



Apostles for Today

Reflections and prayer - May 2009

In communion with Mary.

I. Mary, Patroness of the Union of Catholic Apostolate

Introduction: the month of May is traditionally a month dedicated to Mary, Jesus' beloved mother; in this month we celebrate the feasts of Mary, Queen of Apostles, and of the Visitation of Mary. St. Vincent entrusted his nascent foundation to Mary, he put it under her protection, he entrusted it to her as patroness and relied on her prayers and intercession. Article 3 of the General Statutes of our Union reads: "The Patroness of the Union is the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of Apostles, exemplary model of the spiritual life and of apostolic zeal". We propose to reflect on Mary and pray with her in three issues of Apostles for Today.

St. Vincent wrote: "The pious Society operates under the efficacious protection of the Immaculate Mother of God, Queen of Apostles, for two holy purposes: the first is to obtain through the merits and the intercession of the great Mother of God, the Immaculate, all the graces and all the gifts in order that the Pious Society considered both as a moral body and in the individual (members) present and future may exist always in the Church of God and be fruitful and that it spread rapidly according to the needs of souls in any part of the world. The second purpose is that they all, lay people, secular clergy and religious of any order, state and condition have in Mary most Holy, after Jesus Christ, the most perfect model of true catholic zeal and of perfect charity ...". (OCC I, p. 6-7, cf. also OCC III, p. 6).

Mary, our Mother, our Protector, our Patroness.

This month we take the first purpose, Mary as our Mother, protector and patron. Fr. Vincent had a particularly strong devotion to Mary throughout his life even though the foundational experience of his life was his experience of God and his one over-riding purpose was to correspond to the three Divine Persons of the Holy Trinity, individually and as One God. His relationship with Mary did not take from this centrality of God in his life, rather Mary was Mother to him, and as the years went on Mary undertook to reveal to him her Son Jesus Christ, to obtain for him from her Son all the graces necessary for his life and mission. It was similar to Mary's attitude at the Wedding Feast in

Cana of Galilee (Jn, 2,5), she noticed a need, a lack, and she pointed it out to her Son, then she told those who were there “Do whatever he tells you”, and with complete trust and confidence waited until he responded and fulfilled her request.

Fr. Vincent was graced with several mystical experiences during the course of his life, one of these was his experience of January 9th when he received the charism of the Union. A second event that had a lasting effect on him and on his life was a Spiritual Espousal with Mary which took place on December 31st 1832, from this point on his relationship with Mary took on a new dimension, the experience is recorded in OOCC X, 195-6: he experienced it as a special grace which allowed him to enter into an intimate relationship with Mary. It is for him essentially an experience of mercy, first of all the mercy of Mary who mercifully deigned to make a spiritual marriage with him, he who considered himself to be among the poorest of all creatures on earth. Mary does not come empty-handed to this spiritual marriage, she brings her dowry, the dowry she gives Vincent is “all she possessed and helped him to recognize her own divine Son, and being the Spouse of the Holy Spirit she committed herself so that he be entirely transformed in the Holy Spirit.” Mary promised to give Vincent the gift of knowing her Son Jesus, and because she is the Spouse of the Holy Spirit, she commits herself to work for Vincent’s inner transformation in the power of the Holy Spirit. Vincent is deeply moved by this manifestation of God’s mercy; he speaks of “the mercy of Mary, immaculate Queen, who in love and devotion prays, intercedes and obtains” for him graces. He is convinced that this grace is an expression of the mercy of Jesus as he listens to the pleas of his Mother Mary on Vincent’s behalf. He concludes his account praying “Mercy, mercy, mercy, mercy, mercy, mercy, mercy, mercy, Paradise is full of Mary’s mercy. I will sing the mercies of God for all eternity, I will sing the mercies of Mary for all eternity. My God and my all.” In this account we see that Mary was not merely an object of devotion for Vincent, far from it, she was an active presence, it was she who took the initiative here, it was she who gave all of herself to him as dowry, she who committed herself to reveal her Son to Vincent.

We see here that Mary was Mother for Vincent, concerned for him, for his well-being, for his growth, for his happiness. She was a merciful Mother, mother of mercies. His experience was of Mary as Mother, a mother who was so moved by the ‘wretchedness’ of her son that she prayed, interceded and

obtained for him this special grace. Recently a woman asked me how Vincent's term of address for Mary can be translated, he referred to her as "la mia più che innamoratissima Madre", I suggested 'my beloved Mother', she was not satisfied with this and suggested 'my mother who is deeply in love with me and most dear to me'. She as a woman and mother was struck by the intensity of Vincent's feelings for Mary, fruit of her love for him and her activity in his life.

It was after this experience that Vincent began to prepare and write his treatises on the Month of May (of Mary) for the faithful, for religious and for the clergy. In fact he prepared all three texts in 1833, so full was he of enthusiasm and zeal to lead others to a deeper relationship with May. In the meditations for the faithful, Vincent puts words into Mary's mouth, she speaks lovingly to her children, invites them to learn of Jesus, through her, she invites them "...I, as a heavenly teacher will teach you with motherly affection to way of Paradise." (Preliminary meditation). Mary encourages the faithful who engage in these exercises by saying "I assure you my child in the joy that comes from the Most High, that my heart with maternal affection, and the heart of Jesus with infinite love, burn with a living desire to see you a saint, to see you a saint soon, to see you a great saint." OOC XIII, p. 573. Mary goes on to assure the retreatant that the road to holiness is simple, it consists in listening in faith to her Son, who with his Word and his message of salvation offers us the means to attain it.

Mary is presented as Mother, as Teacher, as Mother of Mercy, as Advocate. This is clearly evident in the text of the day of preparation for the exercises; "Jesus said on the Cross: 'Behold your Mother' (Jn.19,27), my divine Son Jesus, in his agony on the Cross forgot the sins of his creatures ... and left me to his beloved disciple John as Mother, and in John Mother of all the children of the Church ... he (Jesus) wishes that you, my child, even though you may be a sinner, in this month consecrated to me, recognise me as your Mother, experience me as Mother of Mercies ... I, as your heavenly Teacher will teach you with maternal affection to way to heaven ... and even though you know your sins I do not want you ever to lose courage because I am your Mother, your Advocate, the Refuge of sinners, and as the Daughter of the Eternal Father I am able to help you in all your needs..." OOC XIII; 550-51.

However, in all of this devotion and love of Mary Vincent never loses sight of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. All the exercises are based on an attentive

listening to the Word of God as seen through the eyes and heart of Mary, the purpose of the meditations is the building up of the Kingdom of God. The entire spiritual exercise is oriented towards an increase of faith, hope and love, and to lead the person to a greater commitment to the works of faith and charity in the world.

Let us meditate together:

John 19, 25-27: “Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. Seeing his mother and the disciple he loved standing near her, Jesus said to his mother, ‘Woman, this is your son’. Then to the disciple he said, ‘This is your mother’. And from that moment the disciple made a place for her in his home.”

John 2, 3-4 “...the mother of Jesus said to him, ‘They have no wine’. Jesus said, ‘Woman, why turn to me? My hour has not come yet.’ His mother said to the servants, ‘Do whatever he tell you’.

And with the Church let us sing Mary’s hymn, the Magnificat.

Sharing of experiences

Which is my preferred title of Mary? Can I express why one of Mary’s titles or attributes is more important to me than others? How do I live my relationship with Mary?

Let us end with prayer:

1. “St. Vincent Pallotti, from your earliest days you were ardently devoted to the Mother of God. You were indebted to her in a special way for your growth in grace and in the love of God.
2. We ardently desire the same effects of her intercession that you experienced in your life. Intercede for us, therefore, St. Vincent, that we may obtain an enlightened conscience and be able to understand the greatness of the Mother of God, to have an unshakable faith in her, and to leave our lives in her hands. Obtain for us also a child-like and truly dedicated love for her and a courageous heart to follow her virtuous example.” Pallottine Community Prayers, page 241.