

“See that you are not led astray.”

Lk 21:8

One of the loveliest titles of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and one that affords us so much hope and joy, is Our Lady, Co-Redemptrix. Through the co-operation of her will, and uniting it to the will of her Divine Son, and by standing at the Foot of the Cross, Our Blessed Lady played a unique role in the redemption of a fallen race. To many, especially to Protestants, this title, Co-Redemptrix, makes no sense, but when I was a schoolteacher I generally followed the rule that if my pupils did not understand a thing it was better to explain it rather than to push the difficulty aside. So, what does the Catholic Church mean when She says Our Lady is Co-Redemptrix?

We must first, of course, understand and be emphatically clear that Our Lord Jesus Christ, and He alone, is our Redeemer and Saviour. It was His sacrifice on Calvary – His oblation, His gift of Himself – to God the Father, on our behalf, that won back for a fallen race the gifts that were forfeited by sin. As it says unambiguously in Sacred Scripture, there is only ‘one mediator [between] God and men, the man Christ Jesus’ (1 Tim 2:5).

In what way, then, can there possibly be a co-redeemer? Certainly, Our Blessed Lady was redeemed, just as we have been redeemed. All of the graces that filled her soul, and all of her merits and virtues, flow from the pierced Heart of her Son as He hung upon the Cross, just as all the graces we receive in the Sacraments flow from that same wounded Heart. That Our Lady is now in heaven is the result of her Son's redeeming sacrifice on Calvary. She gave birth to Him in the flesh yet, as St Augustine tells us, she was nonetheless born spiritually of Him (*De sancta virgin.*, c.6 – P.L. 40, 399). Our Lady is a member of Christ's Mystical Body just as you and I are members of Christ's mystical Body.

By the same token, you and I are called to unite our sufferings to the sufferings of Christ on the Cross, and to conform ourselves to Christ crucified, so that we may, as St Paul says, make up in our own flesh the sufferings that are wanting in the sufferings of Christ (Col 1:24). In other words, we must play our part in our own redemption by co-operating with the work of Christ so that we can receive fully, and benefit from, the gifts that Christ – and Christ alone – won for us from the Father.

Yet there is a difference between the way in which you and I might co-operate with Christ's sufferings on the one hand, and the way in which the Blessed Virgin co-operated on the other. Our Lady's co-operation was on an altogether different plane from our co-operation, and was unique, even when compared to the role of the greatest of the saints. We do not say that she has redeemed us as Christ has redeemed us, but we *do* mean that 'she has done something for the human race sufficiently similar to what Christ has done to be called by the same name, but yet something so different that the function of Christ Himself remains unique.'¹

So what was the manner of Mary's role?

First, Mary's role was unique because she herself is unique. She alone was preserved free from the stain of sin from the very moment of her conception, and remained untainted by sin throughout her life.

Second, her vocation was unique. She alone was called by God to surrender to His will in such a way that the Son of God might assume human nature, and come among us, and be like to us in all things but sin.

Third, Mary's work was unique. We all play a role in expiating – or making up for – our sins, but Mary had no sins that needed expiation. Her work of co-operation, her conforming herself to Christ, was undertaken solely for others. As her Divine Son suffered

¹ *Mary's Part in Our Redemption* by George Smith, London: Burns & Oates, 1938, revised 1954, p90.

for the entire human race, so she, also, suffered for the whole human race, offering her Son to Almighty God in a way that was not dissimilar to Christ's own offering of Himself to the Father.

Our Blessed Lady consented, at the moment of the Annunciation, to become the Mother of the Redeemer for this reason, namely to co-operate in the work of her Son. She was predestined by God to carry out this unique participation in the work of redemption. From before the world was begun, Mary was predestined to be associated with the work of Christ much as Eve had been predestined to be the associate of Adam. Christ became man to expiate – to make up for – the sins of the human race, and in a similar vein, Our Lady deliberately undertook to become His Mother to be intimately associated with Him in this work and in His sufferings. And in so doing, Mary, uniquely and powerfully, fulfilled the will of God in every particular.

Countless saints have taught us of the uniqueness of Mary's role as Co-Redemptrix: St Iranæus, St Augustine, St Jerome, St Leo the Great, St Gregory the Great, St Bernard, St Bernadine, to name but a few, along with innumerable popes, including Leo XIII, St Pius X, Benedict XV, Pius XI, Pius XII, John Paul II, and many others besides.

Rightly do all faithful Catholics acknowledge this uniqueness which goes beyond her role as Mother of Believers, and rightly do we sing that when wicked men blaspheme her, we will love and bless her name!