

My friends in Christ, on this occasion of our parish patronal feast day – the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary – we are invited to reflect upon Mother Mary’s *relationship* with God...and her own fundamental *identity* that arises from this relationship...and then ultimately her *mission*, her action and personal agency of God’s will that flows out of her identity. And such reflection on *her* relationship, identity, and mission challenges us to consider our own.

There is a convenient acronym at play here (RIM), not *only* to help us remember these three aspects of the Christian life clearly in mind...but *also* to help us keep them in their proper order. R, *relationship*...I, *identity*...M, *mission*.... Now, I have been reflecting upon and praying about this three-fold dynamic of the Christian ethos throughout much of the summer, and I have spoken about this and have preached RIM several times in the last month or so. And the main reason why is because of the somewhat troubling trend that I have perceived for quite a while now that we have gone and made this whole RIM thing completely backwards: MIR. What do I mean? I mean that we have a tendency – *and* I must say a well-earned reputation as hard-working, salt-of-the-earth, take-the-bull-by-the-horns, git-er-done Americans – to derive our *identity*...*from* our mission. That is, we tend to define *who we are* by *what we do*. “I have a good job, can afford a big house, raise a good family, and say and do all the right things...and *therefore*, I *am* a good person.” As if what we *do* is what defines who we *are*. But *that* is just so *backwards* – *think* about it! If Tom Brady, for example, were in some freak accident such that he was suddenly and instantly paralyzed from the neck down...and he can no longer play football and so win Super Bowl after Super Bowl with reckless abandon...does that mean that he is no longer Tom Brady? Absurd! Of *course* he *is* still Tom Brady; it is just that he no longer can *do* that which Tom Brady previously had been able to do. What he *does* may change, but who he *is* remains the same. Mission in life...our purpose...what we *do*: that all *follows* who we *are*, *not* what *precedes* it.

There was a 20th-Century philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre, who basically argued with regard to the essential identity of the human person that what we do *does* define who we are.... I *do*; therefore, I *be*. It is no surprise, therefore, that he was a nihilist, an atheist, and was extraordinarily pessimistic about the human condition.... Meanwhile, one of the great giants of western philosophy, Aristotle,

correctly argued that who we *are* is what gives rise to what we *do*...I *be*; therefore, I *do*.... And, well, of course there is the late, great singer-philosopher, Frank Sinatra, who famously said: *do be do be do*.

The point is, and the fact of the matter certainly remains, that doing *follows* being; it does not *precede* it. Or, again, in other words: who we *are* comes *first*, and what we *do* follows *after*.... Identity, you see, is what must already be there...and *then* we get mission.

But now, even *more* foundational than who we *are* is *this*: from whence we come...and *that* is relationship. And this, *too*, is just plain, basic fact. Who *I* am, as Jeff Lewis, necessarily follows after from whence I come...my *relationship* with my mom and my dad. Of course – there *is* no Jeff Lewis without a Ma Lewis and a Pa Lewis! Again, just plain, basic fact. Science!

Okay then. So, in the realm of the *spirit*, all of this *certainly* is so – *doubly* so, in fact! We have, first of all, our fundamental relationship to consider: that which we have with God, from Whom we come. And because God is *three* Persons, we therefore have *three* fundamental relationships with the Lord: God is our Father Who art in Heaven; God is our Brother in Jesus Christ; and finally, God is our Giver of Life in the Holy Spirit. These are our three fundamental relationships.

And *now*, *given* these three fundamental relationships, we can know our fundamental identity: who we *are* in the context of our relationship with God, *from* Whom we *come*.

Who am *I*, therefore, in consideration of God the Father? I am a beloved child of God the Father.... Who am *I*, in consideration of God the Son? I am a brother of Christ; and, even more, a brother *in* Christ *of* all of *you*, my brothers and sisters *in* Christ. And *still* more, I am a *friend* of Jesus, like Saint John the Baptist who declared *himself* to be the friend of the Bridegroom (that is, the best man of the cosmic, eschatological Wedding Feast of the Lamb).... And who am *I*, in consideration of God the Holy Spirit? I am a temple of the Holy Spirit.

Child...brother...temple: this is who I *am* – again, *because* of the essential truth of my core, fundamental relationship with God.... From that *relationship* comes my *identity*...and *then*, from that *identity* comes my *mission*: the universal call to holiness, to which *each* of us is called; to proclaim the Gospel to every creature and nation, to all the world...to go forth and bear fruit, fruit that will last, even unto eternal life...to do for the least of these, that I may in turn do for the Lord Himself. To

do the works essential to the authentic Christian life, because I *am* a Christian, because Jesus Christ Himself (God the Son) *makes* me a Christian.

Relationship...*then* identity...and *then* mission: RIM.

And we see this played out quite clearly in the Gospel life of our patroness and our perfect model of life and discipleship, Mother Mary. She, like *all* good Jews of her time and place, *certainly* knew well their *relationship* with God; after all, God had chosen them and had declared them to be the Chosen People since Abraham. And *from* that *relationship* came her *identity*; the archangel Saint Gabriel said to her in heavenly greeting at the Annunciation, “Hail, favored one!” Or, as we pray, for example: “Hail Mary, full of grace.” God *made* her favorable, *made* her full of grace – and *that* because of the *relationship* that she was blessed to have with the Lord. And thus she *is* the favored one, and she *is* full of grace – and *that* because it is her God-given *identity*.

And as for her *mission*? “Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus.” How can this be, she asks? The archangel answers: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.” And so *now*, we find that she has a relationship not only with God the *Father*, but in that very moment, when she offers her *fiat* and so gives her free consent, she conceives in her womb and *now* has a relationship with God the *Son*...and it was by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit that this all took place; and thus, she has a relationship with the *Holy Spirit*, as well. From this threefold *relationship* comes her threefold *identity*: beloved daughter of God the Father, loving mother of God the Son, cherished spouse of God the Holy Spirit. And from *thence* comes her *mission*: according to *her* vocation, *her* purpose in life, to work for the salvation of souls for the glorious majesty of God.... And so it is for us all.

May it be, then, always and everywhere, that we will be mindful of our *relationship* with God, our fundamental *identity*, and therefore our *mission* in life. May it be that we remember that what we *do* flows out from who we *are*, which in turn flows out from whence we came. RIM: Relationship, Identity, Mission...that we may engage in this threefold dynamic of the authentic Christian life for the salvation of souls and for the glorious majesty of God.

Mother Mary, assumed into Heaven...pray for us.