

SECTION FOUR
**THE MARIAN DIMENSION
OF SALESIAN SPIRITUALITY**

Presentation

Don Bosco, a tireless apostle of Marian devotion, emphasised the role of the Blessed Virgin for salvation of the individual in the Companion of Youth: she is the mediatrix of graces, defence against the assaults of evil, support in living a Christian life and on the way to holiness. These are things he draws from St Alphonsus Liguori: true devotion expressed through a life of virtue above all guarantees the most powerful patronage one could have in life and in death.

*The issues are taken up in the booklet *The Month of May (1858)*¹¹⁰, where the saint frames popular and youthful Marian devotion explicitly within a context aimed at serious and fervent ethical and spiritual commitment, linking Marian devotion and eternal salvation to this.*

*Ten years later (1868), at the opening of the church of *Mary Help of Christians* he drew up a work called *The Marvels of the Mother of God Invoked Under the Title of Help of Christians*¹¹¹. Particularly evident in this is how he frames Marian devotion within an ecclesial perspective, since Don Bosco's view of things is opening up to this more and more. It is this that guides his missionary and education concerns. Via a number of meditations on the Gospels, the saint also develops other aspects of the spiritual life: Mary is a model of union with God, service of neighbour, practical attention to our brothers' needs, and her universal motherhood.*

*After the sanctuary at Valdocco was consecrated, Don Bosco became a tireless apostle of devotion to the *Help of Christians*: help of the Church in battles throughout history, inspiration and powerful support of Salesian work, maternal and beneficial presence in the lives of those who trust in her.*

¹¹⁰ Giovanni BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio consacrato a Maria SS. Immacolata ad uso del popolo*. Torino, Tip. Paravia e Compagnia 1858 (OE X, 295-486).

¹¹¹ Giovanni BOSCO, *Maraviglie della madre di Dio invocata sotto il titolo di Maria Ausiliatrice*. Torino, Tip. Dell'Oratorio di S. Franc. di Sales 1868 (OE XX, 192-376).

The Association of Devotees of Mary Help of Christians (founded in 1869 and today known as ADMA or the Mary Help of Christians Association), aimed at “promoting devotion to the Mother of God and veneration of the august Sacrament of the Eucharist”¹¹², certainly responds to the religious sensitivity of the time, but it expresses in an excellent way Don Bosco’s efforts to encourage trusting Mary and encourages everyone to imitate her “beautiful virtues”.

Given the worldwide spread of Salesian work the cult of the Help of Christians was propagated everywhere, inseparable from Don Bosco and his mission.

This section, which is a simple selection from a vast amount of material, includes seven meditations (nos. 286-291 and 293), some prayers for ADMA (no. 292) and a “goodnight” to the boys on the efficacy of turning to the Help of Christians (no. 294).

286. Reasons for being devoted to Mary

Critical ed. in G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio...*, pp. 12-18 (OE X, 306-312).

Come with me, O Christian, and consider the countless reasons we all have to be devoted to Mary. I will begin by indicating the three principal ones and they are as follows: Mary is the holiest of all creatures, Mary is the Mother of God, Mary is our mother.

1. Throughout the Old Testament Mary is called beautiful and without stain. She is compared to the resplendent sun, to the moon in the fullness of its light, to the brightest stars, to a garden full of the most delightful flowers, to a sealed fountain from which fresh waters flow, to a humble dove, to the purest lily. In the Gospel the Angel Gabriel calls her “*full of grace*”, “*Ave, gratia plena*”: full of grace, or created and formed in grace, meaning that Mary from the first moment of her existence was without original and actual sin and remained that way until her final breath. Full of grace and therefore with not even the least defect in her purest heart. There was no virtue that was not

¹¹² Cf. doc. no. 41: *Request to Pius IX for indulgences, promoting the setting up of the Association of Devotees of Mary Help of Christians.*

practised to the most sublime degree by Mary. The Catholic Church expresses this holiness of Mary by defining that she was always free from sin and invites us to call on her with the following precious words: “*Regina sine labe originali concepta, ora pro nobis*”; “Queen conceived without original sin, pray for us who have recourse to you.”

2. Mary was free from every stain of original and actual sin. She was adorned with every virtue we can possibly imagine. God had filled her with grace more than any other creature—all these prerogatives meant she was chosen from amongst all women to be raised to the dignity of Mother of God. This is the announcement the Angel made and St Elizabeth repeated it when the Blessed Virgin visited her. This is the greeting faithful Christians offer every day when they say: “Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us.” Human intellect pales before the glorious name of Mother of God, therefore we bow our heads in deep veneration and limit ourselves to saying that no creature has been raised to a more sublime dignity, no creature could achieve that degree of glory, and as a consequence no creature can be as powerful with God as Mary can.

3. But if the title Mother of God is a glorious one for Mary, it is a very consoling and useful one for those who call themselves her children. Since she was mother of Jesus, true God and true Man, she became our mother. Jesus Christ in his great mercy wanted to call us his brothers and by this name he made us adopted sons of Mary. The Gospel confirms what we are saying. The Divine Saviour was on the Cross and suffered pains and terrible agony. His holy mother and the apostle St John were standing at the foot of the cross in deep distress. When Jesus opened his eyes, perhaps for the last time he opened them in his mortal life, he saw his beloved disciple and his dear mother. He opened his dying lips: “Woman,” he said to Mary, “[in John] behold your son.” Then he said to John: “Behold [Mary] your mother.” “*Mulier, ecce filius tuus; ecce mater tua.*” [Jn 19:26-27]. The Fathers unanimously recognise the Divine Saviour’s will in this event, that before leaving the world he wanted to give us Mary as our loving mother and so we are all her sons. Mary is also our mother because she regenerates us through Jesus Christ in grace. Therefore since Eve is called mother of the living, so Mary is mother of all the faithful by

grace (Riccardo da San Lorenzo). St William the Abbott had this to say about it: “Mary is mother of the head, so is also mother of the members and we are the members”, “*Nos sumus membra Christi.*” By giving birth to Jesus Mary also regenerated us spiritually. Therefore Mary is rightly called mother by everyone and as such deserves honour (William the Abbott, *Cant.* 4).

Here then, O Christian, is the one I am proposing for your veneration during this month. She is the holiest of all creatures, Mother of God, our mother, powerful and merciful mother who ardently wants to fill us with heavenly favours. She says, “I live in the highest heavens to fill those who are devoted to me with grace and blessings”, “*ut ditem diligentes me,*” etc. “*thesauros eorum repleam.*” [Prov 8,21].

So courage then you who are devoted to Mary. See that you celebrate our mother, the mother of Jesus. When we celebrate our temporal mother’s feast day we enjoy bringing relatives and friends together and offer her a bouquet of flowers with them along with expressions of affection. The month of May is our true mother’s feast day, our heavenly protector’s feast day. So let us do it joyfully. The most beautiful bouquet we can offer is one made of the virtues she gave us such outstanding example of. Let us resolve today to pray morning and evening with all the affections of our heart to the one whom we like to call our mother. Let us pray that she intercedes for us for some special grace from her son Jesus. Let us pray for the grace we know we have greatest need of.

Example - To encourage us to fervently solemnise the month of May in honour of Mary we could look at the example of the Oriental army when it got to Constantinople. Far from home, without churches and even sacred ministers, those christian soldiers carried from their homes their devotion to and confidence in Mary. Here is a report from a magazine published on June 7, 1855: “The month of May was celebrated in some hospitals with pious and regular solemnity which is an honour to the Oriental army. There is no doubt that heaven’s blessings rained down upon many souls touched by the grace poured out on the entire army and they will be crowned by victory in the war. Before those places came into our power they were mosques, that is churches dedicated to Mahommet. This year the praises of the Queen of Heaven have

begun to resound in them. An altar was erected to Mary and was decorated with a taste that shows how each regiment has its artists. You can see columns there as if sculptured by magic. Marble artefacts in the likeness of the finest marble. Paper and coloured decorations are the work of people convalescing who devote their time to things that serve to enhance the decorum of devotion to the Blessed Virgin. Each house organised its own choir. All the musicians and the best of the harmonic society were vying to take part. Some composed hymns which everyone is happily singing in honour of Mary. In the evening when the hymn singing and the Litany of Our Lady was over the chaplain or other one sent offered an appropriate instruction for the day, keenly listened to by the huge number of devotees that had gathered. The room was often not large enough to hold them all. Even the wounded were brought there half an hour earlier so they could be sure of a place. For them this is the most wonderful moment in the day.” Here then, O Christian, is how we too can celebrate this month and show Mary a sign of our tender devotion. In the cities, in the countryside, at home, alone or in choirs and in military regiments too, homage and devotion can be rendered to the Queen of Saints.

Brief prayer: Merciful Virgin, / here is my heart // inflame it / with your holy love.

Prayer - Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thy intercession was left unaided. Inspired with this confidence, I fly to thee. O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in thy mercy hear and answer me.

287. Mary our protector in our present life

Critical ed. in G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio...*, pp. 169-175 (OE X, 463-469).

1. In the midst of the world we are as though on a stormy sea, as if in exile, in a vale of tears. Mary is Star of the Sea, our comfort in exile, the light pointing the way to heaven while she dries our tears. Our tender mother does this by obtaining for us constant spiritual and temporal aid. We cannot go to any city or town where there is not a monument to the graces that Mary has

obtained for those who are devoted to her. Leaving aside the many famous sanctuaries of Christendom where testimonies of graces received hang by the thousands from the walls, I would point simply to the Consolata which we are lucky to have here in Turin. Enter those sacred walls, dear reader, with the faith of the good Christian and look at the signs of gratitude shown to Mary for benefits received. In one place you see a sick person given up by the doctors restored to health. In another, the grace received by someone freed from fever; in yet another place someone healed of gangrene. Here is a grace received by someone freed from the hands of assassins through Mary's intercession, while there is another one from someone saved from being crushed under a falling rock, someone else saved from floods or given peace of mind. Then if you look at the small square in front of the sanctuary, you see a monument the city of Turin erected to Mary in 1835 when freed from the deadly cholera which was afflicting nearby towns.

2. The favours indicated are only about temporal needs, so what can we say of the spiritual graces that Mary has obtained and does obtain for her devotees? We would have to write huge volumes to list the spiritual graces that her devotees have received and receive every day by the hand of this great benefactress of the human race. How many virgins owe the preservation of their state to her protection! How many of the afflicted have been comforted! How many passions have been overcome! How many martyrs have been strengthened! How many snares of the devil have been overcome! Saint Bernard, after listing a range of favours Mary obtained for her devotees every day, finishes by saying that everything good that comes from God, comes through Mary: "*Totum nos Deus habere voluit per Mariam.*"

3. Nor is she only the Help of Christians, but also the support of the Universal Church. All the titles we give her recall some favour; all the solemnities celebrated in the Church had their origin in some great miracle, from some extraordinary grace Mary obtained on behalf of the Church. How many confused heretics, how many heresies rooted out, to the point that the Church expresses her gratitude by saying to Mary: "*Tu sola, o gran Vergine, fosti colei, che sradicasti tutte le eresie: Cunctas haereses sola interemisti in universo mundo.*"

Examples - We will refer to some examples that confirm the great favours Mary obtains for her devotees. Let us begin with the *Ave Maria*. The angelic greeting, *Ave Maria* is made up of words said by the Angel to the Blessed Virgin and the ones St Elizabeth added when Mary went to visit her. The 'holy Mary' was added by the Church in the 5th century. During this century a heretic called Nestorius lived in Constantinople. He was a man filled with pride. He added to his impiety by publicly denying the Blessed Virgin the august name of Mother of God. This was a heresy that aimed at knocking down all the principles of our holy Religion. The people of Constantinople trembled with indignation at such blasphemy, and to clarify the truth petitions were sent to the Supreme Pontiff called Celestine at the time, begging him to repair the scandal. In the year 431 the Pontiff called a General Council together in Ephesus, a city in Asia Minor on the banks of the Archipelago. Bishops from all across the Catholic world came to this Council. St Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria, presided in the Pope's name. All the people from morning to evening stood at the doors of the church where the bishops were meeting. Then the doors opened and St Cyril appeared at the head of 200 or more bishops and they heard him pronounce the condemnation of the wicked Nestorius. Word of jubilation resounded in every corner of the city. The following words were heard in the mouths of everyone: "Mary's enemy has been vanquished! Long live Mary! Long live the great, the excellent, the glorious Mother of God." It was then that the Church added those other words to the *Ave Maria*: Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners. Amen. The other words, "now and at the hour of our death", were introduced by the Church in later times. The solemn declaration of the Council of Ephesus, the august title of Mother of God given to Mary, was then confirmed by other Councils, until the Church instituted the Feast of the Motherhood of Mary celebrated every year on the second Sunday of October. Nestorius, who dared rebel against the Church and blaspheme against the great Mother of God, was severely punished in this life too.

Another example. At the time of St Gregory the Great a great pestilence was affecting many parts of Europe and especially Rome. To bring this scourge to an end Saint Gregory called on the protection of the great Mother of God.

Amongst the public works of penance he ordered a solemn procession to the miraculous image of Mary venerated in the basilica of Liberius, today known as St Mary Major. Little by little as the procession took place the contagious disease disappeared from the streets, until they reached the place where there was Hadrian's tomb (and this is why it is now called Castel Sant'Angelo), where an angel appeared in human form above it. He placed his bloody sword in its scabbard as a sign that God's wrath had subsided and that through the intercession of Mary the terrible scourge was to cease. At the same time the choirs of angels were heard singing the hymn: "*Regina coeli laetare alleluia.*" The holy pontiff added two more verses to this hymn with its prayer and from that time it began to be used by the faithful to honour the Virgin during the Easter season, a time of joy at the Saviour's Resurrection. Benedict XIV granted the same Indulgences as for the *Angelus Domini* to the faithful who say it during Easter time. Saying the *Angelus* is a very ancient usage in the Church. Since we do not know the precise hour of the Annunciation, whether it was morning or evening, the early faithful greeted her on both occasions with the *Ave Maria*. From that came the custom of ringing the bells on those two occasions, to remind Christians of this pious habit. We believe this was introduced by Pope Urban II in 1088. He ordered this to encourage Christians to return to Mary by praying to her in the morning for her protection in the war that was raging at the time between Christians and Turks, and in the evening to beg her for peace and harmony between Christian Princes. Gregory IX in 1221 also added the ringing of bells at midday. The Pontiffs enriched this devotional exercise with many indulgences. Benedict XIII in 1724 granted an indulgence of 100 days every time it was said and a plenary indulgence for whoever said it for an entire month, so long as one day during the month they went to confession and communion.

Brief prayer: O Mary our advocate, / dispenser of every grace, // messenger of salvation / to both the just and the sinner. // From heaven, merciful mother, / cast your eye on those devoted to you, // hear our prayers, / O great Mother of Our Lord.

288. A way of ensuring Mary's protection

Critical ed. in G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio...*, pp. 179-183 (OE X, 473-477).

1. Now that we have finished Mary's month, I consider it good to conclude it by giving you some useful reminders to ensure the protection of this great mother of ours in life and in death. Since Mary is our mother, she must certainly abhor the outrages committed against her Son, Jesus. Therefore whoever wants to enjoy her patronage in life and in death must abstain from sin. Our hope would be in vain if we believed we enjoyed Mary's protection, while offending her Son Jesus whom she loves above everything else. We must not only avoid offending Jesus, but with every effort of our heart meditate on the divine mysteries of his passion, and follow him in penance. Mary herself one day told St Brigid: "My daughter, if you want to do something very pleasing to me, love my Son Jesus with all your heart." Mary is the refuge of sinners, therefore we must also take holy advice, act with solicitude, prayer, good books and in other ways lead souls to Jesus and increase Mary's children. Jesus has nothing closer to his heart than the salvation of souls. Therefore Mary, who loves her son tenderly, can receive no more pleasing gift than that which wins over another soul. We should also try to offer her a victory over some passion of ours. So if someone who is choleric by nature and often shows impatience, or bursts into curses and blasphemies, or has contracted the habit of speaking badly and with little respect for religious matters, that person should restrain his tongue as a pleasing gift to the Virgin. So in a few words, each one should try to avoid what is bad and do what is good out of love for Mary.

2. Amongst the many good things we can do for Mary are to prepare to celebrate her solemnities devoutly with triduum, novenas, octaves as you would normally do or as is done in public churches and also private homes. St Elizabeth Queen of Portugal on Saturdays and on all the vigils leading up to the Feast of the Virgin, fasted on bread and water. Some others used to go to confession and communion every Sunday and Feast Day, as did St Aloysius Gonzaga, St Stanislaus Kostka and others. Others give alms to beggars and give them in suffrage for the souls who were most devoted to Mary when alive.

There are also some devotees of Mary who often attend Mass in her honour with the intention of thanking the Holy Trinity who raised Mary to the most beautiful throne in heaven. Others revere her with special devotion to the Saints who were her closest relatives, like St Joseph her most holy Spouse, Saint Joachim and Saint Anne her most fortunate parents.

3. There are also special devotional practices that are like tongues of fire that make this compassionate Mother burn with love for us. For example the *Angelus* in the morning, at midday and in the evening, the rosary every day or at least on Sundays, attending Vespers, practices of piety on Saturday in honour of her Immaculate Heart. But I recommend that every evening before going to bed you say the following three times: *Dear Mother Mary ever Virgin, help me to save my soul.* Then let us always remember that being devoted to Mary is one of the most secure means of reaching eternal life. She herself assures us of this by saying: “Those who are devoted to me will have eternal life”, “*Qui elucidant me, vitam aeternam habebunt.*” [Sir. 24:31].

Example - I recommend that you never let a Saturday pass without doing something in Mary’s honour. From the earliest times of the Church Christians used to practise some devotion to the Virgin on Saturdays. Saturday means rest day and was chosen to refer to rest or the abode the Divine Word chose to make of Mary’s most pure womb. One of the warmest propagators of the cult of Mary on Saturdays was Saint Ildephonsus, the archbishop of Toledo. He had written some hymns in praise of the Mother of Mercy and on the following Saturday heard the angels singing them in church with the Blessed Virgin herself amongst them. After this the Saturday practice spread rapidly throughout Europe. From the tenth century abstinence from meat was practised on that day in Mary’s honour. Soon after, the Mass and Office for that day were written. Both the Mass and the Office were approved by Pope Urban II at the Council of Clermont in 1095. We should never let go any Saturday without practising some act of virtue in honour of Mary, and go to Holy Communion if we can or at least let’s hear a Mass for the repose of the souls in purgatory.

Brief prayer: Oh if I could see you one day / all loving hearts would languish / for such a beautiful queen and at hearing / her name praised everywhere. / / And so on earth / it may resound everywhere with sweet harmony, / long live, long live Mary forever, / long live God who loved her so.

289. Mary shows her zeal and power with her son at the wedding in Cana

Critical ed. in Giovanni BOSCO, *Maraviglie della madre di Dio invocata sotto il titolo di Maria Ausiliatrice*. Torino, Tip. Dell'Oratorio di S. Franc. di Sales 1868, pp. 31-37 (OE XX, 223-229).

In St John's Gospel we find a fact that clearly shows Mary's power and zeal in coming quickly to our aid. We are referring to what St John the Evangelist tells us in Chapter 2.

At Cana in Galilee there was a wedding and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. Since they were running out of wine, his mother said to Jesus: "They have no more wine." And Jesus said to her: "Woman, why do you involve me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants: "Do whatever he tells you." Nearby stood six stone water jars of the kind the Jews use for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus said to them: "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them to the brim. Then Jesus told them: "Now draw from these and take it to the master of the banquet." And they did so. As soon as he had tasted the water changed into wine, the master of the banquet, who did not realise where it came from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew, called the bridegroom aside and said: "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper one after the guests have had too much to drink, but you have saved the best till now." What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

Here St John Chrysostom asks: "Why did Mary wait for this occasion at the wedding feast at Cana to invite Jesus to do miracles yet did not ask him before?" He answers that Mary did so out of a spirit of submission to

Divine Providence. Jesus had lived a hidden life for thirty years. And Mary, who preserved within all that Jesus did, “*conservabat haec omnia conferens in corde suo*”, as St Luke tells us (Chapter 2, v. 19), venerated Jesus’ humiliation in respectful silence. Then when she noted that Jesus had begun his public life, that St John in the desert had already begun to speak about Jesus in his preaching and that Jesus already had some disciples, then with the movement of grace, and in the same spirit of union with Jesus with which she had respected his remaining hidden for thirty years, she put her request to ask him to perform a miracle and show himself to men.

Saint Bernard saw Mary’s great delicacy in the words “*vinum non habent, they have no wine.*” Hers was not a lengthy request to Jesus as Lord, nor did she command him as to a son; all she did was proclaim the need, the lack of wine. With hearts that are kind and tending to help, grace does not need to be wrested from them through tricks and violence; it is enough to suggest the occasion (St Bernard, *Serm. 4 in Cant.*).

The angelic doctor, St Thomas, admires in this brief prayer Mary’s tenderness and mercy. Inasmuch as it is proper to mercy to consider other’s needs its own, and since the word ‘merciful’ [*misericordia*] means a heart made for the miserable, to lift up the miserable, he quotes St Paul’s words to the Corinthians: “*Quis infirmatur et ego non infirmor?*” [2 Cor 11:29]. “Who is weak and I do not feel weak?” Now since Mary was full of mercy, she wanted to provide for the needs of the guests and the Gospel says: “They have no wine”, Jesus’ mother told him. So St Bernard encourages us to have recourse to Mary because if she had so much compassion for the shame those poor people would feel and provided for them although they had not asked, how much more pity will she have on us if we call on her with faith? (St Bernard, *Serm. 2 Dominicae II Epif.*).

Saint Thomas again praises Mary’s concern and diligence in not waiting for the wine to completely run out so the guests would notice and it would disgrace their hosts. As soon as the need became imminent she came to their aid just at the right moment, according to Ps 9: “*Adiutor in opportunitatibus, in tribulatione.*” [Ps. 9:10].

Mary's kindness to us as demonstrated in this fact shines out mainly in what she did after her divine son answered her. After hearing Jesus' words a less confident, less courageous soul than Mary would have desisted from hoping further. Mary instead was not disturbed in any way and turned to those serving the tables to say to them: "Do what he tells you." "*Quodcumque dixerit vobis, facite.*" (Jn 2:5). It was as if she said: "Although you might seem to be saying no, you will do it just the same." (Bede).

The learned P. Silveira lists a large number of virtues that shine out in these words of Mary's. The Virgin (this writer says) gave a shining example of faith, despite hearing her son's hard response: "What has this to do with me?" but she did not hesitate. When faith is perfect it does not hesitate before any kind of adversity. She taught trust: for although she heard words from her son that seemed to be in the negative, indeed as the Venerable Bede quoted above says, the Virgin could well believe that Christ had refused her request, just the same she went ahead against hope, trusting in her son's mercy. She taught love for God, getting him to manifest his glory through a miracle. She taught obedience while persuading the servants to obey God not in just one or another thing, but in everything without distinction; "*quodcumque dixerit*" [Jn 2:5], "whatever he tells you." She also gave an example of modesty by not profiting from the occasion to glory in her role as mother of such a son, since she did not say: "Whatever my son will tell you" but left it in the simple third person. She also inspired reverence for God by not pronouncing the holy name of Jesus. "I have never discovered" this author says "in the Scriptures that the Blessed Virgin said this holy name because of the great veneration she had for it." She gave an example of promptness in that she did not exhort them to listen to him but to do what he said. And finally she taught prudence with mercy, since she told the servants to do *whatever he told them*, so that when they understood Jesus' command to fill the water jars, they did not think it was silly: it was just the right amount to mercifully and prudently prevent others falling into difficulty. (P. Silveira, tom. 2, lib. 4, quest. 21).

290. Mary chosen as Help of Christians on Calvary by the dying Jesus

Critical ed. in G. BOSCO, *Maraviglie della madre di Dio...*, pp. 37-42
(OE XX, 229-234).

We find the most splendid proof that Mary is the Help of Christians on Mount Calvary. While Jesus was hanging in agony on the cross, Mary overcame her natural weakness and helped him with unheard of strength. It seemed that there was nothing more left for Jesus to do to show how much he loved us. But his affection for us meant he found one more gift that would seal all the other benefits. From up on the cross he turned his dying gaze to his mother, the one treasure of his on earth still left. "Woman," Jesus said to Mary, "behold your son", then he said to John the disciple: "Behold your mother." "From that time on," the Evangelist concludes, "the disciple took her into his home."

The Fathers recognise three great truths in these words: 1. That John succeeded Jesus as Mary's son in everything; 2. That everything about Mary's motherhood for Jesus was now applied to her new son John; 3. That in the person of John Jesus meant to include all of humankind.

By her loving cooperation in the ministry of the Redemption Mary, says St Bernardine of Siena, "truly generated the life of grace for us on Calvary." In the order of salvation we are all born from Mary's sorrows as from the love of the Eternal Father and her son's sufferings. In those precious moments Mary became strictly our mother.

The circumstances which accompanied this solemn act of Jesus on Calvary confirm what we are saying. The words Jesus chose are generic and appealing, observed P. Silveira, but they are enough to let us know that here we are dealing with a universal mystery which includes not just one man but all those to whom we can apply the title of beloved disciple of Jesus. Since the Lord's words are a broad and solemn declaration that Jesus' mother has become the mother of all Christians: "*Ioannes est nomen particulare, discipulus commune ut denotetur quod Maria omnibus detur in matrem.*"

Jesus on the cross was not a simple victim of the Jews' malice, but a universal bridge acting on behalf of all humankind. So in the same way he asked forgiveness for those who crucified him he obtained it for all sinners; by opening paradise to the good thief he opened it to all penitents. Just as the crucifiers on Calvary, according to St Paul's forceful expression, represented all sinners and the good thief all true penitents, so St John represents all true disciples of Jesus, the Christians, the Catholic Church. As St Augustine said, Mary became the true Eve, mother of all who are spiritually alive, *Mater viventium*; or as St Ambrose states, "Mother of all believers, *Mater omnium credentium*."

Mary, by becoming our mother on Mount Calvary, not only had the title Help of Christians, but acquired that role, that magisterium, that duty. So we have a sacred right to call on Mary's help. This right has been consecrated by Jesus' word and guaranteed by Mary's motherly tenderness. Now that Mary had interpreted the intention of Jesus Christ on the cross in this sense and that he made her mother and help of all Christians, her conduct from then on proves it. We know from those who have written about her life how much zeal she has shown throughout the ages for the salvation of the world and for the increase and glory of the holy Church. She guided and counselled the apostles and disciples, encouraged them to keep the faith, preserve grace and make it effective. From the Acts of the Apostles we know how she attended the religious gatherings of the early faithful in Jerusalem, since the divine mysteries were never celebrated without her taking part. When Jesus went up to Heaven she followed him with the disciples to the Mount of Olives, the place of the Ascension. When the Holy Spirit came down on the Apostles on the day of Pentecost, she was there in the upper room with them. Thus St Luke tells us after naming the disciples gathered in the upper room one by one: "They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus."

Moreover the apostles and disciples and all the Christians living at that time in Jerusalem and surroundings, came to Mary to be advised and guided.

291. The title “help”

Critical ed. in Giovanni BOSCO, *Associazione de' devoti di Maria Ausiliatrice canonicamente eretta nella chiesa a lei dedicata in Torino. Con ragguaglio storico su questo titolo*. Torino, Tip. dell'Orat. di S. Franc. di Sales 1869, pp. 5-9 (OE XXI, 343-347).

The title ‘*Auxilium*’ (Help), attributed to the august mother of our Saviour, is not something new. In the Holy Books themselves, Mary is called the Queen who stands at her divine Son’s right hand side, dressed in gold and surrounded by beauty. “*Adstitit regina a dextris tuis in vestitu deaurato, circumdata varietate.*” (Ps 45:10). This mantle is arrayed with gold, according to the spirit of the Church, as well as gems and diamonds, or the titles with which we usually call on Mary. So when we call the Blessed Virgin *Help of Christians*, it is but a special title, one that is appropriate for her, like a diamond on her gilded clothing. Mary was greeted this way, *Help of humankind*, from the earliest times in the world when Adam, falling into sin, was promised a liberator to be born of a woman, and whose immaculate feet would squash the head of the insidious serpent.

In fact this great woman is symbolised by the tree of life to be found in the earthly paradise, by Noah’s Ark, which saved those who adored the true God from the flood, by Jacob’s ladder, which reached up to Heaven, by Moses’ bush, burning but not burning up, and which alludes to Mary who remained a Virgin after giving birth, by the Ark of the Covenant, by the Tower of David, defence against every assault, by the rose of Jericho, by the sealed fountain, by the well-cultivated garden looked after by Solomon. She is found in the aqueduct of blessing, in Gideon’s fleece. Elsewhere she is called Star of Jacob, as beautiful as the moon, shining like the sun, iris of peace, pupil of God’s eye, the dawn of consolation, virgin and mother and parent of her Lord. These symbols and expressions which the Church applies to Mary, make God’s providential design clear. He wanted to make her known before his birth as the first amongst all creatures, most excellent protectress, help and support, even the one who would repair the evils to which the human race succumbed.

In the New Testament she is not only called help of mankind in general, through symbols and prophecies but the help, support and defence of

Christians. No longer symbolic expressions and figures; everything is the fulfilment and realisation of the past. Mary is greeted by the Archangel Gabriel who calls her full of grace; God beholds the great humility of Mary and raises her up to the dignity of being mother of the Eternal Word. Jesus, great God, becomes Mary's child. He is born of her, raised, helped grow up, and the Eternal Word made flesh submits in complete obedience to his august mother. At her request Jesus worked his first miracles in Cana in Galilee; on Calvary she became mother of all Christians. The Apostles had her as guide and teacher in virtue. They gathered to pray with her in the Upper Room; they waited there with her in prayer and finally received the Holy Spirit. Her last words were to the Apostles and then she flew gloriously to heaven.

From her high throne of glory she gazes down with motherly affection, saying: "*Ego in altissimis habito, ut ditem diligentes me et thesauros eorum repleam* [Prov 8:21]. On my high throne of glory I enrich those who love me and fill their treasuries with heavenly favours." Since her Assumption into heaven the constant, uninterrupted flow of Christians to Mary began and it was never heard, St Bernard says, that one who had recourse to this most blessed Virgin, was never heard. Here is the reason why every century, each year, each day and we could say, each moment is marked in history by some great favour granted to someone who called on her with trust. Here is the reason why each kingdom, every city, country, family has a church, a chapel, an altar, a statue, a picture, or some sign recalling the universal veneration for Mary and which at the same time reminds one of the many graces granted to those who have recourse to her for the necessities of life.

292. Prayers appropriate for the spirit of the Association of Devotees of Mary Help of Christians

Critical ed. in G. BOSCO, *Associazione de' devoti di Maria Ausiliatrice...*, pp. 55-59
(OE XXI, 393-397).

Virgin Mary, Queen of Heaven and earth, in whom, after God, I place all my trust, I throw myself humbly at your feet as the least of your servants, to consecrate myself to your service in this Pious Association erected under

your protection, and I promise with all my heart to practise everything the Rules prescribe with the greatest possible devotion, so that through the merits of Jesus Christ your beloved son and through your powerful intercession all members may be preserved from all spiritual and bodily harm in their lives; may the Lord be blessed in all their activities and may they finally obtain the grace of dying the death of the just. Since only the desire to please you is what has led me to embrace this devout association, I humbly implore you, holy Virgin, to number me amongst your children and obtain for me the grace of corresponding, through good behaviour and holy deeds, with the sublime nature of your servant.

O glorious Virgin Mary deign, from your exalted throne, to look down on me with a kindly eye always open to one who is consecrated to your service; and since today I am writing my name in the book of this pious Association, deign to engrave it also on your maternal heart; ask your Divine Son to be pleased to list me amongst those names written in the book of life. Amen.

Act of a child who wishes to take the Virgin Mary as mother

My Lord Jesus Christ, true God and true man, only Son of God and the Virgin Mary, I thank you and adore you as my beginning and my end. I implore you to renew for me that mysterious loving testament you gave on the cross, giving your especially beloved St John the quality and title of son of your mother Mary. Say these words to me too: *Woman, behold your son*. Give me the grace of being able to belong to her as her son and to have her as a mother throughout my mortal existence on this earth.

Most Blessed Virgin Mary, my principal advocate and mediatrix, I N. N. a poor sinner, the most unworthy and weak of your servants, humbly prostrate before you, entrusted to your goodness and mercy, and encouraged by a keen desire to imitate your beautiful virtues, I choose you today as my mother, and I ask you to receive me amongst the fortunate number of your beloved children. I give you all of myself entirely and irrevocably. Receive this offering gracefully; be pleased with the trust with which I abandon myself into your arms. Give me your motherly protection throughout my life and especially at

the hour of my death, so that my soul, free from bodily ties, may pass from this vale of tears to enjoy eternal glory with you in the kingdom of Heaven. Amen.

Prayer of His Holiness Pius IX

Lord, all-powerful God, who permits evil to draw good from it, hear our humble prayers with which we ask you that we may remain faithful amidst so many assaults and persevere faithfully until death. Give us the strength, through the mediation of Mary most holy, to always be united with your most holy will.

293. Mary our help in life's needs

Critical ed. in Giovanni BOSCO, *Nove giorni consacrati alla augusta Madre del Salvatore sotto al titolo di Maria Ausiliatrice*. Torino, Tip. dell'Orat. di S. Francesco di Sales 1870, pp. 7-14 (OE XXII, 259-266).

1. A good mother is always a real treasure and great comfort for her family. So Mary our compassionate mother will certainly be a source of grace and blessings for Christian families throughout the world. We live as though on a stormy sea, as if in exile, in a vale of tears. Mary is the Star of the Sea, our comfort in our exile, the light pointing the way to heaven, and so our life, our sweetness and our hope: *vita, dulcedo, et spes nostra*. She does this by obtaining for us constant spiritual and temporal aid. St Jerome says: "Mary has a heart so compassionate and tender for human beings that there has never been anyone who has been as afflicted by their own sorrows as has been Mary by the sorrows of others." (*Epist. ad Eustoc.*). As soon as she notices a need she quickly brings help. So as soon as Mary learned from the Archangel that Zaccharia's family and especially Elizabeth needed help, she went to her in haste, making a trip through rugged mountains of about seventy miles: "*abiit in montana cum festinatione.*" (Lk 1:39). When she arrived Mary served her as a humble handmaid for three months and did not leave her until she had no more need of help. She did the same at Cana in Galilee. When Mary found herself invited to the wedding, with Jesus and other distinguished

individuals, in the midst of the feast she saw that they were lacking wine. With her maternal gaze she noticed that the newly married couple were in difficulties and were already feeling ashamed. Mary was moved when she saw this and without even being asked she began to think about how to help them. As St Bernardine of Siena reflected, she immediately took on the role of helper: “*officium piae auxiliatricis assumpsit non rogata*” (Saint Alphonsus Liguori, *The Glories of Mary*). “My son,” she whispered to Jesus “they have no wine.” Mary said these words with such expression that she made it known she wanted a miracle on behalf of her devotees and she gained it and consoled them (Jn 2:3).

2. Mary’s tender concern did not lessen when she was taken up by the angels into heaven; in fact it increased. Oh! Yes, she still remembers that on Mount Calvary Jesus made her our mother. “*Mulier, ecce filius tuus*”, and then to the beloved disciple: “*Ecce mater tua*” (Jn 19:26-27). At that moment Jesus so touched her heart and filled it with so much tenderness for us that the human mind cannot grasp it. If we were to combine all the love that mothers have for their children the fullness of affection these mothers have would not equal the love that Mary alone bears for each one of us. What a dear thought, what sweet comfort that we have a mother in heaven who is so tender and loving! This is the reason, devout Christian, why we do not read that over the centuries Mary failed to help Christians in any need. “Oh! no” St Augustine and St Bernard exclaim in one voice, it has never been heard of in the world that someone in need who had recourse to Mary in trust was abandoned (Saint Alphonsus, *Novena of Meditations*). Turn the pages of holy books and stories, go through every part of the Christian world, question peoples, kingdoms, cities, villages, families and ask them if it had ever happened to them that Mary had failed to come to the aid of her needy children. And to your question all will respond in harmony: “*No, never.*” In order to better convince yourself of this truth, enter, good reader, some sanctuary dedicated to Mary and you will no longer delay in being convinced that she is the *Help of Christians* in life’s needs. Look at the signs of her kindness and power hung from the sacred walls. Here you see a sick person given up by the doctors but

for whom Mary, instead, brought health. Over there you see someone who had a fever, another with dropsy, a third with gangrene—all freed. You can read others who by her intercession escaped from the hands of assassins or from flood, fire or landslide etc. When you come out you cannot but exclaim: “O Mary, how powerful and good you are, how true it is that you bring help to whoever calls on you in life’s need.”

3. If Mary comes to our help in temporal needs, she takes far greater care in coming to our spiritual needs. We would have to write huge volumes to list all the great benefits Mary has done for those devoted to her. Saint Bernard expresses this truth by saying: “God wanted every good thing to come through Mary”, “*totum nos habere voluit per Mariam*”, and St Bernardine of Siena adds: “All the graces we receive from God are dispensed through Mary and to whom and when Mary wishes.” (Saint Alphonsus, *Glories of Mary*). How many virgins owe their virginal purity to her protection! How many young people the victory over their passions! How many fathers and mothers the eternal salvation of their children! We could say that in the new law there is no Saint who does not recognise his or her holiness as not coming from Mary’s intercession. History tells us that the most outstanding of them were also the ones most devoted to Mary. Nor is Mary only the help of Christians in particular but the support of the Universal Church. By Mary’s help the apostles, martyrs, the primitive Church overcame its persecutors. By her help idolatry was eradicated. By her help the banner of the cross has fluttered and triumphed (St Cyril of Alexandria, *Homil. cont. Nest.*; Octava Nativitatis B. V.). It is through her that barbarians have been vanquished, heretics left in confusion, heresies rooted out. Rightly did St John Chrysostom call Mary the decorum, glory, steadfastness of the Church: “*Ecclesiae nostrae decus, gloria et firmamentum.*” (*Serm. apud Metaph.*, die 5 Nativitatis B. V. in Off.). Therefore good reader, let us say with St Bernard: “In dangers, in distress, in doubt, think of Mary, call upon Mary. Let Mary never leave your lips, never depart from your heart.” “*In periculis, in angustiis, Mariam cogita, Mariam invoca; non recedat ab ore, non recedat a corde.*” (*Hom. 2 super Missus est*).

294. The effectiveness of turning to Mary Help of Christians

ASC A000303 *Conferenze*, Quad. III, 1877-1878, ms by Giacomo Gresino, pp. 4-10¹¹³.

Sunday 20 May 1877

We are approaching Pentecost and the Novena to Our Lady Help of Christians. These are days for obtaining graces from Mary, not just once but many times a day, whether you come here to ask for them and be given them, or whether they are reports we receive from afar about the marvellous graces obtained from Mary our Help.

The Church lets us know about this power and kindness of Mary's with the Psalm that begins: "*Si caeli quaeris ianuas, Mariae nomen invoca*", if you seek the gates of heaven, call on Mary's name. If it is enough to call on Mary's name to enter heaven, we need to say she is powerful. And elsewhere the Church presents her like an army in battle array. And although the literal sense of the words mean enemies outside the Church, the Church's spirit understands them also in terms of our particular enemies.

So I recommend, inasmuch as I know and can, that you keep Mary's name engraved on your heart and that you always call on her this way: "*Maria Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro me.*" It is not a long prayer, but a very effective one, you will see. When you want to obtain some spiritual grace, and by spiritual grace we can mean freedom from temptations, afflictions of spirit, lack of fervour, etc., if one of you wants to be free from temptation or acquire some great virtue, he only needs to call on Mary. These and other spiritual graces are the ones mostly obtained and they are the unknown ones but they do great good for souls. And most of you here, without naming them, confess that if you have been freed from some temptation it is through Mary Help of Christians.

And so many to whom I have recommended this short prayer, *Maria Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro nobis*, have confessed how they have felt its effects. And of the hundreds or thousands or more who are or have been here, from the city or beyond, and whom I have recommended to tell me if this

¹¹³ A goodnight for the boys at the Oratory.

prayer was fulfilled or not, up until now nobody has said that it wasn't. One did tell me that his prayer wasn't heard, but after questioning him, he said he intended to pray but hadn't done so. So it is not the Virgin who wouldn't listen but the one who did not want to be listened to. Prayer has to be regular, persevering, with faith and the intention that it be fulfilled.

I would like you to try this out and that you also get your parents and friends to try it out, telling them by letter or on the next Feast of Mary Help of Christians, coming here, or else Don Bosco can tell them that if they have some spiritual grace to obtain, pray this way: *Maria Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro nobis*; and if the prayer is not fulfilled, they can do me the favour of letting me know. And if I come to know that someone has not obtained a spiritual grace from Mary as asked for, I will immediately write a letter to St. Bernard telling him that he made a mistake when he said: "Remember O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thy intercession was left unaided." But you can be certain that I will never have to write a letter to St. Bernard. You are laughing at this idea of a letter to St. Bernard. Do we not know where to find St. Bernard? "It's a problem for the postman", Fr Rua was heard to say. Oh, but we have a much better, faster way of writing to the saints than carriages, steam trains, telegraph. Because the telegraph, although it is almost instantaneous, takes time just the same; but while I am talking to you, in my thoughts I go up, beyond the stars, before the throne of St Bernard. Never fear, he will receive our letters immediately, even if the postman is late. So try it and if you are not heard we won't have any difficulty in sending a letter to St Bernard.

For the end of this novena, which we are making now, I want you to engrave these words on your heart: *Maria Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro me*, and say them in any danger, any temptation, any need and always; and also ask Mary Help of Christians for the grace to be able to call on her in your need. And I promise you the devil will be bankrupt. You know what it means to say that the devil will be bankrupt? It means he will have no more power over us and will need to back off. Meanwhile I recommend you all to the Lord and to the Help of Christians to bless you and protect you. Good night.