

Our most gracious Advocate

OFS Formation

May 2022

The Blessed Virgin Mary



As we enter the Month of May, the month of Mary, it seems fitting to consider some of the words of Saint Francis, in relation to the Blessed Virgin Mary, from the beginning of the Order. In St. Bonaventure's *Life of St. Francis*, Chapter III, 'of the founding of his religion, and sanction of the Rule' it states; "now Francis, the servant of God, abiding at the Church of the Virgin Mother of God, with continuous sighing besought her that had conceived the Word full of grace and truth that she would deign to become his advocate; and, by the merits of the Mother of Mercy, he did himself conceive and give birth unto the spirit of Gospel truth".

The Blessed Virgin Mary
Basilica of St. Mary of the Angels, Assisi

The Rule of the OFS, 9

"The Virgin Mary, humble servant of the Lord, was open to his every word and call. She was embraced by Francis with indescribable love and declared the protectress and advocate of his family. The Secular Franciscans should express their ardent love for her by imitating her complete self-giving and by praying earnestly and confidently".

St. Francis and Holy Mother Church

It was not only St. Francis who considered Mary as his advocate (and the advocate of the Franciscan Order). The Church, in Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium* (Light of the Nations) paragraph 62 of Chapter VIII, dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, states, "this maternity of Mary in the order of grace began with the consent which she gave in faith at the Annunciation and which she sustained without wavering beneath the cross, and lasts until the eternal fulfilment of all the elect. Taken up to heaven she did not lay aside this salvific duty, but by her constant intercession continued to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation. By her maternal charity, she cares for the brethren of her Son, who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and difficulties, until they are led into the happiness of their true home. Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked by the Church under the titles of Advocate, Auxiliatrix, Adjutrix, and Mediatrix."



Outdoor fresco of St. Clare, the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Francis, Assisi

In his 'Letter to the Whole Order' St. Francis states "how right it is that we honour so highly the Virgin Mary, for she carried Jesus in her most holy womb".



St. Francis honours the Blessed Virgin Mary holding the Holy Child of her womb

The *Salve Regina*



St. Herman the Cripple

According to Father Luigi Lanzoni in his book on 'The Virtues of Mary', The *Salve Regina* hymn/prayer (excluding the last line) was most probably composed by the holy Benedictine Monk, Saint Hermann the Contractus (known today as Bl. Herman the Cripple) in the 11th Century. This was therefore written before the time of Saint Francis. It is well known as the Hail Holy Queen prayer recited at the end of the rosary and notably includes the following words: "turn then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us, and after this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus. O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary".

Something to ponder

I wonder what moved St. Francis to make Mary our Order's Advocate? Was he influenced by the *Salve Regina*? Consider what it might mean to have the support of a heavenly advocate and whether the gentle whisperings of our most gracious advocate could be; 'I am always there for you'.

Prayer

In this Month of Mary let us earnestly pray to our most gracious advocate using these words from the Office of the Passion of the Lord, written by St. Francis:

*"Holy Virgin Mary, there is no one like you among women.
Daughter and handmaid of the Most High Supreme King and Father in heaven,
mother of our Most Holy Lord Jesus Christ,
spouse of the Holy Spirit, pray for us..."*