

Why Mary?

Why do we Catholics place so much emphasis on her? First and foremost for the simple and obvious reason that without Mary we would not have Jesus. Without the Mother of God we would have no Saviour. Well that is true of course, some might object, she was indeed God's instrument in coming to save us, but can't we go *directly* to God? Isn't Christ our only Mediator? To answer this way of thinking we must first understand that nothing and nobody can go 'directly' to God, if by this we mean 'immediately'. Only God is God. No one and nothing is His equal. Only the Father, Son and Holy Spirit can go directly to one another (so to speak) because they *are* the One Eternal Communion of the undivided Godhead. Every gift of God to His creatures must necessarily be given according to the creatures way of receiving things – that is mediated through the creaturely nature. Such is God's generosity that in creating things other than Himself, God also bends Himself to their needs. He 'mediates' Himself to them.

We human beings have a shared, physical nature. We come into being through one another, through our parents and ultimately we live and grow by ministry of the whole human family. This means that we naturally mediate life from God to one another in a shared way. God did not save us by uttering a word of command from the heavens. He came to share our nature by his birth. It is true indeed, therefore, that we come to God (or rather God comes to us) most directly and immediately in Jesus Christ, who is God made Man. But this means that He comes to us in, through and together with the whole of what is human. He comes as part of our whole human family, with all its natural bonds and structures of mediated life and love. The first and most obviously essential relationship with humanity he enters into is with Mary.

She is central to the whole saving plan of God. That may be true historically speaking, someone may continue to object, but why do you Catholics pray to her and honour her as if she *continues* to be important to your salvation history here and now? Well, first of all God does not merely use people as instruments then cast them aside. He gives people a *vocation* to share in his own loving plans for the world. It would be natural anyway for Mary, as a mother, to care about the people her Son cares about, to love them for His sake, just as she loves God more perfectly than any of us, through her uniquely intimate relationship. But the other mistake people make when raising this sort of objection is to think that our vocation comes to an end when we die. In fact our vocation comes to its perfection when we enter heaven, and continues together with Christ's own vocation, which also continues until the end of time. Our personalities do not change with death.

In fact it is a sobering thought that we will be for ever who we have become by the time we die. Whatever is not in conformity with God will then be burned away in the purification of purgatory, and whatever is conformed to Christ will be confirmed and glorified and become supremely active. The things and the people that mattered to us

on earth will continue to matter to us. This is why there are 'patron saints' of this, that and the other. It is not some silly superstition, it is the reality and glorious diversity of human beings. In Mary there is nothing that was not in conformity to Christ, so everything in her is now activated to co-operate perfectly with her Son's mission. We could say that Mary is the *patron saint of everything and of everyone*.

Wherever Mary is honoured and loved, there Christ her Son is always present and active in the most direct and powerful way. So it must be true that Mary remains central to that wider and fuller 'Body of Christ' which is the Church – the infrastructure of human relationships by which we belong to God in Jesus through mutual communion with his own sacred humanity. The fact that Jesus is the one redeeming Mediator between heaven and earth does not override that mutual belonging, the influence we have on one another and intercession of prayer that we can make for each other in Christ. It is precisely this whole fabric of humanity that Jesus redeems and brings back to the Father by his perfect mediation between heaven and earth. So far from excluding Mary, the Redeeming love of Jesus for the world includes Mary at the very heart of his concerns and his plans – not just in Galilee two thousand years ago, but now and always.

He is the center, without Him we are all lost. He is the Head and Heart from which all life and blessing flows. But all of us, if we are in communion with Him as members of His Body, also radiate wisdom and holiness, grace and goodness from Him to one another. And Mary was, and is for ever, the first and greatest vessel of grace, and the greatest mediator of His love, His wisdom and His mercies. She is overflowing with her Son's grace and compassion which she freely chooses to share with us – her Son's lesser (and less worthy) brothers and sisters. She does not do this independently of Her divine Son, but under Him as her Lord. He also does everything together with her. That is her glory and her gift, the blessing that she received by agreeing to become the Mother of God Incarnate. When we call on the name of Mary, she always answers with the name of Jesus.