

Rev. Derek Fairman

25<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time B (Pre-eminent disciple)

In the Gospel, the disciples were arguing with each other over the issue of which of them was the greatest. The Lord Jesus taught them that to be the greatest, they must be willing to be servants of all. The Lord Jesus used the example of a child to demonstrate that it is not grandeur that counts in the Kingdom of God, but rather humility. Presumably the child understood what it meant to be the least of all, and the Lord Jesus was teaching them about humility and trust.

The Lord Jesus speaks to us about humility and trust. The Lord Jesus does not tell the disciples to let go of a desire to be more, or to stop striving for greatness. A desire to be more, and to do great things, can be helpful to furthering the Kingdom of God. Rather, it is arrogance and self-aggrandizement which are inimical to furthering the Kingdom. In the Kingdom of God, greatness is achieved through virtue and holiness.

The Lord Jesus has given us an example of trust and humility in His own Mother. The greatest among the disciples was the Lord's own Mother. I have spoken before about the different ways in which the Virgin Mary is the New Eve. Another reason that the Virgin Mary is the New Eve has to do with her discipleship. Her faith in her Son undoes the disobedience of Eve. Her obedience is in contrast with Eve. Eve brought sin into the world, along with suffering and anxiety and a host of other evils, through her disobedience, and by not trusting in God. The Virgin's obedient faith allowed God to bring life and grace into the world.

St. Justin the Martyr was one of the first to contrast Eve and Mary. St. Irenaeus is also famous for his contrasting Eve and Mary. He explained that the Virgin Mary undid the knot that was tied by Eve's sin. Whereas Eve disobeyed God's command to not eat of the fruit of the tree, Mary listened to the angel Gabriel's request to become the Mother of God at the Annunciation. What Eve did in the beginning, the Virgin undid at the Annunciation. In a way, the Blessed Virgin fulfilled the role of mother of all the living that Eve was supposed to take.

The Virgin Mary's faith did not begin at the Annunciation. Her response to God was the culmination of a long process of preparation. She received her preparation at the first moment of her existence, the Immaculate Conception. As she grew, she learned about her ancestors, and those who had faith in the Lord, like Abraham. With God's help, she learned to imitate the faith of the good people of the Old Testament, and reject the bad examples. Her soul was like a garden that continued to grow in grace and every virtue.

By the time the angel Gabriel came to announce God's plan for her, her faith had grown to the point that she considered herself the handmaid of the Lord. She was ready to do whatever God asked of her. She not only accepted God's will, she wanted to know God's will. She looked forward to accepting what the Lord asked of her. Even though she grew in knowledge and maturity, she did not lose her trust nor her humility.

Whenever the time came for the Lord Jesus to begin His Public Ministry, she had spent those thirty years or so in His Presence, learning from Him and serving Him. Yes, she was His Mother, but she was also a disciple. Whenever the Lord Jesus began to draw disciples to Himself, she was able to show the others what it means to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus, and to follow the Lord's commands.

The Virgin's faith was shown especially at the wedding feast at Cana. When the bride and groom ran out of wine, it was the Virgin who came to her Son to let Him know. She then said to the servants, "Do whatever He tells you." The servants did what the Lord Jesus told them to do, and the Lord Jesus turned the water into wine. "Do whatever He tells you:" this statement indicates Mary's whole attitude towards her Son and her God.

The Virgin told them to listen to her Son, as the Father had told the disciples to listen to the Son at His Baptism and Transfiguration. She invited them to join her in following the Lord Jesus, to draw near to the mystery of the Lord Jesus. The Virgin Mary's discipleship brought her to the foot of the Cross. While so many disciples abandoned the Lord to His suffering, including most of the Apostles, she did not leave Him. Her fidelity to the Lord, her role as the Lord's preeminent disciple, found a fulfillment at the Cross. Her emptiness and sorrow at the foot of the Cross was turned into glory and joy at the Lord's Resurrection.

Much like a mother can give good examples for her children to follow, and even helps them to follow, the Virgin Mother of God shows us what it means to be a disciple. She teaches all of us to be like a child, trusting in the Lord and being the lowest and most humble of the Lord's disciples.

As we approach the altar, we ask the Lord to help us to imitate Him, to trust in God and to be humble in His sight. We ask the Lord to make us to grow not in what the world considers greatness, but in virtue and holiness. We ask the intercession of the Virgin Mother of God, so that we may grow in holiness and virtue, and make ourselves the Lord's true servants more and more in our lives.