

Mother of God and Our Mother

When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home. ~ John 19:26-27

THESE WORDS OF JESUS TO MARY AND JOHN are often passed over without much reflection. After all, the Son of God is hanging on the cross with the weight of the sins of the world on his back. This is the climax of his mission, the reason the Father sent him into the world: to save us from our sins and show us the Father's love. "God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8).

It would seem that much greater things are being accomplished at Calvary, so why pay attention to what happens to Mary at the foot of the cross? Having no brothers and sisters and knowing that Mary is already a widow (according to most traditions), Jesus is simply making future provisions for his Mother as any son would. That is all that seems to be going on here. But before turning away from this scene, let us remember what has led up to Calvary. Jesus is in extreme agony. He has been beaten; tied to a post and whipped; crowned with thorns which are piercing into his scalp; dragged, kicked, and mocked as he carried the cross strapped to his back; and finally stripped of his garments and nailed to the cross to die by suffocation. In such a position, a person can only breathe by pulling the body up high enough so that the lungs can expand, but this action at the same time tears the flesh around the nails in the wrists (or hands) and in the ankles (or feet). Eventually the body gets too exhausted and can no longer do this, and the person dies from lack of oxygen. Why should we pay attention to what Jesus said from the cross? Because his words not only express his concern for his moth-

er on a human level but also reveal Mary's motherhood to us. Jesus never ceases to be the Savior of the world, so his words to John are his words also to us, "Behold, your mother" (Jn 19:27).

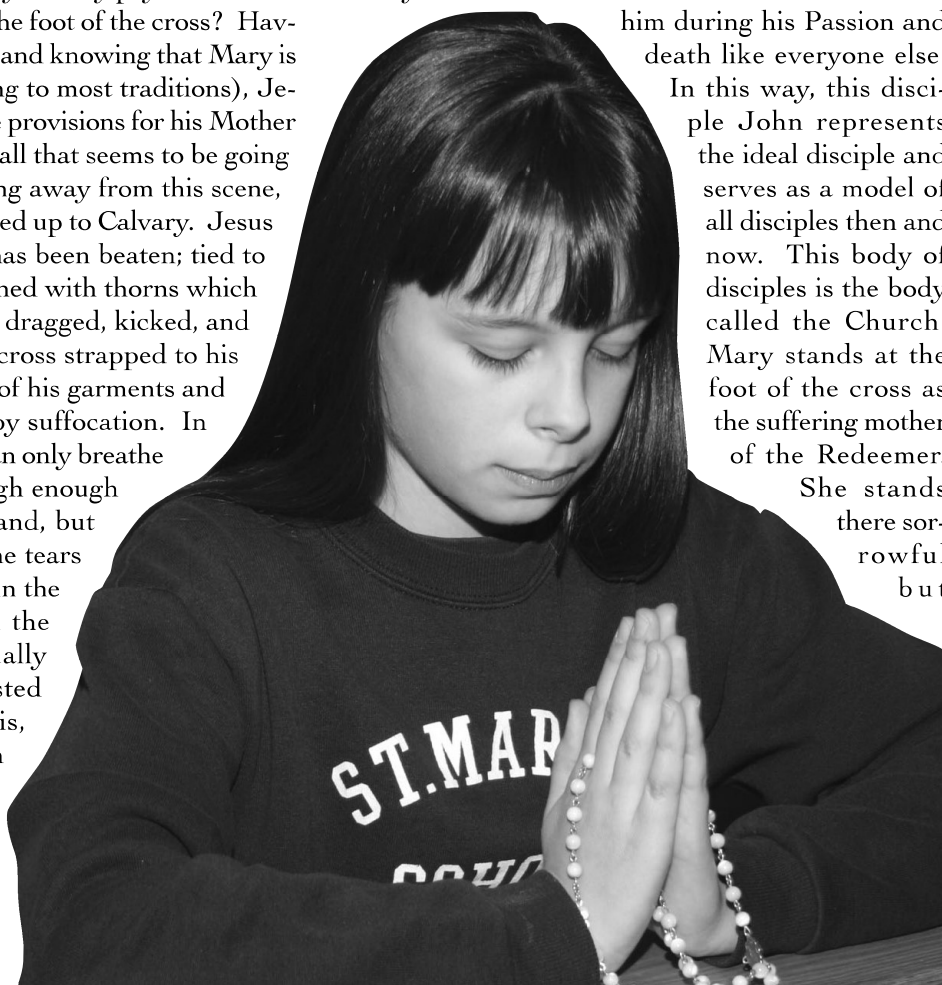
"His words to John are his words also to us, 'Behold, your mother'"

In his agonized state, he uses precious air in order to say, "Woman, behold your son" and to his disciple, "behold your mother." Those who have studied John's Gospel know that what is recorded plainly has deep theological meaning. This disciple standing with Mary is a true disciple; he did not deny

Jesus like Peter or abandon him during his Passion and death like everyone else.

In this way, this disciple John represents the ideal disciple and serves as a model of all disciples then and now. This body of disciples is the body called the Church. Mary stands at the foot of the cross as the suffering mother of the Redeemer.

She stands there sorrowful but



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resolved, having already accepted her role in God's redemptive plan. By giving her to the Church, represented by his disciple John, Jesus reveals his desire and the plan of God the Father to make Mary mother of the Church and our mother in the order of grace.

Mary accepted her role as our mother when she gave consent to the angel's greeting. Let us consider her words in Scripture to understand her role in God's plan and to develop according to his will the relationship he desires us to have with our mother in Heaven.

Mary's Words in Scripture

"How shall this be, since I have no husband?"
~ Lk 1:34

Mary's response to the angel Gabriel's announcement that she would conceive a son is not one of doubt, but rather of readiness to obey the will of God. Mary fully believed Gabriel, yet wished to know how she would conceive a son without a husband.

"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." ~ Lk 1:38

Mary's response to the angel's message is not passive. Rather, it is the active acceptance and choosing of God's will. Mary desired whatever God wanted with all her heart. It was at this moment that the Word of God became flesh in her womb. And it was at this moment that she accepted her motherhood to all Christians as mother in the order of grace.

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior; for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm, he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich



Saints from Predella, detail of the Madonna of San Domenico, by Fra Angelico, 1387-1455

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beth, the mother of John the Baptist. In this prayer, Mary recalls the mighty work of the Lord in her, the Incarnation, and how this work is the fulfillment of God's promise to Israel to save them from slavery to sin.

"Do whatever he tells you." ~ Jn 2:5

The wedding feast at Cana is the site of Jesus' first miracle. When the wine had run out, Mary told Jesus the problem. She then turns to the servants and instructs them with these words. Mary knew that her Son would answer her request, which he did. Jesus performed this miracle, the beginning of his work, at Mary's request, thus showing the importance and value of her intercession. Her words, "do whatever he tells you" are for all of us when we ask Jesus for help.

These few passages from Scripture express her motherhood in and through her discipleship to Jesus. She is always ready to do God's will. God's plan has placed her as Queen over all things. It is through her intercession, expressed in a mother's love for her children, that the grace and gifts of salvation are brought to us. We cannot afford to be without her help, and so we are invited like John at the cross, to take her into our home. Such love and devotion for her is pleasing to the Father and in no way detracts from our love for Jesus. Part of taking on the image of Christ is taking on the same love that he has for his Mother and accepting her as our mother as he once accepted her as his Mother.

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he has sent empty away. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity forever." ~ Lk 1:46-55; emphasis added

This song of rejoicing recorded in Scripture is known as the "Magnificat" from the words of the first phrase in Latin *Magnificat anima mea*. Mary sang this Cantic when she visited her cousin Eliza-