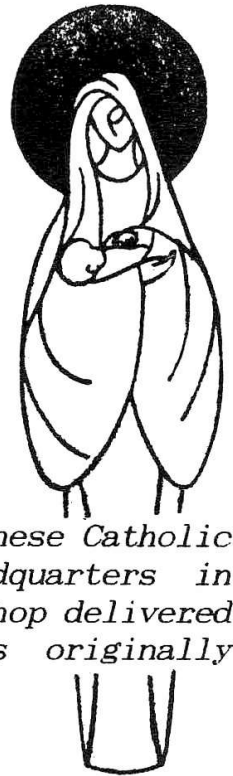


HOMILY ON OUR BLESSED MOTHER

by Zong Huaide
translated by Peter Barry



(Editor's note: Bishop Zong Huaide is chairman of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and resides at its national headquarters in Beijing. The following is an extract from a sermon the Bishop delivered on the Feast of Our Lady's Assumption. The sermon was originally published in Catholic Church in China, No. 10.)

God has created us, so he completely understands our feelings. He understands everything about us, and so of course he understands our needs. He knows that on the rough road of life we need a kindly mother to love and care for us. Therefore, he gave us the most ideal, the most compassionate, and the most capable mother - our Blessed Mother Mary. She is the mother of Jesus Christ and she is also our mother. When Jesus was nailed to the cross and saw his mother and the beloved disciple John standing at the foot of the cross, he said to his mother: "Behold, your son!" Then he said to John: "Behold, your mother" (John 19: 26-27). In this way, Jesus in his final moments of life clearly announced from the cross that the Blessed Mother is the mother of all human beings. And John the Apostle, on behalf of the whole human race, accepted Mary as our mother. We thus became her children. From that moment on, Mary took up her duties of being our mother. She just as warmly began to look after us as she did Jesus. She has more concern for us than even our own earthly mothers have. She is more lovingly compassionate, more helpful to us in our weaknesses, and more concerned about our whole being. She loves her Son, Jesus Christ, in us because we are members of the Mystical Body of Christ and are his brothers and sisters. Beloved Christians, how should we in turn treat the Blessed Mother? Of course we should have an attitude of complete trust in her. We should fly to the bosom of the Blessed Mother, and with a filial heart, give our love to her. We should do our utmost to make her happy. At every moment we should be aware of not doing anything to hurt her. We should have the same filial respect for Mary as Jesus himself did.

To become sons and daughters of the Blessed Mother, besides having filial respect for her, we must imitate her good example. Such imitation will greatly please her. First and foremost, we must imitate the Blessed Mother's strong faith because her faith was active, complete, firm and unparalled. The Blessed Mother always resolutely carried out God's word, trusting in Him with all her heart. A clear example of this is to be found in the Annunciation when the angel Gabriel at God's command told Mary that God desired that the body of the Saviour take flesh in her virginal womb. Basically, "virginity" and "motherhood" are two completely contradictory things. But in that special circumstance Mary believed completely in God and did not doubt. With humble heart, she gave a simple answer which was full of faith: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1: 38). In this way she succeeded in accomplishing the great work of the birth of the Saviour of mankind. Let us compare this to the response of Zachary to the announcement of the birth of John the Baptist. When he heard that his wife in her old age would bear a son he was immediately suspicious. But Mary was not like this. As soon as she heard that Elizabeth would give birth in her old age, she immediately set out to congratulate Elizabeth, thus giving expression to her strong faith and her concern for her fellowman. A third example of Mary's faith is Jesus' crucifixion. The disciples' faith began to waver, and feeling all was lost, they became discouraged. But Mary, in spite of her own great sorrow, still believed in the salvation of God. In mankind's most despairing moment, Mary conquered the darkness and gave forth a ray of hope which was the light of victory for mankind. From these three examples we get a glimpse of how strong our Blessed Mother's faith was. Brothers and sisters, when you are confronted by problems of faith, how do you deal with them? Do you respond like Mary, with a heart that believes completely in God? Or do you waver? O Compassionate Mother! Please intercede with us to God that he might make up what is lacking in our faith.

Secondly, we should study the humility of Mary. Throughout her life Mary was never proud. Rather, humbly and modestly, she always gave all the glory to God. At the Annunciation, the angel Gabriel greeted Mary: "Hail, full of grace" (Luke 1:28). When they met, Elizabeth full of the Holy Spirit praised Mary: "Blessed art thou amongst women...And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord." (Luke 1: 42-45). Mary was not self-satisfied or proud over these successive and unexpected words of praise. Rather, as before, she was humbly and deeply aware of her lowliness, and considered herself to be merely the servant and handmaid of the Lord. She more profoundly praised God, saying: "For he has regarded the low estate of his handmaid." (Luke 1:48). This clearly shows us how exalted and amazing

was Mary's humility! The Bible tells us: "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (Luke 14:11). No wonder God has made Our Blessed Mother Queen of the Universe and Patroness of all Mankind. My dear Christians, when you are content with your success and receiving of praise, are you humble and self-effacing, giving all glory to God, like Mary?

Finally, we must learn from Mary's example of love. The saints praised Mary's love for mankind with such words as: sincere, unselfish, thorough, attentive to detail, wholehearted and unparalleled. Although the Biblical records are not many, from our observation of just a few texts we can still see how great and exalted was Mary's love. For instance, at the Annunciation when she heard that Elizabeth would conceive a child in her old age, without thought for her own safety nor concern for the distance of the journey, Mary immediately left her home "and went with haste into the hill country." In her cousin's home, Mary attentively cared for and served the older Elizabeth, remaining there about three months (Luke 1:39). At the wedding feast of Cana, though Mary was only a guest, she concerned herself with helping the host plan the festivities and served him. When she noticed that the wine was running out and the host remained unaware of what was about to be an embarrassing situation for him, she immediately asked Jesus' help, saying: "They have no wine." Then she said to the servants: "Do whatever he tells you." At her request, Jesus performed his first miracle - the changing of water into wine - and saved the host embarrassment. (John 2: 1-11). How concerned Mary is for man's welfare. Mary, throughout her life, was a compassionate mother, concerned with what others were concerned with, worried about what others were worried about. She wanted to make people happy. She was not concerned about herself, but with the welfare of others. This wholehearted service of others caused all those who came in contact with Mary to be both comforted and blessed. Dear Christians, how do you treat your brothers and sisters who are all around you? Do you have a love like Mary's? Let us follow in Mary's footsteps, study and absorb the beauty of Mary's heart and imitate Mary's virtuous actions. Let us make sacrifices for our motherland, for our church and for our fellow man.

Our Blessed Mother is the mother of compassion. She is at all times and all places concerned about us and loves us. She is most happy to answer our prayers, and at the same time is completely capable of doing so. Let us on life's long and eventful journey beseech Mary to lead us to the bosom of the heavenly Father that we might dwell with God here and for all eternity. O compassionate Mother, gloriously assumed into heaven, pray for us!