

Yesterday was the feast day of Our Lady of the Rosary. Question: do Catholics worship Mary? Short answer: certainly not. Long answer: coming soon. One special aspect of being Catholic is love for Our Lady. Love is not the same as worship. Catholics love God, and truly worship God in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. We praise Mary, we love the Mother of Christ, Mother of us all, and ask for her prayers. But we never worship her. We have statues that remind us of her beauty, her perfect holiness, her tenderness towards Jesus her Son and her love for you and me. I have a photograph of my mother that I look at; I love my mum, not the photograph, and certainly don't worship her. Nor do we worship Our Lady through statues – but they do give a moment of connection with someone we love.

To try to understand well the Catholic viewpoint on Mary, let's consider what we consider worship to mean. For Jews, worship only ever took place in the temple. There was only one temple, at the highest point of Jerusalem city. The regular village synagogues were ideal for prayer and praise of God, reading scripture as a community, even singing; but not for worship. Worship involved sacrifice, initially of animals as God commanded in the Old Testament, and could only take place in the Jerusalem temple. For Catholics, every altar's sacrifice exceeds old temple worship. Because worship centres around Christ, whose sacrifice was made once and for all on the first Good Friday. Today we offer back to God the Father Christ's body, blood, soul and divinity. That's what happens at Mass, the only place of worship for us. Worship is not singing Downside 'bangers' with gusto, marvellous as that is – we're praising God during those; it is right to give God thanks and praise, so let's sing loudly with all our skill. And oftentimes we'll praise Our Lady in song. Worship on the other hand usually happens in silence when kneeling before the altar at Mass. Or at Nightfever in the Gasquet. No sacrifice, no worship. It is that simple. We worship God the Father by the re-presentation of his Son's sacrifice on the cross, offering back to Him the body and blood of His only Son. Worship is beyond any words we can offer during a service, but about the offering of my sacrifice and yours for the praise and glory of His Holy name – through the power of what God the Holy Spirit does for us during every Mass.

So Catholics praise Mary, we don't worship her. Praise and worship are not the same thing. It's like when you hand in maths prep. I may well give you an A, and say to you 'well done'. I don't mean to worship you, nor your homework. We may not worship any created thing or person, that would be idolatry: see the first commandment: *Thou shalt have no other Gods but me*. To say 'well done', is praise not worship. 'Well done' to Our Lady for being so willing to

carry out God the Father's plan, and to become the Mother of God. There again that phrase 'Mother of God' is controversial for some: for us, it's pure logic; Jesus is God. Mary is His Mother. You do the math to deduce that Mary is rightly called the Mother of God.

Christians find common ground on the four gospels. When we pray the Hail Mary, we are repeating the greeting of the angel Gabriel to Mary in St Luke's version. *Hail Mary, full of grace the Lord is with you.* The next bit of the prayer is also in Luke's gospel, when Elizabeth said to her cousin: *blessed art Thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus.* Then we say *Holy Mary* – if anyone is holy she is – *Mother of God* – that's obviously why she's holy – *pray for us sinners now and at and at the hour of our death. Amen.* I ask Mary's prayers, for the same reason that I will soon speak to my mum and ask for her prayers and advice. I speak lovingly to Our Lady as the Mother given to John and all of us – as Jesus hung dying on the cross. *Behold your mother:* words of Christ from the gospel, instructions given to all Christians. Mary was close to Jesus to the last. *Can the human heart refrain, from partaking in her pain, in that Mother's pain untold?* As mother of Our Risen Lord, the king of love, she is like so many Queen-Mothers of old testament times. As Queen Mother Mary never rules instead of Christ; she does not command her Son, yet He is inclined to fulfil her wishes. 'Do whatever he tells you' she said at Cana, prompting Jesus to turn water into wine.

Dear brothers and sisters, an old spiritual song asks the question: were you there when they crucified my Lord? Were you there when they nailed him to the tree? Were you there when the sun refused to shine? I wasn't, but Mary was. All the mysteries of Christ, were witnessed by her, starting in Nazareth, then Bethlehem, back to Nazareth via Egypt, twice at the temple, around Galilee, in the river Jordan and then definitely to Jerusalem where Our lady's sorrows were turned to mysteries both joyful and glorious. Our Lady of the Rosary's Feast in the Month of October is a special time, because we have the chance as sons and daughters of God to approach the Mother of all Christians with love and confidence, as we mourn and weep in this vale of tears. *O clement, O loving, O sweet virgin Mary, pray for us O Holy Mother of God, that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ. Amen.*