

The Solemnity of Mary the Mother of God (2016)

Hail, holy Mother! The Child to whom you gave birth is the King of Heaven and earth forever.

Today's Solemnity of Mary the Mother of God celebrates the divine motherhood of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is the oldest of all Marian feasts and it celebrates not only our Lady's unique role in the Mystery of the Incarnation but also sheds light on our own efforts to live the Mystery of Christ along the path of Christian discipleship; the path of devout humility. Devotion to our Lady has always had a privileged place in popular piety. God's power shines forth most frequently where His Mother is honoured and venerated. Our history clearly shows us that those who lose devotion to her lose belief in the divinity of Christ our Lord; whereas those who intensify devotion to her gradually acquire or deepen that belief. All of us should pay heed to this lesson for it may be the very key to resolving the greatest threat to Christianity in our times.

As we celebrate the beginning of this New Year and look back at the year that was, the threat of terrorism and the horror of that threat looms over us. All over the world New Year's celebrations are dampened by the threat of terrorism and in our memories are the all too numerous attacks of the past year on innocent people. Reluctantly, even politicians have grudgingly admitted that especially in the Middle East and in parts of Africa Christians are the victims of genocide – a concerted effort to eradicate Christianity from its place of origin. The perpetrators of this violence are Muslims. This terrorism is Islamic and though some may erroneously label what I have just said as racist, nothing could be further from the truth. Islam is not a race. Why then, are some Muslims killing Christians and people of other faiths? Quite simply, because the Quran contains at least 109 verses that call Muslims to war with unbelievers for the sake of Islamic rule. Here is an example of such a verse: *Fight against them so that Allah will punish them by your hands and disgrace them and give you victory over them and heal the breasts of a believing people* (9:14). Humiliating and hurting non-believers not only has the blessing of Allah but it is ordered as a means of carrying out his punishment and even “healing” the hearts of Muslims.

The solution to the problem of terrorism and specifically, the persecution of Christians and others by Muslims however, may be found in the Quran itself, and in the summoning of Muslims to a veneration of the Mother of God, the Blessed Virgin Mary. You may know that in the Quran there are many passages concerning the Blessed Virgin Mary. In the Quran there are verses that acknowledge the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady. There are also verses on the Annunciation, the Visitation and the Nativity; including a description of angels accompanying Our Lady and saying: *Oh Mary, God has chosen and purified you, and elected you above all women of the earth.* In the nineteenth chapter of the Quran there are forty-one verses on Jesus and Mary. For Muslims, Mary is the true *Sayyida* or Lady. The only possible serious rival to this title for Muslims would be Fatima, the daughter of Mohammed, the prophet of Islam. After the death of Fatima, the Quran states that Mohammed said, *Thou shalt be the most blessed of all the women of Paradise, after Mary.* In a variant of the text, Fatima is made to say, *I surpass all the women, except Mary.*

Allow me to quote the Venerable Bishop Fulton Sheen who over fifty years ago explained why the Blessed Mother, in the twentieth century, should have revealed herself in the little village of Fatima in Portugal; so that to all future generations she would be known as Our Lady of Fatima. *Since nothing ever happens out of Heaven except with a finesse of all details, I believe that the Blessed Virgin chose to be known as Our Lady of Fatima as a pledge and a sign of hope to the Moslem people, and as an assurance that they, who show her so much respect, will one day accept her divine Son too. Evidence to support these views is found in the historical fact that Muslims occupied [Portugal]for centuries and that the town of Fatima where Our Lady appeared in 1917 bears a historical connection to Fatima, the daughter of Mohammed*

<http://restoringcatholicism.com/2015/11/15/archbshp-sheens-prophetic-warning-of-50-years-ago-mary-and-the-moslems-the-significance-of-fatima/>).

Somewhat prophetically, Bishop Sheen concluded that we must use the forty-first chapter of the Quran to show Muslims *that it was taken out of the Gospel of Luke; [and] that Mary could not be, even in their own eyes, the most blessed of all women of Heaven if she had not also borne the Saviour of the world. If Judith and Esther of the Old Testament were pre-figures of Mary, then it may very well be that Fatima herself was a post-figure of Mary! The Moslems should be prepared to acknowledge that, if Fatima must give way in honor to the Blessed Mother, it is because she is different from all the mothers of the world and without Christ she would be nothing.*

I firmly believe that Our Lady can help us to overcome the menace that we face and that she can also bring solace and deliverance to millions of Muslims who suffer and are victimized by the teachings of Islam. We invoke Our Lady in her litany as *Virgin Most Powerful, Virgo Potens*; and indeed she is. The December issue of *National Geographic* has a feature story on Our Lady and the front cover of the magazine reads, *Mary, The most Powerful Woman in the World*. This article speaks of some of the better known places in the world where Our Lady has appeared to bring to humanity a message of consolation and hope: Lourdes in France, Kibeho in Rwanda, Fatima in Portugal, Medjugorje in Bosnia; and of ancient shrines like the Deir al Adra monastery in Minya, Egypt, where Muslims and Christians alike venerate a place where the Holy Family stayed during their flight into Egypt. A Marian festival in that shrine draws two million of the faithful each year. Six million people visit Lourdes each year.

Powerful indeed! Yet, she is the most tender of all mothers. *The love Mary gives to her Divine Child, she desires to give to each one of us.* At the foot of the statue of Our Lady of Fatima you will find cards inscribed with these words, inviting you to enter into prayerful dialogue with Our Lady and through her with Our Lord. *Divine Conversation.* As your Father in Christ, I exhort you to do all that you can to honour and to love Our Lady. One of the seers who saw Our Lady in Kibeho in Rwanda said of Our Lady, *She only asks us to love her as much as she loves us.* What better time than the beginning of the year to resolve to renew and deepen our devotion to Our Lady; that we might be humble in our discipleship, simple and moderate in our lifestyle and generous in charity. Through us, our cruel and frightened world can see and receive some of that divine tenderness that has been revealed to us through Jesus the Messiah and Mary, His Mother. This is what everyone needs to hear – those who cause terror and those who are its victims. Every human heart has been created for love and God's love conquers all.

With God's help and the intercession of Our Lady, we will defeat the terror of our times and we will share the saving message of the Gospel. This statue of Our Lady of Fatima beautifully illustrates God's tender love for a fallen humanity. This statue was carved at the instructions of Sr. Mary Lucia of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart, one of the three seers to whom Our Lady appeared at Fatima in Portugal in 1917. Sister Lucia interpreted the maternal gesture of the hands: *with the left hand [She is] lifting the son who fell and with the right hand sustains and blesses him. This son is each one of us (A Pathway Under the Gaze of Mary, p. 318).* To each one of us Our Lady says what she said to Sister Lucia: *My Immaculate Heart will be your refuge and the way that leads you to God.*

With great confidence then, we go to Jesus through Mary. More importantly, we go to them with faith and trust in the hope that saves. At the beginning of this New Year, let us, each one of us consecrate ourselves to Our Lady's Immaculate Heart; in the knowledge that *the love Mary gives to her Divine Child, she desires to give to each one of us.*

May our Lady nurture in each one of us the desire to be pleasing to God alone and to seek holiness above all else. May she watch over us and in this Year of Mercy may she teach us to proclaim the mercy of the Lord. She is the *Virgin Most Powerful* and no less the *Virgin Most Merciful*.

To all of you and your families, my best wishes for the New Year!

O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to Thee.

