

# “Behold your Mother”: Mary on Our Path to Holiness

As mothers often do, Mary goes ahead of us on the journey. She guesses what we need and prepares it for us, often so discreetly that we don't even notice. This is the 17th installment in the “Combat, closeness, mission” series.

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“Behold your mother” (Jn 19:27). When Jesus, in agony on the Cross,

spoke these words to our Lady and St. John, He revealed something very profound and very real, one of the things “hidden since the creation of the world” (Mt 13:35). Jesus did not bestow a merely honorary title: Mary truly *is* our Mother and we *are* her children.

“Mary’s motherhood through the mystery of the Cross took an unimaginable leap: the mother of Jesus became the new Eve, the source of new and eternal life for every person who comes into the world, because her Son associated her with his redemptive death.”<sup>[1]</sup> In that solemn and painful moment, Jesus showed us the extent of the infinite gift He gave us by his incarnation. God does not do things by halves: when He enters, He goes all the way. He entered our humanity and filled it with his blessings, and one of the greatest is to be, with Him,

children of the one who is blessed among women (cf. Lk 1:42).

Just as it would be an error to see the Ascension as Jesus distancing Himself and to reduce the sacraments to consolations to help us bear that “distance,” it would be wrong to think that, after Mary’s Assumption into heaven, her maternal presence became any less than it was when she lived on this earth. “Mary is taken up body and soul into the glory of Heaven, and with God and in God she is Queen of Heaven and earth. And is she really so remote from us? The contrary is true. Precisely because she is with God and in God, she is very close to each one of us. While she lived on this earth she could only be close to a few people. Being in God, who is close to us, actually, ‘within’ all of us, Mary shares in this closeness of God. Being in God and with God, she is close to each one of us, knows our

hearts, can hear our prayers, [and] can help us with her motherly kindness.”<sup>[2]</sup> —

The Gospel narrates only a few episodes in our Mother’s life, but all of them are full of meaning for her children. Each one is a window through which we may glimpse her life and her person, love her more, and better understand ourselves as her children. Meditating on these passages, we see in her three fundamental attitudes: Mary *welcomes* Christ, *contemplates* Him, and *delivers* Him. And from her place close to God, she now exercises her motherhood by leading us along that same path. We go to Jesus, and return to Him, with Mary.<sup>[3]</sup> And with her, we bring Him to everyone.

## **So it is, and so be it**

That day in Nazareth, seemingly just like any other, Mary could not have imagined how her *fiat* would become

the greatest act of faith and obedience in history. The verb with which Mary responded to the angel, translated as *fiat* or “may it be,” appears in St. Luke’s original Greek with a word (*génoito*) that expresses an urgent, heartfelt desire for something to happen (cf. Lk 1:38). But our Mother said neither *fiat* nor *génoito*. A more exact reproduction of the word on Mary’s lips would be “amen.” This is how any Jew would express the sentiment, “Yes, may it be,” to God. The root of the Hebrew word signifies solidity and inner conviction. It confirms that what has been spoken is firm, stable, and binding. Its exact translation is: “So it is, and so be it.”<sup>[4]</sup>

Mary’s acceptance cannot be reduced to a single moment in her life. It was a constant disposition. Her heart was attentive to God’s will at the angel’s visit, beside the cross, and always. “All of her life has been a pilgrimage

of hope together with her son, the Son of God, a pilgrimage which, through the Cross and Resurrection, has reached the heavenly homeland, in the embrace of God.”<sup>[5]</sup> The Lord asks us, too, for things that require a personal, “Amen, be it done unto me according to your word.” He waits for us with open arms, like a father bending low to call his little child. Do we let Him enter our thoughts, decisions, and actions without reservations? Do we let Him embrace us?

It is no coincidence that we respond “Amen” when we receive Christ’s Body in the Eucharist. Just as Mary welcomed the Word to become flesh within her, we too welcome Him to grow and live within us. “As a result, there is a profound analogy between the *Fiat* which Mary said in reply to the angel, and the *Amen* which every believer says when receiving the body of the Lord.”<sup>[6]</sup> May we receive

Him with her, with the “purity, humility, and devotion” with which our mother received Him that first time, and always.

## **Putting everything together in the heart**

Contemplation is another fundamental attitude in Mary’s life, and our Mother wants to lead us along the same path. “Being contemplative does not depend on the eyes, but on the heart. And here prayer enters into play as an act of faith and love, as the ‘breath’ of our relationship with God.”<sup>[7]</sup> Mary speaks very little in the gospels, especially considering the role she plays. She treasures her Son’s mysteries and ponders them in her heart, from the shepherds’ visit in Bethlehem to the very foot of the cross (cf. Lk 2:19).

In the silence of Nazareth, in prayer at Cana, during Jesus’ public life, we

see a Mother who meditates, observes, and allows herself to be transformed by Jesus' presence. It is easy to imagine the meeting between Mother and Son on the path to Calvary, when “with immense love Mary looks at Jesus, and Jesus at his Mother. Their eyes meet, and each heart pours into the other its own deep sorrow.”<sup>[8]</sup> On the luminous morning of the Resurrection, too, flooded by the glory of the Risen Christ, she anticipates the splendour of the Church,<sup>[9]</sup> which “lives in her fragile members [...]. Many of them are women, like the elderly Elizabeth and the young Mary — Paschal women, apostles of the Resurrection.”<sup>[10]</sup>

A contemplative gaze, that “breath” of the soul, helps us understand, little by little, the meaning of the events of our lives and what God expects of us. “The Gospel tells us this in speaking of our Lady, who saw things with the

heart. [...] The best expression of how the heart thinks is found in the two passages in Saint Luke's Gospel that speak to us of how Mary 'treasured (*synetérei*) all these things and pondered (*symbállousa*) them in her heart' (cf. Lk 2:19 and 51). [...] What Mary 'kept' was not only her memory of what she had seen and heard, but also those aspects of it that she did not yet understand; these nonetheless remained present and alive in her memory, waiting to be 'put together' in her heart."<sup>[11]</sup>

Like small children struggling with a difficult task, we can rely on our Mother to guide us on this path of contemplation. "Mary speaks with us, speaks to us, invites us to know the Word of God, to love the Word of God, to live with the Word of God, to think with the Word of God."<sup>[12]</sup> If we let her take us by the hand, she will give us patience with the things we don't yet understand and help us to

connect the seemingly unrelated dots until, as in a child's drawing, a figure emerges at the end of the process of tracing patiently.

## **Always giving Jesus to others**

From the beginning of her maternal vocation, Mary understands that Jesus is a treasure to be shared with everyone. The Lord has done "great things" in her (Lk 1:49), not for her personal glory, but for the good of all humanity. The joy of the *Magnificat* reflects a profound experience of divine filiation: Mary perceives the Father's immense love pouring over her, entrusting her with the greatest thing He has, his beloved Son. She finds herself filled with God, the love of God, more than any other human being before or after her. And that abundance drives her to bring everyone to Jesus.

Mary is constantly giving her Son to others: she offers Him as a child to

the shepherds and the Magi (cf. Lk 2:16-20; Mt 2:10-11); she places Him in Simeon and Anna's arms (cf. Lk 2:25-38); she gives Him such "freedom" that she even loses Him in Jerusalem; she "provokes" the miracle at Cana and encourages everyone to listen to what He tells us (cf. Jn 2:3-5); she allows Jesus to attend to his mission, even when their relatives call for Him (cf. Mt 12:46-50); she accepts the Father's will and gives herself with Jesus to all humanity at the foot of the cross (cf. Jn 19:25). And we can imagine the conversations, so full of Jesus, she would have had with the disciples after the Ascension... They must have have been similar to the ones she wants to have with us, and with all those who, like the beloved disciple, welcome her into their homes and lives (cf. Jn 19:27).

**Each of us is a child in their own way**

St. Josemaría once told the story of a visit to Seville during Holy Week: “I went out to the street when the confraternities were already walking there. And when I saw all those people, those pious men walking in the processions accompanying our Lady, I thought, ‘This is true penance; this is love.’ It was very beautiful. Then I saw... I don’t know which procession it was, or which image... The lights and jewels were the least of it. What really mattered were their love, songs, and praises. I was there looking at her, and I began to pray. I was over the moon. Looking at that beautiful image of Mary, I didn’t even realize that I was in Seville or on the street. Someone tapped me on the shoulder. I turned and saw a local man, who told me, ‘Father, forget about that one; look at ours!’ At first I almost thought it was blasphemous. Then I thought he was right: when I show portraits of my mother,

although I like them all, I too say, ‘Now *this* is the best one.’”<sup>[13]</sup>

Each of us can choose the “best” portrait of our heavenly Mother. It may not even be an image, but a personal way of speaking to her, loving her, and entrusting what fills our hearts to her. “Every Christian, looking back, can reconstruct the history of their relationship with the Mother of Heaven – a history that includes specific dates, people, and places, favours we recognize as coming from our Lady, and encounters filled with a special flavour. We realise that the love God shows us through Mary has all the depth of the divine and, at the same time, the familiarity and warmth of the human.”<sup>[14]</sup>

As mothers often do, though even more subtly, Mary goes ahead of us on the path. She anticipates what we need and prepares it for us, often so

discreetly that we don't even notice. And although it fills her with joy when we thank her for those motherly cares, she doesn't stop looking after us if we fail to. Holy Mary, we know you will always do it, but it does us so much good to ask you: *iter para tutum*, prepare a safe way for us.

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<sup>[1]</sup> Pope Leo XIV, Homily, 9-VI-2025.

<sup>[2]</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, 15-VIII-2005.

<sup>[3]</sup> Cf. St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 495.

<sup>[4]</sup> Cf. R. Cantalamessa, *L'anima di ogni sacerdozio*, Ancora, Milan 2014, pg. 53 (our translation).

<sup>[5]</sup> Pope Leo XIV, Angelus, 15-VIII-2025.

<sup>[6]</sup> St. John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 55.

<sup>[7]</sup> Pope Francis, Audience, 5-V-2021.

<sup>[8]</sup> St. Josemaría, *The Way of the Cross*, 4th station.

<sup>[9]</sup> Cf. Sedulius, *Carmen paschale*, 5, 358-364.

<sup>[10]</sup> Pope Leo XIV, Homily, 15-VIII-2025.

<sup>[11]</sup> Pope Francis, *Dilexit nos*, no. 19.

<sup>[12]</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, 15-VIII-2005.

<sup>[13]</sup> Remarks of St. Josemaría, gathered in A. Sastre, *Tiempo de Caminar*, Madrid, Rialp 1989, pg. 312 (our translation).

<sup>[14]</sup> St. Josemaría, “Recuerdos del Pilar,” in *Escritos Varios: Edición crítico-histórica*, Rialp, Madrid 2018, pg. 275 (our translation).

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