

SPIRITUALITY OF UNITY

The Way of Mary

We continue with this year's theme, on Mary, the mother of Jesus. Here **Chiara Lubich** outlines how the different moments in Mary's life can be seen as a model for Christian life.

In 1961 the words of Scripture, 'This is the will of God, your sanctification' (cf. 1 Thes. 4: 3) made a deep impression on Chiara. These words indicate the 'universal call to holiness', as the Second Vatican Council puts it. In reading the writings of St Teresa of Avila, Chiara understood that the life of the soul, just as of the body, goes through various stages, is marked by particular characteristics. She was surprised to discover how the members of the Movement, though living in the midst of the world, go through stages similar to those described by Teresa of Avila. Chiara proposed, therefore, that Mary is for Christians not only a 'model of perfection' who we can look to at all times, and in all circumstances, but she is also one who has lived the various stages of our spiritual journey. We can see our own ascent to God reflected in Mary's journey.

In what follows, Chiara offers a brief summary of some steps of this journey towards holiness, following the stages in Mary's life. She calls it the 'Way of Mary':

The Annunciation (cf. Lk. 1:26-38)



The angel announced the divine plan to Mary and with her 'yes', the Word became incarnate in her womb.

Likewise, when people come to know the charism of unity and decide to make it their own, something similar to what happened to Mary and

to certain saints takes place in them. Christ can truly grow spiritually in their hearts, fulfilling the grace of their baptism.

The visit to Elizabeth (cf. Lk. 1:39-56)



Having found in her cousin a person who was open to the mysteries of God, she felt that she could share with her the great secret she had in her heart. She did so in the *Magnificat*, telling Elizabeth her extraordinary experience.

All those who get to know the Movement and choose God as the ideal of their life realize that in order to translate this choice into concrete terms they must begin to love, as Mary did with Elizabeth. And they do love. But love is a light, and understanding something of the action of God present within them, they perceive, for the first time, the golden thread of his love in their life. And they willingly share what they have understood to their brothers and sisters. It's their experience.

The birth of Jesus (cf. Lk. 2:1-20)



In the Movement, we love and we are loved in return because everyone wants to love. This mutual love brings about the presence of Jesus among people. It is a way of 'generating Christ', in imitation of Mary.

Mary presents her son in the temple and meets Simeon (cf. Lk. 2: 21-38)



It is a moment of joy for her, because this just and holy man confirms that her child is the Son of God. At the same time though, it is a suffering. Simeon turns to her and says: ‘And a sword will pierce through your own soul.’

Those who want to live the spirituality of the Movement go through a similar experience. It happens when they learn that in order to walk along this way, it is necessary to say a resolute yes to the cross. It is the announcement of the mystery of Jesus crucified and forsaken as being essential to the life of unity.

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Also for Mary, the loss of Jesus in the temple was, in a certain way, a night of the senses. She no longer saw him; she no longer heard his voice.

¹With the word ‘Ideal’ Chiara means the divine gift of light of the spirituality of unity, as well as the commitment to the new life which is derived from it.

The flight into Egypt. Mary suffers and experiences persecution (Mt. 2: 13ff)



To a certain extent, something similar happens to those who follow the Way of Mary. The ideal that they live and offer to the world is in opposition to the ways of the world. It is no wonder then that when they begin to spread this Ideal¹, the first signs of opposition can appear. In those moments, they need to respond by loving Jesus forsaken (the victim of persecu-

tion *par excellence*) in these crosses, so that the risen Lord may continue to shine forth in their hearts.

The loss of Jesus in the temple (cf. Lk. 2: 41-50)



When Mary found him again, she asked him: ‘Child, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety’ (Lk. 2: 48). But Jesus told her: ‘Why were you searching for me? Did you not know

that I must be in my Father’s house?’ (Lk. 2: 49).

This is a new step in Mary’s life. We could compare the state of her soul in that moment with a typical period lived by those who follow our way. In fact, they become aware, perhaps after many years, that various temptations or painful aridity, which had long since disappeared due to the effect of the charism they embraced, now re-surface with acute insistence. This makes them suffer and they turn to the Lord, saying: ‘Why have you gone far from me?’

Then the Lord seems to answer them: ‘Did you not know that all the good and beautiful things that you ex-

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perienced were mine, that you received them only out of pure grace?’ This lays the necessary foundation of humility so that Christ can live and grow in these persons. This period might be the so-called ‘night of the senses’ that the mystics speak of. Also for Mary, the loss of Jesus in the temple was, in a certain way, a night of the senses. She no longer saw him; she no longer heard his voice; his presence had been taken away from her mother’s love.

The life in Nazareth (cf. Lk. 2: 51-52)

After this trial, as far as we know, Mary lived a long period of intimate family life with Jesus. Likewise, those who humbly accept and overcome the preceding stages and trials frequently find a new and deeper union with Jesus. This period can last for a long time, even though crosses are not absent.

Jesus’ public life (cf. Jn 2: 1-12; Mt. 12: 46-50)



Mary follows him with her heart and, at times, also physically, as he carries out his mission.

All this reminds the people of the Movement of that period in their spiritual life in which, having acquired the habit of listening to the voice of Jesus in their heart, it becomes their own and they follow it.

During his public life, Jesus pronounced words of everlasting life, he worked miracles, he formed the disciples and he founded the Church.

Something similar happens to the persons of the Movement who have reached this point and, in their own limited way, perform similar tasks as those performed by Jesus who is present in them and in their midst. In them, too, Jesus pronounces words that have the flavour of eternity. Through them, too, he works, for example, miracles of conversion. His presence in them is able to form disciples and bring about new developments for the kingdom of God.

Mary desolate at the foot of the cross. Mary goes through the trial of losing her divine maternity. Pointing to John, Jesus told her: ‘Woman, here is your son.’ At that moment, Mary became the mother of all humanity and the mother of the Church (cf. Jn 19: 25-27).



In the Movement there have been sufferings similar to those of Mary desolate. We have noticed in several of our members... authentic signs of the night of the spirit, when, for example, God permits the terrible trial of feeling abandoned by him or when faith, hope and charity seem to fade away.

Mary in the Upper Room (cf. Acts 1: 14)



Then we find Mary in the Upper Room with the apostles, with her maternal charism towards them, right next to Peter... Mary no longer ‘follows’ Jesus. After the descent of the Holy Spirit, we can say that she is transformed into him.

And as another Christ, she too contributes, in her own way, toward the growth of the Church.

Those who live the spirituality of unity, in their own limited way, aim at reaching this goal, and they can indeed reach it. It is the stage that mystics call the ‘transforming union’, when the reality of Martha is joined to Mary (cf. Lk. 10: 38-42). A very special task for the good of the Church is united to a very special contemplation. ■

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