

SPIRITUALITY OF UNITY

Mary desolate

The way of holiness

We continue with this year's theme on Mary, the mother of Jesus. Here **Chiara Lubich** focuses on Mary desolate, standing at the foot of the cross.



“

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

(Jn 19: 25-27)

A

After several years of difficulties and trials, the Focolare Movement received its first official Pontifical approval on March 23, 1962. In the years that followed, the new Movement enjoyed a vast expansion. Chiara was received in audience by Pope Paul VI and indeed, on several occasions she engaged in written correspondence with him. The Movement launched many initiatives and developed branches for families, young people, priests and men and women religious. It engaged in dialogue with members of other Churches. So it was a period of approval, great activity and new members, and yet what mattered for Chiara, while being totally dedicated to building up the Focolare Movement, was to strive towards holiness, her own and that of others. The 1960s and 1970s were characterized in particular by a love for 'Mary desolate', with the art of 'knowing how to lose' discovered as a way to holiness.

In August 1962, Chiara visited the Marian shrine of Oberiberg in Switzerland. In the darkness of the church all that could be seen was the Blessed Sacrament sanctuary lamp. It was like an image of what Chiara and her companions were meditating on at that time, that is, Mary at the foot of the cross, Mary desolate. It is when all that is simply human is extinguished, annulled within us, that the divine emerges. Some years previously, in leaving the experience of Paradise '49 in order to return to 'normal life', Chiara had written a meditation that became very well known: 'I have only one Spouse on earth: Jesus forsaken! Now, in 1962, at the dawn of the universal expansion of the Movement she had founded, she wrote a similar meditation, this time addressed to Mary desolate, as a programme of life to be lived.

Mary desolate

*I have only one mother on earth: Mary desolate.
I have no other mother but her.
In her is the whole Church for eternity,
and the whole Work of Mary in unity.
In her design is mine.
I will go through the world reliving her.
Every separation will be mine.
Every detachment from the good I have done
a contribution to building up Mary.
In her 'staying' [at the foot of the cross], my 'staying'.
In her 'staying', my 'going'.
Enclosed garden
and sealed fountain (cf. Song 4: 12).
I will cultivate her most loved virtues,
so that on the silent nothingness of myself
her wisdom may shine out.
So that many, all her chosen children,
those most in need of her mercy,
may always find her maternal presence
in another little Mary.*

Oberiberg, Switzerland, August 20, 1962

A monument of holiness

In Mary's desolation at the foot of the cross, all her virtues shine out in an extraordinary way, virtues that she can teach us to live.

From a writing before 1963:

Mary, who stood at the foot of the cross in her excruciating suffering, which transformed her soul into a bitter sea of anguish, lived every virtue to a heroic degree, more than any other human being ever did. She was meek and docile; she was poor to the point of losing her son who was God; she was the embodiment of justice in not lamenting the loss of what was hers only because she had been chosen by God for it. She was pure in her total emotional detachment from her son, God...

In Mary's desolation, we see the triumph of the virtues of faith and hope. These virtues triumphed because of the love she had kept alive throughout her whole life, and which, at that moment, had become so great that she participated fully in the work of the redemption.



In her desolation, which adorns her with every virtue, Mary teaches us to live humility and patience, prudence and perseverance, simplicity and silence, so that on the background of the 'night' of ourselves, of all that is human in us, the light of God who lives in us will shine out for the world. Mary, 'mother of sorrows', is the perfect saint, a monument of holiness. Everyone who is and will come in the future can look to her to learn how to live fully the self-denial that the Church has taught and the saints, in different ways, have reiterated throughout the ages. ■

.....
Extracts from *Mary, flower of Humanity* by Chiara Lubich.
Published by New City (2017)