

Mary: Woman of the Eucharist

What has Mary to do with the Eucharist? Everything, says Pope John Paul II who has devoted a whole chapter to Mary in his recent encyclical on the Eucharist (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*. See chapter VI: nos. 53-58). Let me share with you, in abridged form, some of the Pope's insights.

Mary can guide us towards the Eucharist because she herself has a profound relationship with it. By the very fact that she offered her womb for the Word to become flesh, Mary lived her Eucharistic faith even before the events of the Last Supper. At the Annunciation Mary conceived the Son of God in the physical reality of his body and blood. Just as Mary, in faith, said 'Yes' to the Angel, so does each believer say 'Amen' when receiving the body of the Lord in the sacrament of the Eucharist. Just as Mary was asked to believe that the One within her was the Son of God, so are we asked to believe that the same Jesus, Son of God and Son of Mary, becomes sacramentally present in the bread and wine.

When Mary bore the Word-made-flesh in her womb, she became the first 'tabernacle' in history. It was before this 'tabernacle' that Elizabeth adored the Lord upon greeting Mary at the Visitation. And is not the gaze of Mary as she contemplated the newborn Christ cradled in her arms a beautiful model of love to inspire us each time we receive communion?

Mary made her own the sacrificial dimension of the Eucharist. When the child Jesus was presented in the temple, she heard Simeon announce that a sword would pierce her heart (Lk 2:34-35). Day by day she was prepared for the agony of Calvary where she would be united with her Son in his passion. After the resurrection, when she shared in the Eucharistic celebrations of the early church, what must she have felt as she heard Peter and the other apostles utter the words: '*This is my body which is given for you*' (Lk 22:19)? Having already welcomed the body of Jesus into her womb and into her life, having 'been there' for him and with him at the foot of the Cross, Mary must have somehow relived these experiences as she received the Eucharist.

In the Eucharist all that Christ accomplished by his passion and death is present. Consequently, all that Christ did with regard to his Mother for our sake is also present. To her he gave the beloved disciple. To each of us he also says: '*Behold your mother!*' (Jn

19:26-27) To receive Christ in the Eucharist is to also receive the gift of his Mother. Mary, Mother of the Church, is present at each of our celebrations of the Eucharist. If the Church and the Eucharist are inseparable, then the same is true of Mary and the Eucharist.

The *Magnificat* can be read in a Eucharistic key. In the *Magnificat* Mary recalls the wonders of God in salvation history, and proclaims the greatest wonder of all: God who lives among us, Christ our redeemer. *'My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.'* Like Mary's song of praise, the Eucharist is first and foremost a thanksgiving. As she bears Christ within her womb, Mary praises God *through, in and with* Jesus. This is the true 'Eucharistic attitude'.

The *Magnificat* expresses Mary's spirituality, a spirituality that helps us to experience the mystery of the Eucharist. Through the gift of the Eucharist, may our lives become completely a *Magnificat*!

Teresa Pirola

First published in *Madonna* spirituality magazine