

3rd Sunday of Eastertide (C)

1st May 2022

'Honouring Mary in May'

Acts 5: *the God of our ancestors raised up Jesus*

Ps 29: *I will praise You, Lord, You have rescued me*

Apoc 5: *The Lamb that was sacrificed is worthy of riches and power ...*

Jn 21: 1–19: *Who are You? They knew it was the Lord*

“May is the month of Mary ...” — we used to sing this hymn when I was little: *“May is the month of Mary, month we all love so well. Mary is God’s own mother, gladly her praise we tell. Mary is beautiful, Mary is fair, gladly we praise her in song and in prayer.”* As it’s now May, I want to speak today about Our Blessed Lady, and about the important devotion we have to her as Christians.

We have just begun this Marian month: hence the decade of the rosary that we had as the prelude to Mass, and which will continue to be our practice over the 5 Sundays of May. This month of Mary will coincide with most of the remaining stretch of Eastertide, and it will coincide with much of the universities’ exam season too — both coincidences being no bad thing! She is the Mother of the early Church — hence her close identification with Christians in the immediate aftermath of the Resurrection — and she is honoured too as ‘Our Lady, Seat of Wisdom,’

a particularly important designation for you as patroness of your university studies and research.

Yet, when we think of Our Lady and Eastertide, this coinciding of May and the Easter season, what evidence of a connection do we see? Well, seemingly very little in terms of the text of Scripture! We heard of her on Good Friday at the foot of the Cross; ... and we will hear of her gathered with the apostles on Pentecost Sunday on the very last day of the season. But in between? Well, little testimony of Scripture apart from brief references in *Acts* 1 & 2, and nothing in all those other chapters of *Acts* reaching forward into the apostolic mission to the world, which we will read through this season. And yet ... we know she was there. We know full well that she was there, in Jerusalem between the Cross and Pentecost. Apart from the Scriptural testimony of her being at the heart of the apostolic group as they spent time together, waiting and praying between Ascension and Pentecost, we also have the insights of mystics ... Bl. Anne Catherine Emmerich, for example, saw in visions Our Lady’s direct personal

experience of the Risen Jesus on the night of the Resurrection, as we might well expect her to have received, as His Blessed Mother. Her presence, then, through the mysteries of Easter are not insignificant — neither to the apostles, nor to us. In the background, yes, not drawing attention to herself, but supporting with her perfect spiritual maternity, Mary is the Mother of the Church, the Queen of Apostles. She is then there as they receive that outpouring of the Spirit, anointing them to be the world's first evangelists. Hers is the important maternal help, then, to their vocation.

Maybe this is the best key, then, in which to bring together the Marian dimension of this time of year with the specific celebrations of Eastertide: that Mary is the mother of the apostolic vocations. Surely this is what Jesus intended, anyway, when He said from the Cross to Mary and John, *“Woman, behold your son ... Behold, your Mother.”* Not just that St John look after the material needs of His bereft Mother, but that she become in a formal, spiritual sense, the mother of all believers, starting

with the apostles. We don't know when she moved, if tradition is to be believed, to Ephesus — where today one can still visit 'Mary's House.' But she must have been a point of reference for the apostles and other early Christians for a good while after Pentecost, one would imagine. Think, for example, of St Luke's picture of Our Lady, painted in the infancy narrative of His Gospel — surely with information provided by Our Lady herself. We cannot ever write Our Lady out of the picture of the early Church — I think that the apostles would have relied on her!

Today, for example, we have heard of Our Risen Lord's questioning of Peter, and His re-commissioning of him as leader of the apostles, as Vicar Of Christ the Shepherd of the Flock — and of the intimation of the martyrdom that will be Peter's ultimate expression of faith in Jesus. Part of that dialogue, of course, is Our Lord's gentle 3-fold undoing of the 3-fold denial that Peter had made at the High Priest's palace in Jerusalem when Jesus was on trial. But there's a possible back-story to this event

at Lake Galilee. Again, according to the mystic Bl. Anne Catherine Emmerich, as was portrayed in *The Passion of the Christ* film, there was an encounter between Peter and Our Blessed Lady soon after his denial of Jesus. In that moment, Peter addresses Mary as ‘Mother,’ and voices aloud to her his acute sadness at having denied Jesus; he goes to her, as the first port of call in his inner distress, as part of his repentance. In other words, the apostles, St Peter included, saw that relationship with Mary as spiritually key, a *necessary* part of their relationship with Christ, their vocation.

Personally speaking, I have long felt that my own calling to be a priest, back in the days before I was 10 when we lived in Kent, has a lot to do with Our Lady, and to the shrine of Our Lady of Mt Carmel in Aylesford. We would go there, maybe monthly, for an hour or so on a Sunday afternoon — we would always walk the Rosary Way, whatever the weather, and we would always pray in the Cloister Chapel. Memories of this shrine of Our Lady, and its influence on me, are, I’m sure, bound up with my

being a priest. I very much consider that Our Lady of Mt Carmel is ‘mother’ of my own vocation.

We should, each and every one of us, see Our Blessed Lady as ‘mother’ of our Christian lives, our calling, our path in life. In fact, I would really say that we *must* have a relationship with Mary if we are to be authentic Christians. Why is this? Isn’t Mary just an optional extra for Christians? Some denominations emphasize her, and others don’t — isn’t that OK, take her or leave her? Well, no, not at all. God’s plan for the salvation of the world is impossible without Mary. Without Mary there is no Incarnation, no initial co-operation with God to bring the Son into the world in the flesh. Without, Mary, then, there is no Jesus of Nazareth, no Gospel, no disciples, no Crucifixion and Resurrection, no Church. We cannot airbrush her out of the foundations of Christian faith — she is there, at its beginning and at its heart, because of God’s own divine choice. We honour her not as some sort of a goddess — which would be wrong, and pagan — but instead as the most perfect human being,

acting in symphony with God's will as we would all have done had we not allowed sin to enter the world through our pride.

Mary is, therefore, our great hope, since she shows us how to be a proper human being, i.e., a saint. She is not beyond us, any more than our own biological mother is 'beyond us.' She is 'before us,' and she has a wisdom and a holiness from God that is greater than ours, but she is not 'beyond us.' She is our heavenly Mother, our always-attentive Mother, our constantly-praying Mother. She does know better than us, for she sees God's will and God's plan perfectly, for her sight is not clouded by sin. Our asking Mary to pray for us, then, is a turning to that 'saint of saints,' who has no greater delight than in helping us love her Son as she does. We must not underestimate, then, the power of invoking Blessed Mary's intercession in prayer. Time and again the Church calls us to Marian devotion and to the Rosary. For centuries, for example, the Rosary has been a mainstay of Catholic piety — promoted by St Dominic, even, in the 13th c., though its roots are

even older. Invoking Our Lady's prayers, in the Rosary and other prayers, implies bringing on-side our most faithful ally in the spiritual warfare of life. Even a single 'Hail Mary' in the face of temptation can be provide a saving grace, and help one to resist sin.

So let's make good use of this month of May, to be diligent in our love for Our Lady and in inviting her to be a big part of our prayer life this Easter. She can only lead us *to* God, and never away from Him; she never gets 'in the way.' For where Our Lady is, there is Jesus her Son, held up by her for our adoration. From the Cross, Our Lord gave her to us, in the person of St John, to be our Mother, so we cannot neglect her without doing a great disservice to our faith. We each have so many needs in our lives, needs that we never pray enough about; let's bring Mary in on those prayers, for with her we know truly that we have the greatest ally in prayer that we could ever have.

*Our Lady, Mother of the Church, ... Seat of Wisdom, ...
Refuge of Sinners, ... Health of the Sick, ... Comfort of the
Afflicted, ... Cause of our Joy ... Pray for us!*