

WROCLAW

Wednesday December 16, 2015

MARY

At the end of the Advent mission, we turn to Mary, the mother of Jesus and the mother of the Church. She is the one who has totally received Jesus - into her womb and into her heart. Let us consider Mary in the light of Advent, in the light of mercy and in the light of the New Evangelization.

On Sunday we considered God's promises, hope, and joy. Mary was steeped in the promises of the Lord to her people Israel. She was taught these by Joachim and Anne. She heard them in the synagogue. She knew the prophetic promises we have been hearing during Advent. She knew those words: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given." (Is. 9: 6), and how it continues: "and the government will be upon his shoulders, and his name will be called, Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." She heard God's promise through the angel "You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High." From her knowledge of the prophets of Israel, she must have known she had been chosen to be the mother of the promised Messiah. We don't know how much she understood immediately, how much later. But she knew

the promises of God to her people. In Mary, we see this pattern of God's promises, of hope, and of rejoicing.

Mary is the perfect example of the one who rejoices, who is filled with joy. "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour." (Luke 1: 46 - 47). The message of the angel has overwhelmed her, the visit to her cousin Elizabeth manifests the surprises of God, that Pope Francis is always mentioning. Let the Holy Spirit fill you with joy as Mary was filled - expanding your heart. Come, Holy Spirit, come with the joy of the Lord, come take away our sadness, come fill us with God's promises. Turn our gaze towards God's future.

As the one who is full of grace, Mary longs more than anyone else besides her Son for his coming in glory to complete his work of salvation. She embodies the longing of the Church, she carries the prayer of the Church. Because she was without sin, she has already experienced the resurrection of the body in her bodily assumption. Here Mary has experienced what we have to wait for. She longs for the day of our resurrection, which will be our full salvation, our final deliverance from all the wounds and stains of sin.

Mary is profoundly aware of God's mercy. This also comes out in the Magnificat. "He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke [promised] to our fathers, to Abraham and his posterity for ever." (Luke 1: 54 - 55). "And his mercy is on those

who fear him from generation to generation.” (Luke 1: 50).

Mary is the mother of mercy. Pope Francis writes: “No one has penetrated the profound mystery of the Incarnation like Mary.” He adds, “At the foot of the cross, Mary, together with John, witnessed the words of forgiveness spoken by Jesus.” She witnessed this mercy at the moment of his most intense suffering. Mary understands mercy as a mother. When we are suffering and find mercy hard to receive, we can go to Mary and ask her to share what she learned at the foot of the cross. It is at this point in his letter that Pope Francis calls on the intercession of St Faustina, whom he calls the great apostle of mercy (MV, 24).

Mary is also the example of one who goes out. The Lord has come to her through the angel. Immediately after Mary’s Fiat, we are told, “The angel departed from her. In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country ... of Judah”. She goes straight to see her cousin Elisabeth.

Very interesting, she doesn’t need to say anything! She couldn’t say anything! But the Lord reveals her secret to Elisabeth. The baby leaps in her womb - leaps for joy, we are told. Elisabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit and cries out with a loud voice: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!” (Luke 1: 41 - 42). The Lord reveals to Elisabeth the identity of Mary’s baby. “why am I so favoured that

the mother of my Lord should come to me?” (Luke 1: 43).

Elisabeth recognizes that Mary is so blessed because she believed the promises of the Lord. Because of this, Mary becomes the mother of faith. “Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.” (Luke 1: 45). Mary believed “he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end.” (Luke 1: 33).

Yesterday I spoke about the rhythm of COMING and GOING. We see this in the life of Mary, this movement. I spoke of COMING and GOING as actions, as activities. I said, “It is not enough just to think.” But as Mary moves from Nazareth to the hill country of Judea, from Nazareth to Bethlehem, to Egypt from Bethlehem, back to Nazareth, and then from Nazareth to Jerusalem, she is reflecting, she is wondering, she is pondering. Luke tells us “Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.” (Luke 2: 19). See also Luke 2: 51. Mary brings depth to our faith. This is a particular contribution of the woman. The men easily get absorbed in activity. It is necessary to come and to go, but Mary reminds the Church to go deeper. She helps to guarantee depth. We can sense this from the description of the disciples in the upper room after the Ascension of Jesus. There were praying there, we are told, the eleven apostles, “with the women and Mary,

the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.” (Acts 1: 14). The disciples knew that Mary had stood at the foot of the cross all the time that her Son hung above her. They knew her total faithfulness, and the depth of her mother’s love. Her presence deepened the prayer of the whole body. This is a picture of the whole Church, whose prayer is deepened and strengthened by the prayer of Mary at her heart.

Pope Francis speaks often about the creativity of the Holy Spirit. One of the contributions of St John Paul II, one of his many creative contributions, was to introduce the five luminous mysteries of the Rosary. This was a bold step that filled a gap. For as Catholics we have paid a lot of attention to the birth and infancy of Jesus (the joyful mysteries) and to the passion and death of Jesus (the sorrowful mysteries) and we paid less attention to what happened in between. Now this gap is filled. We can reflect with Mary on every part of the life of her Son, on his ministry and teaching as well as his hidden life and his passion.

Mary accompanies the prayer of the Church. We live at a momentous time, when there are many threats, dangers and problems. But it is an exciting time to be a Catholic fifty years after the end of the Second Vatican Council which initiated a thorough-going renewal of the whole life of the Church. We thank the Lord for the life and work of St John Paul II, who we may say solidified and anchored the conciliar reforms, shown in his

systematic teaching and in the new Catechism. I suggest that now Pope Francis is leading the Church into a second phase of renewal - this builds on the foundations of St John Paul II, but now calls for us to live this teaching. Francis teaches us how to be disciples, how to go out to the world, so that this missionary church of disciples can impact a world torn by violence and conflict, and bring reconciliation. The prayers of Mary accompany the Church in this new period, and we are invited to follow.