

Mary, “Woman of the Eucharist”

‘What has risen from the tomb and what is in truth now our food is the *verum corpus natum de Maria Virgine*, the very body born of Mary. It is not by accident that the Catholic Church and the separated churches of the East, which have best maintained that truth intact, are marked by a fervent love for the one who gave him our flesh.’—Rev. James T. O’Connor

His Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, has dedicated an entire chapter of his latest encyclical, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, to showing the profound relationship of Mary to the Eucharist. In this month’s issue of **The Visitation**, we carry an excerpt from that section of the encyclical.

If we wish to rediscover in all its richness the profound relationship between the Church and the Eucharist, we cannot neglect Mary, Mother and model of the Church. In my Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, I pointed to the Blessed Virgin Mary as our teacher in contemplating Christ’s face, and among the mysteries of light I included *the institution of the Eucharist*. Mary can guide us towards this most holy sacrament, because she herself has a profound relationship with it.

At first glance, the Gospel is silent on this subject. The account of the institution of the Eucharist on the night of Holy Thursday makes no mention of Mary. Yet we know that she was present among the Apostles who prayed “with one accord” (cf. Acts 1:14) *in the first community which gathered after the Ascension in expectation of Pentecost*. Certainly Mary must have been present at the Eucharistic celebrations of the first generation of Christians, who were devoted to “the breaking of bread” (Acts 2:42).

But in addition to her sharing in the Eucharistic banquet, an indirect picture of Mary’s relationship with the Eucharist can be had, beginning with her interior disposition. *Mary is a “woman of the Eucharist” in her whole life*. The Church, which looks to Mary as a model, is also

called to imitate her in her relationship with this most holy mystery.

Mysterium fidei! If the Eucharist is a mystery of faith which so greatly transcends our understanding as to call for sheer abandonment to the word of God, then there can be no one like Mary



to act as our support and guide in acquiring this disposition. In repeating what Christ did at the Last Supper in obedience to his command: “Do this in memory of me!”, we also accept Mary’s invitation to obey him without hesitation: “Do whatever he tells you”

(Jn 2:5). With the same maternal concern which she showed at the wedding feast of Cana, Mary seems to say to us: “Do not waver; trust in the words of my Son. If he was able to change water into wine, he can also turn bread and wine into his body and blood, and through this mystery bestow on believers the living memorial of his passover, thus becoming the ‘bread of life’”.

In a certain sense Mary lived her *Eucharistic faith* even before the institution of the Eucharist, by the very fact that *she offered her virginal womb for the Incarnation of God’s Word*. The Eucharist, while commemorating the passion and resurrection, is also in continuity with the incarnation. At the Annunciation Mary conceived the Son of God in the physical reality of his body and blood, thus anticipating within herself what to some degree happens sacramentally in every believer who receives, under the signs of bread and wine, the Lord’s body and blood.

As a result, there is a profound analogy between the *Fiat* which Mary said in reply to the angel, and the *Amen* which every believer says when receiving the body of the Lord. Mary was asked to believe that the One whom she conceived “through the Holy Spirit” was “the Son of God” (Lk 1:30-35). In continuity with the

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Newsletter material from all Fraternity members is gratefully accepted!

In the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5-7) Jesus challenges us, his disciples, with two images worth reflecting upon. He says we are the “salt of the earth” and the “light of the world”—salt and light, elements of discipleship.

Let's look at them a bit. When I think of salt, I think of my grandfather. When I was a kid I used to love to go to my grandparents' house. They were wonderful people and they surely loved me. BUT, I hated to eat there.

My grandfather had ulcers and high blood pressure, so he lived on a “bland diet”: no salt or spices, cream sauces, etc., YUK! It was so “blah”! When Jesus calls us “salt”, I hear him calling us to bring spice and taste to a blah and tasteless world. You and I are called to bring PIZZAZZ to life. Our relationship with Jesus and our faithfulness to his call on our lives adds taste and flavor to life.

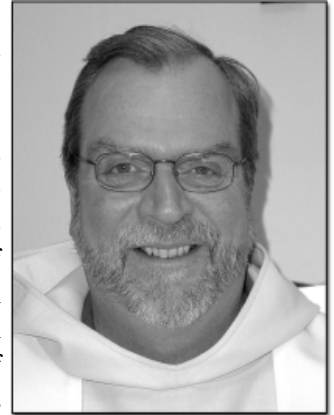
When I think of light, I think of youth Search retreats I used to team. On Saturday evenings the prayer service would start in total darkness. Once everyone would gather we'd turn off all the lights. It is amazing how uncomfortable people are with darkness. The kids would start coughing and twittering and fidgeting. The minute a match was struck to light a candle all eyes were riveted to the light. Silence always ensued, they could see again.

Did you ever play “Blind Man's Bluff”? Isn't it insecure to feel your way around a room when you cannot see? When Jesus calls us “light”, he challenges us to bring security to an insecure world. As darkness seems to get thicker and darker, we show the way. Darkness never snuffs out light, but light always banishes darkness.

I know that last year I shared with you how I always like to look for ways to make “Ordinary Time” extraordinary. Let's face it: our life with the Lord is far from ordinary. This is the message we bring to the world.

This year the images of “salt” and “light” are before my eyes and in my prayer. What kind of salt and light am I?

How can I more effectively bring the flavor of Jesus into the world's “blahness”? How bright do I shine the light of Jesus to the world, and how can I more effectively help show people the way out of darkness and into the safe and secure place of the Light, Jesus Christ? I was baptized to be salt and light.



We Christians can have an extraordinary summer if we seek to live our baptismal call more effectively. The “bonus” in all this is that the Lord has given us the Holy Spirit to move us and inspire us, and to help us shine and give flavor. We can't lose!

Over the years the Fraternity of Priests has helped priests around the world to live and minister in these two elements of discipleship—salt and light. Brothers praying with brothers, helping each other to grow and be healed, supporting, listening, loving—many are the testimonies of our ministry to priests. Please continue to pray for this all-important movement of the Spirit.

Our prayer for you, our intercessors and benefactors, is that the Lord bless, enhance, and challenge your baptismal vocation to be salt and light. Summertime is a time to rest and recuperate; may the Lord renew you this summer. Thanks again for your prayers and generous gifts. Again, you make it all possible. We are blessed! Remember to pray for your parish priest. Please send his name in to us so that we can join you. May your salt be strong and your light be bright.

In Christ,

Fr. John

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Virgin's faith, in the Eucharistic mystery we are asked to believe that the same Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of Mary, becomes present in his full humanity and divinity under the signs of bread and wine.

"Blessed is she who believed" (Lk 1:45). Mary also anticipated, in the mystery of the incarnation, the Church's Eucharistic faith. When, at the Visitation, she bore in her womb the Word made flesh, she became in some way a "tabernacle" – the first "tabernacle" in history – in which the Son of God, still invisible to our human gaze, allowed himself to be adored by Elizabeth, radiating his light as it were through the eyes and the voice of Mary. And is not the enraptured gaze of Mary as she contemplated the face of the newborn Christ and cradled him in her arms that unparalleled model of love which should inspire us every time we receive Eucharistic communion?

Mary, throughout her life at Christ's side and not only on Calvary, made her own *the sacrificial dimension of the Eucharist*. When she brought the child

Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem "to present him to the Lord" (Lk 2:22), she heard the aged Simeon announce that the child would be a "sign of contradiction" and that a sword would also pierce her own heart (cf. Lk 2:34-35). The tragedy



of her Son's crucifixion was thus foretold, and in some sense Mary's *Stabat Mater* at the foot of the Cross was foreshadowed. In her daily preparation for Calvary, Mary experienced a kind of "anticipated Eucharist" – one might say a "spiritual communion" – of desire and of oblation, which would culminate in her union with

her Son in his passion, and then find expression after Easter by her partaking in the Eucharist which the Apostles celebrated as the memorial of that passion.

What must Mary have felt as she heard from the mouth of Peter, John, James and the other Apostles the words spoken at the Last Supper: "This is my body which is given for you" (Lk 22:19)? The body given up for us and made present under sacramental signs was the same body which she had conceived in her womb! For Mary, receiving the Eucharist must have somehow meant welcoming once more into her womb that heart which had beat in unison with hers and reliving what she had experienced at the foot of the Cross.

"Do this in remembrance of me" (Lk 22:19). In the "memorial" of Calvary all that Christ accomplished by his passion and his death is present. Consequently *all that Christ did with regard to his Mother* for our sake is also present. To her he gave the beloved disciple and, in him, each of us: "Behold, your Son!". To each of us he also says: "Behold your mother!" (cf. Jn 19: 26-27).

Experiencing the memorial of Christ's death in the Eucharist also means continually receiving this gift. It means accepting – like John – the one who is given to us anew as our Mother. It also means taking on a commitment to be conformed to Christ, putting ourselves at the school of his Mother and allowing her to accompany us. Mary is present, with the Church and as the Mother of the Church, at each of our celebrations of the Eucharist. If the Church and the Eucharist are inseparably united, the same ought to be said of Mary and the Eucharist. This is one reason why, since ancient times, the commemoration of Mary has always been part of the Eucharistic celebrations of the Churches of East and West.

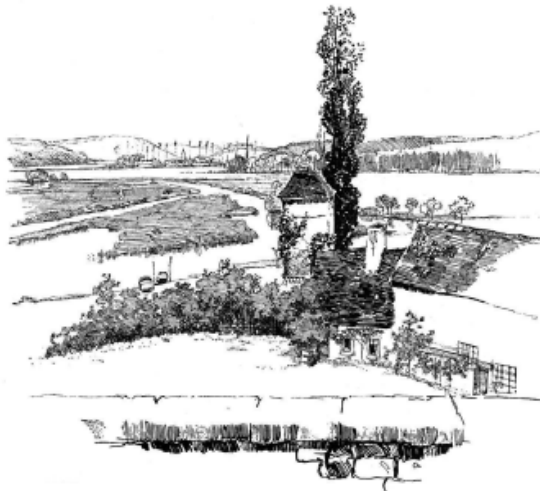
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O Mary, Immaculate Conception, Mother of Jesus and Mother of priests, pray and intercede for (.....). Amen.

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