

Meditation for Aug. 15, 2004, by Janice L. Freeman  
St. Mary's Church, 3916 Locust Walk, Philadelphia, PA

### Mary as Advocate and Intercessor

There's a storey making the rounds about the Virgin Mary, and it goes like this. St. Peter complains to Jesus that heaven is getting too crowded, that too many people are getting in, that people who don't belong there are getting in. Jesus, in his usual patient way with Peter, asks how can this be, since Peter stands at the pearly gates and oversees all entries. Peter protests, "The problem is your Mother... Your Mother is letting all sorts of unauthorized people in by the back door."

This is a contemporary and irreverent expression of the idea that Mary, the Blessed Virgin Mary, advocates for us in heaven before the Righteous Judge. And as Dorothy suggested, it is our way of acknowledging, recognizing what we sense are the maternal qualities of God-- Qualities which have been embodied for us in Jesus, the Christ, and which are reflected for us in the person of the Virgin Mary. She is symbolically our Mother, the mother of each of us, the Mother of the Church, the Mother of all, given to us by Jesus from the Cross.

\* Pause

Since the early centuries of Christianity, one of the ways that believers have prayed is to and through the Virgin Mary. Believers have turned to the Virgin Mary especially in times of adversity beseeching her to protect them and to pray for them. The special place of Mary as a person like us, but also someone who has clearly become one with God, has led both men and women to seek her help, and to ask her assistance. They have asked her to put their prayers before God. ... Prayers on their own behalf and on behalf of others. The words of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century prayer to Mary were likely voiced out of pressing need by Christians who faced persecution and death...

*Under your mercy we take refuge, O Mother of God.  
Do not reject our supplications in necessity, but deliver us from danger,  
[O you} alone pure and alone blessed.*

\*\*\* (Pause)

Words from Luke's Gospel "...Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:10) "His mother treasured all these things in her heart" (Luke 2: 50).... The image of Mary pondering and treasuring things in her heart, are part of what lead us to see Mary as a person of prayer. We see her engaged in prayer, praying the prayer of the heart,... which is prayer without ceasing...And we call on her. She is constantly present to all people on the journey of faith which she herself has traveled before us.

We ask Mary to pray for us, to intercede for us, not to coerce God, but to strengthen our own connection to the divine. "...[Our] creed tells us that we belong, by calling, to the communion of saints, both the living and the dead, for whom intercessory prayer is the natural medium of communication". We are part of this communion even when we pray alone and only for ourselves. "It is ceaseless intercession that binds us all together in the communion of saints." Jesus prayed for himself as well as others, and he taught us to pray for ourselves and others, Give us this day our daily bread.

For those who ask for Mary's prayers, she brings the aid of her own unceasing prayer... Her unceasing prayer merges with the prayers of all the saints... merges with the prayers of the Christ, who joins heaven and earth,...Her prayer merges with the eternal movement of the Holy Spirit. All our prayers flow into the vast heart of the universe which is the love of God.

#### SILENCE

Add your prayer to ours, O holy Mother of God... May we be so grounded in the spirit, that whatever life brings to us, we will be able to go on praying for ourselves and others, praying for release from suffering, praying for experiences of joy, and praying for our ultimate rest in the heart of God.  
AMEN.

Quotation above from Carol Zaleski, Christian Century, Feb. 7, 2001.