

## **Mary, our Hope**

Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God - Lk 2:16-21

Ave Maria Catholic Church, January 1, 2022 - Fr. David M Vidal

From ancient times, the name “*Theotokos*,” or “God-Bearer” (Mother of God), has been attributed to the Virgin Mary. The word “*Theotokos*” was used as part of the popular devotion of the early church. This title did not originally come from the reflection of theologians, but from the intuition of faith of the Christian people. Those who acknowledge Jesus as God, address Mary as the Mother of God, and hope to obtain her powerful help in the trials of life. Today, we can reflect on this last idea: Mary, the Mother of God is our Hope.

### **Hope is the virtue of those who are on the way**

We are “pilgrims on this earth.” We are in *status viatoris*, that means that we find ourselves “on the way.” Saint Paul describes our condition in his letter to the Philippians, when he wrote: “Brethren, I do not consider that I have already achieved the goal,” (Phil 3:13). We did not achieve our goal yet, however, we hope to achieve our goal, we hope to enjoy eternal happiness, we hope to live forever in heaven.

Our present condition can be summarized with this expression: “not yet.” This expression, “not yet,” includes both a negative and a positive aspect. The negative one is the absence of fulfillment: life here on earth is not our final destiny. Here on earth, we do not possess God as we wish and as our hearts desire. We also know with certain anxiety that the “not yet” could even be changed into a definite “no” if we miss the mark, if we lose our souls.

However, the “not yet” has a positive aspect, that is our orientation toward fulfillment, the possibility of eternal life with God. That is our hope. The virtue of hope is the virtue of those who are on the way. Hope is the virtue of those who have not yet reached the goal.

### **What is the object of the theological virtue of hope?**

In the Old Testament, the people of God were expecting the coming of the Messiah. They were expecting the one who was going to restore the material and spiritual, the temporal and eternal Kingdom of David. In the New Testament, the Messiah has a name and a face, He is Jesus. Therefore, all expectations are centered on Christ. From Him, we expect our redemption, we expect our salvation, we expect our eternal happiness. And we expect the fulfillment of God’s Kingdom in our lives.

Saint Paul speaks about this fulfillment in the second letter to Corinthians: “*We have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Here indeed we groan, and long to put on our heavenly dwelling . . . While we are still in this tent, we sigh with anxiety,*” (Cor. 5: 1-5).

Christ is our hope, because he has opened for us the gates of heaven, through his passion, cross, and resurrection. As we learn in the teachings of St. Peter: *“By his great mercy, we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,”* (1 Pt 1:3). Jesus instills in us this living hope!

## **Mary, our Hope**

As we start a new year in our pilgrimage towards eternal life, the Church direct our minds and hearts towards Mary, the Mother of God and our blessed Mother. Why? Because She is our hope on the way.

**First, Mary is a model of hope for us.** After listening to the angel's message, Mary remains always faithful and hopeful of God's promises. Then, She stands firm near the cross of her Son, waiting for the divine promises to be fulfilled. Before Pentecost, She awaits with the apostles the coming of the Holy Spirit. After Pentecost, Mary sustains the Church's hope despite the threat of persecutions. She is the model of hope for the community of believers.

**Second, Mary is not only the model of hope, but She is our hope as well.** On our difficult path through history, between the “already” of the salvation obtained by Jesus and the “not yet” of its fulfillment in our lives, we know we can count on the help of Mary, the Mother of God and our Mother.

Some people outside the Church cannot endure our calling Mary our hope. They say that God alone is our hope, and that He curses those who put their trust in creatures, according to the prophet Jeremiah: *“Cursed is the person who trusts in human beings.”* (Jer. 17:5).

Mary, they argue, is a creature, and how can a creature be our hope? But in spite of this, the Church encourages us to raise our voices to call Mary our hope, as we pray: *“Hail, holy Queen, Mother of Mercy, our life, our sweetness and our hope.”*

St. Thomas Aquinas explains that we can place our hope in a person in two ways: as a principal cause and as a mediate cause. For example, those who expect something from a king put their trust in him as their sovereign, and in his ministers or his favorites as intercessors.

When the favor is granted, it actually comes from the king, though the favorite is the intermediary. For this reason, the petitioners have a right to call the minister or favorite through whom they received it their "hope."

The King of Heaven and earth, Jesus our Lord, desires to enrich us with His graces. But because confidence is a necessary condition for being heard, and because He wants to

increase our confidence, He has given us His own Mother as our Mother and as intercessor on our behalf and has granted her all power to help us.

Therefore, it is perfectly reasonable to call Mary our hope. *“We trust, as St. Robert Bellarmine tells us, that we shall obtain through her intercession the graces we would not obtain through our own unaided prayers.”*

And as St Anselm teaches: *“We pray to her so that the dignity of the intercessor may make up for our own lack of worthiness. And so, our prayer to Mary does not come from any lack of confidence in the mercy of God, but rather from fear of our own unworthiness.”*

### **Mary is the great sign that leads us to Heaven**

We read in the book of Revelation: *“A great sign appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars,”* (Rv. 12:1).

Preserved from original sin, she became the virginal temple of the Word made flesh, the Mother of God, and now, She is our great “sign of hope.” The Blessed Virgin Mary from heaven shines before us, pilgrims on earth, *“as a sign of certain hope and comfort until the day of the Lord shall come,”* (Lumen gentium, n 68).

She is the Star of the Sea, “Stella Maris.” Let us follow Our Star. She is the great sign of hope given to us by God.

Today, in the words of John Bosco, we pray to her:

*Most Holy Virgin Mary,  
how sweet it is to come to your feet  
imploring your perpetual help.  
If earthly mothers cease not to remember their children,  
how can you, the most loving of all mothers forget us?  
Grant to us, we implore you,  
your perpetual help in all our needs,  
in every sorrow, and especially in all our temptations.  
Help the weak, cure the sick, and convert sinners.  
Obtain for us, O Mary,  
that having invoked you on earth  
we may love and eternally thank you in heaven. Amen*