

OUR LADY HELP OF CHRISTIANS

Gospel. John 19:25-27

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. Seeing his mother and the disciple he loved standing near her, Jesus said to his mother, 'Woman, this is your son.' Then to the disciple he said, 'This is your mother.' And from that moment the disciple made a place for her in his home.

LECTIO DIVINA

This passage in John's Gospel is probably the most moving and heartfelt in the narrative of the life of Jesus. As Jesus hung dying on the cross His last act was an expression of love. He thought to take care of his Mother as He entrusted her into the care of the beloved disciple ... "This is your son ... this is your mother." The symbolism of this act goes beyond the immediate situation of Mary and John. It relates to the whole Church, the Christian community and beyond.

Maloney (1971) says that "because of the cross the crucified Jesus has established a new family. And affirms the maternal role of the Mother of Jesus in the new family of Jesus established on the cross" (p.504). Mary is signified as the matriarch of the Church, not in terms of the exercise of power as that was never her way, but as the faithful, trusting, nurturing, gentle, ever observant contemplative one always standing by her Son even in the most agonising times. Mary is our model for enduring in the trust of God. It is fitting that in 1844 Mary the Mother of Jesus was declared Our Lady Help of Christians' patron of Australia. Even though historically the title was in reference to victory in battle, a never ending happening in the human story, today we pray for the peace of Mary and with Pope Leo XIV in condemning using God's name to justify war as "an absurd and dark practice".

It is also significant that the faithful ones at the foot of the cross were four women and John. It is likely that the women were all related by birth or marriage (Fallon, 1998) and they stood together with courage and sorrow supporting one another and honouring Jesus at His crucifixion and death. Like Mary the Mother of Jesus, great strength of love and purpose must have resided in the hearts of these women. "It is a reminder of the high status given to women as equals in the task of discipleship" (Scott, 2003, p.1207).

Women are restricted from many roles in the Catholic Church including priesthood but the tide is turning ever so slowly under the inspired leadership of Pope Francis and Pope Leo XIV. Both have appointed women to high levels of responsibility within the Church in the Vatican. Even so it is distracting when the language of prayer is all male oriented; man, men, sons etc. I am grateful to our own Bishop Brian Mascord for his use of inclusive language. But back to discipleship ... we can't all be high profile disciples evangelising the world. We live within our own times and contexts with our own gifts and abilities. What is important as followers of Jesus is that we act differently when confronted by someone in need or some injustice regardless of how the world views the situation or person. We "stand near the cross of Jesus" and help and we call it out and do whatever we can because "when you did it

to the least of these you did it to me" (Matthew 25:40) which is what we will be judged on when we go before the Lord in the next life.

Family and our interconnectedness with others features in this passage. So we think of our own families however structured, functional or dysfunctional. Families are the source of the greatest joy and solace throughout life and also the source of the greatest pain when things go wrong.

ORATIO

Lord we pray for humanity that your peace will bless our broken world.

Lord we pray for unity among all people in Australia.

Lord we pray for your peace and blessing for our families especially those that most need your help.

Lord we pray for ourselves that we may follow the example of Mary the mother of God with love, trust, quiet but active care and devotion. Mary the Mother of God said "Do whatever He tells you" (John, 2:5).

REFERENCES

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