The Queenship of Our Lady in the Liturgy

Promulgating the feast of the Queenship of Our Lady by means of the Encyclical letter Ad Coeli Reginam, His Holiness Pope Pius XII has affirmed that he was not imposing a new truth to be believed in by the faithful, but only honouring Our Lady with a title which has been hers since early times, as witness both the Fathers of the Church and the Liturgy.

In this article we have to limit ourselves to examining only the witness of the Liturgy in favour of the Queenship of the Blessed Mother of God; nevertheless, this argument alone is sufficient to show that Our Lady is truly Queen, not only because she is the Mother of God, but also because through the Will of God she has had a great part in the work of our Redemption, and therefore she excels in dignity all created things and, after Her Son, has primacy over all. In fact, as the Pope says, Sacred Liturgy is a faithful mirror of the doctrines transmitted to us by our ancestors and believed by the faithful (1), for the Liturgy contains all the Catholic faith, as it publicly witnesses the faith of the Church. We profess the Catholic faith in the Liturgy not only by the celebration of the mysteries and by the administration of the Sacraments, but also by reciting or singing the "Symbol" which may be considered to be a sort of identity card for Christians, as well as by the reading of the Scriptures which were written under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. For this reason, Popes and Councils many times have had recourse to the Liturgy when defining a truth as revealed by God. The Fathers themselves, every time there were discussions on some doubtful or controverted truth, have never failed to seek light from the venerable and ancient rites of the Liturgy (2).

This shows that the Liturgy has ever been considered a "locus theologicus" of the first order, and the fact has often been expressed by means of the saying "legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi". The phrase is taken from the Capitula de

attributed to Pope Celestine I because they are generally found at the end of the letter he wrote to the bishops of Gaul in 431 about the Pelagian controversy. They are often attributed to St. Prosper of Aquitaine, a disciple of St. Augustine, but probably they were collected in Rome by the saint about 435-440 (4) and later on were recognised everywhere as giving the genuine doctrine of the Holy See. The author, writing against Pelagians and semi-Pelagians, argues that the liturgical prayers of intercession (5) witness the belief of the Church in the need of divine grace for the conversion of sinners and infidels. He is referring to a particular case, remarking that “obsecrationum sacerdotalium sacramenta, quae ab Apostolis tradita in toto mundo et in omni Ecclesia Catholica uniformiter celebrantur” are a proof of the rule of faith (6). Therefore, Liturgy does not determine nor constitute in an absolute manner and of its own power the Catholic faith, but, because it is also a profession in the divine truths, and subject to the divine magisterium of the Church, it can furnish arguments and is a witness of no small account as regards particular points of doctrine. And if we want to distinguish and determine, in a general and absolute way, the relations between faith and liturgy, we can truly say: “lex credendi legem statuat supplicandi” (7).

So understood, Liturgy is a more powerful argument in favour of a particular doctrine than any of the most important documents of the magisterium of the Church, for these generally come to the notice of only a few scholars, while the Liturgy teaches all the faithful; these documents speak, so to say, once,

(3) De gratia Dei “Indiculus” seu praeteritorum Sedis Apostolice episcoporum auctoritate. Cf. S. Prosper Aquitanus. Capitula de gratia Dei, 8 (PL 51, 209).
(5) The “Orationes Sallemnes” or “Oratio fidelium” since the 2nd century formed part of the ritual of the Mass and was placed immediately before the offertory. It fell out of use or was suppressed about the 5th century, being maintained only in the liturgy of Good Friday when it immediately preceded the adoration of the Cross.
(7) Encycl. Mediator Dei, A.A S., XXXIX (1947) 541.
and only to the mind of the readers, while the Liturgy is continually speaking to the mind as well as to the heart of all the believers (8). It is quite evident, then, that Liturgy and Faith are intimately connected together: in fact, one can easily notice that various developments in the history of Dogma are paralleled by corresponding developments in the Liturgy (9). For this reason, from the earliest centuries, the Church has always shown great care so that nothing, through fraud or ignorance, contrary to the holiness of the mysteries and to the truths of faith should find its way into the Liturgy (10). Indeed, heretics have ever tried either to attack and impugn the liturgical texts and rites of the Church, or to modify them, or even to propagate their heresy by means of the Liturgy itself (11). It is, therefore, to the Liturgy of the Roman Church and to the liturgies of the Churches in communion with her that we appeal in search of a witness to justify the title of Queen for the Mother of God; and, in so doing, we are appealing to an authority greater than the authority of the Fathers, for it is the authority of the Church itself: in fact, St. Thomas says: “maximam habet auctoritatem

(8) Encycl. Quas primas, A.A.S., XVII (1925) 603.
(9) A few examples will suffice: At the time of the Arian heresy, doxologies and various conclusions were added to the psalms, hymns and canticles of the liturgy, and these clearly testified to the consubstantiability of the Three Divine Persons. Against the Pneumatomachi, the Filologus was introduced in the Nicene Creed. During the Pelagian heresy the custom of often repeating Deus in adiutorium became common. Against the Donatists, St. Augustine composed various hymns to be sung in the African Church. Against the Manichaeanists. St. Leo the Great, according to the Liber Pontificalis, introduced in the Canon of the Mass the words “sanctum sacrificium, immaculatam hostiam”. Cf. Oppenheim, op. cit., pars I, tit. I, cap. II, par. 5; M. Righetti, Storia Liturgica, vol. I, parte I, cap. II, par. 1 (Ancora, Milano, 1950).
(11) As examples of this, one could mention: the fact that Paul of Samosata changed those Mass collects which had references to the divinity of Our Lord (Eusebius, Hist. eccl., 7,30; PG 20, 713); the Anglican Book of Common Prayer; the changes introduced in breviaries and missals in the 17th and 18th centuries in the Gallican Church. Cf. Righetti, op. cit., parte I, cap. II, par. 1; Oppenheim, op. cit., par. 2.
Ecclesiae consuetudo" — the whole context shows that St. Thomas by *consuetudo* means the Liturgy, i.e., the rites, uses, and prayers of the Church (12) — "quae semper est in omnibus aemulanda, quia et ipsa doctrina Catholicorum Doctorum ab Ecclesia auctoritatem habet; unde magis standum est auctoritati Ecclesiae quam auctoritati vel Augustini vel Hieronymi vel cuiuscumque Doctoris" (13).

Having thus established the value of the argument from Liturgy, we can now discuss the witness of the various liturgies in favour of the Queenship of the Blessed Mother of God. During all the ages, says His Holiness (14), the Liturgy, both in the East and in the West, has sung and is continually singing the praises of the Queen of Heaven. In the Eastern liturgies expressions which clearly proclaim the royal dignity of the Blessed Mother of God are fairly common, and among a wealth of examples His Holiness has chosen four quotations, two from the Byzantine rite, one from the Armenian rite and one from the Ethiopian rite.

The Armenian Liturgy in the Matins Hymn for the feast of the Assumption of Our Lady, which is celebrated on the Sunday nearest the 15th August, so sings to the Blessed Mother of God: "O Mother of God, today you have been carried to heaven on the chariots of the Cherubim, the Seraphim minister to you, and the heavenly cohorts bow down before you" (15). The anaphora of Our Lady, Mary, the Mother of God, in the Ethiopian Missal says: "O Mary, the centre of the whole world...... you are greater than the many-eyed Cherubim and the six-winged Seraphim...... Heaven and earth are altogether full of the glory of thy holiness" (16).

(12) Cf. Oppenheim, *op. cit.*, par. 3.
(13) 2a-2ae, q. 10, a. 12.
(15) The canticles and hymns used in the recitation of the divine office (but not those used during the celebration of the Mass) are found in the *Charagan*, the latest edition of which was published at Constantinople in 1877. The Mechitarists of Venice in 1857 published the text and translation of the *Laudes et hymni ad ss. Mariae Virginis honorem ex Armenorum breviario excerpta* (Cf. D.T.C. I, 1965).
(16) The Ethiopian rite has fifteen different anaphoras, of which only one, the *anaphora Ss. Apostolorum*, is in common use, the others being used only on particular feast-days, or for certain times.
From the Byzantine rite the Pope quotes the Maenaeon (17) for the Sunday after Christmas at Matins: "O just and most blessed (Joseph), being of a royal progeny, amongst all you have been chosen as the spouse of the pure Queen who ineffably had to bring forth Jesus King." He also quotes the Achatistos Hymn (18): "I say a hymn to the Mother and Queen whom I approach celebrating with joy, that I may joyfully sing her marvels...... O Lady, our tongues cannot worthily praise thee for, having brought forth Christ the King, you have been exalted over the Seraphim...... Hail o Queen of Heaven, hail, o Mary, Lady of us all”.

We may also mention that the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom applies to Our Lady the verse of Psalm 44: *Adstitit Regina a dextris tuis in vestitu deaurato circumdata varietate* (19). In fact, during the rite of the preparation of the Offering (the *proshomide*), the celebrant cuts away with the holy lance the parts of the "holy bread" (the *prophora*) marked with the letters IC. XC. NI. KA, saying: "The Lamb of God is sacrificed". After the deacon has poured warm water and wine into the chalice, the priest takes another loaf (the *sfragis*) and cuts a bit from it in honour of Our Lady; taking the piece of loaf cut in honour of the All-holy Theotokos, he says: "In honour and memory of the blessed above all creatures, our glorious Lady Mother of God and ever virgin Mary, through whose intercession accept o Lord this sacrifice on your supracelestial altar". Then putting it near the "holy bread" to the right, he says:

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the typical edition of the Ethiopian missal (Asmara 1907) the *anaphora Dominae nostrae Mariae Virginis* is the 4th and is found on pp. 53-60. Cf. Hausseins, *Inst. Liturgicae de ritibus orientalis, III, xvi*, par. 1, n. 1483.

(17) The *Menaion* is the name of twelve books (one for every month) that contain the offices for the immovable feasts of the Byzantine rite. The latest edition was printed at the Vatican Press in 1888-1901.

(18) The Achatistos is a hymn or, better still, an office in the Greek liturgy in honour of the B.V.M.; it is said standing, hence its name. This office is recited entire on the Saturday of the fifth week in Lent, and then it is divided into four parts or stations, between which (sitting) various psalms and canticles are sung. Portions of this hymn are also distributed over the first four Saturdays of Lent. Cf. D.A.C.L., I, 213-216; Catholic Encyclopedia, vol. I, page 92.

(19) Ps. 44, 10.
Adstitit regina a dextris tuis in vestitu decus state circumdata varietate (20).

In the Latin rite, too, we find the above verse of Psalm 41 applied to the Blessed Virgin Mary. In fact, the verse forms part of the introit of the Mass B.M.V. de Consolatione, on the Sunday following the 28th August, and it appears also as the verse in the 6th responsory of the Common Office of Our Lady in our breviaries. The title of Queen is given to our Lady in various Masses of the Latin rite, chiefly in those approved for certain places (21). But it is not to the witness of these Masses that the Pope appeals: as witnesses that even the Latin rite gives to Mary the honour of Queenship, the Pope mentions the beautiful antiphons in honour of Our Lady sung during the year at the conclusion of the divine office, i.e., the Salve Regina (from Trinity to Advent), the Ave Regina coelorum (from Purification to Easter), and the Regina coeli laetare (during Eastertide) (22). He also quotes the hymn at Lauds in the new office

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(21) In the Masses of Our Lady under the titles of Mount Carmel (16th July), Perpetual Succour (27th July), and Good Counsel (26th April), we read: Regina mundi dignissima, Maria, Virgo perpetua, intercede pro nostra pace et salute (Communion antiphon). In the Mass of Our Lady, Regina Apostolorum (31st May), we read: Porta coeli et stella Mariæ, Virgo Maria, Regis æterni Mater, et Regina nostra (Gradual), Suscipe Mater nostra, Regina nostra (Tract); Gloriosa Regina mundi, intercede pro nobis (Communion antiphon). In the Mass of Our Lady, Regina Sanctorum omnium et Mater Puecae Dilectionis (31st May), we read: Egregiæm et videte, filiae Sion, nostram Reginam, quæ laudantium astra matutina (Introït); Deus, qui beatissimam Virginem Mariam omnium sanctorum Reginam nos veneri tribuisti (Collect); Praeposuit eam Dominus super universum regnum suum et dedit ei diadema ut Filium suum nutriret, et regnaret. Corona aurea super caput eius, exspressa signo sanctitatis, gloria honoris, et opus fortitudinis (Gradual); Veni, Regina nostra, veni, Domina, in hortum tuum (Alleluia verse and Tract).

(22) The *Salve Regina* is an 11th century hymn ascribed to either Hermann Contractus or Peter bishop of Compostella or Adhemar bishop of Puy-en-Velay. It was first adopted for a liturgical purpose about 1135 when Peter the Venerable, abbot of Cluny, decreed that it should be sung processionaly on certain feasts among which was the Assumption. Cf. Catholic Encyclopedia, vol. XIII, pp. 409, 410; Thurston, *Familiar Prayers*, pp. 115-145 (Burns & Oates, 1953).
for the feast of the Assumption: "Teque Reginam celebrant potentem terra polusque", and the Antiphon for the Magnificat in the Second Vespers of the same feast which belonged to the former office and has been maintained in the new one: "Hodie Maria Virgo coelos ascendit, gaudete quia hodie cum Christo regnat in aeternum" (23).

But the fact that the title of Queen is given to the Blessed Mother of God, both because she is the Mother of God and because of the part she played in our Redemption, is chiefly brought out in the liturgy of the two feasts of the Sorrows of Our Lady. In the Tract for the feast celebrated on the Friday

The date of composition of the Ave Regina Coelorum is uncertain and no internal or external evidence can prove that it antedates the 4th century. It first appears in the St. Alban’s Book of the 12th century and in Munich MSS of the 13th century. It seems to have been introduced in the Divine Office by Clement VI in the 14th century. Cf. Catholic Encyclopedia, vol. II, p. 149.

The Regina Coeli is of unknown authorship and has been traced to the 12th century. It is due to the influence of the Franciscans, who were using it after Compline in the first half of the 13th century, that it was adopted by the universal Church. Actually it is an adaptation of a Christmas hymn in honour of Our Lady found in 12th century MSS at Seckau and Saint-Mair-des-fosses. Cf. Catholic Encyclopedia, vol. XII pp. 718-719; Thurston, op. cit., pp. 146-151.

(23) We could also note that the original rendering of the hymn at Lauds in the Office of the B.V.M. was O gloriosa Domina, excelsa super sidera. It is still so sung by the Benedictines.

The office of the Apparition of the B.V.M. at Lourdes (11th February) has: Hodie gloriosa coeli Regina in terris apparuit (the Magnificat antiphon for 2nd Vespers).

The hymn at Lauds for the feast of the Holy Rosary (7th October) celebrates the five glorious mysteries, and the last verse before the conclusion is:

Bis sena cingunt sidera
almae parentis verticem,
thono propinquam Filii
unctis creatis imperat;

while the hymn for second vespers, which briefly recounts all the mysteries of the Holy Rosary, says:

Ave, in triumphis Filii,
in ignibus Paracliti,
in regni honore et lumine,
Regina fulgens gloria.

These hymns were composed by Eustazio Sirena and were included for the first time in the Dominican Office published in 1834.
preceding Palm Sunday (and in the Alleluia verse in votive Masses) the Church sings: "Stabat sancta Maria, coeli Regina et mundi Domina. iuxta crucem Domini nostri Jesu Christi dolorosa." On the other hand, in the September feast the verse and responsory for the first nocturn at Matins and for both vespers is: "\textit{V. Regina martyrurn, ora pro nobis. R. Quae iuxta crucem Christi constitisti}.

In the Encyclical \textit{Mediator Dei} the Pope not only insisted on having the faithful imbued with the spirit of the Liturgy and exercising among all fellow-Christians an apostolate for living the Liturgy, but he also made known his wish that the faithful should not be encouraged to do away with the various private devotions which through the ages have become popular and in no way are opposed to the liturgy of the Church — the Pope mentions in a special way those prayers and supplications in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary, among which, as all know, the Rosary is the most important (24). These devotions, by means of which the faithful daily honour Our Lady, furnish us also with a proof in favour of the Queenship of the Mother of God.

The Litany of Loreto (25) invokes our Lady twelve times giving her the title of Queen: eight times with reference to the dignity she enjoys in heaven (Queen of Angels, Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, Martyrs, Confessors, Virgins, Queen of all saints); twice with reference to two special privileges granted to her, one with respect to the beginning and the other to the end of her life on earth (conceived without sin (26), assumed into heaven (27)); and twice again with reference to her

(25) There is a great lack of documentary evidence concerning the origin, growth, and development of the Litany of Loreto into the form in which we know it, especially as it was for the first time definitely approved by the Church in 1587. Cf. Cath. Enc., vol. IX, pp. 287-290; Campana, \textit{Maria nel culto cattolico}, vol. I, sez. III, c. iv. (Marietti, 1933).
(26) Originally granted by Pius IX to the bishop of Mechlin, it was authorised in many dioceses by various rescripts after the definition of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception in 1854; thus it soon became a universal practice, though there was never a decree permitting its inclusion in the Litany for the universal Church, as the Congregation of Rites affirmed on the 8th April, 1865.
(27) Added by Pope Pius XII in 1950 after the definition of the Dogma of the Assumption of Our Lady.
THE QUEENSHIP OF OUR LADY

benefits towards us, exiled children of Eve (Queen of the Holy Rosary (28), Queen of peace (29)). Besides, in certain places, some religious orders also invoke her as Queen and honour of the Carmel, Queen of hermits, of monks, Queen of the World. And the fifth glorious mystery of the Rosary honours Our Lady crowned Queen of heaven and earth (30).

Christian art, too, has not lagged behind in honouring our Lady as Queen, and, since the Council of Ephesus, the B.V.M. has often been portrayed as Queen and Empress, sitting on a throne, adorned with royal symbols, crowned and surrounded by Angels and Saints, and ruling over all the things and powers of nature as well as victorious over the powers of Satan (31).

To conclude, we must also mention another testimony for the Queenship of Our Lady, often given by Popes and bishops, followed in this by the enthusiasm of the faithful, i.e., the crowning of images of our Lady — images which are given this particular honour as they are the object of special veneration or form the centre of pilgrimages. This crowning is regulated by very solemn rites (32).

(28) Approved by the C. of Rites for the Confraternities of the Holy Rosary on the 13th July 1675, though used before that date (a Dominican breviary of 1614 contains this invocation), and extended to the universal Church by Pope Leo XIII by a decree of the 24th December, 1883.

(29) Added by Pope Benedict XV during the First Great War (Letter to the Secretary of State, 5th May, 1917).

(30) The fifteen mysteries, as we know them today, were fixed only in the 18th century, when Pope Benedict XIII rendered their meditation obligatory for the gaining of the indulgences. The five glorious mysteries, as we know them today, are to be found in Stapelton's Promptuarium Catholicum (published in 1589 at Louvain).

(31) The earliest representation of the Virgin enthroned is found at Parenzo in Istria (5th century). Other representations are to be found in the Roman churches of S. Maria in Dominica, S. Cecilia, S. Francesca Romana, and in the cathedral of Capua (all belonging to the 8th century), and in the church of S. Maria in Trastevere (11th cent.). Later on (14th-15th cent.), the Virgin of the Middle Ages, Throne of God and Queen of Heaven, gave place to the Mother, the most beautiful, the sweetest, the tenderest of all women. Cf. Cath. Enc., vol. XI, p. 398; Smith-Cheetham, Dictionary of Christian Antiquities, vol. II, p. 1154 (London, 1908).

(32) The coronation of images in an example of an old and obvious symbolic sign of honour that has become a fixed rite: the one used today is almost exactly the one used by Pope Gregory XVI.
These facts and the various indulgences (33) annexed by the Holy See to prayers to Our Lady as Queen of Heaven and earth have already ratified the exactness and convenience of the title under which the Blessed Mother of God is now being venerated by the new feast introduced in the Liturgy of the Church.

J. LUPI.