



C.Ss.R

PIRITUALITY

ONE BODY (Eph 4,4)

UN SOLO CORPO (Ef 4,4)

UN SEUL CORPS (Eph 4,4)

UN SOLO CUERPO (Eph 4,4)

JEDNA WSPÓLNOTA (Ef 4,4)

UM SÓ CORPO (Ef 4,4)

EIN LEIB (Eph 4,4)

ΕΙΝ ΓΕΙΒ (Εφ 4,4)

ONE BODY - 06 : MARY

“I entrust this Year of Consecrated Life to Mary, the Virgin of listening and contemplation, the first disciple of her beloved Son. Let us look to her, the highly beloved daughter of the Father, endowed with every gift of grace, as the unsurpassed model for all those who follow Christ in love of God and service to their neighbour.” Pope Francis, in his Apostolic Letter ‘To all Consecrated People’ on the occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life (21 November 2014).

As we celebrate the Jubilee of our Icon, we keep in mind, that this is the Year dedicated to Consecrated Life in the universal Church. In this edition of **One Body**, we reflect on Mary. We ask ourselves what role does she play in our life, our mission, our spirituality? What is our personal relationship with her? Jesus asked his disciples: who do you say that I am? Perhaps, we could ask ourselves a question in similar fashion: Who is Mary to us and for us? Is she someone whom we intellectually ponder but find personally distant? Is the relationship based mostly on sentiment? Is she merely an optional extra or someone integral to the expression of our spirituality?



Elizabeth Johnson notes that today we are faced with the task of developing and promoting a theologically sound, ecumenically fruitful, spiritually empowering, ethically challenging, and socially liberating interpretation of Mary for the 21st century. So what then, is her significance in the gracious mystery of God? What difference does remembering her, make in the life of church and society?

As Redemptorists, we have received a great heritage and love for Mary from our founder St Alphonsus and the early confreres. They have underlined the role and importance of Mary in our life and mission. What could be highlighted, is that for us - Mary is our hope and our model.

Some of Alphonsus' earliest writings were devoted to the Blessed Virgin Mary. His **Visits to the Blessed Sacrament** (1748), also included a brief visit to Mary.

The Glories of Mary (1750) was among his major works. As he indicates himself, the first part of **The Glories of Mary** is structured as a commentary on the *Salve Regina* or "Hail, Holy Queen." In the second part, he treats the principal feasts of Mary, her sorrows, her heroic virtues and accustomed devotions in her honor. Finally there are some selected stories by way of examples.

Pope Francis speaking extemporaneously to the clergy and consecrated religious of Naples on March 21, 2015, noted: The Cardinal (Crescencio Sepe) gave me a book by St Alphonsus Maria de'

Liguori, “**The Glories of Mary**”.... In this book, I enjoy reading the stories about Our Lady that are after each of the chapters: in them we see how Our Lady always leads us to Jesus. She is Mother, the centre of Our Lady’s being is being Mother, bearing Jesus.

Behind Alphonsus’ works, lay a lifetime of personal relationship with Mary. In choosing to base a Mariology on the *Salve Regina*, he made a clear theological option against the Jansenist pessimism about salvation, their elitist attitude toward popular piety, and their individualism. Alphonsus highlights Mary as *Spes Nostra*, Our Hope. The theological core of *The Glories of Mary* is found in Alphonsus’ frequent assertion that in the Blessed Virgin Mary, God’s power meets God’s compassion; that Mary not only feels great tenderness toward us but that it is God’s will that she also enjoy the power to help us. This is a particularly liberating and hopeful message for the poor since in their experience those who love them can do little for them and those who have the power to help them are not interested in them.

Alphonsus’ apostolic genius consisted in his ability to use the popular piety of the poor of eighteenth-century Naples as a way of integrating them more fully into the church’s life and of teaching them a more integral spirituality. Alphonsus proclaimed the goodness of God made manifest through the example and witness of Mary, the figure of hope.

Your Word is light for my feet

The Apostolic Exhortation **Vita Consecrata** (1996) presents the Virgin Mary as a *model of consecration and discipleship*. In No 28: Mary in fact is the *sublime example of perfect consecration*, since she belongs completely to God and is totally devoted to him. Consecrated life looks to her as the sublime model of consecration to the Father, union with the Son and openness to the Spirit, in the knowledge that acceptance of the “virginal and humble life” of Christ also means imitation of Mary’s way of life.

“Behold your mother!” (*Jn 19:27*): Jesus’ words to the disciple “whom he loved” (*Jn 19:26*) are particularly significant for the lives of consecrated persons. Like John, we are called to take the Blessed Virgin Mary to ourselves (cf. *Jn 19:27*), loving her and imitating her in the radical manner which our vocation demands. In return, how do we experience her special motherly love? How do we see in her - a model and witness? Further, in the words of the *Salve Regina*, how do we experience her as ‘our sweetness and our hope’?

Before the Icon

There is a saying: “When a child is afraid, the child runs to the mother. When a child is in danger, the mother runs to the child.” A mother who comes to the help of her child who is struck by fear or is in danger is always a reason for support and hope.

The face of the Child Jesus held in his Mother’s arms shows him looking above. Through the angels, the will of the Father is revealed to Him. They present the instruments of his passion. In this, Jesus shared in



our human struggles. His eyes look upwards, into the distance, towards the Heavenly Father, from where the message comes. Jesus is fearful in the face of the vision of the Passion. But he accepts the Father's proposal and seeks help in the arms of His Mother.

Mary chooses to be beside her Son when she sees Him faced with mortal danger. She does not abandon Him but stays with Him, right until the end, when He is on the Cross. Her silent presence is a reason for support and hope. Mary, our Mother of perpetual help is the one in whom we can hope.

Drinking from our own well

Alphonsus gave a strong tradition of Marian devotion to the Redemptorist Congregation. Mary was designated the official patroness of the Institute under the title of the Immaculate Conception. On missions, Redemptorists were never to omit the sermon on the Blessed Virgin Mary. It was to focus on the trust and hope we should have in the protection of our Mother. In their own churches, Redemptorists were always to preach on Saturdays in honor of Mary. The formation of Marian confraternities was an important element in Redemptorist pastoral activity. Alphonsus remained faithful to the praying of the rosary throughout his life. He also applied his considerable musical and artistic skill to propagating devotion to Mary.

One of the images of Mary that Alphonsus owned and venerated was by an unknown artist, entitled "La Divina Pastora" - the Divine Shepherdess. Mary is shown with the child Jesus on her lap. Both of them are in peasant dress wearing straw hats. A shepherd's hut is seen in the background and the child Jesus leans from his mother's lap to play with the sheep. The painting is an eloquent representation of Alphonsus' Marian theology. It was to show Mary was close to the poor and their struggles. And importantly, he wanted to give people a devotional practice which would deepen their radical conversion to Jesus the Redeemer.

Into this tradition, was received the icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help. This was not an accident but an act of Providence. One could say that Mary, under this title, has found a home in our midst. The Icon and its various elements affirm the charism we have been blessed with and highlight the 'abundance' (copiosa and perpetual) offered to us by the Redeemer, and Mary's intercession.

We are described as "helpers, companions and ministers of Jesus Christ in the great work of redemption"(Const 3). This is most evident in Mary, Mother of the Redeemer, our Mother of Perpetual Help. She is a reassuring sign of support and hope.

In conclusion

One of the most popular hymns composed by St Alphonsus is 'O Bella Mia Speranza'. It speaks of Mary as 'my beautiful hope'. It has been translated into several languages and sung across the world. Given below is an adapted translation of the original Italian hymn prepared by Fr Gerard Campos of the Bangalore Province.



O, bright and beautiful Star of Hope

O, bright and beautiful Star of Hope,
In every tempest of my life
With you beside me I calmly cope,
With every storm and strife
And when I call on your sweet name,
Or even think of it Mary
It sets my soul and my heart aflame,
your praises to proclaim

Beneath your mantle I shelter seek,
Refuge of sinners and the weak
O shelter me and when life is done,
Lead me to Christ your Son
I long for Christ and no other,
Who gave me you as my mother
So pray that when I am faced with death
His name be on my breath



ONE BODY is a monthly text of prayer proposed by the Center for Redemptorist Spirituality. For more information: Fr. Piotr Chyla CSsR (Director of the Center for Spirituality fr.chyla@gmail.com)

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