

Sunday Afternoon Readings

(By RIGHT REV. MGR. POWER for the N.Z. Tablet.)

XXVII—MARY OUR MOTHER.

The fairest love on earth is that with which a mother surrounds her child; it shows itself in every turn of tenderness that is exquisite; it ministers with unselfishness; it spends itself in labors, in watchings, in prayers. Pure and holy in itself, it gives to the Church and to the world their noblest and worthiest sons. Of all the memories that men cherish, that which is ever in their thought and sinks deepest in the heart, is the memory of their mother. It is with them in joy and in sorrow, increasing their happiness, diminishing their pain. It is with them in seasons of grace, stimulating them to higher flights of goodness; it is with them in their dark periods of sin, reproaching, yet giving encouragement and hope. The first dear face they loved in childhood, the first sweet words of tenderness that fell upon their infant ears are with them throughout life, and will still be with them when death calls. Such is the power of a dear memory, such the influence of a first love. Now this same influence religion makes use of to keep us close to God. Inspired by God Himself, religion holds up before our gaze another Mother full of beauty and grace, that her face and her form may ever be familiar to us, that we may ever look upon her as the guide of our lives, our defence against all that would hurt our souls, our star of hope amid the encircling gloom of earth.

And if the world's purest and best enshrine the memory of nature's purest gift, their earthly mother, they also apply their genius to the lofty task of preserving the memory of that dearer and fairer Lady who is the loveliest gift of grace. How touching to see them weep over what they call the poverty of their attempts to portray her charms. They had no pen glowing with celestial power, no brush spiritual enough, no tongue touched with seraphic fire, no soul of art rich enough to describe the beauties of her who is clothed with the sun and crowned with the stars. What glorious things have been said of her by Ambrose and Augustine, by Bernard and Chrysostom, by Damascene and Ephraem, by our own Sedulius, and by men of refinement in every age, who loved to call her blessed and thus fulfil the inspired prophecy!

Now, this Lady of whom such glorious things are said is our Mother. This is no mere creation of the fancy, no mere poetical fiction. When by the literal sense of the words of the dying Jesus, Mary was given to John as Mother, and he to her as son, she was declared to have received the office of motherhood towards all whom John represented, that is, towards all the adopted children of God. The beautiful teaching of St. Paul on the Mystic Body admits of no other interpretation: Christ must be formed in His disciples, these must grow up in to Christ, must be clothed with Christ, must be dead and buried and risen with Christ, must live, no longer themselves, but must have the life of Christ within them. Here

we have described that process of divine adoption by which we become members of the Spiritual or Mystic Body of Christ, and so find ourselves in the way of salvation. This is the spirit of the adoption of sons whereby we call God our Father, and it is through this adoption, and not through His birth and death without it, that Christ becomes our Saviour. Now, since Mary is Mother, not of the Man Christ Jesus merely, but of Christ Jesus the Redeemer, and as Redeemer, and since Jesus perfects His redeeming work by forming us into a spiritual body to share His own life, it follows that there are two bodies, one the natural of which Mary is the real and natural Mother, the other Spiritual or Mystic of which she is the real and spiritual Mother. So that the one and same act of adoption that gives us the right to call the Redeemer's Father Our Father, entitles us to call His Mother our Mother. "*Corpore Mater capitis nostri, spiritu Mater membrorum Ejus*," St. Augustine says: The corporal Mother of our Head, the spiritual Mother of His members.

The fact then being certain that Mary is our Mother, it only remains to ask what are her rights and what her duties in our regard. Well, she has the right to expect that we will do her credit, that we will show her reverence and love, that we will be filled with zeal to sing her praises till the echoes of our songs make a magic circle round the earth and the most distant islands give back the music of her name. Then, she in turn has duties towards us. She is the Mother in the House of God, to watch over her children, to help them in their fight against sin, and to be their powerful Advocate when they fall. She must never forget that the Church is the extension of the House of Nazareth of which she was Queen, and that the queenly office is never so gracious as when it uplifts the fallen and wins their pardon. Therefore she is the Refuge of sinners, ever standing before the face of the King, and bespeaking good things for them. It was sinners Christ came to save, for sinners He established His Mystic Body, to sinners He gave His Mother to be their Mother, and she must prove the power of her advocacy in their behalf by the success of her intercession. This will convince sinners that devotion to her is a powerful corrective of sin and a mark of predestination. This is what her motherhood is for, this is what makes her motherhood so precious a thing to us.

Therefore it should be our delight to surround her with every tribute and testimony of affection. Above all, I repeat, we must do her credit. She is our Mother, and we must bring no shame to her. We must fulfil the Church's boast that "she makes her children pure because she gives them Jesus as their Food and Mary as their nursing-Mother." We must put on, that the whole world may see it, the likeness of her virtues. Let our young men learn kindness and no-

bility and goodness of her; let our young girls catch the chaste fragrance of her breath; let the heads of families love the Mother of the Holy House of Nazareth, and learn the art of home-government from her and let all love and praise the Mother of God, for she is our Mother too. She is neither loved nor praised enough—*nunquam satis de Maria*. Sound, sound her praises higher still, and press into the sweet service every skill! Let music sing her sweetest song, and painting fill her glowing page, let poetry explore every richest mine of imagery, and eloquence reach its highest flight, till the cords of Adam, entwined with the golden threads of grace, bring all the nations to her feet!

THE CROWN.

I would fashion a crown for the brow of my Queen,

A crown of jewels rare;

I would set it to match its brilliance
'Gainst the radiance of her hair.

I would search the world for those precious gems

Thus I mused as I sat in the ray
Blue-white of the shrine's one vigil lamp—
But, then, I had come to pray.

I had come to pray, so I took my beads
And began at the cross to tell,

In *Paters* and *Aves* and *Glorias*
Her Joys—while the twilight fell.

Through my fingers the chain of the mysteries slipped

While the darkness came on apace
And, was it the lamp or a halo of gold
That was lighting my Lady's face?

I couldn't be sure, but the tender light
In her eyes kept holding me there.
The shadows, perhaps, told of Sorrows
That comradeship helps one to bear.

So I counted the beads for the winding road

Which to Calvary's summit curls;
And as I looked again, my Lady's head
Seemed wreathed with a crown of pearls.

So bright—that the search for this earth's poor gems

Disturbed my soul no more;
But, on through the Glorious Mysteries
My heart's fast fervor bore.

And when I came to the chaplet's end
Which the gate of Heav'n unbars,
I glanced once more at the coronet's gleam,
And methought 'twas a crown of stars.

—MARY A. HALLINAN.

Let us therefore shake off and burst the bonds of sleepiness, and be instant and watch in prayer, as the Apostle exhorts us, saying continue in prayer and watch in the same.—St. Cyprian.

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