

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Mother of God Seventeenth Week in Ordinary Time Saturday, August 5, 2017
8:15 AM Lv 25:1, 8-17; Mt 14:1-12 (**The Dedication of the Basilica of St. Mary Major**) (The reason for the basilica is to affirm the unity of divinity and humanity in Christ.)

So in the early Church there were many controversies about the Blessed Mother, and they relate to who Jesus is. It's very clear that the early Church understood that Jesus was fully human, but then that started to be denied by people that said, well no, he couldn't have been really a man; he must have been something else, some superhuman creature, some angel with the appearances of humanity. That was the teaching of Arius, a priest of Egypt. And at one point the majority of Christians agreed with that. Bishops gathered around **325 at Nicaea** and they proposed the first part of what we call the *Nicene Creed*, **affirming that Jesus was, yes, fully human and also fully divine**, which seems like a contradiction. How can that be? Well that's what they mulled over for a long time.

Well then came the idea of **Mary**: was Mary really the mother of Jesus or the mother of God? **Well if Jesus is fully human and fully divine, then she is the Mother of God.** Well not everyone could accept that, so they said, no, she is really the mother of Jesus. In fact a great archbishop, patriarch of Constantinople, said that. Well the people themselves wouldn't tolerate it, and they threw him out of the city. Eventually a **council met at Ephesus and decided, yes indeed, she is the Mother of God**, not just the mother of Jesus, as if you could split the two. **This is affirming the unity of humanity and divinity in Christ.**

So in response to that the pope, Sixtus, erected the **Basilica of St. Mary** in Rome, and that is to this day a Basilica in Rome, **a beautiful place of pilgrimage**, one of the four or five major places in the city of Rome where pilgrims go. So today is the day when that basilica was originally dedicated. So it's a moment to consider then **the reason for the basilica, which is to affirm the unity of divinity and humanity in Christ.**

You can imagine how this is really a very hard pill to swallow. It's hard to comprehend how it could be. But if you really look into the gospels, if it isn't true, then the gospels really don't make any sense. **Jesus is always trying to get us into a relationship with the Father as he has one.** Where did he get his relationship? He got it because **he is from the Father, of the same being of the Father.** And if he weren't, what could he give us? On the other hand, if he is not really human, then his sharing in life is really, well, it's actually a deception: he appears human, but he isn't really. Well what kind of truth is that?

So the more the Church has reflected on the reality of the gospels and the ministry of Christ, the more it realizes how these controversies were all valid controversies, but decided in the only possible right way. And this constitutes our basic beliefs as Christians. St. Thomas Aquinas said **there are two fundamental Catholic dogmas, only two.** The first is **the divine Trinity: that God is one subsisting in three divine persons.** The second is that **the Second divine person became human.** That, St. Thomas said, is all we really have to believe to get the truth.