

MARY, THE RELIGIOUS IN THE GOSPEL

God makes the Church holy by setting it apart for himself. We see the same in the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary. She was specially chosen and set apart to be the recipient of God's grace and favour in all their fullness. St. Ambrose says; "The Virgin Mary's life is a rule of life for all, in particular for the religious."

Dear Fathers and Brothers, I would like to draw your attention to a few reflections on '*Mary, the religious in the Gospel*'. As we know, one of the primary aspects of the religious life is the three vows that we have professed on the day of our religious profession. I now intend to dwell upon the Evangelical counsels of obedience, poverty and chastity in the life of Mary, the religious in the Gospel.

When the angel of the Lord conveyed the will of God to Mary, she replied saying, "Here I am the servant of the Lord, let it be done to me according to your word." The obedience of Mary was heroic, continuous and simple. Heroic, because she obeyed regardless of whether the commands were difficult or easy, continuous because she obeyed from the annunciation to the foot of the cross, and even further to her assumption and simple because she obeyed by accepting what God asked of her through the angel, Simeon, her own child and through whomever God sent to convey his will. As a human mother she too could have very well said about the cross that it is not my will. The blessed virgin instead combined supreme prudence and simplicity and said with her son 'your will be done.'

We read in the book of Genesis, when Abraham was found obedient in the sight of the Lord for not refusing God's command and resolving to sacrifice Isaac, his only son, God blesses him saying; "Because you have done this and have not withheld your only son, I will indeed bless you and make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore." And so was with Mary, perhaps her obedience becomes even superior to the extent that she had to let her son Jesus to be sacrificed in actuality. Obedience is that which is prompt, willing and total. All these conditions may be reduced to one, that is to consider in every command only God and his authority, in those who command. Then the reason why we obey will not be because we like the command, or because the superior is holy or wise or because we understand the motives of it, but solely because God wills it so. The damage done by Eve through her disobedience is undone by Mary the new Eve through her obedience. She therefore, invites all of us, to give our wholehearted obedience to her son through her exhortation in the holy Gospel according to St. John; "Do whatever he tells you."

As we peruse the Holy Scripture we come across men like Noah, Abraham, Moses, and King David who found favour in the sight of the Lord. Down the line in the New Testament we have Mary, our Blessed Mother who too found favour in the sight of God. How did Mary find favour in the sight of the Lord? In the Holy Gospel according to St. Luke, she reveals this in her song of praise, "My soul glorifies the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my saviour, *for He has looked with favour on the lowliness of His servant.*" Mary through her Magnificat strongly reminds us of this fact; the need for the spirit of poverty." Poverty from the evangelical perspective, is not privation from material goods, rather it is a detachment from goods of the earth and a seeking after the goods of heaven.

The Blessed Virgin illumined by the Holy Spirit, understood the secret of merit and peace hidden in poverty. St. Peter Canisius says that Mary could have lived in comfort, on her inheritance.

But for love of poverty; she preferred to remain poor, and reserving only a small portion for herself, she distributed the rest in alms to the temple and the poor. She made great progress in this virtue as she saw the incarnate word choose a stable for his lodging, a manger for a throne and two animals as courtiers. St. Bernard writes: “Poverty was not found in heaven, although it abounded on earth, but man was not aware of its value. For this reason, the Son of God willed to descend from heaven to show men the value of poverty.” Mary embraced it faithfully and professed it. In the holy Gospel Jesus exhorts his disciples to enter through the narrow gate. For, the gate that opens to salvation is narrow and simple. It won’t be so fascinating unlike the other gates of the world that leads to damnation. Mary passed through the road that was hard, and went through this gate and entered into this glory. She therefore invites all of us to follow her footsteps.

“How can this be, since I am a virgin,” Mary asks the angel, that being a virgin how it is possible to bear a child, to fulfill the promise or to give birth to the Son of the Most High. The angel replied saying that nothing is impossible with God. And yes, we know that the word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us. As the word of God took flesh in Mary through her virginity; it necessitates our chastity also to be one of allowing the word to become flesh by the Holy Spirit. The prophecy of Isaiah that the Virgin shall conceive and bear a son is extended to those of us who have chosen to be consecrated celibates. Our call thus involves the conception of Christ by the Holy Spirit. We know that the process of conception also entails the pain of child birth. In the words of St. Paul this implies much more, as he says in the letter to the Galatians 4:19 that he is in the pain of child birth until Christ is formed in the people to whom he is sent.

Enlightened by God, Mary understood the precious gem of virginity, and regardless of opinion of men, without previous example, before anyone else, she offered and consecrated to God, as a perpetual holocaust, her spotless virginity. Virginity frees us from three obstacles to perfection; family ties, instability in spiritual life and a divided heart. According to the masters of the spirit there are three ways of preserving chastity: fasting, flight from dangers and prayer. Fasting means mortification, especially of the eyes, palate and repose. Mary mortified herself in everything; flight would mean fleeing from occasions of danger. St. Philip Neri says; “In wars of the flesh, the cowards win, that is those who flee from occasions.’ And the third medium is prayer, in the book of wisdom we read, “And as I knew that I could not otherwise be continent, except God gave it I went to the Lord and besought him.” Mary’s virginity teaches us that our life of chastity is primarily not for ourselves but for others. It is not for an individual but for the humanity at large. As we have the blessed virgin as our mother and model, let us seek her aid to remain chaste and for the grace to make Christmas happen wherever we are sent. So that with her we could say, “The Lord has done great things for me.”

‘And Mary was there,’ as a religious in the Gospel as a perfect example for all of us. As we commence the Marian month, let us fervently implore the help of our Blessed Mother, for the grace to be faithful to our religious commitment, to assimilate her virtuous life of consecration and to impart it into our lives to be worthy servants of God.

Thank you.

Br.Puthussery Antony Anand