

Mary, Mother of God

'Mary held all these words in her heart'(from today's Gospel, Luke 2:51). On this first day of the New Year, the church invites us to take stock of the direction in which our lives are moving. Are we living to the full our privileged call to be disciples of Jesus, or are we perhaps just drifting, or attempting to compromise, attempting to supply our surface needs while neglecting the hunger and thirst experienced in our soul?

We turn to Mary, for, more than any other, she shows us, simply and beautifully, the essence of what it means to live in communion with Jesus. It is to live a life of love. Whatever happens to us in life, we are to respond in love. In God's providence she was prepared for this by her own parents, and by the purity of her personal response to grace. But the fullness of the lesson came as she gazed upon her son, as a child and as a man, in the home at Nazareth, and on the cross of Calvary.

She knew what it was like to experience fear and uncertainty in the face of the unknown. Trusting God, she said Yes to what she believed God was asking of her. She knew what it was like to enjoy the love and companionship of her husband, and the joy of being a mother. She knew, too, the sword that pierced her heart as her Son was drawn by grace away from her embrace on his own journey of faith. She knew what it was like to see her Son welcomed and loved. She also saw him rejected, vilified, disgraced and cast out of the city to be crucified. Yet she continued to say Yes, knowing that love was the only true response, and trusting that where there is love there is God.

Is there any message we need to know that is more important than this? So it is that in our own personal lives, and in our life as a Christian community, facing our own uncertainties, and part of the joys and sorrows, the successes and failures, the celebrations and disappointments, the grace and disgrace of our world, we look to Mary so that we will see Jesus through her eyes and learn from him what it is to love.

Loving is not something which we can do from our own inner resources. Loving is what God does. Mary saw that, in God's desire to give, God gives himself in his Son, and gives himself to us, lost as we sometimes are in this confusing world where we are so easily distracted into sin: 'God so loved the world that he gave his only Son'(John 3:16). Like Mary, each of us in our own way is to say Yes to God's request that we welcome the gift of his Son, so that the communion of love which he enjoys with his Father will radiate out to others from our soul. This is what it is to love, and there is nothing else worth doing. On this first day of the year we are offered a special grace to renew our baptismal commitment to love.

For the Church this means a renewed commitment to mission. Following him who said of himself: 'God has appointed me to preach the Good News to the poor'(Luke 4:18), we are called as a community in each generation to be instruments of God's love to whoever is in need, in this way being part of God's response to the cry of the poor.

In his encyclical *The Mother of the Redeemer* (1987, n.37), Pope John-Paul II wrote: 'The Church's love of preference for the poor is wonderfully inscribed in Mary's *Magnificat*. The God of the covenant, celebrated in the exultation of her spirit by the Virgin of Nazareth, is also he who "has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly ... filled the hungry with good things, sent the rich away empty ; scattered the proud-hearted ... and his mercy is from age to age on those who revere him". Mary is deeply imbued with the spirit of the "poor of the Lord", who in the prayer of the Psalms awaited from God their salvation, placing all their trust in him. Mary truly proclaims the coming of the "Messiah of the poor". Drawing from Mary's heart, from the depth of her faith expressed in the words of the *Magnificat*, the church renews ever more effectively in herself the awareness that the truth about the God who saves, the truth about God who is the source of every gift, cannot be separated from the manifestation of his love of preference for the poor and humble, that love which, celebrated in the *Magnificat*, is later expressed in the words and works of Jesus. The church is thus aware (and at the present time this awareness is particularly vivid) not only that these two elements of the message contained in the *Magnificat* cannot be separated, but also that there is a duty to safeguard carefully the importance of "the poor" and of the "option in favour of the poor" in the word of the living God.'

As persons and as a community we are asked to give only the love that God gives us to give. Let us renew our commitment to listen as Mary listened and to say Yes as she said Yes to what God asks of us. It will mean experiencing much sorrow, but it will mean, here and forever, knowing the wonder of the most wonderful love for which our hearts yearn.