

2-11-1957

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Mariological Society of America

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Recommended Citation

Mariological Society of America (1957) "Sermon of His Eminence, Samuel Cardinal Stritch, During the Holy Hour," *Marian Studies*: Vol. 8, Article 5, Pages 14-18.

Available at: https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies/vol8/iss1/5

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SERMON OF HIS EMINENCE, SAMUEL CARDINAL STRITCH, DURING THE HOLY HOUR

HERE, in the presence of our Blessed Savior, we kneel with the prayer on our lips and in our hearts that we may know better and better our Blessed Lady, whose very soul He revealed to us when, in answer to a woman's acknowledgment of her greatness deriving from her being His Mother, He said: "Rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it." To know better and better our Blessed Lady is to know better and better our Blessed Savior. Surely the King will be pleased if here in His Sacred Presence we stop to dwell on the place of His Mother in the Incarnation and Redemption, the gifts and privileges bestowed by God on her, the meaning of her spiritual maternity and what she means to us in our sanctification and salvation. Recalling all this, it seems to me that you scholars will be better prepared humbly and according to established norms to try to explore what is not defined as Catholic Faith in the field of Mariology.

Truths of Revelation are like unto a crystal, in which the little light ray is broken into myriads of colors and hues, each of which is a refraction of the same ray and each of which is seen only by long, close, continuing observation. There is nothing new in Revelation, but, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we see more fully what is really in Revelation. In this growing knowledge in the Church there is nothing contradictory, nothing that changes, nothing that breaks the continuity of unchanging and unchangeable Revelation given to the Church of Christ. In the Divine Economy, as time goes on, the Holy Spirit leads the Church to see what was always in the perfect harmony of Divine Revelation and for a time either vaguely seen or not seen.

When we speak of a flowering of our knowledge of Our Lady in Divine Revelation in our times, we are only saying

that through the centuries and particularly in our times the Holy Spirit in the Church has given us to know better the gift of God to us which is our Blessed Lady. Human reason can discover something of the way of Divine Providence in giving us deeper knowledge of our Blessed Lady in our times, but always the ways of God are mysterious and, like our Blessed Lady, we must accept them and fit ourselves into them with a humility of will and intellect, which even we know is the great need of men today.

There is a picture of our Blessed Lady in the Acts of the Apostles which is very meaningful. It is the picture of our Blessed Lady with the Apostles when the Holy Spirit came down into the infant Church. She was there in that Church. Who can doubt the veneration accorded her by the Apostles and the rest? She was a witness of many things which she had kept and pondered in her heart. Who can doubt the utter devotion of Our Lady to the Church? But is there not something else in the picture? She was the Mother of God. In her the prophecies were fulfilled. In a great solemn moment on the Cross, when Jesus was nearing the climax of His victory and the sword was piercing the heart of His Mother, as Christian tradition tells, He proclaimed her spiritual maternity in His Church with all its implications. Our Lady in the Church! Spiritual Mother of all, Mediatrix of all graces, Co-Redemptrix by the positive will of her Divine Son in His all-efficacious work of Redemption, Queen of the Universe and Refuge of sinners. It is our Blessed Lady living in the Church with her Divine Son in His giving life to His Mystical Body to whom we turn our eyes today. Reigning in heaven, body and soul, she lives in the Church with her Divine Son and is therefore so near, so close to all of us.

There is little wonder to those who read the Gospels in the light of faith that the love and veneration of our Blessed Lady during her days on earth in the Church, before her Assump-

tion, has grown and grown down through the ages. Somehow we still share the great joy of the Church when the Council of Ephesus confirmed by solemn definition what had always been believed by the Church, that Our Lady is the Mother of God. We still sense the pain that the Innovators of the sixteenth century gave to the Church by their insults to the Mother of God. We glory in the defense which such great saints and doctors as Alphonsus and St. Francis de Sales made for our Blessed Lady against Jansenist heretics. The day of the solemn definition of the Immaculate Conception is still for us a day of triumph. How glad we are to be in the Church when our own reigning Pontiff solemnly proclaimed as a Truth of Divine Revelation the Assumption of our Blessed Lady, body and soul into heaven. And the Proclamation through the ordinary magisterium of the Church through the voice of our Pope Pius XII of the Queenship of Our Lady seemed to us the tribute of devout children to their Spiritual Mother. No longer do we have to suffer the doubters of the truth of Maria Mediatrix of all graces and of the proper and exact doctrine of the Co-Redemptrix. Through the ages we have come to Mary's Age in the Church.

Devoutly we pray to her in our needs. Pope Leo once wrote something which we who have gone far along the path of life like so much. I have not his exact words at hand. The substance of them is: Our Blessed Lady, we loved you in our childhood in our childish love. You were our true friend and mother in our adolescence. When manhood came, our love deepened and came to a happy maturity. Now that the evening of life is upon us, we love you the more and put all our trust in you. What Catholic asks for miracles from our Blessed Lady! He has had thousands of miracles of grace through her intercession. Life in the Church has told us what so many of the saints have emphasized: 'To Jesus through Mary!' How dear to us is that prayer which comes to us certainly from the

third century: "We fly to thy patronage, O Holy Mother of God Despise not our petitions in our necessities but deliver us from all dangers, O Glorious and Blessed Ever Virgin"—the oldest prayer we have, as far as history attests, to our Blessed Lady.

It was our Blessed Savior who held up His Mother to us as our model Great Fathers of the Church stressed her as the mirror of Divine Love and all virtues. We go back to that old fresco in the Catacombs of St. Priscilla at Rome, dating from the third century, of our Blessed Lady being held up to virgins as their model and think how we must hold her up to our virgins in this sex-crazed era We read her autobiography in her Magnificat and come to see her complete humble union with God To tell her to the world is to invite the world to imitate her Sometimes we must read books originally written in a language which we do not know We search for a faithful translation. There is no injury done to our Blessed Lord in making our Blessed Lady our exemplar. She is the translation of Him, the perfect translation, in terms we know and understand "Full of grace," she is by heaven's guarantee, and yet in her full correspondence with divine grace—"Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to thy word"—she tells us how to serve God and through Christ and in Christ let the alchemy of the love of God, personalized in the Holy Trinity, transform us into genuine Christians in the Church of God.

I have gone longer than I had intended, but who can stop when he is talking about his Mother who has been so good to him, solved so many problems for him and to him is tangible in Holy Church? You are here these days for the laudable purpose of deeper studies in Mariology You will pursue your work according to the norms fixed by the Church and good science You will hold unfounded exaggerations unholy and reason and study in the harmony of the unchanging and un-

changeable truths of Revelation Full well you know that theologians are not in the Teaching Authority of the Church, which alone speaks the Doctrine of the Church It is good for you humbly to explore the truths of the Church and in what is not defined as Catholic Doctrine, either by the exercise of the solemn or the ordinary magisterium of the Church, to accord that liberty of opinion which is a Catholic right. You offer here in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament your intellectual wreath of flowers to the Mother of God.

In instituting the Blessed Sacrament our Blessed Savior said: "For as often as you shall eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord, until he comes" (Cor. 2 26) Just before He died the Savior gave us His Mother to be our spiritual mother, through whom all the graces of Redemption would flow Jesus, our Lord and our God, look down upon us here before Thee Through the intercession of our Blessed Mother, give us more and more of the fruits of Thy Redemption of us and lead us, through holy lives, with Mary our guide and advocate, to that eternity where You drink of the vine new in the kingdom of God.