

# Mary's Virtuous Beauty and the Cross

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SUNDAY, APRIL 13, 2025

Praying to Mary by invoking her various titles may disturb people accustomed to dismissing devotion to **Mary** as extra-Biblical. But John Henry Newman warns, **“Throwing off devotion to her, countries cease to worship Christ.”** (Meditations & Devotions) Mary's virtuous beauty radiates throughout the Gospels.

God reveals Himself through Moses, the prophets, the ministry of Jesus, the testimony of the Apostles, Scripture, and Church teaching. Most – if not all – of the original Scriptural scrolls have returned to dust. **Revelation is like a holy swarm of bees, directed by Tradition and held together by the Magisterium of the Church. And Mary – not to press the metaphor too far – is the Queen Bee, interceding to rescue renegade drones. Mary forever directs us to the binding words of Jesus.**

**Mary's obedience brought us the Incarnation, “the greatest Peace Conference ever held.”** (Legion of Mary Handbook) **At the Annunciation, God and man are reconciled.** “Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be done unto me according to thy word. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” cf. Luke 1:38 & John 1:14).

**Mary teaches us how to pray and live. Our Blessed Mother ponders the words of the Angel Gabriel in her heart. Her obedience magnifies the Lord.** (cf. Luke 1:46-55). Like Mary, we joyfully receive God's word and hold fast to the doctrines handed down to us through the Church. **Mary**

**helps us identify the many pieces of Church teaching, assemble them, and, with God's grace, apply them. With Mary, we, too, magnify the Lord in virtuous living.**

**Mary teaches us to abide by God's will.** John writes the last recorded words of Mary at the wedding feast in Cana: "Do whatever he tells you." (John 2:5) Like John the Baptist, Mary, in humility, decreases as Jesus increases. But Jesus gives Mary the highest compliment in a disguised form:

While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood outside, asking to speak to him. But he replied to the man who told him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brethren?" And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brethren! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother." (Matthew 12:46-50)

**Mary's Immaculate Conception and perfect obedience to the Father radiate her virtuous beauty: "Our tainted nature's solitary boast."** (Wordsworth)

**Jesus commissions Mary to intercede for us as our mother with Saint John as His proxy:** "Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, 'Woman, behold, your son!' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home." (John 19:25-27)



*The Crucifixion by Fra Angelico, c. 1420–23 [The MET, New York]*

We can easily imagine the months and years of conversations between Mary and John during their sojourn in Ephesus. John's Gospel was the crown jewel of Catholic theology. (cf., the high priestly prayer of Jesus, Jn 17) In a way, Mary intercedes as the senior editor of the Gospels, with the Holy Spirit as the Executive Editor. Mary is the guardian of orthodoxy and nourishes her children with the words of Jesus through the words of the evangelists.

The prayerful example and intercession of Mary encouraged the theological reflections of the Early Church Fathers. The disobedience of Adam and Eve ruined our happiness and brought condemnation. The obedience of Jesus unto death reveals Him as "the New Adam," restoring our innocence in Him. **Mary's obedience earns her the distinction of "the New Eve," the mother of all the living redeemed in Jesus.**

Mary, the co-worker of salvation with her Son, crushes the head of the serpent as prophesied in Genesis 3:15. With the help of faithful and learned theologians, we sort out conundrums in the beehive of Revelation:

The Hebrew assigns the head-crushing to a he or an it, i.e., to the woman's seed (KJV: And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel). The Greek Septuagint assigns the head-crushing unambiguously to he (autos [masculine] teresei). It is the Latin Vulgate that assigns the head-crushing to a she (ipsa [feminine] conteret: she shall crush – probably a scribal error for ipse [masculine] conteret) Reading the pronoun of the head-crusher as masculine or neuter doesn't really harm the argument, since it is The Woman through her seed that is killing the serpent in any case." (From a private email by the late Father Paul Mankowski, S.J.)

**Mary brought the Incarnation to us through the power of the Holy Spirit. By God’s favor, through Mary (the new Eve), Jesus (the New Adam) redeems us. In union with the sufferings of Jesus, Mary compassionately suffers with her Divine Son for our redemption. Hence, our humanity has the privilege of Mary suffering with Jesus in conquering sin, suffering, and death.**

Mary teaches us to suffer with Jesus as we enter the Holy Week of His Passion. **The Cross was a terrible instrument of torture. But the Resurrection allows us to see its victory and to place it as a glorious artifact in our churches.**

Within the context of this beautiful Marian landscape, some have piously suggested that the risen Jesus must have appeared to His mother first – the humility of Our Lady protecting the intimacy of the moment.

**Mary did not retire after her glorious Assumption into Heaven. The beauty of Mary continues to radiate the virtue of her Divine Son on the Cross.** She is the “woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.” (Revelation 12:1) **Contrary to the attitude of the skeptics, Mary is indispensable to our faith, worship, and culture.**

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