

# THE FAIREST FLOWER OF PARADISE

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE LITANY  
OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN, EN-  
RICHED WITH EXAMPLES DRAWN  
FROM THE LIVES OF THE SAINTS

BY

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## PREFACE

**I**T WAS on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception that the idea first occurred to me of writing a popular work on the Litany of Loreto.

This Litany has been held in honor throughout the Church for many centuries: it is daily recited by millions of the faithful, and has even become an integral part in some of our public acts of worship. We have therefore thought that it would not be out of place to inquire into its doctrinal meaning, and to give to light the fruits of our studies for the edification of the Christian people.

For it seemed to us that while others on this great occasion were offering to Mary profound and erudite treatises, this tender Mother would none the less deign to accept a work, unworthy indeed of her, but yet a pledge of boundless love and gratitude.

Encouraged by this hope, we set ourself to the task, and were presently surprised to see how easy it is, by the application of simple principles, to trace in these invocations all the mysteries of the life of the Blessed Virgin: her

excellences, her privileges, and her sorrows. In reciting the Litany, the faithful, mayhap unconsciously, go over the whole field of Marian theology.

As every one knows, Mary occupies a unique position in the economy of the universe. Her divine Maternity has raised her high above all creatures, even the very angels: she is the epitome of God's works and through the Incarnation of the Word, she is in some sort bound to the Most Holy Trinity by the ties of parentage. Now, the full tale of all these privileges and splendors is, in our opinion, summed up in the Litany of Loreto, that Litany which is, as it were, the Christian people's hymn in honor of Mary, their daily tribute of praise and love to this divine Mother.

Moreover, a pious custom has been universally introduced, of honoring Mary in a special manner during the month of May. In many places the praiseworthy custom obtains of a course of sermons about the Blessed Virgin, in which the prerogatives and the mysteries of her mortal life are dwelt upon. But although it is easy to speak about Mary, it is not equally easy to do so in a fitting manner. For this there is required a profound knowledge of Catholic doctrine, since in Mary are to be found the perfections of the entire universe: rather we should say that in Marian theology the whole deposit of Christian

faith and morality in some way or another lies hid.

It behoves us, therefore, to give the most faithful and exact utterance, to all that concerns the Mother of God. If indeed the Church cares, as with a holy jealousy, about Mary's honor, if the name of this holy Virgin is in the mouth of all the faithful, if her sanctuaries are spread over all the earth, in a word, if Mary is that Woman seen in the Apocalyptic vision, "clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet and on her head a crown of twelve stars,"<sup>1</sup>—is it not fitting that we should strive our utmost to study and know her as she is? In studying Mary we study Jesus, we contemplate the Holy Trinity, we meditate on grace, the sacraments and our last end, because in all the works of God, Mary holds her assigned place: "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His ways, before He made anything from the beginning."<sup>2</sup>

Considering, therefore, that every point of Christian doctrine is after some fashion comprised in Mary, and that one of the most efficacious means to promote the Christian life, is to propose to the faithful the example of the divine Mother, we have thought it profitable to write a popular work, having for its foundation the series of invocations contained in the Litany

<sup>1</sup> APOC. xii, 1.  
<sup>2</sup> Psal. ciii, 22.

of Loreto. In this work the whole Marian theology is briefly set forth, while at the same time the principal dogmas of our Faith and the moral duties of the Christian are brought to mind.

With this in view, we have deemed it advisable to follow the logical sequence in our treatment of what belongs to the Blessed Virgin, applying to each subject that invocation which appears most fitting. Since, however, several of these invocations are in fact but different expressions of one idea,<sup>1</sup> we have been obliged, in order to avoid treating the same subject twice, to adapt to some of them, themes which at first sight may not appear to correspond with them very exactly, though in reality there is no notable discrepancy.

To the usual invocations we have added that which is proper to the Order of Servants of Mary, *Regina Servorum tuorum*—"Queen of Thy Servants," an invocation which has afforded us the opportunity of speaking about the royal dignity which here below invests every Christian who devoutly serves the glorious Mother of God.

And now, as to our design in writing this little book, we may say that it has been to collect in one, under the heading of the invocations of the Litany of Loreto, whatsoever belongs to the Most Holy Virgin, in its relation to the dogmas of faith and the precepts of Christian morality.

<sup>1</sup> For example "Holy Virgin of Virgins" and "Queen of Virgins."

Without entering into subtle points of theology which, useful enough in their own proper time and place, would be little appreciated by ordinary Christians, we have endeavored to weave a garland of all that is most beautiful and at the same time of the greatest practical utility in Mary's life. This Woman without peer is by far the fairest flower of heaven, a flower of so sweet perfume, that only to breathe its fragrance suffices to fill the soul with purest delight. The spiritual enjoyment derived from a more intimate knowledge of Mary, is ample recompense for the labor of study.

With a view to making the present little work servicable to many, we have appended two tables: the first containing the traditional order of the invocations of the Litany of Loreto with the titles of the different subjects we have allotted to each; the second presenting the same subjects arranged in logical sequence. This latter table may be used by those who, whether for their own private study, or with a view to giving public instructions, prefer to have a complete and well-ordered course on all those matters which regard the Most Holy Virgin.

Those who wish to make use of this book for the purpose of finding therein subjects for conferences or sermons during the month of May, can make choice of those invocations which seem best calculated to meet the needs of their audi-

ence. For the rest, the subjects are independent one of the other, and taken separately will perhaps be found of value for occasional sermons.

We lay down this little book at the feet of the Immaculate Virgin, with the ardent longing that she may become more and more known and loved. There is no surer or shorter way to Jesus than the knowledge and love of Mary. Whoever would find Jesus must seek Him at Mary's hands, for it is written of the Magi that they found Him nowhere else except in His Mother's arms. *Invenimus puerum cum Maria Matre ejus.*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Matt. II. 11.

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"At the name  
Of that fair flower, whom duly I invoke  
Both morn and eve, my soul with all her might  
Collected, on the goodliest ardour fix'd."

Dante, *Parad.*, Canto xxiii  
(Cary's Translation)

## Holy Mary

### PREDESTINATION AND NAME OF MARY

"Thy name and thy remembrance are the desire of my soul: my soul hath desired thee in the night."  
(Is. xxvi, 8-9.)

GOD, having decreed that He would become Man for the salvation of the human race, at the same time decided that He would be born of a woman, so that He might not only be like unto us by nature, but, furthermore, be one of our race.

For the fulfillment of his designs, the Most High had chosen from all eternity a creature whom He freely predestinated to the sublime dignity of Mother of the Word, and likewise to be the recipient of all those prerogatives of nature and grace which so high an office requires. For this cause God willed to raise this privileged creature, not only above all men, but also above all the choirs of angels. We need not wonder, then, if so noble a woman was, from the very beginning, by reason of the great mystery to be accomplished in her, the object of the divine complacency: "The Lord possessed me in the begin-

ning of His ways, before He made anything from the beginning.<sup>1 2</sup>

Admire and adore, O my soul, with all possible humility, the justice and mercy of God's ways. Render thanks to this great Lord, for having deigned to predestine a simple creature, of like nature with thyself, to so high a dignity. At the same time ask of Him grace to be contented and quiet in the place He has assigned thee upon this earth, and remember that the conditions of human life are all by His disposal: so that to wish to alter them is to desire the overthrow of the social order, which after all is God's own work.

\* \* \*

It was reasonable to expect that the name of a woman privileged as Mary was, should comprehend in its meaning the office to which she was called, and the lofty privileges resulting from this office.

This blessed Name had been pronounced by God in the very act of predestining this wonderful creature. Further, we may believe that He Himself suggested it, by an interior inspiration, to the parents of this favored Child, when the time of her birth had come. This name is the Name of Mary. It may mean three things: sovereignty, bitterness, and resistance; three

<sup>1</sup> Psal. viii, 28.

ideas which represent the principal prerogatives of our glorious Queen.

In the first place, Mary, by becoming Mother of the Incarnate Word, became also sovereign and mistress of the universe. Furthermore, since she was destined by God to coöperate with Jesus Christ in the ransom of the human race, she had to suffer the greatest torments which a pure creature ever endured. Lastly, by virtue of her Immaculate Conception, she was the first person to shake off the unhallowed yoke of the evil one, and thus in her own person to offer to God the first fruits of the Redemption. The Name of Mary, therefore, is at one time synonymous with her unrivaled greatness, her fathomless sorrows, and her splendid victories.

Blessed and holy Name! Thou art to my soul a source of boundless joy: sweeter than honey to the taste: more pleasing to the ear than the most exquisite melody.

\* \* \*

The most holy Name of Mary, joined to that of Jesus, possesses a hidden power which puts to flight the demon, and fills the soul of him who utters it in loving faith, with consolation and hope. It is a certain fact that God has attached a beneficent power of sanctification and life to the devout uttering of these two Names by the faithful, and this precisely because Jesus

and Mary are the dearest objects of His love

It is, then, the duty of every good Christian frequently to pronounce these two holy Names with faith, hope and reverence. We should call upon them in our needs, and do all in our power to prevent their unworthy usage by the lips of the profane. Alas! why is it that Names so great, so holy and at the same time so dear to our hearts, are oftentimes made the butt of scorn and railery!

O my God, may thy great and awful Name be ever hallowed in those of Jesus, my Saviour, and Mary, His Blessed Mother! In them, we find our life and our salvation!

#### EXAMPLE

##### THE SEVEN HOLY FOUNDERS

In the thirteenth century, when the persecution carried on by Frederick II was raging against the Church, there lived in Florence seven illustrious men who, united by the bonds of Christian charity, strove to make their lives conform as far as possible to the dictates of evangelical perfection. On the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, 1233, when they were absorbed in prayer in the Laudesi chapel, Mary herself deigned to appear among them, inviting them to abandon all things and dedicate them-