

Why I Am Catholic

Our great respect and devotion to our Blessed Mother.

Other Christian denominations do not give Mary the place of honor she deserves. Some accuse Catholics of worshipping Mary and claim we view Mary as a god. **We do not worship Mary.** Some Catholics over the century have on an individual basis, but the Catholic Church has never considered Mary to be the equal of her son Jesus.

We give her a special place of honor, and a unique devotion different than all other saints, but never an attention reserved only to God. Our respect for Mary comes from Jesus' words to St. John: "Behold, your mother." (Jn 19:27). We believe at that moment Jesus gave His mother to the Church through St. John. St. John represents us. Right before, Jesus said to Mary: "Woman, behold, your son." (Jn 19:26). Jesus entrusts all of us to His mother's care. The fourth commandment calls us to "Honor your father and your mother." (Ex 20:12) Each of us has an earthly father and mother and a Heavenly Father and a spiritual mother Jesus has directly given to us.

"Jesus is Mary's only son, but her spiritual motherhood extends to all men whom indeed he came to save: 'The Son whom she brought forth is he whom God placed as the first-born among many brethren, that is, the faithful in whose generation and formulation she cooperates with a mother's love.'" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 501)

The Church today is concerned that many Catholics do not have a devotion to Mary. That some have fallen into the false understandings of other denominations. "What the Catholic faith believes about Mary is based on what it believes about Christ, and what it teaches about Mary illumines in turn its faith in Christ." (487)

Our devotion is both biblical and based on 2,000 years of tradition. "All generations will call me blessed.' 'The Church's devotion to the Blessed Virgin is intrinsic to Christian worship.' 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.' 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.'" (971) Mary shows us how cooperation with God's plan brings forth life and a deeper relationship with God for ourselves and others.

"Through Mary, the Holy Spirit begins to bring men, the objects of God's merciful love, *into communion* with Christ. And the humble are the first to accept him: shepherds, magi, Simeon and Anna, the bride and groom at Cana, and the first disciples." (725) Mary is the one through whom God gives the world His Son. Centuries later her role is still under attack. In the year 431, the Church held a special council at Ephesus (the town where Mary and St. John lived after Pentecost and where Mary's Assumption occurred) to address some of these disputes. The Church declared that Mary is truly "Mother of God" (*Theotokos*) and that "the One whom she conceived as man by the Holy Spirit, who truly became her Son according to the flesh, was none other than the Father's eternal Son, the second person of the Holy Trinity." (495)

The Church also professes that Jesus is the only biological son of Mary and that she is the "Ever-virgin." (499) Jesus' *brothers* were either cousins or possibly Joseph's children from a previous marriage. "The Church has always understood these passages as not referring to other children of the Virgin Mary." (500) In the Bible, when a father has more than one wife, his children are usually differentiated by their mother: "sons of Rachel", "sons of Leah", etc. Jesus is most often referred to as "son of Mary," suggesting Joseph may have been a widower with children from a first marriage. This is proposed by St. Ephrem (ca. 306-373) and other scholars. St. Jerome (c. 347-420) explains the possibility of "brothers" referring to cousins based on the first century understanding of the original Greek word. This is the more accepted explanation among Roman Catholics, although St. Ephrem's view now is gaining acceptance. Scholars have disputed this since the second century, but the Church has *always believed* in the Perpetual Virginity of Mary. "The deepening of faith in the virginal motherhood led the Church to confess Mary's real and perpetual virginitly even in the act of giving birth to the Son of God made man. In fact, Christ's birth 'did not diminish his mother's virginal integrity but sanctified it.'" (499) To diminish Mary's role in God's plan of salvation is disrespectful of God's plan and takes away from the mystery and the power of God's Son becoming one of us through Mary. God chose Mary to be a central part of the plan of salvation—the mother of Our Savior. We need to understand her importance and treat her as God treats her: Mother of His Son, Mother of His Church, and Queen of Heaven.