

Mary, Mother of God

“Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.” A long tradition in the Church tells us that St. Luke interviewed Mary in her later years, and these reflections of hers were a privileged source what we know about these early days around the birth of Jesus. ***How else would we know about the inner life of Mary, unless she shared it?*** They are not just history, but a mother’s gift and the insights of a woman of deep faith. We can only imagine the kind of reverence the first Christians must have had for Mary, even before the Council of Ephesus a few centuries later formalized the title we remember today, the “Mother of God.” Think what it must have been like to sit down and talk with Mary, the Mother of the Savior, who knew Him better than anyone. And down the centuries, the Church keeps learning from Mary this gift of contemplation, keeping a living memory of what God has done, reflecting on His work our hearts, and sharing that lived experience of God’s grace with others.

In a world that moves so fast, where technology puts us instantly in touch with the latest news and almost demands our attention without ceasing, Mary teaches us this discipline ... to take time to set aside the busyness and the noise, the whirl of activities and the ceaseless allure of our phones, and to reflect on God’s work in the silence and stillness of our hearts. Prayer keeps and reflects on those words and promises of God that may not immediately make sense – like Aaron’s blessing over the Israelites, that the Lord’s face would shine on His people. How could the God Who is pure spirit have a face? And when, after the Exodus, Moses had asked God very directly to see His face, God had told him clearly: “my face you cannot see, for no one sees me and still lives.” Yet in Jesus, through Mary, this promise is finally kept; there, in the hidden obscurity of an innkeeper’s stable, she was no doubt the first to look upon the Face of God revealed in her Son.

For some, of course, the silence of a lonely room or an empty chair where a loved one used to sit brings a heavy heart ... and Mary too knows this kind of silence well. The Scriptures make clear that Mary’s

keeping and reflecting were not free from sadness, wondering, and unanswered questions. In his third little volume of *Jesus of Nazareth*, Pope Emeritus Benedict, who died earlier today, highlighted the last sentence of the familiar story of the Annunciation. We know Mary's answer to Gabriel, the enduring response of every disciple and words of the most profound courage: "May it be done to me according to your Word." But then Luke tells us: "***And the angel departed from her.***" This is far more than just a neat closure of the scene. As Benedict says: "*The great hour of Mary's encounter with God's messenger, in which her whole life is changed, comes to an end, and she remains there alone, with the task that truly surpasses all human capacity. There are no angels visibly standing round her. She must continue along the path that leads through many dark moments, right up to the night of the Cross. How often in these situations Mary must have returned inwardly to the hour when God's angel had spoken to her with the consoling words, "Do not be afraid!" The angel departs, her mission remains, and with it matures her inner closeness to God. Even Mary's faith is a journeying faith, a faith that is repeatedly shrouded in darkness and has to mature by persevering through the darkness. Believing means submitting to the Word of God that surpasses our capacity to understand, and slowly growing into it.*"

Mary, the holy Mother of God, remains our Guide to Jesus, her Son. In the days ahead, perhaps you can find an opportunity to share what your faith means to you with someone, especially grandparents with your grandkids, as Mary shared hers with Luke. When we are impatient to understand, when we find God's Word too distant or obscure, when we are challenged by the Word with demands that are hard for us, Mary teaches us to say: "Let it be done according to your Word"; and like her, to keep all these things and reflect on them in our hearts. ***Pray for us, O holy Mother of God, that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.***