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TO JESUS THROUGH MARY

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Women in the Bible

The final poem of the Book of Proverb begins: 'Who shall find a valiant woman'? The answer? Anyone who opens the Old Testament! This valiant woman is found in all kinds of occupations, functioning in a variety of roles, some expected, some surprising. Women appear in as many different kinds of roles as men do, even though they may not be the same roles. Women often appear together and there is a bond between women, and their lives are woven together. Women play a significant role in the story of all periods from the primeval stories of creation through the patriarchal stories into and out of the land, into and out of exile. They function as the image of God very truly. Women appear as religious leaders in the Old Testament. At the crossing of the Sea of Reeds, the central event of Israel's history, the prophet Miriam leads the song of praise: "Sing to the Lord who is gloriously triumphant; horse and chariot God has cast into the sea" (Exo 15:21). The preceding song, which has the same refrain, is sung by Moses and the Israelites (Exo 15:1). It is Miriam, however, who is identified as the leader of the song. Miriam continues in a leadership role in the wilderness community.

A few centuries later, during the period of the judges, Deborah appears as prophet and judge (Judg 4:4). The judges of that period functioned both as religious and political leaders. Their primary task was often to free the people from enemies by military means. At the time of Deborah, the people were being oppressed by Jabin, king of Hazor. Deborah called Barak and appointed him Army General to attack Sisera, Jabin's General. Barak, however, refused to go without Deborah. Deborah not only went along; she decided the time and place of attack. Deborah thus fills the role of judge in much the same way that Jephthah and Gideon do.

The women in the Old Testament have rich stories that are vital to the on-going revelation of God's relationship with the covenant people. Here, readers meet mothers and wives, queens and slaves, prophets and warriors, powerful women and victims; women whose stories offer us courage and insight. Another role in which we find women of the Old Testament is the role of the hero saviour. Esther, another queen, saves her people from genocide. She risks her life in approaching the king without being summoned. The tables are turned, and the enemies suffer what they had planned to inflict on the Jews. As Esther's uncle Mordecai told her, "Perhaps it was for this very reason that you were made queen-to save your people" (Esther). Here we have women who deliver the people through courage and wit.

Women in general in the social and religious life of Israel and the New Testament church participated alongside men in feasts and public worship. "They weren't required to be veiled or silent in the public square... Mothers shared teaching responsibilities and authorities over their children. Women could even be landowners in Israel. In fact, wives were expected to administer many of the affairs of their own households".

At the heart of it all... we must look to the Bible to find our true femininity not feminism. We find that the "Scripture never discounts the female intellect, downplays the talents and abilities of women, or discourages the right use of women's spiritual gifts. But whenever the Bible expressly talks about the marks of an excellent woman, the stress is always on feminine virtue. The most significant women in scripture were influential not because of their careers, but because of their character. The message these women collectively gives us is not about gender equality; it's about true feminine excellence, and is always exemplified in moral and spiritual qualities rather than social standing, wealth or physical appearance". In short, it's not about what we can do... because by the grace of God we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us right?! (Phil. 4:13) but it's about who God says we are and at the heart, our character which is of great worth in God's sight.

Woman is an integral part of humanity, and if humanity is to be purified and Christianized to a far greater extent, it is imperative to have an enlightened, spiritual womanhood. May God increase the number of Christian women through whom He can draw a sin-cursed, war-weary earth nearer to Himself!

Jesus' interactions with women are an important element in the theological debate about Christianity and women. Women are prominent in the story of Jesus. He was born of a woman, had numerous interactions with women, and was seen first by women after his Resurrection. He commissioned the women to go and tell his disciples that he is risen, which is the essential message of Christianity.

As we contemplate a few valiant women and their specific role in the life of the Israelites let us draw inspiration to our life so as to become the true image of God. We need to go a long way to understand their unique role and generous association with Christian faith and the mission of the church today.

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Symbolism of Sarah and Mary

Lesieux cmc

Introduction

Sruthi, a childless spouse used to ask me to pray for the couple so that God may provide children for them. I learned many things from her as she shared her feelings and experiences at various occasions. The initial stages of the family life as she narrated was full of love and enthusiasm and as days went on struggles started as they realized that Sruthi is unable to conceive a child. Sadness and shame haunted her from her family and neighbors. As usual, often people questioned Sruthi for her barren state. After long years of interval when I met her she was carrying a child in her arms with full delight and enthusiasm saying: It is through Mother Mary's intercession we received a girl. Every now and then we also turn to mother Mary and intercede to her for receiving God's blessings as a child turns to mother to fulfill his/her wishes. Mother Mary is prefigured in the Old Testament in and through different personalities especially in the women figures of the Old Testament. Mary is often called the *Daughter of Zion*, the fulfillment and expectations of the people of Israel. In this article my attempt is to make out how *Mary*, as the example of faith and freedom is personified in the OT figure *Sarah*.

The Story of Abraham and Sarah



The story of Abraham and Sarah is found in the Book of Genesis in the context of a family decided to settle in a different place after they had shattered and were looking for sheltering reassuring peace and serenity in their life. Their journey is described as follows: *Terah took Abram his son and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife, and they went forth together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canan; but when they came to Haran, they settled there* (Gen 11:31). After the death of Terah, the Lord God intervened in the life of Abram and Sarai asking them to leave their country to the promised land of Canaan. Under the promise of God their life was revised into a life of journeying with God.

Sarah's original name was Sarai. When God changed Abraham's name, the name of Sarai was also changed into Sarah. The name Sarah comes from the word Sar which means rule or lead. Sarah is the feminine form of Sar and it means princess. The change of name means that Sarah was part of the covenant that God made with Abraham¹. She also is being

¹ Michael Karimattam, *Women in the Old Testament*, Media House, Delhi, 2012, 49.

elected by God to be a blessing to others and all the families of the earth shall be blessed through them. Sarai is seen as the first woman in the salvation history which starts with the promise of God through Abraham and his descendents through his son in Jesus Christ. In that context the symbolism of Sarah and Blessed virgin Mary is very important in the redemptive mystery of Christ.

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The Qualities of a Woman in Sarah

The first thing we learn from Sarah is that she was faithful to Abraham, ready to go with him, renouncing all she had to be a real life. She was found everywhere with Abraham her husband accompanying him faithfully. The Bible gives no evidence of any protest from Sarah all through the long years they lived, and travelled together. She lived in total submission to her husband Abraham who loved her tenderly.²

Sarah the devoted wife of Abraham is described not simply as submissive and

beautiful but also courageous. She is very brave because she gave her consent to go with Abraham to a place unknown to them. As we read from the Book of Genesis, because of famine they decided to go to Egypt. Life in Egypt was not easy, it gave them insecurity and fear of death. Her beauty became a threat to Abraham as the Pharaoh and the others attracted to her. Sarah proved her wisdom and prudence in saving her husband from Pharaoh and Egyptians. She supported her husband even risking her life.

According to the patriarchal custom, men were the head of the family and responsible for taking the decisions. But in the case of Sarah and Abraham they treated each other always with respect, mutual love, concern and understanding. *They cared for each other. A strong bond of love existed between Abraham and Sarah, and Sarah was free within that relationship to urge, to complain, to initiate and even to insist that her husband take a specific course of action.*³

Breaking Moments

As in the case of most families Abraham and Sarah had to undergo certain ordeals in their life. Sarah remained barren woman for a long time. As years passed, desiring for a child Sarah advised Abraham to bring children through Hagar, their Egyptian maid servant. When Hagar was conceived and brought forth Ishmael she became arrogant and proud which forced her to disobey Sarah her mistress.

² Ibid, 50.

³ Sue & Larry, Richards; Every Woman in the Bible, Nashville, 1999, 28.

Ignoring or forgetting one's real state of life can be seen as a social or a familial evil in the context of a family or a community. According to the order Sarah the first wife, the chosen one had to be honoured in the family circle. This first preference cannot be substituted by anyone in the family circles. Hagar on the other hand was trying to overpower what she had been lost by her status or by the human concern. This resulted in a family problem striking the unity of the family. Hagar launched a crisis putting her down and jealousy and anger pervaded Sarah. She sent her away during her pregnancy period, a cruel action taken by Sarah. Hagar came back through God's intervention accepting her real position in the family. Again after some years Sarah found her son Isaac ill treated by Ishmael the child of Hagar and immediately took an action and by force sent her maid out of the house. In a way, she was trying to uphold the promise of God to Abraham through Isaac. But God maintains the dignity of every person. Immediately after this incident God intervened in the life of Hagar and her son and saved them from the troubles. God has a purpose for each human being.

Woman Icon of God's Mercy and Love

The story of Sarah and Hagar tells us that God is merciful and His mercy never ends. They were supposed to be the icons of mercy and love. Both women failed to a certain extent to be merciful to each other in their relation to God as well as in the family atmosphere. Sarah's infertility is a symbol of human fragility. Fertility is the gift of God. With the grace of God, the

infertile surpasses the fertile one by which everyone has to realize that God's plans are beyond our human understanding. Sarah embodied in herself God's mercy and love but failed to share this gift to others. Mother Mary on the other hand, recognizes this particular demeanor of God in her *magnificat* saying: *And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation* (Lk 1: 50).

Mother Mary: Perfect Woman

The promise of God to Abraham and Sarah fulfilled in Mother Mary as she became the mother of Jesus Christ. Blessed Virgin Mary is the model for true relationship with God and she is the perfect model also for how to bring up children on the path of doing the will of God, a real model for virginity and motherhood. Sarah prefigured Mary in many ways at but qualitatively in a different manner: 1. Sarah was barren and yet through the intervention of God conceived her son at an old age. God intervened in the history of so many other biblical figures in the Old Testament in the same way. What is seen apparently barren becomes fruitful through the intervention of God. Examples are: Leah and Rachel (Gen 30:1-24), Hannah and Peninnah (1 Samuel 1: 2) etc.

Unlike Sarah Blessed Mother goes

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beyond the boundaries even to be a helping hand in the midst of one's own fatigue and weakness. She served her cousin Elizabeth in her necessity.

Sarah laughed hearing the announcement of the birth of Isaac due to the lack of faith in God. Yet God made her laughter positive enabling her to name her son Isaac meaning laughter. For Sarah her joy is related to the birth of her son but for Mary the joy comes directly from her relationship with God and it is related to the eternal joy which brings peace for humankind.

Mary's Magnificat expresses the content of her faith vision. It is this faith vision that brings her joy and exaltation. Mary articulates and sees the connection of human families to the eternal plan of God. "God's mercy is on those who fear God from generation to generation" (Lk 1:50). God shows mercy to the poor and oppressed and those who unconditionally trust him find the real joy.

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For Sarah suffering is a shame and has to be solved by human means. Her faith also was tested and purified when Isaac her beloved son was absent for a while from her scenario being

taken to the mount of Moriah in order to be sacrificed. How she suffered this ordeal is not written. In the New Testament we see the fulfillment of this sacrifice in the person of Jesus and Mary as an active participator in the redemptive mystery of Jesus. Here both mother and Son voluntarily undergo suffering for the rest of the humanity; doing the will of God alone can bring real happiness to us. For Mary suffering is redemptive and through which she shares true joy.

True joy is something different from pleasure: joy grows and continues to mature in suffering in communion with the Cross of Christ. It is here alone that the true joy of faith is born.⁴

Whatever be the life situations God demands a total faith in Him. The resonance of the Word of God in the Old Testament and New Testament is the same. In the Old Testament the message given to Sarah was: Is anything too hard for God? (Gen18:13). In the same way, God's intervention in and through Blessed Virgin Mary reminds us: *Nothing is impossible for God (Lk 1:37). Through her Magnificat she says: He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity forever.* Each woman whether she is virgin or mother is called to be the *witness of the power of the Word of God: Nothing is impossible for God.*

⁴ Joseph Murphy, *Christ Our Joy: The Theological Vision of Pope Benedict XVI*, St. Pauls, Mumbai, 2013, 208-209

Deborah the Prophetess and Mary Mother of Jesus

Surekah BS

Bible has many references and examples of men and women who faced challenges in their lives. For our consideration we shall take the spiritual leadership of Deborah the Prophetess and of Mary the Mother Jesus who offer us foundational and holistic insights for a better world to live in today. Although much has been written about this, yet it is one of the topics that are always new because in every era we need to look at ourselves in the mirror to measure ourselves with Mary and other Biblical personalities. Here we shall carry out our reflections in three steps: Deborah centred on Yahweh to take care of his affairs; Mother Mary centred on God's plan in and through Jesus, and finally, parallels and implications for our Christian life today.

Deborah Centered on Yahweh to Take Care of His Affairs

The book of Judges tells the story of a remarkable woman, a prophetess named Deborah, seated under a palm tree as she judged the Israelites, who were oppressed by the Canaanite king, Jabin. Their vineyard had been destroyed, their women dishonoured and their children slain. Many had turned to the worship of idols. Deborah's story comes in the

first part of the Book of Judges. The story of Deborah shows the surprising way of our God, who does not always use the expected rules of society and culture but often goes another way to perform



the divine work. Though she lived in the time of the "Judges" some thirteen centuries before Christ, there are very few women in history who have ever attained the public dignity and supreme authority of Deborah.¹ She is introduced in the Book of Judges 4:4 thus: "Now Deborah, a woman, a prophetess, a woman of Lappidoth, she judged Israel". Deborah was the wife of Lappidoth. Long before she became a leader she was a home maker. Her house was between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim. It was under one of the palm trees that she would sit and give counsel to the people who came to her (Judges 4:5). Deborah is the only female judge in the Book of Judges. She is the fourth in the series of heroes who rise up after the death of Joshua (Othniel, Left handed Ehud, and Shamgar who killed six hundred Philistines with an ox-goad). In Judges 4:4, Deborah, whose name means "bee"² or

¹She was like Joan of Arc who was considered a heroine of France for her role during the Lancastrian phase of the Hundred Years' War and was canonized as a Roman Catholic saint.

²Deborah means "honeybee". God is raising up women who have the sting of the bee, deadly to the enemy, yet they will speak sweet and compassionate words of wisdom to those who are in need. Deborah was a woman used by God to voice His judgement and His prophecy and to spark one of the greatest revivals in history. Michelle McClain-Walters, *The Deborah Anointing: Embracing the Call to Be a Woman of Wisdom and Discernment* (Lake Mary, Florida: Charisma House, 2015), 6-7.

“hornet,” is called 'iššâ nēbî 'â, “a woman, a Prophet”.³

Consequently, Deborah's leadership in the community comes at a crucial time in the history of Israel (Judges 4:4–7). In all of her roles – first that of counsellor to her people, next as judge in their disputes, and finally as deliverer in time of war. She was indeed a mother to Israel. She held a great leadership role, because she trusted in God. Deborah rises to denounce the lack of leadership that was prevailing in Israel and to affirm that deliverance from oppression was at hand. Her religious zeal and patriotic fervor armed her with new strength. She became the magnificent personification of the free spirit of the people of Israel. We can imagine Deborah as a woman with fire in her eyes, determination in her step, and a positive ring to her voice. She never had the ambition to push herself forward, Deborah personified more the homemaker in Israel than a warrior. But as she counselled her people and began to sense their common danger, she enkindled in them an enthusiasm for immediate action against the enemy. She had the courage to summon one of the Israel's most capable military men, Barak.

Consequently, she felt a deep love for the people of Israel, which she demonstrated as she sat under the palm tree patiently mediating disputes and bringing order and justice into the lives of people that were miserably oppressed by the cruel government of her time. She

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confronts the powers of darkness with the power of God, liberating thousands of people around the world, She becomes the voice for the voiceless. She pioneers a movement among women that would empower the next generation to fulfil their destinies in every area of life. With Barak as the General of the Army, she in the name of the God of Israel goes ahead courageously. Together they worked out a plan of action against their enemy. As a judge, Deborah sits under a palm tree and exercises judgment, settles disputes and dispenses justice to the people. As a prophetess, she is the messenger of God, who mediates God's word to the people. Her ability to persevere against all odds as well as her prophetic insight and powerful protection was motivated by a mother's love, for legacy seems to be the focus. (Judges 4:5-6, 14; 5:7-9).

Drawing her confidence from her relationship with God, Deborah ventures into

³ Joy A.Schroeder, *Deborah's Daughters: Gender Politics and Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 1.

her goal - and she leads the people into war. God gives her the strategies for the battle with Sisera. Her glorious victory is best recorded in the concluding but meaningful lines of her Bible biography: "and the land had rest forty years" (Judges 5:31). She gives us an example of consistency of character, love for people and sound judgment in her roles as prophetess and judge. Although she comes across as a counsellor in time of peace, yet her greatest service comes in time of war.

Mother Mary Centred on God's Plan in and through Jesus

At the dawn of the first century, Palestine, the Jewish homeland, was part of the Roman Empire. Rome had imposed a puppet king, Herod, to rule over the Jews, but he was haunted by the prophecy of the coming of a Messiah. Many Jews rebelled against their occupation, but the Roman army put down any resistance with extreme brutality. One of the truly great women of the Bible is Mary, the mother of Jesus. She would have seen the Roman army coming into Galilee to put down these revolts, and the atrocities associated with the armies. She was a woman of faith, courage, humility, praise, and prayer. Besides, she was a good mother, and an exemplary disciple of Christ. Mary teaches us that true greatness comes from placing your life in God's hands and doing whatever He calls you to do.

Mother Mary is many things to many people. Mary is the model of 'perfect womanhood' as she is taken to be "the full revelation of all that is included in the biblical

word 'woman'" (Apostolic Letter, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no.11). Mary is presented as the archetype and a role model to all. While Mary's faith response to God freed her to become a woman led by the Spirit, consecrated women tend to be trapped by the hegemonic codes of religion particularly in its gendered underpinnings that make them uncritically submissive to patriarchal authority figures (Lk 1:38). She accepted the task that God assigned her in spite of its difficulty, and she lived with humility and great faith, even in becoming a disciple of her son, the Christ. St Paul's letter to Galatians (chapter 4:4-5) gives historical validity of Mary's role in the plan of God: "When the fulness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who are under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children".

Mary is seen as a prominent figure by the Evangelists. She is presented with twofold a role: One, that of an intercessor at the wedding at Cana (Jn2:1-11) and the other, a suffering woman at the foot of the cross of Jesus (Jn 19:25-27). It is at the foot of the Cross that she becomes the mother of the entire humanity. Therefore, Mary being the mother of Jesus has played a specific role in the redemptive plan of God. It was her deep faith and trust in Yahweh that enthused her with added courage and freedom to allow herself to be led by God.

Moreover, Mary is the woman given to us by God, through the miracle of the Holy Spirit, to be the Mother of Jesus, our Redeemer. Jesus, from the cross of salvation, gave us his Mother

Mary to be our heavenly Mother here on earth. The Scripture says, "Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved; he said to his mother, 'Woman, behold, your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother'" (Jn 19:26-27). Nonetheless, we believe that Jesus gave Mary the mission to be the Mother of the Church. All generations and races acknowledge and respect this exceptional woman of faith. We can turn to her in both good and difficult moments of our lives. She is ready and willing at every moment to be our perpetual help. Therefore, if there was ever an example of being an active participant in God's work, Mary is the epitome of it.

Furthermore, Mary is portrayed as a woman on the run, a person who repeatedly encountered uncertainty, insecurity and chaos. She experienced the agony of fleeing her homeland in order to protect her child from the life-threatening realities of her time. The revolutionary cry of Mary, the Magnificat, which brings out her liminality forcefully, becomes a pointer to the emergence of a new world order where power hierarchies are toppled and the lowly, the downtrodden and the subjugated find themselves dignified. Her Magnificat is a source of liberation for those who are marginalized and oppressed. The first Book of the Bible (Gen 3:15) and the last book (Rev. 12:1) record Mary's symbolic presence from the beginning to the end of salvation history.

Finally, it is Mary's sensitivity towards the needy and concern for the helpless that makes us ponder and act according to the need of the

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hour. Her sensitivity makes her fully present to the reality, teaching us to be in touch with our own realities and to be aware of our interior movements. She calls us to be attuned to the music of the heart, to show empathy towards the needy and to extend a helping hand to the distressed as she did to her cousin Elizabeth by rushing to greet her, to help her. There were many instances where Mary showed great love and affection to the anawim, the little ones of her time. It is therefore, evident that as a teacher Mother Mary teaches us to be affectionate towards the poor and the needy whom we meet in our daily lives. Mary does it faithfully by accompanying the apostles and all the believers in leading them to the Father through His son Jesus Christ. Mary teaches us to believe in God's providence; whenever He chooses us for something she is a model for us to say, "Let your will be done", i.e. to make a total surrender to participate in God's plan of salvation and future.

Similarities between Mother Mary and Deborah

The following section highlights the similarities between Mother Mary and Deborah and the implications of the role played by these two for Christian life today.

i. Deborah is described in three different ways: first of all as the wife of Lappidoth. Secondly as a prophetess and thirdly, as judge in Israel (Judges 4:4). Mary, the mother of Jesus was a prophetess and poet, the last and greatest along a noble line of women, in whom the finer feminine nature had been kindled into a divine medium of inspiration.

ii. Deborah as Mother of Israel calls her children to walk in the way of the Torah (Judges 5:7). Mary, likewise, exhorts the servants at Cana to do whatever Jesus tells them (Jn 2:1-5).

iii. Deborah is exhorting Israel to glory in the Lord. Water is the symbol or means of victory (Judges 5:9). This is a parallel to Jesus changing the water into wine, thereby manifesting his glory and his disciples believed in him (Jn 2:11).

iv. Deborah is an energetic woman who cooperates actively and decisively with Barak in conducting the war and in achieving, with the help of another woman warrior, Jael, the triumph over the powerful army of Sisera, thus delivering her people from the assault of the Canaanites.⁴ In particular, Deborah directly prefigures Mary as Co-redemptrix with Christ, because Mary cooperates personally and actively with the Redeemer in accomplishing the work of salvation through universal redemption.⁵

With her canticle, the Magnificat, Mary is the greatest prophetess, and in the Church has always been invoked and venerated as “Mother of Mercy”, maternal and omnipotent “Mediatrice” and Advocate, Patroness of all graces to be distributed to her children who, confident of being heard, have recourse to her.

v. Deborah prefigures Mary as prophetess and mother of mercy in a place known as the “palm tree of Deborah”, between Ramah and Bethel, in the land of Ephraim: it is there, in fact, that the children of Israel went when they were in trouble, to obtain grace and justice. With her canticle, the Magnificat, Mary is the greatest prophetess, and in the Church has always been invoked and venerated as “Mother of Mercy”, maternal and omnipotent “Mediatrice” and Advocate, Patroness of all graces to be distributed to her children who, confident of being heard, have recourse to her.

vi. In the victory song, Jael, the wife of Heber, is praised: “Blessed among women be Jael, blessed among tent-dwelling women” (Jg 5:24). We read in Luke the beatitudes bestowed on Mary by Elizabeth (Lk 1:45), by Gabriel in the Annunciation (1:28), and also by the unknown woman in the crowd (Lk 11:27).

⁴P. Raymond L. Burke, et al. *Mariology*, 29-30.

⁵Pietrafesa writes: Deborah cooperated in the liberation of Israel from the oppression of Sisera and of Canaan; Mary cooperated with Christ in the deliverance of the entire human race from the slavery of the Devil, meriting and satisfying with him”. P. Pietrafesa, *La Madonna nella Rivelazione*, (Naples, 1970), 81, as cited by Raymond L. Burke, and Manfred Hauke. *Mariology: a Guide for Priests, Deacons, Seminarians, and Consecrated Persons*. (Goleta, CA: Seat of Wisdom Books, a division of Queenship pub, 2008), 30.

vii. Deborah is seen as Mother of Israel in spirit; Mary is the Mother of all believers represented by the beloved disciple at the foot of the cross (Jn 19:25-27).

viii. There is also the similarity of the Holy Spirit resting upon both Deborah and Mary. Deborah is a remarkable leader who has the gifts of prophecy and wisdom. Her decisions result in victory for Israel at the hands of another courageous woman, Jael. Deborah, in her Canticle (Judg 5) shows total confidence in God and attributes the victory to God's power over the foreign kings. Mary, on the other hand, does not enter into the realm of judging and prophesying, nor is she a leader in time of war. She does display a similar gift of practical wisdom and in her Magnificat Canticle sings of the power of God over Israel's enemies.

Implications for Christian Life today

In the preceding pages we have reflected on the great personalities of Mary, the mother of Jesus and Deborah, the prophetess. The call of God is progressive. He matures the one called gradually into the fullness of His plan. The call of God takes time to develop. These simple but great women of the Bible, invite the people of God to be gripped by sustained God-experience and come across to the people in their mission as loving, compassionate, challenging and as other-centered persons. They are called and are challenged to translate their God experience in their daily encounters

and become authentic witnesses of God's presence.

Are we lacking Seers and Prophets today? What would it mean for us today to become an authentic spiritual woman or man? If Deborah could discern the mind of God and communicate His purposes to others, and if she could stir up Israel to action at a time when the Israelites had grown complacent under the oppression of the Canaanites, why not we the men and women of 21st century?

The vocation and mission of the Blessed Virgin Mary relates to every aspect of our life in Christ, for it is she who brings Christ into the world, through the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, and it is she who, by the work of the Holy Spirit, continues to offer Christ to the world in the Church. Rightly do we invoke her with the title, Mother of Divine Grace. It is the Blessed Virgin Mary who faithfully and lovingly leads us to her divine Son with the maternal counsel, "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:5). She is the Mother of the Redeemer who, when he was consummating the work of our salvation, gave his Mother to the Church to be her Mother always: a human model of Christian discipleship to Jesus for the entire people of God, and at the same time intercedes as a mother in the order of grace for her Son's disciples who seek to respond to the Lord's invitation to Christian holiness with their own personal fiat of Faith.

Feast of the Annunciation

Karen Rodrigues

"Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38), with those words the Virgin Mary placed her trust in God.

The Feast of the Annunciation of the Lord celebrates the angel Gabriel's appearance to the Virgin Mary to announce that she had been chosen by God to bear his son. The Annunciation holds great significance for Christians, it occurs nine months before Christmas and it signals the start of God's plan of salvation. Originally, the Feast of our Lord, but now celebrated as a Marian feast, the feast of the Annunciation was set at March 25.

The birth of Jesus foretold (Luke 1:26-38)

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in

your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord

God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end".

And Mary said to the angel, "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" And the angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore

the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible". And Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word". And the angel departed from her.

The festival celebrates two things

God's action in entering the human world as Jesus in order to save humanity. Humanity's willing acceptance of God's action, in Mary's freely given acceptance of the task of being the Mother of God. When the



angel Gabriel announced that Mary would bear a son, she did not understand how it was possible, yet she believed. She was only 13 or 14; betrothed, but not yet married; and God was asking her to become the Mother of his son. In accepting the announcement of the Archangel Gabriel the Virgin Mary accepts the will of God. The Annunciation is not only about the humility of the Virgin Mary but in this moment, the Son of God emptied himself, taking the form of a servant to be sent down on earth and made in the likeness of man.

the Angelus, and the Magnificat. The angel's greeting to Mary, which is traditionally translated as "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee", (in Latin *Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum*) is the opening of the Ave Maria, and a part of the Rosary prayers. The Angelus consists of three Ave Marias, together with some additional material. It is said three times a day in the Roman Catholic Church. The Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) is the poem with which Mary responds to the Annunciation and celebrates the power of God.

The Annunciation and the liturgy

The story of the Annunciation has produced three important liturgical texts, the Ave Maria,

JOKES

My friend thinks he is smart. He told me an onion is the only food that makes you cry, so I threw a coconut at his face.

A boy asks his father, "Dad, are bugs good to eat?" "That's disgusting. Don't talk about things like that over dinner," the dad replies. After dinner the father asks, "Now, son, what did you want to ask me?" "Oh, nothing," the boy says. "There was a bug in your soup, but now it's gone."

A woman gets on a bus with her baby. The bus driver says, "That's the ugliest baby that I've ever seen. Ugh!" The woman goes to the rear of the bus and sits down, fuming. She says to a man next to her, "The driver just insulted me!" The man says, "You go right up there and tell him off – go ahead, I'll hold your monkey for you."

Sardar on phone: Doctor my wife is pregnant. She is having pain right now.

Doctor: Is this her first child?

Sardar: No this is her husband speaking !!!

Rebecca And Mary: A Paradigm of Tough Spirituality

Anthony Kasper OSM

Can a woman be a woman of toughness? History has recorded the fate of iron-willed women. Ever since the creation of humankind, women are considered to be weaker sex, timid and afraid of even harmless little insects. Women are associated with affects, feelings and emotions. Woman's intelligence is not counted. She is lead by her emotions. She cannot be trusted with taking decisions even for her own life. These social myths have a great role to play in the formation of the society and individual.

Even before they are born, they are categorized, named and framed, and the weight of history and society fall upon their shoulders. The inescapable reality of the gender role ascribed to women, in some cases, lead to them murder. According to Butler, gender is "the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being".¹ The society ascribes the gender roles and responsibilities to men and women. It expects the women to be gentle, caring, pleasant, sweet and etc. It may be surprising, or even objectionable, to address woman as a tough woman! This article attempts to present

two stalwart women namely Rebekah and Mary who stood tough in fulfilling the will of God.

A Tough Name for a Tough Lady



Rebekah: a woman of a tough name. In Bible the meaning of the name Rebekah is: Fat, fattened, a quarrel appeased.² Fat is the symbol of thick and strong skin which denotes a strong personality. However Rebekah is a good blend of gentleness and firmness. As a damsel, that is, a maiden around twenty years of age Rebekah was "fair to look upon", meaning that she had an unaffected Oriental beauty. She had a childlike simplicity. As an amiable and lovely girl, as her name suggests, she was industrious for although she was a member of a family of

As a damsel, that is, a maiden around twenty years of age Rebekah was "fair to look upon", meaning that she had an unaffected Oriental beauty. She had a childlike simplicity. As an amiable and lovely girl, as her name suggests, she was industrious for although she was a member of a family of standing she was not afraid to soil her hands.

¹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 43-44.

² The name "Rebekah" also has got another meaning as "a noosed cord". We opt the meaning of fat in line with the topic.

standing she was not afraid to soil her hands. The hard work of drawing and caring water, the provision she made for Eliezers camels, and the meal she prepared, speak of Rebekah as one who did not shun domestic duties (Gen 24:15-21). This attitude of her hard work reveals sparkling virtues of courage and compassion. That she was a woman of faith is evident from what Paul says of her as being the recipient of a direct revelation from the Lord regarding universal blessing through her favorite Jacob (Romans 9:12).

A Tough Yes

Rebekah's best qualities come out in the simple yet heartwarming narrative describing her response to Eliezer's approach, in her service to him, and in her willingness to believe and act upon all he had told her. In his remarkable cameo of Rebecca, George Matheson uses the following terms and expressions - "a fine manner" - "remarkable tact" - "a sunbeam to her household" - "a very beautiful young woman, with the gift of physical charm which was apt to produce self-consciousness" - "the gift of intellectual sympathy" - "Rebekah's morning ray is a ray of sympathetic insight".³ Faced with instant departure from her dear ones, Rebekah is given her choice - will you go with this man without hesitation, feeling that she too was following the leading of God, as Eliezer had, Rebekah replied in a firm voice, I will go. Rebekah's tough yes to embrace the unknown, to travel in to the unfamiliar place prefigures the total and tough

yes of Mary. Their simple yes contained a series of YES. When we meaningfully say the word "YES" it becomes the power of life, source of strength and it is completely ruled by enigma of love. Truth sees God, and wisdom contemplates God, and of these two comes the third, that is, a marvelous delight in God, which is love.

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Rebekah and Mary were able to say yes wholeheartedly, for their hearts were filled with truth which made them to see God, wisdom which aided them to contemplate God and love which delighted them to stand tough / strong in living out that yes. All those who are tough need not be rough in their personality or in their words. Rebekah and Mary were indeed gentle and mild, yet at the same time tough too, in facing the challenges of life; that toughness was deeply rooted in the faith that they had in the presence and providence of God. For instance, when we comparatively analyze the scene of Eliezer encounter with Rebekah and the proposal to marry Isaac and Mary of Annunciation (Lk 1:26-38), we find these both women had a courage to say yes. This new call

³ Annie Russel Marbel, *Women of the Bible* (London: The Centurion Co, 1989), 132.

might have been disturbing and alarming and unbelievable to them as they were young. At the end they both said, “Yes” to the messengers. Though the word “yes” is a very small word with three letters, it contains a great sea of meaning and significance. It is not a 'yes' just to undergo great inconveniences in fulfilling God's plan of salvation, but it is a deliberate and determined yes,⁴ to meet the unknown, to begin a new life, to bid farewell to the life as a young girl and to be the wife and the mother, to be stone to death (in the case of Mary) a courageous 'yes' to God!

Did Rebekah say 'yes' in a mood of great excitement? Or is in a sort of trance where she did not know what she uttered? Some time when we are highly excited we don't realize what we speak! Does Rebekah behave that way? No... It is not that she is so carried away by seeing the messenger and the gifts offered by him and forgets herself totally. Rebekah who is described as modest and meek, frank and open with, ready kindness, great energy and faith, graciousness matching her physical charm in a profound sense readily agreed to take up the challenges inherent in this yes. Women can think and then speak, not the other way about, as they are usually projected to be. Hence their 'yes' is neither out of an ignorance, nor out of a sense of indescribable ecstasy. It is a conscious yes and which is fully aware of the consequences of it, in their time and their society.

Mary is not ignorant of the dire consequences of an unmarried woman

begetting a child; she knows she would be stoned to death. As we learn from her Magnificat (Lk 1:46-55), she is thorough with the Old Testament. She knows that her God looks with favor upon the poor; He has mercy for those who fear Him; and he is the one who has scattered the proud – hearted and brought down the mighty ones from the thrones. She understands history as an ongoing conflict between the powerful and powerless and light and darkness! So she knows her God to be the one who is against the oppressions and who are always takes the side of the oppressed. This indicates she is aware of the problems of society, the unjust structures there and the inhuman exploitations of the marginalized. Such a girl who is clearly aware of the society of her times will surely know what will happen if a young girl is found with child before marriage. Therefore her 'yes' to the angel is certainly not a 'yes' not a 'yes' out ignorance!

A Tough Spirituality

Spirituality, as traditionally understood,

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⁴Stephen Jayard, *Mary for Modern Times* (Pune: Papal Seminary, 2014), 103.

has often been cast in a dominantly patriarchal and hierarchical mode, where the spiritual quest was primarily the prerogative of male intellectual, social and religious elite. However, our present times require feminine models. In a classical sense spirituality is always associated with high thinking and feelings of peace, ecstasy in an extraordinary sense. But these two stalwart women teach us a spirituality of toughness, rather a tough spirituality which arises from the ordinary life experiences, natural bodily consequences and the everyday life events. Christian spirituality is an embodied spirituality so also is the women spirituality. Contemporary spirituality gives much emphasis on spirituality as an experience of total human person. It is aptly summarized by Karl Rahner: "The devout Christian of the future will either be a 'mystic', one who has experienced 'something', or he will cease to be anything at all".⁵ Motherhood a peak beautiful bodily experience, had become a deep God experience for these two heroic women.

Motherhood came to Rebekah somewhat late in life when Isaac was an aging man. For twenty years she had been childless, and conscious of God's promise that the Abrahamic Covenant could not be broken, Isaac entreated God that his long barren wife might conceive. He graciously answered his earnest intercession (Genesis 25:19-34). As his prayer was in the line of God's purpose, it was sure of an answer (1 John 5:14). The years of waiting on the part of

Isaac and Rebekah show that God has His own time for the fulfillment of His purpose. Motherhood came to Mary when she was so young. In this beautiful bodily experience they questioned, reasoned, argued and reached the climax of surrender (Cf. Gen 25: 22-23 and Lk 1: 34-38). This aspect of combining the experience of body with the reasoning power shows the uniqueness of women spirituality. Feminine wisdom is unique to join the knowing of the body to that of mind, to join soul to spirit, intuition to reasoning, feeling consciousness to intellectual analysis, intimacy to detachment, subjective presence to objective distance. This gives the new perspective to our Christian spirituality and calling it to embrace an integrated spirituality. These two women show us that female body as the connecting point and link between God and all of humanity.

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A Tough Sensitivity

A heart of contemplation is a heart of compassion. Rebekah and Mary were women of contemplation and compassion. The normal

⁵ Karl Rahner, "Christian Living Formerly and Today", in *Theological Investigations* VII, trans. David Bourke, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), 15.

Eastern custom to that day is to give a traveler water to drink, but watering a stranger's thirsty camels is an unheard of courtesy. A camel works up a sizable thirst as it can go without water for four days, and a four day thirst, for a beast that size, it could amount to fifteen gallons (125 lbs.); so the task of watering a camel is formidable. It was going far beyond the call of courtesy. In this display of selfless energy Rebekah identified herself as God's choice. Her act of such sensitivity is a mixture of physical strength and hearty stamina of compassion. Such a kind of sensitivity also echoed in the life of Mary. The sensitivity of women plays a greater role in the salvation history too. In the progressive unfolding of salvation history, God's choices had been mostly men. Though we come across some outstanding women like Judith, Esther, the sacred writers did not include them in many of God's choices. But when the once for all, never-to-be-repeated Christ event was to take place, the divine choice fell on a woman.⁶ Woman would not fail God. With her sensitivity, compassion, love, hope and faith she would create a new history with God.

Mary's sensitivity and openness to the needs of the people seen in the event of the miracle at Cana and she discretely prompts on Jesus' ability to act upon the need. Mary's presence in the scene of Cana is an affirmative presence. She was assertive in gently commanding the servants to do whatever Jesus tells them. The oppressed should assert them and realize their dignity. Being a second son and

soft man Jacob was not that assertive. Rebekah's assertiveness is expressed in commanding Jacob to do what God expects of him to do.

A Tough Discernment

Rebekah is often blamed for the partiality or favoritism she manifested for Jacob. However from the other reference of the Bible we realize that Rebekah loved Jacob, not because he was more of a homebody than his brother not possessed a more loving nature than he, but because Jacob was the Lord's preference (Rom 9:13). Samuel Morely once said, "I am much what my mother has made me". The child comes to understand the life and the world from his/her mother. It might have been heartbreaking for a Mother to choose between her children to be the recipient of irrevocable blessing. Mother wants each of her children to be blessed. Being a person of discernment, being a person of fulfilling the will of God she opted for Jacob. She was familiar with the plan of God as well familiar with the act of her husband. Recognizing both that God is a higher authority than her husband and that her husband was about to sin by acting contrary to His clearly revealed will, prevented him from so doing. Her motivation was thus perfectly correct, though the means she used may be debatable.

Only a person of freedom can be a person of discernment and the person of discernment only could be a person of spirituality. She was

⁶ Corona Mary, *The Divine Dream* (Tiruchirapalli: Servite Production, 1993), 13.

tough enough to discern the plan of God and transcended the gentleness, compassion, softness of her motherhood. She knew that by doing this act she would see no more her beloved son and his act would entail him with the greatest struggle. Here she surpassed the motherhood and just accorded with the will of God. The thoroughness with which Jacob carried out his mother's plan of deception is surely one of the worse features of the narrative. Fearful of the failure of his mother's plot, Jacob said, "I will bring a curse upon me and not a blessing". But Rebekah replied, "Upon me be thy curse, my son, only obey my voice". This reveals her as a person of toughness / person of courage to do the will of God. Here Rebekah stands as the symbol of Mary who stood at the foot of the cross as the woman of courage who made a tough discernment to sacrifice her beloved son in order to save her another beloved child namely the whole humanity.

Rebekah encourages Jacob to dress in the clothes of Esau, so that he can receive the blessing and inheritance from Isaac. (Genesis 27:15-29). While comparing Mary and Rebekah, St. Louis de Montfort says, Mary, who encourages us to take the inheritance of God the Father, fulfills the foreshadowing of Rebecca clothing Jacob. Mary also clothes Jesus in human flesh and offers him to the Father to

secure the blessing for humanity. Jesus received his flesh/DNA from Mary. Mary who stood at the foot of the cross revived the whole humanity in God's image and became mother of all. Women have the tremendous strength to transcend their genuine love feelings to bring about the supreme goodness.

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Conclusion

Rebekah and Mary are certainly tough women, women of strength. A strong woman may be physically strong but a woman of strength is strong in mental and spiritual stamina. A strong woman may not be afraid of anything, but a woman of strength shows courage in the midst of her fear; a strong woman may walk sure-footedly; but a woman of strength knows God will hold her up if she falls. These two women stalwart invite us to be tough and daring in our spiritual life.

Esther and Mary

Sahana BS

“The virtuous woman as presented in the Proverbs is a woman who is motivating force and paragon for the enlightened society of her day” (Prov. 31: 31). Queen Esther and Mary, our Mother, are virtuous women. They were chosen by God at their very young age to fulfill God's plan and to accomplish His mission. Both of them steadily and actively cooperated and collaborated in the salvific plan of God. The greatness of these two women was that they set an example for all women in the world through their life of trust, surrender and confidence in God. It is in humility, hope and total openness to God that they surrendered themselves to do God's will. Imitating them will lead us to conform joyfully to the will of God and courageously confront what is not God's will for the Church and our society. In this article we are going to see the similarities that are evident in these two women.

Esther's 'Yes' and Mary's “Yes”

In Esther, we have a young girl, put into a dramatic position with weighty consequences to herself personally and to her nation of people, the Israelites, just as Mary was. Esther is presented with a choice, to become engaged in God's work in the saving of all Israel, or to decline. Would Esther say yes? Or would she say no? If she had said no, well, the following words will give us clear answer;

“For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another

place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14).

Deliverance will come from another place. Will. Not “if”. Nothing was dependent on Esther, except her personal obedience and trust in the Lord in whom she had declared faith. She was providentially put into an important moment of time and her answer would say more about her faith than any disruption of God's plan, which was going to come to pass anyway.

Nothing was dependent on Esther, except her personal obedience and trust in the Lord in whom she had declared faith. She was providentially put into an important moment of time and her answer would say more about her faith than any disruption of God's plan, which was going to come to pass anyway.

In a similar way when the angel Gabriel came to announce the impending conception of Christ in Mary's womb, Mary said 'yes'. Mary who is blessed and glorious, young and beautiful, ever virgin said the affirming 'yes' to God. Mary is exalted and elevated to a position that is great in the sight of God, because she said 'yes' to God's plan and desire to be the Mother of God.

In Mary's life we don't see that the angel Gabriel asked Mary anything. He arrived to tell her what God said will happen. For God knew that Mary will not go against His design. *"And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end"* (Luke 1:31-33).

If we read the above quote accurately there are seven "wills" in those verses. Not seven 'pleases'. 'The words of the psalmist become reality in the life of Mary when it says; *"The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of his heart to all generations"* (Psalm 33:10-11). We also see similar words in the Proverbs that bear fruit in Mary's life; *"Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand"* (Proverbs 19:21). This explains that nothing about God's plan was dependent on Mary's yes. Of course, God's omniscience was such that He already knew her answer. In addition, His will is irresistible (Romans 9:19a). His plans will come to pass (Lam 3:37).

Esther the 'Queen' and Mary the Queen Mother

Queen Esther, simple handmaid of God, born in a Jewish family, a courageous young lady, exceedingly fair and her incredible beauty won the heart of the king, who placed a royal crown and made her Queen. Queen Esther has

been exalted for three things that are evident in her life: 1) for her transparent beauty, so exceptional that she merited to be chosen by King Assuerus as his spouse and queen; 2) for having been excluded, she alone, from the decree of condemnation to death for all her people; 3) for having succeeded in saving her people from the extermination already decreed as a consequence of Haman's intrigue.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, is similar to Esther in prayer and in her intercessory power with God. She also advances the good of both the Jewish and of the Christian people in her role as Queen Mother. We also see in Mary three beautiful characteristics; 1) the entire Church, in fact, from *time immemorial*, exalts Mary as the *"All Fair"*. 2) Mary was the "only person" excluded from the universal law of contraction of original sin, because conceived "immaculate", without the shadow of any stain, and "full of grace" (Lk 1:28); 3) Mary, with her humble and courageous mediation, saved not only a people, but all mankind, from the sentence of condemnation in Eden, directly and immediately cooperating with the Redeemer in the work of universal redemption by virtue of her role as Co-redemptrix, to ransom the human race from the domination of Satan. Under summarizes this well: "Esther is queen: she is clothed with humility and penitence to be heard by the King. Our Lady calls herself the 'handmaid' of the Lord, because thus she takes her rightful place in the plan of God and becomes 'Co-redemptrix', 'Mother' and 'Queen'.¹

¹ D. Unger, "Mary in the Woman of the First-gospel" (Gen 3,15), in *Marianum* 18 (1956) 62-79

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Esther and Mary's Faith and Courage

Esther is another sterling example of faith and also one of courage. She was queen to King Ahasuerus because the king loved Esther more than any other woman (Esther 2:17). When her nation Israel was in jeopardy of being wiped out (Esther 3:13), Mordecai told Esther "Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:13-14). After the entire nation fasted, Esther said that "I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16b). Queen Esther risked her life when she went before King Ahasuerus because if he did not put out the scepter, then she would have surely died but we know that by Esther's bravery, the Jews were saved.

When Mary, who was a virgin, was told that she was to conceive the Son of God, Jesus, she knew enough to say, "How can this be so" since she had been with no man (Luke 1:34-36). What was Mary's response? She said, "I am the

servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). The word for "servant" is literally bondservant or slave. Mary's humility was astonishing and is a great example for all Christians and believers should aspire to be in all things as she was as she said, "let it be to me according to your word". This was possible to her because of her faith in God. Mary manifested her faith in the God of promises; her faith in her Son in whom the promises are fulfilled and her faith in divine justice, who liberates the poor and the oppressed is visibly expressed. Her faith represents a qualitative leap from conditional to unconditional faith. For Mary faith is no longer only a quality of life, it is life itself.

Esther as the Liberator of Slavery, Mary the Liberator of Sin

Esther is the heroine and is the paradigm for a fully liberated woman who placed all her confidence in God. Through prayer and fasting she was able to challenge the evil perpetrated by the Persians and to intercede for her people Israel before King Ahasuirus. Esther was involved in the fate of the Jews. She was subject to the decree to annihilate her people, although

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she may have been exempted due to her status. She joined the fast of the Jews for three days in preparation for going to the king resolute that if she would perish, she had to do what she had to do to save her people! Having royal pleasure she never forgot her people in their acute need. She trusted in God and resolved to face the danger. Indeed God was in favour of Queen Esther and saved her and all the people, who were exalted and enjoyed freedom and honour. There is both resignation and freedom inspired by courage in her fasting and a certain measure of confidence.

The *Maginificat* of Mary expresses beautifully the integral liberation for which Jesus and Mary stood. She is a disturber of the comfortable and a comforter of the disturbed. The Blessed Virgin Mary however, to a degree far greater than Hadassah, would find “more than all the other women, grace and favour” in the sight of the King of Heaven. Mary appears as one committed to the liberation of all people, particularly the most oppressed. For this reason she experienced poverty, suffering, flight and exile. The Gospel accounts of her humiliation in Bethlehem, her persecution by Herod, her exile in Egypt and her sufferings on Calvary are not pious biblical stories. They are the signs of her faithfulness to the commitment she accepted at the time of Annunciation and maintains the hope and strength to await the hour of the liberating God.

Mary of Nazareth sings a song that celebrates the deliverance of her people from

oppression and servitude. Luke describes Mary as having been called, like Esther to a prophetic partnership with God in his work of liberation. Luke portrays Mary as beginning to fulfill her prophetic vocation of liberation by proclaiming the words of *Maginificant*. The humble will be lifted up. They will possess the land meant for them. This is the language of the liberation of all the oppressed.

Her election by the King of Heaven is also of a far superior order. For if, as John Paul II went on to say, Her election as Mother of the Son of God “is fundamental for the accomplishment of God's salvific designs for humanity, then the election of Mary is wholly exceptional and unique. Mary is 'full of grace'; because it is precisely in her that the Incarnation of the Word, the hypostatic union of the Son of God with human nature, is accomplished and fulfilled”.²

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John Paul II marvelously links this New Testament beginning with the Genesis, when he explains that “In the salvific design of the Most Holy Trinity, the mystery of the Incarnation constitutes the superabundant fulfillment of the promise made by God to man after original sin,

² *Redemptoris Mater*, 9.

after that first sin whose effects oppress the whole history of human (cf. Genesis 3:15). And so, there comes into the world a Son, 'the seed of the Woman' who will crush the evil of sin in its very origins: 'He will crush the head of the serpent' (*Redemptoris Mater*, 11). "I shall ascend to Heaven; above the stars of God, I shall set my throne on high" (Isaiah 14:12).

She who belongs to the 'weak and poor of the Lord' bears in herself, like no other member of the human race, that 'glory of grace' which the Father 'has bestowed on us in His beloved Son', and this grace determines the extraordinary greatness and beauty of Her whole being "Mary", as the Holy Father added, "thus remains before God, and also before the whole of humanity, as the unchangeable and inviolable sign of God's election, spoken of in St. Paul's Letter: 'in Christ He chose us before the foundation of the world, He destined us to be His sons' (Ephesians 1:4, 5)".

It is because of the "unchangeable and inviolable" nature of her unique election in God, that the Blessed Virgin Mary forever brings light and hope to our troubled world. The message of Our Lady of the Rosary at Fatima, the Lady of Light, has always been about hope, "a ray of hope" in the midst of a world filled with gloom and often bordering on despair. This is because of the special blessing that God has bestowed

The message of Our Lady of the Rosary at Fatima, the Lady of Light, has always been about hope, "a ray of hope" in the midst of a world filled with gloom and often bordering on despair. This is because of the special blessing that God has bestowed upon her by reason of her unique election.

upon her by reason of her unique election. For, as John Paul II concluded, "This election is more powerful than any experience of evil and sin, than all that 'enmity' which marks the history of humankind. In this history, Mary remains a sign of sure hope and a sign of liberation".

Conclusion

The life of Esther and Mary reminds us of our responsibility to accomplish our mission entrusted to us. Not only in words but through our prophetic action let us bring new life and hope to whole humankind, especially to the poor, oppressed and the marginalised. Their commitment to God's will, their service to the universal good and their support to all is marvelous and a sure example to be followed. We are called to inspire, to edify, to lead others to the God of love by our very presence. Our every word, gesture and action should mediate this divine presence to those around us.

Mary and Ruth the personification of Wisdom - love

Stella Balthazar fmm

History has a very special place for a very special woman – Mother Mary. The mother of God, born of humble origins and specially chosen by God to bring forth the Savior of the world. She was the one favored by God and loved by many more millions is the proof of her special election and the privileged place in the Plan of God. Is the affinity and affection to Mary just devotional or has it a deeper root? The Angel Gabriel, sent from God, announced the Good News to her; “Of all women you are the most Blessed” Her ‘Ecce’ and ‘Fiat’ are the affirmative statement of her interiority to cooperate and collaborate with God in the Redemption of the world. She opened the way for the messianic action of Jesus in history. The symbolic power of Mary’s image in history bears witness in an unquestionable manner to the power of the humble maiden who is the store house of feminine power. She, in a way, reveals the female face of God, as a human person totally aligned with divine. The annunciation clears her doubt and spurs her to a moment of joyous outcry.

The greatness of Mary can be understood only when we grasp the position of women in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus. Women were expected to be home-bound and not part in public life. Headdress with head bands and veils, forbidden to speak to men on the streets, live in retirement in the home, walk behind their

brothers at home, etc.. make reference to the segregation of women from public life. All public life with its discussions belonged to men. Succession went from father to sons and not daughters. After twelve



and a half years a girls would be betrothed and be married. When she becomes a widow she has no possessions. In adultery she can be stoned to death, but not the man. The power over the woman passed on from the father to the husband. Obedience to the husband was a religious duty. Polygamy was permissible. Therefore the wife must tolerate the concubine living with her. The right to divorce was exclusively the husband's; thus, woman was inferior to man according to the Torah. However this stern seclusion could not stand among the poorer strata of women who supported their husbands in the economic activities.¹

It is against this back ground that we need to situate Mary and Ruth as revolutionary women of great courage. They did not fear the public outcry of their bold stand in obeying the voice of God. They dared to be different in the most harsh conditions. Their courage is the outstanding virtue to be admired and replicated. Mary as a woman, a wife and a mother is a source of tremendous inspiration. She excels in her five areas of life which need to be learnt by

¹ Cf.. Joakim Jeremias “Jerusalem in the time of Jesus” Fortress Press, First Paper back, N Y. Edition 1975. p. 372

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every woman and man to deal with life situations specially in discerning the will of God and obeying the voice of God in the most critical and audacious situations. They are the following.

1. Mary the woman: The will of God was her life; Robust, humblest, merciful and wise: she felt the powerful energy of God flowing within her when the angel Gabriel announced the Good News that she would be the mother of the Savior. She felt all the woman would feel in bearing a child. Every child is conceived in an experience of great happiness and communion of heart between two life partners. This experience was no less. He was a highly matured woman who raised questions and cleared her doubts. The circumstances led her to give birth at the stable reveals the ordinariness of such an extraordinary situation.

2. Mary the Mediatrix and co-redeemer yet the simple girl at Nazareth: Our devotion to Mary is not just devotional. It is the reality of touching the very core of our Christian conviction. She is the visible expression of the Divine Feminine. She is the face of God; our Mother. We are part of a generation that has seen much uprising of feminist concerns and has perceived the root of domination and gender discrimination. Every protest and uprising is an expression of bonding in love. Hildegard of

Bingen said; "Everything that is in the heavens, on earth, and under the earth is penetrated with connectedness, penetrated with relatedness".

3. Mary the Visionary with a Mission and Commitment: When Mary was surprised with Angel Gabriel, her life of surprises begin. A state of confusion leads to clarity and surrender. That clarity is part of the sincere seeker who waits for God's intervention in one's life. Mary to be the Mother of God was chosen by God among all women. The knowledge of the will of God was her point of surrender. When her doubts were cleared without a word of hesitation Mary accepts the place God had carved out for her in His Plan of Salvation. To be the Mother of the Redeemer was her privilege. From eternity God had chosen her to be the woman among all women to bear His son. She receives a gradual revelation of her place in the plan of God and submits herself to fulfilling that plan. She ponders and searches within her in the silence of her being to grasp the length and breadth of that plan. Her commitment springs from that rootedness in communion with God to be the co-redeemer with God.

4. Mary the Transforming Presence: *The Magnificat* – is the Empowerment Song of every Woman. It is an expression of the transformation undergone by persons and by structures of society. 'He cast the mighty from their thrones and raised up the lowly'. This is an expression of political liberation from the rule of oppression, domination, exploitation and manipulation. Those who make high speeches and ignore the poor are unfitting leaders who fail to grasp the God of the poor and the lowly. It also

means that we need to dethrone our pride and ego and raise the attitude of humble submission to God's will.

'He fills the starving with good things and empty sends away the rich': poverty of bodily needs and of the spirit (soul) are an integral part of the Incarnational theme of the abundance of life. The wonder councilor the mighty God, the Prince of peace, the everlasting Father who brings Joy, happiness and prosperity to the most deprived and humble of the earth. The coming of the savior is the announcement of the Good news that life for the poor and humble of the earth will no more be the same. And Mary is that chosen instrument of God to bring forth that Good News to the world. It was her very personal experience. The 'anawim' of Yahweh is now taken to the perennial springs of life. She is planted beside flowing waters of life. This happens to all people of Good will who in turn become the transforming presence to those in desperation. A reversal of values, a metanoia, a conversion that equalizes the high and low as one children of God.

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5. Mary Mediatrix becomes our Sister –

Recent paradigm shifts in Mariology: 29th October 1963 made a great turning point. "In fact what we witness today is the efflorescence of Mariology in manifold new forms many of which though widely varied have their take off point from the teaching of Vatican II". Pre-Vatican II devotion to Mary stressed on the semi-divine character, the Eve-Mary contrast, in a way creating an estrangement of Mary from humanity.² Mary is part of our history as a disciple who grasped the role of being an apostle. She is a disciple who loved the Lord in her entirety.

Mother Mary has attracted the world with her very presence throughout history. She lends herself as an eminent representation of that which is wanting in the masculine image of God. The popular devotion that surrounds her being is indeed a manifestation of her affinity in the hearts of the common folk who long to be connected to the feminine image of God. Her motherly presence lends grace and compassion, care and liberative potential for the downtrodden of the earth. Elizabeth Johnson CSJ, the noted Feminist Theologian says "One of the strongest insights into the compensatory nature of the Marian tradition was articulated by Teilhard de Chardin, who was convinced that the cult of Mary served to satisfy an "irresistible Christian need" in the Church, i.e. the need to correct "a dreadfully masculinized" conception of the Godhead.

² Fr. D. Alphonse, From Semi-Divine Mother – Mediatrix to Our Sister; Ed. Fr. R. K. Samy "Mary in our search for fullness of Life". op cit. p. 25.

Ruth the humble of the earth par excellence

Ruth stands as a woman of the New age to speak of the inherent goodness that people have hidden in the recesses of their heart. "Embrace and celebrate differences in an experience of bonding" super model of affection to in-laws. Ruth is a foreigner who transcends geographical and cultural barriers to bond with another woman from another culture and location. She lives and reflects a zone of Newness that embraces and celebrates differences.

Ruth accepting the God of the Israelites as her God and the Israelite people as her own is an immensely important act of integration needed very much in our society today. In Ruth 1:16-17, Ruth tells Naomi, her Israelite mother-in-law, "Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me". The Book is held in esteem by Jews who fall under the category of Jews-by-choice, as is evidenced by the considerable presence of Boaz in rabbinic literature. The Book of Ruth also functions liturgically, as it is read during the Jewish holiday of Shavuot ("Weeks").³

Ruth was a maid, a bride, a wife, a daughter-in-law and a low cast woman with none to claim as her own. Her clinging to her mother in law symbolizes the state of Jesus at

the Incarnation. "Though He was in the form of God, He did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied himself taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of mankind". In Ruth we find a similarity. She is a woman of valor and determined courage Ruth emerges as a tower of strength which lie hidden in the heart of the marginalized. They know the truth about suffering and develop the courage to face them day after day. Therefore there is no fear of facing suffering. Suffering is indeed the bedrock of success and transformation. In Ruth we find this strength renewed as in every poor person who responds to life with optimism. She cuts across barriers of caste, color, creed, clan and socio-economic status. She is a woman of iron will. She stands as a beacon of light for the hopeless. She makes sense out of a seemingly senseless situation.

Ardent lover: An unusual bond existed between her and Naomi, her Mother-in-law. Bonding in integral love: the relationship between Ruth and Neomi is a reality of immense emotional bonding, financial support and social recognition.

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³https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Ruth Atteridge 2006, p. 383.

Building the Bridge of Communion: Among people of different race, among people of different age, of different status, among people of different interests. Ruth is known for her quality of meekness and shrewd strategy. She looks mild but she nurtures fortitude and courage to face situations of insecurity and musters courage to face them. She is a woman of eminent softness and enormous creativity. Her nature of adapting to strange situations makes her a unique personality to be understood in her own terms.

Learning from Mary & Ruth

Mary and Ruth the eminent personalities of youthful vitality and lend themselves to learning for our situation in the present. Teach all the sons in our families to be respectful to all, especially to women, the girl child, and the elders. Let all parents nurture the conviction that men and women are equal in the eyes of God and the world too, and impart it to specially the male children.

Dependency creates a deficiency in people. Build confidence and caring compassion. Ruth was an independent and confident woman. She knew her choice to be with Naomi held the secret of her freedom. She had overcome all her ego to be at the service of Naomi. Ruth was not dependent on her mother-in-law. Rather she was the only responsible person in the family to care for her mother-in-law as she had no where to go. Her utterly selfless claim to be with the elder generation is a much needed action today. It is a great experience of tolerance, ability to keep up ones attitude of

tenderness and care. Our society needs to gain this virtue especially in a technocrat surrounding where elders are sent to old age homes. This is the folly of development. Development cannot dehumanize us. We need to regain the understanding and practice of caring for elders as they cared for the younger generation. Both Mary and Ruth exemplify in the value of interdependency and mutual affinity with people.

Housewives are not second class: Mary and Ruth, the two women, are proof of a filial and genuine sacrificing love, a caring love between them. They both are house wives and probably widows from an young age. We discover a connecting bond between them as a common value. They are quiet yet revolutionary in their perception and approach in their manner of handling problems. They realize the audacity of dividing people on the basis of traditions, customs, caste, creed, and wealth. This realization urges Mother Mary to bring forth the revolutionary song of the Magnificent.

The similar care must exist among couples as well. No one is superior or inferior. Both are equally respectable and worthy of care. Therefore heaping up domestic burden upon women is part of an uncaring generation which values male as superior. Today socialization needs to create a punch line that women are no less than men. Women need to gain the courage to claim such equality of status in the family and men must convert themselves to share care-giving actions within the home such as cooking, cleaning washing and caring for children.

Widows are empowered leaders in waiting: they are not weaklings. Every widow is a potential leader as she learns to assume more leadership in the home taking up the share of work usually done by the husband. Though emotionally shattered they come out of the trauma and emerge as strong and confident women with vitality to assume the two jobs in one. Free to commit her time for common concerns if the children are matured enough to manage their lives. They have the freedom to invest their time for the common cause of the locality. If they find a supportive organization to guide them they are the best resource to get engaged in health, hygiene, ecological concerns etc..while being engaged in acquiring basic needs for their locality.

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Conclusion

Mary's vision of life shared in the great song of the Magnificat, contains the seeds of a grateful heart, a stunningly courageous spirit to outcry the politically corrupt system, recalling the goodness and compassion of God in the history of Israel. God vindicates the humble and

liberates them from Oppressive forces. This compelling song of liberation is hardly ever realized in its true meaning. Today this magnificence is being felt among women who continue to discern God's will and allow God to act in their lives. On Jan. 23rd 2017 more than one million women's march all over the world draws large crowds in worldwide demonstrations for equality. Mary is the fore runner of this aspiration among women to feel the overwhelming power of God in her life and feel as the equal children of the same Father/Mother.

Mary a simple woman called to play a part in salvation history as mother of the Messiah. The handmaid of the Lord (Lk 1:38; 1:48) summing up in herself the rich religious heritage of the old testament. Exemplar of faithful obedience - the first disciple of Jesus, who hears the word of God, ponders it in her heart and gives a wholehearted assent to it (Lk 8:19-21; 11:27-28). Blesses among women (Lk 1:42), the one whom all generations will call blessed (Lk 1) the mother of the community left behind by the dying Jesus called to play a part when the hour of Jesus has come (Jn 19: 26-27, 48). The early church gathered around Mary awaiting the Spirit's coming (Acts 1:14; 2:1-4). The Church upheld the presence of Mary in Liturgical feasts down the centuries and at times Mary overshadowed the image of Jesus.⁴

We are part of a generation that has seen much uprising of feminist concerns and has

⁴Most Rev. Angelo Gracías, "Mariology the past and the present"; Ed: Fr. R. K. Samy, "Mary in our search for fullness of life" op. cit. pp. 7-8.

perceived the root of domination and gender discrimination. Every protest and uprising is an expression of bonding in love. Hildegard of Bingen said; "everything that is in the heavens, on earth, and under the earth is penetrated with connectedness, penetrated with relatedness".

References

1. Cf.. Joakim Jeremias "Jerusalem in the time of Jesus" Fortress Press, First Paper back, N.Y. Edition 1975. Pg. 372.
2. Most Rev. Angelo Gracias, "Mariology the past and the present"; Ed: Fr. R. K. Samy, "Mary in our search for fullness of life" Op. Cit. pg. 7-8 .
3. Fr. D. Alphonse, From Semi-Divine Mother - Mediatrix to Our Sister; Ed: Fr. R. K. Samy "Mary in our search for fullness of Life" . Op Cit. pg. 25.
4. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Ruth Atteridge 2006, p. 383.

JOKES

A 3 years old boy sits near a pregnant woman.

Boy: Why do you look so fat?

Pregnant woman: I have a baby inside me.

Boy: Is it a good baby?

Pregnant woman: Yes, it is a very good baby.

Boy: Then why did you eat it?!

Wife: "How would you describe me?"

Husband: "ABCDEFGH IJK."

Wife: "What does that mean?"

Husband: "Adorable, beautiful, cute, delightful, elegant, fashionable, gorgeous, and hot."

Wife: "Aw, thank you, but what about IJK?"

Husband: "I'm just kidding!"

Girlfriend: "Am I pretty or ugly?"

Boyfriend: "You're both."

Girlfriend: "What do you mean?"

Boyfriend: "You're pretty ugly."

Our Lady of Lourdes

Janet Rego

Lourdes is the world's most beloved Shrine for Catholics, nestled in a valley in the southwestern part of the Hautes-Pyrenees. Our Lady of *Lourdes* is a Roman Catholic title of the Blessed Virgin Mary venerated in honor of the Marian apparitions that reportedly occurred in 1858 in the vicinity of *Lourdes* in *France*. St. Pope John Paul II, having made three pilgrimages to Lourdes, proclaimed February 11, the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, as World Day of the Sick.

On February 11, 1858, the Virgin Mary appeared to a poor young shepherd girl, Bernadette Soubirous, who was born on January 7, 1844, to bring her a message to the world. Bernadette was raised in a family with profound faith. With her minimal schooling and ill health, Bernadette was also needed at home to help and care for her younger siblings. At the age of 22, Bernadette joined the Sisters of Charity of Nevers, and died in a Convent in 1879. She was beatified in 1925, then canonized in 1933.

The town of Lourdes, has subsequently attracted millions of visitors / pilgrims from different countries and cultures, the young and the old, the poverty-stricken, an incredible mix of people from all walks of life. The Church has recognized many "cures" that have taken place after patients bathed in the springs, confirming them to be "true miracles". It is also a place where, the healthy and the sick persons mingle

freely among each other. Many sick people have gone back to their homes completely cured from their infirmities both spiritual and corporal, leaving behind their crutches, wheel chairs and other instruments, which can be seen displayed at this holy place.

The most sacred site at the Sanctuary of Our Lady of *Lourdes* surrounding the Shrine is the *Grotto* of Massabielle, also known as the Miraculous Cave or the Cave of Apparitions. At the centre of the Grotto stands the Altar. *At the Grotto*, the Virgin is said to have appeared to Bernadette 18 times, between February 11 and July 16, 1858. This venerated site is accessible to pilgrims both day and night, and the holy Mass is celebrated there every day. The Statue of Our Lady depicts the Virgin in the posture she is said to have taken in the place she reputedly appeared, and through a set of private revelations, Mary revealed herself to Bernadette **"I am the Immaculate Conception"**. Our Lady, during her apparitions, also told Bernadette to say the Rosary and pray incessantly for the conversion of sinners, to repent and do penance.

At the back of the Grotto, on the left of the Altar, is the Miraculous Spring that reportedly sprouted on February 25, 1858, during the ninth apparition, when Bernadette scraped the earth as instructed by our Lady. The Virgin is said to have commanded her, "Go and drink at the spring and wash there". The water from this

spring still flows today, it is collected in several reservoirs, from which one can drink and carry the water home. Since then, millions of pilgrims have imbibed and bathed in the water of Lourdes, with faith, and believing in the healing powers of this God-given grace.

Other Sanctuaries associated with St. Bernadette include the Crypt, the first Chapel built on top of the Grotto as requested by our Lady, the Basilica of St. Pius X. In the town, there is the house, Cachot, where Bernadette lived with her parents and siblings, the Baptismal Font in the parish church, and the hospital chapel, where she made her First Holy Communion on 3rd June, 1858.

Personal experience

In May 2010, a group of 26 members from Bangalore with Fr. Peter Mascarenhas made a one-day pilgrimage to our Lady of Lourdes Shrine, amidst other holy places like our Lady of Fatima in Portugal, The Vatican city and other cities in Italy. I was fortunate to be a member of this group. It was truly a beautiful spiritual experience for all of us. It was a Saturday morning when we visited the Grotto, offered our prayers and visited other places at the Shrine. In the afternoon, we were even blessed with a miracle by our Lady. Though we stood in the queue for a long time in the afternoon waiting for our turn for the holy water dip, due to paucity of time and shortage of volunteers on that particular day, the entry was closed at around 4 pm for that day. We were extremely disappointed and some of us in tears. However, we never lost our hope and faith in our Lady. We

kept praying during the holy Mass celebrated by Fr. Peter Mascarenhas, in one of the Chapels. After the Mass, when Fr. Peter once again checked with the volunteers on the feasibility of us getting the entry for the dip, we were granted our much awaited wish. It was undoubtedly a miracle granted to us by our Lady, who never abandoned us. The peace and joy that we experienced with the holy water dip will be a lifelong memory for us. Then we visited Cachot, the house of St. Bernadette, and the entire shrine. In the evening, we took part in the torch light processions, walking along side people we didn't even know, but realized at that moment that we were all the same, each one holding burning candles, saying the Rosary and singing hymns in different languages. The next morning, being a Sunday, we participated in the holy Mass celebrated by an Irish group on the Altar at the Grotto. We then departed from Lourdes and continued on our pilgrimage.

Spiritual insights / application to life

During our pilgrimage to Lourdes, to many of us, the most touching place was the Grotto and so it was a unique experience for us to pray, in silence. Gazing up at the beautiful statue of our Lady, I felt close to her, and even today, when I recite my daily Rosary, I visualize the Grotto and the statue of our Lady of Immaculate Conception, drawing me to a closer encounter with our Lady. The pilgrimage has enhanced my faith and further strengthened my devotion to our Lady, seeking her intercession and help in sickness and in other difficult situations.

Today, Mother Mary is honoured in sanctuaries throughout the world. When we recite the Rosary, we can meditate on the life of Christ, and Mary comes to be with us in our daily lives. At the Shrine in Lourdes, we could see volunteers, not only medical professionals, but of all sorts, helping in many ways including helping the sick to prepare for their opportunity to bathe in the water of Lourdes. The time given in love brings its own miraculous gift to the hearts of those who spend time with the needy pilgrims on their pilgrimage. Their smiles, the

simple gestures of helping one another, the obvious consideration of others, is truly a commendable selfless service that they give at this holy place, and we were witnesses to these kind and selfless deeds. This one-off pilgrimage to our Lady of Lourdes was indeed a spiritual enrichment for us and a journey to remember all our lives.

O ever Immaculate Virgin, Mother of mercy, health of the sick, refuge of sinners, comforter of the afflicted, pray for us.

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Feast of St. Louie Marie De Montfort

Santhosh Prabhu smm

“How I Wonder What you are”. Every feast day is the moment to wonder at the life of a person who walked in the light of God, who led an ordinary life in an extraordinary manner; we are very much privileged to celebrate the feast of our founder St. Montfort. What is that, on this day we need to wonder at him? There are numerous things to wonder at this saint but more precisely we can wonder at his great Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, to wonder at his ardent Desire for the Cross and finally we can also wonder at his life Dedicated for the welfarement of the poor and the needy.

Short biography of St. Montfort

Louis Marie Grignon De Montfort was born on 31st January 1673 in a place called Montfort in France. His father Jean Baptist Grignon was an advocate by profession and his mother Jeanne Robert remained as house wife. Three of her brothers were priests and Louis –Marie was brought up in this religious atmosphere. Right from his childhood, he was more interested to do the things of God and would always help others to seek the ways of God.

Louie-Marie after completing his primary studies in Rennes understood God's call in responding to his vocation, decided to join seminary to pursue theological studies at St. Sulpice in Paris. Like Abraham he felt the call: “Leave your country and fathers house and go to the place that I will show you”(Gen11:2). It was

in this spirit young Louis said goodbye to his family at 'Cesson Bridge', through which a new chapter opened in his life. With total dependence upon the Providence, with total abandonment and deep a desire to experience the radical meaning of the Gospel by trusting so completely in Providence he sang: “The Lord is my Good Father, Jesus my Dear Savior, Mary my Good Mother, could I have great joy?”

During the period of his training in the seminary, one hand he wanted a deep personal experience of God and become vividly aware of the privileged place reserved for Mary in God's plan for our salvation. On the other hand, his interest on reading and making notes that helped him with a wealth of material that was to inspire and enrich his spiritual writings.

Priesthood and Mission: He was ordained as priest on 5th June 1700, at our Lady's parish church in Saint Sulpice. Montfort was a man with great passion to preach the gospel especially to the poor; this passion grew out of his own experience of God's love that led him to derive his motto “God Alone”. Few years he journeyed with various mission bands, preaching parish renewal ministry to the restituted of the poor-house at Poities serving the sick and the poor people at the immense general hospital at La Saltpeter in Paris.

In 1706 he went all the way to Rome on foot to meet the Pope Clement XI, to know from the Vicar of Christ, the will of God and the

direction for his apostolate. The Pope titled him, "Apostolic Missionary", telling him to remain in the native place and renew the church there by the proclamation of the baptismal consecration to the Eternal, Incarnate Wisdom, and Jesus son of Mary.

Montfort lived only about sixteen years of priesthood, in his own missionary lifestyle, he did not have a house, he lived only on charity, total dependence on the providence of God, he always traveled on foot, carrying only what was necessary for the mission, his few possessions were, The Holy Bible, Breviary, note book in a bag, Rosary, small statue of Mary and a long Cross on a walking stick.

Father Louis Marie de Montfort died while preaching a mission on April 28, 1716 at the age of forty-three. In 1838 Pope Gregory XVI declared him venerable. In 1869 Pope Pius IX proclaimed his virtues of heroic. In 1888 Pope Leo XIII beatified him. In 1947 Pope Pius XII canonized him as a Saint.

Devotion to Mary

Saint Louie Marie de Montfort is known throughout the world as "The Herald of our Lady". He takes great care to present our Lady within the great message of the good news of Jesus Christ. As a young boy, he learnt from his pious mother to love Mother Mary and developed an immense devotion towards her. He used to teach his younger siblings to love Mary and to pray the Rosary every day.

As an adolescent he was attracted by three statues of Our Lady: Our Lady of Miracles, Our Lady of Peace and Our Lady of Good News.

He addressed Mary as his, Good Mother, whom he goes with childlike simplicity to ask for spiritual and temporal needs. I wonder what made Montfort to have deep devotion to Mary; it is simply because Mary is the surest, shortest, smoothest and perfect way to Jesus. Even this method was later adopted by St. John Paul II. When we analyze the reason behind it, it said that: more than anyone the child is sure to listen to its mother, for such is the love of a mother. That's why Montfort chose the Marian way. Throughout his missionary journey and preaching he proclaimed Mary and devotion to the Holy Rosary for which he was known as man with long Rosary. Finally Montfort surrendered his entire self by total consecration to Jesus in to the hands of Mary. Personally with conviction I confess that this is the real means, in which my consecration to Jesus is fruitful as I grow in my religious life.

Desire for cross

The spirituality of St. Montfort is based upon the Cross. He was the person who always wanted or desired for more crosses (sufferings). In his life Montfort has written many letters, often he writes, 'long may Jesus reign from his cross' it shows that his extraordinary love for the cross, He says "If only Christians know the worth of the Cross, they would walk a hundred miles to find it, because in the cross the wisdom of the Lord is hidden and locked".

Montfort so much loved the Cross, even he started a small group for the prayer and they were known as "Friends of the Cross". At general hospital Montfort in the year 1701-03

formed a group of women and named them as, La-Sagesse-Wisdom. He conducted special programme for this group, teaching about Jesus, wisdom Incarnate and crucified. This group has to renounce themselves and carry their daily crosses to follow Christ crucified under the guidance of Blessed Virgin Mary.

For Montfort, the Cross is the center of his spirituality, for him Cross is wisdom and wisdom is cross, in another words, Jesus is wisdom incarnate and wisdom crucified on the cross. Montfort always loved to carry the cross, for him cross means real suffering. He always loved suffering and suffering becomes the part of his life. Many a time he was rejected by the authorities, humiliated by colleagues and beaten up by the people. In one of his letters to his sister he writes, "I am like a ball in a game of tennis, no sooner am I hurled to another side than I am sent back to the other and the players strike me hard" (L:26). Looking at him I really wonder what made Montfort to love the cross so much, it is just because his ardent desire for God's Wisdom, he says if one does not take risk for God he can do nothing great for him.

Life Dedicated for the poor

Montfort was the authentic follower of the Gospel values. "I have not come to call the righteous to repentance but sinners" (Lk 6:32). Montfort dedicated his entire life for the restoration of the poor. When he was young, he noticed one of his companions in the class does not have a proper cloth, so he collected some money to buy him new cloths, he also exchanged money and the new suit with the

poor beggars on his way to seminary. Humanly speaking, the life of Louis during his seminary training was painful and tough. He was so poor that, he used to beg for food, watched over the dead bodies at night in the graveyard for money to meet his expenses for studies. During these years, he understood what his life going to be. 'A missionary for the poor by bringing them the good news of God's love'.

As a priest he identified with the poorest of the poor, when he was appointed as the Chaplin at the general hospital, he gave up his personal room to the sick and stayed with sick and also shared food with them. With missionary affection embraced a dying leprous beggar lying in the streets and carried him to a nearby religious house, crying out "Open the door for Jesus Christ!" The poor people felt pity for him took up some collection to purchase warm clothing for this poor priest whom they proudly called 'one of their own'. People also gave him titles like, 'Father of the poor, Father with Big Rosary, Slave of Jesus in Mary, and Vagabond Missionary'.

Conclusion

As we are celebrating the Tercentenary of our beloved fonder St. Montfort, even though down from the centuries there are many events changed the face of the earth but still we follow the footsteps of our fonder till today. We wonder at his simplicity of life with great enriching love for God. He become the model for our life to have devotion to Mary, to desire for the Cross and to dedicate our life for the service of the poor around us.

LENTEN RETREAT

William Rodrigues

A Lenten Retreat was organized for the Montfort Lay Associates on 19.03.2017 at the premises of Maria Bhavan. All the members actively participated and spiritually benefitted by it.

Fr Peter Mascarenhas welcomed the gathering and rendered a heart-warming Lenten reflection and stressed the importance of doing penance, reconciliation and living a life of sacrifices. He emphasized on ASH which is a sign of repentance and elaborated as "A" for availability, "S" for Sensitivity and "H" for hospitality. This is what we have to practice in our daily life. He insisted that the Christian life is incomplete unless and until we reach out to the needy. We should be available for any help, ready to share and care and be hospitable towards fellow being. He insisted on wearing a smiling face always and



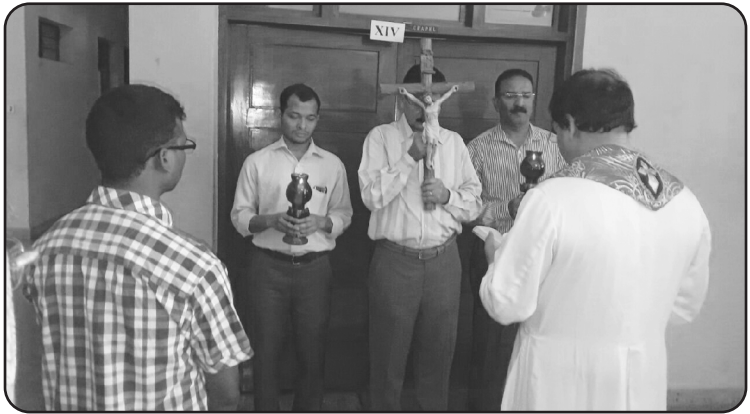
be on our toes to maintain a good relationship vertically with the Lord and horizontally with our neighbours. He also elaborated on how Christ had overcome the temptations in the desert and all the works of Satan. He explained meaning and purpose of 40 days of Lenten practice.

After the recollection we had meaningful Way of the Cross where we had an opportunity to participate in the passion and suffering of Christ.



Immediately after that we had AGM in the hall. Annual reports were read out by Secretary Mr Stany Lobo and Treasurer Mr Percy Pereira. As the 2 year term of the Presidentship of Mr Frank Madtha was getting over a new President was elected. Mr William Rodrigues has been selected as a new President for a term of 2 years. Mr William

Rodrigues President elect had a new core committee members and fresh batch of core committee members and office bearers like Secretary Mr Stany Lobo and Treasurer Mr Percy Pereira were re-elected. The Director of the Marian Center thanked Mr. Frank Madtha for his zealous and selfless service for the past years so also other office bearers. He emphasized the importance of taking part, in holding honorary posts like the one said above would certainly invoke God's blessings. He also said that all the family members of Lay associates will be blessed as they are involved in many social and charitable deeds. The sacrifice of the holy Mass solemnized by Fr SelvaKumar, who during his homily emphasized upon humanity and



forgiveness, which enables strength to human life.

A fellowship meal was shared in the house by the good will and generosity of the Montfort Associates. Before the meal Mr William Rodrigues thanked whole Maria Bhavan community for its generous and valuable service.

JOKES

A doctor and a lawyer are talking at a party. Their conversation is constantly interrupted by people describing their ailments and asking the doctor for free medical advice. After an hour of this, the exasperated doctor asks the lawyer, "What do you do to stop people from asking you for legal advice when you're out of the office?" "I give it to them," replies the lawyer, "and then I send them a bill." The doctor is shocked, but agrees to give it a try. The next day, still feeling slightly guilty, the doctor prepares the bills. When he goes to place them in his mailbox, he finds a bill from the lawyer.

A man is talking to God. "God, how long is a million years?" God answers, "To me, it's about a minute." "God, how much is a million dollars?" "To me, it's a penny." "God, may I have a penny?" "Wait a minute."

Husbands are like Blue tooth.

When they are with wife, they are connected and when they are not, they are searching for other devices!!

Congratulations!!!

Religious Silver Jubilee



Fr. Rayappa Joseph smm

Fr. Rosario Menezes smm

Fr. Selva Kumar smm

Fr. T. Joseph smm

Fr. Vara Prasad smm

TERCENTENARY



**Montfort Marian Centre
Bengaluru**