

Homily for Saturday, 15 September 2018 / Our Lady of Sorrows / Sajnos, nincs magyar fordítás!

“Jesus is the Sun and Mary is the dawn announcing His rising.” This salutary message was recently posted by Pope Francis on Twitter. The platform may belong to the Information Age, but the message itself goes back to the dawn of Christian antiquity. In order to unpack this saying which is loaded with meaning, we must first recall a few basic truths from Christology. As our springboard, let’s start with a Christological error that I once heard proclaimed firsthand at an ecumenical prayer service. When his turn came to speak, one Protestant minister tried to set us Catholics straight. “We shouldn’t call Mary the Mother of God,” he said, “because Jesus received His divinity from the Holy Spirit, not from Mary.” Not only did this so-called minister misrepresent Catholic teaching – since none of us believes that Jesus received His divinity from Mary – but he never studied Protestant theology either, since Protestants agree with us that God the Son took His divine nature from God the Father – not in time to be sure, but throughout all eternity. There never was an instant, in other words, when the Son wasn’t already God. Acting together as one source, Father and Son in turn gave their divine nature to God the Holy Spirit, likewise from all eternity. These three divine Persons all share one and the same divine nature. It was our human nature, not the Blessed Trinity’s divine nature, that Mary gave to God the Son when in the fullness of time she conceived through the power of the Holy Spirit. Henceforth, the Second Divine Person of the Blessed Trinity has possessed two distinct natures: both an infinite divine nature and a finite human one.

Imagine asking a woman: “What are you the mother of?” The question itself seems nonsensical. Nevertheless, to reassure Protestants, let’s first answer this highly unusual question – one that is never put to any mother but Mary! The Virgin Mother gave birth to Jesus’ human nature – not His divine nature. Women, however, aren’t primarily the mothers of something; rather they are the mothers of someone. So now let’s ask the appropriate question! Who did the Virgin Mary give birth to in time? – The Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, the Eternal Word Himself! It’s not what, but who Mary gave birth to that makes her the Mother of God. This is how we Catholics understand Mary’s divine maternity. Our Lady certainly isn’t divine, but she has, as one theologian put it, ‘attained the frontiers of the divine nature.’

Now we’re ready to unpack Pope Francis’ tweet: If the sun’s direct rays symbolize Jesus’ divinity, then this infinite splendor is indeed reflected finitely in the diffused radiance of Mary’s divine maternity. Our Redeemer was born, as we know, on Christmas day. This event was preceded by Mary’s own birth from St. Ann, which amounts to the nativity of our Coredemptrix. Theologians explain the difference between Redeemer and Coredemptrix with one vital distinction between ‘condign’ and ‘congruous’ merit. Jesus merited eternal life for us on Calvary according to condign merit, whereas Mary only merited the same reward for us according to congruous merit. No one else – be he angel or saint, priest or pope – has merited eternal life for us, only Jesus and Mary. What then is the difference between the condign merit of Jesus and Mary’s congruous merit? If God didn’t reward Jesus’ physical sacrifice on the cross with eternal life for us, God wouldn’t be just. If God didn’t likewise reward Mary’s spiritual sacrifice under the cross, God wouldn’t be merciful. Since either scenario is impossible, both protagonists in our redemption – our Lord and Lady of Sorrows – infallibly attained their reward: the remission of our sins. Amen!