parents of a renewed humanity. It is through them that we are clothed in the wedding garment of grace and charity. Let us never forget that the Mass, though so lovely and loveable, like faith and hope is *destined to pass away*. Charity alone will remain in the glory of that true world for which we long.

Receive the Sacrament of the Lord's Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity, always knowledgeable of the greater finality for which it has been given; and do so by souls moved through humility, devotion and contrition. Call upon Our Lady to deepen, daily, your communion with Christ - and therefore your charity with one another.

In this month of the Rosary, during this *Year of the Priest*, we can do no better than to turn towards her who bore God, not according to His divinity, but in the flesh of His humanity, begging her for the grace of perseverance in love. In so doing we become the living Sacrament of Christ's Church, the gracious means for drawing this lost world back to the light of truth.