

Mary Through the Ages – A

Thank you for joining us tonight for a romp through nearly 2000 years of the history of Mary's personal involvement with the Church. Her job has been to keep us faithful to Jesus in the struggle against evil. Her message to us over the years has always been some version of her simple instructions to the servants at the Wedding in Cana: "**Do whatever He tells you.**" (*Jn 2:5*)

Even many otherwise well-informed Catholics have only a vague idea of the extent and importance of her involvements. As mentioned yesterday, what she told us through the children in Medjugorje as recently as May, 1984, is a true and literal description of the facts. "**Throughout the centuries, I have given myself completely to you....**" By the end of this Mission, none of us should have any doubts about that.

May I acknowledge here my happy dependence on the book I referred to yesterday: God-Sent – A History of the Accredited Apparitions of Mary by Roy Abraham Varghese, published in the year 2000 with the specific blessing of His Holiness Pope John Paul II. I have also accumulated a small library of Church-approved books on the same subject.

A brief word on apparitions themselves is in order as we begin. They are nothing new and unusual for the Church. The Bible itself is full of them. For example, when Moses and Elijah **appeared** to Peter, James and John alongside their transfigured Lord Jesus, that was an "apparition". When Jesus came from Heaven to confront and convert Saul on the Road to Damascus and set him up for his Baptism as Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles, that was an "apparition". For his part, Saul had by that time already been an eyewitness to an "apparition" when he stood there looking on as Jesus, "standing at the right hand of God", **appeared** to St.

Stephen at the moment of his martyr's death. The Annunciation to Mary by the Angel Gabriel was an "apparition". Without apparitions there would be no New Testament, no Christianity. It's as simple as that.

So what is an apparition? An apparition occurs when God draws the veil back and permits someone from Heaven, or from Purgatory, or very occasionally even from hell, to make direct personal contact with one or more or many people on earth. Usually, but not always, both in Scripture and in the Church's experience, the targeted persons enter a state of ecstasy, that is, detachment from their immediate physical environment. Today we have perfected the means of testing the objectivity of such experiences to distinguish them from hallucinations or hysteria. For those receiving a true apparition, whether it is the 70,000 people at Fatima in 1917, the 500,000 at Hrushiv in 1988, the 1,000,000 in Cairo in 1968, or one person only as at Lourdes in 1858, the experience has all the objectivity of any other direct encounter with another person. Though I could do it, I will not waste your time and mine defending scientifically the authenticity of the Marian apparitions we will be considering. The Church's screening process before accrediting an apparition as worthy of belief is brutal - morally, theologically, and scientifically brutal. The Church chooses only those apparitions for scrutiny whose **public** impact warrants it and accredits only those that pass severe criteria of authenticity. God only knows how many more authentic apparitions He has accorded privately over the centuries to martyrs like Josyp Terelya in the Soviet gulags, genuine apparitions which never receive the benefit of such scrutiny.

Apparitions were treated as a perfectly normal part of life in the Early Church, as we can plainly see in the book of the Acts of the Apostles and in the writings of the Church Fathers. In fact, Church history is studded with them, from start to finish, many involving Mary. She has

always been active in carrying out God's will to protect her children, but she herself says that she has never been more active than she is right now. Why? Because our need for her protection has never been so great. Satan knows his days are numbered, she tells us, his power is already weakening, his usurped reign of terror is in its final stages. Therefore his fury is savage (*Revelation 12:12b*). His favorite targets are priests and families, and his favorite means are pornography and drugs, with all their related vices. By these he hopes to ensnare, destroy and drag down to hell with him multitudes of souls in his final desperate attempt to hang onto power. Mary's mandate from God is to flush him out into the open where we can see him, to rob him of the souls of people already caught in his traps, and to provide the means for us, her children, to remain so attached to Jesus that the evil one is helpless to do us harm. Millions of people, young and old, attest to her incredible effectiveness in achieving this in our own time, as we shall see especially tomorrow. She calls herself our John the Baptist, sent by God to prepare the whole human race for purifying events leading to the reign of Christ on earth in the days that lie just ahead of us.

Having said that, let us begin our "tour de force" through 2000 years of Mary's diligent care for her children.

It begins at the foot of the Cross where, as we all know, Jesus entrusts Mary and John to one another as mother and son (*John 19:26-27*). We are all present there in John, the Beloved Disciple, who throughout the Gospel of John represents all of us faithful. Jesus gives His mother to us to care for us. He gives us to His mother to receive into our own homes.

In the Book of the Revelation to St. John, Chapters 11 and 12, Mary is depicted as the embodiment of faithful Israel and of the Church, as the new Ark of the Covenant, as the New and Obedient Eve, as the Queen of Heaven and earth, as the Mother of the Messiah, as the Target of Satan's

wrath on earth, and as the Mother of “the rest of her offspring (who) keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus,” **right up to the end of time**. That’s you and me: we’re “the rest of her offspring”. If anyone should doubt that this heavenly Woman clothed with the sun is meant to be understood as Mary, Our Blessed Mother, those doubts are gently laid to rest for those who know the Bible by the fact, as we noted yesterday, that in so many of her apparitions (for example, Guadalupe, Cuapa, Medjugorje, etc.) she comes to us dressed exactly as she is described in this passage: “**clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.**” (*Revelation 12:1*)

So it all begins in Scripture. What happens next? For those interested in pursuing in detail what we know about Mary’s involvement with the Church in its early centuries, Bernard Buby’s book The Marian Heritage of the Early Church (1996) is essential reading. The major apparitions of this period, as recorded, to mention just a few, occurred in Saragossa, Spain to St. James; in Greece to St. John; in Asia Minor to St. Gregory the Wonder-Worker where we see Mary providing catechesis, just as she does in the great catechetical apparitions of our own time; and in Rome to Pope Liberius and simultaneously to the devout land-owner John and also to his wife. All three were told independently to build a church in her honour where the snow fell. The next morning, August 5 (!), there was a miraculous snowfall which fell only on a hilltop owned by John and which outlined the exact form of the church requested by Mary in all three simultaneous apparitions. She quickly became known as “Our Lady of the Snows”. The basilica of St. Mary Major, completed in 360 AD, still stands there resplendent to this day.

Spain, England, and Switzerland experienced important interventions from our Blessed Mother at critical moments over the next centuries. These, of course, are just the ones we know about. Around the year 1000

literacy became more widespread again and from then on we can track Our Lady's interventions more closely.

Walsingham, England, was the site of three loving apparitions of Mary shortly after the turn of the millennium which resulted in many miracles of healing and the renewing of faith. Though destroyed on the orders of King Henry VIII, it has been rebuilt and remains a very active Catholic pilgrimage site today, administered by the Church of England!

Picking out just a few more of the many well-attested apparitions, we cite Our Lady's intervention with St. Francis of Assisi in 1216, her gift of the Brown Scapular to St. Simon Stock in 1251 to ensure the future of the Carmelites, and her gift of the Rosary to St. Dominic just a little earlier to combat the dreadful Albigensian heresy sweeping across southern Europe. [Incidentally, in the last Fatima apparition on October 13, 1917, Our Lady was holding out to us both the Scapular and the Rosary, showing how important these gifts of long ago remain to help us combat two great dangers of our own time – impurity (the Scapular) and heresy (the Rosary).] We cannot overlook her timeless interventions with St. Mechtilde of Germany, St. Bridget of Sweden, and St. Catherine of Siena in the Fourteenth Century, all well documented. Then came the apparition of Our Lady to Prince Ladislaus in Poland, requesting that he place the ancient icon of the Black Madonna in the monastery of Jasna Gora in Czestochowa (chen-sto-HO-va), resulting in countless miracles of healing and conversion right down to our own time, especially during the Nazi and Communist periods. St. Sergius of Radonezh, St. Ignatius of Loyola (Jesuit founder), and St. Teresa of Avila – all three very credible witnesses – were also favoured with Mary's personal interventions at critical moments in their life and mission.

And that brings us down to the historic apparition in Mexico in 1531 which Our Lady continues to use to convert atheists and skeptics in large

numbers and to draw multitudes of people to Jesus in our own time. I am speaking, of course, of the apparitions of Mary to the Aztec Indian St. Juan Diego and of her **continuing apparition** in plain view of millions of people today. We see her here as the evangelist par excellence. I wish I could share with you the whole series of events that resulted in the conversion of the entire Aztec nation to Jesus Christ and His Church and promoted the reconciliation of conqueror and conquered. I will have to be content with reminding you of some of indisputable facts that make this event a **continuing apparition** in our own time: These include the apron or “tilma” worn by Juan Diego made of cactus fibres which should have disintegrated centuries ago but which is still as fresh as the day it was made, despite over 100 years of mauling and exposure to candle smoke before it was given a protective glass enclosure, and despite the “assassination attempt” of the Free-Masons in the 1920’s which destroyed everything all around it but left it unscathed; the image on its surface of Mary as a pregnant Aztec princess with her eyes lowered in adoration of the Child in her womb; of the sun, the moon, the stars identifying her as the Woman of Revelation 12; of the microscopic images in her eyeballs perfectly refracted and recording forever the scene she was seeing in the very moment Juan Diego emptied the tilma of its roses before the Bishop; of the absence of any source of colouring agent on the tilma – no paint, no dye, nothing. Consider the further fact that the image is not even attached to the tilma but, as laser research has shown, hovers 1/100th of an inch above it without touching it. There’s much more. But what’s important is her message, conveyed both verbally and visually: **“I am the ever-virgin Mary, Mother of the true God for whom we live, Creator of all things, Lord of Heaven and earth.... I am your merciful Mother, the Mother of all who live in unity in this land, the Mother of all mankind, of all who love me, cry to me, and have confidence in me. Here I will see their tears, I will**

**console them, and they will be at peace.... Am I not your mother?
Do not be afraid.”**

You know she was declared patroness of all the Americas by Pope John Paul II. Why is there an unbeliever left in this hemisphere? It is a mystery to me why all Christians don't joyfully acknowledge her as their strongest ally in proclaiming the Gospel of her Son.

Over the next three centuries Our Lady was active world-wide, squaring off against Satan and bringing people to faith in her Son: in Russia, Lithuania, Ecuador, France, Brazil, Vietnam, India, all faith-creating events of the highest order. And miracles continue at these pilgrimage sites in testimony to her message of truth! A much heralded and well documented miracle took place when the tsunami hit the beach at Vailankanni, India, a few years ago, totally engulfing the beautiful Basilica of Our Lady of Good Health which marks an almost 500-year-old Marian apparition site right on the coast. It hit during Sunday Mass. The church was packed with 2000 worshipers. Everyone outside, some 800 people, was swept out to sea, along with buildings that were blocks inland from the basilica. Worshipers in the basilica were not even aware that anything unusual had happened until Mass was over and they went outside and stepped into a scene from hell. Not a drop of water had entered the basilica whereas the water level had come over the windows. Testimonies taken from many eye-witnesses have resulted in the Indian Bishops Conference declaring it an authentic miracle of divine intervention through the intercession of Our Lady of Good Health.

Now let's stand and sing before the Second Part.

Mary Through the Ages – B

We enter now into the series of interventions from Our Blessed Mother that lead up to and embrace the modern age, our own time.

We are looking at no fewer than 32 accredited or likely soon-to-be accredited apparition sites since 1830, some involving a single apparition, some a great many encounters over a period of years, some accorded to one visionary alone, some to several, and some to vast multitudes. In addition, the Church has identified many more events of this kind that are deemed tentatively credible; a certain number that have failed to meet the stringent standards of authenticity imposed by the Church and are of questionable authenticity; and also some alleged apparitions that have been declared inauthentic and detrimental to faith.

Mary herself, to Mirjana of Medjugorje, has asked that we pray for false visionaries, some of whom are direct tools of Satan who stops at nothing to discredit the saving work of Jesus and Mary. Both Jesus and Paul warn us that Satan will do “mighty works in the last days to lead astray, if possible, even the elect” (*Matthew 24:24; cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12*). Mary herself has helped us in so many ways to discern the difference between supernatural events that come from God and imitations that come from the other side. She tells us that wherever she is at work, Satan is never far away, seeking to undermine the work of the Holy Spirit in the faithful and preying on people of weak faith.

A pattern emerges from the numerous approved apparitions. Most often Mary chooses as visionaries people who would have absolutely no other access to the messages she is giving: small children, the illiterate, simple religious, even pagan unbelievers. She picks the ingenuous; people incapable of deception, normal people with no signs of psychic disorder, the more transparent the better. Thus, like her Son before her, she uses the weak to disarm the strong, the simple to make foolish the wise. As she told Ivan of Medjugorje with a smile when he asked why she had chosen such an ordinary person as him to transmit her messages: “I do not always choose the best.”

The modern Marian era is deemed to have begun with Mary's apparition to the novice who became St. Catherine Laboure at the monastery of St. Vincent de Paul's Sisters of Charity on the Rue du Bac in Paris in 1830. Only her confessor knew that she was the source of the revelation of the Miraculous Medal that has blessed the world ever since. St. Maximilian Kolbe called these medals his "silver bullets". St. Catherine also received several precise and detailed revelations about what was in store for France in the immediate future – including the violent deaths of two archbishops – all of it accurate. Her mortal remains have the freshness of youth and are incorrupt, on display for prayer and veneration in the very chapel where she received the apparitions from our Blessed Mother.

In 1846 two illiterate unchurched children, tending sheep on a mountain side near La Salette in France, encountered a weeping lady, the details of whose messages, with both short-term and long-term implications, coming from such an improbable source, immediately rang true, proved to be authentic over time, and resulted in many conversions. Today a stunning basilica marks the site high in the mountains of eastern France.

Just a few years later, and still in France, we encounter Our Lady's 18 apparitions to tiny asthmatic Bernadette Soubirous, one of my favourite persons, saint or otherwise. Who could ever forget her story, or disbelieve her account of what happened to her? When finally on the Feast of the Annunciation, March 25, 1858, the "Lady" identified herself to her as "the Immaculate Conception", a term totally foreign to Bernadette, she confirmed the Church's decision just four years earlier to declare her Immaculate Conception as essential dogma for the faith of all Catholics, thus safeguarding the full divinity and humanity of Jesus. Already on February 25 of that year the "Lady" had had Bernadette scratch around in the dirt to open up a Spring of Healing which today flows at the rate of nearly 27,000 gallons per day. Over 5000 probable

healings have occurred there over the years, of which the Church has investigated and declared 69 to be miraculous beyond a reasonable doubt. The blessings are still flowing here at Lourdes more than ever, in spite of, and perhaps on account of, the paganizing and Islamizing of modern day France. God loves all people!

To bring us up to date in the briefest way, we recall Our Blessed Mother's intervention high in the heavens over the devout hamlet of Pontmain, France, in 1871 at the approach of the Prussian army. The people had been praying that their village would be spared and for an end to the war. Our Lady was holding a cross with a white scroll under it on which these words appeared in sequence: **“Pray, my children. God will soon grant your request. My Son allows Himself to be moved.”** This intervention of our Blessed Mother was credited by both the praying French populace **and** the general of the advancing Prussian army with halting that army dead in its tracks and ending the war.

We recall the outdoor tableau of the striking silent apparition of Mary, Joseph, John and Jesus as the Lamb of God, life-size, viewed by 18 people for 2 hours near the gable of the church in Knock, Ireland, in 1879. Large numbers of pilgrims are drawn to Knock to this day.

In 1900 Our Lady intervened in the sky again to prevent a bloodbath of 1000 Catholics in Dong Lu, China, sending the attacking army of 10,000 soldiers scattering in panic. She did it again in the same place in 1995.

We all know about Fatima in 1917, and what a different place the world would be today if we had heeded the messages Our Lady brought to us then, through the three children: Lucia, Jacinta, and Francisco. In the six apparitions of Our Lady to them from May 13 through October 13, plus the three of the Guardian Angel of Portugal that preceded it, **the whole world** was presented with a call to repentance, an experience of the

reality of God and of Heaven, hell, and purgatory and the truth of the Church's faith, and clear directions for the future with a warning about what to expect if we choose to ignore them. Our Blessed Mother has now told us that she will be completing in Medjugorje what she began at Fatima. We are living in awesome times that will see us move through whatever chastisements are made necessary by our continuing defiance of God into an Era of Peace in which, as she assured us already at Fatima, "my Immaculate Heart will triumph". The Miracle of the Sun which arrived as promised on October 13, 1917, and engulfed all 70,000 drenched and terrified on-lookers – intellectual skeptics, mocking Freemasons, and faithful alike – made believers of all but those few who, like Lucifer before them, shook their fist at God and said, "I will never submit." Any honest doubters have only to consider the brief subsequent lives of Francisco and Jacinta and the long life of Lucia to have all their reasonable doubts dispelled.

Then come Our Lady's appearances in Hrushiv, Ukraine, twice, 1914 and 1987, the latter on the first anniversary of the nearby Chernobyl nuclear disaster and lasting for nearly 4 months. She appeared in a column of light estimated by Soviet authorities as rising nearly 10,000 feet (3000 metres) in the air directly over the little church, in the plain sight and hearing of over 500,000 people. Here she announced the imminent collapse of the Soviet Union (which nobody foresaw at the time), thanked the Ukrainian (Catholic) people for their faithfulness in their 70 years of persecution, and sternly ordered them to repay their Russian oppressors only with kindness when the new Ukraine threw off the Russian yoke and achieved its independence in a short time.

In the Zeitun district of Cairo in 1968 she appeared luminous and larger than life above St. Mary's Coptic Church almost nightly for over a year, viewed by at least a million people, Christian and Muslim alike. This

apparition was pronounced authentic by both the Coptic and the Catholic churches, as well as by the government of Egypt. Often she would hold her Son out for all to adore. Sometimes she knelt before the Cross. Larger-than-life luminous doves often flew around in formation above her. There were many conversions from Islam at that time, despite the risks. It is worth anyone's while to visit the Zeitun Internet Sites to learn the whole story and view all the photos.

How can we pass over her tender appearances to the children at Beauraing, Belgium in 1932, and at Banneux in 1933, similar in so many ways to her appeal and outpouring of love at Lourdes 75 years before?

Then came her series of great catechetical and prophetic apparitions in Amsterdam as Our Lady of All Nations, beginning in 1945 and continuing until 1984. Their rediscovery by Holland's youth today is a big factor in drawing many of them back to the Church which their parents and grandparents abandoned. It was an obscure spinster, Ida Peerdeman, the very soul of discretion and balanced sanity, whom the Blessed Mother chose as her vehicle for transmitting a rich catechesis designed "to ensure that the will of the Son is obeyed in these times." This is accompanied by a vivid prophecy of the Second Vatican Council 10 years before it was called and of an appeal to Pope Paul VI towards the end of the Council to stay the course and reject "false theories about the Eucharist, sacraments, doctrine, priesthood, marriage and family planning.... Divine teaching and laws are valid for all time and newly applicable to every period," she taught (*May 31, 1965*). She also warned at length about the impending downward slide of Western Civilization into a secular hell and that the exercise of freely chosen obedience to God is essential for our survival. She asked us all to pray this prayer daily before a Cross: **"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Father: Send now Your Spirit over the earth. Let the Holy Spirit live in the hearts**

of all nations, that they may be preserved from degeneration, disasters, and war. And may the Lady of All Nations, whom we once called simply Mary, be our Advocate. Amen.”

A deaf recently converted Japanese novice at a little convent near Akita in northern Japan was our Lord and our Lady’s choice between 1973 and 1981 for a series of messages that closely parallel the ones given at Amsterdam. The truth and urgency of these messages were reinforced for all to see by the voluminous flows of blood and then of tears from the statue of Mary in the chapel, carefully analyzed as human blood and tears but not of the type found in any of the residents of the convent. It is no coincidence that this statue is modeled on Our Lady of All Nations of Amsterdam. The messages are a strong call to turn to God before it is too late, to believe strongly in the Eucharist as the true presence of Jesus Himself in our midst, and to remain united to the Holy Father in the turmoil soon to beset the Church.

We should also be aware of the woman who has been called the Padre Pio of South America because of her close life-long role as a “chosen soul”. I am referring to Maria Esperanza, whose pilgrimage site Betania, Venezuela, has been honoured by numerous private and public apparitions of the Blessed Virgin, to the point of converting atheists and intellectuals on the spot. So much more could be said about her if time permitted. She, like Padre Pio, was a light in the darkness to many.

Our Blessed Mother’s appearances in 1980 in Cuapa, Nicaragua, mainly to Bernardo Martinez (later Fr. Martinez), were incredibly beautiful, urgent about our call to be peace-makers, and exactly what the faithful in Nicaragua needed at the time. They are still vigorously faith-inspiring.

In Kibeho, Rwanda, our Blessed Mother did everything possible for 8 years (1981-1989) to avert the genocide that engulfed that nation, and

for it she used 7 kids, some of whom saw and received messages from both Jesus and Mary publically in long states of ecstasy. Not all of them were even Christian at first. Mary and Jesus gave graphic warnings in front of great crowds of people of the blood bath that lay in store for Rwanda. In the end Mary left in tears, seeing no change in their hearts. Less than two years later her warnings were fulfilled to the letter. Today there is a great pilgrimage site on the spot where she tried so hard to get her children to love one another and overcome their deep-seated tribal hatreds.

Our Lady's initiatives in Damascus from 1982 to 1990, and through the stigmatic visionary Myrna Nazour down to the present day, warrant a whole lecture series, not just a passing comment. Hers is a mission of peace in the Middle East, above all of peace among the divided Christians there. The confirming sign that has followed Myrna from the first day is the exuding of copious quantities of pure olive oil from her simple icon of Mary holding the Child Jesus, and from many other icons wherever she goes, including the United States. This olive oil has strong healing qualities, to reinforce the message of Jesus as consummate peace-maker and healer. Myrna is also a victim soul. Her redemptive suffering of the stigmata, along with Mary's plea for peace, markedly improved the spiritual climate among the ancient Christian churches in Syria and the Middle East, just in time for the holocaust that has recently engulfed them all.

“Julia Kim of Naju in South Korea is one of today's best known and best attested visionaries: she has been privileged to witness or participate in a broad spectrum of supernatural phenomena ranging from bleeding statues and messages from the Virgin to the stigmata and numerous Eucharistic miracles.” (*God-Sent*) As a young mother she was healed of terminal cancer on her deathbed through the prayers of a Catholic priest.

This resulted in her conversion and opened her soul to an intense life of prayer and availability to God. Her testimony is ongoing, calling millions to repentance, to faith in Jesus, and to love of the Eucharist.

There have been many other initiatives on Mary's part in our own time which have been drawn to the Church's attention. Many have received support and recognition of local bishops and commissions. She is very active to combat Satan world-wide. We cannot begin to cite them all.

But we still have before us the two most significant and powerful evangelizing initiatives of all on the part of our Blessed Mother: her achievements of grace in San Nicolas, Argentina, especially with young people, and above all in Medjugorje, Bosnia-Herzegovina, in the former Yugoslavia. But we'll save them until tomorrow when our theme will be: **“Mary, the Best Evangelist in the World Today.”**