



# Catechesis For the Masses

Basic Teachings on Liturgy and Participation in the Mass in Both Forms.

**Part 6: Humility Leads to Fruitfulness:**

***The Example of the Blessed Virgin Mary in God's Saving Works.***

In the last column, the idea of “restful” participation in worship was set before us, that we might consider how a receptive and restful disposition for the saving works of Jesus that are offered to us in the liturgy might become more real and meaningful in our lives. In this column, this way of restful participation in the liturgy will be considered in reference to the life and example of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

To propose Mary as an example for participation in the liturgy in the Church may lead to the reaction: “How can Mary be an example of participation in the liturgy, seeing there is no scriptural record that she did participate in it?” Though there are no direct references in the New Testament to Mary participating in the formal prayer or worship of the Church, her close relationship to the apostles, and in particular the “Beloved Disciple” to whom Jesus said “Behold, your Mother” (John 19:27), clearly establishes that Mary was active in the life of the early Church (which would include worship). And yet, it will not be through any direct example of “what Mary did at Mass,” so to speak, that I will propose her as an example. Rather, we will go beyond the strict consideration of ritual worship alone to see liturgy more generally as *God's work on our behalf* which will show her as the example. In particular, we can look at how Mary (and all others who do the will of God) participated in His works *according to her vocation* – that is, according to *who she is* – through those places in the Gospels where we hear about Mary and her response to God's will. Therefore, in the general sense of liturgy as the work of God on behalf of the people, including and without limiting this definition to ritual worship alone, Mary both

participated in such works, and was gifted with singularly unique moments to participate in His work.

When looking at the particular moments of Mary's life as an example of perfect participation in God's work, it is essential to be aware of the underlying virtue present in all of these moments: humility. We recall that humility, as defined in the glossary of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, is the virtue by which one sees God as the “author of all good” and is accordingly the root of all prayer (as the one who is humble rejects all tendencies toward pride and self-centeredness or self-reliance). In the person of Mary, we can view every moment of her life as an example of such humility - as she always sought to live in accord with God's will. Whenever she herself received praise, she directed that praise to God Himself. Thus, her participation in the works of God are always expressions of both receiving gifts of grace from God and of offering praise and thanksgiving to God for the good that He accomplishes in her and through her. Five examples of humble participation by Mary are easily identified: 1-at the annunciation to her by the archangel Gabriel; 2-at the visitation to Elizabeth; 3-at the Nativity of Jesus; 4-at the wedding at Cana; and 5-as she stood beneath the cross of Christ.

**1) The Annunciation:** When Mary received the gift of her vocation to motherhood, it is plain that she was not expecting this call - as evidenced by her question “How can this be since I have no husband?” (Luke 1:34). However, her surprise did not dissuade her from accepting *what God wanted to do in her and through her*. Thus, her humble response “I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to

your word” (Luke 1:38) is both a humble response to God and the acceptance of a call to live as she gives her whole life to Him (as it is meant to be done when we say “Amen” upon receiving Holy Communion).

**2) The Visitation:** While this moment may appear as though Elizabeth is praising Mary by calling her “blessed” and speaking of her as the “mother of my Lord” (Luke 1:42-43), Mary’s humble way accepts these words as true while at the same time directs them in praise to Almighty God by her hymn of praise (known to us as the “Magnificat”) as she “magnifies” the Lord who has “regarded the low estate of his handmaiden” and acknowledges that all generations will call her “blessed” as “he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name” (Luke 1:46-56.) Once again, she accepts what is being offered to her while giving herself ever more fully to God. Likewise, our participation invites us to give praise to God for every perceived benefit and blessing, minding that all good things come from Him.

**3) The Nativity of Jesus:** Here (along with the finding of Jesus in the Temple at a later time), we learn how Mary hears the words spoken to her by the shepherds who came and “kept all these things, pondering them in her heart” (Luke 2:19). This meditative way of Mary points again to her humility along with to her openness to continue to grow, learning more about the mysteries as they remain in her heart. The power of the Mass includes for us the similar opportunity to receive that which is beyond our comprehension, meant to be pondered in our hearts toward greater growth until they are more fully revealed.

**4) The wedding at Cana:** At this wedding feast is perhaps the most plain moment to which we can each relate to Mary in our petitioning of Jesus. For, as Mary says to Jesus “They have no wine,” (John 2:4), she is both expressing a present need and interceding for the good of others: the couple who would otherwise be humiliated for running short of wine. Yet, it is in her directive to the servants to “Do whatever



*The life of the Blessed Virgin Mary is one lived in total humility. It is this interior disposition of humility, which includes receptivity and right response to God’s invitation to love, that most fittingly describes how we ourselves can rightly and fruitfully participate in the works of God in our own vocations.*

*The Annunciation by Henry Ossawa Tanner, 1898. Original at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA.*

er he tells you” (John 2:5) that also shows obedience - a readiness to subordinate her will to that of Christ. In this moment of Jesus’ revealing of Himself through the sign of changing water into wine, Mary’s role as both intercessor and example of obedience reminds us to do likewise, that the Lord might reveal Himself more fully to us and through us as He wills.

**5) At the crucifixion of Christ:** As our Lord Jesus offers Himself for us, Mary silently perseveres in witnessing the crucifixion of her son and receives from Him the vocation of motherhood over all the living: “Woman, behold your son,” thus receiving clearly and fully her eternal vocation. So too, our vocation is given through the works of Christ (beginning in our baptism) meant to be lived in the world unto their perfection in heaven.

Thus, it is Mary who shows us how to humbly and fruitfully participate in God’s works - which begin in the liturgy of the Church and are meant to be lived in the whole of our lives.

*Quoted Scriptures are drawn from: [The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition](#). San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006.*