



Mary, Woman of Faith: Renewing Our Awareness

Reflection

Mary in Scripture

When we look carefully at the four gospels, we may be surprised to discover that there are few references to Mary. It is important to recall that the gospels are “the Good News”—documents of faith written by particular authors to affirm belief in Jesus the Christ. They are not documents that attempt to give us eyewitness reports or scientific evidence; nor can we expect to find numerous biographical details in them—certainly not of Mary, who is to be seen primarily in the light of her relationship with Jesus.

Some of the passages that make reference to Mary are the following: the infancy narrative of Luke, in which we have the familiar stories of the annunciation when Mary accepts her role in God’s plan (1:26–38); the visit to Elizabeth when she proclaims the joyful and compassionate *Magnificat* (1:39–56); the birth of Jesus (2:1–20); the presentation of Jesus with Simeon’s prophetic words to Mary (2:22–35); and the meeting of Jesus with his parents in the temple (2:41–52). Jesus later says to his disciples, “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.” (8:19–21) He reinforces an image of Mary as a faithful and obedient follower.

In John’s Gospel, we find the story of the Wedding Feast at Cana (2:1–12) and the scene at the foot of the cross where Mary stands with “the disciple whom he loved.” (19:25–27) In both scenes, Mary is a faithful disciple of Jesus—an image reinforced in Acts 1:14 where Mary is shown in the upper room praying for the coming of the Holy Spirit with the apostles and other disciples of Jesus.

Mary in Tradition

Two of the four major doctrines that the Church teaches about Mary come from early Church history: the real and perpetual virginity of Mary ¹ and her divine motherhood. ² The Council of Ephesus in 431, which ruled that there was only one divine person in Jesus Christ, gave Mary the title *Theotokos*—God-bearer, or Mother of God.

The remaining two doctrines are more recent official declarations. The Immaculate Conception (Mary was “preserved immune from all stain of original sin”) was proclaimed by Pope Pius IX in 1854. ³ The Assumption (Mary “was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory”) was proclaimed by Pope Pius XII in 1950. ⁴ The Second Vatican Council ⁵ emphasized that Mary is part of the Church, the people of God. Devotion to Mary is encouraged, but must not take away from the worship that rightly belongs to her son. Pope Paul VI wrote, “This devotion rightly fits into the only worship that is rightly called ‘Christian,’ because it takes its origin and effectiveness from Christ, finds its complete expression in Christ and leads through Christ in the Spirit to the Father.” ⁶

Mary in Liturgical Feasts and Devotion

It is fitting then that the Church includes a remembrance of Mary in every celebration of the Eucharist. For instance, she is specifically mentioned in the Profession of Faith (Nicene and Apostles Creeds), all four of the Eucharistic Prayers, and in Penitential Rite A. Mary is honored in “the annual cycle of Christ’s mysteries.” ⁷ From the First Sunday in Advent, when the liturgical year begins, we follow Mary through the

seasons. She is honored in four solemnities—the Immaculate Conception (December 8), Mary, Mother of God (January 1), the Annunciation (March 25), and the Assumption (August 15). Many other feasts and memorials appear, such as, the Visitation (May 31), Our Lady of Sorrows (September 15), Our Lady of the Rosary (October 7), and Our Lady of Guadalupe (December 12).

The United States bishops' pastoral letter, *Behold Your Mother: Woman of Faith*, makes suggestions for spreading and deepening Marian devotion. It details several ways to revitalize extraliturgical devotions such as the rosary. "Under the guidance of the Holy Father and the bishops, we must revitalize old forms and devise new devotions corresponding to current needs and desires."⁸

¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 499.

² *Ibid.*, 495.

³ *Ibid.*, 491.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 966.

⁵ *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen gentium)*, 60.

⁶ *Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary (Marialis cultus)*, February 2, 1974, Introduction.

⁷ *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium)*, 103.

⁸ Excerpt from *Behold Your Mother: Woman of Faith* © 1973, United States Catholic Conference, Inc., Washington, DC, p. 98. Used by permission. All rights reserved. No portion of this work may be reproduced by any means without permission in writing from the copyright owner.