



# *Apostles for Today*

*Reflection and Prayer - June 2009*

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In communion with Mary

## **II. “Mary, Queen of Apostles, exemplary model of the spiritual life”.**

This month we will reflect on this topic taken from article 3 of the General Statutes of the Union. Mary, the exemplary model of the spiritual life, occupies a central place in our Pallottine spirituality. As we contemplate the icon of Mary in the Cenacle in prayer with the Apostles we are invited to cultivate our personal and community prayer life which are part of our growth in experience of God.

The Cenacle is an ideal place to develop the contemplation which underpins our spiritual life and motivates us to mission. Prayer and apostolate go hand in hand, but it is prayer which moves apostolic action. Our ‘Pentecost’ begins with baptism.

“All these joined in continuous prayer, together with several women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers” (Acts 1,14). In the Cenacle Mary encouraged the Apostles to wait for the coming of the Spirit, the Paraclete, because without Him (cf. 1Cor 12,3) we can do nothing.

Mary present in the Cenacle, at Pentecost, is a model of the praying Church for the entire Christian community, she teaches that: a) as Church, **we need to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit**. Jesus told his Apostles not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for what the Father had promised (cf. Acts 1,4-5); b) **we need to prepare ourselves to receive the gift of the Spirit**, in the same way in which Mary, the Apostles and the women prepared themselves, **in prayer**. The Acts of the Apostles affirms several times that the descent of the Holy Spirit is linked to prayer. We have need of the Holy Spirit to be able to pray and we pray to receive the Holy Spirit. This gift is freely given to us and we, in prayer, allow it to grow and bear fruit. It is life-giving when our hearts pray with faith for one another, when we say ‘Come Holy Spirit!'; c) it is also necessary that **this prayer be united and persevering**, just as in the Cenacle, “the whole group of believers was united, heart and soul” (Acts 4,32). The power of prayer is increased in the miracle of love.

## **Mary, our model of prayer**

**Personal prayer** – Mary lived life deeply, in the Spirit, in an attitude of prayer. Her life was transformed through an intimate, loving, intense and continuous union with God. She herself was always attentive to his permanent and active presence. Mary’s prayer was centered on God and not on herself.

Mary, a silent woman, loved being with God, she sought out intimacy with him in personal prayer; in Nazareth she meditated and listened attentively to God speaking to her heart. Mary’s meditative prayer is noted twice by the Evangelist Luke: at the birth of Jesus, at the moment when all were “astonished” and “as for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart” (Lk. 2,19), and twelve years later when she found her son who have been lost for three days, she once again prayed in silence (cf. Lk. 2, 51).

Mary teaches us that our life in the Spirit needs to be cultivated in silence in order to acquire its true value. St. Vincent Pallotti wrote “Silence predisposes one for prayer and leads us to intimate union with God” (point 9 of the 33 points of the Fundamental Rule). He also taught us to give priority to the moments of intense personal prayer in order to consolidate our apostolic mission.

## **A spirituality for daily life**

It is possible to fall into a trap of separating life and prayer, for this reason it is necessary to develop a spirituality of daily life, one that is lived in times of joy and success, sorrow and suffering. Mary lived her daily life fully, but in the simplicity of Nazareth, and this is what we live each day. She prayed in all that she did because she lived fully in communion and in harmony with God.

We too can pray in daily life through persons, events and in and through all that we do. We have the example of Jesus, of Mary and of our holy Founder, St. Vincent, who as Fr. Faller wrote, was “a man who became prayer”, because he lived immersed in God and prayed in all he did, he was a contemplative in action.

In our spiritual life the ordinary prevails over the extraordinary. Prayer, contemplation of life in God, involves all of our being. Experience of God can be lived in “the heart of life” in every moment and in whatever mission we engage in.

Prayer is a question of love, of priorities and of perseverance. The fundamental motivation is always LOVE. God loves us first and awakens in us love for him, but our FAITH and our CONCRETE COMMITMENT are also important factors. St. James says “Faith without works is dead” (Jm 2,17). The more we show forth God in concrete ways the greater chance we have of rereading events in the light of faith and of responding to the challenges posed by our world. Spirituality is incarnated in reality.

### **Mary our model of community prayer**

Mary is also a model of community prayer. After the Ascension we find her with the Christian community gathered together ‘in the upper room’, in prayer, waiting for the Holy Spirit: “...and Mary by her prayers imploring the gift of the Spirit, who had already overshadowed her in the Annunciation” (LG 59).

Mary occupies a central place in the Cenacle, the Christian meeting for community prayer. She is a permanent, loving and encouraging presence for all. As she prayed in the Cenacle Mary once more “treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart”.

The Cenacle becomes a mystical Bethlehem where she once again conceives through the power of the Holy Spirit. Through this rebirth Jesus, through the Spirit, remains always with his Church.

Mary is close to the Apostles and to the women, she prays and together with them waits for the fullness of the Spirit. With her silent praying presence she plays an exemplary role in the Church. The Holy Spirit generates Community. At Pentecost the first community of Jerusalem was formed with its special characteristics: “These remained faithful to the teaching of the Apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers” (Acts 2,42).

Common and shared prayer sustain our Christian communities: we gather with one another and with God as one large Christian family. Christ the Apostle promised “Where two or three meet in my name, I shall be there with them” (Mt. 18,20).

### **Mary model of contemplative prayer**

Mary is the perfect contemplative, she looks at God and at all persons with wonder. In her looking towards God we see concentrated all the transparency of creation, we see the divine will and its revelation, and here the Word, Jesus Christ, centre of the universe and of history, is generated.

In Mary contemplation and service are inseparable, they are an expression of the fruit of love. Her ‘Magnificat’ arises out of her silent contemplation of the Incarnate Word in her womb. It is a hymn that proclaims the victory of her people, of the humble, the simple, those without a voice, the obedient, those who entrust themselves to the will of God. She in wonder, sings of her personal experience of God, of all that He has done with His People.

### **Mary’s place in Vincent Pallotti’s spiritual life**

In Vincent’s spiritual journey Mary occupied a central place, but secondary to that of Christ. As a child he used to say “My Mother, make me holy”. He prayed the Rosary every day with his family. His mother transmitted to him a tender affection for Mary. He says to us “a person who has true devotion to Mary will not only be saved, but through her intercession will become a great saint and his/her holiness will grow daily” (OCCC V 447).

Vincent lived a deep Marian spirituality, he sought to imitate Mary in her virtues, in her spiritual life “I intend to imagine myself as being close to my dearly beloved mother Mary in order to possess purity in all”. Vincent saw Mary at the foot of the Cross as the co-redemptrix. She collaborates in the redemption of humanity together with her Son in the work of salvation.

As a young man Vincent formulated an intention to be in the Cenacle “Wherever I shall be, I intend to imagine myself to be together with all creatures in the Cenacle in Jerusalem where the Apostles received the Holy Spirit...As the Apostles were there with Mary ...” (OCCC X, 86-87). “I intend to imagine myself as being together with my loving Mother Mary and my beloved Jesus (...) they will cause the abundance of the Holy Spirit to come down on me and on the others ... (OCCC X, 86-87).

We also have in Mary, but after Jesus, the most perfect model for our spiritual and apostolic life.

Shared reflection:

- What is Mary’s place in my spiritual life?
- What is my ‘every day’ experience of God?
- Mary is our model – how can I describe my spiritual life in the face of the events and the challenges of the present day world?