

MIRROR OF  
THE BLESSED  
VIRGIN MARY



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VIRGIN MARY

by St. Bonaventure

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## PROLOGUE

There is no doubt, as St. Jerome remarks, that whatever is worthily said of Our Blessed Mother redounds wholly to the praise and glory of God. Therefore, for the honor and glory of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and ardently desiring to produce a work which will tend to the praise of His most glorious Mother, I have judged it fitting to take for the subject-matter of my treatise the most sweet Salutation of this Blessed Mother. But I acknowledge my utter insufficiency for such an undertaking. First, because of the sublimity of the subject; secondly, because of the slenderness of my knowledge; thirdly, because of the aridity of my speech, and, finally, because of the unworthiness of my life, and the supreme glory and praiseworthiness of the person whose praises I wish to sing.

For who is there who would not deem that subject incomprehensible of which St. Jerome does not

hesitate to speak as follows: “That which nature possesseth not, which custom useth not, which eclipseth reason, which the mind of man is unable to compass, which maketh the heavens tremble, and striketh dumb the earth, which amazeth every inhabitant of Heaven, all this was divinely announced by Gabriel to Mary, and was fulfilled in Christ.” Therefore I confess myself unworthy to speak of such and so great a heroine. Again I say, how could my slender knowledge and my dull mind suffice to conceive praises worthy of Mary, when the illuminated mind of an Anselm faileth in presence of the task? For he saith: “My tongue faileth, Lady, for my mind is insufficient. Lady, all that is within me burns that I may render thee thanks for thy so great benefits. But I am unable to conceive worthy praise, and am ashamed to put forth that which is unworthy.”

St. Augustine, addressing Mary, says: “What shall I, so poor in talent, say of thee, when whatever I may say of thee is less praise than thy dignity deserves?”

Again, how can my untrained tongue, my arid powers of interpretation not fail in the praises of Mary, when Augustine, that most eloquent of men, says: “What shall we, so little, so feeble, say in praise of Mary,



when, if all our members were turned into tongues, no one of us would suffice to praise her?”<sup>1</sup>

Again, if praise in the mouth of a sinner is unbecoming (Eccli. XV, 9), how shall I, a miserable sinner, a man of most unworthy life—how shall I dare to proclaim the praises of Mary, when I hear Jerome, a man of such great worth, hesitate? For he saith: “I fear and tremble, all the while that I long to fulfill your expectations, lest I should prove to be an unworthy panegyrist. For there is in me neither sanctity nor eloquence, worthily to praise the Blessed and glorious Virgin.”<sup>2</sup>

And again: “Why should I add to the sea a small cup of water? Why a stone to a mountain? And as Mary has already been so adequately praised by the tongues of men and angels, what can our puny efforts, and especially my own, add to these?”

Finally, St. Jerome, speaking of Mary, says: “If I am to speak the truth, whatever can be expressed in human words is less than the praise given by Heaven; for Mary has been excellently preached and praised by divine and angelic heralds, foretold by prophets, foreshadowed by patriarchs, in types and figures, set forth

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1 St. Augustine, “De Sanctis,” CCVIII, n. 5.

2 St. Jerome, “Epist. ad Paulam et Eustoch.”

and described by Evangelists, worthily and officially saluted by Angels.”<sup>3</sup>

Having diligently weighed all these things, pious reader, I must beg your forgiveness for whatever insufficiency, whatever want of skill appears in this writing of mine. How shall I, so inefficient, succeed in a task before which Mary’s unique and zealous panegyrist, St. Bernard, quailed? For he saith: “There is nothing which gives me greater delight than to preach on the glory of the Virgin Mother.” And giving his reasons for this delight, he continues: “For all men honor, embrace, and receive her with the great affection and devotion that is fitting, yet whatever is said of one so unspeakably sublime, by the very fact of its being put into words, is less worthy, less pleasing, less acceptable.”<sup>4</sup>

Yet St. Jerome encourages and consoles me, saying: “Although none can be found who is worthy to praise her, yet let not even the sinner desist from glorifying her with all his might.”<sup>5</sup>

And St. Augustine, speaking of the manner in which the Son of God bestowed upon His Mother the gift of fecundity, yet took not away her integrity by

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3 “Epist. cit.”

4 “Serm. de Assumpt. B. Mar.,” IV.

5 St. Jerome I. c.

being born of her, among other things says: "We who are so insignificant, cannot suffice to speak of so great a gift of God; and yet we are compelled to utter her praises, lest, by being silent, we should appear ungrateful. And certainly, that poor widow who made an offering so pleasing to God with her two brass mites, should not have withheld that offering because she could not give more; yea, rather by giving what she could, she pleased God exceedingly."

Hence it is that I, so poor in talent, and equally devoid of knowledge and eloquence, have presumed to offer to so great a Queen this poor script of mine, that in it, so to speak, as in a dim mirror, the simpler lovers of this great Queen should in some imperfect manner perceive who and how great she is. And because this treatise is, as it were, a kind of mirror which reflects the life, grace, and glory of Mary, it is not unfittingly termed the Mirror of Mary. Oh, do thou, therefore, my most kind Lady and Mother, graciously accept this small gift offered to thee by thy poor lover! For with this puny gift, with this small work on thine own Salvation, I salute thee. On bended knee, with bowed head, with heart and lips, I salute thee, I wish thee blessing. Hail Mary, etc.



## CHAPTER I

# ON THE ANGELICAL SALUTATION

**H**ail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.

HEAR, O most sweet Virgin Mary, hear things new and wonderful! Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline thine ear! Hear that glorious messenger, Gabriel! Hear what is to be the wonderful mode of thy fecundity! Incline thine ear to a fruitful consent. Hear what is announced to thee as a certainty by God the Father! See in what manner the Son of God is to become Incarnate of thee! Incline thine ear to the Holy Spirit, who is about to operate within thee! Because thou hast ears to hear, hear!

And in the beginning of thy hearing, listen to this unheard-of salutation:

Hail Mary. This name, Mary, is not inserted here by Gabriel, but by the devotion of the faithful, inspired by the Holy Ghost. And the last sentence, blessed is the fruit of thy womb, was not uttered by Gabriel in his salutation, but was pronounced by Elizabeth in the spirit of prophecy. Let us each and everyone say, Hail Mary. O truly gracious and venerable, O truly glorious and admirable salutation! As Bede says: "Inasmuch as it is unheard of in human experience, so much more is it becoming to the dignity of Mary."

In this sweetest of salutations five sweet phrases are set forth, in which are contained five sweet prerogatives of the Virgin. Oh, how sweetly are these praises insinuated! For here is signified how most pure, how most full, how most firm and secure, how most worthy, how most useful was the Blessed Virgin Mary. She was most pure, because of the absence of all fault in her; she was most full and abounding, because of the plenitude of grace in her; she was most firm and secure, because of the Divine Presence within her; she was most worthy, because of the dignity of her person; she was most useful, because of the excellence of her Child. How pure Mary was because of the absence of all evil in her, is well expressed by the word Ave. Rightly is the word Ave addressed to her, who was ever entirely immune from

the “vae” or “woe” of sin. Thus it behooved the Mother of God to be, as St. Anselm testifies: “It was fitting that the conception of the God-Man should be of a most pure mother, that the purity of the Virgin-Mother, than which, under God, there was none greater, should be hers to whom God had designed to give His Only Son, whom He had begotten, equal to Himself, from His own Heart, that He should so give Him to her to be at the same time the Son of God and the Son of Man.”

Again, how full of grace was Mary by the abounding plenitude of her gifts is well signified when it is said to her: “Full of grace.” And truly full, and ever full, as St. Anselm testifies, when he most devoutly exclaims: “O Woman full and overfull of grace, of whose abundance every creature is revived and refreshed.” Again, how secure and firm was Mary by the Divine Presence is well signified by the words, *The Lord is with thee*. Rightly is Mary safe and secure, when the Lord is present with her; for the Lord, God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, is with her, so that she is in an especial manner most intimately connected with God. St. Bernard shows this when he says: “Nor is God the Son alone with thee, whom thou dost clothe with thy flesh; but also God the Holy Ghost, of whom thou dost

conceive; and God the Father, who hath begotten that which thou conceivest.”

Again, how worthy was Mary, because of the dignity of her person, is well expressed when she is saluted in the words: Blessed art thou among women! For it could not be that her person, having been made venerable by such a blessing, was not most worthy. Therefore, St. Anselm, overcome with amazement, exclaims: “O Blessed and ever Blessed Virgin, by whose blessing every creature is not only blessed by its Creator, but the Creator by the creature!” Again, how useful was Mary, by the excellence of her Child, is well expressed in the words: Blessed is the fruit of thy womb! For she availed to save the world, having brought forth the most excellent and powerful Fruit of salvation. Therefore doth the devout St. Anselm say: “By thy fruitfulness, O Lady, the unclean sinner is justified, the condemned sinner is saved, and the exile is recalled. Thy Son, O Lady, redeemed the captive world, healed the sick, and raised the dead to life.”

You see, therefore, dearly beloved, in what manner Mary, because of her immunity from guilt, is rightly saluted with the Ave. Because of the abundance and immensity of her grace, she is rightly saluted as full of grace; because of the Divine Presence within her, and



her intimacy with Our Lord, she is told: The Lord is with thee; because of the dignity and reverence of her person, she is rightly saluted as blessed among women; because of the excellence and utility of her Child, it is fittingly said to her: Blessed is the fruit of thy womb. We shall now treat of each of these points in order.