

4th Sunday Easter (C)

12th May 2019

'Honouring Mary in May'

Acts 13: *all were destined for eternal life became believers* Ps 99: *we are His people, the sheep of His flock* Apoc 7: *the Lamb who is at the throne will be their shepherd* Jn 10: 27–30: *the sheep that belong to me listen to my voice.*

It's 'Good Shepherd' Sunday, today, when each year we hear a passage from Jn 10 as Jesus describes Himself as "the Good Shepherd," — it therefore becomes an important day in the calendar to pray for new pastors for the flock of Christ, for vocations, that is, to the priesthood and religious life. But as it's May, I really want to speak today about Our Blessed Lady, and about the important devotion we have to her as Christians. In fact, the two are not unconnected at all. Think of Our Lady at the heart of the apostolic group as they spent time together, waiting and praying between Ascension and Pentecost. She is the Mother of the Church, the Queen of Apostles. He is there as they receive that outpouring of the Spirit, anointing them to be the world's first evangelists. She is the maternal help, then, to their vocation. And, personally speaking, I have long felt that my own calling to be a priest, which goes back to the days before I was 10 when we lived in Kent, has a lot to do with the shrine of Our Lady of Mt Carmel in Aylesford. We would go there, maybe monthly, for an hour or so on a Sunday afternoon — we would always walk the Rosary Way, whatever the

weather, and we would always pray in the Cloister Chapel. Memories of this shrine of Our Lady, and its influence on me, is, I'm sure, bound up with my being a priest. I very much consider that Our Lady of Mt Carmel is 'mother' of my own vocation.

We should, each and every one of us, see Our Blessed Lady as 'mother' of our Christian lives, our calling, our path in life. In fact, I would really say that we *must* have a relationship with Mary if we are to be authentic Christians. Why is this? Isn't Mary just an optional extra for Christians? Some denominations emphasize her, and others don't — isn't that OK, take her or leave her? Well, no, not at all. God's plan for the salvation of the world is impossible without Mary. Without Mary there is no Incarnation, no initial co-operation with God to bring the Son into the world in the flesh. Without, Mary, then, there is no Jesus of Nazareth, no Gospel, no disciples, no Crucifixion and Resurrection, no Church. We cannot airbrush her out of the foundations of Christian faith — she is there, at its beginning and at its heart, because of God's own divine choice. We honour her not as some sort of a goddess — which would be wrong, and pagan — but

instead as the most perfect human being, acting in symphony with God's will as we would all have done had we not allowed sin to enter the world through our pride.

She is, therefore, our great hope, since she shows us how to be a proper human being, i.e., a saint. She is not beyond us, any more than our own biological mother is 'beyond us.' She is 'before us,' and she has a wisdom and a holiness from God that is greater than ours, but she is not 'beyond us.' She is our heavenly Mother, our always-attentive Mother, our constantly-praying Mother. She does know better than us, for she sees God's will and God's plan perfectly, for her sight is not clouded by sin. Our asking Mary to pray for us, then, is a turning to that 'saint of saints,' who has no greater delight than in helping us love her Son as she does. We must not underestimate, then, the power of invoking Blessed Mary's intercession in prayer. Time and again the Church calls us to Marian devotion and to the Rosary. For centuries, for example, the Rosary has been a mainstay of Catholic piety — promoted by St Dominic, even, in the 13th c., though its roots are even

older. Invoking Our Lady's prayers, in the Rosary and other prayers, implies bringing on-side our most faithful ally in the spiritual warfare of life. Even a single 'Hail Mary' in the face of temptation can be provide a saving grace, and help one to resist sin.

So let's make good use of this month of May, to be diligent in our love for Our Lady and in inviting her to be a big part of our prayer life. She can only lead us *to* God, and never away from Him; she never gets 'in the way.' For where Our Lady is, there is Jesus her Son, held up by her for our adoration. From the Cross, Our Lord gave her to us, in the person of St John, to be our Mother, so we cannot neglect her without doing a great disservice to our faith. We each have so many needs in our lives, needs that we never pray enough about; let's bring Mary in to those prayers, for with her we know truly that we have the greatest ally in prayer that we could ever have.

*Our Lady, Seat of Wisdom, ... Refuge of Sinners, ...
Health of the Sick, ... Comfort of the Afflicted, ... Cause of
our Joy ... Pray for us!*