



THE MAGAZINE OF THE Society of Mary



American Region Edition

Annunciation 2020

March 2020

www.somamerica.org

THE SOCIETY OF MARY

(Established 1931)

THE SOCIETY OF MARY springs from two similar societies founded in 1880 and 1901 respectively, which united in 1931. It has members all over the world and is not confined to Anglicans alone.

Where there are sufficient members in one place or area, they combine to form a Ward, with a priest as Superior and an elected Secretary. They can organize regular services, meetings and many other activities. Five or more members may form a Cell, and organize joint prayer and fellowship. Isolated members are joined to the Headquarters Ward.

The Society publishes its magazine "AVE" two times each year with details of pilgrimages, retreats, festival services, etc. It is free to all members and is the effective link between the various Regions.

The Society is not affiliated to any single Shrine or Marian institution, and is the only organization endeavoring to promote equally all the different aspects of devotion to Mary.

THE SOCIETY RULE OF LIFE

The Society is dedicated to the glory of God and in honor of the Holy Incarnation under the invocation of Our Lady, Help of Christians.

1. Members shall keep a Rule of Life, which will include such special devotions as the Angelus, the Rosary, the Litany and Anthems of Our Lady.
2. They will pray for Departed Members of the Society and offer Mass for them.
3. They will take part in the Mass on the principal Feasts of Our Lady.
4. They will engage in apostolic and pastoral work, according to opportunity, under the guidance of the local Ward Officers and the General Council.

OBJECTS AND MEMBERSHIP OF THE SOCIETY

The Society was founded as an Anglican Society with these Objects:

1. To love and honor Mary.
2. To spread devotion to her in reparation for past neglect and misunderstanding, and in the cause of Christian Unity.
3. To take Mary as a model in purity, personal relationships and family life.

From the American Region Superior

Dear Members and Friends,

Since I have two articles elsewhere in this issue of *AVE*, I will try to keep my remarks here brief. But I do want to call attention to our social media presence on Facebook.

Several months ago, we launched the SOM American Region’s Facebook page at facebook.com/somamerica.org. If you are a Facebook user, please take a look and give us a “Like” so that you will receive our periodic posts on the page. The English Society of Mary also has a Facebook page at facebook.com/socofmary.

Both pages represent the Society of Mary’s official presence on Facebook. However, there is also a private group on Facebook called “Society of Mary” that does not officially represent SOM either in England or the United States. To its credit, it bills itself as “unofficial.” I do know that this group’s administrator died not too long ago—may he rest in peace—and I have no idea whether anyone else is monitoring the content that is posted. Often the posts are interesting and edifying. Sometimes they are not. But SOM has no control over them. I say this simply as a disclaimer because on occasion I am asked whether posts on this group’s page represent the official SOM point of view. They do not.

By all means, though, take a look at the two official SOM Facebook pages mentioned above and follow them. And if you are a member in good standing of the SOM American Region, you are eligible to be on our email list to receive periodic online announcements and newsletters. Please notify us of your email address if we don’t have it so we can add you to our list.

On another topic, it gives us great pleasure to announce this year’s SOM American Region Mass and Annual Meeting at S. Clement’s, Philadelphia, on Saturday 23 May 2020 at 11 am. Further details are given elsewhere in this issue of *AVE*, as well as on both the SOM America and S. Clement’s websites.

We hope you enjoy this issue of *AVE*. Please keep us in your prayers. **AVE**

With all blessings in Christ and Our Lady,
The Rev’d John D. Alexander, SSC, Ph.D.
American Region Superior



Letter from the American Region Chaplain

“A Sword Will Pierce Your Own Soul Also”

This year we had the privilege to hear and proclaim the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple—the Purification of Mary—on a Sunday. Every time I read that passage from Luke’s gospel, I am struck by Simeon’s words to Mary, “A sword will pierce your own soul also.” (Lk 2:34)

As Christians, we have the benefit of 20/20 hindsight, unlike Mary who did not have that advantage. God spoke to Mary through the angel Gabriel, announcing “for you have found favor with God” (Lk 1:30), “And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus” (Lk. 1:31). Without a complete understanding of what is to take place in her life, Mary responds, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (Lk. 1:38). What Our blessed Lady did understand was that God had called her for His particular purposes. She knew that her life was no longer hers but belonged totally to God.

Forty days after the birth of Jesus and in accordance with Jewish religious custom, Mary and Joseph take their Son to the Temple. At the Temple, Mary and Joseph are met by a very old man, Simeon, who prophesies to them, “Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed” (Lk. 2:34-35).

St. Bernard of Clairvaux wrote in his sermon, *His Mother Stood by the Cross*: “Truly, O blessed Mother, a sword has pierced your heart. For only by passing through your heart could the sword enter the flesh of your Son. Indeed, after your Jesus—who belongs to everyone, but is especially yours—gave up His life, the cruel spear, which was not withheld from His lifeless body, tore open His side. Clearly it did not touch His soul and could not harm Him, but it did pierce your heart. For surely His soul was no longer there, but yours could not be torn away. Thus the violence of sorrow has cut through your heart, and we rightly call you more than martyr, since the effect of compassion in you has gone beyond the endurance of physical suffering.”

We undoubtedly are aware that a sword is an instrument used to kill an enemy. The Greek word used for sword in this passage depicts a long, large sword or a type of Thracian javelin. In the New Testament, this particular Greek word is only used again in Revelation 1:19 and 2:12 in which Jesus

is described with a two-edged sword coming from His mouth. Simeon was expressing to Mary that her Son would have evil words spoken against Him and this would eventually lead to His crucifixion. She would experience in her heart each and every evil thrust of the sword, both the words spoken against Him and also her Son's body nailed to the Cross and the thrust of the Roman soldier's spear. However, in the end this sword is depicted coming from the mouth of our Lord. The instrument that was used to pierce Mary's soul and to pierce His side while on the Cross now becomes the sign of His victory over sin and death.

How does Simeon's prophetic word to Mary translate to our 21st Century Western witness? Our Catholic faith echoes the Lord when He says, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." (Luke 9:23)

Contrast this prophetic word with a 2015 survey in which 66 percent of practicing Christians agreed (either completely or somewhat) with this statement, "The highest goal of life is to enjoy it as much as possible." Our culture has embraced the goal of self-fulfillment as primary for our meaning and purpose in this life. How does this line up with our call to deny ourselves and pick up our Cross to follow Jesus? What would have happened if our blessed Lady believed that her highest goal was to enjoy life as much as possible? Clearly, a sword piercing her heart would not be consistent with a goal of self-fulfillment and "enjoying life".

How do we live in our Western culture and stay true to our calling as Christians to "take up our Cross" and deny ourselves in order to follow Jesus? "...and a sword will pierce through your own soul also." Our blessed Lady shows us how to sanctify our pain and suffering, so that we can unite them to our Lord's Cross and Passion. Mary's faithfulness and trust in God and her Son demonstrate how we may make acts of atonement for the sins of the world so that we may grow each day in the fruits of Redemption. As we willingly give our lives to Jesus, He fills us with His Holy Spirit and gives us the strength and wisdom to "take up our cross" and fulfill our mission to which He calls us in this world. What sword is it, in pursuit of the gospel of Christ, that pierces your soul also? **AVE**

Fr. Russell A. Griffin, SSC
Church of St. Uriel the Archangel, Sea Girt, NJ



From the Editor

This Annunciation 2020 Issue of AVE offers a rich selection of pieces on the spiritual mysteries of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Both our Chaplain, Fr. Russell Griffin, and Canon Barry Swain provide meditations on Mary’s Purification in the Temple in Jerusalem—an occasion both joyful in the priest Simeon’s recognition of the infant Jesus’ true identity and sorrowful in his prophecy to his Mother—“And a sword shall pierce your own soul also that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.” Fr. Corey French contemplates Our Lady as Mother of the Church. The American Region Superior, Fr. John D. Alexander, discusses the recognition of Marian apparitions in general, and also writes about the first officially recognized apparition in the United States: to a young Belgian immigrant to our shores in a remote area of Wisconsin’s Door County in 1859. Your editor discusses some remarkable 19th century paintings of the Annunciation that may help us move more deeply into this confrontation between the human and the Divine as Mary accepts the invitation to bear the Word Made Flesh. Wishing you all a blessed Feast of the Annunciation. **AVE**

Phoebe Pettingell



From the American Region Treasurer

Treasurers typically report: facts; figures; funds collected, expended, invested; balance sheets; and budgets – everything related to an organization’s money. To those ends, please see the latest, approved and adopted report featured in this edition of AVE.

On this occasion, kindly permit me to share a few brief facts and figures representing my time as American Region Treasurer:

- First financial accounting reported in 1979 as Assistant Treasurer
- First financial accounting reported in 1981 as Treasurer
- Served subsequent terms as Treasurer 1981-present
- My current term expires May 2021 – bottom line:
after 40+ years, it’s time to raise up the next treasury steward

It is my fondest desire to pass along the particulars of this office in an orderly fashion. Any interested member-in-good-standing, devoted to the Rule and Objects of the Society is encouraged to contact the Superior: superior@somamerica.org and/or myself: treasurer@somamerica.org for additional information. **AVE**

All for Jesus, All for Mary,
David B. J. Chase, PhD

P.S. *Status quo* does not pertain to this volunteer position. SoM America is analyzing duties for Officers and Members of Council. This is a unique opportunity to play an important role in shaping the Society’s present and future work and witness.



THE SOCIETY OF MARY, AMERICAN REGION

Treasurer's Report

INVESTMENT ACCOUNT: \$192,642.05 as of 3/30/18
\$202,696.08 as of 3/29/19

(Raymond James Investments)

OPERATING ACCOUNT:

Balance as of 4/4/18.....\$12,775.90
+ Deposits/Credits/Transfers.\$9,342.21
GRAND TOTAL\$22,118.11
- Less expenditures below*....\$7,015.36
Balance as of 4/2/19.....\$15,102.75

EXPENDITURES:	<u>'18-'19</u>	<u>'18-'19</u>	<u>'19-'20</u>
	Budget	Actual	Budget
AVE			
(Printing & Postage)	4,300.	2,735.19	5,470.
Website hosting	180.	180.00	180.
Living Church	1,200.	1,200.00	1,200.
England (Annual Offering)	100.	100.00	100.
Miscellaneous (^)	3,500.	2,800.17	3,500.
TOTALS			
	9,280.	*7,015.36	10,450.

N.B. Fiscal year begins annually on the first banking day of April.

(^) Examples: medals from England, printing and postage other than AVE, P.O. Box rental, Superior's travel expenses, legal fees administrative expenses, technology upgrades, Constant Contact (e-blasts), website security, special offerings, and office supplies.

Respectfully submitted,

David B.J.Chase, Ph.D.,
Treasurer, American Region
A.D. 31 May 2019

Attentive, Faithful, Offering: Our Lady as Mother of the Church

*Address to the Fifty-Fifth Annual Pilgrimage to the Walsingham Shrine
St. James' Anglican Church, Cleveland, June 1, 2019*

By Fr. Corey French

Anglican Cathedral Church of St. Edward the Confessor, Indianapolis

Our Lady's title as Mother of the Church draws our attention to her relationship with the Church's liturgical life. Thinking of Mary in the liturgy, we may tend to concentrate on the panoply of Marian feasts that punctuate the Church year. Or perhaps we think of the great canticle of Evensong, the *Magnificat*, Our Lady's hymn of praise to the Lord. And all of this is perfectly apt.

But Our Lady also has much to teach us about how we are to rightly order our adoration of her Son. Our Lady is an exemplar of true worship. By considering how Our Lady exemplifies the virtues of attentiveness, faithfulness, and oblation, we can deepen our own worship and adoration of the Most Holy Trinity.

Mother of the Church

Our Lady's title as Mother of God—*Theotokos*, the God-Bearer—is one of her most ancient. The Council of Ephesus affirmed it in 431 to combat the errors of the heretic Nestorius. The title “Mother of the Church,” while certainly not as extensive in use in the early Church, still appears among some of the Fathers, including St. Ambrose. Nonetheless, the maternity of the Church has always been a figure in Christian thought. The Church in the Fathers is *mater Ecclesia*, *virgo Ecclesia*, even *immaculata Ecclesia*. The Church who brings forth new life out of the womb of the waters of Holy Baptism has always been understood as “Mother Church.”

Recent thought, particularly among Roman Catholic theologians, has begun to attribute to Our Lady the title of Mother of the Church in a more deliberate way. This is an outworking of the simple recognition that Our Lady, as the mother of the Head whose members we all are in the Body, is also our mother in a more-than-incidental way. She is also our mother

in the order of grace, as the Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church indicates: “By her complete adherence to the Father’s will, to his Son’s redemptive work, and to every prompting of the Holy Spirit, the Virgin Mary is the Church’s model of faith and charity. Thus she is a ‘preeminent and . . . wholly unique member of the Church’; indeed, she is the ‘exemplary realization’ (*typus*) of the Church.” Having gone before us in all obedience to the Lord, Our Lady models what it means to be a member of the Body of Christ. Then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger argues that Mary is “the ultimate personal concretization of [the] Church. At the moment when she pronounces her Yes [in the Annunciation], Mary is Israel in person; she is the Church in person and as a person.”

She is the faithful Remnant of Israel spoken of in the prophets, the one who waits attentively and obediently upon the Lord’s Word. In her submission to God’s will in the Annunciation as the New Eve, she becomes the New Temple, the true and final place of God’s dwelling with men in a union so intimate that God indeed becomes man in her womb. She remains faithful to her Son even at the foot of the Cross, when all of his disciples, save John, have abandoned Him. And she remains faithful to Him after His Resurrection and Ascension. In Acts 1:14, we see her in the Upper Room alongside the disciples, praying and awaiting the promised outpouring of the Spirit.

For all of these reasons, it is fitting to call Our Lady the “Mother of the Church.” As Mother of the Church, then, she is also the Church’s preeminent worshipper among the Communion of Saints, the one who from the very beginning experienced a sublime communion with Our Lord at His conception and continues to experience it with an unsurpassable closeness. As the one who always points to her Son in adoration and worship, Our Lady has much to teach us about how we may worship her Son better and more perfectly. As Mother of the Church, her only desire is that we draw nearer to her Son through the sacramental life that He has bestowed upon us. How, then, should we follow her example?

Attentive Virgin

At Our Lord’s Nativity, when the shepherds recounted what they had experienced, St. Luke tells us that “all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart” (2:18-9). Likewise, after finding Our Lord in the Temple and receiving Our Lord’s explanation, St. Luke tells us, “but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart” (2:51). St. Luke is clearly trying to indicate to us something of the quality of Our Lady’s response to

the events around her. While others “wondered,” Our Lady “pondered”—a clear contrast that Luke draws here. Here is a distinctive quality that goes beyond simple curiosity; rather, it indicates a profoundly contemplative dimension. Our Lady does not merely wonder at what goes on around her: she meditates upon it.

Our Lady models for us what it means to “hear the word of God, and keep it” (Lk. 11:28). In both of these moments, St. Luke stresses that Our Lady “kept all these things.” She is attentive. Nothing escapes her notice. She is not a “forgetful hearer” (Jas. 1:25) but one who, like the just man of Psalm 1, meditates day and night on God’s word to her.

What such profound attention requires, chiefly, is love. Attentiveness is primarily a quality of love, for we ignore what is ultimately indifferent to us. What is of secondary importance receives only a divided and half-hearted attention. In paying attention to something, we give ourselves over to it completely. We are absorbed into it. The twentieth-century philosopher Simone Weil writes that “Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity.... Attention, taken to its highest degree, is the same thing as prayer. It presupposes faith and love. Absolutely unmixed attention is prayer. If we turn our mind toward the good, it is impossible that little by little the whole soul will not be attracted thereto in spite of itself.” Prayer is absolutely unmixed attention to the things of God. It is taking all the things of God and pondering them in our heart.

We live in an age in which attention is difficult to maintain. The constant barrage of notifications, of content, of the incessant daily demands of the trivial overwhelm our capacity for attention. One begins to suspect that the infiltration of social media and its technological vehicles into every moment is an intentional plot to destroy our interior lives. When we lose the capacity to retreat inward, to focus our attention on what we choose rather than what is forced upon us, we are deprived of an interior freedom—a freedom to think, a freedom to choose. A people who have lost the capacity to pay attention can be induced to choose and to do and to buy and to believe whatever those pulling the proverbial levers wish them to buy and to choose and to do and to believe.

Now, before we digress too far, I simply want to say this: reclaiming our attention is the most revolutionary and countercultural act we can perform these days. We reclaim our freedom, and more importantly, we reclaim our capacity to love fully. To live in a perpetually distracted state is to live in a state of selfishness, of self-absorption. In such a state true prayer is impossible because we are turned in on ourselves, away from God.

The implications for our prayer life are that if our attention is perpetually directed elsewhere, our advancement in the spiritual life is all but sure to cease, if not to regress. When our minds wander in prayer or at Mass, this should not surprise us. Even the Desert Fathers, the Olympic gold medalists of prayer and self-denial, wrote voluminously about distraction in prayer. If it was an issue for them, how much more it will be an issue for us!

But we can look to Our Lady as the one who was fully absorbed in her Son, in meditating upon and pondering his words. We can pray earnestly that we may love her Son better, to cultivate that single-minded attention that characterized her prayer. We can begin to discipline our minds through practices of meditation, such as *lectio divina*, that focus our minds on a very concise part of God's word. In the midst of our struggles with the noise around us, Our Lady shows that we, too, can attain an attentive contemplation of her Son, that we too can ponder all these things in our hearts.

There has been a tendency in the Church's history to relegate contemplation to the institutional monastics. In their cloisters, they do the contemplating on our behalf so that we don't have to. But Our Lady was not a monastic in this sense; she was a mother concerned with the cares and trials of life in the world. And yet she by grace was able to adore and to worship and to contemplate with single-minded purity of heart. Let us ask for the grace to do the same.

Faithful Virgin

This virtue of attention and contemplation also requires faith. In giving ourselves over to another—be it a someone or a something—we are entrusting ourselves to that other. We are placing our faith in that other as worthy of our self-giving. It is primarily in Our Lady's faithfulness that we find the ground of her attentiveness. Her trust in her Son's words and the words spoken about Him drives her to hold and ponder them in her heart. Faith as well as love are the prerequisites for attention, which is prayer.

No greater faithfulness is seen than in the Annunciation, the singular moment toward which all of salvation history had been tending, from the call of Abraham to the exile and return of the covenant people. As the Mother of the Church—as Israel personified—Our Lady humbly and faithfully gives her *Fiat* to God: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word." In this moment the New Eve's obedience reverses the disobedience of the Old, and she brings forth the New Adam, who is not merely the image of God but as St. Paul tells us in Colossians, the *eikōn* of the Invisible God. The perfect faithfulness of the Second Eve undoes

the faithlessness of the First.

In this perfect faithfulness, we see again what we hope to become. As the theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar writes, because Mary is Mother of the Church, “Everyone who like her is a handmaiden or servant of God can be a mother of Jesus who lets the divine word become flesh in his own body.” When we submit ourselves in faith to God’s will, when we do the works of God in the world, we become God-bearers like Our Lady. Through the mediation of the Holy Spirit, Christ the Light shines forth in the world through us, the members of His Body.

Our Lady’s perfect faithfulness in the Annunciation also manifests the character of the Church’s prayer. As von Balthasar again writes: “Prayer in the Church should strive to give form to this Yes: as adoration, as thanks, as petition that works within and concretizes God’s gracious will, and at the same time as consent that goes along with everything that God is doing in the world, as readiness to be used, to be used up, in God’s work.” As he later points out, “When you say Yes to God unconditionally, you have no idea how far this Yes is going to take you. Certainly farther than you can guess and calculate beforehand,” even unto the shame and humiliation of the Cross. When we pray truly, when we pray as the Church, we pray with the Mother of the Church, we pray with the one whose Yes to God took her to the desolation of the Cross and the glory of the Assumption. But all of this is conditioned on a perfect trust in the God who loves us, an attentive waiting on his will and his word for us. If our faith is to bear fruit, if it is to make us God-bearers, we must follow Our Lady who exemplifies this faith fully. The adoration, the responsiveness to God’s word that Our Lady shows forth in her life and prayer is precisely what we should strive for in our own prayer. Here the Church must follow its Mother’s lead.

Offering Virgin

As we have said, attention is a form of generosity: a form of self-offering rooted in love and faith toward the other. This brings us to a third virtue of Our Lady: she is the one who offers. In the Annunciation, she offered herself completely and without reservation to God’s will for her. In the Presentation in the Temple, she brings her Son as an offering to the Lord as a fulfillment of the Law and a foreshadowing of His death. And finally, at Calvary, she unites herself perfectly with her Son as He offers Himself upon the Cross. Here she offers herself once again up to the sword that pierces her own soul (Lk. 2:35).

In these acts of offering, Our Lady as Mother of the Church reveals

precisely what it is to be the Church. The Eastern Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann writes that humans were originally created to be priests; that is, man was created to stand in the center of the world and unify it in his act of blessing God, of both receiving the world from God and offering it back to God. This act of receiving from God and offering back to Him what is His—as the familiar offertory verse says, “All things come of Thee, O Lord, and of thine own have we given Thee”—is embedded in our very nature. We defected from this essential vocation in the Fall, but it remains our essential role as new creations to live eucharistically: to thankfully offer all things back to the One who is “all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28).

The source and summit of all this offering is the Mass, where we offer to God the Father by God the Holy Spirit the sublime and eternal Sacrifice of God the Son. We receive God’s salvific promises, the salvation wrought for us on the Cross, and return all to God in thanksgiving, which is all we have to offer. We receive the world from God and offer it back to God. In Our Lady, again, the Church lives out this eucharistic and sacramental existence. She offers herself without reservation. She offers her Son up to His redemptive mission. We see in Our Lady the pattern of reception and offering that should characterize all the prayer and life of the Church.

This spirit of complete oblation demands the attentiveness and the faithfulness already discussed, for all these virtues are necessarily intertwined. Each of these virtues finds its exemplar in Our Lady. As the Mother of the Church, she teaches her sons and daughters how to live and worship not only with attentiveness, faithfulness, and generosity but also with joy: “My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.” The recognition of what God has done for us demands a faithful and loving attention to His word and will, a desire to offer ourselves joyfully and completely to do what He would have us do.

When we come to worship in the Mass or in the Daily Office or in the quiet of our own rooms, we never come alone. We worship “compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses” (Heb. 12:1), among whom the chief is Our Lady, Mother of the Church. As our Mother, she has walked the pilgrimage of Faith that remains before us to be completed, and she shows the reward awaiting those who are faithful in that pilgrimage. If we but look to her, she will teach us how to worship and love her Son. She will teach us to make Him the singular focus of our hearts and lives. She will teach us how to offer our entire selves to Him, by saying only *Fiat mihi* to his divine will. **AVE**

Ecce Ancilla Domini:
New Depictions of the Annunciation
by 19th-Century Artists

Phoebe Pettingell

Medieval and Renaissance paintings of the Annunciation in the Western tradition traditionally depict the Virgin kneeling in prayer as the Angel Gabriel hovers above the floor with elaborate wings colored like a tropical bird. Our Lady's face is reverent and modestly humble, but rarely expressive of surprise. This changed dramatically by the middle of the 19th century when new schools of art broke the mold. The first painting to do so was by the artist and poet, Dante Gabriel Rossetti



Dante Gabriel Rossetti
The Girlhood of Mary Virgin 1849

(1828-1882), one of the founders of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (known by the initials PRB on its artwork). In 1849, Rossetti had exhibited his “The Girlhood of Mary Virgin,” using his sister, the poet Christina Rossetti, as Mary and his mother as Saint Anne. In an interior scene, the Virgin is embroidering a lily on a red background. The lily is a symbol of her purity, but the scarlet cloth behind it reminds us that it is also a funeral flower forecasting Christ’s passion. A child angel points to a plucked lily in a pot, while the mother oversees her daughter’s handiwork. Through the window, Saint Joseph can be seen tending grape vines, while a dove surrounded by a halo, representing the Holy Spirit, perches watching. Young women of the 19th century spent much time learning embroidery, so the domesticity of the scene pleased critics who found it decorous and suitable for a religious theme.

A very different reaction met the exhibition of “Ecce Ancilla Domini” in 1853 (depicted on the cover of this issue of *AVE*). Again, Christina Rossetti modeled the Virgin, with her other brother, William Michael Rossetti as Gabriel, but this painting shocked Victorian sensibilities with its break from tradition. Mary is seated on her bed, her feet drawn up beneath a white nightgown leaving her arms bare. Her



John Everett Millais
Christ in the House of His Parents 1849-50



James Tissot
Annunciation 1886-1894

auburn hair hangs over her shoulders in some disorder, as if she had just sat up. Gabriel has no wings. Instead, his feet show flames coming from his heels like the Greek god Hermes, and he is clearly naked under a white tabard, open at the sides. His face is impassive and he offers Mary another lily. The one she embroidered in the earlier picture is displayed at the foot of her bed. Both figures wear halos, as does the Holy Spirit as dove flying through the window to bring to fruition the miraculous conception. Mary's face expresses shock and apprehension. Her eyes are focused not on the angel's face, but on the hand proffering the lily. She looks utterly vulnerable in the face of the divine. Critics assailed the portrayal of a bedroom scene, the lack of wings on Gabriel, and his obvious lack of clothing under his white garment.

There had already been a furor over John Everett Millais's "Christ in the House of His Parents" where the Holy Child is showing his mother a wound on his hand, symbolic of his future crucifixion. Saint Joseph's carpenter shop is filled with objects also forecasting those at the cross,

while the various characters—Joseph and Mary, the boy John the Baptist carrying water to wash the wound, Joachim and Anne, hover around. In this picture there were no halos, and the figures looked ordinary and not even particularly attractive—certainly devoid of the radiant faces and graceful poses audiences were accustomed to for divine persons. Several generations later, critics attacked Pre-Raphaelite art for being over-symbolic, but when it first appeared the works were assailed for using ordinary, untransfigured people as models. Protestant England further objected to focusing on the Virgin. It was one thing to depict a sweet domestic scene like “The Girlhood of Mary,” even if it didn’t appear in Scripture, but quite another to show her in a nightgown or central to a picture of her wounded boy.

By the last years of the century, new ways of depicting Biblical scenes developed. Initially, the Pre-Raphaelites imitated artists of the Middle Ages who set scenes from Scripture in their local landscapes, villages, and costumes of their particular eras. However, shortly after the exhibition of the early PRB work, Holman Hunt traveled to the Middle East and began to introduce an “oriental” touch to his pictures instead of European landscapes and models. By the 1880s, the French painter James Tissot (1836-1920), who had previously concentrated on fashionable French and English women, embarked on a series of illustrations for Biblical scenes, drawing on Palestinian models and backgrounds. His “Annunciation” (painted sometime between 1886 and 1894) is a luminous watercolor over graphite. Mary, dressed in white clothing that conceals everything but her face, is seated on the ground, bowing her head in awe, while an angel with three sets of wings (presumably one of the cherubim) hovers to her right. Tissot later wrote an extensive commentary on the hierarchy of angelic hosts. While Rossetti’s “Ecce Ancilla Domini” stresses the contrast between the ordinary—a young girl just wakened by an unexpected divine presence—Tissot concentrates on what he took to be the culture in which the Old and New Testaments were revealed.

At the same time, the American black artist, Henry Ossawa Tanner (1859-1937) painted and exhibited his vision of the Annunciation (1898). Again, he had immersed himself in the landscapes and interiors of the Holy Land, and his Mary is clearly a teenage girl from the area, seated on a white bed against the oriental riot of patterned tapestries, rugs, and tiles of a typical interior. In his preliminary sketch, Tanner copied Rossetti in clothing her in a white gown falling off one shoulder.



Henry Ossawa Tanner
The Annunciation 1898

She also has bare feet, something that would have been too provocative in the 1850s. She is looking directly at the angel, who is a column of light, clearly from a supernatural dimension, and her expression displays fear and awe, but also curiosity. Tanner's expressive painting—as original as Rossetti's—makes the scene not so much exotic but something the viewer can identify with, imagining an encounter with a being from God.

These, and other depictions of the appearance of Gabriel to Mary by artists of the period show a fresh attempt to understand and identify with this remarkable scene from Luke's Gospel. By the 20th century, striking paintings of the same theme concentrate less on emotions and more on the techniques of Modernism. Nevertheless, meditating on the art of Rossetti, Tissot, and Tanner, in particular, we may be able to enter more fully into the mystery of the Incarnation and Mary's complete acceptance of God's will. **AVE**

Our Lady of Good Help: An American Marian Apparition

Fr. John D. Alexander

Of the seventeen apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary that have received official approval by the Roman Catholic Church, only one has taken place in the United States: Our Lady of Good Help in Champion, Wisconsin, where the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared three times in 1859 to a twenty-eight-year-old Belgian-born woman named Adele Brise.

Adele was born in Dion-le-Val, in the Belgian province of Brabant, on January 30, 1831. At an early age an accident with lye caused her the loss of one eye. Despite this handicap and her meagre education, she was known for her charming personality and fervent piety.

Adele had resolved to join a religious community when her parents, Lambert and Marie-Catherine, decided to emigrate to America. Her confessor advised her to go with her parents: “If God wills it, you will become a Sister in America. Go, I will pray for you.”

In 1855, the Brises embarked on the seven-week voyage to New



Shrine of Our Lady of Good Help

York. Moving westward, they purchased 240 acres of land for \$120 in Red River, Wisconsin, in what was then frontier wilderness. Here, Adele took on the burdens of pioneer life.

In some versions of the story, the first vision occurred on August 15, 1859, the Feast of the Assumption. In other versions, it took place in early October. (The apparitions to St. Bernadette Soubirous at Lourdes had begun just a year and a half previously.) Adele was walking through the woods on her way to a grist mill about four miles from her home, carrying a sack of wheat on her head. She saw a blinding white light on an elevation between two trees, a maple and a hemlock. Paralyzed with fear, Adele prayed rapidly and breathlessly as the light took definite form as a beautiful lady, clothed in dazzling white garments with a yellow sash about her waist. Her hair was auburn, her eyes deep and dark, and her smile radiant. Above her head hovered a crown of twelve stars. The vision then faded away, leaving a lingering cloud of white mist. Adele told her mother, who speculated that a departed relative might be asking for prayers.

Then, on Sunday 9 October, Adele was walking the eleven miles to the church at Bay Settlement, accompanied by her sister Isabelle and a friend. Reaching the two trees, Adele was about to describe what she had seen when suddenly she saw the same vision as before. Her companions saw nothing. When the apparition faded, they continued to the church. She reported what she had seen to her confessor, Fr. William Verhoef, who counseled her not to be afraid and, if she saw the apparition again, to ask, "In the Name of God, who are you and what do you wish of me?"

On the return journey, Adele came to the spot again. Her companions saw her drop to her knees, though again they saw nothing. Adele now repeated slowly the words the priest had given her. The lady answered in a soft and wonderful voice: "I am the Queen of Heaven, who prays for the conversion of sinners. I wish you to do the same. You received Holy Communion this morning, and that is well. But you must do more. Make a general confession and do penance for the conversion of sinners. If they do not convert and do penance, my Son will be obliged to punish them."

One of Adele's companions asked why they could not see what she did. Instructing them to kneel, Adele answered: "The Lady says she is the Queen of Heaven." Looking kindly at the others, the Lady said, "Blessed are those who believe without seeing." Then, again addressing Adele, the Lady asked: "What are you doing here in idleness, while your

companions are working in my Son's Vineyard?" (The "companions" were Adele's friends in Belgium who had joined a religious order.)

"What more can I do, dear Lady?" asked Adele, weeping.

"Gather the children in this wild country, and teach them what they should know for salvation."

"But how shall I teach them who know so little myself?" Adele pleaded.



Sister Adele Brise

"Teach them their catechism, how to sign themselves with the sign of the Cross, and how to approach the Sacraments; that is what I wish you to do. Go and fear nothing. I will be with you."

News of the apparitions spread quickly. Adele immediately took up her mission of traveling about the area's settlements, catechizing children and admonishing sinners. Her father built a small oratory—measuring ten by twelve feet—on the site of the apparitions. In 1861, this was replaced by a 24-by-40-foot chapel, with the inscription over the

entrance: *Notre Dame de Bon Secours, Priez pour Nous*—"Our Lady of Good Help, Pray for Us"—thus giving the shrine its name. (Devotion to *Notre Dame de Bon Secours* was already well-established in French-speaking North America.)

Adele gathered several companions who lived and worked in a community governed by the Third-Order Franciscan Rule. Their life was that of "secular tertiaries"—they took no vows, retained their property, and were free to leave when they wished.

In 1865, the Rev. Philip Crud, the new chaplain to the Bay Settlement, encouraged Sister Adele to raise funds to build a school, so that the children could come to her. The school, known as “Saint Mary’s Boarding Academy,” was in operation by the late 1860s. In the 1880s, a new chapel, school, and convent were built. The chapel’s altar stood over the spot of the 1859 apparitions. Eventually, in 1942, the chapel was once again replaced by the present neo-Tudor gothic structure.

Relations between the community and the Diocese of Green Bay could be rocky. Some clergy condemned the apparitions as spurious. The chapel attracted pilgrims on feast days, and unscrupulous vendors plied the crowds outside the chapel grounds. The first Bishop of Green Bay, Joseph Melcher (1868-1873), and the second, Francis Xavier Krautbauer (1875-1885), made separate attempts to suppress the community and close the school, but both relented when confronted with Sister Adele’s humility and protestations of loyalty to the Church.

On 8 October 1871, the cataclysm known as the Great Peshtigo Fire—a wildfire turned by high winds into a firestorm—burned approximately 1,875 square miles of land around Green Bay. Between 1,500 and 2,500 lives were lost. As the flames approached, Sister Adele and the members of the community refused to leave and gathered in the chapel to recite the rosary. The flames surrounded the community’s five-acre property but stopped at its boundaries. Although the compound’s survival was never officially declared a miracle, it greatly enhanced the community’s reputation and added to the credibility of Adele’s apparitions. Down through the years, also, many miraculous healings have been associated with the Shrine, though none have been submitted for formal ecclesiastical approval.

During the 1880s, some of the Belgian settlers in the Green Bay area were attracted to the “Old Catholic” movement, which had separated from the Roman Catholic Church following the First Vatican Council (1870). In a singularly misguided venture, Bishop John Henry Hobart Brown of the Episcopal Diocese of Fond du Lac requested the Old Catholic Bishop Eduard Herzog to ordain Joseph René Villate, a Frenchman who had trained at Nashotah House, for mission work in the Belgian community. In 1885, Villate established the *Bon Pasteur* mission at Little Sturgeon, Wisconsin. Escalating conflicts with the Episcopal Diocese led Charles Chapman Grafton, who succeeded Bishop Brown in 1889, to depose Villate from the priesthood in 1891. Villate

then obtained episcopal consecration from Syriac-Malankar bishops in Ceylon and returned to Green Bay as “Mar Timotheus,” a prelate of the “American Catholic Church.” Throughout, Villate attempted to discredit Sister Adele, her community, and the apparitions. By their prayers and catechesis, in turn, the Sisters galvanized resistance to such attempts to deflect the Belgian community from the Roman obedience. (After many further misadventures, Villate eventually recanted his errors and returned to the Roman Catholic Church in France in 1925, not before leaving a string of consecrations of notorious *episcopi vagantes* in his wake.)

On July 5, 1896, having suffered several years following a fall from a wagon, Sister Adele died at the age of sixty-six. Her last words were, “I rejoiced in what was said to me. We shall go into the house of the Lord.” She was buried near the chapel.

In 1970, the chapel, school, and convent were converted into a retreat center and placed under the care of the Discalced Carmelite Sisters. More recently, the Shrine of Our Lady of Good Help came under the guardianship of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Green Bay.

In 2009, Bishop David Ricken of Green Bay opened a formal investigation into the 1859 apparitions. Based on the investigatory commission’s findings, on 8 December 2010, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, he gave the Church’s formal approval: “I declare with moral certainty and in accord with the norms of the Church that the events, apparitions and locutions given to Adele Brise in October of 1859 do exhibit the substance of supernatural character, and I do hereby approve these apparitions as worthy of belief (although not obligatory) by the Christian faithful.”

Unlike Guadalupe, Lourdes, and Fatima, the apparitions of Our Lady of Good Help have never become well known beyond their immediate region, at least until recently. This was due partly to the cultural isolation of the Belgian community around Green Bay, and partly to the physical remoteness of the site. In an era of internet communications and GPS travel this is changing. The Shrine of Our Lady of Good Help website lists numerous opportunities for devotions and pilgrimages. It would be wonderful if Society of Mary Wards and Cells could organize pilgrimages there. In the meantime, we rejoice in the one approved American apparition of Our Lady.

Notre-Dame de Bon Secours, priez pour nous! **AVE**

Marian Apparitions: The Church's Role in Spiritual Discernment

Fr. John D. Alexander

*“Beloved, do not believe every spirit,
but test the spirits to see whether they are of God”
(I John 4:1).*

Miraculous appearances of the Blessed Virgin Mary are not a new phenomenon. They date back to the earliest centuries of Christianity. According to one tradition, the first Marian apparition was actually an instance of bilocation; when still living in Jerusalem, Mary appeared to Saint James the Apostle in Zaragoza, Spain, as commemorated in the Feast of Our Lady of the Pillar (October 12).

Nor have the Blessed Virgin's appearances been limited to Roman Catholics. She has appeared to Orthodox believers in Russia (for example, at Kazan in 1579) and at a Coptic Orthodox Church in Zeitoun, Egypt, from 1968 to 1971.

Such appearances occur according to God's saving purposes, ultimately rooted in the mystery of His sovereign freedom. A common denominator seems to be strengthening the faithful in times of division and stress. Most of all, Marian apparitions are theologically significant in that they confirm the reality of the invisible world and the life of the world to come. Mary's visible appearances and audible words to a few individuals reassure the rest of us that she watches over us, prays for us, and hears our prayers.

The Church has two methods of approving a Marian apparition or devotion. The first is through the calendar. Some appearances of Our Lady, such as that to Richeldis de Faverches in Walsingham in 1061, occurred before the Church had developed procedures for investigating and discerning their authenticity. Nonetheless, they were ratified by the Church's common mind as expressed in tradition—through pilgrimages and other forms of popular devotion—and ultimately given feast days in the liturgical calendar as a sign of ecclesiastical approbation.

Since the official procedures were formalized in the Roman Catholic Church, seventeen apparitions of Our Lady have been approved as “worthy of belief”—the earliest in Guadalupe, Mexico, in 1531, and the most recent in Kibeho, Rwanda, in 1981.

The jury is still out on the alleged apparitions that began in 1981 in Medjugorje in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In 2017, the Commission established in 2010 by Pope Benedict XVI recommended approval of only the first seven apparitions, but not the continuing daily messages. So far, this recommendation has not been acted upon and the 1991 ruling of the Yugoslav Bishops’ Conference that their supernatural character was “undetermined” still stands. However, on May 12, 2019 the Vatican approved continuing pilgrimages to Medjugorje on their own merits. We do well to keep an open mind while the Church continues its work of discernment.

Is such investigation and approval important? In a word, yes. It is crucially important. For every favorable ruling that a Marian apparition is “determined to be supernatural,” dozens and dozens more turn out on investigation to be the product of delusion or deception. Many alleged visionaries turn out to be charlatans or victims of mental illness; many alleged revelations turn out to be vehicles of ideological propaganda.

Against this background, it is impossible to be too careful. Approval only after thorough ecclesiastical investigation—stressful as this process can be to genuine visionaries, as it was, say, to Bernadette of Lourdes—effectively signals to the faithful that a particular apparition is spiritually “safe.” It contains no manifest theological errors and carries all signs of authenticity. Even then, the determination “worthy of belief” does not make it obligatory. The faithful are not required to assent to the apparition, or practice its associated devotions, but they are free to do so.

Since most (but not all) of us in the Society of Mary are Anglicans or Episcopalians, the question naturally arises: what has all this Roman bureaucracy to do with us? My recommendation with respect to any particular Marian apparition or devotion is that we pay close attention to the rulings of that branch of the Church having pastoral responsibility for the individuals and communities involved. In most cases this will be the Roman Catholic Church. In the case of, say, Our Lady of Kazan, it will be the Russian Orthodox Church; in the case of Our Lady of Zeitoun, it will be the Coptic Orthodox Church.

To my knowledge, none of the Provinces of the Anglican Communion has instituted procedures for authenticating Marian apparitions. Anglican liturgical commissions have generally been reluctant to put specific Marian apparitions or devotions into their ecclesiastical calendars for reasons that in no way express skepticism about their authenticity. (Some years ago, for example, the Episcopal Church’s Hispanic Caucus requested the inclusion of Our Lady of Guadalupe in the Calendar, which the relevant committee of the House of Bishops recommended against on the grounds that doing so would open a Pandora’s box of requests for equal treatment of other apparitions that the Episcopal Church was simply not equipped to handle. The recommendation was, in other words, an expression of humility rather than of disbelief.) On the other hand, when successive Archbishops of Canterbury make the pilgrimage to Walsingham, we have about as explicit a sign of “unofficial” ecclesial approbation as we can hope to get in our Anglican context!

So we rejoice. Our Lady is alive and well and continues to appear, at times and places of God’s own choosing, to strengthen and encourage the faithful. Guided by the Church’s corporate wisdom and discernment, we respond with love and devotion to Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church. **AVE**



A Candlemas Meditation

By the Rev. Canon Barry E. B. Swain, SSC

Father Swain gave this meditation to the priests of St John Fisher Chapter of the Society of the Holy Cross (SSC) at St Edmund’s Retreat House, Enders Island, Mystic, Connecticut at their recent retreat. There may be something of value in it for all of us who have recently celebrated Candlemas.

Let us begin with the account from the Gospel of St Luke. As devoted as I am to the King James Version, perhaps a modern version will cause us to hear something new:

²²When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present

him to the Lord ²³(as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord”), ²⁴and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: “a pair of doves or two young pigeons.” ²⁵Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. ²⁶It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. ²⁷Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents



James Tissot
Presentation in the Temple 1886-1894

brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, ²⁸Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: ²⁹“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. ³⁰For my eyes have seen your salvation, ³¹which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: ³²a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.”

³³The child’s father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. ³⁴Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, ³⁵so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.” ³⁶There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷and then had been a widow for eighty-four years. She never left the temple but worshipped night and day, fasting and praying. ³⁸Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. ³⁹When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. (NIV)

Like so many of the vivid word-pictures from the early chapters of St Luke, the purification of Our Lady or the presentation of Our Lord in the Temple, for they are two sides of the same coin, seems like a very ordinary and straightforward story. It is extremely difficult for us to disengage ourselves from two thousand years of Christian tradition, liturgy, art, homiletics and literature, and remind ourselves that this is not a normal occurrence. It seems normal to us that an archangel will appear to a young woman and ask her to bear the Son of God, it seems normal that her aged cousin should conceive and bear a child, it seems normal that Mary’s child should be born in a stable at Bethlehem, that angels should sing above, shepherds visit, Wise Men from the East worship him, and so on. All these things seem normal and expected. We have, somehow, to step back therefore and remind ourselves of what these events seemed like to the original protagonists. It is then that we may be able to take away a few lessons for ourselves from what happened to them.

Mary had agreed to God’s proposal, conveyed to her by the Archangel Gabriel, that she should be the Mother of His Son. It isn’t possible that she

understood a great deal about what she was agreeing to, and in a sense that is her glory. She was prepared to say yes to God, and trust in his loving care, without perhaps understanding very much at all about the plan. From the very moment she conceived the child in her womb, strange things began to happen. She visited her cousin Elizabeth, and the baby Elizabeth was carrying leapt in her womb. Elizabeth suddenly cried out to her young cousin, "And why is it that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?" The stirrings of the Holy Spirit were all around Mary and her child, and they caused these strange things. Mary reflected not for the first time or the last that God was working out a very important and very big purpose. The circumstances connected to the Nativity were also strange. Just before the time she was to give birth, the decree came from Rome ordering a complete census and taxation, to take place in each person's ancestral town. Since wives and dependents would be counted with husbands and widows with sons, this meant a long journey to Joseph's ancestral town, Bethlehem. When they arrived the crush of people was so great that there was no inn or even person with a home who could take them in, so they stayed in the stable of an inn, and there, amongst the animals of the field, the Christ Child was born. As with all births, but even more so with this, there would have been a long period of sheer terror replaced suddenly by complete exaltation when the birth was finished, and mother and child got through it healthy and well. But then queer things continued: shepherds visiting, angelic song. Forty days after the birth, according to the Mosaic Law, they came to the Temple. They would have expected a routine visit which, although it would certainly have been a lovely and important milestone, and a day of joy, would not have been out of the ordinary. There would have been other mothers whose children had been born forty days earlier, and families making offerings, and even others who were dedicating the first born boy to the Lord. But this ordinary scene became extraordinary all at once.

The priest Simeon was in the Temple, and having had a vision or revelation from the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Messiah, he had lived to a considerable age. Suddenly a feeling came over him, and he obeyed the stirrings of the Spirit. He went at once to the Holy Family, of all the people in the busy Temple, and accosted them. They certainly would have had no idea who he was or why he was addressing them. He took the child from Mary's arms, which must have been quite a shock, and offered a prayer to God, a spontaneous prayer: Lord, now I may die in peace, just as you promised, because I have seen the salvation you prepared in the sight of all people, both to be a light to lighten the Gentiles and to be

the glory of your own people, Israel! Mary and Joseph, hearing this prayer, would have realised suddenly that this priest was in on the secret, that God had shared his purpose with the ancient and holy man: the community of the faithful included at least one more person. Then to make the scene complete, an elderly and holy woman, who never left the Temple and fasted and prayed all the time, was also brought by the Spirit to see the child. She came at that exact moment, realised the same thing Simeon did, and gave thanks in her heart. She says nothing, of course, because women could not speak aloud in the Temple, but she gives thanks in her heart and her face and manner convey that she knows what Simeon knows. She is very old, very wise and very loving, so she doesn't need to say anything anyway. But amongst all this happiness and glory, don't let's lose sight of one other thing. Simeon says a very odd thing to Mary, so odd that St Luke underlines how strange she found it. She must have added that herself in her recollections to St Luke, how strange it struck her. "Listen carefully: This child is destined to be the cause of the falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be rejected. Indeed, as a result of him the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed – and a sword will pierce your own soul as well!" This is a queer and deeply disturbing comment; it tells so many unpleasant things at once, that it must have been hard to take in, and Mary thought so too. She is told that her child would be the cause of the falling and rising of many in Israel. Mary knows, as anyone does, that people who have fallen because of someone are angry and apt to take revenge. She is told that he will be a sign that will be rejected. This is one of the first intimations that God's plan will not be without significant obstacles. As a result of her child, the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed – again a prospect that people rarely relish. Most of us would rather the innermost thoughts of our hearts would remain secret, or at least only revealed at our own will. Finally, the terrifying end of the prophecy: a sword will pierce your own soul too. She will have realised that it was unlikely to be a real sword, but a sword of sorrow and grief. This is a sad and terrible note to the otherwise happy moment. The shadows of Calvary fall even in the Temple on a happy day for a forty day old baby and his family.

And then we have St Luke's postscript: "So when Joseph and Mary had performed everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom, and the favour of God was upon him." This is very important: they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord a highly significant comment, for this is exactly what they intended, and exactly what they did. Pause a moment and reflect that Mary had no sins

to be purified of, no uncleanness, not even a ritual, formal uncleanness. She knew that, so did Joseph. There was no need to present their baby Jesus to God in the Temple as a firstborn Son, because he was himself already God, and already belonged to God as part of his inmost and indivisible Being. The whole exercise was in many ways totally unnecessary, and yet it takes place, and we are told at some detail about it. This is clearly because Mary and Joseph wish to be careful to do everything according to the law of the Lord, to do everything right, to stay in right relationship to God as they continue their faithful vocation. And as a result, St Luke tells us, the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom, and the favour of God was upon him.

Having devoted a bit of time to try to get this story out of the storybook fairytale form and think about what it must have been like, we begin to see a number of lessons for us, and perhaps particularly for priests.

The entire situation takes place in the context of worship and liturgical requirements. It is in church, if you will, that the Holy Family meet God and they meet him in a formal, liturgical action. This should remind us that the Mass, our offices, and any extra liturgical devotions in church, matter. They are not formal, cold prayers that we offer because we are ordained to do so, and have to do so, they are opportunities for encounters with God. If he was present in his Old Testament church, how much more so is he present in our churches, in which his own Body resides? If he was present in Old Testament worship, how much more so is he present in the full revelation of the New Testament worship? Let us have an end to this “we can just as easily pray in a garden” foolishness!

They offer the sacrifice that is prescribed. They don't think up something new and more relevant, they don't work to find an individual expression of what they are feeling, they do what is prescribed by God's revealed Word. They have faith that what God has set forward in revelation as the correct thing to do will in fact be the right thing to do. Their faith may be described as simple, but it is nonetheless true and authentic. This should be a word of support and comfort to us who may be worried that our churches are not perhaps as full as others offering worship that is heavily watered-down and altered. The truth is not in popularity or numbers or church growth. The truth is in God's revealed word to us and in the Tradition of his holy Church. They are not only “enough”, they are everything.

Perhaps in the priest Simeon, we see ourselves. We would like to think of ourselves as being holy and waiting for the consolation of God, and in our best moments, we are. But notice a few things. Simeon received this revelation through prayer and closeness to God. Had he not been listening to

God carefully, he would never have heard his word. Had he been working his mouth constantly, pontificating to everyone who would listen, God would scarcely have had the chance to get a word into his head. Simeon was aware that God could and would speak to him, his own prayer life with God was healthy enough that he listened and heard, and when he did listen and hear, he believed and waited. We don't come upon Simeon complaining that God hadn't yet done what he promised, that others weren't good enough to see the Messiah, how terrible most of his fellow Jews were because they weren't searching properly for the Messiah, and so on. No, we come upon him faithfully and patiently waiting for God to perform what he had promised. God always performs what he promises, he never forsakes, and his promise is that the gates of hell shall not prevail against his Church. Then what are all our complaints and agitation about? They are about not wanting to be patient, not wanting to wait on God, not entirely trusting in his promise to His Church, wanting God to do what we want him to do and on our timetable, preferably smiting our enemies at the same time. Simeon did not act this way.

When Simeon sees the child and knows that God's promise has been fulfilled, he reacts at once, and blesses God. He gives thanks, he is joyful and praise naturally rings out to God from his lips. Perhaps he even chanted it. Certainly it has struck us, almost from the beginning of the Church, that this is a song of praise. When Simeon receives this great blessing from God, he blesses God for it, he gives thanks, he gives rein to joy, and he worships God. This is a great moment in Simeon's life, quite literally the ultimate moment. But we come to have this attitude of thanking God for blessings, receiving them with joy and thanksgiving, and praising his Name with great things, but cultivating it with small things. When we realise that all good things come from God, however small, and that moves us to praise and thanksgiving in daily life, then we are ready for great moments of blessing, as Simeon was.

There is an important reminder with the prophetess Anna too. We are told that she was constantly occupied with "fastings and prayers". In our world, in Western society, and even in many parts of the church, this word "fastings" might seem oddly out of place. After all, this lovely elderly lady, why should she be fasting? She's already holy, and praying all the time, why fast and think about sin when she could be "positive"? But Anna knows what those who are trying to be holy always know: she is not there yet. She has not come to God yet, and she is realistic and honest. She understands how she has failed God, how she was not always the person he wanted her to be, the person she wanted to be, the real Anna she should have been. No matter how much she tried, she failed at least a few times, and part of her very close

relationship to God is being honest about that and trying to make up for that, trying to atone for what has been wrong or lacking. For us, as priests, and in teaching our people, it is vital to remember that it is always better to be contrite and engaged in penitence, fasting and abstinence for sins which God may already have forgiven, than it is to be refusing in pride to confess and atone for sins that he may not yet have forgiven.

And then there is that prophecy of Simeon's. On this side of the Crucifixion, probably it doesn't seem all that strange. We know, after all, what will become of this Child. We understand that he has come to this world to offer himself as a ransom for many. We understand that he is prepared, as the Priest of Love, to make himself the victim of his own sacrifice to God the Father for the sins of many, though he himself has committed none. We understand that Our Lady herself, though she too has committed no sin, will experience grief and sorrow almost beyond belief. We understand that in her joyful yes to God there is already grief and sorrow. But do we understand that as priests, Simeon is saying this same thing to us? Every priest is set for the rise and fall of many in the New Israel, the Church. Through us, God will raise up and cast down. People are rarely happy to have their sins pointed out to them, they are often unhappy to be exhorted to become better, they often resent being told they are not good enough already, many even resent the suggestion that there is anything beyond themselves to which they must owe allegiance and obedience. Our roles as priest, preacher, prophet are not always popular, and it is no surprise. If we seek to identify ourselves with our Crucified Lord, in whose priesthood we have been privileged to share, it should come as no surprise that there will be times when their cry "Blessed is he who comes in the Name of the Lord", is changed to "Crucify him". In these times, however, we are closer to Christ than ever. "Whoever does not carry my cross cannot be my disciple."

And finally the summing up of St Luke sums it up for us too. When you have performed all things according to the Law of the Lord, you too will grow and become strong, and find favour from God. In the Seven Sacraments and in the Scripture, God has left us a kind of blueprint for salvation, and those of us in the priesthood have been left a kind of blueprint in the tradition of the Church for how we may help people to salvation. When we, as priests and as Christians, have performed all things according to the Law of the Lord, we shall grow and become strong, find favour from God, and help others to find the same. When that happens we shall have been as true to our vocation as Simeon was to his. **AVE**

Society of Mary American Region

ANNUAL MASS AND MEETING

Saturday, 23 May 2020, 11:00 a.m.

SAINT CLEMENT'S CHURCH

2013 Appletree Street
Philadelphia PA 19103

SOLEMN PONTIFICAL MASS AT THE FALDSTOOL

Celebrant: the Rt. Rev'd Rodney R. Michel
Assisting Bishop in Pennsylvania
Episcopal Patron of the Shrine of Our Lady of Clemency

Missa 'Ave Regina', Juan Gutiérrez de Padilla

Ave Maria (á 8), Tomás Luis de Victoria

Regina Cæli, Giovanni Croce

Organ Voluntaries

Regina Cæli, op. 64, Marcel Dupré

Magnificat vi: Gloria, from 15 Versets, Dupré

LUNCHEON AND ANNUAL MEETING TO FOLLOW

Reservation and \$20 donation requested for the Luncheon

To reserve a place please mail a check to the Church or
use the online giving button on the parish website at:
www.s-clements.org

All information is located on the 'Society of Mary' tab.

FORM OF APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP
Send to the AMERICAN REGION MEMBERSHIP ADMINISTRATOR
Lynne Walker
Society of Mary, P.O. Box 930
Lorton, VA 22079-2930
membershipadministrator@somamerica.org

DECLARATION (which must be made by those desiring to
be admitted to membership of the Society of Mary)

I, _____ (Revd/Dr/Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms)
(block letters – Full name) *(Delete as appropriate)*

Declare that I am a member of the Holy Catholic Church and that I conform to her Discipline and Precepts, and desire to be admitted a MEMBER of the Society of Mary and hereby PROMISE to fulfill the Conditions and Undertake to Promote the Objects and keep the Rules of the Society.

*I enclose herewith my first subscription of \$15 for one year or \$250 for a Life Subscription.
If I want a Society of Mary medal, I have enclosed an additional \$20 for that purpose.*

Signed _____

Mailing Address *(block letters)* _____

E-mail Address _____

RECOMMENDATION by a Priest *(who need not necessarily be a Member)*

From my PERSONAL knowledge of _____
(block letters)

I believe that he/she is suitable to be admitted as a member of the Society of Mary.

Date _____ (Signed) _____

Address _____

Parish/Appointment _____



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Cover illustration:

Dante Gabriel Rossetti *Ecce Ancilla Domini* 1853

For information on the Society of Mary
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the English edition of AVE, please visit
<http://societyofmary.weebly.com>

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