

**From the Meditations
of St. John Baptist de La Salle**

**SOME ASPECTS
OF HIS MARIAN DOCTRINE
(2/3)**

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In the meantime, Joseph who was espoused to Mary and aware of her condition had some difficulties of his own. Only the direct command of God, given to him through an angel, led him to remain with her. (110:2) On her part, Mary also had an opportunity at this time to practice obedience. God had told her that Elizabeth her cousin would shortly have a child. This information was communicated in such a way as to suggest that she should visit and assist Elizabeth during the birth of her son. This she did, promptly and without any delay, "having in view only the accomplishment of what God required of her..." Then, the Founder said, speaking of her dispositions in this matter, that her "very promptitude drew down the blessings of the Almighty. The Lord worked great wonders through her during the visit." (141:1)

One wonder God worked through Mary was "to sanctify John the Baptist by the presence of Jesus Christ, His Son, and to deliver him from Original Sin while he was still in the womb of his mother... (141:2; 162:1) In this way the precursor was prepared for his mission, "the destruction of sin," which was the only thing he lived for after this. (162:2)

Also, through the presence of Mary, God communicated Himself to Elizabeth, filled her with His holy spirit, and made known to her that Mary was the Mother of God. (141:3) Repeatedly in this meditation De La Salle insisted that it was because of the obedience of Mary and her promptness in its practice that such miraculous events took place. At the same time, though, he also portrayed Mary as the channel through which God gives his grace to humans so that his work can be accomplished in this world.

Not too long after the birth of the Baptist, Mary along with Joseph had to make another journey, this time going to Bethlehem in obedience to the decree of Caesar Augustus. In his meditations for the Vigil of the Nativity and for the Feast itself the Founder repeated portions of the traditional Christmas story, but gave them a slant of his own. When he said, "there was no place for them in the inn," (Lk 2:7) the Saint insisted it was both because of their poverty as well as of how "people of the world" see and judge people and things. (85:1) This was why when the Son of God came into the world, he was born in a stable and "wrapped in his swaddling-clothes, and laid in a manger." (Lk 2:7) So it was he came into the world deprived of all human comfort. (85:2; 86:1)

Continuing his retelling of the Christmas story, the Founder concluded with the account of how the shepherds came to adore the new-born Son of God. (Lk 2:16, 20) His main emphasis here is on the poverty of Jesus and the faith

of the poor shepherds, who recognize him as God because of, rather than in spite of, his poverty. And if the poverty of the Christ Child attracted men and led them to believe in him, a similar condition is required of those who would be his ministers, the Brothers included. So he stated most emphatically, "Nothing so attracts souls to God as the poverty and humility of those who try to lead them to Him ..." At the same time, however, he reminded them that the shepherds found Jesus with Mary his Mother, who shared his poverty and deprivation. And once again he was saying it is through Mary, who was so like Jesus, that we go to and find him. (86:3)

Two meditations of De La Salle deal with the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple forty days after his birth, and the Purification of his Mother which took place at the same time. The first is for the Sunday within the Octave of Christmas (5), and the second, for 2 February. (105) The former deals almost exclusively with Jesus as "a sign that is spoken against," (Lk 2:34) while the latter deals with these "historical events" in the lives of Jesus and Mary. Therefore, here we will concentrate on what the Founder said in the second of these meditations.

After summarizing the events commemorated in this feast, the Saint led up to the spirit of the mystery in these words:

The Most Blessed Virgin went to the Temple for her purification at the time prescribed by the law, and thus submitted to the law, not wishing to claim any exemption, although she was in no wise bound to do so, for as Mother of the Son of God, she conceived and gave birth to her child without violating her virginity.

You should admire Mary's humility in this mystery. She wished to appear as one of the common people, though she was far above other women in her double quality of Virgin and Mother... (104:1)

Here the Founder presented Mary to his disciples as a model of obedience as well as of humility. (104:1,3) And for him the spirit of the mystery was to "Learn from her (Mary) never to differentiate yourself from others, and never to ask for exemptions from the observances of Rule ... (104:1) Acting this way, the Saint wrote, is not without its advantages, even in this world. For he asserted that it was the obedience of Jesus and the obedient humility of Mary which caused God, through the holy Simeon, to praise and to bless Son and Mother alike. All this led him to conclude, "How good it is to give oneself to God! The Lord rewards us even in this life. ..." (104:3)

Another traditional mystery of the Holy Childhood, recalled by the Feast of the Epiphany, is the basis for De La Salle's meditation written for this day. Here once again the holy priest associated the presence of the Mother with that of her Son, giving an important place in what he termed the "court" of the Infant God. (96:3)

Likewise intimately associated with the Feast of the Magi and stemming from it is the traditional story of the flight of the Holy Family into Egypt. In addition to finding much to admire in all aspects of Joseph's conduct in connection with these events, (6:1,3; 110:2,3) the Saint praised the conduct of both Mary and her spouse while in Egypt. He wrote:

... It seems that St. Joseph, the Most Blessed Virgin and the Child Jesus remained so unknown in Egypt that they were never spoken of...

... An obscure and unknown existence was what pleased the Holy Family best ... (6:2)

Using these statements as his starting point, the Saint then made the following recommendations to his disciples:

When you are obliged to leave your retreat to exercise your employment in the world, you should act in such a way as to remain unknown.

Your only thought should be to acquit yourself of your ministry in so far as God requires of you ...

Thus, after the example of the Holy Family, you will not cause your name to be raised abroad, but you will be in the world merely as passersby, occupied solely in the work of God. ... (6:2)

Prior to his public life, the last event of the early years of Jesus was when, around the age of twelve, he was "lost" in the Temple of Jerusalem in connection with the celebration of the feast of the Pasch. The meditation De La Salle wrote for the First Sunday after the Epiphany, whose Gospel dealt with this event, is one of a series of nine dealing with religious obedience. So his main emphasis there is on the obedience of Jesus during these events. But still he did call attention to the concern both Mary and Joseph showed on this occasion. (7:1; 110:3)

Traditionally, the first miracle worked at Cana during a wedding feast which took place there is one of the early events of the public life of Jesus. Again, the meditation which the Founder composed that deals with the Gospel account of these events is part of his series on obedience. It has as title, "On Exact Obedience," and deals mainly with this subject. Still the Saint found occasion to stress the role of Mary in this miracle when he wrote, "... Jesus, at the request of the Blessed Virgin, His Mother, ...changed water into wine..." And once again Mary was pictured as being able to obtain any favor from her son through her prayers. At the same time, she was also portrayed as having a special knowledge of the mind of her son so that in part her intercession is efficacious because she knows how to request favors from him for us. (8:1)

For practical purposes, after the incident at Cana, Mary did not figure in the public life of her son again until the time of his passion and death. And in his meditation for the feast of St. John the Evangelist, De La Salle noted almost in passing the presence of Mary on Calvary during the crucifixion. Then, speaking of the special relationship between the Savior and John, he concluded by saying, "... when dying ... (Jesus) gave him (John) to his holy Mother as her adopted son." (88:1) And then, after having said that "The love that Jesus had for St. John, and that of St. John for Jesus, produced a reciprocal love between the Mother of Jesus and the beloved disciple," (88:3) he commented on how John fulfilled his obligations to Mary. He wrote:

... From the time Jesus said to his Mother, "Woman this is thy son," and to St. John "This is thy mother," (Jh 19:26) St. John always kept the Blessed Virgin near him and paid her every mark of affection of a son for his mother. He assisted her in all her wants, and she, in return, honored St. John with her protection before God. (88:3)

As regards Mary's life after her son's Resurrection and Ascension, the only events discussed by De La Salle were her death followed by her assumption into heaven. When writing about the last years of Mary's life and her death, he said:

The Most Blessed Virgin being consumed with the love of God during all her life, remained on the earth only with regret and through submission to the will of God. Hence death appeared sweet and agreeable to her, and as her soul was held in her body by the most slender ties, she died without pain ... her soul ... passed without effort from earth to heaven. ... for she was already disentangled from every tie that could bind her to earth. (156:1)

Then, turning his attention to the central event of this feast, he added:

The greatest favor which the Most Blessed Virgin obtained after her death ... was that she was transported

body and soul into heaven by the angels. It was fitting ... that Mary's body, which was a living heaven, should be placed in heaven immediately after her death. ... (156:3) Therefore, he said:

Our Lady remained only a short time in the tomb. A few days after her death she rose again. It was befitting that God should grant her this favor, for it would ... have been unbecoming that the body from which Jesus Christ came, should have seen corruption ... (156:2)

And he concluded:

... she has been placed above all the blessed spirits, who honor her as their Queen. It was fitting ... that the Most Blessed Virgin should be covered in glory, and that her body, ... should forthwith follow her soul to heaven. (156:3)

After saying all this, the Saint recommended to his disciples how they could enter into what he considered to be the spirit of this mystery:

The special grace which we ask of the Most Blessed Virgin on this day is a total liberation from the corruption of the age, and above all great purity. (156:2)

... Ask the Most Blessed Virgin to obtain this favor for you to-day, namely that your body, participating in the spiritual life of your soul by the mortification of the senses, may no longer have any taste for the things of this world, and may live, so to speak, as if it were in heaven. (156:3)

In brief, then, the Founder's Marian meditations set forth a very traditional and Catholic life of the Most Blessed Virgin. She was a child of the prayers and the faith of her parents, Joachim and Anne. Created to be the Mother of God, she was preserved from all sin, original as well as actual. For her part she was faithful to these special graces received from God as well as to all others given her. And from an early age she consecrated herself entirely to God and then lived apart from the world, first in the Temple in Jerusalem and later in Egypt and in Nazareth. Open to the call of God, she showed her obedience to his will at the time of the Annunciation as well as in the Visitation and at her Purification following the birth of her son. Through her Jesus came into the world, thus beginning the Mystery of our Redemption. Then, both poor and rich, Jews and Gentiles alike, as represented by the shepherds and the Magi, found Jesus with his Mother. But besides giving Jesus to the world, she also served as the channel of God's graces during events such as the Visitation or the first miracle at Cana. And throughout her life she was a concerned person as she showed when Jesus was lost in the Temple as also when she sought to assist her cousin Elizabeth or the newly wedded couple of Cana. As Simeon foretold, she shared in the suffering of her son, particularly during her presence on Calvary. And lastly, following her son's resurrection, she remained on earth only in obedience to God's will. However, after her own death she was raised to life again and assumed into heaven to join her son in glory.

As described by De La Salle, Mary was also presented as the model of many traditional Christian virtues as well as of others proper to or very necessary for religious. In numerous places, therefore, he mentioned how she practiced each of these virtues while praising her for practicing each one to a very high degree or even to perfection. Among the Christian virtues cited might be mentioned her avoidance of sin and her faithfulness to grace as well as her sharing willingly in the sufferings of her son, along with her concern for others and her deep humility – in spite of how she was favored by God. Likewise her total consecration to God joined to her perfect practice of chastity, obedience, and poverty made her, in his eyes, a model for religious, as did her love for a solitary life and her aversion for the world.