

## ***Waiting for the Holy Spirit with Mary the Mother of Jesus***

***There appeared to them parted tongues as it were of fire, and it sat upon every one of them; and they were filled with the Holy Spirit.***

The great image which prefigures this is the Burning Bush that Moses sees, on fire yet not consumed. When the true God comes close, He makes creation more luminous, more radiant and more beautiful, but does not destroy. When the true God comes, He makes the world radiant. Where the burning bush comes to its fullest expression is the Incarnation: God becomes one of us without ceasing to be God and without undermining the integrity of the creature He becomes, and within whom He has His being.

The early Church Fathers contemplated this with wonder and Gregory of Nyssa wrote:

*It is upon us who continue in this quiet and peaceful course of life that the truth will shine, illuminating the eyes of our soul with its own rays. This truth, which was manifested by the ineffable and mysterious illumination which came to Moses is God. And if the flame by which the soul of the prophet was kindled from a thorny bush, even this fact will not be useless for our inquiry. For it truth is God and truth is Light...such guidance of virtue leads us to know that light which has reached down to human nature. Lest one think that the radiance did not come from a material substance, this light did not shine from some luminary among the stars, but came from an earthly bush and surpassed the heavenly luminaries in brilliance.*

*From this we learn also the mystery of the Virgin: the light of divinity which through birth shone from her into human life did not consume the burning bush.*

This Light of Divinity, the Holy Spirit, without which there would be no revelation, no holiness, no Church, found hearts ready to receive it, and none so ready as the heart of Mary. Jesus' indwelling of Mary did not compromise her humanity, but brought it to fullest expression. So, her role in preparing the disciples for the coming of the Spirit was very important indeed, for in her the disciples could see that what they were waiting and praying for, to be clothed with the Holy Spirit, had already happened in Mary. The promise of the Father had already clothed her with power, the power that Jesus had: patient endurance, loving forgiveness; unshakeable peace and joy – all fruits of the Spirit's presence. Her one desire, like that of her Son, was to receive from the Father with grateful acceptance whatever He gave her; and once received to give back to the Father her whole self in order to glorify Him.

Today it may seem as if we are sitting, waiting for the promise of the Father, the Holy Spirit, who will explain all things to us. Like the disciples once again in the Upper Room we wait to receive the loving intimacy Jesus offers and respond with the firm commitment to enthrone Him as the King of our hearts. Our life, our activities, our relationships, our thinking and speaking, all must then be directed to union with Him so that then what we say and do will draw men and women to run to their Saviour. Scripture gives us Mary as the model of the true disciple, showing us her life totally, absolutely dedicated to Jesus her Son.

You make me feel that it's not impossible  
To follow in your footsteps, O Queen of the elect.  
You made visible the narrow road to Heaven  
While always practicing the humblest virtues.

No one can know what was in Our Lady's mind and heart as she waited and prayed with the disciples for the 'promise of the Father'. What we do know is that this aging woman, as a young virgin, consented with her whole being to what God asked of her, something, the height and depth of which

Stanzas from "Why I love you O Mary" by St Therese

she could not understand and, as mother of her first born son, amazed at what the shepherds were saying of Him, 'kept all these things, pondering them in her heart.'

Later in Bethlehem, O Joseph and Mary !  
I see you rejected by all the villagers.  
No one wants to take in poor foreigners.  
There's room for the great ones...  
There's room for the great ones, and it's in a stable...

How I love you listening to the shepherds and wisemen  
And keeping it all in your heart with care !...

She is the same woman who was hurt and bewildered by the independent, seemingly wilful decision of her 12-year old son to remain behind in Jerusalem while the family left for home. Her anguished cry: "My son, how *could* you?" was met with surprise and disappointment: "Why did you look for me? did you not realise that this was where I must be, in my Father's house?" What could a faithful mother do when faced with such sheer mystery but keep all these things in her heart?

But in Jerusalem a bitter sadness  
Comes to flood your heart like a vast ocean.  
For three days, Jesus hides from your tenderness.  
That is indeed exile in all its harshness !...  
At last you find him and you are overcome with joy,  
You say to the fair Child captivating the doctors :  
« O my Son, why have you done this ?  
Your father and I have been searching for you in tears. »  
And the Child God replies (O what a deep mystery !)  
To his dearest Mother holding out her arms to him :  
« Why were you searching for me ?  
I must be about My Father's business. Didn't you know ? »

During the startling, even frightening, wonderful ministry of her son, his mother was not spared the life-or-death question: "Who do you say I am?" and as Simeon had prophesied, the painful sword of discernment pierced her inmost soul, cutting through her cherished Jewish heritage. Along with all who came into contact with Jesus, she must cross the frontiers to unknown vistas of faith. And with bitter pain and apprehension she witnessed the fearsome hostility gathering around her beloved child and with unimaginable grief saw him humiliated and crucified.

I love you mingling with the other women  
Walking toward the holy temple.  
I love you presenting the Savior of our souls  
To the blessed Old Man who pressed Him to his heart.  
At first I smile as I listen to his canticle,  
But soon his tone makes me shed tears.  
Plunging a prophetic glance into the future,  
Simeon presents you with a sword of sorrows.

In these early days of Eastertide we are aware that Calvary is not just a remote and distant event of the past. It is not too difficult to recall our journey with Mary from the Praetorium to Golgotha, and in faith too, we stood beside her beneath the Cross, sharing in her helplessness. St Teresa Benedicata of the Cross writes of this part of our Carmelite vocation:

"But those whom you have chosen as companions here, surrounding you one day

Stanzas from "Why I love you O Mary" by St Therese

at the eternal throne, we now must stand, with you, beneath the Cross and purchase, with our heart's bitter pains, this spark of heaven for those priceless souls whom God's own Son bequeaths to us, His heirs."

To embrace this mystery, as Mary did, requires the deepest faith of all. The faith of Jesus. "Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that suckled you!" was a woman's spontaneous exclamation at the splendour of the human Jesus. Jesus did not deny his mother's blessedness in this, but declared her more blessed for *really* hearing the word of God and obeying it.

The evangelist John completes the scriptural picture of Jesus' mother. He is "the disciple whom Jesus loved". "This is the disciple who is bearing witness to these things, and who has written these things; and we know that his testimony is true." We are told that after Pentecost Mary lived with him in his home. Why had Jesus, on the cross, given her his beloved disciple to her as son and bidden the disciple take her as mother, if not that, together they should give knowledge of the one true God and Jesus Christ His only Son, to the new-born Church and the Church for all time? Mary is our mother and as we may reasonably surmise she enlightened and deepened the faith of the Beloved Disciple, we may trust her to do the same for us. She will show us what it means to abide in Jesus, to live in Him, to be so one with Him that our prayer to the Father is the prayer of Jesus Himself, and the fire of love Jesus enkindled on earth, will through His Spirit, burn within us.

As Carmelites we are aware of our particular vocation of prayer and interior solitude; that free and conscious surrender of our being to Our Lord. To gain the courage and fidelity to do this, like Mary, we ponder the words God speaks to us. As I write this 'talk' I am aware that you are asked to renounce even the communal Eucharist. How much more then should we, the whole Carmelite family, feel responsible for the prayer of the Divine Office which continues to hold us in communion with one another. Pondering these sacred texts, we realise, *make real*, that none of our prayers and liturgies are to be lived without feeling ourselves united to the whole Body of Christ that is the Church, the community of the Baptised reaching out to embrace the whole of humanity, indeed all of creation.

The Marian antiphon for Eastertide is the Regina Coeli. Recited as we enter the night, it is a light breaking in on any darkness that shrouds the earth and the hearts of us all. This is a joyous antiphon and it is meant to be so; Christ Jesus, Son of God, Son of Mary, risen from the dead the first fruits of all those called into God's embrace. Keeping step with Mary as we recite the Regina Coeli, we can be sure that we will be taken into event of Pentecost when a mighty wind surged through the house and what seemed like tongues of fire settled on the heads of each person present. It was a manifestation of the birth of the Church, and for the mother of Jesus, entry into the fullness of her divine motherhood.

Here is a woman who during her life resolutely trod the Way of Perfection, from the free surrender of her will to be conformed with God's, fidelity to that gift given, to its fruition in eternity

We have our part to play like Mary, in His mysterious plan of redemption as it unfolds until the end of time. In the poetry of St Symeon the Theologian (d1022):

*I share with trembling joy in the divine fire  
I who am only hay,  
And, oh, such a strange miracle...  
Without being consumed I continue to burn  
In a beautiful flaming light  
As did once the burning bush*

Stanzas from "Why I love you O Mary" by St Therese

The Holy Spirit of God was able to accomplish in Mary all He desired. There is much in us that needs to be purified and transformed if we are to be all that God longs for us to be and truly this is our deepest desire too. So with St Therese we may pray with gratitude:

*O Immaculate Virgin, most tender of Mothers...  
you rejoice that He makes us understand  
How our souls become his family here below.  
Yes, you rejoice that He gives us his life,  
The infinite treasures of his divinity !...*

