

Mary in Scripture - Part 7 of 8 - At the Foot of the Cross

Reading: John 19:25-27

Mary's Journey into our Day

This reflection completes our journey through the writing of Tina Beattie's *Rediscovering Mary*, a work that shows Mary as a woman of ideas and action, courage and imagination. We have travelled with her from Nazareth to Ein Karim, from Annunciation to Visitation, Bethlehem's birth and Jerusalem's Temple, Cana and Mary's growth as disciple. Now we come to the events we so recently celebrated as a Church, the dying of the light, the Mother at the foot of the Cross.

In our own day we have seen the horror of those killed for their faith in Christ. The mothers of some of these murdered children can comprehend the anguish of Mary and add their own names to the experience of the Golgothas of our day. Ultimately, the mother at the foot of her child's cross occupies a space beyond expression and language.

Mary's relationship with Jesus was no longer based on motherhood but had become one based on discipleship and a community of equals, but she still was his mother and she suffered on Calvary as his mother. It is easy for theology to dwell on her presence as symbol of the Church and the New Israel, but popular devotion has always recognised and identified with her human sorrow. In both the Way of the Cross and 'Mater Dolorosa – Mother of Sorrows', and in many of the hymns and liturgies and poems, popular Catholicism has focused on the figure of the *pieta*, the human mother grieving for the death of her Son.

A Mother in Sorrow

A woman from El Salvador struck a contemporary note with her lament: *"I often think of Mary: I suffered so much when they arrested my son. When I went to ask where he was, they said they didn't know. I searched and searched, but couldn't find him. Finally, his corpse appeared, his head in one place and his body in another. I fainted when I saw him. I thought of how the Blessed Virgin also suffered when they told her that her son had been arrested. Surely she went searching for him and later saw him die and buried him. That is why she understands my sorrow and helps me to go on."*

Through the ages, Mary as Our Lady of Sorrows remains a constant motif in the faith of those who suffer and who find in her a source of solidarity and comfort. Mary on Calvary is both mother and companion to all who find themselves in a place where nobody would choose to stand. Mary stands at the heart of loss, grief, and betrayal. Yet that darkest moment is also the greatest moment of love and faith, for in the midst of violence and horror, a Kingdom of gentleness, mercy, and peace is born.

There were so many births and dyings in Mary's life, and here at the foot of the Cross, she becomes the Mother of all humankind. As once she gave God's child to the world, now that child gives her to the Church.

At the Foot of the Cross

At the moment of his death, the motherly Kingdom is born. As the poor are blessed for the Kingdom of God is theirs, so the Mother of God becomes mother of the poor, mother of that devastated community at the foot of the Cross, a group of women and one unnamed male disciple. As in Mark, women emerge from the silence of the earlier gospel to become named individuals and key participants. She who has been voiceless, finds herself named and acknowledged at the crossroads of history. “Many who are first will be last; and the last first” (Mark 10:31).

Every time we hear that Jesus died alone and forsaken by his friends, we forget that that applies only to his male disciples, not the braver group of his women disciples who did not ‘forsake him and flee.’

The one male disciple who endures the tragedy of the Cross is purposely not named. The women are named real presences; an unnamed male disciple becomes a symbol for all men who must learn to live within a motherly Church, taking Mary as their example and restoring women to their rightful place. A man, the beloved disciple, one loved and loving, takes his place among grieving women without shame or running away. He was brave enough to stay and not be among those who forsook Jesus and fled. This small group at the foot of the cross gathered in solidarity with one another. One was Mary’s sister, possibly Salome, mother of James and John, a friend, companion and support in crisis. Presence in crisis counts for something even if it does not make it better. To step into suffering beside another does not diminish the darkness, but it can take away some of the loneliness and terror of the unknown.

Mary’s Role

In being there Mary shares the darkness with her Son. The terrible abandonment expressed in Gethsemane and the cry from the Cross, is lightened by the presence of the Mother in the midst of the violence, the hatred, and the bloodlust of the crowd. Whenever the powers of this world crucify the innocent, there are women who refuse to run away, who express their resistance in the courage of being there, quiet presences in the midst of chaos. The women at the cross symbolise all the women who refuse to hide, all the women who sorrow and mourn for children killed to satisfy the dictates of power.

We, too, in bereavement or loss, turn to Mary for consolation in our times of trouble. She is not just a motherly figure in one-to-one relationship with the individual believer. She is Mother of the Church, and that tells us something about how we must behave as a community. The Jubilee Year we begin on December 8th of this year is to be the Year of Mercy for the Church. The choice of date is intentional, the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of Mercy.

We stand in need of mercy in so many areas – to the creation we live in, in our own country with regard to the poor and neglected sections of our society, within our church. The mercy of God rings through the Gospel and the life of Jesus, the living embodiment of God’s mercy – and that mercy entered our world through Mary. She is the exposed heart of the God her Son named as “Abba”, who keeps love alive in the depths of hatred and abandonment, sharing in the restoration of humanity through the dying and rising of her Son.

Source

Beattie, T. (1995). *Rediscovering Mary: Insights from the Gospels*. Liguori Publications: Barnhart, MO.