

## Mary's Presence in the Mass according to St. John Paul II: Precedents and Comparisons

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### I. Introduction

Over the course of several years I was engaged in mining the riches of Pope Saint John Paul II's magisterium on Mary's presence in the Mass, which constitutes an extraordinarily rich and original body of teaching. In fact, no other pope had ever come close to teaching what he did, building on Mary's presence and active participation in the sacrifice of Calvary. My first article on this topic was published in the *Homiletic & Pastoral Review* in July of 1997.<sup>1</sup> Almost ten years later, having discovered a good number of new texts from John Paul II on this matter, I gave a paper, which was published in the sixth volume entitled *Mary at the Foot of the Cross*.<sup>2</sup> Finally, I developed a third redaction of the latter text with a more extended section on the roots of his teaching on Marian mediation as found in his encyclicals *Redemptoris Mater* and *Dives in Misericordia*, which was published in the liturgical journal *Antiphon*.<sup>3</sup>

The most solemn, fundamental and essential form of John Paul's teaching on this subject is to be found in his last encyclical, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* §57, in which he states

“Do this in remembrance of me” (Lk. 22:19). In the “memorial” of Calvary all that Christ accomplished by his passion and his death is present. Consequently *all that Christ did with regard to his Mother* for our sake is also present. To her he gave the beloved disciple and, in him, each of us: “Behold, your Son!”. To each of us he also says: “Behold your mother!” (cf. Jn. 19: 26-27).

Experiencing the memorial of Christ's death in the Eucharist also means continually receiving this gift. It means accepting – like John – the one who is given to us anew as our Mother. It also means taking on a commitment to be conformed to Christ, putting

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<sup>1</sup> “Mary's Presence in the Mass,” *Homiletic & Pastoral Review* XCVII, No. 10 (July 1997) 8-15.

<sup>2</sup> “Mary's Presence in the Mass according to Pope John Paul II” in *Mary at the Foot of the Cross – VI: Marian Coredeemption in the Eucharistic Mystery. Acts of the Sixth International Symposium on Marian Coredeemption* (New Bedford, MA: Academy of the Immaculate, 2007) 11-38.

<sup>3</sup> “Mary's Presence in the Mass: The Teaching of Pope John Paul II” in *Antiphon: A Journal for Liturgical Renewal* Vol. 10, N° 2 (2006) 132-158.

ourselves at the school of his Mother and allowing her to accompany us. Mary is present, with the Church and as the Mother of the Church, at each of our celebrations of the Eucharist. If the Church and the Eucharist are inseparably united, the same ought to be said of Mary and the Eucharist. This is one reason why, since ancient times, the commemoration of Mary has always been part of the Eucharistic celebrations of the Churches of East and West.<sup>4</sup>

I remain convinced that this core teaching is not well known and almost never taught or preached.

What I wish to accomplish specifically in this presentation is to discover whatever precedents I can for this original teaching of Saint John Paul II in the writings of theologians and of mystics. I suspect that just as my first essay on Mary's Presence in the Mass was a work in progress, so also this essay will likewise be. At the outset I must state clearly that I have found no precedents for John Paul's teaching in the previous papal magisterium.

## **II. The Teaching of Theologians**

The teaching of theologians covers a very large terrain. I can only state at this point that I have found very few authors of the past hundred years who have come close to treating this theme. Monsignor René Laurentin published a book about the presence of Mary in 2011<sup>5</sup> in which he investigated the presence of Mary from various perspectives, but in which there is no reference to her presence in the Mass. In a much earlier essay he explained that

The part of Mary in the mystery of the Holy Sacrifice corresponds to her part in the sacrifice of the Cross because the Mass is none other than the sacrifice of the Cross commemorated, made present and applied. There is yet another rich datum, equally simple: the presence of Mary corresponds to her presence at Calvary, but the consequences are more difficult to describe: the most secure

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<sup>4</sup> *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 95 (2003) 471 [*L'Osservatore Romano* (weekly edition in English; First number = cumulative edition number; second number = page) hereafter cited as *ORE* 1790:IX-X].

<sup>5</sup> René Laurentin, *Présence de Marie: Histoire, Spiritualité, Fondements Doctrinaux* (Paris: Salvator, 2011).

consequence is the universal intercession of Mary in the Holy Sacrifice.<sup>6</sup>

The one author of a Mariological manual whom I found, who seems to come closest to the matter was Gregorio Alastruey, a professor at the University of Salamanca, who published a treatise on the Blessed Virgin Mary in 1952, which was translated and published in English in 1964.<sup>7</sup> In that book he treats the relationship of Mary to the Eucharist at some length,<sup>8</sup> but the closest he comes to our topic is this statement:

Mary is not alien to the celebration of the Mass. As the consort of Christ the Redeemer, she must for this very reason look down from heaven and assist at the sacrifice in a special manner and delight in its celebration in an extraordinary way, for on the altar is renewed the immolation of that Victim of the sacred Passion, who is her own Son and from whom are obtained for men the immense and salutary fruits of redemption.<sup>9</sup>

The one theologian whom I was delighted to find treating this matter with assurance was the late Monsignor James T. O'Connor (1939-2016) in his book, *The Hidden Manna: A Theology of the Eucharist*. Basing himself on the teaching of *Lumen Gentium*, chapter 8 he wrote:

The role played by each member of the Body in that worship offered to God in heaven is a role congruent with that which each fulfilled here on earth in charity. The Lord's own role in that worship is essentially linked with his perfect all-sufficient offering made on the Cross. It is that which the earthly Eucharist makes sacramentally present. But Christ has associated others with that Mystery, and Mary especially so. "Suffering with her Son as he died on the Cross, she cooperated in a totally singular way by her obedience, faith, hope, and ardent charity in restoring supernatural life to souls."<sup>10</sup> And because the bond between Son and Mother is

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<sup>6</sup> René Laurentin, «L'Eucarestia e la Vergine» in Mons. Antonio Piolanti (a cura di), *Eucarestia: Il Mistero dell'Altare nel Pensiero e nella Vita della Chiesa* (Rome: Desclée, 1957) 647 (my trans.).

<sup>7</sup> Gregory Alastruey, *The Blessed Virgin Mary* Trans. Sister M. Janet Giglia, O.P. (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1964).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Alastruey 100-116.

<sup>9</sup> Alastruey 114.

<sup>10</sup> *Lumen Gentium* 61.

intimate and indissoluble”, as the Council teaches, she remains with him – and because of him and after him – the chief offerer of that sacrifice that is made present in our earthly Eucharist. As it is the Lord who offers and is offered in every Eucharist, and who, in and with himself, offers the sacrifice of praise of his entire Body, so, in him and with him, Mary offers and is offered in each Eucharistic celebration in that utterly unique way that reflects her role in the redemption her Son achieved for her and for all of us. This, I think, is the meaning of the *communicantes in primis* of the Roman Canon. The whole Church in heaven and on earth offers with and in Christ. “It is our mystery that is present on the paten and in the cup”, as Augustin said – and uniquely it is Mary’s.

It can be seen from the above that this offering by Mary totally transcends that of the ministerial priesthood. ... The ministerial priest, acting *in persona Christi*, operates in the order of the sacramental effectuation of the Eucharistic Mystery. Mary operates on the level of the *realities* that are made sacramentally present in the earthly Eucharistic celebration.<sup>11</sup>

Insofar as I am able to determine at this stage in my present research, Monsignor O’Connor’s statement is the clearest statement in complete congruence with the teaching of Saint John Paul II. I have cited the above text from the second edition of his book, which was published in 2005, but the text is just as it appeared in the first edition of 1988. Hence his argumentation seems to be entirely his own.

### **III. The Experience of Mystics**

#### **A. Experiences of Mary during Mass**

There is one section of Alastruey’s treatment which effectively introduces us to the experience of the mystics and that is his thesis on “Mary’s influence on the reception of the Eucharist by the faithful.”<sup>12</sup> This is the entrée that I have found into the world of the mystics.

#### **1. Saint Gertrude the Great (1256-1302)**

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<sup>11</sup> James T. O’Connor, *The Hidden Manna: A Theology of the Eucharist* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, Second Edition, 2005) 354-355.

<sup>12</sup> Alastruey 106-111.

The first instance of a mystic's experience of Mary during the Mass of which I am aware is that of Saint Gertrude the Great.<sup>13</sup> It is true that the experience is not immediately related to receiving Holy Communion, but it does take place during the Mass. It is prepared for on Christmas day in a year that she does not indicate: "On the day of your most holy Nativity, I took you from the manger as a tiny child wrapped in swaddling clothes."<sup>14</sup> Here there is no reference to Mary, but she goes on to tell us:

The next year, on the same day, during the Mass *Dixit Dominus*, I took you from the lap of your virgin mother in the shape of a most tender and delicate little child. While I was carrying you on my bosom, it seemed to me that the sympathy I had shown someone in trouble before Christmas by offering special prayers was at work here too.<sup>15</sup>

We note in this instance that Gertrude receives the infant Jesus from Mary.

Finally, she relates a third Christmas Mass experience where Mary's role is described more explicitly:

The next year, on the same holy feast, you graced me with a gift more welcome than the one I have mentioned but not unlike it. It was just as if my devotion had earned it from you the year before, although in all justice I had earned, not another gift but rather a fitting punishment for having lost the earlier one! For while they were reading the gospel, "She brought forth her first-born son ..." with her spotless hands your spotless mother proffered me you, the child of her virginity, a loveable baby struggling with all his might to be embraced by me.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> On Gertrude as a "liturgical mystic, cf. "The Example of a Mystic: St. Gertrude and Liturgical Spirituality" in Cyprian Vagaggini, O.S.B., *Theological Dimensions of the Liturgy: A General Treatise on the Theology of the Liturgy* Trans. Leonard J. Doyle and W. A. Jurgens from the Fourth Italian Edition Revised and Augmented by the Author (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1976) 741-803.

<sup>14</sup> Gertrud the Great of Helfta, *The Herald of God's Loving-Kindness, Books One & Two* Trans. Alexandra Barratt, The Cistercian Fathers Series: Number Thirty-Five (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1991) [= Cistercian] 139; cf. another trans. Gertrude of Helfta, *The Herald of Divine Love* Trans. Margaret Winkworth (NY: Paulist Press, The Classics of Western Spirituality Series, 1993) [=Paulist] 115].

<sup>15</sup> Cistercian 139-140; cf. Paulist. 115.

<sup>16</sup>Cistercian 141-142; cf. Paulist 117.

We must take note again that the experience does not take place at Communion time, but during the reading of the Gospel. Nonetheless these instances constitute the first cases of a mystic experiencing the presence of Mary during Mass.

## 2. Père John Edward Lamy (1855-1931)

Almost six hundred years later, in the early twentieth century we have the recollections of Father John Edward Lamy, the founder of the Congregation of the Servants of Jesus and Mary and a mystic. He recounted his experience of celebrating the Mass of Our Lady's Nativity at the Shrine of Grey:

“This was the 9<sup>th</sup> September, 1909. I had come [to Grey] nearly every year, and the Parish Priest of Violot was with me. They gave me handsome vestments put out for a prelate who was to come and who didn't arrive. I began my Mass. The Abbé Lemoine was in the interior of the chapel to the right, on the kneeler which is still there. The Blessed Virgin appeared to me suddenly, and at the same time the devil. It caused me violent emotion. I was in great doubt but I did not dare to believe because of my unworthiness, that I was facing the Most Blessed. It was so much beyond me. The Blessed Virgin came down from the ceiling, throned in great glory, so gently, so gently. She was as if in a furnace of light. Her glory went through everything gradually. The candles, the chalice, the altar vestments and myself, like the sun going through water. How far did the glory reach? You need to know what the glory of God is, when you think of what He gives to the dearest of His creatures. It was just like a sun. I never saw the end of it. She came down from the ceiling like that, with Her hands joined. She wore a little smile before letting Her voice be heard. When She uncrossed Her hands, it seemed to make an eddy around Her.”

“She first exchanged a word or two with the demon. During the descent, She said to Lucifer, who appeared behind Her, ‘Is that you?’

(Lucifer): ‘I have leave from the Father.’

‘So be it.’

Then, *as if* She were questioning him, ‘You know how to obey the Father?’ He gave no answer but I felt crushed. She extinguished Her glory. The lesser glory never left Her during all the Mass. I still stayed at the *Dominus Vobiscum*. Had I dared, I

would have fled into the vestry, if I had not been at the altar. When I looked at the Parish Priest of Violot, he put his two hands over his face and his face in his book, and leaned his whole weight on the kneeler. I kept saying, ‘I shall be well defended.’ She talked. She asked me questions. I did not dare to answer. She stood upright. She was of middle height. With the movement that She made, there was like a little storm of glittering spangles. Her crown only appeared when She stood up. Her feet were just about the height of those chairs. She stayed a little above the ground. With the right hand, She signed to me very maternally, ‘Go on,’ to give me back my courage. I said within myself, ‘If you are the Blessed Virgin, show me.’ She said: ‘I am the Mother of God.’ When She said, ‘I am the Mother of God,’ very gently, I seemed to melt away within. I did not doubt the word of the Mother of God. I believed Her, but She came in poor company (the fiend).”

“When I commemorated the martyrdom of St. Gorgonius She smiled gently. It was the prayer of Her Nativity. At the *ut quibus beatae Virginis*, I bowed to Her. She bowed to me, very graciously. What humility, even in Heaven! And for me, a mountebank of the umpteenth class! I saw Her reflection in the glass before me in the altar-card. The interview went on, and so as not to cause too long a break, She signed to me to read the Epistle.”

“The little altar server said: ‘Is it the Blessed Virgin, Father?’ as he took the book from the Epistle side to the Gospel side. I said to him, low, ‘Don’t talk, you will make Her go away,’ She looked on him with motherly tenderness. She stayed aside to let him pass and took Her place again at the middle of the altar. When I said the *Munda cor meum*, She left the middle of the altar and went to the Gospel side.”<sup>17</sup>

In the course of this Mass Our Lady confided much to Père Lamy about which he would say “I have not told you a tenth of what I saw. There are many things that I cannot set down. There are things it would not be good to say even forty years hence.”<sup>18</sup> At the end of his description of what he chose to recount he wrote:

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<sup>17</sup> Comte Paul Biver, *Père Lamy* Trans. Msgr. John O’Connor with a Preface by Jacques Maritain (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, Inc., 1973) 62-63.

<sup>18</sup> Biver 70.

“There was a lively exchange between Her and Lucifer. She spoke to me of my death, promised me Her assistance and said to the fiend ‘Now that we have no more business here, let us go.’ Lucifer disappeared first and as I looked at Her with much respect and attention, I had to blink. After I blinked, there was no one there. The chapel had grown very dark. They had both been at the Gospel side. The interruption in the Mass was long; I could not precisely tell how long. She disappeared and Her Divine Son appeared then at the Consecration. ...<sup>19</sup>

### 3. Saint Faustina Kowalska (1905-1938)

Slightly later in the twentieth century we meet Saint Maria Faustina of the Blessed Sacrament. She, too, has experiences of Mary during Mass, which do not immediately relate to her receiving Holy Communion. Here she describes a vision in which she saw her confessor, Blessed Michał Sopoćko (1888-1975)<sup>20</sup>, celebrating Mass and being protected by Mary.

One day, after our Mass, I suddenly saw my confessor [Father Michał Sopoćko] saying Mass in Saint Michael’s Church, in front of the picture of the Mother of God. It was at the time of the Offertory, and I saw the Infant Jesus clinging to him as if fleeing from something and seeking refuge in him. But when the time came for Holy Communion, He disappeared as usual. Suddenly, I saw the Blessed Mother, who shielded him with Her cloak and said, *Courage, My son, courage*. She said something else, which I could not hear.<sup>21</sup>

Similarly, Faustina relates another time when she was present at another of her regular confessor’s Masses:

During a Mass celebrated by Father Andrasz,<sup>22</sup> a moment before the Elevation, God’s presence pervaded my soul, which was drawn to the altar. Then I saw the Mother of God with the Infant Jesus. The Infant Jesus was holding onto the hand of Our Lady. A moment later, the Infant Jesus ran with joy to the center of the

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<sup>19</sup> Biver 69.

<sup>20</sup> He was a Polish professor of theology and spiritual director of Saint Faustina. He was beatified in 2008.

<sup>21</sup> Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska, *Diary: Divine Mercy in My Soul* Third edition with revisions (Stockbridge, MA: Marian Press, 2014) [= *Diary*] #597.

<sup>22</sup> Józef Andrasz S.J. (1891-1963) was a Polish Jesuit of great assistance to Saint Faustina.

altar, and the Mother of God said to me, *See with what assurance I entrust Jesus into his hands. In the same way, you are to entrust your soul and be like a child to him.*

– ... She was looking at Father with great tenderness, but after a moment, He broke up this beautiful Child, and living blood flowed forth. Father bent forward and received the true and living Jesus into himself. Had he eaten Him? I do not know how this took place. Jesus, Jesus, I cannot keep up with You, for in an instant, You become incomprehensible to me.<sup>23</sup>

This time there is an immediate link between the Infant Jesus and Holy Communion received by Father Andrasz.

As in the texts of Saint Gertrude, we also find Saint Faustina experiencing Mary giving her Jesus at the second last Midnight Mass of her short life:

December 25, [1936]. Midnight Mass. During Mass, God's presence pierced me through and through. A moment before the Elevation I saw the Mother of God and the Infant Jesus and the good Old Man [St. Joseph]. The Most Holy Mother spoke these words to me: *My daughter, Faustina, take this most precious Treasure*, and she gave me the Infant Jesus. When I took Jesus in my arms, my soul felt such unspeakable joy that I am unable to describe it. But, strange thing, after a short while Jesus became awful, horrible-looking, grown up and suffering; and then the vision vanished, and soon it was time to go to Holy Communion. When I received the Lord Jesus in Holy Communion, my soul trembled under the influence of God's presence. The next day, I saw the Divine Infant for a brief moment during the Elevation.<sup>24</sup>

Interestingly, the gift of Jesus, given by Mary is not explicitly identified with Holy Communion in that the vision vanished before she received him in Holy Communion.

Now there may be those who would immediately propose a literary dependence of Saint Faustina on the texts of Saint Gertrude, but in fact, Faustina came from a peasant family and was a lay-sister, a sister of the second

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<sup>23</sup> *Diary #677.*

<sup>24</sup> *Diary #846.*

choir in her community who did not read the mystics, but confined herself to Gospel meditations.

## **B. Experiences of Mary Preparing One to Receive Jesus during Mass**

Here I propose to consider mystics who consciously invited Mary to prepare them to receive Holy Communion.

### **1. Saint Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort (1673-1716)**

One of the notable characteristics of the teaching of Saint Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort was his emphasis in the final part of the *Treatise on True Devotion to Mary* on inviting the soul to ask Mary to prepare her for Holy Communion worthily and devoutly:

In order that the soul may let itself be led by Mary's spirit, it must first of all renounce its own spirit and its own lights and wills before it does anything. For example: it should do so before prayers, before saying or hearing Mass and before communicating; because the darkness of our own spirit, and the malice of our own will and operation, if we follow them, however good they may appear to us, will be an obstacle to the spirit of Mary.<sup>25</sup>

Before Holy Communion: ...

You must renew your consecration by saying: "I am all thine, my dear Mistress, with all that I have [*Tuus totus ego sum, et omnia mea tua sunt*]."

...

You will ask her for her heart, by these tender words: "I take thee for my all. Give me thy heart, O Mary [*Accipio te in mea omnia. Præbe mihi cor tuum, o Maria*]."<sup>26</sup>

What is of particular interest to us here is that Karol Wojtyła, as a clandestine seminarian in Krakow during World War II, had imbibed the teaching of de Montfort and made it his own. As Bishop and Pope he abbreviated, transposed and excerpted from this text of de Montfort *Tuus totus ego sum, et omnia mea tua sunt. Accipio te in mea omnia. Præbe mihi cor tuum, Maria* ["I belong entirely to you, and all that I have is yours; I take you for my all. O Mary, give me your

<sup>25</sup> *True Devotion* #259 [Faber translation].

<sup>26</sup> *True Devotion* #266 [Faber translation].

heart”]<sup>27</sup> and made it his motto, often simply using *Totus tuus* to say it in short form. The first sentence is attributed to Saint Bonaventure.<sup>28</sup> The last two sentences are adaptations of Jn. 19:27 and Prov. 23:26. Would it be surprising that Saint John Paul II would so integrate de Montfort’s teaching about how to invite Mary into one’s receiving of Holy Communion that he would one day expand that mode of thinking into his teaching about Mary’s presence in the Mass?

## 2. Blessed Dina Bélanger (1897-1929)

Growing up in a very devout family in Quebec City Dina Bélanger consecrated herself to Our Lady according to the method of Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort. Like Saint John Paul II, she imbibed the spirit of de Montfort’s *True Devotion* and lived it as she entered the Community of the Religious of Jesus and Mary. Let us listen to how she prepared herself for the reception of Holy Communion when she was in the novitiate:

My hunger for Holy Communion was increasing all the time. Is not a day without bread like a day without sunshine, like a day when evening is slow to come? I entrusted my preparation to the Blessed Virgin. As I approached the holy table, I imagined angels hovering round the sacred ciborium, ardent seraphim in adoration or expressing their love in hymns and sweet harmonies. I listened to their melodies and they seemed so pure that the most harmonious praises sung here on earth sounded discordant. I received Jesus from the hands of my dear Mother. Returning to my place, led by her, I imagined I was surrounded by a host of angelic spirits who formed a guard of honor for my divine King. Often during my thanksgiving, Mary would speak for me; all I had to do was listen to her, unite with her, contemplate my Savior, love him. Sometimes I saw myself as a little lamb in the arms of

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<sup>27</sup> These Latin sentences come from the beginning and the last sentence of #266 in *True Devotion*. Cf. *Œuvres complètes de saint Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1982) 666-667. *God Alone: The Collected Writings of St. Louis Mary de Montfort* (Bay Shore, N. Y.: Montfort Publications, 1987) 375-376. He explained his adoption of this terminology in *Gift and Mystery: On the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of My Priestly Ordination* (Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications, Africa, 1996) 42-43.

<sup>28</sup> *Psalt. Majus, cant. Ad instar illius Moïsis*, Ex. 15 (Opera Omnia, Vivès, Parisiis 1868, 221 b).

the good Shepherd: I would let myself be carried by him. This image gave me unspeakable consolation.<sup>29</sup>

Surely what she had learned from Louis-Marie de Montfort she continued to put into practice.

Dina also tells us of her perception of receiving the Infant Jesus from the hands of Mary after she had received the Sacred Host:

One Christmas night, during my thanksgiving, I was greatly consoled. Our Lord had prepared me for this visit the previous evening. I was in church. Interiorly, I was suffering greatly. A sentiment of peace, of recollection came over me, penetrated me, and I had a feeling that Jesus was going to communicate with my soul in some very intimate way. Indeed, when I had received the Host, I seemed to be, like the shepherds long ago, the stable at Bethlehem. The Blessed Virgin handed me the divine Child, and Jesus kissed me lovingly: his Heart spoke to mine, oh! So sweetly! This colloquy with the Holy Family is characterized by unspeakable, inexpressible happiness. Glimpses of heavenly joys can be felt, but they defy description.<sup>30</sup>

Here it may be appropriate to cite the commentary of Father François-Marie L  thel, O.C.D. in his perceptive introduction to the *Autobiography*:

Dina herself gives us a valuable key, for a sound interpretation, in the most simple and ordinary, of the “pictures” that she sees and the “words” that she hears: “I must explain, once and for all, the expressions that I shall employ such as ‘I saw’, ‘Jesus said to me’, and similar forms of speech. They signify: “I saw in my imagination, Jesus spoke to me with that interior voice that every soul hears in moments of profound recollection when favored with divine consolations” (p. 102). In a way that differs only slightly from this, Th  r  se de Lisieux had the same experience: Jesus spoke to her through the Scriptures, although she did not

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<sup>29</sup> *The Autobiography of Dina B  langer (Marie Sainte-C  cile de Rome) Religious of Jesus and Mary* Translated by Mary St. Stephen, R.J.M. Revised and up-dated by Sr. Felicity Moody, R.J.M. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition revised and up-dated (Sillery, Qu  bec: Les Religieuses de J  sus-Marie, 1997) [= *Autobiography*] 141.

<sup>30</sup> *Autobiography* 107-108.

hear any interior words, she contemplated the Face of Jesus and marveled at its beauty.<sup>31</sup>

### **3. Saint Faustina Kowalska**

While it is true that Saint Faustina was not well read and does not seem to have read Saint Louis de Montfort, she was taught by the Blessed Mother as she herself tells us:

December 23, [1936]. I am spending this time with the Mother of God and preparing myself for the solemn moment of the coming of the Lord Jesus. The Mother of God is instructing me in the interior life of the soul with Jesus, especially in Holy Communion. It is only in eternity that we shall know the great mystery effected in us by Holy Communion. O most precious moments of my life!<sup>32</sup>

Thus she tells us how she, too, cultivated the practice of asking Mary to assist her in receiving Holy Communion and how she experienced her protective presence:

May 1, 1937. Today I felt the nearness of my Mother, my heavenly Mother, although before every Holy Communion I earnestly ask the Mother of God to help me prepare my soul for the coming of Her Son, and I clearly feel Her protection over me. I entreat Her to be so gracious as to enkindle in me the fire of God's love, such as burned in Her own pure heart at the time of the Incarnation of the Word of God.<sup>33</sup>

### **C. Experiences of Mary's Active Collaboration in the Sacrifice of the Mass**

In terms of what I have been able to discover and present here, it would seem that just as there has been a development of doctrine guided by the Holy Spirit in the course of the centuries,<sup>34</sup> so also there has been a similar development of insight into spiritual realities. This is not to say that new truths are brought forward, but rather that the Holy Spirit brings to light in ever more

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<sup>31</sup> *Autobiography* 20.

<sup>32</sup> *Diary* #840.

<sup>33</sup> *Diary* #1114.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. The Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum* #8.

explicit ways what was intuitively sensed in earlier eras. From what I have been able to find it seems that Mary's presence in the Mass has come into ever-sharper focus in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

### 1. Saint Pio of Pietrelcina (1887-1968)

Of all of the mystics of the twentieth century, surely one of the best known is Saint Pio of Pietrelcina, better known to all simply as "Padre Pio". On the first of May 1912 he wrote to Padre Agostino, his spiritual father:

Poor dear Mother, how you love me! I observed it [her lovely face] once more at the dawn of this beautiful month. What great care she took to accompany me to the altar this morning. It seemed to me that she had nothing else to think about except myself as she filled my whole heart with sentiments of holy love.<sup>35</sup>

True, in this letter he does not state explicitly that Mary stayed with him at the altar, although one might well be led to believe that she did, still it is a first reference. Subsequent mentions will be more specific.

Since the Holy Office forbade him to respond to letters in 1923, a rather abundant source of information about him is anecdotal and comes from various testimonies of those who knew him. The following comes from Cleonice Morcaldi (1904-1987) whom he called his "firstborn daughter" [*figlia primogenita*]. He allowed her to question him freely and responded in his inimitable style. On one occasion she asked him about his sharing in the physical Passion of Christ and his suffering during Holy Mass. Here is a part of that interchange as she recorded it:

– Do you also suffer the scourging during holy Mass?

*Yes, in an ever-increasing way from the consecration to the communion.*

– When do you undergo death?

*In Holy Communion.*

– Does the sorrowful Mother assist you? Is she always present during the divine sacrifice?

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<sup>35</sup> Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, *Letters*, Vol. I, trans. Mary F. Ingolsby, San Giovanni Rotondo: Editions "Voce di Padre Pio", 1980, p. 312.

*Can a mother disregard her son? She is there with all of paradise.*<sup>36</sup>

Thus speaks Padre Pio, effectively saying, “How could Mary not be there?”

There is also a fascinating fragment from his Diary recording an event of 15 August 1929:

I was at the altar for the celebration of holy Mass, when what I am about to say came about. Let me begin by saying that that morning I ascended to the holy altar I don't know how. Physical sufferings and internal pains were vying at which one could martyr my poor being. I felt mortal anguish so strongly that I cannot describe it. I can only say that in the measure that I approached the reception of the most sacred species, this state of being slaughtered grew and increased. I felt as if I were dying. Mortal anguish entirely pervaded me and I believed that all was ending for me: temporal and eternal life.

The preponderant thought that tormented me was that I could never again manifest to the divine Goodness my gratitude and love. It wasn't so much the thought of hell that terrorized me, as knowing with clarity that below there is no more love. And this is what made me feel over all and in each instant an infinity of deaths concurrently.

This state was arriving at its peak. The summit of the agony was reached and where I was expecting to find death, I found the comfort of life. In the act of consuming the sacred host a sudden light pervaded my inmost being and I clearly saw the heavenly Mother with her baby Son in her arms and together they said: “Calm down! We are with you; you belong to us and We are yours”.

After hearing that, I saw nothing more. There was calm; there was serenity; in an instant all the sufferings vanished. For the rest of the day I felt as if drowned in a sea of delights and indescribable love for God and for souls.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Cleonice Morcaldi, *La mia vita vicino a Padre Pio: Diario intimo spirituale* (Rome: Edizioni Dehoniane, 1997) 48-49 (my trans.).

<sup>37</sup> Padre Pio da Pietrelcina, *Epistolario*, IV (San Giovanni Rotondo: «Edizioni Padre Pio da Pietrelcina», seconda edizione, 1991) 988-989 (my trans.).

Thus, Padre Pio testified to Mary's union with Jesus as he received the sacred host.

## **2. Blessed Concepción Cabrera de Armida (Conchita) (1862-1937) and Archbishop Luis M. Martínez (1881-1956)**

Blessed Concepción Cabrera de Armida (1862-1937), familiarly known as "Conchita", was a Mexican laywoman and great mystic of modern times. As wife, mother of nine children, then widow, she lived a very committed spiritual and apostolic life. Her writings are recognized as having great spiritual value. She was the foundress of five Works of the Cross, which included founding a community of contemplative sisters, co-founding a community of priests and associations for lay people. She was a spiritual daughter of Archbishop Luis M. Martínez, Primate of Mexico and a renowned spiritual writer, who guided her annual retreats for many years and whose cause for canonization has also been opened. Out of obedience to her spiritual directors over the years she left sixty-six volumes of spiritual diaries, which she called accounts of conscience. She received many great spiritual graces the greatest of which is called the "mystical incarnation".<sup>38</sup> She also became a "mother of priests" and received many words for and about priests, which are included in an anthology of texts from her accounts of conscience.<sup>39</sup>

Conchita's last spiritual director, Archbishop Martinez, is the first theologian whom I have found who gives a very clear teaching about Mary's presence in the Mass. I cite what he wrote here simply because he did not publish it in a treatise, but wrote it as a meditation for Conchita during her retreat of 1935:

The Mass is the sacrifice of Calvary, which renews and perpetuates itself, and Mary who was on Calvary, exercising her sublime role, must renew and perpetuate her role in all Masses until the consummation of time.<sup>40</sup>

Obviously, this teaching resonated deeply in her. Here are words that she believed she received from Jesus:

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. Concepción Cabrera de Armida, *Under the Gaze of the Father: Retreat Directed by Archbishop Luis M. Martínez on the Grace of the Mystical Incarnation* (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 2011).

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Concepción Cabrera de Armida, *Priests of Christ* (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 2015).

<sup>40</sup> Under the Gaze 123.

Mary always offered Me to the Father; she always immolated her pure and innocent Heart in union with Me. When the physical Incarnation was accomplished, as I have said, the mystical incarnation continued in her heart, always offering Me to the Father, lifting up the Victim to the Father so as to obtain graces for the Church, that is, for priests and, through them, for souls.

Mary is especially present at every Mass because wherever My sacrifice is, there is Mary. For this reason, Mary is indispensable for every priest, as is her intimate presence with him at the altar. Why? Because she sees Me in the priest and contemplates him transformed into Me. Mary is never separated from Me, even less from My immolations, even if the sacrifice of the altar is unbloody. As long as it is a sacrifice, this blessed Mother is always at her beloved Son's side.<sup>41</sup>

With Conchita and Archbishop Martinez we find the most explicit and clear teaching about the presence of Mary in the Mass. Every instance we have found up to now has served as prelude. Now we find a teaching as clear as that of Pope Saint John Paul II, even though it is not magisterial.

In two other similar texts Conchita speaks of Mary as the "Spouse of the Holy Spirit" and her collaboration with him in supplying priestly vocations for the Church:

If Mary is the Spouse of the Holy Spirit, then she is so in order to beget by Him priestly vocations for the Church, to protect them, take care of them, form them, nourish them and never leave them. She is present, rejoicing at the ordination of priests and at the hour of the sacrifice of the Mass she accompanies them to the altar. It is she, together with the Holy Spirit, who is responsible for cultivating the seed that the Holy Spirit Himself has sown in the priest's soul for the mystical incarnation during Mass. It is she who takes care to form Jesus, to help Him grow to perfection, trait by trait, in the souls of priests who give themselves over to consummate transformation into Me so that they may reproduce in themselves not only My image but Myself.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> *Priests of Christ* 283.

<sup>42</sup> *Priests of Christ* 286.

This is and has been the active role of the Spouse of the Holy Spirit in the Church: watching over priests, looking after them, interceding and praying continually for this chosen portion, accompanying them in all their ministries and especially being at their side during Mass; and to be at work in them, beginning with the mystical incarnation of Jesus in their souls through its development until, in a certain sense, the creature disappears and they become another Christ.<sup>43</sup>

Besides these marvelous texts, there is also one, which Conchita herself published anonymously in a book entitled *Roses and Thorns*. In this text she speaks in the name of Mary:

I was the first altar on which the heavenly Victim descended, attracted and summoned by my love; and I was the first priest to offer this Victim to the eternal Father in the Temple of Jerusalem for the sake of the world. I lifted in my arms, and raised to heaven, that pure and immaculate Host which would be consumed on the cross. I offered the Redeemer of the world thinking that this action would be renewed in each one of the Masses that all priests should celebrate, always in union with me. I had in mind the ministry that those priests ought to carry out: a ministry of purity, of sanctity, of transformation through imitating me.

Therefore, I have so great and intimate a part in the Mass that all priests ought to invoke me and be accompanied by me in order to celebrate fruitfully.

Oh, if they did, my child, what holy priests there would be!<sup>44</sup>

## **2. Don Stefano Gobbi (1930-2011)**

Father Stefano Gobbi was member of Company of Saint Paul, the first Pontifical Secular Institute founded in 1920 by the then Archbishop of Milan, Blessed Cardinal Andrea Ferrari (1850-1921), who was beatified by Pope Saint John Paul II in 1987. Before his ordination to the priesthood in 1964, Father Gobbi managed an insurance agency. He held a doctorate in sacred theology from the Pontifical University of the Lateran in Rome. It was on May 8, 1972 while praying at the Chapel of the Apparitions at Fatima that the Mother of God impressed upon Father Gobbi her desire that he start the Marian

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<sup>43</sup> *Priests of Christ* 288.

<sup>44</sup> Concepción Cabrera de Armida, *Roses and Thorns* Trans. Sr. Dolores Icaza, rscj (Staten Island, NY: St. Paul's/Alba House, 2007) 31-32.

Movement of Priests. Reassured by an unmistakable sign that it was God's will, and with the approval of his spiritual director, he and two other priests launched the Movement on October 13, 1972. In the course of twenty-four years, from 1973 to 1997, he received locutions<sup>45</sup> from Our Lady addressed to priests. Over the years they were published in books and translated into many languages. The final edition in English is entitled *To the Priests, Our Lady's Beloved Sons*.<sup>46</sup>

This locution is from 20 April 1984:

This Good Friday is repeated when Jesus still immolates Himself for you, although in an unbloody manner, in the Sacrifice of the Holy Mass. The supreme gift of this day is mystically renewed for you.

But, close to Jesus who is immolated, the sorrowful oblation of your heavenly Mother is also repeated. She is always present close to every altar upon which Holy Mass is celebrated, just as she was during the long and sorrowful Good Friday.<sup>47</sup>

The following locution is from 5 July 1984:

I am always at your side when you celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, which renews that accomplished by Jesus on the Cross. With Jesus who, by means of you, today carries out his Sacrifice, I am always at the side of each altar to offer with you to the Heavenly Father, on My Immaculate Heart, the precious Victim of our redemption.<sup>48</sup>

This locution is from the last day of 1988:

My maternal task is also *that of offering reparation* for the great evil, which, still today, is being committed in the world. I unite myself with each Holy Mass, which is celebrated, to offer to the Heavenly Father the precious blood of his Son Jesus, who is still immolating and sacrificing Himself for you on every altar of the earth. It is only his divine blood, shed for you, that can wash away

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<sup>45</sup> On locutions cf. Antonio Royo, O.P. and Jordan Aumann, O.P., *The Theology of Christian Perfection* (Dubuque, IA: The Priory Press, 1962) 658-660.

<sup>46</sup> *To the Priests, Our Lady's Beloved Sons* (The Marian Movement of Priests, "pro manuscripto" 18<sup>th</sup> English edition, 2000).

<sup>47</sup> *To the Priests* #288 m-n, p. 395.

<sup>48</sup> *To the Priests* #291 h, pp. 399-400.

all the evil, the sin, the hatred, the impurity, the iniquity that covers the world. Thus, in a spirit of maternal reparation, I unite to the blood of Christ all the sufferings, which I gather together, each day, along your pathway.<sup>49</sup>

Again, as in the case of Blessed Conchita, each of these texts speaks explicitly about Our Lady's presence in the Mass and the latter two with particular reference to priests.

### 3. An Anonymous Benedictine Monk

The final text that I have found, which deals with our topic, comes from a collection of words received by a Benedictine monk who prefers to remain anonymous.<sup>50</sup> This word was received on 28 February 2008.

Priests who do not collaborate with My Immaculate Mother will be stifled in the exercise of their priesthood. I Myself chose to have My Mother at My side at the Hour of My Supreme Sacrifice. I gave her to My beloved disciple John so that all My priests would understand that My Mother's place is at the side of every priest of Mine, especially when he stands at the altar to offer My Sacrifice to the Father, and to speak and act in My Name.

Never fail to recognize the mystical presence of My Mother in the Mass. She is there at your side. She rejoices in your distribution of the fruits of My redemption, and participates in it. The hands of every priest are, in some way, held in My Mother's hands. She acts with the priest. Her participation in the Holy Sacrifice renewed upon the altar is silent but efficacious. Her presence at the altar, though invisible, is real. My Church has long acknowledged the presence of My Mother at every offering of My Holy Sacrifice, but it is now more than ever necessary that priests should deepen their awareness of this most precious gift. She is the Coredemptrix.<sup>51</sup> Just as My Sacrifice is renewed mystically in

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<sup>49</sup> *To the Priests* #396 f, pp. 584-585.

<sup>50</sup> A Benedictine Monk, *In Sinu Jesu: When Heart Speaks to Heart – The Journal of a Priest at Prayer* (Kettering, OH: Angelico Press, 2016).

<sup>51</sup> Original footnote: Our Lady's dignity as Coredemptrix is well explained in the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* (November 21, 1964): "Embracing God's salvific will with a full heart and impeded by no sin, she devoted herself totally as a handmaid of the Lord to the person and work of her Son, under Him and with Him, by the grace of almighty God, serving the mystery of

every Mass, her offering, her participation in My offering, is also renewed. The priest who knows this and allows it to penetrate his heart will be graced with a holy fervour in every Mass he celebrates.<sup>52</sup>

#### IV. Conclusion

What I have managed to uncover and present here represents perhaps only a fraction of what might eventually be found. The link between the celebration of the Eucharist and the commemoration of the Mother of God is one that is already found in the earliest Christian documents on the Eucharistic Liturgy and it is more than probable that the oral tradition antedates the written, with roots deriving from the era of the Apostles.<sup>53</sup> The ancient practice is echoed in the sound instinct of the faithful that Mary cannot be separated from her Son, especially at the moment when his sacrifice is being renewed on the altar and is confirmed in the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* §103 which explicitly states that

in celebrating this annual cycle of the mysteries of Christ, the holy Church venerates with special love the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, united by an inseparable bond with the saving work of her Son.

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redemption. Rightly therefore the holy Fathers see her as used by God not merely in a passive way, but as freely cooperating in the work of human salvation through faith and obedience. ... [T]he Blessed Virgin advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and faithfully persevered in her union with her Son unto the cross, where she stood, in keeping with the divine plan, grieving exceedingly with her only begotten Son, uniting herself with a maternal heart with His sacrifice, and lovingly consenting to the immolation of this Victim which she herself had brought forth. ... She conceived, brought forth and nourished Christ, she presented Him to the Father in the temple, and was united with Him by compassion as He died on the Cross. In this singular way she cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope, and burning charity in the work of the Saviour in giving back supernatural life to souls. Wherefore she is our mother in the order of grace" (§§56, 58, 61).

<sup>52</sup> *In Sinu Jesu* 44.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Giuseppe Crocetti, S.S.S., *Maria e l'Eucaristia nella Chiesa* (Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna, 2001) 149-160 and the many excellent articles on this theme in Ermanno M. Toniolo, O.S.M. (ed.), *Maria e l'Eucaristia* (Rome: Centro di Cultura Mariana «Madre della Chiesa», 2000) and *Liturgie dell'Oriente Cristiano a Roma nell'Anno Mariano (1987-88): Testi e Studi* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1990).

I think for instance of the rood screens and Calvary scenes with Mary and John at the foot of the cross, which have had a principal place in the art and architecture adorning so many of our churches. The instinct of identifying Mary with the celebration of the Mass has likely been an unspoken instinct of the faithful going all the way back to the Church's beginnings.

As I have already indicated, it would seem that just as there has been a development of doctrine guided by the Holy Spirit in the course of the centuries,<sup>54</sup> so also there has been a similar development of insight into spiritual realities. This is not to say that new truths are brought forward, but rather that the Holy Spirit brings to light in ever more explicit ways what was intuitively sensed in earlier eras. From what I have been able to find it does seem that Mary's presence in the Mass has come into ever-sharper focus in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and I am pleased to have made some modest contribution in this regard. It remains to be seen what further research and scholarship may bring to light.

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<sup>54</sup> Cf. The Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum* #8.