

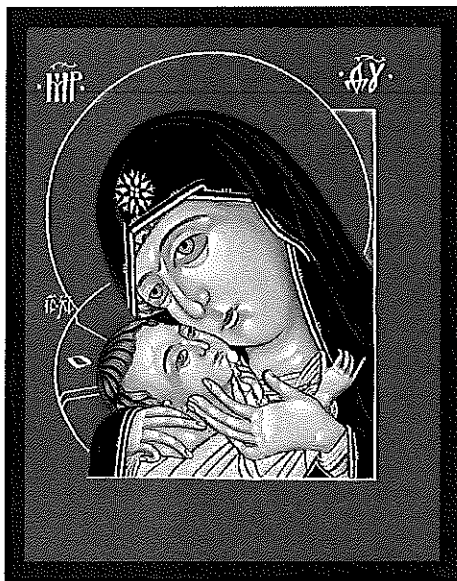
Mary, the New Eve

*And Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord;
let it be to me according to your word." ~ Luke 1:38*

THE ROLE OF MARY in Christ's work of salvation takes us back to the story of the fall of Adam and Eve at the beginning of creation. In a very important passage in Scripture called the *Protoevangelium* (the first gospel), God announces the coming of the Messiah, the battle that will take place between the Woman and the serpent, and his eventual defeat at the hands of her Son: *"The Lord God said to the serpent, ... I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."* (Gn 3:14-15). The Church has always understood that Christ, the new Adam, "born of a woman" (Gal 4:4) fulfilled this prophecy.

In the New Testament, St. Paul is the first to reflect on the relationship between the first Adam and the new Adam: *"For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive"* (1 Cor 15:21-22). The comparison continues: *"The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.... The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from Heaven"* (1 Cor 15:45, 47). What Adam bound up through his disobedience, the new Adam loosened through his obedience: *"For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous"* (Rom 5:19).

Through reflecting upon these Scriptures and others like them, the early Church began to see in Mary the image of the "new Eve." Already in the second century, the parallel between Eve and Mary is well understood. St. Irenaeus, a bishop and theologian



Our Lady of Tenderness, by Renata Grzan

from this century, explains: "Just as [Eve] ... having become disobedient, was made the cause of death for herself and for the whole human race; so also Mary ... being obedient, was made the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race ... Thus, the knot of Eve's disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary. For what the virgin Eve had bound in unbelief, Mary loosed through faith" (*Against Heresies*). In the fourth century, the bishop of Milan, Italy, St. Ambrose, whose fiery sermons brought St. Augustine into the Church, asserts that

while Eve is called mother of the human race, Mary is called "Mother of salvation." And to sum up let us not forget the frequent claim of St. Jerome, the celebrated Doctor of Scripture: "Death through Eve, life through Mary"¹ (CCC 494). All this illustrates the importance of Mary's role in Christ's redemption.

Her role as "new Eve" expresses not only her relationship to Christ but also to us. Her work in our salvation, though secondary to the primacy of Christ, is nonetheless a part of God's design and so necessary and powerful. The Church understands this, and so from ancient times has commended all Christians to her care and intercession.

Let us acknowledge Mary's role in salvation as the "new Eve" and join our voices in the words of the ancient prayer: "We fly to thy patronage, O holy Mother of God, despise not our petitions in our needs, but deliver us from all dangers. O ever glorious and blessed Virgin. Amen" (Prayer entitled *Under Thy Protection*, from 250 AD).

(CCC 411, 494, 504-505)

***"Death through Eve, life
through Mary."***

¹ *Lumen Gentium* 56; Epiphanius, Haer. 78, 18 from J.P. Migne, ed., *Patrologia Graeca* 42, 728CD-729AB (Paris, 1857-1866); St. Jerome, Ep. 22, 21 from J. P. Migne, ed., *Patrologia Latina* 22, 408 (Paris: 1841-1855).