



- What does Benedict mean when he says that few Christians in Dante’s day raise their feet to step on even the lowest rung of the ladder (22.73ff)? Is this similar or different from our own day?
- What constellation does Dante enter as he ascends to the realm of the fixed stars (22.110-117)? Why might this be personally important to Dante (recall Brunetto Latini’s advice in *Inferno* 15).?
- What does Dante see as he turns back to contemplate the distance he has traveled since leaving the dark wood (22.124-147)? How does this change in physical perspective yield a change in Dante’s intellectual understanding (22.133ff)? Why does Dante smile?

### **Canto XXIII:**

Notes:

- **Trivia** [23.25]: The moon personified as Diana.
- **Polyhymnia** [23.55]: The name of one of the Muses. It means “many hymns.”
- **The Rose** [23.73]: The Blessed Virgin Mary. The name comes from Song of Songs 2:1, “I am the Rose of Sharon” and Isaiah 11:1, “But a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom.” John Henry Newman once said, “Mary is the most beautiful flower ever seen in the spiritual world. It is by the power of God’s grace that from this barren and desolate earth there ever sprung up at all flowers of holiness and glory; and Mary is the Queen of them all. She is the Queen of spiritual flowers; and therefore, is called the Rose, for the rose is called of all flowers the most beautiful. But, moreover, she is the Mystical or Hidden Rose, for mystical means hidden.”
- **Regina coeli** [23.128]: A common Marian anthem prayed during Eastertide: “Queen of Heaven, rejoice, alleluia. For He whom you did merit to bear, alleluia. Has risen, as he said, alleluia. Pray for us to God, alleluia. Rejoice and be glad, O Virgin Mary,

alleluia. For the Lord has truly risen, alleluia. Let us pray. O God, who gave joy to the world through the resurrection of Thy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, grant we beseech Thee, that through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, His Mother, we may obtain the joys of everlasting life. Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.”

Questions:

- Why would Dante begin this canto—which takes place close to the boundaries of the created cosmos—with such decidedly rustic and folk images (1-12)? What is Dante trying to say with this juxtaposition of an epic spiritual setting with very ordinary and humble imagery?
- How does Dante praise Mary? How might his praise of Mary be a fulfillment of his earlier love poetry? Similarly, how does Dante see Beatrice in this canto? How does his vision of her show us about how heaven transfigures us?
- What does Dante mean when he says his desire finds satisfaction in hope (23.14-15)? How can hope be fulfilling? From where does Christian hope spring? How does this help us better understand Mary, Lucy, and Beatrice’s heavenly intercession in the dark wood of *Inferno* 1 and 2?
- Why can Dante only bear Beatrice’s smile after he has beheld Christ (23.46-48)? How does Christ not only allow us to see God more truly but to see each other more truly?

- Why would Dante have the Church triumphant use such maternal language when speaking of her (23.121ff)? How does Dante seem to understand the Church's relationship to Mary?

### **Canto XXIV:**

#### Questions:

- In cantos 24-26, Dante stands for his final bachelorette exam before entering into the highest heavens. After everything that Dante has learned over the course of his journey, why do you think he is tested on the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love?
  
- Why does Beatrice recommend that Dante "praise" faith rather than, say, defend his position on the nature of faith? Why use the language of celebration and praise rather than logic and argumentation (24.43-45)?
  
- What is Dante's faith (24.61-81)? Who examines Dante on faith and why might Dante have selected this figure?

