

**Her Name was Mary**  
*A Marian Reflection*

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*May is the month dedicated to Mary. The Congregation of Rites in 1933 recognized the title of "Queen of Palestine", which became particularly dear to the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem; that act welcomed the desire of the Latin Patriarch Luigi Barlassina who in 1920, that is a hundred years ago, invoked her for the first time with that title, before going on to build a shrine in Deir Rafat in 1927.*

*We want to turn to her, as Mother and our Patron, with our prayer and in particular the Rosary; and we intend to do it with profound filial affection.*

The Evangelist Luke notes her name for the first time when he speaks of the mission entrusted by the Eternal One to the Angel Gabriel who went to Nazareth. Mary was a common name in Palestine: the sister of Moses and Aaron was called Miriam (Mary), and, at the time of Jesus, we know the mother of James (the younger) and Joseph with the same name, Mary of Bethany and Mary of Magdala.

In Nazareth, among the friends of the village Mary was known as Joseph's young betrothed; after the birth of the Son she will also be known as the mother of Jesus (cf. Mt 13:55; Mk 6:3). Nazareth was the land where Mary had lived, had played and dreamed as an adolescent, knew sacred history, exercised her faith in the Most High, accepted his will; in Nazareth the Angel Gabriel asked her for consent to become the mother of the Son of God; after Bethlehem and the flight to Egypt, she returned to live with Joseph. She always carried two 'secrets' in her heart: the first linked to her distress at hearing herself called 'full of grace' by the Angel, and the second in learning of the conception of a son while being a virgin. These were intimate and profound issues, not easy to communicate and comment on. Luke mentions it because, apparently, one day she spoke about it and he wanted to leave a trace in his story about the incarnation of the Son of God. It was indispensable, because it concerned the divine origin of Jesus and the very work of the redemption. Mary's initial 'Yes' thus became the starting point of a process that would end with the last 'Yes' under the cross; the two '*fiat*' became inseparable.

An unforgettable moment in Mary's life was her meeting with Elizabeth already in the advanced stages of pregnancy; Elizabeth blessed Mary: *Blessed are you among women, blessed are you who believed in the fulfillment of the words of the Lord* (Lk 1:42.45). A memorable moment, surprising words, memories that became life and companions of reference, even in the darkest hour of her life. Everyone, learning the first of the Marian prayers, repeats in supplication and praise: *Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb.*

Mary rarely appears in the public life of her Son; she remains in the penumbra; the evangelist John says she was present at the wedding feast of Cana in Galilee, where she is referred to as "*his mother*" (Jn 2:1); Mark, on another occasion, mentions it in the same way,

when relatives sent for Jesus who was teaching and he seemed to almost escape the blood relationship to establish a new one: "*Whoever does God's will be my brother and sister and mother*" (Mk 3:35).

Already in Cana of Galilee, calling her with the term "woman" rather than "mother", Jesus seemed to distance himself from her; but on the Cross, "*Woman, here is your son!*" (Jn 19:26), the temporal relationship between Mary and Jesus was concluded with the handing over of her to John, "*Here is your mother!*" (Jn 19:27); there her new maternal mission was defined. With the entrustment to John - "*from that time on, this disciple took her into his home*" (Jn 19:27) - Mary becomes part of the new family that was being established. Indeed, from then on she will belong inseparably to the Church. And in this capacity we find her mentioned for the last time in the New Testament, while she was persevering in prayer with the Apostles on the day of Pentecost (cf. Acts 1:14). Mary, therefore, takes on a dimension, that is not only Christological (for the physical motherhood and being the first educator of her son together with Joseph), but also ecclesiological; in this context, it should be noted that, with her femininity, she balanced the presence of the Apostles since the acceptance of grace had taken place from the beginning in the female dimension. Here we like to quote a significant and illuminating expression of Benedict XVI, who wrote that "*the Church, in its juridical structure, is founded on Peter and the Eleven, but in the concrete form of ecclesial life it is always (...) women who open the doors to the Lord, who accompany him even under the cross and are able to meet him as a resurrected person*" (Benedict XVI, Jesus of Nazareth - From entering Jerusalem to the resurrection).

If Mary was no longer alone under the cross, neither would she be for eternity; She will be the most precious part of the new family, the Church, which in the person of John had welcomed her with immense affection; but above all she will never leave the Church. In fact, we find her always and everywhere and, in our times, in Lourdes in the context of the dogmatic declaration of the Immaculate Conception, in Fatima as a sign of hope after the atrocious first great war, in Sheshan (China) in comforting persecuted Christians, in Czestochowa as champion of the Polish nation, in Guadalupe in identifying with the new populations of Latin America, in Deir Rafat as Queen of Palestine; and then again in Aparecida (Brazil), in Vailankanni (India), in Altötting (Bavaria), in Mariazell (Austria), in Loreto, in Pompeii, in Algiers; moreover, she also assumes the face of the Yazides humiliated and sold in the Isis markets of Mosul and Raqqa, of women disfigured with acid at the hands of mad and violent men, of victims of femicides, of mothers sterilized without their knowledge, of victims of the trafficking of sex, of women deprived of dignity and freedom; and still mother of all the marginalized, of the poor made such by drugs, by the lack of work and by the innumerable human injustices, as well as support for all those mothers who offered their existence for their children; finally, a non-secondary icon of the countless consecrated women who have a caress for everyone with their prayer of spiritual consolation.

We are certain that Mary's faith gives us Jesus, but also that she gives us to God.

**Fernando Cardinal Filoni**