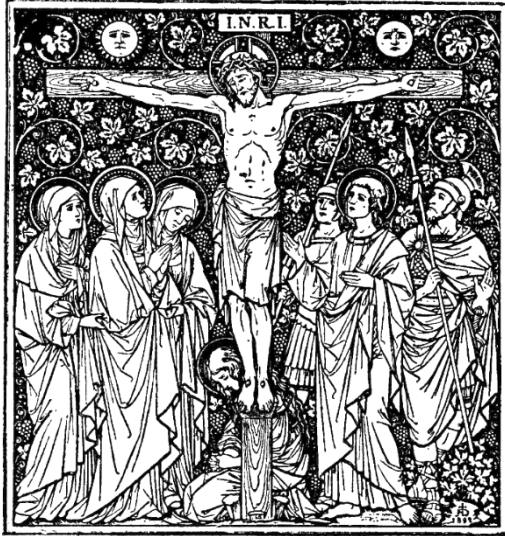


The Sunday Gospel

Fourth Sunday of Lent (Mothering Sunday)

John 19:25-27



^{19:25} Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.'

²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

Interpretation Notes

v.25: “*standing near the cross...*”. John paints a unique picture of the Crucifixion in many respects, including telling us that Mary, John, and other women were there. In the narratives of the synoptic gospels everyone who had been close to Jesus has fled the scene. Only a number of women watch from a distance.

Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him. Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

(Matthew 27:55-56)

There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

(Mark 15:40-41)

All his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

(Luke 23:49)

This prompts St John Chrysostom to point out the obvious and say something rather controversial for his time:

Observe how the weaker sex is the stronger; standing by the cross when the disciples fly. (Homily lxxxv)

v.25: “his mother, and his mother’s sister ...”. Who are these people? Mary (*Myriam* in Hebrew or *Maryam* in Aramaic) seems to be a very common name and there are also shared relations at play here. What’s more, “Mary wife of Clopas” is a post-medieval interpretation rather than a translation. The literal translation is “Mary of Clopas”, no conjugal relationship is involved, but bibles have been interpreting this is a “wife” since the King James Version. St Jerome tries to explain by saying,

The Mary which in Mark and Matthew is called the “mother of James and Josés”, was the wife of Alpheus, and sister of Mary the mother of our Lord: which Mary, John here designates as “of Clopas”, either from her father, or family, or for some other reason. She is not necessarily a different person, because she is called in one place Mary the mother of James the less, and here Mary of Cleophas, for it is customary in Scripture to give different names to the same person. (Homily lxxxv)

So, three women (all named Mary) were there – Our Lady Mary, Mary of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. However, if you look at the illustration above, there are four women. This is because the artist interpreted “his mother’s sister” and “Mary the wife of Clopas” as two different people.

v.25: “... his mother’s sister ...”. Family relations, such as siblings and cousins, are mentioned frequently in the Scriptures, however, there were not as formally defined or structured as we understand them in our own setting. “Sister” does not necessarily mean blood sibling; “cousin” does not necessarily mean “your uncle/aunt’s child”.

v.25: “the disciple whom he loved...”. John never refers to himself by name in his gospel, but he is the beloved disciples. John is not included in the list of people at the scene. The other evangelists and the early Christian tradition could have discounted him on account of his young age and numbered him “among the women”.

v.26: “*Woman, here is your son*”. Jesus calls his mother “woman”. This is not derogatory at all. Some translation put is as “dear woman” to make it more palatable, but that wasn’t the idea to begin with. We are reminded of the Wedding at Cana, “*Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.*” (John 2:4). Well, the hour now has come. The wedding feast of the Lamb is almost ready, and the ‘good wine’ (John 2:10) of his blood is about to be poured from his side (Cf. John 19:34).

v.27: “*Here is your mother*”. The Greek is much stronger; “Behold your mother”. The verb “behold, look” is an imperative mood.

v.27: “*took her into his own home*”. Literally, the gospel says that the disciple “took her to the own”, meaning to himself. This is not so much as taking Mary to his own home, rather taking Mary into his life (or household) as his own mother.

Reflective Questions

At the foot of the cross stand only a few faithful figures.

Where do I place myself in this scene? Am I standing near the cross, or watching from a distance?

“Woman, Behold Your Son”

How do I understand Mary as given to the Church as mother?

What place does the Blessed Virgin have in my prayer, devotion, and imagination of the Church?

The beloved disciple takes Mary “into his own” – into his life.

What might it mean for me to receive Mary into my spiritual life in a similar way?