

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

**Cooperating with Grace**      The Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary      Saturday, September 8, 2018      **Rom 8:28-30;**      Mt 1:1-16, 18-23      (For God's work to happen some people have to be pre-designated and given very special gifts in order to carry out their work.)

**“For those he foreknew he predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.”**

So St. Paul's Letter to the Romans has this idea of certain people being predestined. Now **this later became corrupted and distorted into an idea that there are only a few who are saved,** chosen before time, and that was that; and those who weren't chosen were hopeless. Now this idea is attributed—it surely was the belief of many Calvinists, whether Calvin himself believed it, I do not know, but many Calvinists did. It has also been attributed to Augustine, but it's impossible. Augustine could not have believed that, because whenever Augustine celebrated the Mass he read the Roman canon that prays that all of us will be included among the chosen. So he could not have had some narrow idea of some group pre-chosen as some sort of exclusive group of elect. **The Catholic idea of election is we can all pray to be elect.** We are all eligible for election. We have to choose it, but we are all eligible, so therefore the idea of **the universality of divine grace,** and the desire as expressed in the Letter to Timothy **that all people be saved and come to knowledge of Jesus Christ.**

Now having said that, what was Paul getting at? Well he is simply talking about the fact, and I think this is what Augustine meant too, that **for God's work to happen some people have to be pre-designated and given very special gifts in order to carry out their work.** For the vast majority of people finding God in their daily life and struggles and turmoils and resisting the great tribulations and trials of life, that is what their life is made up of, and in a way you could say they are fortunate if they simply hold out, if they simply keep going. But God needs people who can do more than simply hold out in order to carry out his will, for example, Mary, Joseph—right there

there's two—**they had to have a greater degree of knowledge and grace and courage, virtue, and so on.** And that's what Paul is talking about. Some were predestined for God's glory. Some were given extra gifts **so they could cooperate with his great plan, so that the rest of us could eventually be included.** So that is the more correct understanding of what St. Paul is getting at.

We bring it up on this feast of the Birth of Mary because she is the first of all disciples. It isn't simply that **she was privileged**—in one way you could say she was—**but she also chose to be a disciple.** And she willingly throughout her whole life cooperated with this grace of God. She is an example to us that **we all can cooperate with the grace of God.** When we don't cooperate with the grace of God, it's not because of an absence of grace, although there are certain Protestant writers that act that way, but that cannot be so. **When we fail to cooperate with grace it's our failure.** It's not God's failure. Grace is not irresistible, but Mary chose to cooperate at every step of her life. That is why she is singled out as the greatest disciple, the first disciple, the Queen of Saints, the Queen of Heaven, the Mother of God.