

Fatima and Our Lady Co-redemptrix

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At the core of our Christian Faith lies a mystery which at once manifests the extraordinary generosity of Christ the Redeemer, and at the same time calls all of his disciples to a profound supernatural mission alongside their Redeemer. This mystery is referred to in the words of St. Paul to the Colossians, in which he calls all followers of the Crucified to “complete what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ, for the sake of his body which is the Church” (Col. 1:24).

Jesus Christ is the only Redeemer because He alone is the divine and human Mediator between God and men (cf. 1 Tim. 2:5). He has, however, willed to bring into partnership in his work of redemption all those who have been redeemed by him, in order that the glory and mercy of his work may shine forth in the heavens and on earth in a greater and more wondrous manner. Thus, redeemed humanity can cooperate with the Redeemer in virtue of our mystical union with Jesus, a union so sublime that we, the People of God, form his very Body. We not only receive but should also participate in the distribution of the infinite graces merited by the Redeemer once for all at Calvary. In light of this partnership desired by the Savior for all his faithful, John Paul II rightly designates the People of God as “co-redemers.”¹

Our Lady is the perfect model for the Christian’s mission to participate in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. In virtue of her Immaculate Conception, she is prepared by the Eternal Father to cooperate without compromise, in union with the Redeemer, in buying back humanity from the bondage of the Evil One (cf. Gen. 3:15). In light of her divine maternity, she possesses the greatest conceivable union of body and spirit with Jesus, the Incarnate Savior. Her presence at Calvary, prophesied by Simeon (cf. Lk. 2:35), speaks through action of the Redeemer’s desire that his Mother share entirely in all of his sufferings of passion and death in order to ransom the lost children of the first Adam and Eve (cf. Jn. 19:25-27).

¹ Cf. John Paul II, Address to the sick at the Hospital of the Brothers of St. John of God, April 5, 1981, *L’Osservatore Romano*, English edition, April 13, 1981, p. 6; General Audience, Jan. 13, 1982, *Inseg.* V/1, 1982, 91; Address to candidates for the Priesthood, Montevideo, May 8, 1988, *L’Osservatore Romano*, English edition, May 30, 1988, p. 4; cf. Pius XI, Papal Allocution at Vicenza, Nov. 30, 1933, Domenico Bertetto, S.D.B., ed., *Discorsi di Pio XI* 2:1013.

It is true that the Sorrowful Mother constitutes in her wondrously beautiful person the optimum witness to the essential Christian revelation that human suffering is intended by God to be supernaturally redemptive. Still, the quality and degree of the Immaculate Co-redemptrix's participation in the mystery of salvation extends incomparably beyond that of any other creature, human or angelic. Our Lady alone participated with her divine Son in the acquisition of the graces of Calvary due to her exclusive role as the New Eve. She fought the spiritual battle with Christ against the infernal adversary for the rest of humanity, indeed for the ransom of all creation, with an intensity and at the cost of suffering almost humanly unimaginable,² but which was supernaturally fruitful for the entire human race.

Thus, as the perfect companion with the Redeemer, she embodies the title and heavenly honor of Co-redemptrix with a magnitude and efficacy far beyond any other creaturely participation in redemption.

The Coredemptive Call of Fatima

The three young Portuguese visionaries made the coredemptive call of Our Lady of Fatima a firm Marian foundation for their own paths to Christian sanctity. From the outset of the 1916 angelic apparitions which prepared the way for Our Lady's visits the following year, the call of coredemption through the offering of daily sacrifices and sufferings comprises a pillar of the Fatima message and mission.

During the first 1916 apparition, the "Angel of Peace"³ instructs the children to offer prayers of reparation for those who do not believe, adore, trust or love God.⁴ This is soon followed in the next angelic apparition by the heavenly call to "Offer prayers and sacrifices constantly to the Most High."⁵ When the young Lucia asks how they are to make sacrifices, the Guardian Angel of Portugal⁶ instructs: "Make of everything you can a sacrifice, and offer it to God as an act of reparation for the sins by which He is offended, and in supplication for the conversion of sinners...above all, accept and bear with submission the suffering which the Lord will send

² John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Salvifici Doloris*, February, 11, 1984, 25.

³ *Memoirs of Sister Lucia*, Second Memoir, p. 62.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

you.”⁷ Reparation is indeed a mode of coredemption, whereby a member of Christ’s Body voluntarily offers an act of prayer or penance on behalf of others, which then effects the mysterious release of the redemptive graces of Jesus for the spiritual fruits of atonement to God for sin and for the spiritual conversion and salvation of other members of humanity.

Our Lady re-echoes the call of coredemption initiated by the Angel of Peace during her first apparition. On May 13, 1917, Our Lady of the Rosary invites the young seers to accept a life vocation of redemptive suffering and offering for the salvation of poor sinners: “Are you willing to offer yourselves to God and bear all the suffering He wills to send you, as an act of reparation for poor sinners?” Lucia responds, “Yes, we are willing.” Then Our Lady confirms: “Then you are going to have much to suffer, but the grace of God will be your comfort.”⁸ On July 13, she further directs the children: “Sacrifice yourselves for sinners, and say many times, especially when you make some sacrifice: O Jesus, it is for love of you, for the conversion of sinners, and in reparation for the sins committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary.”⁹

We also see the Fatima mission for Christian coredemption revealed in the invitation of the Child Jesus and his Mother on December 10, 1925, to offer the four revealed components of the First Saturday Communions of Reparation with the specific intention of making reparation to the Immaculate Heart, a maternal heart which mysteriously and mystically continues to suffer. The Christ Child testifies to the ongoing moment by moment piercing of the Immaculate Heart due to the sins and ingratitude of mankind: “Have compassion on the Heart of your most holy Mother, covered with thorns, with which ungrateful men pierce it at every moment, and there is no one to make an act of reparation to remove them.”¹⁰ The Immaculate Heart herself confirms: “Look, my daughter, at my Heart, surrounded by thorns with which ungrateful men pierce me at every moment by their blasphemies and ingratitude.”¹¹ The Fatima call to coredemption and reparation unveils the request to offer consolation directly to Mary’s most Immaculate Heart in atonement for the present pains inflicted on that maternal heart by the daily offenses of humanity. A mother’s heart shares in the suffering of her children in the order of love, and hence the Savior Son

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ *Memoirs*, Fourth Memoir, p. 158.

⁹ Ibid., p. 162.

¹⁰ *Memoirs*, Appendix I, p. 195.

¹¹ Ibid.

initiates the call for reparation and consolation to the Heart of our universal spiritual Mother.

Beyond the general Christian call to coredemption beckoned by the Lady of Fatima, we also witness glimpses of Mary Co-redemptrix herself in the Fatima event. During the solar miracle of October 13, 1917, Our Lady appears as Our Lady of Sorrows.¹² In the monumental message of July 13, she follows her request for the daily Rosary as the providential remedy for world war with the words: "...because only she can help you."¹³ The task of distributing to our present world the graces of peace and redemption has been granted exclusively to the Mediatrix of all graces, and she is the Mediatrix of all graces in the ministry of dispensation because she was first the Co-redemptrix in the ministry of acquisition and reconquest with Christ, the Redeemer King.

Sr. Lucia's Commentary on Our Lady Co-redemptrix

In her final major writing entitled, "*Calls From the Message of Fatima*", Sr. Lucia leaves the world an extraordinary testimony and insight into the profundity of the title and role of Our Lady as the Co-redemptrix. Her repeated commentary on the Co-redemptrix title highlights the unquestionable presence of Marian Coredemption in the Fatima revelation and mission. Her ongoing reflections upon Mary Co-redemptrix designate it as the principal Marian title that occupies her attention along with the title of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Let us examine just a few excerpts from her repeated explanations of the efficacious undertaking of the Co-redemptrix. In the thirteenth chapter dedicated to the imperative for devotion to the Immaculate Heart, Sr. Lucia identifies how the entire work of redemption begins with the Heart of Mary, and how her coredemptive role brings to light the inseparable union between the Redeemer and the Co-redemptrix:

God began the work of our redemption in the Heart of Mary, given that it was through her "*fiat*" that the redemption began to come about: "And Mary said, '*Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your*

¹² *Memoirs*, Fourth Memoir, p. 170.

¹³ *Memoirs*, Fourth Memoir, p. 161.

word.' (Lk 1:38). "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14). Thus, in the closest union possible between two human beings, Christ began, with Mary, the work of our salvation. The Christ's heart-beats are those of the heart of Mary, the prayer of Christ is the prayer of Mary, the joys of Christ are the joys of Mary; it was from Mary that Christ received the Body and Blood that are to be poured out and offered for the salvation of the world. Hence, Mary, made one with Christ, is the Co-redemptrix of the human race. With Christ in her womb, with Jesus Christ in her arms, with Christ at Nazareth and in his public life; with Christ she climbed the hill of Calvary, she suffered and agonized with Him, receiving into her Immaculate Heart the last sufferings of Christ, his last words, his last agony and the last drops of his Blood, in order to offer them to the Father.¹⁴

In the context of our own mysterious call to participate in Redemption's application, the Fatima seer explains Our Lady's mission of co-suffering in relation to the Incarnation, the union of the Two Hearts, and God's providential disposition that Our Lady indeed become the Co-redemptrix of the human race:

The work of our redemption began at the moment when the Word descended from Heaven in order to assume a human body in the womb of Mary. From that moment, and for the next nine months, the blood of Christ was the blood of Mary, taken from her Immaculate Heart; the Heart of Christ was beating in unison with the Heart of Mary.

And we can think that the aspirations of the Heart of Mary were completely identified with the aspirations of the Heart of Christ. Mary's ideal had become the same as that of Christ Himself, and the love in the Heart of Mary was the love in the Heart of Christ for the Father and for all human beings; to begin with, the entire work of redemption passed through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, through the bond of her close intimate union with the divine Word.

¹⁴ Sr. Lucia, *"Calls" from the Message of Fatima*, Ch. 13, p. 137.

Since the Father entrusted his Son to Mary, enclosing Him for nine months within her chaste virginal womb—and "*All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 'Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel' (which means, God with us)*" (Mt 1:22-23; Is 7:14)—and since Mary of her own free will opened herself entirely to whatever God willed to accomplish in her—"*Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word*" (Lk 1:38) is what she said to the angel—in view of all this and by God's disposition, Mary became, with Christ, the Co-redemptrix of the human race.¹⁵

Conclusion

Sr. Lucia's inspired witness to the authenticity of Mary Co-redemptrix appropriately serves, in this hallowed Fatima Sanctuary, as a final "fiat" to what has constituted an ongoing litany of erudite scholarship, homiletic praise, and liturgical worship offered through the course of this extraordinary symposium in just and fitting reverence to our Mother, the Immaculate Co-redemptrix of the human race.

It is now time, my brother cardinals and bishops, to consider prayerfully bringing the labors of our Marian love, which have constituted the "soul" of this symposium, into some concrete form of practical resolution, in order to "give flesh" to our common love of the Co-redemptrix.

¹⁵*"Calls" from the Message of Fatima*, Ch. 13, p. 115. Note: Sr. Lucia also links the Virgin's role as Co-redemptrix from within a christo-typical mariological framework with her example of Christian holiness through the fulfillment of the duties of her state in life as wife and mother in a most fruitful ecclesio-typical mariological application: "Our Lady sanctified herself as a pure and immaculate virgin by corresponding to the graces which God granted to her in that state. She sanctified herself as a faithful and devoted wife by fulfilling all the duties of her state in life. She sanctified herself as a loving mother who dedicated herself to the Son whom God entrusted to her, fondling Him in her arms, bringing Him up and educating Him, and also helping Him and following Him in the performance of his mission. With Him she traveled the narrow way of life, the rugged road to Calvary; with Him she agonized, receiving in her heart the wounds of the nails, the piercing of the lance and the insults of the hostile crowd; finally, she sanctified herself as mother, mistress and guide of the Apostles, agreeing to remain on earth for as long as God wished, in order to accomplish the mission which He had entrusted to her as Co-redemptrix with Christ of all human beings" (*"Calls"*, Ch. 21, p. 195).

My brothers, I wish only to share my own heart with you in this formal closing of the presentation schedule of our symposium, and the initiation of our discussion towards a potential resolution.

I believe the time has now arrived in the life of the Church for the solemn definition of Our Lady's role as Co-redemptrix, along with her subsequent roles as Mediatrix of all graces and Advocate. I am well aware of the numerous objections offered against such an action at this time, the principal objection being its potential negative effect on the ecumenical mission of the Church. But I remember clearly the same objections that were posed against the papal definition of Our Lady's Assumption in 1949, objections which were historically proven to be inaccurate, and which were lost in the sea of grace which was released through the papal definition in 1950. It is important to point out that contrary to the ecumenical objection raised before the definition of the Assumption, its solemn papal definition led to the greatest historical period of ecumenical progress in the history of the Church, an historic ecumenical breakthrough that came through Our Lady's intercession.

I furthermore believe in Our Lady's words delivered at this precise location of Fatima that "only she can help you."¹⁶ Whether it be the ecumenical mission and the new evangelization, the battle against the culture of death and its evil seeds of abortion, euthanasia, and cloning; the crisis of family life; the threat against world peace, particularly in the Middle East; the fight against world hunger, poverty, and disease, especially in its tragic manifestation in Africa; and in all other global imperatives facing the Church and the world, I believe the remedy is the solemn proclamation of this Marian doctrine, which will formally recognize and request the full extent of her powerful mediation for all humanity.

I would therefore like to initiate a *votum* as an expression of hope, directed to the Holy Father and the Holy See, which would respectfully express the desire for the solemn proclamation of Our Lady Co-redemptrix, Mediatrix, and Advocate—a *votum* to which I would like to invite any and all brother cardinals and bishops present to join, if you feel so called by Our Lady, in a spirit of fraternal solidarity. I would be happy to provide a basic

¹⁶ *Memoirs*, Fourth Memoir, p. 161.

draft of the *votum*, which could then be modified and agreed upon during our general discussion of resolutions.

If possible, I would also recommend the personal presentation of any potential *votum* agreed upon here by a cardinal member or two here present, who could possibly convey the final *votum* directly and personally to the Holy Father.

My brothers and friends, I have expressed my heart honestly to you all, and I invite you all to an honest exchange of minds and hearts on this initiation of a *votum* and your own potential participation. Thank you, and may Our Lady of Fatima truly lead our discussion and resolution in her honor, and for the greatest glory of the Most Holy Trinity.