

HOW SHALL I PAINT THE IMAGE of this most fair Maiden
With dull colors of a blending unfit for her?

The image of her beauty is too high and glorious for mixtures such as mine,
Nor dare I rashly paint the image of her that my meager understanding could depict.
Easier were it to paint the sun with its light and its heat,
Than to tell the account of Mary in all its glory.
Had there been another purer than she and meeker,
He would have dwelt in her, and declined to dwell in Mary.
If there had been any soul nobler and holier than hers,
Then He would have chosen that one, and left Mary alone.
When our Lord came down to earth, He regarded all women,
But chose one only, who was the most well-pleasing of them all.
Mary's virtue is of such a stature
That another greater than she hath never arisen in the whole world.



On the Blessed Virgin Mother of God, Mary
by Mar Jacob of Serugh, *True Vine* issue no. 17.
lines 60–64, 117–122, 207–208
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KNOW THAT THOU ART NOW ADMIRING THE
grace of Hermione, and thou judgest that there is
nothing in the world to be compared to her comeli-
ness; but if you choose, O friend, you shall yourself exceed
her in comeliness and gracefulness, as much as golden statues
surpass those which are made of clay. For if beauty, when it
occurs in the body, so fascinates and excites the minds of most
men, when the soul is refulgent with it, what can match beauty
and grace of this kind? For the groundwork of this corporeal
beauty is nothing else but phlegm, and blood, and humor,
and bile, and the fluid of masticated food. For by these things
both eyes and cheeks, and all the other features, are supplied
with moisture; and if they do not receive that moisture, daily
ascending from the stomach and the liver, the skin becoming
unduly withered, and the eyes sunken, the whole grace of the
countenance forthwith vanishes; so that if you consider what
is stored up inside those beautiful eyes, and that straight nose,
and the mouth and the cheeks, you will affirm the well-
shaped body to be nothing else than a whited sepulchre; the
parts within are full of so much uncleanness. Moreover when
you see a rag with any of these things on it, such as phlegm,
or spittle, you cannot bear to touch it with even the tips of
your fingers, nay you cannot even endure looking at it; and
yet are you in a flutter of excitement about the storehouses
and depositories of these things?

Saint John Chrysostom, *Letters to the Fallen Theodore*,
Letter I.14, NPNF, Vol. IX, pp. 103–4

SUPPOSE THERE WERE A KING, who entrusted his
treasure to some poor man. The man who received the
charge of it does not hold it for his own, but always ac-
knowledges his poverty, not daring to squander out of an-
other's treasure. He bears continually in mind, not only that

the treasure is another's, but "it was a mighty king who en-
trusted me with it, and whenever he pleases he takes it away
from me." So ought those who have the grace of God to es-
teem themselves, to be humble-minded and to acknowledge
their poverty. As the poor man who received the charge of
the treasure from the king, if he presumes upon the treasure
that is another's, and is proud, as of wealth of his own, and
his heart conceives arrogance, the king takes away his treas-
ure, and the man who had it in charge is left poor as he was
before; so if those who have grace presume, and their hearts
are puffed up, the Lord takes His grace from them, and they
are left such as they were before receiving the grace from the
Lord.

St Macarius the Great, *Fifty Spiritual Homilies*,
tr. Mason, Homily xv, p. 119

WHEN YOU PRAY, say in your heart, against the
various thoughts and provocations that come
from the enemy: "The Lord is everything to
me." Likewise, during all your life, when passions attack you,
and during every oppression of the enemy, and during sick-
ness, afflictions, misfortunes, and disasters, say: "The Lord
is everything to me; I myself can do nothing – cannot bear
anything, cannot surmount, conquer anything – He is my
strength."

Saint John of Kronstadt, *My Life in Christ*, p. 165

Pearls from the Holy Fathers

Fourth Week of Lent, Annunciation,
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