

The Early Church Fathers on Mary, Mother of the Church

The Church has always thought of Mary as a spiritual mother. This idea is the natural result of the Gospel where at the foot of the cross Jesus entrusts His mother to the care of the apostle John (John 19:25-27). In that exchange Jesus also tells John that Mary is his mother. The fathers often portrayed Mary as someone who cares for the Church with her prayers. Just as at the wedding in Cana, she continues to care for and intercedes for those in need. The book of Revelation lends support to this view when it says: "Then the dragon became angry with the woman [Mary] and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring, those who keep God's commandments and bear witness to Jesus" (12:17).

Irenaeus

The Word will become flesh, and the Son of God the son of man—the Pure One opening purely that pure womb, which generates men unto God. (Against Heresies, 4, 33, 12 [A.D.180-190]).

Just as Eve, wife of Adam, yet still a virgin, became by her disobedience the cause of death for herself and the whole human race, so Mary, too, espoused yet a Virgin, became by her obedience the cause of salvation for herself and the whole human race.... And so it was that the knot of Eve's disobedience was loosed by Mary's obedience. For what the virgin Eve bound fast by her refusal to believe, this the Virgin Mary unbound by her belief. (ibid 3, 32, 1 [A.D. 180-190]).

Rylands Papyri

Under your mercy we take refuge, O Mother of God. Do not reject our supplications in necessity, but deliver us from danger (*Sub Tuum Praesidium*, Egypt [A.D. 250]).

Ephrem of Syria

O Lady, cease not to watch over us; preserve and guard us under the wings of your compassion and mercy, for, after God, we have no hope but in you!" ([Circa A.D. 361]).

Athanasius

It becomes you to be mindful of us, as you stand near Him Who granted you all graces, for you are the Mother of God and our Queen. Help us for the sake of the King, the Lord God Master Who was born of you. For this reason, you are called "full of Grace"... (*Prayer to Mary Mother of Grace* [A.D. 373]).

Epiphanius

True it is . . . the whole race of man upon earth was born of Eve; but in reality, it is from Mary that Life was truly born to the world, so that by giving birth to the Living One, Mary might also become the Mother of all the living. (*Against Eighty Heresies*, 78, 9 [Circa A.D. 374]).

Gregory of Nazianzen

Recalling these and other circumstances and imploring the Virgin Mary to bring assistance, since she, too, was a virgin and had been in danger, she entrusted herself to the remedy of fasting and sleeping on the ground (*Oration* 24:11[A.D. 379]).

Ambrose of Milan

It was through a man and woman that flesh was cast from Paradise; it was through a virgin that flesh was linked to God....Eve is called mother of the human race, but Mary Mother of salvation (Epistle 63, No. 33 [A.D. 397]).

Augustine

The Mother of the Head, in bearing Him corporally became spiritually the Mother of all members of this Divine Head (*Of Holy Virginity* 6, [A.D.401]).

Blessed Virgin Mary, who can worthily repay you with praise and thanksgiving for having rescued a fallen world by your generous consent? ...accept then such poor thanks as we have to offer, unequal though they be to your merits. Receive our gratitude and obtain by your prayers the pardon of our sins. Take our prayers into the sanctuary of heaven and enable them to bring about our peace with God...Holy Mary, help the miserable, strengthen the discouraged, comfort the sorrowful, pray for your people, plead for the clergy, intercede for all women consecrated to God. May all who venerate you, feel now your help and protection. ...Make it your continual care to pray for the people of God, for you were blessed by God and were made worthy to bear the Redeemer of the world, who lives and reigns forever (*Prayer to Our Lady of Mercy* [A.D. 430]).

Basil the Great

God has ordained that she should assist us in everything! (A.D. 379).

Severus of Antioch

More than the other saints, she is able to lift up prayers for us, and we glory to have obtained her as the ornament of our race (Homily 14:18 [Early 6th century]).

John Damascene

The Most High has sanctified His tabernacle. The mountain of God is a fertile mountain, the mountain in which it pleased God to dwell." The apostolic band lifting the true ark of the Lord God on their shoulders, as the priests of old the typical ark, and placing thy body in the tomb, made it, as if another Jordan, the way to the true land of the gospel, the heavenly Jerusalem, the mother of all the faithful, God being its Lord and architect. Thy soul did not descend to Limbo; neither did thy flesh see corruption. Thy pure and spotless body was not left in the earth, but the abode of the Queen, of God's true Mother, was fixed in the heavenly kingdom alone (*Sermon 1 on the Assumption* 6th century).

O Mother of God, if I place my confidence in you, I shall be saved. If I am under your protection, I have nothing to fear, for the fact of being your client is the possession of a certainty of salvation, which God grants only to those whom He intends to save (*Homilies*, 6th century).

Theoteknos of Livias

Raised to heaven, she remains for the human race an unconquerable rampart, interceding for us before her Son and God (*Assumption* 291 [A.D. 560]).

Isadore of Seville

Mary represents the church, which, being wedded to Christ conceived us as virgin by the Holy Spirit and as a virgin bore us. (*Allegories* 139 [A.D. 610]).