

Rev. Derek Fairman

21<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time C

The next name for the Ark of the Covenant that I will discuss is the Ark of Strength. This name occurs only rarely, but there are two basic concepts involved. The first is that the Ark was a kind of throne upon which the Presence of God rested. This also had to do with the concept that the Lord was truly the King of Israel; in the time of King David and his lineage, they were only truly caretakers. The Lord was the One who was truly in charge.

In a way, Mary also served as a kind of throne. After the Lord's birth, Mary no doubt carried the Infant with her, and the Lord Jesus knew that He could rest in her lap and on her shoulder. In the account of the Epiphany, the magi came to the Holy House, and found the Lord Jesus there *with Mary His Mother*. Just as the foreign peoples once came to the Temple in Jerusalem and could look upon the splendor of the Temple, and God's home, so these foreigners came to the Holy House and see the Lord Jesus, and His own Ark there with Him.

The Lord Jesus did not establish any kind of worldly Kingdom, but He did bring people back to God, and established a Kingdom in which love would rule. This Kingdom existed in Heaven, of course, but also in the hearts of those who believed in Him. Now, this Kingdom no doubt existed most of all in the heart and soul of His Mother. She made a kind of throne for the Lord Jesus in her heart, as she carried out all His instructions and commands. After the Lord Jesus was grown, He no longer needed His Mother to carry Him, although she did receive His body from the Cross. Yet He still had a kind of throne in her heart, and He still does now.

The other concept behind the name Ark of Strength is that the Ark was used in battle. The first instance of the Ark being used in battle was the siege of Jericho, in which the Ark was carried around the city for seven days before the walls of the city fell. The good king Jehoshaphat also used the Ark in battle against three armies bent on destroying Judah.

We usually don't think about Mary as being involved in battle. In fact, we usually disassociate women in the ancient world from battle. Well, although women were not used in combat, they often had a role to play in the process of intelligence: we might remember Rahab, who hid the Israelite spies that Joshua sent to Jericho. We also remember Jael and Judith, who found their own ways to defeat Israel's enemies. Women in roles of command were rare, but not unheard of in the ancient world. We might remember Deborah, who helped the Israelites defeat

their enemy in the time of the Judges. Outside of the Bible, Artemisia, for instance, was a commander of the Persian navy.

Mary had her own battles to deal with. Besides having to avoid going down the wrong path and disobeying God, Mary had to deal with the conflicts that came to her Son. In His Infancy, Herod wanted to kill the Infant Jesus, but St. Joseph was warned in a dream about what was coming and fled with the Lord and His Mother. When the time came, the Lord Jesus left His hidden life and began His Public Ministry. Although initially popular for the miracles that He worked, eventually He made enemies in Jerusalem and elsewhere because of His teachings.

Mary stood by the Lord in the midst of this opposition. She stood by Him as He entered Jerusalem and as He went to His death. She stood by Him and His teachings as people opposed them, even when this meant His death. As the Lord overcame death in His Resurrection, His Mother shared in His victory.

After the Lord's Ascension, Mary really engaged in spiritual battle. She had to overcome the assaults of the evil one. No doubt that any faltering on Mary's part would have caused widespread discouragement and despair for the disciples. However, Mary did not sin, no matter what obstacles came her way. In fact, Mary was able to provide strength for the disciples even in the midst of their suffering and their own deaths. Would not the Apostles, who had to face their own deaths because of their preaching of the Gospel, look to Mary, who stood by the Cross when they had fled?

Mary achieved a kind of final victory already, whenever the Lord took her body and soul into Heaven. God brought total victory to Mary: victory over sin, victory over death. Throughout the ages, Mary has brought victory to her spiritual children: the naval victory at Lepanto is a perfect example. She is the Queen of the Rosary, the Queen of Peace, Our Lady of Victory.

How does Mary help us? We can look to Mary to help us achieve victory over our enemies: sin, illness and death, or any other enemy that robs us of peace. Whenever we want to give up, we remember that Mary is the New Ark of Strength, and that she is indomitable. We also imitate her in making her Son the center of her heart. She made a throne for Him, and we too can make the Lord Jesus the center of our hearts.

As Mary, the New Ark of Strength, once held the Lord Jesus in her arms, and made a kind of throne for Him, so we can put our problems into her hands. She will help us and will guide us to put our trust in God and enthrone her Son in our own hearts.