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**THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY A FAITHFUL
COMPANION TO GOD AND MAN. THE LUCAN
MARIAN PERSPECTIVE.
PART TWO: THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY
AS OUR GREAT SISTER**

INTRODUCTION

In this second section of our presentation we now turn to Mary after her delivery of our Lord Jesus Christ although we will include the pericope on magnificat. On this section we endeavour to present our blessed Mother after the nativity as a mother both biologically and spiritually to journey with us today. As a mother she joins us with her maternal tenderness to accompany in a special way those who are experiencing a lot of loneliness and untold pains in their lives. This part x-rays Mary's involvement in the upbringing of Jesus while also emphasizing on her role to us as our companion in our Christian commitment. In arriving at the conclusion of this paper we follow the presentation of St Luke both in the Gospel and in the Acts of the Apostles. We thus situate her today in the story of every man to bring us closer to the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Having been at the center of the proclamation and arrival of the Messianic times she keeps us company as we seek to enter deeply into the Mystery of Christ for our salvation and the Glory of God. The paper seeks to contribute positively to the reception of the Marian Spirituality

which is Gospel centered with an expectation that she will be more appreciated not of her sake but for the sake of her contribution in the salvation history. Therefore this study recommends that the modern man looks upon Mary as a model who is a selfless and sacrificial companion in these times of great anxiety.

1. MAGNIFICAT (LK 1:46-55)

To the words of Elizabeth, Mary responded with the *Magnificat*¹. In this song of joy according to Hamel, “Mary is speaking of herself as a historical individual. She contemplates her own history and that of humanity in the light of God, the Saviour, and the almighty who does wonders with our creaturely “feebleness.”² Mary is a type of authentic prophet, the prophetess of *Magnificat*.³ Jesus Christ was not an isolated entity, without historical connections, coming from Heaven. In other words we can say she stands on the place of humanity and what she did is what every man must do in response to God’s unfailing love to humanity. She stands with each one of us in a very unique way to demonstrates God’s faithfulness to us. In this song of praise Mary is grateful and full of praise to God for her divine motherhood is God’s favour to her. She is what she is because of God’s grace, “he has done great things for me.”⁴ What she is, is a fulfillment to God’s promises to the patriarchs of Israel she is the one carrying the long awaited promise made to our ancestors, to Abraham and his sons for ages to come. She comes out from this song as the real Israel where both the new and the old covenant are joined together

¹ Bishop Sheen calls this joyful song of Mary the song of a woman. Cf. Fulton Sheen, *World’s First Love; Mary Mother of God*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010), 38-54.

² Edouard Hamel, “Justice in the Vision of the Magnificat,” *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, (Middlegreen, Slough: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1994), 581.

³ Breandan Leahy, *The Marian Profile*, “The Ecclesiology of Hans Urs Von Balthasar”, (Canada: New city Press, 2000), 78.

⁴ Cf. Lk 1:49.

and finds completion. We deduce that this is why John the Baptist as the link of the Old and the New Testament leapt with Joy. In her song she holds that God is faithful to his promises acknowledging that she is an instrument of God's faithfulness to His people. Teaching us not to despair for God remains faithful to his people Israel.

Mary comes to us in this song of joy to be with us as we wait to receive God's promise. She has a prominent position in God's plan of fulfilling His promises to His faithful servants and this is the reason she is the companion of those who look upon God. Through her calling, God reaches out to all people and this is why in her song of joy, her mission is to be recognized by all people as they proclaim her to be blessed. In her song of joy Neuner explains that, "She is the lowly handmaid of the Lord who was exalted by a merciful God to conceive and give birth to the Saviour."⁵ In the drama of salvation she is acting both on her personal capacity and also on behalf of the human race acting on their behalf for their reconciliation with God and they will acclaim her blessed. She is thus the Blessed woman, the Blessed Mother of the new people of God. She thus accompanies humanity in bearing witness to God's fidelity in his promises.

In turn she gives men the reason of waiting on God throughout their lives as she joins them in their history. She is thus worth to be chosen as the best companion to lead us to the fulfillment of promises for a new dawn. Humanity thus has Mary as their mother and in this song of joy she prophesies that all generations will call her blessed.⁶ Her blessedness is experienced as she accompanies them to receive God's blessings in their lives towards eternity. Human beings thus have recourse to her as their own Mother as His holiness pope Benedict XVI tells us, "She has become the mother of believers through whom all generations and races of earth obtain blessings."⁷

⁵ J. Neuner, *Mary Mother of the Saviour*, (Bangalore: Theological Publications India 1995), 36.

⁶ Lk 1:48.

⁷ Joseph Ratzinger and Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Mary; The Church at the Source*, trans. Adrian Walker, (New York: Ignatius Press, 2005), 79.

She is related to all men and women as their mother effectively being a companion to us all in our earthly pilgrimage, out of her role she will be proclaimed blessed throughout the human history. Incredibly, the hope of all the ages find their fulfillment in this humble maiden of Nazareth from which nothing good is thought possible.⁸ Mary thus encompasses through her life the way of fulfillment of the human deepest longing. Hence she journeys with every generation towards the destiny of all men singing wondrously to God for his glorious deeds.

2. THE PRESENTATION OF JESUS IN THE TEMPLE (LK 2:21-51)

Mary together with Joseph her spouse in this Gospel pericope accompanied her son to the house of God. This journey was in view of fulfilling the Jewish customs of naming, circumcising⁹ and presenting their firstborn in the temple.¹⁰ Mary is presented here by St Luke in company with Jesus as he comes to fulfil the Law and identify himself with the Jewish customs. Thus Mary leads him to fulfil the Law. Today humanity looks upon Mary to be their companion in fulfilling the Law of our God. She who obeyed the Word has now assumed the responsibility of taking us to the temple in order to be taught by her Son and offer us an example of fulfilling the torah. Those who obey God's Word have life and Mary who listened, conceived and bore the Word is in company with life itself and she exhorts us to imitate her. Her womb became the temple for in it the Word made flesh dwelt for nine months and she was overshadowed by the Holy Spirit. Christ now presented in the temple has taken possession of his Father's house. Being the work of his hands He comes calling us

⁸ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, (Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 1998). No 36.

⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 527 where circumcision is understood to be a sign of God's people from the Abrahamic lineage where Christ is now inserted as one of them.

¹⁰ Cf. Lk 2:21-23.

brought by Mary to take possession of our hearts which are the dwelling place of the Spirit of God.¹¹ Hence we look upon her that she may accompany us till we reach Heaven the home of the redeemed.

Simeon was happy to see the saviour in the hands of Mary. Mary brought joy to many people by taking her son in their lives. Mary accompanied Jesus as he was inserted in the history of Israel. He would fulfil his mission through suffering and Mary would participate in equal measure in the suffering of her son. She suffered with him accompanied him in his agony. May she accompany us in our sufferings and teach us to accept our lot faithfully to Christ. Mary understands well the human suffering for as prophesied by Simeon¹² she suffered in her life in the pursuit of fulfilling God's will in her life. After the birth of Jesus His parents followed the Jewish customs of naming, circumcising and presenting their first born in the temple.¹³ In these events Luke presents Mary playing her role as required.

These events presented the child in the customs of His Jewish heritage and similarly according him all the rights and privileges that are proper to Jewish first born sons in accordance with the law of the first born.¹⁴ In the presentation of Jesus in the temple¹⁵ the remarks of Simeon exhibits to us Marian relevance of this event. First of all, guided by the Holy Spirit we discern that the baby presented is the long awaited Messiah for all Israel. The climax of salvation points to the universalism of Christ's mission. The suffering of Mary is foretold by Simeon.¹⁶ As a mother she was closely united in all what pertains to the joys and sorrows of her child. She accompanied her son in all his daily struggles and through her presence in the life of her son she tasted his pain in line with the prophecy of Simeon. The council fathers aware of this fact taught that our blessed mother

¹¹ Cf. 1Cor 6:19.

¹² Cf. Lk 2:35.

¹³ Cf. Luke 2:21-23.

¹⁴ Cf. Ex 13:1, 11-16.

¹⁵ Cf. Lk 2:26.

¹⁶ Cf. Luke 2:35.

shared in the suffering of her Son during his passion.¹⁷ He would be rejected since His mission is the one of challenging the status quo, she in turn will suffer as she experiences the pains and rejections of her only Son.

The finding of the child Jesus in the temple after looking for him anxiously for three months brings out the parental role of Mary and Joseph clearly breaks the silence on the hidden life of the boy Jesus.¹⁸ St Luke tells us that, “When the days of the feast were over and they set off home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem without his parents knowing it.”¹⁹ As a mother the loss of her only son must have brought to her inexpressible pain and made her restless. She was concerned about the safety of Jesus her only Son. She wanted Jesus to experience motherly care and love which any genuine company would offer. On finding Him in the temple Jesus makes it aware that his place is in his Father’s house. Mary having brought Jesus up now He has to unfold his mission to her and the entire community in Jerusalem. Hence we deduce that the company that Mary gave to Jesus was to lead him in doing His Heavenly Father’s will. As she continues accompanying Christians today she desires to lead us in doing God’s will for it is in God’s will that we will find everlasting joy which will reach climax in Heaven. His place is in his father’s house this is where he comes to lead us to and Mary is part of this mission of her Son. He wanted to be in relation with his father to commune with him. We thus look forward to her company as we seek those who are lost sin, addiction of every kind contrary to doing God’s will. In turn we should feel her company as she accompanies the refugees and the sick as she stands restless in looking for her sons and daughters who are lost in the world.

From this episode Mary continues to learn from her son for she is his daughter even though his mother biologically. As she

¹⁷ Cf. Second Vatican Council Dogmatic Constitution on the church, *Lumen Gentium* 1964; AAS, 52, 1965. No 58 and 61.

¹⁸ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 533-534.

¹⁹ Cf. Luke 2:48.

accompanied her son in his sorrows she accompanies humanity today in the struggles of life. Having experienced the pain of suffering in her life and in the sufferings of her own son Mary is one with those who suffer in one way or the other. As Nwaigbo captures it clearly, “the significance of the sufferings of Mary which are linked with the sufferings of the masses, who were made poor through social and political agencies: as manifested in the exploitation of the common people, underpayment of wages, denial of justice in the court of laws, wars, terrorism and incessant military coups.”²⁰ Thus Mary is a worth companion leading man in his sufferings to Christ for salvation. Her company also instills hope to all those who have been subjected to various sufferings and all those who are childless, widows, widowers, and orphans.

3. THE PRAYING CHURCH (ACTS 1:13-14)

Mary is mentioned the last time in the works of St Luke the evangelist as a member of the first Christian community after the ascension of Jesus. We encounter Mary in the company of the followers of Jesus at the upper room in prayer awaiting the promise.²¹ Her presence in this community shows the continuation of her ministry after the ascension of Jesus. As our great sister in faith she joins us into communion helping us deepen our relationship with God through prayer. The council fathers in the Vatican two reading from this script understood her to be a preeminent member in the church. She is one with those awaiting the promise and as a disciple of her son being in company with those who believe in him.²² Her role here is to accompany the young church as she prepares to receive the promise and begin the mission of evangelizing the entire world in obedience to the mandate of Christ. The church being the work of her Son, our

²⁰ Ferdinaldi Nwaigbo, *Mary Mother of the African Church; A Theological Inculturation of Mariology*, (New York: Peter Lang Gimbit, 2001), 141.

²¹ Cf. Acts 1:14 as a fulfillment of Jn 14:15-17.

²² Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, No. 53.

blessed Mother having understood the mission of Jesus and through her divine calling she stood with this community at such a time that her prayers and company were needed by the followers of her son. Our Blessed Mother had already received the Holy Spirit upon the message of her vocation in time of Annunciation. Mary has gone before the rest of those gathered in that upper room in receiving the Spirit. She leads the way for them. Pope John Paul II says, “In the Upper Room, Mary’s journey meets the Church’s journey of faith.”²³ Her presence was thus to show the followers of Jesus how to dispose themselves in receiving the Spirit of God. She is thus the great sister who teaches her brothers and sisters in faith how to respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Thus she becomes a teacher having learned prior to this community the docility expected in the life of the Spirit.

With the young church she takes on her role as an intercessor and one in the mystical body of her son. The blessed mother having been overshadowed by the Spirit at the annunciation she prays that the followers of her Son may receive the same Spirit for the continuation of his mission. “She who at the start of redemption gave us her son, now by her most powerful intercession obtained for the new born church the prodigious Pentecostal outpouring of the spirit of the divine redeemer who had already been given on the cross.”²⁴ Together with other disciples received the spirit for the post earthly life of Jesus’ mission of them as the church. She was accompanying and teaching them on how to receive and spend the outpouring of the Spirit as a teacher and as a student of the church. That guided by the Holy Spirit they may discern God’s will and ways which are proper to the mission of the new born church. As she accompanied Jesus in his earthly life now she accompanies his body the Church through her presence, prayers and her maternal care.

In this book of Acts of the Apostles the community of the followers of Jesus gathers together to wait for His promise after he ascended into

²³ Redemptoris Mater 1987 No 25.

²⁴ Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis*, 29th June 1943, w2.vatican.va/content/pius.../hf-p-xii-enc.29061943mystici-corporis-christi.html (accessed on Dec 28, 2018).

heaven. Mary and other women join them in prayer.²⁵ “So at the outset Luke emphasizes that the disciples spent the time of waiting for the spirit in an attitude of continuous and united prayer... the family of Jesus were thus among those who became part of the Church.”²⁶ Our blessed mother Mary is part of a praying church.²⁷ Mary Journeys with her son’s disciples for she herself is the first disciple and along her upbringing of her son she became aware that her call is part of her son’s mission. She becomes part of the early community of believers (Church). Her presence encourages and motivates the disciples for they are in turn by implication her sons having been the brethren of our Lord. She is at the centre of this new community, “as the mother, sister, colleague, disciple and teacher of a movement organized by her son Jesus.”²⁸ She is thus a prominent member in the community of believers, as a woman of hope having believed and hoped in God’s promises.²⁹ Mary was given a role to play in the founding of the Church of Christ. The best way to play this role is by availing herself in this community and journeying with them in faith. This role emanates from the fact that having conceived the Word she has every reason to be an example to others who have been called by Jesus to follow him. This is the source of her joy. “Her beatitude must be based on the fact that she has heard, believed obeyed, kept and pondered the word and continued to do it (Acts 1:14).”³⁰

This community was seriously in prayer waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Mary is part of those who pray and are faithfully waiting the eschatological promise. “Mary is in the midst of those

²⁵ Cf. Acts 1:14.

²⁶ I. Howard Marshall, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries; Acts, Leicester*, (England: Inter Varsity Press, 1980), 62.

²⁷ A note from the African Bible on Acts 1:14.

²⁸ Ivone Gebara & Clara Maria, *Mary Mother of God, Mother of the Poor*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), 77.

²⁹ Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter, *Spe Salvi Facti Sumus*, In Hope We Were Saved, (Nairobi Paulines Publications Africa, 2007). No 50.

³⁰ Brown, et al (eds.), *Mary in the New Testament*, 172.

who pray and wait.”³¹ This scene shows Mary assuming her role as the mother of the Church just as she was close to Christ now she is close to His body the Church. For she had all along given herself totally to Christ and His works. Mary continued her maternal role with the early disciples of the resurrected Lord. She accompanies them in prayer as she was accompanying Jesus in his mission now she must accompany those to whom Jesus’ mission is now entrusted. This is how she continues her mission after the ascension of Jesus. She prays to encourage and console the nascent church which needed a strong figure of hope and encouragement.

Mary joins the disciples to pray with them and for them. She was a disciple herself and as such she needs the grace of sustenance in her ministry and she in turn understood her role in praying for the church and being together in solidarity with them in their fears and anxiety. May she accompany us as we seek Jesus in the prayer of the Church. Perseverance in Prayer with Mary at the heart of the praying community is a virtue that she has to teach the disciples of her son. She is thus accompanying each one of us as St John Paul II noted, “More importantly still, Mary continues to cooperate with a maternal love in the birth and development of all of us, the brothers and sisters of her first born son.”³² She cannot settle till we the little ones of the Lord mature in faith.

Amazingly Mary plays this role even to our contemporary Church. The apostles of our times, scattered throughout the world, still find themselves devoted to prayer together with Mary, the mother of Jesus. In doing so, they become, from generation to generation, the sign of the kingdom that is not of this world. This is a new way of showing that Pentecost is still happening today and Mary is ever present in the life of the Church.³³ Through her presence to the church today as their elder sister she passes on her faith. Mary is ever present and continues to be with us in prayer throughout the ages until her

³¹ Joseph Ratzinger and Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *op. cit.*, 74.

³² John Paul II, *op. cit.*, No. 6.

³³ *Ibidem*, No 28.

son comes again to take us home. She is therefore a great, reliable, consoling, encouraging and loving sister to believers of all ages in the community of faith.

CONCLUSION

Mary as presented by St Luke is an important figure in the history of salvation. Her role as a faithful companion to Jesus and to his believers is still relevant today. We see in her total sacrifice for other people and her presence in their lives accompanying them in totality. With her on our side is a sure guarantee of victory against the allurement of this world which disorients us from listening and doing God's will in our lives. In turn we are invited to become another Mary in our communities so as to be source of encouragement to all those who are awaiting the fulfillment of God's promise in their lives. With Mary may we walk with her side by side in our pilgrimage always ready to learn from her heroic virtues in obedience to God's Word. We look forward for another Mary to come up from our communities and offer her consolations through her faithful accompaniment to all people in their respective communities. This is the sure way of giving assurance and guidance to the people of our times who seriously need a great sister on their side.

Her companionship is based on the mystery of Incarnation which is not gender based hence both men and women can be and are invited to be another Mary in our contemporary world. In Luke-acts a ground for Mary's theology and relevance down to our times has been demonstrated. Of special mention was the need of Mary being viewed as a mother and a great sister following Luke's narrative. We now walk with her as she looks forward to the fulfillment of her son's mission all over the world. In conclusion we pray with pope emeritus, Benedict XVI, "Holy Mary mother of God, our mother, teach us to believe, to hope to love with you. Show us the way to his kingdom! Star of the sea, shine upon us and guide us on our

way!”³⁴ With unfailing solicitude she finds out what our needs are and, with the straightforward simplicity of a mother, a sister and a believer she brings them to the attention of God in prayer. As she did in the conversation with her Son at the marriage feast in Cana of Galilee,³⁵ may she intervene for us. Last but not the least we ask of her guidance as we seek to become great brothers and sisters to all the needy in our societies.

Abstract

The term a great brother is in use today in many circles which captures the aspect of a faithful friend or companion. One who stands with the side that feels inadequate in one way or the other. This phenomenon is both manifested in the sacred as well as the secular realms of human existence. The inadequacy employed here refers to a wide range of being incapacitated. In our scope we will employ the term great sister instead of the great brother to refer to the Blessed Virgin Mary as our great sister. It is beyond doubt that our Blessed Mother stands tall in so many ways as compared to the modern man. It is in this line that Mary fits well not only to be called our companion but our great sister. Although the great brother may be understood in terms of political economical or even social power Mary has noble values than these ones.

In this paper we propose to follow St Luke in his Marian presentation and offer her to all Christians today as our great sister. We refer to Mary as our great sister not out of her worldly power or wealth but simply because of her faith, holiness and commitment in her calling after she gave birth to our Saviour. As our great sister she stands with each of us in company of her Son with the sole intention of uplifting our lowly nature to the nature of her Divine Son. The presence of our blessed mother in our lives will seduce us with her heroic virtues which will be beneficial in our Christian life. To achieve our stated purpose in this article we shall articulate the role of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the event of presenting the child Jesus in the temple. We will then examine her active presence and contribution in the first community of believers gathered in Jerusalem awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit and a conclusion will follow thereafter. However it is worth to note that we have also

³⁴ Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi Facti Sumus*, No 50.

³⁵ Cf. John 2:2-11.

carried forward the pericope on Magnificat simply because it is our opinion that the theme of Mary as our great sister is well captured within this scope. Hence, the ongoing companionship will create more zealous Christians in professing their faith both in word and deed for Mary has taught us so.

Key words: Great sister, Mary, Magnificat, Presentation, Praying Church

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