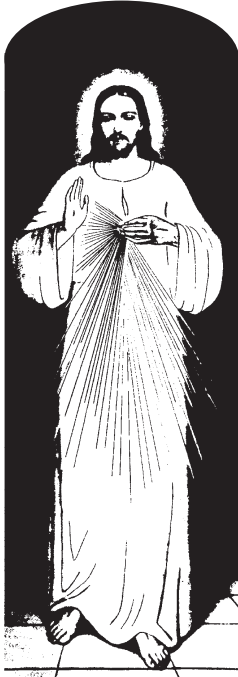


Fr. Slawomir Szkredka



**MARY AND OUR
TRUST IN GOD**

**Lessons from the Evangelists
Luke and John**



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LOS ANGELES 2017

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This short reflection on Our Lady originated as a series of three talks given at Christ the King parish in Hollywood, CA, in March 2017, at the invitation of the Lay Institute of Divine Mercy. It was a prayerful day during which the reflection on Our Lady, prayer, the sacrament of confession, and, above all, the celebration of the Eucharist brought us together and nourished our faith. It was particularly opportune to reflect on Mary's role in our lives in the year that marked the 100th anniversary of her apparitions in Fatima.

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Computer typesetting: Zbigniew Łaszcz
Proof reading: Lelis Cruzata, Joseph T. Norris
The Lay Institute of Divine Mercy, Los Angeles, California
Tel. 323/393-4144, e-mail: faustinum@aol.com
Visit our website: www.divinemercy.opoka.org

Why Mary and why trust?

Whoever is interested in Jesus of Nazareth will sooner or later become intrigued by Jesus' Mother. This should not surprise us. All of us are known not just by what we do and what we say but also by the relationships we form. Our friendships shape us just as much as we shape them. It is in the bonds we form through time that something unique about us is being revealed, to our friends and to ourselves. Jesus' relationship with His Mother is not an exception. There is something about Jesus that can be known only when we look at Mary, or to be more exact, when we look at how she related to her Son. One cannot comprehend who Jesus is and what He has come to accomplish without considering the person of Mary.

As the Gospels tell us, theirs was a unique bond. Even before Jesus formed the tie of discipleship and friendship with Peter, Andrew, or John, He had established a relationship with his mother that went beyond a simple parent-child tie. As Saint Luke reveals, already at 12 years old, He acted as her teacher. Saint John further adds that, both at the beginning of His public activity and in the final hour of His life Jesus interacted with His mother binding her to His own mission. Finally, she was there in the upper room with the disciples, awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit. She, who through the Holy Spirit conceived and gave birth to Jesus, accompanied the young Church on the day of Pentecost. The unique bond between Mary and Jesus attests to her unique role in His life and in the lives of His disciples. There should be no doubt that for us to fully know Jesus we need to learn something about his mother.

How can we learn about Mary? There are many excellent writings about the Mother of Jesus. Many popes, saints, theologians, and even children – we could think here, for instance, of the young recipients of the Marian apparitions in Lourdes and Fatima – have spoken about her. There is a wealth of reflection on the Blessed Mother contained in the Church's liturgical texts. Then there are countless anonymous

hymns and poems that describe the Mother of God, not to mention the works of Christian art. Still, it is the Sacred Scripture that as the inspired Word of God deserves our primary and prayerful attention. Thus, in the pages to follow we shall converse with biblical authors, particularly with the evangelists Luke and John. We intend to hear their stories about the Mother of God. Naturally, we wish to hear them while attuned to the living tradition of the Church, within which Luke and John have been studiously read and elucidated.

What shall we learn about Mary? Out of many valuable lessons that could be drawn from the Gospels of Luke and John, we shall focus on the lesson about trust, Mary's trust in God. I believe that in the Infancy Narrative of Luke 1–2 and then in the Johannine scenes of the Wedding of Cana and the Testament from the Cross Mary appears as the Mother of trust. She is the one who – with her “Let it be with me according to your word” – places her complete trust in God. She then, at the Wedding in Cana, moves us to trustful obedience to Jesus – “Do whatever he tells you.” In the end, it is Jesus who entrusts her to us in the person of the Beloved Disciple – “Here is your mother” – so that now in communion of life with her we can say to the Lord: “Let it be with me according to your word.” That is, we can enter into her trust in God. It is this lesson about Mary as the Mother of trust that we shall attempt to comprehend.

One could ask why it is the notion of trust and not simply of faith or obedience that constitutes the main thread of our reflection on Mary. Before we answer this question, let us pose another one. How can we respond to God who addresses us and invites us into His own company? The Catechism of the Catholic Church answering this very question states that the adequate response to this invitation is faith (CCC 142). In the very next paragraph, the Catechism describes faith as complete submission of intellect and will to God, and still further as the assent to God with one's whole being, and as the obedience of faith. I mention this variety of definitions of our adequate response to God because faith and obedience clearly overlap as they try to capture the essence of our proper response to God. When the notion of trust is singled out here it is not in opposition to faith or obedience but rather in conjunction with them. The notion of trust points to that childlike

simplicity with which one, in obedience of faith, places one's whole being in God's hands.

Saint John Paul II's Marian encyclical, *Redemptoris Mater*, serves here as an inspiration and model. First, because, in large part, it takes the form of a meditation on the Bible. John Paul II rediscovers for us the feminine line in the Bible that culminates in and receives its final meaning from the figure of Mary. Secondly, *Redemptoris Mater* remains so influential for us here because the principal attitude in terms of which it unlocks the figure of Mary is the attitude of faith. For John Paul II, Mary is above all the believer. The full measure of faith, of our relationship to God, is displayed in Mary's life. Naturally, the personal example of Marian piety and devotion left by Saint John Paul II is itself an eloquent sign of what it means to have Mary as our Mother as we learn to trust God.



Mary, the one who trusts God

Luke 1:26-38.

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Saint Luke begins his Gospel story with two Annunciation scenes, the Annunciation of the Birth of John the Baptist (1:5-25) and the Annunciation of the Birth of Jesus (1:26-38). We see how the same angel, Gabriel, appears first to Zechariah and then to Mary, announcing the good news of the birth of a son – a prophet who will

be “great in the sight of the Lord” (1:15), and the descendent of David who will be called “the Son of the Most High” (1:32). But to speak of two annunciations is not the only way to describe the first two scenes of the Gospel of Luke. Another way is to note how Luke’s story of Jesus opens with two contrasting images: a depiction of disbelief and an example of faith. First, in the scene of the Annunciation of the Birth of John the Baptist, we are confronted with disbelief. Then in the scene of the Annunciation of the Birth of Jesus, we see a response of faith. How do we know that these two Annunciation scenes are about disbelief and faith? It is the angel Gabriel who un.masks Zechariah’s lack of faith when he authoritatively declares: “But now, because you *did not believe* my words, ... you will become mute” (1:20). That Mary’s acceptance of Gabriel’s message is, in fact a response of faith, is declared by Elizabeth in the scene of Visitation. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth exclaims: “And blessed is *she who believed* that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord” (1:45). Thus, for Luke, the good news begins with angelic announcements of God’s salvific intervention, and with the human responses, or perhaps with the diversity of human responses. We learn the right response from Mary.

It is important to note that faith and disbelief define the responses given to God by Zechariah and Mary. But it is also important to see how faith and disbelief emerge as the crucial characteristics of Zechariah and Mary. Both Annunciations are so similar in form – an angel appears, causes a fearful response, announces a future birth, and responds to a question – that it is easy to overlook the subtle but important differences between them. Yes, two Annunciations are made and two important individuals are eventually born, but as God’s salvific plan moves forward not everyone cooperates in the same way. Mary truly stands out as someone ready to collaborate with God’s most astonishing and unheard of request. Zechariah, despite all his credentials – he is a Jewish priest, living blamelessly according to all the commandments of the law – appears unconvinced about the fulfillment of the angelic announcement. Let us analyze, step by step, how Zechariah and Mary come to embody such opposing attitudes.

Zechariah's disbelief

Luke begins his Gospel by drawing us into the center of the Jewish world, its piety and its values. We are following an elderly couple, a priest and his wife who, although righteous before God, lack an important blessing: they have no children. When Zechariah is chosen to serve before God in the temple, the spiritual center of the Jewish world, God's angel announces to him the birth of his son, John. John, as Gabriel declares, is to prepare the people for the coming of the Lord. Zechariah's response comes in the form of a question: "How will I know this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years" (1:18). On the surface, this question sounds rather innocent and not that much different from the question Mary will pose: "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" (1:34). They both, Mary and Zechariah, seem to raise objections to Gabriel's initial announcement. Zechariah mentions his old age, Mary her virginity. There is, however, a crucial difference. Mary does not question *whether* the words of Gabriel will be fulfilled. She only wants to know *how* they will come to pass. Her question reveals her readiness to collaborate and her need to know how she could do that. Zechariah's question is different. It reveals his doubt *whether* the words of Gabriel can be fulfilled. Behind his "How will I know this?" stands the need to be convinced that the words of the angel are true. If he needs to be convinced, it is because he is unable to bring himself to believe.

What makes Zechariah's doubting question even more troubling is the fact that miracles like the one announced to him – an elderly couple conceiving a son – are known in the history of Israel. One can recall, for instance, the birth of Isaac, the son of Sarah, a barren and elderly wife of Abraham. Zechariah, the priest, should have been able to remember God's past merciful acts and to expect them in the future. What is more, the angel states that the birth of John comes about in answer to Zechariah's prayer – "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard" (1:13). If it means a concrete prayer for a gift

of a child, then Zechariah's reluctance to believe that his prayer would finally be answered makes his disbelief even more troubling.

In all fairness to Zechariah, we must admit that he ultimately comes to embrace the angel's message. Eight days after the birth of his son, when the neighbors and family members came together to circumcise the child, they intended to name him after Zechariah, his father. Zechariah, still mute, asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John" (1:63). Thus, he obediently complied with the words of Gabriel, "Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John" (1:13), resisting at the same time the pressure of his relatives and neighbors. John's name, just like his identity and mission, will be defined by God, not by the expectations of his family. Zechariah accepts it and he finally regains his speech.

Mary's faith

It is by continually comparing the two Annunciation scenes that we can come to appreciate Mary's trustful "yes" to God. The first thing that strikes us is the geographical location to which Gabriel is now sent. Nazareth is not the center of the Jewish world; Jerusalem and its temple are. And yet it will be in Nazareth – in the peripheries, when considered from the perspective of Jewish religious sensitivities and Roman imperial politics – that the center of the world and the focal point of history will now be found. Once Mary's yes is pronounced, her womb will become the dwelling place of God on earth, a temple.

The way Luke narrates the story of Gabriel's encounter with Mary is very suggestive in this regard. In Luke's narration Mary, unlike Zechariah, remains in one place. She appears as an unmovable center to which Gabriel is first sent – "he came to her" (1:28) – and from which he departs at the end; "then the angel departed from her" (1:38). Similar movement toward the center was visible in the previous scene, where Zechariah was first chosen "to enter the sanctuary of the Lord" (1:9) and then, after the angelic apparition, moved away from the temple; "he went to his home" (1:23). Mary, like the Jerusalem temple, stands in the center; her person becomes a focal point of encounter between God's messenger and humanity. Furthermore, there is a sense in which Mary's yes and her self-identification as God's servant resumes and advances the liturgical service in the Jerusalem temple interrupted and left unfinished due to Zechariah's muteness. If Jewish theology regarded the temple as a microcosm of the universe, a place that represents the entire created reality before God, then Mary in her yes speaks not just for herself but also, in some way, for the rest of us. In Luke's story, Mary's trustful yes acquires a significance that goes beyond a simple consent to become a mother.

Mary's representative role is further indicated by the greeting used by Gabriel: "Greetings, favored one!" (1:28). Its first word, *chaire*, is a standard Greek salutation correctly rendered in English as "greetings."

The Angel Gabriel, then, addresses Mary by a word of welcome, a hello, before calling her “favored one.” But there is more to his simple word of greeting. In literal translation, *chaire* means “rejoice.” If we allow the literal sense of *chaire* to break through its conventional meaning, we can hear an invitation to joy, “rejoice,” and thus an echo of the prophecy of Zephaniah: “Rejoice, O daughter Zion!... The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst” (3:14-14; New English Translation of Septuagint). Guided by the literal meaning of *chaire*, we can see in Mary the Daughter Zion, a feminine personification of Israel. This, again, alerts us to the importance of Mary’s yes. She pronounces it not just for herself. In her yes, the faith of Israel reaches its realization as God comes to dwell in the midst of the Daughter Zion, fulfilling the hopes of the Old Testament prophets.

The more we comprehend the significance attached to Mary’s yes, the more striking becomes her insignificance, that is, her insignificant standing in the social hierarchy. Again, comparison with Zechariah is very helpful. Zechariah’s status as a priest, his blameless observance of the law, and even the privilege allotted to him of entering the sacred space, mark him as someone important in socio-religious terms and thus worthy of God’s revelation. When Luke describes Mary, he mentions nothing about her profession or family of origin. It is Joseph, Mary’s fiancé, of whom it is said that he is from the house of David. Mary is simply described as a virgin from a town in Galilee called Nazareth. This conspicuous lack of social credentials is intriguing. It seems to suggest that God’s choice of Mary rests purely on God’s gracious initiative, and not on any human consideration of worth. As we shall soon see, the greeting with which Gabriel addresses Mary points in the same direction.

In his first words directed to Zechariah, Gabriel called him by his name: “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard” (1:13). In the first words directed to Mary, Gabriel says: “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you” (Luke 1:28). Gabriel does not greet Mary by her name. Or rather, he greets her by a truly revealing name, “favored one,” or literally, the one who has been and remains graced (Greek *kecharitomene*). Thus, Mary’s true standing is revealed; she is the one who has been graced by God. She is defined by what God has done for her.

What have we learned so far about Mary's trust? That it arises from the simplicity of her heart – she has no credentials, no claims to self-greatness apart from being graced by God. That her trustful yes somehow involves all of us, inasmuch as in her, as the new temple, all of creation gives adequate response to God. Still, the most astonishing characteristic of her trustful faith is her readiness to be surprised by God. This characteristic needs to be carefully explained.

Mary's initial reaction of being greatly troubled by Gabriel's greeting, as well as the question she posed – “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” – indicate that God's plan was not something she had expected. In other words, God's invitation to become the mother of his Son is absolutely surprising. In fact, it is so strange that it forces Mary to admit that she does not know how she can remain virgin and yet become a mother. There is no precedence for this sort of event. She stands in front of something totally unheard of. And even though Gabriel announces the fulfillment of some well-known prophecies – in particular, the promise made to David that his kingdom would be established forever (2 Sam 7) – the manner in which these prophecies are to come about is new. It is this surprising originality of God's plan – a virgin becoming a mother of God's Son through the work of the Holy Spirit – that finds in Mary neither resistance nor disbelief, neither clinging to old ways nor attachment to tried practices, but an attentive and listening heart ready to say yes.

Mary's attentiveness is seen right from the beginning. The comparison with Zechariah is again very telling. Zechariah responds to the appearance of God's angel with fear – “When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him” (1:12). His fear is caused by what he sees. Mary's reaction, although also marked by fear, is directed to what is said, not to what is seen – “but she was much perplexed by his words...” – and it quickly moves from initial fear to an attitude of active inquiry – “and [she] pondered what sort of greeting this might be” (1:29). Unlike Zechariah, arrested in his fear over the supernatural vision, Mary focuses on the words, trying to penetrate their astounding meaning. Her question – “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” (1:34) – further demonstrates her desire to comprehend God's plan so as to give it her full collaboration. She is an attentive listener, carefully pondering the message she receives, ready to give

herself to whatever God's plan might reveal itself to be. Her entire attitude indicates that, for her, God and his plan are worthy of her total attention. In front of God, she demonstrates the vigilance of someone ready to be surprised.

What in the scene of Annunciation appears as attentiveness and desire to understand, in the scene of Jesus' birth grows into active memory. When the shepherds, told by an angel "to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord" (2:11), find the child and relate what has been told them about the child, Mary reacts by treasuring all these words and pondering them in her heart (cf. 2:19). She both remembers and tries to grasp the meaning. On the one hand, Mary becomes the first custodian of the Gospel tradition; she is the first one among those who through the centuries will nourish their faith by engaging the story of Jesus. On the other hand, we must admit that in front of the mystery of God's plan, Mary experiences certain darkness. The events are not totally clear. She must continue to ponder them, penetrating ever deeper into their sense. It belongs to the essence of her faith to say yes to God by also keeping the memory of God's deeds alive, letting it release more and more light.

The darkness Mary experiences as she tries to understand God's designs is particularly intense in the last scene of the Infancy Narrative. Mary's twelve-year-old son is lost during the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. After three days of anxious search, Mary and Joseph find him in the temple, sitting among the teachers. When Mary asks "Child, why have you treated us like this?" (2:48) Jesus responds with an enigmatic question: "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" That this question is indeed difficult to comprehend is confirmed in the very next verse, where it is said that Mary and Joseph "did not understand what he said to them" (2:50). Here again Mary is faced with realities that are not easily understandable. She again must continue to ponder the meaning of the events. Indeed, as Saint Luke tells us, upon their return to Nazareth, "his mother treasured all these things in her heart" (2:51).

Why would Jesus treat Mary in this way? Why would He have Mary endure three days of a painful search? Why would His answer to her be so enigmatic? One way to begin to answer these questions is to note that in His response Jesus refers to a certain necessity. He says

that He “must be” in the Father’s house. Throughout His ministry, as recounted in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus will refer to the same necessity many times. For instance, when the citizens of Capernaum attempted to prevent him from leaving them, He said to them: “I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose” (4:43). Jesus refers to a necessity, to a purpose that governs his activity. What exactly this purpose is becomes clearer toward the end of the Gospel, when the Risen Lord appears to two of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Unrecognized by them, He explains to them His own mission. He says: “Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” (24:26). The necessity to which Jesus submits Himself is the mission given to Him by His Father. Jesus “must be” immersed in the things of his Father. And being in the things of His Father involves suffering and death. When we recall that because of His passion and death Jesus would again be “lost” in Jerusalem, and that for three days, from Good Friday until the Sunday of the Resurrection, His disciples would live through anguish and pain, we can slowly comprehend what kind of lesson the twelve-year-old Jesus was trying to convey to his Mother. The three days of her anxious search for her Son seem to foreshadow the three days of His passion and death. From the beginning, He prepares her for the mysterious plan of the Father, for the experience of suffering and loss. The words of Simeon, which Mary heard as she presented her baby in the temple – “and a sword will pierce your own soul too” (2:35) – begin to acquire more concrete meaning. Her response is again to treasure all these things in her heart (cf. 2:51), that is, to patiently ponder the meaning of Jesus’ words and actions even though, at least initially, they appear incomprehensible.

When we continue to read the Gospel story we realize that in the scene of the Annunciation God did not reveal everything to her. There is nothing said about a cross and suffering; only positive statements are made about Jesus’ royal dignity – “and of his kingdom there will be no end” (1:33) – and His status as the Son of the Most High. The revelation of the cross comes only later. It is first intimated by Simeon’s prediction – “and a sword will pierce your own soul too” (2:35) – and then foreshadowed by the painful experience of the twelve-year-old being lost. One could object and say: How can Mary say yes at the moment

of the Annunciation if she does not know everything that God has in store for her? Can her yes be valid if it is based on partial information? This question betrays our own desire to be in control, to be able to know everything before we commit to anything. Mary's childlike trust consists in giving a full yes to God, without knowing everything this yes implies. This complete yes is full of trust, not of detailed knowledge of what is to come. In his encyclical on Mary, John Paul II captured this dimension of her faith: "To believe means 'to abandon oneself' to the truth of the word of the living God, knowing and humbly recognizing 'how unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways' (Rom. 11:33)" *Redemptoris Mater*, 14. Mary teaches us how to say yes, with childlike simplicity and trust, often in darkness.

There is one more incident, worth recalling here, that speaks of the depth of Mary's yes. It takes place later in the Gospel when His mother and His brothers come to Jesus but they cannot reach Him because of the crowd. Instead of telling the crowd to let His relatives in, Jesus says: "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it" (8:21). Again, on the surface, the words of Jesus seem very harsh. He appears to distance himself from His mother. Still, deep down His words contain a great affirmation of the relationship that binds Him to his mother. This new motherhood of which Jesus speaks transcends biological bonds; it is based on hearing and doing the word of God. If Mary is so dear to Jesus it is because she above all others hears the word of God and puts it into practice. Again, Jesus' treatment of Mary is here very demanding in that His indirectness solicits from her an inquiring faith. Expectations arising from natural bonds are set aside making room for a supernatural bond. It must be the depth of Mary's yes that allows Jesus to be so demanding simply because He is so confident that she will not waver from seeking the truth of His words and trusting them.

Mary, the one who leads us to trust God

John 2:1-11

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

Saint Luke has depicted Mary as the perfect disciple. She is the model of how we are to welcome the Word of God, of how we are to entrust ourselves, our future, to the truth of that Word. Mary's attentiveness, her readiness to say yes, as well as her docility and humility in acknowledging things she does not know and in trying to understand better the ones she has already perceived and experienced

make her the perfect collaborator of God in the unfolding of His plan of salvation. For Mary, God is completely trustworthy and so she trustfully follows Him even amid darkness, when God's plans and designs remain hidden. There is something of a childlike simplicity in her who places herself completely at God's disposal, come what may.

Having learned Saint Luke's lesson about Mary's trust in God, we now wish to learn another lesson about Mary, this time from Saint John. In the Gospel of John, Mary accompanies Jesus only at the beginning and at the end of his journey. We see her at the wedding scene in Cana and then again at the crucifixion. These are only two of many scenes contained in the Gospel. Nevertheless, they mark very important moments of Jesus' mission. They are pregnant with meaning. Briefly put, Mary is there, in Cana, entrusting our needs to Jesus – "They have no wine" (2:3) – awakening our trust in him – "Do whatever he tells you" (2:5) – and in a certain way opening the way for Jesus' self-manifestation – "Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him" (2:11). She truly introduces us into the mystery of his person and mission. Thanks to her, like the disciples in the Gospel, we come to see His glory and believe in Him. As Jesus is about to die, as His glory is to be revealed completely, she is there, not just to be entrusted to the Beloved Disciple, but to truly form with Him the new community of the Church. Thus, along with the Beloved Disciple, we all can find in the Church, and in Mary, the Mother who forms in us the attitude of trust. Let us examine these lessons about Mary, the Mother of trust, in more detail.

The scene of the wedding feast in Cana contains the last words of Mary recorded in the Gospel tradition. She says to the servants: "Do whatever he tells you" (2:5). These words should not be underestimated. In a moment, Jesus will tell the servants to fill the stone jars with water and then to draw some out and take it to the chief steward. Both tasks, filling the jars with water and then drawing some out for the chief steward to taste, appear nonsensical. What was running short at the wedding was wine, not water. Why, then, would someone have them fill the jars with water? To what purpose? Despite all the possible objections, the servants obey. In fact, Saint John highlights their obedient attitude when he repeats the same verbs describing

first Jesus' order and then its execution: “*Fill* the jars with water.’ And they *filled* them up to the brim. ... ‘Now draw some out, and *take* it to the chief steward.’ So they *took* it” (2:7-8). Their obedience is truly astounding. Not only do they do without questioning what seems to make little sense, they also take orders from someone who is neither the chief steward nor the bridegroom. The only explanation we find are the words of Mary directed to them: “Do whatever he tells you.” She must have moved them to trustful obedience to Jesus. She is truly the Mother who leads us to trust Jesus.

If Mary can lead us to trust Jesus, it is because she herself possesses complete confidence in Jesus. What she says and what she does demonstrate complete trust in the efficacy of Jesus' word. She trusts the word of Jesus – “whatever he tells you” – even though she does not know what the word will ultimately demand. We have seen the same characteristic of Mary illustrated in the Lukan scene of the Annunciation, where Mary's childlike trust consisted in giving a full yes to God, without knowing everything God's plan implied. At the Wedding in Cana, Mary's confidence in and commitment to Jesus' word are equally unconditional. Jesus' seemingly harsh response – “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come” – is not easily understandable and thus introduces a certain darkness and the need for a docile and trustful attitude. Mary's reaction – “Do whatever he tells you” – expresses both her trust in Jesus' ability to remedy human needs and her readiness to accept whatever the demands Jesus' words might impose. This attitude of Mary becomes now her lesson and her gift to the servants as she moves them to act in trustful obedience to the word of Jesus. Still, to truly grasp how her trust goes hand in hand with her docility, how she is ready to be led by Jesus into the deeper mystery of His person and mission, we need to return to Jesus' strange response to His mother – “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come” – and to the sign performed by Jesus in Cana.

At the end of His account of the Wedding in Cana, Saint John brings forward its significance by saying: “Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him” (2:11). What Jesus did is described here as the first of His signs. This very definition invites us to see the miracle of Cana precisely as

a sign, as something that has a deeper meaning, as something that discloses deeper realities. Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus will perform many other signs. He will, for instance, multiply bread and feed the hungry crowd. When on the next day the crowd looks for Him, Jesus responds: “Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves” (6:26). This rebuke of Jesus shows that not everyone was able to see His deeds as signs, that is, as pointing to the deeper mystery of His person. Sometimes, as in the case of the crowds fed by Jesus, their perception was limited to the external phenomena. They were interested in having their fill of the loaves, not in discovering who is the one who can satisfy the deepest hunger of the soul. A similar challenge can be detected as we read about the Wedding in Cana. It is true that by changing water into wine Jesus saved the newlyweds from a major embarrassment of running out of wine at their wedding feast. But to perceive only this in Jesus’ action is to miss something much more important.

What, then, is the deeper reality disclosed by the sign of Cana? We can begin to answer this question by first noticing Jesus’ strange response to his mother. When Mary, aware of the difficulty, simply says to Jesus, “They have no wine” (2:3), His response is: “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come” (2:4). Jesus appears to distance Himself from Mary’s subtle request. His actions are not to be determined by human needs and calculations. His allegiance is to the Father and to the hour appointed by Him. At another place Jesus will say: “Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise” (5:19). We have observed a similar tension in the Gospel of Luke when the twelve-year-old Jesus responds to His mother’s anxious concern with the question: “Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” We have noted how underneath this seemingly harsh language of Jesus there was an important lesson pointing to the plan of the Father, and in particular to the painful mystery of Jesus’ redemptive passion. A similar lesson seems to be taking place in Cana. Jesus points Mary toward the hour, that is, toward the mystery of His passion.

Once we begin to ask about the deeper reality disclosed by the sign given by Jesus, we must admit that when Jesus responds to Mary’s

request by changing water into wine, it is not simply to remedy a temporary need that had just arisen. When He changes water into wine, He inaugurates the hour appointed by His Father. This is the hour of salvation. But even here we notice a certain difficulty and thus a need for further clarification. Strictly speaking, the hour of Jesus will arrive later as the hour of His passion, death, and resurrection. In John 13:1, at the beginning of the Passion Narrative, its arrival is clearly announced: “Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that *his hour had come* to depart from this world and go to the Father.” If then at the wedding feast in Cana Jesus responds to Mary’s request, it is because His miracle inaugurates His hour even before it arrives; it anticipates it. Pope Benedict XVI sees here an analogy between the anticipation of the hour of Jesus at the Wedding feast in Cana and the anticipation of the final heavenly wedding feast in the Eucharist. He says: “Just as at his mother’s request Jesus gives a sign that anticipates his hour, [...] so too he does the same thing ever anew in the Eucharist. Here in response to the Church’s prayer, the Lord anticipates his return; He comes already now; He celebrates the marriage feasts with us here and now” (Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 252).

This is where the deeper reality disclosed by the sign of Cana is to be found. The redemptive mystery of Jesus’ passion, death and resurrection is now signified by the new, better wine provided in abundance by Jesus. The wedding feast of God and humanity, to be sealed on the cross, has begun. Just as foretold, among others, by Hosea – “And I will take you for my wife forever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy” (Hos 2:19) – and Isaiah – “For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your builder marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you” (Isa 62:5) – the long awaited promise of the final marriage banquet begins to be realized. The “feast of well-aged wines” (Isa 25:6) has arrived.

Mary plays a unique role in this inauguration of the time of salvation. First of all, Mary’s response to Jesus is as respectful as it is trustful. She does not deny that the hour has not yet come, but neither does she doubt Jesus’s ability to help those in need. She simply says, “Do whatever he tells you.” Her intercession on behalf of the newlyweds is not then denied; it is brought to a deeper level. Jesus will give more

than they could have asked for. Here, again, the way Saint John tells us this story seems to suggest that it is precisely Mary's trust and docility that enable Jesus to "go deeper," to perform a revelatory sign. Jesus can speak through the signs because there is someone trustful and docile enough to listen to them. In the end, just as Mary's words to the servants – "Do whatever he tells you" – lead them to obedience that we find surprising, so too the request directed by Mary to her Son – "They have no wine" – together with her trust in his words – "Do whatever he tells you" – lead him to an act that surpasses our immediate expectations. Mary's trustful and docile mediation opens the way to our encounter with the Divine Bridegroom and the gift of his overflowing love.

There is still more to her role. As Father Ignace de la Potterie, S.J. has pointed out (*Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant*, 188-190), Mary's words – "Do whatever he tells you" – echo the Old Testament covenant formulas. We can recall here, in particular, the covenant between God and His people sealed at Mount Horeb after the crossing of the Red Sea. We read in the Book of Exodus that Moses "took the book of the covenant, and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, 'All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.' Moses took the blood and dashed it on the people, and said, 'See the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words'" (24:27-28). The Israelites' promise to do everything the Lord has spoken – "All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient" – marks their response to and their entry into the covenant with God. Mary's words to the servants – "Do whatever he tells you" – express and awaken a similar disposition as the one that sealed the old covenant. Now the new covenant is about to unfold. It will be ultimately sealed by the blood of the new covenant, poured out on the cross, and shared with us in every Eucharist. By inviting us to do whatever Jesus tells us, Mary leads us into communion with her Son, into the new and eternal covenant with him.

Not everyone recognized the sign performed by Jesus. The chief steward having tasted the wine and not knowing where it came from called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now" (2:10). The steward

apparently remained oblivious to the true character of the miracle. Ironically, however, his words are very revealing. He knows that the good wine came from the bridegroom. What he does not know is that the true Bridegroom, whose hour has just arrived, is Jesus. It is the disciples of Jesus, those who are always close to Him, who make an important step. They begin to believe in Jesus. "Jesus ... revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in Him" (2:11). The first fruit of Mary's trust is visible here. Mary, the first to put her faith in Jesus' words, is joined by the disciples who, too, come to believe in Him. Again, in the Gospel of John, simple events of ordinary life, such as the wedding celebration and the troubling reality of running out of wine, manifest and lead to the mystery of Jesus' person and mission. Mary's trust and docility open the way in which we now come to see the revelation of Jesus' glory. Mary paves the way for our journey into the mystery of Christ. This journey reaches its climax at the hour of the crucifixion.



Mary entrusted to us

John 19:25-27

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

We have already noticed how Jesus' mention of His "hour" at the wedding feast in Cana connects the sign performed there with the hour of Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection. When, after the cleansing of the temple, the Jews asked Jesus: "What sign can you show us for doing this?" (2:18), he responded: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (2:19). Jesus spoke of the temple of his body, but he spoke of his bodily death and resurrection in response to the demand for a sign ("What *sign* can you show us for doing this?"). Jesus' death and resurrection will be His final sign. The connection between the first of His signs, the miracle in Cana, and the last of His signs, His death and resurrection, that is, the connection between Cana and Golgotha becomes even more visible when we keep in mind that, in the Gospel of John, Mary appears next to Jesus only on those two occasions. Moreover, on both occasions Jesus calls her not by her name, Mary, nor by her proper title, mother, but rather by the strange designation, "woman." Both the first and the last sign, the initial and the final disclosure of the mystery of His person, involve Mary, and not just as His mother, but as Woman. The tradition of the Church has seen in this title a reference to Mary's universal role as the new Eve, reversing the mistrust and disobedience of the first Eve, and as the feminine personification of Israel, the Daughter Zion,

completing and bringing to fulfillment the faith of Israel. At the cross, this Woman is given to us as our mother. What is the significance of this event?

In John 12:32, Jesus describes the effects of his death: “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” Similarly, in John 11:52, we hear that the purpose of His death is “to gather into one the dispersed children of God.” The forming of the new community around the Crucified One, takes place when Jesus says to his mother: “Woman, here is your son,” and then says to His disciple: “Here is your mother” (cf. John 19:26-27). As Saint John tells us, “from that hour the disciple took her into his own home” (John 19:27). The unity of the dispersed children of God, willed and effected by the dying Jesus, begins with the mutual entrustment of Mary and the Beloved Disciple. She is given to him as his mother. He becomes her son. Standing at the foot of the cross, the two become the recipients of the Spirit of Jesus, given away at the moment of death: “Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit” (19:30). Thus, the nascent Church, the community where Jesus is present in his Spirit and where the blood and water coming out of the pierced side of Jesus (cf. 19:34) wash and nourish believers in the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist, is from the very beginning a place where believers receive the gift of Mary. She is given to them as their mother.

The cross is the fullest manifestation of Jesus’ self-emptying love. For as Saint Paul reminds us, Jesus “though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but *emptied himself*, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross” (Phil 2:6-8). Standing at the foot of the cross, Mary stands next to the mystery of Christ’s self-emptying (*kenosis* in Greek). It is while contemplating this scene that John Paul II speaks of Mary’s *kenosis* of faith. His words are very revealing. He notes how, at the moment of the Annunciation, Mary “had also heard the words: ‘He will be great...and the Lord God will give to Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom there will be no end’ (Lk. 1:32-33). And now, standing at the foot of the Cross, Mary is the witness, humanly speaking, of the complete negation of these

words. [...] At the foot of the Cross Mary shares through faith in the shocking mystery of this self-emptying. This is perhaps the deepest ‘kenosis’ of faith in human history” (*Redemptoris Mater*, 18). This is the hour when the most is demanded of Mary. This is the hour when her trust in God means abandoning herself completely to him whose ways appear completely dark. What a heroic obedience of faith! It is at this hour of her heroic trust in God that she is given to us as our mother.

What does it mean to have Mary as our mother? The Gospel of John tells us that “from that hour the disciple took her into his own home” (John 19:27). Literally, he takes her *eis ta idia*, that is, into those things and realities that are his very own. As Father Ignace de la Potterie, S.J. notes, (*Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant*, 225-228), there is an interesting reversal of the initial situation described in the Prologue of the Gospel of John. The Word of God, “came to what was his own (*eis ta idia*), and his own people did not accept him” (John 1:11). Now the Beloved Disciple takes the one who trusts the Word of God and receives her “into his own.” He accepts the mother who has accepted unconditionally the Word of God.

This is, I believe, where the gift of Mary to us shines in all its splendor. When we accept her into our inner most realities (*eis ta idia*) we enter a communion of life with the One who is the model of faithful obedience to her Son. We have all the right to ask her to form in us her heart, with its trust, docility, readiness to be surprised by God, ability to remember God’s acts, willingness to become collaborators in God’s plan of salvation, and finally with its faithfulness at the darkest hour. Saint Louis de Montfort, in his *Treaties on True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, §266, is quite direct when he states: “Implore Mary to lend you her heart so that you may receive her Son with her dispositions.... Beg her to lend you her heart, saying, ‘O Mary, I take you for my all; give me your heart.’”

Finally, for us to truly receive Mary as our mother we need to place ourselves in her hands as her children. We cannot really receive her without giving ourselves over to her. Just as in any other important relationship, mutual giving is crucial. One cannot receive a gift of friendship from others without becoming a friend to them. A husband cannot receive the gift of his wife without giving himself over to her

as a husband. We cannot receive Mary as our Mother without giving ourselves over to her, without entrusting or consecrating ourselves to her. The life of Saint John Paul II offers an eloquent example of this truth. His motto, *Totus Tuus* (all yours), is drawn from the words of Saint Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort: “*Totus tuus ego sum et omnia mea tua sunt. Accipio te in mea omnia. Praebe mihi cor tuum, Maria* – I belong entirely to you, and all that I have is yours. I take you for my all. O Mary, give me your heart” (*Treatise on True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, §266). We want to belong to her entirely so that we can, in turn, acquire her dispositions and trust God with her heart.

In the darkness that we cannot comprehend or penetrate, when the most is demanded from our faith in God, Mary is there as our Mother. She who learned how to lose and let go for God, including the loss of her dear Son at the hour of the crucifixion, will teach us how to persevere in our yes to God. The full measure of faith, of our relationship to God, is not just displayed in Mary’s life; it is also in a certain way given to us whenever we try to live out Jesus’ testament from the cross: “Here is your mother.” When, like the Beloved Disciple, we take her into our innermost realities and, like Saint Juan Diego, we find ourselves in the crossing of her arms, she awakens in us the strength necessary to trust God. Throughout our trials of faith she continues to call to us:

Listen, put it into your heart, my youngest and dearest son, that the thing that disturbs you, the thing that afflicts you, is nothing. Do not let your countenance, your heart be disturbed. Do not fear this sickness of your uncle or any other sickness, nor anything that is sharp or hurtful. Am I not here, I, who am your Mother? Are you not under my shadow and protection? Am I not the source of your joy? Are you not in the hollow of my mantle, in the crossing of my arms? Do you need anything more?

(Words of Our Lady of Guadalupe to Saint Juan Diego)

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Reverend SLAWOMIR SZKREDKA, Ph.D., S.S.D. Ordained to the priesthood for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles in 2002, Fr. Sławomir Szkredka, a native of Poland, served as an Associate Pastor at Saint Genevieve Parish in Panorama City (2002-2006) and at Saint John the Baptist Parish in Baldwin Park (2006-2008). From 2008 till 2015, he resided in Rome pursuing biblical studies at the Pontifical Biblical Institute. Presently Fr. Szkredka is an Assistant Professor of Biblical Studies at Saint John's Seminary in Camarillo. He is the author of *Sinners and Sinfulness in Luke* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017).

