

**THE MOST BLESSED VIRGIN
IN THE DUTIES OF A CHRISTIAN,
FIRST PART
(2/2)**

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THE HAIL MARY

The exalted position of the Most Blessed Virgin over the Angels and Saints and her power for intercession in favor of Christians justify, according to De La Salle, the fact that we ought to invoke her name and have recourse to her, after the persons of the Blessed Trinity. This preeminence of Mary over the Angels and Saints is guaranteed by the practice of the Church “which has composed prayers in her honor so that they might be recited every day in public and in private” (23).

After these considerations, he begins a section dealing with the “principal prayer directed towards the Most Blessed Virgin” which is none other than the Hail Mary or angelic salutation so called “because the Archangel Gabriel was its first author”.

The excellence of this prayer is rooted in the words that make it up and they constitute a double message - that of the Archangel and that of Elizabeth - and they are inspired by the Holy Spirit. Such prophetic words contain sentiments of *greeting, praise and blessing*; but they lack *supplication*, which is proper to Christian prayer; therefore, “the Church has added others like *pray* so that, as a whole, it forms a complete prayer” (24).

In each paragraph, complete with expressions tinged with spirituality and tender affection, it is explained why and how these sentiments are appropriate, *-greeting, praise, blessing and petition* - and well deserving of the person of the Most Blessed Virgin (25).

De La Salle’s piety and devotion has always been supported by Sacred Scripture and the Church; therefore, as he ponders the importance of the Hail Mary he adds “the esteem and veneration that the Church has for this prayer which is almost always connected to Sunday prayer in the recitation of the Divine Office”. And he does this because he wants his followers to recite it together and so that, after having prayed to and petitioned God, they do the same to the Most Blessed Virgin as the effective Mediatrix; so that, during the entire Office, Mary’s intercession is present to them (26).

The pastoral guidelines of the final exhortation synthesize what the Christian’s attitude should be as regards the Hail Mary or Angelic Salutation:

- * A conviction of the need and the advantages of frequently praying the Hail Mary.
- * It should not be recited in a routine way but “*with piety and fervor*”.
- * He reminds us of the Mystery of the Incarnation: the Gospel principle of the Hail Mary and distinctive note of devotion in De La Salle’s writings.
- * Finally, because it is a sign of commitment to the Most Blessed Virgin, more than any other prayer so that she is concerned for our salvation (27).

THE OFFICE OF THE MOST BLESSED VIRGIN

The third section of Chapter Five of the third part of the second part of DC1 is headed as follows: “Concerning another principal public prayer, the Office of the Most Blessed Virgin”. Two words are very important for the reader: *principal and public*. Both of them favor the attention and interest for this study at the same time as they proclaim the meaning and scope of said prayer, recognizing that “it should be considered as one of the principal public prayers sung by the faithful” (28).

Throughout this page a thorough summary of the history of the recitation of the Office of the Most Blessed Virgin in the Church is given:

This is an ancient tradition in the Church that spread more and more to other Churches so that it used to be recited after the Divine Office.

* As the years went by, this practice was dying out in various places. Pope Pius V, taking advantage of the Encyclical written for the reform of the Divine Office, encouraged Christians, by means of the granting of indulgences, to recite the Office of the Most Blessed Virgin on a daily basis; the recommendation itself was made to Churches where the tradition was being maintained.

* Furthermore, it shows just how many Churches, Cathedrals and religious communities continued to sing this office after the Divine Office.

In addition to this historic point, the Lasallian chatechesis emerged, very devoted to the Most Blessed Virgin: “This prayer has been universally practiced and authorized by the Church so that it should be recited frequently by the faithful: such is the will of the Church” (29).

Next an autobiographical point is mentioned: it certifies that in many books on prayer at the time, published for Christians, the Office of the Most Blessed Virgin was included in order “to show them that the Church wants them to recite this in private when their situation permits it...so that they might bring upon the Church the graces that she need by the mediation of the Most Blessed Virgin” (30). In response to this desire of the Church, De La Salle edited the Office of

the Most Blessed Virgin for use by the faithful and by those in his schools. Unfortunately, not even one copy is available to us and we are unaware if he introduced some adaptations for those for whom it was intended. What we do know is that many of the editions of the DC1 throughout the years incorporate the Office of the Most Blessed Virgin.

In a long paragraph, the composition and the structure of the Office of the Most Blessed Virgin is summarized, and it is no different than that contained in the Divine Office except that the Psalms are proper to the Most Blessed Virgin and the Antiphons and collective prayers are directly addressed to her. While praying this Office “we honor the Most Blessed Virgin and through her we honor God, which is the ultimate purpose of all the Offices of the Church” (31).

The sentiments and feelings that this Office includes are similar to those found in the Divine Office, namely (32):

- * Knowledge of the Majesty of God and the greatness of Mary, contained in the readings and chapters, inspired in Sacred Scripture.
- * Praise to God by means of the Most Blessed Virgin as well as by means of the psalms, antiphons and responses.
- * Petitioning God through the Most Blessed Virgin for graces for the Church and the faithful.

CONCLUSION

It seems to me that the best way to close this discussion would be to cite how De La Salle closes the section on the

Office of the Most Blessed Virgin which is a beautiful explanation of why and how we should have a devotion to the Most Blessed Virgin.

“For those who recite the Office of the Most Blessed Virgin, it is appropriate that they carry out this practice with a very special piety and devotion. In order to obtain the fruit that the Church desires, the following should be kept in mind:

- * the excellence and the dignity of the Most Blessed Virgin in whose honor the office is recited;
- * the charity for those who place themselves under her protection;
- * the great urgency that we have for her intercession before God (33). •

(23) DC1, p. 465.

(24) *ibid*, p. 466.

(25) *ibid*, pp. 466-467.

(26) *ibid*, p. 467-468.

(27) *ibid*, p. 468.

(28) *ibid*, p. 480.

(29) *ibid*, p. 481.

(30) *ibid*, p. 481-482.

(31) *ibid*, p. 482.

(32) *ibid*, p. 483.

(33) *ibid*, p. 492. The Visit of the Most Blessed Virgin to her cousin Saint Elizabeth should serve as a model to Christians for making visits.