

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (English Mass)
Seventh Sunday After Pentecost (Latin Mass)
July 16, 2023
Year of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Ark of the New Covenant

“Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy, our life, our sweetness and our hope.” (Prayer)

Continuing with our reflection upon the Virgin Mary, Blessed Mother of God, the next few words of the “Hail, Holy Queen” prayer highlight three excellencies/qualities/attributes present in Our Lady. Mary is our **Life**, our **Sweetness** and our **Hope**. One should not only question how these three traits apply to Mary, but one should further ask; what does our Catholic faith want to teach us by applying these three to Mary? Let us take each one in turn and try to better understand how they apply and why the Catholic faith, inspired by and guided by the Holy Spirit, wants to teach us about Mary through these outstanding features.

Beginning with the first quality trait, we speak of Mary as our **Life**. The great Bishop, theologian and Doctor of the Church, Saint Alphonsus Liguori, explains this characteristic of Mary by first reminding us of an important point – for everyone present to be alive, our souls must give life or animate our bodies. He builds upon this fact by asking the question: “What gives life or animates our soul?” Our Catholic faith teaches the answer by saying it is grace. Grace is the supernatural gift of God freely given to mankind with the intention of aiding man towards eternal life. Further, we are taught a mortal sin, the breaking of a commandment, expels grace from the soul of a person. The person would therefore be alive (soul animating the body), but in actuality, the person is spiritually dead in their relationship with God. And, if an individual were to die in a state of having a dead relationship with God, I dread the thought of their choosing a very unfortunate external existence. Mary is our life, for she who is “Filled with Grace” (Luke 1:28) and she does not want any of God’s children, her spiritual children to be lost. As our “Spiritual Mother” she continually prays for our conversion from a life of sinfulness toward a life of virtue with her Son. She does this because she loves us. And, we are assured through the tender mercy God has shown to us, that He does listen to his Mother and fulfills her request. A final thought to ponder before we move on, if not for the love of His mother, God had every right to condemn and eradicate human existence with man’s first sin. He did not do this, for if He had, then Mary would have never been born. For love of the life of His Mother, we were not rightfully destroyed.

We refer to Mary as our **Sweetness** due to her presence at the moment of a person’s death. For us to comprehend what is meant by that statement, let us play a game using our imagination. Suppose you were to win the grand prize in a \$500 million lottery. Now, what would you do with all of the money you would receive after taxes? Most would hope we could still afford a senior coffee at What-A-Burger! Seriously, how many friends and relatives would show up at your doorstep seeking a goodwill handout? Now, let us turn the game around. Imagine you lost everything. All of your material possessions are gone due to a catastrophic weather event and, on the same day, the stock market collapses causing you to lose your retirement. How many of those same friends and relatives are going to show up at your doorstep? There is an old term used to describe such individuals who are around only in good times. We call them “fair-weather friends.” Mary is not that for any person who calls upon her

in their need, most especially at the time of their deaths. A spiritual reality, although one we may not like to focus upon, is this: when a person is in the process of dying, Hell unleashes all of its fury upon that soul. This is the last opportunity the demons have to acquire that soul for their eternal tormenting. For this reason, not only should we pray with and for people who are dying, but we should also call upon Mary to do for us as she did for her Son — to be with us, to support us, as we die. As Mary stood at the foot of her Son's Cross supporting Him with her presence, so we ask her to be there to support us and those we love as death's approach looms near. We are assured that as the Queen of Heaven, our Mother, arrives, her enemies flee and scatter. Mary's presence provides for us a sweetness to our deaths. We will not fear, for our Mother will be near.

Finally, we reflect upon Mary as our **Hope**. We often use the term hope for many things. I might say: "I hope my car will start" as I get into it. I hope we will have good weather on our vacation. I hope LSU wins the SEC this year. When it comes to Mary, we need to understand hope in the way it is applied to an advocate. If I would like the Governor to grant me a favor by assisting my request, could I go to the Governor? Yes, I could, but would she know me, know why I make this request, or the importance of the request? Let us say, I know the Lieutenant Governor and go to him to ask his assistance in my request. If my request is granted, then the Lieutenant Governor would be considered to be my hope, for I have placed my hope in his ability to intercede on my behalf. Mary is our Hope, for she intercedes for us to her Son when we ask her assistance. Remember from last month, Jesus will grant the request of His Mother, because He knows she would never request anything from Him which would be contrary to His Divine Will. This, my family, is what I find most hard to comprehend. If you know Jesus loves His Mother and know that He will listen to and grant her request, then why do some hesitate in asking for her help? Do we not ask our family and friends to pray for us in our needs? Then why not ask the prayers of the one person who loves Jesus as only a Mother can love Jesus? It is like trying to win the Kentucky Derby with a donkey. Could it be done? Yes, possibly by miraculous intervention. But why take a chance on a donkey when I have Secretariat in the stable? Do we not do that when we go to another person for their prayers and fail to go to Mary for hers?

As we spoke last month, it is Mary's duty, as requested by her Son dying upon His Cross, to care for us. She is our Spiritual Mother and in way deeper and more profound than any earthly mother can, she loves Her Son, her God, and we her adopted children. There is something special about the relationship between a mother and a child. And when our mothers are gone, something inside us changes. We have a mother, in Mary, who will never leave us. Death cannot rob her from us. She has been given to us by God Himself. So why not take her into your heart and your home as Jesus asked upon His Cross? (John 19:27).