

Mary: Model Disciple in Walking by Faith and not by Sight

I would like to reflect with you today on Mary, the true disciple, a perfect model of what it means to be a true disciple of Jesus. She walked by faith, and not by sight. This reflection will enable us to appreciate the role of Mary in the life of the Church, and follow her lead in becoming more and more like her Son Jesus.

Jesus' own life was ruled by two principles: a) total dedication to the Father and b) total dedication to His mission. Mary's life too was ruled by the same two principles. Total dedication to the Father: "Let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38). Total dedication to the mission of her son: "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:5).

While we celebrate Mary's Birthday this month of September, we rejoice with her for all that the Lord has done for and through her, but we have to be careful not to go overboard with our devotion, but be Gospel-oriented in our faith and so learn from Mary.

The image of Mary needs a lot of change in our imagination. If we take the Incarnation (Jesus becoming a human being) seriously, and if Jesus was the greatest religious leader ever born, his mother must have been a remarkable woman – and not the sweet little girl that disappeared into the background of Jesus' life. The more we take seriously the humanity of Christ, the more His mother moves into the foreground as an extraordinary woman, who not only bore such a man, but who also raised Him. It seems that the woman who was so fascinated with Jesus spontaneously realised what a mother he must have had when she exclaimed, "Blessed the womb that bore you and the breasts you sucked" (Lk 11:27).

John, who always sees Mary in connection with the Church, put her at the opening and closing of Jesus' ministry: at Cana (Jn 2:1-11) and under the Cross (Jn 19:25-27). I would like to reflect on the second text in John's Gospel that refers to Mary and to show through this text what discipleship really implies for her: TO WALK BY FAITH, AND NOT BY SIGHT.

Scripture Reading: Mary under the Cross (Jn 19:25-27) "Mother, behold your son; son, behold your mother."

We read the text slowly. We reflect together.

This is Jesus' last will. The beloved disciple in the Gospel of John is always the prototype of all disciples who will come to follow the Lord. He represents at the foot of the Cross the community of disciples now founded - the Church. He represents you and me, the Church in all its facets (the domestic Church, the neighbourhood Church, the parish Church, the Diocese, the Church Universal). The dying Jesus commends His disciples to the care of His mother. It is as if He is saying, "Mother, you know what it means to be a true disciple of mine. Please, take care of them and make sure they will become what you yourself have lived so faithfully, namely commitment to the Will of the Father." The title Vatican II gave to Mary is exactly what Jesus wanted her to be – the mother of His disciples, that is, the Mother of His Church.

But Jesus also tells the disciple to take care of his mother. This is a theological statement, and not just a petition that John should care for Mary, since Jesus is gone and no would care for her. It means the disciple should develop devotion to Mary, since she, like no one else, can really teach and guide him or her in the most essential task on earth – to become a true disciple of Jesus, to grow more into Jesus, and to walk by Faith and not by sight, to be obedient to the Father's will each day.

Our Catholic faith has always known and practised this devotion to Mary as our Mother. Thousands of shrines and churches have been built in her honour. Numerous sodalities carry her name. If we look at all the apparitions that the Catholic Church holds as genuine, they all reveal one basic truth: Mary always proves to be deeply concerned with the community of the disciples of Jesus, the Church. Her real care and intention has always been to make us into true disciples of her Son, to fulfil her Son's last request on earth, "Mother, behold your son" or "Mother, take care of my disciples." As she was faithful to the mission of her Son up to the last moment, so she will remain faithful to her Son's last will, as long as there are people who have decided to enter into fellowship with Him.

Silence for quiet reflection

Conclusion:

The Gospels are 'handbooks', the 'manuals' of discipleship. They present us with different ways of following the Lord. So we cannot say there is only one way. There are many ways, and we should never use the degree of Marian devotion a person professes as a measuring stick for his or her being a true disciple. Without saying, therefore, that one cannot be a true disciple of Jesus without a deep devotion to Mary, we can with certainty say that to have a genuine devotion to Mary, our Mother, is one of the best guarantees of moving in the direction of becoming a true disciple of Jesus. Mary knows perfectly well what a true disciple is, and all the care and help she has always shown to millions of people who have confidently turned to her, have had, in the last analysis, only one aim and goal – to make them better disciples of her Son Jesus, namely, doing the Will of the Father each day, in living joyfully as Disciples of Jesus.

It seems to me that the Rosary is an excellent means to meditate with Mary on the mysteries of our faith and to get to know Christ Jesus her Son better. She was the true disciple of Jesus who really understood Him. When we pray the Rosary, it is as if she walks besides us and explains to us the mysteries of our faith in order to make us truer disciples of her Son Jesus. Her whole concern is that with her help, we become true disciples of her Son. Allowing Mary to accompany us in life means to walk as she did: BY FAITH, AND NOT BY SIGHT.

Task: Let us pray the Rosary today. *Before each decade of the Joyful Mysteries, let us ask ourselves a question regarding our following of Jesus.*

1. The Annunciation: Mary said "Yes" to the Lord. What am I being asked to say "Yes" today to the Lord in my life as a Christian?
2. The Visitation: Mary went with haste to visit and care for her cousin Elizabeth. Whom am I being sent to care for with kindness and tenderness today?
3. The Birth of the Lord: Mary brought forth Jesus her son in total simplicity and ordinary circumstances. Am I the kind of person who shows the presence of Jesus to people through my life, and how?
4. The Presentation in the Temple: Mary experienced the sword of suffering and pain, uniting herself already to the suffering and Cross of Jesus. Am I ready to unite myself to the Lord in following Him, even though it may challenge me and cause me suffering?
5. The Finding in the Temple: What Mary could not understand in Jesus, she accepted with love and patience, and treasured Him in her heart. What do I not understand or find too challenging in the life of Jesus, and what do I do about it?

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