

Assumption

THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

(15 August)

SERMON 1

Isaias 2:2: *And in the last days the mountains of the house of the Lord shall be prepared on the top of mountains, and it shall be exalted above all the hills, and all nations shall flow unto it.*

Triple metaphor of the praise of the Virgin

The Holy Spirit has pointed out in many ways the praise of the blessed Virgin under various metaphors of heavenly, earthly and intermediate realities. In the words of the Prophet quoted above there is the metaphor of a mountain from three points of view, namely, the summit of exalted virtues: *And in the last days the mountains of the house of the Lord shall be prepared*; the dignity of everlasting rewards: *and it shall be exalted* etc.; the protection of overflowing mercies: *and all nations shall flow unto it*. The first refers to the eminence of the state of grace; the second, to the dignity of the state of grace; the third to the effect of both states.

Part I: The summit of exalted virtues

It has to be noted about the first metaphor that the *house of the Lord* is triple, namely, what dwells in it by a Majesty without limit and this is the grandeur of the eternal Majesty; what dwells in it by a continuous influence and this is the capacity for earthly vastness; and also what dwells in loving goodwill and this is the calm of ecclesiastical unity.

Firstly, the grandeur of the eternal Majesty

Of this Baruch 3:24-25 says: *O Israel, how great is the house of God, and how vast is the place of his possession! It is great, and has no end, it is high and immense.* It is *great* because of incomprehensible Majesty, it *has no end* because of unending

eternity, it is *high* because of incomparable virtue.¹ Job 11:7-9 touches on these four: *Will you perhaps comprehend the steps of God? He is higher than heaven*, because of the sublimity of power, *deeper than hell*, because of a wisdom that cannot be grasped; *longer than the earth*, because of the breadth of love; *broader than the sea*, because of the length of eternity.

Secondly, the capacity for earthly vastness

On this, we read in 2 Timothy 2:20: *In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth. Gold*, refers to intellectual creatures, *wood* to vegetable matter, and *earth* to basic elements. The text continues: *some indeed unto honour, but some unto dishonour*, because it was the plan of God to place some creatures around the higher while some were left below in the centre. Of this house Jeremiah 18:2 says: *Go down into the potter's house*.

Thirdly, the calm of ecclesiastical unity

On this third point we read in 1 Timothy 3:14-15: *These things I write to you etc., that you may know how you ought to behave in the house of God which is the church of the living God*. The foundation of this house is enduring truth; Psalm 118:89 says of this: *For ever, O Lord, your word stands firm in heaven*. The walls of this house are excellent virtue, its roof most eminent love. The Apostle in 1 Corinthians 12:31 says: *I show you yet a more excellent way*. The adornment of the house is shining wisdom, Ecclesiasticus 26:21: *As the sun when it rises to the world in the high places of God, so is the beauty of a good wife for the ornament of her house*. This the house of which the Prophet said: *And in the last days etc*.

The mountain of this house is the blessed Virgin

The *mountain* of this house is the blessed Virgin because she gave its beginning by her grace of fertility, its height by her excellent and exalting grace, its stability by her confirming grace.

¹ The fourth point is missing.

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Firstly, the grace of fertility

Of this, Daniel 2:34-35 says: *You saw, till a stone was cut out of a mountain without hands*, that is, Christ born from the Virgin without human seed. *This stone struck and broke the statue in pieces*, that is, the height of human vanity; *and it became a great mountain* etc. Psalm 117:22 says: *The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner*. This the foundation stone of the Church and so we read in the Prophet: *Behold, I will lay a stone in the foundations of Sion* [Isaias 28:16]. Therefore, when the house of the Church was built upon this stone that was born from the blessed Virgin, it is clear that she gave to this house its beginning by her grace of fertility. The Church obtains from her its beginning by undoubting faith. Hebrews 8:5 says of Moses: *Make all things according to the pattern which was shown you on the mount*. The Church imitates the blessed Virgin Mary when producing spiritual children through faith. Just as the blessed Virgin conceived without human intervention, so the Church conceives by faith alone without human reason. This is well prefigured in 3 Kings 6:7 where we read that *when the house of God was in building, no hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron was heard in it*. By *hammer* and *tool of iron* are understood human reasons and arguments that are not found in the sacred Scriptures upon which the Church is built.

Secondly, her excellent and exalting grace

On the second, Ezechiel 40:2 says: *He set me upon a very high mountain, upon which there was the building of a city, bending towards the south*. Before the incarnation of the Lord the Church could feel ashamed to be cast down but now it can glory as it is built *on the top of mountains*, that is, on the blessed Virgin who is exalted above the choirs of Angels. The Church derives its height from the blessed Virgin by her excellent hope. Hebrews 3:6 says: *But Christ as the Son in his own house, which house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and glory of hope unto the end*.

Thirdly, the stability by her confirming grace

We read in the Canticum in Exodus 15:17: *You shall bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of your inheritance* etc. The

Church draws stability from the blessed Virgin because of her unchanging love. 2 Corinthians 5:1 says: *For we know, if our earthly house of this habitation be dissolved, that we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in heaven.* For it is impossible given the unbreakable and unshaken bond of love that the Son would expel the Mother, the children and servants of the Mother from the kingdom of heaven.

Three mountains

The text continues: *the house of the Lord shall be prepared on the top of mountains.* As has been said, the Church draws its origin from the blessed Virgin by faith, its height by hope, and its stability by love. Hence, it is *the mountain of the house of the Lord* that has three houses to be built on the virtues mentioned above, virtues that were also strong in the Saints: in the Patriarchs was faith, in the Prophets hope, and in the Apostles love, while all the virtues were in all of them. These mountains are called the foundations of the house of the Church. Psalm 86:1 says: *The foundations thereof are in the holy mountains;* the Apostle says: *Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets* etc. The Patriarchs are called aromatic mountains because of their firm waiting for the divine promises; the Prophets are called radiant mountains because of their revelation of divine secrets; the Apostles are called well watered mountains because of their infusion of divine charismata. At the summit of all these the blessed Virgin is called a *mountain prepared*, because whatever was promised or revealed to them is fulfilled in her, and whatever grace flowed into them, came from her and through her.

Firstly, the mountain of the Patriarchs

Of this mountain, Canticle 8:14 says: *Flee away, O my beloved, and be like to the roe, and to the young hart upon the mountains of aromatic spices.* The Virgin excels these and so is said of her: *I will go the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense* [Canticle 4:6]. She is myrrh by her compassion, frankincense by reconciliation; Ecclesiasticus 24:20: *I gave a sweet smell like cinnamon and aromatic balm* etc. Prelates should be such mountains but, on the contrary, it is said in Jeremiah 51:25: *Behold, I came against you,*

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you destroying mountain, corrupting and giving scandal by bad example.

Secondly, the mountain of the prophets

Of the second mountain is said in 1 Machabees 6:39: *The sun shone upon the shields of gold*, that is, divine brightness on the angelic spirits who are called shields because of their beauty and perfection, and *the mountains glittered* from them, that is, the prophets enlightened by their revelations. Psalm 75:5 says: *You enlighten wonderfully from the everlasting hills*. Even so the blessed Virgin excels these. Exodus 24:17: *And the sight of the glory of the Lord, in the Virgin, was like burning fire upon the top of the mount*; in this way the Son who was God made his Mother godlike.

Admonition to clerics

Clerics should be mountains like this, namely, radiant; but on the contrary it is said about evil mountains in Jeremias 13:16: *Give glory to the Lord your God, before it is dark and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains*. The *dark mountains* are all who give false teachings against the truth of sacred Scripture, false counsels against the example of the Saints, false judgments against the decrees of the Fathers and the direction of laws.

Thirdly, the mountain of the Apostles

Psalm 103:13 says of the third: *You water the hills from your upper rooms*. Just as everything that flows from the mountains is poured out as adornments on the earth, so charismata come from the Apostles to the Church. The blessed Virgin excels these because grace comes from her to them. Psalm 132:3 says: *As the dew of Hermon which descends upon mount Sion*. Hermon¹ means an end of sorrow; as a figure of this the *dew* comes down first on the *fleece of Gedeon*, then onto the *floor* from the fleece [Judges 6:37]. Psalm 71:6 says: *He shall come down like rain upon the fleece, and as showers falling gently upon the earth*. Gregory says of this text that ‘showers of charismata came down from the roofs of the Apostles onto the

¹ Jerome, *De Nominibus Hebraicis*.

earth of the Church'.¹ Joel 3:17 says: *In that day the mountains shall drop down sweetness* etc. We should all be mountains like this so that divine grace may come down on us and through us go on to others. But, on the contrary, it is said of the wicked: *You mountains of Gelboe, let neither dew nor rain come upon you*. All who are proud, envious or irreligious are such mountains.

Summary

Therefore, in this way the height of the virtues concerning the state of grace of the blessed Virgin is implied in what has been said. She is called the mountain of the house of God because she give it its beginning by her grace of fertility, its height by her exalting grace, its stability by her confirming grace. The Church has its origin in her by her undoubting faith, her excellent hope, and her unshaken love. She is called the *mountain prepared on the top of mountains*, because she excels the merits and virtues of the Patriarchs, Prophets and Apostles.

Part II: The dignity of everlasting rewards

The text continues: *and it shall be exalted above all the hills*, by which words she is commended for the dignity of her everlasting rewards. It seems wonderful that she is said to be *exalted above the hills* in her state of glory that is called *on the top of the mountains* with reference to her state of grace; mountains are higher hills. Note that it is the Holy Spirit who is speaking here.

Triple hierarchy

According to Hugh,² there is a triple hierarchy, namely, a super-heavenly hierarch of God, a heavenly of the Angels and a sub-heavenly of humans. These relate to one another as being below and being above; those below the higher are called *hills* and those above the lower are called *mountains*. Therefore, because the blessed Virgin is exalted above the sub-heavenly and the heavenly, called

¹ *Homiliae in Ezechielem*, I, Homilia 10, n. 41.

² *Expositio in Hierarchiam Caelestem S. Dionysii*, I, c. 2.

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hills in relation to the super-heavenly, she is fittingly said to be exalted not over the mountains but over the hills.

Triple action of a higher hierarchy

Note that there is a triple action by a higher hierarchy on a lower, namely, to purify, enlighten, and perfect or complete. Isaias 40:12 says: *Who has poised with three fingers the bulk of the earth*, that is, the stability of the Church in its triple hierarchical actions? The blessed Virgin has this action on the hierarchies subject to her, namely, those of the Angels and of humans. Fittingly, then, Mary is called a bitter sea that purifies, someone who enlightens because she sheds light, and Lady because she perfects and completes. She is exalted above the angelic hierarchy that purifies, enlightens and perfects, and above the human hierarchy that has to be purified, enlightened and perfected.

Mary is exalted above the angelic hierarchy that purifies

She is exalted above the purifying angelic hierarchy of which Psalm 71:3 says: *Let the mountains receive peace for the people* namely, by offering prayers and reconciling with God; *and the hills justice* by punishing evil deeds and so purifying. But the blessed Virgin excels in this action. Hence, the Angels themselves wonder and call out in Canticle 3:6: *Who is she that goes up by the desert*, that is, the hierarchy of angels, a hierarchy abandoned by the apostate angels? *As a pillar of smoke of aromatic spices*, because they purify; *of myrrh*, because it purifies of every impurity; *and frankincense*, because it purifies from every impiety; *and of all the powders of the perfumer*, purifying from every evil.

Mary is exalted above the angelic hierarchy that enlightens

She is exalted above the enlightening hierarchy of which Numbers 23:9 says: *I shall see him from the tops of the rocks, and shall consider him from the hills*. The knowledge of divine revelations comes to humans through angelic spirits; they are called rocks because they are firmly set in a good eternity. The blessed Virgin excels these and so in Canticle 3:6 we read: *Who is she that comes forth as the morning rising, fair as the moon, bright as the*

sun, terrible as an army set in array? This text touches on the knowledge of all that is necessary, namely, what can be believed when it says: *comes forth as the morning*; of what can be done, when it says: *fair as the moon*; of what can be desired: *bright as the sun*; of what can be avoided: *terrible as an army set in array*.

The fourfold knowledge

The first knowledge is faith, the second, prudence, the third, wisdom and the fourth, knowledge. Apocalypse 12:1 says: *A great sign appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun*, that is, with the brightness of wisdom, *and the moon under her feet*, that is, the angelic and human hierarchies, *and on her head a crown of twelve stars*, that is, the enlightenment of all knowledge.

Mary is exalted above the angelic hierarchy that perfects

She is exalted above the perfecting hierarchy. Genesis 9:26 says: *The blessings of your father are strengthened with the blessings of his fathers, until the desire of the everlasting hills should come*, that is, of the angelic spirits whose desire is to perfect the heavenly city. This is done by converting rational creatures to the Creator, not however by power over the object, but by being put under the subject, in the identity of the person, as in the Son of God. In the same way, as of one giving a beginning to what is begun as of a mother with her child. The blessed Virgin, therefore, represents a special form of perfection in the heavenly city and she excels the perfecting hierarchy. For this reason there is the cry in Canticle 8:5: *Who is this that comes up from the desert, flowing with delights, leaning upon her beloved?* So it can be stated that she is there bodily for she represents a special form of perfection in the heavenly city, namely, by a transferring that gives a beginning to the one begun. She gave a beginning with her body because the soul of Christ was not from her soul, since a soul is not transferred but a body comes from another body. It is clear that this form of perfection would not be there unless she was there bodily.

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Another reason for the bodily assumption of the Virgin

It is proven also since it says *leaning upon her beloved and flowing with delights*, because of her complete blessedness. Blessedness would not be complete unless she was personally present and a person is not a soul but a union. It is clear that as a union of body and soul she is there, otherwise she would not have complete enjoyment, because, according to Augustine,¹ ‘the souls of the Saints in some way are held to the body by their natural inclination, and not totally centred on God’.

In this way the blessed Virgin is *exalted above the hills* of the purifying, enlightening and perfecting hierarchies.

Secondly, Mary is exalted in a triple way above the human hierarchy

She is *exalted also above the hills* of the hierarchy of souls to be purified, enlightened and perfected: purified from the vanity of pride, enlightened by the truth of knowledge, perfected by the sweetness of joy.

Firstly, the hierarchy of those to be purified

On the first, Isaias 40:4 says: *Every mountain and hill shall be made low*. The example of this purification is the blessed Virgin whose footsteps all Saints are to imitate by rejecting occasions of pride. Isaias 2:12-16 says: *The day of the Lord*, that is, the day of grace, *upon all the tall and lofty cedars of Lebanon, and upon all the oaks of Basan*, the glory of fortitude; *and upon all the high mountains*, the glory of dignity; *and upon all the elevated hills*, earthly favour; *and upon every high tower*, friendship attained; *and every fenced wall*, acquired knowledge; *and upon all the ships of Tharsis*, rich possessions. These are things over which heroes are accustomed to pride themselves.

Secondly, the hierarchy of those to be enlightened

Of the second, Isaias 41:18 says: *I will open rivers in the high hills, and fountains in the midst of the plains*, that is, knowledge in souls attentive to God. He adds the cause of this, namely, *I will turn*

¹ *De Genesi ad Litteram*, XII, c. 35, n. 68.

the desert into pools of water, that is, the blessed Virgin in her fullness of knowledge. Hence, she enlightens most of all by the truth of her knowledge.

Thirdly, the hierarchy of those to be perfected

Of the third, Psalm 64:13 says: *The beautiful places of the wilderness shall grow fat*, the blessed Virgin shall overflow with a fullness of grace; *and the hills shall be girded about with joy*, that is, holy souls shall rejoice.

Conclusion

In this way the blessed Virgin is *exalted above the hills* of the human hierarchy by purifying, enlightening and perfecting it, and in like manner she is exalted above the hills of the angelic hierarchy. Of all these together Deuteronomy 33:13-15 says: *Of the blessing of the Lord be his land*, that is, the blessed Virgin; *of the fruits of heaven and of the dew*, referring to the purification done by the purifying of the heavenly hierarchy; *and of the deep that lies beneath*, referring to the purifying done by the super-heavenly hierarchy; *of the fruits brought forth by the sun and by the moon*, referring to the enlightening of the hierarchy enlightening and to be enlightened; *of the tops of the ancient mountains, of the fruits of the everlasting hills*, referring to the perfection of the hierarchy perfecting and to be perfected. Both hierarchies are purified, enlightened and completed from the blessed earth of the Virgin; and so she is *exalted above the hills*.

Part III: The dignity of her everlasting rewards

Isaias 2:2 says: *All nations shall flow unto her*, by which words the dignity of her everlasting rewards is commended. Note that her mercy is necessary for all and so it is right for all to flow to her. All people are either preoccupied with evil deeds or practised in good deeds.

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Three types preoccupied with evil

The first are of a triple kind for they are oppressed and look for her as a place of refuge. Genesis 19:17 says: *Save yourself in the mountain*. Bernard says¹: 'In dangers, in difficulties, when doubtful, think on Mary, invoke Mary, and so as to obtain the request for deliverance do not neglect to follow the example of her way of life'.

Or they are needy and are looking for a place of abundance. Psalm 67:16 says: *A curdled mountain, a fat mountain*. Isaias 25:6 says: *The Lord of hosts shall make unto all people in this mountain a feast of fat things, a feast of wine, of fat things full of marrow, from the abundance of the incarnate Word; of wine purified from the lees, from the enjoyment of the Holy Spirit*. Psalm 64:9 says: *You have visited the earth and plentifully watered it*.

Or they are afflicted and look for a place of quiet. Psalm 14:1: *Lord, who shall dwell in your tabernacle, or rest in your holy hill?* Ecclesiasticus 24:11 says: *In all these I sought rest*. So, let us be like the dove of which is said: *But she, not finding where her foot might rest, returned to him in the ark*.

Three types practised in good

Likewise there are three kinds in the second group. Some are devout and look for a place of prayer. It was said to Moses: *You shall have for a sign that I have sent you. When you shall have brought my people out of Egypt, you shall offer sacrifice upon this mountain*.

Others are studious and look for a place of learning. Exodus 3:1:

He drove the flock to the inner parts of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, Horeb. And the Lord appeared to him in a flame out of the midst of a bush, and he saw that the bush was on fire and was not burnt.

Whoever will come as a studious person to the mountain of God, that is, the blessed Virgin, will be able to understand divine

¹ Homilia 2, super *Misus est*, n. 17.

mysteries. This is clear in blessed Bernard¹ who at first was uneducated, but reached a high perfection of knowledge through his friendship with the blessed Virgin. It is true also of John the Evangelist for the closer he came to her, the better he was able to understand the hidden and deep mysteries of God and was able to pass them on.

Some are cheerful and look for a delightful place. Apocalypse 21:10-11 says: *He took me up in spirit to a great and high mountain, and he showed me the holy city of Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God.* Therefore, since each finds in the blessed Virgin what he or she needs, rightly do all people flow to her.

¹ See what Chrysostom Henriquez Hortensis says of St Bernard in his *Menologium Cisterciensi* for 13 May (PL 211, 777).

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Wisdom 7:29: *She is more beautiful than the sun, and above all the order of the stars, being compared with the light, she is found before it.*

Three commendations of Mary

In these words, the glorious Empress, raised up above the choirs of heavenly citizens, is commended by the Holy Spirit with a perfect approval relating to her assumption. She is commended for three things that make a noble lady most excellently commendable, namely, perfect beauty, most excellent nobility and brightness of wisdom. Her perfect beauty is commended when she is said to be *more beautiful than the sun*; her excellent nobility when she is placed with more honour and higher than all *the stars*, that is, than all the Saints; her brightness of wisdom when she is *compared with the light* of eternal wisdom, and is said to be renowned for being nearer to it than all other creatures.

Part I: Firstly, her perfect beauty

Firstly, she is commended for her perfect beauty when it is said: *She is more beautiful than the sun*. The most serene Virgin was indeed *more beautiful than the sun* in her assumption, because she was more similar than the sun to the source of all beauty; also because she was nearer than the sun to the source of all beauty with her greater ability to receive perfect beauty; and further because by her beauty she was more noble than the sun.

The first reason

She can be called *more beautiful than the sun* in her assumption because she was more similar than the sun to the source of all beauty. The brightest star is the star known to be most like the sun. So, among rational creatures the most beautiful is the one found to be more like the Sun of eternal light, the source and origin of all beauty. This creature was the royal Virgin. For if, according to

Hugh,¹ ‘the power of love transforms the lover into a likeness of the person loved’, then Mary, more than any other creature, was so transformed into his likeness that she can be literally said to be *the brightness of eternal light and the unspotted mirror of God’s majesty, and the image of his goodness* [Wisdom 7:26]. Accordingly, she became more beautiful than the sun and other creatures. The text of Jeremiah 6:2 can be applied to her: *I have likened the daughter of Sion to a beautiful and delicate woman*, as if to say: *I have likened the daughter of Sion to the glorious and delicate Trinity*, namely, the Virgin Mary. She is a delicate daughter according to what God says in Ezechiel 31:8-9: *No tree in the paradise of God was like him in beauty, for I made him beautiful*. Also Bernard²:

The royal Virgin, adorned with the precious stones of virtues and with an equal beauty of both soul and body, drew the gaze of the heavenly citizens onto her, so that she could incline the heart of the eternal King to desire her.

The second reason

She can also be said to be more beautiful than the sun because, due to her multiple grace, she was closer than the sun to the source of all beauty, more disposed to receive perfect beauty and, especially because of her virginal purity, was closer to it; also, exalted above the sun and stars, she was joined to her most sweet Son with a love beyond measure. She receives a fuller beauty beyond every creature, and for this reason what is said in 3 Kings 1:2-3 can be taken in the person of the Angels as a prefiguring of her: *Let us seek for our lord the king a young virgin*, and note the disposition of virginal purity; who might be with him *and cherish him*, note the closeness of love; and *they sought a beautiful young woman in all the land of Israel*.

The third reason

She can also be called more beautiful than the sun because she was nobler in her beauty. Because of her beauty she was called to the

¹ *De Arrha Animae*.

² Homilia 2, super *Missus est*, n. 2.

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dignity of the imperial and eternal King. So it is said through the Prophet: *With your comeliness and your beauty set out, proceed prosperously, and reign* [Psalm 44:5]. Neither the sun nor any other creature shall find this dignity, no matter how brightly they may shine outwardly in this life while lacking the beauty of grace and virtue.

Part II: Secondly, her most excellent nobility

Secondly, she is commended in a fitting way for her most excellent nobility since it is indicated that she is more sublime than all the stars. The stars are understood to be the Blessed illuminated with the brightness of glory, according to Baruch 3:34-35: *The stars were called and they said, 'Here we are', and with cheerfulness they have shone forth to him that made them.* Accordingly, since the sacred Virgin is said to be more sublime than the ordering of all the stars, it is indicated that she is nobler than all the Saints. There are three reasons that make a person spiritually nobler: the first is a profusion of spiritual delights, the second, an abundance of eternal riches and the third, an excellence of dignity or birth.

Firstly, a profusion of spiritual delights

She is said to be nobler and higher than all the Saints in the profusion of spiritual delights. For this reason the admiring Angels said at her assumption: *Who is this that comes up from the desert, flowing with delights, leaning upon her beloved* [Canticle 8:5]? She was profuse with these delights above the assembly of the Saints not only in her soul but also, as is believed and proven, in her body that was piously glorified in the assumption of her soul.

Secondly, an abundance of eternal riches

She is also said to be nobler than all the Saints because of the abundance of eternal riches. She abounded more than all the Saints with riches of glory and grace, of virtues and rewards, of gifts and happiness. Others abound by ministering glory by their prayers, others grace, others the forgiving of sins, others the building up of virtues. For this reason Proverbs 31:29 says: *Many daughters have gathered together riches, you have surpassed them all.* The text of

Proverbs 8:17-18 can be applied to her: *I love them that love me; and they that in the morning early watch for me, shall find me. With me are riches and glory, glorious riches, that is, sublime riches, and justice.*

Thirdly, an excellence of dignity

She has been made noble also beyond all the saints both in the excellence of her dignity and birth; for she is the noblest of all creatures by birth and dignity since she is the Mother of the most high Emperor. For this reason she is rightly exalted and placed on the highest throne. This was excellently prefigured in 3 Kings 2:19. When *Bethsabee came to King Solomon*, that is, the Virgin Mary in her assumption to her peaceful and eternal Sun, *the king arose to meet her*, accompanied by the whole assembly of the Saints, *and bowed to her*, that is, showed her filial reverence, and the king *sat down upon his throne and a throne was set for the king's mother and she sat at his right hand*, as one of noblest birth according to Apocalypse 22:16: *I am the root and stock of David, the bright and morning star*. An infant of the noblest descent came forth from her womb according to the text: *He who shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God*, without change, however, to her virginal condition. It was right that a glory proportionate to that grace, namely, a fullness of dignity and glory be given to her, while to others it is given partially; on her a fullness of grace is showered in general, even though it is given to others partially. For this reason in Apocalypse 12:1 she is said to be: *A great sign appeared in heaven: A woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars*. The woman is the royal Virgin who is said to be *clothed with the sun*, that is, with the beauty of the Sun of justice; *and the moon under her feet*, that is, trampling most vigorously on earthly glory that like the moon is now waning, and now increasing; *and on her head a crown of twelve stars*, that is, given every honour and dignity, glory, high position and nobility of birth in the twelve orders of Saints who are represented by the twelve shining stars, of which nine are the higher spirits, while three are of the triple state of humans, namely, active, contemplative and

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prelates. For whatever dignity and glory is given to these in a partial way, is conferred on the sacred Virgin in a complete way.

Part III: Mary is commended for the brightness of her wisdom

Thirdly, she is commended for the brightness of her wisdom that is found to be prior or higher when compared to the light of eternal wisdom. For just as uncreated Light, namely, divine Wisdom, transcends all things in enlightenment, knowledge and rule, so the Virgin transcends others in these three things.

Firstly, the enlightenment of creatures

Accordingly, compared to the light of divine wisdom she is said to be prior or higher in wisdom than other creatures. She it is who by the light of reason, in so far as it comes from her, illuminates and brightens all people by the light of grace, according to John 1:9: *That was the true light which enlightens every man that comes into this world.* Therefore, just as she transcends all by enlightening creatures, so this Virgin, enlightened by wisdom more than all the Saints, she more than all others, by her pious prayers, illumined the whole world with the light of grace. Therefore, Wisdom 16:28 says: *We ought to adore you at the dawning of the sun;* and Tobias 13:13: *You shall shine with a glorious light, and all the ends of the earth shall worship you,* as if to say: You are holy and on you *shall shine a glorious light,* that is, you shall obtain the splendour of grace for others. Likewise, Ecclesiasticus 36:1-2 says: *Show us the light of your mercies, and send your fear on the nations, that have not sought after you that they may know that there is no God besides you.*

Secondly, her knowledge

Compared to the light of eternal wisdom she is brighter than other creatures. Divine wisdom sees everything most clearly, according to Daniel 2:22: *He reveals deep and hidden things, and light is with him;* Ecclesiasticus 23:28:

He knows not that the eyes of the Lord are far brighter than the sun, beholding round about all the ways of men, and the bottom of

the deep, and looking into the hearts of men, into the most hidden parts;

and Daniel 13:42: *O eternal God who knows hidden things, who knows all things before they come to pass.* Because divine light transcends all in the knowledge of all things, so this Lady, when compared to this light of divine wisdom, is found to be prior. So the text of Wisdom 6:24 can be applied to her: *I will bring her wisdom to light.*

Thirdly, her rule

None the less, when compared to eternal light, she is brighter in wisdom than other creatures. Divine light transcends all in its rule and direction of all things, according to Isaias 49:6: *I have given you to be the light of the Gentiles that you may be my salvation even to the furthest part of the earth;* for this reason it is said in Luke 1:79: *To enlighten them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death, to direct our feet into the way of peace.* Similarly, the blessed Virgin transcends all in this. So it is said in Wisdom 7:10: *I chose to have her instead of light for her light cannot be put out.* Likewise, Isaias 42:6-7 says: *I have given you for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles that you may open the eyes of the blind and bring forth the prisoner out of prison.* May she by her prayers obtain this for us before him who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

SERMON 3

3 Kings 2:19: *The king arose to meet his mother and bowed to her, and a throne was set for the king's mother, and she sat on his right hand.*

Introduction

In how many ways Solomon prefigures our Solomon is clear in what Augustine says in *The City of God*¹: 'The things said of Solomon apply only to Christ, so that in him a form is foreshadowed, but the truth is presented in Christ'. Therefore, the text quoted can be applied to the present solemnity in which we celebrate the glory of Mary, the Mother of Solomon. For he is the Solomon who is most wise in all wisdom; in fact the very Wisdom of the Father from whom comes the wisdom and understanding of everything in angelic spirits and in human beings. He is a person of peace, in fact *our peace, who has made both one* [Ephesians 2:14] and who by the blood of the covenant [Exodus 24:8] dissolved the ancient discord. He is that grand King *whose face all the earth, his Mother Mary, desired to see*. We should say then: *The king arose to meet his mother* etc.

Four honours of Mary

In the text quoted four honours are described for which today Mary, the Mother of God, is solemnly honoured in her assumption. They are:

- The grand meeting because *the king arose to meet his mother*;
- the most sweet and charming reception, because he *bowed to her*; a text about Joseph says: *he embraced him* [Genesis 45:14];
- a most worthy enthroning: *a throne was set for the king's mother*;
- an immediate placing or nearness: *and she sat on his right hand*.

¹ XVII, c. 8, n. 2.

Brothers, what are we able to add to this? Bernard¹ says: ‘I confess my ignorance, I do not hide my own timidity. There is nothing pleases me more, nothing that terrifies me more than to speak of the glory of the Virgin Mother’. So we should hold as a principle that whatever praise is attributed to the blessed Mary, is not said as an hyperbole, but as inadequate according to the word of blessed Jerome²: ‘Whatever can be said in human words is less than the praise of God’.

Part I: The meeting with the king

Therefore, the first honour is the meeting with the great King. It must be believed totally and doubted in no way that today the Virgin ascending in solemn procession is met not only by the King but also by the whole heavenly court.

Meeting with the heavenly court

The Angels fly ahead to see their Lady; the Patriarchs come down to see their daughter; the Apostles run to see their teacher; the Martyrs hurry to see the one who encouraged them; married women and widows move eagerly to look on their companion and sister; religious sisters come together to see their prelate and abbess, so that the words of Ecclesiasticus 24:16 are justified: *My abode is in the full assembly of saints*; and the text of Judith 13:15-18:

And all ran to meet her from the least to the greatest. And lighting up lamps they all gathered round about her. She says: Praise you the Lord our God, who has not forsaken them that hope in him; and in me, his handmaid he has fulfilled his mercy.

Hence, blessed Bernard³ says: ‘All creatures rightly gaze on you, because through you and from you the hand of the Omnipotent recreated whatever it had created’.

¹ Sermon 4, *In Assumptione B. V. M.*, n. 5.

² Sermon, *De Assumptione B. V. M.* (in the works of Jerome) c. 5.

³ Sermon 2, *In Pentecosten* n. 4.

Assumption

Meeting with the Creator

Whatever reverence the creatures may show it is as nothing compared to the most excellent honour given to her by the Creator. The whole Trinity meets her, not by moving from one place, but by a favourable influence, by a wonderful joy and godlike glory. For the whole blessed Trinity knew you, Mary, spouse of chaste love, palace of a holy indwelling, centre of a wonderful work. Or we should say clearly: The Father knew blessed Mary as the home of his majesty; Isaias 60:7: *I will glorify the house of my majesty*. The Son recognized the beginning of his humanity or humility. The Holy Spirit, recognizing again the shrine of his goodness, placed in it most fully and without measure the charisms of graces, in which, as it were in a public storehouse belonging to all, the Spirit brought together the grain of gifts so that they might reach the poor in a time of need [Genesis 41:47]. Canticle 7:2 says: *Your belly is like a heap of wheat*. But the text: *The king arose to meet his mother*, is rightly understood to refer to Christ, her Son. Coming from his throne, he moved the whole composition of his empire into a service of his Mother. He is Solomon who moved the princes and tribunes, leaders and magistrates of all Israel so as to bring in the ark of the covenant of the Lord into the Holy of Holies, that is, into the highest heaven, as in 3 Kings 8:1ff. For this reason, blessed Bernard,¹ comparing the ascension of the Lord and the ascension of the Mother and finding that the Lord's ascension was more powerful in majesty while hers was more solemn in its procession, says in these words:

Turn our eyes to the assumption of the Virgin and, excepting the majesty of her Son, you will find the gathering of this procession not a little more becoming. Only Angels were able to meet the Redeemer, while all the Angels and the just met her solemnly, and carried her to the assembly of the blessed court.

Exhortation

Accordingly, my dearest brothers, even though God may treat us severely and speak to us rather harshly as if we were strangers, a

¹ Rather Peter Damian, *Sermo* 40, n. 3.

time will come, when in all courtesy God shall appear to friends, come to meet them, gather them in God's arms, and take them to heaven. If you doubt this is so, remember what blessed Gregory¹ wrote of Servulus, what is written of Martin, of Ambrose, of John the Evangelist,² and what is written in our days of blessed Clare,³ who, at her death, when asked as she gazed with her eyes shut what did she see, she replied that she saw the Lord of glory. Isaias 64:5 says of such meetings: *You meet the one who rejoices and does justice.*

How unlike this is the meeting of a sinful soul! Isaias 34:14 says: *Demons and monsters shall meet, and the hairy ones shall cry out to one another.*

Part II: Her reception in sweetness and reverence

The second honour was the fullness of sweetness and reverence in her reception, for which reason it is said: *and he bowed to her.* Lord, what are you doing? You, the true Lord before whom all must bow down, do you bow down to a woman? He replies, I bow since two things compel me to bow down to her, namely, the fact of motherhood and the merit of humility. Her motherhood was singular and her humility without equal.

Three reasons for honouring her motherhood

Does a son act against the laws by bowing down to his mother? Therefore, Jesus does not bow down to any mother but to a mother who is singular in sufficiency, magnificence and diligence. She was singular in sufficiency because she was sufficient for this task without the mixture of male seed for the Holy Spirit gave her in a wonderful way the power to conceive. She was also singular in magnificence because she is the only mother to give birth to God and remain a virgin after giving birth. She was also a mother singular in diligence and care because no mother loved more and was more responsible.

¹ *Dialogues*, IV, c. 14.

² Abdias, *Historiae certaminis apostolici*, V.

³ *Acta Sanctorum, Vita S. Clarae* (13 Aug.) c. 6, n. 52.

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Her humility

Further, honour was due to her because of her humility of which the Lord says in Luke 14:11: She *that humbles* herself *shall be exalted*. See on the one hand how the humility of Mary interacts with divine goodness on the other: Mary humbles herself, while God exalts her; Mary not only humbles herself but prostrates herself in humility and in this prostration empties herself and reduces herself to nothing so that she is conscious of nothing about herself other than being nothing; and God not only exalts her among the Saints and glorifies her over the Saints, but as a final honour he bodily bows down to her.

Exhortation

Therefore, brothers, do not feel you are great, mediocre, nor even minimal. Hand back to God whatever good you have, and reduce yourself to nothing; then wait for the divine hand to whom it belongs to make something out of nothing. Just as when the text says *bowed* it implies the great honour due to a mother from her son, so the text on Joseph that says *he embraced him* shows the love due to a bride from the bridegroom. Then from the women's quarters, that is, the Church militant, she was brought to the chamber of Assuerus [Esther 2:16], and so the text of Psalm 72:24 may be applied to her: *You have held me by my right hand, and by your will you have conducted me, and with your glory you have received me*. Our souls are brought to this chamber provided they have been joined to Christ with a chaste love and are now guarded in the women's quarters, that is, among the orders of just souls who keep themselves for the embraces only of Christ.

Part III: A most worthy enthronement

A throne was set for the king's mother. The third honour is a most worthy enthronement. And since the throne is of an eternal royal title, no more is it to be said: *A throne was set*, but rather: *The king married and made her queen* [Esther 10:6], and rightly so. We read that Christ promises the kingdom of heaven to chastity, Matthew 19:12: *There are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven*; to poverty, Matthew 5:3: *Blessed*

are the poor in spirit etc; to the humble, Matthew 18:3: *Unless you be converted and become* etc. Who is more chaste than Mary, who poorer than Mary, who more humble than Mary? Therefore, to these three virtues that flowered in her more notably, there corresponds a triple marvellous throne. The throne of ivory that King Solomon adorned in many ways corresponds to chastity, as we read in 3 Kings 10:18ff. The throne of sapphire of a heavenly colour corresponds to poverty that follows what is heavenly not what is earthly; Ezechiel 1:26: *The appearance of the sapphire stone upon the likeness of a throne*. The bright throne of the sun corresponds to humility that hides and conceals itself of which Psalm 88:38 says: *His throne as the sun before me*. Crowned, she sits in triumph for ever as all these endure.

Against sinners

But on what throne, sinful soul, shall you sit? It will be such a throne as you make by your evil deeds. I teach you to make a heavenly throne. You ask how? By following the footsteps of Christ; so Matthew 19:28 says: *You who have followed me shall sit on seats* etc. Therefore, to follow Christ is to build a throne. You ask, in what? In penance.

Part IV: Proximity to the King

And she sat on his right hand. This is the fourth honour, namely, to be placed next to the King. There are three reasons for this.

First reason

The first reason is the closeness of love of heart to heart. Just as nothing came between the heart of the Virgin and God, so there is nothing between one throne and the other; Esther 14:18 says: *You know that your handmaid has never rejoiced since I was brought hither unto this day but in you, O Lord, the God of Abraham*.

Second reason

The second reason is the frequency of her intercession for sinners. Having the duty of intercession and reconciliation, she cannot sit for long but must be close by to help and to approach as it

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were from one side, in fact she must be closely connected as a confidant, lest perhaps a cruel sentence be passed against those entrusted to her, and should that happen, she is provoked. You have an example of this in Esther 7:2: *What is your petition, Esther?* Immediately at her word the cruel sentence was revoked, the enemy hung, the enemies perished, the people were freed. So in Canticum 6:3 it is said that she is as *terrible as an army set in array* to help the world and overcome demons.

Third reason

The third reason is that the patriarchy that Adam had in the number of men and Eve in the number of women, so that they might sit at the right hand of God, was transferred to Christ and Mary, his Mother, because, just as they were the destroyers of the human race, so these restored it. In Esther 1:19 we read: *That another that is better than her be made queen in her place.* May she obtain for us forgiveness of sins, she who reigns with the Son for ever and ever.. Amen.

The end of the Sermon of Brother Bonaventure. Amen.

SERMON 4

Esther 11:10 and 10:6: *The little fountain that grew into a very great river, and was turned into a light, and into the sun, and abounded into many waters, is Esther whom the king married and made queen.*

Introduction

Knowledge is a fountain of life to him that possesses it [Proverbs 16:22]. Just as we see that the human body is sustained materially by food and drink so the rational soul desires food and drink. Its food is understanding, hence Ecclesiasticus 15:3 says: *With the bread of life and understanding she shall feed him.* Its drink is the sweetness tasted from the practice of devotion, so it is said: *And give him the water of wholesome wisdom to drink.* If learning is a way to truth, when it is possessed one has this sweetness. Accordingly, just as a hungry person hurries to the table and a thirsty person to drink, so a person should hurry to an understanding of the divine words. It says clearly: *Knowledge to him that possesses it*, because sometimes a person does not possess the wisdom he or she is teaching; then the person does not feed nor give drink to the soul, not from lack of words but from a defect in the one teaching; often the efficacy of a word is taken away from the hearer because of a lack of skill in the one teaching. But who is able to impart this fountain that gives the possession of knowledge? Certainly the Father and the Son can impart it for in them *are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge* [Colossians 2:3]; they have an abundance of bread and wine, that is, truth, love and charity; so we should ask them.

Knowledge is a fountain etc.

Sermon

Dear brothers, the distinguished sublimity of the glorious Virgin so transcends human ability that words are inadequate to explain it. It was the Holy Spirit who filled her with charisms of virtues and the same Holy Spirit, speaking through the Prophets and other doctors of sacred Scripture, praises her in many ways, not only expressly in

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words but also by people who prefigure her and by metaphors. While that text speaks of Esther, it is more excellently and fully interpreted of the blessed Virgin because Esther is a figure of the blessed Virgin both in her name and in her life. Esther means prepared in time or exalted among the people, and she was the wife of King Assuerus who was the prince of the monarchy. While she was a lowly person she was made queen and prefigures the blessed Virgin who was prepared in time and exalted among the people and was assumed into a marriage union with the supreme King so that she might become the Mother of God. Hence, this text is understood to apply to her in what is explained here as *full of grace*.

Three metaphors

She is described for us in the metaphor of a fountain, a river, and of the sun and light, in which she is praised for her fullness of all good things. She is put before us in the metaphor of a fountain because of the grace accepted in her origin; in the metaphor of a river because of the grace added to her in the conception of the Son of God; in the metaphor of the sun and light because of the perfecting grace in her glorification. The first is noted when it says: *The little fountain*; the second is noted when it says: *that grew into a very great river*; and the third when it says: *and was turned into a light, and into the sun*.

Today is the day of the perfecting of her glory, but we are not able to speak adequately of this perfection unless we speak first of her beginning and growth.

Part I: Mary is a fountain of good things

Understand that the blessed Virgin is called a fountain because of the origin of good things. This origin comes principally from God, then through Christ, and thirdly it overflows to the blessed Virgin and so she is called a fountain, and fourthly it applies to each person who shares in any good.

The first origin from God

First I say that the name of fountain belongs to God the Father; Psalm 41:2-3 says: *My soul has thirsted after the fountains of water*,

so my soul pants after you, O God. My soul has thirsted etc. From this fountain originate industries, graces, and whatever other things we have, as from a principal fountain; hence, in the Canonical James 1:17: *Every best gift, and every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights*; the Prophet says in Psalm 35:10: *For with you is the fountain of flight*. This is the fountain to which good people hurry and evil people despise; so Jeremias 2:13 says: *They have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and have dug for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water*.

The second origin through Christ

This fountain distributes its tributaries and influences through our Lord Jesus Christ, and so Christ is called a fountain gushing forth in heaven and on earth. He gushes forth in heaven, in so far as he is the uncreated Word; hence, Ecclesiasticus 1:5 says: *The word of God on high is the fountain of wisdom*. But he gushes forth on earth in so far as he is the incarnate Word; so we read in John 4:13-14:

Whoever drinks of this water shall thirst again, but he that shall drink of the water that I will give him, shall not thirst for ever. The water that I will give him, shall become in him a fountain of water, springing up into life everlasting.

It is of the nature of a fountain that in gushing forth it only goes as high as it comes down; so that fountain, having come down into the womb of the Virgin by accepting flesh, goes up in glory above the choirs of Angels. This is the fountain to which Christians should hurry so as to draw the waters of grace; Isaias 12:3 says: *You shall draw waters with joy out of the saviour's fountain*.

The third fountain under four headings

The third fountain in which *the Word of God on high* overflows is the glorious Virgin of whom is said: *The little fountain that grew into a very great river* etc. The blessed Virgin is compared to a small fountain, a living fountain, a sealed fountain and a bountiful fountain. She was compared to a small fountain because of the prerogative of her humility; a living fountain because of her

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unfailing holiness; a sealed fountain because of her unstained purity; and a bountiful fountain because of the generosity of her mercy.

Mary, a small fountain

I say, firstly, that she is compared to a small fountain because of the prerogative of her humility. In the vision of Mardochai is written: *The little fountain that grew into a very great river*. The smallness of this fountain is only lessened externally because internally it increases; she was made small even to the conception of God. The statement was made: *He that shall humble himself, shall be exalted* [Matthew 23:12]. The more one exalts, promotes and glorifies oneself, so much the more is one lessened, corrupted and humbled, as is clear with Lucifer who exalted himself and so opened for himself the way to eternal damnation [Isaias 14:13]. Our Lord Jesus Christ exalted us by humbling himself and he says in the Gospel: *Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, he is the greater in the kingdom of heaven* [Matthew 18:4]. And I say that whoever will have humbled him or herself, like this small woman, will be greater in the kingdom of God; even though she was the Mother of God, she wanted to be small in her own eyes.

Admonition

Note that this is the starting point of the Christian and divine profession; so the Apostle says in 1 Corinthians 1:26-28:

For see your vocation, brethren, that there are not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, but the foolish things of the world has God chosen that he might confound the wise; and the weak things of the world has God chosen that he may confound the strong. And the base things of the world and the things that are contemptible has God chosen, and things that are not, that he might bring to naught things that are.

Therefore, God looks for what is humble. It can be said of many: *The fountains of the great deep were broken up*, that is, abysmal hearts. It is not small praise to say of the Blessed Virgin that she is a *little fountain*, small in her own eyes because it is praiseworthy to say of

someone: He or she is great; however, it is more praiseworthy to say: He or she is great but small in his or her own eyes, because a great spirit despises great things.

Mary, a living fountain

Secondly, the blessed Virgin is compared to a living fountain because of her unfailing holiness; hence, in Cantic 4:15 we read: *The fountain of gardens, the well of living waters, which run with a strong stream from Lebanon.* Something is living when it has within it the principle for its preservation; so a fountain is said to be living when it has within it whatever makes it flow continuously. The blessed Virgin has within her an unfailing holiness both in her origin and in her untiring devotion. There flows from her continuously an example of holiness because continuously she pours this out. When a fountain ceases to gush forth it loses the dignity of a fountain. Accordingly, people should pour out and receive because they are stupid who do not want to receive and share with others but who say: How will I give what I do not have? Worse are those who refuse to pour out what they have received, such as the greedy; but people are proud who experience nothing of God yet want to teach others. Some have never received spiritual illuminations and yet want to teach others: *These are fountains without water, and clouds tossed with whirlwinds, to whom the mist of darkness is reserved* [2 Peter 2:17]. *Fountains without water* are people deficient in doctrine; they are *clouds tossed with whirlwinds* when they propound imaginary arguments; just as a cloud brings turbulence and not tranquillity, so these stir up a storm through their imaginary arguments. *If you have understanding* then instruct your neighbour but if not put *your hand on your mouth* [Ecclesiasticus 5:14]. Do not put yourself up as a master in things you have not learnt. I would call myself stupid were I to want to diagnose a pulse rate when I had no knowledge of medicine.

Mary, a sealed fountain

Thirdly, the blessed Virgin is compared to a sealed fountain because of her unstained purity; Hence, in Cantic 4:12-13 we read: *My sister, my spouse, is a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed up. Your plants are a paradise.* The enclosing of a garden and the

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sealing of a fountain are joined together, because whoever wants to have the virtue of chastity should have the elegance of modesty. These close the garden of the blessed Virgin; she was fertile but was a virgin; *an enclosed garden* because she remained intact, clean and unstained; she was a *sealed fountain* because she was closed. The text says twice: *a garden enclosed* because she had the firmest discipline and the most elegant modesty; a modest person does not willingly get involved in the ugliness of passion. One who blushes before the Lord does not soil him or herself with lust; but some blush in the eyes of men not in the eyes of God or of an Angel; but *a holy and shamefaced woman is grace upon grace* [Ecclesiasticus 26:19]. A firmness of discipline restrains taste, closes sight and stops hearing, so as to restrain touch by which people become especially like beasts. Sobriety is the sister of chastity.

The bad example of prelates

But alas, today the text of Apocalypse 8:10-11 is fulfilled:

A great star fell from heaven, burning as it were a torch, and it fell on the third part of the rivers, and on the fountains of waters. And the name of the star was Wormwood, and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many people died of the waters because they were made bitter.

So when a prelate falls into a sin of corruption, he corrupts all who listen to him; and I say that a sin of a prelate makes two evils, namely, innocent people are corrupted and the other evil is that it makes it easier for the wicked to sin. When one says to them: You are doing wrong, why do you do this, they answer: If it was wrong they would not do it. Hence, we read in Proverbs 25:26: *A just man falling down before the wicked is as a fountain troubled with the foot and a corrupted spring. It is better that a millstone should be hanged about his neck and that he should be drowned than have him scandalize one of these little ones* [Matthew 18:6].

Mary, a bountiful fountain

Fourthly, the blessed Virgin is compared to a bountiful fountain on account of the generosity of her mercy; hence Zacharias 13:11 says: *In that day there shall be a fountain open to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for the washing of the sinner and of the unclean woman.* The open fountain is the blessed Virgin who purifies and frees the Saints from the causes of sins, from sins committed and from desires leading to sin. Hence, Joel 3:18 says: *A fountain shall come forth of the house of the Lord, and shall water the torrent of thorns,* that is, sinners.

On the trust to be placed in Mary

There are many who were thorns but through their trust in the blessed Virgin became chosen trees. There is no thorny sinner who, if he or she has recourse to her, would not become a life giving tree. If we want to take refuge in her, we should be merciful; Proverbs 5:16: *Let the fountains be conveyed abroad.* And in Genesis 24:43 it is stated that Eliezer, the servant of Abraham, said: *Behold, I stand by the well of water;* and to Rebecca he said give me water to drink [Genesis 24:18], and Rebecca replied: *Both drink you, and to your camels I will give drink* [Genesis 24:46]. While he stood near the fountain ...¹ and did not expect she would give him drink; standing near the fountain, that is near God the Father who gave everything to the Son,² who then gave it to this young woman, that is, to the blessed Virgin who gave us to drink as well as our camels because she gives herself to rational and simple creatures. As often as we call on her we will find her courteous because she says: *I will give freely of the fountain of the water of life* [Apocalypse 21:6].

Part II: Mary is a river for four reasons

This fountain increased more than a fountain growing into a great river because she became the Mother of God and from this fountain flowed a superabundance of all good things. It flowed as a

¹ There is a gap in the manuscript.

² This is based on John 3:35: *The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand.*

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most glittering river from the conception of the eternal splendour that enlightens our ability to know; as a most delightful river from the conception of eternal sweetness that rejoices our ability to feel; as a most fast flowing river from the conception of eternal life that strengthens our ability to work; and as a most fruitful river from the conception of eternal health that saves our powers of control.

Firstly, a most glittering river

Firstly, I say, the blessed Virgin grew into a most glittering river from the conception of eternal splendour that enlightens our ability to know. Apocalypse 22:1: *And he showed me a river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb.* This throne is the blessed Virgin; the river is the Son of God who is *the brightness of eternal light and the unspotted mirror* [Wisdom 7:26] without whose illumination we receive nothing good or true. In this river are *hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge* [Colossians 2:3]; from it flow illuminations and the first foundations of knowledge and ‘the causes of being, the manner of understanding and the order of living’.¹ The blessed Virgin is called *the throne of God and of the Lamb*, because in her God the Father would sit, the Lamb rested and she was the ‘resting place of the whole Trinity’.²

Secondly, a most delightful river

Secondly, the blessed Virgin grew into a most delightful river from the conception of eternal sweetness that rejoices our ability to feel. Psalm 45:5-6: *The stream of the river makes the city of God joyful etc. God is in the midst thereof, it shall not be moved.* And when *a man is born in her* etc [Psalm 86:5], that is, when the omnipotent Son of God, who created her, took flesh for himself from the flesh of the Virgin, and made glad the city of God, that is, the Church and the Patriarchs; so it is said: *Abraham rejoiced that he might see my day; he saw it and was glad* [John 8:56]. God gave this to his contemporaries, that is, to the Apostles of whom it can be said:

¹ Augustine, *The City of God*, VIII, c. 4.

² See Mone, *Hymni Latini medii aevi*, tome II, hymn 517, v. 1-3.

Blessed are the eyes that see the things which you see [Luke 10:23]. It delights innumerable faithful because *blessed are they that have not seen and have believed* [John 20:29]. O how much rejoicing there should be over this river because *all good things came to us together with her* when *light is risen to the just* [Psalm 96:11]. Many rarely rejoice but those having hearts made glad exult greatly through God because *the stream of the river makes the city of God joyful*.

Thirdly, a fast flowing river

Thirdly, the blessed Virgin is a most fast flowing river from the conception of eternal life that strengthens our ability to work. Hence it is written: *Behold my brook became a great river and my river came near to a sea* [Ecclesiasticus 24:43]. *My brook became a great river* when *the Holy Spirit came upon me; and my river came near to a sea*, when that river of immense goodness and wisdom in the unity of a person was joined to you; *unto the place from where the rivers come, they return*, and Christ, just as he came out from the Father and came into the Virgin, so he returned again to the Father. *Through Christ we have access* in glory [Romans 5:2]; strength and power come from God who makes what a mother cleanses to be changed into milk. Hence, the Apostle in Philippians 4:13 says: *I can do all things in him who strengthens me*. Who? Certainly Jesus.

Fourthly, a most fruitful river

Fourthly, this fountain grew into a most fruitful river from the conception of eternal health that saves our power of control. Our power of control takes hold of and places us in the state of eternal happiness; we have this through its cause, Christ. So in Apocalypse 22:2 we read: *On both sides of the river was the tree of life bearing twelve fruits*. The uncreated Wisdom plants these fruits in us and the fruits are hope, joy, peace etc., as listed by the Apostle [Galatians 5:22]. These twelve fruits are twelve reasons for enjoyment in God and they come to us through the river flowing from the glorious Virgin. Blessed is the one who will be planted beside the flow of waters of this river because *his leaf shall not fall off and all whatsoever he shall do shall prosper*. Genesis 2:10-14 says that *a river that went out of the place of pleasure is divided into four heads*, namely, into

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the *Phison*, the *Gehon*, the *Tigris* and the *Euphrates*. Phison means a change in an opening and represents the most glittering river that enlightens our powers of knowing. Gehon represents the most delightful river that rejoices our affections. The Tigris represents the fast flowing river that strengthens our ability to work. But the Euphrates, that means fruitfulness, represents the most fruitful river that saves our powers of control.

Part III: Mary is the sun and light by her perfecting grace

Thirdly, she is compared to sunlight because of the perfecting grace in her glorification. It is rare that a fountain is changed into light; it is not by a work of nature that a bodily element is changed into a heavenly element, but the glorification of the Virgin was a work of grace. Apocalypse 12:1 says: *A great sign appeared in heaven: A woman clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet and on her head a crown of twelve stars.*

Triple property of the sun and the Virgin:

First property

The sun is vigorous by power, is bright by shining and warms by its influence. The glorious Virgin is vigorous from her union with eternity of life by a dowry of possession. Canticle 3:4 says: *I held him and I will not let him go.* But where? She says her *abode is in the full assembly of saints.* Bernard:

Rightly is her *dwelling in the full assembly of saints* for in her the faith of the Patriarchs, the hope of the Prophets, the zeal of the Apostles, the constancy of the Martyrs, the sobriety of the Confessors, the chastity of the Virgins, the fruitfulness of married people and even the purity of the angels were not lacking.

Proverbs 31:29 says: *Many daughters have gathered together riches, you have surpassed them all.*

Second property

Likewise, she shines by knowledge with the clarity of light. Tobias 13:13 says: *You shall shine with a glorious light and the*

ends of the earth shall worship you. You, Mother of God, shall shine with a glorious light in your spirit, your flesh and in special honour. Just as every knee of those in heaven, on earth, and under the earth is bent for her Son, everyone should bend the knee before her whether they so wish or do not wish. Esther 8:16-17 says: To the Jews a new light seemed to rise, joy, honour, and dancing for all peoples. Truly unhappy the person excluded from praising her. Those who love the Virgin are enlightened more in the truth of understanding, in good name and they are enriched in all good things.

Third property

Thirdly, she warms by love with the pleasant taste. Esther 2:16-17 says: *Esther was brought to the chamber of king Assuerus and he loved her more than all the women and he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen.* Bernard¹:

Who is able to comprehend how glorious was the procession today of the Queen of the world whom the multitude of heavenly legions met, with what joyful embraces was she received by her Son and exalted above every other creature?

¹ Sermon 1, *In Assumptione B. V. M.*, n. 4.

SERMON 5

Canticle 4:8: *Come from Lebanon, my spouse, come from Lebanon, come, you shall be crowned.*

The glorification of the Virgin Mary in her assumption is described in the above text from three points of view. It is described firstly from the point of view of merit when it says: *from Lebanon*; secondly, from the point of view of a reward when it adds: *you shall be crowned*; thirdly from the point of view of the intervening journey when it says three times: *come, come, come*.

Part I: Firstly, merit

The condition of merit is correctly designated as being in Lebanon; Lebanon means whiteness and perfect merit in a soul consists in its perfect brightness. This is found most perfectly in the Virgin Mary. So Jerome¹ says of her that 'divine love so glowed in her whole being that there was nothing else in her other than unceasing love and the inebriation of love poured out'. For in the Virgin there was a brightness of continence within her, a brightness of innocence towards others, and a brightness of wisdom before God. Continence whitened her flesh, wisdom her soul, while innocence whitened both.

The brightness of continence

The brightness of continence in the Virgin is represented by the brightness of a flower. Hence, the Bridegroom in Canticle 2:1-2 rightly says of her: *I am the flower of the field, and the lily of the valley. As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.* Other daughters and virgins are thorns on account of the stings and pricking of desire that is not completely dead in them. Bu she was a bright and perfumed lily because she experienced neither impurity not any carnal ugliness, rather she possessed complete brightness in her thought, affection, speech and in the incorruptibility of her flesh.

¹ Rather the author of the sermon *De Assumptione.B. V. M.* (in the works of Jerome) c. 14 (alias 13).

This is indicated in Lamentations 4:7: *Her Nazarites were whiter than snow*, because of incorruptibility in flesh in which there was nothing of the heat of concupiscence. Nazarene means flowering; *whiter than snow* from incorruptibility in speech; *more ruddy than old ivory* in affection; *fairer than the sapphire* in thought. A *sapphire* is of a heavenly colour and the Virgin always thought of what is heavenly, according to the text of 1 Corinthians 7:34: *The unmarried woman and the virgin think on the things of the Lord that she may be holy both in body and in spirit.*

The brightness of innocence

The brightness of virginal innocence is represented by the brightness of clothing. On this Apocalypse 19:7-8 says: *The wife of the Lamb has prepared this and it is given to her that she should clothe herself with fine linen glittering and white.* The innocent lamb could not have a wife who is not similar to him in everything and, therefore, she had to be lamblike and innocent. Such was the blessed Virgin of whom Canticle 4:7 says: *You are all fair, O my love, and there is not a spot in you.* Because the clothing for a way of life directed towards another should conform to a disposition of the soul, she was given bright linen, that is, a most innocent covering for her way of life. The blessed Virgin had this innocence in her way of life because she had the highest piety in her affection. Hence, the text of Ecclesiastes 9:8 applies to her in a most excellent way: *At all times let your garments be white and let not oil depart from your head.* This indeed is fitting for the most innocent Virgin for to others can be said: *All our justices are as the rag of a menstruous woman* [Isaias 64:6], for we do not have the purity of innocence.

The brightness of wisdom

The brightness of the wisdom of the Virgin is represented by the brightness of light. Of her, Wisdom 7:26 says: *She is the brightness of eternal light and the unspotted mirror of God's majesty.* The soul of the Virgin was *unspotted*, that is, she was a *mirror* capable of receiving a divine irradiation. So wisdom came down on her in such abundance that it dwelt not only in her soul but made a dwelling from her flesh. Mathew 13:43 says of other just people: *Then shall*

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the just shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. This is true even more definitively of the soul of the Virgin whose wisdom exceeds the brightness of the sun. What is written in Wisdom 7:29 can rightly be said of her: *She is more beautiful than the sun and above all in the order of the stars; being compared with the light she is found before it.* Bernard¹ says:

She penetrated the deepest abyss of divine wisdom, beyond what one could believe, so that she seemed to be immersed in *unapproachable light* as far as is possible for a creature without personal union.

Part II: Secondly, merit

From this perfect merit the Virgin moved to a glorious reward that is noted in the text quoted: *you shall be crowned.* The reward is glorious according to what is said in 2 Timothy 2:5: *One is not crowned except one who strives lawfully.*

Mary's triple crown

Mary was crowned with a crown that was glorious, luminous and precious, in accord with the triple dignity corresponding to her merit. It is said of the Virgin leaving this world that she hastens with joy to heaven: *you shall be crowned.*

A glorious crown

Hurry, because you shall be crowned with a glorious crown by which you will become conformed to the majesty of the eternal Father, according to what Isaias 62:3 says: *You shall be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.* For she, higher in glory than others, is portrayed, as it were as *in the hand of God*, as an example of union and of the lifting up of desire. Hence, as the queen of heaven she sits at the right of the eternal King, according to Psalm 44:10: *The queen stood at your right hand in gilded clothing*, and is crowned with a crown similar to

¹ Sermon, *De Dominica infra Octavam Assumptionis B. V. M.*, n. 3 where there is a reference to 1 Timothy 6:16.

the crown of the eternal King. Psalm 8:6 says of this: *With glory and honour you have crowned him*, O Lord.

A luminous crown

You shall be crowned also with a luminous crown by which you will be made conformable to the brightness of the Only Begotten, according to Apocalypse 12:1: *A great sign appeared in heaven: A woman clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet and on her head a crown of twelve stars*. Also it is written in Daniel 12:3: *They that instruct many to justice shall shine as stars for all eternity*. Such were the Apostles and so they are like twelve stars in glory. But because the Virgin instructed the Apostles in the mystery of the incarnation and enlightened them by revealing so great a *mystery hidden from eternity*, so all the brightness of the Apostolic crown and of the whole Church triumphant is, as it were, enclosed within the light of the virginal crown.

A precious crown

You shall be crowned also with a precious crown by which you will be conformed to the love of the Holy Spirit so that the text of Psalm 20:4 can be said of you: *You have set on her head a crown of precious stone*. This *precious stone* is the stone cut out of a mountain without hands, that is, Christ the Lord, by whom the Virgin Mary was crowned with a crown of greater value than all creatures since that stone had been taken from her. It can be seen that he had to crown her not only in her spirit but also in the vestment of the body. She then can sing the words of Isaias 61:10: *I will greatly rejoice in the Lord and my soul shall be joyful in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation*, referring to the vestment of the flesh, *and with a robe of justice he has covered me*, referring to the vestment of the soul; *as a bridegroom decked with a crown*, this refers to happiness of spirit; *and as a bride adorned with her jewels*, referring to the glorification of the flesh.

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Part III: Her transitus from three points of view

Thirdly, the Virgin is invited to so great a reward by leaving the world, and this under a triple heading or because of a triple merit, or of a triple reward or of a triple consideration of her transitus

Leaving

Come, therefore, Glorious, Blessed, firstly by leaving the place of sorrows, and to this you are invited by Cantic 2:13-14: *Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come* etc. *Come*, I say, from the place of sorrows, for which reason he adds: *My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hollow place of the wall*; this is said of the present body that is full of *clefts* of the senses and punishments of passion, for which reason it is rightly compared to a pierced stone, to a broken wall.

Going forward

Secondly, *come* by going out through the hierarchical choir, according to what is said in Cantic 2:10-12: *Arise, make haste, my love, my dove, my beautiful one, and come*. *Come*, I say, by passing through the choir of the heavenly hierarchies to where a tempest of sorrows does not approach. So he adds: *Winter is now past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers have appeared in our land*. These *flowers appeared* around the Virgin going up, according to what Mother Church¹ sings: 'I saw, it says, her beautiful like a dove going up from above the streams of water, and like a day of spring flowers of roses and lilies of the valley surround her', that is, the Martyrs, Virgins and all the Saints of the Church triumphant. She passes over the hierarchies and so the voice in Cantic 6:9 could be the voice of all the Blessed in heaven: *Who is she who comes forth as the morning rising*, compared to the first hierarchy; *fair as the moon*, compared to the second; *bright as the sun*, compared to the third; *terrible as an army set in array*, because on her own she makes an order over all other orders.

¹ *Breviarium Romanum*, 1 Responsarium ad 1 nocturnum. in festo Assumptionis. B. V. M.

Entering

Come, thirdly, by entering a garden of delights, according to Canticle 5:1:

I am come into my garden, O my sister, my spouse, I have gathered my myrrh with my aromatical spices; I have eaten the honeycomb with my honey, I have drunk my wine with my milk; eat, O friends, and drink and be inebriated, my dearly beloved;

in this place she is refreshed and inebriated *with the plenty of the house of God*, and she shall drink *of the torrent of pleasure* [Psalm 35:9]. May the blessed Son who lives and reigns for ever and ever lead us to this.

SERMON 6

Apocalypse 12:1: *A great sign appeared in heaven: A woman clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet and on her head a crown of twelve stars.*

If *heaven* is understood of the Church triumphant, then the text is about the assumption of the blessed Virgin; but if it is understood of the Church militant, it is about her nativity.

Mary, a triple sign

Therefore, she is a *sign*,¹ a sign, I say, of a journey, a covenant and love: a journey because she is the star of the sea and so a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. She is also a sign of the covenant, prefigured by the dove sent from the ark [Genesis 8:8.10].² *I will set my bow in the clouds and I will remember my covenant* [Genesis 9:13.15]; likewise, she is *the tabernacle of the covenant* [Exodus 31:7]. She is also a sign of love and so we read: *the bush was on fire and was not burnt* [Exodus 3:2].

Mary, a triple shoot

She is also a shoot flowering, leafy and bearing fruit [Numbers 17:8]; hence: *There shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse* [Isaias 11:1]. Also: *From the moon is the sign of the festival day* [Ecclesiasticus 43:7].

A further triple sign, firstly, prognostic

Also, this sign is a sign that is prognostic, demonstrative and commemorative: prognostic of liberation, demonstrative of love, commemorative of humility. It is prognostic of liberation, hence Isaias 7:14 says: *Therefore, the Lord himself shall give you a sign;*

¹ The sermon lacks any formal division. The words of the text are expounded. The first words are expounded at length but at times in an obscure way; the last words of the theme, the crown of twelve stars, are explained at length star by star.

² These words do not fit the context.

and Canticle 6:9 says: *the morning rising; morning*, when the sun comes out; *rising*, when he rose and makes us rise with him.

A demonstrative sign

Also, she is a sign demonstrative of love: *fair as the moon* [Canticle 9:6]; *a faithful witness in heaven* [Psalm 88:38]. In Canticle 2:2 she is called the excellent *daughter*. John 2:1 says: *There was a marriage in Cana of Galilee and the mother of Jesus was there*, because the wedding of the incarnation took place there, that is, in the place of migration. So David says: *There is Benjamin a youth, in ecstasy of mind* [Psalm 67:28].

A commemorative sign

She is a sign commemorating humility; hence: *He has regarded the humility of his handmaid* [Luke 1:48]; also, the Church: ‘Remember, author of salvation’ etc.¹

A triple sign:

Firstly, of newness

Therefore, the most blessed Lady was a *great sign*, great, I say, in newness, dignity and value: in newness, because: ‘Before her there was no one similar, nor will there be after her’;² Hebrews 9:11 says: *By a greater and more perfect tabernacle*; Jeremiah 31:22 says: *The Lord has created a new thing upon the earth, a woman shall compass a man*. Dionysius and Damascene³ say that this newest of all that is new is the God man and the virgin Mother. In Exodus 3:2 we read: *the bush was on fire and was not burnt*; and Ezekiel 44:2: *a shut gate; an admirable instrument, the work of the Most High* [Ecclesiasticus 43:2].

Sign of dignity

She is also a great sign of dignity. She is *the throne of Solomon* [3 Kings 10:18], indeed, *the house wisdom has built for herself* [Proverbs

¹ Hymn, *Memento Rerum Conditor*, according to an old version.

² Bernard, *Sermon 4, In Assumptione. B. V. M.*, n. 5.

³ *De Fide Orthodoxa*, III, c. 1.

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9:1], *the temple* in which the majesty of the Lord *has entered* [2 Paralipomenon 7:1-2 and Ezechiel 43:2], from whose presence the whole earth is resplendent. Likewise, she is the *propitiatory* over which the Cherubim *look one towards the other* [Exodus 25:20].

Sign of value

She was a great sign of value; she is the *fleece of Gedeon* [Judges 6:38], *the little fountain that grew into a very great river* [Esther 11:10], the fountain that *went out of* paradise and *divided into four* rivers [Genesis 2:10]. Likewise, she is the good and the best land: good by creation, the best by contemplation; good because she brought forth grain, better because silver, the best because gold; good and best because she brought forth all these at one time.

The sign appeared in heaven

Therefore, this great sign, that is, the most blessed Virgin, covered for a long time under the shade of the Law in Scripture, hidden under signs, preached by the shouting and proclamation of the Prophets, was brought forth by the desire of the Saints according to Isaias 45:8: *Drop down dew, you heavens, from above and let the clouds rain the just*. Today, she *appeared in heaven*, coming from the womb amid much rejoicing of the Angels; *clothed with the sun*, that is not subject to sin because of being sanctified in the womb; subtle to the devil, because she was clothed with the sun and was free from any struggle with temptation, clear in body from chastity, nimble from love. So from these four attributes of the most blessed Virgin, that make her bright, adorn her and clothe the height of her way of life, there came forth a life-giving warmth and an enlightening brightness: a warmth that is enlightening, live-giving, preservative and varied, namely, the One who *came that they may have life and have it more abundantly* [John 10:10]; an enlightening splendour that *enlightens every man that comes into this world* [John 1:9].

The moon under her feet

The text continues: *and the moon under her feet*; the moon, that is, whatever passes on light from another light; so every creature is

under her feet, that is, is subject to her power for she *dwells in the highest places* [Ecclesiasticus 24:7]; *from the beginning and before the world she was created* [Ecclesiasticus 7:14], in dignity exceeding every creature as is elegantly prefigured in Esther; in Esther 15:13 Assuerus says to Esther: *This law is not made for you but for all others*, as if to say: You are not one among others but you are above all, as *the firstborn before all creatures* [Ecclesiasticus 24:5].

Crown of twelve stars:

First explanation

The text continues: *on her head a crown of twelve stars*. The twelve stars represent the Saints; I Corinthians 15:41: *Star differs from star in glory*; Daniel 12:3: They shall shine *for all eternity*. The twelve stars represent the totality of the Saints, in as much as they have been saved in the four quarters of the world and crowned from faith in the holy Trinity. That it says there was a crown of twelve stars on her head is nothing other than that all the Saints attribute their crowns to her, as John saw in Apocalypse 4:10: *The twenty four ancients cast their crowns before the throne*. The totality of the Saints is understood in these twenty four ancients: by the twelve Patriarchs, all in the Old Testament; by the twelve Apostles, all in the New Testament; or by the numbers six and four taken together as a Gloss on the Apocalypse.¹ Therefore, all the Saints place their crowns before the feet of the one sitting on the throne because all recognize that they have been crowned by God and by God's Mother who are understood by the throne.

Second explanation

The twelve stars can also be understood as twelve privileges, singularly given to the most blessed Virgin and by which she is crowned in a singular way above every other creature. The first privilege is immunity from sin so that she never sinned mortally or venially. Hence, Augustine says in his book, *De Natura et Gratia*²:

¹ Namely, *Glossa ordinaria* on Apocalypse 4:4, in Lyranus and it says: 'Or twenty four arrived at by six taken four times'.

² C. 36, n. 42.

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In the case of the holy Virgin Mary of whom, for the honour of the Lord, I do not want any question to be raised when speaking of sin, because we know that more grace was given to her to avoid sin entirely; she merited to conceive and give birth and had no sin. Therefore, with the exception of the Virgin, if it were possible to gather together all the men and women Saints, and if they were asked if they had committed sin, what could they answer but to say yes?

John says: *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us* [1 John 1:8]. However, the Virgin by a singular grace was prevented and filled so that she might have as the fruit of her womb the Lord of the universe who did not originate from the womb. By this privilege she transcends human nature, in fact even angelic nature, because she had human nature and an angelic way of life.

First privilege

By this privilege, Mary transcends both in three ways: firstly, an Angel can neither sin nor merit further, and I understand this of a substantial reward; but human beings can both merit and demerit and so, while an Angel can neither lose nor gain, a human being can. The most blessed Virgin exceeded both because she was able to acquire and to merit. She could acquire since she was on the way, but could not lose because she could not sin. That she could not sin has to be understood as a state of free will, namely, a setting aside of any inclination to evil and a fullness of grace for good.

Second privilege

From this privilege another comes, namely, her second excellence which is that the state of angels is nobler, but the state of humans is more glorious: Angels because they cannot sin, humans because by struggle and victory they attain glory. The state of the most blessed Virgin was nobler and more glorious because in her mortal nature she crushed the head of the serpent [Genesis 3:15].

Third excellence

The third excellence following from this privilege is that the state of Angels is more secure in that they cannot fall, but the state of human beings is more useful in that by every act of love they buy the kingdom of heaven; the state of the most blessed Virgin was more useful and more secure because she could not sin but she could merit.

The second star

The second star is the second privilege, namely, the utmost purity that existed on four levels in the most blessed Virgin. The first level was her sanctification in the womb; the second, her practice of virtues; the third, the overshadowing by the Holy Spirit; the fourth, the conception of the Son of God.

First level

In the first level¹ she was purified because there remained in her no inclination to any kind of sin, and by this she surpassed in the womb all others who are sanctified. In others there remains at least an inclination and disposition to venial sin, as is clear in John the Baptist, than whom no one *greater has risen among them that are born of women* [Matthew 11:11]; even though he was sanctified in the womb, he afterwards fled into the desert 'lest he might stain his life by a small sin of the tongue'.²

Second level

On the second level she was not purified by a withdrawal from what is impure but by moving to what is purer and to the highest purity.

Third level

Likewise on the third level, when the Holy Spirit dedicated her with the water of blessing and by the charism of sanctification, into

¹ See Bonaventure, *III Sent.*, d. 3, p. 1, a. 2, q. 1-3.

² *Breviarium Romanum*, Hymn for Matins, Feast of St John the Baptist.

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the Holy of Holies into which the high priest had to enter once *in the year of goodness* [Psalm 64:12].

Fourth level

On the fourth level the majesty of God entered into the temple. On the first level of purification, the perfection of the sacramental levels was conferred on the most blessed Virgin; on the second, the perfection of virtues and happiness; on the third, of gifts; on the fourth, the perfection of fruits.

Scriptural texts on the four levels

Of the first, Canticle 4:7: *You are all fair, O my love*, from original sin, *all fair*, from actual sin, *and there is not a spot*, of venial sin, *in you*. Of the second, in the same book 4:1: *How beautiful are you, my love, how beautiful are you, besides what is hid within; how beautiful*, in deeds from chastity; *besides what is hid within*, in the heart by humility. Of the third level of purity, Psalm 45:5 says: *The Most High has sanctified his own tabernacle*; and Luke 1:35: *The Holy Spirit shall come upon you*; Isaias 11:1-2: *There shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse; and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him*; and without a doubt upon her. Of the fourth level, Ezechiel 43:4, as if a vase could contain water and wine unmixed with nothing between them: *The majesty of the Lord went into the temple by the way of the gate that looked to the east*; then the earth was resplendent from the presence of the majesty of God; nor is it wonderful if she was resplendent when she had within her the light of all the heavens and above the heavens. So Joseph¹ could not look at her, and this is not surprising because the eye of an owl is not able to look at the sun on its circuit.² When the cycle of the sun is in the moon there is indeed an eclipse of the sun, an emptying of the Deity. To this perfect grace of purity, that cannot be expressed in words but in deeds, John the Baptist was sanctified in the womb and Jeremias

¹ What is said of St Joseph is surprising.

² See Aristotle, *Metaphysica*, II, text 1 brevior, c.1. What follows is obscure and it would seem that the text is corrupt.

31:22 expressly explained this by saying: *The Lord shall make¹ a new thing on the earth: a woman shall encompass a man* etc., as is clear in a subtle way to one reflecting; John, I say, pointed this out. Of this most pure purity Anselm² says that ‘she shone with that purity than which under God a greater could not be imagined’.

Third star with three privileges

The third star is a fullness of grace that consists in three things: firstly, because she could not have more; secondly, because she lacked no good; thirdly, because she distributed in such a way that in filling everything she remained full.

The first privilege

She could not have had more because other than to be God there is nothing greater than to be the Mother of the Lord. Luke 1:28 says this: *Hail, full of grace.*

The second privilege with seven distinctions

She lacked no good and this is stated in Luke 10:42: *Mary has chosen the best part.*³ She makes the first distinction of all things with all things. In human beings there are two good roles, namely, active and contemplative. The active role is good, better the contemplative role, the best is to have both at the one time; this is what the most blessed Mary chose. It is represented by Martha and Mary, something implied by the Lord himself when he said: *best*. If he had wanted only to put the contemplative role before the active role, he would have said: *Mary has chosen the better part*; but by saying the best it is understood of her specifically that she was perfect in both roles.

Second distinction

Likewise, she made a distinction with all things. There is a triple good life for people: marriage, widowhood, and virginity. The role of

¹ The Vulgate text has: *created*.

² *De Conceptu Virginali*, c. 18.

³ The Vulgate and Bonaventure have: *best* while the DRB has: *better*.

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marriage is good, better than that of widows, but the best is that of virgins. This is what the blessed Virgin Mary chose and so she chose the best in quality and quantity because she possessed all these states.

Third distinction

She made the third distinction between virgins and mothers. The role of mothers is good because they were fertile; better is the role of virgins because they had a virginal dignity; but again the most blessed Virgin chose the best part, namely, the fertility of mothers and the dignity of virgins.

The fourth distinction

The fourth distinction is between God and creatures. The role of creatures is good because it has the Lord Jesus Christ, God; better is the role of God the Father who had the Son; best is the role she chose that had both God and Son.

The fifth distinction

She had the fifth distinction with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son, not the Son from the Holy Spirit; but the blessed Virgin proceeds from the Son, and the Son from her.

The sixth distinction

She makes the sixth distinction with the Son, with whom she divides the kingdom of heaven of which there are two parts, justice and mercy. The blessed Virgin chose the best for herself because she was made queen of mercy and her Son remained king of justice. Mercy is better than justice because *mercy exalts itself above justice* [James 2:5], and *his mercies are over all his works* [Psalm 144:9].

The seventh distinction

She made the seventh distinction with her Son. The Son *sits on the right hand of God* [Mark 16:19] in the mightier things of the Father; and *the queen stood on the right hand* of the Son [Psalm 44:10]. A

Gloss¹ says: ‘In the mightier things’ of the Son; but in the things that are mightier it is preferable to have the best; therefore Mary chose for herself the best. And so it is clear how nothing good was lacking in her.

The third privilege

Thirdly, what made her fullness was that she distributed in such a way that she fills everything and yet remains full. This was the fullness of a fountain that flowed out when over full; hence, Esther 11:10 says: *a little fountain grew into a very great river* etc. Likewise, this fullness is like that of an instrument, but an admirable instrument; Ecclesiasticus 43:2 says: *an admirable instrument, the work of the Most High*. She is called *an admirable instrument* for three reasons: firstly, because she herself continues for ever as greater since ‘heaven itself cannot contain the one whom you bore in your womb’.² Secondly, she continues as distinct without a division yet unmixed; and so she had within her the wine of the Divinity and the water of humanity with unmixed properties and natures.³

The fourth star

The fourth star or privilege is a perfect contemplation of God during her life and knowledge of the mystery of the incarnation, both of which she had during her life but not from her life; the proof of this is that we do not read of any revelation being made to her afterwards. She was not present at the transfiguration, nor was any appearance after the resurrection made to her; she did not need to be instructed in faith for she was always aware of all the secrets, as is clear in the wedding feast.⁴ Hence, when she knew beforehand what the Son wanted to do, she said to the waiters: *Whatsoever he shall say to you, do you* [John 2:5]. Bernard⁵:

¹ *Ordinaria* ad Ps 109:1 in Lyranus: ‘*On my right hand*, in my mightier things’.

² *The Divine Office*, vol 2, Sydney: E. J. Dwyer, 1974, 269*.

³ A third reason is lacking.

⁴ Namely, at Cana in Galilee, John 2:1.

⁵ Homilia 4, super *Misus est*, n. 4.

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The power of the Most High shall overshadow you [Luke 1:35]. *He that can take it, let him take it* [Matthew 19:12]. For who, except she alone who most happily merited to experience it in herself, can grasp by understanding, discern by reason, how the inaccessible splendour made itself present in the virginal womb, and that she might have been able to bring the inaccessible to herself, and from the smallness of that body, to which he willingly submitted himself, became a shelter for the remaining matter. Perhaps this is the main reason why it is said *the Most High shall overshadow you*, because the matter was in a mystery, and that the Trinity alone through and with the Virgin alone wanted to work, and so to her alone, to whom it was given to experience, is it given to know.

And further on:

The way by which you shall conceive by the Holy Spirit, Christ, *the power of God and the wisdom of God* [1 Corinthians 1:29], in God's most secret counsel, will be hidden and sheltered by an overshadowing. It will be known only to God and to you; as if the Angel were to reply to the Virgin: Why do you ask of me what you experience in yourself? You will know and happily know but taught by the One who is the author.

And yet further on: 'One can be taught only by one giving, and one can learn only by accepting'. So it is made clear that she had a perfect contemplation of God and knowledge of the incarnation.

Three excellences of this privilege

This privilege has three excellences: firstly, that she surpasses the Prophets in this privilege, namely, in knowledge; hence, she knew how to solve the question of the Prophet who asked: *Who shall declare his generation?* [Isaias 53:8] She is able to reply: Certainly, she was able to tell, just as related by Luke as he expounds and describes.

Second excellence

The second excellence is that she surpasses John the Baptist in this knowledge, even though he was *a prophet and more than a*

prophet [Matthew 11:9]. Hence, she knew how to *loosen the shoe* [John 1:27] of her Son, something John the Baptist did not know.

Third excellence

The third excellence is that she surpasses the Angels in this knowledge; hence, she knows how to solve their question: *Who is this that comes from Edom?* [Isaias 63:1]. She knew who he was for she had made a full length *coat of diverse colours* for him [Genesis 37:3].

Nature of this knowledge

It is to be noted that this knowledge was not temporal, that is, limited to time and a single object, nor was it in the form of a rapture, but it was continuous and in quiet, as truly befitted the throne of God and the resting place of the Trinity. The qualities of Thrones can most fittingly be applied to her. Dionysius¹ says of Thrones:

They serve open to divine influences, ineffably, with all their strength turned unchangeably and in a stable way towards the most sublime and truly exalted divine coming, in every way submissive to being impassible, immaterial and godlike.

I believe that in this way, during her lifetime, she had the highest contemplation in a sublime manner and without any abstraction from her affections, for all her powers were made godlike in what she did. It is far from possible, that he was more familiar with or better known to anyone during his or her lifetime than he was to his Mother. In proof of this, everything written about wisdom in Ecclesiasticus is to be read and expounded of Our Lady. The Lord wanted to express this in a prefiguring when the book and the manna were put in the ark [Deuteronomy 10:2 and Exodus 16:34], as if to say: Whatever knowledge is pleasant or savoury is preserved in my Mother, who *kept all these words and pondered them in her heart* [Luke 2:19].

¹ *De Coelesti Hierarchia*, c. 7, # 1 in Hugh of S. Victor.

Assumption

The fifth star, triple love

The fifth star is the perfection of love. In the Canticum we see her full of charity and love, a fullness that consists in three things: she had the highest natural love, the highest acquired love, the highest freely given love, and each of these in its highest form and from the three there is the one greatest love, of which a similar love cannot be found in creatures.

Natural love

The highest natural love is that of a mother for her child, according to 2 Kings 1:26: *As the mother loves her only son* etc. The most blessed Virgin had this love in its highest degree; for never did a mother love her son as much as Our Lady loved hers with a natural love. The nature of love is the nature of fire that, when it is scattered and divided, is weakened and the more it is heaped together, the more it increases. All other mothers who had children knew their husbands and so had a divided love. Moreover, sometimes mothers had many sons or daughters, and so love divided among several is lessened. Only this mother had no husband nor did she have another son or daughter; hence, her whole heart with all its natural power was given to her only Begotten. So, she had natural love in its highest degree.

Acquired love

The highest acquired love is between a bride and groom, and the Virgin Mary had this for her Son to the highest degree. For if virgins are the brides of Christ, then, the Virgin of virgins was the first bride of the Bridegroom as she not only *followed the Lamb* but *the Lamb followed her whithersoever* she went [Apocalypse 14:4].

Freely given love

The highest freely given love is charity and she had this in the highest degree. As has been said, she was full of charity and love, namely, charity towards God and love towards her neighbour. These three highest loves are joined to become one supreme love, something no other creature could do. Any other creature loves her child and loves God: one natural love is love for a child, another is

for God; but the Mother of God alone with the same love she had for her Son, she loved God because her Son is her God; and so it is clear love was perfect in her.

Sixth star

The sixth star is the communication of an act of the most excellent love and this was the redemption of the human race by the passion; she merited this most glorious act of supreme love, as a text states: *Greater love than this* etc. [John 15:13]. The Father of mercies knew that the Mother of mercy would help out of her supreme mercy, and he would be helped by her to fulfil what was said in prophecy in Genesis 2:18: *Let us make him a help like unto himself*.¹ Under the cross and beside the cross she, like her Son, had the highest joy and the highest sorrow just as did her Son on the cross. She had the highest natural sorrow over the death and the highest rational joy over the redemption of the human race. Of the first we read in Lamentations 1:12: *O all you that pass by the way..* The strongest argument for the second is that *his sweat became as drops of blood trickling down upon the ground* [Luke 22:44], not from fear but from love. Fear constricts the heart, restrains the blood and spirit, makes the extremities of the body cold, and brings on shivering and dread. Joy opens the spirit, blood flows through the body, opens the pores and warms the extremities. From this it can be concluded as natural that the sweat of blood was a proof of the ineffable joy our Redeemer had in redeeming us in the friendliest manner that could be imagined. Similarly, the blessed Mother felt a natural sorrow from love over the death of her Son at which she was present; she felt the highest rational love because he, who had been born from her, redeemed the human race with such an outpouring of love. Of the first, Luke 2:35 says: *Thy own soul a sword shall pierce*. Of the second, Ambrose² says that ‘she stood beside the cross, not to look at the sorrow of her Son, but at the salvation of the human race’.

¹ In what follows it seems that some things have been omitted.

² Epistola 63 ad eccles. Vercellens., n. 110, where for ‘the sorrow of the Son’ the original text has ‘the death of the pledge’.

Assumption

Seventh star

The seventh star is her exaltation over every mere creature. The honour we fittingly show to other Saints, we give to her as owing to her. Hence, *the moon under her feet*, as above; and the Cherubim *look one towards the other in the propitiatory*, as above; and *the twenty four ancients cast their crowns before the throne*, as above. As a sign of this, just as God is called Our Lord par excellence, so she is called Our Lady in a complete sense. Hence¹ ... she has become truly the Lady of all creatures, being the Mother of the Creator.

The sign of this excellence

The sign of this excellence is that all the honour the Lord had on earth, he gave to her. So he gave her four feast days in the four divisions of the year, as if to say: just as you served me for the whole year, serve my most dear Mother. And as if this was not enough, he gave her one day in each week, namely, the Sabbath that he loved so much; of this Exodus 20:8 says explicitly: *Remember that you keep holy the Sabbath day*, and he dedicated the following day in a particular way for his own cult. But as if even this was not enough, he would set aside for his Mother, as for himself, a daily service, at distinct hours, day and night, and also directed that she be honoured. All of this he communicated in a sign, namely, that she was to be exalted above every creature. In her assumption, this was done not only as a thought but in reality as is said in Esther 15:4 and 9: *On the third day Esther put on her glorious apparel*; and: *Going in passed through all the doors in order, and stood before the king, where he sat upon his royal throne, clothed with his royal robes, and glittering with gold and precious stones*.

The seven doors or beatitudes

The doors of Assuerus, that is, of beatitude, are the doors listed by the Lord in Matthew 5:3ff.: *Blessed are the poor in spirit* etc.

¹ The editors note: In the manuscript there are some words we could not understand and an empty space probably indicating that neither did the librarian understand them.

these are the doors through which the blessed Virgin passed, as is clear in her actions. The seventh, namely: *Blessed are the peacemakers* etc. refers to the peace that is not now a door but the seat and throne on which they rest. By the first door live the Confessors; by the second, the Martyrs, by the third, the Prophets, by the fourth, the Patriarchs, by the fifth, the Apostles, by the sixth, the Virgins and Angels. Also, this application of the text is clear to each person. The most blessed Virgin *flowing with delights, leaning upon her beloved* [Canticle 8:5], going up through these doors, entered each in order, passed the multitudes of Angels, who as she passed by, all cried out: *Set out, proceed prosperously and reign* [Psalm 44:5]; and so together with her Son she sits on the throne of her Son above every creature; *a throne was set for the king's mother and she sat on his right hand* [3 Kings 2:19]. Who else is so exalted above all creatures?

The eighth star

The eighth star is the taking on of the dignity by which she is called the door of heaven; this means that no one enters heaven and no grace has come out of heaven except through her, because, without faith in the Son of God incarnate from the Virgin Mary, no one has entered nor will enter heaven, nor without her did any gift ever come out of heaven. Hence, the Lord never receives anyone except through her. Regarding the first, Wisdom 7:11 says: *All good things came to me together with her*. Regarding the second, it says in 7:12: *I knew not that she was the mother of them all*.

Difficulty solved

Therefore, she is the gate of heaven; but how can this be since the Lord says: *I am the door?* [John 10:7]. This is not a contradiction because the gate is in the door, as represented in the temple where there were two doors to be opened at the same time [3 Kings 6:34]. But how is she a gate? In Apocalypse 21:12 John saw twelve gates, but all these gates are reduced to this gate, because she connected with and was open to every part of the world. She did this by her merit, her example and by the help of intercession. She is the beautiful gate of the temple of light that looks to the east, an accessible gate, inviting all who pass by, saying: *Come over to me all you that desire me* etc.

Assumption

[Ecclesiasticus 24:26], that is, as attractive and inviting as the master's wine.

The ninth star

The ninth star is when Mary gave birth without pain. This privilege is threefold. There is a triple woe: the woe of loss, the woe of need, the woe of sin and punishment; each of these is threefold in every mother except for the blessed Virgin.

Woe of loss

The woe of loss for a mother is threefold: the loss of virginity in conceiving; loss of bodily attractiveness after conception; loss of human company in giving birth. But in conceiving, this mother received purity than which no greater could be thought of under God;¹ after conception, great beauty; in giving birth, she had the company of Angels and of God; hence Gabriel: *The Lord is with you* [Luke 1:28].

Woe of need

The woe of need in mothers is threefold: in conceiving they need a husband; after conception, quiet; in giving birth, a midwife. But she conceived with the Holy Spirit cooperating; after conception she did not want to be served but went to serve; Luke 1:39: *Mary rising up went into the hill country*; in giving birth, she brought forth with the Angels in attendance.

The woe of sin

The woe of sin in mothers is threefold: passion in conceiving, carrying the pregnancy, pain in giving birth. But she conceived without passion, was pregnant without physical discomfort, gave birth without pain. Of the first, Isaias 7:14 says: *Behold a virgin shall conceive*; of the third, Isaias 66:7 says: *Before she was in labour, she brought forth.*²

¹ Anselm, *De Conceptu Virginali*, c. 18.

² The second point is missing.

The tenth star

The tenth star is because she was a mother and virgin. This privilege also consists in three things: that it is great is clear from the fact that virginity is inestimable in merit, ineffable in reward, invaluable in value and honour: in value, because it is *a treasure hidden in a field* [Matthew 13:44], having more value than the whole world, indeed of a thousand worlds, because *no price is worthy of a continent soul*, as stated in Ecclesiasticus 26:20; it is also ineffable.

Its honour is fourfold

In honour it surpasses ownership and rightly the state of angels in four ways. For human virginity has more aspects than that of Angels: human virginity is of body and spirit while that of Angels is only in spirit; also it is more noble for it comes from grace not from nature; also it is voluntary while the other is necessary. Likewise it is more glorious for it is gained by struggle and victory, but the other without struggle and so without victory; it is meritorious but the other is not meritorious because it is natural. And so it is more universal, nobler, more glorious and more valuable.

The eleventh star

Over her is the eleventh star, namely, the Mother of God is as much higher than the star as God is higher than humans. It would be great if the Virgin had given birth to a mere human being; hence, this excellence of grace is increased threefold. It would be great of itself to be a virgin and the mother of the holiest human; it would be infinitely more in itself to be the Mother of God; more than both and the best is to be the mother of the holiest man and God; this constitutes a supreme order.

The twelfth star

The twelfth star is that the Mother of God is the mother of both carnal and spiritual humans; just as Eve brought us forth to the world, so Our Lady brings us forth to heaven; hence Ecclesiasticus 24:26 says: *Come over to me all you that desire me and be filled with my fruits*. She says *with my fruits* because Eve gave birth carnally, while she brought forth the whole human race spiritually.

Assumption

So it is correctly stated in Luke 2:7: *Mary brought forth her firstborn Son*, because, while she gave birth to one in the flesh, she gave birth to all of us spiritually. So Isaias 66:8 calls out in admiration: *Shall the earth bring forth in one day, or shall a nation be brought forth at once?* Who has ever heard of such a thing? So this excellence is threefold: she is the mother of all who are spiritual, the mother of the fabric of the world and the mother of angelic reparation. So Bernard¹: ‘Rightly then, O Lady, the eyes of every creature turn to you, through whom and in whom and from whom the kind hand of God created and recreated’. And this is what Wisdom 7:12 says: *This wisdom went before me, that is, delighted in everything; and I did not know that she was the mother of them all.* By the intercession of this most blessed Mother may we come to the palaces of heaven, to Our Lord Jesus Christ who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

¹ Sermon 2, *In Pentecosten*, n. 4.