

Mary, Madonna of the Blood

May is Mary's month. Three feasts during this month are set aside for Mary: May 12, Mother of Mercy; May 24, Help of Christians; and May 31, the Visitation. Mary claims this month by the church from our European pagan ancestors, celebrating spring, fertility, and the earth mother with such things as flowers, dances, planting feasts, and maypoles. May 24 in particular commemorates the return of Pious VII to Rome in 1814 from his Napoleonic exile. Thus our Society's original title includes the invocation to Mary, Help of Christians, and we were founded on August 15, 1815, the Assumption.

Gaspar himself had a particular devotion to Mary. He used a special painting of Mary, the "Madonna of the Chalice." Originally by an unknown artist, Gaspar had a man named Pozzi add a chalice in Jesus' hand to the painting already popular and used by others before him in missions. He used this representation at a special crowning moment during his missions by uncovering the painting in a flourish; its unusually gentle and smiling Madonna represented all the attractiveness and mercifulness of motherhood to even the most hardened of hearts. He called this moment "The Victory Sermon." The print was to be displayed in mission houses and during missions. Gaspar used to say, "How beautiful it is to stand with Mary at the foot of the cross!" He used the attractive and gentle mother to invite the people to follow him spiritually to the foot of the cross.

In *Lumen Gentium* (67) when the Second Vatican Council expresses itself about Mary, it teaches that devotion to Mary "proceeds from true faith, by which we are led to recognize the excellence of the Mother of God and by which we are moved to filial love toward our Mother, and to imitation of her virtues."

These characteristics worthy of imitation come from Mary's oldest titles as old as the New Testament and in use as early as the second century; by then she is already being invoked in eucharistic prayers. Her titles are Mother of God and New Eve. Both are because of her relationship with Jesus. According to one legend Mary died in Ephesus, home of perhaps the most famous temple of the Earth Mother goddess, and a place where the church proclaimed her as Theotokos in 431 at the council of Ephesus. The title is reminiscent of the Old Testament term "Queen Mother" as "gebirah" rooted in the notion of a woman with the strength and qualities of a warrior, a woman who "runs with wolves."

For our enterprise of Precious Blood Spirituality, we might best be with Mary at the moment of Visitation to the marginalized in their giving birth to a new and just world order with a new song of God's gracious love for them. Here she is most being that sacred vessel or cup which is the source of Jesus' own blood, her milk the source of Jesus' own growth. Rarely has eurocentric art shown Mary pregnant, but here she is full of incarnation. We might best be with Mary at the foot of the cross where she offers the sacrifice of her son; there she has been shown in artistic imagination as catching the Precious Blood in her chalice or assuaging his wounds, blood-staining her veil, in like manner ourselves standing with the marginalized outside the gates in their suffering and blood shedding. Pope Pious XII wrote in *Mystici Corporis* (1943), "It was she who offered him on Golgotha." Pope Leo XIII wrote in *Jucunda Semper* (1894), "There stood by the cross his mother who...willingly offered her own Son." This sounds like a very priestly act to me. We can begin to consider the blood of women as sacred blood and life-giving in a healthier understanding of many Old Testament texts. Finally we might best be with Mary in the midst of the earliest community on Pentecost as Luke describes in Acts receiving her own full share of the Spirit and empowered to preach and witness to the gospel as we take a stand for the right role of women in the full ministry of the church, in a real implementation of the New Covenant.

I am not only suggesting that we merely recast our thoughts about Mary in modern language that is somehow more attractive, but to say that we have some historical foundation for a completely new development of our devotion to Mary and her place in our spirituality out of the work of liberation and feminist theologies. There's a great deal that needs to be done in these areas, and it is in these directions that my reflections on Mary have led me.

(Fr. Alan Hartway, C.P.P.S., "Reflections on the Woman of the New Covenant and Precious Blood Spirituality," *The New Wine Press*, May 25, 1994)

There is a person near the cross, sometimes standing, sometimes slumping, always crying, who understands the music of the night. Here is where the Mary, the Madonna of the Precious Blood, stands in our spirituality. She is a woman of sorrows who knows the night and the meaning of morning.

Mary, unwed mother, says yes to a plan only God could conceive. A frightened young woman who discovers one day she is pregnant. Faced with choices, she knows some will try to shame her and blame her. But most of all, she thinks

about her beloved and how to tell him. She wonders if he will leave or stay by her side. Confused and fearful, she races off to her cousin, Elizabeth, to share a moment that lasts for months.

Mary, humble mother, is star-struck by all the attention this child of hers is receiving. The poor and rich come to visit. Lavish gifts but one that unsettles her a bit: myrrh. An odd gift to give a child. Isn't myrrh used to prepare a body for burial?

Mary, political refugee, flees with her husband and baby to another country to escape persecution. This child of hers has created a stir and brought down the wrath of the ruler. In her escape, nursing the child at her breast, she grieves for those mothers and holy innocents left behind, not fortunate enough to discover a future in their dreams.

Mary, proud parent, brings her child to the temple and hears the wise old man tell how this child will be the rise and fall of many. She thought she might have to wait until her son's graduation to hear these accolades. But even in the midst of the old man's avalanche of expectation, there is a dire prediction of a pierced heart. And she remembers the myrrh.

Mary, distraught mother, finds out halfway home from vacation that their twelve-year old son isn't with them. She and her husband look everywhere and finally find him in the temple. He is teaching the elders. He deserves discipline but how does one punish a prodigy?

Mary, concerned mother, tells her son to help out at a wedding feast of a friend. She doesn't want the couple to be embarrassed because the wine has run out.

Mary, confused mother, stands outside the house while her son, an aspiring rabbi, is sitting inside surrounded by prostitutes, tax collectors, and other riff-raff. This must have been one of those arrows the old man was talking about. She does not understand her son's bizarre behavior. He's been working too hard. She wants him to come home and get some rest.

Mary, grieving mother, slumps at the foot of the cross, her hands and hair splashed with the blood of her dying son. Now the old man's words and the memory of myrrh make sense.

Mary, faithful mother, listens as her son in his dying breath takes care of her future. She won't have to live alone. His closest friend, John, will provide for her. And she for him.

Mary, mourning mother, cradles her dead son in her arms. Is there a wound more grievous or lasting than this --a mother holding the lifeless body of her first born? Her tears mingle with the blood seeping from her son's forehead. She remembers holding him for the first time that night long ago when the stars were bright and the future was forever. Now she holds him for the last time. There are no stars, no sun, no future now. Only gloom, darkness, and memories.

The memory of myrrh.

(Fr. Joseph Nassal, C.P.P.S., Passionate Pilgrims, Resource Series, # 13, The Messenger Press, Carthage, Ohio, 1993, pp. 101-103)