

Rev. Derek Fairman

6th Sunday of Easter (Virgin Soil)

On this first Sunday of May, I will begin speaking about the Virgin Mary as the New Eve. The idea that Mary is the New Eve has its foundation in the writings of St. John the Evangelist. In the Gospel According to John, the Lord addressed His Mother as “Woman” at the Wedding Feast at Cana: “Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come.” At the foot of the Cross, the Lord Jesus saw there His Mother and the disciple whom He loved (St. John the Evangelist). He said to His Mother, “Woman, behold, your son.” He said to St. John, “Behold, your mother.” The Lord addressed His Mother as Woman because of her connection to Eve, the first woman.

There is also the mysterious “Woman” found in the Book of Revelation, chapter 12. “A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.” This woman gives birth to a son, destined to rule all nations with an iron rod. The woman is the Mother of the Messiah, and there was only one woman who is the Mother of the Messiah. This vision from the Book of Revelation presents Mary as not just the Mother of the Messiah, but in a more universal role.

These passages give us some idea of why the Virgin Mary is the New Eve. The Gospel for this sixth Sunday of the Easter season brings us back to the Last Supper again, in which the Lord Jesus spoke to the Apostles of keeping His commandments, loving one another, joy, and friendship. He also spoke of bearing fruit.

The Virgin Mary could be compared to the soil in the Garden of Eden. As Adam was taken from the soil in Eden, and then God breathed spirit into him, so it is that the Lord Jesus was taken from Mary. The Lord Jesus has only one parent, His Mother, and He was taken from her. Several Fathers of the Church, such as St. Irenaeus, St. Proclus of Constantinople, St. John Chrysostom, St. Andrew of Crete, St. Epiphanius, St. John of Damascus, and St. Maximus the Confessor all compared Mary to the virgin soil in Eden.

This is particularly true, because in Mary there are no thorns or rocks in her. The Lord Jesus once compared human hearts to different kinds of soil: some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it; some seed fell among rocks, and the seed grew quickly and faded; some seed grew in the soil, but the thorns in the soil choked it; some seed fell in good soil, and bore much fruit. The Virgin Mary is the good soil that bore fruit, for herself and for the whole world.

Last Sunday, the Lord Jesus spoke about the vineyard, that He is the vine and we are the branches. The Virgin Mary has her place in the vineyard. She is not just a part of the vine, but the root from which the vine grows. In the *Ave Regina Caelorum* prayer, we recognize that Mary is the root: “Hail, thou root, Hail thou gate, from whom unto the world a light has risen.” The Virgin Mary *remained* with the Lord Jesus; she never left Him, but remained with Him even to the foot of the Cross.

Pope Benedict XVI wrote about Mary being a kind of soil, explaining that whenever a seed is planted in the ground, that seed absorbs nutrients from the surrounding soil. In the case of the Lord Jesus, He is like the seed planted in this world, and He absorbed the energies from the soil in which He was planted. He took to Himself all the Mother of God had to offer. She had inherited so much from her own people, and the Lord took all that to Himself.

Something else that bears mentioning is a passage from the Song of Songs, in which the Groom (meaning the Lord) tells His Bride (meaning Israel) that she is an enclosed garden, and a sealed fountain. This pertains to the Lord’s special favor accorded to Israel. Although this primarily refers to the Church, indirectly it refers to the Virgin Mary, since she embodies the best qualities of her people. This passage is often related to Mary’s perpetual virginity, but it uses the image of a garden and a fountain. This also takes us back to the Garden of Eden.

The Virgin Mary, the New Eve, takes us back to the beginning, whenever the world was new and whenever things in this world were much simpler. The Virgin Mary takes us back to a time of peace, and a time of love, in Eden. Whenever the Lord Jesus teaches us that we should love one another, and that we must keep His commandments, we can look to the Virgin Mary to understand what He meant. The Virgin Mary always loved God, and she loves those who are baptized into His image. The Virgin Mary experiences joy and friendship, especially with the Apostles, but with all those who believe in her Son.

As we approach the altar, we ask the Lord to bring us joy, peace, and the love that makes us whole. Today, the Lord Jesus invites us to think about our own souls. Are we ready to bear fruit, to listen to the Lord Jesus, to keep His commandments? Whenever we keep the Lord’s commandments, and remain in His love, our souls are pure, and we know peace. Our souls can be like a garden, a sanctuary, where we can always go to find peace amid all the problems we face. We have the Virgin Mary to help us and guide us. Whenever we come to her, we will find friendship, comfort, joy, peace, and love.