

LOVE AND RESPONSIBILITY

JOHN 19:26-27

GOOD FRIDAY - MARCH 30, 2018

Of the four gospel writers, John is the only one who records the Mother of Jesus being present at the cross. Of course, we should have expected that Mary would at least be in the city of Jerusalem during the time of the Passover. For after all, we read in Luke 2:41: "Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover!"

The Bible does not tell us when Mary's husband, Joseph, died--but church tradition has assumed he must have died sometime---before Jesus began his public ministry; sometime before our Lord stepped forward into the Jordan River, at age 30, to be baptized by his cousin John the Baptist!

Rather than traveling to Jerusalem with her husband, therefore, now as a widow Mary would now have been making that 64-mile trek with her extended family members and friends.

But now for the Mother of Jesus--the most unthinkable, unimaginable, unbelievable thing has so quickly happened to her Son--the One who had traveled throughout Palestine for 3 years--preaching the good news of the coming of the Kingdom of God, healing the sick, and releasing countless others from the bonds and the tyranny of Satan!

Now Mary's Son is in an enormous amount of trouble! He is arrested, tried, condemned, and now dying. Surely, a mother's place and, therefore, Mary's place was to be close to her Son. But now, at long last, on that first Good Friday--the Prophet Simeon's words that he spoke to Mary, some 30 years prior to this, when the baby Jesus was only six weeks old--and his beloved Mother held him safely and securely in her arms were now fulfilled. Simeon had said to Mary, "And a sword will pierce your own soul too." (Luke 2:35b)

She is NEAR HIM NOW; ALTHOUGH HER HEART IS BREAKING! She is near him now and her friends are trying, THEIR BEST, somehow to console her! BUT HOW COULD SHE BE CONSOLED AT A TIME LIKE THIS!

Of course, there are other women there alongside of Mary in Jerusalem, at the foot of her Son's cross, on what had to be not only for Mary, but also for these other dear women--without a doubt, the worst day they had ever experienced in their whole lives!

Who were these other women? Matthew tells us (Matthew 27:55) that they were Salome, Jesus' Mother's sister, who was also the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee--the fishermen--become apostles! May because James and John were Jesus' cousins--that's why he made them part of his inner circle, at times, together with Peter!

And there was another woman named Mary present there as well; the wife of Clopas, the mother of James and Joses. Mary Magdalene was present there too--someone who is mentioned consistently in all three of the synoptic gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke.

But now the story unfolds for us even further! St John tells us: "When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, 'Dear woman, here is your son,'²⁷ and to the disciple, Jesus said, 'Here is your mother.' And from that time on, this disciple took her into his home" (John 19:26-27)!

Who is this "disciple whom he loved"?

Friends, this nomenclature is recorded for us at four other places in the New Testament -- but all five places are only to be found in John's Gospel! "This" disciple is clearly identified as the author of the Gospel of John (John 21:24). Church tradition identifies this disciple with St. John the Apostle. Perhaps the Gospel writer doesn't identify himself openly and outwardly, by name out of modesty; and because he has no desire to draw the attention of people towards himself--but only towards Mary's Son! Therefore, he refers to himself using the "third person" designation: "He is the disciple whom Jesus loved!"

John was there, no doubt, because he wanted to be there. And John was there, no doubt, because he also wanted to do all that he could to provide support for Mary, the Mother of Jesus, as already duly-noted on this the absolutely worst day of her entire life!

And some time during those 6 long hours our Savior hung upon his cross, which was actually “our” cross, although he in his all-encompassing love for us and for the whole human race--made what should actually have been our cross, his cross!

Jesus spoke to his dear mother saying: “Dear woman, here is your son!” And to John, our dying Lord said: “Here is your mother!” And then this very same man named “John,” who is writing down these words--recalls for us and for himself--one of the most unforgettable moments in his entire life ever---that “from that time on, this disciple took Mary into his own home” (John 19:26-27)!

Therefore, Jesus third sentence that he spoke from the cross to this small band of faithful friends huddled together below that old rugged cross--is actually--also just as remarkable as the six other sentences Jesus’ spoke from the cross that afternoon--with respect to all that it implies.

First, Jesus addresses his mother not as "Mother," but as "WOMAN," translated appropriately as "dear woman" by the New International Version. Qunai -- in Greek.

We might sense a certain amount of “coldness” and maybe even a certain amount of “disrespect” as that kind of “lingo” might be used in our own culture, but in Jesus' culture, it was perfectly proper for a man to address a woman this way -- but still somewhat strange for a son to maybe address his mother this way!

The reason for this more formal address is probably because Jesus was intending for his words to be remembered as a formal testimony with respect to Jewish law! In saying these words, Jesus is making a sworn deposition in the presence of anyone who was there that day--and able to hear his personal desire--now being stated--with respect to his own mother’s future care!

Oh, some people have always seen Jesus’ words here -- as being much more than merely a legal pronouncement, but rather also have interpreted these words of her Son to be a filial declaration towards his mother, that not only John but that all of Jesus’ disciples throughout the ages to come should regard his beloved Mother as their Mother too.

They picture Mary as being appointed by her Son to become the new mother of Jesus’ New Creation we call “The Church,” in much the same way that Eve was in some sense understood to be the mother of the whole human race.

However, this text is--actually--very self-explanatory: "From that time on, this disciple took her into his home" (John 19:27b). So, the point of this verse is not that Mary is being appointed Mother of the Church. Rather, Jesus is clearly appointing John as responsible in his stead to care for his mother in her widowhood.

What Does This Word from the Cross Teach Us?

As I reflect on this Third Word from the Cross, I begin to see something about the extent of Jesus' love. Here he is dying in agony, gasping for each breath. He sees his mother, the one who comforted him through all of childhood's cuts and bruises, teases and taunts. When he was a boy, he would run home to mother and instantly be wrapped in her protective, comforting motherly-love.

But now that he sees her at the foot of the cross, heartbroken, weeping, inconsolable, his heart goes out to her. Rather than being consumed by an understandable concern for his own welfare, he is touched by hers.

She is a widow, soon to be a widow who will be known as mother to that crucified criminal, Jesus. Life will not be easy for her. The other children in the family (whether hers or Joseph's we just don't know), still do not believe in him as she does (John 7:3-5).

Though they might have eventually been demanded by Jewish law to provide care for Jesus’ mother too, who was also their mother too, perhaps Jesus senses that their marginal, at best, would be far less than she deserved!

So, what are we to learn, remember, and take to heart as Jesus' disciples, from this Word from the cross?

First of all, we are to remember about the need we have to provide for the love of our parents--and to provide for their welfare.

Sometimes our parents misunderstand us and disapprove of the decisions we make. Sometimes they, too, can hurt us grievously. But still, we are to love them despite their imperfections, as they have hopefully loved us, throughout our lives, despite of all of our imperfections!

Jesus, too, had felt the hurt of misunderstanding from his family -- even his mother. It's apparent that during part of his ministry, at least, his family didn't understand him.

At the Wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11), Mary pushed Jesus to change the water into wine, even though he tells her, "My time has not yet come."

St Mark tells us in the 3rd chapter of his Gospel account that there were times when his own immediate family members believed that he, Jesus was: "Out of his mind," and therefore, Mark also tells us, that they one day went to the synagogue in Capernaum to "take charge of him," supposedly when he finished preaching the Word of God there one day (Mark 3:21, 31-35) -- his brothers were there, along with Mary!

We read in John 7:5, "Even his own brothers did not believe in him!"

But even when our parents do not understand us or approve of us --and even when we are not certain that we can trust them--at this point in their lives--we are told: "Honor your father and your mother" (Exodus 20:12).

Christ-empowered love can help heal the hurts that usually become visible at some point in our family members' common life! Yes, we are to love our parents! And secondly, we are to become responsible in meeting our family obligations.

While Jesus was clear that his disciples were to put their personal commitment towards his Heavenly Father and towards him, as the Promised Savior of the world, above their commitment to familial relationships, nevertheless, this doesn't mean that we are absolved of all our family obligations.

The Apostle Paul, in writing a personal letter to a young pastor named Timothy one day, said it like this: "If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." (1 Timothy 5:8)

When we are immature believers, sometimes we take rash actions towards our families that in retrospect weren't filled with Christ's love. Our priorities, however, are clear: (1) God himself, (2) Our families, and (3) Our work for God.

Here at the end of his life, we see in Jesus the tender love of a Son for his Mother; a Mother who had sometimes misunderstood him. As he dies he settles his earthly obligations as best he can, we hear him say, "Dear woman, here is your son!" And to John: "Here is your mother" (John 19:26-27).

Here, again this night, my dear friends we see Jesus' example of love and responsibility. As wonderful and loving as familial relationships can be, there are still most definitely those times when these relationships can be very complex and sometimes hurtful. Therefore, we must continuously pray to our Heavenly Father that he would show us how to love the other people in our families and give us the divine wisdom that we need so that we can love them, and so that they too, can hopefully love us, in much the same way that Jesus loves us and that we love him too! Amen