

Mary an Activist?

by Susan Handle Terbay

This morning the news is once again filled with humankind's inhumanity to each other. As I hold my rosary beads in my hands I think of so many mothers who hold in their hands the blood of their children who have been killed through the violence that our world continues to embrace. As I vision such horror, I also vision Mary's hands with her palms up and the blood of her son on them because violence took his life as well.

What is it going to take to stop the violence that is so ingrained in our nature? As Christians we believe Jesus is the Son of God and that God sent Jesus with a message to all of us: to love. Was Jesus a peace and justice activist? I looked up the word activist, and this is the definition I found. The root word of activist is the Latin *actus*, "a doing, a driving force, or an impulse." Someone who acts on what they believe is an activist. So, in my thinking, Jesus was an activist for the cause of peace and justice through his message of loving God and each other. He spoke very clearly and did not hide from those beliefs, even in the turmoil of his own people's leadership and the dominance of the Roman government.

Was Mary, Jesus' mother, an activist? I believe she was and is a profound and powerful activist. She not only supported her son's ministry but also presented him and his message to the world—twice. The first time was at his birth, and the second time was at the Wedding Feast of Cana. Her words to "Do whatever he tells you" were in many ways a request to be an activist: "*do.*" She not only listened to her son's teachings but also lived them.

There are no written documents that indicate Mary as an activist. But if we think about the man Jesus and his public life, it reveals a man who must have had a mother and father active in their faith and who understood the injustices of the poor, the abused, and the forgotten in our world. The constant warring was present throughout their lives. So they knew the results when peace does not reign.

Mary's activism was more obvious during the last hours of Jesus' life. *The Passion of the Christ*,

I believe, powerfully depicted the presence of Mary during those horrendous final hours of her son's life. I believe she was right there in the crowd while standing helpless but at the same time being there for Jesus openly. Later, as she followed him throughout the streets of the city, she watched him fall, but she was unable to pick him up and hold him to ease the pain as she had when he was a toddler. For many mothers, the most unbearable pain is not their own, but their children's pain. I cannot imagine, nor do I wish to experience, Mary's own agony as she watched her son beaten, spat upon, and defiled in public not only by those who hated him but also by those who once called him teacher.

At the cross, Mary didn't run scared or hide like many of his followers. She stood there weeping, while at the same time actively proclaiming her faith in him and his message of love. After Jesus' death, when he was laid in her arms, Mary once again held her son close to her heart and then kissed him—much like she did the day he was born, only this time it was her final goodbye to her child. So often in our world mothers have had their lifeless child placed in their arms to kiss their final goodbye. It is a bond Mary holds with all such mothers. It is a sisterhood that all too many women share.

Mary is my source of strength whenever I have doubts or wonder if I should speak up about an injustice I perceive. When Mary sat and looked at the blood of her son on her hands . . . she did not give up. She could have, no one would have judged her for doing so. But she remained faithful to her "yes" and to her motherhood of love. Again, there are no documents that confirm this, but her whole life speaks of "yes" to God, including the joys and the sorrows she lived throughout her life. We cannot give up either. It may have felt like a lost cause when Jesus died so brutally, but we know he rose from the dead to give us hope. His message is still out there—to love God and each other. This message has never changed: we just seem to forget it more than remember it.

If the blood of God's son has not shaken us to the core to change our violent ways, or a video of a small child sobbing over the loss of his brother in a war zone, or the cries of children being slaughtered in their school, what will? What is it going to take as we awake each day to our own

inhumanity to each other? We always have the chance to change, to stop wavering, to act on Jesus' message of love, but do we have the courage to say "yes" as Mary did?