

Our reassuring metaphor for God's tenderness

*May is Mary's month, and I
Muse at that and wonder why;
Her feasts follow reason,
Dated due to season . . .
This ecstasy all through mother-
ing earth
Tells Mary her mirth till Christ's
birth
To remember and exultation
In God who was her salvation.*
— Gerard Manley Hopkins,
“The May Magnificat”

Gerard Manley Hopkins sees the growth and gaiety of Spring as reminding Mary of her ecstasy during the time of the conception and birth of Christ. The joy all through the earth reminds Mary, now in Heaven, of her joy during the months before Christ's birth. Mary smiles on May.

I attended Catholic elementary school. December 8th arrived a couple of weeks before Christmas with a day off from school, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. Our gratitude to Mary was large, never mind that none of us had a clue what the feast day was about. We got out of school for a whole day and Mary had something to do with it. I got to go downtown with my mother to do Christmas shopping. A highlight of the day was lunch at a restaurant.

I learned from my mother to love “Our Lady.” My mother told me Mary would help me, guide me through the sorrows of this life. Mary, the woman who was “overshadowed by the Holy Spirit,” and who “pondered all these things in her heart”; the woman who spoke her great *Fiat*. I'm impressed that Mary didn't play the “Lord, I am not worthy” card (cf. Luke 1:33).

Mary brings to our relationship with God a touch of gentleness. In Mary we sense God's tender goodness.

I prefer to think of Mary without pious embellishments and myth

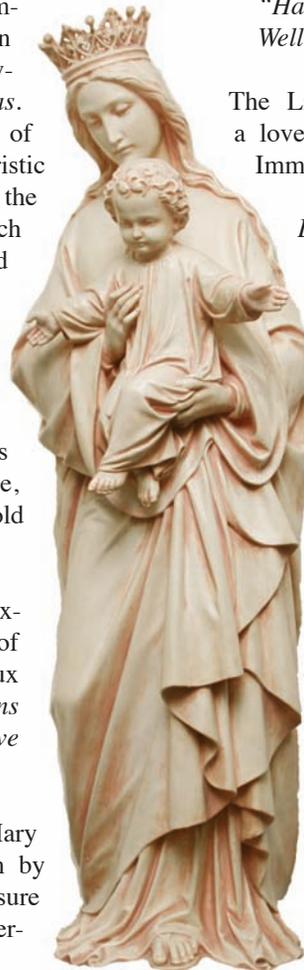
making. A preeminent image I have of Mary is given by the writer Par Lagerge-
vich, in his novel, *Barabbas*. He gives a description of Mary in her most characteristic moment, standing beneath the Cross of Christ. Lagerge-
vich writes that Mary looked like a peasant woman and from beneath her head dress there hung some sweat soaked strands of gray hair. She kept wiping the back of her hand across her mouth and running nose, in a desperate effort to hold back the tears.

Put off by the sugary and exaggerated representations of her time, Thérèse of Lisieux once said, “All the sermons I have heard on Mary have left me unmoved.”

Catholic devotion to Mary is viewed with hesitation by Protestants. I am not sure about the theological underpinnings of Mariology, and I suspect I'll never investigate them. However, I do feel we cannot praise God rightly if we leave Mary out of account. I do believe we live in her protection.

Teresa of Avila said, “Whenever I have recommended myself to this Sovereign Virgin I have been conscious of her aid.” Thérèse of Lisieux put it in her simple and childlike way:

“When we address ourselves to other Saints, they make us wait awhile. We feel that they have to go and present the request to God. But when we ask a grace from the Blessed Virgin, we receive immediate help.”



“Thérèse of Lisieux said, ‘When we ask a grace from the Blessed Virgin, we receive immediate help. Try it and you will see.’”

“Have you not experienced this? Well, try it and you will see.”

The Liturgy of the Hours contains a lovely hymn for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception:

*Bend from your throne at the
voice of our crying.
Bend to this earth
which your footsteps
have trod.
Stretch out your arms to
us, living and dying,
Mary Immaculate,
Mother of God.*

The Litany of Loretto is scarcely heard anymore. Yet those melodious titles rolling out one after another remain in my memory. “Refuge of Sinners,” “Help of Christians,” “Consoler of the Afflicted,” “Mater Dolorosa.”

It seems there has been a diminishment of devotion to Mary. Her portrait was one of the most familiar in the average Catholic home. Mary doesn't seem to have as much place in contemporary patterns of faith.

However, a Marian element is a blessing in our Christian lives. Mary is a metaphor for God's tenderness; she is a symbol of the reassurance of troubled humans.

Ave, Ave, Ave, Maria – the old cry for our Mother.

— Dr. Thomas Hicks

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