



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

MARY, MOTHER OF GOD- January 1<sup>st</sup> 2019- Bodmin 2019

***Readings: Jeremiah 6: 22-27, Psalm 66, Galatians 4: 4-7, Luke 2: 16-21***

In the year 431 AD the Christian Faith had been established as the religion of the Roman Empire for over a century. Its transformation from persecuted culture, three centuries under the cosh, to imperial arbiter had not been smooth. As the advantages of Christian adherence became normative so the rush to get a piece of the governing action intensified and the desire to accommodate state and religion in a harmonious concord threatened to dominate. Almost as soon as Constantine had freed the Church, it was embroiled in a war for its very soul between the popular reductionist doctrine of the heretic Arius and the orthodox faith championed by St. Athanasius. The triumph of orthodoxy we celebrate every Sunday when we affirm the irreducible minimum of our Faith in the Creed formulated at the Council of Nicaea in 325AD.

The battle did not stop there. Arianism – a denial of the divinity of Christ and a denial of the Trinity – appealed to several successive emperors and continued to Hoover up adherents for many decades thereafter. By 431 a new threat was looming. The Patriarch of Constantinople, Nestorius, argued that it was better to call Mary the Mother of Christ than the Mother of God. This was seized on by the Patriarch of Alexandria, Cyril, as potentially reopening the fault lines on the nature of

Christ's divinity. Nestorius asked the Emperor to call a Council to exonerate him. Theodosius II called the Council of Ephesus where, to his utter amazement Nestorius was condemned. The accidental heretic spent the rest of his life trying to justify his position and his schismatic church grew massively from Africa to the borderlands of China.

Why does it matter what we call Mary? It matters still because what we believe about Mary tells us what we believe about Jesus and therefore the very nature of God and Man. If Jesus the Christ is not Man then He cannot represent us. If Jesus the Christ is not God then He cannot save us. The whole formula of salvation dissolves. We are thrown back to a sterile Unitarianism, a god who is distant, judgemental, detached from our humanity, unfamiliar with the lot of Man. Jesus assumes the role of a special prophet, adopted by God but not God. The consequences of this heresy were to have profound historical fruit because it was the Nestorian version of Christianity that founder of Islam encountered in his travels and subsumed into his own theology. Error compounds error. Nor is this simply old news. The wholesale ditching of Our Lady from theological understanding has been a driving force of the schismatic errors of the Protestant Reformation, its misunderstanding of the Church, its evacuation of the meaning of the Mass, its gradual retreat from the authority of the very Scripture it claimed to break for and the absence of a doctrine of womanhood which has left it supremely vulnerable to the materialist doctrine of Marxian feminism with its assault on gender, motherhood and family.

When we give Our Lady these amazing titles, they are not some devotional window dressing, some extravagance to stick in the craw of our theological opponents. These are salvation issues.

What we say about Our Lady tells us what we believe about her Son.

What we believe about her Son determines our eternal destiny.

The Council of Ephesus, sixteen centuries ago, understood this and confirmed the Spirit inspired prophecy of St. Elizabeth in the house of the Visitation – and the prayer of the faithful ever after. She called Mary, ‘the mother of my Lord’.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death