

Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God

January 1, 2017



*O God, who through the fruitful virginity  
of the Blessed Mary bestowed on the human race  
the grace of eternal salvation, grant, we pray,  
that we may experience the intercession of her,  
through whom we were found worthy  
to receive the author of life our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son.  
Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

Collect for the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God

Today we celebrate a varied number of events. Within the Catholic Church we celebrate the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God as well as the World Day of Peace. In our civil society, we celebrate the beginning of a New Year. Throughout the world many people rang in 2017 in many diverse ways from being at parties, watching "ball" drops, and maybe even going to bed early.

This particular feast day introduces us to an ancient dogma proclaiming the Divine motherhood Mary. There are four dogmas stating Mary's personal relationship with God and her role in human salvation.

### **1) Divine Motherhood**

*Mary's divine motherhood was proclaimed at the Council of Ephesus in 431.*

*Various names are used to describe Mary's role as mother of Jesus. She is called "Mother of God" which translates the more accurately stated Greek term "Theotokos" or "Birth-giver of God."*

*The Council of Ephesus (431) attributed to Mary the title, Mother of God. This needs to be read against the Council's declaration that in Christ there are two natures, one divine and one human, but only one person. Indeed, according to the Council the holy virgin is the Mother of God since she begot according to the flesh the Word of God made flesh. This decision was further explained by the Council of Chalcedon (451) which says with regard to Mary's divine motherhood:*

*"...begotten from the Father before the ages as regards his godhead, and in the last days, the same, because of us and because of our salvation begotten from the Virgin Mary, the Theotokos, as regards his manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten..."*

*Mary's Divine Motherhood was not the object of an independent or exclusive dogmatic declaration. The statement is embedded in texts defining the person and natures of Jesus Christ. Thus, the dogma of Divine Motherhood becomes an integral part of the*



*Christological dogma. This does not diminish its definitive and binding character. The dogma of Divine Motherhood is generally accepted by all Christian denominations.*

### **2) Perpetual Virginity**



*The expression perpetual virginity, ever-virgin, or simply "Mary the Virgin" refers primarily to the conception and birth of Jesus. From the first formulations of faith, especially in baptismal formulas or professions of faith, the Church professed that Jesus Christ was conceived without human seed by the power of the Holy Spirit only. Here lies the decisive meaning of expressions such as "conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary," "Mary's virginal conception," or "virgin birth." The early baptismal formula (since the 3rd century) state Mary's virginity without further explaining it, but there is no doubt about its physical meaning. Later statements are more explicit. Mary conceived "without any detriment to her virginity, which remained inviolate even after his birth" (Council of the Lateran, 649).*

*Although never explicated in detail, the Catholic Church holds as dogma that Mary was and is Virgin before, in and after Christ's birth. It stresses thus the radical novelty of the Incarnation and Mary's no less radical and exclusive dedication to her mission as mother of her Son, Jesus Christ. Vatican II reiterated the teaching about Mary, the Ever-Virgin, by stating that Christ's birth did not diminish Mary's virginal integrity but sanctified it. The Catechism of the Catholic Church ponders the deeper meaning of the virgin bride and perpetual virginity (499-507). It also maintains that Jesus Christ was Mary's only child. The so-called "brothers and sisters" are close relations.*

### **3) Immaculate Conception**

*The solemn definition of Mary's Immaculate Conception is like Divine Motherhood and Perpetual Virginity part of the Christological doctrine, but it was proclaimed as an independent dogma by Pope Pius IX in his Apostolic Constitution "Ineffabilis Deus" (December 8, 1854). Though highlighting a privilege of Mary, it, in fact stresses the dignity and holiness required to become "Mother of God." The privilege of the Immaculate Conception is the source and basis for Mary's all-holiness as Mother of God.*



*More specifically, the dogma of the Immaculate Conception states "that the most Blessed Virgin Mary, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege from Almighty God and in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, was kept free of every stain of original sin."*

*This dogma has both a "negative" and a "positive" meaning which complement each other. The "negative" meaning stresses Mary's freedom from original sin thanks to the anticipated or retroactive (here called preventive) grace of Christ's redemptive act. By the same token, the dogma suggests Mary's all-holiness. This "positive" meaning is the consequence of the absence of original sin. Mary's life is permanently and intimately related to God, and thus she is the all-holy.*

*Although difficult to explain, original sin provokes disorderliness in thought and behavior, especially with regard to the primacy of God's presence in our life. Consequently, in declaring Mary immaculately conceived, the Church sees in Mary one who never denied God the least sign of love. Thus, the dogma declares that from her beginning Mary was exceptionally holy and in constant union with the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit.*

#### **4) The Assumption**



*This Marian dogma was proclaimed by Pope Pius XII on November 1, 1950 on his Encyclical *Munificentissimus Deus*.*

*A distinction needs to be made between Ascension and Assumption. Jesus Christ, Son of God and Risen Lord, ascended into heaven, a sign of divine power. Mary, on the contrary, was elevated or assumed into heaven by the power and grace of God.*

*The dogma states that "Mary, Immaculate Mother of God ever Virgin, after finishing the course of her life on earth, was taken up in body and soul to heavenly glory." This definition as well as that of the Immaculate Conception makes not only reference to the universal, certain and firm consent of the Magisterium but makes allusion to the concordant belief of the faithful. The Assumption had been a part of the Church's spiritual and doctrinal patrimony for centuries. It had been part of theological reflection but also of the liturgy and was part of the sense of the faithful.*

*This dogma has no direct basis in scripture. It was nonetheless declared "divinely revealed," meaning that it is contained implicitly in divine Revelation. It may be understood as the logical conclusion of Mary's vocation on earth, and the way she lived her life in union with God and her mission. The assumption may be seen as a consequence of Divine Motherhood. Being through, with, and for her Son on earth, it would seem fitting for Mary to be through, with, and for her Son in heaven, too. She was on earth the generous associate of her Son. The Assumption tells us that this association continues in heaven. Mary is indissolubly linked to her Son on earth and in heaven. In heaven, Mary's active involvement in salvation history continues: "Taken up to heaven, she did not lay aside her salvific duty ... By her maternal love she cares for the brothers and sisters of her Son who still journey on earth" (LG).*

*Mary is the "eschatological icon of the Church" (CCC 972), meaning the Church contemplates in Mary her own end of times.*

*The definition of the dogma does not say how the transition from Mary's earthly state to her heavenly state happened. Did Mary die? Was she assumed to heaven without prior separation of soul and body? The question remains open for discussion. However, the opinion that Mary passed through death as her Son did, has the stronger support in tradition.*

*Glorified in body and soul, Mary is already in the state that will be ours after the resurrection of the dead.*

<http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/resources/mary/general-information/the-four-marian-dogmas/>



*Beginning this year in union with the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, listening to our Holy Father, Francis, we need to be people of nonviolence. This is the 50th Anniversary of the World Day of Peace.*

*"Peacebuilding through active nonviolence is the natural and necessary complement to the Church's continuing efforts to limit the use of force by the application of moral norms; she does so by her participation in the work of international institutions and through the competent contribution made by so many Christians to the drafting of legislation at all levels. Jesus himself offers a "manual" for this strategy of peacemaking in the Sermon on the Mount. The eight Beatitudes (cf. Mt 5:3-10) provide a portrait of the person we could describe as blessed, good and authentic. Blessed are the meek, Jesus tells us, the merciful and the peacemakers, those who are pure in heart, and those who hunger and thirst for justice. This is also a programme and a challenge for political and religious leaders, the heads of international institutions, and business and media executives: to apply the Beatitudes in the exercise of their respective responsibilities. It is a challenge to build up society, communities and businesses by acting as peacemakers. It is to show mercy by refusing to discard people, harm the environment, or seek to win at any cost. To do so requires "the willingness to face conflict head on, to resolve it and to make it a link in the chain of a new process". To act in this way means to choose solidarity as a way of making history and building friendship in society. Active nonviolence is a way of showing that unity is truly more powerful and more fruitful than conflict. Everything in the world is inter-connected. Certainly, differences can cause frictions. But let us face them constructively and non-violently, so that "tensions and oppositions can achieve a diversified and life-giving unity," preserving "what is valid and useful on both sides". I pledge the assistance of the Church in every effort to build peace through active and creative nonviolence."*