

Our Mother Church Fr John Behr

1: (St Irenaeus?) Letter of the Churches of Vienne and Lyons to Asia and Phrygia (Eusebius, H.e. 5.1)

41-2: Blandina, hung on a stake (ἐπὶ ξύλου), was offered as food for the wild beasts that were let in. She, by being seen hanging in the form of a cross, by her vigorous prayer, caused great zeal in the contestants, as, in their struggle, they beheld with their outward eyes, through the sister, him who was crucified for them, that he might persuade those who believe in him that everyone who suffers for the glory of Christ has for ever communion with the living God. ... the small and weak and despised woman had put on the great and invincible athlete, Christ, routing the adversary in many bouts, and, through the struggle, being crowned with the crown of incorruptibility.

...

45-6: Through their continued life the dead were made alive, and the martyrs showed favor to those who had failed to witness. And there was great joy for the Virgin Mother in receiving back alive those who she had miscarried as dead. For through them the majority of those who had denied were again brought to birth and again conceived and again brought to life and learned to confess; and now living and strengthened, they went to the judgment seat.

2: Isaiah 54.1

"Sing, O barren one, who did not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not been in travail! For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her that is married, says the Lord".

3: Galatians 4.22-31

For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, the son of the free woman through promise. Now this is an allegory: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother.

For it is written, "Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and shout, you who are not in travail; for the children of the desolate one are many more than the children of her that is married."

Now we, brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now. But what does the scripture say? "Cast out the slave and her son; for the son of the slave shall not inherit with the son of the free woman." So, brethren, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.

4: Galatians 4.19

My little children, with whom I am again in travail, until Christ be formed in you!

5: Galatians 2.20

I have been crucified with Christ: It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

6: Tertullian, On the Soul, 43.10

As Adam was a figure of Christ, Adam's sleep provided a shadow the death of Christ, who was to sleep a mortal slumber, that from the wound inflicted on his side might be figured the true Mother of the living, the Church.

7: Hermas, Vision, 2.4.1

And a revelation was made to me, brethren, while I slept, by a very beautiful young man, who said to me, "Who do you think that the ancient lady was from whom you received the little book?" I said, "The Sibyl." "You are wrong," he said, "she is not." "Who is she, then?" I said. "The Church," he said. I said to him, "Why then is she old?" "Because," he said, "she was created the first of all things. For this reason she is old; and for her sake the world was established."

8: Second Epistle of Clement, 14

Brethren, if we do the will of our Father God, we shall belong to the first Church, the spiritual one which was created before the sun and moon. Now I imagine that you are not ignorant that the living Church is the body of Christ. For the scripture says "God made man male and female": the male is Christ and the female is the Church. And moreover, the books and the Apostles declare that the Church belongs not to the present, but has existed from the beginning; for she was spiritual, as also was our Jesus, but was made manifest in the last days that he might save us; and the Church, which is spiritual, was made manifest in the flesh of Christ, showing us that if any one of us guard her in the flesh without corruption, he shall receive back again in the Holy Spirit.

9: St Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against the Heresies*, 4.33.11

There are those who say that “He is a man, and who shall know him?” [Jer 17.9]; and, “I came unto the prophetess, and she bore a son, and his name is called Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God” [Is 8.3, 9.6]; and those who proclaimed the Immanuel, born of the Virgin [Is 7.14]: declaring the union of the Word of God with his own handiwork, that the Word would become flesh, and the Son of God the Son of man – the pure one opening purely that pure womb which regenerates men unto God and which he himself made pure, having become that which we are, he is “God Almighty” and has a generation which cannot be declared.

10: Clement of Alexandria, *Pedagogus* 1.6

The Lord Jesus, fruit of the Virgin, did not proclaim women’s breasts to be blessed, nor did he choose them to give nourishment. But when the Father, full of goodness and love for men, rained down his Word upon the earth, this same Word became the spiritual nourishment for virtuous men. O mysterious marvel!

There is one Father of all, there is one Word of all, and the Holy Spirit is one and the same everywhere. There is also one Virgin Mother, whom I love to call the Church. Alone, this mother had no milk because she alone did not become a woman. She is virgin and mother simultaneously, a virgin undefiled and a mother full of love. She draws her children to herself and nurses them with holy milk, that is, the Word for infants. She had not milk because the milk was this child, beautiful and familiar, the body of Christ.

11: St Cyprian of Carthage, *On the Church*, 5-6

She spreads her branches in generous growth over all the earth, she extends her abundant streams ever further; yet one is the head-spring, one the source, one the Mother who is prolific in her offspring, generation after generation; of her womb are we born, of her milk are we fed, from her Spirit our souls draw their life-breath. The spouse of Christ cannot be defiled, she is inviolate and chaste: she knows one home alone, in all modesty she keeps faithfully to one chamber. It is she who seals for the kingdom the sons who she has borne. Whoever breaks with the Church and enters on an adulterous union, cuts himself off from the promises made to the Church. ... You cannot have God for your Father if you no longer have the Church for your mother.

12: Troparion of the Resurrection, Tone Six

Angelic Powers were at your tomb; and those guarding it became as dead men. Mary stood by the grave, seeking thy most pure Body. You despoiled hell, not being tempted by it. You came to the Virgin, granting life. O Lord, risen from the dead, glory to You!

13: Hippolytus *On the Christ and the Antichrist* 61

[The Church will never cease] bearing from her heart the Word that is persecuted by the unbelieving in the world, [while the male child she bears is Christ, God and man, announced by the prophets,] whom the Church continually bears as she teaches all nations. (ὃν αἰεὶ τίκουσα ἡ ἐκκλησία διδάσκει πάντα τὰ ἔθνη).

14: St Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Romans*, 4:

I am writing all the churches and giving instruction to all that I am willingly dying for God, unless you hinder me. I urge you, do not become an untimely kindness to me. Allow me to be bread for the wild beasts; through them I am able to attain to God. I am the wheat of God and am ground by the teeth of wild beasts, that I may be found to be the pure bread of Christ.

15: St Irenaeus *Against the Heresies* 5.2.3

Just as the wood of the vine, planted in the earth, bore fruit in its own time, and the grain of wheat, falling into the earth and being decomposed, was raised up manifold by the Spirit of God who sustains all, then, by wisdom, they come to the use of human beings, and receiving the Word of God, become eucharist, which is the Body and Blood of Christ; **so also**, our bodies, nourished by it, having been placed in the earth and decomposing in it, shall rise in their time, when the Word of God bestows on them the resurrection to the glory of God the Father, who secures immortality for the mortal and bountifully bestows incorruptibility on the corruptible [cf. 1 Cor. 15:53], because the power of God is made perfect in weakness [cf. 2 Cor. 12:9], **in order that** we may never become puffed up, as if we had life from ourselves, nor exalted against God, entertaining ungrateful thoughts, but learning by experience that it is from his excellence, and not from our own nature, that we have eternal continuance, that we should neither undervalue the true glory of God nor be ignorant of our own nature, but should know what God can do and what benefits the human, and that we should never mistake the true understanding of things as they are, that is, of God and the human being.