

Topic● **I SAINTS**● **A INTRODUCTION**

- 1 One of the great differences between Catholics and most other Christians is the Catholic focus upon saints
 - a There really aren't important differences between their theologies,
 - b There is such a difference in this one practical area of worship as experienced by people in the pews
 - c Catholics pray to saints,
 - (1) They name churches after saints,
 - (2) And they write lives of the saints
 - d Other Christians wonder why and criticize the diversion of attention from Jesus who alone saves
- 2 At times, some individuals and some local Catholic churches deserve the criticism
 - a The churches are loaded with statues of saints, hundreds!
 - b There is so much focus upon saints that Jesus does not seem to be the center of the faith
- 3 These abuses, and they are abuses, do not mean that all attention to saints is wrong -- it isn't

● **B WHY PRAY TO SAINTS?**

- 1 Some claim such prayers are wrong -- these prayers seem to deny the religious axiom that "We are saved by Jesus alone"
 - a While this axiom is true, it is not in any way relevant in regard to praying to saints
 - b Those who criticize the Catholic practice in their own way pray to the living saints of the Church
 - (1) They pray for their friends and their relatives who are in some need
 - (a) They offer such prayers publicly in their worship services
 - (b) And they pray for them privately at home, at work, and at play
 - (2) They ask their friends, relatives, and church prayer lines to pray for them when they, themselves, experience a trauma
 - (3) Why offer such prayers for others, why ask for such prayers from others if being saved by Jesus has any relevance to requesting or offering prayers for each other?
 - (a) Indeed, we are saved by Jesus alone
 - (b) Yet there exists an actual need in Christian communities for mutual prayer
- 2 We must recall that in the Church we all form the Body of Christ: the saints alive and the saints who are dead
 - a Praying for each other, therefore, is uniting in spiritual concern and love
 - (1) Praying for others is also promoting our own welfare
 - (2) Your spiritual health affects mine
 - (a) I need your gifts to become whole and fully holy
 - (b) So developing your gifts is important to me
 - b Even the human body suffers from an infection present in its weakest member, cell, organ
 - c We were not created to live as isolated atoms, cells
 - (1) We were created for community
 - (2) The concept of the "Body of Christ" expresses this well
- 3 There is also a Biblical basis for praying for and praying to others
 - a Praying "to" is asking the other person(s) to pray
 - (1) For us

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- (2) Or for some other intention
- b Paul makes such requests
 - (1) He asks for prayers from Christians
 - (a) 1 Thessalonians 5:25
 - [1] Beloved, pray for us.
 - (b) 2 Thessalonians 3:1
 - [1] Finally, brothers and sisters, pray for us, so that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified everywhere, just as it is among you, 2 and that we may be rescued from wicked and evil people; for not all have faith.
 - (2) And He assures Christians of His prayers for them
 - (a) 2 Thessalonians 1:11
 - [1] To this end we always pray for you, asking that our God will make you worthy of his call and will fulfill by his power every good resolve and work of faith, 12 so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - (b) And we know Paul thought we were saved by Jesus alone
 - [1] Yet he felt his praying for others in no way conflicted with Jesus alone saving these people
 - [2] And, equally obviously, he felt others praying for him, Paul, was not in conflict with Jesus alone saving him
 - (3) These statements assume
 - (a) [1] God will listen to our prayers -- we can pray for each other
 - (b) [2] God will respond to such prayers for each other -- else why waste time praying?
- c In fact, Jesus tells us to pray
 - (1) Matthew 7:7
 - (a) "Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.
 - (b) 9 Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? 10 Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake?
 - (c) 11 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!
 - (2) Matthew 5:44
 - (a) 44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.
 - (3) Indeed, Jesus urges us to remain constant in prayer
 - (a) Luke 18:1
 - [1] Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. 2 He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people.
 - [2] 3 In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.' 4 For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone,
 - [3] 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.' " 6 And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says.
 - [4] 7 And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night?
 - (b) This parable assures us that God responds to our prayers
 - (4) Jesus offers us a model of praying for others at the Last Supper

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- (a) He prays for His disciples
 - [1] John 17:15
 - [a] I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one.
- (b) And He prays for the future Church
 - [1] John 17:20
 - [a] "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, 21 that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.
 - [2] Note: "that all may be one"
 - [a] Praying to/for others helps us achieve this goal
 - [b] Praying is a way to love and serve others -- to unite with them spiritually
- d After urging us to die to self, Jesus certainly doesn't want all our prayers to be selfish
 - (1) Matthew 16:24
 - [a] Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 25 For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.
 - (2) We are to follow His model -- to pray for others
 - (3) And Jesus prayed for others
 - (a) John 17:9
 - [1] "I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours.
- C THERE ARE SOLID REASONS SUPPORTING OUR PRAYING TO SAINTS
 - 1 Praying to saints (the saints who have died,) is based upon the reasons already shared
 - a We can pray -- God will listen
 - b God will do more than listen -- God will respond
 - c We can pray for others -- we have unity with them through the Communion of Saints
 - d We should pray for others even more than for ourselves
 - e And we can and should ask others to pray for us
 - 2 When a Christian dies
 - a She/he is perfected by God
 - (1) They are in God's presence and, so, are filled with God's love
 - (2) They are perfected in this love
 - (3) Therefore, they love as God loves, completely although not infinitely
 - b Many, sadly, seem to think the dead are sterile in our world and lives
 - (1) The opposite must be true
 - (a) They have never loved us more
 - (b) They have never had more love to offer us
 - (2) We are limited in our experience of their loving us
 - (3) But they are not limited in offering us this love
 - 3 All the reasons to pray for and ask for prayers from the living increase regarding the dead who are with God
 - a Praying for or to them allows us to maintain and deepen our loving relationship with them

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- b Asking them for prayers must help us because
 - (1) They care enough about us to respond to our request -- they care more now than they did when they were alive
 - (2) God will certainly listen to them
 - (a) We have even more reason to believe that God will listen to them now than He would earlier when they were alive
 - (b) His friendship with them now is perfected
 - (c) They certainly haven't lost influence with Him through this perfection
- D THE EXPERIENCE OF THE CHURCH SUPPORTS PRAYING TO/FOR THE DEAD, FOR "SAINTS"
 - 1 Prayers to saints work!
 - a God made us to need others and to work with others
 - b The same is true in our spiritual lives
 - c We feel comforted when we are surrounded by a caring community supporting us
 - (1) We have such a community in the Communion of Saints
 - (a) Those who have died
 - (b) Those who are still alive
 - (2) We are not alone
 - 2 Specialization is a feature of the Body of Christ as well as it is in our own physical bodies
 - a Paul tells us that God gives special charisms to His living saints
 - (1) 1 Corinthians 12:4
 - (a) Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord;
 - (b) 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.
 - (c) 8 To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,
 - (d) 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.
 - (e) 11 All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.
 - b Experience shows us that this same specialization is true regarding the saints who are dead
 - (1) Prayers to certain saints seem to have been more effective in special areas
 - (2) This claim is proved by years of prayers and responses
 - (3) I have examples in my life
 - (a) I've prayed to Saint Anthony, patron of lost articles, and found lost articles
 - (b) I've prayed to Saint Jude, patron of difficult cases, and received help in impossible causes
- E MY LIFE EXPERIENCE REFLECTED A GRADUAL REALIZATION OF OUR NEED FOR HELP FROM THE "SAINTS"
 - 1 Originally, I scoffed at our need for saints
 - a I ignored their feasts
 - b And I ignored using them in prayer

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- 2 Then I began to reflect on what had happened in my own life
 - a I didn't experience God directly
 - b I found Him under strange (to me!) circumstances
 - (1) Alcoholism stripped me of all dignity and all faith
 - (2) I became a living atheist
 - (3) Finally, I cried out for human help
 - (4) Sober alcoholics supported me
 - (a) Helped me find sobriety
 - (b) Helped me find God -- though I wasn't looking for Him!
 - (c) Helped me find self
 - (d) Helped me find others
 - c I continued to need the dynamic support of others to enrich each of my discoveries
 - (1) So I came to realize my desperate need for others
 - (2) I can't stay sober alone!
 - (3) I can't be me without others supporting me!
 - (4) This dependence on support for others is healthy
 - (5) Now I pray to saints and ask for their assistance
- F HERE ARE A FEW ADDITIONAL NOTES ABOUT SAINTS
 - 1 Their lives are usually offered for our example
 - 2 Tragically, the authors often purge the saints of all human traits
 - a The authors make their subjects appear plastic, unreal, unlike us
 - b They hide all the saint's "warts"
 - 3 These lives, if they included the "warts" as well as the strengths, would have shown us that people like us can become saints
 - 4 Their lives would offer us practical hope and inspiration
- II MARY
 - A INTRODUCTION
 - 1 Mary, of course, is one of the saints of the living God
 - 2 But Mary is more than this for most Catholics
 - a Very early in Church history, Mary was proclaimed the "Mother of God"
 - (1) This was done at the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD -- the 3rd Ecumenical Council
 - (a) "Thus [the holy Fathers] did not hesitate to speak of the holy Virgin as the Mother of God."
 - b She was also proclaimed "virgin" for which there is strong Gospel evidence
 - 3 During the Dark Ages too much attention was focused upon Mary by many Catholics
 - a In practice, Mary supplanted Jesus as the focus of the faith for many of these Catholics
 - (1) Jesus was seen as a stern and punishing judge -- He was feared
 - (2) Mary was seen as a gentle, loving mother
 - b Simple, uneducated Catholics were far more comfortable with her than with Jesus
 - 4 These aberrations of true Christianity persist in some areas into the present time
 - a We constantly hear of rumors reporting apparitions of Mary
 - b A few people chase each rumor, hoping to experience Mary

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- c They don't realize the error such chases reveal about their Christian faith
 - (1) Mary might be there for them
 - (2) But Jesus is here at each Mass, at every true Christian service
 - 5 However, their exaggeration and misunderstanding regarding the importance of Mary does not affect proper attention to Mary
 - B THE GOSPELS FOCUS ON MARY
 - 1 Mark
 - a He uses Mary as a negative example of all who feel they have an automatic membership in the People of God
 - (1) Mark 3:32
 - (a) And the crowd sat about Him, and they said to Him, Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are outside seeking for You. 33* And He answered them, saying, Who is My mother, or My brothers?
 - (b) 34 And He looked around on those who sat about Him, and said, Behold My mother and My brothers! 35 For whoever does the will of God, the same is My brother and My sister and My mother.
 - (2) This is the last appearance of Mary and the family of Jesus in Mark
 - (a) They are outside
 - (b) And salvation is inside with Jesus
 - b Membership in the Kingship is based on doing the will of God -- letting Jesus save us
 - c It is not based on any "blood relationship with Jesus," on anything automatic
 - d Catholics feel uncomfortable with this conclusion and try to soften it
 - 2 Matthew
 - a He offers us the virginal conception and birth of Jesus through Mary
 - b Matthew 1:20
 - (1) And as he thought upon these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take to you Mary as your wife. For that in her is fathered of the Holy Spirit. 21* And she shall bear a son, and you shall call His name JESUS: for He shall save His people from their sins.
 - (2) 22* Now all this happened so that might be fulfilled that spoken of the LORD by the prophet, saying, 23* "Behold, the virgin shall conceive in her womb, and will bear a son. And they will call His name Emmanuel," which being interpreted is, God with us.
 - (3) 24 And Joseph, being roused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took his wife, 25* and did not know her until she bore her son, the First-born. And he called His name JESUS.
- 3 Luke
 - a He also offers the virginal conception and birth of Jesus
 - (1) Luke 1:34
 - (a) Then Mary said to the angel, How shall this be, since I do not know a man? 35* And the angel answered and said to her, The Holy Spirit shall come on you, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow you. Therefore also that Holy One which will be born of you shall be called Son of God.
 - b But he also presents Mary as the model disciple
 - (1) She listens to God's Word
 - (2) She believes in this Word
 - (3) She brings Jesus into the world
 - (4) She stands by Him in His youth

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- (5) She supports Him in His ministry
- (6) And she is with the Church in prayer after the Ascension
- 4 John
 - a Mary appears only twice in this Gospel -- at the start of the ministry and at the end
 - (1) She is called "woman" both times
 - (2) These references cold to us but they teach us Mary's symbolic importance
 - (3) "Eve" in Hebrew is the word for "Woman"
 - b At the start John is teaching, as he does throughout His Gospel, that Jesus saves us all by Himself
 - (1) At the marriage feast of Cana He uses the title for the first time
 - (2) John 2:4
 - (a) And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come."
 - (3) Jesus calls Mary "woman" to teach us that He alone saves us
 - (4) No human assistance, no new "Eve," is needed to establish the New Creation of the Kingship
 - c At the end John is teaching us the social dimensions of Christianity
 - (1) John 19:25
 - (a) *Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.*
 - (b) 26 When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." 27 Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.
 - (2) Now that Jesus is accomplishing our salvation, Mary has a role
 - (3) The new community gathers around her
- C MARY AS THE IMAGE OF THE CHURCH
 - 1 As happened with the saints, some have offered Mary undue attention
 - a Some go off into wild theological speculation about details in Mary's life
 - b Others offer the insights of private meditations
 - c Imaginative details, sometimes highly imaginative details, are supplied as factual
 - (1) Mary, we are told, was presented to the Temple as a young child
 - (2) We are given the names of Mary's parents: Ann and Joachim
 - d There is no theological relevance, no practical, spiritual benefit, to any of this -- nor is their any Biblical basis for these claims
 - 2 But proper attention has been, and should be, paid, to Mary as we follow the pattern offered by Luke and John
 - a "Ad Jesus per Mariam"
 - (1) We go "To Jesus through Mary"
 - (2) We only focus upon Mary in order to relate with Jesus better
 - b We meditate upon Mary to better understand relating with Jesus
 - (1) We can better understand our response to Jesus
 - (2) Our focus upon Mary should not be academic
 - (3) Rather, it should practical
 - c The same claim should be true of all feasts of Mary

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- (1) We should celebrate them to better understand the Church
- (2) We should focus on them to better grasp our roles as members of this Church
- **3 The Virginity of Mary**
 - **a In the Catholic belief, this mystery has two completely different aspects**
 - **b [1] Mary was a virgin in the birth of Jesus**
 - (1) The mystery has a teaching; it is not just a factual claim
 - (a) Jesus was not in Mary's womb
 - [1] Because of anything Mary did
 - [2] Because of anything Joseph did
 - [3] Because of anything Mary and Joseph did
 - (b) Jesus was in her womb for one reason only
 - [1] He was there because of what the Father did
 - [2] The Father gave her the Spirit of His love
 - (2) There is a relevance to this mystery
 - (a) Jesus is not in the Church and/or the lives of Christians because of anything we do
 - (b) Jesus is present solely because of what the Father does
 - [1] He gives us the same Spirit of love that He gave Mary
 - [2] And the God who gives is unchanging
 - [a] Our weaknesses and failures will not strip us of the gift of Jesus
 - [b] Therefore, we have no cause to wonder about the presence of Jesus in our hearts
 - **c [2] Mary was a Virgin after the birth of Jesus**
 - (1) Most Christians believe Mary was a virgin until the birth of Jesus
 - (2) Most do not believe she remained a virgin after the birth
 - (a) The NT refers to the brothers and sisters of Jesus
 - [1] Mark 3:31
 - [a] Then His brothers and His mother came. And standing outside, they sent to Him, calling Him.
 - [2] Matthew 13:55
 - [a] Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And his brothers, James and Joses and Simon and Judas,
 - [3] Acts 1:14
 - [a] All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers,
 - (b) However, since people lived in extended families, the reference could be to cousins
 - [1] But the Greek word for "cousin" was not used
 - [2] The reference could be to children Joseph had from a previous marriage
 - (c) Therefore, the NT is not conclusive
 - (d) And the Fathers of the Church in the East quickly proclaimed Mary was "Ever Virgin"
 - (3) Again, the relevance of the mystery alone is important
 - (a) For all other people, human relations are a way to find God
 - [1] All human love helps us to experience the God who is love

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- [2] And sexual love offers the most intimate and complete experience of interpersonal sharing
- [3] 1 John 4:7
 - [a] Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.
 - [b] 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.
 - [c] 9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.
 - [d] 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.
 - [e] 11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.
 - [f] 12 No-one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.
- (b) **Human sexual relations, sacred as they are, were not the optimum way for Joseph and Mary to discover God**
 - [1] **Perfect love resided within their midst in tangible form**
 - [2] **Human, marital intercourse, though blessed and good, could distract them from God and His love**
 - [a] For all others, this human love leads to God
 - [b] For Mary and Joseph, this human love would or could be a distraction from God
- (c) **There is an important application of this mystery for us, for the Church**
 - [1] **In Jesus, the Church has all it needs for life in the world**
 - [2] **Therefore the Church should never offer itself to the forces and values of the world**
 - [3] **Sadly, most Christian churches have and do enter into intimate relationships with worldly values**
 - [a] They become enmeshed in politics seeking power as a solution to the world's problems
 - [b] They accumulate wealth and construct physical plants
 - {1} The upkeep and protection of these plants are needed
 - {2} Preachers, leaders, are not free to disturb their comfortable donators and supporters
- 4 The Annunciation
 - a Luke 1:26*
 - (1) In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, 27* to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.
 - (2) 28* And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." 29* But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.
 - (3) 30 The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.
 - (4) 31* And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. 32* 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 ancestor David.
 - (5) 33* He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." 34* Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"
 - (6) 35* 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 holy; he will be called Son of God.
 - (7) 36* And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren.

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- (8) 37* For nothing will be impossible with God." 38* Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.
- b Mary paused from the activities in her world and listened
 - (1) She listened to God's "messenger"
 - (a) This is the meaning of the word "angel" in both Greek and Hebrew
 - (b) "Angel" is simply the official representative of a person
 - (2) This messenger, Gabriel, announced a message that was simply impossible according to the laws of nature
 - (a) She, a virgin, would conceive God's life within her
 - [1] She was young in a culture that had no respect for youth
 - [2] She was from Galilee -- the wrong side of the tracks
 - [3] Her lineage was in no way distinguished -- it is never cited in the New Testament
 - (b) God, not human efforts, would accomplish this wonder -- not Mary
 - (3) She believed
 - (a) Not in her impossibility
 - (b) But in God's possibility
 - (4) She committed herself to God's action
 - (a) Luke 1:38
 - [1] Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."
- c There is an application of this mystery for us
 - (1) We are challenged to pause from all the distractions of our lives
 - (2) We must listen to God's messengers
 - (a) Whoever they are
 - (b) The messengers offer us the same message that was given to Mary (the death of Jesus on the cross assures us of this)
 - (3) We must stop doubting our holiness
 - (a) We must accept God's power and allow it to act in us
 - (b) "Let it be done in us according to your will"
 - (4) We must not believe in our impossibility -- our sin
 - (5) We should believe in God's possibility -- the infinite power of His love in Jesus
- 5 The Visitation
 - a Luke 1:36*
 - (1) And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. 37* For nothing will be impossible with God."
 - (2) 38* Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.
 - (3) 39* In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judaeen town in the hill country, 40 where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.
 - (4) 41* When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit 42* and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.
 - (5) 43* And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? 44 For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy.

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- (6) 45* And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.
- (7) 46* And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, 47* and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
- (8) 48* for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
- b **Loved, Mary immediately goes forth to love**
 - (1) **She was told that her cousin Elizabeth had a need: Elizabeth was pregnant**
 - (a) The journey was long -- 90 miles roughly
 - (b) **Mary was young**
 - (c) **And Mary was carrying God's answer to Israel's and the world's needs**
 - (2) **Mary risked all by volunteering to visit and serve Elizabeth**
- c **Most of us would react differently from Mary**
 - (1) We would ask Elizabeth to visit us
 - (2) We would not want to "risk" the love within us by exposing this love to dangers
 - (3) We would want to wait until this love matured, was born, grew in strength
 - (4) And, I feel, if we reacted in this way, this love would never grow!
 - (a) Love must love
 - (b) **If Mary had not responded to Elizabeth's need**
 - [1] The love, Jesus, would be offered to her
 - [2] **But she would spontaneously abort this love**
 - [a] Love can't grow where love is possessed and not shared
 - [b] Only by sharing does she allow Jesus, (God serving us,) to mature to birth within her
 - [3] **Only by loving does she enable Jesus, (God loving us) to grow**
 - (5) **This process explains why Jesus does not mature in our lives**
 - (a) He is continually offered us
 - [1] Often we listen
 - [2] And we accept His love
 - (b) We fail to allow love to mature within us by responding to other's needs -- giving them the love that had been first given us
 - (c) Therefore this love is aborted from our midst; it is unable to develop
 - (d) But the love is offered us anew again and again
 - (6) **Like Mary, we must offer to all in need what (who) we have been and are offered: the Spirit of Jesus**
- 6 The Birth of Jesus
 - a **Mary**
 - (1) **She allowed herself to be loved**
 - (2) **She allowed herself to share this love**
 - (3) **Therefore, love grew within her**
 - (4) **Love took flesh in her world through her**
 - b **We**
 - (1) We must let ourselves be loved
 - (a) Christianity always begins with accepting this love as a gift

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- (b) Before we can serve, we must be served
- (2) Then we must go forth and offer ourselves and the love within us to those in need
- (3) As we do this, we allow God's love, Jesus, to take flesh in our world
- 7 The Presentation of Jesus
 - a Luke 2:25
 - (1) Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him.
 - (2) 26* It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. 27* Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law.
 - (3) 28* Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, 29* "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word;
 - (4) 30* for my eyes have seen your salvation, 31* which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
 - (5) 32* a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."
 - (6) 33* And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him.
 - (7) 34* Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed 35* so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too."
 - (8) 36* There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37* then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day.
 - (9) 38* At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.
 - (10) 39* When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.
 - (11) 39* When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.
 - b Since Mary and Joseph were obedient to the Jewish law
 - (1) **As God wished, (as the Law directed,) they brought Jesus to the Temple 40 days after His birth**
 - (a) **To remind themselves that this child belonged to God**
 - [1] That He was just committed to them for their enjoyment and spiritual growth
 - [2] That He was not their property
 - (b) **To make the prescribed offering to redeem Him for their family**
 - [1] They made the poor family's substitute offering
 - [2] Luke 2:24
 - [a] and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons.
 - [3] They didn't hold back because they could only make the poor person's offering
 - [4] They didn't wait until He was mature before presenting Him
 - (2) By bringing Jesus, they changed the lives of Simeon and of Anna
 - (a) Luke 2:28

Topic

- [1] Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation."
- c We are different
 - (1) So often we are ashamed of our gifts to others
 - (a) We compare our small offering to the great gifts others are giving
 - (b) We decide to wait until we can match what they offer
 - (2) We are ashamed of the immaturity of our love
 - (a) We feel it is too delicate
 - (b) We want to wait until it develops
 - (3) We forget that God can operate with anything
 - (a) His love in us will touch hearts if we allow it
 - (b) He will act regardless of what we do
 - (4) We stay home -- within ourselves
 - (5) And lives aren't touched
- 8 The Finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple
 - a Luke 2:41
 - (1) Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. 42 And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival.
 - (2) 43* When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it.
 - (3) 44* Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends.
 - (4) 45* When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. 46* After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.
 - (5) 47* And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.
 - (6) 48* When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety."
 - (7) 49* He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" 50 But they did not understand what he said to them.
 - (8) 51* Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. 52* And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.
 - b Mary and Joseph
 - (1) A central reality of this Gospel segment is often missed
 - (a) Jesus was, indeed, "found"
 - (b) Before Jesus could be found, He had to be lost!
 - (2) How did Mary and Joseph lose Jesus?
 - (a) After the feast, they had to return home
 - [1] To provide food, shelter, clothing for each other
 - [2] To continue with the necessities of daily living
 - (b) Prior to this experience, wherever they went, Jesus went
 - (c) But Jesus matured; He had a ministry to perform
 - [1] When He ministered, to experience Him they had to go where He needed to be: loving and serving others

Topic

- [2] One day "in the fullness of time," he would, leave Nazareth
 - [a] At that point, He would no longer "follow" them
 - [b] Now, to continue to experience Him, they must "follow" Him
- c We
 - (1) We often ignore requests of God to love and serve us
 - (a) We become engrossed in the joys and sorrows of daily life
 - (b) We get caught up in the need to live
 - (2) Even though we have done no wrong, we can lose our experience of Jesus
 - (a) Sadly, many of us give up our spiritual journey at this point
 - (b) The Finding tells us all we need know
 - [1] To experience Jesus anew, we must go where He is
 - [a] The grace period when He accompanies us ends
 - [b] He must be "In His Father's house"
 - [c] Or He must be "about His Father's business"
 - [2] Jesus can be discovered anew by letting Him love us and, then, loving others
 - (c) That's the mission the Father offers Him
- 9 The Immaculate Conception
 - a Mary
 - (1) There is no clear Biblical foundation for this mystery
 - (2) It was proclaimed as a dogma in the 1854 by Pius IX
 - (3) It does not deal directly with Jesus
 - (a) Many think the words "Immaculate Conception" are connected to His virginal conception
 - (b) They aren't
 - (c) They teach that Mary, from the moment of her conception, was spared the effects of all sin
 - [1] Sin is the absence of God
 - [a] Since God is love (loving), sin is the absence of being loved
 - [b] "Sin" in its broadest sense refers to this absence whether it resulted from our failure or from the weaknesses of others
 - [2] Mary was spared from being scarred by any human weaknesses of her parents
 - [3] In the womb and throughout life she experienced a love that was complete
 - (4) This mystery does not elevate Mary -- it magnifies God
 - (a) It refers to a blessing offered at her conception,
 - (b) There is no possible way Mary could have earned or deserved it
 - (c) Therefore, it must refer to a gift, grace, from God!
 - b We
 - (1) We have experienced the ravages of the effects of sin in our lives
 - (a) From our sin
 - (b) And from the sins of others
 - (2) And yet we do have an "Immaculate Conception!"
 - (a) An "Immaculate Re-Conception" is better
 - (b) We experience this "Re-conception" in two ways as the Church

Topic

- [1] **As a community**
- [2] **And as individuals within the community**
- (c) **In our spiritual rebirth, we are offered freedom from all the effects of sin**
- (d) **We are offered the possibility to love perfectly**
 - [1] **As the Church**
 - [2] **As individual Christians**
- (e) **In this freedom from the effects of sin we are like Mary**
 - [1] **This gift is offered us as grace**
 - [2] **It is not the result of our efforts, decisions, prayers**
- (f) **The gift comes when we die -- in Baptism, not in physical death**
 - [1] **Baptism is the real death for our sinful self**
 - [2] **And it is an "immaculate" rebirth for our spiritual self**
- (3) **We are recreated in the image of Jesus**
 - (a) **It is a gift**
 - (b) **It is an unearned grace**
- (4) **Our challenge is always to decide which birth we choose to live?**
 - (a) **Our imperfect birth in the flesh?**
 - (b) **Our perfect rebirth in the Spirit?**
- 10 The Assumption
 - a **Mary**
 - (1) **This theological teaching is another non-scriptural dogma: proclaimed by Pius XII in 1954**
 - (2) **The teaching must be correctly understood if we are to grasp it's importance for us**
 - (a) **Mary did die -- some Catholics think she didn't**
 - [1] **They see death as a punishment for sin**
 - [a] **They think it entered the world through Original Sin**
 - [b] **And Mary was preserved from the effects of this sin**
 - [2] **But most of the Bible sees death as the normal end of life**
 - [a] Premature death is the result of sin
 - [b] **Catholic teaching holds that Mary did experience death**
 - (b) **At the moment of her death, Mary was assumed into heaven**
 - [1] **Again, this mystery does not refer to something she does**
 - [2] **It refers to an action of God -- she is taken there by Him**
 - (c) **Mary was assumed as a complete person, body, soul, and spirit**
 - [1] **The teaching doesn't describe the kind of body**
 - [a] **It does not say Mary's physical body was taken to heaven**
 - [b] 1 Corinthians 15:42
 - [1] So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. 43 It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.
 - {2} 44 It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body.

Topic

- [c] A "spiritual" "body" is a contradiction in terms
 - {1} It is like a "square circle"
 - {2} "Body" means physical
 - {3} "Spiritual" means non-physical
 - [d] Paul is not describing, but teaching
 - {1} His terms have symbolic importance
 - {2} "Body" has a special meaning to a Hebrew that is not apparent to us
 - {a} To a Hebrew it refers to that which makes the person who he or she is
 - {b} So Paul is saying, that after her physical death, Mary (like all of us,) continues as the person she was before her death
 - {c} She was not swallowed up into some lump of impersonal existence as some Eastern religions seem to claim
 - {d} She kept her unique memories and special relationships
 - {e} In short, she remains Mary
 - {3} "Body" has a very different meaning to a Greek
 - {a} It means limitations
 - {b} Our good intentions are limited by the needs of our body
 - ((1 Try loving others when you have 104 degree fever with the flu
 - ((2 The body confines us
 - ((3 Because of the body's limitations, we can't be present at one and the same time to all the people we love
 - {4} "Spiritual" to a Greek was another technical term
 - {a} It meant perfection
 - {b} Free of the body, the spirit could and would love and love perfectly
 - [e] So "spiritual body" means the person who continues to live after death remains the same person who lived on earth
 - {1} With no limitations
 - {2} With full perfection -- perfection refers to our ability
 - {a} To accept love completely as we are
 - ((1 From God
 - ((2 From ourselves
 - ((3 From others
 - {b} To love as the people we are
 - ((1 To love God as God is
 - ((2 To love ourselves as we are
 - ((3 To love others as they are
 - [2] Thus, Mary is with God in absolute individuality and absolute perfection
- b We
 - (1) I pondered for a long time about the meaning of this dogma for us today
 - (a) The Feast of the Assumption must be more than a "tomorrow" hope
 - (b) It must have, and does have, some "today" relevance
 - (2) Finally I noted the Gospel read for the feast -- the story of Mary's Visitation to Elizabeth
 - (a) I got a glimmer of understanding

Topic

- (b) I realized when Mary's body began to be assumed into heaven
 - [1] First I must define my understanding of "heaven"
 - [a] Most think it's some place up in the sky
 - {1} Their idea flows from the way the Bible talks about God
 - {2} But God is perfect:
 - {a} He is a spiritual, not physical, being.
 - {b} He is not confined to any one place
 - [b] God is love -- the activity of love
 - {1} And God's love is universal
 - {2} So God's presence is universal
 - [c] "Heaven" is different from most people's picture
 - {1} It's "being with God"
 - {2} And it's "experiencing God's life"
 - [d] Heaven, then, is being loved by God and loving everyone in return
 - [2] When did Mary's body first experience heaven in this fashion?
 - [a] It happened at least during the Visitation
 - [b] Earlier she had become aware of the depth of God's love for her -- the Annunciation
 - [c] Now she went to share it with Elizabeth
 - [d] She made the trip physically, not just spiritually
 - {1} She served Elizabeth with her own body, soul, and spirit
 - {2} Her body was already partially being 'assumed' into heaven
 - {3} Her body was already being loved by God and being used to love
 - [e] If she had stayed home and prayed for Elizabeth
 - {1} Her spirit would have been in heaven
 - {2} But her body would not have been!
- (3) This Mystery teaches us our importance in God's plan
 - (a) Too many limit their service to praying for others
 - [1] But God did not create them "angels"
 - [2] God made them people
 - (b) God needs the full person He created
 - (c) God needs our bodies as well as our souls
- (4) Therefore we must remember that
 - (a) We must allow God to love us as the whole persons we are including our bodies with all their imperfections
 - (b) And we must love others as the whole persons we are
 - [1] Using our bodies as vehicles of transmitting the love we receive
 - [2] Using our weaknesses and hang-ups
 - [a] Ministry continues for the disadvantaged
 - [b] Charlie Wade, a Lawton deacon, used an oxygen hose as he served at the altar

Topic

- (c) If we do, our **bodies** are being **assumed into heaven**: being loved by God and loving in return
- **11 The Coronation of Mary as Queen of Heaven and Earth**
 - **a Mary**
 - (1) This mystery of the rosary is not scriptural and not a dogma of the Church
 - (a) But it is a very rich idea to help us understand ourselves
 - (b) The teaching has **indirect scriptural support**
 - [1] **The Twelve are told they will sit on thrones, judging with Jesus**
 - [a] Matthew 19:28
 - {1} Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."
 - [2] **And the Church is described as the "Bride of Jesus Christ"**
 - [a] Revelation 21:1
 - {1} Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.
 - [b] If Jesus is a king who **reigns**, then the Church, as His bride, is a queen who **reigns** with Him
 - (c) Since Mary is the image of the Church, the Church will share in the universal reign of Jesus
 - (2) At her death, Mary began ruling the universe
 - **b We**
 - (1) This means, that the Church **reigns** with Jesus
 - (a) **Collectively**
 - (b) **Individually**
 - [1] This means that you and I **can reign with Jesus**
 - [2] **We can rule over the universe: over heaven and earth!**
 - (2) **How?**
 - (a) **I command so little respect, that the significance of this mystery seemed ridiculous to me**
 - (b) **After years of puzzling, I realized my error**
 - [1] I was understanding "**ruling**" by our definition
 - [2] I forgot that Jesus redefined what it means **to rule**
 - [a] **Jesus rules with service, not power**
 - [b] **He confers honor, He doesn't seek it**
 - [3] Then I understood the teaching of this mystery
 - [4] And I didn't like it!
 - (c) I understood
 - [1] In the Spirit and love offered me and the Church we are given all we need to love, honor, and serve
 - [a] **Each person**
 - [b] **And every person**
 - [2] To the extent we offer these as freely as we've received them, we **rule with Jesus!**

Topic

- (d) **And I didn't like my new understanding**
 - [1] Frankly, I'm not spiritual enough to even want to rule universally
 - [2] There are **some people I don't want to serve**
 - [a] I'd like them to serve me
 - [b] I'd like some just to stay out of my world
 - [3] I thought ruling was an automatic thing
 - [a] Now I know **it takes effort, use of our free will**
 - [b] It requires the effort of giving self humbly to benefit others
 - [c] And, one day, it demands the effort of giving self humbly to benefit all others
- (3) One day, you and I will rule heaven and earth
 - (a) **Easter is our assurance of the victory of the love of Jesus over our self concern**
 - (b) The Coronation of Mary is our challenge to realize this and attempt to begin living it now