

CHAPTER 4

*Our Lady of Providence***“My Soul magnifies the Lord”**OUR LADY OF
PROVIDENCE

As early as 1734, the Barnabite Fathers had placed in their church, dedicated to Saint Charles in Rome, a picture of the Virgin bearing the Latin inscription: *Mater Divinae Providentiae*. This picture drew the attention and veneration of the people, and they

placed many ex-votos and burning candles in front of it. Eventually, a confraternity was formed under the title “Confraternity of Our Lady of Providence”. It spread throughout many cities where the Barnabites had convents.

The Marian devotion was introduced in Canada by Bishop Ignace Bourget, Bishop of Montreal, on June 1, 1863, when he opened a series of retreat exercises at the Asile of Providence:

The first day of June shall be consecrated most especially to honour Our Lady of Grace, who will be known here under the title of Our Lady of Providence. This feast is established to implore the help of Divine Providence through the intermediary of the Holy Virgin, because she has been filled with graces to be poured out everywhere...

The personal Providence which in Mary’s life eventually led to Jesus and the Church, is the same Providence which guides us. Our response to God’s ways with us can therefore be modelled upon that of Mary.

Only by sturdy faith can we reach and remain true to the marvelous ways of Providence. These ways converge in Mary, the woman of faith in the gospels, the paradoxical virgin who gives birth to the Saviour, the silent person of prayer at the foot of the cross and in the upper room who becomes the mother of the Church. In Mary, we have a way of reuniting all the crisscrossings of life.

Mary’s way of responding to God is not out of our reach, because it is the most perfect example of humble and absolute self-abandonment to the will of God. The simple words, “May it be done to me according to your Word”, with which she was content to respond to the words of the angel, form the basis of all Mary’s spirituality. Then, as now, this noble disposition can form the basis for the abandonment of our own souls to the will of God however it manifests itself.

The Magnificat which Mary sings is intensely personal even though it is filled with scriptural allusions and references to Israel’s biblical history. Scripture scholars wonder

whether the hymn was already well known among her people, and spontaneously came to her lips when the angel announced to her that she was the chosen one. The fact that she sang it can only mean that Mary must have meditated these texts often and they had become part of her intimate prayer life. Her Magnificat is an outburst of gratitude which could only have grown within her soul over the years as she prayerfully pondered the goodness of God. Long before the Annunciation, during her years lived in the temple she must have seen herself as the handmaid of the Lord, in an attitude of openness to the divine will, even if unaware of the Lord's designs on her. We sense in her the blessedness of one who has heard the word of God and kept it lovingly in her heart.

St. Thomas holds that even as Mary made the vow of virginity, it was conditional; Mary vowed virginity provided it was God's will for her. After her betrothal, her vow was made absolute. When Mary lies open to whatever God wants of her, she is aware that her being identified so intimately with Jesus will also mean that she will share his mission and will be rebuffed and frustrated while always retaining her hopes and her faith.

In the liturgy of the feast of the Assumption of Mary into heaven, there is a line from the Book of Revelation which can easily pass unnoticed: "...and the woman fled into the wilderness where she has a place prepared by God". We can identify "the special place" as that point in our own soul, or that time in our path of life when we, like Mary, are persons of strong faith, where we acknowledge that we are gifted by God with unique insights and graces, where we struggle for goodness and virtue. This "special place" is both our source of glory and of our trials, our hope and our triumph. It is here that many of our hopes and frustrations remain in the silence of our intuitions as to what is God's will for us. We believe that He alone has placed them there and that this "special place" can be the site of spiritual joy as well as of great trials, where in hope and faith we remain docile to God's will. Such times bring us closer to Mary, the Mother of Jesus and our mother.

It is often said that we would want to know much more about Mary than what the Scriptures tell us. On the other hand, Mary's interior reaction to the call of God so completely manifests her spiritual depth, that one needs to contemplate her vertically rather than horizontally. It is a depth to which we can only aspire, as we probe its full dimension. In fact, it is possible that Mary herself did not always grasp the mystery of her call. When called to be the Mother of the Messiah, her initial response is one of troubled wonderment: "How can this be?" Many of us have offered a similar spontaneous response in the face of what God seemed to want of us. We need to ponder her final attitude: "I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be done as you say".

During his public ministry, Jesus extolled Mary's obedience to the divine will more than any other quality about her. When we rebel at what seems to be God's unreasonable demands upon us, it is perhaps because we are not in touch with who we are at the very base and root of ourselves. It is here that we acknowledge that we are indeed images of God but not gods, and that our freedom is not independent from God's freedom.



MEMORARE OF OUR LADY OF PROVIDENCE

Remember O most faithful Lady of Providence, that you have been given to us by your Son to be our mother. We entrust to you our labours; bless them. We commend to you our needs; supply them. Show for us the same concern you manifested at Cana, for we trust that whatever you ask of your Son will be done. Pray for us on our pilgrimage that we may share the faith and hope that marked your life. Full of confidence in your power before God, we place ourselves, our loved ones, and all our petitions in your providential care. Amen.

-Sisters of Providence
Saint Mary of the Woods, Indiana