

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Eternal God, it is your glory always to have mercy. Bring back all who have erred and strayed from your ways; lead them again to embrace in faith the truth of your Word and to hold it fast; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

SCRIPTURE READING..... John 19:26-27, KJV

²⁶When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! ²⁷Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In the history of Christian interpretation of this text, there have been high and lofty theological claims about the symbolic meaning of this evening's Bible scene — that moving scene when Jesus entrusts Mary and John to one another. And I believe that those claims are true and important.

Let me mention but one of them: For the church fathers, Mary is often understood to be a symbol of the Church and John a symbol of the Apostles. And so, the high theological claim is made that the Church and the Apostles belong together. Mary and John belong together, always.

This happens to be a theme that I very much care about these days. Every generation must ask itself the question, Are we somehow still the *same* Church as that established by the Apostles, or have we, without even noticing it, drifted away and lost our continuity with the Apostles? Have we separated Mary from John?

Well, that is an important question, worthy of our greatest theologians and bishops and no doubt beyond the abilities of a humble parish pastor like me. So, this evening, I mean to set aside such high theological insights and to ponder the simple humanity of what Jesus was able to do on that Cross. He is nailed to the

cross. He has enough strength left for a few final words. One of those words concerned his mother. He entrusted her to St. John, and St. John to her.

This was his own dear mother. She had rejoiced in him even before he was born. For her, even before she laid eyes on him, he had been the occasion for her joyful song, the Magnificat. What a link must have been forged between Mary and her son as he had grown up before her eyes! His childhood was right there in her mind, in her memory, in her heart. Many a mother has loved even a wayward, prodigal son, but this Son had been a good son. Indeed the Bible says that after the family trip to Jerusalem, when Jesus had astonished the teachers in the Temple with his understanding and his answers, the lad went home with his parents, Mary and Joseph, and was "obedient" to them:

NRS Luke 2:51 Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

Mary pondered the things of her son. And, my! She had treasures in her heart from considering her son.

Again, we have the Bible's testimony that Jesus had been a good son and a good citizen of that town:

KJV Luke 2:52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

How could Mary have failed to love her Son, and how could Jesus have failed to love her? When others forsook him in his passion, when his disciples abandoned him and fled, when Judas betrayed him, and Peter denied him, there was his mother! She was among the holy women at his cross.

But what does this young Man have to leave his mother? He is a poor man. "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." (Matt 8:20) When Jesus was but an infant, old Simeon had warned Mary that a sword should pierce through her own soul. Now is that time — now when Jesus lies hammered onto the cross. But a sword must be piercing through *his* soul too, to be leaving his mother behind, bereft of the help and comfort that it is so natural for a son to give his mother.

And yet, he is *not* leaving her alone. He is leaving her with the apostle John. And in entrusting her to John, he is at the same time entrusting all the widows, all the childless ones, all the poor and vulnerable to the Church.

Jesus does not forget those whom it would be easy to overlook: the poor, the weak, the elderly. Such people are precious to Jesus and with his dying breath he loves them. As he commend his mother to John's care, so he evermore commends the lowly to the Church. It is as one of the *Lutheran Book of Worship* prayers says:

Almighty and most merciful God, we call to mind before you all those whom it would be easy to forget: the homeless, the destitute, the sick, the aged, and all who have none to care for them. Help us to heal those who are broken in body or spirit, and to turn their sorrow into joy. Grant this, Father, for the love of your Son, who for our sake became poor, Jesus Christ our Lord.

What did John do with this trust? He honored it. "And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home." (John 19:27) Is Mary a burden to the man? No, she is more like his treasure, his joy. To have someone entrusted to him by Jesus! Such a one is no burden, but the means and occasion for John to continue walking with Jesus.

At the Cross, the sublime and traditional teaching that Mary represents the Church seems to be enriched by this thought too: that Mary represents the weak and the bereft who *need* the Church.

Like St. John, let us give shelter to Mary. May it ever be so, that the poor, the overlooked, and the wretched will find the Church and people who love Jesus, and in loving Jesus love them too. In the name of Jesus. Amen.