

Jesus' example in honouring mothers

The 12th of this month, the second Sunday of May, we'll be celebrating mothers on that annual celebration of Mothers' Day. Let's look at the way Jesus praised his mother.

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While hanging on the cross, he said to the Virgin Mary, "Woman, behold your son." Anyone listening might assume he was asking his mother to fix her gaze on him one last time. That is not what Jesus wanted. He

wanted her to fix her gaze on a young man standing next to her. His name was John. When our Lord said, “Woman, behold your son”, he was asking Mary to care for John as a mother caring for her own child.

Did Jesus really want the Virgin Mary to care for John as her son? To make this clear, he said to John, “Behold your mother.”

There is a mystery here. John was beyond any need for mothering in the usual sense. When Jesus called him to be an apostle, John was a fisherman working with his brother James in a small business run by their father Zebedee. In what way was the Virgin Mary supposed to be a mother to this man?

The Gospel doesn't tell us explicitly. Still, we know the three greatest virtues. As St Paul wrote: “faith, hope and love ... and the greatest of them is love.” One has to assume that

Mary's role as a mother was to strengthen John in faith, to encourage him not to give up in hard times and, above all, to dedicate his whole heart and soul to Jesus. This implies that the Virgin Mary was very good at doing these things herself. In other words, Christ's words on the cross are words of praise for how great his mother was, and how well she could teach someone how to believe, how to hope and how to love.

If the Dean of the Faculty of Business asks a university lecturer to teach first year students, it's no big deal. If the Dean asks a lecturer to teach a course on advanced business practice to a classroom filled with the twenty richest entrepreneurs in the country, what does that say about the lecturer? The more gifted the student, the wiser the teacher has to be.

When Jesus tells Mary, “Woman, behold your son”, the words imply how holy she was. Jesus was asking her to be a spiritual mother to John. Remember the calibre of this apostle. John was the first one to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead. Unlike the other disciples, he believed even before seeing Jesus physically live. John was the “disciple Jesus loved”. John was the visionary who spoke with angels and wrote the *Book of Revelation*.

As Jesus honoured and praised his mother, we want to honour and praise our own mothers for all they have done for us.

This article by Fr. Joe Babendreier first appeared in the Sunday Nation on 11th May 2014.

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