



Apostles for Today

Reflection and Prayer - July 2009

In communion with Mary

III. “Mary, Queen of Apostles, exemplary model of apostolic zeal”

This month we conclude our three part reflection on article 3 of the General Statutes of the UAC and take as the theme for our reflection ‘Mary, Queen of Apostles, exemplary model of apostolic zeal’. As such Mary is **the Model for the Apostolate of All**. Vincent Pallotti’s 1835 appeal to the Catholics of his time to join the “Union of Catholic Apostolate,” was born out of an urgent need to awaken the whole Church to serve the mission which Jesus had entrusted to her. Vincent’s was not a movement **in** the Church but a movement **of** the Church. His vision of apostolate was world-embracing, it was not to take over the official apostolate of the Church (of which as he was accused) but to be of service to it. He was aware of the mobilization of anti-Christian forces that intended not only the unification of Italy but the creation of a new humanistic secular society with Rome at its centre. In response Vincent sought to mobilize all, especially religious and lay people, in a collaborative work of “Catholic Apostolate.”

Mary, Queen of Apostles: trigger releasing the Church’s hidden potential

How could he do this when the official Church was opposed to any seemingly laicist movements? The theology of that period was that Catholic Apostolate belonged only to the Pope and the Propagation of the Faith to those trained for it. Vincent found his answer in the title given to Mary in the Litany of Loreto as Queen of Apostles. She was neither a priest or bishop, she did not preach, yet the Church acknowledged that she was superior to the Apostles. He wrote, “The Church honours Mary as having the merit common to the Apostles without the office of preacher” (OCCC IV:325). Mary’s unique role is as a lay person who, nevertheless, is endowed with the title and merits of the Apostles. Her role is extended to include not only Apostles with a capital “A” but the myriad of small “a” apostles in every sphere of life. “One who is not a priest can be honoured with the name apostle, and his/her work an apostolate” (OCCC III: 140, cf. 182).

Mary’s life: a Gospel beyond words

In 1976 a French Church Commission consulted women on their role in evangelisation. One woman wrote, “A woman is more suited to what pertains to life rather than structure, more suited to activity involving personal relationships. A true life is a life lived according to the Gospel. This goes before any other consideration. If you would preach a sermon, you must yourself be a sermon.” This was especially true of Mary, honoured three-fold as Queen of Apostles: by “her true Catholic zeal and perfect love;” her “surpassing the Apostles in merit”; her “cooperation in spreading the faith far beyond the Apostles” (OCCC I:7).

Catching the fire of the Spirit

Mary evangelised in a unique way by her faithful mothering of Jesus and the apostles. Mary's radical openness to God's Word and Will sprang from a strong, realistic self as she enquired, "How can this be?" A self coupled with a readiness to surrender, "Let it be, let it be done, let it become flesh in me." Mary remained faithful under the cross. She put courage into the disciples by her presence, and readied them for the transforming experience of the Spirit. Did they ask Mary, "Oh tell us, tell us what happened when the Spirit came on you?" Mary would not only tell them, but lead them to prepare for the Spirit in the ways she knew: of silence, unceasing prayer and by interceding powerfully with her Spouse the Holy Spirit. What came first was the desire, wanting to be used by Jesus, to carry on his mission. Mary led them further in disciplined learning, to await the Spirit who ignited them into action. That desire disposed them to receive the Spirit who brought all they had learned from Jesus on fire within them. "If you lack courage," Mary says to priests, "pray to me with confidence. I shall ask the Holy Spirit (my Spouse) that he may set you on fire with his infinite charity, so necessary to exercise the apostolate of Jesus Christ" (Month of May for Clerics, 80). Vincent's own life, his initial devotion to Mary, Queen of Apostles in the Cenacle, became a dynamic reality after his Espousals of December 31st, 1832, when Mary, Spouse of the Spirit and Queen of Apostles, empowered him for ministry through the graces of her Son. When Vincent wanted to rouse apostolic idealism in people he invoked the image of Mary as Queen of Apostles; when he wanted to awaken the inner life of the people, to nurture them, he spoke of her Motherhood.

Holiness: living from the heart outwards

Vincent was convinced that holiness gives power to apostolate. "Holiness consists in fulfilling with exactness and pure intention the duties of one's state of life" (OCC X:111), and doing it from an apostolic intent. "With all her power Mary cooperated in the propagation of the faith without preaching but, in the ordinary circumstances of her life, doing it with such perfection that she surpassed the Apostles in merit" (OCC III: 145). When we try to live the virtues of Jesus and Mary in an inner way we become transparent of God, not for ourselves but for others. Vincent described this process for lay people, "Internal holiness of heart enlivens and vivifies the exterior of a person so that all may glorify our heavenly Father" (Month of May for Lay People, Day 18). The external act had to mirror the inner intent. Mary modelled the interior quality of holiness linked to a gospel following of Jesus in her daily life. It was lived holiness.

Every aspect of Mary's self was consciously used to bring Christ to birth in herself and in others. How Mary used things to nourish the humanity of the incarnate One, inspired Vincent "to understand and imitate [Jesus] in the use of created things ... to do the Will of the Father according to the designs and ends of infinite Love." (OCC X: 260). Her divine maternity nurturing Christ through faith, became a spiritual mothering of all under the cross. In her zeal, "Mary, burning with love, desired to give her life with her Son for the salvation of the human race" (OCC IV: 450). She journeyed from a mother's love to the dedication of a disciple. Vincent taught people that they could share in the merit of the apostolate corresponding to their zeal in cooperating in the spread of the Gospel (OCC IV:136).

Mary, model of ministry

By her life Mary witnessed to that essential aspect necessary in every ministry, whether priestly or lay, namely, spiritual motherhood: a faith-filled and loving openness to God's power giving birth to Jesus. Mother Mary uses her intercessory power to produce Christ in us (cf. OOCC III: 78-9); and discipleship: a conforming of herself to Jesus, that is, a faithful imitation of him in her whole life, body, mind and heart, thereby making Christ present to men and women so that they may experience God's saving power. "Mary walked so faithfully in the footsteps of her Son that she surpassed all the angels and saints" (Ep Lat 20). Mary, Queen of Apostles, stands at the very heart of the one mission and diversity of ministries within the People of God. When the title of the Union "Catholic Apostolate" came under fire, Pallotti placed it under the special protection of Mary Queen of Apostles. That name said it all. She was his advocate, intercessor, and the great missionary.

Shared reflection:

In what way can Mary, Queen of Apostles, help us catch fire as apostles?

How would Vincent motivate people to live the spirit of UAC?

What is your experience of Mary reawakening your faith-relationship with Father, Son and Spirit?