

## **The Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary**

**Hail, O Lady,  
Holy Queen,  
Mary, holy Mother of God,  
who are the Virgin made Church,  
chosen by the most Holy Father in heaven  
whom he consecrated with his most beloved Son  
and with the Holy Spirit the Paraclete,  
in whom there was and is  
all fullness of grace and every good.**

**Hail his Palace!  
Hail his Tabernacle!  
Hail his Dwelling!  
Hail his Robe!  
Hail his Servant!  
Hail his Mother!**

**And hail all you holy virtues  
which are poured into the hearts of the faithful  
through the grace and enlightenment of the  
Holy Spirit,  
that from being unbelievers,  
you may make them faithful to God.**

*~ Francis of Assisi ~*

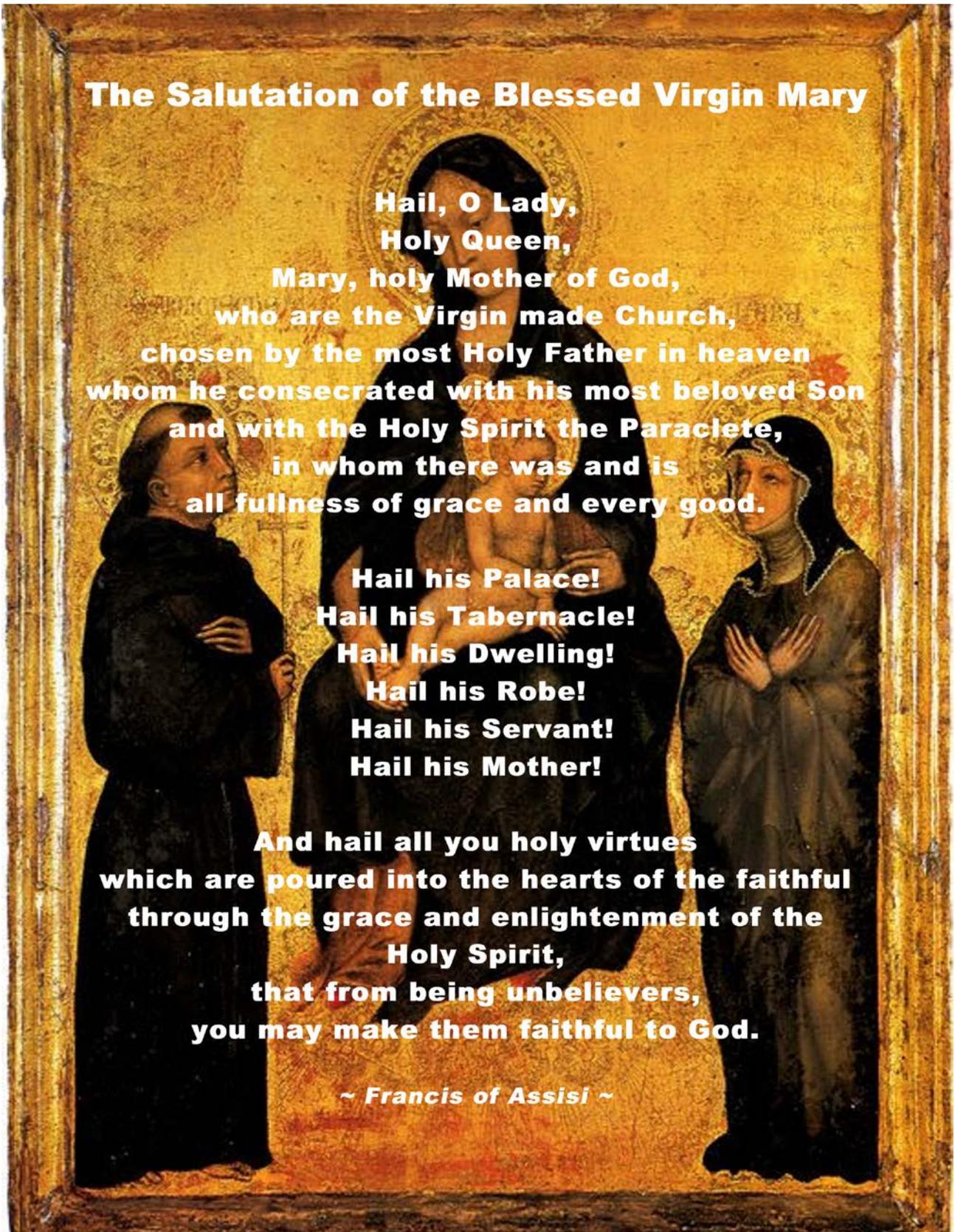


Image: *Mary in Glory with Francis and Clare of Assisi* ~ Gentile da Fabriano, 14<sup>th</sup> C

The Legionnaire  
by Fr. Bob Hutmacher, O.f.m  
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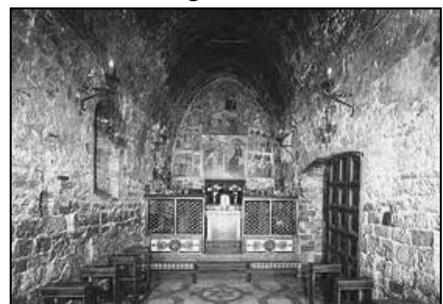
This marvelous litany written by Francis has captivated me for forty years. In fact, in 1977 I set the text to a 13<sup>th</sup> century French melody I'd found in the library while in grad school at Notre Dame. Franciscan scholars list it among the undated writings of Francis but it is definitely his and from the latter part of his life (d.1226). Mary is hailed as *Queen of the Franciscan Order* and indeed, we friars have been instrumental in the development of Mariology. St. Bonaventure (d. 1274) debated with Thomas Aquinas and others at the University of Paris about the role of Mary in salvation history. The dogma of the Immaculate Conception is due, in great part, because of the work of Blessed John Dun Scotus (d. 1308). But for this month, let's focus on this beautiful litany by our founder, Francis, to discover more of his own reverence for the Mother of Jesus.



This is St. Mary of the Angels in the valley below Assisi. It's lovingly referred to as the *Porziuncola*, or *Little Portion* because it's so tiny. Probably built in the 11<sup>th</sup> century it was the third chapel that Francis himself rebuilt. It was under the care of the Benedictine community atop Mt. Subasio. When the friars needed a larger place for prayer, Francis asked the bishop of Assisi for help. The Benedictine abbot offered the friars this chapel in 1209 and it is considered the womb of the Franciscan Order. Francis chose to die inside it 3 October 1226, so it is a pivotal place in his life and the life of our fraternity. Originally Francis called the friars to convene at this chapel on Pentecost and on the feast of St. Michael in September in chapter.

There is a brass plate on the floor of the door frame as you enter with *Hic Locus Sanctus Est* inscribed on it. *This Place is Holy*. Indeed it was, is and always will be. In *The Mirror of Perfection*, ¶83, we read why this is so. "Francis often said to the friars: 'My sons, see that you never abandon this place! If you are driven out of one door, re-enter by another, for this place is holy indeed. It is the dwelling place of Christ and his Virgin Mother. When we were few, it was here that the Most High increased us; it was here that God illuminated the souls of the poor ones with the light of wisdom; it was here that God kindled our desires with the fire of love. Whosoever prays here with a devout heart shall obtain whatever he asks...My sons, regard this place as most worthy of all reverence and honor as the true dwelling place of God, especially dear to Him and to his Mother. Glorify God the Father, and the Son in the unity of the Holy Spirit in this place with all your hearts and with the voice of praise and confession.'"

This tiny, humble chapel now sits under the dome of one of the largest churches in the world; the Basilica was begun in 1569 and has survived numerous earthquakes. I first entered the Porziuncola in 1988 and with complete abandon, fell on the floor. It is, by far, my favorite place on Mother Earth because it holds such history, centuries of prayer and that loving reverence for Mary. Clare was received here on Palm Sunday of 1212. In 1216 Francis had his vision that gave birth to the Porziuncola Indulgence (August 2). The friars were sent out two by two to preach reconciliation and peace. I've been blessed to celebrate Eucharist in it many times, including once with all my siblings, their spouses and our Mom in 2004 when we mounted two concerts of my oratorio *Dialogue of Francis and Clare* in this Basilica with full orchestra and chorus. Friars and millions of pilgrims continue to touch the stones that



Francis himself repaired, finding respite as that huge Basilica disappears and one melts into God's intimate embrace.

What inspired Francis' *Salutation of the Blessed Virgin* and the lovely titles he gave Mary?

Consider the third ascription he accords her ~ *you are the Virgin made Church*. Mary had become prominent in popular piety and absorbed the more maternal aspects of God's providence in the Middle Ages. Francis, however, reveals not only his reverence for Mary but a certain realization of her role in salvation history. Mary was revered as the Virgin Mother since the 4<sup>th</sup> century but when Francis claims her as *Virgin made Church* he shows his concept of Church was the Body of Christ. Not only did Mary give birth to the Savior of the world, it was her 'yes' at the Annunciation that brought about the completion of God's continuous presence in the world as the Mystical Body, Jesus present among people in the community of believers. *Virgin made Church* is an ascription that makes a splendid theological statement about Christ Jesus and his earthly Mother, honoring the humanity and divinity of the Incarnation. It teaches us ecclesiology too!



In *The Salutation* Francis acclaim Mary as *Palace, Tabernacle and Dwelling*. These images are expressions of a medieval love for a mortal woman who carried within her body the Divine One. Look at this remarkable statue of Mary from 1300 that opens to reveal Jesus and his life in miniatures. I believe Francis' words are remarkable in the way they express in words the reality of Mary's role in salvation history, just as this work expresses it in a visual way.

Isaiah 61:10 ~ "I will rejoice heartily in the Lord, my being exults in my God; for he has clothed me with garments of salvation, and wrapped me in a robe of justice." These words were offered to those who had lost everything during the Exile and were restored and clothed with new dignity and honor after the return to Israel. Francis calls Mary the Lord's *Robe*. What a lovely way to convey the maternal care and protection Mary had for her Son.

Of course Francis refers to Mary with *Hail, his Mother!* but how often do we consider Mary as *his Servant?* I have come to absolutely love the story (and many images) of the Annunciation. Her response to Gabriel was: "behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Those are certainly the words of a servant who willingly embraced the will of her Master. A wondrous Mystery was unveiled by Gabriel, and the few memories of the Mother of Jesus in Scripture show how her positive response brought about God's salvation. She is truly a servant! Through Mary the Savior was born, the world was saved, the Kingdom made present.

The final section of *Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary* is an extensive acclamation of the Virtues. Medieval writers commonly presented the virtues as allegorical figures for consistent Christian behavior, often seven of them aligned to balance out the seven deadly sins. They are paths to God and Francis praises the Mother of Jesus as having embodied them. Therefore, chastity, temperance, charity, diligence, patience, kindness and humility are to be lived and highly prized because they keep us faithful to God's will. Just as Mary was faithful to God and conceived by the Holy Spirit, so also can we remain completely in God's love by being virtuous servants.

*The Office of the Passion* written by Francis contains a long antiphon, the first sentence of which is: *Holy Virgin Mary, among the women born into the world, there is no one like you.* One can see Francis' personal understanding of Mary's



unique role in history, and also, his great love for her. Franciscans have continued to enhance Mary in our spirituality. The great Italian friar/poet Jacopone da Todi (d. 1306) penned the *Stabat Mater* (*At the Cross her Station Keeping*). Many of you know the Franciscan Crown, an adaptation of the Rosary commemorating the Seven Joys of Mary. Franciscans influenced art from the 13<sup>th</sup> century on because the Incarnation is central to our spirituality; tender images of Jesus necessitated a tender image of his mother.

In St. Peter's here we have a beautiful statue of Our Lady of Grace in front and one of our shrines is a copy of Michelangelo's masterpiece, *Pieta*. Every Friday after the 1:15 Mass we pray a seasonal Marian devotion. As we continue to celebrate the Great Fifty Days of Easter, may our prayer include his *Tabernacle*, his *Robe*. In our common prayer and at all 41 Masses celebrated here each week we friars give thanks to God for your kindness and generous support of our ministry. You allow us to bring God into the Loop, into countless lives. May Mary fill you with Easter joy and may her Son fill you with peace and all good.

~ *Fr. Bob Hutmacher, ofm*