

## Novena to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart - 31 August to 8 September 2019

### OUR LADY OF THE SACRED HEART: MOTHER-DISCIPLE

#### Day 4: Tuesday, 03 September – in the 22<sup>nd</sup> week in Ordinary Time – Penitential

- 1 Thes 5:1-6,9-11 – The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night...but we are children of the light and of the day
- Ps 26: 1,4,13-14 – I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living
- Lk 4:31-37 – His teaching made a deep impression on them because he spoke with authority – he said to the unclean spirit “Be quiet! Come out of him!”

### MARY IN COMMUNITY, EMPOWERED BY THE SPIRIT

We are now on the 4<sup>th</sup> day of our Novena. Tonight we are invited to participate in a communal penitential service and both after this mass and tonight, we are given the opportunity for individual sacramental confession. On day 1 of this Novena we reflected on the historical Mary, an ordinary human being just like us. Pope Paul VI is careful to say that she is “a true daughter of Eve – **though free of that mother’s sin.**” Her humanity brings us face to face with our own humanity but at the same time calls us to transcendence. In Mary we see that it is possible to live in God’s grace, to open ourselves to God’s unconditional love and live in that love moment by moment. Today, we come to this Eucharistic celebration praying for a deep sense of the times we have failed to love as we ought to. When we failed to say “yes” to God’s call. Times when we closed our eyes to the situations of lack, of pain, of suffering, around us; times when we decided to turn the other way and not do what we felt was needed to be done and in our power to do. We pray for a deep awareness of our failures and our sinfulness. Today, Our Lady journeys with us along the way. At the same time she has already arrived at the finish line, cheering us on, encouraging us to get up every time we fall and assuring us that since there is nothing that we did that made God love us, there is also nothing we could ever do or not do that will make God love us any less.

Today’s readings, I think, echo this sentiment. St Paul says to the Thessalonians, we do not know the day or the time, the Lord will come like a thief in the night, when we least expect him. But there is no need to be afraid because we are children of the light and of the day...God never meant us to experience the Retribution, but to win salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us, so that alive or dead, we should still live united to him. And he adds “so keep encouraging each other.” The psalmist is encouraged and declares “I believe that I shall see the good things of the Lord in the land of the living.” In the Gospel, we see Jesus driving out an evil spirit. We are sure of this ...Jesus can do it! Jesus can drive away our “evil spirits” – our bad intentions, our unloving acts, our transgressions that cause suffering to others and to ourselves...and with Jesus’ Spirit empowering us, we can live in God’s love and love as Jesus did. The invitation is for us to allow His Spirit to come upon us and empower us.

As we saw the other day, in the first chapter of Luke, the angel promised Mary that the Spirit of the Lord will come upon her and that the power of the most high will overshadow her. In volume 2 of his work, the Acts of the Apostles, the evangelist shows this happening in a dramatic way. After Jesus’s ascension, we find his disciples gathered “constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as

well as his brothers...When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit..." (Acts 1:14 and 2:1-4).

We have been looking at Mary from different angles in the past days. Today we meet her as a woman disciple in a community of believing disciples, open to and empowered by God's Spirit.

The group of Catholic and Protestant biblical scholars who wrote *Mary in the New Testament* back in the 1970s tell us that Mary's membership in the post-resurrection community of Jesus' believers is a reliable historical fact. They say "*Since Mary is mentioned only once in Acts, it is clear that Luke was not concerned with exalting her role in the post-Easter community. Undoubtedly, his placing Mary in that group of believers is consonant with his portrayal of her in his Gospel; yet the task force did not regard Acts 1:14 as a Lucan creation but as a tradition which should be accepted as reliable.*"<sup>1</sup> Mary became, historically, a disciple of Jesus and for me it is important to note that she did not live her discipleship on her own. No, she was part of the earliest Christian community. It is in this community that she received the Spirit; it is this community that sent her out to preach the Risen Lord; and it is to this community that she returned at the end of each day of mission. This is important for me because it reminds me that in discipleship, community is essential. We are called to be part of a community or of several communities - that community may be our family, our parish community, our community in our places of work, our prayer group, our charismatic community or our religious community. As community we pray together and act together. We come to celebrate the Eucharist as one believing community. We come to the penitential service together. We confess our sins to the Lord and acknowledge our failures to one another. And as one community gathered in the love of God, we receive God's forgiveness.

Allow me to end with a little thought about sacramental confession. A Dutch Jesuit, Fr Peter van Breemen recalls the parable of the prodigal son and notices that the day of the son's return was the happiest day in the life of the Father. Then he says "It is this joy of the Father which is the basic reason for confession. We make God happy when we give him a chance to forgive us! Our confession gives God the opportunity to be God, to practice his faithfulness!"<sup>2</sup> The joy of being forgiven is a sharing in the joy of the Father who forgives.

Fr Van Breemen further says - Personal and explicit confession of sins is very important for us. If we do not verbalize our sins in a conversation with a fellowman and hear his absolution spoken in the name of God, the forgiveness may not reach our hearts. We are human, we have to express our guilt and we cannot do that alone. Confession gives us the chance to receive God's forgiveness in such a way that it not only forgives, it also heals.

And so sisters and brothers, today we have a chance to make this day the happiest day in our Father's life! Let us ask Mary to be with us as we bring ourselves before our forgiving God. Let the love of Jesus drive out what is evil in us and let his Spirit empower us so that we may truly love like he did. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Raymond Brown, et al, *Mary in the New Testament* (Fortess Press, Philadelphia, 1978), 284

<sup>2</sup> Peter van Breemen, *As Bread that is broken*, page 75