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God's Special Weapon Against Evil: Spiritual Mothers

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There is a most beautiful, vital vocation within a vocation that is “largely unknown, scarcely understood and, consequently, rarely lived, notwithstanding its fundamental importance”: spiritual motherhood for priests. “It is a vocation that is frequently hidden, invisible to the naked eye, but meant to transmit spiritual life.”

(Mauro Cardinal Piacenza, *Eucharistic Adoration for the Sanctification of Priests & Spiritual Motherhood*, 2013, p 12,13).

Cardinal Piacenza further explains the reason why now is the time to emphasize this vocation for the broader Church, “The present situation of the Church in a secularized world and the subsequent crisis of faith has the pope, bishops, priests and faithful looking for a way forward. At the same time, it is becoming increasingly clear that the real solution lies in the interior renewal of priests, and in this context the so-called “spiritual maternity for priests” assumes a special role. Through being “spiritual mothers”, women and mothers participate

in the universal motherhood of Mary, who as mother of the Supreme and Eternal High Priest, is also the mother of all priests of all times.”

Other Mary's

From the heart of the Church comes a call to imitate Mary in transmitting spiritual life to souls. A trumpet sounds, a need arises, and the role of Catholic womanhood is called forth. Where are the “other Mary's”? I've often reflected on why the Lord Jesus, when He ascended to the Father, left behind His holy Mother at the start of the Church? Her presence, prayer, encouragement, wisdom, and exhortation; her feminine love must have strengthened the Apostles. Her maternal holiness and prayer helped to form the first clergy.

In the words of Fr. John Cihak, “The Blessed Virgin Mary's role is to call out of the priest this celibate “agape” to help him become a husband to the Church and a spiritual father—a strong father, even in his weakness. She does this at the foot of the Cross by drawing the priest out of his own pain to offer pure masculine love in the midst of her own feminine love. This scene becomes the icon of the relationship between the priest and the Church.” (Fr. John Cihak article, “The Blessed Virgin Mary's Role in the Celibate Priest's Spousal and Paternal Love”, quoted by Beckman, [Praying for Priests: A Mission for the New Evangelization](#), p 54, 55.)

The lesson for spiritual mothers: the more we reflect the heart of Mary, the more God can use us to spiritually call forth from men the masculine ideal of Christ-like spiritual fatherhood.

The role of a Catholic woman might be summed up in a word: MARY.

- Motherhood (physical and spiritual)
- Adoration (first duty to God)
- Resourceful (wise, creative)
- Yes to God (serving the divine will)

Some women will transmit life physically but all women of faith can be life bearers: Christ-bearers. What does Catholic womanhood have to do with the clergy? We can learn from several female saints whose lives bear witness to the beauty of spiritual maternity for priests.

“Woman: God’s special weapon in His fight against evil”

St. Edith Stein helps us to understand the unique role of woman in God’s plan. Always the role of woman is best revealed in the life of the Virgin Mary. Her singular dignity to be the Mother of Christ reveals the thought of God regarding the dignity of women. He chose women to be cooperators in creating new life. In light of how much the fallen angels despise and fear the Virgin Mary, we better understand the teaching of St. Edith Stein:

The intrinsic value of woman consists essentially in exceptional receptivity for God’s work in the soul. For an understanding of our unique feminine nature, let us look to the pure love and spiritual maternity of Mary. This spiritual maternity is the core of a woman’s soul. Wherever a woman functions authentically in this spirit of maternal love, Mary collaborates with her. This holds true whether the woman is married or single, professional or domestic or both, a Religious in the world or in the convent. Through this love, a woman is God’s special weapon in His fight against evil. Her intrinsic value is that she is able to do so because she has a special susceptibility for the works of God in souls—her own and others. She relates to others in His spirit of love.

Here, a great woman and saint of the Church broadens spiritual motherhood beyond the walls of the cloister or convent where for centuries beloved women Religious Sisters interceded for priests; and thankfully, continue to this present time. More recently, Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa addresses the movement of the Holy Spirit: “God calls some souls to the even higher task of atoning for priests...only men can be priests, but the wisdom of God has kept aside a task for women, and even a higher task in a certain sense, which the world does not understand and thus rejects with disdain: that of forming priests and of contributing to raising the quality, not quantity, of Catholic priesthood. The Lord is calling the faithful in ever growing numbers to pray, to offer sacrifices, in order to have holy priests. A concern, a passion, for holy priests has spread as a sign of the times though today’s Church” (Fr. Cantalamessa, OFM, *Sober Intoxication of the Spirit: Part Two* quoted by Beckman, [Praying for Priests](#), p 18-19).

We turn to Mary to understand how women of faith who are called to be spiritual mothers become God’s special weapon in His fight against evil. We’ll consider the ten evangelical virtues of Mary that form a powerful arsenal of

spiritual arrows to mortally wound the fallen angels; those demons who “prowl the earth like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8).

The ten evangelical virtues of Mary:

- 1 Most Pure (Mt 1:18, 20, 23, Lk 1:24,34)
- 2 Most Prudent (Lk 2:19; 51)
- 3 Most Humble (Lk 1:48)
- 4 Most Faithful (Lk 1:45; Jn 2:5)
- 5 Most Devout (Lk 1:46-47; Acts 1:14)
- 6 Most Obedient (Lk 1:38; 2:21-22; 27)
- 7 Most Poor (Lk 2:7)
- 8 Most Patient (Jn 19:25)
- 9 Most Merciful (Lk 1:39, 56)
- 10 Most Sorrowful (Lk 2:35)

Marian virtues perpetuate the victory of her Son Jesus Christ and can render Satan’s corrupting vices impotent. Satan fears Mary. Why? He knows God is omnipotent. But Mary is a lowly creature favored by God, raised to such a level of dignity and influence that her little heel can crush Satan’s head. He can’t get over this! In many rites of major exorcism in which I have participated on the team assisting the exorcist priest, Mary responds to the plea of the priest to help him cast out demons. Frequently, the Virgin Mary’s presence is the finishing touch to evict the evil one.

A woman who identifies with Mary is His special weapon in His fight against evil. The humble Mother of the Eternal High Priest is gathering a little army of daughters who attain to her virtues. God uses Mary’s daughters as righteous arrows against the malice of the devil.

The example of an ordinary wife and mother

Here’s a practical example in the ordinary life of a Catholic wife and mother of five young sons. She has answered the call to spiritual maternity for priests. Recently, in an interview we did for the Foundation of Prayer for Priests, she shared that when she is making her children’s lunches, desiring to feed them the most nutritious food, she also considers the priest who desires to feed

God's flock the imperishable food of the Eucharist. Then she offers up her tiredness for him.

I asked her how praying for priests has impacted her life as wife and mother. She shared that, at first, she did not fully understand the priest. He was set apart for God and a bit mysterious. When she realized that the Holy Spirit was quickening her heart to pray for her parish priest, the Holy Spirit began to teach her how to pray for him. She came to understand that the priest is a spiritual father of the Catholic family entrusted to him. He is charged with the care of parishioner's souls but is subject to weariness and spiritual warfare also. During the Mass she observed more carefully the reverent gestures of the priest and began to see more of Jesus on the altar. Also, in recognizing the priest's spiritual paternity, her appreciation of her husband's role as spiritual father for the family grew.

When we pray for the priests, the Sanctifier pours graces of wisdom, knowledge and understanding upon us. Thus, we become more like Mary—attuned to the things of God. Priests and laity have a mutual need to mirror holiness for one another. Often this takes place in a silent, hidden, real and transformative way.

“The priest is the target of the devil's malice”

“The priest is a marked man, the target of the devil's malice. Don't pray for priests superficially. Pray fervently. We priests need your prayers and sacrifices” –these words of Fr. William Casey are confirmed by Fr. John Hardon, “...No words I can use would be too strong to state that the Catholic priesthood needs prayer as sacrifice as never before since Calvary. Priests experience pressures with a violence and a virulence such as no one else but a priest can understand. One saint after another has declared that the devil's principle target on earth is the Catholic priest. Priests need special graces from God. We ask why pray for priests? We should pray for priests and bishops because this has been the practice of the Church since apostolic times. It's a matter of truth. It is a divine mandate.” (Fr. John Hardon, *The Value of Prayer and Sacrifice for Priests*, The Real Presence Association, quoted by Beckman, [Praying for Priests: A Mission for the New Evangelization](#), p 21). Priests are the spiritual head of the Body of Christ and therefore; Satan aims to spiritually decapitate the Body of Christ in mockery of the Eternal High Priest. Some spiritual writers refer to Mary as the spiritual neck of the Church connecting the

members of Christ's body with the head, the priests in "persona Christi"—a beautiful analogy.

Spiritual motherhood of priests is our response of love for Jesus Christ. This Year of Mercy is an opportune time to practice a vital spiritual work of mercy: spiritual adoption of priests. May the Lord help you to discover this beautiful vocation within your vocation to His glory.

Visit www.foundationforpriests.org for more information on spiritual motherhood, fatherhood and spiritual warfare. This article contains excerpts from [Praying for Priests: A Mission for the New Evangelization](#).