

## SPIRITUALITY OF UNITY

Marta Theotokos, church in Loppiano, Italy © Centro AveArte

# Mary

## a model for Christian life

We continue with this year's theme on Mary, the mother of Jesus, with Bishop **Brendan Leahy** and **Judith Povilus**, providing a context for our understanding of Mary and her place within the Focolare Movement.

**While, on the one hand**, it is true that Chiara Lubich presents the mother of Jesus as the 'silence' upon which 'God speaks himself', on the other hand, the picture of Mary that emerges is not at all that of a servile, passive or submissive person. Exhibiting both a 'passive' openness and an 'active' willingness in doing the will of God, and in loving, Mary is portrayed by Chiara as a vibrant, engaging model for all. She is 'the flower of humanity'. More specifically, and in what seems a new perspective, Chiara proposes that Mary be seen as a model for those who set out on a communitarian spiritual journey. She highlights a Marian dynamic of faith and love that facilitates our bringing Jesus to birth not only 'within' us, but also 'among us' in our relationships. And this is a dimension that resonates very much with contemporary culture.

### Reliving Mary

A recurring theme in Chiara's spiritual Marian doctrine is that Mary should be loved and 'lived' more than studied (although Chiara also enthusiastically encouraged doctrinal reflection on Mary). In 1959 she wrote:

*'Of her we do not speak,  
of her we sing.  
Of her we do not think,  
but we call upon her and love her.  
She is not the subject of study,  
but of poetry.  
The greatest geniuses of the world  
have put brush and pen at her service.*

*If Jesus incarnates the Word,  
the Logos,  
the light,  
reason,  
Mary personifies art,  
beauty,  
love.  
Masterpiece of the Creator,  
Mary,  
on whom the Holy Spirit  
delighted to bestow all he invented,  
and poured out so many of his inspirations.  
Beautiful Mary!  
About her we can never say enough.'*

### **A Marian shrine built of people**

Mary is much more than a devotion for Chiara Lubich, even if we find the founder of the Focolare engaging in spiritual practices typical of those who love Mary. We see her, for instance, in the course of journeys she made, visiting various Marian shrines: Fatima, Lourdes, Einsiedeln in Switzerland, Częstochowa in Poland, Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico, Aylesford in England, the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington... We know that she often spent time before Michelangelo's Pietà, contemplating the figure of Mary desolate whom she considered a culmination of faith and love. Throughout her life, in reciting the rosary, Chiara drew inspiration from contemplating the various mysteries, both for her own personal life and for those who shared with her the 'holy journey' of life.

When visiting some Marian shrines, Chiara wondered if there should also be a Marian shrine in the Movement. After sharing her thoughts about this with those living in Loppiano, she then also shared these considerations in a telephone conference call with members of the Movement around the world:

*'I imagined this Marian shrine could be built precisely at Loppiano, our little town. Then an answer came to me from within, and perhaps it really was from Mary who seemed to tell me: "I don't want a shrine made of stone. I want you. You are the living stones of my shrine. Don't you say that you are going along the "Way of Mary", in order to become another me? And so aren't you stones, which during the holy journey the Holy Spirit polishes until you are perfect and suited to this kind of building?"*

*'And I understood that Loppiano – and every other little town we have – is not only, as we defined it, a place*

*of formation, whose teacher is Jesus in the midst, nor only a place set on a mountaintop, nor only a place in which you live the Gospel. Loppiano can be considered a city of Mary, where the inhabitants try to live like Mary, both as individuals and collectively, and therefore, a place where in a certain way, Mary lives again mystically in them. Loppiano can be seen as a town in which the spirit of Mary can be felt in the air, so that those who come to visit (and thousands come) find her atmosphere just like in the Marian shrines... But then, thinking it over well, I understood how our whole Movement, spread as it is all over the world, can be considered to be a very unique Marian shrine. Isn't our Movement a big Mariapolis in the world? Don't we all want to become another little Mary, individually and all together? Yes, all of us together form a building constructed in her honour. We are, or better, we should be, a concrete song of praise to Mary raised up from all over the world.'* (Rocca di Papa, Italy, June 5, 1986)

### **Mary's role in the realization of Jesus' last will and testament**

In contemplating Mary, however, Chiara reflected upon her role within the whole economy of salvation which she described in summary fashion as the journey of history towards the realization of Jesus' last will and testament: 'That they may all be one' (Jn 17: 21). She made her own the words of Pope John Paul II who wrote that Mary is 'an integral part of the economy of the communication of the Trinity to humankind'. It is important to keep these perspectives in view, because otherwise this theme on Mary, as a point of the spirituality of unity, could run the risk of presenting a deformed, reductive profile of Mary.

Often we hear in theology of the 'hierarchy of truths' as an indispensable key to reading any specific aspect of faith. In other words, everything must be seen and explained in the light of two central points: the mystery of the Triune God and the mystery of Christ, the incarnation that culminates in the paschal mystery. This is the perspective we find in Chiara, so much in tune with the Second Vatican Council which recommends that we 'abstain zealously both from all gross exaggerations, as well as from petty narrow-mindedness in considering the singular dignity of the mother of God.'

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Extracts from 'Mary – Flower of Humanity' by  
Chiara Lubich. Published by New City, UK (2017)

