



## The Strength of Mary

**'From Mary we learn to surrender to God's will in all things. From Mary, we learn to trust even when all hope seems gone'** (St. John Paul II, Washington, 06.10.79)

Many images of Our Lady depict a lovely woman, dressed in fine clothes in beautiful surroundings attending to or playing with the child Jesus. These may give us the impression, that she may seem far removed from the everyday chores and toils that most of us go through.

Mary's day to day behaviour as narrated in the Gospels, does not reveal any heroic traits or out of the ordinary spectacular behaviour. Pope Francis tells us she lived her faith and her life **'in the simplicity of the thousand daily tasks and worries of every mother, such as providing food, clothing, caring for the house.... It was precisely Our Lady's normal life which served as the basis for the unique relationship and profound dialogue which unfolded between her and God.'** (Pope Francis, General Audience, 23.10.13)

### Reflection:

- ***What is the first image of Mary that comes to mind when you think of her?***

The first mention of Mary in the Gospel of Luke is in the Annunciation. Here was a young Jewish girl being asked to abandon her plans and to embrace God's plans which seem impossible. The angel tells Mary: **'Rejoice, so highly favoured!'** (Lk. 1:28). She is favoured among women because she has received special grace from God. But is this what makes Mary great?

We are so familiar with the events of Mary's life that often we do not take in the magnitude of what is really behind them. Indeed, we tend to overlook the distress, the anxiety, the agony she may have experienced. We may be oblivious to the paradox of the situation. In our admiration of Mary, we often forget the sacrifices she made especially when faced with setbacks or the unexpected turnout of events. Yet Mary is great because of all this. Her question to the angel: **'How can this come about, since I am a virgin?'** (Lk.1:34) does not indicate doubt or disbelief but rather perplexity as to the method of fulfilment.

The Danish philosopher **Soren Kierkegaard** speaks of Mary as a *'strong woman and not a weak wimp'* and whose *'faith was so much more than lip service'* (Casey, 2019, p. 19). It may have looked like God wreaking havoc with her and Joseph's plans, yet she put her trust in God. Kierkegaard attributes the source of Mary's strength to her faith in God.

**Reflection:**

*Spend a few minutes to allow your heart to be ignited with the faith of Mary.*

*Bring to mind situations which you may not understand or which confuse you. These may be situations where you feel that God has asked you or is asking you to believe and have faith in Him...*

- ***What is your reaction to this?***
- ***Are you afraid of what God might ask?***
- ***Do you let God into your life?***
- ***Do you let yourself be surprised by God, as Mary did, or do you remain caught in your own safety zone?***

When we read the gospels we find there are very few instances when Mary speaks. We don't read of any outward show of physical strength or imposing her ideas on others. Her presence is mostly a silent presence, but we can see strength in that silence.

*'Do whatever he tells you'* (Jn 2: 6) she tells the servants at the wedding at Cana. Her faith is the source of her strength and greatness because it is inner, fully centred on her relationship with God. It is invisible to the outside world but it is open to the fullness of God.

Although Kierkegaard lived in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, he was already well aware that *'ours is a world of advertisement and publicity'* (Casey, 2019, p. 23) and that our attention is outwards. He was already lamenting that in order to find the silence so necessary for us to *'hear the loving voice of God and respond to it'* (Casey, 2019, p. 23) we must turn our attention inwards and go beyond the *'clatter of talkativeness'* (Casey, 2019, p. 23) as he called it.

Mary's silence lasted her whole life. It was not simply the absence of words but rather the *'fullness of listening, a continual listening to the word of God, a listening that embraced both joy and sorrow'* (Casey, 2019, p. 23).

***As for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart.*** (Lk 2: 19)

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***His mother stored up all these things in her heart.*** (Lk 2:51)

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Kierkegaard says that *'faith is so mysterious that it often reduces us to a perplexed or even hushed silence'* (Casey, 2019, p. 19).

**Reflection:**

- ***When have you experienced this perplexity in your faith?***
- ***Was there a time when you felt yourself reduced to a 'hushed silence' and allowed God to wrap you in His love and care?***

Listen to the song 'Here Am I, Lord' by clicking on the link below...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EjKjSBW13m4>

**Here Am I, Lord** - Lyrics by Keith Duke

Here am I, Lord,  
I've come to do your will;  
Here am I, Lord,  
In your presence I am still.

Here am I, Lord,  
I've come to do your will;  
Here am I, Lord,  
In your presence I am still.

Conclude by slowly praying the Magnificat or any other Marian prayer you like.

**The Magnificat** (Lk.1: 46-55)

***'My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord  
and my spirit exults in God my saviour;  
because he has looked upon his lowly handmaid.  
Yes, from this day forward all generations will call me blessed,  
for the Almighty has done great things for me.  
Holy is his name,  
and his mercy reaches from age to age for those who fear him.  
He has shown the power of his arm,  
he has routed the proud of heart.  
He has pulled down princes from their thrones and exalted the lowly.  
The hungry he has filled with good things, the rich sent empty away.  
He has come to the help of Israel his servant, mindful of his mercy  
– according to the promise he made to our ancestors –  
of his mercy to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.'***