

THE NATIVITY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

(8 September)

SERMON 1

Psalm 96:11: *Light is risen to the just, and joy to the right of heart.*

Introduction

In the text just quoted from a Psalm, the nativity of the blessed Virgin is described as noble, as useful and as delightful. That it was noble is shown in the text by the words: *Light is risen*; for light in all corporal and spiritual beings holds the first place. That it was useful is shown in the text by the words: *to the just*, that is, for the benefit of the just; ownership is about acquiring. That it was honoured or delightful is shown in the text by the words: *joy to the right of heart*, because her birth is to be celebrated with joy. This triple quality belongs to the Virgin in her birth for light has nobility in her existence, value in her influence, and pleasure in her appearance.

Part I: Triple quality of light

Light has a noble nature because it is unmixed, incorrupt, and limitless. It is not mixed with a foreign nature nor corrupted by a contrary nature nor restricted by a more extensive nature.

Light is unmixed

The Virgin Mary in her birth was an unmixed light through sanctifying grace; so the text of Genesis 1:3-4 can be applied to her: *Be light made. And light was made. And God divided the light from the darkness*, because the blessed Virgin was made such that she was completely unmixed with the darkness of sin, and so the text of Wisdom 7:25-26 applies to her:

She is a certain pure emanation of the glory of the almighty God, and therefore no defiled thing comes into her. She is the brightness

of the eternal light, and the unspotted mirror of God's majesty and the image of his goodness.

Light is incorrupt

She was also incorrupt light by a confirming grace, according to Wisdom 7:10: *I chose to have her instead of light; since her light cannot be put out.* The lights of other Saints, be they men or women, are frequently put out, and so it is dangerous to follow such people, because, while thinking to be following the light, one is following darkness. But the light of this Virgin, because of confirming grace, cannot be put out, rather she acts so that the light of grace is not put out in others, according to Ecclesiasticus 24:6: *I made that in the heavens there should rise light that never fails.* Whoever follows her walks not in darkness, but shall have the light of life [John 8:12], that never fails.

Light is limitless

Her light was limitless because of super abundant grace, according to Esther 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.* This Esther prepared in time is the Virgin Mary in whom such grace abounded in her birth that it can be said of her what was said of Esther, namely, that *the king loved her above all the women* [Esther 2:17]. So it is clear how the birth of the Virgin, in the metaphor of light, is shown to have been noble in her existence according to the threefold quality mentioned above.

Part II: Threefold value of the Virgin's light

Secondly, it is shown under the metaphor of light that her light was useful when considered in its triple effect, namely, to direct the devious, to warm the cold, and to lighten burdens. Light directs the devious by emitting rays, warms the cold by reflecting rays, lightens burdens by multiplying rays.

To direct the devious

The Virgin Mary was a light directing the hearts of those in error, so that the text of Isaias 9:2 is truly fulfilled in her: *The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light, to them that dwell in the region of the shadow of death, light is risen.* And also the text of Isaias 49:6: *I have given you to be the light of the Gentiles.* This light began from Jerusalem but reached the whole earth, according to Isaias 60:1: *Arise, be enlightened, O Jerusalem, for your light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon you.*

To warm torpid hearts

She was also a light warming torpid hearts and so the text of John 5:35 can be applied to her: *He was a burning and shining light that burnt to warm the cold.* The ray of this light is elegantly described by Ezechiel 1:13 where he says: *This was the vision running to and fro in the midst of the living creatures, a bright fire, and lightning going forth from the fire.* By her words and example she warmed the hearts of the Apostles and Evangelists, represented by the animals; hence, the text of Apocalypse 4:5 can be interpreted of her: *From the throne proceeded lightning, and voices, and thunders, and there were seven lamps burning before the throne, which have the seven spirits of God.* She has a sevenfold grace for warming cold hearts.

To lighten humble hearts

She was a light lifting up humble hearts, according to Esther 11:11: *The light and the sun rose up, and the humble were exalted,* that is, the blessed Virgin and the Lord Jesus in her birth exalted the humble, the fearful and the oppressed. For she sang saying: *He has put down the mighty from their seat, and has exalted the humble* [Luke 1:52]. Because the poor were invited to put aside every heavy weight of what is earthly, and the poorer they were, so much the lighter and more sublime they became, according to 2 Corinthians 8:2: *Their very deep poverty has abounded unto the riches of their simplicity.*

The influence of the Virgin

Accordingly, it is clear how the birth of the Virgin under the metaphor of a light is shown to be useful in its influence. Of itself this influence is indifferent to all, unless individuals want to give consent to it by obedience; and so it is said: *to the just*, to make them just, or on those who want to become just, but on others it is not said to have risen. So John 3:19 can be interpreted of her: *The light has come into the world and men loved darkness rather than the light*; and so the Apostle says in Ephesians 5:8-9: *For we were heretofore darkness, but now light in the Lord. Walk then as children of the light. For the fruit of the light is in all goodness, and justice, and truth.*

Part III: The triple delight of her light

Thirdly, it is shown under the metaphor of light that her light is delightful in its shining for a triple quality inherent in it. Light is delightful to the eye for its continuous newness, for its charm, and for its mildness. Because of these three qualities the birth of the Virgin was pleasant and delightful.

Quality of newness

She was delightful because of the newness of a singular prerogative; Hence, the text of Esther 8:16 can be applied to her: *To the Jews a new light seemed to rise, joy, honour, and dancing.* This light is truly new because 'nothing like it had been seen before nor is there anything similar after it'.¹ So Jeremias 31:22 says: *The Lord has created a new thing upon earth, a woman shall encompass a man.* And so she was exempted from the general rule stated in Ecclesiastes 1:10: *Nothing under the sun is new.* But this was from above the sun because it came by a higher power.

Quality of charm

She was delightful on account of the charm of an all embracing elegance, of which Wisdom 7:29 says: *She is more beautiful than the sun* etc. In the sun there is a beauty of uniformity but in the Virgin

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

there is a beauty of variety. 'There is no beauty other than numerical equality.'² Apocalypse 12:1 says: *A woman clothed with the sun* etc. So she is most beautiful because Ecclesiasticus 43:10 says: *The glory of the stars is the beauty of heaven; the Lord enlightens the world on high.*

Quality of mildness

She was delightful also on account of the mildness of her maternal kindness, something sweet to everyone, according to Ecclesiastes 11:7: *The light is sweet, and it is delightful for the eyes to see the sun. It is delightful to see the sun* of justice, delightful and sweet to see and hear the Mother of kindness, who is delightful to all, who provides milk and honey for her Child, so that she might be honey to the taste of the Godhead, and milk to the taste of human beings. The Bridegroom says to the Bride in Canticle 4:11: *Your lips are as a dropping honeycomb* etc. She always spoke words of peace and piety, and so was lovable to all; for this reason the Church sings: 'With joy' etc.³ Anyone who does not rejoice does not have a right heart, but all who have a right heart move to what is heavenly. What great joy then one should have when one sees personally the person who was shown and who became the gate of heaven! *This is no other than the house of God and the gate of heaven* [Genesis 28:17]; may she etc.

² Augustine, *On Music*, VI, c. 13, n. 38.

³ Breviarum Romanum, versus post 2 Responsorium, I Nocturn in festo Nativitatis B. V. M.

SERMON 2

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.*

Introduction

Such is the excellence of the glorious Virgin that all language, Scripture, prophecies, and the comparisons of parables are deficient in speaking of her and praising her. Hence, the Holy Spirit commends her through the mouth of the Prophets not only in words, but also in the comparisons of parables; and because the comparison of no parable is completely adequate to express her excellence, there were introduced varied likenesses and metaphors.

Varied metaphors

Sometimes, to praise her, varied metaphoric likenesses were introduced at one time drawn from a lower nature such as the likeness of a root, of the earth and of a shoot; sometimes from a middle nature such as a fountain, a cloud and a little cloud; sometimes from a heavenly nature such as a metaphor of the sun and moon and stars. Among all these metaphoric likenesses the most excellent metaphor is the metaphoric likeness taken from the sun. The sun is the most excellent of all physical bodies, and by its excellence it represents, above all, Jesus Christ. But because what belongs to the head is applied to the body and limbs, and because the blessed Virgin is pre-eminent among all the limbs, it is quite fitting for her to be compared to the sun. Ecclesiasticus, inspired by the Holy Spirit, describes the excellence of the birth of the Virgin by the metaphor of the sun rising, when he says in the text quoted above: *As the sun when it rises to the world in the high places of God* etc. In this text he states firstly a physical likeness when he says: *As the sun when it rises*; secondly, he adds a spiritual interpretation when he says: *so is the beauty of a good wife* etc.

Physical likeness and its spiritual interpretation

This good wife who is compared to the sun is not any woman but she who is only good and this is the Virgin Mary of whom Jerome⁴ says: 'Just as no one is good when compared to God, so no woman, even though she be proved outstanding in virtues, is perfect when compared with the Mother of the Lord.' Therefore, this good woman is likened to the most excellent sun because of her excellent and sun like qualities. The material sun is beautiful when rising, speedy in its course, sublime in its location, and powerful in its effect. All these qualities can be transferred to the Virgin. She was beautiful in her birth through a purifying grace; speedy in her course through an assisting grace; powerful in her effect through a diffusive grace; and so she is rightly compared to the sun.

Beauty in rising

The material sun is beautiful in rising. Augustine says in *The City of God*⁵: 'There is beauty in a certain arrangement of parts with a pleasantness of colour.' Hence, perfect beauty includes no mixture of anything contrary, coordination with what is joined, and pleasure in the understanding sense; the excellent beauty of the sun consists in these.

No mixture of anything contrary

The sun is beautiful in its rising because it has no mixture of anything contrary, namely, cloud, darkness or any obscurity, all of which disappear when it rises. The blessed Virgin is likened to the sun because of sanctifying grace as indicated in 2 Kings 23:4 where it says: *As the light of the morning, when the sun rises, shines in the morning without clouds, and as the grass springs out of the earth by rain;* so it implies that the seed and the shoot should shine as it rises.. This was fulfilled in the most glorious Virgin and her Child; Apocalypse 22:16 says this of her: *I am the root and stock of David, the bright and morning star,* that is said to shine without clouds in

⁴ Rather the author of the Sermon, *De Assumptione B. V. M.*, (in the works of Jerome), c. 16.

⁵ XXII, c. 19, n. 2.

the morning because of perfect sanctifying grace, because, as Anselm⁶ says: ‘it was fitting for the conception of that man to be from a Mother who was most pure with a purity than which no greater could be thought of under God’. For this reason she is compared to the sun shining or rising in the morning without clouds because in her birth she had no mixture of sin.

Adornment of the whole universe

Secondly, she is compared to the sun because of the adornment of the whole universe and so Ecclesiasticus 43:1-2 says: *The beauty of heaven with its glorious show, the sun when he appears showing forth at his rising, an admirable instrument, the work of the Most High.* The sun in a wonderful way makes the universe beautiful by its presence and rising; similarly, the blessed Virgin adorns the whole world. She is an admirable instrument, bearing light, that, were it taken from the middle, the whole world would be deformed.⁷ For if you take the Mother of God from the world, as a result you take the incarnate Word; with the Word taken away the deformity of sinners and the error of sins remains. It would take away the wisdom of God, Christ, whose beauty purifies everything, according to Wisdom 7: 26 and 29: *She is the brightness of eternal light and the unspotted mirror of God’s majesty. She is more beautiful than the sun etc.*

Pleasure to the senses

Thirdly, Mary is compared to the sun because she gives pleasure to the senses, according to Ecclesiastes 11:7: *The light is sweet and it is delightful for the eyes to see the sun.* It is quite delightful to the material eyes to see the material sun, but it is more pleasant for the eyes of faith to look on the beauty of the Virgin. Esther 2:15 speaks of Esther as a prefiguring of her, namely, that *she was exceedingly fair, and her incredible beauty made her appear agreeable and amiable in the eyes of all.* Such, I say, was the most glorious Virgin who pleased the Angels of God and the eyes of the heavenly

⁶ *De Conceptu Virginali*, c. 18.

⁷ See Bernard, Sermon, *De Nativitate B. V. M.*, n. 6.

Bridegroom with her great charm and beauty. Bernard⁸ says: ‘The Virgin queen, adorned with the precious stones of virtues and with the brightest twin beauty of mind and body, known in the heavens for her splendour and beauty, drew the gaze of the citizens of heaven to herself, in such a way as to influence the spirit of the King to desire her, and bring down a heavenly messenger from above to herself’. For this reason the most glorious Virgin is likened to the light of the sun because of the beauty of her grace.

A sinful soul

On the other hand, a sinful soul is likened to *darkness and the shadow of death* [Luke 1:79]. From a mixture of a desire for sins, this of itself soils the universe because nothing so soils it as does sin, and from this it damages the human image by bad example as well as the divine and angelic. For this reason, Lamentations 4:8 says: *Their face is now blacker than coals, and they are not known in the streets.* This is said of sinful people who are against the Sun of justice.

Part II: Speed in the course from three points of view:

The first

The Virgin is likened to the sun in its speed on its course and this is due to an assisting grace. The sun is swift in its movement for three reasons: firstly, because of the extent of its influence as a moving object, and so 3 Esdras 4:34-35 says: *The earth is vast, and heaven is high, and the sun is swift in its course, for it makes its circuit of the heavens and returns to its place in one day. Is not the one who does these things great?* This is like saying that the sun swiftly completes its course because of the great power of the driving force that determines its movement. The Virgin Mary progressed in the same way and ran most swiftly like the sun; this came from the power of the highest Driving Force. So, in Luke 1:35, the Angel says to her: *The Holy Spirit shall come upon you and the power of the*

⁸ Homilia 2, super *Misus est*, n. 2 that quotes Psalm 44:5.

Most High shall overshadow you. Jerome⁹ says: ‘The fullness of grace is given to others partially, but to Mary completely’.

Second reason

The second reason why the sun is swift in its movements is because of the prompt obedience of the thing moving. Because the solar body is totally subject to its driving force, it runs most swiftly and moves most correctly; this applies to the glorious Virgin who was most obedient to heavenly inspirations. For this reason she was admired by the holy souls in Canticle 6:9: *Who is she who comes forth as the morning rising?* This text implies the swiftest course and the most obedient progress of the Virgin in the exercise of the four cardinal virtues. In saying *rising as the morning*, the discretion of providence is noted: in saying *fair as the moon*, the beauty of modesty or temperance; in saying, *bright as the sun*, the uprightness of justice; in adding *terrible as an army set in array*, the fortitude of tolerance. So the Virgin progressed most swiftly *from virtue to virtue* [Psalm 83:8] by prompt obedience.

Third reason

The third reason why the sun is swift in its descent is because of the removal of all resistance in the way it moves. So Ecclesiastes 1:5-6 says: *The sun rises and goes down and returns to his place and there rising again makes his round by the south and turns again to the north.* This implies a circular motion by which is described the uniformity of contemplation and by which the most blessed Angels move around the throne of Majesty, as blessed Dionysius¹⁰ says. Apocalypse 7:11 says: *All the Angels stood round about the throne.* Just as the most blessed Angels move in a circle, that is, uniformly and unceasingly around the throne of eternal Majesty, so the blessed Virgin was taken in mediation in a circle like the sun around the centre of the assumed humanity. Hence, the text of Canticle 3:1-2 applies to her: *In my bed by night I sought him whom my soul loves, I*

⁹ Rather the author of the Sermon, *De Assumptione B. V. M.* (in the works of Jerome) c. 5.

¹⁰ *De Divinis Nominibus*, c. 4, # 9.

will rise and will go about the city etc. The Virgin Mary never ceased from seeking and meditating on Christ as around the centre of virtue; and so she always advanced in every high point of perfection.

But we, unfortunate ones, do not advance but fall away, because the slight influence of virtue we receive, we do not obey nor act in conformity with it, but we move across it, so that the words of Acts 7:51 can be addressed to many of us: *You stiff necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit;* and that of Isaias 53:6: *All we like sheep have gone astray.* We are not like the sun as it progresses, but rather like lightning falling from heaven, Luke 10:18: *I saw Satan like lightning falling from heaven.*

Part III: Sublime in its location

The Virgin is likened to the sun in the sublimity of its location, and this is because of a perfecting grace that makes her most sublime above every mere creature. The sun is sublime in location and this by a perfecting grace for a triple reason.

First reason

The first reason is due to an incomparable pre-eminence because the sun is incomparably pre-eminent over earthly and obscure bodies, is far distant from them and is located in the higher parts of the world. This metaphor rightly applies to the Virgin, because she, as the Mother of God, is incomparably pre-eminent over other creatures just as the sun is over other obscure creatures; so Psalm 18:6 says: *He has set his tabernacle in the sun* etc. This sun is understood to be the Virgin Mary, in whom Christ set his tabernacle; this is clear in what follows: *and he, as a bridegroom, coming out of his bride chamber,* because within the virginal womb he joined himself to her and espoused human nature.

Second reason

The second reason is due to an indescribable lustre; the sun is located in the heights so that other bodies of the world might be illuminated by it. Such was the most glorious Virgin Mary who illuminates the Church and the earthly creation. For this reason Ecclesiasticus 42:16 says: *The sun giving light has looked upon all*

things, and full of the glory of the Lord is his work. The Virgin Mary like the sun lights up all things by her rays; so Ecclesiasticus 24:6-7: *I made that in the heavens there should rise light that never fails;* then he adds: *I dwelt in the highest places and my throne is in a pillar of a cloud.* She enlightens by her example all things like a light placed on the candlestick of the world. Jerome¹¹: ‘If you look more closely, there is no virtue, beauty, splendour, nor glory that does not shine in her’.

Third reason

The third reason is that the sun is sublime in its location by its incorruptible permanence; because an incorruptible body exists of itself, and so is higher than all corruptible and elementary stars. The blessed Virgin is similar in this because she not only had sanctifying grace, but also a confirming grace; so Psalm 88:36 and 38 says: *Once I have sworn by my holiness, I will not lie to David etc. His throne shall endure as the sun before me etc.* This throne of the true David that endures for ever, was the Virgin Mary, who never lost the grace she had at one time accepted, but it always remained incorrupt in her. So she had sublimity in location because by perfecting grace she was completely heavenly.

We should be like this Virgin so that we may be able to say with the Apostle the words of Philippians 3:20 and 18-19: *Our community is in heaven;* but it has to be feared that it may be said of many what was said earlier: *For many walk, of whom I have told you often (and now tell you weeping), that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in her shame, who mind earthly things.*

Part IV: Powerful in a triple effect:

The first effect

Lastly, the blessed Virgin is likened to the sun in her powerful effect through a diffusive grace. An effective solar power drives away earthly darkness and in this the Virgin is likened to the sun in

¹¹ Rather the author of the Sermon, *De Assumptione B. V. M.* (in the works of Jerome) c. 16.

that she puts to flight heresies and temptations; this is pointed out in Psalm 103:20 and 22: *You have appointed darkness and it is night, in it shall all the beasts of the woods go about*; and further on: *The sun rises and they are gathered together*. Just as in the night before sunrise there is darkness in which the beasts move to and fro, so before the birth of the Virgin heresies, idolatry and adverse powers reigned; but through the nativity of the Virgin heresies are confounded and adverse powers overcome. Bernard¹²: ‘In dangers, in distress, when doubtful, think of Mary, call on Mary; do not let her depart from your heart, nor depart from your mouth etc.’ and, further on:

Following her you do not go astray, speaking to her you do not despair, thinking of her you do not make mistakes, holding on to her you do not stumble; under her protection you do not fear; under her leadership you do not get tired; when she is kind you endure.

Second effect

Secondly, solar power is also effective for dispersing heavenly heat; Ecclesiasticus 43:4 says: *The sun three times as much, burns the mountains, breathing out fiery vapours, and shining with his beams, he blinds the eyes*. This sun burning the mountain three times is the blessed Virgin who warms us with her prayers, example and protection, and she does this out of her most copious love. Bernard¹³:

Mary opened her store of mercy to all so that all might receive from her fullness: release for the captive, healing for the sick, comfort for the sad, forgiveness for the sinner, grace for the just, joy for the angels, and finally glory for the whole Trinity and the substance of human flesh for the person of the Son.

Third effect

Thirdly, the sun is effective for stimulating vital powers. Everything germinating and living on the earth is stimulated to life by solar power, as is clear in the rising and descent of the sun along

¹² Homilia 2, super *Missus est*, n. 17.

¹³ Sermon, *De Dominica infra Octavam Assumptionis B. V. M.*

an oblique path. In this the Virgin Mary is likened to the sun; Esther 10:6 says: *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.* Esther raised up above the people is understood of the Virgin Mary who, while still small as a fountain, was turned into light, the sun and a river, so that in this way life may be saved, which, I say, is saved by warmth and humidity and by the reconciling of contraries. A river stimulates humidity, the sun warmth, so that light might reconcile contraries. Augustine¹⁴: ‘*Hail, full of grace, and indeed full, for you have brought forth life for men and women*’. So she is understood to be the fountain of the sun of which Josue 15:12 and 7 says: *The borders of the children of Juda pass the waters that are called the fountain of the sun.* This fountain of the sun is so named because it brings life to us in what concerns understanding and movement.

Twelve properties of the sun

Therefore, it is clear from the preceding that the Virgin Mary is most like the sun in the twelve properties mentioned above. The text of Apocalypse 12:1 is a figure of this: *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.* In this clothing of the sun is understood her conformity to the true sun, but in the crown of twelve stars is understood the twelve privileges listed above.

Seven people on whom the spiritual sun rises

Therefore, Mary rises in the world as a spiritual sun which, although she shows herself to all, she is not accepted by all nor does she benefit all, but only those receptive of her influence on whom alone is this sun said to rise.

Firstly, on believers

She rises, firstly, on believers; 1 Machabees 6:39: *Now when the sun shone upon the shields of gold, and of brass, the mountains glittered therewith.* By the shield, faith is understood; Ephesians 6:16

¹⁴ Sermo 194 (alias 18 De Sanctis) in Appendicis ad opera Augustini, n. 2.

says: *In all things taking the shield of faith.* The Virgin was resplendent among these shields when through the incarnation, that happened in her, she enlightened the minds of the faithful. This sun is hidden from unbelievers and heretics. In Acts 13:11, Paul said to that magician: *You shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time.*

Secondly, on those who fear

Secondly, she rises on those who fear; Malachias 4:2: *But unto you that fear my name, the Sun of justice shall arise, and health in his wings.* In Wisdom 5:6 the contrary is stated of the proud: *We have erred from the way of truth, and the light of justice has not shone unto us, and the sun of understanding has not risen upon us.*

Thirdly, on those who wait

Thirdly, she rises on those who wait; 1 Kings 11:9: *Thus shall you say to the men of Jabes-Galaad: Tomorrow, when the sun is hot, you shall have relief.* Galaad is interpreted as many witnesses, indicating people who believe in the testimony of the divine promises. On the contrary it is said in Judges 19:14 of those who despair: *The sun went down on them when they were by Gabaa, which is in the tribe of Benjamin.* Gabaa means a descent, referring to the descent of sin that makes one go down to the depths of despair.

Fourthly, on penitents

Fourthly, she rises on penitents; Genesis 19:23: *The sun has risen upon the earth and Lot has entered into Segor.* By Lot who fled from the burning of Sodom is understood a penitent person who flees from the burning of sin. Whoever remains in the fire and disorder of sin, cuts him or herself off from the rays of this sun, according to what Psalm 57:9 says: *Fire has fallen on them, and they shall not see the sun.*

Fifthly, on the obedient

Fifthly, she rises on the obedient; Esther 11:11: *The light and the sun rose up and the humble were exalted.* The genuinely humble are obedient, as she says in her hymn in Luke 1:52: *He has put down the mighty from their seat and has exalted the humble.*

Sixthly, on contemplatives

Sixthly, she rises on contemplatives; Genesis 32:31 and 30: *The sun rose upon Jacob, after he was past Phanuel*, which means contemplation of him, where Jacob *saw God face to face*.

Seventhly, on those arriving

Seventhly, she rises on those who arrive; Mark 16:2: *They came to the sepulchre, the sun being now risen*. By coming to the sepulchre is understood the final perfecting of merits in which the blessed Virgin is perfectly manifested, as she brings the Saints to introduce them to glory.

Conclusion

This sevenfold effect or manifestation of solar light by which she manifests herself to seven kinds of people, can be understood spiritually by Isaias 30:26: *The light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days*. The seven manifestations mentioned above begin from the foundation of faith and arrive at the completion of an eternal reward by the help of the Virgin and the gift of the most blessed Trinity, to whom may there be honour and glory for ever..
Amen

SERMON 3

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.*

Introduction

As I reflect on the excellence of the glorious Virgin before the whole Church, no likeness seems nobler than what Ecclesiasticus says in the preceding text. Just as the sun surpasses and adorns the bodies of the sphere of the whole world, so the blessed Virgin surpasses and adorns the members of the whole Church militant and triumphant. This is because she is a woman who is not only good but excellent, since there is nothing lacking in her that pertains to the perfection of a good woman, according to the metaphor of the material sun and the imitation of the eternal Sun. Just as the sun has a power that is purifying, enlightening, perfecting, and is spread over all things; so a perfectly good woman, such as the Virgin Mary, is seen to be full of a fourfold kind of grace. The Virgin Mary was a woman who was virtuous, beautiful, gracious and courteous according to the above mentioned qualities.

Part I: Virtuous for four reasons

She was a virtuous woman and so is represented by Ruth; Ruth 3:11: *For all the people that dwell within the gates of my city, know that you are a virtuous woman.*

First reason, her restraint

The Virgin Mary was a virtuous woman, firstly because of her holiness in restraint; Judith 8:29: *Now, therefore, pray for us for you are a holy woman, and one fearing God; holy, by separation from every uncleanness of the flesh, and fearing God, by being remote from any uncleanness of soul, and so clean from all defilement of the flesh and of the spirit, and by this she perfected holiness in the fear of God,* according to the words of the Apostle in 2 Corinthians 7:1:

Let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of the flesh and of the spirit, perfecting sanctification in the fear of God.

Second reason, her uprightness in choosing.

Secondly, she was a virtuous woman by her uprightness in choosing; Ecclesiasticus 26:24: *As everlasting foundations upon a solid rock, so the commandments of God in the heart of a holy woman*, because, according to what is said in Matthew 7:24, *everyone, therefore, that hears these words and does them shall be likened to a wise man who built his house on a rock*. Without a doubt, the Virgin Mary was such a person.

Third reason, her fortitude

Thirdly, she was a virtuous woman by her fortitude in persevering; Proverbs 31:10: *Who shall find a valiant woman?* The Virgin Mary was such a woman for, by great constancy, she pleased God in a singular way. Ecclesiasticus 26:2 says: *A virtuous woman rejoices her husband* etc.

Exhortation

If we want to be virtuous according to this pattern, we must begin with holiness by despising all that is earthly and by being remote from carnal desires. We must do this by embracing the cross. Afterwards we are to move to uprightness in observing the commandments and in a zeal for the divine law. Once this is done it is easy to reach the constancy of fortitude, otherwise, if we love earthly things and are not zealous for the divine law, it is impossible for us to be strong and patient in our passions.

Part II: Beautiful for three reasons:

First reason her integrity

She was a beautiful woman, prefigured by Abigail in 1 Kings 25:3: *Abigail was a prudent and very beautiful woman*. The Virgin Mary was *beautiful*, firstly, by the integrity of her actions; Judith 11:19 says: *There is not such another woman upon earth in look, in beauty, and in sense of words*. She was so upright in words and actions that no one could pass judgment on her.

Second reason, integrity of the senses

Secondly, she was a beautiful woman because of the integrity of her senses; Ecclesiasticus 36:24: *The beauty of a woman cheers the face of her husband, and a man desires nothing more.* There is nothing more pleasing to a man than to see chastity and integrity in his wife, and these were complete in the Virgin Mary, according to what she said to the Angel in Luke 1:34: *How shall this be done because I do not know man?*

Third reason, sincerity of affections

Thirdly, she was a beautiful woman because of the sincerity of her affections; Genesis 12:11 and 13: *I know that you are a beautiful woman; say, therefore, I pray, that you are my sister.* To do this she needed the sincerity of a chaste love for him, such a love as the Virgin Mary had for the Lord. So in the Canticle of Canticles 4:9 she is called *sister and spouse.*

Conclusion

Because of the triple beauty to be noted in a spouse and, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, in the Virgin Mary, the spouse in the Canticle is said three times to be the most beautiful of women. For in Canticle 1:7 it says: *If you do not know yourself, O fairest of women;* in 5:9: *What manner of one is your beloved, O most beautiful of women,* and in 5:17: *Whither is your beloved gone, O you most beautiful of women?* This implies the singular privilege of this triple beauty, by which she was the most beautiful of women, not with an empty beauty, but a true beauty. All spiritual persons should strive for this so as to be upright in morals, in actions and gestures, modest in the senses, and immaculate in interior affections.

Part III: Gracious for three reasons

The blessed Virgin was a gracious woman; she is represented in Esther of whom is said in Esther 2:15 that *she appeared agreeable and amiable in the eyes of all.* Hence, further on in 2:17 the text says that she found *favour and kindness before the king above all the women.*

First reason

This cannot be understood in a spiritual sense of any other woman so correctly and rightly as of the glorious Virgin who was gracious, firstly, because she was full of sufficient grace; Ecclesiasticus 26:16 says: *The grace of a diligent woman shall delight her husband and shall fat his bones*. She had sufficient grace to please God and to practise all the virtues, like fattening bones. By this grace she advanced always from good to better.

Second reason

Secondly, because she was full of pre-eminent grace; Ecclesiasticus 26:19: *A holy and shamefaced woman is grace upon grace*. Holiness with virginal modesty is called an excellent grace that was pre-eminent in the Virgin Mary; Canticum 4:12 says: *My sister, my spouse, is a garden enclosed, a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed up*.

Third reason

Thirdly, because she was full of superabundant grace; Luke 1:28 says: *Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you, blessed are you among women*; and further on in 1:35: *The Holy Spirit shall come upon you*. The Holy Spirit came upon her in such superabundance of grace that the text of Proverbs 31:29 can rightly be applied to her: *Many daughters have gathered together riches, you have surpassed them all*; and in Psalm 64:10: *You have visited the earth and plentifully watered it*.

Exhortation

Therefore, if we want to get grace, there is no more sensible advice than that we should go to her who is full of grace, and so is rightly called a throne of grace, according to Hebrews 4:16: *Let us go therefore with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace in seasonable aid*. Through no one can grace be more easily found than through her to whom the Angel said: *You have found grace with God*.

Part IV: Courteous for three reasons

Lastly, she was a courteous woman; so she is understood to be the woman praised by Wisdom in Proverbs 31:15: *She rose in the night and gave a prey to her household* etc. This rightly applies to the Virgin who intercedes for us not only when it is convenient, but also when inconvenient, and this is indicated in John 2:3-4: *The wine failing, the mother of Jesus said to him: They have no wine. And Jesus said to her: Woman, what is that to me and to you?* In this we see the great courteousness and care that the most blessed Virgin has for the human race.

First reason

She is courteous towards us, firstly, by delivering from evil, and what was said to the serpent in Genesis 3:15 is a figure of this: *I will put enmities between you and the woman; and then: she shall crush your head.* She crushed our adversary and freed us from him, when ‘she destroyed all heresies in the entire world’.¹⁵

Second reason

Secondly, by fostering good; Proverbs 14:1: *A wise woman builds her house, but the foolish will pull down with her hands that also which is built.* This is rightly understood of Mary and Eve, for just as Eve by her foolishness cast us down from good, so the Virgin Mary by her wisdom fostered good in us as by one putting a hand to a spiritual edifice.

Third reason

Thirdly, by perfecting what is best; Proverbs 11:16: *A gracious woman shall find glory.* She found glory in herself and in others, because through her the gate of heaven was opened for us; just as God came down to us through her, so we should go up to the Lord through her.

¹ Breviarium Romanum, 3 Noct., 1 Antiphona ad Matutinum In Commemoratione B. V. M. See also on this the famous saying of Peter Canisius, *De Deipara Virgine*, V, c. 9.

Conclusion

So, from the preceding, it can be seen that the blessed Virgin, as a woman who is perfectly and simply good, has a clear likeness to the sun rising over the world by a triple excellence of a fourfold quality. This is on account of twelve excellent privileges and so Apocalypse 12:1 can be understood of this woman of whom is said: *A woman clothed with the sun etc., and on her head a crown of twelve stars.* This text refers to the twelve above mentioned privileges for which she is rightly compared to *the sun when it rises to the world in the high places of God* [Ecclesiasticus 26:21]. May the Virgin Mary be blessed and venerable for ever. Amen.

SERMON 4

Ecclesiasticus 43:2: *An admirable instrument,*¹⁶ *the work of the Most High.*

Introduction

In this text is shown how admirable, and consequently highly commendable is the Empress of every creature, she, namely, who in her nativity was *an admirable instrument*; and this was certainly because she was a *work of the Most High*. This praise, however, points to two things contained in the above text, namely, the excellence of the work and the magnificence of the worker. The excellence of the work is implied in the words *an admirable instrument*; the magnificence of the worker because it is a work of the Most High.

The excellence of the work

The young queen was *an admirable instrument* because of her matter, her form, and what she contained. In matter she was an instrument wonderfully precious; in form she was a wonderfully beautiful instrument; and from what she contained she was a wonderfully copious instrument.

A precious instrument from three points of view

Firstly, in matter she was a wonderfully precious instrument; Proverbs 20:15: *There is gold and a multitude of jewels, a precious instrument. A multitude of jewels*, the limbs and senses, from which the highest Worker made this created instrument wonderfully precious. The material of the instrument was wonderfully precious because it was made of silver and, gold and it was an instrument of lights. Silver denotes the brightness of virginity, gold the eagerness of charity, light, the beauty of exterior goodness, so that the

¹⁶ The Latin word is **vas**, translated here as instrument but in other texts as a vase or vessel.

brightness of virginity might be in the flesh, the eagerness of charity in the soul, and the beauty of goodness in her way of life.

Precious because of silver

Firstly, she was a wonderfully precious instrument because of the matter that was silver; Proverbs 25:4: *Take away the rust from silver*, that is, the dross of original sin from the soul of the most holy Virgin, *and here shall come forth a most pure vessel*, containing within itself all purity.

Precious because of gold

Secondly, because she was golden; Ecclesiasticus 50:10: *As a weighty vessel of gold, adorned with every precious stone*. She was a vessel receptive of grace in gold, the precious nature of love in weight, the vigour of tolerance, all of which were confirmed in the virginal marriage. Hugh of Saint Victor¹⁷ says of her love:

Because the love of the Holy Spirit burnt in a singular way in her heart, so the power of the Holy Spirit did wonderful things in her flesh. This love in her heart had no equal, nor did its working in her flesh have a model.

Precious because of light

Thirdly, she was full of light; Ecclesiasticus 43:9: *Being an instrument of the armies on high shining gloriously in the firmament of heaven*. Mary shone *in the firmament of heaven* since by her brightness she enlightened the whole Church of God, according to the text of Esther 8:16: *To the Jews a new light seemed to rise* etc. This can most fittingly be said of her.

The form and beauty of the instrument

Secondly, in her form she was a wonderfully beautiful instrument. Bernard¹⁸ says of her beauty:

¹⁷ *De Virginitate Mariae*, c. 2.

¹⁸ Homilia 2, super *Misus est*, n. 2.

The Virgin queen, adorned with precious stones and resplendent from a double beauty of virtues of both mind and body, known in the heavens for *her comeliness and beauty*, drew the attention of the citizens of heaven to herself, so that she could attract the desire of the spirit of the King upon herself and lead the heavenly messenger to her from above.

Firstly, beauty of pre-eminence

Her beauty can be seen most clearly in three things, namely, from the elegance of pre-eminence. Just as on a royal table there are many precious vessels, but one, more beautiful than the others, is designated for the mouth of the king, and the beauty of the others, in comparison with it, seems to be overshadowed. So it is said: *Gold cannot equal it* [Job 28:17]. Jerome¹⁹ says: ‘Just as no one is good when compared to God, so no woman, even though she be proved outstanding in virtues, is perfect when compared with the Mother of the Lord.’

Secondly, from satisfaction in work

Secondly, it can be understood from a satisfaction from the work; Jeremiah 18:3-6:

I went down into the potter's house, and behold he was doing a work on the wheel. And the vessel was broken which he was making of clay with his hands, and turning he made another vessel, as it seemed good in his eyes to make it.

The potter is our Creator, so it is noted in the same place: *As clay is in the hand of the potter*; and, the *work on the wheel* is the human race set on the changeability of nature; it was *broken* by the sin of the first couple; but turned into *another vessel*, namely, the glorious Virgin, *as it seemed good in his eyes*.

¹⁹ Author of the sermon, *De Assumptione B. V. M.*, ad Paulam et Eustochium (in the works of Jerome) c. 16 (alias 17).

Thirdly, from its multiple value

Thirdly, it can be understood from its multiple, apt and useful suitability; Baruch 6:58: In a *profitable vessel* the one who made it will be glorified. Anselm²⁰: 'I contemplate Mary on high. God, who made all things, made himself from Mary and so remade all that he had made'.

Wonderful from what was contained

Thirdly, she was an instrument wonderfully copious because of what she contained. She contained the salt of discretion, the manna of refreshment, and the oil of rejoicing. By salt should be understood discretion, by manna refreshment, by oil rejoicing; the first of these pertains to the power of reasoning; the second, to desire, but the third, to being irascible.

Firstly, the salt of discretion

Firstly, she contained the salt of discretion, according to what is said in a figurative sense in 4 Kings 2:20: *Bring me a new vessel and put salt in it*. The *new vessel* was the virginal womb, retaining the purity of newness. In this vessel was put the salt of discretion when into the womb of the Virgin, at the word of the Archangel Gabriel, the Wisdom of God descended.

Secondly, the manna of refreshment

Secondly, she was a vessel containing the manna of refreshment; Exodus 16:33: *Take for yourself a vessel and put manna into it*. The text could be addressed to the Holy Spirit, by whose work the Word of God, containing the rewards of eternal refreshment, descended into the womb of the Virgin.

Thirdly, the oil of rejoicing

Thirdly, she was a vessel containing the oil of rejoicing. The synagogue could not find this vessel full of joy. This was indicated in 4 Kings 4:6 where one of the wives of the Prophets, poured oil as the Prophet had asked and by which the synagogue is understood, said to

²⁰ Oratio 52 (alias 51).

her son: *Bring me yet a vessel. And he answered: I have no more.* But, certainly, when the abundance of graces and *the fullness of time came, in which God sent his son*, she was shaped by the hand of Wisdom and was filled *with the oil of gladness above others*; the mother of all goodness made us her companions, she who rejoices eternally without end. Amen.

SERMON 5

Apocalypse 11:19: *And the ark of the covenant of God was seen in his temple.*

Introduction

Among all the sacred and hidden types that are given and instituted in the Law by the Lord God, the ark of the covenant of the Lord is seen as the most sacred [Exodus 30:26-30]. This did not happen by chance or without reason but according to an arrangement of the heavenly Wisdom that made known the Law. Therefore, this did not happen to the ark because it was made artificially from wood and gold but because it prefigured in a most apt manner the secrets of God according to the direction of the eternal art. Hence, among the other types that, according to the many sided wisdom of God, give rise to various interpretations, the ark of the covenant is filled with a multitude of mystical meanings so that there is nothing in it that does not lead to some spiritual interpretation; there are few things, if any, in the ecclesiastical hierarchy that, according to the varied interpretation of the Scriptures, cannot be prefigured by it.

For the ark in its allegorical sense, as witnessed by the explanations of the Saints, relates to Christ and to the Church; in the tropological sense to a prelate and a holy soul; in the anagogical sense to the heavenly secret and the heavenly Jerusalem; in the mystical interpretation, from all that is said, to the glorious Virgin, the most blessed Mother of God and Our Lady, holy Mary, whose nativity holy mother Church celebrates today. In the text quoted above, blessed John the Evangelist, raised up in spirit to an apocalyptic understanding, describes her nativity and most excellent dignity. He does this in two ways, namely, by referring to the excellence of the one being born, when he says: *Ark of the covenant*; and by referring to the brightness of the nativity when he adds: *was seen in the temple*.²¹

²¹ Only the first part of the text is expounded.

Division

Under the type of the ark of the covenant there is implied a varied dignity under diverse headings. Scripture teaches us to reflect on these in the mystical ark. It is proposed in Scripture that the ark is to be looked at from four points of view, namely, its composition, what it contains, its effectiveness, and its honour. If you look at the ark from the point of view of its composition, you see it according to what it is; from the point of view of what it contains, you see it according to what it has; from the point of view of its effectiveness, you see it according to what it does; of its honour, you see it according to what it receives. This is to reflect on it according to what it is, to what is in it, to what comes from it, and at what is directed towards it.

Part I: Four aspects of its composition

As sacred Scripture implies, the material of this ark was an incorruptible material, proportionate in size, admirable in form, and four sided in shape, by which the dignity of the Virgin Mary is implied. She was made by the skill of the Son of God and of the Holy Spirit.

Firstly, the material

Firstly, the Virgin Mary is the ark of the covenant in material because she is of incorruptible material from the integrity of her flesh, according to Exodus 25:10: *Frame an ark of setim wood* for me; Gloss²²: ‘Setim wood is light and incorruptible, little different from the quality of hawthorn’. This is understood of the integrity of the glorious Virgin who was made light by being free of the burden of a carnal nature and incorruptible by being separate from the contagion of corruption that indeed is in the work of the flesh. For what else is virginity other than a kind of incorruptibility? Augustine²³ says in his book, *De virginitate*: ‘Virginity is a meditation in corruptible flesh on perpetual incorruption’. From concupiscence comes what is rotten; Job 17:14: *I have said to*

²² *Glossa ordinaria*, in Lyranus from Bede, *De Tabernaculo*, I, c. 4.

²³ C. 13, n. 12.

rotteness, you are my father etc. As things rotten and putrefied, we should rightly in our bodies be burned to ashes. But the glorious Virgin Mary, in her life and conceiving was not putrefied by the corruption of actual concupiscence; by dying and breathing her last, she was not stained by the punishment of becoming ashes and for worms; and this was most fitting for the integrity of the incorrupt virginal womb.

Secondly, proportionate in size

Secondly, she is the ark of the covenant because she is proportionate in size by humility of heart, according to Exodus 37:1: *And Bezzeel made also the ark of setim wood, it was two cubits and a half in length, and a cubit and a half in breadth, and the height was of one cubit and a half.* By a whole cubit of full measure one understands a perfect virtue in carrying out actions; by a half one understands perfect humility in reflecting on defects, and these two are what give a most proportioned measure for bearing divine gifts that are given neither to the negligent nor to the arrogant. These two, namely, perfect virtue and deep humility, were pre-eminently present in the Virgin Mary. For, when it was said to her: *The Holy Spirit shall come upon you*, she said: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord.* This is a measure in all things, so we read in Philippians 3:13 and 15: *Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended. Let us, therefore, as many as are perfect, be thus minded.* There is a prefiguring of this in Ezechiel 40:5: *In the man's hand a measuring reed of six cubits and a hand breadth.* By six, a perfect number, perfection in what is done is represented; by a hand breadth, humiliation for a failing. For this reason the Lord, when the disciples asked: *Increase our faith*, said: *When you shall have done all these things that are commanded you, say: We are unprofitable servants.* This is a figure in proportion to grace, however, it is certainly disproportionate when it is imperfect in attitude and presumptuous in self regard, and for this reason the ark should be a cubit and a half.

Thirdly, admirable in form

Thirdly, she is called the ark of the covenant because she is admirable in form regarding goodness of her way of life; Exodus

37:1-2: Beseleel *overlaid it with the purest gold within and without. And he made to it a crown of gold round about.* By this golden covering is understood the fullness of the utmost goodness that made the Virgin Mary beautiful both inside and outside; hence, Jerome²⁴ says: 'If you look more closely, there is no virtue, beauty, splendour, nor glory that does not shine in her'.

And note, that it is said she had *a crown of gold round about*, because she was upright in all her actions. She is said to be *overlaid with the purest gold within and without*, because it is necessary that the beauty of genuine goodness begin from within, so as not to be a hypocrite, and not like the ark of the Lord but rather like Bel of whom is said in Daniel 14:6: *O king, be not deceived, because this is but clay within and brass without.* This can be said of hypocrites, because, as the Lord says: *you are like to whited sepulchres* [Matthew 3:27]. Therefore, whoever wants to be perfectly good is to begin from inside to overlay his or her ark with gold, and afterwards also the exterior, so as to profit one's neighbour. But over many one can weep with Jeremias in Lamentations 4:1: *How is the gold become dim* etc.

Fourthly, four sided in shape

Fourthly, she is said to be the ark of the covenant, because she is four sided in shape to reflect a fourfold virtue; Exodus 25:12-14: *You shall make four golden rings which you shall put at the four corners of the ark. And you shall put bars in through the rings that are in the side of the ark that it may be carried on them.* By the four corners are understood the cardinal virtues; by the rings in the four corners, a four sided obedience of the divine precepts according to the demands of the four virtues; by the bars are understood two things that carry us along the way of right conduct, namely, fear and love. These were perfectly in the glorious Virgin, who observed the divine law perfectly, obeying it according to the four sided cardinal virtues, namely, prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude, which, although each is distinct from another, are connected and equal and are

²⁴ Rather the author of the Sermon, *De Assumptione B. V. M.*, (in the works of Jerome), c. 16.

supported by the fear and perfect love that supported her even to heaven. And note that it says, the *bars shall never be drawn out of the rings* [Exodus 25:15], because fear and love should always be joined with the cardinal virtues in carrying out the divine commands; this is how they were with the glorious Virgin, of whom Proverbs 31:30 says: *The woman that fears the Lord, she shall be praised.*

Part II: What is contained, under four headings

Having reflected on the composition of the ark, attention should be paid to what it contains, of which it has to be understood that in the material ark contained manna, the rod, and the two tables of the testament, and, above, it was finished with two Cherubim overshadowing the propitiatory. By these contents are rightly indicated the things interior to the glorious Virgin. For the blessed Virgin contained manna from the sweetness of grace; a rod, from the virtue of trust; the Law, from her uprightness of understanding; above two Cherubim, from the fullness of wisdom; hence, of all these Hebrews 9:3-5 says:

And after the second veil, the tabernacle, which is called the Holy of holies, having a golden censer, and the ark of the testament covered about on every part with gold, in which was a golden pot that had manna, and the rod of Aaron that had blossomed, and the tables of the testament. And over it were the Cherubim of glory overshadowing the propitiatory.

In this text the four things mentioned above are listed.

Firstly, the sweetness of grace

Firstly, therefore, the Virgin Mary was an ark containing manna from the sweetness of grace, something prefigured in Exodus 16:33 where the Lord said to Moses: *Take a vessel, and put manna into it, as much as a gomer can hold and lay it up before the Lord.* On this text a Gloss²⁵ says: ‘He says *lay it up* for the future, so that it might

²⁵ *Glossa ordinaria*, on this text taken from Augustine, *Quaestiones in Exodum*, q. 61.

be understood that it will then be able to be placed before God when the future ark is present'. When this ark was made and born, then she was filled with the sweetness of grace, not for herself only, but also for the succession of generations. Anselm²⁶ says: 'Through the fullness of your grace both those on earth rejoice in being restored, and those in hell are happy to be set free'. The sweetness of heavenly grace resided in her, so that all go to her to ask for grace; Hebrews 4:16: *Let us go therefore with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace in seasonable aid.* Hence, failure is only among us who are filled with the gall of bitterness because of our sins; Hebrews 12:15 says: *Looking diligently, lest any man be wanting to the grace of God, lest any root of bitterness springing up do hinder, and by it many be defiled.* Some more willingly drink the gall of human wickedness than the sweetness of divine grace; Deuteronomy 32:33: *Their wine is the gall of dragons* etc. But, as stated in Hebrews 13:9: *it is best that the heart be established with grace, not with meats* etc.

Secondly, the rod

Secondly, the ark contained the rod of Aaron that blossomed from the virtue of trust, of which there is a prefiguring in Numbers 17:8 and 10: *Moses found that the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi, was budded. And the Lord said to him: Carry back the rod of Aaron into the tabernacle of the testimony, that it may be kept there* etc. By the rod blossoming we understand the virtue of trust, by which the rod from the root of Jesse was suitable to bear the flower of Nazareth without male seed by the promise of God and the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, to whom the Virgin Mary clung more strongly and faithfully; Proverbs 31:10: *Who shall find a valiant woman? Far and from the uttermost coasts is the price of her,* because trust strengthens and raises up the soul to acquire future and distant goods such as eternal goods. This was especially true in the Virgin Mary; Ecclesiasticus 24:25-26: *In me is all hope of life and of virtue. Come over to me, all you that desire me, and be filled with my fruits.* One

²⁶ Oratio 52 (alias 51).

comes to her by contempt for what is temporal and by trust in God, and this is the rod of blossoming divine fruits; Jeremiah 17:7 and 5: *Blessed is the man that trusts in the Lord, and the Lord shall be his confidence.* But contrary to this: *Cursed be the man, that trusts in man* etc.

Thirdly, uprightness of understanding

Thirdly, she was an ark of the covenant containing the tables of the testament by uprightness of understanding; Exodus 25:16: *You shall put in the ark the testimony that I will give you.* This testimony was the law that was written and placed in the ark of the covenant, that is, in the heart of the most blessed Virgin. For Luke 2:19 says of her: *But Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart.* Just as the ark of the covenant preserved the Law of Moses, so she preserved the law of the Gospel by her right understanding of the truth of faith and of the whole law of Christ. Hence, she could say the words of Psalm 39:8-9: *In the head of the book it is written of me that I should do your will. O my God, I have desired it, and your law in the midst of my heart,* because the Gospel begins with the virginal conception. So in her there had to be placed an understanding of the law of the Gospel as in a most suitable and secure place; hence, Ecclesiasticus 26:24 says: *As everlasting foundations upon solid rock, so the commandments of God in the heart of a holy woman,* because, while others doubted, there remained in the Virgin Mary a firm, solid, and unshaken understanding of truth. The reason for this is that she not only had a speculative understanding of the law, but also a practical and experimental understanding. Of this the Philosopher²⁷ says that virtue is surer than all skill. So in Psalm 118:126-127 it is said to Christ: *It is time, O Lord, to do; they have dissipated your law, therefore have I loved your commandments above gold and the topaz.*

²⁷ Aristotele, *Ethica*. II, c. 6.

Fourthly, fullness of wisdom

Fourthly, she was an ark of the covenant whom the Cherubim covered from above because of her fullness of wisdom; 2 Paralipomenon 5:8: *The Cherubim spread their wings over the place in which the ark was set.* Cherubim are understood of a fullness of knowledge and they were over the ark because the Virgin Mary was filled with this wisdom, according to what Bernard²⁸ says: ‘Mary penetrated the deepest abyss of divine wisdom, so that, in so far as it can lawfully be believed in a creature, she seemed to be immersed in that inaccessible light’. Because she held within herself the hidden and secret things of God, she is rightly called an ark of the covenant; she contained within herself the flesh of Christ *in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.* Hence, whoever wants to come to wisdom, must be brought through the ark to the propitiatory where *the Cherubim look one towards the other, their faces turned towards the propitiatory* [Exodus 25:20], because all the wisdom contained in the two Testaments looks to Christ crucified. So Paul, the wisest of the Apostles, says in 1 Corinthians 2:2: *I judged not myself to know anything among you, but Jesus Christ, and him crucified.*

Part III: The effectiveness of the ark under four headings

After this, the effectiveness of the ark should be considered. The ark represents the Virgin Mary as to what she is of herself.

Firstly, directing those making progress

That ark was effective in the person of the Virgin: firstly, in directing those making progress, according to Numbers 10:33: *The ark of the covenant of the Lord went before them, for three days providing a place for the camp.* By these three days is understood the whole present life in its beginning, progress and ending; or in a triple promise by which a person goes into the desert of Religious life, as if for a journey of three days, namely, chastity, poverty and obedience, and this with the blessed Virgin leading for she was most poor, most humble and most virtuous. She goes before and prepares the way,

²⁸ Sermon, *De Dominica infra Octavam Assumptionis B. V. M.*, n. 3.

until she leads into the promised land; Josue 3:11: *The ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth shall go before you into the Jordan*; the text goes on to say that the waters dried up when the ark entered because with the help of the Virgin what seemed difficult to carry becomes easy.

Secondly, in defending those who struggle

Secondly, the ark in the person of the Virgin was effective in defending those who struggle; 2 Paralipomenon 6:41: *Arise, O Lord God, into your resting place, you and the ark of your strength*. Hence, we sing²⁹: ‘Give me strength against our enemies’. In a prefiguring of this in 1 Kings 4:3 they say: *Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord from Silo, and let it come into the midst of us, that it may save us from the hand of our enemies*, because in truth she can save us. However, it is added there that not all were saved [1 Kings 4:10]. The reason for this was that they had made a covenant with idolatry so that externally they worshipped but interiorly they despised. So Bernard³⁰ says: ‘Think on Mary, call on Mary in dangers, in difficulties, in doubtful situations, and so that you may beg the help of her prayer do not abandon the example of her way of life’. Whoever invokes with the mouth but opposes in actions is not worthy to be heard and saved, rather to be condemned.

Thirdly, in reconciling penitents

Thirdly, she is effective in reconciling penitents; Exodus 26:34: *You shall set the propitiatory upon the ark of the testimony in the holy of holies*. What is meant by the propitiatory other than him through whom sins are forgiven? I John 2:1-2 says: *We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the just, and he is the propitiation for our sins* etc. This propitiatory is above the ark because we approach him through the Virgin Mary, who like a mother of mercy intercedes for us to the Son and who mitigates the anger of God against our sins. 1 Kings 7:2 has a prefiguring of this: *It came to pass that from the day the ark of the Lord abode in*

²⁹ *Breviarium Romanum*, Versus ad Vesperas, In Commemoratione. B. V. M.

³⁰ Homilia 2, super *Misus est*, n. 17.

Cariathiarim days were multiplied. Cariathiarim means a dying town, by which is understood this world that always tends towards failure because of sin; however, the days of grace are multiplied by the sufficiency of the glorious Virgin.

Fourthly, in overthrowing rebels

Fourthly, she is effective in overthrowing rebels; Numbers 10:35: *When the ark was lifted up, Moses said: Arise, O Lord, and let your enemies be scattered.* Hence, we sing a verse³¹ to the Virgin: ‘Rejoice, Virgin Mary’ etc. She is the *woman who crushed the head of the serpent* [Genesis 3:15]; she is the ark that struck the Philistines in 1 Kings 5:9: *While they were carrying the ark about, the hand of the Lord came upon every city with an exceeding great slaughter.* As a figure of this it is said in Josue 6:11 and 20, that as the ark of the Lord went around Jericho, the walls of Jericho fell, because she it is who disperses the enemies of Christ, just as Esther did to Aman [Esther 7:10], and as Judith killed Holofernes [Judith 13:10], and Jahel did to Sisara [Judges 4:21]. She is a terror to our enemies, *terrible as an army set in array* [Canticle 6:3].

Part IV: Honour by fourfold obedience

Lastly, thought has to be given to the honour due to the ark and from this one can understand the honour and reverence due to the glorious Virgin.

Firstly, an obedience of unity

Under the figure of the ark she is to be honoured with an obedience of unity. There is a prefiguring of this in 3 Kings 8:1:

All the ancients of Israel with the princes of the tribes, and the heads of the families of the children of Israel were assembled to king Solomon in Jerusalem that they might carry the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of the city of David.

³¹ *Breviarium Romanum*, Antiphona 1, in 3 Nocturnum, de Communi B. V. M.

By this is to be understood that in honour of the glorious Virgin both great and small are to gather in harmony to show her honour and reverence, according to 1 Paralipomenon 15:28: *All Israel brought the ark of the covenant of the Lord with joyful shouting.* There is no doubt that the Israelites, seeing God, namely, an Angel, gave honour with complete harmony of wills. And we, as Israelites, should honour her in our own way, otherwise, since she loves everyone, when we hate some part of our obedience cannot please her. This is indicated in the words: they *brought her into Jerusalem*, which means a vision of peace; so Ecclesiasticus 24:15 says: *And so was I established in Sion, and in the holy city likewise I rested, and my power was in Jerusalem.*

Secondly, a humble obedience

Secondly, she should be honoured with a humble obedience; a figure of this is seen in 2 Kings 6:14-15: *David was girded with a linen ephod. And David and all the house of Israel brought the ark of the covenant of the Lord with joyful shouting, and with sound of trumpet.* David, who honoured the ark humbly, represents Christ who humbly honours the glorious Virgin Mother. Others, from the example of the king, were willingly humbled to honour the ark. Therefore, from the example of the true David, that is, Christ, who humbled himself to show honour to this ark by being subject to his Mother [Luke 2:51] Christians should be humbled and honour her because, since she is a teacher of humility, the more a person is humbled under her, the more does the person honour her. The text of 2 Kings 6:16 adds:

When the ark of the Lord was come into the city of David, Michol the daughter of Saul, looking out through a window, saw king David leaping and dancing before the Lord, and she despised him in her heart.

Michol means all water, and represents earthly wisdom that despises Christian humility; but a true Christian replies: *I will both play and make myself meaner* etc. [2 Kings 6:22].

Thirdly, an obedience of many

Thirdly, she is to be honoured by obedience from many. A figure of this is seen in 2 Kings 6:12: *David went and brought away the ark of God out of the house of Obbedom, and there were with David seven choirs*. By these seven choirs that came together to celebrate a solemnity for the ark, a gathering of all the faithful is represented, and this gathering should be arranged, not confused, but ordered for singing divine praises. Because divine praises should be sung with all one's energy, there is added that David played an instrument and *danced with all his might before the Lord*. David did this because he noted the example of the striking of Oza who took hold of the ark without reverence, and so was struck. It is said there: *Oza put forth his hand to the ark of God, and the Lord struck him for his rashness*. Whoever thinks anything unseemly of her, *puts forth his hand to the ark* without reverence.

Fourthly, an untiring obedience

Fourthly, she is to be honoured with an untiring honour. For this reason it is stated in 1 Kings 3:3 that *Samuel slept in the temple of the Lord where the ark of God was*; he was continuously concerned with service to the ark, observing the text of the Gospel, that *he who shall persevere to the end shall be saved* [Matthew 24:13]. Josue 4:10 says that *the priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, stood in the midst of the Jordan till all things were accomplished*, which will happen when glory is reached, to which etc.

SERMON 6

Job 3:9: *Let the stars be darkened with the mist thereof, let it expect light and not see it, nor the rising of the dawning of the day.*

Triple difference in births

This text touches on a triple difference in the births of holy people by referring to stars, light and the dawn, and it refers to a triple birth. For all the Saints, conceived and born by the common law of nature, are conceived and born with original sin. Therefore, it says of them: *Let the stars be darkened with the mist thereof*; but Christ had original sin neither in conception nor in birth and so it adds: *let it expect light* etc. The blessed Virgin, although conceived in original sin, was born without original sin, for which reason there is added: *nor the rising*.

Four kinds of stars

It is to be noted that in Scripture one finds four stars: there is a star given as a reward, one proclaiming Christ, one leading to him, and one adorning the firmament.

The first star

The star given as a reward is Christ; Apocalypse 22:16: *I am the root*, by my divinity; *and stock*, by my humanity of David; *the bright star*, that is, by my way of life; *and morning star*, in the resurrection. This star is given as a reward; Apocalypse 2:26 and 28: *And he that shall overcome and keep my words unto the end, I will give him the morning star*.

The second star

The second star is the Mother of Christ; Numbers 24:17: *A star shall rise out of Jacob*. This star brought forth the sun and so we

sing: 'The star of the sea, Mary, brought to its rising the sun of justice, the supreme Christ who was to suffer'.³²

The third star

The third star is grace; Matthew 2:2: *We have seen his star in the East*, namely, when the light of grace arose for the sin of blindness; Wisdom 2:1: *their own malice blinded them*.

The fourth star

The fourth is any good faithful person who adorns the firmament, that is, the Church which is firm because *the gates of hell shall not prevail against it* [Matthew 16:18]; Ecclesiasticus 43:10: *The glory of the stars is the beauty of heaven*. The Church is here called *heaven* in which the elect are concealed.

The just as stars

The just are called stars because they are incorruptible in nature, sublime in their location, regular in their course and useful for giving light.

First quality

Firstly, they cannot be corrupted by the corruption of sin; Ecclesiasticus 24:6: *I made that in the heavens there should rise light that never fails*; Wisdom 6:19-20: *The keeping of her laws is the firm foundation of incorruption, and incorruption brings near to God*; Job 11:17: *When you think yourself consumed, you shall rise as the day star*.

Second quality

Secondly, they are sublime in location by their way of life; Ecclesiasticus 43:10: *The Lord enlightens the world on high*; the Apostle in Philippians 3:20 says: *Our community is in heaven*.

³² See Mone, *Hymni Latini medii aevi*, hymnus 555, stropha secunda, where we read: 'You bring into the world the Sun of justice clothed in flesh'.

Third quality

Thirdly, they are regular in following a set order; Judges 5:20: *The stars remaining in their order and courses fought against Sisera.* Each of us has professed in baptism an order in which we should run; the Apostle in 1 Corinthians 9:24 says: *All indeed run, but one, united by love, receives the prize.*

Fourth quality

Fourthly, they are useful for illumination by good example: *God made two great lights and the stars, and he set them in the firmament of heaven to shine at night* [Genesis 1:16-18]; the Apostle in Philippians 2:15-16 says: *Among whom you shine as lights in the world holding forth the word of life.*

Four opposing stars

Against these are reprobate stars, namely, damaged, fallen, wandering, and darkened stars. These four are opposed to the above mentioned qualities of the good stars; while the good stars are incorruptible, these are damaged; the good sublime, the others fallen; the good regular in movement, the others wandering; the good enlightening, the other darkened.

The damaged stars represent hypocrites; Apocalypse 8:12: *The third part of the stars was smitten.* Hypocrites are stars in appearance only because, as Bernard³³ comments on the text: *He was a shining light* [John 5:35]: 'On its own to be a light is vain, to shine only is little; but to be a light and to shine is perfect'. These are damaged in this life by a sting of conscience, and in the future by the punishment of hell.

Fallen stars represent the avaricious who fall into a desire for earthly goods; Apocalypse 6:13: *The stars from heaven fell upon the earth.*

Wandering stars represent those who err in faith; Jude 13: *Wandering stars to whom the storm of darkness is reserved for ever;* Psalm 106:40: *He caused them to wander where there was no*

³³ Sermon, *In Nativitate Ioannis Baptistae*, n. 3.

passing, and out of the way; the Apostle in Hebrews 11:6 says: *Without faith it is impossible to please God.*

Darkened stars represent people who are obstinate in sinning; Ezechiel 32:7: *I will make the stars thereof dark.*

Therefore, the stars represent both good and bad of whom it is said: *Let the stars be darkened* by the fourfold evil that, according to Bede,³⁴ was inflicted on people by original sin, namely, ignorance in understanding, malice in affection, weakness in effectiveness, concupiscence blowing over everything. These are what Job 3:5 touched on before: *let darkness over it*, namely, ignorance; *and the shadow of death*, that is, malice; *let a mist overspread it*, namely, concupiscence; *and let it be wrapped in bitterness*, namely, weakness.

Waiting for Christ

Afterwards there is added: *Let it expect light* [Job 3:9], that is, Christ, as said above; of this Isaias 42:6 says: *I have given you for a covenant of the people*, concerning the Jews, and *for a light of the Gentiles*, for the pagans; John 12:46 and 3:19: *I have come a light into the world; and men loved darkness rather than the light.* As to why this should be, Augustine³⁵ declares: 'Light is hurtful to sick eyes, while it is pleasant to the pure'. This light accuses the evildoers in this present life and will declare them in the future; it directs the good and will reward them in the future.

Therefore, it accuses the evildoers; John 3:20 says: *Everyone who does evil hates the light, and comes not to the light, that his works may not be reproved*; Psalm 49:21: *I will reprove you and set before your face.* Whoever sins without fear carries the sins on his or her back, because a danger that lies behind is not noticed; but it is *set before the face*, when one is proven guilty of sin in one's conscience; Jeremias 2:19: *Thy own wickedness shall reprove you*, and this is done by the grace of light; Psalm 17:29 says: *For you light my lamp, O Lord, O my God, enlighten my darkness.* It will be clear in the future; the Apostle in Ephesians 5:13 says: *All things that are*

³⁴ *Expositio in Lucam.* 10:30ff.

³⁵ Sermo 88 (alias 18 de Verbis Domini) c. 6, n. 6.

reproved, are made manifest by the light; also in 1 Corinthians 4:5 he says: *The lord will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts.*

However, it directs the good in the present life; John 12:35: *Walk while you have the light that the darkness overtake you not*; also in 8:12 he says: *He that follows me walks not in darkness.* But he will reward them in the future; Ecclesiastes 11:7: *The light is sweet and it is delightful for the eyes to see the sun.*³⁶

Triple rising of the star, Mary

The text adds: nor the rising etc. The blessed Virgin is said to have risen like a star; Numbers 24:17: *A star shall rise out of Jacob*, namely, to correct those who are wandering and so she is called Star of the sea.

As light; Esther 8:16: *To the Jews a new light seemed to rise*, so as to direct those doing good; John 3:21: *He that does truth comes to the light.*

As stated in the text, like dawn, so as to restore the sick. She is said not only to rise but also to lift up and move forward, firstly, from original sin; secondly, in good works.

About the first as in the text, and about the second note Canticle 6:9: *Who is she who comes forth as the morning rising?* Also, she is said to ascend in her assumption; Genesis 32:26: *Let me go for it is break of day.*

She is also the dawn by special privileges, by the benefits she gives to people through her heavenly rewards.

Triple privilege

She has a triple privilege, namely, of a special condition, birth and conception.

Special condition

Her nature was made in a special way by God; Psalm 73:16: *You have made the morning light and the sun*, that is, the Virgin and her

³⁶ See Bonaventure, Collatio 1, In Ioannem, n. 2, where a similar division is found.

Child. The morning light is mentioned before the sun, even though the dawn is created by the sun, the Virgin in time preceded her Child even though she was created by him; Psalm 86:5 says: *A man is born in her and the Highest himself has founded her*; Ecclesiasticus 24:12: *He that made me, rested in my tabernacle*. Colours are not apparent before dawn; so before the Virgin neither graces nor virtues were apparent but it was said: *O Lord, your mercy is in heaven* [Psalm 35:6].

Special birth

She was born in a special way without original sin; hence she is also called a rod; Isaias 11:1: *And there shall come forth a rod from the root of Jesse* etc.; a rod clings to a root but does not turn back to the root; so the Virgin by the common law binding in her conception clung to the root of human nature, but once sanctified did not afterwards turn back.

Special conception

In a special way she conceived her Son; 2 Kings 23:4: *As the light of the morning, when the sun rises, shines in the morning without clouds, and as the grass springs out of the earth by rain*, so did the Virgin *shine without clouds* when she shone in her way of life without a cover of clouds. However, this Virgin, *the earth*, receiving and holding all that falls, *springs forth grass*, that is, her Son, *by rain*, that is by an abundance of graces.

Secondly, by a double benefit

The Virgin distributes benefits in two ways, namely, for avoiding evil and for pursuing good.

To avoid evil from three points of view

For avoiding evil from three points of view: against the evil of sin by distributing forgiveness; against the evil of struggle by helping; against the evil of punishment by consolation.

First point

On the first 2 Kings 23:4 says: *As the light of the morning* etc. This text, interpreted above of the nativity of Christ from the Virgin,

can be interpreted of his spiritual birth in the soul of the faithful. For, by the intercession of the dawn, that is, Mary, the Sun of justice rises in the heart of a sinner that, once made fertile by the rain of grace, brings forth the grass of good works.

Second point

Secondly, Job 24:16-17 says: *He digs through houses in the dark, and if the morning suddenly appear it is to them the shadow of death.* For while the devils scheme by temptation in the house of a faithful soul, as soon as the dawn approaches, that is, help from the Virgin, they flee; hence Canticle 6:9 says: *Terrible as an army set in array.*

Third point

On the third, Genesis 32:26 and 28 says: *Let me go, for it is break of day;* and it adds: *If you have been strong against Go;* here Jacob, fearful of the trouble to come from his brother, is consoled.

To pursue good from three points of view:

First point

The blessed Virgin also gives benefits for pursuing good, because she is a light for those who work well, 'whose glorious life enlightens all the churches'.³⁷ Nehemias 4:21 said that one half of those working *did the work, and one half of us hold our spears from the rising of the morning till the stars appear.* *One half*, that is, those in the Church militant, should defend their work against the demons *from the rising of the morning*, from the light of the glorious and shining Virgin, *until the stars*, that is, souls go out from the body.

Second point of view

Further, because she is a protection for those praying; Genesis 32:26 and 29: *Let me go for it is break of day.* Jacob is heard and blessed in the morning, because those who devoutly invoke the Virgin with their vows are not frustrated; Osee 12:4 states how Jacob

³⁷ Breviarium Romanum, Antiphona 2 ad Laudes in festo Nativitatis B. V. M.

prayed: *He wept and made supplication to him*; tears of devotion and an intention of praying are the shields by which the spiritual Jacob struggles with the Lord.

Third point of view

Further, because she is a mirror to contemplatives; Canticle 6:9: *Who is she that comes forth as the morning rising, fair as the moon* etc. Therefore, she is a dawn by her privileges and benefits.

The rewards of the Virgin

Also, she is a dawn by her heavenly rewards; Job 38:12: *Did you since your birth command the morning?* After rising, Christ commanded the dawn, that is, of grace; and the text goes on: and showed the dawning of the day its place, that is, the throne of glory to the blessed Virgin.

SERMON 7

Genesis 2:6: *But a spring rose out of the earth, watering all the surface of the earth.*³⁸

In this text, the birth of the Virgin Mary is praised under the metaphor of a spring rising and watering, and it describes not only her beginning, but also her rising up or progress and her fruit. Her rising up is touched on when it says: *a spring rose* etc.; her beginning when it adds: *out of the earth*; her fruit when it says: *watering* etc., so that we would understand that the Virgin was a holy Virgin not only in her rising, but also in her progress in holiness and in dispersing holiness.

Part I: Triple rising of the spring

The rising of a spring is usually secret, deep and savoury. The water of a spring comes out of the sea, is held in the depths of the earth by which it is sweetened and refined. In this way the rising of the Virgin was secret by the gift of continence; Canticle 4:12: *My sister, my spouse is a garden enclosed.*

She was deep by the gift of reverence; John 4:6 and 11: *Jesus being wearied with his journey, sat on the well*, and later there is added: *the well is high*, that is, deep.

She was savoury by the gift of wisdom; 4 Kings 2:21: Eliseus, a prefiguring, *went out to the spring of the waters and cast the salt into it* etc.

Part II: Triple rising of the spring

The rising of a spring is usually fast, continuous and spread out; so the rising or progress of the Virgin was fast due to her strong fervour; Canticle 4:15: *The fountain of gardens, the well of living waters, which run with a strong stream from Lebanon.*

³⁸ The Seraphic Doctor in many places applies this text in a mystical sense to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

She was continuous from her strong vigour; Isaias 58:11: *You shall be like a watered garden, and like a fountain of water whose waters shall not fail.*

She was spread out from her great love; Esther 10:6: *The little fountain that grew into a river.*

Part III: Fruit useful for three things

The fruit or effect of a spring is usually effective in three ways, namely, for washing, for drinking, and for promoting growth in plants; hence, it is purifying, drinkable, and preservative. In this way the Virgin Mary is a purifying spring obtaining forgiveness for us; Zacharias 13:1: *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.*

She is a fountain of drinkable water as she asks for grace; as a figure of this, Moses said in Numbers 20:6: *O Lord God, hear the cry of this people, and open to them your treasure, a fountain of living water.*

She is a preserving spring leading to glory; John 4:13-14:

Whosoever 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;

Psalm 35:10: *With you is the fountain of life, which may he give to us etc.*