



MISSIONARIES IN ACTION

DOMINICAN MISSION FOUNDATION

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Celebrating Mothers and Others whose Hearts Magnify the Lord



Dear Mission Friends:

As opposed to the prevailing attitude of the time, Jesus elevated his mother—and indeed all women—to a place of respect and honor. From when we first hear Mary speak, at the Angel Gabriel’s announcement, she is seen as a discerning woman of faith. She does not know how any of it could or would come to pass—“How can this be...?”—but after being reassured by the angel, she puts her faith in God and tells him, “Let it be...” (Luke 1:34,38). She is to be guided on her journey not by earthly evidence or blind faith but by the faith of one who ponders and reflects upon everything in her heart.

When the shepherds come to see the newborn Jesus and tell his parents what an angel had said, that this baby is Christ the Savior, **“Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart”** (Luke 2:19). For the next few years Mary’s maternal heart is attentive to her Son’s growing up, observant of every detail, fulfilling every need. “And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom” (Luke 2:40).

At twelve years old, on a family trip to Jerusalem, Jesus stays behind after his parents leave, assuming at first that he has gone with others. After three days of desperate searching, they find him in the temple, listening to and questioning a group of teachers. Mary admonishes him, probably not as strongly as most of our parents would have—he is the Savior, after all. “Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously” (Luke 2:48). To his parents’ confusion, he answers that he is in his father’s house; nevertheless he goes back home “and was obedient to them; and **his mother kept all these things in her heart.** And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature...” (Luke 2:51-52).

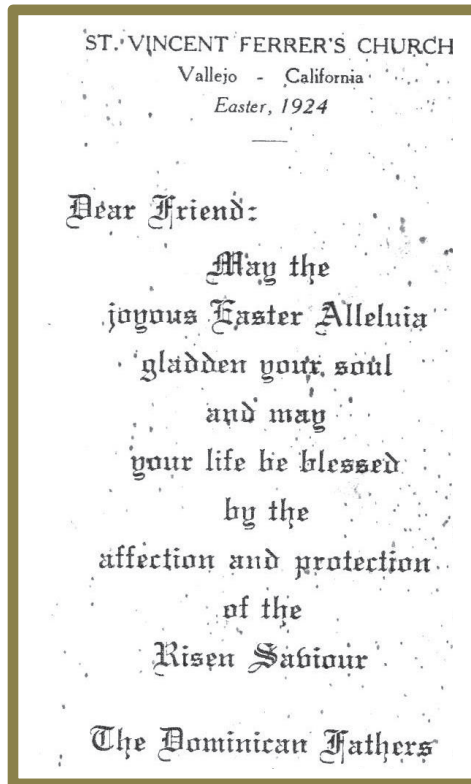
For years Mary’s words go unrecorded, but one gets the feeling that she is quiet and reflective by nature. Her silence is not the silence of one removed from those around her and absorbed in herself. It is the silence of a maternal heart intent on observing and contemplating everything that affects the life of her son.

The next time—the last time!—we hear Mary speak is at the wedding feast at Cana when Jesus is about 30. By now, her understanding of her son has surely deepened. She has known him, pondering and reflecting upon him all these years.



When she observes that the wine has run out and knows how embarrassing that will be for the hosts, she quietly and simply tells her son, “They have no wine” followed by her words of confidence to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you” (John 2:3,5). And of course, multiple gallons of good wine are suddenly available.

In three more years, Mary is at the foot of her son’s cross, having watched his excruciating suffering and now his dying. She is weeping but stands silently by her son as he does what she knows he must. It is her darkest hour, but her faith has become ever stronger, and



Above, front and back of an old Easter holy card from the time the Dominicans served at St. Vincent's in Vallejo.

surely all those years of pondering and reflecting upon the things in her heart help to sustain her. That their great love is mutual is demonstrated when, just minutes before he dies of his agonizing wounds, Jesus sees his mother and says to John, standing nearby, “Behold, your mother!” (John 19:27) and thus ensures that John will take care of her in his absence.

But Jesus’ Blessed Mother is not the only woman who figures prominently at the foot of his cross and later. All four Gospels speak of women who have followed him, learned from him, loved him. Each apostle’s recollection is a little different from the rest, but the premise is basically the same. “Standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother, His mother’s sister, Mary, the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene” (John 19:25). And “many women who had followed Jesus from Galilee and ministered to Him were there, looking on from a distance” (Matthew 27:55).

And then Jesus, who always held women in high regard, bestows the highest of honors on them. Again there are variations in the details, due to the passage of time, varying perspectives, and issues of oral tradition, but the common thread of all four Gospels holds that the first witnesses to Jesus’ empty tomb are women. Of course they are—they get up when it is still dark and, having gathered spices and perfumes, go to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. For them it is a simple act of love, but Jesus knows that finding him gone will become a life-changing event for all of mankind. **Women are not only the first to see but also to believe that Jesus is not dead—he has risen! And they are the first to whom Jesus appears after he has risen.** In both cases the men are more reluctant to believe—some are afraid and others are full of doubt and demand proof.

“When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so they could go and anoint Him...they went to the tomb at sunrise...observed that the stone—which was very large—had been rolled away. When they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; they were amazed and alarmed... Early on the first day of the week, after [Jesus] had risen, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene...Yet, when [the apostles] heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they did not believe it. Later, He appeared to the Eleven themselves as they were reclining at the table. He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart...” (Mark 16).

Some of the apostles think the women’s accounts were “an idle tale” (Luke 24:12). Indeed, women were second-class citizens in Biblical times and not considered credible witnesses, but that fact only serves to support the Gospels’ historical accuracy because no ancient author would have had women be the first witnesses if he was making it up. And God does not choose in accordance with ever-changing societal attitudes but rather with fundamental truth. According to Pope Francis, “part of the mission of women; of mothers, of women! is to witness to their children, to their grandchildren, [to those in their care], that Jesus is alive, is living, is risen...Women, carry on witnessing to this! **It is the heart that counts for God,** how open to him we are, whether we are like trusting children,” and not, as Jesus calls the men “slow of heart” (Luke 24:25).



An example of the Church's admittedly slow but growing emphasis on advocating the dignity of women is provided by Mary Magdalene. She is, in all four Gospels, a devoted disciple of Jesus who follows him to the foot of the cross. She is the first to see Jesus' empty tomb and later to encounter the risen Jesus, during which time she alone embodies the Church on earth. Referred to as "Apostle to the Apostles" by Thomas Aquinas, she is entrusted with proclaiming the good news to the apostles, making her also the Church's first true evangelist. Her feast day is July 22, but it has only been since 2016, when, at Pope Francis's request, it was decreed a major feast, taking precedence over the eleven other saints who share the same feast day. Described in the decree as "one who loved Christ and who was very dear to him," Mary Magdalene is the first woman after Our Blessed Mother whose feast day has been raised to the rank of major.

And earlier that year, Pope Francis overturned centuries of tradition that banned women from the service of washing of the feet during Holy Week. Until now, only men or boys were formally allowed to take part in the service, in which a priest washes the feet of others to commemorate Jesus' gesture of humility, service, and love towards his apostles on the night before he died.



Far left, Fr. Tim and some First Communicants; Left, Fr. David Bello, O.P. after presenting our donor's check to the sisters at Oasis del Niño in Mexicali.

But in a letter to the Vatican department that regulates rites of worship, Francis said the group should be made up of "all members of the people of God."

Fr. Timothy Conlan, O.P., our missionary in Guatemala, also advocates the dignity of women. He once discussed, for example, the oft-argued story of Jesus' visit to see his friend Lazarus, whose two sisters Martha and Mary personify differing roles of women: one is preparing the food and the other is enjoying the conversation. Which is more important? For me, Fr. Tim settles the argument. "Both of those activities are essential to making sure a guest is enjoying himself. These ordinary human customs enshrine much deeper values of respect, compassion, and the hope for peace, friendship, and the invitation of God himself to partake of the heavenly banquet here and hereafter, all of which is summed up in the invitation to the Eucharist."

Fr. Tim is one of those rare caregivers to whom, as articulated by St. Timothy, his namesake, "a special grace has been entrusted" (1Timothy4). Among other ministries in Rabinal, he serves the children, primarily through his program *Jovenes Arriba*, "with all the patience [and heart] of a teacher" (2Timothy4).

I was recently reminded of a ministry we help support on the outskirts of Mexicali, *Oasis del Niño*. One of our long-time donors who died at 99 had left a gift in his will for us to send to the good Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus who run the 'Oasis.' Another caregiver who saw with his heart, the donor would occasionally call to relay his sadness upon seeing the suffering of children in the world and he wanted to do what he could.

The Oasis serves as a home for children from poor or dysfunctional families. Many are children of destitute single mothers who must take long bus rides to factories where they put in twelve-hour days (or nights), followed by another long bus ride home and a few hours of sleep before the cycle starts again. Their children are necessarily left alone for hours, often without food, and certainly without adult guidance or protection. In striving to fill the needs of this group of children, the Sisters at the Oasis open their doors to them from Sunday afternoon until Friday evening, when, at the Sisters' encouragement, their mothers pick them up to spend the weekend at home together. Other children, whose families are seriously dysfunctional due to domestic violence, drug addiction, or alcoholism, are allowed to stay the weekend.

A visitor is met with the contagious joy, enthusiasm, and affection of the children for their beloved Sisters who feed them and clothe them; teach them habits of good health and hygiene; impose rules and responsibilities by which they are made to feel confident and safe; and foster values of work and play, sharing and giving, compassion and, of course, faith. The Sisters lovingly nurture and protect the children who come to them, following Jesus's teaching, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me" (Mark 9:37).

In all our mission areas our primary focus has always been on the most vulnerable—helpless elderly who have been abandoned and children, especially those who have been orphaned or abused or whose parents are unable to provide them with adequate personal or medical care or education. Like the Oasis, many of those missions are administered by groups of caregiving sisters—Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul at Hospital San Carlos in Chiapas; Dominican Sisters of Fatima in Puerto Rico; Iraqi Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena in Iraq; Dominican Sisters of Christian Doctrine in both

Equatorial Guinea and Mexico—all rare caregivers who lovingly witness to those they serve that Jesus is alive and that "it is the heart that counts for God." Pope Francis proclaimed that "women, in the Church and on the journey of faith, had and still have today a special role in opening the doors to the Lord, in following him and in communicating his Face, for **the gaze of faith is always in need of the simple and profound gaze of love.**"

In peace and love,
Lesley Warnshuis



If you would like to remember our missionary work in your will, our legal title is:

**Province of the Holy Name, Inc.
Dominican Mission Foundation
2506 Pine St., P.O. Box 15367
San Francisco, CA 94115-0367**

We are a 501(c)3 non-profit, tax-exempt organization.

Upcoming Mission Appeals
Our director Fr. Jordan Bradshaw, O.P. will be preaching at the following parishes:

June 3-4: St. Maria Goretti, Elk Grove
June 11-12: St. Dominic, Benicia
July 15-16: St. Dominic, San Francisco
Aug. 12-13: St. Anthony, Long Beach
Aug. 19-20: St. Teresa of Avila, Reno

More to come!