

Rev. Derek Fairman

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time C

The next name for the Ark of the Covenant that I will discuss is the Ark of Testimony. The name Ark of Testimony occurs a good number of times, and it refers to the purpose of the Ark providing a kind of testimony to what had occurred on Mt. Sinai. The Ark was an inanimate object, so its testimony was not literal; however, the existence of the Ark testified to the reality of the covenant made on Mt. Sinai. The Ark's existence was a reminder of all that happened on Mt. Sinai, and served as a kind of reminder of the covenant that the Lord had made with the Israelites, that they needed to keep the covenant that the Lord had made with them.

This is somewhat similar to the monument that Joshua set up at Shechem. The stone was a kind of testimony to the pact that Joshua and the twelve tribes made whenever they came into the Promised Land. The people were their own witnesses that they had agreed to serve the Lord, and the stone was a kind of witness. Again, the stone could not literally speak, but its presence served as a reminder. The Israelites could look upon the stone and remember the pact that they had made, and that they had agreed to serve the Lord.

The Virgin Mary is the New Ark of Testimony. She is the New Ark of Testimony in four ways. First has to do with her motherhood: there was a resemblance between Mother and Son. Her very existence was and is a witness that the Lord Jesus did truly come among us. This was certainly true after the Lord Jesus ascended into Heaven, and Mary's face would remind the Apostles of the Lord Jesus Himself. The Lord Jesus made a New Covenant between God and the human race whenever He descended from Heaven. The truth of His humanity and of this covenant is something to which Mary testifies, even without having to speak a word. That God has a Mother is a testimony to the Lord's coming down among us.

The second way that Mary is the New Ark of Testimony concerns her perpetual virginity. That she retained her virginity throughout her life is a witness to the miraculous way in which the Lord Jesus was conceived by the power of the Spirit and the miraculous way in which He was born. In Mary, motherhood and virginity were combined, a mystery in itself which points to the greater mystery of the Word who dwelt among us. She could not cease to be the Lord's Mother, but if virginity is lost, there is no longer a mystery. However, Mary persevered in this mystery until her last days on earth, and now forever in Heaven.

The third way that Mary is the New Ark of Testimony is her actual testimony. While the Ark could not literally speak, only figuratively speak, Mary could literally speak, as a living human being. When we read the first two chapters of the Gospel According to Luke, scholars notice that the Gospel contains idiomatic phrases often used among Jews of that time. Also, the accounts of the Lord's Infancy seem to be from Mary's point of view, and contains descriptions of the events that only she would know, such as what the angel Gabriel said to her at the Annunciation, or that she kept all the events in her heart and pondered over them. Certainly, after the Lord's Ascension into Heaven, Mary would be the only one who would have related all that happened in the Lord's youth. Mary did testify, then, about all that the Lord had done for her.

The fourth way that Mary is the New Ark of Testimony is something mentioned previously, that Mary is the Ark of the New Commandment because of the way that she embodies the Lord's Commandment to love one another. She also embodied the Old Commandments, and she embodied all that the Lord Jesus instructed His disciples to do. In this, her way of life and her actions are a kind of testimony or witness to how seriously she takes the Lord's instructions, how her Son gives new life through His New Commandment, and what comes to the believer who does follow the Lord's instructions.

What does this mean for us? Mary is someone who guides us on the way to salvation. She is a teacher who shows us how to live the Gospel in our own lives, and how to come to help others grow in their own faith. Mary embodied all that the Lord taught, and she remained faithful to the grace which God had given her from the first moment of her conception. When we pray to her, she can help us to remain faithful to the Lord and make the most of God's graces.

We too have testimony to offer. We are not witnesses of the Resurrection, as the Apostles were. Nevertheless, we too can testify to what the Lord has done for us. Whether it is the Lord strengthening us through a difficult time, or the closeness of the Lord in our prayer, or the Lord arranging things in our lives whenever we really needed help, there are moments in which we know that the Lord has been good to us and made His Presence known. We can help others to find God's Presence in their own lives.

As we approach the altar, we thank the Lord for giving us His Mother to be with us and to guide us on our way. We pray that we may have the courage to witness our own faith, and to help others along their way as Mary has helped us.