

Lectio Divina (John 19:15-27)

Mary at the Cross

Lectio: What the Word says in itself

John is the only evangelist to mention the presence of the mother of Jesus 'near the Cross.' He is also the only evangelist to mention the presence of 'the beloved disciple standing near her.' This indicates the importance of these two persons and their place in the last will and testament of Jesus. John also mentions other women present at Calvary (Jn 19:25), whether two or three, we are not sure. For John's purposes, however, what matters is that Mary the mother of Jesus is there, and that something significant happens between Jesus, his mother and the beloved disciple.

Who is this 'beloved disciple'? The phrase is used only in John's Gospel, where it appears five times. Clearly, this disciple is identified as the author of the Gospel (Jn 21:24). But, because John's gospel relies heavily on metaphor and symbol, 'the beloved disciple' stands as a representative for all disciples, including disciples today.

Jesus addresses his mother, Mary, saying, 'Woman, this is your son.' To the beloved disciple, Jesus says, 'This is your mother'. Addressing one's mother as 'woman' may seem rather strange to us today. In the culture of Jesus' time and place, such usage was common for a man addressing a woman, although not for a son addressing his mother. Perhaps it indicates something more than filial language – possibly even a solemn legal act? This is not Jesus' first time addressing his mother in this way. At Cana (his first miracle, according to John) Jesus addresses his mother as 'Woman' in a solemn symbolic act where he 'reveals his glory' (Jn 2:5). The words addressed to Mary and to 'the beloved disciple' on Calvary, spoken at a most solemn moment, are meant to carry special weight. They signify and establish a new community of disciples.



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Meditatio: What the Word says to me/us

Current situations of suffering in our world come to mind. I bring them to Mary at the Cross, asking her to teach me something about active compassion, about generosity. She, who brought the Word into the world by her 'Yes', has been praised by Jesus elsewhere for 'hearing the Word and keeping it' (Lk 11:28). She is faithful to the end as disciple and as mother. She does not speak at the Cross, but her words to the waiters at Cana (her last recorded words in Scripture), 'Do whatever he tells you' (Jn 2:8) are still echoing on Calvary's hill. I pray that I may really hear those words as they apply to me today.

Oratio: What the Word leads me/us to say

Sometimes it helps if I pray with an icon or painting of the Calvary scene, or ponder the Twelfth Station of the Cross in my local church. In that scene I see myself as 'the beloved disciple' today.

Jesus has gifted me (and all other disciples) with his own mother. Gratitude and amazement fill my heart. I may wish to write my response in journal or diary, finishing with a prayer of thanks: 'I thank you, Lord, that I am part of the community of disciples that you brought into being at Calvary. I thank you for the gift of your own mother.'

Contemplatio: Being transformed by the Word

As I allow the words of Jesus from the Cross to echo in the silence of this moment, I am aware that I am richly gifted. I treasure the sense of belonging which is implied. I belong to the family of God, I belong to all the brothers and sisters in that family, all 'beloved disciples,' all gifted as I am today. The generosity of Jesus invites me to look at all the relationships in my life – obligations to my natural family, and to the wider family of disciples to which I belong. I

allow the Word to speak to me in this time of stillness and active listening.

Actio: Putting the Word into Practice

Mary does not speak at the Cross. Deep grief does not call for words. What do I learn from the silence of Mary?

Mary's last recorded words, 'Do whatever he tells you' (Jn 2:5), call me to action. Can I name that action now? The beloved disciple is asked to make a response to homelessness. 'He made a place for her in his home' (Jn 19:27). To what does that example of generosity inspire me?

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