

Holy Mother of God

Preached January 1, 2020

I suppose many of you are familiar with the song “Mary, did you know?”

To tell the truth, I have never really liked it because apart from anything else, Mary really did know, more than we can imagine. She was not a clueless teenage girl.

In truth, conceived without sin, Mary possessed a depth of understanding far beyond any other human being who ever was or will be. No, she did not know the details of her child’s future, there things about his mission that she did not yet understand, but she did know that all things were possible for him and she certainly did know that when she kissed her little baby that she kissed the face of God.

On this Solemnity of the Holy Mother of God we would do well to stop in amazement at this knowing relation between Mother and child.

When Mary held her baby in her arms, like any other mother, she knew she was holding the very Son of God, her own Creator. When she gently rocked him, cuddled him, kissed him, smiled at him, spoke lovingly to him, all these deeply instinctive maternal actions became knowing and intentional acts of love of God. By all these little maternal actions she was continually saying not only, “You are my baby and I love you”, but also “You are my God, and I adore and I love you.” The greatest act that any human being can accomplish is to make an act of pure love of God, the more intense the greater. Such were the maternal actions of Mary, far beyond anything we can conceive.

Next, let us take a look at the other side. A mother smiles at her baby and the baby smiles back. Mary smiles at Jesus and Jesus smiles back; God smiles at Mary, and she knows that it is the smile of God.

Nor is the smile of the baby Jesus just an instinctive smile, like the smile of any baby. The smile of the baby Jesus is also a truly knowing smile.

We enter this world in ignorance and must learn everything (and also how to express what we know) from scratch. Jesus also learned this way. In his case, learning in this human fashion gave him the tools, we could say, to express the fulness of knowledge that was already hidden deep within his human soul, flowing forth from the vision of his own godhead. He already knew interiorly who he was and why he had come. He knew who his Mother was and why he had made her. He could not yet say any of this in words, because he did not yet possess the power of speech and it was not yet the time for miracles either, but he could express it in his smiles. Indeed, we could well imagine that Mary, looking into the eyes of her baby could see a light of intelligence that gave meaning and purpose to his every gesture.

In a word, when that young Mother held her Son in her arms and looked at him and he at her, like any mother and child, there was an amazing and unique interchange of love and knowledge. There was a whole divine universe that will never be known nor grasped by any angel or saint in heaven.

If we can learn to rejoice in this secret of love and knowledge that exists between Jesus and Mary, we will be delivered from the poison of envy that comes from the devil. Further, from that holy interchange of knowledge and love, there comes to us a living ray of light, a flowing fountain of love.

In the first place that light will give us the ability to gaze in wonderment at every baby cradled in his mother's arms. That light will give us the ability to recognize the inestimable dignity of all motherhood. When a mother holds her baby, smiles at him and rejoices to see the baby smile back, even though unawares, she has become a living reflection of Mary, in relation to Jesus.

There is, however, an even greater possibility here. Mothers, after your baby is baptized, when you cradle that child in your arms, the life of Jesus is in him, for that is the gift, the life of grace, that he received in his baptism. So, all the maternal love you bestow on that baby is bestowed also on Jesus; the more you do that consciously, the more you love Jesus in loving your baby. You enter into that sweet interchange between Jesus and Mary.

Does this seem strange or surprising? Remember Jesus' own words: *Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.* (Mt 25:40)

Of course, you fathers hold your babies to, but you didn't carry that baby in your womb and you can't nurse that baby at your breast. Like St. Joseph, you must place yourself at the service of mother and child, humbly recognizing and admiring something that you will never be able to understand from the inside.

Yet, there is another important lesson from Jesus that we need to apply here. He said: *Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.* (Mt 16:25)

This was realized in the life of Mary, with her Son, who was her very life. She gave him up on the Cross; in union with Jesus' own self-offering, she offered him for us and to us. In this way she even became the 'co-redemptrix', uniquely sharing, in subordinate fashion, in her Son's work of redemption. In this way, she also became our Mother, in the order of grace. She then found Jesus again in the resurrection so as to possess him forever in heaven.

At the foot of the Cross, Mary once again sheds light on the vocation of motherhood. A woman must bear, give birth to, and nurture her child, for his own sake, for her husband, for the world, for God. In the measure that a mother wants her son exclusively for herself, she destroys both her son and herself. Only by freely giving her son, will she be able to find him in eternity.

A final note. Mary sums up in her own person the life of the whole Church. In the life of the Church, we can find the written word of God, the Bible; this comes to us from sacred Tradition, as from a mother. Sacred Tradition itself has two principle sources, the Twelve Apostles, the chief of whom is St. Peter, and the Holy Mother of God, the Immaculate Virgin Mary. The Tradition from the Apostles gives to us the basic message; the Tradition from Mary gives us the depth of wisdom.

If we cut ourselves off from Tradition means we cut ourselves off from the Wisdom of God; if anyone separates himself from Mary, he will separate himself from Tradition; one who separates himself from Tradition will separate himself from Mary.

Finally, without Mary, there is no man, Jesus Christ. After Jesus came into this world through Mary, God did not just discard her, as though her task was complete; no, Jesus continues to come to us through Mary, and we need to go to him through Mary. In that we, we will begin to take part in that wonderful secret of love and knowledge that belongs to Jesus and Mary.