

## Good Friday 2009 – St. Jude

“When Jesus saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing near, He said to His mother, ‘Woman, behold, your son!’ Then He said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother!’ And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.”

In just a few weeks, our parish will have new stained glass windows – our FIRST in our 50 year history. They will be placed here, in the front, above the altar and behind the cross. In designing these windows, I had to keep in mind where they would be – above the altar and behind the cross. And so, in the end, we developed a design which, I hope, brings all those things together: the image we chose is exactly what we heard in today’s Gospel – Mary & John at the foot of the cross. So, today, allow me to focus on that one section of today’s Good Friday Passion.

In John’s Gospel, the way of the cross is the way of glory – albeit a very *strange* glory. In chapter 17 of the Gospel, we find Jesus in prayer. He has just explained to the disciples what lies ahead. “The hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, every one to his own home, and will leave me alone.” Now, on the cross, a long shadow is cast over this prayer, and yet he prays, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you.” A strange glory, indeed!

Then the arrest, the mock trial, the cruel jests, the whipping, the crown of thorns, the nailing to the wood – and it is finished. But, Jesus is not entirely alone! Not yet. Standing by the cross with his mother are his aunt, Mary the wife of Clopas, Mary Magdalene and John, the disciple whom He loved – all of them beholding this strange glory of the crucified Lord of life.

From the beginning, Christians have focused on the mournful mother and her dying son. And so, an old traditional hymn comes to mind for our reflection, the “Stabat mater” – “At the cross her station keeping, stood the mournful mother weeping, close by Jesus to the last.”

It was all turning out just the way it had been foretold. Pious Jewish minds remembered now the words of Genesis: “I will put an enmity between you [the serpent] and the woman; between your seed and her seed, he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel.” Mary, descendant of the first Eve (acknowledged by Christians for centuries as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Eve), watches as Satan does his worst to her Son. Did she know, as she stood there by her dying Son, weeping, that this was the way of the strange glory by which He would conquer sin and death?

She must have had some sense it would be something like this. Old Simeon in the temple, probably now long dead, had told her, as she and Joseph carried the infant Jesus into the temple for His dedication, that “This Child is destined for the rise and fall of

many in Israel, and a sword will pierce your own soul, that the thoughts of many may be revealed.” Strange words – but whatever they meant, she now knew the piercing sword of grief, cutting her body and soul.

For us as Catholics, to think of Jesus is to think of Mary. From her, Jesus received his humanity, his Jewish humanity: the color of His eyes, the cut of His nose, that odd way of smiling. She potty-trained Him, taught Him His first words, encouraged His first steps, kissed His scuffed knee and made it all better, picked Him up in the dark of nightmare nights and told Him everything would be all right – even as she pondered prophecies about piercing swords and wondered at the meaning of a king from the East who presented as his royal gift – myrrh for the birth (or was it for the burial) of her lovely child.

Jesus and Mary could not have been closer – and yet there was a strange distancing – seen even here in these words from the cross, “Woman, behold your son.” At Cana the wine ran out and she told him, “They have no wine.” Jesus responded, “Woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” And Mary simply told the servants, “Do whatever He tells you.” These are the last recorded words of Mary in the Scriptures: “Do whatever He tells you.” Mary is learning, as all mothers must, to let go. She knew it had to be, but it must have hurt when he said, “Woman, what have you to do with me?” Love that lets go is NEVER easy. Love like this has to be learned – and Mary is learning as Jesus’ disciple.

“Woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” Jesus has no other life than what he calls His “hour” – referring to his mission of salvation. There is no connection with Christ or to Christ without this “hour,” His mission, His cross. Not even the connection of mother-son holds – only the connection of woman and disciple. The key to understanding Mary is to understand her role as, first, the perfect disciple. She “lets go” – she gives everything to God – she emptied herself, just as Jesus did on the cross.

Mary, “at the cross, her station keeping.” There was nothing else she could do – except be there. The presence of our helplessness is our gift to the helpless – our presence is as important as our action. The *Stabat Mater* was written in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Ten three-line verses which form a prayer that takes us through Mary’s sufferings to the sufferings of Christ, by whose mercy we hope to attain the glory of paradise. This prayer-poem has been set to music by some of the worlds greatest composers: Palestrina, Rossini, Verdi, Dvorák and others. Antonin Devorák, for one, composed his music for the *Stabat Mater* in 1878, after losing three children in three years. A large and romantic work, it is at one and the same time melodic and painfully intense. It takes the listener into the heart of darkness, and there, at the heart of darkness, is hope – because there is Christ. We move through Mary’s sorrow – into Christ’s – there to discover God’s saving grace. If you indulge me, let me sing it for you today...

**English:**

At the cross her station keeping,  
Mary stood in sorrow weeping  
When her Son was crucified.

While she waited in her anguish,  
Seeing Christ in torment languish,  
Bitter sorrow pierced her heart.

With what pain and desolation,  
With what noble resignation,  
Mary watched her dying Son.

Ever-patient in her yearning  
Though her tear-filled eyes were burning,  
Mary gazed upon her Son.

Who, that sorrow contemplating,  
On that passion meditating,  
Would not share the Virgin's grief?

Christ she saw, for our salvation,  
Scourged with cruel acclamation,  
Bruised and beaten by the rod.

Christ she saw with life-blood failing,  
All her anguish unavailing,  
Saw him breathe his very last.

Mary, fount of love's devotion,  
Let me share with true emotion  
All the sorrow you endured.

Virgin, ever interceding,  
Hear me in my fervent pleading:  
Fire me with your love of Christ.

Mother, may this prayer be granted:  
That Christ's love may be implanted  
In the depths of my poor soul.

At the cross, your sorrow sharing,  
All your grief and torment bearing,  
Let me stand and mourn with you.

Fairest maid of all creation,  
Queen of hope and consolation,  
Let me feel your grief sublime.

**Latin:**

Stabat Mater dolorosa  
Juxta Crucem lacrimosa,  
Dum pendebat Filius.

Cujus animam gementem,  
Contristatam et dolentem,  
Pertransivit gladius.

O quam tristis et afflicta  
Fuit illa benedicta  
Mater Unigeniti!

Quae maerebat, et dolébat,  
Pia Mater, dum vidébat  
Nati poenas inclyti.

Quis est homo, qui non fleret,  
Matrem Christi si vidéret  
In tanto supplicio?

Quis non posset contristári,  
Christi Matrem contemplári  
Doléntem cum Filio?

Pro peccáti sua gentis  
Vidit Jesum in torméntis,  
Et flagéllis súditum.

Vidit suum dulcem natum  
Moriéndo desolátum,  
Dum emisit spíritum.

Eja mater, fons amóris,  
Me sentíre vim dolóris  
Fac, ut tecum lúgeam.

Fac, ut árdeat cor meum  
In amándo Christum Deum,  
Ut sibi compláceam.

Sancta Mater, istud agas  
Crucifixi fige plagas  
Cordi meo válide.

Tui nati vulneráti,  
Tam dignáti pro me pati,  
Poenas mecum dívide.

Virgin, in your love befriend me,  
At the Judgment Day defend me.  
Help me by your constant prayer.

Fac me tecum pie flere,  
Crucifixo condolére,  
Donec ego víxero.

Savior, when my life shall leave me,  
Through your mother's prayers receive me  
With the fruits of victory.

Juxta Crucem tecum stare,  
Et me tibi sociáre  
In planctu desídero.

Virgin of all virgins blest!  
Listen to my fond request:  
Let me share your grief divine

Let me, to my latest breath,  
In my body bear the death  
Of your dying Son divine.

Virgo vírginum praeclára,  
Mihi jam non sis amára:  
Fac me tecum plángere.

Wounded with His every wound,  
Steep my soul till it has swooned  
In His very Blood away.

Fac, ut portem Christi mortem,  
Passiónis fac consórtem,  
Et plagas recólere.

Be to me, O Virgin, nigh,  
Lest in flames I burn and die,  
In His awe-full judgment day.

Fac me plagis vulnerári,  
Fac me Cruce inebriári,  
Et cruó re Fílii.

Savior, when my life shall leave me,  
Through your mother's prayers receive me  
With the fruits of victory.

Flammis ne urar succénsus,  
Per te, Virgo, sim defénsus  
In die judícii.

While my body here decays  
May my soul your goodness praise,  
Safe in heaven eternally. Amen Alleluia.

Christe, cum sit hinc exíre  
Da per Matrem me veníre  
Ad palmam victóriæ.

*The Collegeville Hymnal*  
Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1990.

Quando corpus moriétur,  
Fac, ut ánimæ donétur  
Paradísi glória. Amen. Allelúja.

*Missale Romanum*  
Cincinnati: Benziger Brothers, 1956.

Mary, what grief you felt – what horror at this occurrence. Who, contemplating this scene, would not weep and grieve with you? It is a scene beyond our imagining... She sees her son, bruised, beaten, dying – all for our salvation – that we might have life. We can only imagine the depth of love she felt for her Son as he hangs, dying. May I feel that same depth of love for Christ. Pray for me, Mary, that I, too, may feel that deep love for Jesus, your Son – that I could stand with you and beside you to mourn, to weep, to cry... to LOVE. Jesus, Christ, receive me when I, too, die. May Mary's devotion – may her discipleship help me to be a better disciple – loving to the end – suffering it all in union with you.

That's my own summary of the Stabat Mater. Truly it is a prayer-poem which employs a famous Catholic saying: "To Jesus through Mary." Think for a moment – without Mary, Christ would have no body to offer on the cross. Mary is the one who brings forth God from her womb – who enables God to "take flesh and live among us." Mary truly is at the heart of the mystery of our salvation. It was Christ's death on the cross that brought us the offer of salvation, but without Mary's *fiat* (let it be done to me as you have said) to the angel, there would be no death on the cross.

This image of Mary and John (the beloved disciple) at the cross – which will very soon illuminate the windows above the sanctuary and beside the cross – becomes an image of the pilgrim Church. Mary is the model of discipleship in her total availability to the will of God. She had no agenda of her own. To the angel's announcement, she says "Let it be done according to your word." She has given herself totally over to God – and yet she is dependant upon others here on earth – upon Joseph her husband – and now upon John – to whom Jesus entrusts her. At Jesus' conception, she was alone – but God told Joseph "have no fear of taking Mary, your wife, into your home." Now, at the cross, Mary is alone again – and again God intervenes and provides her with comfort: "Behold, your mother." And from that hour he took her into his home." In Mary's discipleship – in her being totally available to God – she is also totally dependant upon God's providing for her needs.

This is how Mary teaches us to be true disciples of Christ: true availability to God overcomes any fear of being dependent on others, because God always provides. Our determination to be independent by being in control (an idea so prevalent in our culture and world today) is what makes us totally unavailable to God. Availability is letting God have His way, even when it brings us to the cross. For those who are available to God, our very lives are at His disposal – and so, Mary, "at the cross her station keeping" is totally available to God even "to the last."

Weeping at the cross, Mary is both the Mother of Sorrows (a heart which loves so much, broken in anguish) and the Mother of Hope (because in her availability, she knows God will take care of her – and us!). This is the key to true Christian discipleship. Here at the cross, in Mary and in John, we come to know that we are capable of total surrender – of love so deep that it surrenders itself into God's hands.

It is the cross that binds John to Mary, and binds all of us as Christians to one another in a mutual gift of self. Christ is THE gift, and Christ enables us to give the gift of ourselves – which is ultimately the gift of Christ.

Mary's presence at the cross, Mary's last recorded words in Scripture tell us how to be Christ's disciples:

1. be available – place yourself totally in God’s hands – it may bring great sorrow, but be filled with hope and trust.
2. “Do whatever He tells you.” Whoever wishes to be my disciple must take up his cross and follow me.

The invitation resounds through all time – and we make our way, together with Christ, together with Mary, together with John, together with one another, to the foot of the cross. There we find ourselves with Mary and John and a host of others who have given themselves totally over to Christ – and soon, our new stained glass windows will be a constant reminder of this to us. To each of the brothers and sisters we find here in this church – and on the other side of that window, Jesus says, “Behold, your mother” And to Mary, “Behold, your children.”