

One

Behold Your Son

When Jesus hung there on the cross, He only spoke seven times.

He was dying of asphyxiation. Every breath was torture and He wasn't going to waste it. But one of the times He spoke, He spoke to Our Lady and St. John – who is only described as “the disciple Jesus loved.”

Our Dying Lord gathered a breath, turned to His Mother, and said, “Woman, behold your son.” Then He turned to St. John and said, “Behold your Mother.”

What happened there? Why did Jesus say that, and what did He mean by it?

Two

The Misconception

It's a common misconception to think that Jesus was simply making practical arrangements to be sure Mary was taken care of after He died.

Every man wants to make sure the family members who depend on him will be provided for if He dies. Could that be simply what Jesus was doing?

No, definitely not. Jesus wasn't so much entrusting Mary to the beloved disciple's care. He was entrusting the beloved disciple to her care. And in that act, He was entrusting all of us into the care of His Mother.

Three

Why It Wasn't Giving Mary to John

It's important to remember that Mary wasn't materially dependent on Jesus at the time of His arrest and crucifixion. Remember, Jesus had been gone from home for three years. He hadn't been supporting Mary for a long time. So whatever Mary's practical situation was, it had been her practical situation for a long time, and there was no reason it couldn't continue.

Also, Mary already had family support. In fact, Mary of Cleophus, one of her relatives, was there beneath the cross at that very moment. Likewise, John didn't need a natural mother. In fact, we're told that "The mother of James and John" was also beneath the cross. So in terms of practical family support, both Mary and John had that already from other people who were right there.

Finally, notice that Jesus speaks to *Mary* first.

If He was giving John a new responsibility, He would have said, "John, I need you to take care of my mother when I'm gone" – and then He would have said, "Mother, He'll take care of you."

But instead, He spoke to Mary first, because she was the one He was giving a new responsibility to. She was the one who would take care of John. And He called her "Woman," the Woman put in enmity with the Serpent, the Woman of Cana, who He prophesied would be with Him in this hour.

She was the Woman who had cooperated with Him in the mission of saving the world. And from now on, her cooperation in salvation meant being a Mother to all His beloved disciples.

Four

What John does – what we are to do

When Jesus gave Mary as a Mother to John, He was giving Her to all His beloved disciples.

As Pope Leo XIII said, the Church “has always understood that in the person of John, Jesus Christ designated the entire human race.”

And how did John respond to Jesus’ direction to take Mary as his mother? The next passage tells us.

Immediately after Jesus’ words to Our Lady and John, the gospel says, “And from that hour, the disciple took her into his home.”

Now, when someone comes into your home to stay, it means they are part of your everyday life. And this is what we are supposed to do with Mary. We are supposed to welcome Her into our home. Make her part of our everyday life. She’s not a passing guest. She’s not a stranger. She’s someone we greet every day. Someone whose presence we’re aware of every day. Someone we show our love for every day.

And when someone is in our home to stay, it means we’ve put our house at their disposal. That we have nothing withheld from them.

We sometimes say, “My house is your house.” The Church often talks about consecration to Mary. It just means accepting her as Mother, the way John did, and taking her into our house. Saying to Mary, “My house is your house.” Saying to Mary, “My life is your life.”

And when Mary comes to stay with us, when our house becomes her house, she will make it a holy house. And when our life is put at her disposal, she will make it a holy life.

Five

The Strange Beauty of Calvary

We've heard the story of Calvary so often, we can forget what a strange story it is. But focusing in on Mary at the foot of the cross can help us remember how beautifully unexpected God's plan is.

So remember this: we are responsible for Christ's murder. It was our sin. The Church reminds us that we are, all of us, the authors of Christ's passion. But it's also Christ's death on the cross that reunites us to God the Father. Which means that *at the very moment when we are killing His Only Son, we become God's children again.* Jesus, in dying at our hands, gives us His Father to be Our Father.

So too, and even more explicitly, at the cross, while He is dying at our hands, Jesus gives us His Mother to be Our Mother. *At the very moment when we are killing Her Only Son, Mary accepts us as Her Children.*

What a strange and beautiful story of love and forgiveness is this!

When we call Mary Our Mother, let's not forget her love for us. Let's not forget what it cost her to become Our Mother. And let's give ourselves without holding anything back, to this perfect woman, who didn't even hold back her perfect beloved Son, in order that we might be saved.