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# SPIRITUAL MOTHERHOOD

*Virtues, Fruits, and Witness  
of Spiritual Mothers*



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## THE MEMORARE

*Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary,  
that never was it known  
that anyone who fled to thy protection,  
implored thy help or sought thy intercession,  
was left unaided.*

*Inspired with this confidence,  
I fly to thee, O Virgin of virgins, my Mother;  
To thee do I come,  
before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful.  
O Mother of the Word Incarnate,  
despise not my petitions,  
but in thy mercy hear and answer me. Amen.*

The Blessed Virgin Mary is not only the physical Mother of Jesus Christ, but also the Mother of the Church, the Mother of those redeemed by Christ. By our loving concern for our neighbor and by our love for Christ's Holy Priesthood, we try to imitate her virtues and way of life.

This booklet highlights some of the virtues and fruits the Blessed Virgin Mary possesses as she cares for the children of God. As Spiritual Mothers, we too can receive similar graces as we pray for our priests and the holiness of the people of God.

Before examining some of the virtues and fruits of our Lady, we should keep in mind these definitions given to us from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

**VIRTUE:** “A virtue is an habitual and firm disposition to do the good. It allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of himself. The three theological virtues received at baptism are: faith, hope and charity. The four cardinal virtues are: prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance.”<sup>1</sup>

**FRUIT:** “The fruits of the Spirit are perfections that the Holy Spirit forms in us as the first fruits of eternal glory.”<sup>2</sup>

*“Think of Mary. Call upon Mary.”*

—ST. BERNARD CLAIRVAUX

1) *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1803

2) *idem*, 1832



# THE VIRTUES

## FAITH

The Blessed Virgin Mary had unwavering faith because she believed all that God had revealed to her and acted upon it in love. She is known as “Virgin most Faithful.” The Catechism of the Catholic Church states “Faith is the theological virtue by which we believe in God and believe all that he has said and revealed to us, and that Holy Church proposes for our belief, because he is truth itself.”<sup>3</sup> Spiritual Mothers imitate the faith of the Blessed Virgin Mary by:

- **Trusting in Divine Providence** in all circumstances
- **Contemplating God and the things of God**, keeping all things **in their heart**
- **Staying faithful** amidst scandals and persecutions

## PURITY

Our Lady is the Immaculate Conception. She was conceived without original sin and committed no actual sin in her earthly life. She is also known as “Mother most Pure.” According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, “Purity of heart will enable us to see God: it enables us even now to see things according to God.”<sup>4</sup> Spiritual Mothers emulate the purity of the Blessed Virgin Mary in their:

- **Speech:** resisting gossip and foul language
- **Modesty:** in body, dress and feelings
- **Chastity:** loving with an upright and undivided heart
- **Intentions:** always seeking the true end of Heaven
- **Vision:** external and internal; by discipline of feelings and imagination; by refusing all participation in impure thoughts



## HUMILITY

The Blessed Virgin Mary is the most humble disciple of Christ because she lived completely dependent upon God and always said yes to the vocation the Lord called her to.<sup>5</sup> Humility is a virtue based on truth.<sup>6</sup> Our Lady not only lived in the fullness of truth, but conceived Truth Himself in her womb. She is constantly present to guide mankind to her Son, humbly knowing she is only an instrument of God Most High. Spiritual Mothers are humble like the Blessed Virgin Mary because of their:

- **Obedience to God** (and His will), the Pope, their Bishop, their Pastor and all lawful authority
- **Acceptance of the truth**, even though it may be difficult to accept
- **Acknowledgment of being completely dependent** upon God and recognizing that they are only an instrument of God's saving work

3) *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1814

4) *idem*, 2531

5) Cf. *idem*, 725

6) Cf. *idem*, "humility" in Glossary

# THE FRUITS

## YOUTHFULNESS

The Blessed Virgin Mary stayed *spiritually* youthful all through her life because she was guided by the Holy Spirit and was completely conformed to a life in Christ. **Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, yesterday and today; all time belongs to him.**<sup>7</sup> Consequently, those who are Christ-like are guided by the true fountain of youth, the Holy Spirit. Therefore, as long as Catholics stay faithful by saying yes to grace and doing the will of God, they will be youthful as they tend toward the timeless eternity of Heaven. Spiritual Mothers imitate the *fruit of youthfulness* of the Blessed Virgin Mary by their:

- **Prompt** and loving concern for the People of God, especially of priests
- **Childlike prayer** (being completely dependent upon our Heavenly Father)
- **Unselfishness** for the Mystical Body of Christ and their spiritual children
- **Constant request for grace** through the Holy Spirit

## BEAUTY

The Blessed Virgin Mary is all beautiful because she is the perfect disciple of Christ and the chosen vessel of God the Father. One of her many titles is the *Beauty of Carmel*. She isn't simply externally beautiful by her physical appearance, but more importantly, most beautiful because of her saintly soul, her sanctity.<sup>8</sup> Contrary to popular belief, true beauty isn't simply an external physical attribute; true beauty is found interiorly and is based on the grace of God. Something is beautiful because it mirrors the beauty and majesty of God; it is beautiful because it is "God like" - its symmetry and proportion is based on





the mirroring of God.<sup>9</sup> Our Lady's beauty wasn't based solely on her physical appearance, but in her **love and service to God**.<sup>10</sup> Spiritual Mothers are beautiful like the Blessed Virgin Mary because of their:

- **Avoidance and detestation** of sin
- **Living out the virtues** of faith, hope and charity, and the cardinal virtues
- **Acts of reparation** for the sins of priests and those of the whole world

*“Rather, blessed is she who hears  
the word of God and keeps it!”*

—LUKE 11:28

7) Cf. Roman Missal, Easter Vigil Mass

8) Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, 3 Sent., d.23, q.3.al, sol.1, ad 2; ST Ia 5,4, ad1

9) Cf. idem, *Expositio* in Dion. De div. Nom. 4.5-6 as quoted in *The Pocket Aquinas*, trans. Vernon J. Bourke (New York: Washington Square Press, 4th ed., 1965), pgs. 269 – 272; Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone*, trans. and ed. by Alexander Dru (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), p. 157.

10) Cf. Pope Paul VI, Allocutio: “In auditorio Pontificii Athenaei a Sancto Antonio in Urbe ob coactos Conventus, VII Mariologicum atque XIV Marianum, 16 maii 1975,” in AAS 67 (1975): 334-449, quoted here according to “Mary and the Way of Beauty,” *Marian Studies*, p. 109.



## Joy

The Blessed Virgin Mary is the **Cause of our Joy**. Through her yes, she physically bore Jesus, who is the **True Joy** of the world. However, at the Foot of the Cross, as the Mother of Sorrows, she also gave birth to the Church in one of the greatest pains imaginable. Even amidst her spiritual pangs of birth, she remained joyful knowing that the children of God were born in the order of grace; that is, by being bought with the *price of Christ's own blood*. As the Gospel of John states, "In all truth I tell you, you will be weeping and wailing while the world will rejoice; you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn to joy. A woman in childbirth suffers, because her time has come; but when she has given birth to the child she forgets the suffering in her joy that a human



being has been born into the world” (John 16:20-21). Spiritual Mothers share in the joy of the Mother of God (especially in spiritual childbirth) because of their:

- **Cooperation with grace** in “offering up” their sacrifices for the salvation of souls
- **Endurance** to *stay with* the ordained priest of Jesus of Christ
- **Conformity to the will of God** in all things, especially in praying for and being patient with obstinate sinners who refuse to change

## EMPATHY

Although men and women were created with equal dignity, each gender has its own specific gifts and strengths. One of the gifts that women possess naturally more than men is empathy. Empathy is the ability to not only understand and identify with another person’s feelings, but also having the capacity to accept another’s suffering and (spiritually) make it their own. Hence, the Blessed Virgin Mary is known as the Refuge of Sinners and Comforter of the Afflicted; that is, one who aids the children of God in their suffering and distress. She is always there for us as our Queen and Mother knowing the sorrow we are experiencing, keeping it close to her heart and offering it up to her Son. Spiritual Mothers empathize similarly to the Mother of God because of their:

- **Loving concern for their neighbor** (especially other women)
- **Meekness** for the injustice committed against the innocent
- **Recognition of the weaknesses** of priests with the hope of their “yes” to stay faithful

*“By the cross with you to stay, there with you to weep and pray, is all I ask of you to give.”*

—STABAT MATER

# THE WITNESS OF SPIRITUAL MATERNITY

The Catholic Encyclopedia defines the word “witness” as “one who is present, bears testimony, furnishes evidence or proof.”<sup>11</sup> Spiritual Mothers who believe in Jesus Christ and follow Him become witness to our Lord’s glorious Resurrection and give validation to it by their holy lives. By their fidelity and perseverance, Spiritual Mothers give Christian witness to the following truths of the Catholic faith:

## THE NECESSITY OF THE HOLY EUCHARIST

The Holy Eucharist is the “source and summit of the Christian life”;<sup>12</sup> it is Jesus Christ Himself. St. Pio of Pietrelcina (Padre Pio) once said, “It is easier for the earth to exist without the sun than without the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass!”<sup>13</sup> Spiritual Mothers give top priority in bearing witness to the necessity of the Holy Eucharist: the re-presentation of Jesus’ Sacrifice at Holy Mass, the invaluable fruits in reception of Holy Communion, and His True, Real, Substantial, and abiding Presence in the Most Blessed Sacrament of Altar.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE HOLY PRIESTHOOD

Spiritual Mothers know that without Priests, we won’t have Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. It is through the hands of priests we are able to adore, praise, and give honor and glory to God in the Eucharist and offer ourselves in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Spiritual Mothers give witness to the **fundamental necessity** of ordained priests, the *Alter Christus, the other Christ*. Without our priests we would not receive the life giving sacraments.

*“Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.”*

—POPE PAUL VI, EVANGELII NUNTIANDI, 4

## THE ROLE OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Spiritual Mothers give testimony that the Blessed Virgin Mary is the greatest saint and disciple of Jesus Christ. Our Lady is the mother of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, and it was by her constant “yes” we are able to come to Jesus our Lord. Going to Jesus through Mary is the greatest means we have in being in union with Christ.

## THE DIGNITY OF WOMEN

Spiritual Maternity emphasizes the different roles we have in the Church. It is true that by Divine Law women cannot be ordained priests<sup>14</sup>; but that does not make them any lesser in dignity than men! Each gender has its own gifts based on their nature. Consider another example: men **cannot** conceive children, but that does not make them any lesser in dignity than women. Even though men and women are created differently, and may have distinct roles in society and in the Church, that doesn’t mean they are unequal in self-worth. ***Difference does not mean inequality!*** The Blessed Virgin Mary was the greatest saint to live on the face of this planet, but was she a priest? No. In humility, our Lady knew her role and accepted it, and answered her call to holiness accordingly. Therefore, even though women cannot be priests, Spiritual Mothers accept it and pray for those who have been called to represent Jesus Christ as ordained ministers.

11) Cf. *Catholic Encyclopedia*, witness

12) *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1324

13) <http://www.ewtn.com/padrepio/priest/index.htm>

14) Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1577



## THE UNIVERSAL CALL TO HOLINESS & THE ORDINARY LIFE

The practice of Spiritual Maternity within a vocation emphasizes the fact that we are all called to become saints. Spiritual Mothers realize that the merit we receive in doing good works and our call to holiness in general, isn't dependent upon the difficulty of the act, or the amount of times it is done, but rather, on the LOVE put into the action itself!<sup>15</sup> Holiness isn't necessarily about "saving a whole country from the tyranny of evil," but more akin to caring and praying for *one* soul's conversion, a soul who may be having a hard time living the commandments of God. In simple words, Spiritual Motherhood is more about focusing on quality than quantity; it is concerned more about helping save souls one by one, than externally worrying about converting "the masses." Therefore, the "ordinary life" lived on a daily basis has much supernatural fruit to bear based on the love put into the "little actions" of each day.

## THE PRIORITY OF CONTEMPLATION ABOVE ACTION; BEING IN LOVE AND THEN DOING

As joyous as spiritual mothers are in seeing priests actively spread the faith and preach, we know the real power behind the fruit of pastoral ministry lies within the strength of *prayer*. All our attempts as Spiritual Mothers, and the attempts of ordained ministers, to evangelize and catechize would be in vain without accompanying them with the necessary prayers and sacrifices. The key to success in bearing fruit in the eyes of God is not how "creative" we are, or how "externally great" our active works look to be, but rather, in the quality of prayers and sacrifices we perform by doing God's will in love.<sup>16</sup> Both active works and contemplation should be present for an efficacious attempt of evangelization. In other words, Spiritual Motherhood is a ministry dedicated *first* to being in love with God through prayer, sacrifice, and contemplation, and *secondly, if God so wills*, in externally seeing the fruits of our contemplation and sacrifice. Thus, the soul of every apostolate is the interior life.



## THE VICTIMHOOD OF PRIESTS

In the New Testament, Jesus is not only a priest who offers up an unblemished Sacrifice, but He is also the one who is sacrificed; He is both the priest AND victim. He is the one who offers and the one who is being offered. Hence, it is a common belief there is *no Easter without Good Friday*; there is *no Crown without the Cross*; and to add to that, there certainly is *no participating in Christ's ministerial Priesthood without participating in Christ's Victimhood*. Therefore, as Spiritual Mothers, we identify that priests must mirror Christ's sacrificial life within their vocation and we also realize our duty to help and assist the Priest in his participation of Christ's Victimhood by our prayers and sacrifices. Just as our Lady and the rest of the women were at the Foot of the Cross offering up sacrifices, we as Spiritual Mothers do the same for our priests. Therefore, we help the other Christ, the *Alter Christus* in their ministry; in their temptations, doubts, and long days; in their spiritual difficulties, and sacrifices.

15) Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2011, 2026

16) Cf. *idem*, 864; Dom Chataurd, *The Soul of the Apostolate*

## GRACE OVER NATURE

By misunderstanding orthodox Catholic theology, many people don't realize that we are closer to each other by God's grace than in our blood ties or physical distance with one another. In other words, we are united more closely to each other by the grace of God, rather than by our kinship with our relatives or closeness to our friends.<sup>17</sup> As Spiritual Mothers, even though we may or may not have physical children, our unity to our spiritual children is based more on God's *life giving grace*, than with our immediate physical relationship with one another. That is why Jesus said, "Whoever does the will of God is my brother, my sister and my mother" (Matthew 12:50). Also, that is why our Lady conceived Jesus spiritually first by an act of faith, and then became the physical mother of Jesus from His conception in her womb.<sup>18</sup>

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CONSECRATED LIFE AND VIRGINITY OR CELIBACY FOR THE SAKE OF THE KINGDOM

The consecrated life, consecrated virginity, and celibacy *for the sake of the Kingdom* have always been sources of strength when the Church has experienced difficult times. The witness of those called to consecrate themselves to God by the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, or those who have said yes in being *celibate for the sake of the Kingdom*, have helped many Catholics realize that life here on earth is temporary and people should always be in preparation for eternal life with God in Heaven.<sup>19</sup> Spiritual Mothers look especially to Cloistered Nuns, Active Religious Sisters, Consecrated Virgins and people who are *celibate for the sake of the Kingdom* in their unique hidden vocation of Spiritual Motherhood. Since some are called to these vocations, their mystical espousal to Christ by their vows or promises is something to praise as a sign of what life will be like in Heaven. Celibacy and Virginity for the *sake of the Kingdom* affirm the Sacrament of Matrimony; they are not in opposition to one another. Even though a person may be called to live a life



of celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom, that doesn't automatically mean their lives will be fruitless and lifeless. In actuality, the calling of celibacy for the *sake of the Kingdom* lends itself to be more fruitful based on the *total gift of self* to God, the Church and the apostolate.<sup>20</sup> But with that in mind, God has called each and every single one of us to bear much fruit within our own particular vocation and state of life, whether in holy Matrimony, or celibacy for the *sake of the Kingdom*.

## THE PRIORITY OF ELIMINATING THE CULTURE OF DEATH

The gift of being a Spiritual Mother has its source in the Holy Eucharist, is strengthened by its love for the Priesthood, and is done in imitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is a joy for women to unite their sacrificial offerings in union with Christ's Sacrifice of the Cross at Mass and to bear children spiritually. Because of their love for life, especially the life of grace, Spiritual Mothers give witness to the utmost priority of eliminating direct abortion and the culture of death. Therefore, since abortion is a *moral evil*, Spiritual Mothers recognize grace is needed for a person to realize that their child is worth having and is a supreme gift of God. When living the life of Christ, Spiritual Mothers are not *only* spiritually adopting babies who are in danger of abortion, but equally important, praying and sacrificing for their parents with the intention of a *spiritual conversion*. God willing, those tempted in having an abortion will realize their child is one of the greatest gifts God can bless them with. Consequently, Spiritual Mothers recognize that if they wish direct abortion to end, they should pray for the grace of conversion for those who believe abortion is an actual good. Through our constant witness as Spiritual Mothers, God will hear our prayers and will help these people realize *Life is Sacred* from the moment of conception (fertilization) to natural death.

17) Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 954-957; Matthew 12:50

18) Cf. St. Augustine, Sermon 25, 7-8: PL 46, 937-938

19) Cf. *idem*, 1579

20) Cf. *ibid*

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