

Mary, Mediatrix of Grace

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Closely related to the Catholic teaching on Mary's cooperation in the redemption is the teaching that, with through and under her Son, she is Mediatrix of all graces. What exactly does this mean?

The term Mediatrix in itself could refer to either the objective redemption (the once-for-all earning a title to grace for all men), to the subjective redemption (the distribution of this grace to individual men), or to both. It is most usual to use it to refer only to subjective redemption, i.e., the process of giving out the fruits of the objective redemption, throughout all centuries. We must consider whether or not the term Mediatrix applies to all graces or only to some. We will ask also about the nature of the mediation: is it only by way of intercession, that is, does Mary simply pray to her Son that he may give us grace, or does God also use her as an instrument in distributing grace.

To begin, we can say without doubt that the title "Mediatrix" is justified, and applies to all graces for certain, by her cooperation in acquiring all graces on Calvary.

The Second Vatican Council (*Lumen gentium* # 61-62), said:

... in suffering with Him as He died on the cross, she cooperated in the work of the Savior, in an altogether singular way, by obedience, faith, hope, and burning love, to restore supernatural life to souls. As a result she is our Mother in the order of grace.

This motherhood of Mary in the economy of grace lasts without interruption, from the consent which she gave in faith at the annunciation, and which she unhesitatingly bore with under the cross, even to the perpetual consummation of all the elect. For after being assumed into heaven, she has not put aside this saving function, but by her manifold intercession, she continues to win the gifts of eternal salvation for us. By her motherly love, she takes care of the brothers of her Son who are still in pilgrimage and in dangers and difficulties, until they be led through to the happy fatherland. For this reason, the Blessed Virgin is invoked in the Church under the titles of Advocate, Auxiliatrix, Adiuatrix, and Mediatrix. This however it to be so understood that it takes nothing away, or adds nothing to the dignity and efficacy of Christ the one Mediator. For no creature can ever be put on the same level with the Incarnate Word and Redeemer...."

We notice that Vatican II did not add the words "of all graces." However, as many papal texts point out, Mary's role in dispensation flows logically from her role in acquiring all graces. Further, the Council itself added a note on the above passage, in which it refers us to the texts of Leo XIII,



Adiutricem populi, St. Pius X, *Ad diem illum*, Pius XI, *Miserentissimus Redemptor*, and Pius XII, Radiomessage to Fatima.

Leo XIII, in the text referred to, spoke of her, as we saw above, as having "practically limitless power." St. Pius X said she was the "dispensatrix of all the gifts, and is the "neck" connecting the Head of the Mystical Body to the Members. But all power flows through the neck. Pius XII said "Her kingdom is as vast as that of her Son and God, since nothing is excluded from her dominion." These and many other texts speak in varied ways of Mary as Mediatrix of all graces, so often that the teaching has become infallible.

Objection

Protestants object to this, saying that there is only one mediator: 1 Tim 2:5. We agree that there are many ways in which Christ is the only mediator between God and man. 1) There is only one mediator who is such by very nature, being both true God and true man. 2) There is only one mediator whose whose work is necessary, without whom, in God's plan, there could be no salvation. 3) There is only one mediator who depends on no one else for power.

Mary differs on all three counts. 1) Mary only a creature, but it was appropriate that God be freely choose her as Mediatrix because he had made her Mother of the God-man, the Redeemer--it was she who on behalf of the whole human race consented to God's plan of salvation by proclaiming herself the handmaid of the Lord. 2) Her role was not necessary, since Christ was and is the perfect Redeemer and the perfect Mediator. Rather, Mary was associated with her Son by the free decision of the Father, a decision which we cannot ignore. 3) Her whole ability to do anything comes entirely from her Son, and hence we are not contradicting *Lumen gentium* # 62 which says no creature can be ever counted together with Him. Really, the Father did not need her at all, except that if He decreed the incarnation, He necessarily decreed a Mother: she was and is that Mother. But everything else in which He has employed her is not needed.

Yet, if we recall the economy of redemption,

it is clear that the Father wants everything to be as rich as possible, so that He will not stop with something lesser if there is more than can be done. Really, the incarnation in a palace, without death, would have been infinite in merit and satisfaction, as we have seen in the section on her cooperation in the redemption.

Further, the principle of St. Thomas helps here. In *Summa Theologiae* I. 19. 5. c., Thomas says that it pleases God to have one thing in place to serve as a title or reason for granting something further, even though that title does not move Him. It is His love of all goodness and good order that leads Him to act this way. Hence too, even though Calvary earned infinite forgiveness and graces, the Father wills to provide titles for giving out these, in the Mass. Even though He did not need even our Lady, yet He willed to employ her. Even though there is no need of any other saints, in objective or subjective redemption, yet He wills to add them--all to make everything, every title, as rich as possible.

Lumen gentium speaks of her as taking care of all her children. We are extremely numerous, but yet not infinite in number.

Therefore, we are not too numerous for her to see and care for. For her capacity for that infinite vision of God is in proportion to her love on earth, so great that Pius IX, as we saw, said it was so great that "none greater under God can be thought of, and no one but God can comprehend it."

Is her mediation merely by intercession, prayer for us to her Son and to God the Father? Or does she also play a role in the distribution of graces from the Father through her Son to us? Many today, influenced by Protestant theology, tend to speak of grace merely as favor, and so say grace is not a thing given. But that would imply Pelagianism, the heresy that says that we can be saved by our own power. For if God merely sits there and smiles at me, and gives me nothing, that would mean that I had to do it by my own power.

So we answer, since Mary was associated with her Son in acquiring grace for us, she will also share with him in distributing that grace to us. This fits well with the words of the Popes, who call her the *ministra* of grace, meaning that she administers or dispenses it. So Pope Leo XIII, *Iucunda semper*, said:

"... when He [the Father] has been invoked with excellent prayers, our humble voice turns to Mary; in accordance with no other law than that law of conciliation and petition which was expressed as follows by St. Bernardine of Siena: 'Every grace that is communicated to this world has a threefold course. For by excellent order, it is dispensed from God to Christ, from Christ to the Virgin, from the Virgin to us.'"

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Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal

In 1830, Zoe Laboure was a 24 year old novice with the Sisters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul. She had lost her mother at a young age. She came to the sisters of Charity because of a dream she had had of St. Vincent who beckoned her. She took the religious name "Catherine" at her entrance into the order. To those who knew her, she was unremarkable, for she hid her spiritual life from their sight.

At 11:30 pm on the night of July 18th, Catherine was awakened from her sleep by a child who stood at the foot of her bed. "Come to the chapel," the child said. "The Blessed Virgin is waiting for you." Fearful that she might be discovered by the sisters who kept night watch, nonetheless, Catherine followed the child, who appeared to her to be no more than five years old. As she went along, the lamps were lit before her, and she walked along unnoticed.

As she entered the chapel, the child once again said: "The Blessed Virgin awaits." He led her to the altar rail, where she knelt in stunned wonder for several minutes. Suddenly she heard the rustle of silk as a beautiful woman emerged from the sacristy and took the Director's seat to the left of the altar. To Catherine, she resembled a portrait of St. Ann she had seen, but she was quick to point out the face was not that of St. Ann.

Doubting that this was the Blessed Virgin, Catherine was reassured by the child that this was, indeed, the Mother of God. Catherine approached, knelt at her feet and placed her hands on the Lady's lap. Mary began to speak.

She told Catherine that God had destined

her for a great mission, and that she should trust His guidance. She warned Catherine that she would have many trials in this unless she shared everything with her spiritual director. She then told Catherine about many of the sorrows that would unfold in France in the decades to come. Religion and the Faith would be under fire by anti-Catholic forces. Blood would be spilt in the streets, the Cross would be trampled. "But come," our Lady said, "to the Foot of the Altar. There graces will be shed upon all, but especially upon those who ask for them."

Our Lady then returned to the theme she

had begun earlier, reprimanding the communities of St. Vincent DePaul for the laxity of the rule that came about as the two orders (The Vincentian priests and brothers and the Daughters of Charity) sought to restructure following the French Revolution and the reign of Napoleon Bonaparte. If they returned to the rigor of the rule, she encouraged, then peace and prosperity would come to the Order and they would flourish so much that others would seek to be joined with them. And indeed, Mother Elizabeth Ann Seton, from Emmitsburg, Maryland, sought to merge her newly formed American order with the Daughters of Charity. They were admitted in 1849, some 19 years after this first apparition to St. Catherine Laboure! (But I digress)

Our Lady then returned to the troubles France would experience in years to come. But she encouraged Catherine to withstand these trials. Our Lady would be with her and with the children of St. Vincent de Paul.

Having finished her conversation, the Blessed Virgin rose and walked back toward the Sacristy where she disappeared. The child led Catherine back to her dormitory and her bed. As Catherine settled back into bed, she heard the clock strike 2.

Later that year, on November 27th, the vigil of the First Sunday of Advent, Catherine was at vespers with the whole community. Suddenly, she was transported out of herself and witnessed a new vision there at the altar.

This time, our Lady appeared standing upon a globe. (Catherine assumed it was a globe for she could only see half of it.) Our Lady was dressed in shimmering white and Catherine could see the tresses of her hair bound by lace beneath the veil. She held in her hand a golden ball which she raised up to heaven. Catherine, wondering what this ball represented, heard an inner voice say: "This sphere represents France, the World and every individual."

The scene then began to change. The globe in our Lady's hands disappeared and our Lady dropped her hands to her side. Catherine noticed that every finger was clad with rings of varying intensity. Some were brighter, others dimmer. These rings shed their light upon the globe at our Lady's feet. Atop the globe she saw a hideous serpent crushed beneath the feet of the woman.

Catherine wondered about the rings and the light they spread over the world. "These rings" she was told "represent graces for which men pray. There are many graces which God desires to give to the world, which men do not ask for.



These are the dimmer rings that you see."

As Catherine continued to gaze, a frame formed around the image and on the frame, words: O Mary conceived without sin, Pray for us who have recourse to thee.

The whole image seemed to turn and the vision of our Lady disappeared. Now Catherine saw 12 stars in the frame. In the center was a large M surmounted by a Cross. Beneath the M the heart of Jesus, surrounded by thorns and the heart of Mary, pierced by a sword, could be discerned.

"Have a medal struck from the image you have seen," the inner voice instructed. "All who wear it will receive great graces. Graces will abound for those who wear it with confidence."

The vision then faded "like a candle that has been blown out," Catherine commented.

In the years that followed, many of the horrors foretold came to pass in France and throughout the world. Catherine managed to maintain her anonymity within the community. Very few discerned that she was the sister graced with the vision which led to the promulgation of the Medal of the Immaculate Conception, more commonly known as "the Miraculous Medal". As for the medal, it gained its reputation as being "miraculous" because of the many cures, conversions, and miracles attributed to its use. Many received these graces, not through the medal itself, but because they heeded the admonition: "Come to the foot of the Altar..." It was their Faith that became their Salvation.