

Mary and Faith

by Susan Handle Terbay

[*Editor's Note:* The following excerpt is taken from "Morning Coffee with Mary," an unpublished manuscript.)

Explaining my faith to another is like explaining the color of blue to a blind person. I can describe it as the taste of blue in blueberries or the sound of blue as in the ocean, but for me there's no definitive explanation for those who do not understand (from my journal).

As I enjoy my coffee brew I begin to reflect upon Mary's faith and I wonder: "Did Mary ever ask why? Did she ever once feel anger, frustration, or despair?"

I believe Mary did ask questions—it began when the angel Gabriel asked her if she would be pregnant with God's son. Her first comment was "how could this be?" Yet, even in this question she has the faith that an answer will be forthcoming. In that instance she taught me about faith—that it is okay to question God and to seek answers, trusting that God's love will respond. I learned faith is based on trust outside oneself with love as a foundation.

Did Mary get angry? I think she did but certainly not in a violent way. She must have experienced anger at the way her people were treated by the Romans, the way her Son was treated by those who wanted his teachings silenced, and the way society looked down upon the poor. Jesus grew angry with those who desecrated the temple. I can only imagine how Mary must have felt with those who desecrated her son's body.

Did Mary ever get frustrated? All of us when embarking on our call to ministry, no matter what it is, feel a bit uncertain at times, wondering if we are making the right decision and frustrated when things don't always turn out the way we had planned. I'm sure Mary felt frustrated when the apostles didn't understand her son's message or when crops failed and things happened that caused pain and sorrow to so many.

Did Mary ever feel helpless at times? As Mary stood in the midst of the crowd watching Jesus be condemned to die and then standing at the foot of the cross, she must have experienced helplessness. I wonder if deep inside she asked herself if she made all the right choices; could she have done something different to spare her son from such an ending to his life's work.

Did Mary feel despair? That night after her son was taken to a burial site, Mary was alone in her grief, even if John and other friends and family members were with her. Her depth of brokenness was something only she herself could feel and in which the tears she shed could not fix. Too many mothers know of such overwhelming despair and grief.

There are books galore about how to raise children . . . books about foods they should eat, schools they should attend, sports they should play, and computer games they can use for education or entertainment (even when they should have a cell phone). It is all out there for anyone to read and learn. There are no books that teach a mother not to be a mother after her children are grown and on their own . . . no "how-to" books speaking to the pain and agony of watching a child die or holding a dead child in your arms. There are no books out there that speak of how not to worry anymore about your children or how not to miss them or not think about them every day. There are no books teaching a mother how to go on with her

life as though her children are no longer a part of her life. Motherhood does not end when the last child leaves the nest.

As I continue to write about my motherhood in my column for young mothers, Mary plays a vital part of it as I reflect upon her love, her depth of faith, and her womanhood and motherhood. She is more than just a holy woman who gave life to God's son. She is my friend, my mother, and my mentor. I want other young mothers to know Mary as I know her and through her share their memories and stories.

The Hail Mary prayer is a beautiful prayer, and I recite it throughout the rosary. In addition, I also have my own rendition, and I recite it this morning . . .

Hello Mary,
friend, mother, and mentor,
so comforting and loving,
and filled with God's love.

You are the complexity and
simplicity of woman
and nurturer of Holy Life.

I ask you
to guide me with your wisdom,
to sustain me with your understanding,
to empower me with your faith,
to comfort me with your love,
and be with me now until my last breath. + Amen

Reflective Thoughts

My soul magnifies the Lord, And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. For He has regarded the low estate of His handmaiden, For behold, henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name. And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with His arm: He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of low degree. He has filled the hungry with good things; the rich He has sent empty away. He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy; as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to His posterity forever. (Lk 1:46-66)

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

When and how will I invite Mary to share common reflections and memories with me each day?

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