

# Mary, Mother of Mercy: Christ, the Power of Merciful Love

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Where does the title, "Mary, Mother of Mercy," come from? We have many popular prayers that speak of Mary as Mother of Mercy. For example, "Hail holy Queen, Mother of mercy" ... and, later: "turn, then, your eyes of mercy towards us." In another prayer, the *Memorare*, we hear: "To you I come, before you I stand, sinful and sorrowful, O Mother of the Word incarnate, despise not my petitions but in your mercy, hear and answer me."

Pope John Paul II refers to Mary as Mother of Mercy in his 1980 encyclical, *Dives in Misericordia*:

Mary is also the one who obtained mercy in a particular and exceptional way ... Mary, then, is the one who has the deepest knowledge of the mystery of God's mercy. She knows its price, she knows how great it is. In this sense, we call her the "Mother of mercy" (§9).

Note that the Hebrew word for mercy, *rahamim*, comes from *rehem*, a mother's womb. God's mercy must have something of a maternal warmth about it—unconditional, intimate, and nurturing love, symbolized by a mother's womb. God's mercy is, therefore, tender and affectionate, life-giving and indispensable. God chose Mary to reveal this merciful love to us. Therefore, we need Mary in our lives as Christians.

God has given us a mother for a reason. At the foot of the cross, Jesus said to his beloved disciple, St. John: "Here is your Mother," and he said to Mary: "Here is your son" (Jn 19:27). Mary was able to stand firm at the foot of the cross—a merciful love is a strong love! Merciful love is capable of withstanding the cross; capable of withstanding difficulties and challenges. How many times in our lives are we in need of that firm and strong love of Mary?

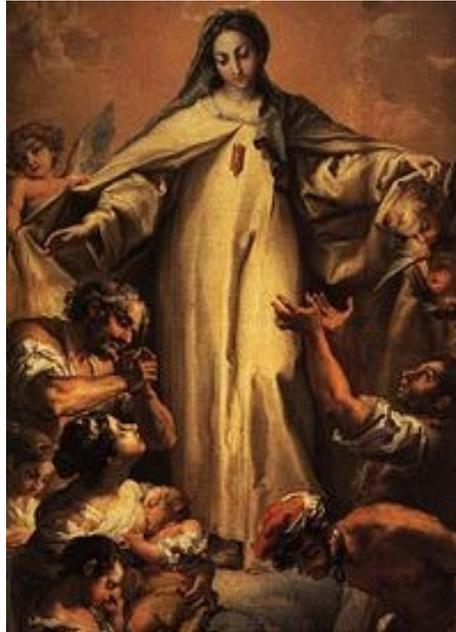
## Through Mary, the divine life is born in us

In those words, spoken by Christ from the cross, "This is your son," Mary is given her mission: to form the image and likeness of Christ in each of her children. In some ways, the mercy she shares with us is to help form the face of Christ in us. Mary, our Mother, desires that the life of Christ grows in us, his divine life in us grows and becomes strong. When we come to Mary, Mother of mercy, when we ask for her help, what is it for? Is it to help the life of Jesus grow in us? Is it so that we can become more Christ-like?

## Through Mary, Christ is born in us, Christ matures in us

The desire of Mary is to see that each one of us grows up as her children: growing up in faith, growing up in charity. If we draw close to her, she will teach us how to be more mature in our following Christ.

For many years, I lived my faith in a very



immature way. I did not know Jesus; I felt distant from him. I went to Church on Sunday, but I did not know Jesus. I was working as a doctor, a surgeon. I was doing my work and being praised. But my love was quite immature. It needed to grow up.

I remember saying a prayer before a job interview: "Mother Mary, I want this job. Seeing as it is for three years, I will go to Lourdes three times as payment." So, I went to the interview, got the job, and, then, forgot the promise.

A year later, I walked into a church, where I saw a poster which read: "Doctors needed for Lourdes!" with a big finger pointing at me. "Okay," I said. "I surrender. You win. I'm going!"

I was so very cautious to get to know the love of God. I don't know about you, but sometimes, we are so afraid of God's mercy: "What will he ask me? He will take something away. He will make me do something I don't want." These are all signs of immaturity in love. It is the selfish, adolescent syndrome: "Gimme, gimme, gimme...!"

But, little by little, Mary was teaching me how to trust more in the Lord, to trust in his mercy over my life. She taught me not to be so *stingy* in front of him! I learned, instead, to be more generous. In that experience of Lourdes, Mary helped open my eyes to the power of Christ's merciful love in my life.

When I went back home after my time in Lourdes, many of my colleagues were teasing me about seeing miracles. They asked: "Did you see the lame walking? Did you see the deaf hear?" So I responded: "Yes! I saw a blind person opening his eyes." But the miracle was that I opened **my** eyes, and saw the need for the mercy of God. That

is what the world needs, as well: to experience the power of Christ's merciful love. This love can fix our brokenness.

## Where God's mercy meets human misery

The Latin word for mercy, *misericordia*, is derived from two words, "poor" and "heart." In Jesus, in his crucified love, he receives all human misery, pouring out his merciful love on the world. This mercy can heal the brokenness of the world today! This merciful love can put back the broken pieces, making the person whole again.

## To be sharers of God's mercy to others

In Lk 6:36, Jesus gives us a commandment: "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."

We are called to be instruments of God's mercy, revealing the power of God's mercy in our lives. It is not only to experience mercy, but that others can experience his mercy through our lives.

Do people experience God's mercy through me?

For example, if I keep a record of all the wrongs done to me, is this being merciful?

Merciful love does not keep a record of wrongs done against me (1 Cor 13:6). We need to see others with the eyes of mercy.

We know that Jesus looks at us with eyes of mercy. But what if we look at others with eyes of revenge? Do you think that makes Jesus happy?

Be merciful! How do we see others? Do we see them with the merciful eyes of Jesus?

When you look at others, what do you see? Do you see Christ?

If you see Christ, why do you so easily get angry with others? Even the children experience this anger; so many times they are shouted at!

Jesus asks us also to show merciful love by reaching out to the "lost" ones, too.

In his parables of mercy, he talks of the lost son, the lost coin, and the lost sheep. He wishes us to seek out the lost until they are found, in the same way that we have been found. Sometimes in our families we have black sheep, who may have not performed so well. Jesus invites us to seek out these lost ones, and not give up for lost anyone we know.

Let us not be discouraged by any situation. Instead, let us rely, more and more, on God's mercy, believing that Christ's merciful love is powerful. Let us give thanks to Jesus, who asks us to be merciful to others. He desires that our families be as good as they can be, that we try to love each other as much as we can. He does not want us to become discouraged by our limitations, but rely, more and more, on the merciful love of Christ, which he has for each one of us.

# The Visions at La Salette, France

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On Saturday afternoon, September 19, 1846, two children—Maximin Guiraud (age 11) and Melanie Calvat (age 14)—were tending sheep for their employers near La Salette in the French Alps. The effects of the French Revolution which had terrorized the Church, the blood spilt during the reign of Napoleon, the increasing secularization of social thought, and the rising political turmoil enveloping Europe had taken a serious toll on the faith of the people. In the parish of La Salette, fewer and fewer people attended Mass and the sacraments were neglected. Cursing had overtaken praying; licentiousness, purity; and greed and self-indulgence, piety and sacrifice.

Melanie, one of eight children, came from a poor family and began working at age seven. She had no schooling, knew only bits of the Catechism, infrequently attended Mass, and could hardly recite the Our Father or the Hail Mary. Similarly, Maximin, whose mother had died and who did not like his stepmother, had little religious education and no schooling.

While they were tending their sheep, they saw a brilliant light, brighter than the sun. As they approached, they noticed a "Beautiful Lady" seated on a rock and crying, with her face in her hands. In tears, she stood and spoke to them in their local French dialect. She wore a headdress topped by a lucent crown with a band of roses, a dress with beams of light, and slippers edged with roses. Around her neck hung a golden crucifix: on one end of the cross beam was a hammer and nails, and on the other, a pincher. Over her shoulders was a heavy chain.

She said, "**Come to me, my children. Do not be afraid. I am here to tell something of the greatest importance.**"

She continued, "**If my people will not obey, I shall be compelled to loose my Son's arm. It is so heavy, so pressing that I can no longer restrain it. How long I have suffered for you! If my Son is not to cast you off, I am obliged to entreat Him without ceasing. But you take not the least notice of that. No matter how well you pray in the future, no matter how well you act, you will never be able to make up to me what I have endured for your sake.**

**God has appointed you six days for working. The seventh He has reserved for Himself. And no one will give it to Him. This it is which causes the weight of my Son's arm to be crushing.**

**The cart drivers cannot swear without bringing in my Son's name. These are the two things which make my Son's arms so burdensome.**

**If the harvest is spoiled, it is your own fault. I warned you last year by means of the potatoes. You paid no heed. Quite the reverse, when you discovered that the potatoes had rotted, you swore, you abused my Son's**

**name. They will continue to rot, and by Christmas this year there will be none left.**

**If you have grain, it will do no good to sow it, for what you sow the beasts will devour, and any part of it that springs up will crumble into dust when you thresh it.**

**A great famine is coming. But before that happens, the children under seven years of age will be seized with trembling and die in their parent's arms. The people will pay for their sins by hunger. The grapes will rot, and the walnuts will turn bad."**

Truly a sobering message!

Then Our Lady said, "**If people are converted, the rocks will become piles of wheat, and it will be found that the potatoes have sown themselves.**"

She then asked the children, "**Do you say your prayers well, my children?"**

"No, we hardly say them at all," they mumbled.

**"Ah, my children, it is very important to say them, at night and in the morning. When you don't have time, at least say an Our Father and a Hail Mary. And when you can, say more."**

Our Lady then returned to her chastisement of the people:

**"Only a few rather old women go to Mass in the Summer. All the rest work every Sunday throughout the Summer. And in Winter, when they don't know what to do with themselves, they go to Mass only to poke fun at religion. During Lent they flock to the butcher shops, like dogs."**

She concluded saying, "**My children, you will make this known to all my people.**" She then walked away, up a steep path, and disappeared in a bright light.

The children repeated the story to each of their employers. When the people ascertained that the stories matched, and several pious people concluded this had been an apparition of the Blessed Mother, the children were sent to the parish priest of La Salette. The priest recounted the children's story at Mass. The government officials began an investigation, and the children maintained their story despite threats of imprisonment. The case was then submitted to Bishop Bruillard of Grenoble, who initiated a thorough investigation of the Apparition.

Meanwhile, more miraculous cures occurred. The greatest miracle was truly spiritual: people started to attend Mass faithfully and confess regularly, they stopped working on Sundays, and they returned to living a pious and devotional life. Pilgrimages to the site became increasingly popular. Five years later, on September 19, 1851, Bishop Bruillard determined that the apparition "bore in itself all the marks of truth and that



the faithful are justified in believing it to be certain and indubitable." A real conversion of the people had taken place.

As we ponder this apparition, the message of our Blessed Mother is as pertinent now as then:

- How many people forsake Sunday Mass but take time for the newspaper, sports, or shopping?
- How many have not been to Confession in years?
- How many use our Lord's name as a common profanity?
- How many fail to pray each day?
- How many entertain such blasphemies as *The DaVinci Code*?

Oh yes, the message still resounds. The world and each of us is in need of conversion. Let us turn to Our Lady of La Salette, and offer her Memorare:

**Remember, Our Lady of La Salette, true mother of Sorrows, the tears you shed for us on Calvary. Remember also the care you have taken to keep us faithful to Christ, your Son. Having done so much for your children, you will not now abandon us. Comforted by this consoling thought, we come to you pleading, despite our infidelities and ingratitude. Virgin of Reconciliation, do not reject our prayers, but intercede for us, obtain for us the grace to love Jesus above all else. May we console you by living a holy life and so come to share the eternal life Christ gained by His cross. Amen.**