

DAY 26: Mary's Retreat (Day Three)

Yesterday, at the wedding feast of Cana, we saw a glorious example of Mary's motherly mediation. After this event, Mary surely pondered it deeply in her heart and discovered much about her maternal mediation. Yet Cana was not the most important part of her preparation. The "crowning moment" of her preparation — indeed, its full actualization — came at Calvary.

At Calvary, Mary suffers with Christ. Through faith, she is "perfectly united with Christ in his self-emptying." Through faith, she shares in the whole "shocking mystery" of his gift of himself out of love for us. Through faith, "the Mother shares in the death of her Son, in his redeeming death." Before his death, Jesus has one more lesson for his perfect disciple, who has followed him to the Cross and fully accepted to suffer with him. Seeing her standing at the foot of the Cross next to his beloved disciple, John, he says, "Woman, behold, your son." Then, to John, "Behold, your mother" (Jn 19:26-27). With these words, Jesus gives Mary as Mother "to every single individual and all mankind."

According to John Paul, this "new motherhood of Mary" is "*the fruit of the 'new' love* which came to definitive maturity in her at the foot of the Cross, through her sharing in the redemptive love of her son." This "new love," says John Paul, actually causes a "transformation" in Mary's motherhood such that she burns even more with love for all those for whom Jesus suffered and died.

This idea that Mary, at the foot of the Cross, received a new, burning love for souls may remind us of Mother Teresa's deep insight about Mary. Recall that, for Teresa, Mary is the one who took Jesus' words "I thirst" most deeply to heart and that she helps others to take them to heart as well. Anyway, John Paul further reflects on Mary's transformation in love:

[A]t the foot of the Cross there was ... accomplished her maternal *cooperation* with the Savior's whole mission through her actions and sufferings. Along the path of this collaboration with the work of her Son, the Redeemer, Mary's motherhood itself underwent a singular transformation, becoming even more imbued with "burning charity" toward all those to whom Christ's mission was directed. Through this "burning charity," which sought to achieve, in union with Christ, the restoration of "supernatural life to souls," Mary *entered, in a way all her own, into the one mediation* "between God and men" *which is the mediation of the man Christ Jesus.*

At Calvary, Mary's preparation is ended. She has received the full gift of her universal spiritual motherhood and mediation, which is a unique cooperation in Christ's work of redemption and a sharing in his mediation.

After Jesus' death on the Cross, we don't hear about Mary exercising her new motherhood until the day before Pentecost, when the apostles, together with "the women and Mary the mother of Jesus and his brethren" (Acts 1:14), are devoting themselves to prayer in the upper room. John Paul comments, "We see Mary prayerfully imploring the gift of the Spirit, who had already overshadowed her at the Annunciation." He goes on to point out that Mary is the "discreet yet essential presence" that indicates the path of "birth from the Holy Spirit" first at the Annunciation and now at the birth of the Church.

Mary's new spiritual motherhood is deeply connected with the Church, "*with maternal love she cooperates in the birth and development' of the sons and daughters of Mother Church.*" This birth and development has its source in the Church's sacramental life, where Mary's motherly mediation is particularly present. For instance, Mary is surely interceding and active with her Spouse, the Holy Spirit, when the Spirit transforms us into members of Christ's body at Baptism. Moreover, she is just as present and active with her Spouse at Mass; for it is at Mass that Christ's "*true body born of the Virgin Mary*" becomes present. Because of the centrality of the Eucharist in Christian faith and life, Mary is always striving to lead the faithful to it.

As we close today's reflection, which concludes the three days of "Mary's spiritual motherhood retreat," we should keep in mind one important point: Mary's new motherhood is not some vague or abstract sort of thing. It's concrete and personal. And even though it's universal, it's also intensely particular. Mary is *your* mother. She is my mother. In this light, John Paul thinks it's significant that Mary's new motherhood on Calvary is expressed in the singular, "Behold, your son" *not* "Behold, your billions of spiritual children." The Pope gets to the heart of it when he says, "Even when the same woman is the mother of many children, her personal relationship with each one of them is of the very essence of motherhood." In short: Mary is uniquely, particularly, personally your mother and my mother, and she doesn't lose us in the crowd.

Today's Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, living in Mary.

Thank you for the gift of my loving Mother, Mary.