

Seeing it Through

January 1, 2021, The Solemnity of Mary, The Holy Mother of God

Gospel of Luke 2:16-21

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Mary appears only for a few brief episodes in Scripture - - at the Annunciation with the Angel Gabriel, at the Visitation with Elizabeth, at the Birth of Jesus, and then at the Presentation and at the temple. Beyond that she recedes into the background. Oh yes, and she gave Jesus instruction at the wedding at Cana, in a way inaugurating his public ministry and then, not appearing significantly until the end of Jesus earthly life at the cross.

Knowing His divine secret, Mary is always pondering as she watches Jesus, year by year, wondering what it all means and where it will all lead.

She sees Him grow and bond with Joseph as he learns the carpentry trade. But, when Jesus turns 30, Jesus leaves a stable job and, rather than move on training as a rabbi (which would seem to be a natural step) he moves in circles of people in the streets, and begins hanging out with fishermen who are rather rough around the edges.

Eventually the neighbours start to gossip about Him and his followers, and He is beginning to upset people, especially the religious authorities. As a mother, Mary must have gone through much turmoil and confusion to watch as Jesus moved in a direction that seemed at odds with the synagogue leaders and the long established ways of doing things. He definitely was rocking the boat.

Though she had the grace of having seen the angels and knew God's presence and love first hand, she must have suffered as a human mother at simply not knowing how it would all end. She quietly pondered all that was happening.

How do we ponder? As human beings, we are all wired to solve problems - - drawn to the security of having an answer.

Yet Mary's call was not to be a problem solver or to have answers. She was one who 'pondered patiently' and who 'kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart'. We can all learn from this.

How often do parents step in to solve their children's problems? Mary did not try to solve Jesus' 'problems'.

But she was called to be a PRESENCE. God placed her there. Perhaps 99% of mothering and nurturing is to just SHOW UP.

As parents, counsellors, teachers, spiritual directors, we are not called to fix or resolve the hardships of others. God continues to be the healer through the Holy Spirit. But our presence as support, accompanier is fundamentally important since we bring the presence of Christ.

There is a saying, 'Don't just do something, stand there.' In our most painful times, there is often nothing we can do other than be present or available to the person who is hurting.

The motherhood of presence is very much the presence of God in the world.

Mary, in her submission to God, personifies that for the whole world.

So don't be afraid to stand there and ponder all that is in your heart.

Remember, the Blessed Mother is a resource in prayer

She is our Mother; the first disciple; the first member of the Church.

And as we enter a new year, we also ponder the fact that we have been through a very difficult year, one like no other in our lives. Perhaps we can ponder a few questions as we transition into 2021.

Has this past year, overrun by a pandemic, been a time that has been an opportunity to make a permanent shift in our lives that will ultimately be life giving? Along with all the challenges of self distancing , masks, uncertainty, death and sufferings, unemployment, isolation and loneliness, further grappling with the reality of racism, political and ideological polarization, - - have we been able to ponder and name unhealthy aspects of our pre-pandemic lives that can be pruned out so that we can better focus on what is truly important in life? What is reasonable for us to ponder as we begin a new year?

Have we learned, for example, to embrace the unknown in trust; can we let go of the past gracefully? Have we, like Mary, been able to refrain from impulsive reactions, pushing the panic button, holding on to resentment, indulging our fears?

Have we discovered that we can nurture relationships beyond physically being together in the same room? Have we discovered that we don't have to travel the world in order to live a good life? Have we slowed our lives down enough to ponder what is truly important as Mary did in hers?

Perhaps we can also remember that, to ignore Mary's motherly concern for us, is to ignore one of God's great gifts to us.

Remember, this new year is also God's gift to us. What we do with this year is our gift to God.

Mary's example inspires us to see this pandemic through and all of the hardships that have gone with it. We had no way of knowing 2020 would turn out the way it did. We have no way of knowing exactly how 2021 will turn out, but we have hope.

As we celebrate this Eucharist in thanksgiving, we ponder the gift of Mary's concern for us, who are her children, brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus her Son.

It was through her that we as human beings were found worthy to receive the author of life.

She said yes to God's unfathomable invitation and stayed true to that yes, in spite of all else. She saw it through to the end, all for the glory of the God in whom she trusted and gave herself over too. And humanity has benefitted ever since.

We can each follow that example in our own way.

May Mary lead us to her Son, may she inspire us in our concern for others, and may Mary, the Mother of God, protect us now and at the hour of our death. Amen