

MARY: ICON OF INTEGRALITY

Giuseppe Forlai, igs



Giuseppe Forlai (1972) is a priest of the Rome Diocese and a member of the Jesus the Priest Institute. He received a Doctorate in Theology with a specialization in Mariology from the Pontifical Faculty of Marian Theology. Following this, he studied Political Philosophy and Ethics at Tor Vergata University, Rome. From 1999-2003, he served as chaplain for Rome's penal institutions. He has worked as a professor at the Pontifical Gregorian University's Institute for Spirituality and also in the Pastoral Office for Schools in the Diocese of Rome. His current ministry is the spiritual accompaniment of the members of Rome's major seminary and he also

carries out animations in different Institutes and organisms dedicated to the consecrated life.

Fr. Forlai likes to say that he occupies his time best when he is striving to be a humble and reflective Christian. He carries out a fruitful "apostolate of the pen" and is, in fact, the author of many books, some of which have been published by the Society of St. Paul and the Daughters of St. Paul. The latter have published his texts: *Cristo vive in me: La proposta spirituale di Don Alberione* (2013) and *Io sono "Vangelo": Decidersi per Cristo alla scuola di Paolo* (2015).

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MARY, LIVING IN THE CHURCH

The Holy Spirit forms the flesh of the Son of God in the womb of a woman and generates the Church in the womb of the Cenacle in Jerusalem. Each time the Third Person of the Trinity gives life to something new, Mary is present. Just as the Mother cannot be disassociated from the Son, so too the story of Mary and that of the Church are indissolubly united through the action of the life-giving Spirit. The Church depends continually on the effusion of the Spirit and this effusion becomes operative if he is not grieved (cf. Eph. 4:30). In other words, it becomes operative if one says to him: “Here I am,” like the Virgin of Nazareth did. Adoration and silence, typically Marian attitudes, transform the Christian community into a *creature of the Spirit*.

The Holy Spirit, that elusive Person who cannot be grasped by the human imagination, finds in the Mother of the Lord a kind of transparency: through her we are able to understand something of him. Like children, we can glimpse the features of his beauty by fixing our gaze on Mary. Even though we don’t know where he comes from or where he goes (cf. Jn. 3:8), we can clearly perceive his voice in the story of the Virgin. The Gospels bear witness to the fact that Mary lived the attitudes proper to persons filled with the Spirit: the praise that springs from recognizing God’s actions in history; the prophecy that springs from the intimate presence of Christ; the freedom of following him.

Antedating the communion of the saints through faith, the hope and completely gratuitous love of the Mother of the Lord extends her spiritual presence in the Church to every age. It is a presence that is conveyed through the exemplary quality of her virginal maternity, the paradigm of how the Church can generate new children by virtue of the Spirit, not human efforts; a regal presence, that is to say, a presence that guides others to her Son through her obedience; and finally, her presence as the spiritual mother of all the baptized, begging the Spirit to generate and bring about each person’s interior development until Christ reaches full maturity in him/her.

For believers, the Woman of Nazareth is also the clear memory of the Lord’s Incarnation and Passion: Mary’s Jesus is a real, true person who lived in human flesh. A disincarnated or spiritualistic Christianity cannot withstand the test of the presence of Mary, who always demands of us fidelity to history and responsibility for the earthly life given to us by divine Providence. Besides being the measure of Christian realism, Mary is also an echo of the consolation of the Spirit. She who knew the stupidity of the evil that lies in human weakness and who herself experienced the blindness of faith, is our “refuge” when we open our hearts to repentance; she is our comfort when we are tempted to believe that there is no place for rebirth after Calvary.

(From G. Forlai, *Madre degli Apostoli. Vivere Maria per annunciare Christ*. Summary of Chapter II. Cf. pp. 60-61.

LIVE MARY SO AS TO GIVE CHRIST

Baptism marks the mystical birth of Jesus in us and unites us to the community of believers. Just as in the womb of Mary the human and divine natures of Christ were united without fusing, in the same way, at the baptismal font, an explosion of grace takes place in our mortal flesh. Everything is founded on the DNA of Christ so as to be healed and reborn in the truth. The principle and foundation of our soul—that is, the process of transformation in Christ to which we are called—can already be contemplated in his Mother: her immaculate conception prefigures the baptism of

grace in which our rejection of God was washed away; her assumption and reign over the communion of saints anticipates the entrance of our entire being into paradise, so as to take our place in the heavenly Church.

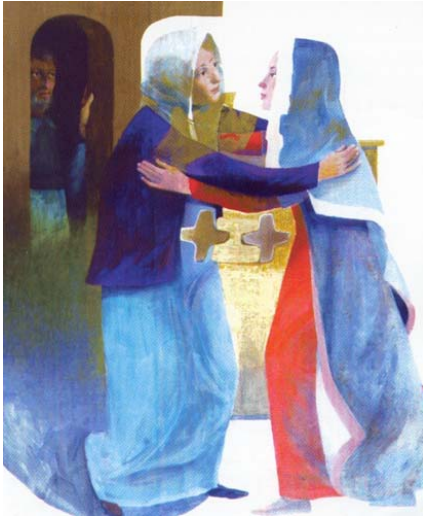
To give ourselves to Mary is our response to the gift we received from the crucified Jesus. To welcome his Mother as our own leads us to consciously choose to correspond to the grace of Baptism so that Christ will reach full maturity in us. The free act by means of which we surrender to this transforming dynamic leads us to follow the Master by means of self-renunciation and the bearing of our cross. In short, we must make the humility and self-renunciation of Jesus—his *kenosis*—our own. “Take Mary into your home” and “make your own the self-abasement of her Son” (the maximum act of love possible to a creature): these acts are almost equivalent because there can be no Christianity without self-renunciation, just as there can be no Marian spirituality that shuns the mystery of the cross.

The gift of Baptism initiates our commitment to allowing Christ—humanity’s priest and the Father’s missionary—to live in us. To give Jesus to others is the natural consequence of meeting him. “It is not enough for me to love Christ if I don’t love my neighbor,” said St. Vincent de Paul. After conceiving her Son, Mary gave him to others. She, the model of all apostles, did this by extending her arms. The Scriptures, however, do not permit us to remain in a state of pacifism. We proclaim grace to a world that often does not want it because it does not know it: “He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him” (Jn. 1:11). Those who dream of success in the apostolate or weigh things according to numbers are in a very sad situation; they are deceived! It is rare that people applaud those who proclaim the truths taught by the Master. The cross and struggle against the sluggishness of indifference are the daily bread of the true apostle!

Mary’s apostolate was clearly marked by intimacy with Christ and a hidden life. This is the reason why she did not witness to simple “action” but to a special *apostolic mysticism*. Her transformation in Christ overflowed very naturally into action thanks to her contemplative heart. More intimately united to her than she was to herself (to paraphrase St. Augustine), the Master breathed and acted in her even before she gave birth to him. But if her actions were already those of her Son, who humiliated himself by taking the form of a servant, then her manner of self-giving cannot help but be hidden from the eyes of the world, far removed from every type of spiritual pride or ostentation.

(From G. Forlai, *Madre degli Apostoli. Vivere Maria per annunciare Christo*. Summary of Chapter III. Cf. pp. 97-98.

Presentation of the Icon



The icon of the Visitation is part of a collection of 11 works painted between 1995-1997 by French artist Arcabas (the pseudonym of Jean-Marie Pirot). The series of pictures can be found in the residence of the Archbishop of the Malines-Brussels diocese. [In the painting of the Visitation] the artist expresses with rare ability the joy of the meeting between Mary and Elizabeth through colors that stand out against the white background of the canvas. Red and blue embrace, like the divine and human in the Incarnation of the Word. The movement of the women toward each other is underscored by the positions of their feet and the mantle of Mary, the first Apostle of the Gospel.

The Visitation is not just the meeting of two relatives: the evangelist Luke presents it as a salvific event. The artist expresses this mystery by placing between the future mothers two small crosses—a distinguishing feature of many of his works. The

crosses have powerful symbolic value: they foreshadow the meeting between the two children (Jesus and John the Baptist) and the bloody gift of their lives.

The scene takes place at the door of Elizabeth's house. Standing on the threshold, she welcomes the Mother of the Lord. The roof above her head emphasizes her, seeming to almost protect her unusual maternity, while a small wall behind Mary's shoulder defines the scene. The door to the house is open and a man—Zechariah—can be glimpsed in the shadows. His role is that of silent witness; his speech will be restored at the moment of his son John's circumcision. Although cloaked in darkness (foreshadowing the end of the levitical priesthood), Zechariah's face is illuminated by the new era that is dawning. With the arrival of Mary, he already contemplates the beginning of the fulfillment of the Angel Gabriel's promises. Very soon now, he will be freed from the bonds of the Law and will sing his canticle of salvation. As we observe the meeting of the two women, we too are called to loosen our tongues and prophetically proclaim the arrival of the Kingdom. Fr. Alberione underscored that the Visitation is a paradigm of the mystery of the Christian mission: Mary brings to Elizabeth—who has already been touched by the grace of God—the presence of the Savior, the One she conceived when she said, "Here I am".

From the book:

MARY, QUEEN OF APOSTLES

by Blessed James Alberione

IV

The Apostolate of Interior Life

*“But they did not understand what he said to them.
Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth,
and was obedient to them.
His mother treasured all these things in her heart.
And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years,
and in divine and human favor” (Lk. 2:50-52).*

An Apostle

An apostle is one who bears God within him/herself and radiates him everywhere.

An apostle is a holy person who stores up treasures and pours out the surplus on others.

An apostle’s heart brims over with love for God and for fellow humans, and he/she cannot hold back these thoughts and feelings.

An apostle is an ostensorium that holds Jesus Christ and spreads his ineffable light to everyone.

An apostle is an overflowing vessel of election to whom people rush to slake their thirst.

An apostle is a temple of the Holy Trinity, at work to the maximum within that individual.... He/she is a person who transudes God from every pore: through words, works, prayers, gestures, attitudes; in private and in public.

Now, armed with this profile, take a look at the people around you, both nearby and far away. Can you identify any apostles among them? To the highest degree—one that we can never hope to reach—[we see] the face of Mary. And after her, Paul.

Interior holiness is the first and most essential apostolate, unmistakable and irreplaceable. When the interior life is present, then there is always an apostle, even if the person is an “Anthony” in the desert, a Carthusian monk in silence, a cloistered nun carrying out the most humble tasks.

The First Apostolate

a) A soul that is interiorly holy injects into the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, the Church, a pure and life-giving blood that benefits all its members, helping them to grow and reinvigorating them for God’s battles.

St. Paul often speaks about this Mystical Body. In his encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi*, Pius XII clearly presents the doctrine of the Church on this subject. Many books illustrate it. Now, in a body, the hand, the foot and the tongue work externally; their activities can be clearly seen by all. But the heart carries out a more important, a vaster and a more necessary function, even though invisibly.

The weapons at our disposal are not human but divine, capable of overcoming evil and the actions of evil-doers; of vanquishing every doctrine opposed to God and Jesus Christ; of winning over every intellect and submitting it to Christ. “For the weapons of our battle are not of flesh but are enormously powerful, capable of destroying fortresses. We destroy arguments and every

pretension raising itself against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive in obedience to Christ” (2 Co. 10:3-5).

From the Cenacle down to our own day, the Church has always lived by means of this pure blood, this supernatural life.

The words of Jesus Christ, “I consecrate myself for them [his disciples]” (Jn. 17:19), are very powerful. Grace flows from him to the saints, who share in it and pour out the surplus on others.

b) The saints are powerful in the presence of God to the measure and degree of their holiness and merits. Their power of intercession corresponds to the degree of union they had with God on earth.

Prayer, says St. Augustine, is the strength of human beings and the weakness of God. In fact, the Lord commits himself to listening to our requests: “All that you ask for in prayer, believe that you will receive it and it shall be yours” (Mk. 11:24). What an apostolate Jesus carried out from the cross! In the midst of his agony, he prayed for sinners, crying out “I thirst!” To put it in our terms: he saved the world more through his passion and death than through his preaching.

c) A true apostolate is grafted onto, immersed in, and united to the apostolate of Jesus and is inspired by the same motive: glory to God and peace to all people. Many of those who call themselves apostles are not working for the greater glory of God. They are clashing cymbals, noisy gongs, gusts of wind—afterward, everything dissipates. Many people—too many—“seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 2:21).

A person who belongs to God judges things in the light that comes from on high. Instead of looking at their external aspects, he/she perceives the part they play in the redemptive plan of God. Failure does not discourage such people because God can be glorified in their humiliation. Their goal, their intention, is always God and souls. Thus every apostolate acquires increasingly supernatural characteristics, effectiveness and vitality. God is everything and souls are in the arms of God: “My children, I am going through the pain of giving birth to you all over again, until Christ is formed in you” (Ga. 4:19).

When God wants a work to be entirely his, he takes away all [the person’s] power and only then takes action. When the ego is eliminated, God lives. According to the program of Jesus Christ, a person works with him, in him and for him. And when God is with us, who can stand against us? We can have no greater security than this: “The Lord worked with them and confirmed their message by the signs that accompanied it” (Mk. 16:20). This kind of apostle can do all things: “The one who believes in me will do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these” (Jn. 14:12).

Mary’s Interior Life

Mary is holier than anyone: she is the first apostle; indeed, she is *The Apostle*.

Her principal contribution to the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church, is her holiness. Hers was a vigorous life, lived to the full. She poured out this fullness (“Hail, full of grace”) on all souls: from John the Evangelist to John Bosco, from the martyrs to the virgins, from the Popes to humble laborers.

Christ is Life, and this Life flows down from the Head to all the members of the body. Each day he calls new souls to life through Baptism, the Eucharist and the sacrament of Penance. These souls live in Christ.

Through divine election, Mary has been made the great Mother of everyone redeemed by Christ. She is the head of the new Family formed by Jesus Christ. Eve was the mother of the human family according to the flesh; Mary inaugurated a new family—one that is Christian and holy. She is

our spiritual Mother, transfusing new life to us, giving birth to us in her anguish on Calvary. In the prayer *Hail, Holy Queen*, the Church salutes Mary, calling her “our life.”

A mother transfuses her blood—and often her character, qualities and inclinations—to her children. Mary transfuses to souls her inclinations, preferences, love and her very self. And she does this even more with regard to the souls who draw close to her: “In me is all hope of life and virtue” (Sir. 24:25).

Mary is Queen. Whatever belongs to the Queen also belongs to her subjects. A people is powerful to the degree that its ruler is powerful. How fortunate we are to have such a great Queen: “humble and high beyond all other creatures” (Dante, *Heaven*, XXXIII, 2). Her goods and her powers are all for us: she uses them to benefit her subjects and children.

Mary is the hope of everyone: sinners, the sick, the upright, the poor, the shipwrecked—everyone.

She is called *the omnipotent intercessor*.

St. Peter Damian writes: “When Mary comes before the throne of God, it is not as a supplicant but rather to express her desires because she does not approach God as a servant but as a Mother and Queen.”

It can be said of Mary that “what God does by nature, she does by grace.”

And Mary possesses innumerable graces: she is the light of the Fathers, the wisdom of the Doctors, the conqueror of heresies, the life of the Church. From heaven, she carries out an immense, perpetual and extremely effective apostolate. Addressing her, St. Germanus says: “No one is freed from any sin if not through you, O Immaculate one; no one receives any good if not through you, O most merciful one; no one attains final victory if not through you, most holy Virgin.” Mary’s request to Jesus at Cana prompted him to begin his public ministry: “This was the first of his signs” (Jn. 2:11).

Everyone’s Apostolate

Let the souls who pray and suffer in silence rejoice.

The world provokes the wrath and punishment of God. But these souls save it through atonement. They work to build up the Body of Christ perhaps to a greater degree and better than those who travel the paths of the world, working to the point of exhaustion to carry out difficult tasks. A soul truly called to the cloister enters it so as to find God and carry out the apostolate that is most beneficial to souls: to destroy the old self and replace it with the new self: “For me, life is Christ” (Phil. 2:21).

The heart of Paul was the heart of Jesus Christ.

After Jesus, the most apostolic heart is the most pure heart of Mary. The supernatural goods of humanity all came forth from the hearts of Jesus and Mary.

After the heart of Jesus, no heart loves humanity more than the heart of Mary.

A saint has a kind of omnipotence: a small stone broken off from a mountain is enough to bring down a giant.

“Teresa and a few cents are nothing. A few cents are nothing. Teresa is nothing. But Teresa, a few cents, plus God, are everything.”

The apostolate is never carried out more broadly and effectively than when one makes the examination of conscience, practices self-denial and works on him/herself interiorly.

The interior life of a person who guides others has a decisive influence in schools, in catechetical activities, in the confessional, in the pulpit, in Catholic associations, in religious institutes, in families, in hospitals, in seminaries, in parishes.... Persons who guide others hold in their hands the future of those individuals—their earthly lives and their eternal lives. It would be well to often repeat: one activity less and a half-hour more with God through prayer and meditation; or else: “works, yes, but they should be the fruit of prayer.”

By all means, sow, but water what you sow through prayer. And remember that “it is God who gives the growth” (1 Co. 3:7): this is a truth of faith. Dig a well to water the field you sowed. You might possess a powerful electrical plant, but the electricity must be hooked up if it is to provide the city with light or enable a factory to produce its work. Let us strive to become holy, but let us do so through Mary. We can say with confidence that a person is not truly devoted to Mary if he/she does not thirst for souls like Jesus because, in that case, we do not resemble either Jesus the Apostle or Mary the Apostle. Only those who imitate Mary are her children and are united to Jesus. How can one live in union with Jesus and Mary if he/she does not possess their mind and heart?

Jesus reminds all those who want to love God: “The second [commandment] is like [the first]: You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt. 22:39).

V The Apostolate of Desires

*O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you,
my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.
So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory.
Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.
So I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands and call on your name.*
(Psalm 63:1-5)

Preceded by Grace

When she was conceived, Mary was not only immaculate and enriched by grace; she also possessed infused wisdom and the full use of reason.

This wisdom gave the Virgin the possibility of holy desires, yearnings, supplications and vows. These constitute a genuine apostolate; indeed, they are the foundation and principle of every apostolate.

Fr. Roschini says: “From the time of her conception, the Blessed Virgin had full knowledge of natural things, which was necessary for an exact understanding of Sacred Scripture: history, geography, astronomy, cosmogony, etc. She understood the supernatural truths that concerned her destiny to become the Mother of God and the co-redemptrix of humanity. Thus she understood dogmatic and theological truths better than the angels and all human beings. She also knew, in an overall way, the work of the Redemption and her part in it. She knew the needs, the moral miseries, the dangers, the temptations, the sins (both in number and malice), the obstinacy and the damnation of many souls.... In this way, she was able to suffer, pray and yearn for the redemption and salvation of everyone. How many ardent desires filled the heart of Mary!”¹

As an infant in the crib, as a small child in her father’s house, and then in the Temple, the heart of Mary yearned for the redemption and salvation of all people more than the most ardent saints.

On 21 November, the Church celebrates the Presentation of Mary in the Temple. The object of the feast is this: “At the age of three, the child Mary was taken by her parents, Joachim and

¹ Fr. Roschini’s words reflect traditional Mariology, which was re-examined and reworked by post-Vatican II theology, which is more moderate but at the same time richer in biblical foundations.

Anne, to the Temple in Jerusalem, and was offered to the Lord.” This is what St. John Damascene and other Fathers of the Church say.

Holy Desires

Holy desires spring from a vibrant faith and a loving heart, and they are the first step toward works. They are like seeds that burst open and thrust their roots into the soil, seeking nourishment. They grow into small plants that are destined to mature and bear fruit. If these desires reach the point of prayer, then they already yield a very precious fruit.

There are many desires that are empty, sterile, strange and bad, just as there are useless—even sinful—criticisms. Thus St. Paul said: “Turn from youthful desires” (2 Tm. 2:22).

Instead, there are desires that come from God, “who wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth” (1 Tm. 2:4). There are the desires of a loving soul: “O God, you are my God—for you I long! For you, my body yearns; for you my soul thirsts” (Ps. 63:2).

St. Paul had ardent desires: “We felt so devoted to you that we would have been happy to share with you not only the Gospel of God but also our own lives” (1 Th. 2:8). “I long to depart this life and be with Christ” (Phil. 1:23).

Psalm 42:2 says: “As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God.”

So good desires should be cultivated: “My heart is pining away with longing at all times for your judgments” (Ps. 119:20).

Under the guidance of Joachim and Anne, and nourished by Sacred Scripture, Mary grew as a promising olive plant; she was the seat of every virtue. Reading the Scriptures and drawing from the living Word, her desires became the apostolate of yearning for the coming of the Messiah and for the redemption of humanity.

The Desired One

Jesus is the *Desired of Nations* (Hag. 2:8). He was desired by the Patriarchs, the Prophets, all the Just and all the nations from the remotest times. But he was desired by Mary most holy with greater ardor, effectiveness and intelligence than everyone else.

Her desires were not purely emotional; they were efficacious: they went directly from her heart to the heart of God.

The prophet Daniel was “a man of ardent desires”:² he desired the glory of God and the salvation of all people; he was a person who yearned for the redemption of his people and all humanity. It was revealed to him that the slavery of the Jews in Babylon would end and that the Messiah for whom he longed would come. If this was true of Daniel, then how could God not satisfy the yearnings of a small, humble and very holy little Virgin? What was the fruit of these desires directed to heaven? She begged God for the redemption of the world more than the Patriarchs, Prophets and many good Jews had ever done.

With what power this holy child raised her hands and eyes to heaven, repeating Isaiah’s prayer: “Let justice descend, O heavens, like dew from above, like gentle rain let the skies drop it down. Let the earth open and salvation bud forth; let justice also spring up!” (Is. 45:8)

An Efficacious Apostolate

² “*Vir desideriorum*” (cf. Dn. 9:22; 10:11). More recent versions of the Bible translate the phrase as: “a man specially chosen.”

Doctors and theologians of the Church confirm that the Lord's coming was hastened precisely because of the ardent yearnings of the blessed Virgin.

St. Vincent Pallotti summed this up when he wrote: "In the adorable decrees of God, it was established that the upright, and especially the Queen of all Saints, through self-denial, fasting and *desires*, hastened the Incarnation of the Son of God. And that is what happened, in spite of the fact that the world was crushed under the weight of sin and unworthiness."

The *Life of Mary* by Williams contains this moving statement: "Every aspect of Mary's existence—especially her virginal consecration to the Lord—served to draw the Word of God to her womb."

It can certainly be said that, in the Temple, Simeon, an upright and God-fearing person, awaited the salvation of Israel, and Anna entreated the Lord day and night to hasten the coming of the Messiah. But Mary did the same with even more intensity.

In her solitude, she offered herself in sacrifice for the salvation of Israel and the whole world. She was like a dove crying out from her perch on the ruins of a huge edifice. Human beings, who had emerged beautiful and clean from the creative and sanctifying hands of God, were subsequently soiled by original sin. And Mary's cries were heard by the Father, who took steps to restore the edifice in Christ: "to sum up all things in Christ" (Eph. 1:10).

Simeon invoked God ardently and was told by the Holy Spirit that he would not die until he had seen the Savior with his own eyes. In the Temple, Anna prayed, yearned and fasted, and she was able to recognize the Messiah as soon as he was brought there by Joseph and Mary for the purification rite. For this, she thanked the Lord with great faith and joy (cf. Lk. 2:25-38).

Mary yearned for the Messiah more than anyone else. She carried out this apostolate more fully than anyone else because the apostolate is to give Christ to the world.

In Mary, these holy desires lasted from her immaculate conception up until the moment in which the Son of God was incarnated in her womb as a result of her *yes*.

In fact, the "fullness of time" (Ga. 4:4) had come. The Archangel Gabriel was sent to the Virgin to announce that the moment prophesied by *the man of desires*, Daniel, had arrived, and to offer Mary the divine Maternity. It was humanity's great hour.

God fulfills the holy desires and listens to the prayers of the upright of heart when they plead before the altar of God. How many souls are heard by him as they pray in the silence of the cloister, in intimate communication with him, perhaps in the midst of anguish and sorrow. The heart of God is moved to compassion by these children of his who place all their trust in him and plead: "Your kingdom come" (Lk. 11:2).

"The Lord hears the cries of the poor" (Ps. 10:17); he grants the desires of their hearts (cf. Ps. 21:20).

When Mary was born, dawn broke over the earth: "Who is this that comes forth like the dawn?" (Sg. 6:10) She heralded and brought the Sun of Justice, Christ Jesus.

This child [Mary] was the young woman in the Song of Songs who went looking for her Spouse, Jesus Christ: "Tell me, you whom my heart loves, where you pasture your flock.... I adjure you, Daughters of Jerusalem, do not stir up love before its own time.... My lover belongs to me and I to him..." (cf. Sg. 1, 2).

Cultivate Holy Desires

You might say to me: "I can't carry out the apostolate: I'm small; I'm in a hostile environment; I'm very busy; I'm sick...." My reply is: "But who or what can prevent you from having holy desires? If you can't take direct action, if you can't march at the head of Christ's army or even in the ranks of his foot soldiers...at least you can remain in the rear guard through your desires and sacrifices, following his work with vital interest."

Let us speak about apostolic desires, of which Jesus Master is our model:

1) Jesus said: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how many times I yearned to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her young under her wings, but you were unwilling!” (Mt. 23:37) “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you” (Lk. 22:15). “There is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished!” (Lk. 12:50) “Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest” (Mt. 11:28).

2) The Psalms are filled with these desires: “Praise the Lord, all you peoples; let all peoples praise the Lord: may kings and their people, old and young, praise the name of God. My soul yearns to observe your law throughout my life. How I suffer for those who do not follow it. May they be ashamed. Servants of the Lord, praise the Lord!” (cf. Ps. 113:1)

3) The desires of ardent souls: “Lord, I want to empty purgatory. I want your kingdom to reach the farthest ends of the earth. I wish I had a thousand hearts to love and praise you with all the angels and saints in heaven.” “Lord, I want to live until the number of your chosen ones is reached. I offer my prayers and sufferings so that all might be saved. I offer myself as a victim for everyone, in union with Jesus Host. I want to print the *Catechism*, the *Great Means of Prayer* and the *Preparation for Death*³—enough so that each person on earth might have a copy. I want to give a copy [of these books] to everyone so as to enlighten them, so that all sinners will be rescued from the path leading to damnation. I want to give everyone the means of salvation. May everyone come to know God and Jesus Master, Way, Truth and Life. May all generations sing the glories of Mary.”

“Lord, tonight may my every breath, may every beat of my heart, may every movement of my blood be an act of love for you.”

St. Catherine of Siena said one day: “How is it possible in these sad times to heal all the wounds of the Church? I know what you will do: you will raise up souls with ardent desires; their activities will be limited but their desires will be boundless: when united to one another, they will succeed in saving the world.”

In her convent, St. Gertrude prayed in this way: “My dearest Love, I love you with all my heart. If it were possible to bring all people to you, I would be ready to travel the earth barefoot, take them in my arms and perhaps even drag them with me if this would satisfy your burning love. Indeed, I would be ready to divide my heart into as many pieces as there are people living on earth so as to make them ready to love you and generous in doing so!”

St. Therese of the Child Jesus said in a similar way: “I want to be your spouse...a mother of souls. But this is not enough for me. I feel the call to be a soldier, a priest, an apostle, a doctor, a martyr...to lead heroic undertakings; to die defending the Church.... With what love I would take care of children! I want to enlighten the Doctors, the Prophets, and at the same time proclaim the Gospel to the ends of the earth; to be a missionary not for just a few years but until the end of time!”

St. Gertrude, St. Matilda and St. Thomas Aquinas teach that the Lord accepts holy desires as if they were works. “Jesus rewards desires in the same way he rewards actions” (St. Matilda). “The Lord accepts good resolutions as if they were works” (St. Gertrude).

The Lord wanted this saint to carry in her heart the needs of the whole Church. One day, she asked him why he honored St. James with so many miracles and conversions in Compostella, Spain. He answered: “Because while he was on earth he yearned to preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth, but he was martyred before he could do this. Now, from heaven, he can do what he desired to do while he was alive.”

Seeds that Bud

Do not be afraid! Even if a premature death were to bring all your plans and activities to an abrupt end, God would take into account your yearnings, prayers and desires.

³ Respectively: the *St. Pius X Catechism*; the *Great Means...* and *Preparation for Death* by St. Alphonsus Liguori: books that the members of the Little Workers' Typographical School printed as quickly as possible in the first decades of the 20th century.

In a short time, a person can do all the good he/she could have accomplished in a long life. Jesus lived only 33 years but he redeemed the world: he was the Apostle of the Father.

A sister might make her profession with a heart filled with desires and the resolution to dedicate all her energies and her entire life to the apostolate of teaching, of the missions, of doing good to others...and then die shortly afterward, having accomplished nothing.

A seminarian might be ordained a priest and, a few days later, be struck by a sudden illness and fly to eternity without having fulfilled even a small part of his ardently-desired program.... Does that mean everything is lost? No. The apostolate of desires yields great fruit: for the sister and for the priest themselves, for the glory of God and for the souls they carried in their minds and hearts.

May our heart be an altar—a vast hearth of holy desires and ardent yearnings: may your kingdom come! Expand your heart to embrace all peoples and all needs.

Desires To Do Certain Things

Rise with power, Lord, we beg you, and protect us from the dangers to which we are exposed because of our sins. May your liberating hand save us. You who live and reign....

In his excellent book, *The Discernment of Spirits*, Fr. Scaramelli writes: “At times the Spirit of God stirs up in us a desire to do good things that, in reality, he doesn’t want us to accomplish. All he is looking for is a docile will and good dispositions: he is satisfied with that. Thus God ordered Abram to sacrifice his only son, whom he loved very much. Abram obediently prepared everything for the holocaust, but when he raised the knife to strike his son, the Lord held back his hand: “Enough! Don’t harm him!”

God inspired David to build a Temple. But when he took steps to do this, God sent the prophet Nathan to tell him: “No, you are not the one who will build my Temple. Your son Solomon will do it.”

In the same way, there are souls who long for martyrdom, but the Lord only wants them to yearn for this: he is satisfied with that and will give them the reward of the martyrs. He inspires missionary zeal in souls who will never be sent to the missions, just like he inspires resolutions of penance and fasting in people who are physically weak and need to nourish themselves. Or else he inspires a yearning for a life of solitude in persons who need to remain with their families.

It is the voice of God, who through these desires wants something else, that is: he wants certain individuals to pray and suffer for the mission and for sinners; he wants them to mortify their will, tongue, heart; he wants them to live in the world while avoiding its dangers.

The Lord is pleased with holy desires; he blesses those desires and will reward the person for them.

VI The Apostolate of Prayer

*“Mary said: ‘My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my savior.’”
(Lk. 1:46-47)*

What is the Apostolate of Prayer?

Ordinarily, St. Paul presents himself to the communities of the faithful with the words: “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ” (Rm. 1:1). Having chosen twelve apostles, Jesus Christ then added St. Paul to their ranks: “He is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings...” (Acts 9:15). With this presentation, Paul clearly defines his mission and also his own strong-willed character. He was continually driven by the yearning to conquer the whole world [for Christ].

He never rested. The desire to gain more souls [for Christ] urged him on without respite. The part of the world he had already conquered was his prize and he defended it like an eagle defends her young.

In perfect serenity of spirit, but with an even stronger will, Mary yearned for the salvation of all humanity.

Prayer is a consequence of one’s desires. It is the third apostolate—a very important, easy and universal form of zeal. St. James recommends: “Pray for one another.... The fervent prayer of a righteous person is very powerful” (5:16).

In his first letter to Timothy, St. Paul says: “First of all, I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions and thanksgivings be offered for everyone.... This is good and pleasing to God our savior, who wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth” (2:1-3).

In this passage, St. Paul recommends the apostolate of prayer. He says it is pleasing to God and that it is a useful and effective means for the evangelization of people and for their eternal well-being. In fact, by means of this apostolate one begs God to have mercy on sinners, unbelievers, heretics, Jews, Muslims...asking him to grant them light, growth in faith, zeal in serving him and perseverance in doing good.

The Importance of Prayer

Every human labor—even our best initiatives—would be sterile without the grace of God. They would be like bodies that have weight and occupy space but do not have a soul and life. The life of every apostolate is a divine life that brings forth fruit—stable fruit. Without this divine life, our works are branches cut off from the vine and thus will die “because without me you can do nothing” (Jn. 15:5). Can human beings by means of their natural strength (which is very weak) accomplish supernatural works? It would be foolish and mistaken for a person dedicated to an apostolic activity to believe this.

The holy Curate of Ars said: “The life of prayer is the greatest happiness [one can experience] on this earth. What a beautiful life! What a beautiful life! Beautiful union with God! The interior life is a bath of love in which the souls immerses itself, drowning in love.... Eternity would not be long enough to understand this happiness.... God holds the soul that cultivates the interior life like a mother holds the head of her child, covering it with kisses and caresses.”

St. Francis of Assisi said: “Prayer is the source of grace. Preaching is the channel that distributes the graces received from heaven. Its ministers are the heralds of their king, chosen to

bring the people what they heard and received from the mouth of God and from the Holy Eucharist.”

“Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build” (Ps. 127:1).

But with God I can do all things: “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13).

Mary: the Apostle of Prayer

a) *Mary is the Apostle of prayer* because she prayed for everyone and did this better than anyone. A holy life is the most perfect and efficacious prayer.

There is a precept that says: “It is necessary to pray always without becoming weary” (cf. Lk. 18:1). No saint fulfilled this precept as fully as Mary.

How abundantly Mary prayed from the moment of her immaculate conception up to the Annunciation! She drew the Word of God from the heart of the Father to incarnate himself in her and become the fruit of her womb.

Mary’s life was a continual prayer. Her holiness pleased God, who saw in her a dwelling-place worthy of his beloved Son.

Before Mary, the Word of God had not yet found a worthy tabernacle to welcome him. He finally found this dwelling-place in her heart: “You prepared a worthy dwelling-place for your Son.”⁴ We could say that it was a dwelling fashioned by God himself on the design of the Son: “All things came into being through him” (Jn. 1:3). God intervened in a marvelous way, preserving Mary from original sin and enriching her with special graces: “Although God was pleased with her virginity, she became Mother because of her humility.”

Drawn by Mary’s beauty, the Son of God incarnated himself in her: “One alone is my dove, my perfect one” (Sg. 6:9). Because of this, the Holy Spirit poured his graces copiously into Mary: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you” (Lk. 1:35). As the Song of Songs says, the fragrance of Mary’s virtues attracted her Beloved to delight in the garden of her heart.

b) *Mary is an Apostle through her mental and oral prayer.* The Fathers and Doctors of the Church agree that Mary hastened the coming of the Redeemer through her prayers. In the plan of God, Mary was to bear within herself the three “ages” of the world: to herald his coming in the Old Testament; to live with him; and to be grafted onto the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, the Church. Thus, along with the chosen souls of the Old Testament, she waited for the Messiah; along with the shepherds, the Magi and St. Joseph, she adored him; after the ascension of Jesus into heaven, she became the most holy and venerated member of the Church.

Mary’s office emerges more clearly during the time of preparation [for the coming of Christ]. The Jewish people lived in a constant state of yearning for the coming of the Redeemer. Their yearning intensified as little by little the time drew nearer for the fulfillment of this prophecy. Among the Jews, there was no one more enlightened and holy than that privileged creature, Mary. She yearned for the Messiah more than anyone else. The commentaries on the Scriptures that she listened to in the Temple opened always vaster horizons to her with regard to the greatness of the Messiah, his supreme beauty and his mission among human beings. She understood the abyss of error, vice and idolatry into which humanity had fallen. With even greater ardor than the Patriarchs, she pleaded for the coming of the Savior: “Come, do not delay! Come and save your people!” These supplications played a powerful role in the plan of God by hastening the incarnation of his Son. Prayer holds great sway over the heart of the heavenly Father, especially when it springs from a humble, innocent and loving heart. Heaven responds to the pleas of such a heart. And so one day, when Mary was immersed in prayer, the Angel Gabriel appeared to her and greeted her with the words: “Hail, favored one.... You will bear a son.... He will be great and will be called Son of the

⁴ Collect for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

Most High” (Lk. 1:28ff.). The power of Mary’s prayer caused the scale of God’s justice to weigh heavily in favor of mercy.

The apostolate of prayer obtains vigor and perseverance for preachers, writers, teachers, catechists, missionaries, lecturers...all those who carry out an apostolate of works or words, written or printed. Thus St. Paul writes: “Pray for us, so that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified everywhere” (2 Th. 3:1).

A preacher once made a pact with a very humble person, saying: “Remain in adoration while I am preaching so that my words will bear the fruit of conversion.”

Everyone’s Apostolate

The apostolate of prayer is simple, easy, obligatory and appropriate for everyone.

Many confessors, missionaries, writers and bishops have collaborators who contribute [to their work] through their good deeds and prayers. These souls work and engage in combat in solitude or in the cloister: like Moses on the mountain, they extend their hearts and arms toward heaven.

In the Church, the apostolate of prayer has been organized into a vast association that today extends across the whole world and counts millions of members.⁵ If the prayers of a single fervent person are powerful, how much more powerful are the prayers of many people united in supplication to the Lord! “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Mt. 18:20). The purpose of the Apostleship of Prayer is to promote the desires and interests of the heart of Jesus through recitation of the following formula: “Divine Heart of Jesus, I offer you in union with the Immaculate Heart of Mary, my prayers, works, joys and sufferings of this day for all the intentions of your Sacred Heart, in union with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass throughout the world, in reparation for my sins, for the intentions of all our associates, and in particular for the intentions of the Holy Father for this month.”

More than half of the human race still knows nothing about the Redemption. Countless people have still not heard the Good News: they are in the condition we were in before the coming of Jesus Christ.

Let us pray with Mary that the Kingdom of God will be extended; that the Church will reach new parts of the world; that there will be one sheepfold and one Shepherd.

Let us unite our prayers to those of Mary: the child in Nazareth, the girl in the Temple, the teenager who felt always more acutely the work of the Holy Spirit in her soul, preparing her for her divine maternity.

(J. Alberione, *Mary, Queen of Apostles*, chapters 4-6, pp. 41-62)

⁵ The Apostleship of Prayer was launched by a group of Jesuit seminarians in Vals, France in 1844. In 1861, Fr. Henry Ramière, S.J., adapted the organization for parishes and various Catholic institutions. It’s bulletin, *Messenger of the Sacred Heart of Jesus*, helped to spread the Movement and its doctrine. It was approved by Pope Pius IX in 1879. Recitation of *The Morning Offering* (which Fr. Alberione himself recited every day) and prayer are the basic membership requirements.