

Monday Week 9 of Ordinary Time

Mary, Mother of the Church

Genesis 3:9-15,20

John 19:25-34



Reflection

The day after Pentecost Sunday, the Church celebrates her mother, our blessed Lady. The title “The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church” was given to Mary by Pope St. Paul VI in 1964. All Marian doctrines (teaching) point to her Son, our Blessed Lord Jesus Christ and each one teaches us more about Him. In this case, the title reminds us that the Church is the Body of Christ.

This fifteenth century painting by the Italian Dominican Fra Angelico, leads us more deeply into the mystery of Mary's motherhood of the Church. First, we see in the top left-hand corner, three figures walking across a barren ground. This is Adam and Eve being sent out of Eden, after disobeying God. In the first reading we hear God promising that, "I will make you enemies of each other: you and the woman, your offspring and her offspring. It will crush your head, and you will strike its heel" (Gen. 3:15). This little verse tells us that God has already planned our salvation through a descendant of Eve, Mary, whose Son will strike the head of the serpent (the Devil) in His Passion.

Mary is the new Eve, the woman of the new creation and one who obeyed. The main feature of this painting is of course the visit of the Angel Gabriel at the Annunciation and although the detail is hard to see on a small copy, the lines in gold in the centre are the words of the conversation between Mary and the Angel Gabriel and the Father.* Mary's words are upside down to show that she addressing the Father to show that she agrees to His request. The open book on Mary's knee also indicates that she will bear the Word of God, i.e. Jesus, and like any mother, hold Him on her knee. Therefore, Mary gave birth to Jesus and as the Church is His mystical Body, when she gave birth to Him, in a way she also gave birth to the Church.

In the Gospel today we hear Jesus announcing that from then on, Mary was to be mother to John and he, a son to her (Jn. 19:26-27). The rather formal title which Jesus uses, "woman," is a direct reference to Eve whose name means "mother of all the living" (Gen. 3:20). Mary, the new Eve, is to be the mother of the new creation in Christ, the Church. In the painting can you see at the foot of the palm tree (which represents both Christ's Cross and victory) two white roses? They symbolise Our Lady and St. John at the foot of the Cross.

Mary was with the Apostles gathered to pray after the Ascension (Acts 1:14) and was with them at the descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost day; the birth of the Church's mission. In the painting we see the dove hovering over Mary's head, as she was "overshadowed" by the Holy Spirit (Lk. 1:35) who enabled her to conceive virginally and give birth to Christ. It is the same Holy Spirit who now descends upon the Apostles, enabling them to go forth and bring Christ to the world.

Mary now looks over and cares for us, the Church, the body of her Son on earth. Let us never forget to ask her for her help and care in all our daily lives.

Hail Mary, full of grace....

Carol Ann Harnett 1st June 2020

*The figure in the roundel above Mary is Isaiah, indicated by the scroll he holds, who prophesied that the virgin would give birth. It is not the Father.