

Walking with Mary on the Path to Holiness

Saturday, June 13, 2020 ~ Mary, Model of Prayer



It happened while at prayer. For her prayer had become a habitual practice; scarcely was she not in His presence. While traveling to the market or her daily visit to the well to fetch water, she kept herself in His company.

In the eyes of her neighbors in the village she wasn't anything exceptional, just one of the ordinary folk who did the daily chores of washing and cooking like everyone else.

In the synagogue the only attention she attracted was her pensive absorption in prayer. She was not distracted by the happenings around her; nor, in vain curiosity did she move from the interior room of her prayer. It was as if she anticipated Jesus' teaching: *"When you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. and your Father who sees in secret will repay you"* (Matthew 6:6). She learned early on to safeguard her relationship with Yahweh with attentiveness and care.

Without her knowing, He had created her for a particular purpose and now the time had come. It was the sixth month and happened eighty miles north of where Christ would be born.

God sent a messenger to announce His desire and plan for her to be the Mother of the promised Messiah. The angel Gabriel came seeking her free will consent. We are relieved at her fiat, but it was no surprise to the Father. Wasn't she already disposed to do His will? Mary was ever mindfully aware of His presence and His boundless love for her. So, we see, Mary's life of prayer did not begin at the Annunciation; rather, it only intensified!

In a General Audience of 2012, Pope Benedict XVI speaking of the Annunciation said, *"Mary is the creature who opened the door to her Creator in a special way, placing herself in His hand without reserve. She lived entirely from and in her relationship with the Lord; she was*

disposed to listen, alert to recognizing the signs of God...she submitted freely to the Word received...Mary trusts implicitly in the word that the messenger of God announced to her and becomes the model and Mother of all believers.”

How can we, like her, live entirely from and in our relationship with the Lord? I think the answer is contained in one word – love. Do I, like her, really believe in God’s personal, intimate, and unique love for me? It was Mary’s familiarity with His love for her that enabled her to do and endure all He asked of her throughout life. We were created to love and be loved. How can I truly love another if I do not first allow myself to receive it?

“Praying means accepting God’s love trustingly. Praying is not first and foremost doing something for God, but primarily accepting His love, letting ourselves be loved by Him. We find it hard to put this into practice, because we do not believe strongly enough in God’s love; we often feel that we are unworthy of that love, and we are more centered on ourselves than on Him” (Philippe, page 63). This is our fallen state, but I’m convinced that if we go to our Mother daily, she will patiently teach us to gradually turn our eyes from ourselves to her Son. Is not the way to the heart of the Son through the Mother?

Like waves that peacefully come to the shore, our Lord is continually inviting us to Himself. Have we not read or heard His words many times? “Be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:11). “Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid” (John 14:27). “Come to Me all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). “Remain in Me, as I remain in you” (John 15:4).

In the Gospel, St. Luke tells us that Mary “kept all these things, pondering them in her heart” (Luke 2:19). She interiorly remained with the Lord. At the same General Audience, Pope Benedict taught that “this pondering means she “kept together”, “pieced together”, in her heart all the events that were happening to her; she placed every individual element, every word, every event, within the whole and confronted it, cherished it, recognizing that it all came from the will of God. Mary does not stop at a first superficial understanding of what is happening in her life, but can look in depth...and attains the understanding that only faith can provide.”

Unlike we Americans, Mary does not rush through or gloss over events in her life. She takes them to her heart where she thinks and prays about how God is acting in her life. How else could she have so readily pronounced her fiat within moments after St. Gabriel came to her?

How differently might we see the world, our neighbor, ourselves, if we, too, took the time to see, not just God's fingerprint in the events in our lives, but His continual abiding presence with us. Perhaps Brother Lawrence, a seventeenth-century Carmelite friar can help us. He said, *"The practice that is holiest, most usual and most necessary in the spiritual life is the practice of the presence of God. That is, to take pleasure in and to accustom ourselves to His divine company, speaking humbly and conversing lovingly with Him at all times, at every moment, without rule or measure; and especially at times of temptations, sufferings, dryness and self-disgust, and even infidelities and sins. We should apply ourselves continually to ensure that all our activities whatsoever are a way of holding little conversations with God, not studied words, but just as they come forth from purity and simplicity of heart.... everyone is capable of such familiar conversation with God."*

With all the COVID19 restrictions and all the upheaval in our country, I've had to ask myself what the Father is asking of me in all the 'whys' and 'what ifs' in the last few months. I believe He is asking me to really trust Him and to see with the eyes of faith His abiding presence in me, with me, and all around me.

Also, I need to make an active choice and to beg Our Mother for the grace to remember to live in His presence in a way that will deepen my relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is to live more in reality and walk with Him in life as Adam and Eve did before the fall.

In his book, *Thirsting for Prayer*, Fr. Jacques Philippe wrote, *"God is intimately present in every reality and desires nothing more than to reveal Himself, but He is a hidden God. He reveals Himself to us not through manifestations or compelling proofs, but through signs that are often unobtrusive clues, calls, arousing a free adherence of faith on our part"* (page 72).

Simple as it may sound, every day is really a 'hide and seek' day with God. We need to ponder as did our Mother, "What gifts did God give me today?", "What was He trying to tell me through the readings at Mass and the people I encountered?" "How and why did I avoid Him or

put Him off when I knew He was calling my name?" "God was present to me, but was I present to Him or other things?"

The omnipresence of God implies He cannot and **does not** ever want to leave me. From the beginning, He Himself said, "It is not good for man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18). When we do feel alone, however, we need, like our Lady, to enter into the temple of God that we are and allow ourselves to bond more deeply with our Creator. St. Teresa of Avila said, "There is nothing more beautiful than a soul for the King of Glory in which to dwell, and learning how God dwells in the soul will give us great comfort and who He is and His plan for us." Is this not what Mary did when she pondered all things in her heart?

Unlike His creatures, God is not bound by space and time. This is why I can teach my students that we can pray everywhere and all the time. I don't have to wait until I get to Church or begin my Adoration hour to pray.

Somewhere I once heard or read, "If you wait until you're on your knees, you don't pray very much." What would that mean for those who can no longer kneel down?

If my memory serves me correctly, it was during my sophomore year of CCD (PSR) class in which our teacher gave us all a letter that then affected me deeply, especially since I had little knowledge of our faith. There are, to this day, things that I carry with me from the words I read. It reads:

Dear Friend,

How are you? I just had to send this letter to tell you how much I love and care about you. I saw you yesterday as you were walking with your friends. I waited all day, hoping you would want to talk with Me also. As evening drew near, I gave you a sunset to close your day, and a cool breeze to rest you. Then I waited, but you never came. O yes, it hurt Me, but I still love you because I am your friend.

I saw you fall asleep last night, and I longed to touch your brow so I spilled moonlight on your pillow and your face...again I waited, wanting to rush down so we could talk. I have so many gifts for you.

You awakened late this morning and rushed off for the day. My tears were in the rain. Today you looked so sad, so all alone. It makes My Heart ache because I understand. My friends let me down and hurt Me many times, but I love you. I try to tell you in the quiet green grass. I whisper it in the leaves and trees, and breathe it in the mountain streams, and give the birds love songs to sing. I clothe you with warm sunshine and perfume the air with nature's scents. My love for you is deeper than the oceans and bigger than the biggest want or need you could ever have.

We will spend eternity together in heaven. I know how hard it is on earth. I really know, because I was there and I want to help you. My Father wants to help you, too. He's that way, you know. Just call Me, ask Me, talk to Me. It's your decision...I have chosen you and because of this I will wait...because I love you.

Your Friend, Jesus

How can we cultivate a relationship such as this? I think an easy way to begin is to end our day thinking about all the various gifts, however small, God gave us. It could be as big as a promotion at work, compliments on a job well done, a special grace received at Mass, a beautiful rainbow, a tiny budding flower or a smile on a baby's face. Not to mention all the things we take for granted such as our daily necessities or the people we love.

God is a giver of gifts. The more we become aware of them throughout the day, the more we recognize the Hand of the Father. In response to her cousin Elizabeth calling her *blessed*, did not Mary sing in her Magnificat? "*The Mighty One has done great things for me*" (Luke 1:49)? Her prayer came from the profound awareness and pondering of God working in and through her.

Tonight when we kneel down to pray, let us recall the various and personal gifts we have received this day and see, with Our Lady how the "*Mighty One has done great things for me*" (Luke 1:49).

Bibliography

Benedict XVI. General Audience. Paul VI Audience Hall. Wednesday, 19 December 2012

Brother Lawrence. *The Practice of the Presence of God*. New York, NY: Templegate Publishers, 1974.

Philippe, Jacques. *Thirsting for Prayer*. New Rochelle, NY: Scepter Publishers, Inc. 2014