

Mary, Faith, and Me
by Susan Handle Terbay

Faith is like the air I breathe. It sustains me even when I do not see it or feel it. It is like water that refreshes me and quenches me when life leaves me thirsty. (From my journal)

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

We know from the Bible that Mary asked questions—beginning when the angel Gabriel told her she was 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 while 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 only can 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 becoming frustrated when things do not always turn out the way we had planned. I am sure Mary felt frustrated when the apostles did not understand her son's message, especially when they abandoned Jesus in his final days.

Did Mary ever feel despair? I am sure 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 total helplessness. She could do nothing to stop the flow of events; all she could do was watch, pray and "be" with her son. That night after her son was taken down from the cross and placed in the sepulcher, Mary was alone in her grief—even if John and other friends and family members were with her—she was still alone. Her depth of brokenness was something only she herself could feel and in which the tears she shed could not fix. There is nothing to prepare a mother for the pain and agony of watching a child die or holding a dead child in her arms. Too many mothers in our world know of such overwhelming despair and grief, and Mary understands all of it.

For so long, Mary was placed in such a way that a simple woman/mother could never relate to the Mother of God, but the reality is that Mary is our sister in every part of our lives. For me personally, Mary plays a vital part in much of my writing. It is during my quiet time in the morning—drinking a cup of coffee and praying my rosary—that I come up with ideas and topics for my writing. She is more than just a holy woman who gave life to God's son; she is my friend, my mother, and my mentor.

The *Hail Mary* is a beautiful prayer, and I recite it throughout the rosary, but I also have my own prayer, which I recited 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 to be with me now until my final breath.
Amen