

Mary and the Holy Spirit

June 21, 2014

This talk is titled Mary and the Holy Spirit so obviously, I will address the relationship between Mary and the Holy Spirit, and I will also address its significance for us. Before I do so, I would like to review who St. Maximilian Kolbe is, since I will refer to his teachings on this subject.

Raymond Kolbe (Maximilian) was born into a poor, Polish, farming family in 1894. One day, as a boy, his mother was so frustrated with his behavior that she yelled at him in exasperation, “Raymond, what will become of you?! This shook the boy to the core. Filled with grief, he immediately turned to the Mother of God, asking her, “What *will* become of me?” Then he went to a church and repeated this same question, what *will* become of me?

In his own words we learn what happened next: “Then the Virgin Mother appeared to me holding in her hands two crowns, one white and one red. She looked at me with love and she asked me if I would like to have them. The white meant that I would remain pure and red meant that I would be a martyr. I answered yes I wanted them. Then the Virgin looked at me tenderly and disappeared.” (Gaitley, 33 Days till Morning Glory, page 11.)

So how did this unfold in his life? Well, the white crown, representing purity, was manifested largely by his life as a Franciscan priest living the religious vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. All three vows represent one big yes to God’s invitation to love Him undividedly, directly, purely with one’s whole being, body and soul. From this pure love of God flowed forth his love for others.

This love for God and others was most seen in his great passion to bring the whole world to God as quickly as possible through Jesus Christ under the leadership of Mary Immaculate. This great desire materialized and bore abundant fruit through Militia Immaculata. He used the modern technology of the time to promote devotion to her – he had a broadcasting station and a magazine publication called the Knights of the Immaculata which by 1938 had nearly one million subscribers. Hence one of his titles is Saint of our modern times.

So after many years of his incredibly fruitful work, Kolbe was arrested during WWII by the Gestapo and sent to the Auschwitz concentration camp. He was beaten and even had the dogs attack him. But the story for which he is most remember is when a prisoner had escaped from the camp, and in retaliation, the Nazi’s punished the other prisoners by selecting 10 men to be starved to death. One of these men cried out that he could not die because he had a family that depended on him. Kolbe stepped forward and offered to take the man’s place. The Nazi’s agreed, which is a miracle in itself. In the starvation bunker Kolbe encouraged and prepared the other men for a death. He himself, though, was given a lethal injection to hurry his death. This happened on the eve of the Assumption of Mary into Heaven – coincidence? God-incidence! Thus, he died a martyr of charity and attained the red crown Mary had offered him as a boy. (Gaitley, page 11)

Now, how was he able to be so peaceful and powerful in the face of such full-blown evil? The

answer is his great devotion and deep union with Mary which brings about confidence and trust in God. One of his lines that I like to call to mind is “give all your difficulties to Mary and for the rest be at peace.” So his heart was united to hers and that point leads us into the **heart** of this talk, literally to the **heart** of Mary, her Immaculate Heart.

In the Mass for the Feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary one of the prayers, the collect, begins,

O God, who prepared a fit dwelling place for the **Holy Spirit** in the **Heart** of the Blessed Virgin Mary – in other words, Mary is a worthy dwelling place. Wow! Can you imagine a human being worthy of God who created the heavens and earth out of nothing, who is Almighty, Omniscient, utterly Other, and Thrice Holy? Yet it’s true - Mary is **that** holy, **that** immaculate. She is mankind’s solitary boast.

Of course, she was made worthy by God Himself. Her holiness is pure gift. She benefitted from the Redemption of Christ in the most eminent manner. In consideration of the merits of her Son, she was preserved from original sin and all stain of sin. (*Lumen Gentium*, 56.) Mary was filled by the Holy Spirit even from the time of her own conception in the womb of her mother, St. Anne. She was/is united, bathed, plunged in the Spirit of the Father and the Son to such an extent that we can give her the title, Spouse of the HS.

Now this term itself, spouse, sheds light on their relationship. We know human spouses are intimately united at all levels (not only physically, but spiritually, emotionally, in every respect etc.,) In the Book of Genesis we read that a man shall leave his mother and father, cling to his wife and the two shall become one flesh.

But what does this spousal union look like between Mary and the Holy Spirit? Kolbe puts it this way “that this union is above all an interior union, a union of her essence with the essence of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit lives in her soul, in the core or depths of her very being. It is this intimate union, this oneness with the Holy Spirit, that makes her fruitful, from the very first instant of her existence, all during her life on earth, and for all eternity. So this intimate union, this oneness with the Holy Spirit is the key in understanding the spousal relationship between Mary and Holy Spirit?

Kolbe says that Mary doesn’t just possess the Holy Spirit but is possessed by the Holy Spirit. If a person can give himself over to Satan and be possessed by him, certainly a person can give themselves over to the Holy Spirit to be possessed by the Holy Spirit, to be the instrument by which the Holy Spirit works and pours out his graces. So Mary who was so given over to the Holy Spirit, so permeated by the Holy Spirit, so immersed in the Holy Spirit, so receptive to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, that she perfectly did the works of the Holy Spirit. In one sense, we could say her words were the words of the Holy Spirit, her thoughts were the thoughts of the Holy Spirit, her actions were the actions of the Holy Spirit because she was such a docile and faithful instrument in his hands. She is so united, so one with the Holy Spirit that we can say she perfectly reflects or images the Holy Spirit. In a sense, she personifies the Holy Spirit – we can know what the Holy Spirit is like because of her. (Gaitley, page 15.)

Consider that the Holy Spirit is the Fruitful Love between the Father and the Son and Mary is so united with this Fruitful Love, it follows that she will be fruitful herself, especially as the Mother of Jesus and then as our Mother, giving spiritual

birth to God's life of grace in us of which she is so full. Perhaps this image will help clarify the point:

Think of a vase placed right in the heart of a bubbling spring. Not only does the vase fill with water; it overflows, so that those who come to drink, can do so from the water contained in the vase and drink all they want so long as the vase remains in the spring. Mary is the vase immersed in the Life-giving Spring, the Holy Spirit and she communicates this living water to us which refreshes us. (Immaculate Conception and the Holy Spirit, Mantequ-Bonamy, page 51.)

Maximilian Kolbe puts it this way: "The creature most completely filled with this love, filled with God Himself, was the Immaculate, who never contracted the slightest stain of sin, who never departed in the least from God's will. United to the Holy Spirit as His spouse she is one with God in an incomparably more perfect way than any other creature." (Gaitley, page 14)

This last statement brings out a second and very important point but before I address it, I want to say a word about the Holy Spirit. What exactly is this life in the Spirit?

Lumen Gentium, the dogmatic constitution on the Church, teaches that the mission of Christ and the Holy Spirit is brought to completion in the Church. The Church is both the Mystical Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit. This joint mission, this shared mission, henceforth brings Christ's faithful, that's us, to share in Christ's communion with the Father **in the Holy Spirit**. The Spirit prepares us and goes out to us with his grace in order to draw us to Christ. The Spirit reveals the risen Lord to us, the Spirit makes present the Mystery of Christ.... that we may bear much fruit. (LG, nn.4)

Some of the fathers of the Church referred to Christ and Holy Spirit as the two hands of God the Father by which he embraces and saves His children.

The Spirit dwells in our hearts as in a temple. He prays in us, bears witness in us to our adoption as sons. He leads us to truth, gives us unity, endows us with gifts, directs us and enriches us with his gifts. If this can be said of all the faithful, how much more can we say this of Mary, who was/is completely receptive to the Spirit's life in her.

Now let us return to a second point I want to emphasize about Mary, that is, she always did/does the will of God and did so/does so perfectly. By doing God's will she bears fruit, she gives life, she proves her love for God and her love for others. What does this mean for us?

Kolbe would answer: "To be one in will with Mary who was the only human being whose will has never deviated by her choice from the will of God, is to be perfectly united to the will of God. And it is this alignment of your will with His that is the **pressing business of your life.**"

Pressing business, this sounds pretty important. Aligning our wills with God's is pressing, Kolbe tells us, because it makes us saints. Kolbe's number one goal, which he wrote down in his retreat notes before his ordination, was to become a saint, and a great one. His formula for becoming a saint was BIG "W" (God's Will) + little "w" (our wills) = SAINT. (Gaitley, p. 14)

Mother Teresa said, good people do good things, holy people do God's things and that's what will lead us to heaven which is ultimately all that matters. Scripture says, "What profit a man if he gains the whole world, but loses his soul? This maxim clashes with the "world's" mentality illustrated for example by a shopping

advertisement that read – ‘Whoever dies with the most toys wins’ and ‘Shop till you drop.’ Kolbe recognizes that: “Man desires to be great, wise, rich, famous, happy, loving and beloved. But no happiness on this earth satisfies him. He desires more, always more. When will he finally be satisfied?” (Aim Higher, Wisz) We have a modern day illustration of this in the actor/comedian Eddie Murphy. In an interview he told the reporter that even though he had all the money, fame, women, and material possession he could desire, something was still missing. St. Augustine expresses this experience in his well known words, “Our hearts are restless until they rest in you, O Lord.”

To continue Kolbe’s quote: “The heart of man is too big to be filled with money, sensuality or the deceptive but intoxicating smoke of fame. It desires a higher good, without bounds and lasting eternally. Only God is such a good.” (Aim Higher, Wisz.) We have a God shaped hole in our hearts that only He can fill. Hence the pressing business of our lives is to fill that hole, that longing in ourselves more and more with God - this is our true happiness – to LOVE God and do His will. They really are the same thing.

Let me give you an illustration: We sisters are happy to take a vow of obedience because we love God and want to please Him by doing His will. We find happiness in doing God’s will. We see this in natural relationships as well. When I was a teenager I would prefer to do what my friend wanted because my joy was to give her joy. We can see this in boyfriend/girlfriend relationships. Does this sound familiar? “What do you want to do, I don’t know, what do you want to do. I don’t know, you choose.” You see, we want to please the other. Their joy is our joy. Love naturally sacrifices for the other.

See then how loving God and obeying His will go together. It is our love put into action. Kolbe says: “Intelligent creatures love God in a conscious manner. Through this conscious or freely given love they unite themselves more and more closely with Him and so find their way back to Him.” It is in conforming our wills to His that we return to God. (Gaitley, 14.)

Let’s look at this in a broader context. According to St. Thomas Aquinas, all of creation makes one big, circular movement from God, back to God. We came forth from God and will return to God. Sometimes this is referred to as exit and return. Maximilian Kolbe put it this way, “Everywhere in this world we notice action...departure and return; going away and coming back; separation and reunion. He says all this is simply an image of the Blessed Trinity in the activity of creatures.” (Gaitley, page, 13.)

Even Jesus, when he became incarnate, when he came to earth in the flesh, **in a sense** departed from the Father and after His resurrection, returned to the Father in heaven. He paved the way for us to follow. He said, “I come to do your will” and after completing the Father’s will, He returned to heaven. Our return to the Father is what matters. Who was not moved by St. John Paul II’s last words on his death bed, “Let me go to my Father’s house.”

Now we know that doing God’s will is not always easy, but Kolbe would add, unless we have the Immaculata’s help. He taught that through Mary we can become great saints and what is more, in an easy way. Easy? Really? Why? He points out that the Immaculata is the Mediatrix of Graces. Now we know that Christ is the one mediator between God and man, but He allows all of us to share in His unique mediation. We do this when we intercede for others through prayer, sacrifices,

etc. Mary, however, participates in this mediation in a more profound and singular way. Remember, Jesus, as he hung upon the cross gave Mary to us as our Mother so she can mercifully intercede for us before Him and obtains graces for us.

Kolbe points out “God has willed to entrust the entire order of mercy to Mary. It’s God’s will that she distribute his graces. Why? Because it’s God’s will to unite himself to Mary by his Holy Spirit – the Holy Spirit acts through Mary his spouse. Hence, it’s easy to become holy when we stay close to and ask for graces from the one whose very job it is to distribute them for God.” Gaitley, page, 15)

This should not surprise us. Remember, Jesus came to us the first time in His Incarnation by the power of the Holy Spirit through Mary and continues to come to us by the power of the Holy Spirit through Mary.

A very tangible example of her intercession and distribution of graces is seen with the miraculous medal. The image on the medal depicts Mary standing on a globe with rays of light streaming from the rings on her fingers. The rays represent graces.

Example: Fr. Harden and miraculous healing of young boy through the miraculous medal.

Example: Apostate Bishop who repented due to the miraculous medal.

Well, I’ll conclude with more words of wisdom from Kolbe:

“Let us pray much that we would understand more and more what the Immaculata said at

the Annunciation, “Behold the Handmaid of the Lord. Let it be done to me according to Your

Word. As God wills, so be it. In this thought, all happiness is contained already here on earth, all destiny fulfilled...

Let us beg our Blessed Mother that she might teach us how our soul might be a hand servant of the Lord. We need to learn to belong to her in an ever more perfect way. We learn this by relying on her powerful intercession, experiencing her tender care, speaking to

her from our hearts, letting ourselves be led by her, having recourse to her in all things, and trusting her completely. (Gaitley, p 14.)

My dear brothers, let us remember and often recall that a single turning to the Immaculata

will suffice, either by word or glance or only a thought, so that she would repair all that we have ruined both in ourselves and those around us. She will guide us at the present moment

and take our future and the results of our future work under her care. For that reason let us have recourse to her. (Aim Higher, Wisz)

Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you.

Our Lady, Spouse of the Holy Spirit, obtain for me the grace of an intimate union with Jesus!

