

DAY 24: Mary's Retreat (Day One)

During this retreat, we've been pondering in our hearts certain truths of our faith that relate to Marian consecration. One might say we're on a kind of "pilgrimage of faith" leading up to Consecration Day. During her earthly life, Mary, too, was on a kind of retreat and pilgrimage of faith. She, too, pondered in her heart different truths related to Marian consecration. After all, she didn't discover all at once her vocation to be a spiritual mother and mediatrix. Like us, Mary needed to walk by faith while pondering in her heart. She, too, needed a time of preparation regarding her special role as our "mother in the order of grace."

Because Mary's maternal mediation is so central to a proper understanding of Marian consecration, we're going to spend the next few days making a retreat within our retreat. We'll do this by peering in on *Mary's retreat*. In other words, we're going to accompany Mary along the way that God led her to progressively discover her vocation to be our spiritual mother and mediatrix.

In some sense, Mary's retreat begins at the Annunciation. By her "yes" to God, her "*fiat*," she accepted her vocation to be the mother of Jesus. But did she also know that she was accepting the call to be the spiritual mother to all Christians as well? I don't know. What I do know is that the whole mystery of the Annunciation gave Mary something amazing to ponder, something that happens to be deeply related to Marian consecration and entrustment. Let me put it this way: Who was the first person to entrust himself to Mary? It wasn't St. Louis de Montfort. It was God the Father. John Paul explains, "For it must be recognized that before anyone else it was God himself, the Eternal Father, *who entrusted himself to the Virgin of Nazareth*, giving her his own Son in the mystery of the Incarnation." Mary surely marveled at this act of humility on God's part. As she marveled and pondered it, might she have begun to have some inkling that God would later want the people he came to redeem to follow his example?

Mary had many other things to ponder during her preparation to be ever more completely our mother in the order of grace. The Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) offer several points of reflection that speak to Mary's spiritual motherhood. Take, for example, the passage in the Gospel of Mark (3:31-35) where Mary and Jesus' cousins are outside, wanting to see Jesus, and so they send for him and call to him. Jesus responds by asking, "Who are my mother and my brethren?" Then, looking at those sitting around him, he says "Here are my mother and my brethren! Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother."

In giving this response, was Jesus being a bad son? No. He was being exactly the kind of son his Father wanted him to be. At the same time, he was preparing his mother for who he wanted her to be. Specifically, he was revealing to her the new filial bond of the kingdom that goes beyond the bonds of the flesh. In other words, he was pointing out the

primacy of the spirit to the flesh, the primacy of the supernatural Fatherhood of God to the natural fatherhood (or motherhood) of man. It's likely that Mary immediately grasped some of what Jesus was trying to teach her. After all, for years she had pondered in her heart another strange response of Jesus, the one he gave when she found him in the Temple after three days of sorrowful searching: "Did you not know I must be about my Father's business?" (Lk 2:49).

During his public ministry, Jesus was indeed completely concerned with his Father's business. Now, a key part of this business involved preparing his mother for her new role in God's kingdom. Jesus knew that "in the dimension of the Kingdom of God and in the radius of the fatherhood of God" Mary's motherhood "takes on another meaning." In the words reported by Mark that we read earlier, Jesus points to this meaning, "Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother." We can be sure that Mary pondered this in her heart and that she realized that by these words, Jesus was not rejecting her but rather preparing her.

Can we be sure Jesus wasn't rejecting Mary? Yes, we can. Even if Jesus' words sound like he's rejecting her, they aren't. In fact, if we consider a similar passage in the Gospel of Luke (11:27-28), it's clear that Jesus is actually *blessing* his mother. In this other passage, "a woman in the crowd raised her voice" and said to Jesus, "Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you." Jesus responds in a way similar to what we read in Mark, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it." At first reading, this may seem like a rebuke of Mary. But it's not. After all, who heard the word of God and kept it better than Mary? Nobody. Thus, Jesus is actually blessing his mother, and she would have realized it.

Mary is an incredibly perceptive woman, and she paid close attention to Jesus' every word and action. The subtleties of his teaching were not lost on her, and she progressively came to realize the unfolding mystery of her own unique motherhood:

[A]s the messianic mission of her Son grew clearer to her eyes and spirit, [Mary] herself as a mother became ever more open to *that new dimension of motherhood* which was to constitute her "part" beside her Son. Had she not said from the very beginning: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38)? Through faith Mary continued to hear and to ponder that word Thus in a sense Mary as Mother became *the first "disciple" of her Son*, the first to whom he seemed to say: "Follow me" ...

What a joy it must have been for Jesus to have *one disciple* who fully understood him. What a consolation to his Heart to find such attentiveness to God's Word!

Tomorrow, we'll reflect more on Mary's attentiveness and how it led her to discover yet another aspect to her "part" beside her son in his work of salvation. This part does indeed involve, as John Paul wrote, a "new dimension of her motherhood." Thus, at Cana, we'll see that she gives *birth* to the faith of Jesus' disciples by initiating his first miracle, which comes through her *motherly attentiveness* to human need.

Today's Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, living in Mary.

Help me to be faithful to heart-pondering prayer, as was Mary.