

### **Session III**

#### **Mary, Christ and Transformation**

**Opening Prayer:** To be given by the Priest or leader

**Faith-Sharing focus:**

This session is about understanding the Eucharist by examining Mary's relationship with the Real Presence of Christ as it was known to her.

**Sharing:** Time allowed: 10 minutes

*“If we wish to rediscover in all its richness the profound relationship between the Church and the Eucharist, we cannot neglect Mary, Mother and model of the Church.... The Church, which looks to Mary as a model, is also called to imitate her in her relationship with this most holy mystery.”<sup>1</sup>*

We are called to imitate Mary and her relationship with the Eucharist. What was her relationship with the Eucharist? In considering this issue, keep in mind that the Eucharist is Christ.

#### **1. God found Mary to be an acceptable dwelling place for Christ.**

“Hail favored one! The Lord is with you. But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.”(Luke 1:28-30).

Mary, our beloved Mother, was the first to experience Christ with and within her. God chose Mary to be the first earthly dwelling for his precious Son. God was very particular about dwelling places. We see in the Old Testament the rigorous specifications he gave the Israelites for building the ark of the covenant (Exodus 25). Mary is referred to as “the ark of the covenant” because she carried within her Jesus, the new and everlasting covenant. What was there about Mary that God liked so much?

Mary was a perfect dwelling place for Christ- pure and free from the stain of original sin. Her nature was as compatible to Christ's nature as any human's could be. Although born without sin, she did have free will and could have chosen not to do the will of God in all of her daily activities. Yet we know that the Lord found favor with her, so we believe that she must have made some good choices prior to the Annunciation. We know by Gabriel's greeting that the Lord was already with Mary even though she had not

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<sup>1</sup> Iohannes Paulus PP. II, Ecclesia de Eucharista, 2003 04 17, Par. 53.

yet conceived.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the spirit of the Father was with her before he sent His complete Presence, body, blood, soul and divinity, to dwell within her.

What did the Father like about Mary? Although the Bible does not come out and say it, we draw the answer from Mary herself. She was humble. She was respectful. She was contemplative and spent time in prayer with God. She had a relationship with Him. She had been educated in scripture and had an understanding of her faith. We know this from the Magnificat which is in large part a compilation of scripture verses. (Luke 1:46-55). Her canticle shows that she was very aware of God's tremendous power and she knew that he kept the promises he made. She expressed love, reverence and complete trust in her God. God longed to hear those words. How happy he must have been that day! Mary indeed found favor with God, and her name has been blessed through all the ages.<sup>3</sup>

Mary continued to grow as one of Christ's disciples. After the resurrection, she was waiting in the upper room with the other women and disciples, deep in prayer. "All these were *constantly* devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers." (Acts 1:14). She could have thrown in the towel after watching the cruel torture and crucifixion of her Son. She could have looked back sarcastically at her then seemingly naïve words when she said her name would be "blessed." She could have become bitter and turned away from God. She did not. She remained constant in her faith and prayers. She persevered throughout all of the hardships. She proved herself a worthy, stable, dwelling place for Christ throughout her life.

When we receive Christ in the form of the Eucharist, we become His new dwelling place. He and the Father come to live with us. Do we provide a worthy, stable, loving home for Christ?

## **2. Mary was given a choice to receive and accept Christ:**

"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord.  
May it be done to me according to your word."<sup>4</sup>

God let Mary chose whether she would receive Christ. He had chosen her for this special task before she was born. He preserved her from original sin so that she would be suited for the role she was to play. He knew what he would ask of her even if she did not. Nevertheless, he "asked." He gave her the choice to receive Christ. He allowed her to say "Yes" or "No." She said "Yes" to Christ. Notice that in the Annunciation dialogue, the Angel Gabriel made no promises to her. He did not say that she would be blessed. It was Mary who concluded in the next few paragraphs that her acceptance of God's will would make her blessed. Gabriel simply relayed the request without promises. She, in

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<sup>2</sup>(Note the difference in tense: The Lord *is* with you. vs. "Behold, you *will conceive*...The holy Spirit *will come* upon you and the power of the Most High *will overshadow* you." Luke 1:26-35.

<sup>3</sup> It is interesting to note that Mary is revered in both the Christian and Islam religions.

<sup>4</sup> Luke 1:38

turn, gave her “Yes” without conditions. She knew from her intimate relationship with God of his greatness and His mercy. She knew she could trust Him.

Mary made it possible for God to extend that same choice to us every time we receive communion. First, we can choose to believe. Second, we can choose to follow. Third, we can choose to receive Christ into our body and into our lives. Finally, we can choose to say “Yes” when Christ asks us to take Him with us out the doors of the church and into the world. He gives us all of these choices. Mary chose to do all of them. How about you? Someone is keeping track of your choices, even if you are not.

When God asks us to choose “for Christ,” he also asks us to sacrifice those things that keep us from Christ and from being more Christ-like. Mary’s “Yes” implicated sacrifice for her. When she gave her “yes,” it meant that she would likely lose her fiancé and everything she had been dreaming about. Joseph would surely divorce her. Yet she said “Yes.” God asked her to accept Christ into her life and make room for Him. He asked her to nurture Him and let Him grow within her and with her. To do that properly, she would have to focus on Christ. It is one thing to invite Christ into our home. If we do not make room for him, feed him, care for him and love him, how long will he stay? Will he remain in a home with no love? Will he remain in a home with no forgiveness? How long will he stay in a home filled with hatred, jealousy and bitterness? Christ’s love for us was unconditional and sacrificial. Mary’s love for Christ was unconditional and sacrificial. Our love for Christ must also be not just unconditional but also sacrificial. We must give up those things that prevent us from being an acceptable dwelling place for Christ.

### **3. Mary allowed Christ to grow within her and transform her.**

There could be no doubt in Mary’s mind that her “Yes” would bring about a great change in her life. She anticipated difficulty from the start, and it soon came when Joseph was faced with the decision of what to do with a pregnant fiancé. Things did not get easier as they had to travel to Bethlehem in the final weeks of her pregnancy and then had to flee immediately after childbirth to escape Herod. Yet as the child grew within her, as He became an adult and began his ministry, and as He was crucified, so too was Mary undergoing her own transformation. She grew from a young girl to a young mother who guided, nurtured, loved and protected Jesus. She grew into His disciple and then finally, as she stood at the foot of the cross, she was transformed into our Mother. At the same time Christ was transformed from a child to our Savior, Mary was transformed from a teen to the Mother of the Church. He transformed a young, simple, humble virgin into someone with extraordinary strength and grace.

She grew in holiness and came to believe not just in the Father, but also in the Son. At the wedding feast in Cana, “His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." [John 2:5] Her confidence in Him was clear. This mandate came from not only her personal experience and trust in the Father, but also grew from her intimate relationship and trust in her Son. We read no equivocation in this simple order. She

knew His power to transform, perhaps because he had transformed her. She knew that he could transform even the lowliest objects into something special.

We see from the story of the wedding feast that something transformed by Christ is not just ordinary. "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." (Luke 2:10). The wine transformed by Christ was better than what the groom was serving. Christ transformed many people that he encountered during his short ministry on earth. He made the lame walk and the blind see. He cured the sick. In all cases, however, the outward physical transformation was accompanied by an inward transformation of the heart and by faith in his power. The outward sign was merely to show those around who served as witnesses, that Christ had effected a dramatic change in the person. Being transformed by Christ leads to extra-ordinary results.

#### **4. Mary was part of the complete plan for our salvation and still is:**

God used simple elements to perform his work. Mary was a simple woman. Jesus came as a simple, humble, man-- the son of a carpenter. Bread is the simplest form of food and one of the most basic food groups. He used the simplest tools to work the greatest miracles. Through Mary, God provided our Savior. Through Jesus, He provided the means of our redemption. Through the bread, he provided, once again, our Savior and eternal life. Just as he worked through Moses to bring Pharaoh to his knees, God chooses to use the simplest of tools so that we might know that the wonders accomplished are because of Him and Him alone.

God had a plan for Mary. He has a plan for each of us. As evidence, we see that God prepared Mary specifically and perfectly for the role she was to fulfill long before the Angel Gabriel was to advise her of her mission to bring Christ into the world. He preserved her from original sin. He placed her in a religiously devote family that would help keep her on the path to holiness. He gave her strength and courage. He gave her the gift of faith, and she accepted it and nurtured it. He introduced her to Joseph, a man from the line of David. When she said "Yes" to God, all the pieces of that part of God's plan came together.

Just as he prepared Mary perfectly for her role in life, he also prepares each of us for the life he would like us to lead. He prepares us for whatever we may encounter, but makes no promises that we will not face difficulties. Most assuredly we will. The only promise he makes is that He will be with us always until the end of the ages. He keeps that promise through the Eucharist. If he can transform bread into his body and wine into his blood, what can he do with you?

### **Sharing Questions:**

1. What one thing could you change about yourself that would make you a more acceptable dwelling place for Christ?
2. Discuss whether the following would be or have been helpful in your efforts to transform your life and why:
  - Taking a bible study course or joining a faith sharing group.
  - Setting aside regular time to pray and be with God.
  - Signing up to help with a ministry at your parish.
  - Socializing with others who also love Christ and are trying to live Christ-like lives.
  - Making an agreement with yourself to try to talk to at least one person a week about God.
- 3.. Do you say “Yes” to God without conditions? Have you tried to bargain with God in the past? If so, how did it work out? Name one thing that you could sacrifice this week that would bring you closer to Christ.
4. If you were to live a truly Christ-like life, how do you think your life would be different? How would your family’s life be different? If your spouse or those you work with lived Christ-like lives, how would your life be different? Have you done anything to share your love for Christ with them? What was the reaction to your effort?
5. Assuming there is an overall plan for salvation and you are to play a part in it, what part are you playing (other than the person who needs to be saved!) What talents and gifts do you have that can be used to spread the gospel and bring Christ to the world? (Example: a person who loves the elderly might take the Eucharist to shut-ins and share their faith for a few minutes a week. A person who is a good letter writer and interested in social justice might engage in activities designed to educate politicians on moral and ethical issues. A person who likes children might teach CCD on Sunday and teach our youth how to share their faith with the schoolmates and parents (who may or may not attend mass on Sunday...)). Everyone is commissioned by Christ to take Him and His message into the world. Assess your strengths and gifts and decide one way that you might be able to participate in the essential mission of the Church: evangelization.

**Scripture Passage:**

*I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God--what is good and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. [Rom 12:1-5]*

**Silent Reflection:**

What does the scripture reading tell us about whether we should be transformed by the world in which we live and about how our own personal transformation might affect the world?

**Closing Prayer:** A prayer can be led by the Priest or group leader.

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