

Second Sunday of Ordinary Time
Second Sunday after Epiphany (Latin Mass)
January 15, 2023
Year of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Ark of the New Covenant

“The development, desire by us, of devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary is an indication of the Church’s genuine piety. This devotion fits – as we have indicated above – into the only worship that is rightly called ‘Christian,’ because it takes its origin and effectiveness from Christ, finds its complete expression in Christ, and leads through Christ in the Spirit to the Father.”
(Pope Paul VI, For the Right Ordering and Development of Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, p.4)

As we continue our yearlong reflection upon the Blessed Virgin Mary, I would like to again remind all that the Catholic Church’s teaching concerning the Mother of God began as a response to questions concerning her Son, Jesus. This becomes very evident as one studies the writings of the earliest disciples of the Apostles whom we refer to as the Apostolic Fathers. Previously, I had mentioned the names of three, Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp of Smyrna and Clement of Rome. Please remember; many of the Apostolic Fathers were personally connected to the Apostles, themselves. They were in their company, listening as the first preaching of the Good News (Gospel) of Christ was being proclaimed. Therefore, much of what they taught and wrote about centered upon Jesus, Himself. For our study, we must ask what did they understand and teach concerning Mary, the Mother of Jesus?

We will answer that question in two words — Not Much. One may ask if there was a reason for this? We may, for our part, speculate and pose a reason due to the historical circumstances the Apostolic Fathers lived within. At this time, gods and goddesses were commonly believed to be active in the daily lives of men and women. To list the many examples from various cultures would take more time than we have allotted for our reflection. Needless to say, the silence of these first teachers of the Christian Faith does not diminish the person of Mary or the role she had played in mankind’s salvation. The focus of the Apostolic Fathers is to both establish and teach a coherent understanding of who Jesus is. In doing this, they would speak of Mary as His Mother stressing the important reality that Jesus was fully human. His flesh was formed in the womb of Mary, His Mother.

Although the main emphasis was upon the person of Jesus, Christians of this first century would also seek to collect as many stories and traditions as was possible concerning everything and everyone involved in God’s Salvific Plan. This would lead to a number of writings which would later become known under the title of *Apocrypha*. The apocryphal works dating back to this time attempt to fill in the areas where Christians were ignorant concerning the life and teachings of Jesus. Of these works, some were accepted as containing points of truth concerning Jesus and His teachings. Others contained stories which were so very fanciful, that they could not be taken seriously. All in all, the authors of these works were not attempting to teach a

dogmatic statement concerning Our Savior. However, in these accepted works, we can find statements which have become part of our present devotions. An example is the apocryphal *Protoevangelium of James* which recounts the names of Mary's parents, Saints Joachim and Anne, and a tradition concerning Mary's birth and young life.

At this point you may find yourself asking: "Why am I giving you all of this information?" You are not in a college level theology class on the Virgin Mary. My answer is this; I need you to understand that the Catholic/Christian Church has never placed its sole emphasis or any offerings of worship upon the Blessed Virgin Mary from its very beginning. Mary is part of, as Saint Ignatius of Antioch would coin the phrase, the "economy of salvation." Jesus is the center of our salvation. His Incarnation is a defining point in our salvation. We love and honor Mary because she co-operated with God in the work of our salvation. All of the information and devotional materials which we have now concerning Mary would slowly develop later, historically, as Christians began to reflect upon and write about her Son.