

The Merciful Gaze of Mary

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In front of a statue of Our Lady Help of Christians, Dr. Plinio was “contemplated” by Mary’s merciful and compassionate gaze. The grace he received on this occasion profoundly marked his life.

Tying to explain the essence of my devotion to Our Lady, I recently found an image that, although very simple, expresses my thought well.

Let us imagine a well-formed polyhedron. If its faces are triangular, looking at one of them, in some sense we can see the others, for they are all triangle-shaped.

So it is with the Mother of God, whose perfection is super-eminent and to whom the Church renders the cult of hyperdulia. When we consider one of her sublime qualities, we see that She has in an equally high degree all the other virtues of which a human creature is capable. For example, knowing her faith, one understands her hope and her charity. Seeing one side of the polyhedron, one can intuit how the others are and their dimensions.

If a polyhedron is not exactly like this according to geometry, at least the image can serve as a metaphor.

Our Lady's compassion

What first touched me most in Our Lady was not so much her virginal and majestic holiness, but the compassion with which She looks upon those who are not holy, hearing them with pity and answering them generously; her mercy, in short, has the same dimensions as her other qualities.

In other words, it is an inexhaustible mercy, of great clemency and patience, prompt to help at any moment, in an unimaginable way, without ever letting out a sigh of fatigue, exhaustion or impatience. She is always ready not only to reiterate her goodness, but to surpass herself, so that when such mercy is shown, even if it is poorly received, another even greater follows. It is as if our abyss attracts her light. And the more we flee from Her, the further she extends to us the graces She has obtained, casting light in our direction.

How did I come to realize this?

“A gaze that made me calm for the rest of my life”

As a boy, having gone to the Church of the Heart of Jesus and taking notice for the first time of the statue of Our Lady Help of Christians, I was not favoured by any vision, ecstasy or revelation, but I felt touched, as if the image were looking at me, and I had a kind of personal knowledge of this unfathomable goodness that totally enveloped me. Even if I wanted to run away or reject Her, She would hold me affectionately and say, “My son, come back. Here I am!” And this made me understand the depth of that mercy.

First of all, I became calm for the rest of my life. In fact, no matter how great our problems may be, if we are enveloped in this mercy, we can rest; because when someone is not brutally insensitive and turns to the Virgin Mary, She eventually resolves everything.

And, note, one of the things that most impressed me – in the ambiguity of a child's mentality, this was very clear to me – was to understand that this was not a privilege for me alone, but it was her attitude towards everyone. With all the people who have ever existed and will exist, all the sinners who are on the streets, in the houses, the streetcars, the vehicles, She is exactly like this. Many, however, reject Her.

Whenever I see people who are agitated and full of problems, I have great pity for them and ask myself: “Why can I not transmit to them a gaze like the one I received from Our Lady? They would be calm for the rest of their life.”

I cannot fully express what that grace was. When I pray that passage from the Magnificat: “*et misericordia eius a progenie in progenies timentibus eum* – He has mercy on those who fear Him in every generation,” I always think: This is very true, and it is accomplished through Mary Most Holy. She is the insatiable mercy that does not fail, but that multiplies solicitously,

kindly, coming down to our stature and, out of compassion, making herself even smaller than us so as to accommodate us.”

Mercy, purity, fortitude and wisdom

In considering this mercy, the virginity of Mary Most Holy comes to mind, for these notions are, so to speak, contained within one another. If we know her mercy, we know her purity; it is once again the image of the polyhedron. She is pure, with an unspeakable degree of purity. Any chastity which can be conceived is nothing as compared with her purity, characterized not only by the absence of the least inclination to evil, but by an up-springing of soul aimed directly and exclusively at God, without the least attachment to anyone or anything else. It is a total *élan*, of an impetus, integrity and desire for the Absolute which is immeasurable. The purity of Our Lady, compared to that of other people, is like the whiteness of snow compared to coal.

And, from my perspective, purity comes together with the concept of fortitude, which does not simply mean that nothing can break it. It is something else: in face of what the Mother of God decides, in her purity, the rest of the world must bend to the power of her will; it is an impetus and a resolution without the possibility of resistance from anyone or thing. It is a sovereignty and dominion of such a magnitude that there are no words to express it. Today we often hear of shells and other weapons. In reality, they are simply harmless and ridiculous popguns compared to an act of will, a preference of the Blessed Virgin.

In turn, this fortitude, mercy and purity bring to mind her lucid and adamant wisdom, arranging everything, never having the least doubt, but only certainties. In other words, She has knowledge of all things, as well as their interrelationships, and penetrates into the depths of every being. The universe is so enormous! The fact that Our Lady understands the order of the universe and its apex once again allows us to glimpse the immensity of her purity, fortitude and mercy.

These are the virtues that, for the moment, most call my attention when I remember the gaze of Our Lady Help of Christians in the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

“My Mother, I am thine”

One might ask: “You received this gaze when you were eleven or twelve years of age; and you never experienced anything similar afterwards?”

This grace was given to me in such a way that it remained like a shining light for my whole life. I feel it happened yesterday. It is as if the Blessed Virgin said to me, “My son, I love you.” And I declared: “My Mother, I am thine.”

Someone might ask: “But where do you put Our Lord Jesus Christ in these considerations?” I reply, “In everything!” It is the idea that St. Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort develops

extensively: Our Lady is the cloister, the oratory, the sacred tabernacle where the Redeemer is, and the closer we are to Her, the closer we will be to her Divine Son.

Imagine Our Lady at the time when the Child Jesus was being formed within her virginal body by the action of the Holy Spirit, and someone were to want to adore the Messiah apart from Her. This would be absurd; it would not make sense!

I know that I will be more united to Our Lord the more I am united to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Naturally, it follows that my devotion to Him passes through Her. I believe – I hope, at least – that even on those occasions when I am most tired, when I make reference to the adoration due to Our Lord, I soon afterwards speak of His virginal Mother. It is systematic.

It could be said: “But often you talk about Her without referring to Him.” Yes, because He is infinitely greater than She. Thus, in speaking of Her, He is included implicitly. But when talking about Him, She is not implicitly included. Therefore, like it or not, with the help of Our Lady, I will do this until I die.◇

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