

## *Mary, Mother of God and of the Church*

### **Q. 302. Why does Mary, after Christ, have the highest place in the Church?**

Mary has the highest place in the Church after Christ because: (1) she is the Ever-virgin Mother of Jesus Christ our Lord and God; and (2) she is our spiritual mother.

*1. Mary has the highest place in the Church after Christ because she is the Ever-virgin Mother of Jesus Christ our Lord and God.*

The source of Mary's motherhood is the generous consent which she gave to the Archangel Gabriel at the Annunciation, who had come to invite her to become the Mother of God, the Mother of God the Son. In God's plan, the salvation of the world was made dependent on Mary's decision at that moment. Our Lady not only consented, but also willed, with a clear understanding of the meaning of the mission, that which was being confided to her.

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*2. Mary has the highest place in the Church after Christ because she is our spiritual mother.*

The origin and foundation of the spiritual motherhood of the Blessed Virgin Mary is intimately associated with the Incarnation, because at the Incarnation, Mary

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*For commentaries on each question with Cardinal Arinze, Sr. John Vianney and Fr. Straub (in Spanish), see Appendix E.*

gave Jesus to mankind. On Calvary, Our Lord gave us His Mother, and He assigned to her a place near to Him, yet still of a secondary order, subordinated to Him. But this place, in relation to all mankind, is all-powerful and unique. Jesus Christ, the Head Himself, has appointed her to be the mother of the Whole Christ, that is, of the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church.

***Sacred Scripture***

And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end.”...And Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” *Luke 1:30-33, 38*

When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son!” Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” *John 19:26-27*

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***Catechism of the Catholic Church***

**964** Mary’s role in the Church is inseparable from her union with Christ and flows directly from it. “This union of the mother with the Son in the work of salvation is made manifest from the time of Christ’s virginal conception up to his death”;<sup>1</sup> it is made manifest above all at the hour of his Passion: “Thus the Blessed Virgin advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and faithfully persevered in her union with her Son unto the cross. There she stood, in keeping with the divine plan, enduring with her only begotten Son the intensity of his suffering, joining herself with his sacrifice in her mother’s heart, and lovingly consenting to the immolation of this victim, born of her: to be given, by the same Christ Jesus dying on the cross, as a mother to his disciple, with these words: ‘Woman, behold your son.’”<sup>2</sup>

**1195** By keeping the memorials of the saints — first of all the holy Mother of God, then the apostles, the martyrs, and other saints — on fixed days of the liturgical year, the Church on earth shows that she is united with the liturgy of heaven. She gives glory to Christ for having accomplished his salvation in his glorified members; their example encourages her on her way to the Father.

***Splendor of Truth***

Mary is also the Mother of Mercy because it is to her that Jesus entrusts his Church and all humanity. At the foot of the Cross, when she accepts John as her son, when she asks, together with Christ, forgiveness from the Father for those who do not know what they do (cf. Lk 23:34), Mary experiences, in perfect docility to the Spirit, the richness and the universality of God's love, which opens her heart and enables it to embrace the entire human race. Thus Mary becomes Mother of each and every one of us, the Mother who obtains for us divine mercy. (*section 120*)

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***Vatican Council II***

The Virgin Mary, who at the message of the angel received the Word of God in her heart and in her body and gave Life to the world, is acknowledged and honored as being truly the Mother of God and of the redeemer. Redeemed, in a more exalted fashion, by reason of the merits of her Son and united to him by a close and indissoluble tie, she is endowed with the high office and dignity of the Mother of the Son of God, and therefore she is also the beloved daughter of the Father and the temple of the Holy Spirit. Because of this gift of sublime grace she far surpasses all creatures, both in heaven and on earth. But, being of the race of Adam, she is at the same time also united to all those who are to be saved; indeed, “she is clearly the mother of the members of Christ... since she has by her charity joined in bringing about the birth of believers in the Church, who are members of its head.” Wherefore she is hailed as pre-eminent and as a wholly unique member of the Church, and as its type and outstanding model in faith and charity. The Catholic Church taught by the Holy Spirit, honors charity. The Catholic Church taught by the Holy Spirit, honors her with the filial affection and devotion as a most beloved mother. *The Church, 53*

Mary has by grace been exalted above all angels and men to a place second only to her Son, as the most holy mother of God who was involved in the mysteries of Christ: she is rightly honored by a special cult in the Church. From the earliest times the Blessed Virgin is honored under the title of Mother of God, whose protection the faithful take refuge together in prayer in all their perils and needs. Accordingly, following the Council of Ephesus, there was a remarkable growth in the cult of the People of God towards Mary, in veneration and love, in invocation and imitation, according to her own prophetic words: “all generations shall call me blessed, because he that is mighty hath done great things to me” (Lk. 1:48).

This cult, as it has always existed in the Church, for all its uniqueness, differs essentially from the cult of adoration, which is offered equally to the Incarnate Word and to the Father and the Holy Spirit, and it is most favorable to it. The various forms of piety towards the Mother of God, which the Church has approved within the limits of sound and orthodox doctrine, according to the dispositions and understanding of the faithful, ensure that while the mother is honored, the Son through whom all things have their being (cf. Col. 1:15-16), and in whom it has pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell (cf. Col. 1:19) is rightly known, loved and glorified and his commandments are observed. *The Church*, 66

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### **Summary Prayer**

*Mary, Mother of God, how great is the honor which was given to you at the Annunciation! Within your humble home in the little town of Nazareth, the Holy Spirit willed to perform a miracle which was the masterpiece of infinite power—the Incarnation of the Son of God.*

*With heavenly homage the angelic messenger greeted you: “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!” (Luke 1:28). In all humility, you attributed this holiness to God Who was working wondrously within you.*

*When the Triune God destined and elevated you, a mortal virgin, to the dignity of the Mother of the Redeemer, the Father had to endow you with a fullness of perfection which would be suitable for such a dignity. The Son, the Eternal Wisdom of God, in choosing you for His Mother, bestowed on you a certain fullness of grace so that when you gave Christ His human nature, Christ, in a certain sense, brought you as close to God as a mere creature can come. The Holy Spirit, Who descended upon you in the Incarnation with all His fullness, conferred upon you such treasures of sanctity as would prepare you to receive the Son of God in your most pure womb.*

*Do not forsake us, Mother of Jesus and our Mother. If we confide our salvation to your loving care and faithfully imitate your virtues, we know you will keep us in your love, both now and at the hour of our death. Amen.*

**Doctrine • Moral • Worship Exercise** (see Appendix B for answer key)

1. After our Lord, Our Lady is given the highest honor in the Church. How can you explain this to others?
2. How do you and your family express your devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary? How can you promote and spread devotion to Our Lady in your neighborhood, school, parish community, and workplace?
3. As a family, pray the Rosary and offer it for world peace and for the preservation of family unity.

### **Q. 303. What are some of the special gifts which God gave to Mary?**

Some of the special gifts which God gave to the Virgin Mary are: (1) she became the Mother of God, (2) she was preserved from all stain of original sin, and (3) she was assumed body and soul into heaven, since she had such a special place in the history of salvation.

*1. One of the special gifts which God gave to the Virgin Mary was that she became the Mother of God.*

The Blessed Virgin Mary is the collaborator with the Divine Word and the Holy Spirit in the mighty work of the Incarnation, and she also collaborates in the essential role in the work of sanctifying souls. Her dignity as the Mother of God and as the Mother of the Church, her role as Mediatrix of All Graces, and her own perfect holiness obtain for her a place of singular importance in the sublime work of imitating Christ.

*2. Another of the special gifts which God gave to the Virgin Mary was that she was preserved from all stain of original sin.*

In view of the merits of her Divine Son, Mary enjoyed the privilege of being preserved from all stain of original sin. From the moment of her Immaculate Conception, God willed that she should crush the head of the serpent, having decided from all eternity to make her the Mother of the Incarnate Word. The Blessed Virgin Mary was never, even for an instant, subject to the evil spirit. She remained in the state of sanctifying grace forever.

*3. Yet another of the special gifts which God gave to the Virgin Mary was that she was assumed body and soul into heaven, since she had such a special place in the history of salvation.*

At the end of her life on earth, our Blessed Lady was triumphantly assumed into heaven with her soul and body, and was crowned Queen of Heaven by her Divine

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Son. The dogma of the Assumption—celebrated in one of the most ancient and solemn of Mary’s feasts—was infallibly defined at Rome, on November 1, 1950, by Pope Pius XII.

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### ***Sacred Scripture***

And he (the angel Gabriel) came to her and said, “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!” ... And the angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.”  
*Luke 1:28, 35*

### ***Catechism of the Catholic Church***

**490** To become the mother of the Savior, Mary “was enriched by God with gifts appropriate to such a role.”<sup>71</sup> The angel Gabriel at the moment of the annunciation salutes her as “full of grace.”<sup>72</sup> In fact, in order for Mary to be able to give the free assent of her faith to the announcement of her vocation, it was necessary that she be wholly borne by God’s grace.

### ***Splendor of Truth***

Mary shares our human condition, but in complete openness to the grace of God. Not having known sin, she is able to have compassion on every kind of weakness. She understands sinful man and loves him with a Mother’s love. Precisely for this reason she is on the side of truth and shares the Church’s burden in recalling always and to everyone the demands of morality. Nor does she permit sinful man to be deceived by those who claim to love him by justifying his sin, for she knows that the sacrifice of Christ her Son would thus be emptied of its power. No absolution offered by beguiling doctrines, even in the areas of philosophy and theology, can make man truly happy: only the Cross and the glory of the Risen Christ can grant peace to his conscience and salvation to his life. (*section 120*)

### ***Vatican Council II***

The Immaculate Virgin preserved free from all stain of original sin, was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, when her earthly life was over, and exalted by the Lord as Queen over

all things, that she might be the more fully conformed to her Son, the Lord of lords, (cf. Apoc. 19:16) and conqueror of sin and death. *The Church*, 59

Mary's function as mother of men in no way obscures or diminishes this unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power. But the Blessed Virgin's salutary influence on men originates not in any inner necessity but in the disposition of God. It flows forth from the superabundance of the merits of Christ, rests on his mediation, depends entirely on it and draws all its power from it. It does not hinder in any way the immediate union of the faithful with Christ but on the contrary fosters it. *The Church*, 60

This motherhood of Mary in the order of grace continues uninterruptedly from the consent which she loyally gave at the Annunciation and which she sustained without wavering beneath the cross, until the eternal fulfillment of all the elect. Taken up to heaven she did not lay aside this saving office but by her manifold intercession continues to bring us gifts of eternal salvation. By her maternal charity, she cares for the brethren of her Son, who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and difficulties, until they are led into their blessed home. Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked in the Church under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix. *The Church*, 62

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### **Q. 304. What is the wish of the Catholic Church concerning devotion to Mary?**

The Catholic Church encourages that special veneration be given to Mary. This honor is due to her as Mother of Christ, as Mother of the Church, and as our spiritual Mother. This veneration is to be shown to others by word and example.

Pope Paul VI solemnly brought the third session of Vatican Council II to a close on November 21, 1964, in the presence of the entire body of the Church's bishops, with the following words: "For the glory of the Virgin Mary and for our own con-

*For commentaries on each question with Cardinal Arinze, Sr: John Vianney and Fr: Straub (in Spanish), see Appendix E.*

solation, we proclaim Mary the Mother of the Church, that is, of the whole People of God, of the faithful as well as of the pastors, and we wish that through this title the Mother of God should be still more honored and invoked by the entire Christian people.”

Pope John Paul II, in his homily in Washington, D.C., on October 6, 1979, said to the American people and to the world:

“Mary is not only the Mother of God, she is the Mother of the Church as well. In every stage of the march through history, the Church has benefited from the prayer and protection of the Virgin Mary. Holy Scripture and the experience of the faithful see the Mother of God as the one who, in a very special way, is united with the Church at the most difficult moments in its history, when attacks on the Church become most threatening. Precisely in periods when Christ, and therefore His Church, provokes premeditated contradiction, Mary appears particularly close to the Church, because for her the Church is always her beloved Christ.

“I, therefore, exhort you in Christ Jesus, to continue to look to Mary as the model of the Church, as the best example of the discipleship of Christ.

“Learn from her to be always faithful, to trust that God's word to you will be fulfilled, and that nothing is impossible with God.

“Turn to Mary frequently in your prayers ‘for never was it known that anyone who fled to her protection, implored her help or sought her intercession was left unaided.’

“As a great sign that has appeared in the heavens, Mary guides and sustains us on our pilgrim way, urging us on to ‘the victory that overcomes the world, our faith’ (cf. Revelation 12:1; 1 John 5:4).”



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**Sacred Scripture**

And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God”... And Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word”... When Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb”... And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.” *Luke 1:30, 38, 41-42, 46-49*

There was a marriage at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; Jesus also was invited to the marriage, with the disciples. When the wine failed, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine,” and Jesus said to her, “O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” *John 2:1-5*

And a great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars... Then the dragon was angry with the woman, and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus. *Revelation 12:1, 17*

**Catechism of the Catholic Church**

**971** “*All generations will call me blessed*”: “The Church’s devotion to the Blessed Virgin is intrinsic to Christian worship.”<sup>1</sup> The Church rightly honors “the Blessed Virgin with special devotion. From the most ancient times the Blessed Virgin has been honored with the title of ‘Mother of God,’ to whose protection the faithful fly in all their dangers and needs.... This very special devotion...differs essentially from the adoration which is given to the incarnate Word and equally to the Father and the Holy Spirit, and greatly fosters this adoration.”<sup>2</sup> The liturgical feasts dedicated to the Mother of God and Marian prayer, such as the rosary, an “epitome of the whole Gospel,” express this devotion to the Virgin Mary.<sup>3</sup>

**Splendor of Truth**

Let us entrust ourselves, the sufferings and joys of our life, the moral life of believers and people of good will, and the research of moralists, to Mary, Mother of God and Mother of Mercy.

Mary is the Mother of Mercy because her Son, Jesus Christ, was sent by the Father as the revelation of God’s mercy (cf. Jn 3:16-18). Christ came not to condemn but to forgive, to show mercy (cf. Mt 9:13). (*section 118*)

Mary is the radiant sign and inviting model of the moral life... Mary lived and exercised her freedom precisely by giving herself to God and accepting God’s gift within herself. Until the time of his birth, she sheltered in her womb the Son of God who became man; she raised him and enabled him to grow, and she accompanied him in that supreme act of freedom which is the complete sacrifice of his own life. By the gift of herself, Mary entered fully into the plan of God who gives himself to the world. By accepting and pondering in her heart events which she did not always understand (cf. Lk 2:19), she became the model of all those who hear the word of God and keep it (cf. Lk 11:28), and merited the title of “Seat of Wisdom.” This Wisdom is Jesus Christ himself, the Eternal Word of God, who perfectly reveals and accomplishes the will of the Father (cf. Heb 10:5-10). Mary invites everyone to accept this Wisdom. To us too she addresses the command she gave to the servants at Cana in Galilee during the marriage feast: “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:5). (*section 120*)

**Vatican Council II**

And now, assumed into heaven, “her motherly love keeps her attentive to her Son’s brothers, still on pilgrimage amid the dangers and difficulties of life, until they arrive at the happiness of the fatherland.” Everyone should have a genuine devotion to her and entrust his life to her motherly care. *Lay People, 4*

In celebrating this annual cycle of the mysteries of Christ, Holy Church honors the Blessed Mary, Mother of God, with a special love. She is inseparably linked with her son's saving work. In her the Church admires and exalts the most excellent fruit of redemption, and joyfully contemplates, as in a faultless image, that which she herself desires and hopes wholly to be. *Sacred Liturgy, 103*

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***Doctrine • Moral • Worship Exercise*** (see Appendix B for answer key)

1. The Blessed Virgin Mary received from God some special gifts and privileges which obtained for her a special place in the history of salvation. What are some of these gifts and privileges?
2. Think of some of Our Lady's virtues. In your daily life, how can you and your family imitate her perfect example of following Christ? Draw up a plan to imitate her virtues in a systematic way. For example, one month you could focus on her humility, another month on her love and concern for others, and so on.
3. Memorize and reflect on several important Scriptures pertaining to Mary. In prayer, thank God for the great gift of His Blessed Mother. Entrust yourself and your family to her maternal care, especially by praying the Rosary daily and meditating on its profound mysteries.

**Chapter Summary Prayer**

*Most Holy and Immaculate Virgin Mary, our loving Mother, the powerful Help of Christians, and Mother of the Church, we dedicate ourselves entirely to your love and to your devoted service. We consecrate to you our minds with their thoughts, our hearts with their affections, our bodies with their senses and all their powers, and we promise always to work for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls.*

*Most glorious Virgin, since you have always been the Help of Christians and Mother of the Church, pray for us and continue to show yourself as a Mother to us, especially in these times. Humble the enemies of our religion and make their wicked designs ineffective. Bless and protect our Holy Father, the Pope. Enlighten and strengthen the bishops and priests and keep them always united and obedient to the Pope, our infallible teacher. Preserve incautious youth from godlessness and vice. Promote holy vocations and increase the number of priests so that, through them, the reign of Jesus Christ may be preserved among us and may extend throughout the earth.*

*We beg you, dearest Mother, look with eyes of pity upon youth who are exposed to so many dangers, and upon poor sinners and the dying.*

*Great Mother of God, Mother of the Church, we also pray for ourselves. Teach us to reproduce in ourselves your virtues, particularly your faith, hope, love and humility, so that in our behavior, by our words and example, though we live in the midst of the world, we may imitate as far as possible your divine Son, Jesus, and may make you known and loved. Grant that the remembrance of your love for your children may so strengthen us as to make us victorious over the enemies of our souls in life and death, so that we may be united with you forever in heaven. Amen.*

**Family Wisdom Library: Chapter 84**

*See Appendix A for more references.*

**Q. 302. Why does Mary, after Christ, have the highest place in the Church?**

*Gospel of Life, John Paul II, sect. 103;*

*Lumen Gentium (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), Vatican II, sect. 52-67;*

*Mother of the Redeemer, John Paul II, sect. 20-24, 42;*

*On the Dignity and Vocation of Women, John Paul II, sect. 3-4, 27, 29;*

*On the Hundredth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum, John Paul II, sect. 49;*

*On Social Concern, John Paul II, sect. 49;*

*Redeemer of Man, John Paul II, sect. 22.*

**Q. 303. What are some of the special gifts which God gave to Mary?**

*Gospel of Life, John Paul II, sect. 103;*

*Lumen Gentium (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), Vatican II, sect. 53, 56, 58, 63, 65;*

*Mother of the Redeemer, John Paul II, sect. 10, 20-25, 38-41;*

*On the Dignity and Vocation of Women, John Paul II, sect. 3-4, 27;*

*Redeemer of Man, John Paul II, sect. 22;*

*Rich in Mercy, John Paul II, sect. 9.*

**Q. 304. What is the wish of the Catholic Church concerning devotion to Mary?**

*Lumen Gentium (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), Vatican II, sect. 54, 66, 67;*

*Mother of the Redeemer, John Paul II, sect. 22;*

*Redeemer of Man, John Paul II, sect. 22.*



## Thought Provokers

*Please see Appendix C for the answers.*

- Q. 302: Is it true that very little was taught about the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Second Vatican Council?
- Q. 303: Exactly what does Mary's most ancient title, Mother of God, mean?
- Q. 304: Is it true that the Catholic Church teaches that because Mary is the Mother of God, she should be worshiped as God?