

The Title, 'Mediatrix of All Graces'

We have been reflecting on the new document from the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Mater Populi Fidelis* [MPF]. Last month we started to consider the Marian title of 'Mediatrix', which the document says 'requires special prudence', (MPF 24) in view of the clear statement of Scripture that 'there is one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all.' (1 Tim 2:5-6)

The Second Vatican Council did affirm Mary as Mediatrix, making clear the understanding of this that was long taught by theologians: that her mediation of grace is a *sharing in*, and *subordinate to*, the primary mediation belonging uniquely to her divine Son.

The Council highlighted the approach that Mary 'is a *mother* to us in the order of grace' (Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* (1964) 61) This is because 'in a wholly singular way she cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope, and burning charity in the Saviour's work of restoring supernatural life to souls.' (*ibid.*)

'This motherhood of Mary in the order of grace continues uninterruptedly from the consent which she loyally gave at the Annunciation and which she sustained without wavering beneath the cross, until the eternal fulfilment of all the elect. Taken up to heaven she did not lay aside this saving office but by her manifold intercession continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation... Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked in the Church under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix.' (*Lumen Gentium* 62, quoted in *Catechism of the Catholic Church* n. 969) So the title of 'Mediatrix', clearly affirmed by the Council, is hardly being condemned in *Mater Populi Fidelis*. Rather, the total *dependence* of Mary's mediation on that of her Son is being re-emphasised and explained in more depth.

Vatican II continues, in words referenced by *Mater Populi Fidelis*: 'Mary's function as mother of men in no way obscures or diminishes this unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power. But the Blessed Virgin's salutary influence on men... flows forth from the superabundance of the merits of Christ, rests on his mediation, depends entirely on it, and draws all its power from it.' (*Lumen Gentium* 60; cf. *Catechism* n. 970; MPF 37)

'No creature could ever be counted along with the Incarnate Word and Redeemer; but just as the priesthood of Christ is shared in various ways both by his ministers and the faithful, and as the one goodness of God is radiated in different ways among his creatures, so also the unique mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude but rather gives rise to a manifold cooperation which is but a sharing in this one source.' (*Lumen Gentium* 62; cf. *Catechism* n. 970)

Thus the entire Church cooperates in Christ's mediation of grace, as she 'extends in time and communicates everywhere the effects of Christ's Paschal Mystery, and Mary holds a unique place in the heart of Mother Church.' (MPF 28) Mary is a "preeminent and...wholly unique member of the Church"; indeed, she is the "exemplary realisation" of the Church.' (*Catechism* 967, quoting *Lumen Gentium* 53; 63) So under Christ, all believers are 'mediators' in our own way, but Mary does this supremely. 'From the Incarnation to the cross and the Resurrection, she was united to Christ in a way that is unique and that far surpasses any other believer.' (MPF 32) 'Her prayer for us has a value and an efficacy that cannot be compared to any other intercession.' (MPF 38)

'All of this is not on account of her own merits but because Christ's merits on the Cross were applied to her fully...for the glory of the one Lord and Saviour...Any acknowledgment of her

beauty immediately points back to the glorification of the original source of all good: the Trinity.’ (MPF 33) However, it is ‘when we strive to attribute active roles to her that are *parallel* to those of Christ, [that] we move away from the incomparable beauty that is uniquely hers.’ (ibid.)

What then of the title, ‘Mediatrice of *All* Graces’? Here we first distinguish two different ways in which Mary is Mediatrice. *Mater Populi Fidelis* explains: ‘Mary’s cooperation in the work of salvation has been traditionally approached from a double perspective: her participation in the *objective* redemption accomplished by Christ during his earthly life – particularly in the Paschal Mystery – and the influence she *currently* has on those who have been redeemed.’ (MPF 4)

Through her consent at the Annunciation, ‘Mary gave the Redeemer, the Source of all graces, to the world, and in this way she is the channel of all graces.’ (Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, p. 229) So in this basic way, there is certainly no falsehood in calling Mary ‘Mediatrice of All Graces’, and when we use this title in Legion prayers (as we are continuing to do, at least for the present) we can unproblematically understand it at least in this manner.

Regarding the influence Our Lady continues to have in heaven in the distribution of graces: *Mater Populi Fidelis* emphasises that when God infuses sanctifying grace into our souls – justifying, transforming and divinising us in Christ – he touches the soul in a direct and unmediated way. No created mediator can be thought of as being ‘between’ God and the soul in this action, for example by somehow ‘receiving then passing on’ this grace, perhaps by a sort of ‘overflow’ – keeping God himself a step distant from us. Rather, ‘by grace, God becomes fully near to the human being, with an absolute immediacy, an “entering into” the person’s innermost part that only God can achieve.’ (MPF 51)

‘To avoid these difficulties, Mary’s motherhood in the order of grace must be understood as a *help in preparing us to receive* God’s sanctifying grace...encouraging us to open our hearts... to prepare ourselves to receive the life of grace that only the Lord can pour into us.’ (MPF 46) So her intercession *has a role* in us receiving sanctifying grace, but not in the sense of directly *handing this grace on* to us.

‘Through her intercession, Mary can implore God to grant us those internal impulses of the Holy Spirit that are called “actual graces.” These are the aids given by the Holy Spirit that operate even in sinners to prepare them for justification, and that encourage those already justified by sanctifying grace to further growth.’ (MPF 69)

In view of all this, *Mater Populi Fidelis* explains: ‘Some titles, such as “*Mediatrice of All Graces*,” have limits that do not favour a correct understanding of Mary’s unique place. In fact, she, the first redeemed, could not have been the mediatrice of the grace that she herself received. This is not a minor point since it reveals something central: even in Mary’s case, the gift of grace precedes her and comes from the absolutely free initiative of the Trinity in view of Christ’s merits. Like all of us, she did not merit her justification by a preceding action of her own, nor did she do so by any subsequent action.’ (MPF 67, which references the Council of Trent, *Decree on Justification* (1547) DS 1532; cf. *Catechism* n. 2010)

In summary, it is fair to say that this title ‘Mediatrice of All Graces’ is being somewhat discouraged by *Mater Populi Fidelis*, because of the ease of certain misunderstandings. Even so, it has not been forbidden, and it bears legitimate meanings concerning the amazing role that Our Lady has in our salvation. Echoing the advice of Fr Churchill, Spiritual Director of Concilium; keeping in mind the cautions and clarifications of this document; and subject of course to further direction from the Church: we can continue to use it in our prayers.