

COMMENTARY ON THE INVOCATIONS OF THE LITANY OF LORETTO

The Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary is one of the most often recited prayers. It is one of the wonderful hymns in honor of Mary, in which her great virtues and privileges which God has granted her are presented.

Mary (Miriam) means “Star of the Sea.” These days, we have no problem with navigation, but two thousand years ago, a star was the only indicator for determining the location of a ship for sailors. At night, a star was a guide which allowed them to find their way. We know that in Holy Scriptures, names always have a certain meaning, that they are not just accidental.

Therefore, Mary is like our guide and, in addition, the only one thanks to whom we manage to find the right way to Jesus. She is also the Mother of God, for she bore the Savior, and since this is so, she is also our Mother in a spiritual sense.

Lord, have mercy on us

The Litany begins with the invocations, “Lord, have mercy on us, Christ, have mercy on us” as well as the invocations to the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity, that is, to God Himself. This introduction appropriately frames our prayer. It reminds us that in the long run, we always pray to God and it is He whom we ask for His mercy.

Jesus established the Church, which constitutes His Mystical Body. The Lord therefore invited people to cooperate in His saving work.

Mary and the saints have their role to play in the mission of reconciling God with the world. Prayer to Mary and the saints has a different character than prayer to God Himself. At the heart of the matter is a petition for prayer, for intercession, which is why we repeat the refrain: “pray for us.”

Queen of peace, pray for us!

This last invocation was introduced into the Litany of Loretto during World War I. At that time, it seemed that the war would not end and that peace would never reign among the nations.” Our Immaculate Mother merited this distinction, since it was she who gave us Him, whom the prophet Isaiah foretells as the “Prince of Peace” (Is 9:5), and who Himself said, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you” (J 14:27).

Mother inviolate, pray for us!

The first woman, Eve, sinned and brought on herself the following sentence: "I will intensify the pangs of your childbearing; in pain shall you bring forth children." (Gen 3:16). Mary, as immaculately conceived, she was not subject to the effects of original sin. And it was thus that she gave birth to the savior as a Virgin, as completely pure, without suffering and pain. This is a special mystery, which St. Augustine explain: "Just as the rays of the sun penetrate glass, and despite this do not harm it nor destroy it, so also Mary bore Christ, the Sun of righteousness, without any violation of her virginity."

Virgin most powerful, pray for us!

St. James writes: "The fervent petition of the just man is powerful indeed" Could not the most special friends of God, the saints, accomplish this?

How much more so can the Most Holy Virgin? St. Anselm calls upon her: “O Immaculate Virgin, higher than the patriarchs, higher than the martyrs, higher than the confessors, higher also than the virgins...”

Mary is Mother of the All-Powerful Son of God. If Her Son is All-Powerful by nature, then she is all-powerful by grace, so she is the Virgin most powerful in every sense of the word.

Queen of the Holy Rosary, pray for us!

Through the title of Queen of the Rosary, Mary again stands by our side. We see her again, how she lived on earth, how she shared the joys and sorrows with the Savior, and how in this way she merited for herself the glory of heaven. In this way, the Holy Rosary is like Jacob's ladder, which ascending its 20 rungs, leads to heaven.

Queen conceived without original sin, pray for us!

The exalted title, “conceived without sin,” honors the special privilege of Mary, which she received in view of being chosen as worthy to be the Mother of God, and which at the same time constitutes the deepest foundation of the entire beauty of her virtues. We, the children of Adam, came into the world stained by the sin of our first parents. Mary was excluded from the yoke of this law and protected from this stain in view of her mission and the dignity of her divine motherhood.

Queen of all saints, pray for us!

The Most Holy Virgin shines above all the Saints in grace, virtue and glory. St. Peter Damian writes: “To You, O Virgin and Queen, has been given all authority in heaven and on earth; for You, nothing

is impossible. Would, therefore, He who from your body took His own body be able to withstand this power? You approach the golden altar of reconciliation with a petition, but also with a command as a mother, and not as a servant.”

Queen of confessors, pray for us!

“Whoever acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God remains in him, and He in God” (1 J 4:15). Those who have faithfully lived according to this principle we call confessors. Their Queen is Mary!

Mary did not doubt in Jesus for even a single moment and stood next to Him, as if she wanted to call out to the whole world: He, who is here on the cross is truly the Son of the living God, Jesus Christ, to whom be honor and glory forever!

Queen of apostles, pray for us!

What did the apostles do? St. Paul answers: “We proclaim our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Cor 4:5). Mary, however, is the only one “from whom was born Jesus, who is called the Christ.” (Mt 1:16). Therefore, she is thus supreme over the Apostles in the measure that a deed stands above a word.

Queen of Prophets, pray for us!

Our Immaculate Mother was a constant theme of the prophets. Their predictions revolved around her and all of them (Elijah and Elisha, the four great prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezechiel, and Daniel, and later the twelve minor prophets built up the longing for the Messiah to be born of the Virgin.

Gate of heaven, pray for us!

In her priestly prayers, the Church honors the Immaculate Virgin as the glorious gate of heaven. Mary is the gate of heaven, because through her came Jesus, who opened again for us the doors of the heavens that had been shut, who said: "I am the gate" (J 10:9).

Help of Christians, pray for us!

"O Mother, come and help me to pray! O Mother, come and help me in my struggle! O Mother, come and help me in time of suffering! O Mother, come and stay with me! You, after all, are able to help me, O Most Powerful One! You wish to help me, O Best of helpers! You must help me now, O most Faithful one! You will also come to my aid, O Most Merciful One!"

Health of the sick, pray for us!

If the Savior Himself heard the plea of the centurion Jairus, how much more will he listen to His own Mother, as often as she pleads for the suffering children, for those whom He Himself entrusted to Her in His testament on the Cross: “Son, behold your Mother!” (J 19:26).

Star of the Sea, pray for us!

St. Bernard writes: “It is right for Mary to be compared with a star; she is, after all, the shining star what came down from Jacob, whose rays enlighten the entire earth, and whose splendors shed their light on all the heavenly heights, penetrate every depth, dispel the darkness of the world, and give warmth more to souls than to bodies”

Ark of the Covenant, pray for us!

In the stone case of the Old Covenant, the Israelite nation preserved the Tablets Of The Commandments, the rod of Aaron, and the vessels with manna. How marvelous is this symbol of our Immaculate Virgin! She hid in the ark of her soul the true manna, Christ, who at the same time was indeed the shepherd and Himself the Lawgiver.

House of gold, pray for us!

When Solomon completed that marvelous building which was the temple, he said: "I have built a house for the Name of the Lord, God of Israel" (1 Kings 8:20). In an extended, sublime sense, Mary could say the same. She built herself up as a temple of virtues by her love for the word of God. "Blessed rather are they who hear the word of God, and observe it" (Lk 11:28).

Tower of ivory, pray for us!

Just as people assembled from everywhere at Solomon's tower of ivory to attain his counsel, so also does everyone come to Mary, to obtain at her feet the counsel of salvation. Mary is the tower of ivory also in view of her unparalleled whiteness, by which she brightly shone far and wide, and in view of the loftiness of her virtues.

Tower of David, pray for us!

Mary is called the house of David in view of her gift of fortitude. The gates of hell never prevailed against her soul.

On the contrary, she defeated them and like a fortified tower helps us to triumph over them again and again.

The expression "Tower of David" is connected with the praise from the Song of Songs: "Your neck, like a tower of David, built in courses; a thousand

shields hung upon it, all the armor of warriors.” Aside from this, the invocation is directly connected with that powerful tower, which guarded the northwest cornice of Sion and was called the tower of David.

Mystical rose, pray for us!

The Church rejoices in Virgin Mary - the rose of virtues and sings of her as “a rose-bush in Jericho” (Sirach 24:14) and as “a blossom of the rose in springtime” (Sirach 50:8). In this way, the Church wishes to place emphasis on the rare beauty of Mary’s life full of virtues, and at the same time on her love of God and neighbor, as symbolized by the rose. To this is also added a connection to a beautiful legend which recounts that in Mary’s tomb, white lilies and fragrant roses were found instead of her body.

Singular vessel of devotion, pray for us!

The righteousness of Mary was ultimately based on her devotion – on her devotion in the sense of the Latin word “devotion.” And such devotion is loving surrender to God.

Mary said: “May it be done to me according to Your word. (Lk 1:38). In these words, is contained her complete consent to offer herself as a sacrifice without any limits.

With her unconditional consent to accept the will of the Most High, she willingly accepted, that is to say with love, the chalice of suffering, in truth a singular vessel of devotion.

Vessel of honor, pray for us!

The righteousness of Mary was based next on the pillars of hope and trust in God.

For just as distressful is the one who, despising God's help, wishes to rely on his own nothingness, so again the one who merits special honor is the person who supports his building on God and places his trust only in Him. For this reason, also, we honor Mary as the Vessel of honor.

Spiritual vessel, pray for us!

Mary is the spiritual vessel because her righteousness was based on faith. Tertullian writes about it thus: "Eve drew upon the earth a sentence of death, since she trusted the serpent in spite of God's command; in contrast, Mary, our queen Mary, brought salvation to the world, for she trusted the words of the angel." Let us be a spiritual vessel like Mary, filled to the brim with a humble and unwavering faith. "Stand firm in the faith." (I Cor 16:13)

Seat of wisdom, pray for us!

This invocation expresses the Blessed Virgin's teaching role in relation to us, the children of humanity. Mary is therefore already the seat of wisdom in that she carried in her womb Jesus, the eternal Word of the Everlasting Father, the eternal Wisdom, of which the book of all books sings in a brief but profoundly compact refrain: "From the mouth of the Most High I came forth, the first-born of all creation" (cf. Sirach 24:5). She gave us Jesus, of whom St. Paul writes: "in Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col 2:3)

Mirror of justice, pray for us!

Mary is that mirror because her soul and all her actions are "the refulgence of eternal light, that spotless mirror of God's work, the image of His goodness"

(Wis 7:26). She did not only do for God what was required, but went far, far beyond the limits of strict obligation.

Virgin most faithful, pray for us!

“Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord” – this word of Mary declares her faithfulness in its entirety. In the convictions of the Blessed Virgin Mary, this meant: “Do, O Lord with me as you please, whatever you wish, whether it be pleasant or also sorrowful – I am completely ready, at Your disposition, I who am your servant!”

In this fidelity to God, she remained unwavering: in the inhospitable stable at Bethlehem, during the exile in Egypt, in the times of need at the home in Nazareth, and finally, during the Way of the Cross of her Son, marked with blood, at the foot of the dreadful tree of sorrow on Golgotha.

Virgin most merciful, pray for us!

The Gospel also tells us about the kindness of our Mother. After all, she had complete freedom in rendering consent to God's proposal. But she accepts it, not pondering at all the spiritual and physical sacrifices connected with it; in her generous love, she only took into account our redemption.

If already here on earth she encountered the proof of her merciful love, how much must she care for her children from heaven?

Virgin most renowned, pray for us!

The Church sings: "Blessed are You, Virgin Mary, deserving of all praise, for from you came forth the sun of righteousness, Jesus Christ, our God".

Virgin most prudent, pray for us!

Thomas à Kempis wrote: “In truth, a humble apprentice who serves God is better than a proud philosopher who, while neglecting himself, pursues the course of the stars”. Mary is the prudent Virgin in the mind of the Most High, who said “The fullness of wisdom is the service of God” (cf. Sirach 1:20)

Mother of our Savior, pray for us!

Mary not only gave us the God-Man, but also gave us our Redeemer. She is therefore also the Mother of our Redeemer!

Mary gave birth to Jesus, of whom the angel said: “For He will save His people from their sins” (Mt 1:21), and of whom St. John the Baptist acknowledged: “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world” (J 1:29). It was Mary who gave us this Savior.

Mother of our Creator, pray for us!

As Mother of our Creator, Mary wishes to remove even the shadow of every, even the slightest doubt, that through the use of the word “God” in her title as Mother of God, we wish to express the real, eternal Son of God, Him whom the Holy Gospel calls the Creator.

Mother of Good Counsel, pray for us!

The gift of counsel relies on the capacity for a wise discernment, especially in difficult and decisive moments, so that as the next step, we may choose what is appropriate in accord with this. This is why the Church places on Mary’s lips the words of Sacred Scripture: “Mine are counsel and advice to the wise.” (Prov 8:14)

Mother most admirable, pray for us!

Miraculous, for it was without stain, was her coming into the world. The messenger from heaven was compelled to acknowledge: “Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with You” (Lk 1:28). Mary is the mother most admirable as Mother of the Redeemer. St. Andrew of Crete calls out: “What could be a greater miracle than that by which God is enclosed in the womb of the virgin. Yes, this indeed is something unheard of!” It is also the miraculous working of the Holy Spirit. Only Mary heard the words: “The power of the Holy Spirit will overshadow You” (Lk 1:35). And this same Spirit of God worked in her the miracle beyond our grasp, by which He joined her motherhood with her virginity, pure as a lily.

Mother most amiable, pray for us!

How amiable is the Immaculate Virgin also for us her people! Blessed Henry of Suso calls out in ecstasy: “O sweet name of Mary! Whom will you yourself become, since your name is so worthy of our love and contains so much sweetness within it!”

Thousands of places of pilgrimage, millions of souls in heaven and on earth have come to know the kindness of Mary. All in one voice call upon her in this act of praise that says everything: Mother most amiable!

Mother undefiled, pray for us!

This title praises the Mother of God as that extraordinary mother who likewise after the birth of her Divine Child remained immaculate, that is, undefiled.

St. Jerome said “It is inconceivable that Mary who bore God in her womb

would receive into that sanctuary any man bearing the stain of original sin.” This same Doctor of the Church praised St. Joseph as the virgin guardian of Mary’s own virginity and proclaimed these significant words: “St. Joseph was also a virgin and, through Mary, remained as such, so that from this virgin marriage, the virgin Son might be born.”

Mother most pure, pray for us!

“Mother most pure” is a title that honors Mary as Mother of God, since Mary precisely as Mother of God was totally free and had to be preserved from all stain of original sin. It was not fitting, after all, that her womb, which later would be the temple of the Son of God, was at any time under the power of sin and the dominion of Satan.

After all, our Mother Most Pure became the Cause of our Joy as well. Her joy at the Magnificat and at the Wedding at Cana poured out on others as well.

Mother of Divine Grace, pray for us!

Mary bore for us Jesus, who came not with earthly power, and not as a strict judge, but as the image of goodness and salvation for humanity, as the Grace of God in person. She is therefore rightfully honored as Mother of Divine Grace. St. Ambrose writes of this: "She was called full of grace in virtue of the right which was entirely accorded to her, since she alone received that grace which no other creature attained. For she was filled with the Author of grace, God Himself."

Mother of mercy, pray for us!

Recently, The Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments gave permission that in Poland there be added to the Litany the invocation, “Mother of Mercy.” We pray this after the invocation, “Mother of Divine Grace.” The new title was introduced for theological, liturgical, and pastoral reasons. Mary, as the Mother of Jesus Christ, is the Mother of the Divine Mercy manifested in Him (Eph 2: 4-10). She gave expression to this in the words of her Magnificat which she spoke to St. Elizabeth: “His mercy is from generation to generation” (Lk 1:50). This invocation “Mother of Mercy” is already found in the medieval antiphon “Salve Regina”.