



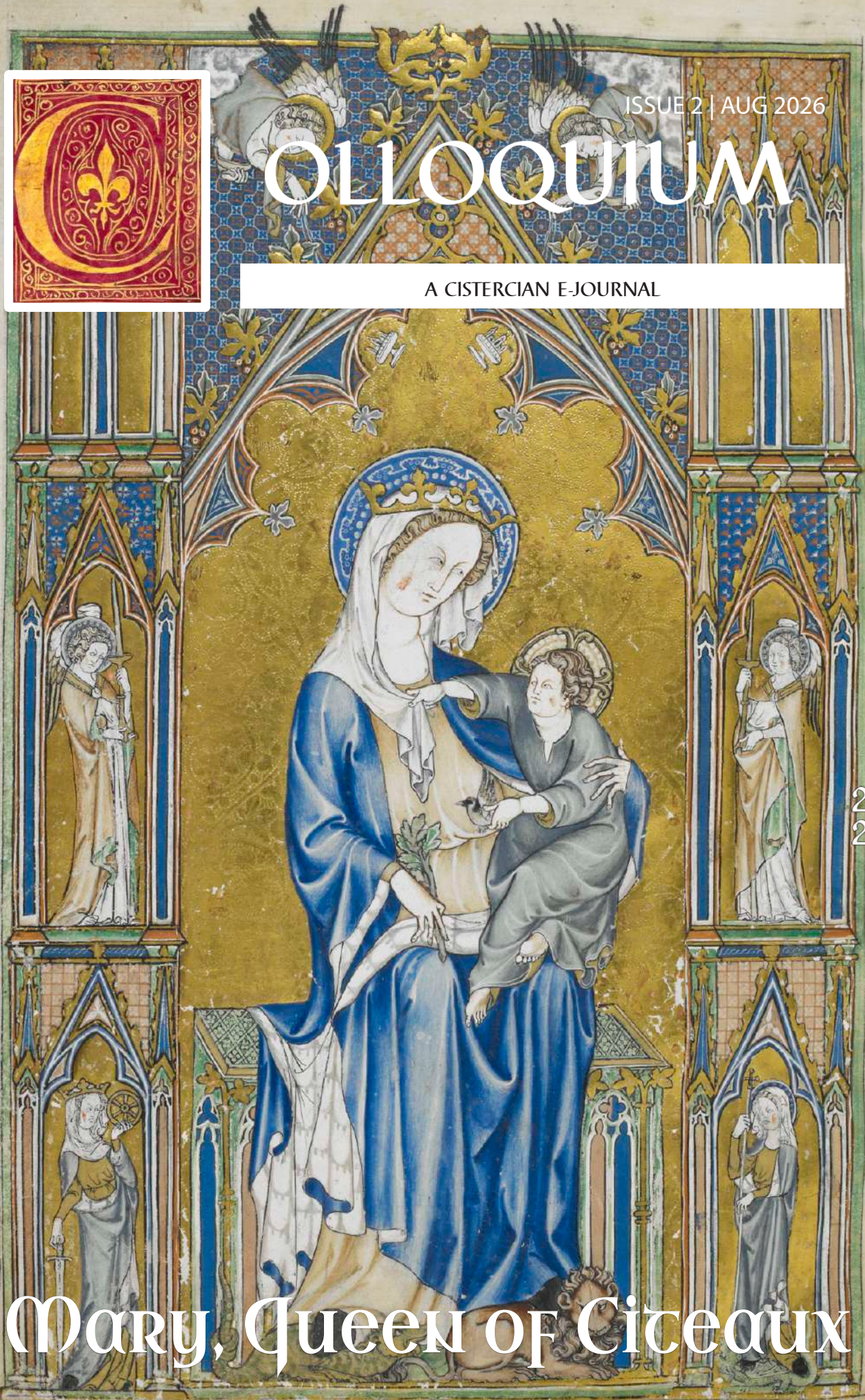
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OLLOQUIUM

A CISTERCIAN E-JOURNAL

20
26

Mary, Queen of Cîteaux



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*Cover Photo: **Virgin and Child Enthroned.***

*Page from the De Lisle Psalter (c. 1310), illuminated by
the Madonna Master. Image courtesy of the British
Library, London, MS Arundel 83 II, f. 131v.*

ISSUE 2



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COLLOQUIUM

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Editorial



Virgin and Child Enthroned.
Page from the De Lisle Psalter (c. 1310), illuminated by
the Madonna Master. Image courtesy of the British
Library, London, MS Arundel 83 II, f. 131v.

THIS ISSUE brings together rich insights from the monks and nuns of our Order as we strive to honor Mary, Queen of Cîteaux, who, under her title of Our Lady of the Assumption, is our special patroness. Each contribution explores a different facet of this inexhaustible theme, allowing us to see Cistercian Marian devotion from historical, theological, spiritual, and experiential perspectives. Special thanks to Our Lady of Cîteaux Abbey for the very beautiful invocation to Our Lady of the Assumption which heads this issue.

Between the Veil and the Goldfinch

Marian devotion—both communal and deeply personal—often takes hold of us amidst quiet, seemingly humdrum moments. It flourishes in the Cistercian cloister, marked from the very beginning by the maternal patronage of Our Lady.

During my novitiate, my novice mistress gave me a poem by St. John Paul II, I quote a few lines below.

*Light piercing, gradually, ordinary events...
I knew – the light that lingered in ordinary things,
like a spark sheltered under the skin of our days –
the light was You, it did not come from me...
– Her Amazement at Her Only Child¹*

To this day, the experience of reading that poem remains etched in my memory. It carries a profound sentiment: the dawning of that realization that she, Mary alone, knew the mystery of divinity that she carried in her womb. And yet she, even she, was daily ‘amazed’ by her Son.

This interior dialogue of Mary with her Son as she contemplates His hidden divinity shining through His humanity is beautifully captured on the cover of this issue. It is from a luminous folio of the Gothic *De Lisle Psalter* (Arundel MS 83) that exquisitely illustrates a tender moment between Mother and Son. With one hand, the Child Jesus playfully reaches out for his Mother’s veil—a tender, endearing human gesture that portrays the mystery of the Incarnation. But the other hand holds a goldfinch, a living prophecy, a symbol that comes to us from Christian folk tradition to signify the Paschal Mystery. As Mary is framed under a royal canopy, her hands also carry the insignias of her Queenship: the Child Jesus on one hand, her maternity and a leafy, blossoming branch on the other—the traditional emblem of her perpetual virginity.

Interestingly, this manuscript illumination bears a striking resemblance to the famous smiling Virgin and Child of Fontenay, sculpted for a premier Cîteaux daughterhouse founded directly by St. Bernard. It is said to be an exception to his famously austere Cistercian architecture and thus remains an enduring testament to St. Bernard’s special, tender, boundless devotion to Our Lady.

As simple children of Mary, our Cistercian vocation unfolds quietly under the mantle of her maternal tenderness and the goldfinch of the Paschal Mystery. Devotion to Our Blessed Mother invites us to this intimate space between Mother and Son. To live under the patronage of the Queen of Cîteaux is a daily summons to live the sweetness of her maternal protection as we tread daily the way to her Son, the Paschal Mystery.

When our life becomes opaque to this mystery that should inhabit it, our turning to Mary may yet allow that lovely, searching ‘Son’light to ‘pierce’ our everyday events. May she help us behold the ‘Son’light—the quiet splendor of our ‘hidden, obscure and laborious’ Trappist life. And in this continual “amazement”—and, perhaps, at times, bewilderment—find our life hidden in Christ, in Mary.

Happy Feast of Our Lady’s Assumption!

Sr. Anna Marie

¹ Wotyła, Karol (St. Pope John Paul II). “Her Amazement at Her Only Child”, in *The Place Within: The Poetry of Pope John Paul II*, translated by Jerzy Peterkiewicz. New York: Random House, 1994.



Through you, O blessed Lady, we have access to the Son;
for you are the one who has found grace, the one who has given birth to life,
the one who is the mother of salvation;
through you we receive the One who was given to us through you.

May your integrity make amends to him for our culpable decay.
May your humility, which found favour with God, beg pardon for our vanity.
May your ample love cover the multitude of our sins and may your glorious
fruitfulness confer on us the fruitfulness of good deeds.

You are our Lady, our mediator, our advocate.
Reconcile and recommend us to your son; be our representative with him.
O blessed Lady, through the grace which you have received and the special
privilege of which you have been found worthy and through the mercy to which
you gave birth, grant that by your intercession he who became through you a
sharer in our life of weakness and pain may make us sharers in his life of
happiness and glory.

ST. BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX





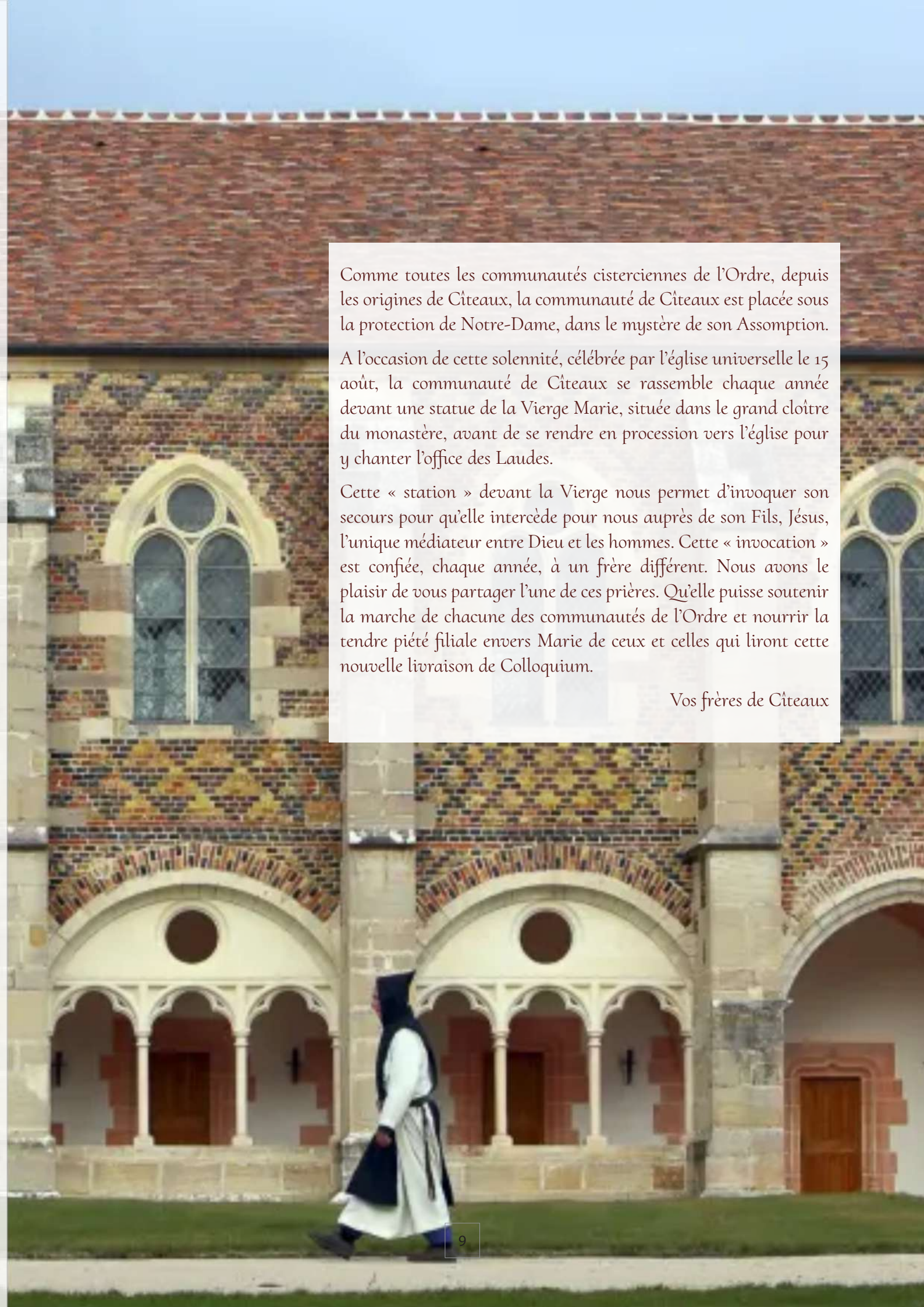


Like all Cistercian communities of the Order, ever since the founding of Cîteaux, the community of Cîteaux has been placed under the protection of Our Lady, in the mystery of her Assumption.

On this solemnity, celebrated by the universal Church on August 15, the community of Cîteaux gathers each year before a statue of the Virgin Mary, located in the monastery's great cloister, before proceeding in procession to the church to sing the Office of Lauds.

This "station" before the Virgin allows us to call upon her help so that she may intercede for us with her Son, Jesus, the one mediator between God and humankind. This "invocation" is entrusted each year to a different brother. We are pleased to share one of these prayers with you. May it support the journey of each of the Order's communities and nourish the tender filial devotion to Mary in those who read this new issue of Colloquium.

Your brothers at Cîteaux



Comme toutes les communautés cisterciennes de l'Ordre, depuis les origines de Cîteaux, la communauté de Cîteaux est placée sous la protection de Notre-Dame, dans le mystère de son Assomption.

A l'occasion de cette solennité, célébrée par l'église universelle le 15 août, la communauté de Cîteaux se rassemble chaque année devant une statue de la Vierge Marie, située dans le grand cloître du monastère, avant de se rendre en procession vers l'église pour y chanter l'office des Laudes.

Cette « station » devant la Vierge nous permet d'invoquer son secours pour qu'elle intercède pour nous auprès de son Fils, Jésus, l'unique médiateur entre Dieu et les hommes. Cette « invocation » est confiée, chaque année, à un frère différent. Nous avons le plaisir de vous partager l'une de ces prières. Qu'elle puisse soutenir la marche de chacune des communautés de l'Ordre et nourrir la tendre piété filiale envers Marie de ceux et celles qui liront cette nouvelle livraison de Colloquium.

Vos frères de Cîteaux

Prayer to Our Lady of the Assumption

O Our Lady, on this day when we celebrate your glorious Assumption, with trusting hearts we turn to you as children turn to their Mother, confident that you will lend a benevolent ear to the expression of our present needs. *In necessitatibus nostris!*

I

O Our Lady, we love to invoke you under the title **"Our Lady of Fidelity."** When the angel visited you on the day of the Annunciation to seek your consent to God's plan, which had set its sights upon you—after, no doubt, the inner turmoil you felt at such an unprecedented and unexpected request—you, the humble handmaid of the Lord, you dared to utter the "YES" that all humanity was waiting for—a "yes" that would reverse the entire course of human history, transforming it from a place of rebellion against God into an infinite space where God's Covenant with humankind could finally unfold in all its fullness.

So we dare to ask you: in the irrevocable "yes" that you spoke, accept our poor "yeses," which are always fragile and uncertain, be the guardian and protector of our faithfulness!

II

O Our Lady, you whom we love to contemplate in the generous haste that led you to rush to your cousin Elizabeth to bring her the help that she—soon to become a mother in her old age—awaited from your youth, now the bearer of all the ancient promises; we also love to invoke you under the beautiful title of **"Our Lady of Service,"** revealing, through the breadth of your charity, the depth of your open heart.

So we dare to ask you this: in the openness of your generous heart, welcome all our impulses of fraternal charity, whose wings are perhaps too often clipped by our self-centeredness. Yes, be the guardian and protector of our good zeal: a zeal that leads to eternal life and is manifested in true charity.

III

O Our Lady, you who carried the fruit of your womb in the midst of adversity, even as the sword that would later pierce your heart was already foreshadowed, you were forced, together with Joseph, to flee and seek refuge in Egypt. In you, we love to contemplate the strong and courageous woman and to invoke you under the luminous title of **"Our Lady of Trust."**

So we dare to ask you: while our world, ravaged by wars; the Church, disfigured by abuses of every kind; and even our Order, sorely tested by its growing poverty, are faced with so many adversities that they sometimes cause us to lose heart, be the guardian and protector of our trust in God, strengthened by the assurance that He causes all things to work together for the good of those who love Him.

IV

O Our Lady, you who, at the wedding feast at Cana, showed such concern for the distress of the young couple who had run out of wine: full of discretion, asking nothing of your Son but expecting everything from him, you addressed this humble plea to him, saying, "They have no wine"; and to us: "Do whatever he tells you." In you, Mother of Mercy, we thus love to contemplate the Mother of the One who received from you the gift of experiencing, in his own flesh, our very misery. That is why we love to turn to you and invoke you by the incomparable title of **"Our Lady, Mother of the One who is Mercy": Mater Misericordiae.**



Prière à Notre-Dame de l'Assomption

O Notre-Dame, en ce jour où nous célébrons ta glorieuse Assomption, d'un cœur confiant nous nous tournons vers toi comme des enfants qui se tournent vers leur Mère, dans l'assurance que tu prêteras une oreille bienveillante à l'expression de nos nécessités présentes. **In necessitatibus nostris !**

I

O Notre Dame, nous aimons t'invoquer sous le titre de « **Notre-Dame de la Fidélité** ». Quand l'ange te visita au jour de l'Annonciation pour obtenir de toi le consentement au dessein de Dieu qui avait posé sur toi son regard : après, sans doute !, le trouble intérieur que tu ressentis devant une demande aussi inouïe qu'inattendue, toi, l'humble servante du Seigneur, tu osas prononcer le « OUI » qu'attendait toute l'humanité et qui inverserait tout le cours de l'histoire des hommes, pour en faire non plus le lieu de la rébellion contre Dieu, mais un espace infini où pourrait enfin se déployer en toute sa plénitude, l'Alliance de Dieu avec les hommes.

Alors, nous osons te le demander : dans le « oui » sans retour que tu prononças, accueille nos pauvres « oui » toujours fragiles et incertains. Sois la gardienne et la protectrice de notre fidélité !

II

O Notre-Dame, toi que nous aimons contempler dans la hâte généreuse qui te fit courir auprès de ta cousine Élisabeth afin de lui apporter l'aide que, bientôt mère en sa vieillesse, elle attendait de ta jeunesse désormais porteuse de toutes les promesses anciennes, nous aimons aussi t'invoquer sous le beau vocable de « **Notre-Dame du Service** », manifestant, par la largeur de ta charité, la profondeur de ton cœur disponible.

Alors, nous osons te le demander : dans la disponibilité de ton cœur généreux, accueille tous nos élans de charité fraternelle, dont peut-être trop souvent les ailes sont coupées par nos repliements sur nous-mêmes. Oui, sois la gardienne et la protectrice de notre bon zèle : un zèle qui conduit à la vie éternelle et qui se manifeste en charité vraie.

III

O Notre-Dame, toi qui portais le fruit de tes entrailles en plein cœur de l'adversité, alors que déjà se laissait entrevoir le glaive qui transpercerait plus tard ton cœur, tu fus obligée, avec Joseph, de prendre la fuite pour trouver refuge en Egypte. En toi, nous aimons alors contempler la femme forte et courageuse et t'invoquer sous le titre lumineux de « **Notre-Dame de la Confiance** ».

Alors, nous osons te le demander : tandis que notre monde, par les guerres qui le ravagent, l'Eglise, par les abus en tout genre qui la défigurent, et même notre Ordre, bien éprouvé en sa pauvreté croissante, sont confrontés à tant d'adversités qu'elles nous font parfois perdre cœur, sois la gardienne et la protectrice de notre confiance en Dieu, fort de cette assurance qu'Il fait tout contribuer au bien de ceux qui l'aiment.

IV

O Notre-Dame, toi qui, au banquet des Noces de Cana, te montras si attentive au désarroi des jeunes époux qui manquaient de vin : pleine de délicatesse, sans rien exiger de ton Fils, mais attendant tout de lui, tu lui adressas cette humble supplique en lui disant : « Ils n'ont pas de vin » ; et à nous-mêmes : « Faites tout ce qu'il vous dira ». En toi, Mère de la Miséricorde, nous aimons ainsi contempler la Mère de celui qui reçut de toi de faire, dans sa propre chair, l'expérience de notre propre misère. C'est pourquoi nous aimons nous adresser à toi et t'invoquer du titre sans pareil de « **Notre-Dame, mère de Celui qui est la miséricorde** » : **Mater Misericordiae**.

That is why we also dare to ask this of you. When, forgetting our own misery, we are overcome by the temptation to look down on our brothers and sisters in humanity, to point an indignant finger at them, or to shoot them with a murderous glare, be the guardian and protector of our mutual forgiveness.

V

O Our Lady, weeping before your disfigured Son, you who, at the foot of the cross, received the Beloved Disciple and welcomed him into the embrace of a motherhood whose horizon would have no other boundary than the endless limits of world history—we love to gaze upon you, cradle of the nascent Church, and honor you with the admirable title of **“Our Lady of Hope.”**

That is why, once again, we dare to ask you: you who shine like a star in the dark night to illuminate our anxious journeys across stormy seas, be the guardian and protector of our hope when it is overwhelmed by doubt and anguish in the face of an uncertain future.

VI

O Our Lady of Fidelity, O Our Lady of Service, O Our Lady of Trust, O Our Lady of Mercy, O Our Lady of Hope—there are many other titles by which we would love to invoke you.

But isn't the one that encompasses them all the very title by which we dare to invoke you today: Our Lady of the Assumption?

Today, raised to Heaven and fully assumed into the glory of the One to whom you communicated our humanity, it is you who, first among the saved, lead us in the footsteps of your Son, our brother, so that one day He may grant us, too, as a share and by grace, the glory of His divinity.

That is why we love you and finally dare to sing your praises with this simple word, which, without the slightest attribute, is undoubtedly most fitting for the one who, O Our Lady, claimed no other title of glory for herself than that of *Ancilla Verbi*, **“Handmaid of the Word.”**

That is why, once again and at last, we dare to ask her: *“May it be done to us also, in our lives, according to the Word.”* ■

C'est pourquoi nous osons aussi te le demander. Quand, oublieux de notre propre misère, la tentation nous surprend de vouloir regarder de haut nos frères en humanité, de les pointer d'un doigt indigné ou de les fusiller d'un regard assassin, sois la gardienne et la protectrice de nos pardons mutuels.

V

O Notre-Dame, éplorée devant ton Fils défiguré, toi qui, au pied de la croix, reçus le disciple bien-aimé et l'accueillis dans l'étendue d'une maternité qui n'aurait plus d'autre horizon que les limites sans fin de l'histoire du monde, nous aimons te regarder, berceau de l'Église en naissance et t'honorer du titre admirable de **« Notre-Dame de l'Espérance »**.

C'est pourquoi, aussi et encore, nous osons te le demander : toi qui brilles comme une étoile dans la nuit obscure pour éclairer nos courses inquiètes en mers agitées, sois la gardienne et la protectrice de notre espérance, quand elle vient à se laisser submerger par le doute et l'angoisse devant des lendemains incertains.

VI

Ô Notre-Dame de la Fidélité, Ô Notre-Dame du Service, Ô Notre-Dame de la Confiance, Ô Notre-Dame de la Miséricorde, Ô Notre-Dame de l'Espérance, il y aurait bien d'autres titres sous lesquels nous aimerions t'invoquer.

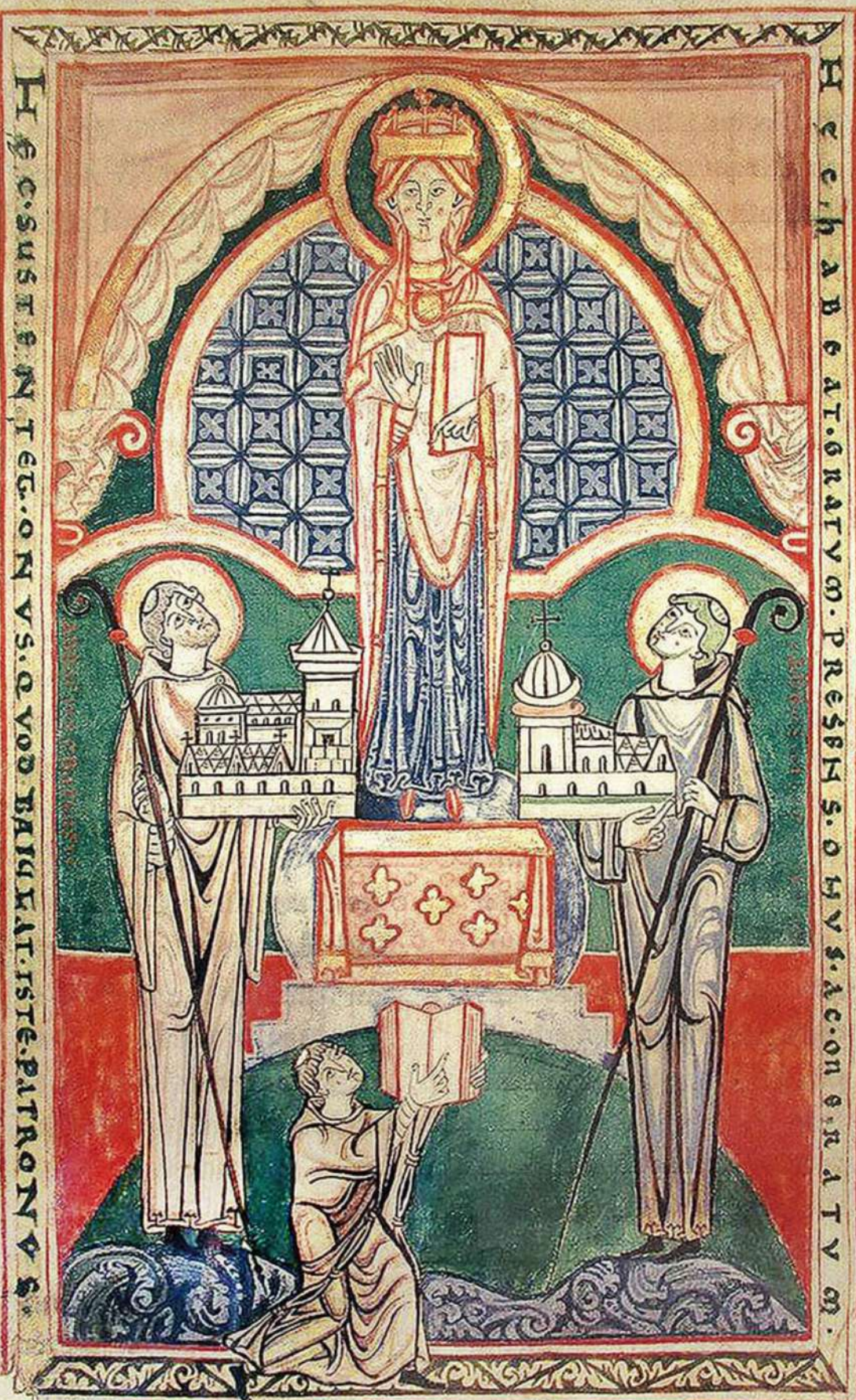
Mais celui qui les rassemble tous, n'est-ce pas celui par lequel nous osons t'invoquer aujourd'hui : Notre-Dame de l'Assomption ?

Aujourd'hui, élevée au Ciel et intégralement assumée dans la gloire de Celui à qui tu as communiqué notre humanité, c'est toi qui, la première parmi les sauvés, nous entraîne à la suite de ton Fils, notre frère, afin qu'un jour, Il nous donne, à nous aussi, en partage et par grâce, la gloire de sa divinité.

C'est pourquoi nous aimons et osons enfin te chanter avec ce simple mot, qui, sans le moindre attribut, convient sans doute le mieux à celle qui, O Notre-Dame, ne s'attribua d'autre titre de gloire que celui d'*Ancilla Verbi*, **« Servante du Verbe »**.

C'est pourquoi, encore et enfin, nous osons le lui demander : *« Qu'à nous aussi, en nos vies, il nous soit fait selon La Parole »*. ■

hoc uirtus meruit. parit & hoc tribuit.



The Holy Founders of Cîteaux. The image comes from a manuscript from *Commentaire sur Jérémie*. "Expositio sancti Jheronimi presbiteri super Jheremiam prophetam", Saint Jérôme, Cîteaux, 1125. Image courtesy of the Muzeum Duchowości i Kultury Cystersów w Mogile. <https://muzeumcystersow.pl/en/cistercian/>

Mary, Queen of Cîteaux

DOM DAVID LAVICH, OCSO

We might find it curious to note that the name of Mary, or even the name “Jesus”, is not mentioned in the Rule of St. Benedict. Although the Rule of the Master includes the name of “Jesus” three times.¹ It seems that St. Benedict consciously avoided much reference to the humanity of Christ or his Virgin Mother, perhaps because he wanted to distance himself from Arian tendencies (Christ not equal to God; rejection of the Trinity) that were present in the Italy of his time.² Monks “prefer nothing to Christ” and serve him as “Lord.” Nevertheless, we remember that the Council of Ephesus took place in 431 AD, nearly a century before St. Benedict. This Council declared Mary as the Theotokos, “Mother of God”, and, naturally, this would influence the piety of the monks.

The Cistercians of the 12th century, on the other hand, are characterized by a love for Christ’s humanity. For them, Christ’s humanity is the path leading to his divinity. The theme of human love was a particular concern of their generation, as we can infer from the medieval troubadours. The Cis-

tercians experienced an intimacy with the poor Jesus, the meek and merciful Savior born of the Virgin Mary. Following some earlier monastic precedents, the White Monks clearly manifested a tender devotion toward the Virgin Mother. She was their queen: “Salve, Regina!”

This devotion and loyalty to Mary can be noticed from the very beginning of the Order. *Ordinatum est: In honore Reginae caeli et terrae nostra omnia fundari debere cenobia.* “It has been decreed: All our monasteries are to be founded in honor of the Queen of heaven and earth.”³

Because of a lack of sufficient water at Cîteaux, the second abbot, St. Alberic, found the site of the first settlement inadequate, and so the community moved about a kilometer northward. It was here that the first stone church of Cîteaux was built and consecrated by Bishop Walter of Chalon on November 16, 1106, and dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the beginning of an unbroken Cistercian tra-

¹ The text of the Regula Magistri names “Jesus” once in the Prologue, when quoting a biblical passage about salvation and returning to God, and twice in the later chapters, when recounting events from the Gospels, such as the betrayal or suffering of Christ.

² Arians persisted among the Lombards, and Theodoric, king of the Ostrogoths (c.455-526), himself an Arian, had much influence on church affairs in the Italian peninsula in the 6th century. Some think that St. Benedict’s portrait of Christ as king and his monks as servants demonstrates his desire to ensure that his monks remained within the catholic and apostolic faith.

³ Summa Carta Caritatis, Capitulum 9.2: “Of the building of Abbeys”. Chrysogonus Waddell, Narrative and Legislative Texts from Early Cîteaux, p.408.

dition.⁴

Even today we receive this Marian piety originating from our foundations as something precious and confirmed by our OCSO Constitutions: "Each community of the Order and all the monks are dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother and Symbol of the Church in the order of faith, love and perfect union with Christ."⁵

In more recent times, on November 7, 1999, during the General Chapter in France at the Mass in the Lourdes grotto, Abbot General Dom Bernardo Olivera, in the presence of all the abbots and abbesses, consecrated the Order once again to the Virgin Mary.

Even though the Cistercian white cowl may seem to some reminiscent of the white garment received at Baptism, the early documents teach us that it signifies that we are sons of Mary. An ancient legend of the Order tells that the Blessed Virgin came to bring St. Alberic the white cowl with which she wished the monks to be clothed. The Cistercian martyrology says that "he had a filial devotion to our Lady from whom he received the white cowl."⁶ From that time until now, as sons and daughters of Mary we wear the distinctive white cowl.

Adam of Perseigne recommends Mary's innocence to his "white monks."⁷ "O this flowing fountain, to this most merciful Virgin, I would especially commit Cistercian monasteries. Indeed, all of them are dedicated with due devotion to the memory and merits of this very Mother. O how much innocence of heart and purity of conduct ought to be in my monks, who imitate the whiteness of the virginal lily both by the habit's whiteness and by the title of their name! They are especially called 'white monks' not only because they shine in white clothing but because they stand out as the spiritual ministers of virginal innocence."⁸

Salve Regina

Each day in a Cistercian monastery closes with the final antiphon, *Salve Regina*, and each of the seven daily offices includes a commemoration of Mary. Although the *Salve Regina* was not of Cistercian origin, it has always been thought of as particularly loved by Cistercians. Around 1218, the Cistercians adopted it as a processional chant, and in 1251 it was sung at the end of Compline.

The Latin Marian antiphon *Salve Regina* likely originated in the 11th century, and is traditionally attributed to the German Benedictine monk Hermann of the monastic island of Reichenau (Germany). This magnificent hymn was set down in its current form at the Abbey of Cluny in the 12th century, where it was used as a processional hymn on Marian feasts.

There is a legend that the final three invocations of the *Salve Regina* were added by St. Bernard. According to the story, the hymn originally ended with the word *ostende*. Music scholars know this from studying the ancient texts. However, when St. Bernard was the Papal Legate in Germany, on Christmas Eve in 1146, he heard the hymn being sung in the Speyer Cathedral. Then, kneeling down and in a sudden inspiration, he sang out the words: *O clemens, O pia, O dulcis Virgo Maria*. These three invocations begin to appear in manuscripts immediately after Saint Bernard's time and continue to be used by the whole Church. The additional words of St. Bernard can be seen engraved in a circle on the pavement of the Speyer Cathedral, on the same spot where he supposedly pronounced them.

It might also be interesting to note that each evening during his 1492 voyage to the New World, Christopher Columbus and his sailors gathered on the ship's deck to sing the "*Salve Regina*". He gave Mary's name to his flagship, the *Santa María*.

Cistercians under our Lady's mantle⁹

The idea of tutela or "protection" symbolized by the mantle is both timeless and universal; the image is also found on Roman coins from the second century, which feature the *custos* ("guardian") Jupiter protecting Caesar.

In the Cistercian context, Mary is portrayed as protecting the members of the Order who are gathered under her mantle. Belief in the protecting qualities of Mary's mantle was at its greatest in the East. It is said that her mantle was brought to Constantinople by the Empress Pulcheria (450-53) and was kept as a precious relic in the royal chapel of Blachernae, where it was venerated and formed the subject of visions and miracles.

The image of protection under Mary also appears in the oldest Marian antiphon, *Sub tuum praesidium confugimus* (traditionally sung at the end of Lauds),

⁴ Fr. Louis Lekai, O. Cist., *The Cistercians, Ideals and Reality*, p.16.

⁵ OCSO Constitutions, 3.4.

⁶ *Menologium Cisterciense*, under the feast day of Saint Alberic (January 26).

⁷ Adam was ordained a priest, then became a Canon Regular, then a Benedictine of Marmoutier Abbey, Tours, and finally a Cistercian. Sometime in the 1180's he became abbot of Perseigne in Normandy. He was an advisor to Richard the Lion-Hearted, King of England from 1189 until his death in 1199. Adam died in 1221. The Migne editor comments that "Adam had a totally Marian life."

⁸ "Sermon Five on the Assumption," trans. Philip F. O'Mara, CSQ 33, 1998, p.159.

⁹ See "Cistercians Under Our Lady's Mantle," James France, CSQ, Vol. 37.4 (2002), 393-414.

The oldest Marian Antiphon

Ant.
7.

S UB tu-um praesi-di-um confú-gimus, * sancta De-

i Gé-nitrix : nostras depre-ca-ti-ónes ne despí-ci-as in

ne-cessi-tá-ti-bus : sed a per-í-cu-lis cunctis lí-be-ra nos

semper, Virgo glo-ri-ó-sa et be- ne-dícta.

commissioned by Charlemagne (c.742-814), first emperor of what was later to be called the Holy Roman Empire.

The earliest known literary example of protection under Our Lady's mantle is found in Gregory of Tours (538-94), a Gallo-Roman bishop and historian. According to what he writes in his book *Glory of the Martyrs*, a Jewish boy in the East attended school with Christian children. He entered a church of Mary, Mother of Christ, and took Holy Communion. His enraged father threw the boy directly into a hot glass-making furnace. The fire did not burn the boy. When asked how he survived, the boy replied that the Virgin Mary covered him with her cloak.

The most well-known account of the Cistercian Order described as being under the special protection of Mary comes from the *Dialogus Miraculorum*, written by Caesarius of Heisterbach (circa 1220s).¹⁰

Part of the folklore of Cîteaux portrayed the Cistercians as Mary's favored sons, her *propria familia*. There is a story of a monk who saw the Cistercian Order in the kingdom of heaven beneath Our

Lady's cloak. It may have its origin in earlier sources, but the story as told by Caesarius in the *Dialogus Miraculorum* is as follows:

"A certain monk of our Order, who was a great devotee of Our Lady, a few years ago fell into an ecstasy and was taken to view the glories of heaven. There he saw the different ranks of the Church triumphant, that is, angels, patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, confessors, and all of them divided into their particular Orders, that is, canons regular, Premonstratensians, or Cluniacs. Being troubled about his own Order, he stood there and looked around and could find in glory no single person of his Order, and therefore turning with a groan to the Blessed Mother of God, he said: 'Oh! Most holy Lady, why is it that I see no one here of the Cistercian Order? Why are your servants, who serve you so devotedly, shut out from sharing in so great a happiness?' Whereupon, the queen of heaven, seeing him so greatly troubled, replied: 'Those of the Cistercian Order are so dear to me and so beloved that I cherish them in my bosom.' And opening her cloak, with which she seemed to be clothed, and which was of marvelous ampli-

¹⁰ It is called the Dialogue on Miracles because it takes the form of a dialogue between Caesarius as novice master and a young novice. It is a collection of 746 popular exempla or short stories based in part on earlier written sources, in part on a living oral tradition, and in part on Caesarius' own experience. He devotes chapter 7 to Marian stories.



Cistercians under Our Lady's Mantle.

Illuminated initial letter G of Gaudeamus from a 14th-century gradual (Wrocław, Biblioteka Uniwersytecka, MS I F 413, fol. 145r). Image courtesy of Jan M. Ziolkowski, as featured in an article by Tomasz Kałuski.

Those of the Cistercian Order are so dear to me and so beloved that I cherish them in my bosom.

And opening her cloak, with which she seemed to be clothed, and which was of marvelous amplitude, she showed him an innumerable multitude of monks, lay brothers, and nuns.¹

¹ *The Dialogue on Miracles*, Caesarius of Heisterbach, H. Von E. Scott and C.C. Swinton Bland, ©1929, Harcourt, Brace & Company, New York.

tude, she showed him an innumerable multitude of monks, lay brothers, and nuns. Then he, greatly exulting, and giving heartfelt thanks to her, returned to his body, and told his abbot what he had seen and heard. He indeed, at the following chapter, reported this to the other abbots."

This imagery of being covered by a protecting mantle is hinted at in Scripture, referring, of course, to God; but the same qualities by accommodation apply to Mary's unique role as Mother of the Mystical Body.

"I spread my cloak over you and covered your nakedness." (Ezekiel 16:8). "He will shelter you with pinions, spread wings that you may take refuge; God's faithfulness is a protecting shield." (Ps. 91:4).

The theme is taken up by St. Bernard in a sermon in which he echoes the words of the psalm when he says that Mary "does not fail to protect those little ones who fly to her under the shadow of her wings."

An early Cistercian example of the graphic representation of the protective power of Mary's mantle is the historiated initial *G(audeamus)* from a manuscript of a gradual from the scriptorium of the Silesian Lubiąż Abbey in Poland, dated about 1325. (See p.17) Here we can see the standing figure of Mary holding her cloak open and revealing monks on one side and the *barbati* (lay brothers) on the other side.

Some years later, this motif appeared on Cistercian seals.¹¹ Actually, this theme is represented in a wide range of media: in manuscript illuminations, seals, paintings, stone sculpture, wood carvings, stained glass, and enameled work.

Of course, St. Bernard's devotion to Mary is well known for its wide influence on subsequent medieval piety. The best examples are his four famous homilies on the Annunciation (*Super missus est*), which he himself entitled *In laudibus Virginis Matris*. Here he compares Mary to the North Star, which sailors used to guide their ships through dark and stormy waters, and says, "If you do not want to be overwhelmed by the waves, look at this star and call on Mary." In his sermon *In nativitate Virginis*, Bernard also depicted Mary as a mediatrix by the masterful use of the metaphor of the aqueduct. Mary is the channel through which

grace flows like water from the mountains, a vital conduit but not the source itself. He gave this sermon the title *De aquaeductu*, by which it is better known.

Around 1140, when Saint Bernard ordered a revision of the Cistercian liturgical books to restore monastic simplicity, remove errors that had crept into the texts, and ensure that all branch monasteries prayed the same way, several Marian antiphons were introduced.

After championing the Blessed Virgin in his lifetime, Bernard was laid to rest in 1153 at Clairvaux before her altar.¹²

Mary is also a prominent figure in the sermons of Gueric of Igny. While Mary is often mentioned throughout his sermons, fourteen of the fifty-four sermons specifically address the Marian feast days: Purification (15-19), Annunciation (26-28), Assumption (47-50), and Nativity (51-51).

Conrad of Eberbach¹³ has a story of an apparition of Mary to one of the old monks at Clairvaux. "A pious old religious sees the Blessed Virgin presiding at the chapter of the monks.... She held the place of the abbot.... She was holding the Infant at her breast.... She presented the Child to the monks for them to contemplate and embrace. ('Show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus!') Everything was concluded with the kiss of peace." Afterward, whenever he passed the chapter house, he bowed toward the spot where he had seen the Mother of Mercy.¹⁴

This story reveals more than simple medieval piety. Looking at it more closely, we can discern the Cistercian abbey as the house of Mary. Here she presides as mother and teacher. The Church herself is considered *Mater et Magistra* from ancient times. But the title *Mater Ecclesiae* is a title given to Mary.¹⁵ If she is the Mother of the Church, then the Cistercians acknowledge her unique role as mother of their abbeys; hence, they are her sons and daughters. There she wishes to see her Cistercian monks and nuns born again every day to new life in Jesus.

The title of Mary as *Magistra Apostolorum* honors the Virgin Mary as the spiritual teacher of Jesus' apostles.¹⁶ She guided the early Church leaders by

¹¹ The seal of the Definitors of the Cistercian Order from about 1360 is now in the Archaeological Museum of Dijon.

¹² After the French Revolution destroyed the abbey in 1792, Bernard's remains were saved and moved to the Cathedral of Saint-Pierre-et-Saint-Paul in Troyes, where they rest today.

¹³ Conrad of Eberbach (died 18 September 1221) was a Cistercian monk and later abbot of Eberbach Abbey, Germany. He was a historian of the early Cistercian Order and the author of the *Exordium Magnum*.

¹⁴ *Exordium Magnum*, Ch. 29

¹⁵ The title first appeared in the 4th-century writings of Saint Ambrose of Milan and was officially confirmed by Pope St. Paul VI in 1964.

¹⁶ The 12th-century Benedictine monk Rupert of Deutz, in his *Commentary on the Canticle of Canticles*, gave this title to the Virgin



Magistra Apostolorum, Mary seated in the Abbot's chair (Image: Tre Fontane Abbey)

sharing her unique memories of Jesus' life and pondering the mysteries of God. She continues this role also in the Cistercian monastery. There are images of Mary seated in the abbot's chair and wearing the abbatial insignia, as can be seen in the cloister of the Abbey of Tre Fontane in Rome. This indicates Mary's preeminent role as teacher in the monastery.¹⁷ What does she tell the Cistercian

monks and nuns? "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn.2:5).

Many other references to Cistercian monasteries as our Lady's Order include:

Dom Jean de Cirey (1476-1501), abbot of Cîteaux¹⁸ described the Cistercian Order as Mary's "very own family," and Mary as its "patroness, protector, and advocate," for she came in person to console, instruct, help, and direct them."

Helinand of Froidmont¹⁹ considered that Mary is the land most especially blessed by the Lord. From this land the Flower of the root of Jesse would bloom (Isaiah 11:1). And he adds, proud of his Order: "In this land are planted the Cistercians who pay homage to this great lady and promise perpetual service to her."²⁰

Adam and Eve were like king and queen in the Garden of Eden, set over all creation. Now Mary reigns with Jesus in the Kingdom of heaven. Mary is Queen in paradise, the new Garden of Eden, and she is Queen in the claustral paradise of monks and nuns.

Our OCSO Constitutions end with prayerful supplication to Mary Queen of Cîteaux: "May God grant that by the breath of the Paraclete, the monks and nuns may observe these Constitutions in a spirit of fraternal charity and fidelity to the Church, and so joyfully make their way to the fullness of love, with the help of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Queen of Cîteaux." ■

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Mary. Rupert believed Mary stayed with the apostles after Jesus' ascension into heaven and that Mary explained the mysteries of her Son as she recalled them from memory.

¹⁷ A similar image can be found in the 1830 apparitions of Our Lady to St. Catherine Labouré in Paris. During one vision, Mary sat in the chair of the convent's superior. This posture symbolizes her approachable, maternal role.

¹⁸ Jean IV de Cirey was a courageous defender of the Order against the practice of In Commendam, which allowed a cleric or layman to hold the position of abbot and collect the revenues of the monastery without performing the spiritual duties.

¹⁹ Helinand was a 12th-century troubadour before his conversion. He became a Cistercian monk of Froidmont in the Diocese of Beauvais in northern France near Rheims. He is the author of the well-known vernacular work *Les Vers de la Mort*, and became a famous preacher. The diocese of Beauvais honors him as a saint.

²⁰ Helinand, *Nat* 2; PL 212:495.



The Virgin Sheltering the Order of Cîteaux
 Jehan Bellegambe, *The Virgin Sheltering the Order of Cîteaux*, 1507.
 Oil on panel, 91 × 74 cm. Musée de la Chartreuse, Douai. Image
 sourced from the Musée de la Chartreuse online collection.

May God grant that by the breath of the Paraclete, the monks and nuns may observe these Constitutions in a spirit of fraternal charity and fidelity to the Church, and so joyfully make their way to the fullness of love, with the help of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Queen of Cîteaux.

-OCSO Constitutions

A Litany of Mary's Praises *in* Blessed Oglerio of Locedio

SR. JULIE ANN PESONGCO, OCSO

*"I cannot – indeed I must not –
refrain from PRAISING her
whom angels, archangels,
and all the orders of heaven LAUD."¹*

The Second Vatican Council taught that the authentic renewal of religious life requires "a continual return to the sources of all Christian life and to the original inspiration behind a given institute." At the same time, it urged religious communities to faithfully preserve "the spirit and aims of each founder, as well as sound traditions," recognizing them as part of the Church's enduring patrimony (*Perfectae Caritatis*, no. 2).

From the time of Mother Cristiana Piccardo, Abbess of the Community of Vitorchiano during the years of the Council, the Vitorchiano Family has sought to respond faithfully to this conciliar vision. Such renewal has never been understood as a departure from tradition, but rather as a deeper appropriation of the spiritual inheritance received from our Cistercian Fathers and Mothers.

In our monastery, this commitment continues to shape our ongoing formation. We have adopted the annual observance of Cistercian Week, an initiative from the Monastery of Valserena, the first daughterhouse of Vitorchiano. This week-long program consists of a series of conferences presented by selected members of the community, occasionally supplemented by guest speakers from other monasteries or by specialized online courses. Together, these conferences revisit the history, spirituality, theology, and literary heritage of the Cistercian tradition, paying particular attention to the legacy of Cîteaux.

The theme chosen for our Cistercian Week in 2021 was the lives and contributions of lesser-known Cistercian Fathers and Mothers. I was entrusted with studying Blessed Oglerio of Locedio, a figure about whom I knew very little. What began as preparation for a conference gradually became an unexpected encounter with one of the hidden treasures of medieval Cistercian spirituality.

As my study progressed, my appreciation for the Cistercian tradition deepened considerably. This admiration is neither historical triumphalism nor

¹ *In Praise of God's Holy Mother*, CF 70, Ogier (or Oglerio) of Locedio: *Homilies*, Cistercian Publications

an attempt to magnify the Order's achievements beyond their proper measure. Rather, it is the genuine wonder of a student rediscovering the remarkable spiritual and theological vitality that flourished within the early Cistercian movement. Time and again, evidence emerges that Cîteaux served as a privileged seedbed in which numerous theological insights, liturgical expressions, and especially Marian devotions were cultivated with exceptional richness before finding wider reception in the life of the Church.

Among the discoveries that most impressed me was the Marian work of Blessed Oglerio, *In Praise of God's Holy Mother*, commonly known as the *Planctus Mariae*. While studying this remarkable text, I became increasingly convinced that its sequence of Marian invocations anticipates, both in spirit and literary form, what later generations would know as the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Loreto. Although no direct historical

dependence can be asserted with certainty, the *Planctus Mariae* stands as a significant witness to an earlier tradition of Marian praise and may rightly be regarded as one of the liturgical and devotional antecedents of the Loreto Litany.

What began as a research report prepared for the community soon resembled an archaeological excavation. Each resource revealed another layer of a forgotten spiritual heritage, and every text uncovered suggested richer veins waiting to be explored. Then, unexpectedly, another discovery emerged. Scattered throughout the chapters of the *Planctus Mariae* was a remarkable series of Marian acclamations—brief yet profound praises woven into Blessed Oglerio's meditation on the Blessed Virgin. Considered individually, these acclamations are beautiful literary expressions; gathered together, they form what may fittingly be described as a Marian Litany of Praise.

PROLOGUE

*God's Chosen Vessel
Storehouse of Every Virtue
Vessel of Choice
Salver of Life
Everlasting Bliss
Beauteous Virgin
Vessel of Solid Gold
Vessel of Ivory
Mother of Creation's Lord
Bearer of the Maker of All Things*

HOMILY I

*Most Holy & Immaculate Virgin
The Meadow's Graceful Comeliness
The Desert's Austere Beauty
The Root of Jesse
The Virgin of Whom Isaiah foretold
The Mosaic Plate Engraved with
God's Holy Name
Loveliest Among Women
Whole and Spotless Virgin
Mary Born of David's Line
Mother of Our Lord
Fair of Face & Mind*

HOMILY II

*Virgin Mother of God
Mistress of Virgins
Most Holy Virgin Mary
Most Wise Judith*

*Most Beautiful Virgin
Valiant Woman of Solomon
Bestower of Grace
Most Blessed Daughter
Morning Star
Most Blessed Virgin
Blessed Mary
Mother and Bride of Christ
God's Chosen Virgin and Mother
Most Blessed Woman
Christ's Virgin Mother
Sublime Queen On High
Beauty of Delight
Fountain of Gladness
Over-flowing Glory
Star of the Sea
Absence of All Bitterness
Wholly Beautiful
Mother of the Lord and Saviour*

HOMILY III

*Most Blessed Mother
Most Blessed Virgin
Our Lady
Virgin Mary
Virgin Undeiled
Immaculate Virgin
Star of the Sea
Splendor of the World
Joy of Paradise
Gladness of the Blessed*

Second Only to Jesus

HOMILY IV

*Temple of the Holy Spirit
Mother of the Son of God
Mary, Beloved of God and Mortals
Queen of Heaven
Mistress of the Angels
Rose of Roses
Flower of Flowers
Fragrance of All Fragrances
Humble Maid
Sublime Queen
Queen of the World*

HOMILY V

*Sublime Queen
Most Blessed Virgin
Wholly Beautiful One
Royal Virgin
Noble and Sacred Virgin Mary
Star of the Sea
Splendor of the World
Ransomer of Captives
Saving Grace of the Lost
Queen of Heaven
Glory of the Elect
Noble Virgin
Venerable Woman
Blessed Mary
Glory of Virgins
Grace of Women
Mary, Ever-blessed
Salvation and Redemptress of the Soul
Mother of Grace and Mercy
Glorious Virgin Mary
Mother of Mercy
Most Holy Mother of Jesus
Mary, Queen and Advocate
Virgin Mary
Worthiest of All Praise
Sublimely Blessed
Accorded All Glory & Praise
Wreathed with All Beauty & Comeliness
Full of Grace
Most Sacred Virgin*

HOMILY VI

*Gate of Paradise
Holy Virgin Mary*





*Ave Maria. Page from the Coldingham Breviary (c. 1270–1280).
Image courtesy of the British Library, MS Harley 4664, f. 125v.*

O bride of Christ, and you, monk of the Mother of the Most High, you who have come to partake in the Order of Our Lady and consecrated yourself as a Cistercian religious: say, together with every people and tribe and tongue, with the angel Gabriel and with Elizabeth the mother of the Prophet of the Most High, Hail Mary, full of grace; the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.

-CF 70, Ogier of Locedio: Homilies, Cistercian Publications

Queen of the World
 Second Joy of Paradise
 Mother of Glory
 Mother of Everlasting Gladness
 Glory of the World

HOMILY VII

Wondrous Virgin
 Restorer of the Lost
 Revival of the Dead
 Virginal Mother
 Blessed Mary
 Earth's Glory
 Heaven's Splendor
 Mother of Life
 Womanhood's Beauty
 Fragrance of the Spices
 Scent of All Aromas
 Most Beautiful of Women
 Ever-blessed Virgin
 Mistress of the World
 Mother of Zion
 Jerusalem's Glorious
 Queen of the World
 Garden of Delight
 Humble Virgin
 Sublime Queen
 Mother of the Maker of the World
 Radiant Mother of God
 The Queen of Queens
 Glory of Young Women
 The Confidence of Sinners
 The Hope of the Fallen Away
 Sin's Pardon
 The Grace of the Revived
 The Bliss of the Blessed
 The Mother of the Creator
 The Queen of Golden Garments
 Ever-Virgin Mary
 Glory of young widows
 Begetter of Glory
 Loveliest of the Daughters of Jerusalem

HOMILY VIII

Mother of the Eternal King
 The Blessed Virgin
 Queen of the world
 God's Chosen Mother
 A Beautiful Virgin Guest

Bearer of Christ
 Health-Bringing Virgin
 Lady Mary
 All Glory's Crown
 Hope of Our Salvation
 The Defense of our Virtue
 The Splendor and Beauty of Virgins
 Virgin Mother
 Blessed Mary
 Sublime Virgin
 Most Holy Virgin
 Mother of the Most High
 Mother of our Saviour
 Blessed Mother
 Handmaid of the Lord
 World's Bright Star
 The Gate of Life
 Doorway to Paradise
 Pleasure Garden of delights
 Supremely virtuous Virgin Mary
 Humility's Queen
 Mother of the King of Ages

HOMILY IX

Heavenly Mother
 Blessed Virgin Mary
 Blessed Woman
 Immaculate Virgin
 Fragrance of the Fruitful Field
 The Scent of Paradise
 Delight of Paradise
 Splendor of the Saints
 Glory of the Elect
 Mother of Glory
 Bliss of the Blessed
 Hope of the Dying
 Life of the Living
 Mother of Truth!

HOMILY X

Fair and Blessed Maiden
 Mother of Our Love
 Mother of Our Rejoicing and Praise
 Mother of God
 Ever-Blessed Virgin Mary
 Beauty of Virgins
 Comeliness of Holy Women
 Decorous Grace of the Saints
 Blessed Virgin
 Heavenly Treasure

Wealth of the Deity
Fullness of Sanctity
Perfection of Justice
Child bearer of the Creator
The House of God
Immaculate Home of the King!

HOMILY XI

Gate of Heaven
Doorway of Paradise
The Way to Life
The Straight Path to Eternal Glory
Most Holy Mother
Virgin Mother
Glorious Mother
Queen of the World
Divine Virgin
Virgin Mary
Comely Virgin
Beautiful Virgin
Flower of Flowers
Beauty of Virgins
The Jewel of All Consecrated to God
Confidence of Brides
Heaven's Mistress
Immaculate Mother of the Holy One
Fragrant Nard
Splendor of the Earth
Glory of Heaven
Glory of Widows
Glory of Maidens!
Mother of God
Blessed of All Women
Temple of the Holy Spirit
Full of God
Full of the Holy Spirit
Virgin, Most Blessed
Mistress of the World
Beloved Mother of Christ
Heaven's jewel and joy
Mother of Truth

HOMILY XII

My Lady
Most Blessed Virgin Mother of God
Christ's Mother

Mournful Mother
Doleful Mother
Weeping Mother
Sweetest Mother
Mary, the Virgin
Delightful Mother
Mary, Most Holy
Mary, Most Loving
Wholly Good & Beautiful!

HOMILY XIII

Mother of Everlasting Salvation and Glory
Delight of the Angels
Happiness of the Saints
Sole Bliss of All the Elect
Ever- Virgin
Blessed Above All Women
Blessed and Spotless Virgin
Blessed Queen of the World
The Mother of Jerusalem's King
The Treasury of Eternal Bliss
Brilliance of the Heavens
Sweetness of Paradise
Delight of God
Glory of the Angels
Happiness of the Saints
Blessed Jewel of Virgins
Glad some Joy
Blessed Benediction
Lady of Glory
Queen of Happiness
Fountain of Mother Love
Vein of Mercy
Richness of Sanctity
Pleasant Delight
Matchless Queen
Mother of the Most High
Weeping Mother
Beloved Mother
Virgin Mother
Praise of Paradise
Mother of the Eternal King
The Sacred Virgin

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ALL FOR JESUS AND JESUS FOR MARY



how to not bless God with all our strength when we see his great mercy to man by placing between heaven and earth the Most Holy Virgin? How not love God when one has Mary! Ah, Brother, this is something in which the soul loses itself, it does not understand, it has but one recourse to keep from going crazy, that is, to love, to love much, very much; to live swept away in ecstasy of love for Mary, the Mother of God, the Most Holy Virgin, full of grace; she who helps us in affliction, covering us with her blue mantle; refuge of sinners; she is our hope, who helps us on earth so as to give us in heaven to her Son Jesus Christ, she who is blessed and extolled by all the choirs of heaven's hosts, she who lovingly smiles to us.

What more should I tell you? Who am I to sing of the beauty of Mary? A nobody, I already know it, but it does not matter. When I picked up the pen, I tended to tell you about Our Lady, to remind you, what presumption, that in heaven is Mary, our Mother. Would that I could fill sheets and sheets of paper, even nonsensical things, but you have to pardon my crudeness; she too, will excuse me; she sees my intention as the intention of Jesus, that is enough for me. Ah! If I but had the words and heart of David! Jesus would be my fortress; to Mary I would give my weaknesses; my bulwark in God, my consolations in Mary, I do not know, I lose myself, I am such an insignificant little thing, Brother. Many times you say: All for Jesus. Why not add: And Jesus for Mary? Yes, dear Brother, In God alone have I placed my hope, says the great King David. Ah! If he had known the Most Holy Virgin he would have added, And that hope is Mary.

Do you think so?

You see, in the monastery we have so many images of Our Lady that it seems the house belongs to her. There nothing is done without consulting Mary, all the vocations have their root in her. You who see the hand of God in everything, do you not also see the hand of Mary? How great God is, how sweet is Mary! How great a joy it is to think of heaven when we shall be there at her side, some singing always: songs of our school days, others the Salve Regina, still others the Magnificat of the monastic choirs, and others, so full are they of joy at the beauty of Mary, may not know how to sing.

How is it possible to live not loving Mary, not loving God!

ST. RAPHAEL ARNAIZ BARON, LETTER OF OCTOBER 11, 1937

St. Rafael Arnaiz Baron is a monk of San Isidro de Dueñas Abbey in Palencia, Spain.

Among its other distinguishing features, the Cistercian order has been marked since its very commencement by its fealty to the Virgin. Cîteaux arose in a century that was stamped on all sides by confident dedication to the worship of Mary and unwavering trust in her. Even in a prevailing climate of fevered Marianism, even against a backdrop of such generally intense commitment to the Mother of God, the white monks were second to none.

Mary was not decreed a queen by the pope until 1954, but the Middle Ages greeted her routinely in that capacity—and that reginal reverence held particularly true for the white monks. An early statute stipulated officially that every Cistercian church and cloister should be founded in honor of the “Queen of Heaven and Earth.” Not the faintest doubt exists that by this formulation the Mother of God is meant. The designation of the Virgin as Queen of Heaven and Earth had been conventional for a long time already. This status positioned her to operate as a unique conduit between the two realms. In an extension of this power, relics of her and of physical contact with her earthly self could also provide petitioners with a pipeline to God and all the holiness surrounding him on high. Madonnas, as images of her, could fulfill the same funneling function.

The Virgin, along with these tokens of her, arbitrated between the simplicity of humble believers in the sublunary realm and the loftiness of God above. She was not unapproachable and unresponsive in her queenliness. On the contrary, she thrust herself forward as mediator. In medieval and theological terms, she came not as an accessory to the crime but as an intercessor for the sinner. The movements involved in Marian intercession were perceived to take place in both directions. Petitions from votaries on earth were relayed to Christ in heaven. Rebounding in the opposite course, expressions of divine grief, joy, and other emotions were transmitted from heaven through visions or animated images. Those celestial feelings could take palpable terrestrial form, with tears, milk, blood, and oil being four of the most common drippings that exuded from the Virgin, especially as represented in Madonnas. In the Middle Ages, virgin olive oil was not at all the same as today.

Veneration of the Mother of God belonged among the paramount manifestations of Christian practice. To go further, it reigned supreme in that same class. Consequently, nothing is strange about the fact that the liturgies of the Cistercians were heavily Marian. Each of the daily offices features a special reflection on her vocation. Since the thirteenth century, each day in a monastery of white monks has been capped by the singing of “Hail, Holy Queen” as the final antiphon. This hymn praises the Virgin in her guise as Mother of Mercy who intercedes with the Lord. It can be difficult to know which personage is meant when a Mary is mentioned within a Cistercian context. A reference to a woman by this name could allude to the historical person, the Jewish woman who was the mother of Christ; to the patroness of the order, ever to be trusted to champion the life- and soul-saving of contrite sinners; to the buildings dedicated to her, especially in this case all Cistercian churches and most cathedrals; or to the mother Church as an institution.



St. Alberic receives the Cistercian habit from the Virgin. Fresco, 1732–1752. Zirc, Zirc Abbey Church.

Since 1109, Cistercian monks have not worn the black vestments of the Benedictine order from which they branched off. Rather, they dress in ones of natural, unwhitened, and uncolored wool. The resultant hue is off-white, effectively a beige. For all that, the brethren have tended to be called white monks. In the Middle Ages, they were also known sometimes as gray monks. In either case, they were dyed in the wool for being undyed. Wherever we place the color of the Cistercians' unbleached woolen habits on the chromatic spectrum, the most common explanation for the adoption of this lightness in preference to black was a specific of Marian symbolism. The color honors Mary's purity and spotlessness. A hue unblemished by blackness is what immaculate conveys etymologically in the original Latin: unstained and ultraclean.

The Cistercians wore clothing as white as a sheet—a modern and not a medieval one, since bed linens would not have had the incandescence often prized today for its connotation of cleanness. The whiteness betokened not ghostliness or fear, but virginal purity. More than once, they explained the color as bespeaking their service to the bright splendor of the Mother of God. In legend, the change from black to its opposite resulted directly from an apparition of the Virgin. One August morning, Mary made herself visible among the monks as they chanted matins. Not stopping at merely appearing, she went up to the second abbot of Cîteaux and later Saint Alberic, and threw a white cowl over his shoulders. At this moment, the habits of all the other monks present also turned the same color.

*This text is an excerpt from *The Juggler of Notre Dame and the Medievalizing of Modernity* (Volume I) by Jan M. Ziolkowski, PhD, Arthur Kingsley Porter Professor of Medieval Latin at Harvard University. Published by Open Book Publishers (Cambridge, 2018). Reprinted with the kind permission of the author.*

My Soul Magnifies *the* Lord!

A Reflection on Cistercian Dedication and Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary

DOM PAUL MARK SCHWAN, OCSO

What elements make up a Cistercian devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary (BVM)? As a member of the Order of the Cistercians of the Strict Observance, I propose that first it is necessary to look at our Constitutions to see what is said about the BVM and then comment upon their relevance in forming a Cistercian devotion to Mary.

In our Constitutions, there are found four references to the BVM. In Constitution 3, The Spirit of the Order, in section 4, it states, "Each community of the Order and all the monks are dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother and Symbol of the Church in the order of faith, love and perfect union with Christ." Here in this basic statement is the basis of our devotion as Cistercians to Mary, Mother of God. The historical origin of this constitution is found in the earliest constitutions.¹ Furthermore, this Constitution 3 reflects the theological insights that Vatican II provided for an authentic devotion to Mary.²

The second reference to the BVM is found in Constitution 22, Heartfelt Prayer; it states, "May the Blessed Virgin Mary who was taken up into heaven, the life and sweetness and hope of all earthly pilgrims never be far from their hearts." This reference to Mary's Assumption alludes to the

patronal feast of the Cistercian Order. The role of the Assumption thus figures prominently in our understanding of ourselves both as Cistercians and how the mystery of the Assumption helps to form our prayer. This theme will be developed more thoroughly below.

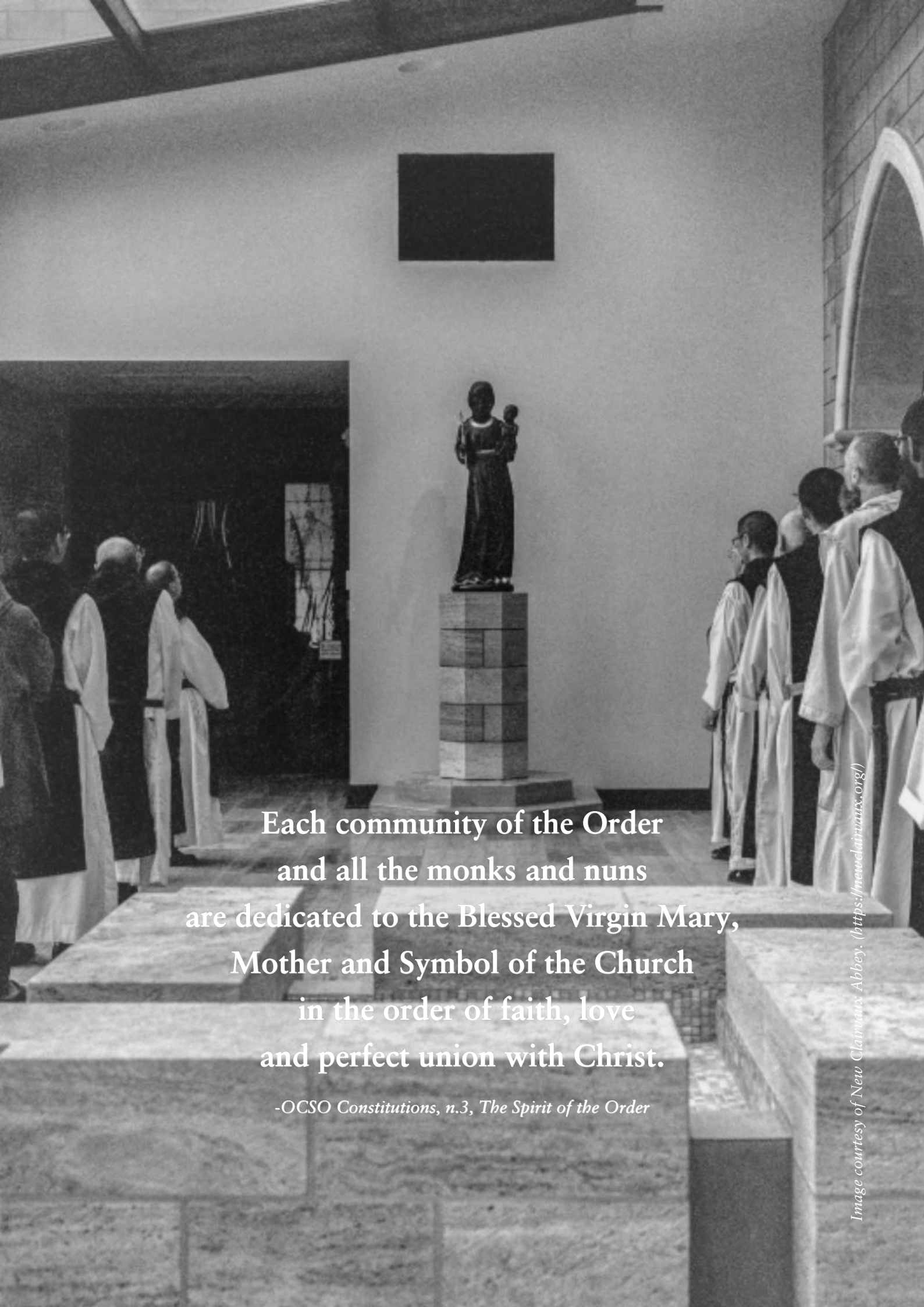
Thirdly, in Constitution 45, The Process of Formation, the role of Mary in the formative process of the monk is expressed by the following: "Aided by the maternal care of the Mother of God, the brothers so advance in the monastic way of life that they progressively attain the full measure of the stature of Christ."

Finally, the fourth reference to Mary is found in Constitution 86, the very last constitution, In the Joy of the Holy Spirit. "May God grant that by the breath of the Paraclete the brothers may observe them (i.e., the Constitutions and Statutes) in a spirit of fraternal charity and fidelity to the Church, and so joyfully make their way to the fullness of love with the help of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Queen of Citeaux."

What do these four Constitutions tell us and, more importantly, how do they form us in a living, animated, heartfelt devotion to Mary as Cistercians?

¹ Statuta Capitulum Generalium Ordinis Cisterciensis, AB Anno 1116 AD Annum 1789, Tomus I, Louvain, Bureaux de La Revue, 1933, Statuta XVIII, p. 17.

² See Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Chapters 2 – 5, Vatican Council II, The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents, 1988 Revised Edition, Austin Flannery, O.P., Editor.



Each community of the Order
and all the monks and nuns
are dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary,
Mother and Symbol of the Church
in the order of faith, love
and perfect union with Christ.

-OCSO Constitutions, n.3, The Spirit of the Order



May the blessed Virgin Mary
who was taken up into heaven,
the life and sweetness and hope of all the pilgrims,
never be far from their hearts.

-OCSO Constitutions, n.22, Heartfelt Prayer

First, dedication³ is consecration, meaning one's whole life is consecrated in a special way to Mary by virtue of our vocation and the vows that articulate our vocation. Second, the attitude and stance of all our prayer practices are in imitation of Mary, who is more than a model; she is in fact our very life, sweetness, and hope.⁴ Third, we are taught that like Mary, and with Mary, all is grace, that all we have and are is totally dependent upon God.⁵ Furthermore, any and all progress we make is in part the result of Mary's intercession on our behalf.⁶

When we reflect upon Mary in the gospel, we see movement, journey, and pilgrimage. By movement I mean an interior process. For example, the image that Luke gives us of Mary at the Annunciation and Visitation expresses well this inner movement. At the Annunciation, upon the departure of the Angel Gabriel, Mary has "moved" to a new understanding of who she is and her role in the history of salvation of God's people. Likewise, in her encounter with her cousin Elizabeth, she has "moved" to a further deepening of her experience of God's work that occurred through her brave, yet simple "fiat".

Next, we see Mary who journeys from Nazareth to Bethlehem, Egypt, and then back to Nazareth. This journey is an expression of trust and confidence that echoes her ancestor Abraham. At a relatively old age, Abraham journeyed forth from his native land of security and comfort to move forward to an unknown land that God would show him.

Finally, Mary is a pilgrim, first reflected in the pilgrimages she makes to the temple in Jerusalem with her son and husband. The pilgrimage with Jesus at the age of 12 prepares her in a particular way for the ultimate pilgrimage she makes at Passover, which leads her to Golgotha, where she stands at the foot of the cross. In all these three facets, we find Christ at the beginning, center, and end of Mary's life. For us, too, in this movement, journey, and pilgrimage, Mary beckons to us. She assures us that she walks with us and will lead us also to Christ. In this she represents the fullness of love, the full measure of the stature of Christ, and

union with Christ.

But why should there be devotion to Mary if the encounter with Christ is our goal? Because Mary stands closest to Christ in the order of faith, love, and perfect union with Christ.⁷ Furthermore, Mary shares most perfectly in the mysteries that make up the total Mystery of Christ. She is closest to the "whole" Christ – head and members, Christ and Church.⁸

Whenever Mary appears in the gospel, there is found Christ. Christ is always the reference which Mary points to. Think of the manger, temple, Nazareth, the cross, and the upper room. In other words, Mary can only be understood in the context of the Incarnation. She stands at the heart of the Mystery of the Word-made-Flesh. Is it any wonder then that Mary embodies Christian humility and obedience leading to the love of God? This is the very essence of Cistercian life.

When we consider Mary's role in salvation history, her response, pondering, and following of Christ, she becomes a type of the Church in the order of faith, charity, and perfect union with Christ.

In conclusion, the Cistercian practice of devotion to Mary is first scriptural, for we share in Mary's pondering and active participation in salvation history. Second, Cistercian devotion is liturgical, as the liturgy flows from Scripture and Tradition, expounding upon salvation history and the role of Christ as Savior and Redeemer, so Mary's life was permeated by Christ and his ministry.⁹ Hence the daily Marian antiphons in the Divine Office, the daily *Salve Regina* concluding each liturgical day, the weekly Mass of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the more popular prayers of the *Angelus/Regina Coeli*, prayed after the liturgical office. Third, Cistercian devotion flows from Tradition, the Church's pronouncements, most notably the Assumption of the BVM, the patronal feast of the Order. Finally, Cistercian devotion is rooted in the charism of the Order, that from the very beginning the monasteries, hence the members of the Order, were dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary.¹⁰ ■

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³ OCSO, Constitution 3

⁴ OCSO, Constitution 22. St. Bernard is said to have added these concluding words to the *Salve Regina* as he walked down the nave of Speyer Cathedral, Christmas Eve, inspired by the assembly's fervent chanting of the *Salve Regina*. He was there to preach the Second Crusade.

⁵ OCSO, Constitution 45

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ See Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Chapters 2 – 5, Vatican Council II, The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents, 1988 Revised Edition, Austin Flannery, O.P., Editor

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ John 2, The Wedding Feast at Cana.

¹⁰ Statuta Capitulum Generalium Ordinis Cisterciensis, AB Anno 1116 AD Annum 1789, Tomus I, Louvain, Bureaux de La Revue, 1933, Statuta XVIII, p. 17.

Mary *and* the Monk*

DOM AUGUSTINE ROBERTS, OCSO

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Where does Mary fit among the many elements of monastic life? How does the monk or nun live out a relationship with the Mother of Jesus? Who and what is Mary for me?

These are not questions to be answered lightly. In general, it seems to me that Mary will be for each one of us what we let her be. For many, even in monasteries, the reality of Mary may be one of the truths of faith accepted and recited in the Creed but not really lived or appreciated as referring to a person who intervenes directly in daily life. She can be an implicit part of our life but often not an explicit one, apart from routines such as the Angelus, the Rosary, or commemorations in the Liturgy.

Because of such a difficulty, it seems important to base ourselves on both doctrine and *experience* —

Mary's experience and ours—so as to discover for ourselves just what our relationship with her can be. Experience will make doctrine real for us, and doctrine will let us interpret experience correctly. This is what we will attempt to do in the following pages by looking at the basic patterns of both Mary's life and the monk's, pointing out their mutual significance and interaction. Of course, when we refer to the experience of monks, we understand it to include nuns as well. In fact almost all of what follows is applicable to any Christian vocation. The conclusions will be for each reader to draw for him or herself.¹

Who is Mary?

When Mary prophesied that "All ages to come will call me blessed,"² she foresaw the praise which she was going to receive. Above all, however, she was pointing to an intrinsic connaturality between herself and the rest of the human family. She saw how she had become, through the great things God had done for her, the supreme model of what it means to be human. We can understand this when

¹ Most of this article was written before the Marian Year was announced. Many of the themes and biblical references mentioned here are also treated by Pope John Paul II in his Marian Encyclical, *Redemptoris Mater*, of March 25, 1987.

² Lk 1:48.

we see that blessedness or happiness, especially in the Bible, refers to the *inner* vocation of *the* human person. Thus the Beatitudes are not primarily promises of extrinsic rewards if certain dispositions, such as poverty, gentleness, or purity of heart, are cultivated,³ but rather they point to truth: to the real perfection of the human person, indirectly condemning the falsehood of worldly standards. Blessedness is ontological.

For the same reason, Simon, son of Jonah, is called "blessed" by the Lord because his deepest identity will be not to pay attention to "flesh and blood" but to proclaim the revelation which comes from the heavenly Father.⁴ By doing this he will become "Rock," his new name. Similarly, all ages will call Mary blessed because her inner vocation, what the Mighty One has done in her, has made her the paradigm of what it means to be human. She is, in union with her Son, the member of the human family in whom our shared identity is most perfectly achieved. God's promises to us all are first fulfilled in her. We are somehow created or re-created, or both, in her image and likeness. And so our destiny is to be like her.

How can this be? What is this likeness of Mary present in the human heart throughout the ages? In what does the blessedness of Mary consist?

"Blessed is she who believed that the Lord's words to her would be fulfilled."⁵ The inner heart of Mary, her personhood in soul and body, is a *total receptivity to God's eternal Word*.⁶ This is the positive side of her Immaculate Conception. The Gospels consistently show that she is blessed for letting herself be governed by God's Word even more than for the external fact of giving birth physically to the Son of God.⁷ Perhaps it would be truer to say that there seems to be a continuum, an unbroken continuity, in the different expressions of God's Word: the written inspired

Word, the prophetic spoken or read Word, the existential Word in history, the Incarnate Word, the Eucharistic Word, the Word present when two or three meet in Christ's name,⁸ the inner mystical or visiting Word.⁹ Mary's inner heart receives every expression of God's Word, meditates upon it and says, "I am your handmaid. Let your Word become reality in me."¹⁰ And the Word was made Flesh from her flesh and blood.¹¹

So it is also in the Christian life. How blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it!¹² The truly believing heart of the Christian receives every expression of God's Word, embracing it in an act of self-donation-commonly called "faith"- which grows to include all dimensions of the person.¹³ The will, the intelligence with its concepts and reasoning, the affective and emotional powers, sexuality, prayer, relationships, lifestyle, all are submitted to the light and power of God's only Son. And the Word becomes flesh once more in the flesh and blood of the believer.

It is at this point that Mary's relation to the monk or nun becomes both more explicit and more interior. Radical receptivity to God's Word, which constitutes the very personhood of Mary, receives certain outward expressions in monastic life that are not found, at least to the same degree, in other forms of Christian living. These expressions include withdrawal from society, night watching, a humble and sober lifestyle, ready obedience, increased time for prayer, formation in receiving and assimilating God's saving Word. Through these outward expressions, monastic life puts the emphasis on that total receptivity to the Word of God which constitutes the ground of Mary's being and the inner center connecting all other aspects of her life.

Other Christian vocations will stress different Marian dimensions or combine the central one with the needs of the exterior apostolate.¹⁴ It is beautiful

³ Cf. Mt 5:3-12.

⁴ Mt 16-17.

⁵ Lk 1:45.

⁶ Cf. Lk. 1:38.

⁷ Cf. Mt. 12:50; Mk. 3:35; Lk. 1:45;8:21; 10:39-42; 12:28; Jn. 2:5. This does not of itself contradict the fact that the divine maternity is the first principle in Mariology, but it does indicate that Mary's maternity of the Word should be understood in the proper spiritual sense and not just physically. It concerns the whole Christ, the Word in all its expressions. The following sentences of the text attempt to explain this.

⁸ Mt. 18:20

⁹ The terminology comes from St. Bernard of Clairvaux. See his Sermons on the Song of Songs 74:3; 84:3.

¹⁰ Lk 1:38.

¹¹ Jn 1:14; Gal 4:4.

¹² Lk 12:28

¹³ Cf. Vatican II's descriptive definition of faith, in its Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*) 5: "an obedience by which man entrusts his whole self freely to God, offering 'the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals,' and freely assenting to the truth by Him."

¹⁴ Vatican II's Decrees on the Appropriate Renewal of Religious Life (*Perfectae Caritatis*) 6,8; on the Ministry and Life of Priests (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*) 4,18; and on the Apostolate of the Laity (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*) 4, emphasize the need for this

to know that Mary washed dishes, helped her neighbors, changed diapers, laughed with her relatives, shared in her husband's work, walked the roads of Palestine, instructed and worried about her Son, and later consoled and advised the apostles.

It will be important for monks and nuns, also, to identify with Mary in such routine activities, of which their life is so full. Yet it is vital to appreciate, above all, the central nucleus of Mary's existence: her interiority. Mary can thus become less an object of devotion and more a life to be followed within the intimacy of one's own conscience, one's own heart. This is where monastic life becomes truly Marian. In fact it would seem that Mary lives most especially in those persons who, like her and the Church, have "fled into the desert, where a special place has been prepared for her by God."¹⁵ To understand better this life with Mary in the desert, we will have to look at her personal spiritual history and how we are inserted into its different stages.

Mary's History and the Monk's

Radical receptivity to the Word, which links Mary's life to the monk's, is not just a static state of soul. On the contrary, it is a growing reality whose various stages are revealed through the successive events of Mary's human life.

First there are the years of *silent preparation* which precede the Annunciation. Exteriorly, these are years of discovering the nature of Salvation History through the liturgical and social life of God's people. Mary learns to live in faith, to read the Scriptures, to search for God's will, to meditate in her heart, to put the Word into practice, to hope in God's unfailing promises and to rejoice in the simple life of God's poor. It is hardly necessary to point out how similar this is to monastic life and to the substance of monastic formation.

Interiorly, Mary's prayer during her growing years is characterized by two interdependent qualities: profound intuitions into the truths revealed to her people, and intense desire that God's promises, His plan of salvation, be achieved. The time before

the Annunciation is, above all, a time of desire, a burning prayer for the Messiah: "Come!"¹⁶

This form of prayer is abruptly modified by God's intervention. Mary accepts to be the Mother of Christ and her prayer of desire becomes a prayer of *presence*. Listening to God's Word takes on for Mary of Nazareth an unthinkable realism as she carries, watches, caresses, feeds, listens to and dialogues with the Son of God. While teaching Him she herself is taught, and motherhood becomes itself a prayer, a meditation in the heart.¹⁷ The nun and monk, too, are called to this prayer of presence. The truths of Salvation History are not abstract, but historical, and the messianic promises continue to be fulfilled daily through the presence of Jesus in the simplicity of monastic existence. For those who believe, adoration replaces and, at the same time, increases the prayer of desire.

About thirty years after the Annunciation, another shift in Mary's life took place, a change of relation with her Son which had been hinted at by Simeon in the Temple many years before,¹⁸ and which would be clarified at the foot of the Cross. This new relationship with Jesus would remain basically the same for the rest of Mary's earthly life.

The change occurred when Jesus literally walked out on her at the beginning of His public ministry. There had been a foretaste of it when Jesus was twelve years old,¹⁹ but who can be prepared for the *absences* of the Word? Mary learned by experience how to live in hope during these times of perplexity, darkness, and contradiction.²⁰ She accepted the hard lesson that Jesus can and should be followed despite His seeming rebuffs and that these very contradictions school us for a new presence. She was being prepared for the Spirit of Pentecost.

Through Mary's loyalty to her Son, the whole Church was learning to recognize the Savior in His silences. The prayer of presence reverts back to a prayer of absence, but now on a new and higher level, one of total availability, proven love, and of oblation in darkness and contradiction.

This period of sacrificial love is clarified by Jesus Himself on the Cross when He looks on His Mother with the beloved disciple and says, "Woman, this is your son." And to the disciple, who clearly stands for

harmonization. The last paragraph (AA 4) ends by affirming that: "The perfect example of this type of spiritual and apostolic life is the most Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of Apostles."

¹⁵ Rev 12:6,14.

¹⁶ Mary would have made her own Pss. 71 and 79, and Is 63-64

¹⁷ Lk 2:19, 51.

¹⁸ Lk 2:35.

¹⁹ Lk 2:41-50

²⁰ Cf. Mt 4:13;12:48; Mk 3:33; Lk 2:48; Jn 2:4.

each one of us, "This is your Mother."²¹ Penetrating through the different possible interpretations of these words, the monk understands them personally: Mary is now his truest Mother and, as such, the channel of his life in Christ. She is his teacher and refuge in time of trouble, his bond of union with the other members of his new family.

What is proclaimed on the Cross is sealed on the day of Pentecost when the Apostles receive the Holy Spirit "together with Mary the Mother of Jesus."²² During this time the primitive Church learned from her the prayer of desire: "Come!" Her *motherhood over the Church*—and over each member of the Church in particular—is confirmed through her docility to the Word and Spirit of the Risen Christ. What we can forget, however, is that something analogous happens to each one of us. In the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation we are sealed with the same Spirit and we take Mary "into our care," as the beloved disciple did,²³ since she has become an integral part of what makes us children of God. That is to say, we take her into our life as Mother. Mary, in her turn, joins her intercession with that of the Spirit for us so that we may "pray as we ought."²⁴

After the Ascension and Pentecost, the humanity of Jesus is more real for Mary than ever, but not as a palpable object present to her senses or pictured in her imagination.²⁵ Jesus is now glorified and is experienced by Mary in faith as the principle of new life, the source of a living water,²⁶ embraced by the nuptial assent of the deepest powers of her soul. However, this more purely spiritual relation to Christ does not impede her from reflecting on the great events and the many details of His earthly life. She continues meditating on them in her heart,²⁷ and answers the stream of questions put to her by the first Christians about "what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked upon and our hands have touched."²⁸ In fact, her gentle catechesis of the primitive Church would seem to lie at the very root of Christian tradition.

We shall see below how she continues this teaching role in our daily life.

Mary's bodily Assumption into the divine presence of the Blessed Trinity at the side of her risen Son adds a unifying glorification of body and soul to her already total availability. The Daughter of Zion has ascended to the Heavenly Jerusalem.²⁹ Mary's personhood is not fully achieved until then, when her assent to God's Word is totally fulfilled and now can be shared with her children on earth. She says to the monk what Jesus tells His disciples: "It is much better for you that I go."³⁰ Now her inner life as Mother of Christ, itself a work of the Holy Spirit, can be continued and expanded through her children in the Church. *She truly lives in them*, not only as an inspiration, but as the most intimate companion of the glorified Christ, "united to him by a close and indissoluble tie," "an associate of unique nobility,"³¹ preparing her children through the power of the Spirit for perfect union with her Son.

The result is Mary's twofold relation to the Church: that of Mother and that of the member in whom the identity of the whole is most perfectly achieved.³² In one sense, what began at the Annunciation is completed in the Assumption. But in another sense, Mary's identity with the Church means that her work is not at all complete. This is the meaning of the woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, who appears in Chapter 12 of the Book of Revelation. This Mother of the Messiah, who eventually "flies off to her place in the desert,"³³ is the Church herself, and especially Mary, present to her children in pilgrimage.

The Assumption is, then, a feast of personal maturity: Mary's and ours. The monk comes to understand that his own fulfillment, like Mary's, can only consist in letting himself be invaded by the Word and Spirit of God, and responding in complete obedience. He wants to become like her, a servant of the Lord whose Word has total dominion over him. He sees that this is the way to the truest form of creativity and fruitfulness, in behalf of all the human family. Mary's grace in him relativizes all other

²¹ Jn 19:26-27.

²² Acts 1:14

²³ Jn 19:27. Cf. Mt 2:24 where Joseph also "received her into his home"

²⁴ Rom 8:26

²⁵ Cf. Jn 20:17 and 2 Cor 5:16-17

²⁶ Jn 4:10; Rev 7:17; 21:6; 22:4, 17.

²⁷ Lk 2:19, 51

²⁸ 1 Jn 1:1

²⁹ Cf. Is 52:2

³⁰ Jn 16:7

³¹ Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) 53, 61

³² Cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 62-65

³³ Rev 12:14.



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norms and methods of human maturity. The Assumption guarantees, among other things, that our present life is the final stepping-stone to eternity. No reincarnation is available. Nor is it necessary, since Christ, the divine Spouse, has taken His human spouse to Himself *once and for all*.³⁴

With Mary in the Desert

We have seen that, by taking Mary "into his care" as his true Mother,³⁵ the monk inserts his own inner growth into the different stages of her personal history. Thus the Mother of Jesus becomes both an external model for him and an interior life within him, sharing his life in the desert. In fact, part of the mystery of monastic life is that it makes visibly present the secret "place in the desert where, far from the serpent, she could be taken care of" during this time of trial.³⁶

As Mother of the Church Mary is not inactive, particularly in the desert! But *how* is her activity experienced by the monk? What does it mean to live with Mary in the desert? To answer these questions on a personal level, each person has to look at his or her own experience in order to discover the patterns of contact with Mary which have emerged over the years.

This is where a problem arises, perhaps the essential paradox of life in Mary. She much prefers to stay out of the limelight. She has been so assumed and penetrated by the Holy Spirit that her heart is continually repeating the words first spoken by her relative, John the Baptist: "He must increase; I must decrease."³⁷ The result is a disconcerting habit on Mary's part of not making her activity readily apparent. Hers is not a flamboyant spirit nor one that seeks to impress the world with extraordinary happenings. If she does this occasionally, it is only because of our own stubbornness. Her humility of heart is her principal character trait.

Within this humility of heart, however, and through the ordinary events of monastic living, it is very possible to experience Mary's personal loving care. The necessary condition is a prayerful dependence on her. In the lives of those monks

and nuns who develop such an explicit relationship with her there seem to be several ways she intervenes, each of them truly beautiful. Mary can be Mother, Helper, Teacher, Friend, and Beloved. Through these different forms of activity, she shares with us the different phases of her human experience. It will be enough to sketch briefly each of these relationships.

Obviously the most common experience, the one which really underlies any other, is that of Mary as *Mother*. This is her essential role, proclaimed, as we have seen, by Jesus on the Cross. Through it God shows to all ages the inner fruitfulness of listening to His Word and acting upon it.³⁸

As the Christian grows in the knowledge of Mary, there is a certain healthy tension between the two poles of her motherhood: Mary is the Mother of Jesus and she is my own truest Mother. As faith grows and devotion becomes more mature, these two aspects are fused into one: Mary is my truest Mother because she forms Christ in me.

It is significant that the doctrine of the formation of Christ in us by Mary should have been developed in a special way during the twelfth century, when Western monasticism was experiencing its most spectacular growth. It was the Cistercian abbot, Gueric of Igny (1087-1157), who most clearly taught this inner dimension of the divine maternity:

Wishing to introduce the Beloved of her womb, the Beloved of her desires, into the affections of all her children, Mary... desires to form her Only-begotten in all her sons by adoption. Although they have been brought to birth by the word of truth, nevertheless she brings them forth every day by desire and loyal care until they reach the stature of the perfect man, the maturity of her Son, whom she bore and brought forth once and for all.³⁹

Gueric's younger contemporary, Abbot Isaac of Stella (1120- 1175), based himself on this same reality and showed how Mary sums up in herself the spiritual action of Mother Church in such a way that "what is said collectively of the Church as Virgin Mother is true in the singular of Mary. And what is said in a special way of Mary, Virgin and Mother, is true in general of the Church." Thus "Mary and the Church are just one mother and yet are distinct. They form just one Virgin Spouse and yet are two."⁴⁰ Both Mary and the Church teach us to keep the Word of God, to grow up in love, to pray as Christ

³⁴ Heb 9:25-28.

³⁵ Jn 19:27

³⁶ Rev 12: 14

³⁷ Jn 3:30

³⁸ Cf. Lk 1:45 and 8:21

³⁹ Sermon 52:3 in Liturgical Sermons II (Cistercian Fathers Series 32, Spencer, 1971), pp. 200-201

⁴⁰ Sermon 51:7-9 (PL 194, 1863 A) in Sermons III (Sources Chrétiennes n. 339, Paris, 1987), pp. 202-205.

taught us, to address the Father in holy liberty. And they both suffer pains until Christ is formed in us.⁴¹

This experience of Mary as Mother of Christ in oneself and in the Church is really the substance of life in Mary. This substance, however, is expressed and enriched by the different nuances which are particular to each person's vocation, grace, and attraction, as we shall now see. The humble splendor of Mary's grace can only be reflected partially in any one person's life, so we have differing expressions of her maternity according to the different life situations which a monk or nun faces.

One expression common to all of us is Mary's action as *Help of Christians*, according to the title she receives in the Litany of Loreto. One of the earliest prayers to her, known in Western monasticism as the *Sub tuum*, dating from the third century, expresses how the believing soul flies to the patronage of the Mother of God, knowing that she will not turn away from us in our necessities, but rather deliver us in our distress.

The *Memorare*, which seems to have been inspired, though not written, by St. Bernard of Clairvaux, proclaims the same conviction: "Never was it known that anyone who fled to your protection, implored your help or sought your intercession was ever left unaided." The conclusion reflects the happy experience of generations of monks and nuns: "Inspired by this confidence, I fly to you, Virgin of virgins, my Mother. To you do I come, sinful and sorrowful." How many men and women of prayer have not been aided beyond their deepest aspirations by the Mother of the Word Incarnate!

It is St. Bernard himself (1090-1153) who gives the most well-known and powerful description of an experience of Mary as Helper in time of distress, proposing it as the best way to learn who Mary is. It is the well-known text at the end of his Second Homily In Praise of the *Virgin* Mother, probably written when Bernard was still a young abbot in his thirties:

You, whoever you are, who feel that in the tidal wave of this world you are nearer to being tossed about among the squalls and gales than treading on dry land, if you do not want to founder in the tempest, do not avert your eyes from the brightness of this star. When the wind of temptation blows up

within you, when you strike upon the rock of tribulation, .. whether you are being tossed about by the waves of pride or ambition or slander or jealousy, gaze up at this star, call out to Mary. When rage or greed or fleshly desires are battering the skiff of your soul,...and you begin to founder in the gulf of despair, think of Mary. In dangers, in hardships, in every doubt, think of Mary, call out to Mary.... With your hand in hers, you will never stumble. With her protecting you, you will not be afraid. With her leading you, you will never tire. Her kindness will see you through to the end. Then you will know by your own experience how true it is that "the Virgin's name was Mary."⁴²

St. Bernard's mention of temptations in all their forms seems to reflect accurately the most common situation in which monks invoke the Mother of God. St. Amadeus of Lausanne (1109- 1159) explains the reason for Mary's help in such times of tribulation:

The more she beholds from on high the heart of the mighty King the more profoundly she knows, by the grace of divine pity, how to pity the unhappy and to help the afflicted.⁴³

Thus Mary makes herself known in a special way as "Mother of Mercy," "Mother of the Afflicted," and "Hope of the Hopeless." She who received from God so gratuitously, and is herself such a gratuitous gift to the human family, knows how to give beyond human reckoning. "For all the saving influences of the Blessed Virgin on men originate, not from some inner necessity, but from the divine pleasure."⁴⁴

In monastic life the action of the Mother of God is very often connected with her teaching role. Mary, like the Church, is Mother and *Teacher*. She continues in the monastery what she did within the primitive Church. No one can teach the secrets of the Kingdom of God as she can.

Normally Mary teaches in two ways: by her example and by her touch. We have already reviewed the principal examples which her life history offers us, but how can we describe her touch? It can be caressing, sweeter than honey, a kiss of tenderness which the world cannot give. It can be strengthening: Mary is the Mother of Martyrs and wants us to witness to Christ without counting the cost, at every moment of the day or of the night, because this is what truth, and our deepest personhood, call for. Or she can give us a sharp spank, a rebuke or correction that penetrates the heart and teaches God's children what contrition really is. With Mary, one learns by experience what it means to be a member of a divine family.

These touches of Mary are always enlightening.

⁴¹ Cf. Gal 4:19; Rev 12:2

⁴² English translation from *Magnificat* (Cistercian Fathers Series 18, Kalamazoo, 1979), pp. 30-31. Emphasis added.

⁴³ Homily 8 on the Praises of the Blessed Mary, in *ibid.*, p.131.

⁴⁴ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 60.

They can be purely interior, but more often she wishes to use living instruments: our brothers or sisters and the ordinary circumstances of monastic life, especially the Liturgy. In fact, she prefers to teach in this way, combining her message from outside with some grace from within, or vice versa. The final lesson is fundamentally one of total confidence: "to know and to believe in the love God has for us."⁴⁵ This is what gives monastic life its true and lasting joy.

It can be seen, then, that this school of Mary is nothing else than the "school for the Lord's service" of which St. Benedict speaks at the end of the Prologue to his Rule.⁴⁶ But Mary's action gives a surety of touch and depth of peace which would otherwise be lacking. As St. Bernard says, "Following her you will never go astray."⁴⁷ Mary holds within herself the secret teaching of the Lord's service. And so, with sincerity in this school, its lessons are learned: Jesus becomes real. The truths of faith are understood in simplicity of heart. Faith, humility, charity and prayer become more connatural, more Marian, and therefore more truly human. One learns the close interconnection of these elements of Christian living, and their mutual dependence. A new spiritual transparency is born. In the process, Mary, while remaining always a Mother, Helper, and Teacher, becomes more intimately a *Friend*.

The friendship of Mary is probably most often experienced in monastic life as the presence and action of a unique companion. A friend is one who sticks with you in joy and sorrow, in success and failure. When all others depart, your friend remains. Just so with Mary. She is present at a moment's notice, ready to act as Mother, Helper, or Teacher in ways both interior and exterior.

But how does the friendship of Mary differ from that of her divine Son, or from that of the Holy Spirit, the interior Counselor, or from the

mysterious friendship of one's guardian angel? Obviously there is a functional unity among these spiritual friendships, which are not mutually exclusive. In particular, the Divine Persons are pleased to act through Mary in such a way that Their acts of friendship – self-revelation in all its forms – become manifestations of her own kindness, love and power which, after all, come from Them. What seems to be the characteristic quality of Mary's friendship, though, is her subtle combination of the ordinary and the extraordinary. All is simple and hidden. Yet Mary's touch renders the simple extraordinarily beautiful. Hidden things, which the Father chooses to reveal to simple persons,⁴⁸ become exceptionally clear without ceasing to be hidden. The friends of Mary are also like that: totally ordinary, sometimes embarrassingly so. Yet, if their

friendship with her is genuine, they are possessed by a combination of qualities which is truly remarkable: spiritual insight, social poise, interpersonal humility, ease of collaboration, generosity of service, unassuming *selflessness*, unconquerable faith, trust, and joy.

Those who have experienced the friendship of Mary in their lives usually point out the two characteristics of the Marian touch which we have already noted in her

role as Teacher: sweetness and purification, probably in equal proportions. The precise distribution of these characteristics in the lives of her children is part of divine wisdom. Mary's action makes sweetness purifying and purification sweet; the result being a type of bittersweet experience that gives its flavor to all of one's life. It reflects, at one and the same time, the inner destitution of the Cross, the invincible peace of the Resurrection, and the unified harmony between Cross and Resurrection that has been achieved in the heart of Mary. The communication of this inner Paschal harmony is the fruit of Mary's friendship.

With continued fidelity to all that is implied in

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⁴⁵ 1 Jn 4:16.

⁴⁶ RB Prol. 45

⁴⁷ *Loc. cit.*, (note 41), p.30

⁴⁸ Cf. Mt. 11:25.

Mary's friendship, she can become, besides a Mother, Helper, Teacher, and Friend, a *Beloved Spouse*. This is not a question of special "nuptial" feelings, but rather a residing conviction of mutual belonging.⁴⁹ The Holy Spirit repeats the exclamation of Elizabeth, "Blessed are you among women,"⁵⁰ as an enduring attitude towards Mary in the heart of the Christian. This nuptial sense of mutual belonging is expressed in two external ways which have become deeply embedded in Marian spirituality: *consecration* and *praise*.

Consecration and Praise

"Set me as a seal on your heart!"⁵¹ This climax of the Bible's inspired love song shows how love instinctively leads to consecration. In one way or another such an expression of permanent mutual belonging to Mary has been a part of monastic experience at least since the end of the first millennium, in both East and West. To the unsurpassed Marian hymns of the Eastern monks corresponds the Cluniac and Cistercian recognition of Mary as Queen, Patroness, and Lady. These feudal terms imply a pact of mutual loyalty. Thus St. Bernard spontaneously sees himself as bound to Mary by oath when he speaks about praying for a hardened sinner:

Could a lowly slave like myself, honored enough by being the slave of Mother and Son, dare to ask for such a thing?⁵²

In our day, the influence of St. Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort has clarified the theological meaning of consecration to Mary.⁵³ It is basically a reinforcement of the Marian dimension of consecration to Christ already contained in the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, since Mary is an essential part of the mystery of Christ. Thus many modern religious institutes are dedicated in a special way to her, and many monks and nuns, inspired by the Montfort consecration, have made a similar personal consecration.

An example of the Marian dimension of monastic consecration is given in the Constitutions of a modern monastic Order, where it is said that

Each community and all the monks and nuns are dedicated to Blessed Mary, the Mother and Type of the Church in the order of faith and love and perfect union with Christ.⁵⁴

Open praise to Mary, although it began with the Angel Gabriel's first words to her,⁵⁵ does not come spontaneously to many of us, children as we are of a secularizing culture. Yet one look at a love poem such as the *Song of Songs* shows how natural praise is to true love. In fact, it is the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of Elizabeth, who cannot resist exclaiming, "Blessed are you among women," immediately adding the reason: "Blessed is the fruit of your womb!"⁵⁶ The scene is reminiscent of the exclamation of the *Song's* Groom on seeing his Bride: "Beautiful are you among women!"⁵⁷

Through the centuries there have been "Marian Saints" who entered into a more nuptial dimension of Mary's love and expressed themselves in words of admiration for the Mother of God. In the East we find Ephrem the Deacon (d. 380), Germanus of Constantinople (d. 733), John of Damascus (d. 753), and Andrew of Crete (d. 761). In the West there are Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort (1673-1716), Alphonsus Maria de Liguori (1696-1787), and Maximilian Kolbe (1894-1941), who bring this current of Marian spirituality down to the present day. But seldom if ever has there been such a multiplied outburst of Marian enthusiasm as among the monks of the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. It was not simply a question of the ones whom we have already quoted – Bernard, Gueric, Isaac, and Amadeus – but also of Anselm of Canterbury, Aelred of Rievaulx, Helinand of Froidmont, Baldwin of Ford, Oglerio of Locedio, Adam of Perseigne, Alan of Lille, and others.⁵⁸

Several of these monks wrote whole treatises in praise of the Blessed Virgin.⁵⁹ But even in their ordinary sermons they let us see into their personal experience of Mary by the names they give her:

⁴⁹ Cf. *Song of Songs* 2:16; 6:3.

⁵⁰ Lk 1:43. The literary dependence of this phrase on *Song of Songs* 1:8; 6:8-9, even more than on the praise of Judith (13:18) or of Jael (Judges 5:24), has not been sufficiently exploited, especially in view of the fact that the context of the Visitation is decidedly more nuptial than military. See below, note 57.

⁵¹ *Song of Songs* 8:6.

⁵² *The Steps of Humility and Pride* XXII:53, in *Treatises II* (Cistercian Fathers Series 13, Washington, DC, 1974), p.80

⁵³ Cf. his two best known works, *The Secret of Mary* and *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary*.

⁵⁴ *The Constitutions and Statutes of the Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance* (1984), n.3,4.

⁵⁵ Cf. Lk 1:28.

⁵⁶ Lk 1:42

⁵⁷ *Song of Songs* 1:8. See note 50, above.

⁵⁸ Cf. Robert Thomas (ed.) *Mariale* (Collection *Pain de Citeaux*, Chambarand, hors commerce) Vol. 5-8, 1960, and 17-20, 1963.

⁵⁹ Thus Anselm of Canterbury, Bernard of Clairvaux, Amadeus of Lausanne, Baldwin of Ford, Oglerio of Locedio and Stephen of Sawley.

"Most Merciful Mother," "Most Powerful Advocate," "Walking Staff leading the just to our heavenly homeland."⁶⁰ In just one page of his *Treatise on the Praises of the Mother of God*, Oglerio of Locedio invokes her as, "My salvation," "My love," "My life," "My glory," "My crown," "Queen of joy," "Fountain of tenderness," "All beautiful one," and "Consoling presence to my aching soul."⁶¹ It is not without significance that the time of greatest monastic expansion in Western Europe coincided with this generalized outpouring of love for Mary.

From this same period comes Western monasticism's most typical expression of its love for the Mother of God, the *Salve Regina*: Hail, Holy Queen. It would be difficult to overestimate the influence this one liturgical piece has had on the monks and nuns of the West since the beginning of the twelfth century. It is still sung solemnly in most monasteries at the end of either Vespers or Compline as a final salute to Our Lady at the close of day. While it is true that a more positive approach to the values of this world has made us sensitive to phrases such as, "mourning and weeping in this valley of tears," the *Salve* remains what can only be called a moving love song originally set to one of the most inspired melodies of Gregorian chant. Basically it is an eschatological prayer to Mary as Mother of the longed-for Savior. The high point of the traditional melody describes the Virgin's "eyes of mercy." But the real climax comes when the monastic community asks her, in lullaby rhythm, "After this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of your womb, Jesus."

In the process, the *Salve* allows the monk to express his feelings about the Mother of Jesus: "Queen," "Mother of Mercy," "Life," "Sweetness," "Our Hope," "Our Advocate," "Clement and Loving Lady," "Sweet Virgin," ending softly with the name of the loved one- Mary. It is safe to say that no other single element of Latin monasticism has so influenced the ordinary monk or nun's relation to the Mother of Jesus as has the *Salve Regina*.

As we bring to a close this overview of Mary's place in monastic life, we could ask ourselves two important questions: What is my personal experience of Mary? And is there any general need for a shift of emphasis in my relation to her? Clearly the reply to the second question depends on how we answer the first one. Yet, behind the different experiences of Mary which we may have, and underlying the successive stages of her own pilgrimage of faith, she herself remains the woman of inner harmony who has totally embraced God's living Word and has let herself be embraced by Him. This, as we have seen, is the foundation of who she is and what she can be for us. May she help us to do the same. ■



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⁶⁰ Adam of Perseigne, Sermon I, Migne PL 211, c. 703-4, quoted in Robert Thomas, *op. cit.*, vol. 18, p. 121.

⁶¹ (Turin, 1873), p. 76, quoted in Robert Thomas, *op. cit.*, vol. 19, p. 143.

He ahí a Tu Madre

La Experiencia de un Martir Contemporaneo:
Christophe Lebreton (1950-1996)

DOM BERNARDO OLIVERA, OCSO

Las siguientes páginas son un extracto de una conferencia dictada por Dom Bernardo Olivera. El texto original en español fue publicado como 'He ahí a tu Madre. La experiencia de un mártir contemporáneo: Christophe Lebreton (1950–1996)' en III Congreso Internacional sobre el Císter: Actas (Tomo II), Ourense, 2006, págs. 1387–1403. Este extracto fue traducido al inglés para Colloquium y se publica aquí con la amable autorización del autor. Para el texto completo en inglés, véase Cistercian Studies Quarterly (CSQ), Vol. 41, No. 2, 2006.

*Llena de gracia, yo te elijo, hoy, con José:
Madre de Dios, María toda santa en la comunión de todos los santos.
Gozo de mi gozo, yo te recibo de manos de Jesús, mi amado
y te tomo conmigo. MAMÁ. Misericordia, Vida,
Dulzura, Esperanza.
Bien cerca de ti, como un niño, en paz, silencio y
confianza: yo soy.
Cerca de ti, toda la humanidad, los pueblos del Islam,
mi familia y cada uno de mis hermanos, aquí, en Fez (en Tamié, en Dombes,
mis hs. y hnas. de Berdine, mis hermanas de Klaarland y las hna. clarisas de
Argel...)
En lo más cercano de tu corazón: JB y D. (...)¹
María Iglesia, yo te amo y me dono por tus manos
al Amor crucificado.*

Christophe se dirige a María Inmaculada, la Llena de Gracia, se dirige a ella a fin de elegirla, estamos en el ámbito de la predilección. Pero Ella no está sola, optar por ella es optar también por José, no en vano es el día de su fiesta. Ambos están

¹ Se trata de Jean-Bernard, un amigo minusválido, y del H. Didier Mouvet de Tamié. Los tres formaban un trío de amigos y muy amigos de María. Cf. *El soplo del don*, 15-IX-94.

Behold *your* Mother

The Experience of a Contemporary Martyr:
Christophe Lebreton (1950-1996)

DOM BERNARDO OLIVERA, OCSO

The following pages are an excerpt from a conference paper given by Dom Bernardo Olivera. The original Spanish text was published as 'He ahí a tu Madre. La experiencia de un mártir contemporáneo: Christophe Lebreton (1950–1996)' in III Congreso Internacional sobre el Císter: Actas (Tomo II), Ourense, 2006, pp. 1387–1403. This excerpt was translated into English for Colloquium and is published here with the kind permission of the author. For the full English text, see Cistercian Studies Quarterly (CSQ), Vol. 41, No. 2, 2006.

*Full of grace, I choose you today, together with Joseph:
Mother of God, Mary, all holy, in the communion of all the saints.
Joy of my joy, I receive you from the hands of Jesus, my beloved,
and I take you with me. MAMA. Mercy, Life,
Sweetness, Hope.
Very close to you, like a child, in peace, silence, and
trust: I am.
Close to you, all of humanity, the peoples of Islam,
my family, and each of my brothers and sisters, here in Fez (in Tamié, in Dombes,
my brothers and sisters from Berdine, my sisters from Klaarland, and the Poor
Clares of Algiers...)
Closest to your heart: JB and D. (...)¹
Mary, the Church, I love you and I give myself through your hands
to the crucified Love.*

Christophe turns to Mary Immaculate, the Full of Grace; he turns to her in order to choose her—we are in the realm of predilection. But she is not alone; to choose her is also to choose Joseph—it is, after all, his feast day. Both are always in communion

¹ They are Jean-Bernard, a disabled friend, and Brother Didier Mouvet de Tamié. The three of them were a trio of friends and very close friends of Mary. Cf. *El soplo del don*, 15-IX-94.

siempre en comunión con todos los santos.

Es Jesús en Cruz quien entrega a su Madre, tal como lo ha revelado en su Evangelio el discípulo amado del Señor (cf. Jn.19,25-27). Ella es para Christophe: Mamá de misericordia, vida, dulzura y esperanza, tal como cantan los monjes al caer la tarde de cada jornada: *Salve Regina, Mater misericordiae, vita, dulcedo et spes nostra, salve...*

Christophe se re-encuentra a sí mismo en esta maternidad y filiación: *yo soy*. Encuentra, además, a toda la humanidad, al mundo islámico y, sobre todo, a su familia de sangre y según el espíritu. María es Madre porque es asimismo Iglesia y por eso el lugar de encuentro con todos y todas como hermanos y hermanas.

Elegirla y recibirla es al mismo tiempo donarse, por mediación de María, a Cristo en Cruz, es decir, al Amor crucificado. La consagración mariana consiste en esta acogida y donación, materna y filial, a fin de ser más plenamente del Señor. Nuevo nacimiento que actualiza la gracia bautismal.

Un hermoso y sencillo poema, titulado *A la sombra de la cruz*, expresa este súblice misterio con pocas palabras, honda intuición y alta evocación.

sobre la mujer de pie
tu corazón dándose hace una sombra
la cruz para un beso se ha inclinado
sucede un hermoso misterio y yo llego
nacido del mayor Amor²

La consagración a María encuentra su fundamento en un hecho capital de la vida de Jesús: la entrega de su propia Madre, cuando ha llegado “su hora”. La paz de Jesús, su cuerpo, su sangre, su madre y su Espíritu son patrimonio de quienes se reconocen y confiesan cristianos. Christophe lo es, por eso puede confesar sin vacilación: *Le dice –a Ella: Mujer he aquí a tu hijo. Creo en este nacimiento. Y a mí: he aquí a tu madre. Llevarla a mi casa es abrirme a su trabajo de alumbramiento: paciencia*³.

El P. Christophe es un testigo privilegiado de la especial presencia de la Madre de Dios en el misterio de Cristo y de la Iglesia. Aquello que es para todo cristiano “doctrina de fe” se convierte en él en “vida de fe”. Su vida en el Espíritu esta grávida de espiritualidad mariana, la cual conjuga indisolublemente devoción y consagración.

Sabemos que la maternidad es una realidad absolutamente interpersonal, ella determina una relación única e irrepetible entre dos personas, la madre con el hijo y el hijo con la madre. Y no importa cuantos hijos pueda tener una madre, la relación con cada uno de ellos caracterizará su maternidad en su misma esencia. Esto que es válido en el orden natural lo es también en el orden de la gracia. Las palabras de Jesús en el Calvario: *He ahí a tu hijo, he ahí a tu madre*, muestran que la maternidad universal de María es absolutamente única y original para cada uno. La vida mariana y la consagración a María de los discípulos de Cristo se apoyan sobre esta verdad.

La Madre de Jesús y nuestra nos conduce siempre a la Eucaristía. Esto es así pues existen profundos lazos entre Ella y este sacramento pascual. Podemos decir que María ejercitó su fe eucarística antes de que este sacramento fuera instituido: al momento de la encarnación “ofreció su cuerpo” para que el Verbo divino se hiciera carne para ser luego inmolado. Y hasta podemos pensar que cuando Jesús nos dice:

² *Aime jusqu'au bout du feu*, p.126

³ *El soplo del don*, 4-II-1994

with all the saints.

It is Jesus on the Cross who entrusts his Mother, just as the Lord's beloved disciple revealed in his Gospel (cf. Jn 19:25–27). For Christophe, she is the Mother of mercy, life, sweetness, and hope, just as the monks sing at the close of each day: *Salve Regina, Mater misericordiae, vita, dulcedo et spes nostra, salve...*

Christophe rediscovers himself in this motherhood and sonship: I am. He also encounters all of humanity, the Islamic world, and, above all, his family—both by blood and in spirit. Mary is Mother because she is also the Church, and thus the place of encounter with everyone as brothers and sisters.

To choose her and receive her is at the same time to give oneself, through Mary, to Christ on the Cross—that is, to Love crucified. Marian consecration consists in this maternal and filial acceptance and self-giving, so as to belong more fully to the Lord. It is a new birth that actualizes baptismal grace.

A beautiful and simple poem, titled “In the Shadow of the Cross,” expresses this sublime mystery with few words, deep intuition, and powerful imagery.

On the woman standing
your heart giving itself casts a shadow
the cross for a kiss has bent
unfolds a beautiful mystery and I arrive
born of the greatest Love²

Consecration to Mary is rooted in a pivotal event in the life of Jesus: the entrusting of his own Mother when “his hour” had come. Jesus’ peace, his body, his blood, his Mother, and his Spirit are the heritage of those who recognize and profess themselves as Christians. Christophe is one such person, who can confess without hesitation: *He says— to Her: “Woman, behold your son.” I believe in this birth. And to me: “Behold your mother.” To bring her into my home is to open myself to her work of giving birth: patience.*³

Father Christophe is a privileged witness to the special presence of the Mother of God in the mystery of Christ and the Church. What is for every Christian a “doctrine of faith” becomes for him a “life of faith.” His life in the Spirit is imbued with Marian spirituality, which inextricably combines devotion and consecration.

We know that motherhood is an utterly interpersonal reality; it establishes a unique and irreplaceable relationship between two people—the mother and her child, and the child and the mother. And no matter how many children a mother may have, her relationship with each one defines her motherhood in its very essence. What is true in the natural order is also true in the order of grace. Jesus’ words on Calvary—“Behold your son; behold your mother”—show that Mary’s universal motherhood is absolutely unique and original for each person. The Marian life and the consecration to Mary of Christ’s disciples are founded on this truth.

The Mother of Jesus and our Mother always leads us to the Eucharist. This is so because there are deep bonds between her and this Paschal sacrament. We can say that Mary exercised her Eucharistic faith even before this sacrament was instituted: at the moment of the Incarnation, she “offered her body” so that the Divine Word might become flesh and then be sacrificed. And we may even think that when Jesus

² *Aime jusqu’au bout du feu*, p. 126

³ *El soplo del don*, 4-II-1994

haced esto en memoria mía (Lc.22,19), refiriéndose al “memorial” del Calvario, se refiere también a lo que hizo con su Madre por nosotros: *He ahí a tu hijo, he ahí a tu Madre*. Quien vive la Eucaristía en plenitud vive igualmente la acogida de la Madre y se dona como hijo.

La devoción mariana del P. Christophe enraíza en la gran tradición católica. Sabía muy bien que hay devoción y devociones, serias y bobas. El 14 de Agosto de 1992, predicando en la fiesta de San Maximiliano Kolbe, se preguntaba y respondía: *¿Hacia dónde va este devoto? ¿Hacia dónde lo conduce su devoción? Hacia la entrega, dice la oración del día, hacia la entrega total : al servicio de sus hermanos, hasta la donación de su propia vida*⁴.

La consagración a María, basada en la mutua donación al pie de la cruz, y actualizada en la Eucaristía cotidiana, fue para el P. Christophe condición y posibilidad de convertirse él mismo en cuerpo donado y sangre derramada, para gloria del Padre y salvación del mundo. ■



El beato Christophe Lebreton, OCSO (1950–1996), fue un monje trapense francés, poeta y uno de los siete mártires de Tibhirine. Era el miembro más joven de la comunidad de la Abadía de Nuestra Señora del Atlas en Argelia. En la noche del 26 al 27 de marzo de 1996, fue secuestrado junto con seis de sus hermanos. Fueron ejecutados varias semanas después, el 21 de mayo de 1996. El Papa Francisco los reconoció oficialmente como mártires, y fueron beatificados el 8 de diciembre de 2018 en Orán, Argelia.

Dom Bernardo Olivera, OCSO, es un monje de la Abadía de Azul (Argentina) que se desempeñó como Abad General de la Orden Trapense durante dieciocho años (1990–2008).

⁴ Homilía inédita, 14-VIII-1992

tells us, “Do this in memory of me” (Lk 22:19), referring to the “memorial” of Calvary, he is also referring to what he did with his Mother for us: “Behold your son; behold your Mother.” Whoever lives the Eucharist to the full also lives the openness of the Mother and the gift of oneself as son.

Fr. Christophe’s Marian devotion is rooted in the great Catholic tradition. He knew very well that there are devotions—some serious, others foolish. On August 14, 1992, while preaching on the feast of St. Maximilian Kolbe, he asked himself and answered: “*Where is this devotee going? Where is his devotion leading him?*” *Toward self-surrender, says the prayer of the day, toward total self-surrender: in the service of his brothers and sisters, even to the point of giving his own life.*⁴

Consecration to Mary—based on mutual self-giving at the foot of the cross and made present in the daily Eucharist—was for Fr. Christophe both the condition and the means by which he himself could become a body given and blood shed, for the glory of the Father and the salvation of the world. ■



Blessed Christophe Lebreton, OCSO (1950–1996), was a French Trappist monk, poet, and one of the seven Martyrs of Tibhirine. He was the youngest member of the community of Our Lady of the Atlas Abbey in Algeria. On the night of March 26–27, 1996, he was kidnapped along with six of his brothers. They were executed several weeks later on May 21, 1996. Pope Francis officially recognized them as martyrs, and they were beatified on December 8, 2018, in Oran, Algeria.

Dom Bernardo Olivera, OCSO, is a monk of the Abbey of Azul (Argentina) who served as Abbot-General of the Trappist Order for eighteen years (1990–2008).

⁴ Homilía inédita, 14-VIII-1992

Blessed Marie-Joseph Cassant: God's *Cumy* One

MO. AUGUSTA TESCARI, OCSO

Childhood and Adolescence

Except in monastic circles—especially French-speaking ones—Blessed Marie-Joseph Cassant is a very little-known Trappist. Discreet, reserved, and unassuming, Fr. Cassant lived his life in a way that drew little attention to himself. He spent nine years at the Abbey of Our Lady of the Desert in southern France, passing almost completely unnoticed. One of his biographies is included in Robert Masson's aptly titled book, *God's Unnoticed Ones*.

Yet Marie-Joseph Cassant is someone worth talking about because he is one of the humble and simple people for whom Jesus gives thanks to the Father. He is a soul completely oriented toward God, passionate about God, and captivated by the love of Jesus.

Joseph Cassant was born in 1878 in Casseneuil, France, to devout and hardworking farmers who enjoyed a certain degree of economic prosperity. As a child, he was deeply devout and of average intelligence. He had a poor memory and little imagination. From a young age, he played games that reflected his desire to become a priest. He was fascinated by the liturgy. At home, he would reenact the gestures he had seen the celebrant perform during Sunday Mass. After his grandmother died, he became the caretaker of the small altar in her room. He was shy and obedient but became demanding and stubborn when choosing those who would serve at "his" Mass. He wanted the Mass to be perfect and celebrated it with great piety while wearing paper vestments. He attended the St. John Baptist de La Salle

boarding school, run by the Brothers of the Christian Schools, for nine years as a day student. He had good will and extraordinary common sense, but his intellect showed little development. Despite his relentless dedication to his studies, his academic results were mediocre.

A classmate remembers him as reserved, shy, but always smiling. During recreational breaks—which he had been forced to attend, putting his studies aside—he would practice on the parallel bars to keep himself away from the groups playing noisy games.

He received his First Communion at the age of twelve. During the preparatory retreat, he jotted down the parish priest's instructions for proper preparation: desire, prayer, and silence. These would become the guiding principles of his entire life, motivated by his love for Jesus.

His privileged and secluded childhood unfolded between his home, school, and church. It was clear that he would never be a farmer like the other boys in the village. His exceptional piety aroused both admiration and bewilderment in his parents and brother, Emilio. He had no friends outside his family circle and was extremely reserved around girls. At fourteen, he naively wrote in his diary, "First day of the year 1892... Lord, one day I will be a saint. I hope so with your grace... Lord, I come to ask you for the grace to become a saint." He wrote in broken French, using the plural for the singular. But, he immediately clarified the exact meaning of his desire: "Give me the intelligence and everything that will be useful for becoming a good priest." As we will see later, the

Lord granted this humble yet passionate request exactly as the boy had asked.

Joseph had more or less managed to pass elementary school. As he grew older, however, he developed a greater sense of responsibility and became fully focused on achieving his goal of becoming a priest. He began taking Latin lessons and added French tutoring the following year. Despite the effort he put in and the time he spent studying, he saw no results. By the end of the school year, the fifteen-year-old Joseph realized he was one of the lowest-performing students in his class, outperformed by children as young as ten or twelve.

The Parish Priest's Guidance

Abbé Jean Filhol, the parish priest of Casseneuil, was a priest from a bygone era who would have given his life to foster genuine priestly vocations. He noticed the boy's goodness and spirit of prayer and contemplation, as well as his difficulty with his studies. He therefore took the boy into the rectory and, together with the assistant priest, Father Monneins, took charge of his education. Father Monneins became the boy's teacher of Latin and French. Joseph felt right at home in the rectory. He helped clean the church, played with the sacristan's children, participated in liturgical services, and devoted himself to private prayer. However, the fifteen months he spent with Father Filhol were disappointing regarding his studies: his grades were insufficient for admission to the minor seminary.

Concerned about Joseph's true calling to the priesthood, the good parish priest suggested that his student give up the seminary in favor of the Trappist monastery. Due to the absence of external ministry, fewer demands would be placed on the student regarding his progress in theological studies. The course of study at the monastery was adapted to the candidates' abilities and aptitudes, and it could be completed over a longer period of time.

On the other hand, Joseph felt an undeniable attraction to silence, prayer, and solitude. Why not give it a try? The teenager accepted the proposal, but a practical test was necessary because at that time, monastic life, especially at a Trappist monastery, was difficult. We are witnessing something wonderful that serves as a striking example of what is needed for vocations to flourish: a relationship between a spiritual father and son committed to fulfilling the Lord's will. The parish priest and the young man decided to test

their ability to follow the Rule of St. Benedict to see if Joseph, despite his fragile health, could follow it. This included rising at two in the morning, reciting the Divine Office communally, attending Mass, doing manual labor, practicing *Lectio Divina*, and praying. As was customary at Trappist monasteries in those days, the diet consisted of legumes alone. Joseph succeeded and was introduced by Father Filhol to the Abbey of the Desert in the fall of 1894, where he stayed for a few days, overjoyed to have finally found what his heart had been seeking.

Entry into the Monastery and the Spiritual Direction of Father André Malet

On November 30, the young postulant, with great sorrow but with equally great determination, left his family to enter the cloister. The Master of Novices, Fr. André Malet, encouraged him: "Have faith; I will help you to love Jesus." Joseph, who was sixteen years and nine months old, entered the community on December 5, 1894, a Wednesday in the first week of Advent. In accordance with the custom of the time,

he took his vows a month later, on January 6, 1895, retaining his baptismal name and adding the name "Maria," as was customary in the Order. Passionate about silence and a lover of prayer, he found the place where his personality could take shape and flourish. He wrote in his diary: "Do nothing except out of obedience... Follow the Rule faithfully... Be ready to die rather than fail to observe even the slightest, the smallest point of the Rule... Holy martyrs, obtain for me the grace to be a martyr for obedience to my Constitutions."

Marie-Joseph Cassant is someone worth talking about because he is one of the humble and simple people for whom Jesus gives thanks to the Father. He is a soul completely oriented toward God, passionate about God, and captivated by the love of Jesus.

During his first few months at the abbey, the young Marie-Joseph encountered death for the first time. Standing before the body of a deceased lay brother, the emotional and tearful novice went to see the Master. He was deeply moved and wanted to become a saint like Brother Marie-Pierre. His temperament predisposed him to austere asceticism, but he lacked the health to engage in rigorous practices. The young monk therefore needed wise and prudent guidance. Father André Malet promised to teach him to love Jesus and passed on to him his devotion to the Sacred Heart, "the fire of charity and the symbol of God's love for us." "Blessed," he taught, "are those who walk in the light of faith, open themselves to Christian hope, and act under the influence of charity." It is a matter of responding with love to Jesus' actions within us. Like the Virgin Mary, believers can then "exalt the Lord and rejoice in God, their Savior."

In the silence of the monastic days, when the risk of dwelling on one's difficulties is high, two obstacles could threaten the teenager's balance and peace:

intense emotionality and jealousy toward brothers whom he considers smarter or more virtuous. Joseph-Marie undoubtedly suffered from an inferiority complex, which was not entirely unjustified. After all, he was small in stature, of fragile health, not particularly skilled with his hands, and shy. He could have lived in bitterness and withdrawal.

His nervous and highly emotional temperament hindered him more than once, and he suffered from his inability to do the work. His brothers expected more initiative from him, and they would sometimes express their dissatisfaction when he was assigned to them as an assistant. The young novice's tendency toward scrupulosity, combined with his desire to "achieve perfection," often threatened to paralyze him. Following St. Benedict's advice, he practiced opening his heart. He confided in Fr. André about his difficulties, worries, and anxieties. This is how a true monastic friendship began, with the elder displaying boundless patience, understanding, and firmness, and the disciple displaying trust and docility. "His mere presence was often enough to keep me at peace," Marie-Joseph acknowledged. The novice entrusted himself to his Master's guidance with complete trust, just as he had done with Don Filhol during his adolescence. He was like a child who didn't know the way, accepting the hand of the one who guided him with gratitude and without surprise.

His Master's spiritual guidance kept his great ideal alive: to become a true Trappist monk, priest, and saint. Although he did not excel in his studies and lacked the strength for rigorous asceticism, he overcame his feelings of inferiority and frustration caused by his lack of natural gifts through love. He turned his inadequacy and weakness into a providential means of attaining holiness. Thus, little by little, the young man came to accept his mediocrity and obscurity.

The Arduous Path to the Priesthood and the Acceptance of Humiliations

Though he went unnoticed, his presence was by no means insignificant. His brothers loved his virtue, gentleness, and smile. He was filled with love for his neighbor and optimism toward others. He was meek, tender, wholly self-giving, and possessed the charm of innocence. He gave the impression of a candid, pure, and peaceful soul.

Some were struck by him and said, "What an angelic figure!" One of his brothers testified: "He was as simple as a dove. He was neither a debater nor a grumbler. He was always content, and that was the beauty of his countenance. Everyone loved and respected him. He was always smiling." However, the brothers treated him poorly. They grew irritated by his lack of aptitude for manual labor. The highest position this little "clumsy

fellow" ever held in the monastery was bell ringer—and even that, only briefly!

On the Feast of the Most Holy Name of Jesus in 1897, Brother Marie-Joseph took his first vows: he was a frail teenager not yet 19 years old, who followed the Rule with a relaxation regarding the night vigil—a practice he would observe out of obedience until he turned 21.

After his simple profession and his deeper integration into community life, his innate common sense enabled him to overcome, without too much turmoil, the disappointment that every young person experiences when faced with the inconsistencies of his older brothers. He used to say, "Do not judge others. Look for the good in my brothers, not the bad." This young man, though not particularly gifted, possessed an iron will that drove him to spare no effort in pursuing the ideal to which he aspired: the priesthood. He wrote in his notebooks: "*Labor improbus omnia vincit*."

He lived only for the desire to celebrate Mass until the day he completely surrendered to the bare will of God, even if it meant renouncing the priesthood. However, before reaching this pinnacle, he had to face many other difficulties. He had not yet completed his military service and was terrified at the thought of leaving the monastery and living in distant barracks. In May 1899, he received a temporary deferment, and in March 1900, a permanent exemption on health grounds. Another source of anxiety was the recurring fear that religious orders might be expelled from France due to anticlerical laws. Where would he go? Would he be separated from Fr. André Malet? Fortunately, the Trappists were exempted from the expulsion decree, in part due to a notable meeting between Father Chautard, abbot of Sept-Fons, and Minister Clemenceau.

Like all his classmates, the young monk had to resume his studies to meet the minimum requirements for philosophy and theology in preparation for the priesthood, and he had more or less managed to keep up. However, when he began his theology studies, an unfortunate change in faculty occurred at the community of Our Lady of the Desert. This greatly disrupted the poor student's peace of mind, as he was already troubled with his own failures. Father André Malet was overburdened with work and was removed from teaching; he was replaced by a young professed monk who had already been ordained a deacon at the diocesan seminary. The new professor, intellectually well-prepared but lacking any pedagogical skills, held Marie-Joseph in low esteem and humiliated him publicly. His difficulty in learning earned him rebukes and even contempt, which he accepted with heroic patience: "You are completely limited... It's useless for you to study; you won't learn anything! Ordaining you a priest would be a disgrace to the priesthood." Unfortunately, the young students—his brothers and classmates—merely laughed at these remarks. The young Cassant was unable to respond to them and did not



Everything for Jesus!
Everything for Jesus through
Mary!

even wish to: no one defended him or complained to the superiors.

His suffering was immense. His intellectual difficulties were compounded by poor health and a lack of practical sense. This was a constant source of humiliation and gave rise to strong temptations to lose heart. However, he overcame these temptations through prayer and obedience.

The Vow Never to Lose Heart

In those tragic moments, he risked falling into the deepest depression. Yet, at the urging of Fr. Malet—who encouraged him like a true father—he made a vow, under pain of mortal sin, never to lose heart. He wrote: “Through tireless work and prayer, one can overcome all difficulties.” The sickly young man, who was not very bright and rather clumsy, was in reality a rock.

In 1900, on the Solemnity of the Ascension, he made his solemn profession. He had only three years left to live. Let us follow this young monk step by step as he rapidly advanced toward holiness. His constancy in regularity and his zeal for the Divine Office, work, and all the observances were extraordinary and heroic. A fellow monk once said of him: “Brother Marie-Joseph gets on my nerves with his regularity!”

Until the day he was admitted to the infirmary, he never missed the Divine Office, whether that could be due to illness, fatigue, or any other reason. Once he came of age, he always rose at 2 a.m. and was the first to arrive at church. He would bow deeply before the Blessed Sacrament preserved in the tabernacle and then kneel before the altar of the Sacred Heart. He would then proceed to the altar of Our Lady and finally take his place in the choir. When it was his turn to sing the Invitatory, because of his shyness and his conviction that he was not very musically gifted, he prepared extensively. This involved extra work and a great deal of anxiety.

Deeply contemplative, he did not notice the faults of others. In the chapter of faults, he never had anything to say to correct them. He saw the positive side in everyone, regarding his brothers as saints. Whenever asked to perform any service, he did so with eagerness. He saw Jesus in his superiors; for this reason, he was submissive to them and full of respect.

He never wasted a minute, seizing every opportunity to guard himself against sin and grow in the love of God. He was a man of strong will who made resolution after resolution and kept them all. Knowing—or believing—that he was incapable of formulating his own thoughts and prayers, he relied on set prayers, books, and devotional images. When asked why he read during meditation, he replied that if he prayed with his eyes open, he would be distracted, and if he prayed with his eyes closed, he would fall asleep. He received no extraordinary graces. He fulfilled his entire duty with heroic constancy,

generosity, and love. For this reason, he deserved for the gaze of the Lord, who loves the little ones, to rest upon him. Generosity was his fundamental disposition; he would implore: “O Jesus, do not let me lose even the smallest grace,” and the means by which he obtained these graces was prayer of petition and absolute trust that he would be heard: “O my Jesus, grant me all the graces I would ask of You if I thought of them or knew their importance. Grant them to me as if I were praying for each one in particular, for my intention is to ask You for them all with the best intentions of which I am capable.”

The Lord's Ivy

People have long wondered about the mystical aspects of Fr. Cassant's life, which was characterized by humility, silence, regularity, and a steadfast commitment to daily duty. We will now share the opinion of Don Malet: “Fr. Cassant's path was a truly mystical life with a practical dimension. He will remain a striking example of genuine holiness, far removed from illusion, that leads the soul along the path of humility, generosity, and surrender. I would call our Father Marie-Joseph ‘the Lord's ivy,’ since God's will appeared to him as the foundation of his mystical life. He clung to it to live, to rise, to grow, and he drew nourishment from it.” His contemplation was rooted in his ardent faith, which led him to discover the love of Jesus in every act of his life. If he rejoiced, it was because Jesus gave him joy. If he suffered, it was because Jesus willed it for him. He went straight to the first cause, transcending the secondary ones. “Whatever happens is always the will of Jesus,” he said.

In this way, he attained total obedience and surrender into the hands of his superiors, clinging to Jesus with blind and pure faith, with simple and total love, making use of ordinary means through the most ordinary religious experience. He always lived in union with God. His great refuge was the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and he was convinced that “the heart of Jesus is a throne of mercy, and the wretched are most welcome on this throne.” He repeated these words ceaselessly: “Everything for Jesus,” “Everything for Jesus through Mary.” Despite the variety of phrases, the young monk's prayer had attained great simplicity. One thought: Jesus, and a single act: love.

At that time, Communion was not received daily in the monastery. However, because of Marie-Joseph's love for the Eucharist, Father Malet allowed him to receive it more often than the others. Father Cassant would not have missed receiving Communion for all the gold in the world. One time, when he was supposed to serve Mass for a visiting priest, he was not told that the priest had left. As a result, he did not receive Communion with the others at the conventual Mass. Distraught, he went to work without breaking the fast, hoping that another visiting priest would arrive at the monastery, which happened providentially. On days when he was not permitted to receive Communion, he remained calm and humbly submitted. To test him, the Master ordered him not to receive Communion on a day when he was usually entitled to do so. Marie-Joseph

accepted the command immediately and without the slightest complaint. On the other hand, he longed so much for the priesthood so that he would never be separated from his Jesus.

In 1900, a heart condition and a lung ailment marked the beginning of his martyrdom. Marie Joseph's tuberculosis progressed steadily, but he never wavered from his exemplary discipline. He had to leave for work before his brothers, or he would have great difficulty keeping up and would lag behind them. During the grape harvest, he dragged himself to the vineyard, where he had to work kneeling on a sack because he was unable to bend over.

In those days, during chapter meetings, a brother could be publicly admonished for a fault that had been noticed and committed: so-called "proclamations." Marie-Joseph was called out in a chapter meeting because his bows in church were not deep enough. From that moment on, despite his tuberculosis, he made an effort to bow more deeply. This young man has a complete absence of self-love and a total surrender to God, who guides him at every moment. This explains why grace is so fruitful in his arduous journey as a sick man.

The Holy Death of the Young Priest

Marie-Joseph wanted nothing more than to know Jesus crucified. He was poor in spirit and detached from himself—he was worth so little!—and even from the grace of the priesthood, if God had willed it. The Lord eventually granted him this grace, in the face of which nothing else had any value. In October 1902, Marie-Joseph was ordained by Monsignor Marre, Abbot General of the Order, who had also retained his position as Abbot of Igny and was Bishop of Constance, auxiliary to Reims.

"When I can no longer say Mass, Jesus may take me from this world," Joseph-Marie used to say. From the time of his priestly ordination onward, he prayed for the grace of a peaceful death, and for this: "I beg to live ever more united to the Heart of Jesus, to the point of being absorbed by His Love."

After his ordination, he was sent back to his family for a few months in the hope that he would regain his health. In Casseneuil, he celebrated Mass every day, regardless of the weather or his condition, despite the half-hour walk to reach the church. He longed to return to his abbey, which he did on December 2, 1902, having shown no improvement.

When he was admitted to the infirmary in March 1903, he would get up at 3:30 a.m., following the schedule for the sick, to which he was strictly faithful. Slowly, like a shadow, he would make his way to the sacristy to put on his vestments, ring the bell to announce his Mass, and celebrate it with the utmost devotion. As his illness progressed, he had to get up even earlier to arrive on time. Feverish and racked by coughing fits, he suffered from bouts of suffocation and spent

sleepless nights. Throughout his illness, he never complained about the negligence of the brother-infirmarian—his former theology professor who had humiliated him so much—enduring the infirmarian's scoldings and mood swings. Beginning in May 1903, a month and a half before his death, he quietly disposed of all his belongings, including the breviary from which he had been exempted. He kept only an image of the Sacred Heart.

When Marie-Joseph was a novice, he went to confession once a week. But when he parted ways with his spiritual director (which cost him dearly), he went to confession more often, to receive the benefit of absolution and spiritual direction. In the last months of his life, knowing that the sacrament of penance increases grace, purifies us from sin, and partially remits the temporal punishment due to sin, he went to confession every day with great humility. Sometimes Father Malet, held up by his many duties, would forget the appointment or arrive very late. He would find the penitent on the kneeler, resting on just one knee—since he had excruciating pain on the other—in an attitude full of peace, patience, and absorbed in God. If he suggested that he might sit down, Marie-Joseph would reply calmly: "One must surely suffer a little for Jesus, who will be so good to me in this confession!" Joseph-Marie would go to confession by leaving the infirmary, walking very slowly as he struggled to breathe. He continued this way until he was no longer physically able to make the journey. In his very last days, he wished to receive absolution twice a day, knowing that the end was near. He celebrated his last Mass on May 31, 1903. When he was ordered to cease celebrating Mass, he received Communion every day until his very last day. He died an hour after receiving it. Joseph-Marie had written: "What could Jesus who has already given Himself to us as our nourishment possibly deny us in the future? The Eucharist is the only happiness on earth."

One of his last words was: "I am glad to suffer, because I am more united with Jesus, I make amends for the past and lift up the souls in Purgatory. I am happy, yes, to suffer for Jesus and for the Church." A fellow brother testified at the process for beatification: "He smiled at death." Death came to him amid intense suffering on June 17, 1903. Fr. Cassant had turned twenty-five a few months earlier.

The Cause for Beatification and the Miracle of the Healing of Little Jean Delibes

Despite his growing reputation for holiness, no one considered initiating a cause for beatification. At the time, the abbot, Dom Candido, believed that the Trappists' monastic, purely contemplative life required complete seclusion. He did not allow public attention, which would lead to visits from devotees and pilgrimages. Alternatively, he may have feared the cost and supposed pomp of a beatification ceremony. Like the Carthusians, the Trappists were certainly members of the Holy Church. However, to be influential, they had to "disappear," and their influence had to be purely spiritual. Dom André Malet, the abbot who

succeeded Dom Candido, authorized the publication of a biography titled *The Flower of the Desert*, which was first published in 1926 and reprinted in 1931. Father Cassant became widely known and invoked in prayer, and many healings, especially of children, were reported and attributed to his intercession. The obvious consequence was that the ordinary process was initiated at the ecclesiastical curia of Toulouse, but only in 1936–37; Dom André Malet felt that the time had come to bring this young, unnoticed monk to the attention of the Order and the Church. Then came the interruption of the war and the many postwar events that delayed the process, but the proceedings of the Cause—which were very laborious at that time—were eventually resumed, and the apostolic process took place in Toulouse from 1960 to 1963. The lengthy process of the Cause proceeded normally; the *Positio* was written and examined, and finally, on June 9, 1984, John Paul II proclaimed the heroicity of the virtues of the Servant of God.

An investigation was conducted into a healing that was considered miraculous. On December 5, 2002, the Medical Council, composed of five doctors, completed its examination of a miracle attributed to the intercession of Fr. Cassant at the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. The vote was 5 out of 5 in favor.

The miracle concerned the healing of a nine-year-old boy, Jean Delibes, who was suffering from purulent cerebrospinal meningitis, a condition that had subsequently worsened. The local physician who made the diagnosis and arranged for the young patient to be hospitalized was also present during the lumbar puncture. The results confirmed the severity of the situation. Dr. Pradel also treated the monks of Our Lady of the Desert and knew of Father Marie-Joseph's reputation for holiness. Fearing the worst, had earnestly prayed to him that evening, asking him to intercede from Heaven on behalf of the dying child. He was also a father and understood the pain that parents feel when their children are seriously ill. The following evening, when he went to visit his young patient at the hospital, he found him healed, with no more stiffness in his neck or limbs and no more headaches: all the doctors at the hospital who had examined him that same morning had been forced to acknowledge the child's perfect health. "There is a power here greater than medicine," Dr.

Pradel had told Jean's mother. He had asked for Father Cassant's intercession and he was heard.

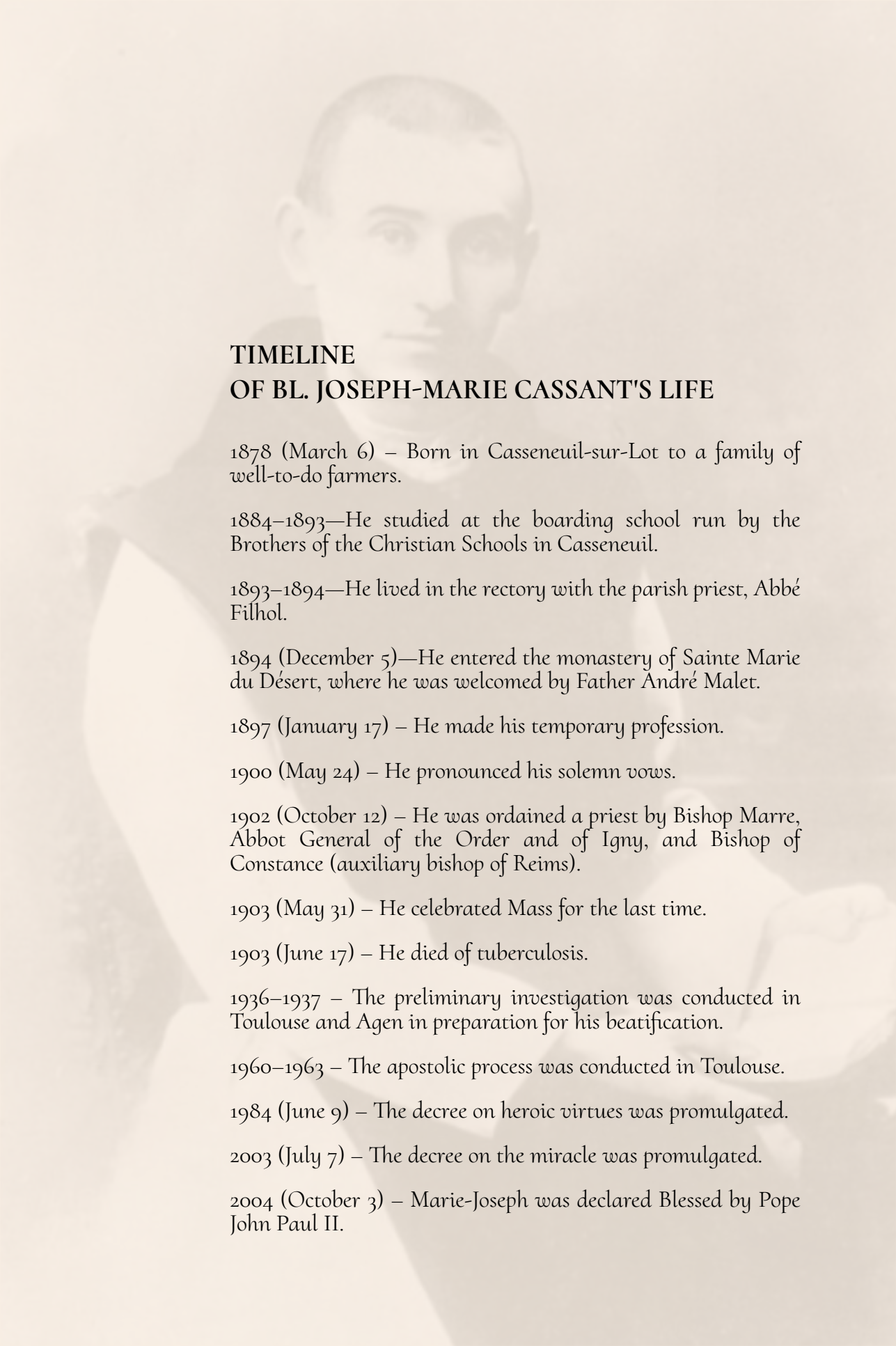
One might wonder why the Church has solemnly proclaimed this "little one," this "poor one," this unremarkable teenager—who counted for nothing in his own eyes or in the eyes of others—Blessed and thus proposed him for veneration by the local Church and the Cistercian Order. The question is legitimate.

Let us answer with the words of Father Jean-Marie Couvreur, who was Abbot of Sainte Marie du Desert: *"In a world that is no longer capable of trust, in a world plunging into depression and despair, in a world thirsting for love and tenderness, the life of our brother can be an answer, especially for young people searching for the meaning of life. Marie-Joseph owes the success of his life to his life-changing encounter with JESUS." In answering the call, Joseph-Marie accepted the outstretched hand of a spiritual man who became both a friend and a father to him. This man comforted and strengthened him on his journey of following Jesus within a community of brothers. Only his unshakable faith and unwavering love for Jesus Christ can explain the hope he had. Even today, the life of this young monk assures us that our darkest moments can lead us to the light of Jesus. The important thing is that we agree to accept help from a sister or brother in the community who is experienced and capable of guiding us in the footsteps of Jesus."*

Dom André Malet, the experienced spiritual guide who led the young man along the spiritual path and taught him to love Jesus, had already said: *"If Fr. Joseph Cassant is destined for that supreme glory which the Church bestows upon her finest sons, he will serve as an exceptional example. He will also be a formidable source of inspiration for the most humble and the least among us."*

The Church, especially in difficult times, needs witnesses like Fr. Cassant who, despite countless difficulties and frailties, persevered without ever turning back, sustained solely by the love of Jesus. His life demonstrates that the genius of divine love can make up for even the most enviable human gifts. ■

Mo. Augusta Tescari was the former Postulatrix of the Order. She is one of the founders of Our Lady of Palacoulo, Portugal.



TIMELINE OF BL. JOSEPH-MARIE CASSANT'S LIFE

1878 (March 6) – Born in Casseneuve-sur-Lot to a family of well-to-do farmers.

1884–1893—He studied at the boarding school run by the Brothers of the Christian Schools in Casseneuve.

1893–1894—He lived in the rectory with the parish priest, Abbé Filhol.

1894 (December 5)—He entered the monastery of Sainte Marie du Désert, where he was welcomed by Father André Malet.

1897 (January 17) – He made his temporary profession.

1900 (May 24) – He pronounced his solemn vows.

1902 (October 12) – He was ordained a priest by Bishop Marre, Abbot General of the Order and of Igny, and Bishop of Constance (auxiliary bishop of Reims).

1903 (May 31) – He celebrated Mass for the last time.

1903 (June 17) – He died of tuberculosis.

1936–1937 – The preliminary investigation was conducted in Toulouse and Agen in preparation for his beatification.

1960–1963 – The apostolic process was conducted in Toulouse.

1984 (June 9) – The decree on heroic virtues was promulgated.

2003 (July 7) – The decree on the miracle was promulgated.

2004 (October 3) – Marie-Joseph was declared Blessed by Pope John Paul II.



Mẹ Maria

Reflecting on Vietnamese Marian Devotion

SR. MARTA HA THI THANH THUY, OCSO

Our Lady of La Vang

I received an email from my abbess asking me to write an article on devotion to the Blessed Mother in Vietnam. This request came because Sister Anna Marie of Matutum was asked for a contribution from a Vietnamese sister for publication in the Colloquium journal. Strangely enough, even though I didn't have any ideas about what to write at that moment, I had absolutely no intention of refusing. But what on earth should I write about!? Anyway, I replied to her that I would give it a try.

Diverse Backgrounds

Vietnam is divided into three distinct regions: North, Central, and South. The climate, weather, geography, and customs of each region are very different. The North has four seasons: spring, summer, fall, and winter; the Central region is often heavily affected by natural disasters, especially floods. The South, on the other hand, has only two seasons: the dry season and the rainy season. During the dry season, there's almost no rain, so from around February to March, water is very scarce; the planting season usually begins around the Feast of Pentecost.

In the past, the economy was primarily based on agriculture, but over the past 20 years or so, many foreign companies have opened up, and farmland

Nhận được email từ mẹ bề trên của con với nội dung là Sơ Anna Marie ở đan viện Matutum ngỏ ý nhờ một chị em người Việt Nam viết về lòng sùng kính Đức Mẹ tại Việt Nam để đăng lên bài báo của Colloquium. Mẹ bề trên hỏi con có thể viết được không? Lạ lùng thay, lúc đó trong con dù chưa có ý tưởng là sẽ viết gì nhưng ý định từ chối hoàn toàn không có. Sẽ viết gì đây nhỉ!? Con đã hồi âm cho mẹ là con sẽ viết thử ạ.

Nền tảng đa dạng

Đất nước Việt Nam được chia ra thành 3 miền rõ rệt: Bắc, Trung, Nam và khí hậu, thời tiết, địa lý, phong tục tập quán của mỗi vùng cũng rất khác nhau. Miền Bắc thì có 4 mùa: xuân-hạ-thu-đông, còn miền Trung thường chịu ảnh hưởng rất nhiều của thiên tai, đặc biệt là lũ lụt. Miền Nam thì chỉ có 2 mùa: mùa nắng và mùa mưa. Mùa nắng thì hầu như không có mưa nên từ khoảng tháng 2-3 là nước rất khan hiếm, mùa trồng trọt thường bắt đầu từ Lễ Chúa Thánh Thần Hiện Xuống.

Trước đây chủ yếu là nông nghiệp nhưng khoảng 20 năm gần đây, các công ty ở nước

and hillside plots have been sold to corporate contractors. Currently, where I live (in the South), the vast majority of people work for companies, so they have to depend on them; they don't have the same freedom as they did when they were farmers.

A musician once wrote about Vietnam: 1,000 years under Chinese rule, 100 years under Western rule (France, the U.S.), and 20 years of daily civil war... As a result, Vietnamese culture has been greatly influenced by other nations. The Vietnamese language was originally written using Chinese characters; later, Father Đức Lộ adapted it into the modern Vietnamese alphabet as we know it today. Vietnamese people place great importance on filial piety, especially toward grandparents and ancestors, and family bonds are very close-knit and enduring.

The Faith and Our Lady

The Catholic faith was spread by foreign priests and took deep root in various regions. Unfortunately, from the 17th to the 19th centuries, kings issued edicts that persecuted the faith, leading countless ancestors to sacrifice their lives as witnesses to their beliefs. During this time, the faith was primarily passed down orally; the faithful often read and memorized familiar prayers, gathering with their families before the family altar to recite morning and evening prayers. Praying the Rosary was a constant practice among them.

During our grandparents' time, they fled to the South due to the war. At that time, the government allowed free migration only within a specified period; people from the North were free to move to the South and vice versa. Most people chose to head South. In some cases, entire villages migrated to the South, and there, they built churches and parishes just as they had done when they were in the North.

My grandparents also migrated during that time, settling in the South to build a new life and clearing land for farms and fields. The area where I lived was predominantly Christian, which gave me the impression as a child that Christianity was the primary religion of the Vietnamese people. It was only later that I learned Vietnam has many different religions. According to statistics, Catholics currently make up about 7.4 percent of the population.

In the past, our ancestors were persecuted for practicing the Catholic faith. During that time of suffering, specifically in 1798, the Blessed Virgin Mother appeared to the faithful who were hiding

ngoài được mở ra khá nhiều và các thửa ruộng, nương rẫy được bán lại cho các chủ thầu công ty. Hiện tại chỗ con đang ở (miền Nam) cũng đại đa số làm công ty nên phải tùy thuộc vào đó, không được tự do như thời còn làm nông nghiệp.

Có một nhạc sĩ đã viết đất nước Việt Nam: 1000 năm bị đô hộ bởi giặc Tàu (Trung Quốc), 100 năm bị đô hộ bởi giặc Tây (Pháp, Mỹ), 20 năm nội chiến từng ngày... Vì vậy nền văn hóa của Việt Nam cũng được lãnh hội rất nhiều từ các quốc gia khác. Tiếng Việt trước đây là viết bằng chữ Nho theo tiếng Trung Quốc, sau này được cha Đức Lộ chuyển thành chữ quốc ngữ như hiện nay. Người Việt Nam rất trọng chữ hiếu, đặc biệt với các ông bà, tổ tiên, tình cảm gia đình cũng rất khăng khít, bền chặt.

Đức tin và Đức Mẹ

Đức tin Công Giáo cũng được các cha ở nước ngoài truyền bá và được đâm rễ sâu ở các vùng. Tiếc thay vì lý do nào đó mà từ thế kỷ thứ 17-19 các nhà vua ra sắc lệnh bắt đạo và có rất rất nhiều vị tiền nhân đã dùng chính máu của mình để làm chứng cho đức tin. Đức tin thời đó chủ yếu là truyền khẩu, giáo dân thường đọc và nhớ các bài kinh quen thuộc, cùng gia đình quây quần trước bàn thờ gia đình để đọc kinh sáng tối, cầu nguyện bằng Chuỗi Mân Côi không bao giờ thiếu.

Thời ông bà của chúng con cũng vì chiến tranh nên chạy vào miền Nam để sinh sống, lúc đó nhà nước cho tự do di dân trong khoảng thời gian được ấn định mà thôi: nghĩa là người miền Bắc được tự do vào miền Nam và ngược lại. Hầu hết là mọi người chọn vào miền Nam. Có nơi họ di dân cả làng vào miền Nam và tại đó họ làm nhà thờ, giáo xứ y như lúc họ còn ở miền Bắc.

Ông bà của con cũng di dân vào thời điểm đó, vào trong miền Nam lập nghiệp, khai hoang đất đai, ruộng nương. Và khu vực con ở hầu như là toàn những người theo đạo Chúa, khiến con lúc nhỏ có cảm tưởng là Đạo Chúa là đạo của người Việt Nam. Sau này mới biết là Việt Nam có rất nhiều tôn giáo khác nhau. Theo số liệu thống kê, người Công giáo hiện chiếm khoảng 7,4% dân số.

Thời xưa, tổ tiên cha ông chúng con bị bách hại vì theo đạo Thiên Chúa. Và trong thời gian chịu đựng gian khổ ấy, cụ thể là vào năm 1798, Đức Mẹ đã hiện ra với các giáo dân đang trốn trong rừng sâu để an ủi họ và

deep in the forest, comforting them. She instructed them to gather a specific type of leaf, boil it in water, and drink it for healing. This is Our Lady of La Vang (Quang Tri-Hue). This became a national pilgrimage site. Our Lady of Tra Kieu (Quang Nam) commemorates the apparition of Our Lady in 1885, when she came to shield and protect the faithful from massacre.

In the South of Vietnam, there are also two Marian pilgrimage sites:

Our Lady of Núi Cui (Dong Nai): home to the tallest statue of Our Lady in Vietnam (34 meters), it is a major pilgrimage destination in the South, and Our Lady of Bãi Dầu (Vũng Tàu): built on the slopes of Núi Lớn, it is a familiar destination for the faithful and tourists alike.

I first came to know Our Lady through my family; my grandparents and parents taught us, children and grandchildren, to pray morning and evening prayers by reciting memorized prayers and saying the Rosary. I also remember my mother teaching me how to count the beads, but since I didn't know yet when to move on to the next bead, there were times when I'd be praying and would have to look at my mother's hand to see which bead she was on, then follow along with my own fingers. At the end of the prayer time, my mother would lead us in singing familiar hymns; for example, in March we would sing about St. Joseph, while the rest of the year we would mostly sing about the Blessed Virgin Mary. Perhaps that's why I've remembered these hymns since I was a child.

In the parish, liturgical ceremonies are organized according to the liturgical seasons. There are two special months dedicated to honoring the Blessed Virgin Mary. One is May, also known as the Month of Flowers. Every Sunday afternoon, each parishioner brings flowers, whether grown at home or purchased, to offer to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Groups take turns dancing to offer flowers to the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is very devout and beautiful – a myriad of flowers bloom at the feet of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

October, the Month of the Rosary, involves praying

chỉ cho họ hái một loại lá cây về nấu nước uống và sẽ được lành bệnh. Đó là Đức Mẹ La Vang (Quảng Trị-Hue). Đây trở thành nơi hành hương quốc gia. Đức Mẹ Trà Kiệu (Quảng Nam) ghi dấu sự kiện Đức Mẹ hiện ra năm 1885 để che chở, bảo vệ giáo dân khỏi sự tàn sát. Còn hai nơi hành hương Đức Mẹ ở miền Nam. Đức Mẹ Núi Cúi (Đồng Nai): nơi có tượng Đức Mẹ cao nhất tại Việt Nam (34m), là điểm hành hương lớn ở miền Nam. Đức Mẹ Bãi Dầu (Vũng Tàu): được xây trên sườn Núi Lớn, là nơi quen thuộc của các tín hữu và du khách.

Con được biết đến Đức Mẹ trước hết là từ gia đình, ông bà, ba mẹ đã chỉ cho các con, các cháu trong gia đình đọc kinh sáng, tối bằng những kinh nguyện đọc thuộc lòng và bằng Chuỗi hạt Mân côi. Con còn nhớ mẹ của con đã chỉ cho con cách để đếm các hạt, nhưng vì chưa biết phân biệt khi nào là bắt đầu

đếm qua hạt tiếp theo, có lúc đang đọc kinh mà cứ nhìn tay của mẹ là đã đếm tới hạt số mấy rồi và con cũng chuyển ngón tay của mình theo. Cuối giờ cầu nguyện là mẹ sẽ bắt những bài hát quen thuộc, ví dụ: tháng 3 sẽ hát về Thánh Giuse, còn lại hầu như sẽ hát về Đức Mẹ Maria. Có lẽ nhờ vậy mà nhớ được các bài hát từ khi còn nhỏ.

Trong giáo xứ thì tổ chức các nghi lễ theo từng mùa của phụng vụ. Riêng về Đức Mẹ Maria thì có 2 tháng đặc biệt dành tôn kính Ngài. Tháng 5, còn gọi

là tháng Hoa. Vào mỗi chiều ngày Chúa Nhật, mỗi một người trong giáo sẽ tự mang hoa đến để dâng lên Đức Mẹ (hoa của nhà trồng hoặc là mua...tùy vào mỗi người). Các nhóm thì thay phiên nhau múa dâng hoa lên Đức Mẹ Maria, trông rất là sốt sáng và đẹp. Muôn hoa khoe sắc dưới chân Đức Mẹ.

Tháng 10, tháng Mân côi, sẽ cầu nguyện theo khu xóm trong giáo xứ. Chỗ con ở thì đa số là nhà gần nhau và hầu như đều là đạo Công giáo nên chia đọc kinh, cầu nguyện tại tư gia của mỗi nhà. Đọc luân phiên đến hết tháng 10, (ngày cuối cùng sẽ tập trung lại đền thờ

I first came to know Our Lady through my family; my grandparents and parents taught us, children and grandchildren, to pray morning and evening prayers by reciting memorized prayers and saying the Rosary.

Con được biết đến Đức Mẹ trước hết là từ gia đình, ông bà, ba mẹ đã chỉ cho các con, các cháu trong gia đình đọc kinh sáng, tối bằng những kinh nguyện đọc thuộc lòng và bằng Chuỗi hạt Mân côi.



Shrine of Our Lady of Bãi Dâu

in neighborhood groups within the parish. Where I live, most houses are close together, and nearly all residents are Catholic, so we take turns reciting the rosary and praying at each family's home. We rotate through the homes until the end of October. On the last day, we gather at the parish's Shrine of Our Lady to pray the rosary together. We usually recite the rosary at 7:30 p.m. That's a convenient time since everyone has returned from work. Kids like us looked forward to the time after the rosary, when the hosts would treat us to drinks, snacks like popcorn, candy, and fruit. It was always so much fun. These memories still linger in my mind.

What I want to say is that even before we knew who the Blessed Virgin Mary was or what she was like, we were taught and guided by our grandparents, parents, family members, priests, brothers, sisters, and catechists... Over the years, our faith and love for the Blessed Virgin Mary took deep root in our hearts. At first, we simply followed and imitated, but now we can proclaim on our own: The Blessed Virgin Mary is the Mother of God, the Mother of humanity, the Mother of the Church, and the Mother of every one of us. We also sense, to some extent, the "Yes" she spoke long ago—the very moment she was ready to accept the death she might have to endure. She was ready to offer her entire life to God. When she fled to Egypt with Saint Joseph and Jesus, and when she heard the prophecies of Simeon and Anna, how deeply the Blessed Mother must have suffered! Above all, when she stood at the foot of the Cross, witnessing her dearly beloved Son being crucified... oh, who can fully comprehend the anguish she was enduring at that moment... Throughout her entire life, she was always ready to say "Yes," even when she did not fully understand God's will.

Is it perhaps because She has endured countless sufferings that She is so close to Her children? I am grateful to all those who have helped our beloved Vietnam receive the Gospel; grateful to the pioneers who braved all difficulties to preach the Word of God; grateful to the holy martyrs who remained faithful to the very end; and I am grateful to my grandparents, parents, my loved ones, and to all benefactors who have kindly guided me; and finally, I give thanks to every member of the monastery as well as all my "brothers and sisters" who share this same contemplative vocation—I give thanks to all...

May the maternal love of the Blessed Virgin Mary continue to comfort, sustain, and assist each one of us and all humanity, so that we may always turn our hearts toward God, who is Love, and fulfill His will. Amen.

Đức Mẹ của giáo xứ để đọc kinh chung). Thường sẽ đọc kinh vào lúc 7:30 tối. Giờ đó mọi người đã đi làm về nên thuận tiện. Bọn trẻ như chúng con thì thích sau giờ đọc kinh hơn, bởi vì sau giờ kinh thì các chủ nhà luôn thết đãi nào là nước uống, đồ ăn như bắp nổ, bánh kẹo, trái cây... rất là thích luôn. Những điều này vẫn còn lưu lại trong kí ức.

Điều con muốn nói là từ khi chúng con vẫn còn chưa biết Đức Mẹ Maria là ai, là người như thế nào nhưng chúng con được ông bà, ba mẹ, người thân trong gia đình, các cha, các thầy, các Sơ, các anh chị giáo lý viên dạy dỗ, chỉ bảo... theo năm tháng, đức tin, lòng yêu mến Đức Mẹ được bám rễ sâu vào trong lòng chúng con. Ban đầu chỉ là học theo, làm theo nhưng nay thì tự chúng con có thể tuyên xưng rằng: Đức Mẹ Maria là Mẹ Thiên Chúa, Mẹ của nhân loại, Mẹ của Giáo Hội và là Mẹ của mỗi một người chúng ta. Chúng con cũng cảm nhận được phần nào lời thưa Xin Vâng năm xưa của Mẹ, cũng chính là lúc Mẹ sẵn sàng đón nhận cái chết mà có thể đón chịu. Mẹ sẵn sàng hiến dâng cả cuộc đời mình cho Thiên Chúa. Lúc cùng thánh Giuse và Chúa Giêsu trốn sang Ai cập, khi nghe lời tiên báo của Simeon và Anna đã làm Đức Mẹ đón đau biết chừng nào! Hơn hết, khi Mẹ đứng dưới chân Thập giá, chứng kiến người con rất mực yêu thương của Mẹ bị đóng đinh... ôi, ai có thể thấu hiểu được nỗi đón đau mà Mẹ đang mang lúc này... Cả cuộc đời của Mẹ luôn sẵn sàng hai tiếng Xin Vâng ngay cả những lúc chưa hiểu hết được thánh ý của Thiên Chúa.

Phải chăng vì Mẹ đã từng trải qua ngàn nỗi khổ đau nên Mẹ rất gần gũi với đoàn con cái của Mẹ. Con xin biết ơn tất cả những người đã giúp cho đất nước Việt Nam thân yêu được đón nhận Tin Mừng, biết ơn các vị tiên khởi đã không quản ngại khó khăn để rao giảng Lời Chúa, biết ơn các vị thánh tử đạo đã một lòng tin trung đến cùng, xin được biết ơn đến ông bà, ba mẹ, những người thân thương, quý vị ân nhân đã thương dân đất, sau cùng xin được biết ơn đến mỗi một thành viên trong đan viện cũng như tất cả các "anh chị em" cùng chung chí hướng trong ơn gọi chiêm niệm này, xin được biết ơn đến tất cả...

Nguyện xin lòng từ mẫu của Mẹ Maria tiếp tục an ủi, đỡ nâng, phù trợ mỗi một người trong chúng ta và toàn thể nhân loại để luôn biết hướng lòng về Thiên Chúa Tình Yêu và làm đẹp ý Ngài. Amen



Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary in Cistercian Monasteries

It has been 20 years since I first set foot in the Monastery of Our Lady of Ajimu in Japan. My first impression was that every Saturday was set aside in honor of the Blessed Mother, and each day the Angelus was recited; at the end of the day, the hymn "Salve Regina" was sung as all the lights were turned off, leaving only a single lamp illuminating the statue of the Blessed Mother. The song echoed through the small chapel—it was truly sacred. In this deeply quiet space, the prayer seemed to bring even greater peace to each person's heart, immersing them more deeply in absolute stillness. Every soul turns toward the Blessed Mother, and it is as if all creation is united in heart and mind to offer prayers to the merciful Mother. First, to give thanks to the Blessed Mother for watching over each person through a day of peace, and next, to implore her mercy for all humanity... Oh, how sacred these moments are!

We begin and end each day under the Mother's

Lòng sùng kính Đức Mẹ ở các đan viện Xi-tô

Con được đặt chân đến đan viện Thánh Mẫu Ajimu ở Nhật Bản cũng được 20 năm. Ấn tượng đầu tiên là các ngày thứ bảy trong tuần luôn được dành riêng kính Đức Mẹ và mỗi ngày đều được đọc Kinh Truyền Tin, cuối ngày là bài hát Salve regina, được hát lên khi tất cả các ngọn đèn được tắt, chỉ có một ngọn đèn duy nhất được chiếu sáng lên tượng Đức Mẹ. Lời ca vang vọng trong ngôi nhà nguyện bé nhỏ, thật là linh thiêng. Trong không gian thật tĩnh lặng này lời kính như càng làm cho lòng mỗi người được an bình hơn, chìm sâu vào cái tĩnh lặng tuyệt đối hơn. Mọi tâm hồn hướng về Đức Mẹ, và như thể vạn vật đang cùng một lòng một ý dâng lên Đức Mẹ nhân hiền. Trước hết là để tạ ơn Đức Mẹ đã thương gìn giữ mỗi người trong một ngày sống bình an và tiếp đến là khẩn xin lòng thương xót của Đức Mẹ cho tất cả nhân loại... Ôi, những giây phút này thật là linh thiêng!



protection and guidance. In daily life, there are always moments of joy and sorrow, suffering, difficulties, and even despair... which everyone experiences. At such times, whether we are aware of it or not, Mother Mary is always by our side to



Khởi đầu và kết thúc ngày sống dưới sự che chở phù trì của Mẹ. Trong đời sống thường nhật, luôn có những lúc buồn vui, sâu khổ, những khó khăn và cả khi tuyệt vọng... mà ai ai cũng đều được nếm trải. Những lúc như vậy, dù có ý thức được hay không ý thức được thì Mẹ Maria vẫn luôn bên cạnh để che chở, phụ giúp, ủi an, nâng đỡ mỗi người. Khi được sống trong đan viện, con càng nhận ra được lòng thương yêu của Mẹ Maria dành cho bản thân con và cho mỗi một người. Mỗi ngày, mỗi đều được dâng lên cho Mẹ Maria và thông qua Mẹ chúng ta được đến gần Thiên Chúa Tình Yêu hơn. ■

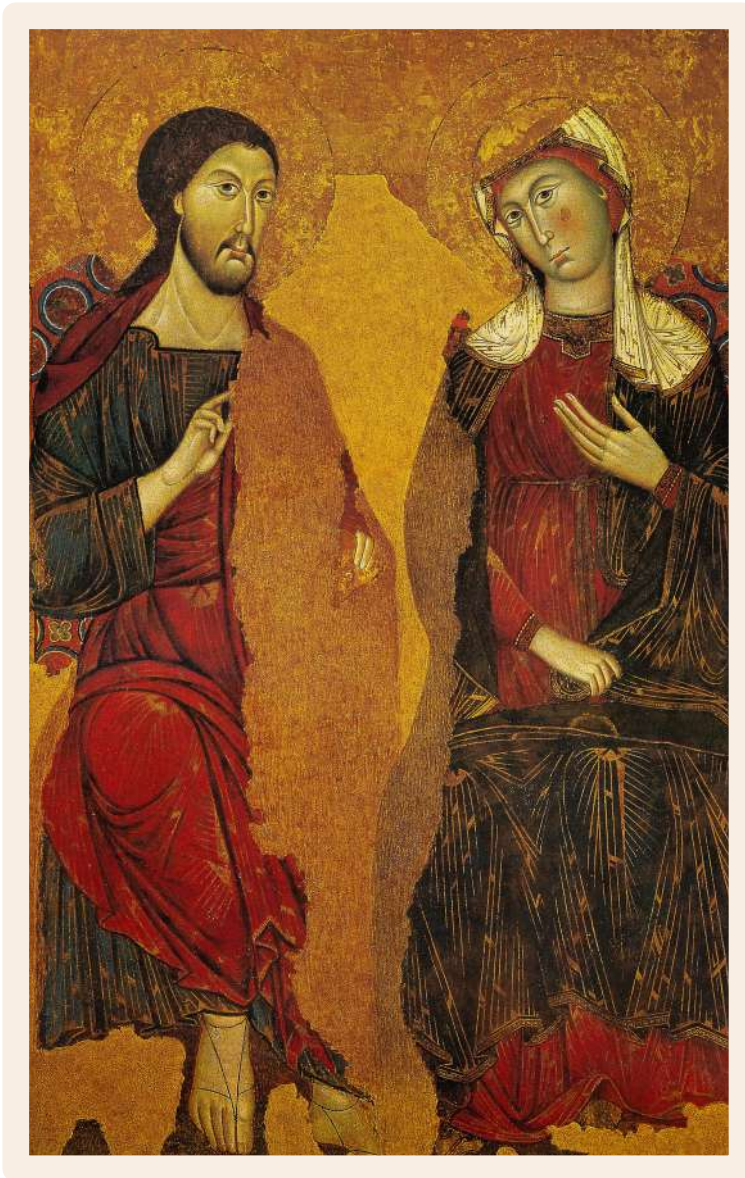
protect, assist, comfort, and support each of us. Living in the monastery, I have come to realize even more deeply the love Mother Mary has for me personally and for each person. Every day is offered to Mother Mary, and through her, we draw closer to the God of Love.

In our monastery, Ajimu, there are many beautiful images or statues of the Blessed Mother, placed in various locations. This is truly wonderful for me because wherever I go, I am watched over by the Blessed Mother and can see Her presence through these images. I personally experience the special favor and love the Blessed Mother has for each person—and even for a small, weak child like me.

I still do not fully understand the devotion to the Blessed Mother in Cistercian monasteries, but I believe that each person is a deeply beloved child of the Blessed Mother. She loves us all simply because we are her children. May every prayer and every small daily task that each monk quietly performs also glorify the Name of God, just as the Virgin Mary's "Let it be done" did so. ■



Sr. Marta ba thi thanh thuy, OCSO is a solemn-professed member of Our Lady of Ajimu Trappist Monastery in Japan.



O kindest of ladies, as you sit face to face with your Son in glory pleading even in behalf of the very wicked, what is there that he will not grant you? Did he not pour the grace that filled his own heart from all eternity into your gentle heart so that the fullness of the Godhead would dwell in your womb?

O most clement Lady, I will be satisfied. I will indeed be completely satisfied if, by way of intercession, you will just once turn

your beautiful face on the eyes of majesty-God the Father-in my behalf. I have no fears that the Father of all mercies will not receive me among his sons when I have before him the Mother of Mercy as my advocate, pleading for me in matters where I have reason to fear him.

Your blessed presence has made joyful the entire City of God where you rejoice and exult before God as the ranks of the heavenly court look on in wonder. With your eyes, more beautiful than those of any other creature, you now contemplate God the Father and the Son – truly yours, truly Lord, and truly Son – the Son in the Father and the Holy Spirit in both.

STEPHEN OF SAWLEY

- Stephen of Sawley, from *Fifteenth Meditation in Meditations on the Joys of the Blessed Virgin*, CF 36, Cistercian Publications

Salve Regina : Oriens

Entering a Trappist monastery, you will find many statues and images of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Yet few images are held more dear, and none chosen with more care, than the statue of Our Lady of the Salve Regina. In most of our communities, she resides within the monastery church, a silent witness to the profound interior and exterior dramas of monastic life. It is to her that we all come at the end of the day, imploring her intercession.

As we close our day by intoning the Salve Regina, “Maria” becomes the last word on our lips—which are then bound by the Great Silence until the “Lord, open my lips” resounds at Vigils. With that last trembling note and a final gaze upon her image, we bid Our Lady ‘adieu’ and file silently into the night.

When I attended the General Chapter of 2022, it was touching to see the superiors of our Order—after a day of hard, sometimes grueling work in the aula—singing the Salve Regina with the heartfelt simplicity of children. They were coming home to a Mother who understands their woes and burdens. Truly, upon this humble Queen of Cîteaux rests our quiet gaze of supplication for our Order, that she may lead us perseveringly to her Son—to that Heart of Mercy which alone fulfills all hope.

In the pages that follow, the communities of the Oriens¹ region offer reflections on this sacred image: its provenance, its cultural significance, and its role in the Marian devotion of our monks and nuns. Every statue radiates a distinct beauty, imbued with the quiet charm and simplicity so characteristic of the Cistercian spirit. Shaped by a rich cultural heritage, these images from the Oriens region bear the profound hopes of their people—participating intimately in that hidden apostolic fruitfulness to which we are bound by our Cistercian vocation.

¹ Communities belonging to the Asia-Pacific region, includes monasteries from Japan, the Philippines, Indonesia, Macau, Korea and Oceania (Australia and New Zealand).

Ant.
1.

S Al- ve,* Re- gí- na, Ma-ter mi-se-ri-córdi- æ;
vi- ta, dul-cé- do et spes nóstra, sal- ve. Ad te cla-
má-mus éxsu-les fí-li- i E-væ. Ad te suspi-rá- mus ge-
méntes et flén-tes in hac lacrymá-rum valle. E- ia ergo,
advo-cá- ta nostra, il-los tu- os mi-se-ri- cór- des ócu-
los ad nos convér- te. Et Ie- sum, bene-díc- tum fruc-
tum ventris tu- i, no- bis post hoc exsí- li- um os-ténde.
O cle- mens, o pi- a, o dulcis Virgo Ma- rí-
a.

The statue of the Blessed Virgin portrays Mary holding the Christ Child during a rest from her work in the fields. For this reason, her sleeves are rolled up, reflecting her life of humble labor. The sculptor is Katsura Funakoshi (born 1951), the second son of Yasutake Funakoshi, a renowned sculptor and professor at Tokyo University of the Arts.

In 1977, while still a graduate student at Tokyo University of the Arts, Funakoshi was commissioned by the Trappist Monastery in Hokuto, Hokkaido, to create a monumental sculpture over two meters tall entitled The Trappist Madonna and Child. During this project, he discovered camphor wood (kusunoki) as a sculptural medium. He later recalled that it was "a fateful encounter." The wood possessed just the right degree of hardness, and its carving speed perfectly matched his own working rhythm. The Madonna and Child statue at Phare was the very first sculpture of his professional career. Throughout his life, Funakoshi consistently used the human figure as the central motif of his work, seeking to express the depths of the human spirit and a universal sense of presence. He is internationally acclaimed as one of the foremost sculptors of contemporary Japan. ■

以下に描かれた聖母マリアの像は、畑仕事の手を休めている最中に幼子イエスを抱くマリアの姿を表現しています。そのため、袖はまくり上げられており、謙虚な労働の生活が反映されています。彫刻家は船越克（1951年生まれ）で、著名な彫刻家であり東京芸術大学教授である船越康武の次男です。

1977年、まだ東京芸術大学の大学院生だった船越は、北海道北斗市のトラピスト修道院から、高さ2メートルを超える記念碑的な彫刻『トラピストの聖母子』の制作を依頼された。このプロジェクトを通じて、彼は彫刻の素材としてクスノキと出会った。彼は後年、これを「運命的な出会い」だったと振り返っている。この木材はちょうど良い硬さを持ち、その彫刻のスピードは彼の制作リズムに完璧に合致していた。ファレにある『トラピストの聖母子像』は、彼のプロとしてのキャリアにおける最初の彫刻作品であった。生涯を通じて、船越は一貫して人体を作品の中心的なモチーフとし、人間の精神の深みと普遍的な存在感を表現しようと努めた。彼は、現代日本を代表する彫刻家の一人として国際的に高い評価を得ている。■



Our Lady of the Lighthouse Abbey

PHARE, JAPAN



私たちの聖堂正面の十字架像とサルヴェの聖母マリア像は、長い間フランスのルーブル美術館のコピーの美しい石膏のご像でした。

2011年3月の大地震でどちらも破壊されました。その時、横尾龍彦先生というカトリックの芸術家が、すぐに助けてくださいました。この方は若い頃フランスで勉強することを望んでいた時、日本の母院であったブリックベック修道院が西洋の修道院建築と芸術美術を学ぶために彼を一年間招待しました。この時からトラピストとは数十年の恩人であり友人です。西宮修道院と伊万里修道院の聖母像は彼の初期のものです。その後、彼は日本とドイツで独創的な絵画で有名になり、トラピスト以外の修道院にも

ご像があります。

震災直後から、横尾先生は楠の木から私たちのために現在の聖母像を彫りました。その後、那須で育った桜の木で十字架像を彫りましたが、この頃、彼はすでにがんに侵されていました。桜の木は強く、先生の最期の日々に大きな十字架となりました。あと少しのところでは彼は逝去、十字架像は未完となりましたがそのまま掲げられています。

このような神の計らいの中で、十字架像とサルヴェの聖母マリア像は多くの善意を通して賜った木像の美しいものです。■



Our Lady of Nasu Abbey

NASU, JAPAN

The crucifix and the statue of Our Lady at the front of our church were, for a long time, beautiful plaster replicas of the originals at the Louvre Museum in France.

Both were destroyed in the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 2011. At that time, a Catholic artist named Tatsuhiko Yokoo immediately came to our aid. When he was young and hoping to study in France, Bricquebec Abbey—the motherhouse of the Japanese Trappist houses—invited him to spend a year there to study Western monastic art and architecture. Since then, he has been a benefactor and friend of the Trappists for several decades. The statues of the Virgin Mary at the Nishinomiya and Imari monasteries are among his early works. Later, he became famous in Japan and Germany for his original paintings, and his

statues can also be found in monasteries other than Trappist.

Immediately after the earthquake, Mr. Yokoo carved the current statue of the Virgin Mary for us from a camphor tree. Later, he carved a crucifix from a cherry tree grown in Nasu, but by this time, he was already suffering from cancer. Cherry wood is hard, and it became a heavy burden for him during his final days. He passed away just before finishing it, and although the crucifix remains unfinished, it is displayed as it is.

Through such divine providence, the crucifix and the Salve Regina statue of Our Lady are beautiful wooden works bestowed upon us through the kindness of many. ■



Patung Bunda Pemersatu

sedangkan tangan kanan terulur kepada kami, seperti sedang mengajar Yesus untuk memandang ke arah kami, saudara-saudari-Nya. Warna patung sewarna dengan lantai gereja yaitu warna tanah liat, lambang manusia. Tinggi patung 158,5 cm dan ditempatkan di atas sebuah tiang semen setinggi 96 cm. Patung ini berdiri di belakang altar, menghadap ke arah kor para suster.

Patung ini dibuat sekitar tahun 1992 sesudah kami menyelesaikan pembangunan gereja. Untuk mengiringi lagu *Salve Regina* pada akhir Ibadat Penutup, ada kerinduan menyanyikan lagu penutup tersebut di depan



Our Lady of Unity

GEDONO, INDONESIA

The statue of Our Lady inside the church of our monastery is very unique. She is depicted as a Javanese village woman, 158.5 cm tall, standing on a 96-cm pillar.. She is wearing a traditional "*kebaya*" , a long-sleeved blouse, combined with a "*jarik*", a long cloth wrapped around the waist and down to the ankles. Her hair is coiled-up. She carries the Child Jesus using a "*slendang*" – a traditional cloth commonly used to carry a baby. She is walking barefoot, holding Jesus in her left arm, while her right arm stretches out to us, as if to teach Jesus to look at us. The colour of the statue matches the church floor, which is the colour of clay, a symbol of creation. The statue stands behind the altar, facing towards the choir.

This statue was made around 1992 after the church's construction was completed. It was created in response to the community's longing to have a statue of Our Lady before which they can sing the Salve Regina at the end of Compline. A sister was asked to collect several images of Our Lady to use as models, but none of them pleased the community. Then, one day, Ibu Martha (the superior at the time) went to a retreat house in Central Java and was impressed by the very lively reliefs there. Upon discovering that the artist is Mr. Bambang, a member of the Third Order of Carmelites,



patung Bunda Maria. Seorang suster diminta untuk mengumpulkan beberapa gambar Bunda Maria yang bisa dipilih sebagai model, namun tidak ada satu pun yang berkenan di hati komunitas. Suatu ketika, Ibu Martha (pemimpin saat itu) pergi ke rumah retret di Jawa Tengah, dan terkesan dengan relief di sana yang sangat hidup. Ketika diketahuinya bahwa senimannya adalah Pak Bambang –anggota Ordo Ketiga Karmelit, ia mengundangnya ke Gedono dan memintanya untuk membuat patung Bunda Maria yang mengekspresikan lagu Salam Ya Ratu, yang bergaya Jawa itu. Sebelum membuat patung, Pak Bambang retret terlebih dahulu. Di tengah retret tiba-tiba ia pergi dan kembali dengan membawa sekarung tanah liat. Setelah beberapa hari membentuk patung itu, kami diundang untuk melihat hasilnya. Perhatian komunitas langsung terarah kepada Bayi Yesus dan keindahan-Nya terpancar pada wajah ibu-Nya. Itulah Bunda kita, salah satu dari kita: Ratu tanpa mahkota, berbusana orang desa. Sinar kemuliaannya, yang merupakan anugerah cuma-cuma Penebusan Kristus, tersembunyi di balik kesehariannya yang sederhana. ■

she invited him to Gedono and asked him to make a statue of Our Lady, that would complement the Javanese-style music of our Indonesian *Salve Regina*. Before making the statue, Mr. Bambang went on a retreat. During his retreat, he suddenly left and returned with a sack of clay and gypsum. After a few days of quietly shaping the statue, he finally invited us to see the work of his hands. Our attention was immediately drawn to the beauty of the Child Jesus and how it radiated onto Our Lady's face. That's her. She is our Mother, one of us: the Queen without a crown, dressed as a villager. The light of her glory, the fruit of Christ's Redemption, shines through her, hidden within her simplicity. ■



Our Lady of the Philippines
GUIMARAS, PHILIPPINES



Our Lady of the Angels

TENSHIEN, JAPAN

The Salve Regina statue of Mary at Tenshien depicts Mary's Assumption. This dates to when the French founders prayed to Our Lady of the Assumption for her protection over the foundation..

In the 1960s, when Mother Michael, the French prioress at the time, attended the first gathering of female prioresses of our Order held in Citéaux, she was invited to the Fille-Dieu convent in Switzerland. Mother Michael was so taken with the statue of Our Lady of the Assumption she saw there that she asked to be introduced to the artist. It is a wooden sculpture of the Virgin Mary created by the French sculptor couple, J.S. Hartmann.

In 1969, after being displayed in the meeting room for a time, it replaced the painted statue of Our Lady of the Assumption in the church, which had been there since the monastery's foundation. This change occurred during the renovations of the church, as part of the liturgical reforms following the Second Vatican Council.

According to an elderly parishioner who viewed this statue—which stands approximately 2 meters tall—up close in the meeting room, Our Lady has a very beautiful face.

Accompanied by angels as she ascends straight upward, Our Lady seems to be lifting us—who gaze up at her, holding the prayers of this world in our hearts—up to the heights of heaven with her.

天使園のサルヴェのマリア様は被昇天のマリア様です。フランス人の創立者たちが、被昇天の聖母に創立の保護を求めて祈ったことに由来します。

1960年代、当時のフランス人の修道院長 Mother Michael がCi(^)teaxで開催された本会で最初の女子修道院長の集まりに参加した折に、スイスの女子修道院Fille-Dieuに招かれました。そこで見た被昇天の聖母像をM. Michaelがとても気に入り、製作者を紹介して頂きました。フランスの彫刻家夫妻、J.S.HARTMANNによる木彫の聖母像です。

しばらく集会室に置かれた後、1969年、第二バチカン公会議の典礼刷新により聖堂を改装した際に、創立時からあった彩色の被昇天の聖母像と取りかえられました。全長約2メートルのこの聖母像を集会室で近くから見た年長者の話では、とても美しい顔のマリア様だということです。

天使たちを伴って真っすぐに昇りゆく聖母が、この世界の祈りを抱いて聖母を仰ぎ見る私たちを、共に天の高みへと引き上げてくださるかのようです。





Santa Maria Rawaseneng

RAWASENENG, INDONESIA

Patung Maria Salve di kapel komunitas Pertapaan Santa Maria Rawaseneng menyatu dengan tabernakel berukir kayu jati, menjadi pusat doa dan kontemplasi. Karya ini dipahat oleh Frater Y.B. Mangunwijaya pada Juli 1956 saat masih menjadi frater calon imam Diosesan Vikariat Semarang. Keindahan ukiran kayu jati mencerminkan kesederhanaan, keteguhan, dan kekayaan seni tradisional Jawa.

Patung Maria ini memadukan iman Kristiani dengan budaya lokal melalui ukiran kayu bergaya Jawa yang sarat makna spiritual. Simbol anggur dan gandum mencerminkan Ekaristi sekaligus rasa syukur masyarakat agraris atas hasil bumi. Sikap Maria yang hening dan tangan terkatup melambangkan nilai *andhap asor*, *tepa salira*, serta *eling lan waspada*. Bagi komunitas Pertapaan Santa Maria Rawaseneng, patung ini menjadi lambang keselarasan antara doa, kerja, kesederhanaan, dan kebersamaan dalam kehidupan sehari-hari.

Seorang peziarah bertanya mengapa Maria tampak diam. Seorang rahib menjelaskan bahwa keheningan Maria mengajarkan manusia untuk lebih banyak mendengarkan daripada berbicara kepada Allah. Peziarah pun menyadari bahwa doa sejati lahir dari hati yang tenang, tempat Kristus berbicara dan menuntun setiap orang.

Dalam hening Engkau berdiri,
Bunda penuh doa,
menyimpan Sabda
di kedalaman hati.

Anggur dan gandum
bersaksi tentang Kristus,
Roti Kehidupan
bagi dunia.

Ajarlah kami, Maria,
mencintai keheningan,
berdoa dengan setia,
dan bekerja dengan kasih,
hingga dalam segala sesuatu
Allah dimuliakan.

The statue of the Salve Regina of Our Lady in the chapel of the Community of Santa Maria Rawaseneng Monastery is harmoniously integrated with a tabernacle carved from teak wood, forming the spiritual center for prayer and contemplation. The statue was carved by Brother Y.B. Mangunwijaya in July 1956 while he was a diocesan seminarian of the Vicariate of Semarang. The beauty of the teak wood carving reflects simplicity, steadfastness, and the rich heritage of traditional Javanese craftsmanship.

This statue beautifully unites the Christian faith with local culture through Javanese-style wood carving imbued with deep spiritual meaning. The symbols of grapes and wheat represent the Eucharist while also expressing the gratitude of an agrarian people for the fruits of the earth. Mary's serene posture and folded hands embody the Javanese virtues of *andhap asor* (humility), *tepa salira* (consideration for others), and *eling lan waspada* (mindfulness and vigilance). For the community of Santa Maria Rawaseneng Monastery, the statue symbolizes the harmony of prayer, work, simplicity, and fraternal life in everyday living.

A pilgrim once asked why Mary appeared so silent. A monk replied that Mary's silence teaches us to listen more than we speak before God. The pilgrim then realized that true prayer is born from a peaceful heart—the place where Christ speaks and gently guides every person.

In silence You stand,
Mother full of prayer,
treasuring the Word
within the depths of Your heart.

Grapes and wheat
bear witness to Christ,
the Bread of Life
for the world.

Teach us, Mary,
to love silence,
to pray faithfully,
and to work with love,
so that in all things
God may be glorified.



Ka Waiata ki a Maria
Ka waita kia Maria, Hinei whakaae,
Whakameatiamai hei whare
tangata, Hine purotu, hinenga kau,
hine rangi marie, Kote Whaea, Kote
Whaea o te ao, o te ao, Ko te
Whaea, Kote Whaea o te ao, o te ao.

Let us sing to Mary
Let us sing to Mary, the girl who
said yes, let it be as you say, that I
become the house of humankind,
a simple girl, a strong-hearted girl,
a quiet girl, the mother of Jesus,
the mother of the world.

KOPUA,
NEW ZEALAND

Our Lady of the Southern Star

This image is in the Southern Star Abbey Chapel of the Cistercian-Trappist monastery in Kopua, Central Hawke's Bay. The painting hung in the church, on the right side of the tabernacle. Southern Madonna is a representation of Mary and her child, depicted as Māori people, or Tangata Whenua of Aotearoa New Zealand.

The artist of Southern Madonna, Julia Bridget Lynch (Sister Mary Lawrence, RSM), uses traditional motifs to reference an authentically Catholic theme, and the image signifies Aotearoa New Zealand's host culture. Mary is Te Kahurangi o Mahutanga. She wears a Māori face and dons a simple korowai, tipari, heru, and pekapeka made of tangiwai pounamu.

A depiction of Mary or Jesus as Māori says more than "Mary is Māori" or Jesus is O te whenua (of the land). Everyone knows that the mother of Jesus was not ethnically a Māori woman, and that Jesus was a Jew. The subjective assignment of race to a religious figure is not a racial issue in the iconography of the Christian tradition. It is a devotional practice that has been around for

centuries. In ancient times, it was used to establish familiarity. Host cultures that have adopted Christianity often use local ethnic characteristics for Jesus and Mary, and Christianity has often adapted its religious images in a way familiar to indigenous people. The Māori are no exception. Today, however, in a multicultural society, this practice moves beyond ethnic familiarity to create a sense of religious unity.

The monastery is dedicated to Our Lady of the Southern Star. This title comes from a constellation in the Milky Way galaxy that is visible in the southern hemisphere. European explorers in the sixteenth century named the constellation the Southern Cross, recognizing its shape as resembling a cross, comprised of four bright stars that outline the figure, with a fainter star below the crossbar. In Māori, this constellation is called Mahutonga. The star at the foot of the cross is thought to represent the southern star, which signifies Mary, as she stood near the foot of Jesus's cross, as recounted in the Gospel of John (John 19:25). Therefore, the painting is titled "Southern Madonna." The imagery is enhanced by the star's blue-tinged light and brightness, which further symbolize Mary. ■



Our Lady of Joy

LANTAO, HONGKONG

Our Lady of Joy Abbey, a daughter house of Our Lady of Consolation, was established in 1928 in Zheng Ding, Hebei, China. Our monks, who speak Chinese, often have a statue or picture of Our Lady in a Chinese style. For example, there are depictions of Our Lady with the infant Jesus, both dressed as the Queen Mother and her son.

In the church, our Fr. Giles Chong designed a wooden panel on the wall of the altar in 1962, depicting the Virgin Mary and her son Jesus on the cross. This simple image conveys profound meanings.

The Blessed Virgin Mary raises her hands in praise, bearing witness to the resurrection of her Son, Jesus Christ, from the dead after his crucifixion. In this context, she embodies the words expressed in the 'Magnificat': "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit exults in God my Savior!" ■





When Sujong Monastery was dedicated in 1987, only the foundation for the church had been laid, with plans to build a full-scale monastery in the future. As a result, during the first ten years, the current gift shop and guesthouse meeting room served as a temporary chapel for the sisters. In 1997, the Japanese community of Our Lady of the Angels (Tenshien), which celebrated its 100th anniversary that year, expanded the existing church to signify the completion of the founding of Sujong Monastery.

The temporary chapel contained a small statue of Our Lady, which had been a gift from the Oita Monastery. However, this statue was far too small for the current church, which had doubled in height since its initial construction. At that time, we had just started our jam-making business and were still relying on Tenshien for our living expenses, making it impossible for us to afford a larger, more suitable statue.

Upon learning of our situation, two groups of benefactors came forward to help. One group donated a statue of the Holy Family for the cloister garden, while the other provided a new statue of Our Lady of Salve for the church. This statue,

sculpted by artist Chang-rim Raphael Lee, was enshrined in the church on July 15, 1999. Additionally, artist Joseph Choi Jong-tae, who created the Holy Family statue, generously donated the church's crucifix.

When artist Chang-rim Raphael Lee initially sent the model for the statue of Our Lady, opinions within our community were sharply divided. The main points of controversy were the eyes and mouth, which were depicted as simple, dot-like forms. Nevertheless, the majority felt that this minimalist form was far more meaningful and beautiful, leading us to enshrine the statue exactly as it is today. As time passed, we look upon her face and experience the profound love of unity between Mother and Child—a love that embraces all our emotions, pain, and suffering. Dom Bernardo, the former Abbot General, once remarked about our statue, saying that "the Mother and the Infant Jesus are so deeply united that this very place is already the Cross." For his work on this statue, artist Chang-rim Raphael Lee was honored with the grand prize at the Korea Catholic Art Awards, established in 1995. ■

*Salve Regina,
the door to an unfamiliar world that opens every
night.*

*Salve Regina,
the place where the power, greatness, and glory
built by the familiar world crumble away.*

*Salve Regina,
the cross made by the Holy Mother and the
Infant Jesus becoming one.*

*Salve Regina,
the woman who resembles her Son, possessing
His heart, eyes, and mouth.*

*Salve Regina,
she who embraces the sorrows of the world that
no eyes, no matter how large, can hold.*

*Salve Regina,
the Mother's mouth that silences thousands and
tens of thousands of languages of power.*

*Salve Regina,
the unity of Mother and Son that unties the
suffering that the world created and bound itself
with.*

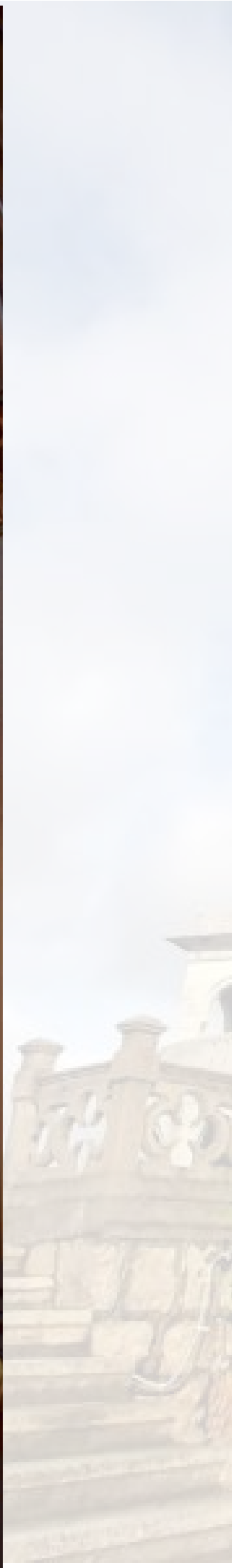
*Salve Regina,
the unfamiliar world, the new world that opens
within this unity.*

*Salve Regina,
a glimpse of that newness shapes the language of
silence.*

*Salve Regina,
together with the Mother, we also grow to
resemble the Son day by day.*

Our Lady of Sujong

SUJONG, SOUTH KOREA



Our Lady of Star of Hope

MACAU

Since 2009, our community, Our Lady Star of Hope Macau, have her temporary place in the ex-Episcopal Palace close to Penha Church, a historical building the Diocese granted us for the beginning of our community.

The statue of the Virgin Mary with the Child Jesus, located inside the Chapel of Our Lady of Penha in Macau, is part of a centuries-old devotion associated with Portuguese sailors and Augustinian missionaries, dating back to 1622. This statue symbolizes Mary as the protector of seafarers and travelers. It has been preserved through several reconstructions of the chapel, notably in 1837 and 1935.

This statue depicts the Virgin Mary crowned, holding the infant Jesus, surrounded by angels—an iconography emphasizing her role as Theotokos (Mother of God) and Queen of Heaven.

Symbolism:

The crown and stars recall Revelation 12:1, presenting Mary as the woman clothed with the sun.

The cherubs and clouds highlight her heavenly intercession.

The Child Jesus with a radiant halo emphasizes the Incarnation.

This statue served as a devotional centerpiece for worshippers, especially sailors and travelers who were seeking protection for safe voyages.

It is venerated under the title “Our Lady Stella Matutina, meaning ‘Morning Star,’ which comes from one of the ancient invocations in the Litany of Loreto, where Mary is praised as the guiding star that leads Christians safely to Christ, much like the morning star heralds the dawn.

This title was especially meaningful to Portuguese sailors, who saw Mary as their celestial guide across dangerous seas. It embodies Macau’s Portuguese Catholic heritage, blending Marian devotion with the city’s maritime identity. Mary is seen as the light that precedes Christ, guiding believers toward the dawn of salvation.

To all the visitors and pilgrims entering the Chapel, we offer a prayer card with the photo of the statue and this most appreciated prayer:

May the Lord
bless you and keep you.
May the Lord
let his face shine on you
and be gracious to you.
May the Lord
show you his face
and bring you peace.

Numbers 6: 24-26

願上主賜福給你，
保護你。
願上主使他的臉
光照你，賜恩給你。
願上主向你仰臉，
賜你平安。

戶 6:24-26



Our Lady of Joy

KUNNAMBETTA, INDIA

ഞങ്ങളുടെ ആശ്രമം ആനന്ദത്തിന്റെ മാതാവിന് (our Lady of Joy) സമർപ്പിക്കപ്പെട്ടിരിക്കുന്നു. ഈ നാളം നാം സ്വീകരിക്കാനും മറുപടുവരുമായി പങ്കുവെക്കാനും ആഗ്രഹിക്കുന്ന ദൈവത്തിൽ നിന്നുള്ള സവിശേഷമായ കൃപയെ പ്രതീക്ഷിക്കുന്നു. ദൈവത്തിൽ നിന്ന് വരുന്ന ആനന്ദം, ക്രിസ്തുവിന് ജനനം നൽകിയതിലൂടെ മറിയം ഈ ലോകത്തിലേക്ക് കൊണ്ടു വന്നു.

ഓരോ സാധാരണത്തിലും ഞങ്ങൾ Salve Regina ആലപിക്കുമ്പോൾ, ഞങ്ങളുടെ ഹൃദയങ്ങളെ മറിയത്തിന്റെ പക്കലേക്ക് തിരിക്കുന്നു. അമ്മയുടെ അടുക്കലേക്ക് മടങ്ങിയെത്തുന്ന മക്കളെപ്പോലെ അവൾ എപ്പോഴും തന്റെ പുത്രന്റെ അടുക്കലേക്ക് ഞങ്ങളെ നയിക്കുമെന്ന അചഞ്ചലമായ വിശ്വാസത്തോടെ ഞങ്ങൾ ഞങ്ങളെത്തന്നെ അവൾക്കു സമർപ്പിക്കുന്നു. പരീക്ഷണങ്ങളുടെ സമയങ്ങളിലും സന്തോഷത്തിന്റെ നാളുകളിലും വിശുദ്ധ ബർണാർഡിന്റെ ഈ ആഹ്വാനം ഞങ്ങൾ ഹൃദയത്തിൽ ഏറ്റെടുക്കുന്നു: “നക്ഷത്രത്തെ നോക്കുക; മറിയത്തെ വിളിച്ചുപേക്ഷിക്കുക.”

മറിയം പ്രത്യാശയുടെ മാതാവാണ്, കാരണം അവൾ ആനന്ദത്തിന്റെ മാതാവുമാണ്. അവളുടെ ഉദരത്തിൽ മനുഷ്യവതാരം സ്വീകരിച്ച, ആനന്ദം തന്നെയായ യേശുക്രിസ്തു വസിച്ചു. ദൈവം ആനന്ദമാണെങ്കിൽ, അതിനു കാരണം അവിടുന്ന് അനാഥി കാലം മുതൽക്കേ സ്നേഹത്തിന്റെ കൂട്ടായ്മയും, ശാശ്വതമായ ആത്മസമർപ്പണവും, പങ്കുവെക്കപ്പെട്ട ജീവന്റെ പൂർണ്ണതയുമാണ്. ദൈവത്തെ സ്വാഗതം ചെയ്യുക എന്നാൽ ബാഹ്യമായ സാഹചര്യങ്ങളെ ആശ്രയിക്കാത്തതും, അവന്റെ വിശ്വസ്തമായ സാന്നിധ്യത്തിൽ നിന്ന് ഉറവെടുക്കുന്നതുമായ ആ ആനന്ദത്തിലേക്ക് പ്രവേശിക്കുന്നതാണ്.

മറിയത്തിന്റെ വിദ്യാലയത്തിൽ നമ്മുടെ ജീവിതത്തെ രൂപപ്പെടുത്താൻ ഈ ആനന്ദത്തെ എങ്ങനെ അനുവദിക്കണമെന്ന് ഞങ്ങൾ പഠിക്കുന്നു. അവൾ നമ്മുടെ ഹൃദയങ്ങളെ വിശ്വാസത്തിലേക്ക് തുറക്കുന്നു; നമ്മുടെ പ്രത്യാശയെ പോഷിപ്പിക്കുന്നു, ഷം നമ്മിൽ കൃതജ്ഞത നിറഞ്ഞൊരു ആത്മാവിനെ ഉണർത്തുകയും ചെയ്യുന്നു.

“എന്റെ ആത്മാവ് കർത്താവിനെ മഹത്വപ്പെടുത്തുന്നു; എന്റെ ചിത്തം എന്റെ രക്ഷകനായ ദൈവത്തിൽ ആനന്ദിക്കുന്നു.” അങ്ങനെ, യഥാർത്ഥമായ ഓരോ ആനന്ദവും ദൈവിക അത്ഭുതങ്ങൾക്കായി സമർപ്പിക്കുന്ന കൃതജ്ഞതാഗീതമായി മാറുന്നു.

അങ്ങനെ, ഓരോ സന്ധ്യയിലും Salve Regina എന്ന പ്രാർത്ഥന നമ്മുടെ ജീവിതയാത്രയിൽ നമുക്ക് താങ്ങായി നിലകൊള്ളുന്നു. സുവിശേഷത്തിന്റെ സന്തോഷത്താൽ നിറഞ്ഞ്, ദൈവം സൗമ്യനും, കരുണാമയനും, വിശ്വസ്തനുമായ സാന്നിധ്യമാണെന്ന ആത്മവിശ്വാസത്തോടെ നമ്മൾ സമാധാനത്തിൽ മുന്നോട്ട് പോകുന്നു. ആനന്ദത്തിന്റെ മാതാവിന്റെ സ്നേഹനിർഭരമായ ദൃഷ്ടിയുടെ കീഴിൽ “കർത്താവിന്റെ ആനന്ദമാണ് നമ്മുടെ ശക്തി” എന്ന തിരുവചനത്തിന് ഞങ്ങളുടെ ജീവിതം മുഴുവൻ കൊണ്ട് സാക്ഷ്യം വഹിക്കുവാനാണ് ഞങ്ങൾ ആഗ്രഹിക്കുന്നത്.

Our monastery is dedicated to **Our Lady of Joy, Ananda Matha** in Malayalam. This name expresses the particular grace that we desire to receive and to share: the joy that comes from God and that Mary brought into the world by giving birth to Christ.

Each evening, as we sing the *Salve Regina*, we turn our hearts to Mary. Like children returning to their mother, we entrust ourselves to her, confident that she always leads us to her Son. In times of trial as well as in days of light, we make our own the invitation of Saint Bernard: "*Look to the star, call upon Mary.*"

Mary is the Mother of Hope because she is also the Mother of Joy. Within her dwelt Joy Incarnate, Jesus Christ. If God is joy, it is because from all eternity he is a communion of love, an eternal self-giving, and the fullness of shared life. To welcome God is to enter into that joy which does not depend on outward circumstances, but springs from his faithful presence.

At Mary's school, we learn to allow this joy to shape our lives. She opens our hearts to trust, nourishes our hope, and awakens within us a spirit of

thanksgiving. Together with the Virgin of the *Magnificat*, we cherish in our hearts this canticle of praise: "*My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.*" Every true joy thus becomes an act of gratitude for the wonders that God accomplishes.

So, evening after evening, the *Salve Regina* sustains us on our journey. Filled with the joy of the Gospel, we go forward in peace, confident that God is a gentle, merciful, and faithful presence. Under the loving gaze of Our Lady of Joy, we desire to bear witness, through our whole lives, that "*the joy of the Lord is our strength.*"





Biana Trappist Lamanabi
LAMANABI, INDONESIA

At the heart of our Monastery Church at Lamanabi stands a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary, expressing a distinctive Cistercian-Trappist vision of faith. She is depicted holding the Child Jesus, who extends His right hand forward as if beckoning all who gaze upon Him to come. Yet the image reveals more. Directly beneath her is a profound symbol of the Most Holy Trinity: an eye with an inscription of the Sacred Name YHWH, representing God the Father; a dove, representing the Holy Spirit; and pierced hands of Jesus Christ, representing God the Son. In this way, Mary is presented not as the center of devotion, but as the humble Mother who continually leads humanity into the mystery of the Triune God.

On either side, two figures of kneeling Trappist monks hold lit candles in silent adoration. They embody the vocation of the monastery itself: a life of prayer, contemplation, and hidden fidelity. Their silent presence reminds every visitor that the true response to God's mystery is not found in many words, but in a heart that listens.

This unique composition beautifully reflects the spirituality of the Cistercian-Trappist tradition. Mary teaches us how to receive Christ, to remain open to the Holy Spirit, and to entrust our lives to the loving providence of the Father. Standing before this image, pilgrims are gently invited into the same silence that shaped Mary's own heart — a silence in which faith deepens, hope is renewed, and every prayer becomes an offering of love to the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. ■



Di tengah Gereja Biara kami di Lamanabi berdiri sebuah patung Perawan Maria yang Terberkati, yang menggambarkan visi iman khas Ordo Cistercian-Trappist. Beliau digambarkan sedang menggendong Bayi Yesus, yang mengulurkan tangan kanan-Nya ke depan seolah-olah mengajak semua orang yang memandangnya untuk datang. Namun, gambar tersebut mengungkapkan lebih dari itu. Tepat di bawah-Nya terdapat simbol mendalam dari Tritunggal Mahakudus: sebuah mata dengan tulisan Nama Suci YHWH, yang melambangkan Allah Bapa; seekor merpati, yang melambangkan Roh Kudus; serta tangan Yesus Kristus yang tertusuk, yang melambangkan Allah Putra. Dengan cara ini, Maria ditampilkan bukan sebagai pusat devosi, melainkan sebagai Bunda yang rendah hati yang terus-menerus memimpin umat manusia memasuki misteri Allah Tritunggal.

Di kedua sisinya, dua sosok biarawan Trappist

yang berlutut memegang lilin yang menyala dalam adorasi yang hening. Mereka mewakili panggilan biara itu sendiri: kehidupan doa, kontemplasi, dan kesetiaan yang tersembunyi. Kehadiran hening mereka mengingatkan setiap pengunjung bahwa tanggapan sejati terhadap misteri Allah tidak ditemukan dalam banyak kata, melainkan dalam hati yang mendengarkan.

Komposisi unik ini dengan indah mencerminkan spiritualitas tradisi Cistercian-Trappist. Maria mengajarkan kepada kita cara menerima Kristus, tetap terbuka terhadap Roh Kudus, dan mempercayakan hidup kita kepada pemeliharaan penuh kasih Bapa. Berdiri di hadapan gambar ini, para peziarah diajak dengan lembut memasuki keheningan yang sama yang membentuk hati Maria sendiri — keheningan di mana iman semakin mendalam, harapan diperbarui, dan setiap doa menjadi persembahan kasih kepada Bapa, melalui Putra, dalam Roh Kudus. ■



Our Lady of Mt. Matutum (Ardent Fire) is the name of our monastery, yet the prominent Marian statue in our church is the *Mother of Perpetual Help*. To solve this apparent puzzle, the key is found in Mary herself. Following her dialogue with the Angel Gabriel at the Annunciation, she identifies her new status with simple clarity: "I am the handmaid of the Lord." Transposing her statement into our own context, this means she remains entirely at our disposal, under whatever title we choose to approach her. Suffice it to say that the Mary we have, standing at five feet and one inch upon the marble riser in our monastic church, is the one most widely known and venerated here.

Her presence among us is steeped in its own quiet history. She arrived here in February 2003, carefully cradled inside a *cassa* or casket from Italy. Well-sculpted in wood, Our Mother of Perpetual Help looks very much like 16th-century royalty—not aloof, but deeply modest. Her lowered eyelids convey a deep compassion, her rosy cheeks softly glow, and her carmine lips seem ready to say a kind word or two. Depicted as a queen mother, she wears a crown, surely without any reference to herself. The Child Jesus is cradled in her left arm, his sandal undone as though fearing something in the distant future. Her satin-red inner robe,

Our Lady of Mt. Matutum
MATUTUM, PHILIPPINES



complemented by a blue mantle with gentle creases, seems to soothe whatever may have come upon our little Savior. For a visitor entering from the right side of the church, Our Lady is at the far left corner of our octagonal presbytery, resting beautifully next to the blue-green stained glass of the Trinity windows.

As the only Trappistines in this downside of South Cotabato—and, in fact, the entire archipelago—our connection with the Mother of Perpetual Help is evident. Because of her, the insertion of our monastic community and its Italian foundresses into this landscape was never a problem. Varied dialects, ethnic cultures, local foods, political complexities, and environmental shifts—including a rough and bumpy pineapple road at the beginning, and the inevitable discomforts of the backwaters—were of secondary importance. We know well that these factors are mere variables, not constants, in any foundation. Now, this other Nazareth is firmly on the spiritual map

This can raise a question on the inculturation of the Gospel. A monastic community is inherently missionary, though not like active congregations whose apostolates are highly visible. Those callings are wonderful in themselves, but our continuing presence is what "ticks," to borrow a modern phrase. By hearing the pealing of our bells seven times a day for the Divine Office, plus the daily Mass bells at 6:30 a.m. and 10:00 am on Sundays, our neighborhood seems to expand. The surrounding population becomes not mere statistics but a spiritual family. In this way, our liturgical existence becomes our evangelization. Many visitors and retreatants are entranced by the Divine Office, feeling as though angels were singing in our choir. That is the true wonder of Our Lady: it is in the weakest possible inactivity that she emerges as the strongest link. Mary's supernatural position is, after all, silence.

To supplicate the Virgin Mary in this way is far more homey, natural, and carefree than to construct rigid explanations of what she is. Regarding this latter effort, I am reminded of a remark from a modern interpreter of Plotinus that perfectly captures my own circuitous rendering: "Our unity of measure is necessarily transcendent to the things measured, the things it serves to evaluate and fix."² With the Mother of God, who

could ever truly evaluate and fix our understanding of her?

Yet, the mystery of her presence weaves itself flawlessly into our history and dates. Remember that only last year, the 267th successor of St. Peter, Pope Leo XIV, was elected on May 8, 2025. As an Augustinian, this date is significant for him and his order, as it is marked in their liturgical calendar as the Memorial of Our Mother of Good Counsel. For the Universal Church, it is also the commemorative feast of Our Lady of Pompeii. Whatever the hidden mysteries behind calendars, our experience of the workings of Providence and Marian influence always go hand in hand.

To press further regarding dates, in some quarters of the Catholic world, the Memorial of Our Mother of Perpetual Help falls on June 23, 27, or 30. It is fair to say that beyond May, the whole of June—especially here in the Philippines—is a thoroughly Marian month. A novena always precedes these movable celebrations of Our Mother of Perpetual Help, and as a matter of pious devotion, Filipinos truly make time for Our Lady, come rain or shine. Consecrated to Mary, our country—so-called *Pueblo Amante de Maria* (Mary's beloved people)—and its Catholic devotees honor her every single Wednesday. On that day, expect every church, especially those of the Redemptorists, to be overflowing. Often, a traffic rerouting becomes unavoidable.

Why we Filipinos have this deep veneration for our Mother of Perpetual Help is certainly because of her being a MOTHER. Her maternal solicitude is an analogy for the ways Filipina mothers care for their own sons and daughters. This filial relationship rests securely in the order of faith and Catholic tradition. Our Marian devotion is not a temporary stop-gap, but a permanent full-stop for those of us who possess the childlike faith that Our Lord so admires.

For Our Lady of Mt. Matutum, Our Lady of Perpetual Help, a Marian poet like Gerard Manley Hopkins may not hesitate to pour these verses for her.

*All things rising, all things sizing
Mary sees, sympathizing
With that world of good
Nature's motherhood.*³

Sr. Leah Socorro Ponteras is a solemn-professed nun of Our Lady of Mt. Matutum Abbey in South Cotabato, Philippines.

² Etienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*, University of Notre-Dame Press, ©1991, p.430-431

³ Gerard Manley Hopkins, *As Kingfishers Catch Fire*, Selected and Annotated Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, Word on Fire Catholic Ministries, ©2023



Our Lady of Nishinomiya

NISHINOMIYA, JAPAN

OUR MARIAN CISTERCIAN LIFE



Sacred Scripture can help you a lot to live out the liturgical life characteristic of our Order. Herein lies our true spirituality: this is what should be the nourishment of our Marian Cistercian life; because in all this admirable and celestial doctrine there appear Jesus and the Holy Spirit who come towards us and always through the maternal intervention of Mary. It is good to pray to Mary and also to turn to her when we are in danger or are tempted. But it is not enough: Mary is more than all this. She influences much more directly in the sanctification of souls. By her prerogative as Mother of grace, she transmits to every soul this precious gift, namely, the very same spiritual life of the soul.

The formation of Jesus in us takes place through Mary, and his development and his growth through our cooperation with the maternal action of Mary.

How? First of all we need to get rid of all willful obstacles to the continual development of Jesus in our souls; because sins committed intentionally, a dissipated life and, above all, lack of charity towards our neighbor paralyze almost completely our spiritual growth. We must accustom ourselves to the idea that the Virgin brings about this formation of Jesus in us, and place ourselves at her disposal in everything that we do with the renewed intention of reproducing Him in all our behavior and always under the gaze of the Mother who accomplishes almost all things, and under her guidance. Be conformed in all things to the most holy Virgin, taking her not only as Mother and model, but as form, as mold, which is something more. Because a model is something outside of ourselves that we strive to imitate, making a sort of copy, whereas a mold signifies an exemplar that receives me within itself and to the demands of which I must conform all my acts, both internal and external. Mary served as a mold to a man who was contemporaneously God. She continues his work, forming in sanctity those who aspire to be transformed in God.

To live with the humble servant of the Lord and not to be humble is impossible: either repudiate Mary or repudiate pride. The secret of the spiritual life consists in knowing and being convinced of our powerlessness to attain the virtues that are found in Mary and which we should allow to permeate our souls. At first sight we might think that on our part we have to work hard, striving with great effort and tenacity, to obtain charity. Yes, but there is another method, simpler and more in accordance with spiritual infancy that consists in accustoming ourselves to live and act under the gaze and influence of Mary, in such a way that, with simplicity and without excessive violence, everything may be done as the Virgin did it, imitating her as much as possible.

BL. PIO HEREDIA, LETTERS OF PIO HEREDIA

SACRED MUSIC

ALLELUIA, VIRGA JESSE

MO. GIOVANNA GARBELLI, OCSO

Image: Madonna col Bambino, Duccio, Wikimedia Commons

8.

A L- le- lú- ia. * ij.

Ÿ. Vir- ga Jesse fló- ru- it : Vir- go

De- um et hó- mi- nem gé- nu- it : pa- cem

De- us réddi- dit, in se re-concí- li- ans * i-

ma sum- mis.

Alleluia.

*Virga Jesse floruit:
Virgo Deum et hominem
genuit:
Pacem Deum reddidit,
In se reconcilians ima
sumis.*

Alleluia.

*The rod of Jesse blossoms:
A Virgin brings forth
One who is both God and
man.
God restores peace to
man,
Reconciling the lowest
with the highest in
Himself.*

Alleluia, Virga Jesse

MO. GIOVANNA GARBELLI, OCSO

The Alleluia text celebrates the 'flower' that buds from the stump of Jesse: the God-man, the mediator who will definitively reconcile God and humanity. It is sung on the Fourth Sunday of Advent in Year A and echoes one of the 'O' antiphons. The stump of Jesse's root is a sign of God's love for all people, having sprouted and blossomed into the Saviour.

*O Root of Jesse's stem,
Sign of God's love for all his people,
Come to save us without delay.*

However, this Alleluia is sung every year on the Feast of the Nativity of Mary, as she is the New Eve whose birth reversed the Fall of Man. During this feast, we remember the stump of Jesse as we read the Gospel account of the genealogy of Jesus.

We are all part of God's family tree. Jesus has a genealogy. It may seem surprising, but I have always been thrilled to hear the names mentioned in the first chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. As the priest proclaims them, we trace Jesus's royal lineage from Abraham to Joseph and Mary. We thank God for His lovingkindness in including sinners and women in it.

Our Cistercian Fathers loved this Feast and wrote beautiful sermons celebrating God's mercy. I particularly love St. Aelred's sermon on the Nativity of Mary. In it, he views Jesus's genealogy as a miracle of God's mercy.

"Today, God has begun to reveal his wonderful mercy and compassion to us, which he promised to Abraham many years ago. Through his descendants, all nations would be blessed. He says, 'In your descendants, all nations will be blessed' (Gen. 22:18; 26:4). Today, the seed from which Christ our God, the sun of justice, arose was born. (Ant. Nat.

BVM). Not only one people, but all peoples have certainly been blessed in him because faith in Christ and his blessing are for all nations."

Aelred also discusses the descent and ascent implied by the Matthean genealogy. He imagines it as a three-step staircase that Christ descended and that we must now climb.

Aelred writes: "My dear brothers and sisters, if we want to ascend to the exalted Father where Jesus came to us, we must begin our ascent here. Where? From the Son of Mary—that is, from the humanity of Christ—and thus we ascend to his divinity. He is the way, as he himself says: 'I am the way' (Jn 14:6). Without him, no one can reach the exalted Father. Therefore, he says, 'No one comes to the Father except through me' (John 14:6). Nothing good can begin unless it starts with Christ. As the Apostle says, he is the foundation of all goodness: 'No one can lay a foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ' (1 Cor. 3:11)."

The Alleluia text contains the same image: "Reconciling the lowest with the highest in Himself."

In the majestic Gregorian eight-tone, the verse's melody rises first on *Jesse* as if to underline the importance of the Messiah's humanity, and then again on *Deus* and *sumis* to stress Jesus' divinity.

As we sing this Alleluia, the truth of our reconciliation with God fills us with consolation and joy.

The new Adam, flourished from the old stump of Jesse, born of the Virgin, has become the "Way" back to salvation. We can climb from our place below to the summit of heaven.

The Virgin Mary is not named; she is simply referred to as 'the Virgin'. However, just as the dawn of a new day breaks and only the Sun of Righteousness shines, leaving her in the darkness of her humility, it is her Son who is celebrated on her feast day. Thus, her feast day celebrates her Son, the true peace and righteousness coming together.

The eighth tone, which is usually the tone of fulfillment and completion, jubilantly brings forth this truth. Through our voices, we experience this fulfillment in our lives.

■



VISIO DIVINA

**FRANCISCO DE ZURBARÁN:
Christ and the Virgin
in the House of Nazareth**

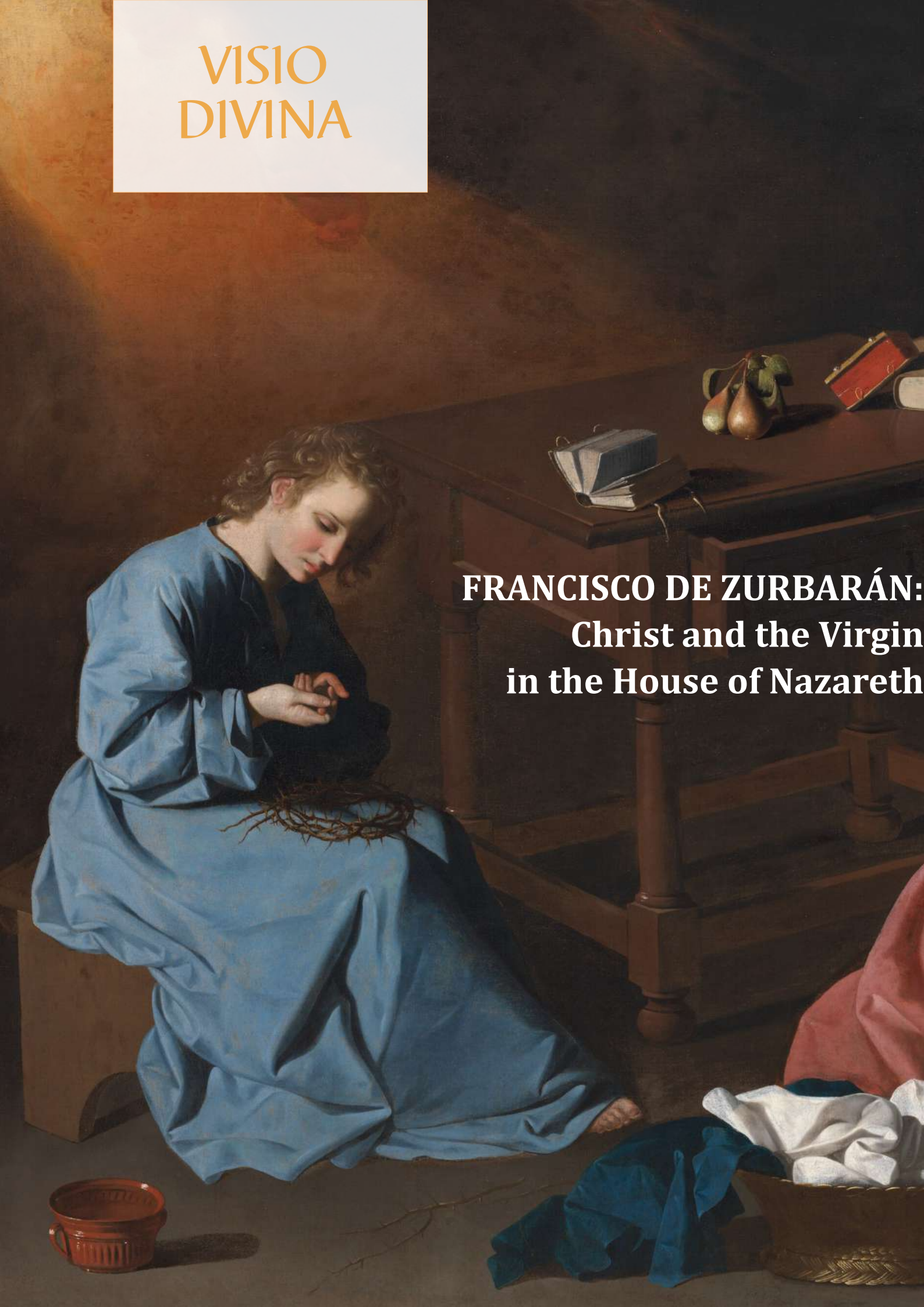




Image: Francisco de Zurbarán, Christ and the Virgin in the House of Nazareth, Wikipedia Commons

The Tears of the Virgin

MO. GIOVANNA GARBELLI, OCSO

Ordinary Time is punctuated by some of the most beloved feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary, such as the Assumption on August 15 and the Nativity on September 8.

But we also celebrate Mary, Queen of Heaven, on August 22; Our Lady of Sorrows on September 15; the Blessed Virgin of the Rosary on October 7; and the Presentation of Mary on November 22.

There are beautiful artistic depictions of all these commemorations, but what I want to show here is a depiction of everyday life in the home of Nazareth, in hopes of helping us appreciate the Ordinary Time, which is not so ordinary when lived in remembrance of Christ (*memoria Christi*).

I found the image I was looking for while browsing the Notebook section of Bishop Erik Varden's website. Bishop Erik calls this work by Francisco de Zurbarán depicting the Virgin Mary contemplating Jesus in the house of Nazareth "a remarkable view."⁴ In this painting, the Virgin is intently looking at the young Jesus weaving a crown of thorns. In this endeavor, Jesus has pricked his finger, and blood is flowing from it. Undoubtedly, the painter presupposes that both Jesus and Mary knew that a crown of thorns would be Jesus' royal sign during His passion. We know that Jesus knew it because he announced the Passion in detail to his disciples three times during his final journey to Jerusalem. Mary, too, seems to know because the sight of Jesus' blood brings her to tears. Looking closely at Mary's face, in fact, we can see that her cheeks are streaked with tears. The mother's heartbroken expression at the sight of the blood makes us reflect on how deeply her immaculate heart has known the horror caused by our sins.

It makes us reflect on the difference between why Mary weeps and why we weep.

In an insightful article, Aaron Kheriaty, MD⁵ writes about our selfish tears in times of distress:

⁴ *Coram Fratribus* Website, Notebook, May 26, 2026

⁵ Aaron Kheriaty, MD, is a Fellow & Director of the *Bioethics, Technology and Human Flourishing Program at the Ethics and Public Policy Center*. He is a physician specializing in psychiatry and author of five books, including the most recent: *Making the Cut: How to Heal Modern Medicine* (2025)



"In my clinical practice, I frequently see patients who have endured unspeakable evils. They bear an anguish that cannot be communicated or comprehended. Trying to accompany them in their pain has been my daily bread for over twenty years. This professional experience has provided a window into the suffering of the human heart that most people probably cannot access in the same way, at least outside of their own personal experience of suffering. When we suffer, we understandably want to comprehend the reasons for our anguish. My patients often ask, as I ask when I am in pain: *Why is this happening to me? Did I do something wrong to deserve this? Is God punishing me? Why is God—who is all good, all-knowing, and all-powerful—allowing me to suffer when He could have prevented it?* These questions are perfectly natural. Notice, however, that they all involve asking God to teach me about my suffering..."

Dr. Kheriaty continues arguing that these questions are beyond the capacity of our finite intellect to comprehend, and then warns us that if we do not fix our gaze on Christ's Cross, any answer to questions about suffering is incomplete or simply wrong. We must *learn* from Jesus' suffering and go more deeply into His Passion to find peace. Kheriaty says: " During my nearly five years of dealing with a severe, debilitating chronic pain condition, [...] I wish I had learned sooner to turn my attention to Christ's Cross rather than focusing on mine. [...] I needed a crucial shift in focus: anything to do with my sufferings puts me at the center instead of God. When I rightly recognize His place, my attention reorients from my own suffering to His. There I can find liberation."

Faced with Christ's suffering, our suffering eventually fades into the background. Mary's tears convey exactly this truth. She sees her Son's sufferings. She focuses on His precious blood.

Francisco de Zurbarán was a deeply religious painter who experienced sorrow, too. He experienced the plague that killed half of the population in Seville in 1649. His adult son John, aged only twenty-nine, was among the victims.

Francisco de Zurbarán wants us to see the tears of the Virgin even in the quiet days in her home at Nazareth. He forebodes Mary's intense participation in the passion of her Son. Mary knew that she couldn't prevent it. She could only wait in patience and repeat her "*Fiat*."

In another work by Francisco de Zurbarán, the Child Mary, surrounded by a cloud of glory, contemplates God. Even in this painting, the girl's expression is deeply intent and almost tearful.

Mary's tears open a window into her pure heart. The purer her heart, the more excruciating her pain from the sins and evil committed by people around her. Sin touches her heart like a sword.

Therefore, Mary's concern for sinners is so profound that she often intercedes even before the sinner cries out for help when facing temptation. As Dante writes: "*...ma molte fiate/ Liberamente al domandar precorre* (but many times she freely anticipates the request...). "Blessed are those who weep because they will be consoled." ■

*The Virgin is intently looking
at the young Jesus weaving
a crown of thorns.*



*Jesus has pricked his finger,
and blood is flowing from it.*



*The spectators to the scene,
one of them looking at us.*





In another work by Francisco de Zurbarán, the Child Mary, surrounded by a cloud of glory, contemplates God. Even in this painting, the girl's expression is deeply intent and almost tearful.

The Child Virgin in Ecstasy. Francisco de Zurbarán, The Child Virgin in Ecstasy, c. 1630–1635. Oil on canvas, 116.8 x 90.2 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Image sourced via Wikimedia Commons (Public Domain).

I draw from you,
Mother,
The clear consistency
That nails you to faith.

I draw from you,
Mother,
The secret glow
That pierces you
with inexhaustible serenity.

From you, only from you, I draw
Mother,
The look smooth and strong
That calls everything
by its real name.

And you teach me
Mother,
Your tenacious abidance
Under the cross.

In this flow of time
the silence of your days,
Crumbles away in service to life.

In you I love,
Mother,
The wisdom of your candor
That flourishes in obedience
to every breath of the Spirit.

Behold, your daughter
As she contemplates the mercy
That overshadowed you,
Marveling in silence.

M. Cristiana Piccardo, OCSO



Virgin and Child Enthroned with Angels and Saints (Maestà), Duccio di Buoninsegna, Maestà (Central Panel Detail), 1308–1311. Tempera and gold on wood, 213 x 396 cm (approx. main panel). Museo dell'Opera Metropolitana del Duomo, Siena. Image sourced via Wikimedia Commons (Public Domain).

Mo. Cristiana Piccardo is a nun of Monasterio N.S. de Coromoto in Venezuela. She was the Abbess of Vitorchiano f (1964-1988) and Titular Prioress of Humocaro (1991-2002).

Out of the Box

After all the
perceived evils
flew

from the box
what remained
was: hope

not
expectation
but hope as

the openness
of the box
its emptiness.

*

Two-way
gate you
pass thru
freely: out
to field
back to
pen. Sure
of pasture.

Fr. Isaac Slater, OCSO



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VIGILS

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Word count must be from 500 - 2000 words.

It is preferable to cite references as footnotes.

Scriptural citations should be placed alongside text.

Between the Veil and the Goldfinch

PRAYER TO OUR LADY OF THE
ASSUMPTION

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MARY AND THE MONK

BEHOLD YOUR MOTHER
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MÈ MARIA: REFLECTING ON VIETNAMESE
MARIAN DEVOTION

ORIENS Communities

VIRGA JESSE

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TEARS OF THE VIRGIN

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OUT OF THE BOX

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